

ANTHROPOCENTRIC ATTITUDE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEPLETION IN R.K. NARAYAN'S 'A TIGER FOR MALGUDI'

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Abstract: Ecocriticism is based on the idea that the physical world and the human culture are connected and are affected by each other. It examines the relationship between the human and the non-human represented in literary texts. Ecocritics study the ways nature is portrayed in the body of the text and attempt to analyze their relevance to environmental crises. R.K. Narayan's *A Tiger for Malgudi* deals with the theme of rootedness and timelessness, a novel whose hero is a Tiger capable of thinking, feeling, and behaving like a human being deserves more attention than this. Similarly, while *A Tiger for Malgudi* can be considered as Narayan's experiment in the genre of ecowriting, an attentive reading reveals how even a sincere effort to condemn the anthropocentric worldview may suffer from constructs like anthropomorphism and the imperial gaze that human usually turn on wild beats, and thereby fail to transcend the very trope of anthropocentrism.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, environmental crises, anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism, R.K. Narayan, *A Tiger for Malgudi*

INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism studies the relation between man and nature. In the words of Pramod K. Nayar where he admits the relation of literature and environment and the language used for Nature as – Ecocriticism is a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape in the cultural text, paying particular attention to attitudes towards 'nature' and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs material practices towards the environments while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking itself with other ecological sciences and approaches.(242)

Eco-critics critique anthropocentric ethical systems and ask people to go along with the ecosystem. Since man is an intermediate player in the drama of material and abstract reality, therefore, it is a prerequisite to understand the nature of Nature and Man. Eco-critics never visualize men in conflict with nature. All forms of ecological imbalances are anthropogenic and hence they must be got over immediately.

Anthropocentrism refers to a system of belief that man is the centre of all of the things in the universe. It takes man and nature as two separate regions. The latter is only subordinate to the former. Rob Boddice in an Introduction to his book *Anthropocentrism: Humans, Animals, Environments* opined, "Anthropocentrism is expressed either as a charge of human chauvinism or as an acknowledgement of human ontological boundaries. It is in tension with nature, the environment and non-human animals" (Boddice).

R. K. Narayan is the first thinker and writer who wrote an autobiography of an animal from animal's vantage point. Normally novels are abuzz with human beings and human characters occupy the centre of attraction. Narayan as a novelist in the novel *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983) chose a tiger named Raja for the hero of the novel. The monopoly of human characters either as a hero or aides got dislocated. Definitely, it is insane to take animals simply nature beings requiring no freedom, food, shelter, and our caring. The novelist humanized Raja, the tiger in the novel. The novel focuses on the human-animal relationship. The novelist sheds light on the selection of the tiger as a hero for his novel:

...with a few exceptions here and there, 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 (ATM 7 8).

The novel begins with Raja, now aged, lost in thoughts about past days beginning from cubhood and early days roaming wild in Memphi forests to live in a cage. Captain, the owner of Grand Malgudi Circus made Raja captive. Raja here found a great difference between the silence of forest life and noisy nature of human world-affairs. Raja abhors the human life pattern. Anyhow he brought himself around. He says:

It was uncomfortable, and I had to roar out my displeasure. The noise I made scared the spectators surrounding my cage and sent them [goats, bullocks etc.] running. My guards broke into laughter and shouted at the crowd, "If you are so scared of the tiger locked up in the cage, what'll you do if we open the door and let it out?" This was their way of joking. And then much talk, inevitable wherever human beings are gathered. (ATM 44)

The story begins from lush green forests where the tiger was originally born and grows, has a mate and raises a litter until the hunters capture his mate and the litter. He starts to destruct on the villages surrounding his jungle, killing cattle. He is captured by circus animal trainer known as "The Captain" who starves him to make him do tricks. The Tiger lives in captivity until he escapes his captor to be captured again. But this time the tiger voluntarily goes with his captor who happens to be a monk. The monk helps the tiger find inner peace.

As the novel begins, the reader begins to think that the author has a serious concern for wildlife as poaching is depicted painfully by killing the tiger's mate and cubs. The forests of Memphi can be contrasted against the streets of Malgudi. The cave in Memphi, where the tiger lived in freedom and seclusion when compared to the cage in Malgudi circus where the tiger is surrounded by people, gives us a clear idea of how power changes hands. The tiger's acts of violence such as the killing of other animals are supported by Narayan for it appears that the tiger was maintaining the balance of the environment.

Meanwhile, a human's hunting of animals is seen as a ruthless act. To the tiger, Malgudi is a dangerous place, where an unwary human considers the jungle to be a place of unknown horrors. Narayan's protagonist is capable of thinking, feeling and behaving like a human. But on a close reading of the text, we find it to be anthropocentric with elements of anthropomorphism. Anthropocentrism can be defined as a belief that human beings are the central species on planet Earth, thus making them have high values than other living creatures. Anthropomorphism attributes human characteristics and thoughts to any animal or plant or an inanimate object.

In *A Tiger for Malgudi*, the tiger is more humane than the humans. Raja, the tiger does not attack captain even though he is starved and beaten. In the event of his attack on the captain, he does try to warn the captain and merely tries to push him away. When the tiger fails the captain by doing something which it was not trained to do like biting off the goat's head in front of a shocked audience, a film producer captures the tiger in what he thinks to be "a moment of glory" and plans to feature a film with Raja (*The Tiger*). The film aims to show the tiger as a destructive agent, to promote human society as superior and to preach nonviolence.

"A goat, brought up as a pet, is constantly being pursued by a 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. Nonviolence in India's contribution to civilization" (page 82)

The director, however, wants to preach this message by removing the tiger's claws and its mouth sewed, which is an act of violence. However, the tiger escapes and is returned to the jungle as a changed animal. He becomes spiritual and starts despising his own food, looks, and behaviour which can be seen as an attempt to attain the status of a human.

In his Introduction, Narayan says that other creatures possess ego and values. This anthropomorphic attitude is shown by Raja where he finds himself uncomfortable to stand on two legs, not because of the posture but because he finds himself exposed too much. Raja is drawn into the human world to be educated. Even after his escape from the circus, he is told that he is not fit to go back to the jungle and is taught the art of meditation. At last Raja (*Tiger*) goes to a Swamiji and gets advice from the saint. Raja accepts that:

"He did not treat me as an animal which sat before him in respectful silence trying to understand his words; I only felt grateful that he was trying to transform me in so many ways. How he could do it was his own secret" (ATM 158).

One day, while talking with a visitor Master showed his great respect for Raja:

...Remember he is only a tiger in appearance.... He is a sensitive soul who understands life and its problems exactly as we do. Take him as a gift from God; only please don't put him in thorough company (ATM 175).

CONCLUSION

The novel, *A Tiger for Malgudi* is more than an autobiography of Raja, a magnificent tiger. R. K. Narayan in the novel presented himself as the staunchest supporter of wild-life. This novel can easily be situated within the trajectory of Narayan's novels dealing with the theme of rootedness or timelessness. The entire incidents indirectly reveal that animal also has feelings, emotions and family attachments. At the end of the story i.e. the beginning of the novel where Raja is left by his master, we see the imperialistic attitude of humans as they pass comments and fling stones when the keeper is not looking. Thus the novel does depict wildlife contrasting it to the civilized human life.

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