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Composite Interiorization: A Narratological Study of R.K.Narayan's *A Tiger for Malgudi*

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Abstract:

A Tiger for Malgudi (1983) is an outstanding novel by R. K. Narayan written after seven years of the publication of *The Painter of Signs* (1976). Narayan returns with an unusual and challenging novel with a tiger as its chief protagonist who is undergoing an internal spiritual transformation. *A Tiger for Malgudi* is a narrative told from the point of view of a tiger who is spiritually transformed at the end of the story. Its skin is that of tiger but its essence is not that of an animal. The present paper proposes to examine how the novelist creates an interesting animal allegory within an inventive style of time and space, plot construction and characterization. A narratological reading reveals complex interiorization of the text which earns a distinctive place for *A Tiger for Malgudi*.

Keywords: Flashback, Flashforward, autodiegetic, hypodiegetic, framed narrative.

A Tiger for Malgudi is an autobiographical narrative of a tiger, which describes his journey from "Supreme Lord of the jungle", afraid of no one, instigating terror in others to a tiger full of intelligence and human feelings when he thinks, "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 (*A Tiger for Malgudi* 12) The novel tells us the tale of a tiger 'with a soul' who is ruminating over his past starting from his cubhood days to the spiritual awakening in the hermit's hands. The tiger remembers the days when he was living with his mother in a cave in a forest. One day, his mother disappears leaving him alone and panic-stricken. But gradually with the passage of time he became a strong, ferocious and seasoned animal called himself 'The Supreme Lord of the Jungle' (*TM* 13). Later he encounters a tigress which is as much big and fierce as him. They began living together and had four cubs. But unfortunately one day, the mother and the cubs were shot dead. Their death causes great agony to the tiger and changes him to be more violent. His own violent depredations in the nearby villages throw him into the jaws of death but luckily, he very carefully avoids all the traps laid for him. One day he is cautiously captured by the Captain, an owner of Grand Malgudi Circus. The Captain tames and trains him and makes him perform in the circus under the regal name Raja. With the arrival of the tiger, Malgudi Circus gains momentum. The tiger has been much publicized. He wins much applause for his remarkable performance and becomes the favourite of Captain. The tiger resigns itself to its fate in the circus and later in film-shooting until the Captain uses the metal gadget to subdue Raja. Unable to bear the humiliation anymore, tiger eventually revolts killing the Captain.

Freed and released from bonds of captivity, he walks through the streets of Malgudi and takes shelter in a school building. A hermit, later called Master by the tiger, now appears on the scene and brings the tiger under a hypnotic spell. The hermit puts some supernatural powers on the tiger and subdues him spiritually. Thus he is rescued by the hermit who opens the door of spiritual life for the ferocious tiger. He becomes his disciple and attains great spiritual heights. They spend many years happily together listening spiritual discourses on the teachings of the *Bhagwad Gita*. One day, hermit realizes that the time has come to attain *samadhi*. He entrusts the tiger to the care of a zoo and the narrative ends with a hope for them to meet again in the next life.

Narayan presents the story of a tiger in a flashback technique. From the chronological point of view the novel begins almost at the end. Its general movement is backward, from present to the past and from past to the present. The complexity of the narrative structure of *A Tiger for Malgudi* becomes apparent from its opening pages. In 'Introduction' the narratee is alerted to the fact that Narayan "wished to examine what the result would be if I made a tiger the central character in a novel"(TM 8). Like *The Guide*, in *A Tiger for Malgudi* also, Narayan employs a framing device. There are two stories in the novel, a framing story and a framed story. Raja, the protagonist, tells the story of his life in his own words. The framing story narrates Raja's present life (I shall here after refer to this primary narrative as N_1); the framed story, his past. The framing story which takes place in the present is told in the first person narration. But to tell the framed story, Narayan employs two narrational levels—first person or homodiegetic narration and third person or heterodiegetic narration. (These subordinate narratives will henceforth be referred to as N_2A and N_2B respectively.) Told in the first person, the one framed narrative N_2A depicts Raja's life since his cubhood; and the second framed narrative N_2B told in the third person narration records the events which are outside the perception of a first person narrator. So the protagonist reveals his past at intradiegetic level with the help of third person narrative voice. Thus N_1 is a primary narrative which contains N_2A and N_2B as two embedded narratives. Hence the tiger's narration of N_1 is extradiegetic in so far as the events he recounts are at a higher level than his narrating act. Yet he is also an intradiegetic narrator, for he functions as a character in the diegesis of N_1 . In N_2 , however, tiger is an intra-homodiegetic narrator, since he tells a story in which he himself is present. But due to some temporal and spatial limitations, a homodiegetic narrator cannot narrate all the events. So he takes the help of an intra-heterodiegetic narrator. Tiger can also be described as autodiegetic narrator, in terms of Genette, in so far as he is the protagonist of N_1 and N_2A both.

The intradiegetic narrative begins with an external analepsis which provides information about the tiger's past. The first intra-homodiegetic narrative, N_2A depicts Raja's life since his cubhood life in the jungle, his encounter with the tigress, his coming to Grand Malgudi Circus and then film-making, his meeting with the hermit and then coming to the zoo. The second intra-heterodiegetic narrative narrates the tiger's encounter with Captain and Madan, which occupies a larger space in the narrative. This structure is further complicated by the fact that both N_2A and N_2B frame two other narratives. N_2A frames two hypo-homodiegetic narratives—one narrated by the hermit later called Master by the tiger and the other narrated by Master's wife to the homodiegetic narrator Raja, the tiger. N_2B further frames one hypo-heterodiegetic narrative N_2B_1 , which narrates the past life of Captain; and the other hypo-homodiegetic narrative N_2B_2 , which narrates the past life of Master narrated by an intradiegetic character, Jayaraj. In other

words, these narratives are stories within intradiegetic level, thus constituting hypodiegetic narratives. Jaggu’s story is hypo-hypohomodiegetic narrative embedded in N₂B₁ recounted by a hypodiegetic character Madan, a film-maker. Thus *A Tiger for Malgudi* is a highly organized and complex structure with several narrators functioning at multiple levels of story-telling. It is the most intricately designed text interweaving tales with various discourse and debates ever written by R. K. Narayan, which can very well be understood by the following diagrams:

Narrative Structure

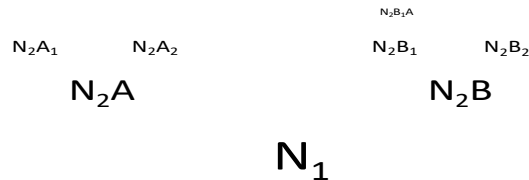


Fig.: Source: Self

Framing Device

- Framing story---Raja’s present---Narrative-I---extradiegetic homodiegetic narrator.
- Framed story---Raja’s past---Narrative-II

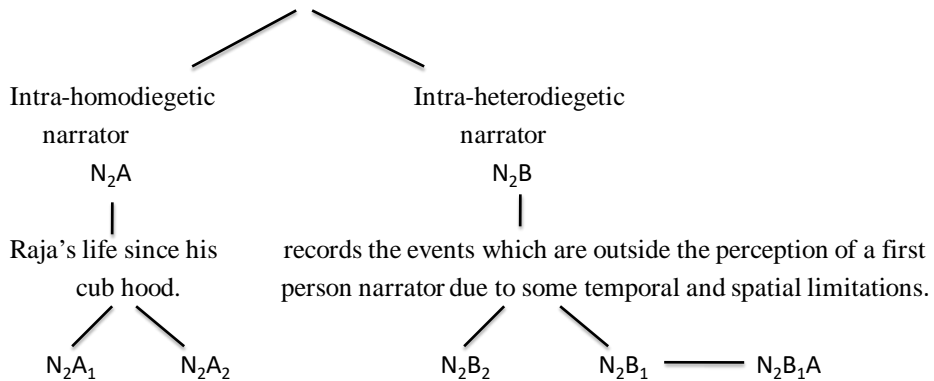


Fig.: Source: Self

Narayan is highly experimental in terms of time/space management. The manipulation of time/space continuum in *A Tiger for Malgudi* is also very complex. Like a stream of consciousness novel, there is a little chronological forward movement but a zigzag movement from the past to the present and present to the past. The movement of the narrative, instead of being temporal, is figural through space. The juxtaposition and overlapping of several different time levels is quite apparent in the early part of the narrative when Raja resorts to persuasion of his being like a human being. Mostly narratee gets confused by the frequent and sudden shift in time and narrative situation. Due to this complex treatment of time, the reader fails to understand what is being told and when. It is through the painstaking efforts that one can find out the interiorization of the narrative. The reader is asked to participate more fully. The opening pages invite the narratee to be more attentive. This shift in the time scheme and narrative voice leads to a very complicated plot. A clever mingling of past and present with the past through flashbacks makes it difficult to put things straight.

The novel begins with a few days after Raja's coming onto the zoo. The mixed analepsis on P. 11 records the events when he enters the zoo. The narratee is introduced just from the outset that the protagonist, though it is a tiger, an animal, but "is used to human company and a lot of free movement" (TM 11). It is only because of his Master whom he is still awaiting cautiously. Narayan here presents an autobiography of a tiger who recounts his past in the present. The tiger in the course of his life's journey completely changes from a brutal and ferocious beast to calm, peace-loving and intelligent with humane feelings. Thus the spiritually transformed-tiger, Raja narrates events during his jungle days from the perspective of character-tiger. This temporal and psychological gap as is said by Rimmon-Kenan, makes focalization and narration two separate entities in first person retrospective narratives (74). The spiritual transformation provides the tiger, Raja, double vision in the sense that Raja is looking back on events from a space of fifteen years. This technique also authorizes the narrator, 'narrating I' to treat the character 'narrated I' with a sort of 'condescending or ironic superiority' (Genette 252). As Raja says, "Tigers attack only when they feel hungry, unlike human beings who slaughter one another without purpose or hunger . . ." (TM 117).

It is also observed that most of the times authorial voice mingles with the narrative voice. In such cases when the narrator does not know more; an omniscient narrator capable of a moral experience is 'objectivized' (Genette 252). The enlightening observations on the life and nature of men and animals have the undertone of author. For example, on P. 25 Raja makes a general observation on human nature: "Human beings have their own theories, and it is always amusing to hear them talk about us. Such ignorance and self-assurance!" (TM 25). The last sentence is clearly an author's voice within an autodiegetic voice which takes the form of an authorial narration. Though the main bulk of the narrative has been narrated in an autodiegetic voice, yet it shifts sometimes in the middle to the heterodiegetic voice also. The same technique is used in *The Guide* where there is a deliberate shift from first person to third person narrator, but this shift is not planned consciously in *A Tiger for Malgudi*. There are various examples in the text when it is not easy to locate exactly when the shift takes place. For example the incident on P. 97 when Madan and Captain were discussing Raja's role in the film, the shift in the narrative voice is not smooth. The narratee is puzzled and cannot easily locate where the autodiegetic narration ends and heterodiegetic narration begins. Though the strategy employed by Narayan is same as in *The*

Guide but the changing angle of narration in *A Tiger for Malgudi* is not quite explicit and demands a cautious and careful reading.

In autodiegetic narration, the narrator is entirely limited to his own thoughts, feelings and perceptions. So he cannot narrate the events which fall outside his perception. The autodiegetic narrator-focalizer in *A Tiger for Malgudi* proves too much restrictive for the author because the tiger-narrator is always caged and cut off from others and remains passive. So the author introduces some other channels of information in the text. The narrative, which is also concerned with religious and philosophical issues, focuses on some other characters to narrate events. Narayan as a narrator nowhere gives any overt commentary on the behavior of the characters. He manipulates the narratee's response by resorting to a subtle and complicated symbology. He instructs and moralizes through Master. Even the past of Master is revealed through an intradiegetic narrator, Jayaraj; the Master himself and through his wife. Even at the end, Narayan as an omniscient narrator does not directly comment but maintains artistic ambivalence. The philosophical issues are touched upon by the Master in the narrative but Master's point of view is not presented directly; it is filtered through the tiger who takes help of the Master throughout the text to accomplish the narrative. For example, the events taking place in the school when the autodiegetic character-focalizer is sleeping inside the room is justified later by the narrator-tiger as: "I learnt about it later through my Master, who was in the crowd . . ." (TM 118). Similarly, the intricate thoughts of Hindu philosophy like rebirth, God, Karma etc. which are beyond the narrator's comprehension are first told to him by Master and then later narrated to the reader.

The narrative in *A Tiger for Malgudi* covers almost fifteen years of time in the life of its narrator protagonist beginning with his early childhood to adult life, in the human world of the circus and film-shooting till he becomes an ascetic. The chronological account of life for such a vast span of time is quite impossible for any writer. Hence Narayan takes up only those incidents in his life which are important for thematic development in the text. Hence Narayan resorts to summary and ellipsis to avoid the discrepancy between story time and narrative time. The tiger's journey from cubhood to adulthood is given eleven lines only which is the longest ellipsis used in the text whereas the time period which the protagonist spends in the circus covers sixty eight pages. It is perhaps because the early part of his life does not contribute to any thematic development. His cubhood is recorded as: "When I ventured out, I was chased, knocked down and hurt by bigger animals and menaced by lesser ones. I starved except when I could catch miserable creatures such as rabbits, fox cubs and squirrels, and survived somehow" (TM 13) and immediately the next line says: "Not only survived, but in course of time considered myself the Supreme Lord of the Jungle, afraid of no one, striking terror in others" (TM 13). The summary method can also be observed in the middle part. The tiger's circus life is given in expression as: "For days they kept me without food and water . . ." (TM 148); "Day after day I had to do the same thing over and over again . . ." (TM 110); "Several days had to pass before Madan could finalize the agreement. . ." (TM 86); "Thus life went on . . ." (TM 173). Not only N₂A but N₂B is also shortened and summarized through various ellipses and iterative frequency: "Madan worked night and day to transform the land he had taken on lease . . ." (TM 89), "After Dadhaji's death, Captain shifted his circus to Malgudi . . ." (TM 35). Another example of explicit ellipsis when the narrative jumps over to another time sequence is on P. 56. But the gap is later filled after two pages and the narrative once again moves back to the training period of the tiger: "Let me go back to my training period" (TM 59). Such examples of ellipsis and summary are scattered throughout the

text. In contrast to this, the novelist has also given attention on the events of one day which covers almost forty pages in the text. The tiger's elopement from Ginger field after killing the Captain to his taking shelter in the office room of the school headmaster is depicted in forty pages. Patnaik rightly says:

The allotment of this long textual space to one day's story time is made with the aim at showing the tiger's gradual change from a ferocious, violent animal to a being with a "feeling of change" coming over to him. This slot of long reading time helps draw a parallel, first between man's cruelty and the tiger's fierceness and then to the tiger's soul progress towards a force greater than the force on earth. (104)

Besides, there are certain events which are narrated more than once. For example, the tiger's fierce make up which God has chosen to give him is talked three times, and Master's morning ablutions are narrated two times—one shows the spiritual development in the protagonist and another is linked to the limited needs of an ascetic.

Discrepancy between story order and narrative order can be seen throughout the text. This difficulty arises because some of the events are beyond the perception of character-focalizer. These are later narrated to the autodiegetic narrator by other characters, thus achieving the effect of immediacy. For example, visit of the villagers in collector's office is beyond the knowledge of the character-focalizer. This problem is solved in the narrative order when the tiger says, "But I come to know of it later in my life" (*TM* 29). Similarly, tiger's visit to the city after Captain's death and school activities are narrated to him by Master, and the tiger says, "Later I learnt from my Master of the chaos that befell the city . . ." (*TM* 116). Such examples can be found throughout the text. Thus the narratee finds it difficult to maintain a balance between the narrative present and the narrative past. The return to the present while recounting one's past makes the narratee conscious of the time when the narrative present and past might coincide.

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