

# Exploring the Marginalized through Anthropocentrism: A Case Study of R. K. Narayan's *A Tiger for Malgudi*

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**Abstract:** Literature is considered to be the highest form of human achievement which marks the human race better than other animals on the planet. It helps humanity to have multiple perspectives and celebrate life. But the other side of the coin is the cruel nature of the race to destroy the voiceless for its own pleasure. In this paper, the researcher aims to analyze R. K. Narayan's novel *A Tiger for Malgudi* to enquire how literature works as a mirror to the species to realize its own mistakes. The researcher uses textual analysis methodology to dissect the ideas from the text which highlight the anthropocentric nature of humans.

**Keywords:** Anthropocentrism, Anthropomorphism, Marginalized, Malgudi

## INTRODUCTION

R. K. Narayan a.k.a. Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayanswami Iyer is one of the literary giants in Indian writing in English. Even though he has written mostly on the simplest of subjects about everyday life, he writes them so interesting that the readers are lost in his fictional world and these subjects make a permanent room in their heads. This is because of the essence of his writing which focuses on the emotional side of human beings.

He is praised to be one of the founding fathers of Indian English novels. This is not an overstatement when Graham Green himself has said the following in his introduction to R. K. Narayan's *The Bachelor Of Arts*: "There are writers – Tolstoy and Henry James to name two whom we held in awe, writers – Turgenev and Chekhov – for whom we feel a personal affection, other writers whom we respect – Conrad for example – but who hold us at a long arm's length with their 'courtly foreign grace'. Narayan (whom I don't hesitate to name in such a context) more than any of them wakes in me a spring of gratitude, for he has offered me a second home. Without him, I could never have known what it is like to be Indian."

R. K. Narayan was born on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1906 at Chennai. He spent initial years of his life with his beloved grandmother and these years left an everlasting impression on core memory. That stimulated him to picture beautifully his childhood memories in his first novel itself, *Swami and Friends* which got published in the year 1935. He has set 14 novels and various short stories in his fascinating imaginary village Malgudi which is still admired by the literary detectives of today (Archana, 2017). Narayan is predominantly sensitive to how mankind falls short in its

religious ambitions, as many of his characters frequently settle for less than the ideal and are frustrated by the fundamental limitations of being human. In his novel *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), these limitations emphasize the unsettling disjunction between the philosophical underpinnings and their relevance to everyday life.

## OUTLINE OF THE NOVEL

In the novel, *A Tiger for Malgudi*, Raja, a tiger is the protagonist and the narrator. The story begins from a dense forest where a tiger cub is born, has a mate raising a litter until the poachers capture his mate and the litter. In a battle rage, he wreaks havoc on a village, killing cattle nearby his jungle. Later he is captured by an animal trainer, the Captain who works at a circus. Raja is captured to do the performance on the circus stage. As he is used in the circus, he starts dreading the humans whom he has to obey day and night. Eventually, he breaks free and wanders into a town spreading fear and panic everywhere he goes. Later he gets captured once again. Only this time he willingly goes with his captor who is a saint. The saint helps Raja to attain inner peace.

## MARGINALIZED FROM THE WILDERNESS

At the beginning of the novel, a reader could begin to think that the author is apprehensive about the wildlife since poaching is represented as a painful act by the killing of Raja's mate and cubs. The dense forest area of Memphi can be contrasted against the streets of the village Malgudi. The cave in the forest where Raja lived with freedom can be contrasted against the cage in Malgudi circus. The life of Raja in Malgudi is a total contrast when compared to his life in the jungle. In Malgudi he is powerless, surrounded by people, and punished when not obeying orders.

People tend to think that the animals are dangerous and the humans are the passive, non-aggressive beings. But in reality animals are the poor ones. Even the "ferocious" big cats for that matter. They tend to mind their own primitive lifestyle in the forest but humans invade their territory and bring death and destruction just for the sake that they can. The animals have no voice and become marginalized here, with no voice and means to take back their right.

As tiger being a carnivorous animal, Raja has killed many lives in the jungle. But it is supported by the author with the fact that the animal maintains the balance of the

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environment. But in the name of hunting, humans do ruthless things to the animals without any plausible reason. To the tiger, the village Malgudi is a murderous place whereas thoughtless humans consider the jungle to be the place for unknown horrors.

In literature, it is common that the animals are often represented as a humanized version of their real self as the writers exploit human attributes and emotions to them. The same format can be found in Raja as he is capable of feeling, thinking and behaving like a human. On a closer reading of the work, the reader can find that the author has used anthropomorphism to establish the anthropocentric nature of mankind.

Anthropomorphism gives human thoughts and characteristics to any animal, plant or an inanimate object. Anthropocentrism shall be defined as an idea that humans are the central species on the Earth, and eventually humans have high values than all the other living creatures. The tiger Raja is more humane than any human character in the novel. Because the readers see the world through the eyes of the tiger, he even achieves human intelligence through a saint in the end.

Raja is underfed and malnourished inside the circus. He is made to be scared of the chair by torturous caning and whipping continuously. This is something that the general public does not know when they watch a circus. Most people, especially children would marvel and believe that the animals are obeying to commands due to love towards their owners but the novel has clearly explained what happens behind the curtain. The marvel of the general public could be linked to the idea that humans tend to celebrate the accomplishment of tasks through their will power. So it is our will and clearly not the tiger's that pushes it to do the tricks at the circus.

When a film producer looks at Raja, he gets fascinated in a moment of real glory and decides to make a movie featuring the tiger. The film represents Raja as the agent of destruction, violence and seeks to sermonize the message of non-violence and human superiority (Sengupta, 2015). The storyline as stated by the director is –

“(a) goat, brought up as a pet, is constantly being pursued by the tiger, who is accustomed to ripping off goat heads, but the giant that owns the goat fights it off with his bare hands. He finally captures the tiger and trains it to live at peace with the goat... Non-violence is India's contribution to civilization.” (Page 82)

At the beginning of the novel itself, the reader can witness the imperialistic attitude of the humans as they throw comments and fling stones at the tiger when the keeper is not looking. It beautifully illustrates wildlife contrasting with the “civilized” human life. Even though the novel goes from the point of view of the tiger, it has purposefully failed to capture the raw beauty of animal life for its anthropomorphism. Because human understanding is limited and only when it is made to be relatable to the readers they can start to think about their own point of view. That is why the tiger is made as the narrator and given a human voice.

## CONCLUSION

*A Tiger for Malgudi* is a unique work of R. K. Narayan, which deals with simple days and common life and with a

different perspective in a simple language full of humor. But the novel is very deep and rich with philosophical ideas which gives voice for all living creatures. Through the novel one thing is clear that the human mind does not open up to all the living things easily. That is why the author has used anthropomorphism to show the readers about the modern civilized man's mindset, anthropocentrism. The author has the necessity to do it because only then the idea can register in the reader's mind. So he has turned the philosophy into a beautiful, emotional and soulful experience (VM, 2016). When R. K. Narayan writes his introduction he says, “Now in my story ‘the Tiger Hermit’ employs his powers to save the tiger and transform it inwardly – working on the basis that, deep within, the core of personality is same in spite of differing appearances and categories.” Understanding this perspective shall make everyone's life happier, easier and less heavy.

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