

A MYTHICAL VOYAGE THROUGH R.K.NARAYAN'S THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI

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Abstract

This article tries to discuss the mythical concepts used by R.K Narayan in his novel *The Man Eater Of Malgudi*. In this novel R.K. Narayan consciously incorporated the mythical concepts. Through this we can trace how R.K.Narayan used the mythical concepts to narrate the story. He used it as a tool for writing. He used the concept of 'karma'; it's an Indian doctrine in this story. He consciously used Indian myths, stories, Indian names, background. The story deals with the universal theme of good and evil in the world, which is represented by the two characters Nataraj and Vasu. Mythical concepts of Bhasmasura, Mohini are also beautifully incorporated by R.K.Narayan in this novel. Myths offer the patterns of traditional motifs and symbols for communicating meanings. Narayan has used the mythic events and characters in the form of metaphors in order to make the sense and meaning of the story clear, impressive and appealing. He tried to convey a message through the character Vasu that evil always bring destruction. Narayan depicts the reality that modern man is not yet different from rakshasa.

Keywords: Myth, Mythical, Karma, Good and evil.

R.K.Narayan is a famous Indian English writer, who played a prominent role in making India accessible to the outside world through literature. He was the one of the foremost writer in the great Big Trio including Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. Mulk Raj Anand is a social critic and Raja Rao , a metaphysical novelist, but when coming to R.K.Narayan he is a pure novelist who used his art for art's sake. He strongly believed in the doctrine of aestheticism. He created an imaginary town called Malgudi, which is a small village in South India which come felt as a living ambience in his fiction.

Man Eater Of Malgudi is a famous novel by R.K.Narayan which was published in 1961. He dedicated this novel to his friend Graham Greene, famous British novelist. The novel is divided in to twelve chapters and it depicts the story of a printer, Nataraj. He is an ordinary man who lives in Malgudi and spends his time in the company of his two friends Sen, and Sastri.

He has a small family consisting of his wife and son. The setting of the novel is also portrayed with some realistic elements like Kabir street, New Extension and so on. The whole novel is pictured with an exquisite landscape. He describes each and everything in the village in detail. When one go through the novel he didn't feel that Malgudi is an imaginary place. Narayan used all his artistic excellence in creating this fictional town. Malgudi is the symbol of the mythical space which actively participate and determines the action of the novel. Both psychological and physical level it plays an important role. It brings a religious dimension in the novel he included fantasy and realism in the novel. In this novel Narayan recreated the ancient myth of Bhasmasura. According to M.H.Abrams:

a myth is one story in a mythology a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular group, and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social custom and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives (230)

In *Man Eater of Malgudi*, Narayan uses the technique of flash back. He used the flash back technique in the beginning by telling the story about Nataraj that how he inherited his ancestral house and Vasu, another major character speaks about the days when he learned the craft from his master and so on. The owner of the shop, Sastri and other minor characters also recollect their past memories.

In the novel R.K.Narayan beautifully transcends the ancient myths in terms of the 20th century India. He used myth both thematically and technically. Narayan has used myth as a metaphor in the *Man Eater Of Malgudi*.

R.K. Narayan incorporated hilarious comedy with a powerful message, that the good cannot be defeated by evil. The *Man Eater Of Malgudi* is a modern version of the ancient tale of Bhasmasura, a demon, which is taken from Mahabharata. In this novel R.K.Narayan intermingles the mythical and the contemporary characters, and situations which has a resemblance with the myth. Narayan's moral concern is expressed through this retelling. According to M.K.Naik :

The *Man Eater Of Malgudi* is an impressive novel dealing with ethical issues such as the fate of evil and the question of human relationships and precepts and practice of the entire business of living (23).

The novel mainly centered on the myth of Shiva and Bhasmasura. Nataraj the protagonist of the novel lives a peaceful life in Malgudi. But he faced a disruption of his peaceful rhythmic life by an aggressive intruder Vasu, a taxidermist. He came there to hunt animals for his business from the Memi jungle.

The village lost its peaceful atmosphere and also Nataraj became confused when Vasu comes to live with them in a room in the upper storey of his press. But Vasu's gigantic and weird look forced him to allow vasu in his press. In the novel R.K.Narayan described Vasu as a man with tanned face, large powerful eyes under thick eyebrows etc. He is very confident, hard-hearted and does not have perception of morality. He comments about marriage that only fool crave to get married by saying "only fools marry and they deserve all the trouble they get (29). He processes all the characteristics of a rakshasa. He is like 'Kumbakarna in Ramayana shows his gluttony diet. Vasu has also great passion for women and he brings the temple dancer Rangi in his room, it also creates a stormy situation in the village. Nataraj's friend Sastri, an orthodox Sankrit scholar always blames Vasu. All the time he serves as a chorus, and foretells about Vasu's destruction by narrating the stories of demons like Bhasmasura and concludes that the evil has its own seeds of destruction. Nataraj knows from Rangi that Vasu plans to shoot Kumar a temple elephant on the day of festival celebration and he tries to inform the police.

Nataraj goes to his office the next day where he found Vasu is dead. The police starts investigation they questions Nataraj thinking etc. From the final medical report they came to be known

that Vasu died of concussion received on his right temple from a blunt instrument. Rangi later reveals that while striking a mosquito settled on his forehead, Vasu slapped himself and thus dies of a blow from his own hammer fist.

The plot of the novel, which is parallel to the Bhasmasura myth. The writer uses mythical elements not only to narrate Vasu but also in the case of Rangi. Rangi is the temple dancer in the novel she is compared to Mohini. She also plays the role of salvager of Kumar which refers to the perception of Dharma. Vasu indulges in illicit sexual relations with many women. One of them is Rangi, who is a devadasi. Here Vasu symbolizes the mythical Bhasmasura, who is the representation of evil while Rangi symbolizes Mohini, the seducer and killer of Bhasmasura. Rangi is very beautiful as the paranoiac character Mohini. Vasu is completely attracted by her beauty. She is a prostitute but she has a great faith and devotion in God. At a point of time she says:

Sir, I am a public woman, following what is my dharma. I may be a sinner to you, but I do nothing worse than what some of the so-called family women are doing (31).

In the novel we can see a strong relationship between Vasu and Rangi. Vasu plans to kill temple elephant Kumar, but Rangi does not like his plan and she wants to save the lives of animals. In the end she informs Nataraj, the real reason about Vasu's death.

Vasu is the embodiment of evil on the other hand Nataraj is the representative of good. He is altruist and he always tried to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in Malgudi. He is the true symbol of goodness, tolerance and generosity. Narayan gives a powerful message through the character of Vasu that evil brings self-destruction. He depicts the reality through this myth. In ancient myth good and evil represented by the Sura and Asura respectively. In the Holy Scriptures Asuras were more dangerous and they wanted to rule earth and heaven. They were always in want of more power and for this they destroyed everything. Through this myth Narayan portrays the picture of modern man. In this era man wants all the success, luxury etc for achieving this entire he destroys everything. Vasu is the representative of modern man.

R. K. Narayan also discusses the myth of Gajendra moksha in the novel. After Vasu's decision to shoot elephant Kumar, Nataraj reminds the story of the Gajendra, an elephant in ancient mythology. When this Gajendra stepped into a lake, then a crocodile caught his leg. The elephant struggled a lot for survival. At that time he called Lord Vishnu for help and Vishnu appeared before him and offered help. In this novel Nataraj believes that just as Lord Vishnu saved the life of Gajendra he saved the life of the temple elephant Kumar. Like this R. K. Narayan incorporated many mythical elements and we can see many similarities with Puranas.

The novel concludes with the opinion of Sastri, the poet who always made some comments related to Puranas here he compares Vasu with Bhasmasura and hints at the manner of Vasu's sudden and unexpected death. At the end Vasu dies like the Puranic character Bhasmasura. Sastri points out that Vasu dies like Bhasmasura who is tricked into placing his hands on his head by Krishna who is disguised as a dancer Mohini and went to death by placing his fatal touch.

By giving a mythical parallel to Vasu's death the novelist wants to convey that no one can escape from Karma. Here he depicts the genesis and destruction of karma. Novelist also used connotations in the names of the characters like Nataraj, which relates to Lord Shiva, Shiva is also called as Nataraj he is the one who destroys many rakshasas who became a fear toward human society. Here in the novel Nataraj indirectly destroys the rakshas Vasu for that Malgudi becomes apart. He gets back the peaceful atmosphere of Malgudi. It's a story of the victory of good over evil and R K Narayan magnificently presented it.

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