

The Eye of God- The story of an Unscrupulous Man and a Socio – Cultural Document

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Abstract:

N.O. Mohamed's The Eye of God (Malayalam Original Deivathinte Kannu) is at once a personal narrative as well as a socio-cultural document highlighting the distinctive life – style of the Mappillas, and tells the story of an unscrupulous man consumed by a blind greed for wealth. The Mappilla customs and institutions come vibrantly alive in the novel. The intensity and the horror of violent adult passions and the manner in which superstition pushes the characters in the novel towards an inexorable process of self-destruction are rendered doubly potent because the narrators Is a child who is both observer and participant. The child himself understands the significance of happenings only partially, but his acute and sensitive perception of people and events skillfully builds up a credible narrative for the reader.

The Mappillas of Kerala had their origins in the Muslim navigators and traders who came to the Kerala coast around the seventh century and who gradually established trade relations between Malabar and West Asia, North Africa and even the Mediterranean. Unlike the Muslims in the North, the Mappillas are not the inheritors of a Muslim empire. N.P. Mohamed also belongs to the Mappillas tribe. In his writings he copies the life-styles of the common folk.

Key Words: *Customs, institutions, inexorable, superstition, credible, inheritors*

Introduction

Over the centuries the Mappillas gradually evolved their own language, a Malayalam richly interspersed with Arabic words, and their own style of dress and music. Mappilla songs, composed and sung for special occasions like weddings and religious functions of different kinds, are now very popular and well-known all over Kerala. Religious education has always been an integral part of Mappilla life and virtually⁶ all Mappilla children went to the Madarasa which functioned either as purely religious school and worked before or after regular government school hours, or dispensed a general and religious education simultaneously. Children were taught the Quran through rote memorization and recitation, and the life of teachings of the prophet. In this novel also we find such type of references throughout the novel. The child narrator Ahamed talks of his experiences in the family and the customs and traditions adapted by his Mappillas. The characters in the novel move steadily towards the culmination of a personal tragedy. Mariam Ammayi, the head of the joint Matrilineal family in the story, makes repeated efforts to save her nephew, the child-narrator from the evil forces which menace him, but fails. Her brother, Koyassan is driven solely by greed for health.

He succumbs to the temptation of sorcery and in doing so unleashes the grim punishment of a family curse. The innocent child protagonist is trapped in this fearful drama and becomes the terrified witness of his own tragic and vivid cameos of everyday life in a Mappila house hold, minute descriptions the ritual associated with black magic, episodes that recount the delicate awakening of a young boy's sexuality, are all woven into the main lines of the narrative without intruding on it.

Th child, Ahamed wishes to be called with that name but is called Thupran {(a person of a lower caste in Kerala) by his Moothappa (uncle). The child is very angry with his Moothappa because of Moothappa's behavior towards him. The boy was happy in Kozhicode. He has come to Parappanangadi. Here he likes the place as well there are so many trees there is a spreading Jackfruit tree that looks like an umbrella, a mango tree that touches the sky in front of the well. There are more Jackfruit trees and payans hear the fence. And at the corners of the compound are clumps of Mamboo whose tips bend over to touch the ground. All these things make him happy here. His cousin Ummoo is some years older than him and likes the boy very much and he likes her also. The little girl tells him everything of the place she tells everything interestingly. But she always asks him promise not to tell the things she is going to tell to anybody. The child narrator narrates his experiences with the other members of the

family and with surroundings of the house-hold. Ummoo has seen a number of snakes all over the yard. She tells him a secret also about snakes also.

“You must never scream when you set a snake. Snakes come out of their houses praying they will not see human beings, because human being kill snakes. So if a snake sees a human being it strikes at one. It’s head swells up, flat and round as a jackfruit leaf, and the two tongues on either side flutter in the wind. It stretches itself out and swags. Then it blows, phoo, and strikes. If a snake bites you, you are sure to die”

The boy is frightened, listened to Ummoo. He does not like it here at all they do not even have a proper house here. So he feels sad to live in this hut with thatch screens all around, a thatched roof and thatch again to mark out the rooms.

In the opinion of the narrator Ummoo is clever. She has finished the fifth class and is waiting to get married. She is a good company of him in Parapanangadi. She is a friend, a care taker, a guide, an advisor and everything to the boy.

He pities with his another cousin Moyammadali because he cannot come out of the house as he was imprisoned in the room. Moyammadali shoots like a crow – pheasant and behaves like a mad person. The narrator tells us that it was because Moyammdali has eaten poisonous mushrooms through his mother Mariyam Ammayi has boiled some water with care way seeds and has given it to him. He cannot get well. The child has been brought up in such an atmosphere of fear of snakes and fear of spirits, that he is afraid of everything all the time. His Ummaa (mother) likes the boy very much though his Bappa (father) is away from home living in Kozhicode and some business.

The boy’s Moothappa (uncle) is a very serious man. All the members of the family are afraid of him. If he gets angry he roars like a lion and makes others frighten. The boy is not allowed to wear trousers in Parappanangadi.

His Moothappa has given him a checked lungi the day he has arrived, a coarse one. The boy has to wear his lungi when he goes to Mosque as well. He is in fifth class and his sister Ayiseyi in the second. Now she is not here.

Discussion:

Ummoo and Ahamed play together there so seeds in the field and they sleep together. It is only when at Moothappa’s presence they are afraid. Ummoo has come of age and she is going to be married soon. Moothappa is thinking of her marriage. One day some people come to their

house and Ummoo's marriage is fixed. When her marriage is performed she has entrusted all the things to the boy and went to her husband's place now the boy feels very unhappy because he finds no other company. No the boy's life is with Moothappa. Mariyam Ammayi, his mother and others in the house hold. . When Ummoo is away he sees everything dull. He remembers all the memorable incidents with Ummoo. Now Ummoo has gone far away. When she has left she has been worried about Moyammadali and has stood looking at him. But he cannot look at her he is bound with chains and his feet. It's a common thing that Moothappa beats him severely when he behaves madly. Ummoo has walked behind her husband and Ahamed beside her Moothappa has followed carrying the box. Umma and Ammayi have walked together behind him. The moment she has left everybody in the house has cried. It is Ahamed more.

Ahamed is admitted in night school of the panathil mosque. The room is led by three petromax lamps. Some are reciting from The Quran aloud. The school is full of Musaliyar children (children who receive a religious education of Islamic faith). They look at his new cap laugh they make fun of him. Komu Musaliyar, the Mudaris is seen in school now and then. Even the flies in the panathil mosque are afraid of him. He stays on the lower side of the mosque. He sits there and recites. Taphsir to the Musaliyars Kunharu Musaliyar chants the Taphsir in the mornings. The boy here describes the different experiences he faces in the school. One day he goes into a burial ground and see the skeleton of a human body. He is afraid of it and comes back home. At home he does not reveal it to anybody because of the fear of Moothappa.

Ahamed has written to Ummoo and Ummoo writes sometimes to Moothappa, Ammayi and Umma. He feels upset for not receiving any letter from her. But he craves for meeting her old friend. The boy feels sad for Moyammadali is punished very often for his misbehavior. One day when Moyammadali threw away all the food prepared for Musaliyar children, his Moothappa kicked on his stomach and beats severely. [Poor Moyammadali cannot bear the blows. Very soon he dies. Mariyam Ammayi is very much upset with the incident. She does not eat and sleep for some days. She curses Moothappa for behaving brutally with the boy. She goes to her daughter Umma as the other was a pregnant. After coming back she behaves very rudely with Moothappa. She hates his actions and words. She does not care him. The death of Moyammadali and some other bad incidents in the house lead the members of the family to think of the bad spirits they think existed in the place. This leads to believer sorcery.

They think that some snakes are at watch of the wealth hidden in the ground by their fore fathers Moothappa brings some haggis and other sorcerers to the house. One day Kankan Thami is brought home. He is seated cross-legged on a big low wooden stool. He recites something loudly. He draws some stripes and squares on the ground a brass oil-lamp is burned behind him. The child narrator is taken to sit before Thami. There is a skull before him it is a disgusting thing to him. He wants to get out. But his feels heavy. A sharp pain pierces his eyes. As he goes on doing so the boy cannot breathe properly. He hears his heart beat loudly. He feels suffocated. He wants to tell his mother but there is no way. As Thami's recitation grew louder the body becomes stiff. Thami blows on his faced and his head begins to spin. Thami asks some questions. Answers come from the boy but it is not he who gives the answers. Someone answers from somewhere in a voice that is like the sound the water makes when throw pebbles into it.

Thami says that they have to do one of two things – either they have given the spirits the flower of their Taravad (ancestral home, a joint family) as their resting place or they have to offer the blood of a boy in the house. He also says that they do neither of these he will face his death in forty days. As they are in the practice of superstitions, they believe the words of Thami. Moothappa falls ill. His hand and a log don't work. He cannot speak even. Many people come to visit him. Doctors come to cure him of the disease but there will be no use. He dies.

Thami begins sorcery in a room it is then the boy's mother gets furious and screams at him to get out of the house. She takes a scythe and beats Thami with it. She cannot control her anger for her son is going to be offered to the spirits. Drops of blood drip down Thami's face. He wails. The portrait of the child's mother in the novel is the most tender of all the woman characters but when she becomes aware of the harm that will be done to her son, she is transformed from docile soft-spoken creature into a fierce tigress, ready to kill in order to protect her son. Her courage however, proves futile. The women of the family are custodians of goodness and justice. None of them susceptible to avarice, and although they are very different from each other, they are completely united in their love for the child protagonist. However they are powerless to save him from his destiny.

Scrupulously attentive to mind of a child, to the direct, uncluttered way in which it perceives the world. The author uses language with care and restraint. The child's narrations remains simple, sometimes even casual, but the sequence of events is tightly controlled and no

statement that the child makes it haphazard or irrelevant. The narrator retains a deep compassion for all his fellow characters throughout the novel, from the innocent, doomed Moyammadali to the scheming Koyassan. Although the protagonist is surrounded by the people who recognize the forces of evil and try to protect him, it is darkness and destruction that prevail. The protagonist mother is dared to Thami in order to protect her son. Here we see the love of another upon her child. All the events of the novel go around the little boy Ahamed and this way he is protagonist of the novel.

To quote the words of Ramakrishna here.....

“N.P Mohamed shows in usual empathy with the child’s mind in recording even his passing fancies to minute detail. The transparent idiom moves easily between the inner and outer worlds of a young boy’s alert gaze. The Sun is supposed to be the eye of god, who can see everything? In a sense it also refers to the omniscient gaze of the novelist”

Conclusion:

The novel captures the essence of the world through Ahmed’s world view. In narrator, probably the double of the author himself as a child, only partially grasp the significance of things and events to which he is a witness. However his eye for the subtle detail and his deep perception of people help the reader construct a vital structured narrative out of the series of incidents and encounters which apparently constitute the novel.

Ahamed’s world unfolds through observations of the people around him. The stories told by unmoor unwrap the magic and mystery of the nature and life bound by the dictates of the Muslim community in Kerala. The innocent child observes and experiences the disappointment, helplessness and the destiny in their fullest forms towards the end of the story. As Ranjini Rajgopal points out.....

“The family attempts to derive away the spirits inhabiting Moyammadali ikkukka steer the story through Frustration anger, helplessness and ultimately the mute acceptance of late – all play through the narrative fabric, which, even as it gravitates towards a crescendo, deceptively holds hope aloft. In a related paradigm, young Ahamed takes stock of the world around him as his sexuality and budding youth flower in dreamy sequences of time. After Ahamed grows up, witnessing the constraint battle of the family to exercise the ‘tharavad’ of spirits, the imaginary world envelopes him in its misty folds”.

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