

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MANOJ DAS'S A TIGER AT TWILIGHT AND R. K. NARAYAN'S A TIGER FOR MALGUDI: COMBINATION OF REALITY AND FANCY

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Abstract

This present paper is a study in comparison of the two novels. In Manoj Das's A Tiger at Twilight, Heera is an animal in her words and deeds and there is none to reform and put her on the right path through proper counselling. A human being regressed into an animal. In Narayan's A Tiger for Malgudi an animal sheds its widely acknowledged nature in the presence of a hermit who has understood the meaning of life. A tiger progresses into an enlightened human being. Both the novelists adopt a unique narrative style that balances a wondrous fusion of the things real with those fancy. Manoj Das portrays the outcome of regression uninitiated. It has been broadly considered referring to everything animals do, including movement and other activities and underlying mental process. Human fascination with animal behavior probably extends back millions of year, perhaps even the times before the ancestors of the animal became human in the modern thought. Initially, animals were probably observed for practical reasons because early human survival depended on the knowledge of animal behavior.

Keywords: reality and fancy, human and animal.

“Better be prepared to accept the inevitable when it occurs. Therein lies prudence,” says Subbu, a character in A Tiger at Twilight (102). With a slight twist, when it comes to reading Manoj Das's A Tiger at Twilight and R. K. Narayan's A Tiger for Malgudi, it can be said, “Better be prepared to accept the incredible when it occurs. Therein lies a willing suspension of disbelief.” There is a wondrous fusion of things real with those of fancy to projecting the regression of a human character in Manoj Das's A Tiger at Twilight and the progression of an animal character in Narayan's A Tiger for Malgudi, two fictional presentations with a purpose. A discerning reader can understand how the real and the fanciful are transfixed by each other in the two novels. In Manoj Das the fusion is implicit while in Narayan it is explicit. The narrative technique subtly crosses the bounds of the incredible in Manoj Das and overtly in Narayan.

In A Tiger at Twilight, the magical aspects are accepted as part of everyday reality. In this novel, it is the Raja with the hangovers of his past glory and the tiger like woman, Heera who merit our attention most. In A Tiger at Twilight, who is the tiger? The man eater or the Raja who awaits the tiger or the tiger like Heera? The tiger in Manoj Das's novel is not a mystery but a living entity and a terror to the surroundings. Is it the tiger or the Raja who is at the twilight of their life? Both of them appear to be heading for it, or is it Heera at the twilight of their life? Twilight is a transitional phase but there is going to be a daybreak for Balika, the hapless princess who is poised to emerge from the dark at last.

Balika, who has been in the murderous clasp of Heera can be conceived to be representing all that is good and all that is beautiful. This angelic character breaks free at last after Heera's death and comes into the open to bask in the sunshine of love and care ensured by Dev, the narrator. So Balika too is beginning to move through a certain transitional exercise, of course, for the better.

Considering the novel's backdrop, India as a country after partition is also sailing through a crucial phase. Within the changing socio political system, the erstwhile feudal system has almost broken down and its residue is still holding on to the people's collective consciousness. However, the Raja in Manoj Das's A Tiger at Twilight is allowed to enjoy the fast declining glamour of the feudal system in terms of social hierarchy with some lingering nostalgia. He is forced to sell his Nijanpur mansion, the last piece of his royal inheritance to one Sahoo, an ordinary upcoming merchant. And with this sale, the past of the Rajas and Ranis have vanished into the unknown pages of human history. The mansion is a symbol of the beauty and graciousness and authority too of a way of life that has seen its time. Things have indeed come to an end for the Raja in India. Does the

twilight characterize the universal awareness that the old order was dying? Throughout the novel the auguries of radical change are worked out in human rather than political terms.

The Raja, though conscious of the changed socio political system, is not sincerely repentant of the follies and foibles of himself and his predecessors. Rather, somewhere in the privacy of his in one self he has been gloating over the so called achievements of his ancestors and nurturing a wish to stage a comeback and relive the bygone days. The Raja, although immobilized by the inability to face reality, still possesses more self awareness. True he manages to come to terms with the newly arisen circumstances that embarrass him a lot, but the spark or residual royal dignity and ambition often kindles him to relish his past glory secretly and, given a chance, he undertakes midnight adventures and plunges in the temple pond as a daily ritual in the dead of night with the burning desire of getting back what his lineage has lost. He rummages through the pond slush; fishing for a treasure that marks the world of illusions the Raja has forcibly pushed himself into. He is at last for a rude shock deservingly in the sanctum sanctorum of the dilapidated temple and the treasure is nothing but a heap of skeletal ruins covered with mud. "It could have been the remains of a rebel punished by an ancestor of the Raja or the remains of country lass who had inspired the passions of a prince but had endangered his honour" (TT 125).

Disappointment shatters his high hopes and it spells disaster on his psyche. He is not able to survive this mental wreck and collapses. With his death, the remaining traces of his memories, like his Nijanpur mansion in Samargarh and his only daughter, tear themselves away from him. The mansion changes hands and now it belongs to Sahoo. The only survivor of the Rajas, Balika, and the Princess too moves into a family far away from her royal image. The ex princess transits herself into the loving and caring hands of Dev, into his and trust takes place between them. Her dark and unpleasant past is waiting to break up the horizon and the rising sun will shine upon her to put her in a different light, adorning her with an aura of happiness and security. She is now on her feet after a prolonged bedridden life and walks up to horizon and Dev hopes that "She will surely be able to walk further" (TT 132). The relationship is going to metamorphose into love and she is this progressive transition.

Regressive transition in the case of the Raja and the "enigmatic" Heera started from the days of misrule and misconception, avarice and unreasonable authority and is still continuing. Both of them fall victim to and pursue their own inherent tendencies. They refuse to read the writing on the wall and pursue their interest of seeking pleasure and satisfaction in their own self styled manner. The Raja is now "not only a reminder of the inglorious colonial white rule, but also a symbol of all that was reactionary" (TT 85).

The Raja, the master of the household and legal inheritor of the royal title, shies away from Heera and why he is not able to contain Heera or at least overrule her idiosyncrasies is shrouded in mystery. It gives room for the inference that they share certain attributes. Notwithstanding that the Raja manages to put up a pragmatic stance, in his subconscious layer lie the embers of his anger and agony over his sudden slump. The embers burn bright ant midnight and force him to indulge in his nocturnal quests in the pond waters, braving the chill and muddy slush. It is a quest for something unknown or an attempt to dig into the past and bring out the skeletons in his cupboard? Balika, the sickly princess is found talking to Dev in the presence of Vimala though. Heera appears there as "an apparition", falls on Balika and slaps her. Her silent and stern stance chills Dev's blood. The Raja, father of the motherless child Balika, comes and stands mute without exhibiting even a vestige of displeasure of protest. How powerful Heera's spell on him is!

Heera is not a member of the royal blood. The Raja's father brought her from some unknown whereabouts and entrusted her to the Raja. That is how Heera entered the royal portal. Is she the collective symbol of all the misdeeds and sins committed by the rajas over the years? "You know the absurdity and whimsicality for which the Rajas were notorious" (TT 97). Is it the right turn of events that the nemesis should hang over the destiny of the royal family? Whatever it might be, Heera, herself being "formidable", can be understood to match the formidable nature of the Raja who can laugh as a tiger roars and by all means she is evil.

Her designated bridegroom had drunk himself to death for no valid reason the night before the marriage day, but apparently she found great amusement in announcing the death of her prince to the guest. The unlucky wife of the Raja, had to swallow all the poison Heera spat forth in every word she uttered, while the Raja remained indifferent. Nobody is sure about Heera's relationship with the Raja. As Vimala, a sometimes childhood nurse of Dev and now Balika's nurse, says, "The Raja knows that she is not his step sister. And yet he cares for her so much that is rather surprising". (TT 78) Vimala felt that Heera was a curse on the Raj family. Misfortune had stalked the dynasty since her arrival. Heera keeps Raja under an inexplicable spell. Heera took charge of the princess and developed a frenzied attachment to her. It is not like a child's fondness for its lifeless doll but "a boa constrictor's coiling grasp round its hypnotized prey. Heera chose to narrate to the Princess tales of horror only – of blood thirsty vampires, brutal killers, and ferocious tigers" (TT 82). The Raja is a bit humane to all appearances but, however, he often unwittingly makes a claim to be deviant and despicable.

The Raja prefers midnight adventures, masters the study of behavior of ferocious animals like the tiger and observes mysterious silence over Heera's atrocities. His own daughter is slapped and yet she looks the other way and not a word he utters to admonish Heera or at least show her the prescribed limits. A certain fancy enshrouds his character and he appears to walk clandestinely hand in hand in hand with the explicit evil force,

Heera. He is pictured as being helpless and lacking will and resolve. The Raja and Heera complement each other in a sense and warrant their inevitable end.

Heera is a chatterbox and can “unstring the Raja’s purse at her will” (TT 79). When she at last found the man of her dreams, the Prince Charming, “after months she smiled, conducted herself beautiful in her manners and speech. That was the finest phase of her life” (TT 79). Surprisingly, Heera could conduct herself as a social animal but only for a very short span part of her being. Evil smiles and it smiles only to spit venom. Excepting this finest momentary phase in her life, Heera is not better than a tiger and betrays her arrogance and audacity wherever possible. When Dev conveyed Sharma’s determination to marry her, Heera’s true colours surfaced yet again and Dev was shouted at. It was a kind roar that entire he could hear. Dev wonders: “Was it a human face at all?” (TT93) “Like a wild cat she chased Sharmaji. Poor Sharmaji continued scurrying from one corner of the hall to another even after she had given up the chase” (TT93). Her regressive transition from a any corrective steps. If at all, it is the only one, the master fails to show her the way to humility and serenity. Every human being has in him or her something animal like which can smell certain things concerning himself of herself which others cannot. Heera can smell other’s weak points and suck their spirit like vampire.

It has been told that Heera is an enigma and “the subject of many a rumour, some juicy and some fearfully weird” (TT 3). She shoots Dev’s dear doe dead and shows no signs of regret. Dev finds her “feeling as much at home in the forest as a squirrel in the bush” (TT 35). She is “much more her natural self here than in the castle”. Yes, she is a wild cat by nature. To Dev, Heera “was as alive for me as the midnight hours I paced through; as trenchantly real death preceding his physical death; she was as unforgettable as the slap she had planted on Balika’s cheek which, I felt, had struck my jowls” (TT 121).

Heera, being animal like at the beginning of the novel, get totally metamorphosed into a tiger towards the end of the novel when she suddenly, probably deliberately, appears to dare the tigress, the man eater that has been eluding the people and he Raja. The transition culminates into a transformation which is total. In the final encounter, when Dev from the machan sights the real tigress they waited “seemed transfixed by each other” (TT 119). The man eater roared and Heera gave a blood curdling shriek simultaneously. Dev is confused: “I could not distinguish between and looking at the tigress I wondered if she was not Heera” (TT 119). He admits: “I could not know the human from the beast.” (TT 119) Heera comes there as if to challenge the man eater to a duel and prove her might over the non human tigress. Established habits are difficult to change. In the process the human tigress, nature is invincible. The question why Heera finally identifies herself with the man eater may arise. No wonder, but for the physical frame, Heera and the man eater share all their qualities. Heera lacks proper guidance and has a spiritual paralysis within. In the absence of a bridled tongue and sensible advice, a human being is destined to become and animal.

At times Manoj Das’s world glitters with satire which is not plain anger but a generous irony. For example, “Story of a strange Last Journey”. It is set in a far from real world; it is akin to that of Aesop’s fables and Kipling’s tales. Jackal senior is the commissioner of the forest. There are donkeys and also three distinguished wild buffaloes, the director of the house of hyena, the secretary general of the grand circles of the owls, Madame president of al luvurva union of spotted deer, the chairman of the federation of non poisonous snakes, the honorary treasurer of genre of tiger, the private secretary (who is now under the surveillance of plain clothed foxes to the late president of the luvurva (forest). Needless to say that Manoj Das through this journey into a jungle offers an interesting commentary on the human or rather, social situation prevailing in current times.

In contrast to the human tiger, Heera in *A Tiger at Twilight*, Narayan’s *A Tiger for Malgudi* has a tiger human called Raja. Two characters in this novel represent the two broad kingdoms of earthly beings — humans and animals. The dividing line is often indistinct and human attributes of analytical ability and reason, besides the shared ones. Here are a hermit, often addressed as the Master and Raja, a tiger. The Master represents the pinnacle of striving humanity. And the tiger too is enabled by the hermit to closer to pinnacle.

Narayan in his introductory note to the novel says: “Man in his smugness never imagines for a moment that other creatures may also possess ego, values, outlook, and the ability to Man assumes he is all important, that all else in creation exists only for his sport, amusement, comfort, or nourishment” (Asani 8). His opinion conforms to the Indian spiritual quintessence: “When one is seized with a passion to understand one’s self, one has to leave behind all normal life and habitual modes of thought” (Asani 8 9).

To borrow the words of the author, the story “begins with an aged tiger lying in its cage ruminating over its past, beginning with its cub hood and wild days in the jungle, and after life in from a film shooting camp wanders away into the town. The terror stricken public attempts to get it shot, but an ascetic who appears on the scene protects and adopts it as a companion” (Asani 8). Narayan deftly fuses reality and fancy here to project the theme of progression, the process of developing from an animal state to a state of spiritual illumination. Narayan just voices the well known Indian philosophical tenet that all life is holy and that beasts and humans are not to be differentiated since the same soul permeates all living beings so that the transition from being to becoming is possible for a tiger much as for a human being.

Raja the tiger, after birth, had “a natural delusion which afflicts all creatures, including human beings” (TM 12 13): his mother would live forever to look after him. However, she just vanished from his world one evening. It is an essential truth. In his youth every creature in the jungle trembled when it sensed his approach. “Let them

tremble and understand who is the Master, Lord of this world,” the tiger thought with pride (TM 13). He could hear a path clear...” (TM 14). Such attention pleased him and seemed to add to his statue. The Master of the Memphi Hills was thus like any other member of its species. The tiger had been under another unapproachable for human beings. But soon he was deprived of his spouse and children by any creature stronger than a tiger, but later he felt that he was mistaken.

When a hermit came to his rescue, the tiger surrendered this kind of acknowledgment of his superiority, unquestioned and undisputed and the erstwhile Master of the Jungle accepted the hermit as the Master, as his guru. This chance meeting with the hermit while trying to escape from a shooting spot marked the beginning of Raja’s progressive transformation. When Raja feels guilty at reminiscing his past habit of “running after every kind of flesh indiscriminately” (TM 15), the new found master or guru, who reads his mind, tells Raja that there is nothing wrong in it, and such behaviour is a part of a tiger’s life, indispensable and unshakable. Raja says: “When I imbibed my Master’s lessons I realized that deep within I was not different from human beings and I got into their habit myself” (TM 44). As with the cursed creatures, “weighed down with the karma of their previous lives” (TM 49), he was spotted by Mr. Captian of the Creative Circus. Captain christened the tiger Raja, perhaps like a Raja who had been dethroned in the post colonial era.

Mutual communication, once the tiger felt, was one privilege left for animals: human beings could not interfere with their freedom of speech because they never suspect that animals have their own codes, signals, and idioms. Now Raja, having listened to the hermit guru, is able to transcend his usual territorial limits, both physical and psychic and become a human being and is on his way to further inward elevation and enlightenments, cutting an edge over even the so called human beings. The hermit admonishes the crowd calling Raja a brute: “Never use the words beast or brute. They’re ugly words coined by man in his arrogance. The human being thinks all other creatures are beast. The Tiger hermit recognizes that Raja is not a man eater, and shouts at the crowd: “he is no brute. No more than any of us here” (TM 130). “Who are you?” He just says, “All my life I have been trying to find the answer” (TM 118). Under the benevolent influence of the Master, Raja can now scrutinize faces, “but all faces look dull and monotonous, none radiant like my Master’s” (TM 11).

The Master assures the tiger that “life or death is in no one’s hands: you can’t die by willing or escape death by determination” (TM 142). He further teaches the tiger: “the eye is the starting point of all evil and mischief. The eye can travel far and pick out objects indiscriminately, mind follows the eye, and rest of the body is conditioned by the mind. Thus starts a chain of activity which may lead to trouble and complication, or waste of time, if nothing else; and so don’t look at anything except the path” (TM 155). The tiger is now well composed and prepared to pursue the path, no more the clear path in the jungle but the path of divinity lying ahead. The tiger feels grateful that the hermit “was trying to transform me in so many ways” (TM 158). “No relationship, human or other, or association of any kind could last forever. 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” (TM 174). These words if tiger master prepare the tiger, now no more a tiger, but a true companion of the hermit, to accept the Master’s separation with greater equanimity and he aggress to go to a zoo, where he can make hundreds of men, women and children happy.

The departing words of the Master ring optimistically for his companion from the animal kingdom: “Both of us shed our forms soon and perhaps we could meet again, who knows? So good bye for the present” (TM 176). Now the tiger is a Raja who has conquered himself. Remember he is only a tiger in appearance. He is a sensitive soul who understands life and its problems exactly as we do. As Narayan himself states, in this 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 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” (TM 10). Fusion of reality and fancy is adopted with great control over the narrative to convey a basic truth of life. Given the right atmosphere, all living beings can elevate themselves onto a certain spiritual plane where they can understand themselves. Progressive transition is possible in the right ambience and with the right guidance.

In Manoj Das’s a Tiger at Twilight, Heera is an animal in her words and deeds and there is none to reform and put her on the right path through proper counseling. A human being regressed into an animal. In Narayan’s A Tiger for Malgudi an animal sheds its widely acknowledged nature in the presence of a hermit who has understood the meaning of life. A tiger progresses into an enlightened human being. Both the novelists adopt a unique narrative style that balances a wondrous fusion of the things real with those fancy. Manoj Das portrays the outcome of regression uninitiated. The hermit’s preaching enables the tiger “to rediscover a new meaning and pattern of life in the light of the pas experiences” (Asanani 6). This inversion of nature is intriguing but satisfying.

Manoj Das uses both familiar and unfamiliar themes for his fictional works. While the unfamiliar themes reflect over man’s mysterious relationship with the natural and the supernatural world and man’s helplessness in the face of an omnipotent supernatural order, the familiar themes have strong socio political and human significance and point to man’s strengths and weaknesses. Das very often mingles and juxtaposes both the themes and uses magical realist devices and elements to offer the vision of a deeper and truer reality. Sarat Chandra Parida rightly says that the themes of Manoj Das “range from the most matter of fact happenings of everyday life to the events suggestive of supernatural”. (Web)

The stories and fictions of Das written about the time of pre independence and post independence period present the effects of transition. Born in a remote village in Odisha and born before India's Independence, he thoroughly uses in his fictions the experiences of his impressionable age and of the epoch making transitions through which the country was passing. Thus we meet in his works lively themes relating to India's passage from the colonial era to freedom, the impact of the end of the princely states and the feudal system, and the mutation of several patches of rural India into clumsy bazaars. In this context writes K. R. S. Iyengar, "The background is rural India, the changing yet changeless Indian village or the rather more quickly changing 'our small town'...not of Orissa alone, but of rural India" (Web).

In the works of Das, coincidence of the opposite elements of life, both in the foreground and in the background, develops an air of mystery and ambiguity. He attempts to show the reader the everyday world in new and unfamiliar ways and to reach what is today referred to as a hyper reality or an altered reality through his use of myths and legends, fables and folk lore's, occultism and mysticism, fairy tales, supernaturalism, spiritualism, the oral literature and many more strategies of magical realism. Elements of human experiences that influence personalities in real life are often emphasized by Das's dreams and fantasies, fancies and imaginations, feelings and emotions and subconscious and spiritual. His world has the fullness of human psyche, with its dreams and fantasies, its awe and wonder, the height of sublimity can be courted by the depth of the fictive. He proves that the reality is richer than what realists conceived it to be.

The images Das uses are real, visible and powerful, but most often the concept of reality he presents is fantastic and exaggerated. The reader of an otherwise realistic text is instantly disoriented when something otherworldly happens. But in a magical realist text this otherworldliness does not confound the reader. These texts provoke the readers into reevaluating their own individual perceptions of the world. They require a dual perspective where equal credibility must be given to the plausible, and at the same time, to the uncanny.

Like other magical realist writers, Das uses a varied range of themes forming a close resemblance between the usual and the unusual. Dream analysis and psychological studies are often used for thematic purpose by him. Das treats dream as an important theme in many of his fictional works. It fulfills his purpose of mingling reality with imagination. Dreams are known to be composed of various elements like reminiscences, remembrance and sensory stimuli. Dreams come to us within some seconds, but our subconscious presents them to us in a dramatized form. However absurd the dramatization may be, the dreamer in a magical realist text has no doubts about their authenticity. The same is true for a hypnotized person. He may respond to the most unbelievable suggestions. He may fall into some trance, become struck with the natural and the supernatural, and hallucinate things and events. This is glaringly noticeable in many of Das' works.

R. K. Narayan is a regional realist. Malgudi is 'the figment of his fictional imagination as a suitable and exotic setting for his novels and short stories. It is like Hardy's Wessex country and Nagarajan's Kedaram. In this connection, Prof. P.S. Sundram is of the opinion that, Narayan's books spring from the mud and river of Malgudi. The scene is Malgudi, but the play is a human not merely an Indian drama. In his novels and short stories, underneath the apparent change and human action the 'soul' of the place is witnessed. Just like Jane Austen he is content with his 'little bit of Ivory' as his art is of resolved limitations and conscientious exploration. As K. R. Srinivas Iyengar says, "Malgudi and Malgudi humanity are the theme of these various fictional essays and when a new novel is a jerk of the Kaleidoscope when anew engaging pattern emerges to hold our attention" (209). The familiar details of the early Malgudi are never neglected in the later works and absorbed in the story. In this delineation of Malgudi lies his greatest strength. He presents a microcosm of Indian life rarely touched by the impact of English.

Narayan's ironic fictions were as disconcerted by A Tiger for Malgudi as the frantic villagers who are confronted by Raja, the tiger. Since Raja is the hero narrator of the novel, Narayan seems to be abandoning reality for fantasy; but A Tiger for Malgudi is no traditional anthropomorphic beast fable. Drawing delicately on Hindu doctrines of reincarnation, Narayan depicts Raja as a creature with a soul, who lacks only the faculty of conversing with humans. His tale is told by those who learn to read his mind: the fictional master that saves Raja from the rest of the wryly depicted human community and the master of fiction who has conjured him up. The tale is of the overcoming of the potential of violence, with which, Raja's master observes, every creature is born. The seemingly whimsical history of a talking tiger thus expands into an ironic fable and prophecy about not just the recent troubled history of Narayan's own country, but of mankind generally. A wise and witty message from one who has aged serenely without missing the significance of a moment of his experiences, this novel should take its place among the most beatific visions of a century that has produced far more diabolical ones. It climaxes the achievement of the major Malgudi novels in depicting the soul's erratic progress from fanaticism toward the tranquil transcendence of the dusty streets of Malgudi. Comparing both the novels, the writers are almost same in their style and techniques. In A Tiger for Malgudi, R.K. Narayan shows the animal, which behaves like a human being, and understanding the human feelings and atmosphere. But in the novel A Tiger at Twilight, a human behaving like a tigress exhibiting her ferocity.

Thereby to conclude, both the novelists adopt a unique narrative style that balances a wondrous fusion of the things real with those fancy.

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