



REVIEW ARTICLE

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

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ABSTRACT

R.K.Narayan is the greatest of Indo- Anglian novelists. He is undoubtedly India's most famous author and is most accomplished. R. K. Narayan has deservedly come to be regarded as a pioneer of the Indian novel in English. He has endeared himself to millions of readers throughout the world, because of his impassioned blend of profound and comic vision. He has an uncanny capacity for empathizing with the common masses in a realistic manner. His art of storytelling enabled him to carry the tradition of great writers to new heights. His complete objectivity as a creative writer made it vitally important for him to infuse life into the inhabitants of his fictional world. His characters with their oddities and eccentricities do not strike as figures from morality plays or humours. They preserve a basic quality of individuality despite their allegorical and representative characters in some cases. Raju, Sampath and Nataraj are among the most illustrative of his characters in this regard. The exotic and bizarre in Narayan's comic art gets its most striking manifestation in *The Man- Eater of Malgudi* (1961). The most striking feature of this character is the element of the fantastic, fabulous and allegorical in him. 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 characters are thoroughly realistic in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. The present study is an attempt to analyse the characters of Narayan in his novel *The Man Eater of Malgudi*.

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INTRODUCTION

"My focus is all on character. If his personality comes alive, the rest is easy for me".
R.K.Narayan.

The period across the 1930s and 40s was significant both in the history of nationalism and in the history of Indian writing in English. This was the time when a few talented writers appeared on the scene. To name, three major writers were Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan. It is indeed not possible to think of the Indian English novel without these three novelists. One of the 'Big Three' (Walsh 26) R. K. Narayan has made a significant contribution to the development of Indian English fiction. Among these three, R. K. Narayan is an artist who has experimented with both western and classical storytelling art. Narayan's works exhibit his multifaceted talent; his extraordinary aptitude to blend character and action; a sound and sensitive observation of life; an authentic elucidation of India and a lucid deployment of Indian Myths and legends. These numerous qualities have helped to make him a well-known and established man of letters.

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He is undoubtedly India's most famous author and is most accomplished. Rajeev Taranath says, "When we consider Narayan's novels as a totality, we are faced with the problem of locating the precise area of his creative genius" (307). R. K. Narayan has deservedly come to be regarded as a pioneer of the Indian novel in English. He has endeared himself to millions of readers throughout the world, because of his impassioned blend of profound and comic vision. He has an uncanny capacity for empathizing with the common masses in a realistic manner. His art of storytelling enabled him to carry the tradition of great writers to new heights. He not only interpreted the soul of India, the real India of the villages to the West, but also convincingly made known to the colonial rulers, the religious, moral and spiritual heritage of India. Rashipuram Krishnaswami Narayan Iyer Narayanaswami was one of those creative writers who made a living out of their creative writing. He struggled very hard to establish himself as a man of letters. He was born in 1906 in Madras in a working class south Indian family. He made his first appearance on the literary horizon with the publication of *Swami and Friends* (1935) and has fifteen novels to his credit. He is an eminent writer whose creative vision has attracted diverse criticism. His literary output is rich and varied. He wrote fifteen novels, multiple volumes of short stories, collections of non-fiction, English translation of Indian epics, and the memoirs *My Days* and *My*

Dateless Diary. There are a number of literary awards and distinctions to his credit. He received the Sahitya Academy Award for *The Guide* in 1961. Padma Bhushan was awarded to him in 1964. The University of Leeds honored him with a degree of D.Litt. in 1967, which Delhi University followed in 1973. He was nominated as Fellow, Royal Society of literature; Fellow, Sahitya Academy and Member, Rajya Sabha. He earned high acclaim in India and abroad. K. R. S. Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English* represents the first comprehensive critical assessment of the novelist's works. Iyengar concludes that Narayan "is one of the few writers in India who take their craft seriously, constantly striving to improve the instrument, pursuing with a sense of dedication what may often seem to be the mirage of technical perfection" (359). He further says that "the novels' characters seem to achieve some sort of transmigration from body to body and name to name" (363). William Walsh, who was the first British critic on Narayan, extends Iyengar's character analysis and looks at Narayan's whole oeuvre. His most widely read book-length treatment of Narayan's works, *R. K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation* is perhaps the first systematic European study on R. K. Narayan. By looking at the moral and ethical aspect, he argues, that the journey of "Narayan's characters proves to be one from mundane levels to spiritual heights" (56) a quest rooted in Hindu philosophy of *Karma* and *Moksha*. Skill in characterisation, which is the measure of a novelist's greatness, and in this respect R.K.Narayan is the greatest of Indo-Anglian novelists. His complete objectivity as a creative writer made it vitally important for him to infuse life into the inhabitants of his fictional world. His characters with their oddities and eccentricities do not strike as figures from morality plays or humours. They preserve a basic quality of individuality despite their allegorical and representative characters in some cases. Raju, Sampath and Nataraj are among the most illustrative of his characters in this regard. The exotic and bizarre in Narayan's comic art gets its most striking manifestation in *The Man- Eater of Malgudi* (1961).

Narayan's ninth novel *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, is a novel which denotes later phase of Narayan's writing. The novel was published in 1961 and immediately attracted attention as a next novel after *The Guide*, an undisputed masterpiece. It has also received a considerable attention of the readers and the critics and has been regarded as one of the finest novels of R. K. Narayan. P. S. Sundaram, a well known critic of R. K. Narayan, opens his discussion of the novel as *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* may well be regarded as Narayan's greatest work" (97). M. K. Naik says that the novel is "an impressive fictional statement dealing with ethical issues such as the fate of evil and the question of human relationships and the precepts and practice of the entire business of living" (73-74). William Walsh's comments that in this novel "Narayan has perfect pitch in his sense of human relationships. This is exactly what people say and do; this is precisely how they behave" (36) have been echoed by successive critics of the novel. *The Man Eater of Malgudi* takes us back to the same familiar Malgudi territory. The main protagonist Nataraj is a printer with a shop in Market Road and with a house in Kabir Street. His settled daily routine is disturbed when one day a taxidermist, Vasu, enters his premises. The man eater of Malgudi is Vasu, a potent and dangerous bully, from the jungles of Junagadh in Northern India. He forces himself as a tenant on Nataraj's printing press and sets himself up there as a taxidermist who kills the animals, stuffs them and sells them to the people. In search of a larger game, his evil eye is set on the temple

elephant, Kumar that Nataraj has befriended. But the elephant has a miraculous escape. In order to trap a couple of mosquitoes, Vasu bangs violently on his forehead with his fist and drops dead of concussion. Sastri, a friend of Nataraj, makes a wise comment that "every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility" (*The Man-Eater of Malgudi* 242).

The exotic and bizarre in Narayan's comic art gets its most striking manifestation in *The Man Eater of Malgudi*. *The Man Eater of Malgudi* is particularly rich in comic variety of life. Its eccentric set includes such interesting and individualised characters as the invetrate Nehru critic Sen, the 'monosyllabic' poet, the sagacious and taciturn Sastri, the cadaverous forest officer, the dehydrated sanitary inspector and the resourceful and selfmade Muthu, the timeless adjournment lawyer, the mysterious Rangi and many more. Vasu, 'the man- eater' is unique among Narayan's characters in more than one sense. The most striking feature of this character is the element of the fantastic, fabulous and allegorical in him. The mythical framework is so pronounced that he almost looks a reincarnation of a figure from pages of our legendary lore. Through reiterate analogy by Sastri, Vasu is suggestively and later unmistakably identified with the mythical demon, Bhasmasura. The analogy is maintained all through- from the moment of his first appearance with a 'tanned face, large powerful eyes...and a black halo' to the last moment of his self destruction. His colossal physical strength, divorced from conscience, degenerates into a formidable destructive power. He is unencumbered with any moral scruples or sentiments. He hates marriage because 'only fools marry' and he hates poetry because 'nothing seemed to touch him'. He has no respect for life and he considers himself 'lord of Universe'. He symbolises the cult of materialism which passes under the cover of modernity and scientific outlook.

His demonic qualities are on the rise when he goes to the extent of bringing temple prostitute Rangi, and a procession of other immoral women to the attic. When with the strict vigil of the guards, the Mempi forest becomes inaccessible to Vasu, he starts shooting pet dogs and animals. Vasu also plans to kill the sacred temple elephant, Kumar and touches the heights of the embodiment of evil. Sastri rightly compares him with *rakshasha* and comments: "Every *rakshasha* has a tiny seed of destruction in him. Sooner or later something or other will destroy him" (MEM 95). It is remarkable how Narayan has managed to impart to his demonic and diabolic figure his usual comic treatment. The allegorical significance of the character is finally underscored by the resolution of the catastrophe at the end. The ludicrousness of the manner in which he destroys himself to ashes by plastering a couple of mosquitoes on his temple, has curiously, a touch of sublime profundity. It is suggestive of the dancing of demon Bhasmasura, burning himself to ashes by placing his own hand on his head. The eternal moral comes out in Sastri's observation, "Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the *rakshashas* 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. Otherwise what is to happen to humanity? He narrated again for my benefit the story of Bhasmasura the unconquerable" (242).

Vasu is thus a complete *rakshasha* and the close parallel between his story and the myth of Bhasmasura is quite evident,

as is indicated in the text by Sastri twice, who seems to act as the mouthpiece of the author in making his world vision clear. Sastri also illustrates:

Bhasmasura, who acquired a special boon that everything he touched should be scorched, while nothing could ever destroy him. He made humanity suffer. God Vishnu was incarnated as a dancer of great beauty, named Mohini, with whom the asura became infatuated. She promised to yield to him only if he imitated all the gestures and movements of her own dancing. At one point in the dance Mohini placed her palms on her head, and the demon followed this gesture in complete forgetfulness and was reduced to ashes that very second, the blighting touch becoming active on his own head. (96-97) There is thus persistent interweaving of serious parallelism where Vasu "the invincible" is the man eater of Malgudi. He can now easily be placed in the Malgudi community as a *rakshasha*, a demon; and Rangī, the temple dancer, is the parallel of Mohini, the seducer and destroyer of Bhasmasura. The character of Vasu is viewed from two points of view- as a typical Malgudian in a middle class setting of family and other associations and as a symbolic character in relation to Vasu, the alien. The negative aspects of Vasu's character can be seen easily. Vasu is brutal, self-centered who intrudes into Malgudi and disturbs the placid routine in this peaceful town. He has no respect for tradition, religion or the law. He is a bully who intimidates people and acts aggressively. He can do anything to achieve his goal he has set for himself. But Vasu is also presented as a humored, spontaneous and spirited in his attitude towards life despite his strong physical strength, "he tries his best to control himself and remain non-violent in the face of provocations" (Alam 80). Nataraj's own words of praise for Vasu are scattered throughout the narrative as: "He was a man of his word" (MEM 66); "He worked single handed on all branches of his work. I admired him for it" (MEM 67); "I admired him for his capacity for work, for all the dreadful things he was able to accomplish single-handed" (93). It is significant that Rangī who knows Vasu best also sees his attractive and repulsive features both. Despite her determination to stop him from shooting the elephant, she admits "He cares for me very much" (160).

In *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, Narayan explores the perpetual struggle between good and evil using the *Bhasmasura* myth from classical Indian mythology. R. A. Jayanta says, "Through his use of *Bhasmasura* Myth Narayan is able to convey in terms of fictional art the traditional Indian belief regarding evil, its destructiveness as well as self – destructiveness" (96). Meenakshi Mukherjee in his book *The Twice Born Fiction* starts the discussion saying that "*The Man Eater of Malgudi* has a definite sustained mythical structure" (150). Vasu is perhaps the only Narayan's character who remains remarkably alive even if he is stripped off his mythical dimensions. One can notice the way, Vasu's personality is introduced in terms of certain implied impact in the atmosphere. Vasu's 'unkept hair' is symbolic of the force of disorder that he lets loose in Malgudi. The physical description is only a prelude to what Vasu's violent presence brings to bear upon the serene, normal run of life of Malgudi. Nataraj, the first person narrator, is another hero of the familiar mould. He is a shrewd businessman rooted in cultural traditions of Malgudi and a peaceful loving amiable family man. He and his set of Poet and Sen represent cultural milieu of Malgudi which gets a sudden disruptive onslaught of evil in the shape of Vasu. The opening pages of the narrative present a complex Nataraj before us. It is true that he enjoys

the company of his friends but at the same time he is also aware of "while they rested there, people got ideas for bill forms, visiting cards or wedding invitations which they asked me to print"(2). His act of advising his customers to go to the neighboring press, an original Heidelberg, is also an act of winning over the citizens of Malgudi by his "seeming disinterestedness" (Alam 79), which is again in the interest of his own business. Again, on his way back home from his daily walk to the river, he meets the adjournment lawyer, who is known for his delaying legal proceedings. Nataraj says to himself, "I am undone; Mr. Adjournment will get me now" (MEM 5). Outwardly, he says nothing. But later when the lawyer refers the expenses incurred in a large family, Nataraj thinks: ". . . and you will have to manage all this by seeking endless adjournments"(58). Outwardly he sympathizes with him as: "Yes life today is most expensive" (58).

As an ordinary citizen of Malgudi world, Nataraj is amusing, comic and gentle. However in the mythical framework of the novel, Nataraj acquired a deep symbolic significance. His relationship with Vasu follows a queer course of fascination and repulsion. "Nataraj's fascination for Vasu and his attempts to re-establish friendly relations with the taxidermist indicate that evil is not merely stronger but also attractive than goodness" (Meenakshi Mukherjee). It has to be kept in mind that Nataraj does not lose his identity in the abstraction of allegory. He is palpably alive and is important both as helpless participant in and passive spectator of the conflict between good and evil. Nataraj also tells the readers his personal nature of enjoying the company of his friends, his unselfish desire to help other people and his ego-effacing personality. So "It is obviously in his own interest to make himself appear as attractive as possible, but he is not always he pretends to be" (Alam 79). His presentation of Vasu as a giant man may also be questioned, which seems as an exaggeration and again questions his reliability. Just from the beginning, from first instance, Vasu is being presented as a demon: "a tanned face, large powerful eyes under thick eyebrows, a large forehead and a stock of unkempt hair, like a black halo" (MEM 13). Nataraj further says, "He gave me a hard grip. My entire hand disappeared into his fist—he was a large man about six feet tall . . . His bull neck and hammer fist revealed his true stature" (13). It is not Nataraj who compares him with *Bhasmasura*. Septuagenarian and the forest warden are other characters who also have the same views as Sastri. Nataraj is the one who rather shields his tenant from the accusing eyes. When the septuagenarian, an old man, who wants to confront the man who has shot his grandson's dog, Nataraj hopes that "the old man should be bundled off before someone or other should offer to point Vasu out to him" (92). When the warden of Mempi forest comes to meet Vasu at the press, suspecting him the killer of the animals, Nataraj even refuses to co-operate with this officer of law. Again when Sastri who reports Nataraj the presence of immoral women in the attic, he tries to ignore him and pretends that some "visitors waiting to discuss a printing job" (107). So Nataraj though seems doubtful in the opening pages of the narrative cannot be considered unreliable. Nataraj is presented as a meek, gentle, helpful, friendly and passive in many respects. He is a good citizen who is interested in the welfare of others. His altruistic nature can very well be seen in his serious attempt to organize a festival to celebrate the publication of a long poem written by his friend. He also shows his good side in his dedication to save the elephant Kumar when its life is threatened by Vasu. It is also a part of author's narrative strategy to prove Nataraj innocent in the eyes

of the narratee that he allows the narrator to point out some good qualities in Vasu at the most crucial parts of the story. Another character in the novel is Sen, who is a journalist. He comes almost every day to the printing press of Nataraj. Nataraj regards for him a lot and considers him to be one of his good friends. Sen is a Nehru critic and always discusses the mistakes of Nehru, which seems to be his favourite topic. One day when Vasu heard Sen criticizing Nehru, he said to Sen, "If you feel superior to Nehru, why don't you go to Delhi and take charge of the Cabinet?" (19) and laughed disrespectfully. He resisted himself and suppressed the expression of his political opinions in Vasu's presence. But when one day, Vasu asked him, "What are the views of our wise friend on this?" Sen gave him fitting reply, such as "if people are dense enough not to know what is happening, I'm not prepared to..." (28). Sen plays a significant role in the novel. It is from Sen that Nataraj seeks information regarding the veterinary hospital in Malgudi for the treatment of Kumar, the elephant. During the celebration of the completion of the epic of the poet- the marriage of Radha and Krishna - along with the spring festival at the temple, Nataraj takes help from Sen in writing the notices and hand bills containing appeals for donations. Nataraj gets too much elated in the temple and is carried home for rest. As a good friend, Sen visits him and is kind and sympathetic towards him. However after Vasu's murder, Sen like everybody else in Malgudi also suspects Nataraj and avoids going to him.

The poet, another character of the novel, whose name is not mentioned, is also a constant visitor at Nataraj's press. He occupies the best seat in Nataraj's parlour, the Queen Anne chair. A teacher by profession, 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" (2). Like Sen, the poet too is the victim of Vasu's sarcasm and taunts, but he handles Vasu more tactfully than Sen. He is the source of much diversion for the simple people of Malgudi. His epic completion had a grand celebration with lot of formalities and show. Like others, he too suspects Nataraj of being a murderer of Vasu and turns away from him. He stops visiting him saying that he has been assigned some extra duties at the school and this does not leave any time to pay his usual visits. Sastri is a close friend and Lieutenant of Nataraj. He is the only staff member who works in the printing press of Nataraj. Though Nataraj tries to create the impression that a number of people work in his press behind the blue curtain but the reality is that Nataraj has a one man army. He is the foreman, compositor, office boy, binder and accountant. Nataraj never treats him a staff and always remembers him as his well-wisher. Sometimes when some important order is to be delivered on time Sastri acts 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. Sastri is hard working and obedient. Indeed, it can be said without Sastri, Nataraj would not have been able to run his press. As Sastri is an orthodox-minded Sanskrit scholar, he narrates many stories to Nataraj from the 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". (94) He displayed great versatility and

knowledge. 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) He make a wise and conclusive comment on the death of Vasu. Sastri hints at the self -destruction of Vasu, who actually destroys himself in the manner of Bhasmasura:

Every demon appears in the world with a specific boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the rakshas that were born. Every demon carries with him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self destruction and goes up in the thin air at the most expected moment, otherwise what is to happen to humanity. (242) Sastri is also very possessive of the reputation of the press. That's why he is agitated when he sees Rangi and other women of loose character coming down or going up to the attic of Vasu. At the end, it is Sastri, who explains the mystery of Vasu's death, he is after all the semi-scholar in Sanskrit with encyclopaedic knowledge of mythology and folklore:

...Mahisha, the asura, who meditated and acquired a boon of immortality and invincibility, and who had secured a special favour that every drop of blood shed from his body should give rise to another demon in his own image and strength, who nevertheless was destroyed. The Goddess with six arms, each bearing a different weapon, came riding for the fight on the lion, which sucked every drop of blood drawn from the demon. (247)

Muthu, another minor character of the novel, is a simple man of ordinary means. He runs 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. Like Nataraj and Sastri, he too is a deeply religious man. He has himself built a temple of the Goddess on the neighbouring hills and is now planning to celebrate the installation of the idol of Goddess. When Nataraj is left penniless and stands on the road side by Vasu, who proceeded in his jeep for a hunt, it is Muthu who 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. In such a situation, Muthu tries to relieve the tension of Nataraj. Muthu loves the temple elephant, Kumar and allows Nataraj to use Kumar during the temple festival. After the celebration, he returns to his village along with Kumar, and nothing more is heard of him. Rangi is a professional prostitute. But she is neither ashamed of her profession, nor tries to conceal it. She lives in the shadows of Abu lane. She is the daughter of Padma, who was an old dancer and was attached to the temple of God Krishna. Rangi is a notorious character of Malgudi. But at the same time, it is Rangi, the temple dancer, who contributes to the downfall of Vasu. Vasu's plan to kill Kumar, the temple elephant is communicated to Nataraj by Rangi. One day when she met Nataraj in the early hours of morning, she told him about Vasu's plan to shoot Kumar. She asked him to save the elephant. When Nataraj asked her angrily, "Are you in your senses or have you been taking opium or something of that kind?" (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" (156). Thus Rangi provides the information regarding Vasu's plan to Nataraj at a great risk to herself. This shows that she is religious and has a sense of dedication. She may be a woman of loose character but there is much good in her. It is Rangi, who throws light on the mystery surrounding Vasu's unexpected death. So Nataraj's reputation is restored. Thus the narrative ends as per Hindu norms of the impermanence of evil. Saxena rightly says, "When all human efforts fail to destroy the evil, God intervenes and Vasu is destroyed by divine intervention" (290). Narayan's *Malgudi* and his characters clearly draw upon the contemporary Indian history, which is quite apparent in the innocent language of the characters, their dreams and aspirations, and their struggles and conflicts. Narayan has depicted Indian life realistically and vividly and he has captured the very flavour 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 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. It is typically Indian which brings out beautifully their personalities at cross purposes with each other.

There are few writers in India or elsewhere who have succeeded in achieving so much with so little. A small group of people with middle class setting, in an imagery town in South India is all he has allowed himself in his successive novels. It has acquired young men with side burns and check shirts. But Narayan's steady warm gaze has not lost its urbane humanity even one little bit. His portrayal of life is as sharp and penetrating as ever. His characters therefore do not lose their identity in the mass of Malgudi. Narayan's art of characterization provides a mixed fare. His chief as an artist is with the character. His delineation of character has rare qualities of economy and delicacy. It is the dramatic mode, presenting the character in visual detail and then realizing it in action. A keen eye for the incongruous and grotesque in life helps him create a whole world of eccentrics. Their foibles often get exaggerated, turning many of them especially, minor ones into grotesque figures or caricatures. As a result his minor flat characters are generally delightful and amusing. Some of them as the Adjourment lawyer, the small shopkeeper are as timeless as the Nallappa's grove, the Mempi Hills and the Malgudi world. The collectively form the Malgudi world, familiar yet interesting. His characters inspite of their oddities and eccentricities, do not strike as figures from morality plays or humours. They preserve a basic quality of individuality despite their allegorical and representative character in some cases. They are vivid, striking and often memorable but they rarely strike a deep analytical note. The main reason for such an approach is Narayan's comic vision of detachment. His pre-occupation is with the average "From average to the extraordinary and back again to a more poignant state of average" (Walsh 33) this seems to be the recurrent movement

in terms of interacting characters in the majority of Narayan's novels. Narayan's essential comic objectivity gives him the artistic detachment which constitutes the staple of his art. "It is primary through characterization that Narayan filters this special point of view. As a result, his minor characters, while well developed, remain elusive. They embody truth without necessarily being true to life." (Walsh 33)) His characters therefore, come out vividly in their oddities and angularities, but their depth is only suggested. It is only occasionally that we come across a revealing truth or psychological flash that lights up the inner countries of the mind and soul. At the core of Narayan's art of characterisation lie this spirit of belonging, this sense of community and an innate warmth of humanism. His commonplace characters from commonlife come alive under the focus of a compassionate but shrewd vision. The essential comic irony of his vision bestows upon his art of characterization, a spirit of detachment and good humoured acceptance of life. This comic spirit coupled with a breadth of vision gives him wide perspective of life in its variegated pattern of shade and shine. Narayan's outlook of affirmation does not blind him to the existence of evil and vice. Infact it is the folly fair on which his comic art operates. His protagonists are the illustrations of the theme of deviation in human conduct. But his generous and comic view of life saves his comedy from moral acerbity.

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