

# Nature and Human Interaction in Selected Novels of R.K. Narayan

**Md. Jobaar Talukder**

Postgraduate Researcher, Department of English, Islamic University, Kushtia, Bangladesh  
jobaar.eng@std.iu.ac.bd | ORCID: 0000-0002-2273-7770

**Prakash Chandra Biswas**

Associate Professor, Department of English, Islamic University, Kushtia, Bangladesh  
prakashbiswas@english.iu.ac.bd | ORCID: 0009-0002-1537-0840

## Abstract

Indo-Anglian literature has often been criticized for neglecting environmental concerns as writers were predominantly focused on addressing issues related to post-independence reforms, progress, and modernization. However, R.K. Narayan emerges as a notable exception, providing a strong foundation for later Indian authors. Despite his primary emphasis on social themes, Narayan's works subtly reflect ecological awareness. In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, he critiques taxidermy, an act condemned by ecocritics for its cruelty towards animals. The novel aligns with ecocritical objectives by fostering compassion for vulnerable animals that coexist with humans and are deserving of empathy and goodwill. Similarly, *A Tiger for Malgudi* employs an anthropomorphic approach to explore the human-animal relationship. By portraying a tiger with human-like qualities, Narayan challenges the perceived division between humans and the nonhuman world. He advocates for shedding primitive attitudes such as power, greed, and dominance, urging humanity to adopt a more empathetic and respectful perspective towards their environment. Another notable work, *The Guide*, examines themes of personal transformation and societal change, while also addressing the intricate connections between nature, its response to human actions, and cultural responsibilities toward the environment. Collectively, these novels celebrate the harmony that has historically united humans, nature, and culture in a timeless bond.

**Keywords:** ecocriticism, environmental awareness, cultural responsibility, social commentary, Indian literature

Indo-Anglian fiction from the pre-1980s era is often criticized for its limited focus on environmental concerns. This period marked a transitional phase for India, as the nation sought to redefine itself from its traditional roots to embrace modernity. Influenced by Western concepts of holistic development, post-



independence India prioritized social, cultural, political, and religious challenges over ecological issues. Consequently, many writers of this time concentrated on these pressing matters rather than environmental themes. However, such criticism does not entirely hold true. Several novels and short stories from this period subtly highlight the interdependence between humanity and the natural world, suggesting that a closer look at pre-1980s literature from an ecocritical perspective can be rewarding. In contrast, post-1980s writers, influenced by postcolonial interpretations of ecocriticism, offered more explicit engagement with environmental issues, paving the way for richer analysis in this domain. Among the pioneers of Indo-Anglian literature, R.K. Narayan stands out for his significant contributions. His works not only enriched the literary landscape of his time but also laid a firm foundation for future generations. Known for his keen observations of everyday life, Narayan infused his narratives with humor and satire, making his stories relatable and engaging for readers of Anglo-Indian fiction.

To contextualize his writings within an ecocritical framework, it is essential to first explore the fundamental concepts of ecocriticism. As Glotfelty says, while ecocriticism primarily focuses on nature, not all literary works about nature qualify as ecocritical. For a piece of writing to be considered ecocritical, it must demonstrate a profound and meaningful connection between humans and the nonhuman world. Ecocritical literature does more than represent or interpret the natural environment; it also advocates for its preservation and protection from harm (Glotfelty). The evolution of ecocriticism, often described in terms of waves, is not strictly linear or time-bound but is characterized by overlapping ideas. The shift from the first wave to the second marks a transition in how nature is culturally perceived by humans. While the earlier waves focused on depictions of wilderness, landscapes, and flora and fauna, subsequent developments expanded to include urban environments and address “eco-injustices” inflicted on marginalized communities within society. Interestingly, the novels and short stories of Narayan reflect Glotfelty’s ecocritical principles, albeit coincidentally. This alignment is noteworthy because Narayan’s major works had already gained prominence before Glotfelty introduced ecocriticism as a formal literary theory in the 1990s. For instance, Narayan’s most celebrated works, including *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, *A Tiger for Malgudi*, *The Guide*, *Swami and Friends*, and his short story collections, were published between the 1930s and 1990s, predating the formal establishment of ecocriticism through Glotfelty’s seminal contributions.

R.K. Narayan’s writings inherently convey the core values of ecocriticism that match up the spirit of an artist and that of an ecologist. It is well known that

literature dives deep into the crisis of the time, and with special attention to the perspective of ecocriticism, it is noted in the twenty-first-century context that environmental unsettlement has become one of the most prominent disturbances facing dislocation of humanity. In the latter half of the twentieth century, environmental derangement reached such a catastrophic height that its severity was best realized by the continuous warning of scientists about the colossal obliteration of species. Narayan started writing during this time promptly reacting to this global crisis in his major writings. His narratives explore the intricate relationships between humans and the nonhuman world, the interdependence of culture and nature, nature's nurturing role in human life, and humanity's responsibility to protect and preserve the environment. His works consistently exhibit an ecocentric perspective, underscoring the importance of harmony between humans and their natural surroundings. To supplement his ideas concerned with ecocriticism, it can be mentioned that: "Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, xviii).

*The Man-Eater of Malgudi* operates as an allegorical tale, utilizing extended metaphor to impart moral teachings. The tale depicts the struggle between Nataraj, a tranquil printer, and Vasu, a malevolent entity akin to Shakespeare's Iago, who epitomizes the legendary figure *Bhasmasura*, representing hubris and self-sabotage eventually precipitating his demise (Shinde 13-15). The novel examines the tension between traditional values and contemporary individuality through the narrative, via Nataraj and Vasu. The novel underscores the profound Indian veneration for nature and cautions that environmental degradation eventually jeopardizes mankind figuratively illustrating the conflict between preservation and destruction, and highlighting the necessity for harmony with nature (Yashodha 69-71). The novel exposes the significance of myths in Indian literature taking tales from the *Puranas*, *Panchatantra* and *Jatakas*. The *Bhasmasura* myth and the *deva-asura* war represent the communal unconscious and are used as instruments to bridge myth with reality (Baruah 451-456). In fact, the *Ravana* and *Bhasmasura* myths used in the novel portray Vasu as a recurrent embodiment of evil in human society, especially in urbanizing spaces like Malgudi. The use of myth in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* juxtaposes ancient legends with modern life emphasizing the eternal conflict between good and evil, thereby highlighting the deeper significance of seemingly mundane life experiences (Syal 55154-55157).

Narayan's *A Tiger for Malgudi* portrays the Hindu concepts of dharma and karma which underscores the individual's endeavor to overcome ego-driven ignorance. Human arrogance, depicted through the lens of Raja-the tiger,

determines humanity as self-centered and unaware of its position within the cosmic hierarchy. The novel, thus, emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and alignment with nature as a means to transcend the cycle of existence (Atkinson, "Tradition" 8-13). Narayan deals with fundamental human problems especially man's weaknesses and also his shortcomings not only to portray a bleak, irredeemable picture intentionally but also to affirm the individual's effort to overcome his mistaken realization of himself and of the world as well for his spiritual growth (Atkinson, "R.K. Narayan's *A Tiger for Malgudi* 237-241). The themes of *A Tiger for Malgudi* reflect Upanishadic beliefs, specifically of karma and reincarnation, as seen in the Sanyasi's teachings to the tiger about the consequences of past actions. The study of the novel highlights its structure, the author's narrative style, technical mastery, humor and the significance of time in shaping events (Muthusamy and Sindhu 1-9). *A Tiger for Malgudi*, a satirical bildungsroman, interweaves allegorical Hindu philosophy with whimsical metafiction, prompting readers to reconsider narrative, textuality, and self-identity. Narayan, in fact, examines, reimagines, and satirizes human stupidity via Raja's voyage while providing a profound reflection on samsara and transformation (Dupras 186-210). The tale of *A Tiger for Malgudi* illustrates the themes of non-violence, enlightenment, and the cyclical dynamics of power and servitude via Raja's journey, from a wild cub to a circus slave and subsequently a pupil of the Sadhu. Narayan eventually champions compassion and harmony as the authentic avenues to a meaningful existence (Sudhalakshmi 131-132).

R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, in the fashion of a contemporary retelling of a Panchatantra tale, delves into the themes of self-deception and sincerity. The clear narrative style and personal experiences of the writer significantly influence the novel's central theme of enforced sainthood depicting Raju's evolution from a guide to an inadvertent spiritual leader (Barman 65-74). *The Guide* analyzes issues of identity, self-discovery, and enlightenment emphasizing how Raju's changing positions influence his path. The novel puts insights on human nature and the societal intricacies of personal development (Akter and Talukder 141-145). *The Guide* represents interaction of dualities, beliefs, and betrayals emphasizing the themes of spiritual enlightenment and self-realization, and also by criticizing society conventions, Narayan's employment of humor and the equilibrium between appearance and truth (Biswas 1-6). Issues of tradition, modernization and personal growth are dealt with in Raju's transformation from tour guide to spiritual leader, focusing on identity, redemption, and societal influences. Thus *The Guide* underscores the conflict between traditional and contemporary norms, providing insights into Narayan's critique of Indian culture and ethical quandaries (Yadav and Srivastava 365-368). *The Guide* again examines Raju's duality as a self-serving individualist and a redeemer, highlighting

the novel's principal theme of spiritual fulfillment as well as depicting suffering and self-discovery as crucial for achieving true identity and genuine selfhood (Mondal 74-85). *The Guide* also analyzes the marginalization of women within a patriarchal society and underscores the transformative potential of economic independence through Rosie who exercises her agency through her education, talent, and dance, notwithstanding societal disdain and patriarchal limitations, ultimately becoming an empowered individual who challenges conventional expectations (Promila 349-354). The novel reflects the societal changes in postcolonial India emphasizing the identity crisis experienced by the characters, caught between indigenous traditions and Western influences. The quintessential postcolonial dilemma in *The Guide* has been exposed through the dialogues on cultural adaptation and self-identity (Singla 1-25). *The Guide*, finally, explores the contrasting representations of Rosie, a hybrid modern woman, and Raju's mother, the traditional figure, within the discourse of nationalism reinforcing the tension between tradition and modernity. Rosie's characterization as a corrupting influence, in fact, reflects racial and gendered biases, ultimately reinforcing nationalist ideologies (Silva 1-6).

The background study shows that research on R.K. Narayan's selected novels has been done partially and in fragments, creating an important window to explore his works from a new angle. This paper, therefore, explores R.K. Narayan's selected novels from a human and nature interactional perspective that adds value to existing research. This qualitative study focuses on textual analysis of Narayan's selected novels, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, *A Tiger for Malgudi*, and *The Guide*, through an ecocritical lens. The primary method is close reading, identifying themes related to nature, animals, and human-environment interactions, with an emphasis on ecological ethics, anthropocentrism, and environmental stewardship. The research utilizes an ecocritical framework propagated by Cheryll Glotfelty, William Rueckert and Greg Garrard drawing on key concepts such as the rejection of dualistic thinking and the ethical treatment of nature. Additionally, a comparative analysis with other Indian authors and global ecocritical narratives highlights Narayan's unique contribution to eco-conscious literature. Secondary sources, including ecocritical theory and literary criticism, support the interpretation of Narayan's works, while the study concludes by synthesizing findings to demonstrate how his fiction subtly critiques societal attitudes toward nature and advocates for a more harmonious relationship with the environment.

*The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961) is regarded as one of R.K. Narayan's most accomplished and widely read novels, shedding light on the practice of taxidermy, a brutal act that has consistently faced strong criticism from ecocritics. Within the

framework of ecocriticism, the Straussian concept of dualism, which positions humanity as superior to nature, is strongly rejected. This school of thought seeks to challenge anthropocentric attitudes and foster empathy toward nonhuman beings. Narayan's novel aligns with this aim by encouraging compassion for the vulnerable and trusting animals that coexist with humanity and deserve benevolent care. In fact, ecocriticism, as a study of human-nature interaction, puts emphasis on the study ecology and literature. The basic law of ecology shows that everything is linked with everything else and by applying this law it is possible to bring ecology and criticism together in a greater and expanded reality. Without acknowledging and acting upon this fact, it is quite impossible to address the probable environmental dangers through literary texts. So, it has been a bounden duty for the literary critics and artists to integrate ecological aspects with literature to teach the readers the equilibrium state in the physical environment. Otherwise, literature will lose the applicability and hence the void between literature and reality will be increased ceaselessly. For this reason, William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" suggests the mingling of and relationship between literature and ecology. Rueckert emphasizes on the incorporation of environmental issues to teaching, writing, and criticizing literature. Mentioning this as power, Glotfelty says:

A poem is a stored energy, a formal turbulence, a living thing, a swirl in the flow .... Poems are verbal equivalent of fossil fuel (stored energy), but they are a renewable source of energy, coming, as they do, from those ever generative twin matrices, language and imagination. (108)

In the narrative, Ramasamy, a forestry officer, boasts of having killed eighteen elephants and sixty tigers, claiming these acts were necessary to protect humans from the dangers posed by these wild animals. This justification, rooted in the belief that human life is inherently more valuable than that of other creatures, reflects an anthropocentric worldview. Such an attitude, which prioritizes human supremacy and dominance over nature, is strongly criticized within ecocriticism. Glotfelty in this regard says:

all the oceans of our home are slowly being contaminated by all the pollutants disposed of in modern communities – even what we try to send up in smoke – then we will soon lose the environment in which we write and teach. (112)

Contrary to this view, ecocriticism stands in favor of a harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world, rejecting actions like Ramasamy's that perpetuate human dominance over other species. Rueckert opines that ecology

does have greater coalition to science than literature and for this reason there is a gap between literature and ecology, poetry and science. Glotfelty exposes the view of Rueckert regarding this two and considers them as “that old pair of antagonists” (107) and he advocates for the demolition of this antagonism.

Another significant character in the novel, Vasu, represents cruelty and disruption. An outsider and a taxidermist, his presence brings chaos to the life of Nataraj, the protagonist. Vasu’s unethical practice of taxidermy not only tarnishes Nataraj’s hard-earned reputation but also negatively impacts his Printing Press, which serves as his primary livelihood. Through Vasu’s actions, Narayan critiques the exploitation of nature and its detrimental impact on both individuals and society. Through the character of Vasu, R.K. Narayan critiques the modern human tendency to exploit the animal world for personal profit. While progress, whether on an individual or collective scale, is generally desirable, an ecocritic emphasizes the toll such development often takes on the nonhuman world. By embodying greed and disregard for ethical values in the character of Vasu, Narayan conveys a powerful message that contemporary society frequently prioritizes material gain over moral principles, with environmental exploitation serving as the primary vehicle for so-called development. This unchecked materialism, a recurring subject of ecocritical interrogation, underscores humanity’s failure to establish sustainable alternatives that do not come at a significant ecological cost. Vasu’s character exemplifies this exploitation vividly. He chillingly calculates the monetary value of a dead elephant, stating:

Has it occurred to you how much more an elephant is worth dead? You don’t have to feed it in the first place. I can make ten thousand out of the parts of this elephant—the tusks, if my calculation is right, must weigh forty pounds that is eight hundred rupees. I have already an order for the legs, mounted as umbrella stands, and each hair on its tail can be sold for twelve annas for rings and bangles; most women fancy them and it is not for us to question their taste. (Narayan, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* 132-133)

Vasu fills his rented room at Nataraj’s printing press with the remnants of dead animals, prompting Nataraj to lament: “Stag-heaves, tiger-skins and petrified feathers were going to surround me forever and ever” (Narayan 58). This killing of the animals, from the viewpoint of ecocriticism, highlights and challenges the destruction of the natural environment. Rooted in the principle of reciprocity, this theory asserts that the environment nurtures humanity and, in return, demands care and respect. Narayan integrates this principle into *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, contrasting Vasu’s anthropocentric actions with the resistance of characters like Nataraj, Shastri, and Rangi. Even the forestry officer voices concern

about the disappearing wildlife stating: “A lot of game has been vanishing from our reserves and even tigers disappear from the blocks” (Narayan 78).

*A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983) stands out for its anthropomorphic portrayal, which adds a unique dimension to Narayan’s ecocritical narrative. For ecocritics, the act of humanizing a nonhuman character – common in fables – is a progressive step toward dissolving the long-standing division between the human and nonhuman realms. This novel underscores the urgent need for humanity to shed its primal egos of power, dominance, and greed, and adopt a more empathetic view of the environment. Raja, the tiger protagonist who exhibits human-like emotions, thoughts, and actions, delivers this profound message at a time when wildlife continues to suffer from human exploitation through poaching, hunting, and poisoning, often in pursuit of commercial gains. The story begins with Raja’s tragic loss of his mate and cubs to hunters, an event that triggers his instinctive response of killing humans and domestic animals near the Memphi forest. Narayan here writes about the brutality of Raja who “just raised a fore paw, 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” (114). Such actions align with Darwinian notions of the survival of the fittest and ecologists’ views on the balance of ecosystems. From an ecocritical perspective, Raja’s retaliation can be seen not as cruelty but as a natural reaction to human encroachment on his territory. History repeatedly illustrates that when humanity disrupts the natural order, the repercussions inevitably follow. The violent clash between humans and Raja is a poignant metaphor for the unintended consequences of human interference in nature.

However, the novel delves deeper into critical issues like poaching, a recurring theme in ecocriticism. Raja, labeled as a “man-eater,” is eventually captured by the “Captain,” a circus ringmaster who exploits him for profit. Raja is subjected to harsh treatment, starved, trained, and made to perform for audiences. Later, a filmmaker seeks to feature him in a movie, further commodifying the tiger. By narrating Raja’s capture, exploitation, and commodification, Narayan vividly illustrates human beings’ tendency to exploit nature for personal gain. The novel challenges readers to reflect on a world where greed is rationalized as necessity and ethical boundaries are crossed in the name of profit. This cornucopian view of gaining profit by exploiting other organisms in the ecosystem leads the exploiters towards capitalistic gain. This type of notion is the outcome of the naked clutch of capitalism and colonialism as well. Capitalism, colonialism, and neocolonialism always demand virgin land to dominate its people and the supply of unlimited raw materials to produce capital. To tackle this brute reality of capitalism, colonialism, and neocolonialism, ecocritics place emphasis on politicized reading practice as Greg Garrard states:

The need not only to “think globally” but to think about the globe involves a politicized reading practice more akin to social ecology, postcolonialism and cultural studies than to deep ecology. Such a practice considers constructions of the Earth provided by economics, politics and biology, as well as literature, TV and film. (183)

So, Garrard’s statement makes it evident that the relationship between literature and the physical environment should be critically analyzed from political, economic, biological, historical, and philosophical perspectives. In *A Tiger for Malgudi*, the contrast between human greed and environmental ethics emerges as a central conflict in the narrative. The poachers, the Captain, and the filmmaker disregard moral and ethical considerations, not out of need but driven by avarice. Narayan leaves readers grappling with this tension: humans prioritize survival and advancement but also speak of environmental ethics that call for compassion and stewardship toward the rapidly dwindling natural world. *A Tiger for Malgudi* compels us to examine this moral rift and seek harmony between human development and ecological preservation. The significance of unity, togetherness, love and compassion for each other as well as fellow feeling is highly focused here through the speech of the Jackal:

If you cannot discover a reason to be enemies, why don’t you consider being friends? How grand you could make it if you joined forces – you could become supreme in his jungle and the next and the next; no one will ever try to stand up to you expect a crazy tusker whom you could toss about between you two ... if you combined you could make all the jungle shake. (20)

The Jackal’s message is clear: enmity leads everyone to destruction because enmity among human and nonhuman entities creates severe violence only leading to anarchy, bloodshed, and death.

The episode involving Raja in the town of Malgudi vividly exposes the troubling reality of anthropocentrism. During his exploration of Malgudi, Raja finds refuge in the office of the school headmaster, where he becomes a victim of human panic and prejudice. Trapped and frightened, Raja is far more distressed than the excited crowd, which delights in labeling him as a “beast” or a brute. Human beings’ deep-seated bias against the nonhuman is starkly revealed when a schoolteacher suggests, “Now that this brute is safely locked up, we must decide” (Narayan 117). Some members of the terrified crowd, driven by curiosity, gather to scrutinize Raja, seeking validation for their perceived superiority by contrasting themselves as “civilized” beings against the “wild” tiger. The hunter Alphonse is summoned to kill Raja, underscoring the anthropocentric ideology that justifies

dominance over nonhuman life. Through this sequence, R.K. Narayan critiques the dualistic worldview reinforced by hierarchical structures of power. In this view, Raja, as a tiger and therefore a beast, is regarded as nonhuman, violent, and inferior, while the human crowd, by contrast, considers itself humane, peaceful, and unquestionably superior. Narayan challenges this anthropocentric bias by introducing Raja's reflective moments with the Master, who leads him to safety. When asked by the Master about his perception of god, Raja envisions: "God must be an enormous tiger, spanning the earth and the sky, with a tail capable of encircling the globe, claws that could hook on the clouds and teeth that could grind the mountain, and possessing, of course, immeasurable strength to match" (Narayan, *A Tiger for Malgudi* 158).

This poignant moment allows Raja to express a conception of divinity that mirrors his own identity, dismantling the hierarchical boundaries imposed by human superiority. The scene is a profound critique of humanity's disregard for the nonhuman world, offering a compelling ecocritical perspective on the need for coexistence and mutual respect within the natural order. Humans are often granted the authority to eliminate the beast, regardless of its innocence or gentleness. This dichotomy between human and nonhuman life obstructs the possibility of establishing true coexistence between the human and natural worlds. The environmental crises human beings face today demand harmony and balance, as only such an approach can offer hope for a secure future. So, to raise consciousness is the most important task of ecocriticism (Glotfelty xxiv) and the ethical perspective on the environment should stand in favor of all the species, not only of humans (Glotfelty 15-26). The same scenario is observed in the novel *A Tiger for Malgudi* when Raja's life hung in the balance of Alphonse's decision, it was Master, a saintly figure, who intervened. Master not only rejected the derogatory view expressed by the school teacher but also defended the tiger, saying, "He is no brute . . . No more than any of us" (Narayan 136). By leading Raja safely away from the crowd's outrage, the Master exemplified the possibility of harmony between man and beast, as the two grew closer, moving together through the world.

R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) is a timeless bestseller, celebrated for both its narrative excellence and its deep exploration of human transformation within a changing socio-economic context. One of the novel's most profound elements is its portrayal of nature, particularly the ways in which nature interacts with and impacts humanity. Viewed through an ecological lens, the fictional town of Malgudi becomes a bioregion that sustains both human and nonhuman life. Narayan consistently references the river Sarayu, the Memphi forest, and other natural elements to highlight the interdependence of all life forms, with humans

relying on their environment for survival. Regarding Malgudi, R.S. Singh in his book *Indian Novel in English* writes:

Malgudi is not only the microcosm of India in its multifarious mood but it is also the real hero of his novels, Swami, Chandran, Ramani, Krishnan, Sampath, Sriram, Raju, Vasu, and Mali – all these characters are typically Malgudian, therefore, Indian, despite their angularities and oddities. (127)

Nature in *The Guide*, indeed, teaches vital life lessons: stoicism, resilience, and adaptability. The protagonist, Raju, is shaped by his early years in close connection with nature. While his mother was occupied with household chores and his father with the family shop, Raju often spent hours under the shade of a tamarind tree, interacting with birds and monkeys. This connection to nature becomes a formative aspect of his character. Narayan describes Raju's childhood moments in vivid detail in *The Guide*, illustrating his harmonious relationship with the natural world:

With that I was off to the shade of a tamarind tree across the road. It was an ancient spreading tree, dense with leaves, amidst which monkeys and birds lived, bred and chattered incessantly, feeding on the tender leaves and fruits. Pigs and piglets came from somewhere and nosed about the ground, thick with fallen leaves, and I played there all day. (13)

In these early years, Raju finds solace and companionship in nature, which becomes integral to his development and understanding of life. Raju's return to his adaptive nature, long suppressed during his period of aimless wandering, becomes evident as he sits on the granite slab by the riverbank near Mangal, Velan's village. His acceptance of his new role, initially as a man of wisdom and later as a Swami revered by the villagers, reflects his ability to reconnect with the natural world around him. There is no clear boundary between the living and non-living elements in this environment. As the novelist describes:

He started the count from above a fringe of Palmyra trees on his left hand side ... he suddenly realized that if he looked deeper, a new cluster of stars came into view .... He felt exhausted. He stretched himself on the stone slab and fell asleep under the open sky. (17)

The introduction of drought in *The Guide* serves as a pivotal thematic device, driving the plot forward and contributing to Raju's character development. However, it also adds a deeper layer to the novel's ecocritical discourse. Drought, as a natural phenomenon, cannot be entirely blamed on nature's wrath. Modern humanity's utilitarian approach over the centuries has played a significant role

in the ecological imbalances leading to disasters such as famine, drought, and the extinction of species. Human actions, including the reckless use of harmful technologies, chemical pollution, deforestation, overuse of fertilizers, and thoughtless construction, have disrupted ecosystems. This theme aligns with modern ecocritical concerns, and while the novel touches on this issue in a small way, it nonetheless highlights its importance. Amidst the drought that affects Mangal and surrounding areas, the villagers, who seek Raju's wisdom, find it increasingly difficult to concentrate on his words. Their minds are preoccupied with the devastating consequences of the lack of rain. Instead of focusing on his discourse, they crowd around him, expressing their anxieties:

People listened to discourses and philosophy with only half interest. They sat around, expressing their fears and hopes. "Is it true, Swami, that the movements of aeroplanes disturb the clouds and so the rains don't fall? Too many aeroplanes in the sky." "Is it true, Swami, that the atom bombs are responsible for the drying up of the clouds?" (Narayan, *The Guide* 92)

The villagers' fear that aircraft flights may contribute to the drought is not merely a fictional element introduced by Narayan but reflects a real concern of the time. In the forties and fifties, during the height of the Second World War and the Cold War, the widespread use of aircraft and the fear surrounding atomic bombings likely heightened such anxieties. Moreover, large-scale disasters such as drought have a profound effect on biodiversity, leading to the untimely death of both plant and animal life. Wild animals, such as crocodiles, along with domesticated creatures like cattle and sheep, endure the hardships caused by the drought. The villagers, deeply concerned about the death of these animals, often discuss it among themselves. The third-person narrator presents the situation vividly: "Cattle were unable to yield milk; they lacked the energy to drag the plough through the furrows; flocks of sheep were beginning to look scurvy and piebald, with their pelvic bones sticking out" (Narayan, *The Guide* 93). The villagers' concern for the suffering of animals hints at the possibility of a harmonious coexistence, which ecocritics advocate for as an ideal state. According to their views, mutual care and respect for all living beings could offer hope in addressing environmental disorders.

The concept of "delocalization," introduced by the anthropological school of ecocriticism, acknowledges the impact of globalization, driven by human mobility, tourism, economic changes, and the development of transportation and communication. One result of this is the alteration of indigenous practices due to the influence of migrants or the blending of these practices to form new ones. The arrival of railways in Malgudi, emblematic of Western culture, ushers

in significant socio-economic changes. Tourism, previously unknown, begins to thrive, and businesses like hotels and guided tours spring up. Raju, once a simple shopkeeper, grows wealthier as a tourist guide, while Gaffur sees new opportunities in his rickety vehicle. However, this progress comes at a cost. Large portions of land are sacrificed for the necessary infrastructure, causing the destruction of local biodiversity. The development of progress and the degradation of the environment go hand in hand, as the former pushes ahead while the latter suffers. Narayan captures this tension in the following lines:

One fine day, beyond the tamarind tree, the station building was ready. The steel tracks gleamed in the sun; the signal posts stood with their red and green stripes and their colourful lamps; and our world was neatly divided into this side of the railway station and that side. (*The Guide* 37)

Exclusive economic classes emerge in Malgudi, making a living by catering to tourists' desires or working in various capacities at the railway station. Raju's financial success and his relationship with Marco and Rosie allow him to become "Sanskritized." The term "Sanskritized" comes from sociologist M. N. Srinivas's idea of "Sanskritization." It means the way lower or middle class groups try to raise their social status. They do this by following the customs, values, and lifestyle of higher castes (Srinivas 6). In the novel, Raju goes through this kind of change. His link with Marco's learning and Rosie's refined art shapes him. He starts to copy their tastes and manners. He also learns new social behaviors linked to higher prestige. His rise is not only about money. It is also about culture. The railway system gives him new chances. With these, Raju steps into a more respected identity in society. The changes in Malgudi are largely attributed to the introduction of the railway system. Krishna Sen aptly captures this transformation when he observes:

The main signifier of the alien culture in the novel is, of course, the railway. In the novel, the railway, with its connotation of mobility, is the marker of a new social economy that subverts the fragile equilibrium signified in the co-presence of the missionary and pyol schools. (112)

For Marco, Rosie, and others who see the Memphi forest as a charming wilderness ready to captivate those in search of beauty, the forest holds aesthetic appeal. However, people like Raju and Gaffur view the forest differently, adding a utilitarian value to it. They see nature as a resource to exploit for financial gain. This colonial perspective – of man as master over nature, using it for his benefit while nature is subjected to exploitation – has long posed a threat to the environment's well-being. Although the Memphi forest is physically untouched, the actions of the guide and the taxi driver reflect an attitude of indifference

to its preservation. This dilemma underlines the paradox of tourism; while it boosts the economy, improves infrastructure, and fosters cultural exchange, it simultaneously exacerbates the damage to the environment. Tourism, in Malgudi, is facilitated by the railway, which connects the town to the rest of India. The Memphi Hills become a focal point for tourists, where Rosie admires the scenery, Marco is fascinated by the ancient cave paintings at Peak House, and Raju and Gaffur see it merely as an opportunity to earn money. The novel reflects how human needs shape the value of nature, with natural surroundings being altered for human use. As Narayan describes the scene:

The Peak House was perched on the topmost cliff on Memphi Hills – the road ended with the house; there was a glass wall covering the north veranda, through which you could view the horizon a hundred miles away. Below us the jungle stretched away down to the valley, and on a clear day you might also see the Sarayu sparkling in the sun and pursuing its own course far away. This was like heaven to those who loved wild surroundings and to watch the game, which prowled outside the glass wall all night. (75)

In addressing concerns about Indo-Anglian fiction's insensitivity to environmental issues, Narayan's novels, therefore, provide a counterpoint. Man and culture cannot thrive in isolation from nature, and similarly, a writer cannot ignore the world around him. The novels of Narayan celebrate the theme of harmony that has historically bound man, nature, and culture. Furthermore, the era during which he wrote these works had already experienced the damaging effects of industrialization, which placed immense pressure on the environment to sustain unchecked economic growth. Human greed and the pursuit of fulfillment through environmental destruction are, thus, central themes in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, *A Tiger for Malgudi*, and *The Guide*, which can be seen as a bioregion, with its flora and fauna intricately woven into the fabric of the town's life.

R.K. Narayan's novels, especially *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, *A Tiger for Malgudi*, and *The Guide*, explore the complex relationship between humans and nature. In his stories, nature is not just a background but an active force that influences human life and behavior. In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, the elephant, Kumar, represents the wild and sometimes destructive power of nature. The story shows that it is human greed and arrogance, embodied by Vasu, that upset the natural balance, leading to conflict and tragedy. The battle between Vasu and the elephant symbolizes humanity's desire to control nature and nature's refusal to be dominated. In contrast, *A Tiger for Malgudi* presents a more harmonious view. The tiger, Raja, symbolizes primal instincts, yet through his interaction with the sage, he changes and learns to coexist peacefully with humans. The sage's

empathy, patience, and non-violent approach offer a model for understanding and respecting nature. Similarly, *The Guide* highlights how the natural world shapes human destiny. Raju's transformation from a tourist guide to a spiritual guide is closely connected to the river and the drought-stricken land. His ultimate sacrifice to bring rain to the village reflects a deep spiritual communion with nature, showing that human life and well-being are intertwined with the environment.

Overall, Narayan's novels critique the human-centered worldview and stress the importance of living in harmony with nature. From the warning against human arrogance in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, to the vision of coexistence in *A Tiger for Malgudi*, and the spiritual connection in *The Guide*, his works urge readers to consider the moral, ecological, and spiritual consequences of their actions. They encourage respect, empathy, and responsibility toward the natural world. Narayan's stories provide rich material for ecocritical study and remind readers that human destiny depends on their relationship with the environment. Future research could explore the Malgudi landscape as a character and compare Narayan's treatment of nature with other postcolonial Indian writers. An ecocritical approach can reveal the environmental awareness embedded in his work and highlight the timeless message that harmony with nature is essential for personal, societal, and ecological well-being.

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