

Vasu (Narayan's novel *The Man-eater of Malgudi*) Demonic

Character Vasu is a taxidermist who comes to reside in Nataraj's house. On first reading, he appears to represent brute force, in contrast with Nataraj's cultured sensitivity. He kills and stuffs animals; Nataraj discusses poetry and publishes religious books. Vasu is physically strong, with a thick-neck and powerful arms. It is suggested that he is a demonic force (*rakshasa* in Hindu mythology). In other words, Vasu is brutal, menacing and self-centred. However, just as with the seemingly one-dimensional Nataraj, Vasu's character is actually more complex. Compared to the kind yet cunning Nataraj, Vasu has a refreshing spontaneity and an instinctive passion for life and pleasure. It is true that his chosen profession may involve pain to animals, but Vasu is a dedicated craftsman. He is hardworking, holds high standards and appreciates excellence in other professions, as well. He is well-travelled, good humoured and capable of loyal friendship. And yet, his brute force is what destroys him in the (humorous) conclusion: when he smacks a mosquito on his temple, he gets a brain tumour and dies. As Narayan reminds us, evil is self-destructive.

Activities Vasu is a dedicated taxidermist. He spends hour upon hour meticulously reconstructing animal bodies and displaying them. He also hunts and kills animals, for his work. He is unmarried but has a mistress, a local dancer.

Illustrative moments

Cruel Vasu's cruelty, especially to animals, is expressed when he shoots dead a neighbour's dog. There is no provocation, no reason, for the shooting, except that the dog seemed to dislike Vasu.

Strong Vasu is questioned by the police about his possibly illegal hunting in the national forest. When a policeman slaps him, Vasu grabs his wrist and dislocates it with a mere twist of his hand.

Spontaneous Vasu's spontaneous good-nature is shown when he first meets Nataraj in the printing shop. He immediately befriends him, joke with him and gives him an order for business cards. What a jovial, good-natured person this is, we say to ourselves.

Craftsman Vasu is a dedicated craftsman, who takes pride in the quality of his work. When Nataraj praises the eyes of a stuffed eagle, Vasu replies, 'So you are taken in! You poor fool. Those eyes were given it by me, not by God. That's why I call my work an Art.'