



IGNITED MINDS
Journals

*Journal of Advances and
Scholarly Researches in
Allied Education*

*Vol. V, Issue X, April-2013,
ISSN 2230-7540*

**CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RK NARAYAN'S
NOVEL- A TIGER FOR MALGUDI**

Critical Analysis of RK Narayan's Novel- a Tiger for Malgudi

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Abstract – R. K. Narayan is considered one of the three best Indian authors writing in English; the other two are Rao Raja and Mulk Raj Anand. Narayan's fiction contains a unique blend of Indian mysticism and the English novel form. His fictional world, Malgudi, is one of everyday concerns and common language set in southern India, which he successfully portrays through subtle prose and humor.

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Narayan was born in Mysore, India, in 1906. His father was an administrator and headmaster at several government schools and instilled in Narayan a love of literature. He did not have much academic success, however, having difficulty with his college entrance exam in English. In 1926, he enrolled in the B.A. program in English in Maharaja College, Mysore, after which he embarked on a short-lived teaching career. Finding the academic life was not for him, Narayan turned to writing. After being turned down by several publishers, Narayan gave the manuscript of his first novel, *Swami and Friends* (1935), to a friend and gave him permission to destroy it. The friend showed the novel to Graham Greene, who was impressed and found a publisher for the book. Narayan's writing career was born and the prolific writer went on to publish novels, several volumes of short stories, collections of essays, and his memoirs, entitled *My Days* (1974).

R.K. Narayan is one of India's top notch writers. His novels are a mix of human emotions and good natured humour. The best part of his novels are that they are so close to real life behaviour that you can almost feel that you are a part of the novel. R. K. Narayan, the famous Indian-English novelist, has behind him a golden half a century of creative writing. Even now, at the age of eighty. Narayan is a very busy and active writer.

Narayan habitually denies the existence of any "philosophy" or "message" in his writing. He even emphasized in an interview that he has not produced his "masterpiece", nor would he plan one. But *A Tiger for Malgudi* negates his denials and is undeniably the greatest and the most mature of his works – his "masterpiece", for several reasons. Apart from being steeped in the Hindu philosophical attitude to life, in the acceptance of the theory of "karma" and the cycle of life and "rebirth" and perceiving the godhead even in the meanest forms of life, this novel is a crystallized reflection of Narayan's own response to the deeper needs of life.

All his novels are named after the central characters, and as the title suggests here, the "hero" of the novel is Raja a magnificent tiger measuring eleven feet from head to tail. The introduction of animals as characters is not new to the Indian story-telling tradition, where they have allegoric, symbolic and didactic functions as in the *Panchatantra* and *Jataka* tales. Justifying his choice of a tiger as the central character Narayan says: ".....humans have monopolized the attention of fiction writers. Man in his smugness never imagines for a moment that other creatures may also possess ego, values, outlook, and the ability to communicate: though they may be incapable of audible speech. Man assumes he is all important, that all else in creation exists only for his sport, amusement, comfort, or nourishment". Hence, he creates a unique tiger possessing "a soul" within its "forbidding exterior", in whom the *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamo gunas*, the four stages of life *baalya*, *yauvana*, *grihasta* and *vaanaprastha* and the three important ways of yoga, *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnaana* are skilfully blended. The other important characters in this novel are the Captain Madan and the Master with whom Raja's life is closely related and in whose association Raja passes through the cycle of life – from freedom, captivity, discipline to freedom again.

As a cub Raja lives happily under the protection of his mother and the illusion of her everlasting presence, "a natural delusion which afflicts all creatures, including human beings". Her disappearance leaves Raja to fend for himself. In course of time he reigns supreme as the Lord of the jungle, despising the lion, and subduing lesser animals and striking terror in all. After his bloody fight with the mighty tigress, Raja and the tigress join forces. Raja becomes a householder soon and finds himself taking care of four cubs. The tigress and the cubs vanish like his mother and Raja, in search of his family, steps into human society, a "thoughtless act" which he regrets later. Infuriated at the death of the tigress and the cubs Raja sets out to take revenge but ends up earning easy cattle for

meal and thence into captivity. From a life of "wildness, violence and unthinking cruelty inflicted on weaker creatures" Raja passes into life in a cage, "an impossible condition of living", where he suffers "emptiness, helplessness and hopelessness".

Captured by the Captain for his circus, Raja finds the vast difference between the "grand silence" of the jungle and the "noisy nature of humanity" distressing. While under training Raja suffers humiliation and hunger, and views all circus animals as "cursed creatures weighed down with the *karma* of their previous lives". The period of suffering lasts until Raja learns obedience. From one difficult task Raja is forced to another by the Captain. He observes thus on their connection.

"There was no meeting ground between us, but still we had so much to do with each other all the time. That was the irony of fate".

The much advertised "Four-in-one-Act" of Raja for the Jubilee Show of the Grand Malgudi Circus of the Captain places more difficulties in Raja's Path. During the Jubilee Show Raja is kept on light food for greater agility. The last item of his Four-in-one Act includes drinking milk from a saucer in the company of a goat. It becomes more and more difficult for Raja to accept milk in the company of the goat. His mouth waters at the sight of the goat. He finds the goat "appetizing" and milk "offensive". For Raja "the agony of self-control was worse than the raging hunger. How lovely it'd be to put one's teeth to it and go off to the bamboo bush for a leisurely meal".

Finally Raja kills the goat but ironically it does not appease his hunger. The circus chimp 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, starvation and being deprived of the company of other animals. This hurts him very much.

When the Captain enters into a contract with Madan involving Raja, Raja suffers more humiliation and more degradation. He finds film-training vastly different from that of the circus ring. He wishes he could communicate with the Captain and make him understand his fatigue and dislike for the film atmosphere. But the Captain, "drunk with authority", drives Raja to a point of desperation and he kills the Captain without even intending to do so. There is no dearth of nemesis in the novel. Each falls a prey to his own failings. Raja loses freedom, becomes servile, suffers indignity, because of blind fury. However, the circus phase proves to be a disciplining factor in his life. The Captain brings about his death because of excessive self-confidence. In the confusion that follows the Captain's death, Raja freely prowls the streets of Malgudi, wondering at the fragility and flimsiness of man who controlled him so long. Raja thus gains freedom, curses 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 here that the Master takes charge of Raja.

The final stage in Raja's life begins when the Master takes charge of him and "awakens" the "soul" within him. A nonverbal communication links Raja with the Master, a state in which transmission of thought is done from mind to mind; Raja gains knowledge and inner light in the company of the Master and learns much about himself and the world. He feels ashamed of his violent nature. He kills only to sustain himself and that too with longer intervals between each meal. He almost makes penance by controlling hunger and feels nobler for it. Raja observes that during meditation "a profound silence prevailed and the sublime state to which he had raised his mind carried mine also along".

The Master completely changes Raja.

"He did not treat me as an animal which sat before him in respectful silence trying to understand his words".

When the time for his *samadhi* is near at hand, the Master ensures a life of safety for a now old and disabled Raja by entrusting him to the authorities of the zoo. Raja accepts this although with a heavy heart. In the zoo he madly hopes for his Master to reappear and lead him to *freedom* again.

The Captain is of humble origins. He comes from the Abu Lane of Malgudi. But he rises to the ownership of the Grand Malgudi Circus, through O'Brien's monkey-parrot "Grand Irish Circus" of the street corner and Dadhaji's Grand Circus through diligence and perseverance. The Captain is deeply involved in his work and committed to it. He is original, innovative and ambitious in his field. He is "law-abiding in a general sense", and generally "indifferent in money matters". Though very unrelenting during training period the Captain well regulates hours of work and rest for each animal and shows deep concern for them. His overwhelming involvement with the circus world makes his wife grumble thus:

"Only animals seem to be fit for his company".

He efficiently manages his circus troupe consisting of scores of animals, hundreds of men and women, and warns Madan the film-producer against "the tail wagging the dog" in his affairs. The wise chimp calls him a "damned 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 affluence of the film industry, proves to be a corrupting influence in the Captain's life. In the beginning he refuses to pull out Raja's teeth or claws and the use of an electric gadget to subdue him. He says:

"I do not destroy the natural pride an animal possesses".

He falls for the easy money offered by Madan, just as Raja falls for easy prey before his capture. Greed overpowers him as does excessive pride. He loses grip over himself and self-control. The consequential inconsideration for Raja's fatigue brings about his end. The Master explains it thus:

"People only follow their inclinations and sooner or later find their reward or retribution".

Madan's plans to make a film on a giant training his pet goat and a tiger to live in peace are absurd, as he is not equipped with any story but shoots scenes and plans to connect them later with the help of a story writer! In *Mr. Sampath*, Sampath and others, engaged in producing "The Burning of Kama", in spite of their money-mindedness and high mediocrity, are professionals at least, while Madan falls below even mediocrity but clamours for the Oscar. The fateful end of such attempts is predictable. Ravi's madness ruins the film in *Mr. Sampath*. Here, Raja, brushing past the camera after his "liberation", sends it crashing down, lens, film, and all.

The Master is an embodiment of the renunciation ideal, philosophical aspirations and spiritual attainments, exemplified in the Hindu way of life. Like the "gurus" of ancient times who sought to guide and enlighten their disciples, the Master takes on himself the responsibility of educating and humanizing Raja. He first appears to be an interfering and inquisitive mendicant with his mad demand for a tiger's safety and freedom. He indulges in common banter, proves argumentative and formidable as far as Raja is concerned. But he is a sanyasi.

The Master exercises his powers to change Raja. He is neither high-sounding nor eloquent like Raju but speaks in simple terms about the cycle of life, the chain reaction set on by one's actions, the relation between one's nature and action, ways of controlling nature by yogic practices, and on God and His Omniscience, for the sake of Raja's understanding. He enlightens Raja on the reason for his captivity thus, which reflects on the theory of *karma*:

"One has to face the reaction of every act if not in the same life, at least in another life or a series of lives. There can be no escape from it".

The Master quotes from *The Bhagavadgita* where Lord Krishna refers to himself as the one who gives and takes life, where he

"reveals himself in a mighty terrifying form which pervades the whole universe in every form of life and action".

His advice to Raja to keep his eyes only on the path is replete with the understanding of the mischief the mind can get into through the eye.

The key to happiness lies not in brooding over one's short-comings but improvements. In spite of his attainments the Master never allows people to make a "godman" out of him. He discourages them from having his "darshan" and taking "dust" from his feet". He considers these as words and actions indicative of mental slavery. He firmly tells them:

"you must prostrate only before God. You should seek only God's darshan,the same God resides within all of us".

His final words to keep Raja are:

"Both of us will shed our forms soon and perhaps we could meet again, who knows".

In this novel the lives of Raja, the Captain, Madan and the Master are closely linked as factors influencing, diverting and directing each other. Each becomes the instrument of other's fate or fortune. The Captain becomes a disciplining factor in Raja's life. But Raja brings death to the Captain because of the latter's pride and haughtiness. The Captain who is a symbol of concern and affection for his animals is driven to greed by the corrupting influence of the cine-producer Madan. Madan actually paves the way for Raja's freedom through violence and disturbance of normalcy without which the Master has no way of bringing Raja under his influence. In this way the novel has a well-knit plot which effectively presents its theme.

What make this novel admirable are not merely its well-knit plot and fine character portrayal but the obvious connotations to the Hindu philosophy as exemplified in *The Bhagavadgita*. The characters of the Master, the Captain and Raja stand for *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas gunas* and Raja himself progresses from one *guna* to the other by which he becomes a *Sattvic* at the end. From a state of total ignorance, fury, haughtiness and strength Raja passes through stages of humiliation, discipline and desire to please the captain, to a state of calm and peace through association with the Master. Raja treads the difficult path of improving his nature and what awaits such transformation can be nothing short of self-realization. The three ways of attaining salvation, through *jnana*, *bhakti* and *karma* are subtly presented in the Master, Raja and the Captain. The Master leaves his mundane life in quest of self-realization and attains it through penance, meditation and knowledge; the Captain fulfills himself through his deep commitment to work is *karma yoga*,

yoga meaning skill in works. Raja also attains this state through *bhakti* or devotion to the Master.

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