

Representation of Socio-Economic Transformations and Textualizing Postcolonial India in R.K.Narayan's *The Man- Eater of Malgudi*

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Abstract :

R.K. Narayan is always famous for the limpid prose, the down-to-earth characters and the gentle humour. Although human relationship gets priority in the narrative structure of his fictions, certain other critical issues have also been a critical tool for critics and scholars to question a few concepts embedded in his texts. In this paper I am primarily concerned about two perspectives of the novel, The Man-Eater of Malgudi. In the first section my objective is to discern the socio-economic transformation in the society after industrialisation, which paves its way into the country after the death of colonialism. The analysis is essentially based on textual references. In the second section I have tried to situate the novel against post colonial background of India which develops as an opposition against colonialism. The paper shows the manner in which the accepted notions of identity and culture are challenged in the relationship between Natraj and Vasu. My concern is also to study The Man-Eater of Malgudi in the spectrum of subaltern discourse, a representation of postcolonial theory and show how domination and power is exerted on the subalterns.

Key words – Colonialism, Subaltern discourse, Post colonialism and Industrialization

INTRODUCTION

“I wanted this, and today I got it. I want that: I shall get it tomorrow. All these riches are now mine: soon I shall have more. I have killed this enemy. I will kill all the rest. I am ruler of men. I enjoy the things of this world. I am successful, strong and happy. I am so wealthy and so nobly born. Who is my equal?”(Nandy :78) These slokas (verses) from Gita quoted by Ashis Nandy in his important work on Colonialism in India, *The Intimate Enemy* ascribes to Vasu's demonic creed, like the attitude of the Colonising British. The British people or white – settlers came to India as infiltrators and gradually formed their colony. Then they started waging war against the Indian Kingdoms, plundered the states and thereby confiscated the territories to form their strong foundation in India. They drained raw materials of the country to cripple the stability of the country both politically and economically. Against these atrocities of the Imperial rulers, the countrymen woke up to oppose with the intention to dethrone the British settlers. The opposing attitude of the Indians reiterated their struggle against Colonialism. The responsible political

stalwarts, freedom fighters, with their continuous battle against the British rulers, brought freedom in the country. Quoting the words of Ramachandra Guha,

“The Congress had reached beyond the anglicized elite to the vernacular middle class; and it was soon to penetrate even deeper. The popular campaigns it organized in 1920s and 1930s resonated deeply with peasants across the country, who participated in large number of these movements... The British now realised that they had to progressively devolve power to Indians.”(Guha : 46)

The climate of India was in favour of Self-Government and thus India got freedom on 15 August 1947. In Post Independent India several authors emerged- R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. They started a war of reformation in the society with their pen against the evils of British Imperialism and also contemporary social evils. *The Man –Eater of Malgudi* textualises postcolonial India along with other social issues. The novel primarily focuses on two characters Vasu and Natraj. Natraj symbolises the characteristics of the timid, meek, passive and submissive Indian whereas Vasu typifies the “Dionysian aspect of the modern west...the demonic self or asura prakriti.”(Bhatnagar : 146) Here Vasu is the coloniser like the British Imperialist and Natraj is colonised and suppressed under the powerful self of Vasu. The mythical construct of the novel forms a provocative factor and it stimulates a critic to decipher the text embedded in the formal relationship between Natraj and Vasu. The objective of the essay is to dissect the anatomy of the novel on the basis of its structural specifications and also to make an indepth study and observation of the attitude of Natraj towards Vasu. Vasu subverts the ideals of Natraj, however towards the end one can observe the driving force in Natraj against the domination and anarchy of Vasu. The novel questions identity and culture in Post Colonial India. In addition to this the novel also explores socio-economic condition in Post Independent India.

The narrative of the first chapter in the novel mentally prepares the readers to observe Natraj in various dimensions. He is deeply inclined towards his business and he is found both social and sociable. The author presents Natraj as a humble, submissive and passive character. His altruism is revealed in his interaction and way of accepting others. The press has an adjacent parlour where he entertains various kinds of people. The parlour is furnished and quite attractive to passersby. Natraj’s magnanimous statement lays more emphasis on his nature.

The statement goes: “Anyone who found his feet aching as he passed down Market Road was welcome to rest in my parlour on my seat that happened to be vacant. While they rested there, people got ideas for bill forms, visiting cards, or wedding invitations which they asked me to print, but many others came whose visits did not mean a paisa to me.”(Narayan : 02)

These lines although reveal the generous nature of Natraj but at the same time evoke the complexity of his stance. Personally he wants to be social and amicable with everyone who visits his parlour but there is an ulterior motive also. Along with interchange of friendship he also intends to see a smooth flow of business. Perhaps his professionalism inspires him to set up such an ambience in his press. This proves his intelligence and his passively aggressive nature in business. While presenting the altruistic nature of Natraj the author also mentions that he has a framed picture of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity on his wall saying that by her grace he does well in business. In this context John Thieme comments: “This may seem to undermine his claim that he is not materialistic, but given the omnipresence of Lakshmi icons in Hindu homes, it

could equally well be seen as commonplace.”(Thieme :121) The other half of the chapter depicts the traditional family life that Natraj used to cherish in his earlier days. As seen in the chapter the disintegration of family and the consequent erosion of values leads to separation and the change is symbolical, as it emphasises the change in society due to socio-economic transformation after industrialisation.

SOCIO – ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

If we try to situate the fictional world of the text at the backdrop of socio-economic perceptions; we will positively discover the factors that act as a background force to establish this theme in the analysis of the novel. The objective of free and democratic India was to attain self-sustaining and self-generating economy both in agriculture and industry. At that time India became free, the economy of the country was underdeveloped with poverty rampant and the quality of life dismally low. The standard of average Indian was very low as they did not have enough wealth to sustain their families. To raise the level of living of the people, government undertook the task of developing the countries through the medium of Five-Year Plans. It was Nehru, who initiated the economic planning to remove economic stagnation, hunger, squalor and inequality in the country. Pertaining to this situation, Sen, one of the friends of Natraj, who used to be a frequent visitor to Natraj’s press and who carries on discussions on burgeoning social issues, comments very seriously on this initiative of the government . Natraj quotes: “Nehru’s third Five-Year-Plan; my friend Sen saw nothing but ruin in it for the country.”(Narayan :10) Incidentally the novel taken under consideration was published in 1961 and the Third-Five-Year Plan (1961-1966) was also formulated at that time. The third Five –Year-Plan laid stress on agriculture and improving production of rice, but the brief Sino-Indian war of 1962 exposed weaknesses in economy and shifted the focus towards the Defence Industry. Since the war led to inflation, priority was shifted to price stabilisation. There was a severe drought in the country. It was because of human and natural calamities the plan failed to hit the targets but a strong foundation was laid and right path was found for proceeding towards planned economic growth. Perhaps the author also evaluated the proposed plan and so he incorporates the discussion in the text. The statement of Sen is opposed by the client who has come to meet Natraj for business card quotations. The client opposes Sen by saying: “What is wrong with people is they have got into the habit of blaming everything on the Government. You think democracy means that if there is no sugar in the shops, Government is responsible. What if there is no sugar? You won’t die if you do not have sugar for your morning coffee some days.”(Narayan : 12) The entire discussion is extremely significant as it foregrounds the author’s understanding of the economic situation that India was undergoing at that time. Perhaps the author intends to redefine the concept of democracy and break the illusion about democracy that is already entrenched in our mind. The critical debate between the ideals of Sen and the prospective client of Natraj is in reality an evocation of the debate or dichotomy that is observed in the economic ideologies of Nehru and Gandhi. On one side Gandhi advocated his firm belief in the minimum material consumption. He condemned the European or modern civilization as in that civilization man was more dependent on machines, deplorable working conditions and moral degradation. Nehru’s ideologies differed from Gandhi as he made an advocacy of national self-sufficiency and village Swaraj. Through the economic plans his mission was to exorcise the spectres of poverty, disease, unemployment and to keep pace with the developed countries of the world. So Nehru struggled during his time to bring modernization and industrialization in the country. In the text the author consciously

brings out the difference between Gandhi and Nehru's economic theory and to establish his faith and his strict adherence to Gandhi's ideals of life.

As we unwind the chapters' we happen to witness the fierce onslaughts of Sen against the Third Five-Year-plan. He says: "If Nehru is practical, let him disown the congress ...why should you undertake projects which you can't afford? Anyway, in ten years what are we going to do with all the steel?"(Narayan :12) If we try to situate the novel *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* beside the other novels of R.K.Narayan like *The Vendor of Sweets*, *Waiting For The Mahatma*, a common element is always revealed- Narayan's attachment to Gandhi's ideals of life. Jagan in *The Vendor of Sweets* is an admirer of Gandhi. He tries to lead an austere life like Gandhi and in every minute details of his life he has recourse to Gandhi's philosophy. The title *Waiting For Mahatma* is self – explanatory as Gandhi appears in the title itself and the plot of the novel is centered round his ideals. Since the author adheres to Gandhi's ideologies, it can be claimed that the author in some form criticises Nehru's economic models when he tries to depict the fallacies of the Third Five-Year-Plan. In a very subtle manner the author unravels the limitations in the Government plans and strategies as it gets exposed through the conversations of some minor characters. In broader perspective the author in such a short conversation between Sen, Natraj's friend and the client, who comes to his press for some quotation intensifies the difference in opinion between Nehru and Gandhi. Both of the national heroes struggled very hard to bring reformation in our country and also in Indian society precisely. Nehru firmly believed that industrialisation and modernisation of India could give a new dimension to the motherland after the British regime. Vishnu Dutt remarks: "For Nehru, on the other hand industrialisation, as the spearhead of a programme of all round development, was the first necessity in independent India." (Dutt : 111) Juxtaposed to the economic theory of Nehru is the philosophy of Gandhi .In Gandhi's opinion Khadi movement, hand spinning, hand weaving, etc. were an intensification of individualism in production and a return to pre – industrial age. He wanted to propagate the concept of small-scale industries. Gandhi himself says : " So long as my faith burns bright, as I hope it will even if I stand alone, I shall be alive in the grave and what is more, speaking from it."(Shriman : 08)

Natraj, the protagonist of the novel is social, amicable and enterprising. In the midst of his fellow friends, various incidents occur in the parlour of his press but he is never distracted or dispirited. His full attention, dedication and devotion are always there in business. He undergoes a very symbolical conversation with the waste-paper buyer. Natraj bargains with him while selling the waste papers and in response he defends his bargaining strategies by detailing his family expenditure in a very assertive manner. After a long session on bargaining the waste-paper buyer gets annoyed and he blurts out: "My final offer Sir. It's getting late; if I get nothing here I must at least find another place for my business today."(Narayan :25)The speech is extremely important to feel the pulse of the country men after industrial revolution. It highlights the distinction between haves and have-nots. Even the waste-paper buyer is so pragmatic and professional that he is reluctant to waste time in negotiating the price with Natraj where he could sense, the possibility of business is too low. The awareness, enterprising attitude and consciousness to do business in an effective way are an outcome of the uprising after industrial revolution. In this context one can envisage a different image of Malgudi where forces of modernity after percolating the society provide a new dimension. John Thieme reflects on this: 'Malgudi of his fiction is always a fractured and transitional site, an interface between older conceptions of "authentic" Indianness and contemporary views that stress the ubiquitousness and

inescapability of change in the face of modernity.’(Thieme :03) In Narayan’s early novels Malgudi is observed in different dimensions. In early novels his prime concern is Malgudi as a whole or the entire locale in its totality. In middle and later period novels, there is a slight change in his dealing with Malgudi. In his later novels social evils and other conflicting issues get parallel recognition. In one of Narayan’s conversation with an inquisitor regarding the inquisitor’s complaint against Narayan so that he makes virtue triumph over evil, he remarks : “How can I?(...) When God himself seems unable to arrange things that way. In any case I can’t undertake it because I do not understand what is evil and what is good in my various characters. They interest me only as individual not as symbols or embodiments of this or that.”(Self – Orbituary : 05) The pathetic outburst of the waste-paper buyer till the last moment justifies the transformation in Malgudi: “I’m a poor man. Don’t squeeze me. If I invest it.”(Narayan :25)The word squeeze is emphasised here as it reminds us of the fierce torture of the British regime. It reminds us how they exploited our resources to satisfy their own demands. In the post-independent era when the word is uttered by a poor man then it attains a new meaning. The word in the modern context epitomises the capitalist tendency of the society. In a capitalist country always there is a wide gap between the rich and poor/the haves and the have-nots and this gap is absolutely unbridgeable. There is again a reiteration of the difference between Gandhi and Nehru’s economic policy. Gandhi’s vision of free India was a confederation of self-reliant, self-employed, self-governing people living in village communities’ deriving their right livelihood from the products of their homesteads. He was against industrialisation whereas Nehru sought to promote it in India. The author’s attitude towards the text reveals his inclination towards the economic philosophy of Gandhi and so he expresses his angst for the poor in this way. Gandhi struggles for socialism, Sarvodaya (welfare of all). To eradicate poverty from the country he tries to preach socialism and his definition of socialism is:

“Socialism is a beautiful word and so far as I am aware in socialism all the members of society are equal, none low, none high. In the individual body, the head is not high because it is the top of the body, nor are the soles of the feet low because they touch the earth. Even as members of the individual body are equal, so are the members of society. This is socialism.”(Gandhi, 2009 : 24)

Vasu also exhibits his business acumen when he interacts with Natraj: “Even among brothers business should be business.”(Narayan :30) In Vasu’s life emotions, values of life hardly get any recognition. He is engrossed in his business and even not bothered to acknowledge the help that Natraj has extended towards him. In Vasu’s statement one can ascertain his professionalism and dedication to his cumbersome business. He knows that he has forcefully thrust himself on Natraj and Natraj does not claim that he is a landlord. Taking advantage of Natraj’s docility and submissiveness Vasu brings a forester to his press who is desirous to get a book printed and Natraj is entrusted with the responsibility to execute the job for him. Natraj is apprehensive of the financial gain as his intuition conveys the message that: “there was going to be no money in it; I was positive about that. The whole transaction, it was potent, was going to be a sort of exchange between the two: Vasu wanted to win the other’s favour through my help.”(Narayan : 30) Natraj understands the internal politics behind it and he contemplates that in this work there would be no professional gain only physical labour will be exploited. This consciousness in Natraj proves that he can be professionally strong and vocal but too much suppressed under the boisterous and vibrant Vasu.

Life after the impact of Industrial Revolution changed drastically. People have become conscious and too much aware of their surroundings. Profit and loss played a significant role. Utilitarian philosophy determined the life of enterprising people. Irrespective of their social status and financial condition they were driven by the force of utilitarianism. Incidentally the characteristic feature is visualized in one of the minor characters of the text. Muthu, the tea-stall owner near Memphi expounds his philosophy while interacting with Natraj. He is seriously involved in his business and so hesitates to waste even a fraction of a second. He turns down the proposal of Natraj and says: "I have no time to leave this place and attend to another business in the town."(Narayan :42)The simple retort of Muthu reveals his straightforward nature and his simplicity. He is pragmatic, rational and quite aware of the demand of a locale which is imbibing the characteristics of industrialisation. Although one can assume that Muthu's attitude towards business has a semblance with the industrialised era, there is also a proclamation of Gandhian philosophy in one of his evocation: "he was a self-made man."(Narayan: 43) The simple statement has great insight as it brings out the efficacy of Swadeshi movement. Gandhi did not depend on external market force rather sustained his life with the small resource material that he could exploit in his own village. It was Gandhi's vision to make each village self-sufficient so that they can be a microcosm of India-a web of loosely connected communities. Muthu's progressiveness is also perceived when he inclines to get his daughter marry a boy who is educated. Being a representative of a village, a poor man, running a small tea stall, is endowed with such an intellectual power that he could foresee the significance of education in the days to come. In the light of the discussion we can assume that Narayan was moved by the condition of India in the post-independent era and so the intricate details like- Nehru's economic theory, Gandhian model of economy and the seeds of industrialisation had a tremendous impact on the fictional world of Malgudi.

Accidentally Natraj gets the view of Vasu's room (attic in Natraj's printing press).The description of the room goes in this way:

"He had his bed draped over with a mosquito net; a table in corner, heaped with clothes and letters and a trunk with its lid open with all his clothes thrown about. He had tied a string across the room and had more clothes hanging on it. On the little terrace he had put out some skins to dry; there was a tub in a corner in which the skin of the tiger was soaking. Skins of smaller animals lay scattered here and there; a jungle squirrels and feathered birds were heaped in corners. A lot of wooden planks and moulds and all kinds of oddments lay about. (...) The room smelt of decaying flesh and raw hide, he had evidently been very active with his gun, which now rested on his bed."(Narayan : 60)

The terrific rather horrendous description of the room associates him with a rakshasha. A man absolutely lost in his frenzied world, extremely workaholic and zero tolerance for anything. His life style although situates him in a very shabby and uncivilized world but still he is a diehard professional. He claims that he is: "a man of business, and I cannot afford to waste my time. Each day that I spend without doing my work is a day completely wasted."(Narayan : 60) Although Vasu has a diabolical connection as proved in the literary sense of the term but his enterprising attitude is commendable. Vasu gives a description of the stuffed animals in his room and it seems he is totally disconnected with the world; he is absolutely engrossed in his own business of taxidermy. Natraj's expression is beyond literary perception; he is appalled and also paranoid at the bizarre view of stuffed animals in his room. It seems Vasu is obsessed and

possessed in his profession. When Natraj gets the view of an eagle in Vasu's room he is too disturbed, his repugnance gets reflected in his vision and he tries to convince Vasu that eagle has a sacred association with 'Garuda', the messenger of Lord Vishnu. A very interesting contrast evolves out of this conversation. While Natraj is worried with Vasu's courage to kill an eagle, Vasu is unmoved rather he decides that it will be highly lucrative if he can make more stuffed garudas, then his business will flourish. In the words of Prof Kalyan Chatterjee: "A Marxist may see here a symbol of capitalism, but then it is nobody's argument that a capitalist cannot be monstrous."(Raymond : 158) In chapter five there is a reference to 'Nandi Cotton Corporation'. Narayan's adherence to Gandhi's economic philosophy is well perceived in many excerpts discussed earlier. The reference has got no pertinent relationship with the text but still the author incorporates this to make the readers understand Narayan's close association with Gandhian economic theories. Gandhi endorsed the idea of mass production by village communities which would be able to restore dignity to the work done by human hands. According to him there is an intrinsic value in anything we do with our hands, and in handing overwork to machines we lose not only material benefits but also the spiritual benefits, for work by hands brings with it a meditative mind and self-fulfillment. The author comments: "Inside you saw nothing at first except bales and bales of cotton, and then a heap in a corner with some women beating them into fluff for bed-making."(Narayan :78)

POST COLONIAL ELEMENTS

The objective of the paper is clearly defined in the introduction. The paper intends to analyse the novel from two different perspectives socio-economic transformations in the wake of industrial revolution and how it brings death to Colonialism; in the second section there is an advocacy of postcolonial theory as an attack on Colonialism. Critics have explained the novel as a conflict between the modern and the traditional and also a confrontation between the colonizers and colonized. Professor Meenakshi Mukherjee studies the novel in an altogether different perception and interprets it as: "The Man-Eater of Mythical design (order-dislocation of order-restoration of order) reiterated by references to the puranic conflict between Sura and Asura."(Mukherjee :155)To comprehend the postcolonial context of the novel in the true sense of the term there is a requirement to study the historical context of India. In India the native people were subjected to the whims of British Colonialism, which involved a strict system of monopolisation to afford greater profits for the English. The English colonial perspective is revealed in the famous Minute on Indian Education, presented in 1835 by Thomas Babbington Macaulay. In the Minute Macaulay stated his intent for English education in India. In one of the essential parts of the Minute it is stated to form a class who may be interpreters between the British and the millions of people whom they govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. These people would help the British Government in governing and civilizing the natives of India, so that they would conform to British rule. Under the British Regime India was mercilessly exploited, tortured and terrified. The revolution against this inhuman torture evolved with the rise of the freedom fighters. After a prolonged struggle and terrific bloodshed India was freed from British Colonialism. According to Leela Gandhi:

'the colonial past is not simply a reservoir of "raw" political experiences and practices to be theorized from the detached and enlightened perspective of the present. It is also the scene of intense discursive and conceptual activity, characterized by profusion of thought and writing about the cultural and political identities of colonial subjects.'(Leela : 05)

The colonial aftermath can be interpreted in this way: ‘the range of ambivalent moods and formations which accompany periods of transition and translation. It is the first place, a celebrated moment of arrival-“charged with the rhetoric of independence and the creative euphoria of self-invention.” ’(Leela : 05) In Narayan’s *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* the fundamental discourse of postcolonial theory can be interpreted on the basis of the character delineations of Natraj and Vasu. Astonishingly the entire novel is based on these two antithetical characters and their antithesis adds new dimension in the novel. The crisis in the text emanates from Vasu’s attempt to kill the temple elephant in the inaugural ceremony of the poet’s publication of the epic poem on Radha and Krishna. Here the temple elephant symbolizes the culture, tradition and the topography of the space, Malgudi. Malgudi represents India at the microcosmic level. Vasu’s attempt to kill the elephant is a bold step to destroy the culture and tradition of a space. He attempts to destroy the religious fervour and this at the macrocosmic level is cultural colonization. Vasu as a colonizer expresses his superiority over Natraj. Here Vasu is the centre, ‘the self’ and the Colonised is Natraj, the margin, ‘the other’. Natraj opposes Vasu towards the end of the novel and he tries to break away from the subversive forces of Colonialism. He breaks away from the norms and conventions of the Colonial discourse and this is how the post colonial element is evoked in the novel. Coming to the main issues which the second section of the paper intends to discuss, we would like to delve into the concept of postcolonial discourse. Ella Shohat in her essay Notes on the ‘Post Colonial’ endorses :

‘Echoing “post-modernity”, “post coloniality” marks a contemporary state, situation, condition or epoch. The prefix “post”, then aligns “post - colonialism”, “post - Marxism”, “post – feminism”, “post-deconstructionism” all sharing the notion of a movement beyond. Yet while these “posts” refer largely to the supersession of outmoded philosophical, aesthetic and political theories, the “post-colonial” implies both going beyond anti – colonial nationalist theory as well as a movement beyond a specific point in history , that of Colonialism and Third World nationalist struggle.’(Shohat :113)

For Homi Bhabha, the task of postcolonial representation is simultaneously a rejection of the West as the centre and a renegotiation of an accommodation, continuing conversation with the imperial centres. As he explains:

‘My use of poststructuralist theory emerges from this post colonial contra modernity. I attempt to present a certain “defeat” or even impossibility, of the “West” in its authorization of the “idea” of Colonization. Driven by the subaltern history of the margins of modernity rather than by failures of logo-centrism, I have tried, in some small measures, to revise the known, to rename the post modern from the position of the postcolonial.’ (Bhabha : 175)

Language and literature have always been used by colonizers as a powerful tool in the process of colonization, be it political or cultural. It is very obvious that whatever knowledge, wisdom, science, technology, literary criticism and modernization that are projected as universal are associated with Eurocentric norms and practices. The postcolonial discourse in the second section of the essay is a continuation from the first half of the essay as in the first half of the essay we observe socio-economic transformation after the end of colonial reign. In the second half constantly there is an element of opposition and it is evident in the narrative structure of the novel. If we clearly study the textual references, every single reference expresses dissent which originally voices out protest against hegemony and colonialism.

At first let us consider this excerpt:

‘Before I could open my mouth, he asked, “You Natraj?” I nodded. He came forward, practically tearing aside the curtain, an act which violated the sacred traditions of my press. I said, “Why don’t you kindly take a seat in the next room? I’ll be with you in a moment.” He paid no attention, but stepped forward, extending his hand. I hastily wiped my fingers on a rag, muttering, “Sorry discoloured, been working...” ’(Narayan :13)

There is an undercurrent of colonial force in the text. A stranger entering an unknown land with no prior introduction and extending a gesture of friendship is quite awkward and unexpected. The phrase ‘You Natraj’ is highly symbolical. It symbolizes his arrogance, malevolence and desperate trial to occupy a space in Natraj’s abode of peace and prosperity. The word ‘space’ is significant in post colonial discourse. Vasu is in search of identity in Malgudi and so he forcefully attempts to occupy Natraj’s space in his printing press. This particular excerpt leads us to question the basic concept of identity and show how identity is treated as a monolith in post colonial nations like India, thereby leading to fissures in the social life. Here Vasu wants to establish his own identity in Malgudi as a whole. His attempt is to overrule the culture and tradition of Natraj to establish his own ideologies in Natraj’s territory. The attitude of Vasu can be compared to the attitude of British Colonisers. The white settlers also came to India in a secret manner, gradually started disrupting the harmony and peace of the country and then like true colonizers established their colossal empire. As described by the author Vasu: “was a huge man, about six feet tall. He looked quite slim, but his bull neck and hammer-fist revealed his true nature.” (Narayan :14) Vasu’s physical description evokes his psychological disposition. He is an outsider in Natraj’s life. He is involved in the business of Taxidermy unaided by anyone and due to his profession he is in constant struggle with the Forest Department as well as Malgudi as a whole. His appearance itself is intimidating and mentally prepares one to face along with Natraj the devastating consequences that are going to befall on the entire locale. His charismatic style, mesmerizing words and unnatural activities perplex Natraj and he starts introspecting. He constantly undergoes intrapersonal discussion and in a baffled tone asks himself: “Natraj, are you afraid of this muscular fellow? and said authoritatively, Yes? As much as to indicate.” (Narayan:19)The paranoid nature of Natraj is revealed in this way. It is quite obvious as it is his premonition that some uncanny atmosphere is about to set in his life and in a broader perspective in the entire locale (Malgudi). As the novel progresses Vasu interacts with Natraj, explains the intricacies of his profession and also shares the philosophy of his life. As Homo sapiens Vasu estimates himself as a very superior human being as he wants to conquer science. He is proud of his profession and is constantly engrossed in devising methods to exploit the natural resources. His plundering and conquering style of natural resources and exploitation of mankind is quite synonymous with the British people as they also followed this strategy to conquer our country. Suddenly after fifteen days Vasu once again appears and in a brazen manner communicates to Natraj: “You thought you were rid of me.”(Narayan :19) The word ‘rid’ in the line is significant as it cries out the hidden pang that resided in every Indian heart during the British regime. Vasu’s statement is an explication of his latent desire. His ruling attitude is evoked here. In response to this Natraj’s communicates inwardly: “Somehow this man’s presence roused in me a sort of pugnacity.”(Narayan : 19) The word pugnacity is specially used by the author to express his opposition. In a broader perspective the attitude of Natraj is a rejection of power; he musters courage to speak in a voice of his own. Leela Gandhi contextualizes this in her book *Postcolonial Theory*:

“postcoloniality is painfully compelled to negotiate the contradictions arising from its indisputable historical belatedness, post-coloniality, or political and chronological derivation from colonialism, on the one hand, and its cultural obligation to be meaningful inaugural and inventive on the other. Thus, its actual moment of arrival –into independence-is predicated upon its ability to successfully imagine and execute a decisive departure from the colonial past.”(Leela : 06)

Immediately after this Vasu steps in the parlour of Natraj and gets the view of Queen Anne Chair. The name of the chair connotes some royal association. Instantly he remarks: “That’s my chair, I suppose.”(Narayan : 19)When Vasu jumps to take his seat already the chair was occupied by the poet. Such an insolence of Vasu exhibits his dominating and all powerful attitude. The use of personal pronoun ‘I’ indicates his mental makeup, that he is destined to rule in Natraj’s territory. The sentence exemplifies his colonial temperament. Natraj is in apprehension regarding Vasu’s inclination to stay in the attic of his press. It seems to be Natraj’s nightmare to imagine Vasu residing in his attic. Vasu retorts: “I will stay here till a bungalow is vacated for me in the new Extension.”(Narayan :27) The auxiliary verb ‘will’ indicates his authoritative gesture. Vasu repeatedly overrules Natraj, uses all his strength to enslave him. Natraj being non-chalant, passive, and submissive accepts Vasu with all his evil designs. Later Natraj realises his incorrigible mistake and blurts out in utter dejection: “Now it was like having a middle-aged man-eater in your office and home, with the same uncertainties, possibilities, potentialities.”(Narayan : 30)

Natraj’s annoyance and impatience gradually soars high, he acquires tremendous courage and strength to oppose Vasu and get freedom from his subordination. The first declaration of his self-importance appears in chapter four when he directly replies to Vasu’s call: “No, I can’t spare ten minutes.”(Narayan : 37) Natraj’s rejection of Vasu’s call indicates his repugnance towards Vasu and it is also a proclamation of his desire to remain free from any disturbance. Eventually Natraj succumbs to his power, which means he can not remain firm in his standpoint and gives him company. The outburst of Natraj is in reality an expression of his anger which takes a concrete form in his heart. Though he knows it is a futile attempt to express his displeasure as Vasu has an overwhelming strength to defeat him still he refuses Vasu initially. The instance is an example of Natraj’s struggle for freedom from the hegemony of Vasu. One can observe certain symbols in Vasu such as the colonial intruder, the Machiavellian politician, the capitalist, the technocrat and assorted enemies of humanity. He is a philosopher of brute materialism, which is attributed to the life style of industrial West. The position of Natraj in his self-owned place is like a subaltern. The subaltern theorization is directed to touch upon the core issues of cultural and economic power and the representation of Marginal that are at centre in the politic of discipline itself. The notion of representation of postcolonial subaltern is based on argument that discursive focus can be shifted from hegemonic to marginalize. The subaltern classes refer fundamentally in Gramsci’s words to any “low rank” person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation. So like a subaltern Natraj’s life is under subjugation and subordination, resignation and silence, resilience and neglect and even when he tries to resist and rise up, he feels bounded and defeated by his subject position.

Besides subjugating Natraj and flourishing his business of taxidermy, Vasu also expresses his interest in women but in his consideration marriage is observed as a ludicrous institution. In his words: “If you like a woman, have her by all means. You don’t have to own a coffee estate because you like a cup of coffee now and then.”(Narayan : 38) There is a subtle metaphorical expression used by the author to show how women are considered commodities in our society. His attitude towards women is of course an attitude of a colonizer or a patriarch in the Third World countries. Vasu’s attitude to women invites the subaltern representation. In the statement of Robert J.C. Young : “The term ‘Subaltern’ refers to marginalized groups and the lower classes –a person rendered without agency by his or her social status.” (Narayan : 38) In *The man Eater of Malgudi* there are two women characters – one is Natraj’s wife and the other is Rangi, the temple dancer and also Vasu’s mistress. Natraj’s relationship with his wife remains traditional from patriarchal point of view till the discovery of his connection with Rangi. Rangi, the temple dancer is declined a social status and she is looked down upon by everyone in Malgudi. She is a ‘subaltern’ in the novel as she is denied any form of representation in the society. A subaltern in post colonial terms has limited or no access to cultured imperialism. Rangi is also a ‘Marginalised’ figure in the novel if one goes by the definition of ‘Subaltern’ by Robert J.C. Young. If one tries to interpret the meaning of ‘marginalised’ and one will obviously consider those perceived as being without desirability or function are removed or excluded from the prevalent systems of protection and integration. Rangi even though a socially ostracized figure in the novel, always subdued under the domination of Vasu, at last exhibits her strength by disclosing Vasu’s contrivance to kill ‘Kumar’ , the elephant, on the day of the poet’s religious inauguration of his epic poem on Radha and Krishna. Her extraordinary courage to challenge the authority of Vasu after being a marginalized figure is an exemplary action. In reference to the essay ‘Can the subaltern speak’ where Spivak argues that the gendered subaltern is simply the medium through which competing discourses represent their claims: “a palimpsest written over with the text of other desires, other meanings,”(Leela : 98); Rangi’s voice against Vasu takes a new dimension, it is a vehement protest against domination and oppression. In Narayan’s earlier novel *The Dark Room* Savitri surrenders to her debauched husband Ramani and her submission is a blow to women’s liberation. Perhaps Narayan dared to proclaim women’s liberation movement when the social structure was totally patriarchal and feminist movement was a far cry. In his later novels he triumphs to raise a cry against male chauvinism in a mild tone and in an indirect manner in the characters like Rosie in *The Guide* , Daisy in *The Painter of Signs* and Rangi in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*.

The seeds of post colonialism were sown with colonialism which not only destroyed native culture but also “induced the natives to abandon their culture and way of life and imitate the colonials”(Nayar : 40) Natraj is an ambiguous person as he can never totally defy Vasu and consider him an incarnation of devil. At times he admires him for his potential, self-dependence and single handed labour and tries to imitate him in his thought process, at the same time he pours out his vengeance on Vasu when he claims that he has put his hard effort to make his attic live able. Natraj inwardly slams at him in these words: “After all you are living on my hospitality; get out if you do not like it.”(Narayan : 71)When Vasu could sense the revolt originating in Natraj, he charges him legally. In a broader perspective the power play between Vasu and Natraj is actually synonymous with the power used by the white settlers in India to snatch the birthright of independence from the native dwellers. The surging revolutionary spirit of Natraj is the postcolonial element that one can perceive. If one tries to ascertain the involutions of their relationship then truly one can situate Vasu as someone challenging the

peace and tranquility in Natraj's personal space. The revolution/opposition/ existential struggle for independence, observed in Natraj surmounts to the revelation of the postcolonial element embedded in the text. In the mythical construct of the novel, Vasu is associated with the demonic creature 'Bhasmasura' and in reference to this there is a philosophical statement of Natraj: "everyman can think that he is great and will live forever, but no one can guess from which quarter his dooms will come." (Narayan : 95) The mythical construct also situates the novel against postcolonial discourse as it ushers in freedom with the death or destruction of evil. The British settlers were the rakshasas like Vasu as they used their power to exploit the natural resource of the nation. The slaughter of innocent animals for personal profit is quite similar to exploitation of Indian raw materials and merciless treatment of Indian people for their own pleasure. The death of Vasu epitomizes the death of the devil and it restores peace and freedom to Natraj's life.

Narayan depicts the problem of socio-economic transformation and conflicting issues of colonization in post colonial India. He deals with graphic accounts of the fictional town Malgudi as it is the loci of the novel. The printing press forms the central trope and the relationship between Natraj and Vasu establishes the crux of the argument that emanates from the discussion in the paper. The domain vision of the paper is to put forward the critical issues deeply embedded in the text of the author who is eternally appreciated for 'humor', 'irony' and 'human relationships'.

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