

GANDHIJI'S VISION EXHIBITED IN THE NOVELS OF R.K. NARAYAN**M. Sudha****ABSTRACT**

Gandhiji, a socio-political figure, struggled for the sake of India's development and independence. He is an immense source of writing and has influenced different disciplines and many writers from different fields like history, politics, philosophy, literature, sociology, and so on. He served as a central figure for their writings. Gandhiji not only struggled for India's independence but also taught the people of India to love one another and advised them to show bitterness towards non-violence. In this principle of non-violence Gandhiji introduces technique of resistance to evil and untruth. His Satyagraha is inspired by boundless love and compassion. It is opposed to sin and evil. Gandhiji was the speaker of truth and he does not like falsehood. These principles of Gandhiji were very well exhibited in the novels of R.K. Narayan. One or in another way the characters of the novels explore Gandhiji himself or his views. For example, in a novel called *Waiting for Mahatma* Gandhiji, himself has participated as a character. Bharati an important personality in the novel serves as a disciple of Gandhiji. The famous novels of R.K. Narayan were *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Waiting for Mahatma* (1955), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) were all set in Narayan's imaginary town, Malgudi. It is not a place but an experience of soil and soul of India. The paper aims at analysing the novels of R.K. Narayan on this backdrop and it concludes that his novels serve as a panorama for the future generation, to know Gandhi as a whole.

The period between 1920 and 1947 is noted for spreading Gandhian philosophy in Indian Writing in English. M.K. Naik, an eminent critic regarded this period as "the Gandhian whirl world" (Naik 114) with an unprecedented awakening of "a distinctive national unity" (Naik 116). "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em." (Twelfth Night Act II Scene5) This is very applicable to Gandhiji. He is born and brought in a normal background, but his principles gained from his experience made him a great and best individual.

He is an immense source of writing and has influenced different disciplines and many writers from different fields like history, politics, philosophy, literature, sociology, and so on. All throughout his life he believed and lived as a man of ideals. This was instructed and educated to all the

individuals of India, through the writings of various writers. R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and also many other Indian writers explore Gandhiji's view in their writings. The main thing which attracts these writers to write about Gandhiji is that, truth, satyagraha, simplicity, and last but not the least his non- violence. These Gandhian philosophies were well established by R.K. Narayan, one of the best writers of Indian English. His characters in the novels, namely, *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) and *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) one or in another way exhibits Gandhiji himself or his vision.

The protagonists or the characters of these novels were rooted and flourished in the Indian ethics and Indian philosophy. And they are in search of truth who exhibits Gandhiji, a man of truth in their own particular manner. When the characters failed it is because they haven't followed Gandhism and if they were hailed, it is all because of following Gandhism. Like Gandhism, Malgudi, an imaginary town plays an important role in Narayan's novels. Most of the novels of Narayan are set in Malgudi. Malgudi is not a place but an experience of soil and soul of India. It is a town which combines traditionalism and modernism. William Walsh correctly asserts that, "The Mysore of his personal life, the Malgudi of his novelist's life, becomes an intense and brilliant image of India itself. What happens in India happens in Malgudi and whatever happens in Malgudi happens everywhere." (Walsh 59).

R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* is a systematized attack on Indian cultural values. Swaminathan is a protagonist of the novel. He was educated in Albert Mission School where Hindu Gods and their rituals were considered as an object of laughter. Swami hates such attitude so he wants to quit from the school in protest. Swaminathan and his friends show aversion towards western culture. They were struggling to protect the Indian culture. Gandhi wrote in *Young India*, "My resistance to Western civilization is really a resistance to its indiscriminate and thoughtless imitation based on the assumption that Asians are fit only to copy everything that comes from the West." (Gandhi 1928).

Gandhi advocated for the use of khaddar clothes, so Narayan makes use of the situation to keep up the spirit in this novel. When Swaminathan wears a foreign cap on his head, someone states that, "Young man, do you want our country to remain in eternal slavery?" (Swami 97). Hearing this, he felt ashamed and removed the cap and throws it into the fire with a thought of saving his country. Burning of "foreign cloth" in the novel is the representation of Gandhian ideology and the friendship

of Swaminathan with a Muslim boy Akbar Ali “a nice Mohammedan” (Swami 108) is symptomatic of communal harmony.

Chandran is the protagonist of the novel *The Bachelor of Arts*. He is also concerned with the misrepresentation of the Indian history by the imperialists for their own selfish ends. He stood against all sort of injustice, untruth, slavery and the demolition of Indian history by the British rule. Another interesting member of the novel is Raghavachar, the professor of history. He is also a protestant like Gandhiji and says, “If he were asked what the country needed most urgently, he would not say self- government or economic independence but a classified, purified Indian history”(The Bachelor of Arts 37)

Krishnan is the hero of the novel *The English Teacher*. A person who rebels against English educational system is Krishnan. He is an enemy of those people who are interested in westernisation. Western educational system in India subsequently leads to the alienation of an individual from his cultural roots. Michel Pousse has pointed out that “Narayan has stressed three points which stand out in Gandhi’s philosophy, namely, life is a never ending quest for truth, and secondly, individual peace can only be achieved within a well-defined social context and thirdly the reasons for the use of English language by Gandhi as means of communication” (Pousse 4).

In the beginning of the novel, he voices his disagreement with Mr. Brown, the Principal of Albert Mission College about the purity of English language and its uses of the vowels. He regards English teaching as “literary garbage” and the curse of English teacher is to teach the literary garbage as “the paid servants of the department” (*The English Teacher* 171). Like Gandhi, he stresses on the importance of mother-tongue education. He considers British colonial educational system was going to attack the whole century of false education so he wants to resign the job. Instead of feeding the false education he wants to search his innermost soul like Gandhian philosophy of self-realization and he wants to love his motherland like a true citizen of India.

At the time when Gandhiji was assassinated he became the theme of each and every writer of India. “Waiting for Mahatma” was written after seven years of Gandhiji’s assassination. Sriram, the protagonist of the novel stands as an example for an average Indian middle class family. In this novel Gandhiji appeared as a character. Sriram is an orphan who lived a content life with his grandmother in Malgudi. Narayan gives an account of his colourless life: “All day he lounged on this canvas seat and looked at the ceiling or read a tattered novel borrowed from the municipal library. It was an

unruffled, quiet existence, which went on without a break for the next four years, the passing of time being hardly noticed in this scheme – except when one or the other of the festivals of the season turned up.” (*Waiting for Mahatma* 21-22).

Sriram’s life passed meaningfully only after she met Bharati, a disciple of Gandhiji. Sriram fell in love with Bharati who serves as a driving force for Sriram to participate in the Gandhian camp. But once Sriram finds an entry, the romantic relation between him and Bharati transforms into a new relationship. According to K. R. S. Iyenger: “In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, the theme is apparently the Bharati-Sriram romance which, however, gains a new dimension in the background of their common allegiance to the Mahatma.” (Iyenger 372).

Sriram stays in Gandhi’s camps and shares the room with Gorpad, a mature volunteer who adds new dimension to his knowledge and highlights the aims and objectives of the Gandhian movement. Travelling with Gorpad in famine stricken areas, Sriram is initiated into the spirit of Gandhian movement and ideology. Gandhiji prefers to live in an untouchable quarters than in luxurious apartments. He is a man who gives importance to humanity so he shows love towards those living in that area. Narayan portrays Gandhiji’s love towards his fellow human in an effective manner. Though initially Bharati serve as a driving force for Sriram, once he know about Gandhiji and getting attracted towards his ideals Sriram becomes a true disciple of Gandhiji like Bharati.

As becoming the disciple of Mahatma, Sriram renounces the luxurious lifestyle. He preferred to stay with Harijans when he visits the village for campaign. But once Sriram came in contact with Gandhiji, he inspired towards the Gandhian ideology and philosophy of life knowingly or unknowingly. On the eve of his departure from Malgudi, Gandhiji says to Sriram: “Spin and read Bhagwad Gita and utter *Ram Nam* continuously, and then you will know what to do in life” (*Waiting for Mahatma* 96).

Sriram attains the height of a true *Satyagrahi* later in the novel. Influenced by Gandhiji and Bharati, Sriram’s fancy and fanatic notions are transformed into fair, firm ideas. Bharati is the true exponent and believer of Gandhism in the novel. An orphan, brought up by Gandhi, she has encapsulated in essence the teachings of Gandhi, be it a call to court arrest, or to look after the orphaned riot-victims, she does her duty with utmost devotion and dedication. Unlike Sriram, she is in absolute control of her emotions and situations. At a young age, she has acquired self-discipline, self-denial and self-control. She marries Sriram only with Bapu’s blessings. Sriram and Bharati

represent two facts of Gandhism. William Walsh praised "Waiting for the Mahatma" as "a rare piece of triumph" in which the genius of Mahatma is exquisitely projected (Walsh 86-94).

Like Bharati in "Waiting for Mahatma" there is a character in "The Vendor of Sweets" Jagan, a protagonist of the novel represents Mahatma Gandhi. In the opening of the novel he says to his nephew, "Conquer taste and you will have conquered the self." (The Vendor of Sweets 31). He is a vendor of pure ghee sweets. He is a man who gives importance to purity, thus he said, "Purity that is important" (The Vendor of Sweets 96). He never compromise quality for the sake of money. He is presented as a Gandhian in the post-independent India and he follows the Gandhian way of life to the minute details. He eats natural salt, wears khadi and shoes made only of the hide of dead animals, spins charkha, reads the Bhagwad Gita, writes a book on natural therapy, renounces caste system, very evident from his son's marriage, Mali married to a Christian American lady Grace – all these things serves as a evident that he is a firm follower of Gandhism. Jagan, like Sriram in "Waiting for the Mahatma", gradually undergoes transformation from a pseudo-Gandhian to a Gandhian in spirit by Dorai Swami. Dorai Swami inspired him very much as like Bharati to Sriram in "Waiting for Mahatma".

R.K. Narayan supports Gandhism and he said in an interview with Susan E. Croft, R. K. Narayan avers: "I liked Mahatma (Gandhi) personally and I wanted to somehow recount this. He was a very impressive person. I did not know him personally but I went to many gatherings he addressed" (Susan 31).

Swaminathan, Chandran, Krishnan, Sriram, and Jagan– all the protagonists in his novels are true embodiments of Gandhian virtues and principles. Thus, R. K. Narayan has presented an encompassing view of Gandhian ideology and philosophy in his novels. These novels serves as a panorama for the future generations who wants to understand Gandhiji as whole.

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