

Portrayal of R.K. Narayan's 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi' as an Allegorical Novel: An Overview

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Abstract

This article deals with R.K. Narayan's The Man-Eater of Malgudi as an allegorical novel. An allegorical story tries to entertain the reader through the use of extended metaphor in which characters, plot, abstract ideas represent not only moral lessons but also explain the story hidden underneath. In R.K. Narayan's The Man-Eater of Malgudi, the author has profoundly used allegorical elements to explain the relationship between Natraj and Vasu. Natraj, a well-to-do printer of the town lives his life peacefully but he gets outraged with the arrival of Vasu. Vasu is just like Shakespeare's Lago in Othello who is an embodiment of self-destruction. He has been called the Man-Eater of Malgudi who tries to suppress the innocent lives of Malgudi. The author has used the mythological term, 'Bhasmasura' to explain the demonic attributes of Vasu. He kills innocent animals, seduces women, threatens people of Malgudi and seeks pleasure out of it. He considers himself as the supreme figure which leads him to his doom. R.K. Narayan through Vasu's character has highlighted that who are prideful will bring about their self-destruction. In allegorical view, the author has depicted the sad reality of modern society where people like Vasu try to squash the innocent people.

Keywords: Allegorical, Mythological, Bhasmasura, Outraged, Self-destruction, Squash.

Introduction

"It is stimulating to live in a society that is not standardized or mechanized, and is free from monotony." - R.K. Narayan, Malgudi Days

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Ayyar Narayanswami or R.K. Narayan is one of the most accomplished writers of Indian English Literature. Born on 10th October, 1906, in Chennai he took R.K. Narayan as his name at the suggestion of Graham Greene. Reared by his grandmother Narayan completed his graduation and worked as a teacher before deciding to devote himself to writing. His simple and modest writing style was often compared with American Author William Faulkner. Most of his stories were set in small town named Malgudi which encouraged him to involve deep into literature. Through his writing style he opened a window for the reader to peep into Indian culture.

His first novel, *Swami and Friends* (1935), is an episodic narrative recounting the adventures of a group of school boys. His further publications *Bachelor of Arts*, *Mr. Sampath*, *Waiting for the Mahatma*, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* gave him enormous acclamation. Narayan's writing began in a realistic manner and used to revolve around characters of all classes. He portrays the peculiarities of human relationships and the ironies of Indian society. R.K. Narayan's contribution to the field of Indian Literature is admirable. He grabbed the attention of the foreign audience for Indian Literature through his modest writing. For his writing he was accolade with the most prestigious awards like Padma Bhushan, Sahitya Akademi Award and AC Benson Medal etc. Graham has called Narayan:

“The novelist I most admire in the English Language”.

In his literary career he published fourteen novels, over two hundred short stories, a memoir, two travel books and innumerable essays. Narayan’s art of maturity is reflected in many of his work one of them is *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. According to K.R.S Iyenger:

The *Man-Eater of Malgudi* jumbles the ingredients of comedy to excellent purpose and provides ample entertainment, but the undercurrent of serious intention cannot be missed. The setting of the novel is Malgudi and it belongs to the collection, ‘*Novels of Malgudi*’. For the theme of novel Narayan went to Hindu Puranas taking the story of Bhasmasura, who was granted a boon from Lord Shiva that anyone whom he places his hand would be reduced to ashes. Being malfeasance by this boon, he went on applying and testing the boon which eventually led him to his self-destruction. The story of the novel revolves around this tale where Vasu is the allegorical representation of Bhasmasura.

The novel begins with Natraj’s the owner of a small printing press in Malgudi. He is the central figure of the novel and a man with pure-heart who has never made any enemy in his entire life. On the contrary, Vasu is a taxidermist, who finds pleasure in harassing human beings along with animals. He is resembled as person with demonic attributes. Most of the action of the story takes place in Kabir Street of Malgudi where Natraj lives with his wife and son. He is a shrewd business man who doesn’t like interference of anyone in his printing press:

‘Between my parlor and the press hung a blue curtain. No one tried to peer through it.’ (p.2)

His privacy is invaded after the arrival of Vasu:

‘Now an unusual thing happened. The curtain stirred an edge of it lifted, and the monosyllabic poet’s head peeped through. An extra ordinary situation must have arisen to make him does that’ (p.12). The title of the novel is very apt and suggestive as it is filled with irony and humor. Vasu here is symbolized as the *Man-Eater of Malgudi* who from his first appearance suggests the barbarous and evil qualities underlying in him. Natraj and Vasu holds a prominent place in the novel, but along with them stands a number of minor character such

as the argumentative Journalist Sen, the Sanskrit Scholar and poet Shastri, who is shown composing a monosyllabic poem on Lord Krishna, the seductive temple dancer Rangi, Muthu tea shop owner and Kumar the temple elephant. On the whole people of Malgudi are happy and contented. The novel is thoroughly Indian and Narayan has successfully created Indian atmosphere by depicting the beautiful scenario of Malgudi. To Graham Green:

‘No one could find a second home in Kipling’s India or Foster’s India. Narayan has indeed caught the very spirit and atmosphere of India and gather its favor and aroma’. Vasu a taxidermist debar in Malgudi with a selfish intention of exploring Mempi hills in search of wildlife. His bull neck and hammer fist reveals his true nature. He is resembled as a self-centered character that can do anything in order to fulfill his needs. On his first visit, he enters Natraj’s office tearing aside the curtain and thus violating the sacred tradition of his office. Vasu take holds of Natraj’s attic without taking his consent and uses it to house him and practice the profession. He fills the attic with all kinds of stuffed animals and their skin-flesh which results in spreading the foul smell of the dead animals all over the locality and soon the neighbor’s complain Natraj against it. What remains more interesting is the Natraj’s passivity towards it. He is overwhelmed by the spirit and courage of Vasu. He is proud of his muscular power and it is for this that Natraj appreciates him and also distances himself from him. Soon this *Man-Eater of Malgudi* kills one man-eater and the attic is being filled up with all kinds of stuffed animals and their skin-flesh. All these negative acts set him apart from common human beings. His bull-neck and hammer-fist, personalities make him appear more like a fiend than a man. Sastri, the semi scholar-worker in Natraj’s press defines Vasu as “Every rakshas gets swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him”. (p.94). Vasu is not just a killer of animals but also disturbs the existence of Natraj. He kidnaps Natraj and leaves him stranded far from home to pass through inevitable suffering which shows Vasu’s devilish spirit. In the novel, Narayan uses the mythical technique to stress the self-distributive nature of Vasu. The Bhasmasura

who with his special boon made humanity suffer. Lord Vishnu was incarnated as Mohini with whom the asura became infatuated which later results in his self-destruction. This mythical story holds a parallel coordination in Narayan's novel as Rangī, the temple dancer arrives to infuse dispirited Vasu. She has the charm to enchant and at the same time bewildered others. From her first appearance it is also evident that Natraj comes to think and brood on her and admits that, "My mind was busy following the fleshly image of Rangī and perhaps I resented the intrusion". One day she met Natraj in the early hours of morning and tells the deadly intention of Vasu's to shoot Kumar the temple elephant. She urges Natraj to save the elephant. She provides the information at a great risk to herself. This brings out her religious sense and dedication. Natraj is shocked to learn from Rangī Vasu's intention to kill the temple elephant for the sake of business. This causes mental agitation to Natraj who seeks for help to Lord Vishnu who believes that Lord Vishnu will save the temple elephant from the evil influence. Meanwhile Rangī in order to save the elephant she fans and sings for Vasu so that she can do something to stop him. But she also falls asleep and to her surprise she finds Vasu dead in the morning. Later it is revealed that in a fit of anger over a mosquito hovering over him, he hit himself hard on the forehead and meets with his own end.

Conclusion

At the end Vasu dies like Bhasmasura with a blow of his fist on his own head and the novel ends with Sastri's word, "Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the rakshasas that were ever

born. Every demon carries within him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction, and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment. (pg.240). The Man-Eater of Malgudi depicts universal fact that evil is always been anti-life and anti-faith. Eventually the novel highlights the fact that a person with wrong deeds is going to face his karma.

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