

A horse and two goat literary criticism



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A Horse and Two Goats is a short story written by R. K. Narayan, one of the most prominent Indian authors writing in English in the twentieth century. Taking place in a small village called Kritam, this short story revolves around Muni, an old poor man without education from a low caste in the Indian society. A Horse and Two Goats is divided into two parts, the first part where Muni and his wife's life are being explored and the second part where the comic scene between Muni and an American takes place.

There are two literary theories applied in this short story, the gender theory focusing on feminism and also the social theory which focuses on the social status and conflicts in two different languages and values between two societies. Feminism theory in gender criticism focuses on sexual difference and sexual politics. Women need to consider what it meant to be a woman, to consider how much of what society has often inherently deemed female traits. More than often, women have been always perceived as inferior to men and that men are more powerful and capable as compared to women.

In the A Horse and Two Goats short story however, the wife has more control over the husband. According to Muni, “ he had trashed her only a few times in their career, and later she had the upper hand”. This indicates that even though in the beginning Muni behaves like most men where they are being condescending toward the women, but eventually later the wife has more power in that marriage and Muni has to listen to her. This is very apparent when the wife warns Muni not to go back before the sun is down and Muni's reaction is, “ he knew that if he obeyed her she would somehow conjure up some food for him in the evening.

Only he must be careful not to argue and irritate her. ” In this short story as well, the wife plays more role as the breadwinner, provider and supporter of the family as stated in the textual evidences “ she was sure to go out and work – grind corn in the Big House, sweep or scrub somewhere, and earn enough to buy foodstuff and keep a dinner ready for him in the evening” and “ also he must give her time to cool off her temper and feel sympathetic, and then she would scrounge and manage to get some food. All of the textual evidences clearly show that Muni depends a lot on his wife and that his wife has the control, power and upper hand in their marriage. Although the wife has the upper hand in this story but as usual women stereotypes are still evident. Women are the one who do all the housework, “ his wife lit the domestic fire at dawn, boiled water in a mud pot, threw into it a handful of millet flour, added salt, and gave him his first nourishment for the day”.

Another women stereotype can be seen when Muni says “ women must be watched; otherwise they will sell themselves and the home”. Meaning to say, women are not to be trusted and men have to keep tab on them all the time. The second literary theory in A Horse and Two Goats is social theory. Social theory is the beliefs, values and norms of the society. It is a way of thinking about the world which is concerned with the perceptions of structure. The two social theories, which are the social status and conflicts between two different societies, are the main theme and concern in this story.

The most apparent social status issue in A Horse and Two Goats is the Poverty vs. Wealth. The poor people are to live in embarrassment while the rich people live superiorly. Muni is embarrassed to walk around the village because of his poverty. He often looks down because he doesn't want

anyone to approach him, “ he passed through the village with his head bowed in thought. He did not want to look at anyone or be accosted,” and “ he avoided looking at everyone, they professed to be so high up, and everyone else in the village had more money than me. Other than that, poor people also have little access to basic necessities such as food and water while the rich people live in luxury. Muni and his wife have to struggle everyday just to make a living and fill their empty stomach. Can you imagine how desperate their lives that they have to eat leaves just to keep on living when Muni’s wife says, “ if you were content with the drumstick leaves alone, I could boil and salt some for you”? Besides that, poor people don’t have any access to education because only rich people are provided with education.

Muni has little knowledge in the Parangi (English) language which is shown in the textual evidence “ I don’t know the Parangi language you speak, even little fellows in your country probably speak the Parangi language, but here only learned men and officers know it” because he “ never went to school, in those days only Brahmin went schools”. The differences between the poor and the rich (Poverty vs. Wealth) are clearly depicted by R. K Narayan in the way they live and their access to basic necessities and also education.

The second social theory is the conflict in different languages and values between two societies, which is probably the main conflict in A Horse and Two Goats as it takes more than half of this story. In the conflict between two different languages, Muni and the American can’t seem to understand each other; Muni can’t speak English and the American can’t speak Tamil. This is evident when the American says, “ please, please, I will speak slowly,

<https://assignbuster.com/a-horse-and-two-goat-literary-criticism/>

please try to understand me. Can't you understand even a simple word of English? Everyone in this country seems to know English".

Their difficulties in communicating lead to the misunderstanding about the horse statue and two goats, where Muni thought that the American wants to buy his two goats when actually the American wants the horse statue; " I have sold our goats to a red-faced man. He was absolutely crazy to have them, gave me all this money and carried them off in his motor car! " The other conflict between these two societies is their values; the ignorance or disrespect of the Western society towards other society, and in this case the Indian Society.

The American offers to buy the statue from Muni without knowing how valuable the statue is to the Indian village; the statue which has remained there from generation after generation. This is clearly shown in the textual evidence " the stranger almost pinioned Muni's back to the statue and asked, " isn't this statue yours? Why don't you sell to me? ". The American is being rude by thinking that money can buy the valuable horse statue when he says " I don't want to seem to have stopped here for nothing.

I will offer you a good price for this". The author is able to bring out the differences in languages and values between the societies beautifully by adding a comic touch but making people think deeply about the differences at the same time. In conclusion, the gender theory which is the feminism and social theory which are the social status and differences in languages and values between two societies are two of the literary theories explored in this story.

Anyone who reads A Horse and Two Goats will be fixated by R. K. Narayan's masterpiece, enjoying the comic relief while feeding their souls with the food of thoughts. It is important for us to understand other society's values and languages, especially when we are directly in contact with the society practicing different cultures than ours. By doing that, an individual is able to be more understanding toward the community of the society and will be able to communicate better to avoid any forms of misunderstanding.