A Tiger for Malgudi written six years after The Painter of Signs reveals a downward trend in Narayan's technique of fictional realism. In it we notice the writer's preference for fantasy. The novel therefore remains more of a fantasy. But it remains a compelling fable with its stress on philosophy. Though the simplicity of the fable attracts the young and the old alike, the philosophical discourse in it has a striking appeal to those who wish to explore the pathway to true enlightenment. The many exciting and comedic touches in the novel interest the readers as much as the insight and teasing wit of Narayan. In short, The Tiger for Malgudi has enough measured wisdom, charm and comedy.

The novel has a strikingly original theme. Raja, the hero of this novel is a tiger - eleven feet from head to tail and is a terror of Malgudi. When he leaves his home in the Mempi hills he is captured and trained as a circus performer and subsequently as a film star. Eventually he escapes only to be captured again, this time voluntarily, by a guru. The guru and Raja return to the hills to pass their days in sweet
philosophical discourse. The tiger gives up his beastly qualities and takes to sanyasa. At the end of the novel, the guru attains samadhi leaving the tiger to the care of a zoo-manager, with the assurance that they will meet again. He whispers to the tiger: "Both of us will shed our forms soon and perhaps we could meet again, who knows? So goodbye for the present.'"¹ What seems to be a simple and entertaining fable becomes ultimately a novel of surprising depth and humanity. However, from the point of fictional realism, the novel remains more of a fantasy.

Raja, the narrator of this novel is a tiger. Narayan himself confesses that he has deliberately made the tiger his central character for man in his smugness never feels that other living creatures may also possess like himself, 'ego, values, outlook and the ability to communicate, though they may be incapable of audible speech.'² By making the tiger the central character of his novel, Narayan wishes to prove that an inward transformation is as much possible in the case of a tiger or any other animal, as in the case of man, for "deep within, the core of personality is the same in spite of differing appearances and categories, and with the right approach you could expect the same response from a tiger as from any normal human being."³

² Ibid., p.8.
³ Ibid., p.10.
The strange relationship between Raja and a Hermit - which would normally have become a pure fantasy - is made into a memorable work because of Narayan's wit and insight into human as well as tiger-nature. The Hermit uses his power to 'save the tiger and transform it inwardly.' This inward transformation in the tiger, which approximates to sanyasa, is the central theme of the novel. Saints, spiritualism and the mystery of death are the dominant themes in some of Narayan's novels. Right from his The English Teacher, Narayan is concerned with the mystery of Life and Death. 'Who am I' is a metaphysical question that man puts to himself and sages have pondered over it for an answer. Krishnan in The English Teacher poses such a question and ruminates on the topic of the mystery connected with Death. Raja, the tiger, ruminates on the same topic. He says:

You are carried away by appearances - my claws and fangs and the glowing eyes frighten you no doubt. I don't blame you. I don't know 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. I would not blame you for keeping your distance - I myself shuddered at my own reflection on the still surface of a pond while crouching for a drink of water, not when I was really a wild beast, but after I came under the influence of my Master and learnt to question 'Who am I?'

4. Ibid., p.9.
5. Ibid., p.12.
Narayan has dealt with the outward transformation of people in his other novels. Margayya and Sampath experience such a change for a short time; Raju, even transforms himself into a Sanyasi by growing a beard and uttering random thoughts. This sort of transformation, either from poverty to riches or from a simple person to a Sadhu is a fact well within the comprehension of human beings as they notice such things in every day life. But the transformation, inward of course, of a tiger into a sanyasi is a thing that puzzles human credibility. Narayan attempts such a thing in his novel and therefore presents it as a fantasy. But it is a fantasy of a different order. C.N. Manlove, distinguishes between the two types of fantasy thus:

Two broad classes of fantasy may be distinguished: 'comic' or 'escapist', and 'imaginative' fantasy. The line of division is simple enough: it is between fancy versus imagination, where 'fanciful' works are those carrying either no deeper meaning or one lacking in vitality.  

He argues that in 'comic' fantasy there is 'little intelligence or any fibre of reality', but the 'imaginative' fantasists avoid the failings of the 'escapists'. He says that the object of the imaginative fantasists is to 'enlist their experience and invention into giving a total vision of reality transformed: that is, to make their

Narayan's novel is an 'imaginative' fantasy. He transforms the tiger into a sanyasi to prove that, "A sanyasi is one who renounces everything and undergoes a complete change of personality." Narayan has been preoccupied with the theme of 'sanyasa' right from his second novel, *The Bachelor of Arts*. Chandran, in a moment of frustration dons the ochre robes to become a sanyasi, but very soon gives it up. Raju, in *The Guide* not only puts on the dress of a sanyasi but dies because of it. Even the old man in Mr. Sampath fancies himself a sanyasi though he is materialistic to the core. Somehow, Narayan has been unable to come grips with a true sanyasi, in all these novels. It is only in *A Tiger for Malgudi* that he is successful in presenting a true sanyasi. Raja, not only undergoes a transformation but also obliterates his past in the manner of a sanyasi. He remains a tiger in appearance; he becomes a friendly soul of the Hermit. It is this aspect that makes the novel a fantasy. Speaking about the basis for such a relationship between man and a beast Narayan says:

During the Kumbh Mela festival, which recurs every twelve years at the confluence of the three rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati in Allahabad, a vast crowd gathers for a holy bath in the rivers. Amidst

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7. Ibid., p.12.
that ocean of humanity also arrives a hermit with his companion, a tiger. He does not hold the animal on a leash since he claims they were brothers in previous lives. The tiger freely moves about without hurting or scaring anyone.

Such a combination seemed incredible when I read reports of it and saw the photographs. But as I got used to the idea, I began to speculate on its possibilities for a novel.\footnote{9}

The novel falls into three parts. Part one deals with the tiger lying in the confines of a zoo and ruminating on its cubhood and wild days in the jungle. This is presented in a realistic way. Raja recollects his early days as a cave dweller and jungle beast. All the beastly qualities in him are graphically presented. He says:

\ldots I lived in my cave on the edge of a little rivulet, which swelled and roared along when it rained in the hills but was fordable in dry season, with the jungle stretching away on the other side. I remember my cubhood when I frolicked on the sandy bank and in the cool stream, protected and fed by a mother.\footnote{10}

The cub is deserted by the mother very soon. His next stage of life is a little arduous:

I was seized with panic and hid myself in the cave. When I ventured out, I was chased, knocked down and hurt by bigger animals and menaced by lesser

\footnote{9. A Tiger for Malgudi, p.7.}
\footnote{10. Ibid., p.13.}
ones. I starved except when I could catch miserable creatures such as rabbits, foxcubs and squirrels, and survived somehow.\textsuperscript{11}

The cub grows into a full fledged tiger and becomes the 'Supreme Lord of the Jungle', afraid of no one, striking terror in others. This is the stage of his extreme wildness. It is graphically described thus:

It was naturally, a time of utter wildness, violence, and unthinking cruelty inflicted on weaker creatures. Everyone I encountered proved weaker and submissive, but the submissiveness did not count - I delivered the fatal blow in any case when I wished and strode above as the King of the Forest.\textsuperscript{12}

Very soon, this King meets his queen. And at first, they challenge each other. The fight between the two is dramatically described:

We butted into each other, scratched, clawed, wrestled, grappled, gashing, biting, tearing each other, and I also stood up and threw my weight on her and struck, but it was like beating a rock - she was no normal animal.... I collapsed on the ground bleeding from every pore; I had no strength even to run away... My satisfaction was that the monster, my adversary, seemed to have fared no better. She had also collapsed in a ditch, no less bloody, with her flesh torn up and exposed.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p.13.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p.13
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.19.
Raja and his adversary very soon become life-partners and they raise a family. Narayan once again, excels in the description of the domestic life of Raja, in the company of his mate and young ones. But very soon the young ones and their mother are separated from Raja, butchered and killed by hunters. The sight of the dead bodies of his young ones and his mate fills him with 'a blind and impossible anger' in him but fate wills that he is to be captured. A circus company manager, whom Raja calls Captain, captures him and trains him as a circus performer.

The second part of the novel deals with Raja's life in the circus company. This again is realistically portrayed. The tiger narrates the story of the Captain, from the beginning to the end. The Captain's story remains a story within a story. As usual, Narayan describes the domestic scenes of the Captain's family in a telling manner. It is the regular habit of the Captain to get up at five in the morning everyday and inspect all the animals of his circus troupe. Later, he sits at the table and makes his observations. Then follows the breakfast. At the breakfast table his wife and he have their usual quarrel. The quarrel is presented in the usual Narayan humour thus:

''All our animals from the performing mongoose to the tusker are in excellent condition,'' he boasted at breakfast.
''Yes,'' said his wife, ''they are tended better than your family.'''
"You must say something unpleasant - otherwise you are never happy."
"Your beloved animals may also have something to say if they could speak..."

... When she became too trying, Captain would abruptly leave the table. When she saw him rise, she felt uneasy and said as if nothing had happened, "Your coffee. Want more milk, sugar?" He never answered, but just emptied the cup at one gulp and walked out of the tent. She kept looking after him and muttered, "He has lost all sense of humour, the slightest upset and he flounces out, let him... I don't care. Only animals seem to be fit for his company."

He told himself, "Women are impossible. Worse than twenty untamed jungle creatures on one's hand at a time..." 14

The Captain's story is a realistic story embedded in the fantasy of the inward transformation of the tiger. Born and bred in Malgudi, the Captain behaves as any Malgudian does. In his temporary stay at Poona, he comes across one O'Brien, a down and out Irishman who hands over a parrot and a monkey to him for fifty rupees. He makes use of the signboard - Grand Irish Circus - to earn a living. Later, he approaches Dadaji the owner of Grand Circus and becomes an employee of him. Very soon he becomes a working partner in the company. At Dadaji's death he inherits the circus with all its property and assets and animals. He shifts his company

to Malgudi. In the course of his stay he captures Raja and trains him for his circus performances. Raja's circus life begins. It is a typical example of fictional realism. Raja's jungle life is a realistic presentation; his circus life is a heightened version of realism. Raja becomes a 'star'. Even Rita, Captain's wife, the trapeze artist is relegated to the background. Raja performs such feats as coming through the ring of fire, sitting on a stool dangling his tail and even drinking milk from a saucer. When he at first abhors the sight of cow's milk, the ape his companion strikes a conversation with him, in the manner of the animals in Aesop's fables. This, in fact, is the beginning of the fabular aspect of the novel. The scene is described thus:

The ape was grinning as he clutched the bars of my cage and asked, "'How did you like it?''

"'What?'" I asked.

"'The milk in the saucer which you had to lick up,'"

"'Terrible,'" I said. "'Why should I drink it?'"

"'You will see for yourself soon. Why, don't you like it?''

"'How can anyone like that terrible stuff?''

"'Human kids are brought up on it right from birth. Men think no end of it.'"

"'Do you drink it?!'

"'Yes, of course, I don't mind it, but I prefer banana and what they aptly call monkey-nuts.'"

"'Why do you have to drink it?!'

"'Can't help it, when Captain thinks it is good for us, we have to take it.'" 15

15. Ibid., p. 61.
Much more fabular is that Raja is compelled to enact the show of drinking milk along with a goat, from the same saucer. At every performance Captain announces Raja as "that miracle tiger Raja - the magnificent."\(^\text{16}\) He considers him as an extraordinary creature, "not an ordinary commonplace tiger but an intelligent creature, almost human in understanding."\(^\text{17}\) The Captain sounds prophetic. Narayan seizes this remark to convert Raja into an extraordinary creature.

The first extraordinary gift that he bestows on Raja is Raja's power of understanding human speech. He understands Captain's speech at the beginning of every show. He says:

At every show, Captain made a speech, sometimes autobiographical and sometimes to boost a special act, such as mine. He delivered his message in at least three languages, as he explained: '... in Hindi since it is our national language and given to us by Mahatma Gandhi himself; also in English because as our beloved respected leader Nehru put it, it opens a window on the world. In Tamil, because it is, ah, our Mother Tongue, in which our greatest poets like Kamban and Valluvar composed ...',\(^\text{18}\)

Raja's circus life comes to an end fictitiously because of the arrival of Madhusudhan, a cine-director who demands an unusual performance of Raja. Madhusudhan desires to

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16. Ibid., p.65.
17. Ibid., p.65.
18. Ibid., p.66.
produce a film with Raja as the key-figure. He desires to have in his film a fight-scene between Raja and Jaggu, the muscled man. His fantastic description of the sequence is:

"... Raja must make one spring at Jaggu, who will ward it off with the back of his hand, and pound his face with such a cry that Raja will turn back with his tail between his legs."\(^{19}\)

Tucking the tail between legs is a dog's habit and not the tiger's. When foolishly Captain compels Raja to do it Raja's patience crosses its limit. Raja at first warns Captain not to pursue it, but when Captain is adamant he just raises his paw to ward off Captain's attack on him with a whip. But it happens to be a fatal blow. In his own words:

> As he stooped down to caress me with its tip, I just raised a forepaw, taking care to retract my claws, and knocked the thing out of his hand. The blow caught Captain under his chin, and tore off his head.\(^{20}\)

The Captain's story comes to an end with his wife committing suicide. With this Raja's life in captivity ends.

The third section of the novel deals with the liberated Raja, his harmless attitude, his companionship with a Hermit and his final inward transformation. The entire section is

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19. Ibid., p.97.
20. Ibid., p.114.
fabular. The section starts with an incredible incident. Soon after his liberation, Raja walks along the streets of Malgudi without any fear and with the least intention of harming any human being. He enters the busy streets of Malgudi and people become panicky. He wonders at the fear of the human beings. At Ananda Bhavan he even assures them, probably with his look, 'Don't fear, I am not out to trouble you. Eat your tiffin in peace, don't mind me... I'm not out to kill.'

He even follows the school-children, just like Mary's lamb, to their school. He narrates his journey thus:

I followed them through their school gate while they ran up and shut themselves in the school hall securely. I ascended the steps of the school, saw an open door at the far end of a veranda, and walked in. It happened to be the headmaster's room...

I walked in and flung myself on the cool floor, having a partiality for cool stone floor, with my head under the large desk - which gave me the feeling of being back in the Mempí cave...

The rest of the novel is farcical. The headmaster jumps to an attic to save his skin, the people assemble before the room and discuss ways and methods of shooting the tiger without damaging the headmaster's life. In his characteristically humorous way Narayan depicts the reaction

21. Ibid., p.117.
22. Ibid., pp.117-118.
of various human beings. But the whole episode appears to be pedestrian compared to the other humorous scenes in his other novels. In his mature novels, Narayan engages the attention of the readers with his ability to marshal 'clearly visualized details in presenting situations and incidents.'

Here, the highly improbable situation is handled in a style that only produces a comic effect without offering any insight. It appears as though Narayan is only bent upon evoking laughter. There is a ludicrous scene in which the First Assistant of the school expresses his inability to act for according to him, 'The H.M. is still there in his room. He is not away actually.' The actual situation is that the headmaster is locked up in his own room with the tiger. At the remark of the First Assistant, the 'Master' comes forward to ask, 'Is this the time for levity?'. The reader is tempted to pose the same question. Still more ludicrous is the plea of the Chairman of the local Chapter of Tiger Project, affiliated to the Central Committee under the Ministry of Agriculture at Delhi, not to shoot the tiger as there is already a decimation of the tiger population. Both the scenes appear to be out of context in a situation like this and they are forced upon the readers.

The final scene in the school is still more incredible. This is a scene between the Master and the Tiger. The Master

25. Ibid., p.126.
assures the crowd that the tiger is harmless and expresses his desire to walk into the tiger's room unarmed. When the Chairman of the municipality, in the capacity of a Honorary Magistrate, opposes the idea on the ground that it amounts to suicide, the Master uses a quotation from Bhagavad Gita which runs: 'I'm life and death, I'm the killer and the killed.' The Chairman who is bewildered allows the Master to risk his life, after executing an affidavit.

The Master-Tiger scene is highly imaginative. The Master addresses the tiger and says this: 'Understand that you are not a tiger, don't hurt yourself. I am your friend...' His influence on the tiger is narrated thus:

'How I was beginning to understand his speech is a mystery. He was exercising some strange power over me. His presence sapped all my strength. When I made one more attempt to spring up, I could not raise myself. When he touched me, I tried to hit him, but my forepaw had no strength and collapsed like a rag. When I tried to snap my jaws, again I bit only the air. He merely said, 'Leave that style out. You won't have use for such violent gestures any more. It all goes into your past.'

The tiger not only understands his speech but undergoes

26. Ibid., p.142.
27. Ibid., p.144.
28. Ibid., pp. 144-145.
a change inwardly. When the Master insists that the tiger must change his nature, he follows him implicitly. The Master and the tiger walk along the streets of Malgudi, as friends. People begin to wonder at their relationship. They reach the foot of Mempi and stay there as companions. In the course of this stay the Master effects a total change in Raja's inward self. To him he confesses his own past:

"I was a man of the world, busy and active and living by the clock, scrutinizing my bank book, greeting and smiling at all and sundry because I was anxious to be treated as a respectable man in society. One day it seemed all wrong, a senseless repetition of activities... and I abruptly shed everything including (but for a bare minimum) clothes, and fled away from wife, children, home, possessions... in the manner of Siddhartha... I trudged and tramped and wandered through jungles and mountains and valleys not caring where I went. I achieved complete anonymity, and shed purpose of every kind, never having to ask what next. And so here I am, that's all you need to know."

The Master-story is the opposite of Captain-story. Though both are Malgudians, Captain is a worldly wise man and the Master is a saint. In fact, it is through him that Narayan fulfills his ambition of creating a true sanyasi. The Master is a true sanyasi because he has renounced everything. When his wife comes in search of him to talk about

29. Ibid., pp.161-162.
their married-life, he tells her not to use the word 'husband' for it is a wrong word. He tells her:

''Listen attentively: My past does not exist for me, nor a future. I live for the moment, and that awareness is enough for me. To attain this state, I have gone through much hardship, I don't have to explain all that now. I have erased from my mind my name and identity and all that it implies. It would be unthinkable to slide back. You must live your own life and leave me to live mine and end it my own way.''

And when the time of Samadhi approaches he hands over the tiger to a zoo-keeper explaining philosophically, ''No relationship, human or other, or association of any kind could last for ever. Separation is the law of life right from the mother's womb. One has to accept it if one has to live in God's plans.''

Though apparently a fantasy A Tiger for Malgudi has in it enough measured wisdom and insight into life and death. It remains, therefore, a thought provoking fable. It combines in itself simple narrative and profound thinking. Though Narayan is a realist he experiments with fantasy and is quite successful in creating an imaginative construction which pleases the readers. In fact, it is the fantasy in the novel that attracts the readers than its scenes of

30. Ibid., p.171.
realism. In this respect it remains the opposite of the early novels of Narayan; and it is not a representative piece as far as fictional realism is concerned.

As in his novels, so in his Short Stories Narayan fuses realism and fantasy. Though not all short stories of Narayan make use of fictional realism, many of them are built on it. Consequently, many of the short stories present the familiar scenes in an amusing way. Thys, in fact, accounts for Narayan's popularity as a short story writer. The next chapter deals with the fictional realism aspect of Narayan's short stories.

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