Chapter-VI

A TIGER FOR MALGUDI——NARAYAN’S

DIVINE COMEDY
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In Narayan’s latest novel A Tiger for Malgudi, a tiger named Raju ruminates over his past days. This is almost a spiritual odyssey of his life starting from his wild days at the jungle to the humiliating and rigorous training at the hands of the Captain of the Grand Malgudi Circus and then to the spiritual care and training of the Master and then ultimately delivered by the Master to the protective retirement of the zoo. The most striking features of the novel is that a tiger is endowed with an intelligent, sensitive personality, spiritualized by the mysterious powers of his master, a Swami.

Vasu, In Narayan’s earlier novel, The Maneater of Malgudi is a man Metaphysically termed a man-eater. But in this novel we have Raja, a tiger behaving much more humanly then human beings. Raja has not only undergone humanization, but even looks forward to his salvation. He understands the master’s spiritual and death.’1 on God and Bhagvad Gita and the like. The tiger can even convey to the Master
his own conception of God as being as enormous tiger, spanning the earth and the sky. He even feels remorse for killing animals to sustain himself.

One may put question - - - - Is not Narayan asking too much of a tiger? Working out a spiritual metamorphosis of a tiger is a different task. To a reader aseptic of such spiritual workings, this may also seem utterly absurd. Even the craziest behaviour in spiritual miracles would find it hard to accept a tiger repenting for his kills. Understanding lessons on Yoga, time and eternally. The reader at times is inclined to question - - - - has not Narayan, being overzealous in his spiritual thesis, sacrificed credibility and in the process made his tiger to perform for his readers or too much from his readers to believe in the tiger? Narayan has admitted in the introduction to the novel that he was examining “What the result would be If I made a tiger the central character in a novel.” (p.8) It is not carrying the experiment too far and brining a lot of pressure on the narrative reality wherein a reader finds difficult to participate?

Perhaps that has been uppermost in the novelist’s mind. That is why the tiger (narrator) adopts a persuasive stance throughout the course of
the narrations. The reader is persuaded to suspend his disbelief almost in the beginning of the novel.

You are not likely to understand that I am different from the tiger next door, that I possess a soul within this forbidding exterior. I can think, analysis, judge, remember and do everything that you do perhaps with greater subtlety and sense (pp,11-12)

Time and again Master's spiritual powers are referred to under whose influence the tiger has been spiritually transformed. It is in India where Yogis perform miracles, a fraud can be metamorphosed into a martyr, a temple priest can tell one's past even from a glance and even one can communicate with his dead wife. It is then no wonder for a tiger to behave like a wise human being after coming under the influence of a Swami. If one believes the Master, one ought to believe his miraculous powers.

The tiger's awakened personality can be traced to his pervious life. It is not at all incredible in the context of a culture where successive birth are considered to be stages in the evolutionary process of the soul. "Each human soul goes through contagious series of incarnations reaping the fruits if thoughts, desires and actions done in
the past and generating, during the process of reaping, new causes which will bear their fruits in this or future lives.'2 This amply explains the phenomenon of the tiger who is already bound for the spiritual. In Ramayan and Mahabharat one can find numbers instances of re-incarnations where human beings and even gods are transformed, under curse into creatures of sub-human species like brids, elephant, tigers and senses. These great Indian epics as well as the ancient legends and folklores abound with characters who are animals, but are endowed with superior intelligence and sensibility. The Jatak tales are also based on the many reincarnations of Bodhisattva as monkey, elephant or deer before he finally become the Buddha, the Enlightened one. In this context, the Master's statement that the Tiger might have been a poet in one of his previous births sounds quite Probable. It is significant that the tiger escapes the Captain, but submits to the Master. It is not at all difficult to guess a reason The tiger and the Master might have been brothers in their previous birth.

The tiger also may have been influenced and transformed by the powers of the Master. In this context Narayan refers to the eight kinds of supernatural powers that a yogi can attain. By one of them, one can control men and animals. In the yogic tradition these eight kinds of occult powers are known as Maha- Siddhis.'3
Narayan first works up a postulate that "deep within, the care of personality is the same in spite of differing appearance and categories, and which the right approach you could expect the same response from a tiger as from any normal human being". (p.10) and then builds up the novel on this postulate. The Indian psyche reared up in a tradition of the Vedanta and Upanisads, the panchantantra and the Jatakatalus find it not at all difficult to accept the spiritual transformation of a tiger.

Narayan, stage by stage, builds by a comic world where the reader would have the freedom to accept the incredible. Just before the tiger's transformation, when he come in contact with the Swami in the Head Master's room reader is psychologically prepared to accept the miracle. The Swami's persistent efforts not to address the tiger as 'beast' or 'brute' convey to the reader the tiger’s specialty in which he is not a savage beast, but there is something else to his character, even Alphonse, after winning over the members of the save Tiger committee and after procuring a ladder, after all the elaborate rituals of preparing his gun and aiming at an imaginary tiger, after taking a whole flask of run to restore his nerves is ultimately undone by his hand. Alphonososo feels that his "hands are shaky".(p.138) One is remind of Vasu who has also undone by his own hand when he was all prepared to shoot the temple elephant. And in keeping with this design to the narrative, the
tiger appropriately enough, meets his Master in a school, where his
first educates is to start. The narrative reality subtly communicates the
feeling that the tiger is not just on ordinary tiger and he is not going to
be shot and that probably an unforeseen destiny awaits him. And once
the Swami comes and takes the centrestage, the mundane world yields
place to a spiritual world where the spiritual transformation of a tiger is
not at all incredible.

Once this credibility is established, the narrative poses no other
Problems. The unmistakable signs of Malgudi life as well as the
brilliant style of Narayan noticed in all his earlier novels are once again
here. But the comedy here moves to become a spiritual drama once the
tiger comes under the influence of his Master and begins to transcend
himself. What one notices afterwards is the spiritual training of the
tiger. The plot then just drags on with the routine spiritual programme
for the tiger. Narayan’s comic Forces have eased to operate at this point
and what follows is Narayan’s Illustration of the spiritual thesis about
the university of soul. In the process the aesthetic interest gradually
gives place to a sort of religious interest. What one notices here is not a
comic hero’s absurd education with the universe and his ultimate
integration into it by the process of explation, but a tiger simply
meeting his pre-ordinary destiny.
The tiger in the first half acts mostly out of instincts and the reader has an interest in it as is essentially due to a tiger, not more than that. The reader’s curiosity of the tiger’s life and other animals is only satiated. In the second half the tiger is no more a hero, but is passive character who is always acted upon. The main characters have moved to super-human dimensions and the typical human interest arising out of man’s dreams, fads and fancies that characterize Narayan’s earlier comedies becomes noticeably absent. The tiger-protagonist fails to become either a tiger or a protagonist. There is of course, the typical comedy of Narayan in the old world of Malgudi, in the world of the Head Master, the Assistant Head Master, Alohonao and many others. But the comedy here is confined to the periphery of the narrative, only tangential to the central theme.

Wherever Narayan has left the solid, earthy reality of Malgudi and has chosen to dwell on any philosophie treatise, as he does in The English Teacher while dealing with the occult, his narrative has lacked vigour ad Warmth, gaiety and good humour. Here in this novel, Narayan does the amazing task of carrying his protagonist from the subhuman of Narayan’s earlier novels struggling defiantly against destiny by innumerable funny, cunning and absurd ways?
In *A Tiger for Malgudi* Narayan attempts a new dimension in form by combining myth and fable. This form is deeply rooted in the cultural context of Narayan’s India. Narayan, here, does not merely attempt a small town comedy he brings the centuries old religious and philosophical beliefs of his nation into the orbit of a fictional narrative which has its source, as far as form is concerned, in the great epics, legends and folktales. Fable and myth are the inherited formal patterns in which the Indian race from generation to generation finds its expression. Narayan’s narrative in *A Tiger for Malgudi* adopts these rhetorical modes and tries to transform fantasy into a spiritual experience.
NOTES & REFERENCE


3. Ibid., p.357.