CHAPTER - II

PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE IN THE NOVELS OF

R. K. NARAYAN

“Philosophy has for its function in the ordering of life and the
guidance of action. It sits at the helm and directs our course
throughout the changes and chances of the world. When
philosophy is alive, it can’t be remote from the life of the
people.” (1)

According to Radhakrishnan, philosophy in the Indian context is not confined
to the dissemination of intellectual knowledge and wisdom only. Indian
philosophy is both man-centered and life-centered. The homo-centralisms and
centrality of man is the perennial theme of Indian philosophy. Max Muller, the
renowned thinker and critic of Indian philosophy writes:

“It exhibits a strong instinct for life, a strange vitality and a
strong power – all its own. It is deathless in that the values
outlined in Indian philosophy are neither old nor new but are
eternal.” (2)

P. Nagaraja Rao also perceives this centrality of man as the constant theme
of Indian philosophy and thought. A definite way of life is outlined here for
obtaining spiritual experiences aimed at the attainment of final bliss – Moksha.
(3) Radhakrishnan has rightly said that Indian philosophy is not merely a view
of life, but it is also a way of life, “an approach to spiritual realization.” (4)

R. K. Narayan is primarily a novelist, not a philosopher. Though he
imports the material from the traditional wisdom and store-house of India, he
makes it contemporary. His subject matter is based on the myths, legends, stories and incidents from the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagwad Gita*. By and large, Narayan's novels permeate in Indian culture and tradition, ideologies and views that are fore-grounded in Indian philosophy and thought. Though in a different context, Pam Morris has opined:

> “This understanding of ‘ideology’ rests on the assumption that as we enter the cultural life of our society – as we acquire language and interact with others – we absorb and assume its ways of seeing. We are drawn imperceptibly into a complex network of values, assumptions and expectations which are always already there prior to us and as seem natural, just the way things are.” (5)

R. K. Narayan’s characters with a fore-grounding in the cultural life of their society have deeply absorbed and assumed philosophical ways of life. The characters’ position in his novels corroborates T. S. Eliot's views of “historic sense and tradition” as prescribed by him in his essay entitled *Tradition and Individual Talent*. (6) His major characters have the “historic sense” of drawing the traditional philosophy and religion into their lives. Although they cherish the ancient values and retain the traditional ways of life yet they do not hesitate in bringing about a change, adopting and adapting to the modern ways of life.

R. K. Narayan does not preach philosophy in an abstract or abstruse way. On the contrary, he has made the serious material of Indian thought comprehensive and contemporary giving a touch of humour. In the three novels namely *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1962) and
The World of Nagaraj (1990) the philosophy of the protagonists and other characters is largely derived from the Vedas, the Upanishads, the epics and the Bhagvad Gita. This philosophy is a part of their cultural heritage and ancestry which varies according to the familial or social conditions of these characters.

Narayan’s characters have a philosophic outlook towards life. Philosophy for them is not an objective reality but is a way of their lives. They can be categorized into three distinct groups on the basis of their philosophy, philosophical perspectives and social activities or engagements. Firstly there are the chief protagonists with a specific philosophical vision in life. Srinivas in Mr. Sampath and Nataraj in The Man Eater of Malgudi are philosophers in their own right who expound, protect and promote the value system that is deeply rooted in Indian philosophical thought. Secondly, there are those like Vasu in The Man Eater of Malgudi and Sampath in Mr. Sampath who offer a resistance to the order, unity and harmony of the Malgudian world which is a microcosm of Indian society. Lastly, Narayan introduces in his novels a class of people who offer a critique of Indian philosophy and thought, in their own ways. They are ordinary people engaged in the mundane activities and their interpretations circumstances, consequences and fate bring about the divergent interpretations and analysis of Indian philosophy.

In Mr. Sampath R. K. Narayan is influenced by the Shiv Purana and he endeavors to portray the reality and immortality of Indian thought through The Banner. In The Man Eater of Malgudi the demonic or Tamasik Gunas or virtues are symbolized through Vasu. Here Narayan revives the Puranic myth of Bhasmasura and Mohini.
Narayan's characters adhere to or violate the ethical and moral system which is the major component of Indian philosophy and thought. His philosophical characters subscribe to the moral and ethical dictates and codes laid down in *Manu Smriti*. Srinivas and Nataraj are moralists who adhere to the values of the Indian society. The characters who violate the peace and harmony of the Malgudian world are immoral, unethical and they are eventually punished. Mr. Sampath ends up a forlorn person while Vasu precipitates his end in a mysterious manner. The critiques of philosophy simultaneously pursue their own ethics.
MR. SAMPATH: THE PAPATMIKA AND THE SHUBHA

R. K. Narayan in Mr. Sampath (1949) traces the roots of philosophy and antiquity. Here the novelist has picked up the character of Mr. Sampath, the publisher, a real life character who worked as an editor in the Indian Thought - "a quarterly publication devoted to literature, philosophy and culture." (7) Srinivas, the protagonist and writer associates the existence of Malgudi, to the old Puranic times. He retraces the departure of Shri Ram through the present Market Road of Malgudi when it was an uninhibited country followed by Laxmana, Hanuman and Sita. The river Saryu was born when "He (Shri Ram) pulled an arrow from his quiver and scratched a line on the sand, and water instantly appeared." (p. 206) (8) Again when Buddha came this way, preaching his gospel of compassion, centuries later, he passed along the main street of a prosperous village. The great Samkara appeared during the next millennium in Malgudi. "He installed the goddess there and preached his gospel of Vedanta: the identity and oneness of God and his creatures." (p. 207) The Christian missionaries also preached here. Thus, he reflects mainly upon the culture that existed before the arrival of the imperialistic powers in India.

All the external symbols of the ruined civilization have been washed down by the waters of the Saryu, but one thing which has not been washed out is the historicity and antiquity of the nation and its culture. The people of Malgudi have provided a panacea to the wounds of the past, revived the memories and have rejuvenated the ancient civilization by reflecting upon the preaching of the great national heroes, saints and seers. Srinivas hesitantly desires to immortalize the glorious past of Indian philosophy and Hindu
culture in his quarterly, *The Banner*, thereby revitalizing the greatness of Hinduism and reawakening the insensibilities of the Malgudians.

*The Banner*, not only attacks ruthlessly the pig-headedness in the society, but also paddles humanity into pursuing an ever-receding perfection. It is more or less a philosophical document invented to satisfy philosophical craving of two dedicated inhabitants of Malgudi i.e. Srinivas, the editor and Mr. Sampath, the publisher who anticipate the World War in 1938. Mr. Sampath writes in the novel:

"*The Banner* has nothing special to note about any war, past or future. It is only concerned with the war that is always going on - between inside and outside. Till the forces are equalized, the struggle will always go on." (p. 6)

The protagonist Srinivas is always preoccupied with the problems of human existence rather than the mundane problems of the Malgudians. His questioning mind is focused on two planes - the personal and philosophical.

In *Mr. Sampath*, Narayan focuses on the *Vedas*, the eternal issues of life and death and the message of the *Upanishads*. He also reflects upon the relevance and implementation of knowledge in terms of modern living and the recurring changes in modern life. Srinivas contemplates about life and death in the novel. Being a social thinker and Messiah of the Malgudians, he exposes the idiosyncrasies of Hinduism. He is not a blind follower of the orthodox notions and whims of his religion. He challenges casteism and reprimands his wife when she refuses to eat the hotel food, cooked by the people from the lower class. He takes up new challenges in life, fights against conservatism searches for harmony and peaceful existence. The essence of this is transported to the Malgudians through *The Banner*. When his wife and
child come to stay with him he is confronted with the problem of adjustment between his profession and domesticity. He endeavors to form the equilibrium:

“There is perhaps some technique of existence which I have not understood….Here I am seeking harmony in life, and yet with such a discord.” (pp. 36-37)

In a true sense of a social reformer Srinivas trounces the appalling public opinions. He believes that such type of propaganda stifles the true essence and the growth of the society and civilization. Shanta Krishnaswami compares Srinivas to Camus in pointing out the futility of rebellion. (9) “Life and the world and all this is passing – Why bother about anything? The perfect and imperfect are all the same. Why really bother?” (p. 30) This philosophy of quietism of acceptance is a distinct feature of the philosophy of Karma. Once when he stays home on a holiday, he contemplates on the value or importance of human existence. He hears the homely sounds of his wife and son in a state of contemplation:

“Mixed sounds reached him – his wife in the kitchen, his son’s voice far off, arguing with a friend, the clamor of assertion and appeals at the water-tap, a peddler woman crying ‘brinjals and greens’ in the street – all these sounds mingled and were woven into each other. Following each one to its root and source, one could trace it to a human aspiration and outlook…. “ (p. 49)

Srinivas wonders at the multitudinous and vastness of the whole picture of life. He tries to trace each noise to its source between sunset and sunshine, but realizes that the vastness and infinite nature of the universe is too big for
In each of his novels R. K. Narayan categorically introduces the typical Malgudians who represent the average Indians and their philosophy which is based on the sayings of great saints or seers, a surface knowledge of Bhagvad Gita, Shastras and Puranas. Srinivas’ landlord likewise oscillates between the material and spiritual pursuits. He desires the encroachment of Western products on the daily needs of the Malgudians, yet prefers Margosa to tooth brush made of “pig-tails….They (Aryans) knew more science than any of us today – you see my teeth.” (p. 51) Although a self titled Sanyasi, the landlord causes great inconvenience and discomfort to his tenants, is disowned by his family for his miserliness yet he feels himself capable of appeasing the metaphysical doubts of Mr. Sampath on the basis of the Bhagvad Gita and Upanishads. He is a victim of dual standards which conveniently shield the oddities of his life behind the garb of spiritualism. Quoting from the Bhagvad Gita or Upanishads is a matter of habit with him. Succumbing to the passions of anger and desires, he fails to encapsulate the essential ideals of Indian philosophy. Narayan’s comic satire exposes the class of such pseudo-philosophers. When Srinivas tells the old man that it is not alcohol, but coffee, he says, “What if it were alcohol? Does a man’s salvation depend upon what he drinks? No, no – it depends upon…” (p. 120) Suddenly, he pauses in reflective mood and Srinivas is curious to know what it really depended on. But the old man seems confused. Narayan’s artistic genius lies in the comic treatment of such hypocritical characters and realistic situations.

‘Kama’ or desire or lust is another significant aspect of Indian
philosophy highlighted in this novel, Mr. Sampath and Ravi are the victims of this passion. Srinivas’ script about the ‘Burning of Kama’ from the Shiv Purana is selected to be picturized by the board of directors of Sunrise Film Industry comprising of Srinivas, the script writer, De Mello, the technician, Somu, the promoter and Sohan Lal, the financer. Through the film ‘The Burning of Kama’ Narayan explores the mythical aspect of Kama. “The secularization of the myth consists in transforming lust into love.” (11) Ravi, the amateur painter and the portage of Srinivas is obsessed with Shanti who plays the role of Parvati in the film. Srinivas tells Ravi to burn up lust and search for true love. Ravi, Mr. Sampath in the role of Shiva and Shanti in the role of Parvati are all victims of Kama with varied degrees of lust. Artha is involved in the perpetuation of Kama. The whole set catches fire because of short circuit which symbolizes the burning of Kama. Narayan has used fire as the symbol of purity to integrate life and Indian philosophy in the novel. Kama is ultimately destroyed in the end - Srinivas overcomes his ego and his lust slowly but surely burns away.

In this novel Narayan has fully exploited his experience of movie making in the Gemini Studios in Madras. His portrayal of Srinivas’ brief encounter with the tinsel world is hilariously accurate and real. The Board of Directors’ preference of Kama as the subject for the film, to other subjects like Gandhi, Ramayana or Bhagawad Gita reflects the decaying, degenerating moral values of the contemporary society and the impact of Western civilization on modern Indians. Sampath in his role swayed by the wave of Kama forgets his duties towards his wife and children and expresses his repressed wicked intentions:
“Some people say that every sane man needs two wives – a perfect one for the house and a perfect one outside for social life… I have the one. Why not the other? I have confidence that I will keep both of them happy and if necessary in separate houses. Is a man’s heart so narrow that it can not accommodate more than one? I have married according to Vedic rites: let me have one according to the civil marriage law.” (p. 179)

This concept of Kama or lust is found in ancient Indian literature. Ravan in the great Indian epic The Ramayana is a symbol of lust or Kama. He too attempts to seduce Sita, the symbol of purity and innocence after having kidnapped her. The same idea is also displayed in The Mahabharata wherein Duryodhana casts his malicious sight on Draupadi. Indian philosophers have always condemned the idea of monogamy and accordingly both Ravan and Duryodhan suffer at the end. Mr. Sampath, the victim of Kama too meets his tragic end in the novel.

While writing the script Srinivas is aware of the moral and spiritual significance of the myth of Kamadev, the God of Love. When Rati, Kama’s wife wails and prays to Lord Shiva to revive her dead husband, Lord Shiva tells her, “He is not lost, he is bodiless, that is all; his grossness has been burnt up, but he lives in essence.” (12) The novel thus upholds the philosophical truth that it is only the body that dies or perishes. The soul is immortal.

Srinivas advises Ravi, the main victim of Kama to refrain from lust and search for true love:

“Like Shiva open your third eye and burn up love, so that all its grossness and contrary elements are cleared away and only
its essence remains: that is the way to attain peace, my boy." (p. 185)

Vatsayana has classified Pravritti or will as Papatmika and Shubha i.e. wicked or impious and pious or auspicious. (13) The latter leads to Dharma or righteousness. The will (Pravritti) of Sampath and Ravi is Papatmika – wicked and impious which leads them into undue indulgence in carnal activities, obscene speech and mental distraction. Consequently, Sampath is forced to leave Malgudi in despair and Ravi ends up in the police custody. The whole staff of Sunrise Film Limited is disarrayed. All the film equipments are ironically burnt like Kama by the opening of the third eye of Lord Shiva.

Srinivas the only survivor comprehends the mystic, spiritual and religious significance of his script. R. K. Narayan has dramatically epitomized the eternity of Hindu philosophy, religious myths and legends which are vividly upheld by his characters.
THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI:

THE SURA AND THE ASURA

The Man Eater of Malgudi (1961), one of the greatest novels of R. K. Narayan, is a hilarious comedy with the undercurrent of serious intentions. Prof. K. R. S. Iyengar aptly remarks:

"The Man Eater of Malgudi jumbles the ingredients of comedy to excellent purpose and provides ample entertainment, but the undercurrent of serious intention can not be missed." (14)

The Man Eater of Malgudi as Naik (15) and Meenakshi Mukherjee (24) have pointed out recreates the ancient Puranic myth of Mohini and Bhasmasura in a modern form. The novel has deep philosophical and moral significance. It concentrates on the universal theme of conflict between the good and the evil, represented by Nataraj, the painter and Vasu, the taxidermist respectively. Although evil seems indomitable, yet carries within itself a tiny seed of self-destruction, and goodness seemingly weak is ultimately victorious.

The polarization between the Sura and Asura, the gods and demons is a recurrent motif in Hindu mythology and religion. As V. V. N. Rajendra Prasad observes that Narayan has juxtaposed the painter Nataraj, the Sura symbolizing his namesake, Lord of Dances with the taxi driver, Vasu, representing the mythic ‘rakshasha’ Bhasmasura in the realistic context knitting them with the lives of the Malgudians. (17)

In Sankhya system of Indian philosophy, Prakriti or nature is said to be the root cause of all physical happenings in this universe and this nature or Prakriti is enveloped in three forms of Gunas or qualities i.e. Sattva (Purity),
Rajas (Passion) and Tamas (Ignorance). This is substantiated in the Bhagwad Gita also:

सत्यं रजस्तमं इति गुणा: प्रकृतिसम्प्रवासः।
निब्ध्वज्ञि महाबाहो देहे देहिनपञ्चयम्। (XIV/5) (18)

(Purity, Passion and Ignorance are the qualities which the law of nature bringeth forth. They fetter the free spirit of all beings.)

Vasu is attributed with Asuri or demonic inclinations and tamasic qualities. He is the epitome of ignorance, the product of darkness which stupefies the senses and binds one to the chain of folly, indolence, infatuation and lethargy. Vasu, a science graduate and the taxidermist by profession wants to overpower Shrishti, the creation of God which is the prerogative of the Supreme Being or God as per Hindu philosophy. Vasu, by killing the innocent animals boasts, “Science conquers nature in a new way each day; why not in creation also?” (p.17) (19) This encroachment on nature is repulsed and duly punished by nature in due course. Vasu represents the Asuri Shakti or demonic powers surrogating the creator through a blatant act of Hinsa.

Malgudi, a traditional town upholds the Hindu way of life. Every Malgudian believes in order and stability for which they have definite ethical patterns or framework. But Vasu, a man of liberal ways and an experimenter does not subscribe to these indigenous institutions set by the Malgudians – a microcosm of Hindu society. He has already left his parents, kith and kin and has settled in Malgudi. Here he cheats his friends like Nataraj and ridicules the institutions of marriage saying, “Only fools marry and they deserve all the trouble they get.” (p. 29)

Vasu symbolizes the mythical Bhasmasura, being a bachelor he does
not believe in the sanctity of marriage and indulges in illicit sexual relations with many women in Malgudi. His mistress Rangi, a *devadasi* – a temple woman, symbolizes Mohini, the seducer and killer of Bhasmasura. She is an archetype of the pretty mythical damsel, Mohini. This temple woman or *devadasi* is known as “a perfect female animal”, “black as cinders” who is the principal mistress of Vasu. A poor temple dancer and woman of easy virtues, she confesses her religion before Vasu. Defending her profession of a prostitute she tells Vasu:

“Sir, I am only 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.” (p. 33)

Her sensual activities do not restrain her from her devotion or worship of God. She abhors Vasu’s plan of killing the temple elephant and passes on all the requisite information to Nataraj about the evil intentions of Vasu. She fans and lulls Vasu to sleep, keeping a strict vigil on him. Although she herself goes to sleep to find Vasu dead by his own fatal blow while attempting to swat the mosquito.

Rangi is the catalyst in the act of final retribution. Her faith and devotion to God and goodness transcends her profession. She pursues dharma in her own right. It is the intentions of a person that virtually matters. Hindu epics, scriptures and *Puranas* refer to many sages, holy men and women of low origin or caste, like Shabri, Jatayu, Bali and Sugriva in the Ramayana and saints such as Ravidas and Kabir and even Hanuman who command great respect in Hindu religious order in spite of their low origin and birth. David Scott rightly remarks that Rangi’s elevated position further corroborates with the ancient Indian ethical code that accords great respect to women of
substance rather than caste or birth. He states, “She (Rangi) can not tolerate the idea of killing an elephant that does service to God.” (p. 123) Rangi, like Mohini, the destroyer of evil reveals to Nataraj Vasu’s secret plan of killing the elephant during the procession.

Vasu personifies the title The Man Eater of Malgudi as he is the embodiment of a Rakshasa in the modern context. He is immersed in all the Tamasik qualities or Gunas as found in the Bhagvad Gita and the Vedantic doctrines. He is a self righteous person overpowered with Ahankara or arrogance, the foremost symptom of a Tamasik or Asuri person. Like a demon, he possesses enormous strength and will power. Vasu does not believe in any system, institution or religion and disapproves of people talking sentimentally like old widows and considers the temple festival a sheer waste of energy. He has an epicurean, Carvaka approach towards life; he takes non-vegetarian food, indulges in illegitimate sex, kills innocent animals, threatens people and enjoys at the cost of simple people like Nataraj.

Vasu has also violated the Vedic tradition of the Guru – Shishya relationship. In Indian philosophy a special emphasis is laid on the teacher-disciple relationship. Guru is considered an illuminated soul who dispels the darkness and ignorance of his disciple and guides him in his spiritual journey.

\[\text{gurub/Hma\ guruivR}^*\text{u\ gurudeRvo\ mheXvr: a}\]
\[\text{gurusaR9atl\ prb/Hm\ tSmE\ &lgurve\ nm: aa} \quad (20)\]

\(\text{(Guru is Brahma, Guru is Vishnu, Guru is Lord Maheshwara, Guru is the Almighty Brahma. Such a Guru is to be bowed, venerated.)}\)

Vasu however violates this Indian tradition of utmost veneration to the Guru. He reveals his ingratitude towards his Guru saying:
“I knew his (Guru’s) weak spot. I hit him there with the edge of my palm with a chopping movement...and he fell down and squirmed on the floor...I left him there and walked out and gave up the strong man’s life once for all.” (p. 21)

Vasu symbolizes the demonic qualities of pride, envy, disorder and immorality. The peace loving people of Malgudi pray for his end.

Vasu’s murderous intentions to assassinate the most sacred of Indian beasts, the elephant God Ganesha, results in his own death. He traps a couple of mosquitoes which settle on his forehead when he brings the flat of his palm with all his might on top of them and he smashes his own skull. Although every demon believes that he has a special boon of indestructibility, through the character of Vasu Narayan conveys that the universe has survived all the Rakshasas and that the life of every demon ends up in self destruction and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment.

The death of Vasu is an example of poetic justice. It also reiterates the age old Hindu philosophical claim of the annihilation of all the Asuras or demons. Unlike Vasu, the altruistic and gentle Nataraj is the focal point of activity in Malgudi and his press forms the epicenter. He the counterpart of the mythical Lord Nataraj (Lord of Dance) who maintains the stability of the universe. Like his counterpart Nataraj also upholds the Indian ethical and moral code of conduct and social institutions. His magnetic personality draws people from all walks of life to his press. People like the businessman K. J., Idle, adjournment lawyer, Sen, the monosyllabic poet, children, Muthu from Mempy and various other officials of Malgudi are among the coterie of his friends. Nataraj states:

“I could never be a successful enemy to anyone. Any enmity
worried me night and day… It bothered me like tooth-ache… I was longing for a word with Vasu… He was a terrible specimen of human being no doubt, but I wanted to be on talking terms with him." (p. 199)

Although he is aware that Vasu is evil incarnate, yet he can not hate him. He perhaps believes in the philosophy that preaches to ‘deplore evil but not the man.’ Nataraj devises ways and means to reform Vasu in his own way but these traits of acceptance and tolerance are satirized by Vasu. Nataraj upholds the Indian philosophical ideal of faith in God’s will. When Vasu decides to kill the temple elephant, Kumar, Nataraj is in a dilemma. Being non-violent and tolerant by nature he only obtains temporary mental relief in the mystic tale of the elephant Gajendra whom Lord Vishnu had protected.

Nataraj’s dependence on divine intervention is a typical example of people who use religion or philosophy as a scapegoat to escape from their responsibilities and duties. Narayan delineates such cowardly creatures with his usual comical insight and humour. Initially, Nataraj can not believe that anybody would want to kill the temple elephant, and later on he depends on Lord Vishnu, he prays to Him to protect Kumar during the Janmashtami procession.

“Oh Vishnu, saviour of elephant, save all the innocent men and women who are going to pull the chariot.” (p. 175)

Nataraj is a deeply religious person gifted with godly qualities of tolerance, altruism and generosity. His belief in Hindu tradition is portrayed in the opening lines of the novel. He says:

“I hung up a framed picture of Goddess Laxmi poised on her lotus, holding aloft the boundaries of earth in her four hands...
and through her grace I did, not too badly." (p. 7)

In *The Man Eater of Malgudi* the character of Nataraj symbolizes Lord Rama of a great Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. Lord Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu who spreads the message of brotherhood, equanimity and unselfishness for the betterment of the universe. His relations - with Ahalya the wife of a *rishi*, Kevat, a low caste sailor, Shabari, a low caste poor tribal old woman, Vibhishan, the brother of his enemy, Sugriv, a monkey - project Him as the preacher of peace and brotherhood. However, Rama is often criticized for his passivity and too much patience. Rama could not protest against a washer man’s objection. The washerman objected against Sita’s coming back to Ayodhya as she had lived with the Ravan, the demon. He raised a question against Sita’s purity and demanded her exile from the state. Even in spite of knowing that Sita is pure and pious in character, he ordered her to leave Ayodhya. Nataraj also possesses these qualities. This kind of passivity is hinted in his own confession:

“The trouble with me was that I was not able to say ‘no’ to any one and that got me into complications with everyone.” (p. 199)

Nataraj like Lord Rama is a peace-loving and tolerant person. When neighbours complain of a foul stench, he does not even think that Vasu’s room upstairs could be the fountain head of this stench. Although a strict vegetarian with a reputation for peace and *Ahimsa*, Nataraj has no option but to tolerate the company of a drunkard, non-vegetarian and a potent killer, Vasu who is his alter-ego. In this way the Buddhist and the Jain philosophy of submission and acceptance of all oddities are also found in the character of Nataraj.

Like Nataraj, Narayan presents Sastri, a balancing factor between the
polarities of good represented by Nataraj and evil by Vasu. Sastri is an innocent person, a commentator on Hindu philosophical thought. It is Sastri who reveals the mystery of Vasu’s death and thus exonerates Nataraj from suspicion. His strong faith in the divine retribution or dispensation allows evil to flourish for a time, yet destroys completely in the end. The truth of Vasu’s death is envisaged by Sastri on the testimony of a parallel mythical ending of Bhasmasura. Sastri states:

“God Vishnu was incarnated as a dancer of 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 of dance, Mohini places her palm 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.” (p. 96)

This is a Hindu belief promulgated by the Puranas and the epics where the evil doers, be it Ravana, Kansa, Duryodhana or Bhasmasura – they all have been annihilated in the end. Like Bhasmasura, Vasu brings about his own death. Sastri rightly sums up the Hindu philosophy in the end or destruction of evil. Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility, yet, the universe has survived all the Rakshasas. An inflated ego temporarily engenders a feeling of invincibility in a Rakshasa but sooner or later evil is destroyed. Every Rakshasa gets swollen with his ego. He thinks, he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later goodness and truth is victorious.

Sastri and his family believe in ancient rituals or Pujas such as fasting
etc. In the end when Vasu dies, he wishes to invoke the Almighty to thank Him for restoring peace and prays for the Sadgati of the departed soul. He tells Nataraj:

“I’d not trouble you but for the fact that this Satyanarayan puja must be performed today in my house; my children and wife will be waiting for me at the door…” (p. 16)

Like Sastri, Muthu, the tea-shop owner is also a religious person acquainted with Nataraj. Vasu forcibly abducts him to the forest of Mempi-Hill and abandons him there. Muthu apprises Nataraj about the temple and elephant:

“Because the Goddess protects us, I rebuilt a temple with my own funds. I have regular pujas performed there. You know we also have a temple elephant… His name is Kumar and children and elders alike adore him and feed him with coconut and sugar-cane and rice all day.” (p. 46)

The religious festivals, fairs and gatherings are an inseparable part of life in Malgudi. Narayan has artistically interwoven the festivals of Shivaratri, Janmashtami, Holy, Diwali and spiritual fairs like Kumbha and religious pilgrimages which are a part and parcel of a Hindu way of life. One such festival described in this novel is Janmashtami – the celebration of the birthday of Lord Krishna. This is artistically interwoven by R. K. Narayan into the fabric of the text. Vasu is ready to test the climax of his art of shooting. Nataraj is pre-occupied with the arrangements of the procession and the elephant’s safety while the ordinary Malgudians are preparing enthusiastically to celebrate this festival.

The death of Vasu epitomizes the victory of good which reinstates the pre-Vasuian amity and harmony in the Malgudian society. Vasu’s position as
an outsider in the peaceful town of Malgudi is analogous to the alien forces of modernity that disturb the peaceful equilibrium of traditional life. Ron Shepherd remarks in this regard:

"Nowhere is the personification of modernity more perfectly exemplified than in the figure of Vasu in The Man Eater of Malgudi." (21)

R. K. Narayan does not debate upon the evil in the abstract manner, but upholds the value of what is good. He portrays the Malgudians who are deeply rooted in the culture and tradition of India in a realistic manner.

The Man Eater of Malgudi contains within its framework of a comedy the cardinal truths of Hindu philosophy that strongly supports the victory of good over evil. H. M. Williams perceives a comic banality at the end of the novel with Nataraj and Sastri's return to printing bottle labels for a water company. (22) The comic banality of this return to normality ironically suggests the loss Malgudi has suffers by Vasu's demise! This normalcy suggests the Indian ideology of peace. By presenting the death of Vasu and the return of peace and harmony in Malgudi, Narayan stresses on the idea of the victory of the good over the evil. Despite its comic vision, Narayan has artistically interwoven in of The Man Eater of Malgudi the hidden layers of philosophy of the Sura and the Asura imbedded in human nature which emerges in man's behavior.

THE WORLD OF NAGARAJ (1990)
SATVAH, RAJAS AND TAMAS

In *The World of Nagaraj* (1990) R. K. Narayan has assimilated his experiences of life and triple vision of man in relation to himself, his environment and his gods. Such deep philosophy of life has been presented with a deepening sense of comedy. The surface of this hilarious comedy leads the reader to the profoundest thoughts of Indian philosophy. This novel is an artistic and mature presentation of Narayan who offers a perfect blending of tradition and modernity. David Scott Philips refers to the ancient Indian society as “a world of thinkers, a nation of philosophers” (23) This is true in the context of Malgudian society which is vividly portrayed in Narayan’s novels.

In *The World of Nagaraj*, Narayan presents the characters from different walks of life who reiterate their belief in Indian philosophical thought and moral values through their actions. The novel presents a critique of the Indian values. According to David Scott Philips, Narayan was in his critical and transitional phase while writing this novel “… realizing the material if not the spiritual inferiority of his culture, he seeks to modernize and in the process of adapting … he realizes that willy – nilly, he will or must adopt certain of its values also.” (24)

Though mostly acclaimed as a writer of social and comic novels, Narayan has encapsulated philosophical perspectives in his novels which also win him the status of a serious novelist. He has presented a kaleidoscope of characters in *The World of Nagaraj* to correlate the Indian philosophy and life in India. Nagaraj, the middle aged protagonist of *The World of Nagaraj* is deeply engrossed in the prospect of writing down his *magnum opus* on Saint Narada, the ‘manasputra’ – the earthly son of Lord Brahma, his wife Sita, like
her mythical counterpart is devoted to her husband and her gods and Gopu
his elder brother is a worldly wise busy agriculturalist. The Townhall Sanyasi
advocates and preaches Vedantic philosophy. Bari, a businessman is also still
devotional. Most significantly, the young people, Tim and his wife Saroja who
initially reject the traditional Malgudian mode of life for the glittering world of
Kismet-inn finally return back to Kabir street, the center of Malgudi. The
reflection of Kismet-inn resounding with loud music and loud gossips in favour
of Kabir street which is diametrically opposed to Kismet-inn culture is a
reiteration of Malgudian culture and its social, moral or ethical value system.

In *The World of Nagaraj* Narayan presents a reversal of the great
Indian epic *Ramayana*. Nagaraj in his subordination to his brother Gopu offers
a parallel to Laxmana in the *Ramayana*:

"‘You are like Laxmana in the *Ramayana*, who stood behind
Rama, his elder brother, all the time without a murmur or
doubt’, remarked his father sometimes.” (p. 27)(25)

Nagaraj like Lakshmana adores his elder brother Gopu. Nagaraj is
extremely generous, even during the separation of the ancestral property he
maintains his poise and calm. However, Gopu can not be called the
archetypal of Rama, the protagonist of the great epic. Unlike Rama, he is an
egoist.

Nagaraj, though childless, proves himself to be a lovable, generous,
and uncomplaining spouse to his wife Sita. Nagaraj bestows his parental love
on his brother’s son Tim, yet he is detached in performing the *Karma* and
does not contemplate the consequences. Tim’s erratic, unpredictable actions
are perceived by him in a stoic manner and therefore he suffers less than his wife who is devoted and attached to Tim as a worldly woman.

The relationship of Nagaraj and his wife Sita to their semi-adopted son Tim projects two facets of Hindu philosophy – the ideal and the illusory. The Bhagvad Gita compliments one who is detached and performs the Karma – his duties in a detached, indifferent manner like the lotus flower that blooms in the midst of mud and mire.

\begin{quote}
यस्तविद्विज्ञाय यां मनसा नित्यायार्थेते
कर्मेन्द्रतियें: कर्मयोगमस्तकः स विशिष्यते।
\end{quote}

(On the other hand, he who controls the senses by the mind and engages his active organs in works of devotion, without attachment, is by far superior.)

The relationship of Sita and Tim is juxtaposed to the relationship of Nagaraj and Tim. Nagaraj presents the ideal kind of relationship in accordance with the principles and doctrines of Indian philosophy and therefore suffers less from the oscillating nature of Tim. In his relation with Tim, Nagaraj transforms from the illusory to the ideal world whereas in her relation with Tim, Sita struggles more within her illusory world of attachment. She can not detach herself from the material aspects of family relations.

The Vedantic tradition of Guru-Shishya is focused in the novel in the relationship between Nagaraj and the Townhall Sanyasi. The term “Upanishad” means “to stay near God devotedly”, to attain the knowledge of Brahman in order to annihilate ignorance. This knowledge about the Supreme Reality is imparted by the Guru – the teacher to his Shishya – the disciple. This Vedantic conception of Guru-Shishya, the learned one and the seeker is
pre-requisite in the process of the seeker’s spiritual journey. Nagaraj fulfills his necessary pre-requisite for the pursuit and subsequent attainment of spiritual knowledge. The Town hall Sanyasi, his Guru advises him:

“Your thoughts must be away from all sensual matters, free from kama, krodha, lobha and moha. ... Don’t look at your wife except as a mother, and don’t let your mind dwell on your night life.” (p. 12)

Nagaraj replies, “For over ten years we have been living like brother and sister.” (p. 12) He follows the advice of his Guru and detaches himself from all the preoccupations of family and money.

Unlike Krishnan in The English Teacher, Srinivas in Mr. Sampath, Margayya in The Financial Expert and Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets who finally learn the lesson of renunciation and quit Grihastha Ashrama to attain spiritual aspirations, Nagaraj though religious and staunch follower of the Vedas, is not mentally prepared for such a renouncement of worldly life. He leads a harmonious life in his huge ancestral house situated in the aristocratic Kabir Lane. Nagaraj is visibly in no mood to renounce his home like his predecessors. On the contrary, he pursues the ritualistic mode of worship in an archer-dress in the sanctuary of his home experiencing, “The fragrance of incense and flowers which gave him a feeling of sitting in heaven of peace, silence, (and) isolation.” (pp. 12-13)

R. K. Narayan seems to be offering a viable mode and model in Nagaraj, the philosopher and moralist in the modern context. All the schools of Vedanta propagate the Varna Ashrama Dharma i.e. common duties. The relative duties classified as Varna Ashrama Dharma are the specific duties relating to one’s status or position in life. A person’s status in life is
determined by one’s caste and one’s *Ashrama* or particular stage of life. Under the class of *Sadharana Dharma* or common duties, Manu \(^{(27)}\) enumerates ten duties – steadfastness (*dhairya*), forgiveness (*kshama*), application (*dama*), non-appropriation (*chouryabhava*), cleanliness (*shoucha*), sensuous appetites (*indriya-nigraha*), wisdom (*dhi*) learning (*vidya*), veracity (*satya*) and restraint of anger (*akrodha*). All these duties prescribed by Manu are significantly relevant for the attainment of an individual’s own perfection. Hindu moral ethics primarily aim at self reliance of an individual, free from all external bonds – physical as well as social. Prasastapada also classified the duties of man like Manu into common or *Samanya Dharma* and specific or *Vishesha Dharma*. Nagaraj follows the relative duties of *Varna Ashrama Dharma* as classified both by Manu and Prasaspada \(^{(28)}\) in his life.

Narayan presents the ideal and the real world of Nagaraj who symbolizes the virtues of *Samkhya Dharma*. The classical systems of Indian philosophy called *Darshanas* are categorically classified into three broad groups – the orthodox (*astika*), the heterodox (*nastika*) and the Indian materialist (*charvaka*) school. The greatest contribution of *Sankhya* system to human thought is its conception of *Prakriti* or nature which is the root cause of all physical entities in the universe. The entire system of *Prakriti* is woven out of three gunas – *Satvah*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. *Purusa* or man is the other important category in *Sankhya* system.

Narayan has encapsulated the virtue of *Satvah* in the character of Nagaraj who is an epitome of steadfastness or *dhairya* in the face of all upheavals or crises in his life. Despite the adverse situations like the death of his beloved father, separation of two dear brothers, death of his mother, his childlessness and
foolhardiness of Tim and his wife Saroja and even amidst the rebuffs of his brother, Gopu, he remains calm and poised without any grudges against his loved ones. All personal tragedies are borne heroically by Nagaraj in a mood of equanimity. Narayan has presented in him the quality of dhairyā or steadfastness. He performs his duties in an unselfish manner whether it is to extend financial help to Coomar, or to forgive the follies and stupidities of Tim or to bear with the eccentricities of his brother Gopu. He is the best example of dama or application and kshama or forgiveness.

Through Nagaraj, Narayan reflects chouryabhava or non-appropriation and akrodha or restraint of anger. Nagaraj, a lovable soul is miles away from the evils of theft and anger. He disapproves of Coomar’s theft of income-tax. During the division of ancestral property he maintains his poise even when Gopu indulges in altercation with a jutkawala, he is an example of his calm and poised temperament. “Life is too short for teaching lesson…” (p. 39) These instances reflect the specificity of chouryabhava or non-appropriation and akrodha or restraint of anger in Nagaraj.

Narayan has presented the philosophical ideas of Hindu culture exhaustively in The World of Nagaraj. Most Indian ethos including Shrimad Bhagvad Geeta have advised men to practice Indriya-nigraha or control of senses.

नासिति बुद्धिर्युक्तस्य न चायुक्तस्य भावना ।
न चाभाभवयतः शान्तिरशान्तस्य कुलः सुखम्॥ (II/66)²⁹

(One who is not in transcendental consciousness can have neither a controlled mind nor steady intelligence, without which
there is no possibility of peace. And how can there be any
happiness without peace?)

Shrimad Bhagvad Gita upholds the belief that the devotee who controls his
senses and meditates the Almighty achieves the equilibrium of mind. This
Indriya-nigraha or control of senses is experimented by Nagaraj in the novel.
He restrains himself from sensual pleasures such as indulgence in the sense
of touch, smell and vision. He abstains from alcohol and stands in binary
opposition to the dancing and ditching of Tim and others in Kismet-Inn.

Gopu rightly compares Nagaraj to the ideal Saint Narada who is
incidentally the ideal saint of Nagaraj who desires to write a book on Saint
Narada who is a source of dhi or wisdom and vidya or learning for Nagaraj.

The virtues of shoucha and satya i.e. cleanliness and veracity are
deeply entrenched in the character of Nagaraj. The protagonist practices and
preaches these cardinal duties as devised by Manu and Prasatapada. The
means and actions of Nagaraj are also in accordance to these moral duties.
Nagaraj’s mission in his life is to sketch the character of Narada – one of the
seven saints, the progenitors of mankind. He seeks guidance from various
sources to complete his work. The mythical character of Narada is highly
venerated by all the gods and demons – as a promoter of goodness and
truthfulness in the universe. Narada is also known for his wisdom,
manipulative tactics and cleanliness. All these qualities are gradually
incorporated in the personality of Nagaraj – his devotee. Thus, the devotee
becomes one with the devoted one which is the prerequisite of attaining
salvation.
Through Nagaraj, Narayan explores the various facets of human behaviour and temperament and the progress of man from the real to the ideal world. The qualities of *chauryabhava* or non-appropriation, *akrodha* or restraint of anger, *dhairya* or steadfastness, forgiveness or *kshama*, cleanliness or *shoucha*, control of senses or *indriya-nigraha*, wisdom or *dhi* and learning or *vidya* and above all oneness with the Almighty reflect an ideal person trying to face the crudities and oddities of real life. According to the Upanishads the person having all these qualities and having strong faith in *Dharma* is able to achieve the Supreme. Nagaraj holds these virtues and has faith in the Almighty.

*Dharma* and belief in God is the underlying theme of *The World of Nagaraj*. All the characters, major and minor attach great significance to religious and moral concepts of Hinduism. Nagaraj’s wife Sita, Gopu - the Townhall Sanyasi, Bari, Kavu Pandit, even the owner of Boeing Sari Company – all lead a religious but pseudo-philosophical life. They embody all Rajasik qualities in them. Gopu, a very arrogant, self-centered person is deep within orthodox Hindu traditions who carries with himself a rosary of sandalwood beads, the book of morning prayers, a little brass box of sacred ash and a packet of incense sticks. So this is Gopu’s “… secret channel of communication with God, a private arrangement with eternity.” (p. 175)

The idea of detachment from all powers including money has been propounded by number of Indian philosophers. Shankaracharya avers:

\[
\text{A4Rmn4R> Waavy inTy> naiSt tt: suQale}x: \text{sTyml a)
\]

\[
\text{pu5adip 6nWaaja} \text{> Walit: sveR5E8a ivihta nliit: a} \text{a} \quad (30)
\]
(There is not least amount of happiness in richness. Know it as the gateway of calamities. Rich people have fear of even their son. This is applicable to all.)

Narayan has epitomized this idea in the character of Nagaraj in the novel who lives a Sattvik life. When Coomar, a hard-working person and a childhood friend of Nagaraj offers him the monetary help in lieu of his services in his shop, he declines the proposal. This is a fine example of chouryabhava or non-appropriation. This detachment from money, the fountainhead of all evils clearly differentiates Nagaraj from Narayan’s earlier protagonists, Margayya, Jagan and Raju who for the large part of their lives remain enslaved to monetary matters. Nagaraj recollects:

“Did not some philosopher declare: all money is evil?
Somehow I am not attached to it.” (p. 100)

R. K. Narayan has presented the ideal and the real world in juxtaposition in the novel. On the one hand through the characters like Nagaraj and Townhall Sanyasi he tries to explore the ideal world as discussed and advised by Indian philosophical schools and on the other hand he unfolds the real world of oddities and menace through the characters like Coomar, Bari and Kavu Pandit. Narayan believes in the concept of transformation from the real to the ideal in the process of his life. This transformation leads one to achieve peace and happiness.

Narayan presents the parallels of life in his novels. The ideas of good vs. evil, spiritualism vs. materialism and religious worship vs. hypocrisy are artistically juxtaposed in The World of Nagaraj. He presents the character of Coomar in the novel to project the idea of materialism. Coomar is identifiably associated with the evils of money. He adopts an ostentatious life style
wearing a lace turban and buttoned-up silk coat over a lace dhoti riding in motorcar with a chauffeur to open the door of his car. He is an income-tax evader and a secretive drunkard who has no time to interact with his friends at night. Narayan also unfolds the idea of evil through the character of Kavu Pandit who is addicted to playing cards. He represents the orthodox class of Malgudians, his dilly-dallying attitude and whimsicalities of character are highlighted by the author. Narayan in his fiction has caricatured this class of self-titled pseudo-ascetics and pedants who fail to comprehend quintessence of religion, ethics and philosophy. Bari, a businessman by profession is a philosopher by his temperament and commands great respect in the eyes of the protagonist. But his philosophy of life is to acquire richness and fame. Nagaraj quite often shares his philosophical thoughts and doubts with him. Bari summarizes philosophy in his own way:

“My philosophy is to give complete satisfaction to my customers. Do you mind? I can’t make it up for you – that’s my philosophy in business.” (p. 119)

On another occasion Nagaraj shares his philosophical doubts with Bari. When he asks Bari if he believes in the saying, “God helps those who help themselves” he replies without a moment’s pause, “That’s my philosophy, otherwise do you think I could have developed this business?” (p. 146)

But on the other hand Narayan juxtaposes these materialistic people of Malgudi to the spiritualistic people like the Townhall Sanyasi and the protagonist Nagaraj. The Townhall Sanyasi who is introduced in the beginning of the novel presents a meaningful discourse on the outward, inward physical properties of a Sanyasi. He firmly believes that one does not become a Sanyasi by simply wearing an ochre robe. Meditation, indriya-nigraha or
control of senses, contemplation of God, suppression of sensual pleasures and desires are a few essential qualities to be comprehended by a Sanyasi. He speaks:

“Your thoughts must be away from all sensual matters, free from kama, krodha, lobha and moha. You must observe silence…. It’s good to experience death a little each day.” (pp. 11-12)

There is one very important aspect of personality to be marked in the characters of Bari and Kavu Pandit that though they seem to be living for material pleasures, yet it is evident that they aspire to get them through right means. They all have certain ideals in their lives to which they would never compromise. Indian philosophy emphasizes on the attainment of material pleasure through right means. This attitude projects the Rajas Guna in man’s life. Hence, the wholesome representation of Nagaraj and Townhall Sanyasi on the one hand and Bari and Kavu Pandit on the other hand strikes the ideal balance between ideal and the real, philosophy and life.

The main philosophical centers in The World of Nagaraj are the abode of Townhall Sanyasi and Kavu Pandit’s house in Ellaman Lane, the pyol of Nagaraj’s house in Kabir Street, the shop of Coomar and Bari. It is at these places that Narayan’s characters discuss Indian philosophy. These places correlate philosophy to daily life. Philosophy has been related to a domestic man in his home, a businessman in his commercial center and a Sanyasi in Townhall. Philosophy for Narayan is not an intellectual activity, an activity or practice apart from life pattern, but it is a way of life. Thus, his Malgudi projects the Indian philosophical systems and ways of life. Raja Rao rightly avers in this respect:
“India is the kingdom of God and is within one Malgudi, a microcosm of India is not only a political, social or economic entity but also a spiritual entity. India makes everything and everywhere as India.” (32)

William Walsh hails Malgudi as “a metaphor for India.” (33) It is the epitome of the novelist’s vision that is enshrined in Indian philosophy, religion and ethics. The Malgudians and the town of Malgudi portrayed in Mr. Sampath, The Man Eater of Malgudi and The World of Nagaraj are not only a political, social or economic entity but also a spiritual entity. This is an inside view of India. Anthony Thwaite rightly says, “Unlike E. M. Forster’s India (Narayan’s) is seen from the inside.” (34) The foregrounding of Narayan’s characters in philosophy, religion and ethics in these novels impart Indianness to his works. According to Driesen, “His books have the ring of the true India in them.” (35) This true India is what Scott means when he says, “the India of Narayan’s novels is not the India the visitors see.” (36) Narayan has his roots in Indian philosophy, religion and ethics which accrue to him the distinction as a writer who in the words of Gerow “…is not a foreigner at home.” (37)

Srinivas, Nataraj and Nagaraj – the protagonists in the above discussed novels support and expand some aspects of Indian philosophy. Their vision of life is by and large philosophical and they sustain themselves in crises on their knowledge of philosophy and religion. Srinivas, Nataraj and Nagaraj belong to traditional families. Each one of them suffers resistance from hostile alien forces. Srinivas’s dedicated devotion to The Banner is disturbed by Mr. Sampath’s grandiose plan of film-making. The Banner, a vehicle for spearheading philosophical, metaphysical debates is pitted against The Burning of Kama. Nataraj’s faithful engagement with his Truth Painting
Works is disturbed by Vasu, the taxidermist and Nagaraj’s life mission of writing a book on Saint Narada can not be completed by the disruptions in the family caused by his semi-adopted son Tim.

Furthermore, the protagonists also manifest similar temperaments and approach to life. The philosophy of *Karma* and of acceptance is uniformly practiced by the protagonists. Modernity disturbs the harmony and tranquility of the society. Srinivas, Nataraj and Nagaraj devise ways and means to fight against the hostile, alien forces in a philosophical way. This is the philosophy of quietism of acceptance. The victory of the protagonists in all three novels and the annihilation of the evil, subversive forces reiterate the novelist’s faith in the Indian philosophical thought and system. Srinivas returns to continue his work as the editor of *The Banner*, Nataraj resumes his work in *Truth Painting Works* and Nagaraj resolves to concentrate on his *magnum opus* of Saint Narada. Mr. Sampath is defeated, Vasu is vanquished only Tim reforms his ways and rejoins the joint family in Kabir Street. These novels critique the validity and relevance of Indian philosophical, religious and moral concepts such as *Kama*, *Mayic* philosophy, quietism of acceptance, the theory of divine retribution, the conflict between good and evil and the journey into the self – the focus all along is on the internal reality.
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