



## THEMATIC SIGNIFICANCE IN R. K. NARAYAN'S *THE MAN-EATER OF MALGUDI*

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### Abstract:

The present paper deals with R. K. Narayan's thematic concerns that his novels have thematic touch of myths. He has presented Indian myths to show Indian morals and ethics. *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* is very nice novel based on the story of Bhasmasura. The demon that has blessing of Shiva that the person on whose head he puts his hand is destroyed. Vasu is an amoral force in the novel. Vasu is representing unchecked ambition. He has disconnection from traditional values. He is destructive force. He has no respect for nature. He kills animals. Vasu also kills himself by slapping a hammer while killing mosquito. The story disseminates the message that the people who destroy others destroy themselves.

**Keywords:** Significance, self-destruction, man-eater, myth, puranas, Bhasmasura, Karma, dharma, adharma.

**Introduction:** Rasipuran Krishnaswamy Narayan was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1906. He has given identity to Indian fiction. He has a setting of his novels in Malgudi town. It is nowhere in India. It is fictitious town. The events happen in Malgudi are common events which happen in India. He was born in a Brahmin family who were the worshippers of Siva and Vishnu. He was the second son of his parents. He was transferred to another school, and then he completed his schooling at the Maharaja's Collegiate School at Mysore.

“Born a Hindu, he grew up in a Hindu family, and he has imbibed Hindu culture of which he has a profound knowledge.” (Krishnan x) He must have heard many of the stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in his childhood from his grandmother and mother and other older relatives. The influence of the epics on him was so strong that he strongly believed that, “characters in the epics are prototypes and molds in which humanity is cast and remain valid for all time.” (Narayan GDO 9)



R.K. Narayan wrote the novel *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* in 1961. It is considered as the finest work of Narayan. It is an allegory. It shows that evil is self-destructive. The story of Bhasmasura is introduced in the novel. The title of the novel is ironic for man eater in the novel is no tiger, but a mighty man, Vasu. He kills number of wild animals, but also kills himself with a single blow of his hammer-like fist. Natraj is the owner of a small press in Malgudi. He is common man and lives a normal life. He embodies dharma. He loves moral order and duty. His ideas are driven by innate sense of justice. Vasu, taxidermist visits his shop. He gives him some cards to print. He embodies adharma. Immediately Vasu turns it into taxidermy operation which dead animals' skins and solvents. He goes on hunting of the animals into the forest of Mempi, a village outside of Malgudi. After complaints of the neighbors of unsanitary conditions about the taxidermist, Natraj tries to stop him. By the time the poet completes a long poem. The journalist and Natraj plan to celebrate. Meanwhile Natraj learns from Rangi, the dancer that Vasu is planning to kill Kumar, the temple elephant during the procession Natraj tries to stop Vasu. Natraj posts the wicked decision of Vasu. He gets lawful advice. He reports to the police. They show their inability. He finds the taxidermist dead. An investigation follows, no murderer is found. Natraj's assistant discovers that Vasu was killed by his own hand, when he slapped a mosquito on his forehead. Narayan's many novels have got mythic structure.

The theme of ego and pride is seen in the novel *The Man-Eater for Malgudi*. Vasu is incredibly egoistic caring for himself but eventually ignoring the needs of others. The moral of the story is that the person ignores others feelings, destructs himself. Sastri describes his all qualities that he has qualities of rakshasas. Vasu's downfall is the reason of his bad qualities. He is destructed by his own hands Bhasmasura destructs himself

In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* Narayan introduces the notions of Karma Yoga, Gyan Yoga, and Bhakti Yoga which are the paths of Moksha i.e. liberation from the cycle of life and death, as described by Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita. Rangi introduces the notion of dharma. Though a temple prostitute and Vasu's mistress, she does not like Vasu's plan to shoot Kumar, the temple elephant. She requests Natraj to save Kumar, "I am also a woman of the temple and I love that elephant. It must not be shot sir, you must somehow see that he doesn't do it. Please save the elephant" (MEM, 120). She is peaceful woman. She is Physically betrayed but mentally virgin. She further adds, "Sir, I am only a public woman, following what is my dharma. I may be sinner to you, but I do nothing worse than what some of the so-called family women are doing. I observe our rules." (MEM, 121)

*The Man-Eater of Malgudi* is a story of good and evil. It is an allegory. It focuses on the relationship between the narrator, Natraj and the demon quality eccentric Vasu. In the allegorical forces of modernism posted to threaten and disablize Indian society. Natraj has a small cosy warm world. his loving wife, his pretty son Babu, his dear friends, the scholar Sen and sincere assistant, Sastri, a semi scholar. He is henpecked, gentle, modest and sensitive. He is innocent and comes under influence of Vasu. It turns into fear and the fear is up to the end of Vasu's death. He is ideal father as well as an ideal husband. He loves his son and wife. He is blessed with spiritualism. He works with his employees with cooperation. He does everything for Kumar. He does everything for Kumar's life when he knows about Vasu's plan. He even ignores his business.



*The Man-Eater of Malgudi* has got obvious mythic pattern: the conflict of Good and Evil which essentially results in the suffering of the good and the destruction of the evil. This is the pattern of epics and puranas. Narayan himself admits of making conscious use of Bhasmasura myth in this novel. The mythological story of Bhasmasura helps Narayan to underline the distinction between good and evil. It gives him the scope to dramatize all encounters between the two characters Natraj and Vasu embodying a conflict between the good and the evil forces and showing the triumph of the good over the evil. The evil, for the time being, may appear stronger and the good may suffer, but in the long run the evil is bound to perish, because evil conserves all the might for its own destruction.

“Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the rakshasas 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?” (MEM, 183)

The use of myths and legends in his novels demonstrate Narayan’s obsession with ancient Indian values and his pride for the rich spiritual heritage of his country. But their significance does not remain confined within the Indian context. As Shyam M Asnani says, “The fact that Narayan’s roots are deeply planted in his own cultural ethos ensures that his works transcend the narrow political social and cultural frontiers and embrace human values that are valid for all times and all climes.” (30)

The novel *The Man Eater of Malgudi* presents the theme of cosmic justice. The central theme of novel is a concept of Karma. Vasu’s downfall is not brought about by heroic intervention. It is his returns of evil actions. R.K. Narayan makes structural and digressional use of myths in his novels. Most critics believe that his novels return to the inevitable Indian values, reinforcing the strength of tradition. Myths provide parallel to his plot in order to give authenticity and credibility to his Indian theme and setting. He seems to make conscious use of myths and legends in his novels. The myths of Valmiki and Bhasmasura are distinctly visible in his ‘the Guide’ and *The Man eater of Malgudi* respectively.

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