

**MYTHICAL ELEMENTS IN R. K. NARAYAN'S *MAN EATER OF MALGUDI***M. Vanisree<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. G. Mohana Charyulu<sup>2</sup><sup>1\*</sup>(Associate Professor of English, Dept. of English, S.V Engineering College for Women, Tirupati.)<sup>2</sup>(Professor and Chairman, Research Progress and Assessment Committee, Department of English, K L University, Vaddeswaram, Guntur dist.)**ABSTRACT**

This article attempts to discuss the mythical elements in R. K. Narayan's *Man Eater of Malgudi*. The novelist uses ancient myths, legends and folklore consciously as the techniques of narration. By using mythical method and puranic style, Narayan insulates the doctrine of Karma in the novel. Narayan's usage of the mythical names, Indian idioms and Indianized words add local flavor and the combination of expressions with gestural descriptions and behavioural documentations project that culture is locally structured. The greatness of Narayan lies in the presentation of the true spirit of Indianness.

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*"I want a story to be entertaining, enjoyable and illuminating in some way"*

-R.K.Narayan

Rasipuram Krishna Swami Narayan is a versatile writer and one of the foremost novelists of Indian Writing in English. He is contemplated as one of the Big Three – the other two being Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. He opts to inscribe in English language because he was very fond of English language and his use of this language is piquancy by his Indian consciousness. He is best known creator of Malgudi, a fictional South Indian village that has been called as zany, eccentric and true to life world.

R.K.Narayan bequeathed his novel *Man Eater of Malgudi* to his friend, the British novelist – Graham Greene. The novel is carved up into twelve chapters and imparts the story of a printer Nataraj who lives in Malgudi and squanders his time in the company of his two friends Sen, a poet and Sastri, a journalist. The setting of novel is portrayed realistically by mentioning places like Kabir Street, New Extension and so on which leads the reader to picture the setting with precision and empowers the place with a sense of geographic legitimacy. The whole novel is pictured with an exquisite landscape which is painted with an optic exactitude which



makes the panoramas come bustling. Malgudi is the symbol of mythic space which actively participates in and determines the action of the novel. It has psychological dimension and physical locale. It brings a ritualistic dimension into the novel. Narayan has a very idiosyncratic style which has been considered as objective, unpretentious, untheoretical and volubly professional. He uses a permutation of fantasy and realism.

In his novel, Narayan uses the flash back technique to tell the reader about events which took place before the narrative commenced. For instance, Nataraj tells the story of how he inherited his ancestral house and then Vasu also speaks about the days when he learnt his craft from his master Suleiman. The owner of the tea shop talks about how he prospered in his business even though he began as a worker in a tea plantation at the age of twelve. It is also described the manner in which Kumar become the temple elephant. Kumar represents a symbol of sacredness of life values.

Narayan's stories are based on classical Indian narrative texts and often there are overt references to Puranas and other scriptures from the Indian canon in his novels. He uses ancient myths, legends; folklore consciously as a technique of narration. He is well versed in the Hindu epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata and other Hindu scriptures as also in the myths and legends which form a part of the Indian folklore. In the novel, he used myth as a technique in the manner of such modern English writers like T.S.Eliot, W.B.Yeats, Eugene O'Neill, James Joyce and many others. The novel is based on the mythical structure of i.e., war between Sura i.e., God and Asura i.e. Demon and defeat of the Asura's by the God.

The novel is the first person narrative begins with Nataraj who is the owner of a petite homely printing press in the friendly town of Malgudi. He is the narrator of the story, a simple-hearted, naïve and good-natured man who has never made any enemies. His peaceful life is disrupted by the coming of a stranger, Vasu who is an aggressive taxi demist, moves into Nataraj's attic, fills the place with an alarming number of ballooned

hyenas, pythons and tigers. He introduces dancing girls into the tranquil ambiance and the ensuing events put the endurance of Nataraj to a stern test. The story is described as a novella dealing with classical art among other things. It is characterized by cavernous emotions and enthralling, suspense-filled climax and it also portrays the mundane, everyday struggle of the middle-class to disentangle themselves from the clutches of the past. There is a powerful comic tone in the narrative with elements of fantasy effortlessly included in the narrative. In the novel, most of the action takes place in Kabir Street in Malgudi village where the narrator lives behind Market Road with his wife and his son, Babu.

Every man in Hindu family is grateful to the Goddess Lakshmi for happiness which is sought through the earning. The Hindus firmly believe that worshipping Lakshmi keeps on a flow of money ceaselessly. Similarly, living in a traditional family, Nataraj worships the Goddess Lakshmi for his contented life. By the modishness of goddess Lakshmi, his domicile is in Kabir Street which was well-stocked ancestral house where he could send his son to Albert Mission School in Malgudi:

"I hung up a framed picture of Goddess Lakshmi poised on her lotus, holding aloft the bounties of earth in her four hands, and through her grace I did not do too badly" (*The Man-Eater of Malgudi* 7).

Nataraj could afford to use the front room as his parlor for his friends of whom two were his constant companion's one is a poet who was marking the life of Lord Krishna and another is a journalist.

"A poet who was writing the life of God Krishna in monosyllabic verse. His ambition was to compose a grand epics newest lines and he came almost every day to recite to me his latest lines. My admiration for him was unbounded. I was thrilled to hear ...." (7).

The narrator uses a mythical technique which reflects to ancient myths and legends and juxtaposes them with the facts of modern life, in this way it brings out the similitude and contrasts between the past and the present. For instance in the novel, Sastri is the character who links myth and



reality. His name Sastri which means man of scriptures indicates a mythical link. He possesses ancient wisdom which seems to frame everything in a perfect manner. He is the one who compares Vasu as Rakshasa, a demon who is an embodying force of destruction. He is the one who is in-charge of Nataraj's inner sanctum at the press. Being a Brahmin, he performs Satyanarayana Puja on full-moon days as homage to Lord Vishnu and he also makes pilgrimages to holy sites.

Even the character of Rangī is also an imperative stature which epitomizes not only through her moniker which means Lord Ranganatha Swamy or Lord Krishna. Rangī who is a temple dancer present at the decease of Vasu. She also plays the role of salvage of Kumar which refers to the perception of Dharma. The perception of Dharma and its complement, the perception of Moksha, put numerous of the characters in a new radiance. The other character, Muthu exemplifies the path of devotion. He does what on earth he can to save his temple elephant and improves the Mempi temple and also scrutinizes the proper offerings to the temple goddess.

In the novel, the narrator shows all the definitions of Rakshasa by the persevere natter of Sastri and went on to define the make-up of an evil beast who acquired colossal potency, eccentric clouts, intellectual but identified no sort of restraints of man or God. In the novel, Vasu was introduced as an evil incarnate. He is six feet tall with large powerful eyes, bull neck, large forehead and hammer-fist. He is very confident, hard-hearted and does not have perception of morality. He boasts of being the rival to Nature whose values of life are based on material sources and destructive reasons. He abhors marriage system and comments that only fool crave to get married. Like how a demon Kumbakarna in the Ramayana shows his gluttony diet, Vasu also possess the diet which involves almonds with milk, six eggs with honey every morning, rice and chicken at lunch and profusion of vegetables and fruits at night. His physical edifice, appearance and destructive thoughts reflect an ogre. He petrifies children, slays animals, repels

neighbourhood people with the stench of his workshop and defies social conventions by bringing in prostitutes. 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. His hair is described as a 'black halo'. In common case, 'halo' should be bright, radiance, aura and considered as a mark of exceptionality or divinity but here it is contemplated as an evil man which refereed to his negative role in the novel. The narrator shows all the definitions of *Rakshasa* by the persevere natter of Sastri and went on to define Vasu as *Rakshasa* and says,

"Every *Rakshasa* gets swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him. He stood expatiating on the lives of various demons in Puranas to prove his point" (84).

He displayed with great versatility and knowledge. Nataraj found his talk enlightening. He went on, his information was encyclopedic. He removed his silver-rimmed spectacles and put them away in his shirt pocket as being an impediment to his discourse.

The novel is read as a modern restructuring of the stories of the Puranas where a demon works hard usually by prayer and penance propitiates a deity of his choice, acquires a boon and then uses this for negative and destructive purposes. Finally, the deity is so tortured that he takes divine help to destroy the demon. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law, but finally he oversteps his limitations and is destroyed. Nataraj is comparable to the deity who grants the demon Vasu, a place and adequate encouragement to carry out his murderous profession and finally it is Nataraj who is most troubled by the demoniac Vasu and the strength with which he perpetrates endless violence and destruction is finally the cause of his own death.

In very little time, Vasu has shown derision for almost everything that Nataraj holds i.e., the caste system, the path of peacefulness, admiration for elders, the inviolability of the family and of chastity and the sanctity of life itself. When



he kills Nataraj's cat it shows that he is not above killing something that is part of Nataraj's family. The only thing left for him is to insult Nataraj's devotion to the gods. Vasu kills a tiger, a symbol of Shiva, and also sees him stuffing golden eagle Nataraj says to Vasu that that he has deprived Lord Vishnu by killing his messenger golden eagle, Garuda who is a symbol of sacredness. But Vasu makes a joke of it and retorts stridently, "I want to try and make Vishnu use his feet on now and then" (58).

This is an offensive thing to Nataraj who have deep faith in God but Vasu who is an atheist cannot sympathize with his viewpoint. Eventually, Vasu sketches to slay the temple elephant; it amounts to a direct attempt on the life of a god. Kumar is a sacred elephant being associated with the temple, and represents the Lord Ganesha. His killing of the sacred animals shows his disrespect for the gods which is a feature of demons. Like how the demons threatens Indra, God of heaven Vasu also threatens Nataraj and kills animals which causes his own ultimate destruction and order is restored again in the world.

Vasu is not only just a killer of animals but also disturbs the existence of Nataraj. He acts like a true Rakshasa, a demon who threatens to destroy Nataraj's way of life. He kidnaps Nataraj and leaves him stranded far from home to pass through inevitable suffering which shows Vasu's devilish spirit. We can see a parallel between that event and the kidnapping of Sita by Ravana in the Ramayana. He is also reckons to have poisoned Kumar, causing his illness and also shooting Kumar for financial benefit which is attributed to demons in mythology. He will not give importance to the cultural heritage and does not care for people's spiritual and poignant emotions. He imparts Nataraj: "I can make ten thousand out of the parts of this elephant". This causes much mental agitation and spiritual anguish to Nataraj and he grows delirious and loudly cries out 'Vishnu', which makes the agitated people rush to him to see what has gone wrong. "Oh, Vishnu!, I howled. 'Save our elephant, and save our innocent men and women who are going to pull the chariot" (155).

These things view a light that Vasu deserves to be called a Man-Eater.

In the novel, Narayan uses the Bhasmasura myth as a conscious technique, the mythical technique and the purpose being to stress the self distributive nature of Vasu so as to enrich the texture of the novel and to link it up with the Indian classical tradition. When Sastri says to Nataraj, "to deal with a *Rakshasa* one must possess the marksmanship of a hunter, the width of a pundit, and the guile of a harlot" (84). He further said, "There was Ravana, the demon of Ramayana, who had ten heads and twenty arms and enormous yogic and physical powers, and a boon from the gods that he could never be vanquished. The earth shook under his tyranny. Still he came to a sad end. The other demon Mahishasura who meditated and acquired a boon of immortality and who had secured an especial favour that every drop of blood shed from his body should give rise to another demon in his own image and strength, and who nevertheless was destroyed. The Goddess with six arms, each bearing a different weapon, come riding for the fight on a lion which sucked every drop of blood drawn from the demon" (84).

"Then there was a Bhasmasura, who acquired a special boon that everything he touched should be scorched, while nothing could every destroy him. With this special boon he made humanity suffer. Later God Vishnu was incarnated as Mohini, a beautiful dancer with whom the asura turn out to be obsessed. She assured to acquiesce to him merely if he imitated all the gestures and movements of her own dancing. At the end of the dance, Mohini put her palms on her cranium, and the fiend pursued the same gesticulation in absolute forgetfulness and was reduced to ashes that very moment, the blighting touch flattering active on his own cranium. Every man can assume that he is great and will be eternal, but none can speculate from which part his destiny will approach" (84-85).

In the novel, Sastri stresses the parallel between Vasu and Bhasmasura and hints at the manner of Vasu's sudden and unexpected death. At the end Vasu dies like Bhasmasura with a blow of his



first on his own head and the novel concludes with the words of Sastri as, "Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the *Rakshasa* 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. Otherwise what is to happen to humanity? He narrated again for Nataraj's benefit the story of Bhasmasura the unconquerable who scorched everything he touched, and finally reduced himself to ashes by placing the tips of his fingers on his own head" (203).

Sastri compared Vasu's death with the death of the demon Bhasmasura who is tricked into placing his hands on his head by Krishna who is disguised as a dancer Mohini and is scorched to death by his fatal touch. His death emulates that of Bhasmasura's death. Finally, Nataraj realizes the story of Gajendra-Moksha in Vishnu Purana, where Lord Krishna who is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu who saved the life Gajendra, Kumar. This teaches the moral lesson of how to pull down the killer and save the innocent: "God Krishna was really an incarnation of Vishnu, who had saved Gajendra; he would again come to the rescue of the same animal" (154).

Thus, Vasu's death suggests mythical parallel. The novelist wants to show that no one can escape from Karma. He also shows the relation of birth and death to Karma. Even the character of Nataraj exemplifies the kind of people who the novelist would like to inhabit his Malgudi and who is the reader would also welcome in his midst as a person worthy of trust. The narrator used the name Nataraj for the protagonist because the Lord Shiva who is also called as Nataraj is the patron of dance and arts. He is also the destroyer of the world. So, in the novel Nataraj also support in launching the artist in the world which is a laudable attempt while he is also the person who indirectly destroys all that is evil in the microcosm of Malgudi so that good can prosper and proliferate. The rhythm of life returns to Malgudi and Nataraj after Vasu's death.

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