



**DRAMATIC IRONY IN THE TRIBAL BODOS AND MALGUDIAN SOCIETY;
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MANRANJAN LAHARY'S *DAINI?* AND R. K. NARAYAN'S
*THE GUIDE***

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Article Received: 30/12/2019

Article Accepted: 28/01/2020

Article Published online:
01/02/2020

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.8.1.141](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.8.1.141)

Abstract

The Guide by R.K. Narayan and *Daini?* by Monoranjan Lahary are the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning novels, based on the rural lives of south India and northeast India. In *The Guide* Narayan sticks to his fictional Malgudi and Lahary's *Daini?* is set on the villages of Kokrajhar. The regional issues the authors highlight in the books is not limited to those areas, but is microcosm to many parts of the world, especially Indian. Lahary's *Daini?* incorporate supernatural and fall in a tragic and gothic genre whereas Narayan's *The Guide* is a comic satire. There is a psychological way of looking at the two novels from a linear perspective. Firstly, both the novels are social novels projecting the irony of uneducated superstitious villagers. Secondly, they focus on the relationship of superhuman versus masses. Thirdly, both the novels have similar endings, where the villagers gather around the protagonist to hear the final announcement from them. It is the underlying dramatic irony in the narrative that makes the plots of the novels interesting. In my paper, I intend to locate the dramatic irony in the society, the two writers has projected.

Keywords: dramatic irony, malgudi, supernatural, swami, witch.

Introduction

Irony "in its usage there remains a root sense of dissembling or hiding what is actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effect" (Abrams 184). When we think about dramatic irony, it involves a situation or the narrative as a whole. Therefore, it doesn't count only irony underlying in a sentence or two. All other types of irony such as verbal, structural, stable, unstable, sarcasm, cosmic, socratic, etc. are elements of dramatic irony as a whole. In a long run story or a novel an irony forms in a unit and structure where the dramatic essence of comedy and tragedy keeps intriguing.

R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* and Monoranjan Lahary's *Daini?* highly incorporates humor and irony. *The Guide* is more of satire and *Daini?* project grotesque and tragedy ironically. A relentless working of inner irony keeps the reader's conscious awake and enables an outlet to grasp the possibility of the happenings in reality. In a country where education standard is low and scientific development is very slow, the behavior of the Indians appears extraordinary unnatural. A poor uneducated Indian villager lives a life vulnerable to victimization by social machinery they don't understand.

Aim of the Study

Humour and irony plays a pivotal role in both the novel. Without dramatic irony, the plot of the novel would not progress. The logic behind adhering so much of irony in narrative has in contrary a very important societal relevance. Both the novel silently criticizes the irresponsible human behavior, attitude and practice of social evils especially in India. In my paper I will highlight the superstitious beliefs in a typical tribal society, explain how superstitions are established, educate against the superstition and witch-hunting in tribal society and against the blind belief of the fake godman through Lahary and Narayan's novel.

Fear of the Unknown

One of the strongest emotions of the human is fear; fear of the unknown and mystery. It is so closely connected with the physical emotions. Human lives under the shadow of fear from the very beginning of his cognitive development. It is a powerful part of our unconscious mind that plays a great role in molding and shaping our personality. "The objects and situations which arouse fear, will depend largely on our knowledge of and feeling of power over the outer world" (Freud, *General Theory* Para 4). "The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefather a terrible and omnipotent source off boons and calamities-the phenomenon of dreaming likewise helped to build up the notion of an unreal or spiritual world" (Lovecraft, Para 3). Fear in this sense becomes a medium of imagination and dream for the feared. Since the time immemorial the wiser man used the emotion of fear to reign on his subject. The master will rule on the slave, educated on uneducated, rich on poor, a politician on uneducated poor and so on. The protagonist of the novels, Durmao (*ojha*; bodo term for a traditional healer) and Raju (swami) are taken by the uneducated villagers as superhuman having some special spiritual power. They are not only incapable of making a rationalistic approach but lack the scholastic aptitude to initiate the questioning process. No explanation in the world can defer them from their matured superstitious belief. Both Durmao and Raju in the course of the novel confess

themselves of not having any special power but ends up in vain. The superstition in villagers is so ingrained in their unconscious mind that it will take many more years for them to come out. In this sense it can be said that Durmao and Raju without any strive are occupying the power position as a signifier; ironically the power against their belief tradition and faulty ideologies. Both the novels are about the relationship between constructed superhuman and masses and it is the concept of fear that upholds the relationship between the two.

Dramatic irony is further enhanced by the constants introspection and soliloquy of the characters in the midst of dialogues. It is also true that both the protagonist never intentionally wanted to be what they are. There was a lack of choice in their way. When they found no way, the ways found them. Their occupation demands certain kind of attribution though it adheres bizarre in reality. In Dumao's case, it is primarily poverty with no work to choose after her husband's death, forces her to take up the profession of *ojha*. At the beginning of the novel, when her husband was alive we are told that she was not interested in *ojhagiri* but living together with him allows her to learn a few methods of medicine making. As a nurse, she has been helping her husband while curing the patients at home. Love, enthusiasm, and excellence of her profession have developed inside her eventually. By the middle of the book, we get to know that it is not money but service to humanity she is working for. Raju's case is different. He is a fake swami. He has achieved his intelligence from his working as a guide in a materialistic Malgudi. His past life story explains how eloquent and inquisitive one has to be working as a tourist guide. Railway talks delighted him. Working in his father's shop, he learned the economy from both his father and the visitors. The father-son episodes in the book are important for understanding Raju's mental development. An ordinary villager like Velan is in no equal to him. He was born in the most developed fictional Malgudi town living the slyest life. He too was not prepared for his swami life. "I am here because I have nowhere else to go" (Narayan, *The Guide* 8). All the time his conscious and self-clashed out of contempt. He also imagines declaring the truth and Velan reaction on

his confession. But Velan is hidden from all his introspection because Raju knew that his words would be echoed in a different tone. Raju's skeptical face further allows Velan to consider him of having a great mind, full of philosophy. Unlike Durmao's poverty and love of the profession Raju's motive is guided with viciousness. Coming out of the jail he couldn't completely get over from his earlier mindset. For instance, in the very beginning, we find him imagining Velan's daughter age and face. It was still his inclined habits that lead him to take easy help from Velan. The villagers free food amidst hopeless life motivates him to sticks on the little bit more lying for some time. Thus, the beliefs of the villager gradually turn to grave danger for them. They are put in a position having only two options i.e. to lead or to leave.

Fear is an emotion as old as the development of human thought and speech. Since the earliest social contact cosmic horror appears to be the basic ingredient of myth, folklore, chronicles, sacred writings. Supernatural demands a certain amount of fear from the audience part. For this reason, there would be weirdness in any supernatural tale. The unknown being unpredictable will pave a way for fancy to invade. It allows the reader to freely imagination. "The writer creates a world of fantasy which he takes very seriously-that is, which he invests with a large amount of emotion- while separating it, sharply from reality. The unreality of the writer's imaginative world, however, has very important consequences for the technique of his art" (Freud, *Creative Writers* Para 4). Here I am not taking the creative writer into account but the creative orator who can fuel the intensity of fantasy by their clever narrative. Durmao and Raju were given ample scope to speak. Their words are taken as coming from heaven. Whatever they utter rational or irrational ironically turns up a semblance of truth. The villagers consume their words like the tastiest dish. Durmao and Raju profession demand certain kind of supernaturalism in words and action; the supernaturalism that has to be projected should be professional, inclined in their consciousness too. It depends on the profession of ojha and swami.

The Witch and the Godman

Daini in Bodo language means a witch. The uncanny tales of witch is rampant all over the world, in folktales fiction, movies, and unconscious mind. "Witch-doctor in a primitive society is a person who uses magic power for healing" (Witch-Doctor). However, when the word is modified with craft, it gives weightage on negative essence. "Witchcraft is the practice of magic especially the use of the spell and the calling up of the devil or evil spirit." (Witchcraft). Witches are considered good as in some children stories as long as they possess angelic attribution but when their acts and views are seen as unacceptable or a threat to the society, a campaign 'witch hunt' is directed against the person. In the beginning, people took Durmao as a herbalist and later on 'a witch doctor'. When the critical patients die during Durmao's examination, she is regarded as practicing witchcraft. The irony is that as a reader we know exactly the causes of death is not for Durmao's intervention. Durmao herself explains that no one can stop people from dying when God wishes to take them away. The Bodos villagers Lahary refers are the residents of remotest villages in Assam. The uncanny explanation of forest areas clearly invites the rhetoric of every supernatural existence and believes.

"Godmen are considered as special human beings and often worshipped by their followers in line of idol and gods. Some godmen come from established schools of spirituality, but often they don't belong to any religious order. In Hinduism there is no centrally established religious authority, so people tend to follow such charismatic personalities. The existence of such Godman or omnipotent being has a long tradition in India, can be traced back to guru-sishya tradition and caste system of Hinduism. It is deeply rooted in culture and tradition." (Godman, Para 2). They are the leading characters in the Hindu myth and folktales. These gurus tend to live in their own *ashram*, temples, old monuments, etc. In recent years, many godmen have gained followers even outside of India, which has increased their fame and wealth. Several godmen have found patronage among rulers, politicians and other high-ranking officials. Some common features of Indian Godmens are that he/she has followers, is a humble person, puts God

first everywhere, a man of prayer, has clean heart, is of sharp mind, speaks wisely, truth teller, dress unique, is a vegetarian, utters gods words, non-violence, bless people, lives apart from family, in ashram, temple or old monuments, etc. Since ancient times they were worshipped without any objection and question. But today we get to hear news of some godman booked for frauding and looting. The irony is that there can't be an explicit description of a real spiritual leader. One term to address them equates the other; he is something of everything-a herbalist, a messenger, a teacher, a social activist, a magician, etc. Simple living and high thinking is clearly not a maxim, modern-day's godman follow. That is why today we find *babas* and swamis who are arrested for committing a heinous crime and also some nominated for peace awards.

The novels clearly indicate the othering of witch and godman in society. The very formation of such beings is a time-consuming process. There is an element of various attribution, practices, incidents, coincidence, elements, projection and forces both natural and artificial behind such make-believe. Lahary and Narayan, however, doesn't state that witch doesn't exist at all or all swami to be fake. What the authors wants to project is that, in the very making of such being, dramatic irony relies.

Superstition

"Superstition is a pejorative term for any belief or practice that is considered irrational: for example, if it arises from ignorance, a misunderstanding of science or causality, a positive belief in fate or magic, or fear of that which is unknown. Superstition also refers to religious beliefs or actions arising from irrationality." (Superstition) It has come a long way in history and has been evolved in the process. Ironically to some, superstition works as a mechanism. For them, it is a way to happiness, a guide, and a ray of hope; never realizing how it can affect their personal and social life. The wise people misuse it as a medium of oppression and subjugation on various affairs.

Bilasu and Velan are the two major characters who connect Durmao and Raju with the masses. They are the messenger for the villagers and the protagonist. Their misinterpretation of things on

the uneducated villager, with mindful of fear and superstitions evokes further fantasy. Bilasu's misinterpretation is backed by his emotion towards Durmao, his sole enemy. Since the beginning of the book, we find conflicts between the two. If Durmao was not a woman, there would be a physical fight between the two long ago. He has a bad intention. He is the villain of the novel. Other linkmen also exist like Joysrwn, Dilsrwn, Mularam, but their influence is minimum. Velan, however, is an innocent fool. Things work out in *The Guide* because of Velan's foolishness, which lay his faith in superstition, living on the superstitious culture. When the world is of utter mystery, he finds an answer in Raju. He enjoys his position of being a secretary to a great swami. At first, he connects Raju with his family. His frequent visit has helped Raju to construct his plot. Raju however never wanted harm on the innocent villagers but he slowly learned that he has benefit on lying them. Though it was tough for him explaining philosophies to the uneducated villagers he enjoy his stay and leadership.

To some extent, the novels include the miracle and supernatural in the narrative, but as the realistic writers representing the society, they don't go further explaining and forecasting. A reader can simply make a positive guess of the natural world where no superficial and magical power exists or work out. Though supernatural exists they can't intervene in human livelihood or can be manipulated by anyone through magic, these are very much both novelists are insisting on. "The Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations has organized seminars showing how the so-called miracles are actually performed by sleight of hand. Members of the Indian Rationalist Association travel to villages across India and perform shows to debunk the miracles, educating villagers to prevent them from giving money to godmen." (Godman, Para 10). Thus, such godly people may trick the uneducated villager by just simply entertaining with their skill and manipulate things of being supernatural, such as levitation, eating fire, walking on burning coal, creating fire out of nowhere, bursting stone just by seeing it, etc. Durmao though ironically misunderstood as a witch beside a doctor, however, lives a simple humble life in the reader's eyes. The

schedule of her treatment of the patient, collecting ingredients, mixing, grinding, filtering, etc. clearly relates the world of ayurvedic and homeopathic system of medical approach. The snake charming episode project Durmao a conjuror of incredible talent that no villager can digest anymore. Might she be in the television reality show she would turn up the number one? The myth of snake charming, retaking her poison from the victim is found in various folktales. The author doesn't explain how far it is reliable by incorporating magic realism narrative technique.

Godmen are the man of prayer. Both Durmao and Raju adhere to the art of praying and meditating. Everything they utter is godly. Durmao's tribal appearance and chanting mantras have closely resembled priest woman *deodani* (bodo term for female priest). "The Deodani, a somewhat weird looking figure, with disheveled hair, and vermilion-stained forehead, wearing a long petticoat, dances up and down to and fro on cymbals and tom-tom played by four or five men, who act as assistants." (Endle 40). Praying for Raju means nothing but just a beguiling activity to meet the attribution of swami.

Sub-plot

The subplots of Arangbir, Nijira, Marco and Rosie project the class-based borders in society. In *Daini?* it provides the audience relief from grotesque narration and distance from the uncanny tale and in *The Guide* it allows connection between the present and past situations. It is the clever inferring of the silent features in flow narrative by the author that make untellable story lucid. Arangbir stands a sharp contrast to the irony of villager's situation. His explanation to his mother about witch hunting in Bodo society clearly indicates his modern mind. Lahary finds through him, an outlet to speak about the irony in the audience. In *The Guide* Raju has a stereotyped view of duty minded Marco. He unnecessarily elevates the high character of Marco. The very naming does not come from his admiration and respect for the traveler Marco Polo but to disgrace him as a comic character. Marco, in reality, is an unsuccessful husband but a successful scholar and an honest man. It depends on the way one look at people. Rosie is a multifaced personality just like

Raju. She reveals the intricacies of life. Being a *devadasi* (female dancer in a Hindu temple) and M.A. in economics, a housewife, a woman rejected by her husband for infidelity, but nevertheless becomes a successful professional dancer and yet regrets her failed marriage. She challenges the orthodox Hindu conception of what a woman should be and yet there's a part in her that's orthodoxy.

Conclusion

The culmination of the narrative first person and third person is necessary to understand the working dramatic irony. Indirect description of scene and atmosphere are as important as character's dialogue. Narayan's selection of English language for Indian audience has forced him to abide with the usage of maximum sentences, without relying on native words. Lahary, however, was economical throughout, with very plain words in fashion. "The story of *The Guide* develops along a bewildering succession of time shifts. He applied cinematic techniques of jump, cut, flashback, flash forward and montage in his plot construction" (Sen 14). Unlike *The Guide*, *Daini?* has a more linear plot structure as usual kind of novel. The incongruity of the society in the novels is addressed side by side, which is episodic and can be adapted in stage very easily. For instance 'the violence of the villagers'. Such nationalism is also seen in a public gathering in the end which clearly indicates that Indians can turn any situation, scene and atmosphere trivial or grave into a greater occasion.

Both authors are aware that the novels are social oriented. Social reality evoked by the Bodos and Malgudians is recognizably Indian. It is the faith and superstition that inspires the villagers to come together or turn against each other. It does not matter whether the faith is based on illusion or reality or is good or bad. Therefore the authors do criticize the very existences of local trends with the fair and foul play of fictional characters. There is also a door to unpattern the moral features wherever necessary and it is through 'dramatic irony'.

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