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## A Critical Appreciation of R.K. Narayan's A Tiger for Malgudi

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### KEYWORDS

Narrative technique, Plot construction, Humor, Ironic

### ABSTRACT

R.K. Narayan's novels are remarkable for their technical maturity. Narayan has completely stated his faith in the values popularised by Hindu mythology and its recognition of life and death. The monk describes to his disciple tiger that one is glad or unhappy in this society because of one's karma in earlier life. The Sanyasi's conversation with the disciple also has a reverberation of the karma as described in The Upanishad which articulates, "Those whose conduct here has been good will quickly attain a good birth of a Brahman, the birth of a Kshatriya or the birth of a Vaisya. But those, whose conduct here has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth of a dog". The styles in his novels are straightforward and simple. In a work of fiction, while studying its technique, importance is given to its narrative perspective. The aim of this study is to critically analyze R.K. Narayan's A Tiger for Malgudi giving importance to narrative technique, plot construction, humor, the characteristics of the tiger, and how time plays an important role in arranging the events. R.K. Narayan's novels are remarkable for their technical maturity. Narayan has completely stated his faith in the values popularised by Hindu mythology and its recognition of life and death. The monk describes to his disciple tiger that one is glad or unhappy in this society because of one's karma in earlier life. The Sanyasi's conversation with the disciple also has a reverberation of the karma as described in The Upanishad which articulates, "Those whose conduct here has been good will quickly attain a good birth of a Brahman, the birth of a Kshatriya or the birth of a Vaisya. But those, whose conduct here has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth of a dog". The styles in his novels are straightforward and simple. In a work of fiction, while studying its technique, importance is given to its narrative perspective. The aim of this study is to critically analyze R. K. Narayan's A Tiger for Malgudi giving importance to narrative technique, plot construction, humor, the characteristics of the tiger, and how time plays an important role in arranging the events.

### Introduction

Critical appreciation is clear reasoned thinking involving critique. According to Beyer, critical appreciation means making clear judgements. During the process of critical appreciation or thinking, ideas should be well thought and reasonable.

The fictional town of Narayan is Malgudi. It is an imaginary town acting as the background of his novels. The town serves the literary purpose of Narayan extremely well. R.S. Singh discussed the same opinion. In his book *Indian Novel in English*. He writes: "Malgudi is not only the microcosm of India in its multifarious mood but it is also the real hero of his novels, Swami, Chandran, Ramani, Krishnan, Sampath, Sriram, Raju, Vasu, and Mali – all these characters are typically Malgudian, therefore, Indian, despite their angularities and oddities"<sup>1</sup>.

It becomes a successful device to give reliability to his character. About the choice of an imaginary town like Malgudi, Narayan says, "An imaginary town like that has great possibilities. You can make anything of it, whereas if you set your town in a real place you are bound by the geography and its existing structure. But in a place like Malgudi, though the heart of the city may be fixed, it can expand"<sup>2</sup>. Narayan's experience in the artistic form contributed with his technique helps him in discovering the nuances about the world.

Narrative style is one of the most important aspects of literature. To narrate the story is to tell the story in a traditional manner. It includes

actions and dialogues in a novel, which is told and shown in the novel. His narrative style provides deeper meaning for the imagination to visualise situations. First, it is important to understand that literary elements in narrative including plot, theme, characters, and structure. A popular saying is style is a man. It means a writer's style plays a huge role in the formation of a novel. It means the manner in which the author tells the story in terms of language and expression. The style is determined by choice of words, sentence, structure, syntax and the use of language.

Narayan is well aware of the importance of narrative perspective in his novel. He does not effectively focus on narration in his first novel *Swami and Friends*. He gradually takes control of this art and sharpens his tool to experiment with different types of narration to suit the needs of the thematic material in his novels.

*A Tiger for Malgudi* is the story of the life of the tiger. The tiger is the central character and storyteller of the story. The novel arises with an aged and dying tiger summon up its carefree cub days. As it grew, it moved and hunted independently. It came across a human environment in a forest and made easy pickings of the farm animals. The villagers contact a circus company to a ploy the tiger. The ringmaster captured the tiger and torture on the poor creature. The graceful tiger killed the instructor in an accident and walks out into Malgudi. A wise sage come and take control of the tiger through his mystical powers. The animal is

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enchanted by his new master's glistening eyes and tails him spiritually. The tiger devotes the rest of its life faithful to its master. The author intricately enticements peers to the phases of life of a human and tiger beautifully through the eyes of a tiger.

*A Tiger for Malgudi* is a novel worthy to invite comparison with *The Panchantatra*. The Narrator here is not a human being but a tiger named Raja and through the Tiger Narayan present the story of a human exploring the path to enlightenment. When a tiger becomes the narrator, it's compounded that, when the tiger undergoes humanisation, understands time and eternity, looks forward for salvation, comprehends, the teachings "on life and existence and death"<sup>3</sup> and tells the story of his spiritual transformation. It reflects the life of a human being. When the author chooses a Tiger as the narrator it puts him under lot of pressure in narrating the reality and Narayan has beautifully surpassed this obstacle in this novel.

The Tiger says in his introduction, "Now, in my story the "Tiger Hermit" employs his powers to save the tiger and transform in inwardly working on the basis that, deep within, the core of personality is the same in spite of differing appearances and categories, with right approach you could expect the same response from a tiger as from any normal human being"<sup>4</sup>.

*A Tiger for Malgudi* itself is in need for a hermit tiger, who while replaying his past action will inform the message of inevitability of the passage of four ashramas in one's life, the need for a spiritual quest in this ordinary world, full of action and excitement and competition. A real author Narayan is at pains to stress in the introduction that his story has a basis in its philosophical truth.

The suggestive mode of narration reinforces the impression that the tiger is symbolic of man playing various roles, and the narration is not far away from reality. The narration of the novel is Raja, the tiger, but his narration is related by another unnamed narrator, the implied author, both for whom the world is a means self-transcendence. Author's life time occupation of the profession of an artist and steady union of his self into his skill is symbolised by captain and sanyasi respectively. The tiger echoes the view point of the author and looks like a human being. By making so, he adopts a convincing stance in the very beginning and maintains his stance throughout the narration

A certain point in the narrative when the tiger was supposed to have acquired enlightenment for killing captain early he did not show any such emotion, "I caught myself thinking, why should I fear this creature no bigger than my tail"<sup>5</sup>, the narrator who recounts his past and present. As the novel is a psychological drama, surfacing an inner conflict through ascetic objectivity, the narrator mirrors himself in the theme, but at the same time remains detached and engages himself in self-analysis.

In course of life's journey a tiger undergoes a change from "Supreme lord of the jungle, afraid of no one, striking terror in others"<sup>6</sup>, to the tiger able with cleverness, compassion and humour feelings, "Why God has chosen to give us this fierce make up, the same God who has created the parrot, the peacock and the deer, which inspire poets and painters"<sup>7</sup>.

The spiritual transformation gives him double vision on the events and incidents of his life. In the narration, most of the time, authorial voice runs along-side the narrative voice. Interesting observations and enlightening is narrated by Narayan of the protagonist lives and societies of both man and animal have the overtones of the author.

Raja while passing amusing remarks on the villager's reaction also has a common opinion on human nature. "Human beings have their own theories, and it is always amusing to hear them talk about us. Such ignorance and self-assurance"<sup>8</sup>.

The action of the protagonist is limited almost entirely to his own thoughts, feelings and perception. In *A Tiger for Malgudi* the tiger, the narrator of the novel remains passive, caged and cut off from others for a significant length of time. The critical analysis also makes observation on human and animal life and discusses the philosophical issues. The author focuses only on the tiger and never digresses from the main story. Though he focuses on other characters to narrate events which the tiger

cannot have participated the importance is always to the tiger.

In this novel, the Master does not narrate his point of observation directly but it is clarified through Raja, who seeks the support of the Hermit. The sequence of events taking place in school at the time when the tiger was sleeping inside the room of the headmaster is sought to the defensible advanced by the tiger by reporting. "I learnt about it later through my master, who was in the crowd"<sup>9</sup>. The tiger's enlightenment of Hindu philosophy like knowledge of self, God, mystery of rebirth and human relations has been a gradual evaluation of the novel.

The narration in the scene where Madan and circus master were conversing Raja's character in the flick begins in the first person, "I heard Madan say to Captain"<sup>10</sup> and then the perspective glides to the third person. The whip split and Raja jumped from cage but it is difficult for the tiger to locate exactly where the switch over takes place. The narration suggests a special sympathy between the master and the tiger.

There is without doubt a good deal of life in the story. The story is told not from a single point of view but from many points of view and each interferes with another. The story maintains coherence but the angle of narration changes frequently between the Tiger and the third person narrator and the angle of the tiger being mostly controlled by the Master. The sequence of events leading to building up of suspense and then resolving it by sudden turns controls the attitude and degree of emotional involvement. The events are well constructed to give the narration an appearance of authenticity. For example, the tiger during one of its usual night prowls in villages is attacked upon by the villagers with flaming torches, hatchets, crowbars and staves. The same suddenness in the turn of events resolves the suspense built up during the narration of circus life of Raja.

The peculiar incidents like forcing the tiger to jump through fire-rings or drink milk along with a goat or stand on its hind legs constitute a masterly increase of tension heightened by the tiger's heart rending roaring. The tension is relieved by tiger's killing of the goat taking advantage of captain's diversion of attention following a sudden collapse of gallery seats. Political imagery and the device that have been used in the novel add to the richness of narration.

*A Tiger for Malgudi* captures a great time in the life of Raja, a tiger opening with its early days in the jungle till he attains enlightenment. It is almost impossible for any novelist to give an account of the life and development of the tiger spanning over such a vast span of time. But Narayan has selected only those important and significant incidents in the life of Raja that helps him in achieving a state of spiritual enlightenment. The continuity of time has been possible with the help of summary method. The longest time in the narration is found when the tiger passes from its cubhood to its youth. The Tigers of cubhood days was chiefly spent in the circus. Every stage of the tiger contribute meaningful passing of his journey for spiritual illumination It defines the future course of his action.

The narrative of tiger, "When I ventured out, I was chased, knocked down and hurt by bigger animals and menaced by lesser ones"<sup>11</sup> tells of youthful stage of the tiger. Raja's imprisonment in the cage is suggested by the expression like "for days they kept me without food and water"<sup>12</sup>. The starvation of Raja was a repeated cycle in the circus life. Several days had to pass before Madan, film producer could finalise the arrangement for the Tiger's new avatar. In this way, Narayan has portrayed a vast expanse of time in Raja's life.

Narayan also focuses on the actions of a single day that happened in Raja's life. The author described the day on which the tiger escaped from the set after killing Captain and took lodging in the room of the headmaster till being led away by the master. The plot of this one day's is made with the purpose at viewing the tiger's steady transformation from a fierce animal to an enlightened being. In the story, Raja describes his past time. The hero narrator while telling his past to enjoy the pleasure in frequent comments and generalisations by using the present time and comments life through his protagonist, "now I follow human speech, by the grace of my Master"<sup>13</sup>.

Thus Raja gains experience with the passing of time. It is highly fictitious and the most natural way of telling a story. The scene where the negotiation between Captain and Madan happens to make the film the scene of tiger's exodus from the school campus along with sanyasi are some of the portions where third person narration is used to create a sort of illusion of present. The novel ends towards a significant steadiness. The tiger looking back on his earlier days in a detached fashion and observing at his abrupt present is not the illumination of the present, but his timeless arrangement of the future.

*A Tiger for Malgudi* is the most effective, greatest and the most mature of his works. It reiterates the Hindu philosophical attitude to life and rebirth and believes that God is the head of all forms of life. This novel is a critical reflection of author's own answer to the profounder requirements of life. All his works are titled after the protagonist and as the title suggests here, the "hero" of the work is Raja a brilliant tiger gaging around eleven feet from its head to tail.

As a cub, it breathes fortunately under the safety of his parents. His mother's loss leaves the tiger lonely. In course of time he becomes the supreme Lord of the forest, feels contempt for slighter animals and strikes fear in all. When the captain locked it in circus, it finds the massive difference between the silence of the wilderness and the boisterous nature of humanity that was distressing. During the training at circus, the tiger agonises disgrace and hunger.

The much advertised Raja for the anniversary show of the Malgudi Circus of the captain places more difficulties in Raja's path. Raja food embraces sipping milk from a bowl sharing with a goat. It develops more and more hard for the tiger to drink milk with the goat. Raja's mouth tempting at the moment it saw a goat. The goat seems tasty and milk hateful for the tiger.

Finally, Raja kills the goat but ironically it does not appease his hunger. The circus chimpanzee reprimands Raja for killing the goat. He even throws a piece of advice to eat fruit and nut like himself. Raja undergoes a period of rest and isolation after this, which actually means hunger and being in the company of other animals. When the Captain enters into a contract with Madan involving Raja, Raja suffers more humiliation.

Captain drives Raja to the point of desperation and he kills the Captain without intention to do so. Raja loses freedom, becomes servile because of his anger. The captain gets his own death as of too much self-confidence. In the confusion that follows the captain's death, Raja freely walks along the streets of Malgudi. Raja thus gains freedom in human society and desires once more to belong to the jungle. But his brief imprisonment in the headmaster's room gives a new direction and meaning to his life. As it is from here that the Master takes charge of the tiger.

The last phase in the tiger's life begins with the Master taking charge of him and awakens the soul within him. A nonverbal communication associates tiger with the Master, where transmission of idea is completed from mind to mind. Raja observes that the meditation and Master has completely changed him.

In the zoo, Raja madly trusts for his Master to coming back and set him free again. The captain is from humble origin. He comes from the Abu Lane of Malgudi. In a short time he grows to the possession of the Grand Malgudi circus and successfully manages his circus and the group of animals, hundreds of men and women belonging to his circus. While Madan shoots for his film, the wise ape calls him a fool, who considers himself the lord of the universe. He darkly wishes for a day when the captain would be made to run round the ring.

Contact with Madan and the people of the film industry, proves to be a corrupting influence in the captain's life. In the beginning, he declines to tweak out tiger's teeth and the use of an electric tool to control him. The captain falls for the easy money offered by Madan. Madan earns money through Raja and his greed overpowers him with excessive pride. He loses his self-control and his grip over himself. The inconsideration for Raja's tiredness brings about his end.

Madan's plan to make a film on a goat and tiger living peacefully is

absurd. Raja brushing past the camera after his freedom throws away the lens, film and all. The master is an idol of philosophical and spiritual realisations, in the way of Hindu life. Similar the guru's of early times who guide and educate their disciples, the master the responsibilities and humanising tiger. His first appears to be a curious religious man with his mad demand for a tiger's safety and freedom. But he is a sanyasi and satisfied with the safety and future of Raja with his demands. The master exercises his powers to change Raja. He is high sounding but speaks in simple terms about the cycle of life, the chain reaction set on one's actions. He enlightens Raja on the reason for his captivity which reflects on the theory of Karma. His advices Raja to keep his eyes only on the path of enlightenment.

The author portrays the aspect of the tiger's life through his furious behaviour. Finally, Raja's return to the forest indicates Narayan's theme of the return of the native. The tiger begins to listen to spiritual conversation to seek peace of mind. It indicates the spiritual growth in the nature of Raja, the tiger.

The characters are the persons in a novel or a story, who are given some moral qualities by the writer, which they reveal through the actions. The author describes the character and evaluates their actions. He presents the character and let them see to reveal the actions, reactions and dialogues.

And the presence of same sensibility is found in *A Tiger for Malgudi* when Raja, the tiger, expressed his feelings at a certain moment of his association with his Master, "At such moments I felt lighter at heart and my physical self also became secondary. My sight became clearer; if I lifted my gaze to the horizon; the sun shining on the land filled me with joy: the leaves of the mighty banyan trees sparkling like gems, bamboos swaying their golden stems with their filigreed leaves- I felt I could ask for nothing more in life"<sup>14</sup>.

Raja is the fictional name of the tiger that suggests his arrogance, his pride which ruled his personality in his youthful days, and defined his dealing with animals during his jungle life. The tiger after his self-chosen role in the jungle kingdom gradually realises the approaching realities of his life. It is understood that the master basically re-educate the tiger. After the tiger is sent back to the jungle it realises the environment where it was comfortable once again.

*A Tiger for Malgudi* follows Narayan's literary tradition of imitating *The Panchtantra* tales in which animal characters behave like human being and are the protagonist of a story. The novel gives an account of the life story of a Tiger Raja, who is gifted with a mental ability, and other qualities like human being. Opening the door of spiritual life for the furious tiger that caused terror in other animals of Mempi Forest his master brings a change in his wild life. Narayan views that the animals have thoughts and feelings as a human beings. The novelist presents the spiritual development of the animal community. It reveals that humanity comes out from the heart of the terrorist like Raja.

The tiger makes human beings to understand a living creature. Raja is the hero of the novel who comes out better than most human beings. Captain, the owner of Grand Malgudi Circus is the Malgudi person. He takes care of animals and is worried about their health and happiness. The episodes in the novel leave a big impact on the human mind because of its originality.

According to R. K. Narayan, the animals also have likes and dislikes, feelings and emotions and taste like human beings although their structure of the body is different. In the introduction Narayan says, "With the right approach you could expect the same response from a tiger as from any normal human being"<sup>15</sup>.

In the narrative most of the time, the author plays the role of the narrator. Interesting and enlightening observations of the protagonist on life and societies of both man and animal have the overtones of the author. Raja passing on comments on the villager's reaction to the nature of the general observation on human nature, "Human beings have their own theories and it always amusing to hear them talk about us such ignorance and self-assurance"<sup>16</sup>. Finally, the tiger lands in a zoo as per

the wish of his spiritual master.

### Conclusion

A critical appreciation of R.K.Narayan's novel is marked by values of Indian philosophy. His vision is like that of gentle breeze and with reconcilable realities. R.K.Narayan's brainchild, Malgudi is the symbol of traditional India with a classified outlook. Narayan informs his visions of life through the moods, emotions, reactions of his characters in a short compass of time. An analysis of his time design also reveals that he has a mythic consciousness that forges a subtle undercurrent of unity in almost each of his novels. The author explores the theme of timelessness in his fictional world where human time is used only as means to help the protagonist like Raja's self-assurance toward spiritual fulfillment. His interest in exploring individual personality does not stop him against contriving incidents and events in his novels. He selects only those materials that are necessary for satisfactory introduction of his characters and also for submitting to illusions and aspects of reality.

Narayan is always on alert to the response to his work for which he

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Singh. R.S, *Indian Novel in English*, New Delhi: Macmillan publications, 1986. p.127

<sup>2</sup> Pattaanayak Nityananda, R.K.Narayan. *A Study in Narrative Technique*. Delhi: Adhyayan Publishers and Distributors, Tarun Offset Printers, 2012. p.7

<sup>3</sup> Narayan, R.K. *A Tiger for Malgudi*. Indian Thought Publication, Mysore. 1986.

<sup>4</sup> Narayan, at p.9-10

<sup>5</sup> Narayan, at p.114

<sup>6</sup> Narayan, at p.13

<sup>7</sup> Narayan, at p.12

<sup>8</sup> Narayan, at p.25

<sup>9</sup> Narayan, at p.118

<sup>10</sup> Narayan, at p.97

<sup>11</sup> Narayan, at p.13

<sup>12</sup> Narayan, at p.48

<sup>13</sup> Narayan, at p.54

<sup>14</sup> Narayan, at p.165-66

<sup>15</sup> Narayan, at p.10

<sup>16</sup> Narayan, at p.25

gives much attention. Sometimes he leaves his narrative without giving it a finalised hypothesis so as to make it a gushing game for the reader. Sometimes he creates gaps in the text so as to allow the reader to find out the missing links and deriving pleasure as a maker of the story.

The main character is linked to these traditions. One of Narayan's most favorite methods of characterisation is to create and then to express his vision of life through the interaction of his characters. Critics charge with an offence at him of lacking vitality in the use of language. But there are places in Narayan's work where his language illuminates the meaning of his message and affirms his skill in rich handling of it. His varied application of different grammatical categories makes his language striking, appealing and gives out a flavour of naturalness. Narayan cannot be brushed aside as a traditional novelist, at least when one takes into account of his story telling art. His careful and selection of narrative devices and his skilful use of it in his works are instrumental in making him a precise painter in words.