GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY IN R.K. NARAYAN’S FICTION

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Abstract: Mahatma Gandhi is one of the most talked-about, yet frequently contentious, political figures in Indian history. There is barely a place in the pre- or post-independence era that he did not desecrate in the name of Indian independence and progress. He is a socio-political icon that is nearly impossible to forget or ignore. There is barely any discipline that he has not remarked on, and he has affected every facet of human consciousness. Many authors from a variety of disciplines, including history, politics, philosophy, literature, sociology, and more, have used him as their main inspiration because he is a vastly influential writer who has influenced many other fields.

Even though Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, the other two members of the renowned triumvirate of Indian English fiction, are more interested in social or philosophical issues than R.K. Narayan, one of the most well-known senior Indian English novelists, he was unable to escape the Gandhian whirlwind that reshaped the entire social, political, and economic landscape of this nation in the 1930s and 1940s. On closer inspection, however, several of Narayan's books show that his creative ethos was also impacted by the Gandhian philosophy, even though the impact of the Gandhian thinking on Narayan was not of the same sort as it is in the situations of Raja Rao and Anand.

Keywords: Gandhian Philosophy, Literature, R.K. Narayan.

Narayan's artistic perspective is "ultimately Gandhian," which was influenced by his moral concerns to a significant extent. As a writer, Narayan was of the opinion that a novelist should aspire for more than just amusing their audience with stories. The author must be aware of his societal obligations. The Gandhian movement sparked a societal upheaval, and Narayan, like other modern novelists, found his inspiration in the ensuing changes. An in-depth review of Narayan's books from the 1930s and 1940s would show that his vision is one of a moral analyst rather than the philosopher as is typically perceived by critics, and that Gandhian ideology serves as the basic frame of reference for this moral analysis. To begin with, then, we should take into account the specifics of the Gandhian effect on R.K. Narayan's creative ethos before examining his works from this perspective. Since Narayan has little interest in politics, it is true that he does not make an effort in his novels to directly address current sociopolitical issues. He is more interested in showing the range of human reactions to social concerns in his works. Gandhi's political philosophy does not intrigue him at all. He is interested in Gandhianism because of its social component. Richard Cronin asserts that Narayan "offers Gandhianism without politics." Similar to this is A.N. Kaul's opinion, according to which Narayan has nothing to do with Gandhianism as a political philosophy. Because of this, with the exception of Waiting for the Mahatma, Gandhi's philosophy appears as an underlying theme in the majority of his novels.

With certainty, it can be argued that Narayan gives his characters a social conscience befitting of an anti-colonial activist. The main character in Swami and Friends acknowledges its protest against one facet of colonialization, namely the educational system, on page 4. Young Swaminathan is described as being frightened "at the very thought of school: this gloomy yellow building, the fire-eyed Vedanayagam, his class teacher; and the Head-Master with his thin long cane... in the very first paragraph of the book." In the overall scheme of the book, this passage is quite significant. Swami and his buddies are soon going to use the Gandhian movement of 1931 to change his and his classmates' lack of interest and apathy in class. If we examine the other facet of Swami's character, we discover that he is portrayed as being rather ill-at-case with Ebenezer, the scripture instructor, who seized every opportunity to indoctrinate children in the classroom and referred of Hindus as Heathens. Gandhi's own encounter with Christian missionaries who were hostile to Hinduism as a schoolboy is brought to mind by Ebenezer's bigotry, which Swami offends by challenging. The novel's comedic characterization of Ebenezer's character reflects Narayan's condemnation of the religious, and subsequently racial and cultural, prejudice that was sustained in Indian educational institutions under colonial control, it is also clear from a closer reading of this book. The battle between the rulers and the ruled in colonial India is undoubtedly something Narayan has foreshadowed in this book. He sees this tension as the result of a cultural clash between Christianity and...
traditional Hinduism, which is his go-to comedic style. Gandhi's philosophy on religion and politics is reflected in the way he approaches this subject. In Gandhi's view, politics and religion are inextricably linked. The source of moral principles, in Gandhi's view, is Hinduism. Even though his moral concern is clear enough, Swami Narayan delivers this issue in a subdued manner. The plot of the work appears to revolve heavily around the interactions in the classroom.

A closer look at the book reveals that Gandhian principles permeate every area of its political, cultural, and economic spheres. As a result, we can see that the protagonist reflects Gandhian ideology in the majority of his or her deeds. Narayan has successfully incorporated Gandhi's ideals into the narrative structure since, upon closer inspection, the novel reveals that all of the various Gandhian concepts—political, economic, social, and cultural—are extensively present throughout.

The Gandhian movement's patterns are also explored in R.K. Narayan's other notable book, The Bachelor of Arts. The main character of this book, Chandran, seems to be an expanded and more complete representation of Swami when we evaluate it. The Bachelor of Arts also extensively addresses the issue of English education's futility in India. Chandran can be seen debating the proposition that "historians should be slaughtered first" in the book's main body. Students appear to understand India's past in the proper context. It's important to uncover British rulers' fabrications of Indian history. The topic of race and colonial strife is naturally raised in the discussion. Conflict between the protagonist and entities that are symbolic of another culture serves to highlight this issue.

R.K. Narayan's book, The English Teacher, examines the subject of cultural struggle as well as mental captivity and the ensuing alienation of a person from his or her roots. Walsh claims, "A better way to describe Krishnan is as someone who is ambitious to rid himself from delusions and hysteria. The novel's main character, Krishnan, appears to be more nuanced. The deeper dimensions of life, in his opinion, have been harmed by English schooling. If we shed enough light on the fundamental plot of this book, we discover that Krishnan can't be fully reconciled to his cultural roots without rejecting the values that his Western education has instilled in him. The English teacher no longer works as an English teacher at the end of the book, and she is given the opportunity to experiment with education along Gandhian lines. Unexpectedly, the narrator of this book employs first-person narration. It appears that Krishnan is a reflective individual. He can now examine the true nature of Indian civilization under British rule using his consciousness, which has evolved into a fundamental potential. We are made to understand this issue throughout the narrative through his self-questioning consciousness. Gandhian thought offers a fundamental attitude towards man. We also note that a recognition of each person's role in India emerged together with the expansion of social and national awareness that Gandhi thinking fostered. This element of liberty and self-realization appears to be a component of Gandhi's desire for freedom. This facet of Gandhi's philosophy plays a significant role in Narayan's story.

Krishnan is an intelligent man. What exactly is wrong with him, he asks himself? The colonial position is questioned in Swami and Chandran's first two books, but the issue is not treated with the urgency that comes with self-examination and self-criticism. Krishnan's goal is to find an answer to his query. He criticises the educational system in the West. It's interesting to observe that the main character, who teaches English, is both a part of and a user of the western economic system.

The opening of the book is a successful place for Narayan to present this struggle. It is plain to observe in Mr. Brown's speech at Albert Mission College's English Department, in which he discusses the significance of the English language's grammatical purity. According to reports, Mr. Brown reprimanded the teachers for not being cautious about using vowels correctly. The main character of this book disturbs Gajapathy, the department head, by asking an important question regarding Mr. Brown: "Why does he magnify his own importance?" (p. 3) The western educational system is brought up in these queries. The Western educational system is entirely at odds with Krishnan's anxiety. We can also claim with certainty that Krishnan's experience instructing Indian students in English has bred a sense of meaninglessness in him. The shishya Tradition of older India is opposed to the teacher's position in the western educational system.

In his upcoming book, Mr. Sampath addresses Narayan's theme, which is connected to Gandhian philosophy. This book illustrates how post-Independence India has changed. The main character, around whom all the action centres, is Srinivas. His goal is the same as Krishnan's in The English Teacher. When we examine several facets of Krishnan's personality, we see that Srinivas' dimension of self-expression and identity exploration is more philosophical. If Krishnan looked for personal redemption in Gandhian experiments with fundamental education, Srinivas decides to be the editor of the "Banner," a provocative weekly paper. Srinivas is more of an Upanishadic character who poses the question "Who am I?" early in the book, which is typical of Narayan, if we compare his literary sensibility to Krishnan's. How can I make decisions if I don't know who I am? If we study Mr. Sampath's inner voice, we find that his self-discovery leads him to experiment with numerous areas before settling as the editor of the Banner in Malgudi. These sectors include teaching, practising law, working as an apprentice at a bank, and farming.
It is clear that R.K. Narayan appears to be more concerned in considering how a regular person, who had no ideology to follow in the first place, gradually changed into a Gandhi devotee. The novel's main character, Sriram, is twenty years old. It is demonstrated that he led a comfortable life in the environment of Malgudi. But when the Mahatma and his supporters arrive in the town, his composure is disturbed. He is drawn to the charming and quirky girl in the group, and as a result of her, he is brought into Gandhi's company. The first time Sriram sees her, she confronts him with a collection box, and he puts an eight-anna coin in it. He appears to have asked about her labour, and the jaggery vendor replies, "She is raising money and has some connection to Mahatma Gandhi."

In this way, we discover that Narayan, with his acute insight and sardonic sense of humour, illustrates how individuals attempt to capitalise on the mystique around Mahatma Gandhi's name. Gandhi has been introduced by Narayan as a person, not as a symbol. Gandhi isn't given a major part in the book. While maintaining Mahatma Gandhi's historical accuracy, the narrator stays within his artistic bounds and portrays him in relation to everyday situations rather than major political events. The tale has numerous examples of Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy in action. The printer Nataraj represents virtue and valour. He makes an effort to live a peaceful life by adopting Gandhi's philosophy of conduct. Vasu, the ambitious taxidermist, advocates for the destruction of evil. He has taken over Nataraj's attic and is abusing his good nature by staying there forcibly. He practises womanising and poaching. Nataraj, who has been harassed by the neighbours, requests that he leave the attic because he needs it for a visitor. Nataraj is in a bind since Vasu won't budge. Similar to Gandhi, he opposes violence because Speaking harshly only leads to more harsh speaking. If for no other reason than to stop violent speech in its tracks and forbid it from spreading, Mahatma Gandhi had commanded absolute non-violence in thought and speech from us. I could never be anyone's successful enemy. I worried about any animosity day and night. As a young child, I repeatedly avoided the one person I was supposed to have hate and animosity towards. I pretended to be miserable so that my adversary would look at me favourably or say something nice to me, and I patiently awaited an opportunity to tell him that I wished to be his buddy. I felt like I had a toothache from it. (p. 93-94)

Finally, he accepts Vasu's right to remain there for as long as he chooses. In the works of Narayan, Gandhi's satyagraha also finds expression. Through hilarious minor occurrences that happen as a result of her, he is brought into Gandhi's company. The first time Sriram sees her, she confronts him with a collection box, and he puts an eight-anna coin in it.

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