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CHARACTERIZATION IN R.K.NARAYAN'S *A TIGER FOR MALGUDI*

Dr. K.KOTESWARA RAO

T.G.T (ENGLISH), JAWAHAR NAVODAYA VIDYALAYA
KALUJUVVALAPADU (POST), TARLUPADU (MANDAL), PRAKASAM (DIST)

A.P- 523 241

Email-kkoteswararao105@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

A Tiger for Malgudi is a remarkable book which gives a realistic picture of the casual and cavalier concern of the government functionaries for the redressal of genuine grievances of common people. Even after four decades of independence the administration of the country has yet to shed its red-tapism, inefficiency and delaying tactics. The village representations to the District Collector about the tiger-menace fall flat on deaf ears. Through the description of an ascetic, Narayan reveals his firm faith in the related doctrines of *karma* and *samskara*. The doctrine of *karma* works itself out through transmigration of soul and rebirth.

Key words :- genuine, annihilation, functionaries, grievances, administration, tradition, doctrines, mythology, transmigration.

A Tiger for Malgudi is interspersed with various incidents and characters that depict the conflict between tradition and unconventionality. The lively descriptions of villagers with their characteristic terror of the primitive man and of the tiger as "a cave-dweller and jungle beast" carry the reader back to the savage times when man's foremost preoccupation was to save his race from utter annihilation at the hands of wild beasts. The village and the sheep are symbols of innocence and unalloyed simplicity of our culture. *A Tiger for Malgudi* is a remarkable book which gives a realistic picture of the casual and cavalier concern of the government functionaries for the redressal of genuine grievances of common people. Even after four decades of independence the administration of the country has yet to shed its red-tapism, inefficiency and delaying tactics. The village representations to the District Collector about the tiger-menace fall flat on deaf ears.

By giving the old ascetic a major role in his novel, Narayan retains a permanent feature of the Hindu tradition. Moreover, unlike any other ascetic of his earlier novels, the sanyasi here is no imposter or charlatan, but "one who renounces everything and undergoes a complete change of personality" is his search for self-realisation. He is a true remnant of the Indian tradition and a propagator of spiritual wisdom. It is due to his presence that *A Tiger for Malgudi* "acquires somewhat didactic tone," and especially towards the end, the novel threatens to become a treatise on Hinduism.

Through the description of an ascetic, Narayan reveals his firm faith in the related doctrines of *karma* and *samskara*. The doctrine of *karma* works itself out through transmigration of soul and rebirth. That is to say, one is born high or low, or as a human being or an animal or any other of the creatures of the lower order, all according to one's *karma*, one's deeds and conduct, in course of the cycle of births. The same belief is also known as the doctrine of *samskara*. Belief in these interrelated doctrines is well-rooted in the minds of Indian

masses and is shared by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains with minor modifications. In origin these are philosophical beliefs and “can be traced back to the earliest times in the history of Indian thought.”

Thoroughly extolled in the texts like *The Bhagvad Gita*, the *Upanishads* and the *Smritis*, these doctrines find an articulate expression in *A Tiger for Malgudi* where Narayan has seriously asserted his belief in the values popularized by Hindu mythology and the “Hindu acceptance of life and death.” The *sanyasi* explains to his companion tiger that one is happy or sad in this world because of one’s *karma* in the previous life. Sooner or later, one has to reap the fruit of one’s action. Addressing the tiger, the ascetic says:

You probably in a previous life enjoyed putting fellow beings behind bars. One has to face the reaction of every act, if not in the same life, at least in another life or a series of lives. There can be no escape from it... That’s the natural law of life, as inevitable as the ripening of a mango in its season or the fall of a withered leaf.

These words of the *sanyasi*, spoken to the tiger, also have an echo of the karma theory as explained in The Chandogya Upanishad says:

Those whose conduct here has been good will quickly attain a good birth (literally womb), the birth of a Brahman, the birth of a Kshatriya or the birth of a Vaisya. But those whose conduct here has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth of a dog, the birth of a hog or the birth of a Candala.

Similarly, while listing out the kinds of bodies that different categories of unrepentant sinners will acquire during transmigration and rebirth according to their karma, The Manu Smriti says:

In consequence of many sinful acts committed with his body, a man becomes in the next birth something inanimate, in consequence of sins committed by speech, a bird or a beast, and in consequence of mental sins he is reborn in a low caste.

Through the ascetic’s dialogue with the Municipal Chairman, Narayan reaffirms the traditional Indian belief regarding life and death.

The ascetic in *A Tiger for Malgudi* repeatedly admonishes the people for disgracing the tiger by calling it a ‘beast’. The exhortation of the *sanyasi* seems only a simplification of the following passage from the *Trihadaranyaka Upanishad*:

The Atman in Man is the very same as the vital force in the elephant, the gnat, the ant, the four quarters of the world, in short, the Atman in Man is part and parcel of the whole universe.

The Indian tradition, enshrined in the *Upanishads*, teaches the inter-dependence of man and the world including birds, beasts and vegetables. *A Tiger for Malgudi*, by evoking sympathy of human beings for a barbaric and ferocious animal like tiger, expresses Narayan’s affirmation of the Hindu belief that he, who sees all beings in his own self and his own self in all beings, has nothing to fear. Treating the tiger at par with human beings, the ascetic expects “the same response from a tiger as from any normal human being.”

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