



Satire Presented in the Story *The Overcoat*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Overcoat is a Russian short story written by Nikolai Gogol. The present story is one of the most influential short stories first published in 1842. It was a part of a four volume Collected Works Sochineniya by Gogol. The present story is not only a masterpiece in the Russian literature by the author but it is considered as the progenitor of the modern short story form. It has been observed that Gogol has tried to build a bridge between the two literary genres of realism and romanticism in Russian literature by his literary outputs. Gogol has been praised by the progressive critics of his time for simplicity because he has focused on the ordinary men and women of the society and has dealt with the everyday's happenings of the people in his works because of this, these critics consider him as a pioneer of a new Naturalism. In many ways Gogol is seen more conservative in his writings and it seems that he has tried to incorporate folklore and fantasy as realistic detail. The present story is a result of Gogol's self imposed exile in Rome and Geneva where he had observed the society and the people and presented them in his works.

II. THE ELEMENT OF SATIRE

Literature has many elements like plot, characters, theme, dialogue, spectacles, irony, satire, comic, tragic etc. All these elements have their own importance and heighten the effects of literature. M. H. Abraham defines satire as:

The literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation.

Satire thus makes fun of the people, their tradition, customs, thinking etc.

III. THE PLOT OF THE STORY AND THE ELEMENT OF SATIRE

It is a story of an impoverished clerk named Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin who has worked for a number of years within the huge government bureaucracy in St. Petersburg. The clerk is the protagonist of the story around whom the entire story revolves. From beginning to the end is present in the story and he is so dominant character that after his death he also present in the story. The present story is told by an unnamed narrator to the readers in editorialize and digress manner and tendency. The narrator showers all his sympathy on Akaky. It has been noted that the tone of the narration many times is compassionate, condescending, nightmarish and humorous. He is greatly devoted to his work and always longs for good fortune everyday but his office mates often make fun of him. He always accepts the funny words from his office mates without uttering even a single word and he behaves in such a way that nothing is happening to him. In the course of the story through the character of Akaky story's thematic concern with compassion and universal brotherhood of mankind, the storyteller utters in the response to teasing:

Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?

These words have deep impact on one of the Akaky's coworkers:

There was something touching in Akaky's words and in the voice in which they were uttered. There was a note in it of something that aroused compassion, so that one young man, new to the office, who, following the example of the rest, had allowed himself to tease him, suddenly stopped as though cut to the heart, and from that time on, everything was, as it were, changed and appeared in a different light to him. Some unseen force seemed to repel him from the companions with whom he had become acquainted because he thought they were well-bred and decent men. And long afterward, during moments of the greatest gaiety, the figure of the humble little clerk with a bald patch on his head appeared before him with his heart rending words: "Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?" and with those



moving words he heard others: “I am your brother.” (Excerpt from “The Overcoat, translated by Constance Garnett”).

Until the forth page of the story, the plot does not get motion but when it is released that the old and tattered overcoat of Akaky does not able to withstand in the cold atmosphere of St. Peterburg, the plot gets motion. So, the reluctant Akaky wanders here and there to get it repaired but one of the tailor of his village named Petrovich convinces him that his overcoat his not in position to repair so he advises him to purchase new one. Akaky does not have enough money to buy a new one so he must have to save from his earning and at last after two or three months he can save money to purchase a new coat. The storyteller gives many funny incidents of purchasing a raw material for his overcoat and at last he purches it and gets a new overcoat. When finally he reaches in his office with his new coat, the entire department notices it and in a half-mocking way they demand a celebration in his honour. At this occasion Akaky feels both embarrassment and proud also and finally he accepts an invitation of party offered by his superior that evening itself. In the evening on that occasion he puts on his newly stitched overcoat happily but he feels out of place at the party. However he enjoy a lot himself in his newly adorn coat in that party and he takes little drink in that party.

On return to his home at night, he was robbed ay the gang in front of the policeman but he does not do anything on the contrarily he claims that he assumed Akaky’s robbers were simply his friends. Now after this incident Akaky deteriorates gradually. For the first time, he gathers strength and he tries his level best to lodge a complaint in response to this incident to seek restitution. However the Almighty does not favour him and his all efforts go in vain and nobody really helps him. When he reaches to the police commissioner, he on the contrary he asks questions and casts suspicion on Akaky that what was he doing during late night. Due to this matter for the first time in his life he misses his work in his office and his coworkers try to collect sum amount to purchase a new coat but all this goes in vain. Finally, he collects his courage to talk with high level bureaucrat who is called by narrator as ‘the person of Consequence’.

However, this man seems to be an arrogant and petty to Akaky and he on the contrary lectures him to follow the proper channels of bureaucratic. He cannot bear this humiliation and faints on the spot and falls ill on the next day. After a few days later he dies due to his illness. At the end of the story, the ghost of Akaky is seen wandering in the streets of St. Petersburg. Eventually, the rumors is spreaded all around until the ghost finally confronts and steals an overcoat from the ‘Person of Consequence’. ‘Person of Consequence’ is deeply disturbed by this incident and reaches to his family and takes an oath to practice better morals. Thus, Akaky takes his revenge at the end of the story.

Gogol has skillfully puts the element of satire in the present story by the character of Akaky and at the same time he also presents the supernatural element in this story. In many incidents we find the element of satire. The entire episode of efforts of purchasing the fur material for overcoat is full of humour and satire. Here, the he makes mockery on the Russian society through his characters. He also presents the reality of the policeman how they treat with the common persons. The supernatural element teaches a moral to the human being is a great satire.

IV. CONCLUSION:

Through the character of Akaky and other minor characters Gogol present the picture of the Russian society. Thus, the entire story is full of the element of satire from beginning to the end of the story.

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