

HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP IN R.K. NARAYAN'S *THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI*: A BLEND ON TRADITION AND MODERNITY

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Abstract

India is a multicultural nation renowned for its abundant flora and fauna. Indians have a special bond with the natural world. The majority of the elements in nature are worshipped as gods or goddesses. A severe disaster for human existence could result from damaging nature. This ideology has been exposed by an eminent writer R.K. Narayan in his novel *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. R.K. Narayan was known for his realistic characters. Most of his novels have centred in a fictional town Malgudi. The novel illustrates the tension between contemporary individualism and traditional ideas. The diverse relationships between humans and nature are examined in this research paper. The disagreement between contemporary ideology and conventional ethics is also highlighted in the paper. The research paper also asserts that harm done to the natural world would ultimately harm humanity. The character Nataraj becomes a metaphor for a traditional man whose name gets exploited for providing space that leads to the exploitation of nature. The taxidermist Vasu's characteristics serve as an archetype for the idea that the devastation of nature is equivalent to the demise of humanity. The paper's conclusion asserts that leading a harmonious existence in harmony with nature can benefit humanity as a whole.

Keywords: Tradition, Modernity, Human-Nature Relationship, Indian Writings, Malgudi.

Introduction:

R.K. Narayan, an Indian writer in English is well known for his simple language and description of Indian customs and tradition in everyday life. His love for Indian Puranas and legends can be sensed through his writings. His novel *The Man-Eaters of Malgudi*, acts as an archetype from Indian Legend *Bhaskarasura*. Through this novel, Narayan tries to exemplify the growing modernity. He has brought nature as a metaphor to modernity. Destruction of nature will have a catastrophic effect on human kind. Similarly, a complete turn to modernity, neglecting traditional values of India can lead to the destruction of the true essence of Indians.

Nataraj is the main character of the story. Narayan has used this character to represent traditional ideals. Narayan's depiction of Nataraj aids the reader to know about the traditional Hindu Indian Life. Nataraj's early morning bath and worshipping sun are seen as a traditional routine done by everyone (Bhaduri 56).

At the foot of the tree was a slab of stone on which I washed by dhoti and towel, the dark hour resounding with the tremendous beating of wet cloth on granite. I stood in waist-deep water, and at the touch of cold water around my body I felt elated. The trees on the bank stood like shadows in the dusk. When the east glowed I sat for a moment on the sand, reciting a prayer to the Sun to illumine my mind (4).

Narayan's description about the traditional way of living is to show the peace within oneself. This helps the global readers know about the life of Indians. He also describes the Indian joint family system. People lived together on one roof with lots of values. "Narayan initially gives a picture of a vibrant Indian joint family system where people of different kinds reside under the same roof sharing common values, the same codes of conduct and staunch belief in ahimsa" (Bhaduri 56).

Modernity is taking over the ground and traditionalism is fading away. It is well expounded through Narayan in his story.

Not in my wildest dream had I ever thought that my press would one day be converted into a charnel house--but here it was happening.

And I was watching it helplessly.

Sometimes it made me very angry.

Why couldn't

I ask him to get out? (41)

The above mentioned lines depict that none has ever thought about the transformation which is taking place. The modern people are forgetting the ethics and the traditional ones are helpless at this transcending situation. People are unable to question the transition happening in post-colonial India.

The character Vasu is represented as a modern man, with selfish ideology. He never cares about the pain he is causing to the animals. The environmental degradation happening in society is expressed through his actions. Street, and right across it to my own home. But all this for harboring the murderer of innocent creatures! (41). I was brought up in a house where we were taught never to kill. When we swatted flies, we had to do it without the knowledge of our elders. I remember particularly one of my grand-uncles who had the little room on the pyol, who used to give me a coin every morning to buy sugar for the ants, and he kept an eye on me to see that I delivered the sugar to the ants in various corners of our house (41).

Indians follow Ahimsa, they are thought to feed animals and not to kill any fellow beings. The moral values are vanishing in the mind of modern Indians. Narayan's concern about preserving Indian values is expressed through the character Nataraj. Harmony with nature will bring harmony to human kind. "Narayan's concern for the common man is distrust of power, his love of all created beings and his conviction that humanity has in it a built-in-mechanism which will enable it to survive-all this finds their effortless and triumphant expression in this story" (Rao 97).

Vasu living as a tenant without permission of Nataraj can be seen as modernity taking over the place of traditionality. Later Nataraj was forced to accompany Vasu to the forest and Vasu left him alone. Without any kind of courtesy Vasu continues to do his work. The attitude of modern people will be similar to that of Vasu. They take traditional values to an extent and leave them in the middle as they are not contributing to their growth. "It is metaphorical that modernity has taken traditional ideologies with it but it is left in the middle and started seeking individuality. This will be the attitude of a modern person. Though they take some traditional ideas with them, they will not be able to carry them completely. Modern person will be keen in achieving his desire irrespective of traditional notions and values" (Sarkar 49).

The growth in education and update in the culture are not to destroy nature or feel superior over nature. Though science has brought changes in the life of Humankind, without natural elements one cannot sustain in life. Nature can play multiple roles especially in a post-colonial world that has a materialistic vision (Sahoo 773). The character Vasu misunderstands this phenomenon and tries to be superior over nature. His harmful behaviour towards the innocent animals depicts his anthropocentric attitude. ". . . we are civilized human beings, educated and cultured, and it is 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. . ." (10)

The two extremes of human nature have been portrayed by Narayan in the novel one, Nataraj who is courteous towards nature and another one Vasu who destroys and disturbs its existence. "Human beings will have to be sympathetic towards the whole of nature only to be sympathetic towards the human race. The sentiment of this whole affair will have to be understood by them, and in this regard, sentimentality is essential for creating a mentality of preserving nature"(Sarkar 48).

Women are always related to nature. In this novel, the character Rangi is brought in parallel to nature. Vasu exploits both forest and women. "... representation of women is parallel to the representation of nature in society. Human beings are continuously violating the virginity of nature for their own interest. They are threatening the natural environment extensively" (Mannan 100).

R.K Narayan exposes the psychology of a male who is not sympathetic towards nature and who is not sympathetic towards any living being. A person's psychology can be understood by his attitude towards nature. Vasu is neither good with nature nor with women. He exploits Rangi and uses her. He is against the traditional notion of marriage which is expressed through the following lines "Only fools marry, and they deserve all the trouble they get. I really do not know why people should marry at all. If you like a woman, have her by all means. You don't really have to own a coffee estate because you like to have a cup of coffee now and then" (24).

Vasu shows no differentiation between animal and woman. In India women were subjects used by men for their welfare. "It clarifies the fact that females are exploited by the males in the same way as human beings exploit natural elements" (Sarkar 49).

Women are always associated with nature. It is important to preserve nature as well as take care of women. Without women and nature, the world becomes void and lifeless. "It criticizes patriarchal society for exploiting natural resources such as animals, land, air, water and so on . . . Nature is feminized by men; as women are strictly connected with nature and nature possesses the qualities of women"(Mannan 99).

The natural phenomenon of the food chain aids the other animal. The death of one animal gives life to another animal. But Vasu's action of killing one animal is not giving life to anyone. This action shows nothing but his superiority over animals and destruction of forest creatures. "Nature is powerful enough to annihilate its enemies"(Sahoo 773) .The statement is true in the case of Vasu.

The author has included the legend of Bhasmasura in the novel ". . . the story of Bhasmasura the unconquerable, who scorched everything he touched and finally reduced himself to ashes by placing his fingers on his own head" (145). Similar to this story, Vasu also dies in a mysterious manner. Narayan has used this as an archetype to show that we will also be destroyed if we keep destroying Mother Nature. Narayan preserves his traditional value by including an Indian mythology into his novel. Indian mythology serves to explain the cosmic reality. By including the ancient legend with modern touch creates a blend between tradition and modernity. "Myth criticism attempts to bring out the cultural myths underlying literature. Weaving modern material on the pattern of ancient myth is supposed to be a new approach to antiquity with the aim of fusing it with modernity" (Pandey 1).

The author ends the novel by stating that a harmful attitude towards nature is like self destruction. Vasu's death is the symbolic representation of it. "Nature is powerful enough to annihilate its enemies in due time, and this process of annihilation comes in the shape of natural disasters" (Sarkar 50).

Nataraj on the other hand has lost his fame in the city for not taking rightful action at the right time. The novelist tries to expose that one must not remain silent, if someone is harming other living beings. People must raise their voice against the injustice happening to their fellow beings and try to preserve as much as possible. The human kind should live in harmony with nature and they should not completely leave out their traditional ideologies.

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