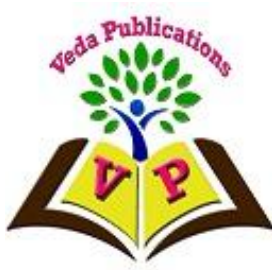


**CHARACTERIZATION IN R.K.NARAYAN'S THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI**

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The Man-Eater of Malgudi is a great fable of the modern age. Narayan's art reached its maturity in this novel. The novel has an implied moral. The setting of this novel is Malgudi and it belongs to the category "Novels of Malgudi". The novel begins with Nataraj's description of his press with a framed picture of Goddess Lakshmi hung up, of his son Babu, his Albert Mission School, and of his beloved wife, an intelligent housewife who "kept the pantry well-stocked and our kitchen fire a glow, continuing the traditions of our ancient home in Kabir Street." It is a classic of Indo-Anglian fiction and has received international recognition. It has been translated into a number of Indian and Foreign languages. The novel presents a slice of life from the South-Indian world and portrays it graphically. V. Pandu Ranga Rao notes that "the novel is an allegory of the coming of modernity to India and more particularly to South-India". The novel has a universal theme of the ultimate defeat of falsehood and dishonesty in human life. The story is narrated in the first person by its tragic-comic hero Nataraj, a printer of Malgudi. There is a strange mixture of fact and fiction. The plot is coherent and well knit.

Keywords: *Modernity, South-India, Fact and Fiction, Indian Society.*

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The Man-Eater of Malgudi is a variation of Puranic story of Bhasmasura, a demon who destroyed himself. Syd. C. Harrex suggests that Narayan has a "profound and discriminating reverence for those ancient traditions which they find to be still culturally and morally vital". In the novel, Vasu represents forces associated with western modernity, such as individualism, industrialism, and commercialism. The characters in the epics are prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast, and remain valid for all time. Every story has implicit in it a philosophical or moral significance, and an understanding of the distinction between good and evil. Bhasmasura is prototype for Vasu, and moral significance of the story concerns the self-destruction of evil, the restoration of *dharma*. In his essay 'The Quintessential Narayan', Edwin Gerow expands this conclusion, relating the novel very clearly to the Indian philosophical conceptions of action and reality. 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. It is suffused throughout with the Narayan brand of humor but covers a wider space, rises to greater heights and plunges down to deeper depths than any of his other novels.

Nataraj and Vasu occupy a prominent place in the novel, but behind them stand a number of minor characters. This group of minor figures includes the journalist Sen, the adjournment lawyer, the Sanskrit scholar Sastri, the poet, the seductive temple dancer Rangī, the tea shop man Muthu, the Mempi forest officer, the bus conductor, and Kumar—the temple elephant. Vasu is a mighty man, who not only kills a large number of wild animals in Mempi forest but can also kill a man with single blow of his hammer-fist. The title is very apt and suggestive, as R.K. Narayan's irony and humour is concerned with the depiction of evil as self-destructive. *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* is a regional novel. It deals with physical features, people, life, customs, habits, manners, traditions, languages etc., of a particular locality of South Indian world Malgudi. Hence all the characters reflect Indianness in every movement and appear to be as representatives of a cross-section of

Indian society. Through the proper selection and ordering of his material, the novelist stresses the distinctive spirit of the chosen region and shows further that in its essentials it is the same everywhere. Malgudi, a typical South Indian Town, has been presented as changing, growing and becoming different. In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* we come across a number of localities such as Market Road, Kabir Street, Sarayu River, the Taluk office, the Lawley extension and the Mempi forest in Malgudi. An account is also given of the professions, beliefs, customs, superstitions, traditions of Indian origin etc., and of its people. Malgudi is shown to be a developing town like any Indian Town of those times, where important changes are taking place. The changes are the changes that occur in any post-independent town of India. For example we find that the project for the establishment of a veterinary hospital has been cleared and a veterinary doctor is already there. However, the implementation of the project has been delayed because of the apathy of the officials concerned and paucity of the funds. At the foot of the Mempi forest there is the Mempi village and Malgudi. A government bus flies between the village and Malgudi. All this reveals Indian setup especially South Indian traditional life.

The tenor of life is peaceful in Malgudi. On the whole the people are happy and contented. They have ample leisure. They gossip for hours together. They can make elaborate arrangements to take out processions to celebrate some religious occasion. Sen, the journalist's daily routine is to, dwell at length on the mistakes of Nehru at Nataraj's press. A teacher-turned-poet writes an epic in mono syllabic verse and recites the verses to Nataraj as the novel proceeds. There are also jealousies, doubts and suspicions. We can also see women of loose morals like the temple-dancer Rangī, Kumar, an elephant who plays a vital role in this fiction is a mysterious character. In the beginning its illness and after treatment its perfect condition paves a path for the success of the procession on the temple-festival day. The tailor does not want the ailing elephant to move; at the end he was also suspected to be in league with Vasu in his attempt to poison the elephant by the charitable people of Malgudi. Thus an elaborate



picture is painted of Malgudi and its life in the Indian setup.

Nataraj is the central figure in the novel. The entire action and other characters are looked through his eyes. So his point of view is always stressed. Nataraj is an 'unheroic hero', a passive character. He suffers and endures, rather than being a man who causes suffering to others. He does not act but is acted upon. He lives happily, peacefully and comfortably in Malgudi. He has affectionate friends and numerous clients. He suffers much pain and emotional agitation as a result of his actions. He is the owner of a printing press. In his printing work, Nataraj is helped by his assistant Sastri. Sastri is the only staff Nataraj has. Nataraj is a shrewd business man. He lives in his large ancestral house, close to the press. He lives with his loving wife and his little son, Balu. About his domestic life he himself tells us:

"My son, little Balu, went to Albert Mission School and felt quite adequately supplied with toys, books, sweets, and any other odds and ends he fancied. My wife, every Deepavali, gave herself a new silk saree, glittering with lace, not to mention the ones she bought for no particular reason at other times. She kept the pantry well-stocked our kitchen fire aglow, continuing the traditions of our ancient home in Kabir Street". (The Man-Eater of Malgudi, p.1)

Nataraj is a deeply religious man, a repository of the customs and traditions of Malgudi. He has a framed picture of Goddess Lakshmi in the parlour. He attributes his prosperity to the grace of a Goddess. Every day he goes out early in the morning to the River Sarayu. There he offers prayers to the Sun-God which is an Indian tradition. He is apprehensive that Vasu might shoot the temple elephant, Kumar. He is assured by the belief that Lord Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu would come again to the rescue of Kumar, as he had saved Gajendra. Nataraj is also kind and helpful. His humanitarian zeal is crystal clear in his arrangements for the treatment of Kumar. He is considered to be a passive character of Narayan who allows others to manipulate him. He also yields in the face of aggression. Narayan invests everything connected with his passivity and weakness to show him in a comic light. In short, Nataraj is an unheroic hero and is an ordinary

individual like majority of Indians. He leads a humdrum of routine as common people usually do in this prosaic world of reality. He is orthodox and a figure of fun. He is one of the important comic characters of Narayan and a perennial source of amusement for the readers of the novel. In many respects he is friendly, meek and helpful. He represents a good Indian citizen interested in the welfare of the community.

Vasu is a taxidermist. He is a rootless intellectual and a figure we meet frequently in Narayan's novels. His bull-neck and hammer-fist reveal his true nature. He is brutal and self-centered. He has no respect for tradition, religions or the law. He sets himself up against the nature. He loves to bully the weak. He will do anything to achieve the goals he has set for himself. He himself tells his life-story to Nataraj when he comes to get his letter-heads and visiting cards printed. "I was educated in the Presidency College. I took my master's degree in History, Economics and Literature". (p.16) When Nataraj asks Vasu as to why he did not stay to help his guru (phaelwan), he tells "I helped him by leaving him there, instead of holding him upside down and rattling the teeth out of his head, (p.17).

Vasu occupies Nataraj's attic without caring to ask for his permission. On his first visit, he enters Nataraj's office, tearing aside the curtain and thus violating the sacred traditions of his office. This incident symbolizes his rude efforts to expose "the traditional society to the modern monstrosity of materialism." He does not pay any rent. He treats the place as his own. He comes and goes when he likes. He does what he deems fit. Soon the attic is turned into a charnel house. He kills dogs in the neighbourhood and frightens the children. The foul smell from the attics spreads round the locality and soon the neighbours complain Nataraj against it. He treats the complaint with contempt. A Man-Eater means a tiger which causes death and destruction whenever it gets an opportunity. So it is an object of terror to all in the neighbourhood. There is no man-eater in Malgudi in the literal sense. But Vasu, the Taxidermist, is as destructive as a man-eater. This giant man-eater is not afraid of man or beast. But Vasu is afraid of mosquitoes and could not endure them. Vasu, the aggressive bully from the very first



day of his arrival in Malgudi, creates death and destruction. He spoils the peaceful, carefree life of Nataraj and his circle. He prides in telling how he dealt with his guru Suleiman:

"I helped him by leaving him there, instead of holding him upside down and rattling the teeth out of his head."

Before Vasu could shoot Kumar the temple elephant, he used his hammer-fist on mosquitoes on his head, and killed himself with the same blow. So like Bhasmasura, he destroyed himself. Thus Vasu is the evil incarnation as humanized by Narayan. He was evil and carried the seeds of his own destruction within himself as far as the Indian belief is concerned. As he once warned Sen, the journalist, showing his hammer-fist "I may settle many problems with this, but I don't. If I hit you with it, it will be the end of you, but that does not mean, I may not kick". (p.29) Perhaps he consumed his strength for his own destruction. Thus Narayan successfully portrays *Vasu*, who represents the evil incarnation from ancient to modern India. Narayan intends Vasu to be "a satirical embodiment of modern western violence." The novelist has painted him as a man of enormous strength, "cannibalistic propensities, incapable of affection, gratitude or sympathy and regard for others and in fact reveling in inflicting pain, a nocturnal creature, a creature of the jungle, full of mystery;...and a being completely amoral, obeying no laws of God or man." His pride in his skill is revealed in his talk to Nataraj:

"After all 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..."

Commenting on the violent and ferocious nature of Vasu, James Dale aptly remarks:

"...he (Vasu) became interested in taxidermy, probably because it gave him an excuse for killing animals and thereby provided an outlet for his violent nature. He is a scoffer and a mocker, brushing aside custom and tradition, kindness and courtesy. His whole life is an exercise in ferocious self-expression; he lashes out the world around him to compensate for his own lack of

purpose and his failure to find a place in society."

Sen is a journalist. He comes practically every day to the parlour of Nataraj. Nataraj has great regard for him and considers him to be one of his good friends. Sen is an anti Nehru and discusses the mistakes of Nehru always which is his favourite topic. One day Vasu said to Sen, "if you feel superior to Nehru, why don't you go to Delhi and take charge of the Cabinet?" and laughed contemptuously. He suppressed the expression of his political opinions in Vasu's presence. But Vasu one day said "What are the views of our wise friend on this?" To which Sen gave fitting reply, such as "if people are dense enough not to know what is happening, I'm not prepared to..."(p.28)

Sen plays a significant role in the novel. From Sen, Nataraj seeks information regarding the veterinary hospital in Malgudi for the treatment of Kumar, the elephant. During the celebration of the completion of an important stage in the epic of the poet-the marriage of Radha and Krishna-along with the spring festival at the temple, Sen helps Nataraj by writing the notices and hand bills containing appeals for donations. Nataraj becomes delirious in the temple and is carried home for rest. Sen visits him and is kind and sympathetic as a good friend. Later, he goes along with others to Vasu, and talks boldly to him and warns him not to harm Kumar. It is another matter that his remonstrance fails to move Vasu. But Sen does his best. However after Vasu's murder, Sen too suspects Nataraj like everybody else does in Malgudi. He too, avoids him and stops coming to his press, as were his custom.

The poet whose name was not given to us is also a constant visitor at Nataraj's press. He occupies the best seat in Nataraj's parlour, the Queen Anne chair. He is a teacher by profession but he is more a poet than a teacher and it is for this reason that Nataraj has great respect for him. He himself tells us, "...among my constant companions was a poet who was writing the life of God Krishna in monosyllabic verse. His ambition was to compose a grand epic and he came almost every day to recite to me his latest lines". (p.2) Like Sen, the poet too is the victim of Vasu's sarcasm and derision, but he is more tactful in his response to the formidable man-eater than Sen.



The poet is the source of much diversion for the simple people of Malgudi. When his epic was completed up to the stage of the marriage of Krishna and Radha, a grand celebration was made with due pomp and formalities. However, like others, he too suspects Nataraj of having murdered Vasu and turns away from him. He stops visiting him under the excuse that the extra duties given to him at school leave him no time for his usual visits.

Sastri is a close friend and Lieutenant of Nataraj. He is the only staff member of Nataraj, though he tries to create the impression that a number of people work in his press behind the blue curtain. According to Nataraj he was a one man army, he is the foreman, compositor, office boy, binder and accountant, as people imagined a lot of men working on the other side. Nataraj never dared call him a staff and always remembered him as his well-wisher. During an emergency, i.e., when some important order was to be delivered on time Sastri acted like a tyrant and as Nataraj humorously says, the usual relationship of employer and employee was reversed. Nataraj has to carry out Sastri's orders and work according to his dictates. Wife and children are absurd. Such encumbrances were not necessary for Sastri; I felt Nataraj said many a time. Sastri is hard working, obedient and self-effacing. Indeed, it may safely be assured that without Sastri, Nataraj would not have been able to run his press. Sastri is an orthodox-minded Sanskrit scholar, so he narrates many stories to Nataraj from the time-honored Hindu-scriptures, myths and legends. About Vasu he says, "Vasu shows all the definitions of rakshasa". He 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". (p.94) He stood expatiating on the lives of various demons in puranas to prove his points.

He displayed great versatility and knowledge. He removed his silver-rimmed spectacles and put them away in his shirt pocket as being an impediment to his discourse. In his discourse he speaks about Ravana, the protagonist in Ramayana, Mahishasura and Bhasmasura, who acquired a special boon that everything he touched should be scorched, while nothing there to even destroy him. (p.95) Sastri hints at the self-destruction of Vasu, who

actually destroys himself in the manner of Bhasmasura. Sastri is also very jealous of the reputation of the press. That's why he is very much agitated when he sees Rangi and other women of loose character coming down or going up to the attic of Vasu. It is he who first informs Nataraj of all this shady goings-on, unknown to him. In the end, it is Sastri, who explains the mystery of Vasu's death, and thus brings much relief to Nataraj.

Muthu is a simple man of ordinary means, if not actually poor. He keeps a tea stall in Mempi village at the foot of the Mempi forest. The buses going to and fro from Malgudi to Mempi stop in front of his tea stall and so, he enjoys brisk business. He too is a deeply religious man. He has himself built a temple of the Goddess on the neighbouring hills and now plans to celebrate suitably the installation of the idol of Goddess. Muthu loves the temple elephant, Kumar. Muthu allows Nataraj to use Kumar during the temple festival. After the celebration, he returns to Mempi village along with Kumar, and nothing more is heard of him.

Rangi in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* represents a cruder type, for she is a professional prostitute, neither ashamed of her profession, nor trying to conceal it. Rangi is a notorious character of Malgudi. She lives in the shadows of Abu lane. She is the daughter of Padma, an old dancer, attached to the temple of God Krishna. One day she met Nataraj in the early hours of morning and told about Vasu's plan to shoot Kumar and asked to save the elephant. Then Nataraj whispered, "Are you in your senses or have you been taking opium or something of that kind?" (p.156) She glared at Nataraj angrily and says, "Sir I am a public woman, following what is my dharma. I may be a sinner to you, but I do nothing worse than what some of the so-called family women are doing. I observe our rules. Whatever I may do, I don't take opium'. Thus Rangi told Nataraj of Vasu's plan of shooting the animal. She provides the information to Nataraj at a great risk to herself. This brings out her religious sense and dedication. She may be a woman of loose character but there is much good in her. But her visit and Nataraj's whispered conversation with her make Nataraj's wife jealous of her. Thus, their domestic peace and harmony is disturbed for the time being. It is Rangi,



who throws light on the mystery surrounding Vasu's unexpected death. So Nataraj's reputation is restored. Thus Rangī is a woman of courage and determination though of loose morals.

The wife of Nataraj is typical Pativrata, a Hindu wife, loving, affectionate, dutiful and helpful. But she is a passive, weak and colourless personality. That's why the novelist has given her no name and refers to her merely as the wife of Nataraj or the mother of Babu. However, she shares the joys and sorrows of her husband and takes affectionate care of him. When he is ill and delirious, she takes him home from the temple and pampers him. As Nataraj himself tells us, "she unrolled a mat, spread a soft pillow and insisted upon my lying down to rest, turning a deaf ear to all my pleading that I was in perfectly normal condition". (p.184) She went in to make coffee and nourishment for me. On return she grumbled, "Not eating properly, not sleeping, and not resting. God knows why you wear yourself out in this way". When so many visitors come to enquire about his health, like a good house wife she serves coffee to all of them. She does not at all mind the trouble to which she is put.

Only once in the novel does she assert herself. The whispered conversation which her husband has with Rangī makes her jealous. She goes away with Babu to see the procession, leaving Nataraj all alone in the home. However her anger is short-lived and she is again all solicitude for her husband when he is suspected of having murdered Vasu. As the novelist puts it, "they shake hands over the dead body of Vasu and are one, once again". In the opinion of Rajeev Taranath "in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* Nataraj, the printer and Vasu, Taxidermist, correspond to Srinivas and Sampath. There is again reassertion of the average over the extra-ordinary. Its artistic failure is due to the fact that the power average theme in the novel is handled in somewhat exaggerated terms".

Vasu, Nataraj, Rangī, Muthu etc, are all typically Malgudian, therefore Indian, despite their angularities and oddities. Narayan has great regard for family ties and pities of the home and family. If the accepted norms are violated, social order is disturbed, and order is restored and normalcy is established once again largely as result of the

influence of the family especially in the Indian setup. This stress on the role of the family shows his Indianness vividly. This is clearly seen in this novel, where Rangī makes Nataraj's wife jealous. Moreover there are a number of house wives in his novels, who suffer in the hands of their husbands passively and meekly, which is a common phenomenon in the Indian region. Such is the case with Nataraj's wife, whose name is not even mentioned by the author. Certain vernacular words as phaelwan, mahout, namaskaram, rakshasas etc., all Indian words, occur in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. Indian superstitions and religious beliefs and ceremonies etc. are freely used to create the flavor of Indian life.

In the novel, Muthu got a temple constructed on a nearby hill and he proposes to celebrate the installation of idol of the Goddess with due religious rights and ceremonies. Consultation of astrologers for the auspicious dates has been sketched with the typical ironic humour of Narayan in this novel, which is also a quite common phenomenon in India. However Narayan's Indianness in this novel is best seen in his use of Indian myths, legends and folklore in which Narayan is well-versed. Sastri narrates to Nataraj a number of Indian myths of rakshasas, who carried within themselves the seeds of their own destruction. In this novel, the most extensive use is made of Bhasmasura myth. *Vasu is rakshasa*, the evil incarnate, in the novel, Vasu was the bully for men, but terribly afraid of mosquitoes. He lacked in social morality. In his pride of power, he decided to kill Kumar, the temple elephant, which was supposed to lead the procession to be taken out on the release of Radha Kalyan, an epic by a local prodigy. Vasu disturbed by mosquitoes, while waiting in his room for the procession, slapped his forehead to kill the mosquitoes, but ironically he killed himself. So it was proved with the death of Vasu, that evil always carries within it the seeds of its destruction.

Here we can appreciate the skill of R.K. Narayan, for comparing Vasu with Bhasmasura. The mythical reference renders the anti-climax credible. Vasu has super human strength and he conserved the same for his own destruction. That's why Vasu is compared with Bhasmasura, the demon known for tremendous energy, which turned himself in to ash



by the touch of his own hands as explained by Sastri. Narayan has depicted Indian life realistically and vividly and he has captured the very flavor of Indian life. But in one important respect he deviates from the Indian tradition. That is he makes no attempts to preach or to deliver a message. He is perhaps a moral analyst, an analyst of character and conduct. But he does not attempt to impose his views on his readers like other traditional writers. No doubt as Indian, Narayan portrays his characters and their feelings, emotions and actions for an exploration of hidden human conflicts, which are live pictures of South India. So his Indian spirit successfully forms an organic whole in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*.

The setting and characters are thoroughly realistic in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. Narayan's description of every day scenes in the life of Malgudi symbolizes India. The dialogues are also typical of every day Indian life. Nataraj has been left penniless and stands on the road side by Vasu, who proceeded in his jeep for a hunt. Then Muthu the tea shop man treats him with some refreshment. Nataraj is keen to return home by bus to attend to the printing of some wedding cards in his press. Remarks are exchanged between Muthu and Nataraj regarding the character of Vasu, each one trying to placate the other. While Nataraj is in hurry to return by the next bus (penniless as he is), Muthu wants to detain him till Vasu returns from his hunt. It is a half-comical, half-serious situation. It is typically Indian which brings out beautifully their personalities at cross purposes with each other.

Nataraj in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* serves as a spring board for the various forces to act and react. Left to him, he is passive, peace-loving citizen who seems to have no difficulty in getting integrated with the community. As Raju in *The Guide*, Margayya in *The Financial Expert* grow into ripeness, so also the character of Nataraj, Sastri in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. To Nataraj, Vasu represents the force of evil that is inherent in the world of reality. The first chapter of *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* builds a picture of peace and stability in the everyday existence of Nataraj as well as that of Malgudi. But the smooth sailing of life is suddenly interrupted with the appearance of Vasu. Malgudi is gripped by a fear psychosis and free spirit; the community feeling and

the normal business of this small town remains under temporary suspension.

For the Malgudians the nightmarish presence of Vasu is a necessity for the reassertion of their community spirit. In Vasu's case it is a blast of his tremendous ego. He terrifies everybody. His attic is full of stuffed animals, and his vocation turns him into a symbol of death. He goes on harassing individuals like Nataraj, the monosyllabic poet and Mr. Sen, the journalist. He even defies and assaults the police-inspector. But his ego swells to its saturation point when he defies the entire community by planning to injure the temple elephant. Vasu's ego is taken to the height of absurdity and correspondingly his fall becomes absurd and comic which is quite common not only in India but everywhere. Implicit in this design is a motive to break the complacent attitude of the Malgudians and rouse their dormant inner spirit to fight against the force of evil. The festival offers such an opportunity, when the community is to be re-integrated and the enemy of the community is to be eliminated. With Vasu's death, the elephant, Kumar, does not face any more danger nor does the festival, and the people's faith in their religious roots asserted. Nataraj feels confident that: "God Krishna was really an incarnation of Vishnu, who had saved Gajendra: he would again come to the rescue of the same animal..." (p. 180) Sastri interprets Vasu's death along the Bhasmasura myth who was 'unconquerable' and 'who scorched everything he touched, and finally, reduced himself to ashes by placing the tips of his fingers on his own head' (p. 240)

In the school of life, Narayan's characters learn to discover their own follies and discard their illusions and pseudo values. The compulsions of reality weigh heavy on the characters, man's ego is trimmed and he matures into blissful state of knowledge. The human situation is portrayed in a sort of uncanny atmosphere in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. Narayan not only depicts the state of Indian society in a period of transition, on the existential plane, he seems to suggest the bewildering relationships between the individual and the world.

Vasu the arrogant taxidermist lives a gross philistine existence. His highly inflated ego does not



brook any challenge. The humble society of Malgudi can only build a relationship of tame submissiveness with him. He virtually creates a parallel world where he reigns supreme, as his own ideas and logic confound our moral sense and the time-honoured social values. He considers marriage to be an unnecessary social institution. For him 'melas' are arranged in our country so that thousands can die in cholera or small pox or just get trampled as a result of which the population of the country can be kept in 'manageable limits'. To him shooting is not all terrible and it is just a 'give and take' between the shooter and the object who receives the bullet. His immense physical strength, his fantastic logic in the way of life and the very nature of his profession set him in immediate contrast with the docile-folk of Malgudi. He becomes a menace to the smooth flow of life and has his own will and terms. The spirit of Independence has taken an exaggerated form in him and he brooks no moral or social barrier while celebrating the urges of his self. Even though Nataraj is embarrassed and overawed by Vasu he feels a 'sneaking attraction' for the latter's spirit of Independence and his manly defiance. Nataraj's predicament springs from his transactions with the fantastic Vasu. From the Vasu-Nataraj relationship the scene moves to the sphere of the community when Vasu decides to shoot at the temple elephant. The comedy of Vasu's relationship with the people of Malgudi is sustained with continuing anxiety till the man-eater is undone by the mere mosquitoes. Vasu revolts against all routine habits of mind, against all accepted beliefs and pattern of human behavior. With such an attitude his transaction the normal world produced a bizarre spectacle.

Vasu jeers at all sorts of social institutions. He belittles the world that does not allow the individual full sovereignty. He breaks the arm of the police inspector, flirts with any woman he likes, without caring for the public opinion and shoots according to his whims. In all his actions he brings down the Malgudian world around him to its knees but in spite of all his apparent success he remains a solitary and mysterious figure. A proper study of his character and strange relationship with the world is not possible unless the workings in the inner depths of his existence are proved. K.R.S. Iyenger thinks that

Vasu is the symbol of 'anti-life'. But on the individual plane, Vasu lives his life to full, even to an enviable extent, whereas Nataraj and his sort are just ordinary people living a life of bridled aspirations and instincts like majority Indians.

Vasu just can't be dismissed as inimical to the spirit of living, once the darker recesses of his unconscious are understood. Vasu is a forlorn figure having no kith and kin-for reasons unknown to us-and is divorced from the main stream of life. Possibly the monstrous actions of Vasu that we witness are the results of his injured ego, the inevitable consequence of some deprivations of the earlier part of his life. Behind the violent facet he still nurtures some of the dreams of his life. His possessive affection with Rangi and desire to build a cozy home with her provide a glimpse into one part of his inner self that is tender, cares for the simple, elementary values of life. In his young days, inspired by patriotism, he had joined the civil disobedience movement against British rule, broken the laws, marched, demonstrated and ended up in jail. It bears ample testimony to the man that lies concealed beneath the surface monstrosities. In his violent actions he tries possibly to compensate what he has lost, what he was deprived of. Here is a grotesque figure driven by violent impulses of his own character and in the end when these forces reach their ultimate point he meets his doom.

Vasu is a vindictive man. He not only killed animals illegally but when his illegal activities were stopped, or at least curtailed he returned to womanizing. He had no moral scruples and sense of decency at all. He always causes great mental and emotional agitation to poor Nataraj who provides shelter. Narayan has humanized him by giving him at least a redeeming touch. Vasu did not use his hammer-fist on the *phaelwan*, his guru, and he did not use it on any other man except on himself. As he said to Sen, the journalist "no sir" said Vasu recoiling, "I may settle many problems with this, but I don't, if I hit you with it, it will be the end of you. But that doesn't mean, I may not kick". Perhaps he conserved his strength for his own destruction.

The easy flow of life is suddenly interrupted by Vasu. He is seen as the extreme representative of a new egoism as well as a new will and a new energy



that we can call western or modern, associated as these are in our minds with post-renaissance Europe. But in the orthodox atmosphere of Malgudi it immediately takes up a religious interpretation. Vasu's business proposition to supply stuffed eagles at about fifty rupees each so that everyone can keep a sacred garuda in the *pooja* and his guarantee "that it won't fly off" is at once a morbid violation of the sacred traditions. Rightly, therefore, Nataraj thinks, "His presence defiled my precincts" and Sastri concludes "He shows all the definitions of a rakshasa". Even though we witness a modern scenario, Vasu is an M.A., and a taxidermist, as Vasu claims, is a modern art. We come to realize that Narayan operates in a religious framework where the ancient India is more pronounced. As ordained by the sacred mythologies, Vasu, the rakshasa must bring his own death:

Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the rakshasas that were even 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. Otherwise what is to happen to humanity? (The Man-Eater of Malgudi, p.240)

Quite in violation of the orthodox Hindu sensibility, Vasu brings harlots and dead animals to Nataraj's house. Quite in violation of the social codes, Vasu's egoism and sadism disturb the serenity of Malgudi existence. The entire Malgudi community including Vasu's mistress is morally against him. As A.N. Kaul has pointed out, "in the midst of this solid reality, Vasu becomes not impotent, but unreal". The unreal has no place in Malgudi, it is once again itself. Vasu, the demonic presence that has threatened the peace loving orthodox community of Malgudi meets his ordained end. But during this brief period of Malgudi's life Narayan has carved out a brilliant human comedy out of the fear and faith of innocent people nurtured with Indian traditions.

Indian superstitious and religious beliefs, ceremonies are freely used to create the flavor of Indian life. Thus in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, Muthu has constructed a temple on the nearby hills. He proposes to celebrate the installation of the idol of

the Goddess with due religious rites and ceremonies, and an impressive procession is to be taken out to mark the occasion. Narayan's Indianness in the novel is best seen in his use of Indian myths, legends and folklore in which Narayan is well-versed. Sastri narrates to Nataraj a number of Indian myths of *rakshasas* who carried within themselves the seeds of their own destruction. However, in the present novel, the most extensive use is made of Bhasmasura myth. Thus, in the novel, Narayan has captured the very flavor of Indian life. All the characters in the novel become timeless and remain in the memory of the readers, by their sheer simplicity and their unique camaraderie.

As Susan Nirmala points out "Narayan hardly needs a glossary to give an explanation of the words and phrases that he has used in his novels". As in his other novel, here also he writes specially of Indian customs which the readers will never find it difficult to understand. The many Indianisms that Narayan uses in this novel could have been heard on all sides and in every part of India. It is significant to note that while all his characters speak English, Narayan manages to express through his novel, not only the general Indian sensibility but a whole range of characters, personality and temperament within it.

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