Both The Man-Eater of Malgudi and The Vendor of Sweets are built on fabular themes. Vasu's grotesque death in The Man-Eater of Malgudi and Mali's story-producing machine are fantasies. Vasu's death is based on the Hindu myth - Bhasmasura Vadha - and Mali's conception of story-producing machine is a sad commentary on modern man's subservient attitude to machines. Though fabular in nature these novels deal with the complex problems of modern life namely, evil in society and evil at home. They demonstrate the validity of Hindu philosophy that evil is self-destructive. The Vendor of Sweets even upholds the idea of 'renunciation'. By taking the example of a mythic prototype, Bhasmasura, Narayan establishes the fact that evil though powerful in the beginning cannot go on for ever and deliverance from it is bound to happen to the innocents, sooner or later. Nataraj of The Man-Eater of Malgudi suffers destruction of his world - printing - at the hands of Vasu but at the end he is delivered and liberated by a divine intervention. This divine intervention comes in the form of a mosquito and, Vasu, the terror of Malgudi, dies because of mosquito-attack. The ridiculous death of Vasu serves as a good example of fictional realism. Death due to a mosquito is not an everyday
phenomenon but all the same is not incredible. Narayan makes use of this fictionally realistic thing to drive home his message. Mali, in The Vendor of Sweets, destroys domestic peace with his fantastic idea of manufacturing story-producing machines and demands a huge sum from his father. Jagan, his father, feels shaken by this fantastic idea but upsets Mali's apple cart with a simple solution; he renounces the world to become a 'venaprastha' - retired life in the forest.

The Man-Eater of Malgudi

The plot of The Man-Eater of Malgudi is built on the abnormal behaviour of Vasu and his grotesque death. Vasu is a non-Malgudian. He comes to Malgudi from the jungles of Junagadh in North India and he professes a non-Malgudian job of taxidermy. In the name of Science and Faith he attacks the traditional beliefs of the Malgudians. Nataraj, the protagonist of the novel, unwittingly allows Vasu to stay in the attic of his printing press; and thus causes trouble for himself and others. Vasu leads a care-free life striking terror in the minds of the people of his locality. He behaves as though he is a 'rakshasa' or a demon. He possesses incredible strength and boundless cruelty. He kills birds and beasts without any pity, in order to stuff and sell them. Not being satisfied with that he even tries to disturb the peace of the place; he attempts killing Kumar the holy
temple elephant. It is aborted by a most unusual turn of the screw. The 'rakshasa' literally in trapping and killing a mosquito, by a blow on his forehead kills himself. Evil destroys itself. Right from the beginning of the novel, Vasu is associated with a demon of Hindu mythology, namely Bhasmasura. The Bhasmasura myth is used in an artistic way. It indeed makes the novel fabulous. Narayan himself confesses thus:

At some point in one's writing career, one takes a fresh look at the so-called myths and legends and finds a new meaning in them. After writing a number of novels and short stories based on the society around me, some years ago, I suddenly came across a theme which struck me as an excellent piece of mythology in modern dress. It was published under the title, Man-Eater of Malgudi... I based this story on a well-known mythological episode, the story of Mohini and Bhasmasura.¹

Sastri, in the novel, elaborates the story of Bhasmasura thus:

Then there was Bhasmasura, who acquired a special boon that everything he touched should be scorched, while nothing could ever destroy him. He made humanity suffer. God Vishnu was incarnated as a dancer of great beauty, named Mohini, with whom the 'asura' became infatuated. She promised to yield to him only if he imitated all the gestures

and movements of her own dancing. At one point in the dance Mohini placed her palms on her head, and the demon followed this gesture in complete forgetfulness and was reduced to ashes that very second, the blighting touch becoming active on his own head.  

Vasu is a perfect 'rakshasa' and the close-parallel between his story and the Bhasmasura myth gives a fictional touch. Commenting on the fable in the death of Vasu William Walsh writes thus:  

The fantasy of this has been carefully prepared for and it fits without friction the final 'explanation' of Vasu... The Man-eater of Malgudi finally takes his place in the community of a 'rakshasa', a demon, the other side of life. All his enormities now fall into place; his absolute rejection of everything Nataraj and his friends live by now makes sense and indeed testifies to the sanity of the assumptions they had begun to doubt; and everyone takes comfort, especially Nataraj, from grasping that even had he not died he could be certainly relied upon to bring about his own destruction. That it was the frailest of animals, the mosquito, which helped him, the exterminator of animals and the eater of men, to his own death, clinches the lightly drawn parable.  

The novel abounds in quite a few fabular elements, both in its plot and characterization. To begin with, Vasu imposes himself on Nataraj in an unusual way. He comes to Nataraj as a customer but soon takes control of him saying that Nataraj knows nothing of the world around him. He resides in the attic of Nataraj's press, paying no rent, but causing enormous inconvenience. He even lodges a complaint with the Rent Controller pointing out the so-called menace of the owner. At one stage, Nataraj, the owner of the house, feels he is at the mercy of his tenant. Vasu starts his taxidermy business in the press and literally inconveniences the people of the locality. He preserves and stuffs the hunted animals and birds, in the upper floor of the house, fills the place with prostitutes and even takes to stealing public money from a public fund Nataraj is heading. He remains a virtual 'rakshasa'. Nataraj feels that Vasu, 'had set himself as a rival to Nature and was carrying on a relentless fight.' On one occasion Nataraj feels shocked at the sight of the stuffed 'garuda' at Vasu's room and questions him, 'Don't you realise that it's sacred? That it's the messenger of God Vishnu?'. Vasu's reply is: 'Everyone can keep a sacred 'garuda' in the 'puja' and I'll guarantee that it won't fly off. Thus they can save their eyes from glare. I want to be of service to our religious folk.'

4. The Man-Eater of Malgudi, p.64.
5. Ibid., p.64.
He does not rest contented with 'garuda'. He intends killing the sacred temple elephant for he 'could retire for a year on the proceeds of one elephant' . When Nataraj is excited at the very idea of shooting of an elephant Vasu's explanation is this:

There's nothing terrible in shooting. You pull the trigger and out goes the bullet, and at the other end there is an object waiting to receive it. It is just give and take.

Sastri, Nataraj's type-setter, alone realizes that Vasu is a 'rakshasa' and is bound to meet the fate of the similar rakshasas described in mythologies. He says:

'Every rakshasa' gets swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him.'

Taking the clue from him Narayan destroys Vasu in a ridiculous manner.

Though Vasu's death seems grotesque, it assumes moral significance when it is looked at the background of Sastri's remark. At the end of the novel, Vasu kills himself by misusing his tremendous strength to strike a mosquito on his forehead. Sastri's remarks on the self-destruction of the

6. Ibid., p.64.
8. Ibid., p.176.
9. Ibid., p.96.
'rakshasas' is this:

'Because,' said Sastri puckishly, 'he had to conserve all that might for his own destruction. Every demon appears in the world with a special boon of indestructibility. Yet the universe has survived all the 'rakshasas' that were ever born. Every demon carries with him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction, and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment...\(^\text{10}\)

Narayan adds credibility to Vasu's death by giving the medical report on his death thus:

'Mr. Vasu of Junagadh died of a concussion received on the right temple on the frontal bone delivered by a blunt instrument. Although there is no visible external injury to the part, the inner skull-covering is severely injured and has resulted in the fatality.'\(^\text{11}\)

But the pathologist's report opens new problems. Vasu dead seems a great nuisance to Malgudi as Vasu living. People begin to suspect one another. It is here, once again, Narayan gives a realistic touch to the fictional death of Vasu. M.M. Mahood opines:

'It is the measure of Narayan's ability to make us share his world-view that this outrageous denouement seems not only very funny but also right and true.'\(^\text{12}\)

10. Ibid., p.242.
As a shrewd observer of men Narayan depicts the true reactions of them, immediately after Vasu's death. The air becomes thick with their suspicion. Sepr, the journalist-friend of Nataraj suspects Muthu - the teashop man - as the possible murderer. He feels that, as the elephant is Muthu's he could have killed Vasu, to save its life. His argument is: 'People in rural areas are habitually vindictive and might do anything.' The monosyllabic poet, Nataraj's another friend, in his turn, suspects Sen. He finds a 'blunt thing' - 'a long iron bolt' in a corner of the house of Sen and he concludes that Sen could have killed Vasu. His remark is: 'I knew that Sen would do something terrible sooner or later.' All people are unanimous in suspecting Nataraj. He states:

I could almost hear what they were saying about me. 'Never knew he could go so far, but, poor fellow, he had stood enough from him, having made the original blunder of showing him hospitality... Smashed the vital nerve in his brain without drawing a drop of blood! Never knew Nataraj could employ his hand so effectively.'

Even Nataraj's wife contributes her share with this remark: ''Oh, why should you have got mixed up in all this affair.' It is only Babu, the son of Nataraj who takes

13. Ibid., p.231.
15. Ibid., p.232.
pride in his father's strength in killing a 'rakshasa' single-handed. Though Narayan is quite realistic in his presentation of people's reactions, very soon, like his hero Nataraj, he slides into fantasy. Nataraj entertains the fanciful idea of having murdered Vasu single-handed. He entertains a hallucination. He narrates it thus:

At first I resented the idea of being thought of as a murderer. Gradually it began to look not so improbable... Going over my own actions step by step, I remembered I had gone up the staircase stealthily, opened the door on the landing. So far all was clear... Perhaps while he slept I had rammed the butt of the gun into his skull. Who could say? 17

Nataraj's delusion is in keeping with his character. There is an instance in the novel which points out this quality in him. When he finds himself being deserted by Vasu, at the foot of Mempi Hill, he entertains a wild fantasy. He feels he is being kidnapped for a ransom. His wife may be forced to part with her jewellery to raise money. He is given to day-dreaming. However, all suspicions are cleared when Rangi the lover of Vasu gives a graphic account of his death. Shortly after the death of Vasu, life returns to its normalcy, in Malgudi. Vasu-story appears as a 'bad dream' in the novel.

17. Ibid., p.235.
The host of eccentric characters found in the novel add to the fictional quality of it. Vasu himself is an eccentric. He is a combination of pragmatism and demoniac destructiveness. He is an M.A. in History, Economics and Literature and has specialized in taxidermy. As a pragmatist he has this to say: "I admire people with a scientific outlook." Callous and hard-hearted, he is absolutely incapable of refined feelings and he takes a perverse pleasure in making people suffer. He enjoys the discomfiture of people, when he drives his jeep at a break-neck speed and tells Nataraj: "More people will have to die on the roads, if our nation is to develop any road sense at all." He is, in brief, a fictionally developed 'rakshasa'. Shirley Chew sums up his character thus: "Viewed simply, Vasu is a fiend, but he stands as well for the instincts and feelings at their rawest and reason at its most obdurate." Though he remains a terror of all, he is terrified at the mention of mosquitoes. He admits: "Night or day, I run when a mosquito is mentioned."

Nataraj is the next eccentric character in the novel. He is self-effacing and altruistic that he brings trouble upon himself. His timidity is as accentric as Vasu's temerity. Like Margayya, Nataraj does not learn a lesson. His

18. Ibid., p.175.
19. Ibid., p.38.
characteristic remark, 'I am at your service,' reveals his weakness. He conjures up visions of disasters out of airy nothings. Just as he imagines fears he entertains imaginary desires. When Rangi, the temple dancier, desires to speak to him in privacy, he slides into a wild fantasy of seduction and passion. His eccentricity reaches its climax at the temple where he cries out thus: 'Oh, Vishnu!... save our elephant, and save all the innocent men and women who are going to pull the chariot. You must come to our rescue now.' Narayan builds a few fabular incidents connected with him. Nataraj's meeting of the Adjournment Lawyer, who has his office above Nandi Cotton Corporation, in connection with Vasu's complaint against him to the Rent Controller and his travel in 'Mempi Bus Transport Corporation' with no money in pocket but with his assurance of selling a Morris car to the conductor, are built in a fictitious way.

Apart from Vasu and Nataraj, there are a number of other centric characters such as the monosyllabic poet, the armchair politician Sen who always finds fault with Nehru-administration and the Forestry Officer who indulges in printing and distributing, free of cost, 'Golden Thoughts' to school-children. They do not just make their appearance here and there but they are the constant companions of Nataraj.

22. Ibid., p.242.
23. Ibid., p.183.
They comment on the doings of the protagonists. According to M.K. Naik, "these characters and situations do not merely provide comic relief, but are the integral part of the total experience projected." 24

Sastrī is the only character who appears sane. It is he who acts as a chorus predicting the destruction of Vasu. He narrates the story of Bhaummasura, not once but twice, to assure that evil cannot go on for ever. It is he who tells Nataraj that they, "must deliver K.J.'s labels this week," 25 thereby reminding the readers that Nataraj's printing-world is a more stable thing than Vasu's temporary evil-doings.

The Man-Eater of Malgudi remains, at best, a fable based on a modern theme. As the title suggests, the novel deals with thrilling adventures. Though Vasu, 'the man-eater' is not a tiger, he is a tiger-killer and 'man-bullyer'. Though the novel uses the ingredients of a thriller to provide entertainment, it has the undercurrent of serious intention. The Vendor of Sweets, on the other hand, remains a delightful story, only providing amusement.

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The Vendor of Sweets

The Vendor of Sweets, published also under the title The Sweet-Vendor, is a fable built on the theme of the modern man's craze for machines. It, like The Man-Eater of Malgudi, broadly repeats the theme of 'evil' in man, and creates a fictional world to offer a key to the moral bewilderment of today. In The Man-Eater of Malgudi, Narayan makes use of the Bhasmasura myth to connect the present with the cultural past of India and to reaffirm the traditional Hindu teaching, evil is self-destructive. But in The Vendor of Sweets Narayan is lighter and more comical and therefore the novel appeals more as a delightful story than as a serious interpretation of a principle. Narayan appears more a natural story teller and the novel records the comedy that results from the comic ways of people.

The novel deals with two opposing themes - Jagan's business world that is singularly realistic and his son Mali's fascination for producing and marketing 'story-writing machines' that is farcical, and ends on a note of escapism with Jagan's so called 'renunciation'. However, both the themes are delightfully told and the novel remains a beautiful story. Pointing out the story-aspect in it, Prema Nandakumar says: 'In The Vendor of Sweets Narayan has returned to his usual pace of story-telling'.

The story centres round the fifty-five year old Jagan who is a sweet-vendor at Malgudi. He is a rich man, conscientiously adding everyday to his money hoarded at home. But he remains a Gandhian, a faddist and a man associated with the idea of purity. Though he makes sweets he does not taste them for he believes in the philosophy, "Conquer Taste, and you will have conquered the self."\textsuperscript{27} Though fair with his customers he is unfair to the government for he does not bother much about paying taxes to the government. Yet he swears, "we came under the spell of Gandhi and could do no wrong."\textsuperscript{28}

Jagan is a widower who dotes on his only son Mali. Right from the beginning of the novel a strange relationship grows between the father and the son. Narayan builds it up as fictionally realistic. Mali a young man has the temerity to tell his father that he is finished with education imparted in colleges. Jagan who has illusions of seeing his son as a graduate - he himself aspired to become one, but due to repeated failures in examinations gave it up - is shaken at the very idea of his son. The scene goes on thus:

Mali said one morning, 'I have an idea.'
Jagan felt slightly nervous and asked, 'What may it be?'

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p.45.
The boy paused while swallowing his breakfast. 'I can't study any more.'
The father was aghast. 'Has anyone been rude to you in the college?'
'Let them try!' said the boy. 'Tell me what's happened.'
'Nothing,' said the boy, 'I do not find it interesting, that's all', and he went on munching his food with his eyes down. 29

This relationship is fictionally treated and Jagan is made to realise, 'the time had come for him to forget college education and get completely identified with Mali's fantasies.' 30 The reader is made to compromise with Mali's fantasies to enjoy the comedy.

Jagan learns from his friend, whom he calls his cousin, that Mali intends to become a 'writer'. Though it at first shocks Jagan he reconciles to it. He builds castles in the air; he visualizes the picture of his son becoming a great writer. Again he is disillusioned. The scene is described thus:

... 'What are you writing now?' asked Jagan with the humility of a junior reporter interviewing a celebrity.
'A novel,' the boy said condescendingly. 'Oh, wonderful. Where did you learn to write novels?' Mali did not answer the question; Jagan repeated it. 'Are you examining me?' Mali asked.

29. Ibid., p.29.
30. Ibid., p.39.
'Oh, no, I'm just interested, that's all. What story are you writing?'
'I can't tell you now. It may turn out to be a poem after all. I don't know.',31

As Narayan expresses, the whole thing is 'mystifying to the junior reporter.'32 Jagan gets a few other shocks in quick succession. The cousin tells him, 'New things are coming your way; your son wants to go to America.'33 Jagan is still more mystified when he learns that Mali wants to go to America to learn the art of writing novels. Considering the entire idea to be farcical, Jagan questions thus:

'Did Valmiki go to America or Germany in order to learn to write his Ramayana?'.34 Even before Jagan gives his consent he learns that Mali has made all arrangements for his journey. Jagan wonders how the boy has managed money for his travel. A suspicion arises in his mind. On inspection he detects that ten thousand rupees have been extracted from his noarding. Once again, Narayan treats Jagan's behaviour fictionally thus:

At dead of night, he put up the ladder and climbed to the loft. About ten thousand rupees had been extracted from his bundled currency... He heard the front door opening, put out the torch and sat still until he felt sure that Mali had safely locked himself in, feeling like a burglar himself, instead of one whose cash had been extracted.

31. Ibid., p.41.
32. Ibid., p.41.-
33. Ibid., p.51.
34. Ibid., p.51.
35. Ibid., pp.55-56.
The rest of the novel is built on this fictionally created topsy-turvy note. Like Sampath controlling his master Srinivas or Vasu controlling Nataraj, Mali controls Jagan. This fictionally-realistic relationship offers the novelist enough scope to construct a delightful comedy.

From America Mali shocks Jagan with a confession of his, in one of his letters. He writes:

'I've taken to eating beef, and I don't think I'm any worse for it. Steak is something quite tasty and juicy. Now I want to suggest why don't you people start eating beef? It'll solve the problem of useless cattle in our country and we won't have to beg food from America...'

Mali resembles Vasu in his actions. Even before Jagan could swallow this bitter pill another shock comes to him in the form of a cable from Mali with the message, 'Arriving home: another person with me.' At the railway station Jagan learns that the other person is Grace, a half-American and half-Korean girl whom Mali has brought with him.

Jagan-Mali-Grace relationship in the novel is nothing but a fictional version of reality. The character of Mali is drawn from real life. In Narayan's My Dateless Diary there is a reference to this character. He is an Indian

36. Ibid., p.62.
37. Ibid., p.63.
friend from Bombay, who marries an American girl. When his family ostracizes him, he takes to eating beef and he recommends it as a national duty, to his teacher. With slight variations Narayan has developed his character Mali. What is fictionally developed in this real observation is the reversal of father-son relationship. Similarly, Jagan-Grace relationship is also built on a strange note. Narayan sacrifices Jagan's individuality in order to develop the fictionally possible situations. In fact, the moment Mali returns from America, Jagan begins to feel that he is inferior to him. His strange behaviour is described thus:

Jagan felt that he was following a stranger. When Mali approached him, extending his hand, he tried to shrink away and shield himself behind the cousin. When he had to speak to his son, with great difficulty he restrained himself from calling him 'sir' and employing the honorific plural.\(^39\)

Even in his own home Jagan feels himself to be a stranger. He feels uneasy both in the presence of Mali and Grace. Though he senses that Mali is deeply involved in some business activity he does not question him. When he is invited for a business discussion he feels elated. Narayan describes the comical situation thus:

Jagan was seized with a cold dread at the prospect of a business discussion with Mali, although pleased that after all Mali was going to talk to

39. The Vendor of Sweets, pp.63-64.
him. He was in one of his rare moods of communication. Jagan could see by the deliberate manner in which Grace kept herself in the background that she must have been responsible for this meeting. Mali suggested, 'Father, let us adjourn to the hall. We have chairs there.'...
Jagan obediently trooped behind his son and took his seat in the hall, where he had not stepped for many weeks now...
... He had anticipated this meeting for a long time and he realised now with a shudder that he had probably missed the opportunity of a lifetime.

Mali ends the talk officially thus: 'Well think over it; you have all the data',' and even without waiting for his father's reply he dashes to his scooter with the remark, 'I must check at the rail station about my unaccompanied baggage, expected to-day; ...';

The baggage carries the so-called 'story-writing machine', a farcical thing on which the rest of the novel is built. Presenting it as a reality Mali tells his father:

'With this machine anyone can write a story. Come nearer, and you will see it working.'... 'You see these four knobs? One is for characters, one for plot situations, one for climax, and the fourth is built on the basis that a story is made up of character, situations, emotion and climax, and by the right combination...' He interrupted his oration for a moment to pull a drawer out and glance

40. Ibid., pp.73-75.
41. Ibid., p.75.
42. Ibid., p.75.
at a cyclostyled sheet of paper; he shut the drawer and came back to say, 'You can work on it like a typewriter. You make up your mind about the number of characters. It works on a transistor and ordinary valves. Absolutely fool-proof. Ultimately we are going to add a little fixture, by which any existing story could be split up into components and analysed; the next model will incorporate it.\textsuperscript{43}

Narayan depends on one of his earlier humorous fantasies\textsuperscript{44} for this idea. The idea in the fantasy is described thus:

Through an error in our Government printing section five tons of forms intended for the controller of 'stores' were printed controller of 'stones', ... Since the stationery were inadvertently ready, a department of stories was started.\textsuperscript{45}

The work of that department is given thus:

The central story bureau, technical branch will consist of four directorates, one each for plot, character, atmosphere and climax, and each section will examine the proposed story, in respect of its jurisdiction and may suggest emendations and improvements in respect of the story before issuing a final authorisation certificate to the author, which must be prominently displayed in his study.\textsuperscript{46}

What is treated as a nightmare in this piece is given a fictional touch in the novel. Jogan does not suspect the

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp.82-83.
\textsuperscript{44} 'A Writer's Nightmare', Next Sunday (Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1956).
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p.124.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p.127.
fantasy-aspect in his son's project. What worries him is his son's demand of fifty-one thousand dollars to start the business of manufacturing 'story-writing machines'. After this incident he finds his domestic life irksome. The situation is fictionally developed thus:

He felt nervous as he approached the ancient house. The expectant stare of Grace when she opened the door and the significant side-glances of Mali got on his nerves. He was aware of a silent tension growing. He felt happy if nobody came when he turned the key in the door, at the times when both were away, Grace shopping and Mali with his local associates in his green car... When he was in, if he heard them open the front door, he retreated far into the backyard of the house or sometimes even locked himself in the bathing shack. 47

Instead of tackling the problem in a realistic way Jagan resorts to another fantastic end. He sells his sweets at a loss. When his assistants feel surprised at his behaviour, his only answer is:

Sit down and learn how best to utilise the precious hours that come to us, not by lounging in the market-place or discussing money matters. Sit down, all of you. I will read to you from the Bhagavāc Gītā every day for an hour. You will benefit by it. 48

He knows that the Gītā teaches 'the need to fight for a

47. The Vendor of Sweets, p.92.
48. Ibid., p.102.
cause even if you had to face your brothers, cousins, uncles or even sons.'\(^49\) But he does not fight with Mali; rather he tries to shy away from him. It is at this stage he learns that Grace and Mali are not married at all. He feels 'that he had been fooled by the young people and that the house which had remained unsullied for generations had this new taint to carry.'\(^50\) Even then, he does not retaliate. He accepts to barricade himself from them and does everything 'to insulate himself from the evil radiations of an unmarried couple living together.'\(^51\) He gives up the use of front door. His behaviour is similar to Nataraj of *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. All these actions of Jagan are fictionally contrived. Part of Narayan's gift as a novelist depends on convincingly presenting this thin nature in Jagen. He is 'much drawn to the truth of character shown in a person's work in which the stretched personality submits itself to impersonal ends.'\(^52\) Jagan is made to submit himself to all the atrocities of Mali. This in fact is the fictional version of reality.

Jagan's action of selling sweets at the lowest rate incurs displeasure on the part of other shopkeepers. But fictionally speaking it serves a fine purpose; he comes into contact with one Chinna Doraı, the sculptor turned hair-dye

\(^{49}\) Ibid., p.103.
\(^{50}\) Ibid., p.144.
\(^{51}\) Ibid., p.146.
Jagan notices that Chinna Dorai has "the whitest beard and sells the blackest hair dye." Chinna Dorai accompanies the delegation led by the Ananda Bhavan Sait to protest against Jagan's sudden reduction in the prices of his sweets. The songs on God sung by both Chinna Dorai and Jagan bring them closer. Jagan is mesmerised by his talk. To him every other thing appears useless before this man. It is described thus:

Watching him in this setting, it was difficult for Jagan, as he mutely followed him, to believe that he was in the twentieth century. Sweetmeat vending, money and his son's problems seemed remote and unrelated to him. The edge of reality itself was beginning to blur; this man from the previous millennium seemed to be the only object worth notice; he looked like one possessed.  

Chinna Dorai's talk opens up a new world into Jagan's view. He realises that his sweetmeat shop and his home are nothing compared to the new world. He wonders: "Am I on the verge of a new 'janma'?") Speaking fictionally, Narayan re-creates a new Jagan. Upon Chinna Dorai's suggestion he accepts to buy the garden, which Chinna Dorai shows him, and instal the idol of the goddess Gayatri. Jagan says:

54. Ibid., p.118.
55. Ibid., p.120.
'Yes, yes, God knows I need a retreat. You know, my friend, at some stage in one's life one must uproot oneself from the accustomed surroundings and disappear so that others may continue in peace.'\(^\text{56}\)

He therefore decides to renounce society. His conversion is fictionally effected. M.K. Naik remarks: "Chinna Dorai can hardly be accepted as a credible agent of Jagan's sudden conversion."\(^\text{57}\) However, William Walsh views thus:

When Jagan retires from life - 'I am going to watch a goddess come out of a stone' - he does so unromantically practically. He seems to be doing so for comparatively external reasons because of the hell which his son Mali has made of his life at home, or because he can no longer face the incomprehensibility of conduct beyond his understanding.\(^\text{58}\)

Jagan's conversion is a fictionally realistic possibility. Narayan has already in his The English Teacher dealt with the belief, that loneliness is the only truth of life. Jagan's realisation of it is achieved through the fictional device of Chinna Dorai's association. The one thing that hastens this conversion is Mali's arrest under the Prohibition Act, for possessing "half a bottle of some alcoholic drink."\(^\text{59}\) Jagan views it with detachment. He says: "A dose of prison life is not a bad thing. It may be just what he needs

\(^{56}\) Ibid., p.126.

\(^{57}\) The Ironic Vision, p.85.

\(^{58}\) R.K. Narayan, p.152.

\(^{59}\) The Vendor of Sweets, p.187.
now.'

However, he does not show the same detachment towards his bank balance or cheque book. Jagan renounces society confessing: 'I will seek a new interest - different from the said of repetitions performed for sixty years.'

In a distant way Jagan's dream of a new interest corresponds with Mali's dream of manufacturing a substitute for the imagination of man. Therefore, by and large, *The Vendor of Sweets* remains more fabular than *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*.

However, as any other Narayan's novel it is built on surface realities. Jagan's sweet-shop and his domestic life before the birth of Mali are very realistically portrayed. The sweet-shop with its 'scent of jasmine and incense and imperceptibly blended with the fragrance of sweetmeats frying in ghee, in the kitchen across the hall,' and Jagan as a business-man are very realistic. So also, Jagan's life as a bachelor, his marriage with Ambika and their pilgrimage to a temple to invoke the blessings of God for a child - Mali was born after this - are narrated in the usual realistic way.

Contrasted to these, both Mali's fantasy of story-writing machines and the plot connected with Chinna Dorai remain bizarre. It appears as though there is a clash between realism and fantasy. Keith Garebian explains it thus:

> When Narayan intends his tales to carry more significance than their plots could support...
art falls victim to a curious and disturbing collision between realism and fabulism. 63

It seems that Narayan works out Chinna Dorai's episode just to give the novel its desired end; it comes as a usual Narayan 'twist'. Just as Mali is obsessed with story-writing machines, Jagan is obsessed with the idea of watching the growth of the image of the goddess in stone. Jagan's drift towards his goal is a sudden development and therefore the reader is left with uncertainties.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar says:

And like Jagan who is expectantly watching the stone-breaker and image-maker at work, we too will have to hold ourselves in patience for Narayan's next- or next-novel in which, perhaps, he will be able to hew his way through the ambiguities and uncertainties of his vision and craft, and let the image of Faith (even if it needs must carry the necessary 'small flow' recognizably emerge. 64

Narayan's 'next- or next' novel A Tiger for Malgudi remains a novel of affirmation. The image of 'Sanyasi' is presented in it in unmistakably clear terms, though the novel borders on fantasy. However, before taking up, A Tiger for Malgudi, an attempt is made, in this work, to consider Waiting for the Mahatma and The Painter of Sighs from the point of view of fictional realism.

64. Indian Writing in English, pp.383-384.