

## MYTH ELEMENT IN THE NOVEL OF R.K. NARAYAN'S "MAN EATER OF MALGUDI "

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### Abstract

R.K. Narayan, the oldest novelist, is still as prolific as ever, and as obsessed with middle class people experiences as before. R.K. Narayan is junior to An and by just one year. Narayan is at his best when he is able to hitch the wagon of gentle irony to the star of serious moral concern, as in *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. He created a tiny but perfectly credible universe in Malgudi like Hardy's Wessex and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha. He has filled his novels with men and women who are as real to us as the people actually around us. In *The Man –Eater of Malgudi* Mempi village, Tea shop, Village temple, Kumar ailing elephant are used. In this novel old Indian mythology is portrayed in a well manner. Vasu is a taxidermist, he represents as a demon, Nataraj is a press owner, protagonist of the novel. Vasu leads his life happily like an incarnation of rakshasha. At the end of the novel, he loses his life like Basmasura.

**Keywords:** Middleclass-wessex-Malgudi-Myth.

There is a town that millions of English readers have flocked to since 1935. A town that is a cross between Mysore and Madurai, Manipal and Maisanagudi. Its star cast includes characters like the irrepensible school boy Swaminathan, the young graduate Chandra in "The English Teacher", dancer Rosie in "The Guide" and others. They came to life in a fertile literary ground called Malgudi. An imaginary town created by one of Indian literature's truest voices, R.K. Narayan. R.K. Narayan's Malgudi is considered a microcosm of the nation. It becomes a metonym for a traditional India.

Narayan celebrates the extraordinary in the ordinary and his pages are crammed with minutiae, every day triumphs and disasters of common people. Like Malgudi, Narayan's childhood had an enchanted quality. He lived at his maternal uncle's house in Purasawalkam, Chennai, while the rest of his family lived in chennapatna, Hassan, and then princely Mysore. As a child, he listened to folktales and carnatic music, or played with a peacock and a monkey in the garden. These memories from a world up to the age of 15 buoyed him life long.

A myth is a well known story which was made up in the past to explain natural events or to justify beliefs or social customs. In Greek Mythology there is a famous Greek myth in which "Icarus" who is the son of master craftsman "Daedalus" flew too near the sun. In the literature of ancient Rome, the myth was of interest to Augustan writers. Myth is a term which shows

influence on the readers. Most of the Indians have a deep abiding love for mythology, especially Indian mythology.

The Man-Eater of Malgudi is one of the well known novels written by the renowned Anglo-Indian writer R.K.Narayan. It is a simple and entertaining novel, full of interesting characters and events. Vasu is a taxidermist who can be called the villain of the novel. Vasu's demise is like the demon Bhasmasura in the end of the novel.

In the world of R.K.Narayan we find some similarities between contemporary and antiquity. That is illustrated one, perhaps, provided in The man-eater of Malgudi. It has definitely mythical structure. The novel re-asserts the old Hindu myth of Bhasmasura in the modern form. It is undoubtedly a vivid and significant phenomenon in Narayan's creative work for the imaginative rendering of ancient puranic myth with both serious parallelism and ironic contrast. Being an adaptation of the puranic story of an asura, the novel turns out to be archetypal as it springs forth from the collective unconscious of the universal mind. The polarity between Nataraj, the meek, benign, considerate, ineffectual printer, and Vasu, a self-centred, impatient, operational taxidermist is too obvious to be overlooked. Whereas Nataraj is mainly passive and incapable of coping with the ordinary things in life, Vasu is a dynamic man devoted to the goals of individual achievement. He has set himself as a rival to nature and carries on a relentless fight throughout.

Nataraj is a press-owner living in Malgudi, an imaginary town in south India along with his wife Rajam and son, Babu, a school-going boy. Nataraj lived in his ancestral home in Kali street consisted of office-boy, composer, binder, accountant etc.

The Bhasmasura parallel in the novel is clearly suggested more than once by Sastri, an orthodox minded Sanskrit scholar who tells Nataraj, "demonic creature who possessed enormous strength, strange, strange powers and genius", but recognized no sorts of restraints of man or God. Nataraj is the protagonist of the novel, narrates the entire story in the first person. We find good qualities in him. Nataraj is an early riser. His day starts before 4 A.M. He goes to the river Sarayu on whose banks Malgudi was located, for his morning chores. On his way he would meet a few people and greets every one whom he came across. As a Hindu believer he practices the old traditions.

Vasu, a taxidermist enters into the life of Nataraj at the press. Vasu interferes the conversation of Nataraj and his friends and introduces himself. Nataraj falls into the trap of Vasu at the first meet. Vasu states that he had postgraduated from presidency college-Madras in the year 1931. That he joined the civil disobedience movement of Gandhi against the British rule and had been imprisoned several times.

One day the man-eater like Vasu brought home a forest-officer and introduced him to Nataraj. The officer wanted to publish the titled "Golden thoughts" and wishes to distribute them to the school children free of cost. Nataraj comes to know that there would be no income from Vasu and sends them to the next-door press. Vasu bullies Nataraj like a demon in a verbal manner. After a week Vasu receives a cover from the forest department. Extremely happy opens it, only to find that he does not get approval to shoot the animals in the forest. Vasu starts fretting and fuming and swears that he would teach the concerned officials a lesson.

One day Nataraj involves in the proof reading of a wedding invitation of an adjournment lawyer. Vasu suddenly appears at Nataraj and takes him for a short-ride. In spite of Nataraj's reluctance Vasu almost forcibly takes him in his jeep and drives to Mempi village at the foot of the hills. Vasu again shows his arrogance while driving fast and reckless he creates a lot of inconvenience to the pedestrians.

Sastri being an orthodox minded Sanskrit scholar reminds Nataraj about the legends of Rakshasas and cites the examples of Ravana, Mahishasura, Bhasmasura and Daksha who destroyed themselves by their own anger and foolishness. Sastri tells Nataraj that Vasu will meet the same fate.

Malgudi is a traditional town. Malgudi people believe in values and ethics. But Vasu does not stick on to the principles of Hindu life. He keeps aloof from his parentage, kith and kin and has settled in Malgudi. He betrays his pals like Nataraj and casts the mockery of the institutions of marriage asserts, “Only fools marry and they deserve all the trouble they get.”<sup>1</sup> (P-29)

Vasu seems to be the mythical Bhasmasura, he violates the bachelorhood and traditions which are in the existence. He possesses animal instincts. He spends his time in the attic with women of disrepute. One such woman is Rangi visits Vasu, she carries food mixed with sleeping powder for Vasu to avert the harm to the holy elephant Kumar.

Vasu occupies his easy chair and orders Rangi to fan him to keep the mosquitoes from biting. Later Rangi dozes off and since the fanning stopped, the mosquitoes come from all sides and start biting Vasu. Vasu becomes furious and brings the flat side of his palm with all his might on his forehead. That is his end. Sastri compares Vasu to Rakshasas, who appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility but carry the deed of destruction within them. In the novel simultaneous things like good, evil, good takes place.

The mythical rakshasa and apsaras have the quality of never growing old. Vasu is none other than one of the predatory rakshasas whom Sastri describes as “Psychopathic “killer of the epics. And Rangi is an apsara who lives her life dangerously. In our ancient mythology, these apsaras are described as ever youthful, ever charming damsels. Rangi can be compared with the apsaras in more ways than one. She confesses before Vasu:

“Sir, I am only 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.”<sup>2</sup> (P.152)

In India we show respect to Guru. we give priority to mother, father and then to guru. Vasu shows gratitude towards his guru. It is evidenced in these lines:

“I knew his weak spot. I hit him there with the edge of my palm with a chopping movement...and he fell down and squirmed on the floor...I left him there and walked out and gave up the strongman’s life once for all.”<sup>3</sup>(p.21)

He reminisces this episode with arrogance and laughter, rather than with remorse and repentance. Vasu is a law unto himself. He frightens children, hates neighbours, and kills dogs. He aims at killing the temple –elephant, Kumar. He troubles Nataraj in so many ways. When Nataraj requests for getting attic vacated, Vasu feels enraged and dishonored. He has negative qualities all compact.

Vasu devised himself as the Rakshasas, opposed to the affable and benevolent Nataraj. Two absolutely opposite attitudes towards life are shown in their characters. Vasu is wicked, immoral and of resentful nature, he is needlessly unfriendly everywhere. Nataraj is a kindhearted printer of bottle-labels, school magazines and visiting cards, Vasu is a vehement slayer and stuffer of wild animals.

All the citizens of Malgudi, except for Vasu, believe in the efficacy of the worship. In the opening lines of the novel, Nataraj says:

“I hung up a framed picture of Goddess Laxmi poised on her lotus, holding aloft the bounties of earth in her four hands and through her grace I did not too boldly.”<sup>4</sup>(P.7)

In this novel not only Nataraj as well as the Sanskrit scholar believes in the divinity. Sastri performs Satyanarayana Puja in his house and treads all the way to Vinayak street. He tells Nataraj frankly:

“I’d not trouble you but for the fact that his Satyanarayan puja must be performed today in my house, my children and wife will be waiting for me at the door.s”<sup>5</sup>(p.16)

In The Man-Eater of Malgudi, R.K.Narayan mingles the context of ancient values and modernity. Are those relevant to our present generation. He reveals an essential pattern of order-disorder-order in this novel. It sums up in a classical manner of order and harmony. Indian ethos and humanistic belief social forces, so significantly relevant to the Indian tradition, characterizes the world of R.k.Narayan.

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