



R.K. NARAYAN'S *THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI*: A VICTORY OF GOOD OVER EVIL

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ABSTRACT

The Man Eater of Malgudi deals with the universal theme of conflict between the good and evil which is represented by Nataraj and Vasu respectively. In beginning evil seems indomitable, but it always carries with itself a seed of self-destruction, and in the same way goodness seemingly weak is ultimately victorious. Nataraj is living a peaceful life but his life gets disturbed with Vasu's arrival. Vasu is a product of darkness and liberal thinking. He indulges in illicit sexual relations with many women. One of them is Rangi who is a devadasi. Vasu symbolizes the mythical Bhasmasura, who is the representative of the evil while Rangi symbolizes Mohini, the seducer and killer of Bhasmasura. Vasu is shown as a modern man who is blindly following the short-cuts to earn more and more money at the cost of other's lives. He kills the innocent animals, threatens people of Malgudi, destroys their property and enjoys his life. He considers himself omnipotent and invincible that leads him towards his destruction. He got swollen with his ego. On the other hand Nataraj is a representative of goodness. Narayan gives a very powerful message through the character of Vasu that evil always brings self-destruction and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment. He depicts the reality of modern man through this myth.

Key Words: Good, Evil, Victory, Self- destruction.

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The Man Eater of Malgudi is one of the greatest novels of R.K.Narayan. It is a hilarious comedy with a powerful message, that the good cannot be defeated by the evil. 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 intension cannot be missed. (380)

This novel has a deep philosophical and moral significance. According to Naik and Meenakshi Mukherjee this novel has recreated the ancient

Puranic myth of Mohini and Bhasmasura in a modern and interesting form. We find the universal theme of conflict between the good and the evil in this novel, which is represented by Nataraj and Vasu respectively. In beginning evil seems indomitable, but it always carries with itself a seed of self-destruction and in the same way goodness seemingly weak is ultimately victorious. The novel begins with Nataraj who is the owner of a printing press in Malgudi. He is shown as a simple and pure-hearted man who has never made any enemy. On the other hand Vasu is a taxidermist, who is attributed with demonic inclinations. He is the

product of darkness who wants to rule the world. V.V.N. Rajendra Prasad observes that:

Narayan has juxtaposed the painter Nataraj, the Sura symbolizing his namesake, lord of dance with the taxidermist Vasu, representing the mythic 'Rakshasha' Bhasmasura in the realistic context knitting them with the lives of the Malgudians. (97)

Most of the action of the novel takes place in Kabir Street of Malgudi, where Nataraj lives with his wife and son, Babu. He is grateful to goddess Lakshmi for his happiness and prosperity and worships daily. He is living a peaceful life but his life gets disturbed with Vasu's arrival.

Narayan uses a mythical technique which reflects to ancient legends and myths related to them. He juxtaposes the myths with the contemporary scenario which makes the reader to see the similarities and contrasts between the past and the present. Narayan himself says; "I want a story to be entertaining, enjoyable and illuminating in the some way." His fictional place Malgudi is a traditional town which holds the Hindu way of life. The people of Malgudi believe in order and stability. The peace of Malgudi gets disturbed with the arrival of Vasu. He is a man of liberal thinking who does not ready to follow any rule of society. He moves into Nataraj's attic and fills the place with lots of ballooned pythons, hyenas and tigers and skins of the other animals. He has already left his family and comes to Malgudi as he finds this place better for his business. He ridicules the institutions of marriage by saying; "Only fools marry and they deserve all the trouble they get" (29). He indulges in illicit sexual relations with many women. One of them is Rangi who is a devadasi. Vasu symbolizes the mythical Bhasmasura, who is the representative of the evil while Rangi symbolizes Mohini, the seducer and killer of Bhasmasura. She is very beautiful as Mohini is described in the myth. Vasu is completely mesmerized by her beauty. Although she is a prostitute but her sensual activities do not restrain her from faith and devotion in God. She defends her profession by saying:

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. (33)

Vasu shares each and everything with her and plans to marry with her. He tells her about his plan of killing the temple elephant, Kumar. However, Rangi enjoys Vasu's company but she does not like his plan of killing the elephant. She does not get attracted towards his scheme of making money. She wants to save the innocent animal and that is why she informs Nataraj about Vasu's evil intentions. She proves that it is the intentions of a person that make him good or bad not his profession. In night she keeps him busy with her. She fans and sings for him so that she can do something to stop him. But she also gets sleep and finds Vasu dead in the morning. Nataraj is not aware about his death. He goes to meet him in night but at that time he finds him sleeping. Next morning everyone comes to know about Vasu's sudden death. He is dead by his own fatal blow while attempting to swat the mosquitoes.

Vasu is given the title of 'The Man Eater of Malgudi' by the narrator as he is the embodiment of destruction and demonic activities. He represents the modern man who is blindly following the shortcuts to earn more and more money at the cost of other's lives. He is the product of modern industrialization, competition and urbanization to which the simple and peaceful people of Malgudi are not ready to accept. He is a self-righteous person who is full of pride about his physical strength as he introduced himself as a 'Pahalwan' in the beginning. He disrespected even his Guru who taught him the skills of pahlwani. He tells how he attacked on his Guru in fight:

I know 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 strong man's life once for all. (23)

He is an epicurean who does not believe any institution or follow any rule except of his own. He kills the innocent animals, threatens people of Malgudi, destroys their property and enjoys his life at the cost of others. He considers himself omnipotent and invincible that leads him towards his destruction. He got swollen with his ego. His all

activities put him apart from the common human beings. He himself admits his rival nature when arrives Malgudi:

After all we are civilized human beings, educated and cultured, and it's up to us to prove our superiority to nature. Science conquers nature in a new way each day: why not in creation also? That's my philosophy, Sir; I challenge any man to contradict me. (51)

On the other hand Nataraj is a representative of goodness. He is altruist and always tries to maintain the peace and brotherhood in Malgudi. He believes in the Indian ethical and moral code of conduct. He is presented as a true symbol of tolerance and generosity. His friendly behavior draws attention from the people and makes them to visit his printing press. He has lots of friends including a businessman, lawyer, poet and various other officials of Malgudi. Nataraj is quite famous because of his nature and good behavior. He wanted to be friend with Vasu even after knowing his reality. He himself says:

I could never be a successful enemy to anyone. Any enmity worried me night and day...It bothered me like tooth-ache...I was longing for a word with Vasu...He was a terrible specimen of human being no doubt, but I wanted to be on taking terms with him. (199)

He got attracted by Vasu's personality and his boastful conversations when he arrived. But at the same time he found him strange and he thought to maintain distance from him. But Vasu played tricks to trap him in his lies. Nataraj was aware about his evil incarnates, yet he does not hate him. He tried to stop him many times in his own way, but failed. He regrets on his decision of giving his attic to Vasu on rent. He confesses "The trouble with me was that I was not able to say 'no' to anyone and that got me into complications with everyone" (199). Nataraj believes in God firmly and his philosophy that preaches to 'hate evil but not man.' He remembers God when he comes to know about Vasu's plan of killing the elephant. "Oh Vishnu, savior of elephant, save all the innocent men and women who are going to pull the chariot" (175). He himself brought Kumar

from Mempi Hills. He finds himself helpless before Vasu's evil intentions. So he leaves everything on God. And in the morning Sastri tells him that Vasu is dead. Sastri is introduced by Narayan as another gentleman next to Nataraj. He is a balancing factor between the good and the evil. He has a good learning and wisdom which makes him to frame everything in perfect manner. He links the past with the present through the myth when he explains the death of Vasu. He compares Vasu with a Rakshasa, Bhasmasura and exposes the suspense of his death on the testimony of a parallel mythical end of Bhasmasura;

God Vishnu was incarnated as a dancer of beauty, named Mohini, with whom the Asura became infatuated. She promised to yield to him only if he imitated all the gestures and movements of her own dancing. At one point of dance, Mohini places her own palm on her head, and the demon followed this gesture in complete forgetfulness and was reduced to ashes that very second, the blighting touch becoming active on his own head. (96)

Narayan gives a very powerful message through the character of Vasu that evil always brings self-destruction and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment. He depicts the reality of present through this myth. In ancient times good and evil were represented by the Sura and Asura respectively. Asuras wanted to rule the earth and heaven as it is depicted in our holy scriptures. They were always in want of more and more power and for this they destroyed each and everything which came in the way of their victory. In the same manner, modern man is also in the want of power, wealth, success, luxury etc. and for this he is ready to do anything without giving a second thought as it is shown by Vasu. Like Vasu modern man's actions are also leading him on the way of self-destruction. He is already facing its consequences but for him it is just a beginning. He is covering his sins under the covers of development and modernization. Narayan is a writer whose roots come out from Indian tradition and culture. He has a deep knowledge of Ramayana, Mahabharata and other Indian holy scriptures. That is why his most of stories are based

on classical Indian narrative texts. He uses ancient myth, legends, folklore consciously to highlight the problems of the present era. He is a keen observer and always tries to show some serious and untold issues of society. He always deals with practical life or issues. The present novel depicts evil of the society, exposes it in a very interesting and humorous way and at the same time criticizes it on all levels whether it is physical, psychological, racial or cultural. *The Man Eater of Malugdi* depicts universal fact that evil is always been anti-life, anti-nature and anti-faith, in other words it makes a person blind in his misunderstanding of considering himself the most powerful person. It is true that in the beginning it fascinates everyone. Nataraj also got attracted towards Vasu and his personality. But when he came to know about his actions, he starts to find way to get rid from him. Evil appears in the world with a boon of indestructibility but sooner or later goodness comes with a victory. Narayan has shown the victory of the good over the evil by presenting the death of Vasu by his own hand and the return of the peace and harmony in Malgudi.

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