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in *The Man-eater of Malgudi*: A Quest to Enter a "New World"**

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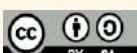
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MELVILLE'S AHAB IN MOBY DICK AND R K NARAYAN'S VASU IN THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI: A QUEST TO ENTER A "NEW WORLD"

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Abstract

Utilizing critical literature on Melville and RK Narayan and then reading Moby-Dick (1851) and The Man Eater of Malgudi closely (1961), this article concerns American and Indian works of literature and argues that both writers were among the leading imaginative writers to create niches in terms of philosophy. Both used imagination, symbolism, and spiritual and universal impulses to make the characters and books worth reading. However, both novels portray a quest to enter a "New World" through protagonists Ahab and Vasu, who bring multiple concerns and commit catastrophic blunders. The article sails through a comparative study of the protagonists analyzing the critical factors, such as adventurous and mysterious wanderers, the universe being both godless and purposeless, virtues versus sins, influence and fusion of divergent subjects, their anti-life and anti-nature attitude, intelligence and wisdom and archetype ambitions that lead them to self-destruction. This paper intends to explore the dynamics of the relationship between American and Indian Literature through protagonists Ahab and Vasu's acquisitive, coseismic, nomadic, and fanatic nature in their quest to enter a "New World" to address aspects that the present time calls for; hence, making both novels great in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Herman Melville; Moby Dick; RK Narayan, The Man Eater of Malgudi.



A. Introduction

This paper concerns American and Indian works of literature and argues that both writers were among the leading writers of philosophy. Herman Melville (1819-1891), an American writer, and Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami (also known as R. K. Narayan) (1906-2001), an Indian writer, were the greatest novelists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both used imagination, symbolism, and spiritual and universal impulses to make the characters and books worth reading. So does it, the study undertakes the novels Melville's *Moby Dick* and Narayan's *The Man-eater of Malgudi* to embrace the reasons that compel the protagonists Ahab and Vasu to escape the existing world and enter a new domain to establish their dominance. Additionally, both novels portray a quest to enter a "New World" through these two protagonists, who brought multiple concerns and committed catastrophic blunders. The study sails through a comparative study of the protagonists analyzing a few previous works and several factors that lead them to self-destruction.

Many studies have been undertaken on Melville's *Moby Dick* that includes the theme of the novel as an empty and self-consuming aspect of reality; measuring of pain in Melville's writings; the dominance of a materialistic approach over spirituality; the narrator's perspective from *Moby Dick* beyond boundaries; and finding the novel as an "Epic-Romance" (Chase, 1949; Cole, 2012; Constantinesco, 2021; Lovasz, 2022; Matthiessen, 1941; Parker, 2002; Parker & Hayford, 2002; Schenck, 2022; Sharma, 2017; Walsh, 1970). Similarly, many scholars have undertaken multiple concepts to explore different aspects of Narayan's novels. The notable works covering varied aspects of *The Man-eater of Malgudi* include the myth elements in the novel; Vasu as the embodiment of evil and a seed of self-destruction; Vasu as a complete rakshasa and the Bhasmasura; and Vasu views himself as a god (Iyengar, 1975; Naik, 1976; Priyanka, 2014; Radhika, 2016; Sharma, 2006; Shinde, 2020; Syal, 2017). However, we could not find any study that deals with the mechanics, specific domains, and comparative study between an American scholar's and an Indian scholar's works in today's context.



Therefore, this paper intends to explore the dynamics of the relationship between American and Indian Literature through protagonists Ahab and Vasu's acquisitive, coseismic, nomadic, and fanatic nature in their quest to enter a "New World" to address aspects that the present time calls for; hence, making both novels great in the twenty-first century.

Melville and Narayan are undoubtedly the world's acclaimed authors (Sharma, 2006, 2017), giving a new dimension to world fiction. Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Whitman, and Melville are the "Big Five" and pioneers of American literature (Sharma, 2017, 2023) and helped revive its spirit and light among scholars. Similarly, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan produced many creative works adding new fragrances and dimensions to the history of Indian writing in English. Walsh (1970) calls Narayan one of the "Big Three" and affirms that Narayan has significantly contributed to the development of Indian English fiction. They crafted characters like Ahab and Vasu to provide readers with a real glimpse of people and their outlawed, unethical, and dishonest behavior against animals and people in society. Additionally, *Moby Dick* and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* are more than just descriptions of actual events since Melville depicts Ahab's fervor for vengeance and the tragic voyage, and Vasu's illusions to be ungodly and omnipotent harassing people and killing animals in their journeys of life. However, a few previous related works are needed to understand how Ahab and Vasu share similar personal and societal features to establish a "New World".

Melville's *Moby Dick*, published in 1850, is the incarnation of man's quest for reason for existence in a new world. Scholars have different interpretations of the novel. Lovasz (2022) considers the novel's theme empty and self-consuming and states that real objects are unreal, and the matter is hauntingly immaterial. Constantinesco (2021) investigated the measure of pain in Melville's writings and examined how it may begin on the terrain of epistemology and end in literary representation. Cole (2012) revealed the dominance of a materialistic approach over spirituality in *Moby Dick*, where people consider a white whale "plundered for its oil" and "left to stink up the beach". Alike, Schenck (2022) investigated the narrator's perspective from



Moby Dick, where it looks for truth by looking beyond conventional geographical, political, and social boundaries. Additionally, it encourages accurate depictions of exploitation that change people's views of the man who steals valuable assets for paltry gain. The protagonist Ahab, a moody and resentful sea captain of Pequod, is pitted against the enormous White Whale that maimed him and eventually came to rule his life in this obsessive maritime adventure which Chase (1949) calls an "Epic-Romance".

Narayan has produced several good works, and *The Man-eater of Malgudi* (1961) sets the stage to illustrate the conflict between good and evil. The novel modifies the old Hindu myth of Bhasmasura, portrayed through the character Vasu, a "demon" killer of animals, who terrorizes people, and rules over defying social norms. Syal (2017) wrote about myth elements and argued for Vasu, who remains remarkably alive even if he is stripped of his mythical dimensions. Priyanka (2014) described Vasu as the embodiment of evil and compared him to Milton's Satan. Radhika (2016) also mentions Vasu as a symbol of evil which always carries with him a seed of self-destruction. Similarly, Shinde (2020) writes that Vasu views himself as a god, which brings him to his demise. Naik (1976) compares Vasu as a complete rakshasa and the Bhasmasura and believes that the Vasu story also compares to how Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* hilariously employs the Christ analogy in the instance of the Compson children.

In addendum to the preceding explanation, the study's significance lies in understanding the social, moral, spiritual, and political aspects in pinpointing the societal problems and sufferings of people caused by Ahab and Vasu. The description exposes the societal evils and people suffering in light of the different pressures surrounding them and their persistent negative approach to creating a "New World" for them. Here, the authors alienate the pragmatic approach to life through their range of talent, a portrayal of characters, and an authentic presentation of philosophical, spiritual, and real situations of time and society. Despite all the previous works, there is still a dearth of studies that examine its protagonist Ahab



compared to other novel characters, and Ahab and Vasu, for which the current study intends. The succeeding sections delve deep into the two novels and their protagonists to attest to their quest to enter a "New World".

B. Method

In this study, a descriptive study design with a component of qualitative analysis is used. The research is qualitative and provides a content analysis of Melville's *Moby Dick* and Naryana's *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. This study focuses on previous studies' content, quotes, and findings. It is conducted from a comparative standpoint to understand the societal and humanistic aspects represented through the characters of Ahab and Vasu, the demons, a symbol of evil forces of animal and human life.

The comparative literature approach is employed as it entails the similarities and differences between the protagonists and other aspects of these novels. The comparative method is also used to understand Ahab and Vasu's behavior by examining both texts. The researcher sorted, analyzed, and compared the literary works in various contexts to empathetically create meanings and convey their emotions, feelings, and ideas to the readers. Besides, the information is gathered by reading edited books, past research, theoretical viewpoints, and resources on novels and related works. He also critically examined the literature on Melville and Narayan's abilities to see things from several angles and their use of artistic skills. The researcher, however, also looked into other studies on several issues that the novels raise on Ahab and Vasu, the protagonists, to present the results that are carefully discussed further.

C. Result and Discussion

The study's probe of the two novels and their central figures, Ahab and Vasu, yields valuable results. Firstly, the protagonists, in their sole fixation, adopted an aggressive and anti-social approach in a quest to enter a "New World" that brought out multiple concerns. They committed ruinous blunders in pursuit of their archetype ambitions that proved fatal. Secondly, anyone who thinks himself insatiable, omnipotent with infinite



powers, gives no value to nature, animals, and human beings, who never surrenders and submits to societal norms, and higher power becomes societal evil with a tragic end. Ahab and Vasu's misdeeds and obsession with killing animals and disturbing nature and peace in society proved fatal to their lives. Both were destroyed by the invincible faith in their community. Moreover, Ahab and Vasu are the avatar of evil and are hell-bent on destroying all that preserves nature and life. Thirdly, we find that evil minds' intentions do not sustain long and leave no time for contemplation, resulting in an inevitable defeat.

The accurate portrayal of man's evil nature and societal values in the novels proved the artistry of Melville and Narayan, who perfectly brought a fusion of divergent subjects such as philosophy, science, history, and politics. Fourthly, Ahab and Vasu's failure to recognize the evil they possessed, accepted, and improved upon them had multiplied their challenges, problems, and misfortunes. We also found that Melville and Narayan's total objectivity as writers had given the characters their fictional universe life, and despite being allegorical and representative figures, they maintained a uniqueness that prevented their characters from coming off as figures from real people. Thus, Ahab and Vasu represented all classes who looked as if they acted genuine for readers. Both novels depicted different shades of individuality, societal and human relationships, and the incongruity of society. Finally, the dynamics of the relationship between American and Indian Literature address all the desired aspects that the present time calls for enlightening young readers and scholars with knowledge of "at that time" cultures and societies and "at this time". Additionally, the main issues regarding the two protagonists Ahab and Vasu we consider from multiple readings, perspectives, and analyses, which are enumerated in the succeeding paragraphs significantly, support these findings.

1. Adventurous and Mysterious Wanderers

Ahab and Vasu pretended to be people with dual personalities. They were very friendly and supportive and behaved positively in some situations;



however, being secluded individuals, they consistently created a terrifying, troubling, and terrorizing environment for the people around them. Their actions, therefore, disturbed people's peace of mind. Both intended to invent a new world where they might become omnipotent and kill anyone who challenged their mighty powers. They were courageous and had an indomitable spirit that enabled them to take stringent paths to follow their pursuits. Their path was dangerous and mysterious; however, they yearned to explore and find new identities. Obsessed with the amputated leg, Ahab wanted to kill the White Whale. He had a burned face, gray hair, and a visible scar, giving him a menacing appearance. He chose to sea voyage to pursue his desire to find a new home.

Hamad (1999) felt that a sea journey represented the urge to wander into new territories or questing far away from society for the holy grail of raw experience. Ahab unsuccessfully attempted to kill a White Fish called Moby Dick on the sea voyage creating an unhealthy, threatening, and unpleasant environment in and around the ship. He was an atheist who never surrendered and submitted to any higher power. He thought of himself as a person with infinite power and never held anyone beyond himself. Similarly, Vasu moved from place to place to hunt animals and scare and beat people. He was a taxidermist who came to Malgudi to hunt animals in the wildlife in the nearby Mempi Hills. He was strong, built with mighty muscular strength, and always seemed belligerent and aggressive. His mysterious nature scared everyone, and shot pet dogs, animals, and birds near his living place and the Mempi Hills. His illusion of becoming omnipotent as Bhasmasur had consistently put him in great trouble in the peaceful world of Malgudi. Sastri, an orthodox-minded Sanskrit scholar called Vasu a rakshasa and said, "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" (Narayan, p. 94). Therefore, we may call Ahab and Vasu adventurous and mysterious wanderers since they are insatiable, obstinate, and obsessed with gaining powers by all means, even if at the cost of people's and animals' lives.



2. Self-destruction

Both Ahab and Vasu were engaged in hunting animals. The ship "Pequod" was engaged in following the White Whale or Moby Dick. The White Whale was the obsession of Ahab, who suffered limb amputations while pursuing the White Whale. Unfortunately, a three day-chase ensued, bringing up the destruction of the "Pequod" engineered by Moby Dick that resulted in all crews dying except Ishmael, who narrowly escaped death to tell us the story. Conversely, Vasu hunted animals and threatened people with his terrifying personality. He consistently terrorized the people with his demonic strength; however, literally, Vasu was not a man-eater, but only ate animal flesh. His potent power and strong muscles could break a huge strong "pahelwan" (which means wrestler or a strongman). Moreover, he was ready to kill a temple elephant Kumar and the tiger with his hands and no weapons. Ahab and Vasu died due to their own misdeeds and obsession to kill animals, disturbing nature and peace in society. The fetishism of their strength destroyed both, and the unvanquishable faith in their community brought about their elimination. After the Whale destroyed the ship, Ahab uttered his last words, saying, "Sink all coffins and all hearses... Thus, I give up the spear!" (MD, Chapter 135).

Conversely, people were happy about Vasu's death, like Bhasmasura, as the novel ends with Sastri's words, "Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. However, 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" (Naryan, p. 240).

3. Anti-life and Anti-nature Attitude

Ahab and Vasu acted against nature and had no value for other creatures' existence. Both had a shared obsession and purpose: hunting down and killing animals. Their quest to invent a "new world" made them fight against the infinite and natural powers of the universe, bringing their tragic end. Ahab is ungodly and wants to capture nature and God by going to



extremes and taking revenge against a “dumb brute . . . that simply smote thee from blindest instinct” (*The Quarter-Deck*, Chapter 36). Mad and obsessed with becoming omnipotent, he felt he could “strike the sun if it insulted me”. Similarly, Vasu consistently threatened people and killed animals in Mempi Hills. Vasu was fighting against human life, nature, and Godly things in his madness and pursuits. He wanted to kill Kumar, the elephant of Mempi's temple, just to earn money from the dead animal. Reading the novel, it seems that Vasu was above the law; however, he was not above God and Nature. Such an attempt to kill the divine elephant ultimately led to his demise. Both Ahab and Vasu when going against life and nature, died before they fulfilled their mala fide desires.

Acknowledging an absolute evil in the *Man-Eater of Malgudi*, Iyengar (1975) calls it “anti-life, anti-nature, anti-faith”. Moreover, the novel alienates Vasu as a rakshasa and may refer to him as anti-human, anti-nature, anti-society, and anti-faith. Therefore, we believe that evil minds' intentions do not sustain last since insane people like Ahab and Vasu have no time for contemplation, and their final defeat is inevitable.

4. Influence and Fusion of Divergent Subjects

Melville in the Ocean adventure *Moby Dick* and Narayan in his jungle adventure offer an array of wild adventures filled with several memorable characters. Besides, Melville's and Narayan's artistry is seen in their skillful fusion of divergent subjects such as philosophy, science, history, and politics. We can admire the authors' imagination when examining the representations from beyond the sea and jungle, but the sure, solid ground of reality always guides us. Thus, the actions and deeds of Ahab and Vasu significantly add to the pragmatism and sea of information. Nevertheless, Melville's intense reading about Job, the Stoics, the Agnostics, Manicheans, Spinoza, and the men of science greatly influenced the writing *Moby Dick*. These readings influenced Melville's thoughts profoundly, and he drew on them heavily and essentially changed the direction of Melville's book. He was stylistically influenced by Shakespeare, Thomas Browne, Carlyle, Hawthorne, and the Bible. Shakespeare's



influence enriched Melville's style at crucial points and elevated it to express profound natural forces. Parker (2002), in his biography of Melville, states, "Macbeth and King Lear had been strongly in his mind [by] mid-1851 when he was completing his whaling book". Further, as Matthiessen (1941) points out, there is a "Homeric level" in Melville. He evolved a visionary aesthetic akin to Antony and Cleopatra's depictions of the globe to preserve the reader's feeling of grandeur. He equally and successfully managed to maintain the stature of Ahab and the great Whale, as explicitly shown in the concluding lines of the passage when Ahab hurled defiance at St. Elmo's fire.

As in the hurricane that sweeps the plain, men fly the neighborhood of some lone, gigantic elm, whose very height and strength render it so much the more unsafe because so much, the more a mark for thunderbolts; so at those last words of Ahab's many of the mariners did run from him in a terror of dismay. (The Candles, Ch.119, p. 762).

Alike, Narayan also had a vast knowledge of literature and reads books of many native and foreign scholars; therefore, expanding his horizon of information in his book *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, he created the character Vasu, who resembles others such as Iago from Shakespeare's Othello, Heathcliff from Emile Bronte's Withering Heights, and Voss from Patrick White's Voss, who is the prince of darkness and his operations are to be done in darkness (Sarkar, 2019). Vasu is mentioned by different names such as "man-eater", "terrifying", "unreasonable", "man with the dark halo", "cruel", "rakshasa", and "arrogant by implication" in the novel. In addition, Williams (1977) considers Vasu as a revolutionary and mighty force that is uncontrollable, a mighty avalanche or a tempest. Further in the novel, Vasu's misdeeds and cruel nature make him a wild animal hunter and taxidermist.

5. Virtues versus Sins

Ahab and Vasu are the main protagonist-turned-central antagonist of the novels *Moby Dick* and *The Man-eater of Malgudi*, respectively. The above explanation provides ample evidence regarding the nature of Ahab and Vasu to comprehend their outer actions and inner reactions at the end;

however, again leaves multiple interpretations. Both went against nature and his will to destiny. To underscore such a one Ahab and Vasu attribute "deliberation" against themselves, they imagined the animals as the enemies of the soul and strive to enlarge it into the size of a life-superseding charm that would eventually kill them.

The exterior actions represented both novels' core motif, which was the inward annihilation of humanity. Moreover, both characters decided to play against destiny and did not consider their obligations and human feelings but identified their whole being with an injured part that would not heal. Ahab was so overpowered that he did not attend the cry of Starbuck before it was too late, "even now the third day to desist". "Moby Dick seeks thee not", cries Starbuck. "It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him" (The Chase- Third Day, p. 135, 851). Similarly, Vasu was mighty and disregarded all values and the goodness of life. He warned to toss Sen, the poet, Muthu, and Dr. Joshi out of his attic when they asked him not to shoot temple elephant Kumar. Even so, he grabbed Natraj's folder and donor list, then took the money from the townspeople for his purposes. However, God keeps a balance between nature, society, and humans. Saxena (1985, p. 290) opines, "When all human efforts fail to destroy the evil, God intervenes, and Vasu is destroyed by divine intervention". Vasu, therefore, was an inhumane and barbaric who defamed his owner. Natraj says, "He had destroyed my name, friendship, and world". Ahab and Vasu were evil-incarnate and bent on defeating all that supported nature and life.

6. For them, the universe is both Godless and purposeless

Ahab and Vasu had dual characters in the novels. At once both were supportive; however, mainly, their obsession and fanaticism against nature, animals, and people took them to exhibit their callous attitude that invited denunciation, profanity, and their tragic plight and fatal end they never expected in life. Taking up the metaphysical vein of thought in Melville, Parke (1955) traces the chaos "universe both Godless and purposeless" in *Moby Dick* and tries to explain why the author killed off his hero in a terrible black rage of pride and denial. Similarly, Vasu was helpful when he took



Natraj to the Mempi village with high spirits and playfulness. Additionally, he took Natraj to Malgudi in his jeep when the bus was broken down on the way to Mempi village.

However, his Bhasmasur temperament plunged the world into disorder, bringing restlessness to his face. Also, his consistent devilish activities against animals, humankind, and the community invited his self-annihilation. Taking both characters, we may say that man is not just surrounded by chaos, but he also lives in it. In reality, the apparent anarchy outside is a result of human depravity: "The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them" (*Moby Dick*, Ch. 41, p. 286). Because of their devilish and demonic actions, Vasu and Ahab's misfortune was their inability to see the evil inside them, act morally, and proceed. Therefore, their misfortune was their failure to recognize the evil they possessed, gracefully embrace it, act wisely against it, and grow up for impending challenges.

7. Knowledgeable and Intellectual

Ahab and Vasu were intellectual and knowledgeable giants and experts in their workings. Ahab was a ship Captain with vast knowledge of the sea, navigation, technical know-how, and sailing. Vasu was a postgraduate in three subjects English, Economics, and History. Besides, he had legal and spiritual knowledge. Vasu got accolades from Natraj, who said, "He worked single handed on all branches of his work. I admired him for it" (p. 66). Additionally, his oratory skill, dictatorial cum leadership qualities, and pseudo-self-willed ideology could be traced in his speech: "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 every day; why not in creation also? That's my philosophy, Sir". (p. 20).

The scholars are unanimous in seeing both Ahab and Vasu as professionally sound, intelligent, and visionary (Parker & Hayford, 2002; Sharma, 2017; Yadav & Yadav, 2019); however, their obsession, dominance, and archetype ambition made them surrender to their illusions of becoming Godly and omnipotent. The information provided in the novels concerning

these characters, the circumstances, and the fruitless attempts to find a "New World" entitles the novels to be regarded as having both fictional and scientific content.

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article looked at Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* protagonist Ahab and R K Narayan's *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*'s Vasu as the key characters who, in their quest to establish a "New World", dominate and rule the novels. As mentioned earlier, the findings and the discussion on the novels and protagonists Ahab and Vasu assert that the title through varied perspectives and headings portrays their attitude, temperament, indomitable desires, actions, and obsession, which collectively make characters and books worth reading.

However, Captain Ahab and Vasu's cruelty, insatiable mind, and their power of blackness reflect in the evil, and their tragic ends profoundly impact readers to conclude that an evil mind can never overpower Nature and God. Melville and Narayan also attempt to reconcile the gap between factual and fake, belief and disbelief, and nature and unnatural problems. The analysis of these novels is still ongoing; however, analyzable and complex and often lends itself to new meanings and interpretations.

The findings advise us to appreciate nature, people, and Godly things else will face similar consequences. Therefore, the dictum of Tennyson (stanza xxi), "I do but sing because I must, and pipe but as the linnets sing", holds good in this case. Discussion upon these facts rests on Ahab and Vasu as not just the devils but quintessential heroes with good intellect, dictatorial minds, and vision. Nevertheless, their only fault was their monolithic ego, which gave them an overarching ambition to invent a "New World" and made them cross all limits and challenged human life, nature, and God. Furthermore, the findings are invaluable not only for the insight it provides into American and Indian awareness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, reflecting "the human mentality of the day", but also serve as a shining example of Melville and Narayan's knowledge, fervor, and moral righteousness. It teaches digital learners and people of all ages that one



should never elevate oneself above nature, people, culture, and society since an obsessed and insatiable mind with evil intent never sustains long and gets little time for contemplation, resulting in a tragic end.

Finally, despite all limitations, we conclude that Melville's Ahab in *Moby Dick* and Narayan's Vasu in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* are two of the most interesting characters of all ages and in world literature.

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