

Q. Critical appreciation of  
'A Horse and Two Goats'

Ans : 'A Horse and Two Goats' is a short story written by acclaimed Indian writer R.K. Narayan. The story was first published in 1960 in the Indian newspaper The Hindu. It did not reach a broad international audience until it was published again in 1970 as the title story in Narayan's short story collection "A Horse and Two Goats and Other Stories." The story appeared for a third time in "Under the Banyan Tree," another volume of Narayan's short stories published in 1985.

The story is based on cultural differences and shows how they affect people. An American who dreams of going to India, finally travels there to a small village that was mostly forgotten. He sees a statue there. He likes it and demands an old Indian present there to sell it to him. The oldman misunderstands and thinks that the American wants his goats and the two start to argue. However the truth dawns on the old man and they settle into an agreement.

The story is set in Kritam, a tiny village located on the edge of India. The main character and protagonist of the story, Muni, is shown as poor and deprived oldman who previously led a prosperous life, which has gone down-hill, leading to him and his wife living in poverty. Muni and his wife are taunted by the villagers as a barren couple as they have no children, and are frowned upon, because even though they are childless and must only support themselves, they still live a rundown life. In the rising action of the story, Muni begs his wife to make him a breakfast of drumsticks. She decides to make this breakfast as long as Muni is able to find the other ingredients needed. Muni's wife does not have these ingredients in the house not the money to buy them, therefore she sends her husband off, telling him that a day of fasting will do him good.

Muni continues to his usual spot, underneath a large clay statue of a horse and warrior, where he rests as his goats graze. Unexpectedly, Muni is approached by an American man who has just pulled over in a station wagon. Muni becomes frightened as the man's 'Khaki' coloured clothing misleads Muni to believe the foreign a soldier or police officer.

Muni tries to run away, however his old age restricts him and he is unable to move. The stranger approaches Muni and greets with 'yes, no'. These two words are as far as Muni's English vocabulary reaches. The foreigner, who in reality is a businessman from New York, pulls out a cigarette, lights it and offers it to Muni. Muni accepts this offer and then, the American pulls out a business card. Muni becomes startled at this action as he believes that this is a warrant of some kind, therefore he starts blabbering of his innocence. The American asks Muni questions about the marvellous horse statue which he believes that it belongs to Muni. Both men converse, though neither understands what the other is saying. This language barrier leads to Muni, reminiscing about his past, the statue and his childhood, while the American explains to Muni how he will be rearranging his furniture back in New York, to accommodate the statue.

Finally after this strange conversation, the American places a hundred rupee note into Muni's hand. Muni believes he has just sold his goats, while the American believes he has just purchased the statue. The American makes his leave with the horse statue, while Muni returns home to his wife. When he arrives home and explains to his wife that the money has come from their sold goats, she is infuriated and does not believe him. Muni is left confused and the story ends with the wife threatening him to go back to her parents.

The story thus shows cultural differences. Both the American and the old man are quite ethnocentric by knowing little of each other's cultural background and both keep talking about different topics, not understanding a word of what the other one is saying. The writer tries to convey that cross-cultural knowledge is important in the world today. We see how different these two people are by what they value. For the wealthy American, the statue is nothing but pretty decoration, and the hundred rupee note the American offers the old man is of little value to him.

Muni, on the other hand, who only owns copper and nickles, can not even afford the pretty dream of his because he does not have the small amount of twenty rupees that are needed for this. The statue of the horse is not a decorative object for Muni. As a matter of fact, Muni values it for the spiritual importance of it. This shows how wealthy people are quite materialistic while the poor value the small things.