Chapter Four

Spirituality versus Materialism

As part of East-West conflict, one can notice the conflict between spirituality and materialism in all the novels of R. K. Narayan. Due to the colonial rule and western education, modern materialism got into Indian minds. Spirituality, the hallmark of the Indians, started to ebb from people’s way of life. Thus there appeared open conflict between the elder, uneducated Indians and the younger, educated ones. Conflict is also visible within the minds of the younger generations—between their inherited spiritual self and the acquired material self. The characters in Narayan’s novels can be divided into two categories: spiritualists and materialists.

Analyzing Narayan’s magnum opus, The Guide, this spiritual-material conflict is discernible throughout the novel. Raju, the Railway Guide, is attracted by Rosie, the beautiful wife of Marco, the archeologist. Since Marco does not care for her needs, Raju exploits the situation and tries to win her through flatteries and wants to molest her. As she serves food to Raju, her hand touches his and then his mind confronts conflicts between religious, spiritual ethics and worldly, materialistic pleasures. To quote his thoughts: “My thoughts dwelt on her golden touch. A part of my mind went on saying, ‘No, no. it is not right. Marco is her husband, remember. It’s not to be thought of.’ But it was impossible to pull the thoughts back. ‘He may shoot you,’ said my weary conscience. ‘Has he a gun?’ commented another part of my mind” (G 77).

Gaffur, Raju’s friend and the taxi driver notices Raju’s molestation attempts on Rosie and tries to correct him. To quote from the text:
Gafur warned me when he got me alone for a moment outside the store, ‘She is a married woman, remember.’

‘What of it? I said. ‘Why do you tell me this?’ ‘Don’t be angry, sir,’ he said. ‘Go slow; that is all I can say.’

‘You are unhealthy-minded, Gaffur. She is like a sister to me,’ I said, and tried to shut him up.

All he said was, ‘You are right. What is it to me? After all, that man is here, who has really married her. And I’ve my own wife to bother about.’ (G 87-88)

In the above dialogues between Gaffur and Raju one can find the conflict between the spiritual mind and the materialistic mind. Gaffur upholds the Indian culture of sanctity of married life whereas Raju is influenced by the modern Western life devoid of values.

This conflict of values between the East and the West is evident in the first sexual outrage of Raju on Rosie in the hotel room. The narration goes on thus:

It was nearing midnight. The man at the hotel desk watched us pass without showing any interest. Desk-men at hotels learn not to be inquisitive. At the door of Number 28 I hesitated. She opened the door, passed in, and hesitated, leaving the door half open. She stood looking at me for a moment, as on the first day.

‘Shall I go away?’ I asked in a whisper.

‘Yes. Good night,’ she said feebly.

‘May I come in?’ I asked, trying to look my saddest.
‘No, no. Go away,’ she said. But on an impulse I gently pushed her out of the way, and stepped in and locked the door on the world. (G 88-89)

Chapter five ends with this narration. The restraint Narayan shows on sexual indulgence here is remarkable. Rosie, though sexually starved, wants to keep up the noble Indian tradition of chastity and faithfulness to her husband, but she is tempted and seduced by the cunning Raju.

The guilt of conscience and the reflections of a devout Hindu wife are observed in the words of Rosie. To quote from the text:

‘After all . . . After all . . . Is this right what I am doing? After all, he has been so good to me, given me comfort and freedom. What husband in the world would let his wife go and live in a hotel room by herself, a hundred miles away? . . . As a good man he may not mind, but is it not a wife’s duty to guard and help her husband, what ever the way in which he deals with her?’ (G 120)

Marco, her husband, has been staying meanwhile in the Peak House on the topmost cliff on Mempi Hills. He was perfectly involved in his observations of the antique things which he had collected from the cave as part of his archeological study. Though he does not care for her sexual desires, she, as a true Hindu wife, still loves him and cares for his well being. Raju, a materialist, tempts her and molests her. Poor Rosie does not have the will power to resist the temptations. Marco sits up all night writing and spends all day in the cave. While he is copying she should not talk to her. Thus she is neglected all day and night by her husband. Indeed Marco was a misfit as a husband. He is fully pre-occupied with his studies. He married out of a desire to have some one who cares for his practical
life. Rosie, a gifted dancer, wants to foster that art and get appreciation and encouragement. But Marco has no temperament for it and dislikes her dance.

Raju, the materialist, gave no respect for values. He wanted the love of Rosie at all cost and for that he tried his best to detract her from her husband Marco. Raju learned the weakness of Rosie and pretended to care for her likings. He started promoting her dance skill and pretended to show interest in it. He spent day and night with her attending her practice and performance. Rosie’s husband never cared for her talents in dance and that was the main reason why she disliked him. Raju exploited this situation very well and thus won her love. One night she was making the demonstration of a dance of an ancient Sanskrit composition of a lover and lass on the banks of Jamuna. To quote form the text:

She held the performance for nearly an hour; it filled me with the greatest pleasure on earth. I could honestly declare that, while I watched her perform, my mind was free, for once, from all carnal thoughts; I viewed her as a pure abstraction. She could make me forget my surroundings. I sat with open-mouthed wonder watching her. Suddenly she stopped and flung her whole weight on me with ‘What a darling. You hare giving me a new lease of life.’ (G 125)

Rosie felt guilty about staying with Raju in the hotel. She wanted to get rid of Raju and live satisfied with her husband. Since Marco and Rosie had not taken their supper and were remaining mute and discontent in their room after some possible quarrel, Raju pushed into their room with their food. He found Rosie lying on her bed with eyes
shut and in a very miserable condition. Marco was sitting in his chair, elbow on the table and his chin on his fist. Raju requested them to take their food. To cite from the text:

She sat up and told me, ‘Don’t waist any more of your time with us. You go back. That’s all I have to say,’ in a thick, gruff, crackling voice. Her voice shook a little as she spoke. ‘I mean it. Leave us now.’ What had come over this woman? Was she in league with her husband? She had every authority to ask me to get out. Probably she repented her folly in encouraging me all along. (G 135)

Upon her insisting that Raju should leave them, he left the room and wet back to the town in Gaffur’s car. The spiritual element of a wife is seen here in Rosie. She is repentant of cheating her husband and she tried her maximum to live with him as long as he accommodated her. But finally he deserted her when he knew that she stayed with Raju in the hotel and danced before him. The contrast between the materialist, pleasure-seeking, cunning Raju and the loyal, spiritual wife Rosie is portrayed here.

When Marco discarded his wife Rosie and went to Madras, she had no other alternative but to seek refuge in Raju, who was responsible for her destiny. Thus she came to Raju’s house. His mother, a traditional Hindu woman had apprehensions about Rosie, an abandoned wife and belonging to another caste, living for many days in her house with his bachelor son. But she treated her with love and hospitality. As Rosie continued to stay there and the people in the neighbourhood started to spread rumours she wanted his son to get rid of her (G 154). But Raju was unwilling to send her out as she had no where to go. Moreover, he was infatuated by her and he continued his life with her spending every day in her dance practice. Meanwhile he had lost his shop at the
Railway station. The boy who ran the shop for him squandered the money and the shop fell into heavy debt. Since Raju did not give back the huge amount of eight thousand rupees he had borrowed from the Sait, the Sait visited him and demanded the amount. Raju ill-treated the Sait and even assaulted him. Thereupon the Sait filed a criminal case against Raju. Thus Raju was facing great trouble and his mother knew that she will even lose her house to clear the debt. Thus agonized and helpless she asked her brother to come to her house and save her son from the snake woman, Rosie. Thus Raju’s uncle, a tall and strong man came there and asked him to send Rosie out (G 167-168). But Raju insisted that he would not send her out. Thus when his taunts had no effect on Raju, the uncle turned to Rosie who was dancing and said:

‘You are not of our family? Are you of our clan? . . . No. Are you of our caste? No. Our class? No. Do we know you? No. Do you belong to this house? No. In that case, why are you her? After all, you are a dancing girl. We do not admit them in our families. Understand? . . . Did any one invite you? No. Even if you are invited you should go on staying where you belong, and not too long here. . . . You should not be seducing young fools, deserting your husband. Do you follow? . . . You must clear out by the next train. You must promise to go. We will give you money for your railway ticket.’ (G 169)

Though Rosie was willing to go Raju did not allow her. Then Raju’s mother appealed him to send her out. “‘Have some sense, Raju. She is another man’s wife. She must go back to him’” (G 172). When he replied that she could not go anywhere but stay there, his mother brought out her trump card. “‘If she is not going, I have to leave the house’”
(G 172). Then his uncle supported her. “Did you think she was helpless, and only a dependent on you?’ He thumped his chest and cried, ‘As long as I am breathing, I will never let down a sister” (G 172). Raju was stubborn on his decision. Thus his mother left him and went with her brother (G 175). Though Raju had a momentary feeling when his mother left him, it was overcome by his infatuation for Rosie. The spiritual element of the strong filial love was conquered by his infatuation for some one’s wife. In a sense Raju was responsible for the present crisis. He wanted to possess Rosie and his intentional and unintentional words and actions culminated in Marco leaving her and thus her taking refuge in Raju’s house. It is not the sympathy for her, rather lust and infatuation that forced him to give up his mother whom he loved dearly. The modern materialist influence is evident in his attitude.

After a few months Raju was forced to move out of his old house. The Sait managed to secure an attachment of the property before the court (G 185). Raju’s lawyer secured the necessary signature from his mother. Four days later Raju received a letter from his mother. To quote from the text:

. . . she had written on a yellow paper with a pencil: ‘. . . I gave my signature not because I was happy about it but because otherwise the lawyer would not let him stay in peace. . . . I am sick of everything. . . . Any way, what does it all mean? Your lawyer mentioned that you are looking for a new house for that woman. If it is so, I’ll come back to live in my old house. After all, I wish to spend the rest of my days in my own house.’ (G 186)
Raju was not willing to pay rent to the Sait to have his mother live in that house alone.

Raju thought:

I felt touched by her desire to come back. I could understand it, but I resisted the idea. It seemed best to let the Sait take the home and be done with it once for all. . . . I rationalized in all possible ways and put away her letter without a reply. I moved to another house and became very busy, and in all the rush quietened my conscience. I felt sorry, but I rationalized:

‘After all her brother is dear to her, and he will look after her. Why should she come here and live all alone?’ (G 186)

He moved to a two-storeyed house with all luxuries. He appointed permanent group of musicians, dance master, large staff of servants—a driver for their car, two gardeners, a Gurkha sentry at the gate and two cooks. Living comfortably in this new house with many people visiting the house every day and asking his permission to meet Nalini, the new name Rosie adopted under Raju’s compulsion, her programmes getting more and more popular and thus Nalini and herself becoming celebrities, he totally ignored his mother. He never visited her or even wrote a reply to her letter. This change in him could be attributed to the influence of materialism. It is unlike the traditional, spiritual bond between a Hindu son and his mother. The material affluence, fame and infatuation for Rosie made him a materialist. Rosie also became a prey to this materialism. She never persuaded Raju to contact his mother or write a reply.

Nalini cherished every garland she got at the end of a performance (G 194). Once smelling those flowers she told Raju:
‘To me this is the only worth-while part of our whole activity.’ . . . I asked her, ‘What makes you say so?’ ‘I love jasmine.’ ‘Not the cheque that comes with it?’ ‘What is one to do with so much? All day long and all through the week you are collecting cheques, and more and more often. But when is the time coming when we can enjoy the use of those cheques?’ ‘Well, you have a big household, a car and what not—is that not enjoyment of life?’ ‘I don’t know,’ she said, remaining moody. ‘How I wish I could go into a crowd, walk about, take a seat in the auditorium, and start out for evening without have to make up or dress for the stage!

\((G\ 194)\)

These words show the attitude of Nalini for material wealth. She wanted to enjoy life as ordinary people did. At the same time she loved her profession and art very much. She wanted recognition of her performances form the public whereas Raju was a greedy man. His philosophy was that of a typical modern materialist. “My philosophy was that while it lasted the maximum money had to be squeezed out. We needed all the money in the world. If I were less prosperous, who would care for me? . . . If we don’t work and earn when the time is good, we commit a sin. When we have a bad time no one will help us (G 195). Thus Raju very cunningly extracted the maximum performance from Nalini and put the excess money in the bank.

Marco published his archeological findings through a book named \textit{The Cultural History of South India}. His photograph appeared in \textit{The Illustrated Weekly of Bombay}, on the middle page (G 199). \textit{The Illustrated Weekly} was one of the papers Nalini read regularly. When she saw the photo and the review of the book titled “An epoch-making
discovery in Indian cultural history,” she was thrilled. She dashed down stairs and showed it to Raju. He was shocked. She called Mani, his secretary and asked him to get that book. The book was bought but Raju kept it in his safe custody. She had cut the photo from the weekly and pasted it on her dressing mirror. Since she didn’t get the book she asked Raju where he had hidden the book (G 200). But Raju was not willing to give it to her. He promised that he would give her the next morning and asked her to put the light off and sleep. But after the light off, she sat on the bed and started crying. To quote from the text:

Half an hour passed. I switched on the light, and there she was, quietly crying still. ‘What has come over you?’ ‘After all, after all, he is my husband.’ ‘Very well. . . . Don’t you remember when and how he left you?’ ‘I do, and I deserved nothing less. Any other husband would have throttled me then and there. He tolerated my company for nearly a month, even after knowing what I had done.’ (G 202)

These words of Nalini revealed her character. She was repentant of what she had done to her husband. She still nurtured love for him. The spiritual element of a true wife was evident in these words. Raju, the materialist dissuaded her from keeping any love for her husband.

One day Raju received a letter addressed to Rosie, alias Nalini. It was from a lawyer’s firm in Madras. Raju opened the letter and read the content. It had arrived by registered post some days ago, but Mani kept it on his table. Narayan writes:

The letter came from a lawyer and said, ‘Madam, under instruction from your client, we are enclosing an application for your signature, for the
release of a box of jewellery left in safe custody at the Bank of ……, in
the marked place. After this is received we shall proceed to obtain the
release of the said box, and arrange to forward it to you under insurance
cover in due course.’ (G 205)

Instead of giving the letter to Rosie he kept it in his drink cabinet and later came and read
it carefully. “I looked at the enclosed application. It was on a printed form; after her
signature was going to be Marco’s” (G 206). Raju feared that if Rosie read the letter she
would be more attracted to Marco and consider how considerate and kind-hearted her
husband was. So he did not show the letter to her. He kept the letter in the cabinet
brooding over it. The enclosed application form had to be signed by Rosie and sent it
back by return post. “I took it over to the office desk. I found a scrap of paper and made a
careful trial of Rosie’s signature. . . . Then I carefully spread out the application form and
wrote on the indicated line: ‘Rosie, Nalini.’ I folded it and put it in an addressed cover
which the lawyers had enclosed, sealed it” (G 208-209) and posted it early morning.

Raju’s character is proclaimed through this action. He had no reluctance to open her
letter, hide it and forge her signature. He wanted to possess her as well as her jewellery.
He is a typical modern materialist who cares the least for values. Later when he was
arrested by the Superintendent for forgery her response was well-deserving to his
character and misdeeds. “‘I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is karma.
What can we do?’” (G 216)

_The Guide_ is a metafiction. Beginning with Raju, the guide, Narayan seems to
have become increasingly interested in _The Guide_, the text, the fiction. The result is that
in _The Guide_ we find element that have come to be associated with contemporary
metafiction or the self-reflective novel. “The two phases of Raju’s ontology produce two
texts or rather a text within a text, one reflecting on the other” (Sharma, R. S. 146).

The predicament of Raju is commingled with that of Malgudi. It is the
materialistic ways of Malgudi town that tempted him to wed his fate. As R. S. Sharma
writes:

Raju, the narrator, is aware of his own degeneration, under the pressures
of an economy conditioned by Time and Money. He compromises his
honesty and sincerity to pursue money and success. As he unfolds his
story, we see the growing commercialization of Malgudi since the coming
of the railway station. It is no more a place of art, religion, history or
community. It is a place inhibited [by] financiers, seedy hotel-keepers,
cunning lawyers and fake creators. Thus, Malgudi does not remain a
simple town, it comes to represent the complex reality of a world
increasingly dominated by the value of Time and Money—a world full of
activity and glamour but ultimately devoid of substance. (149-150)

Though Raju is affected by the materialism of Malgudi, Rosie is not. While Raju enjoys
this world of showmanship and gets swelled with pride, thinking of himself as a man of
consequence and status who had charge of a growing celebrity, Rosie remains aloof from
the entire drama of money, power and influence. She is not manipulated even by her
audience. Marco represents modern materialism in a different manner. In a way, both
Raju and Rosie are aware of this tragic irony of creativity. They must invent fictions in
order to live. The only character who does not go through this cycle is Marco. To quote
R. S. Sharma:
He is interested neither in art nor in life. He is a fossil gatherer content to collect and reproduce what is already dead. Rightly he descend [sic] in to the caves to find what he negates on the surface. With his knowledge, precision and industry, he produces a book, but conspires against those who are the true makers like Raju and Rosie. No doubt, he always remains on the fringe, a constant threat to creativity in art and life. (160)

Rosie is overwhelmed by the presence of Raju and thinks that her dreams are going to be translated into reality. Raju, being an intelligent and shrewd man, understands the rift between Marco and Rosie. He promotes her taste and talent in dancing, which Marco tampered on. But he does it with hidden, evil intention. When Rosie learns that Raju is exploiting her art for his material prosperity, she becomes disillusioned. Raju is devoid of feeling and fervour of an artist and he shows his shabby treatment by invading the inner holiness of her heart. To Rosie, art is meant for spiritual elevation. To quote from Gajendra Kumar’s essay “R. K. Narayan’s ‘The Guide’: The Vision of Indian Values.”: “Both Raju and Marco proved their mettle in negative gesture. For both of them, woman is nothing but a commodity for their self and exploitation. Rosie is more sinned against than sinning. Rosie extols herself as the representative of the noble institution of the great national heritage” (177).

In spite of Rosie’s submission to Raju, she continues to have regard for her husband. “Perhaps the strong pull of the middle-class morality and the Indian woman’s traditional subservience to and worship for her husband as god makes her feel the best of both the worlds: the name, honour, and wealth of her husband, and physical love and fulfillment of her ambition to dance from Raju” (Goyal 145).
Narayan, a believer in conjugal loyalty, has painted Rosie’s character with sympathy. Influenced by Marx, Freud, the growing industrialism and technology, and the new money economy, he could not shut his eyes to the socio-economic realities. He has recorded all these developments and with an ironic detachment explored their important consequences on the lives of individuals living under various pressures. Similarly Narayan has portrayed Raju’s seduction of Rosie in a revolutionary manner and not in a contemptuous way. Raju is more a revolutionary than a romantic, anxious to revolutionize the traditional institution of marriage and shake of the fallacious notions that eat into the vitals. To quote B. K. Tripathi:

Since his creator seems anxious to present him as a rebel with positive and progressive views on important issues like happiness in marriage, it would not be fair to take him for’ a romantic doubled with a rascal’ as regarded by K. R. Srinivas Iyengar in his Indian Writing in English or “a likeable rogue” as done by R. S. Singh in his Indian Novel in English. If he were a rogue or a rascal, he would have preferred to carry on his relation with Rosie secretly and silently behind the façade of her married life with Marco, instead of building up a situation when Marco would finally settle his accounts with Rosie. (147-148)

It is evident from the above quotation that critics are divided upon the judgment on Raju. Many condemn him as a rogue or rascal but a few extol him. Raju wants to covet Rosie and win her love at all cost. Hence he tries to please her even in her relation with her husband. Since she loves her husband Marco intimately, Raju tries to settle the quarrel between the couple, knowing well that Marco can not satisfy her sexual desire.
Raju is confident that he can seduce her even while maintaining the good relations between the couple. Again, he can abuse her only when she is happy with her husband. He only needs her body, not her spiritual love.

Deserted by her husband, Rosie takes refuge in her lover, Raju. Raju’s mother protests against her living with her son, since the people around them would criticize them. But Raju never bothers about the talk of the people and insists on staying with her in the house. In the words of Tripathi, “If he were a romantic he would have escaped with Rosie into “the bowering woods,” of Mempi Hills. The novelist seems to suggest at this point that one has to be an enemy of the people in order to preserve human dignity, raise the Devadasis (Rosie in particular) and give them a social status at par with the so called socially respectable” (148-149).

Narayan, through his character Raju brings out an artistic transformation of ironies, from an irony of comic contradiction to one of achieved moral integrity. The duality of Raju’s character contributes to the ironic design. His transformation into sainthood enclosed the story of his degeneration. In the words of S. C. Harrex:

At a simple level of contrast, the dual narration distinguishes between the miscreant who breaks the Hindu and legal codes and the Sanyasi who epitomizes the higher spiritual and communal aspirations between the adulterer who dishonours his mother and cast her out and then chases lover of his fellow men; between base passion and pure piety. (109)

Though these contrasts exist in Raju’s character, the novel’s design is not very arbitrary. Though rogue, Raju is not spiritually unique. S. C. Harrex continues:
His vanity, possessiveness, materialistic obsessions—all of which contribute to his downfall—are in fact the failings of a dynamic personality. . . . As his greed for status and wealth grows, he becomes increasingly selfish and possessive in his attitudes to people. He commits the cardinal Hindu mistake of falling into the trap of Maya, becoming imprisoned by his passion for attachments and the illusory bonds of self.

(109)

At the end of the novel when Raju sinks in the river pronouncing that the rain is falling in the hills, the irony is complete, the comedy is consecrated, the archetype is renewed and the character is fulfilled. The illuminating ambiguity of the climax assures us that faith is a vital force, that moral courage gives man nobility, that Raju has achieved real stature; but which, on the other hand, teasingly queries whether or not Raju’s last conviction was not his greatest self-deception of all (Harrex, S. C. 111).

The ending of the novel has been much praised for its ambiguity and suggestiveness. Raju collapses with the words that it is raining in the hills and he can feel it on his legs. In the words of G. S. Balarama Gupta, “it is wrong to believe that Raju who is a selfish opportunist, a crass materialist, and a voluptuous hedonist, has all of a sudden become martyr, capable of making grace descend from heaven” (“A Sinner” 135). Raju is a sinner and he can never be called a saint; he is a hypocrite masquerading as a saint, a sinner in saffron (“A Sinner” 127). “We have enough reason to view The Guide as a delightful expose of the ignorance-ridden Indian rural society as well as typically Indian pseudo-saints” (“A Sinner” 135).
Thematically The Guide is a good illustration of the contrast between typically Western themes and Indian themes. Raju’s quest is the universal human quest for spiritual fulfilment through freedom from the vexations of the Spirit. As a Hindu, Raju ultimately finds this fulfilment, and his self-hood, not in terms of Western individualism, but in terms of sacrificing the self for the potential good of the Hindu community. The story of Raju, Rosie and Marco could easily have been a trivial eternal triangle. To quote Krishna Sen:

That it achieves far greater resonance and complexity is because this ‘eternal triangle’ has been firmly located against a realistically evoked social context, that of India at a crucial historical juncture when tradition and modernity begin to intersect, and the claims of caste and creed collide with the demands of the individual for personal fulfilment. This is surely one of the major social and moral issues in India today. (33)

Through the character of Raju, who is portrayed as an anti-hero, Narayan explored the problems and possibilities of spiritual transcendence in a materialist world. Narayan was well aware that great spiritual guides of antiquity, like Valmiki, had had unsavoury pasts. The traditional folk tales very often features fake swamis or heroes who were rascals.

Raju, the central character of the novel, goes through a series of roles, living by his wits alone, as if in a comic masquerade, and playing the shrewd businessman, the clever tourist guide, the unscrupulous lover, the forger and the imposter. He is “a rogue, a rascal, a conman who falsifies historical truth, violates the sanctity of human relationships and forges priesthood for the sake of self-aggrandisement, cheap
exploitation, and self preservation respectively” (Kher 123). At the end of the novel he decides to purge himself of all these negative elements in his character and nature and bring salvation to himself as well as for the villagers. Raju rises to the occasion; he accepts the devotion and faith of the people, particularly Velan’s and plays the saviour. He realizes that a profound sacrifice is required to obtain divine favour. In a moment of illumination in which the individual liberates himself from the bondage of distracting illusions and hysterias of normal secular existence, Raju performs the niskama karma. He is enlightened by the idea that if, by avoiding food, he could help the trees bloom and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly. For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort in which he was not personally interested. “This is how Raju achieves full awareness of his being and escapes the wheel of karma which leads to suffering; by performing the self-liberating act, he becomes a jivan-mukta purush in the end” (Kher 130).

Spirituality and materialism are at loggerheads in The Vendor of Sweets. “Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self,” said Jagan to his listener, who asked, “Why conquer the self?” Jagan said, “I do not know, but all sages advise us so” (VS 7). This opening paragraph of the novel proclaims what follows it. It is clear from Jagan’s words that he represents Indian spirituality. Though he is a follower of Indian spirituality, he is not aware of the philosophy behind it. He follows what the sages have advised him to do. The philosophical aspect of spirituality is exercised or is supposed to have been exercised by the sages. The sages are meant for it. The lay man need not bother about it. He just obeys the advice of the sages. This is the case of Indian spirituality. Compared to several million spiritualists in India, we find only a few
thousands in the West. The majority of the people in the West are materialists. They are not willing to surrender their brain to blind faith. This line of thinking is reflected in the listener’s question. The westerners do not feel the need for conquering the self. What he loves most is his self, and he devotes his life for its sustenance and comfort. This attitude is revealed in the listener’s question although he is an Indian. An Indian raising such a question implies that modern Indians have started to ape the materialistic thinking of the westerners.

Jagan is a Gandhian and a spiritualist. His way of life—dress, foot-wear, food etc. are narrated in detail in the first chapter. He wore a loose jibba over his dhoti, both made of material spun with his own hand; every day he spun for an hour. He never possessed more than two sets of clothes at a time. He delivered all the excess yarns to the local hand-loom committee for cash. Although the cash he thus earned was less than five rupees a month, he felt a sentimental thrill in receiving it. He had begun the habit when Gandhi visited the town over twenty years ago. He draped his shoulders in khaddar shawl with gaudy yellow patterns on it. He wore thick sandals made of the leather of an animal which had died of old age. Being a follower of Gandhi, he explained, “I do not like to think that a living creature should have its throat cut for the comfort of my feet,” and this occasionally involved him in excursions to remote villages where a cow or calf was reported to be dying (VS 9). The Gandhian principles of self-reliance, ahimsa, as well as the dignity of labour are established in Jagan’s way of life.

Jagan’s words and deeds do not hold up under thorough scrutiny. For example, Jagan orders one of his employees, “Captian, that beggar should not be seen here except
Jagan’s hypocrisy is revealed in this response. There is a conflict of materialism and spirituality in his mind. Merchants are concerned with the sale of their goods to make maximum profit. Jagan, though a Gandhian, can not be an exception to it.

Jagan felt proud of his son Mali ever since he had told him that he was going to write a novel. Jagan also had a plan to write a book on diet. Jagan shared this news about the son with his cousin and added:
“I hope he will also emulate my philosophy of living simple living and high thinking, as Gandhi has taught us.”

“True, true. But what I don’t understand is why you should run a trade, make money, and accumulate it.”

“I do not accumulate, it just grows naturally,” said Jagan. (VS 39)

Jagan’s hypocrisy and his bent for materialism are evident in his words.

Though Jagan was a Gandhian in his observances, his mind lacked that true Gandhian spirit. It is evident at the beginning of the story. He was materialistic and therefore a profiteer. But since Mali and Grace started to exploit him for their whims, a sudden transformation took place in Jagan. He wanted to reduce the price of the sweetmeats. He told his cousin:

“From tomorrow the price of everything will be reduced. I have made up my mind about it.”

“Why?” asked the cousin in consternation.

Jagan spurned an explanation. He just said, “We buy provisions for, let us say, a hundred rupees a day, and the salaries of our staff and the rent amount to, let us say, a hundred . . . and the stuff produced need not earn more than, let us say, two hundred in all. Now, the truth is . . . more people will benefit by a reduction.” (VS 91)

Jagan’s transformation from a materialist to a Gandhian is evident in these words. He has become a true Gandhian now.

When the cousin told Jagan that he (Jagan) was opposed to eating sugar, Jagan replied, “‘I see no connection. It others want to eat sweets, they must have the purest
ones, that is all. I am thinking particularly of children and poor people’’’ (VS 91). The spiritual and Gandhian element of Jagan is evident in these words. He did not want to cheat people and amass money like many of vendors.

On another occasion Jagan told the cousin, “Money is an evil . . . We should all be happier without it. It is enough if an activity goes on self-supported; no need to earn money, no need to earn money’’” (VS 92). These words proclaim that Jagan has been growing in asceticism.

When the bearded man Chinna Dorai insisted Jagan to come down to the water in the pond, Jagan doubted that he was going to be drowned by him. Jagan was not afraid but thought that it was better to die than to live. He told himself, “If I do not perish in this water, I shall perish of pneumonia. In my next life, I’d like to be born . . .” his mind ran through various choices. Pet dog? Predatory cat? Street-corner donkey? Maharajah on an elephant? Anything but a money-making sweet-maker with a spoilt son” (VS 116). It is evident from his thoughts that he has matured into a spiritual man, purged of his material, money-making urges.

Chinna Dorai told Jagan that he was sixty-nine, and would die next year. He wanted to finish before his death the idol of the goddess on the stone which his master had put in the pond for seasoning. Thoughts about the future of the garden and of the idol of the goddess troubled him. Hence he asked Jagan to buy that garden and install the goddess. He said, “‘I only though it would do you good to have a retreat like this.”

“Yes, yes, God knows I need a retreat. You know, my friend, at some stage in one’s life one must uproot oneself from the accustomed surroundings and disappear so
that others may continue in peace” (VS 120). Jagan’s transformation from *grihasta* to *vanaprasta* is revealed through these words.

The novel depicts the opposition between two value systems—spiritualistic and materialistic—operating in the post-colonial Indian society. But the conflict is of a knotty and intricate nature. “Both Jagan and Mali experience the opposition between traditional Indian values and the modern Western values. Mali, with all his national, progressive modern attitudes ends up in prison and Jagan for all his faith in the traditional Indian culture becomes a modern sanyasi” (Nanda 91). Jagan could not retreat to the forest and lead a lonely life there for ever. His retreat had to be bought with the money from the sweet shop. As the novel ends, Mali who has been imprisoned and thus tempered of his aggressiveness waits to be bailed out by his father.

Narayan is ironical in the treatment of Jagan’s character, but his irony has been tempered with sympathy. He is never critical of the Indian tradition. In the words of Nanda:

In Jagan’s retreat, Narayan has given us the sense of the timelessness of his struggle and of the larger social, cultural and religious fabric in which he plays his part. Jagan has turned sixty. At this ripe age, the worldly entanglements appear futile to him, his daily routine monotonous and empty. At this age one has to turn the work of the world to others. Like a true Indian, Jagan decides to retreat to some place of purity. (92)

Though Jagan retreats, he does not forget his duties to Grace. He tells his cousin, “If you meet her, tell her that if she ever wants to go back to her country, I will buy her a ticket. It’s a duty we owe her. She was a good girl” (VS 185).
With regard to Jagan’s Gandhism one may doubt whether it is hypocritical, “Pecksniffian”, or a mere “smoke-screen” for his dishonesty. Though the contradictions are very true and apparent, to be fair to him, one has to note that he keeps up well past his middle age certain Gandhian practices acquired as a young man. To quote Jayantha:

In his own way he is an upright businessman and would not brook, under any circumstances, adulteration of the quality of sweets he makes and sells. And he takes considerable trouble to guarantee their quality even when he slashes down their period. To make money, as he successfully does, in the world of Malgudi he does not require any “smoke-screen” at all, at least of all Gandhism. Therefore “Pecksniffian” can not be the word to describe Jagan’s “Gandhism.” (“Gandhi” 64-65)

Jagan finally decided to retreat to Chinna Dorai’s grove and spend the remaining part of his life in prayer and meditation. He took with him his Gandhian charka and the “bank book.” One may suspect Jagan’s genuine intent of renunciation and vanaprastha. But a closer look at what happens at the end of the novel would present Jagan’s action in the right perspective. He asks the cousin to run his shop and look after the cooks well until Mali takes it over from him eventually. Even the money in the bank is intended for his son when he comes out of the prison. His readiness to buy Grace a ticket to enable her to return to her country is an indication of his attitude to people and money. To quote Jayantha again:

It is amply made clear in the novel that though Jagan, at the time of his departure to the grove, has neither conquered his attachment nor achieved the necessary equanimity of mind for a recluse, he has made a beginning
in that direction . . . There is no indication either of Jagan’s return to his former way of life. It is a part of Narayan’s artistic strategy that he does not surround his protagonist’s withdrawal with an aura of solemnity and other worldliness. It is his distinction as a novelist that through the comic mode he is able to affirm the continued relevance of certain traditional Indian values of life. (“Gandhi” 72)

One of the modern influences that provided continuity between the past and the present culture of India was the personality of Gandhi. Himself an enigmatic man, Gandhi was a great force that provided a whole generation of Indians in preindependent India a new sense of dignity, purpose and character. His strong sense of patriotism, ethical values, and asceticism deeply influenced the masses. “Narayan acknowledges the influence of Gandhi’s personality on the ordinary people in Waiting for the Mahatma and The Vendor of Sweets, for his heroes are not outstanding in any way but reflect the mood of that period” (Gupta, Santhosh 23).

When Jagan is freed from the attachment and pursuit of money, the aesthetic, religious and moral tendencies surge forward for a new recognition and new interrelationship. When he is taken to the garden and the lotus pond by Chinna Dorai, Jagan receives a new set of impression, through which he perceives the close relationship between the various Indian arts, literature and Hindu mythology (Gupta, Santhosh 27). At this stage in Jagan’s life the Gandhian ideals of truthfulness and detachment merge with the ancient Hindu ideals of Purushartha and Ashramadharma, enabling Jagan to form a more coherent and meaningful relationship with them. “He gives up the illusion of being “a soul disembodied, floating above the grime of the earth” and becomes “free,”
“determines,” perceiving with “extra-ordinary clarity, what his goals in life are.” His experiment with truth brings him a new critical perception and he faces himself with a courage. His retirement is purposive and creative for it is related to his quest for truth (Gupta, Santhosh 29).

Jagan does not lose hope of his son. He is optimistic that Mali will come back to lead a noble and responsible life. He believes that jail life will purify him of all the blemishes. To quote Bruce F. Macdonald:

Even Mali, who constantly rejects his Indian past and tries to imitate a spurious Americanism, who lives unmarried with the casteless Grace, and advocates the killing of cows, and who is in jail when the novel closes, seems capable of being reclaimed into the historic process he has spurned. Jail may do him good, as his father anticipates, and the indication seems to be that he will, like his father, be imperfect yet acceptable. (155)

Narayan accepts the Hindu world view and believes in Maya. Through Jagan he proclaims that there is “that non-aligned human centre which refuses to be committed to anything in the world of illusion, because absolute commitment or orthodoxy in human society makes sincerity in the spiritual realms false, as being too strongly identified with maya” (Macdonald 156). *Karma* has not escaped Jagan’s renunciation. “. . . In modern India, Narayan feels, the ideal of the sanyasi, like many other historic ideals, is impossible to attain fully, although the motivation may be the same as in earlier ages” (Macdonald 157).

*The Vendor of Sweets* is not merely a Hindu fable intended to illustrate man’s passage from one *ashrama* to another but a novel set in modern India where individuals
strive to make sense of a complex and fast changing life and are continually caught in clash of ideas and values. “Narayan’s main discovery is the fact that traditional concepts like the *ashramas* and *purusharthas* in various disguises, distortions and subterfuges survive and continue to influence the lives of the people” (Amur 130).

*The Vendor of Sweets* can be viewed from the postcolonial perspective. Jagan epitomizes the characteristic qualities of a traditional Indian. His spirituality meets confrontation with the western materialism of his son and daughter-in-law. Jagan is not willing to surrender his Hindu philosophy, but wants to uphold the noble tradition, ethos and values of his country. In the end he prefers an ascetic life and thus resists the onslaught of western materialistic influence through his dearest son. Narayan seems to tell his countrymen through this novel to be alert and vigilant against such modern evil influence of the West.

Since *Waiting for the Mahatma* is a novel in which Gandhi’s presence is throughout from the beginning to the end, the spiritual element, characteristic of Gandhi, is found in conflict with the material element in several parts of the novel. Materialism is an offshoot of the West which conquered the minds of the East as well. Though Gandhi studied in the West he was not at all influenced by the western values which devour the noble Indian values. Spirituality is a hallmark of India and Gandhi preached the people to keep spirituality in their words and actions. The following are the episodes in the novel where spirituality is confronted with materialism:

Sriram went to Kanni’s shop with the fifty rupees he had withdrawn from the bank and ordered coloured drinks and plantains. The cost was four anas. He drew from his pocket several rolls of notes and pulled one out for Kanni. It was a veritable display of
wealth. Kanni was duly impressed. He asked Sriram to wait there for the balance amount. Sriram had to wait some minutes because there was a rush of customers then. After the customers were sent Kanni “pulled out a long notebook, blew the dust of its cover, turned an ancient page, and pointed at a figure and asked, ‘Do you see this?’ . . . He read out: ‘Nine rupees, twelve anas.’

‘It’s a debt from your grandfather which is several years old’” (WM 18)

Kanni said that it was the cost of special cheroots from Singapore which grandfather used. Sriram said generously, “Take it, by all means,” and turned to go. ‘That’s a worthy grandson,’ muttered Kanni (WM 18).

In order to receive Gandhi in his house Mr. Natesh, the Municipal Chairman made many arrangements. He was a materialist having a very large house with rich furnishings. The text says:

He had effected a few alterations in his house, such as substituting Khaddar hanging for the gaudy chintz that has adorned his doorways and windows, and had taken down the pictures of hunting gentry, vague gods and kings. . . . He had also discreetly managed to get a picture of Krishna discoursing to Arjuna on Bhagavad-Gita, knowing well Gandhi’s bias towards Bhagavad-Gita. He had kept on the window-sill and in a few other places a few specimens of charka (spinning wheels). . . . Now he hoped as he approached the main building that his wife and son would emerge in their proper make-up to meet Gandhi: he hoped his wife would have had the good sense to take away the diamond studs not only in her ears but also in their son’s. (WM 44-45)
Mr. Natesh’s hypocrisy as well as clash between materialism and spirituality in his mind is visible in the above narration.

Mahatma was received by the Municipal Chairman in his luxurious house. Though oranges were offered to him he did not eat or drink its juice. Instead Gandhi called the children to his side and gave them all oranges. The Chairman though unhappy had to obey Gandhi and brought more and more oranges to the children. The children dirtied his beautiful diwan where Gandhi was sitting. After eating oranges the children were still sitting there. The Chairman hoped if the children had disbursed. Then Gandhi beckoned a boy who was standing aloof from the rest. The text says:

His face was covered with mud, his feet were dirty; he had stuck his fingers into his mouth and was watching the proceedings on the veranda keenly, his eyes bulging with wonder and desire . . . Mahatmaji beckoned to the young fellow. One of his men went and fetched him. The Chairman’s blood boiled. Of course people must like poor people and so on, but why bring in such a dirty boy, an untouchable, up the steps and make him so important? (WM 48)

The Chairman’s conflict of values is pictured here. He is very selfish and he wants only popularity and praise from the people. He honours Gandhi with a selfish motive of becoming a friend of the great man. He has none of the Gandhian values. His materialism can in no manner go along with Gandhi’s spirituality. The Chairman is an orthodox Brahmin who can never tolerate an untouchable boy sitting on his diwan.

The Municipal Chairman wished Gandhi to stay overnight in his palatial house. But Gandhi preferred to stay in one of the sweeper’s huts in the slum. Gandhi was about
to leave the Chairman’s house and he told him, “You will come along with me too. Let me invite you to come and stay with me in a hut.’ Unable to say anything more, the Chairman replied, ‘All right, sir, I obey’” (WM 51). The mental conflict the Chairman experienced could be read from his words. It is hellish for him to stay in a sweeper’s house. His materialistic thoughts had to yield before Gandhi’s spirituality.

Mahatma along with Sriram, Bharati and the followers were visiting the villages which were affected by famine. He refused accommodation arranged by the officials. They wanted to make arrangements for him. His reply was, “For me? Don’t trouble yourself. I can sleep in any hut. I can live where others are living. I don’t think I shall demand any luxuries. . . . I’m not a guest here; I am a host. Why don’t you join us as our guest?’ He said this to the District Collector. ‘We will promise to look after you, giving you all the comforts that you want’” (WM 90). The humility and spirituality of Gandhi is expressed in these words. His invitation to the District Collector to be his guest must have put him into conflicts between materialistic comforts and simplicity.

Gandhi toured the villages mostly on foot. He halted wherever he liked. He stationed himself at the lowliest hut in the village if it was available, or in a temple corridor, or in the open air. For hours he walked silently, holding his staff and supporting his arm on one or other of his disciples. Often he stopped on the way to speak to a peasant cutting a tree or digging a field (WM 90).

Gandhi was about to leave Sriram and Bharati. He got into the train to leave Malgudi and go northwards. Both Sriram and Bharati were found overwhelmed with emotions. To quote from the text:
For the first time during all these weeks Sriram felt depressed and unhappy. The thought of having to live a mundane existence without Mahatmaji appalled him, not even the proximity of Bhrati seemed to mitigate his misery. As the sound of the approaching train was heard he looked so stunned that Mahatmaji said: ‘Be happy. Bharati will look after you.’ Sriram looked at Bharati hopefully. Mahatmaji added: ‘Remember that she is your Guru, and think of her with reverence and respect, and you will be all right and she will be all right.’ Sriram took time to digest this sentence. (WM 93)

The above passage points out the transformation that took place in Sriram by the influence of Gandhi. The amorous, flamboyant and materialistic Sriram had changed into a spiritual man. He could conquer his weakness of sensuousness. Gandhi did not forget to comfort him and advise him. He reminded him that Bharati should be treated only as his Guru and never looked through a lover’s eye.

Sriram learned to spin and in exchange of the yarn he got warm cloth of the same count. Thus he got his Khadi clothes, a simple dhoti and a jibba stitched by the village tailor. He took off his mill manufactured clothes and heaped them in the middle of the street, poured half a bottle of kerosene over the lot, and applied a match. “Sriram explained to the gathering, fascinated by the leaping flames: ‘I will never again wear clothes spun by the machinery.’ The Dhoti and jibba were heavy, it was as if a piece of lead were interwoven with the texture. But he felt it was something to be proud of. He felt he had seen and reached a new plane of existence” (WM 99). Sriram’s words and
actions show that he has totally transformed into a disciple of Gandhi, a transformation from materialism to spirituality.

Sriram, as part of spreading the ‘Quit India’ message got into Mathieson Estates and talked to the English man about the need of the British to quit India. Mathieson asked Sriram what Mahatma had advised him to do. Sriram replied, “We will spin the charka, wear Khadi, live without luxury, and we shall have India ruled by Indians” (WM 113). The message of Charka—the simple, spiritual way of life is spoken out through Sriram’s words.

Mathieson offered Sriram a glass of juice. It looked so tempting that he couldn’t but accept it. “Sriram could merely mumble. ‘Thanks,’ and drained his glass. The passage of the juice down his throat was so pleasant that he felt he could not interrupt it under any circumstance. He shut his eyes in ecstasy. For a moment he forgot politics, Bharati, strife, and even Mahatma. Just for a second the bliss lasted. He put down his glass and sighed” (WM 113-114). The passage shows how Sriram was tempted. In the conflict between spirituality and materialism he fell a victim to materialism though only for a few minutes.

In the conversation between Sriram and Mathieson, Sriram asked him whether he would not quit India. Mathieson replied that he would not leave the country as he was part of it. He pointed out that he had employed five thousand field labourers and two hundred factory and office workers and so he was of use to the country. Sriram replied, “You are doing it for your own profit. You think we can only be your servants and nothing else,” said Sriram, not being able to think of anything better . . .” (WM 114). Mathieson and his British government is not doing any service to the Indian people, but rather exploiting them and accumulating material prosperity for England. Hence ‘Quit
India’ is a message of fight against materialism. The freedom struggle itself is a spiritual struggle, a struggle for existence.

In *Waiting for the Mahatma* the theme is apparently the spiritual love between Bharati and Sriram which gains new dimension in the background of their allegiance to the Mahatma. To quote Iyengar:

> Since the stress is not merely on Gandhi’s influence but on Gandhi himself—we see him in Malgudi stationed in Nellappa’s grove and we see him, years later, in Delhi on his way to prayer on the fatal day, 30 January 1948—the novel develops a duality of interest which is not wholly resolved by the compulsion of art. *Waiting for the Mahatma* is an ambitious effort, and an impressive feat; but one also feels that Narayan’s art—now denied the security of Malgudi and catapulted into Gandhian or terrorist political action—betrays unsureness and perplexity . . . It is Bharati who makes a patriot and a man of Sriram, and in marriage he is certain to find in her the saviour strength that is woman’s *sakti*. (373)

The materialist Sriram was converted into a spiritualist and patriot by the effort of Bharati and Gandhi.

Sriram was attracted by white complexion. As a little boy he liked very much the portrait of the unknown English lady better than his own natural mother. “This is typical of many young people who were (perhaps even now are) more in love with the glamour of the West than with the culture of their own poverty-stricken mother-country” (Patil 87).
Gandhi explained to the people how non-violence could be practiced in daily life. He told the people that when someone had wronged them or had done something which appeared to them to be evil, just pray for the destruction of the evil. He asked the people to develop love and not bitterness. Only then they can tell the British to leave the country to be managed or mismanaged by the Indian people, which is purely their own business.

Sriram left his Granny at Kabir Road at night leaving behind his household things and went to become a non-violent soldier of Gandhi. His aim was to remain with Bharati. “Gandhiji welcomed Sriram and told him: “Before you aspire to drive the British from this country you must drive every vestige of violence from your system. . . . You must train yourself to become a hundred percent ‘ahimsa’ soldier”” (qtd. in Mukherjee, Gurugopal 49). Gandhi could easily read what type of a man Sriram was. So he advised him to leave his materialistic life and accept a spiritual life.

In August 1942, Gandhi in his famous speech said that Britain must quit India. He was arrested because of this exhortation. But his message “Quit India” spread like wild fire throughout the country. It had a tremendous momentum. Bharati went to jail but Sriram did not go. He dreaded the hardships and loss of comfort in the prison. Material pleasures and comforts of life were still dormant in him even though became a Gandhi disciple.

Sriram became a violent a soldier of freedom. He became a slave of Jagdish who was a follower of Subash Chandra Bose. Jagdish turned the Mempi temple into a fortress. “Sriram did many destructive works on the request of Jagdish. Soon he understood that by destroying things none could oust the British from India. He felt that Mahatma
Gandhi’s non-violent weapon was superior to the violent weapon. He was arrested under the Defence of India rule” (Mukherjee, Gurugopal 50).

Gandhi’s spiritualism and noble ideas of democracy could not easily enter into the minds of the materialist VIPs of the town. To quote Aikant:

> When Gandhi enters the scene there is a sudden hush, as all the babbling voices subside. His presence triggers feigned deference on the part of the notables of the town, but their conversation reveals their indifference to the distinguished visitor. A comment made by Mr. Natesh, the municipal chairman, shows how opportunistic he is: some people conveniently adopt patriotism when Mahatmaji arrives (p, 26). . . . He emerges as a product of what Gauri Viswanathan has seen as the policy of the British administration to draw the Indians into its own hegemonic structure.” (94)

This indifference was found among the masses also when Gandhi addressed them. When the Mahatma urged the crowd to join him in chanting “Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram,” the familiar hymn to the glory of the Lord Ram, there was a bemused reaction to it and it was only after much insistence that the crowd repeated the refrain with hesitant attempts. “Thus the reaction of the audience problematizes the very myth of the charisma of the Mahatma and his appeal to the popular imagination. Of course, it also underscores the shifting allegiances of the people and the fact that they can not always be taken for granted” (Aikant 94).

Gandhi preached truth and non-violence. He was the epitome of love. He loved Harijans and wanted to uplift them. So he stayed in their house. He was very courteous to the municipal sweepers, railway guards and the engine driver. His greatness lay in his
intimate concern for every man, woman and child as an individual. To quote P. S. Sundaram from his book *R. K. Narayan as a Novelist*: “Individual happiness or misery weighed as much with him as natural needs, so there were occasions where he was human enough not to stand too rigidly on principle. Incident is thus made to throw light on character, and history and invention are so twined as to seem a single thread” (71).

Sriram needed a prolonged training in understanding and realizing the meaning of love and the wider implications of non-violence in this and the context of freedom. Bharati made him aware of the feminine beauty and Gandhi truth. To quote Bhatnagar:

> Beauty had enamoured him and truth had astounded him. He could not grasp what Gandhi was saying, but he looked rapt, he tried to try and follow something, the first time that he found himself at a disadvantage. When he tried to meet Gandhi in the camp he had to undergo a trial of not only waiting but hunger, patience and order and receiving a warning from Bharati—“Don’t imagine that because it is Mahatmaji’s camp it is without any discipline. He himself felt that “If one were to live in this camp one had to follow orders that emanated from the great soul.” (63)

The apprenticeship under Gandhi had brought about a new awareness in Sriram both towards himself and his countrymen. He was full of desire to do something for the country. It was only under such moments of extreme boredom due to loss of faith in action that his thoughts turned towards Bharati and her presence made him pounce upon her in all his passion and possess her.

In pursuance of Gandhi’s wishes, while Bharati courted arrest, Sriram kept himself out of it and fell a prey to the machinations of a revolutionary terrorist Jagdish.
Temporarily he found satisfaction in his job of setting fire to the records in half a dozen law courts, derailing a couple of trains, paralyzing the work in various schools and exploding a crude bomb. “But he enjoys these bouts only as “a relief in his lonely drab life, isolated from all human association. His revolutionary activities give him a feeling of romantic importance and an image of a character out of an epic” but he feels a loss of direction and “a certain recklessness” about himself. The freedom that he abrogates for himself in disorder as destruction proves him false” (Bhatnagar 65).

Bharati has no existence without Gandhi. She has no independent character of her own. She only symbolises Gandhi model of love, non-violence and freedom. Sriram comes into contact with Gandhi through Bharati. The nearer he goes to Bharati the more he learns about Gandhi. “In no other novel on Gandhi has Narayan’s ideology been so well integrated with the personal. The fictional technique adopted by Narayan in concretizing the image of Gandhi and validity of his ideals both at the personal and national level against the background of Sriram’s love for Bharati is unique and effectively engaging.” (Bhatnagar 67-68).

*Waiting for the Mahatma* is the study of a Gandhian disciple’s struggle to accommodate Gandhian principles in his life. The novel presents a study of the bewilderments, the uncertainties, the struggles and the human failures of the disciple who only imperfectly understand his master, and whose attempts to follow the latter’s teaching involve a battle not only against external circumstances but also against deeply ingrained unsaintly aspects of his own imperfect nature. “What the novel dramatizes, then is Narayan’s continuing concern with the idea of spiritual perfection and the difficulty of its attainment by “average” humanity” (Driesen 363).
Sriram’s name recalls that of the great hero of the Indian epic the Ramayana.

“While there is some irony here, considering the nature of this particular hero, the detail is significant. The novel could be read as a kind of parable with Sriram as a figure representative of the Indian nation, attracted to the Gandhian teachings but lacking the moral fibre necessary for faithful continued adherence to them” (Driesen 366-367).

Waiting for the Mahatma is a story of progress and growth of the hero Sriram. From a materialist he has grown to a patriot and man of values. “At one level, therefore, Waiting for the Mahatma is a story of progress of young, irresponsible, carefree Sriram into a passionate lover, a responsible citizen of the country with a record of considerable sacrifice and a term in jail to make him a complete patriot” (Tiwari 86).

Spiritual-material conflict is discernible in the novel The Painter of Signs. Raman came to his house after a bath in the river. His aunt who had dozed off in her corner, woke up and asked him why he had taken a second bath that day. He felt slightly irritated at the interference of his aunt in his personal affairs. “He then asked her, “Have you eaten?”

“Today I fast,” she said. Her fortnightly day of fasting” (PS 15).

Fasting is done on spiritual ground by several Hindus, especially women. This is a sacrifice to please gods and receive their favours. In addition the physical health, it gives spiritual and moral strength.

The bangle seller asked Raman to do him a favour. Raman was requested to ask Daisy if she would buy bangles from the seller to give to the women as a reward for controlling childbirth. When Raman asked Daisy about this she got angry and cried, “‘Rubbish! . . . We don’t believe in that kind of conversion. They must understand what
they are doing, and not be enticed in this childish manner”” (PS 143). Daisy takes birth control programme as a spiritual mission. Women should do it as a sacrament because it is a necessity for the human existence. Daisy wants to educate women about the dire need to control population. She does not want to compel them or bribe them to do it. Most often children are born not because they are wanted to be born but because of uncontrolled sex. Hence unrestrained sex becomes materialistic and restrain on it becomes spiritualistic. If birth control is spiritualistic to Daisy, it is materialistic to the orthodox. To them birth is a divine act and man has no right to put artificial control on it. Thus artificial birth control becomes materialistic. Hence when Daisy teaches the women the necessity of birth control what they undergo is the conflict between spirituality and materialism.

Raman’s aunt expressed her desire to go to Banares along with some of her neighbours. Raman asked her when she would come back. She replied that they should all be back by next Adi. Then he asked her:

“When do you intend to return?”

“Well,” she drawled, “that question is not so important.”

“What do you mean Aunt?”

“It is like this, my boy. At my age, with a few years left, people do not generally want to return. A visit to Kasi is the end. I may live for ten days or ten years or twenty; it is immaterial how long one lives after this stage. It is the ambition of everyone of my generation to conclude this existence at Kasi, to be finally dissolved in the Ganges. That is the most auspicious end to one’s life.” (PS 152-153)
Aunt continues, “Well I don’t think I want to live forever. I will be quite happy to leave this world any time I have done my duty. I was mainly seeing that you didn’t miss anything in life . . .” (PS 157)

Raman’s aunt is so highly orthodox, pious and traditional that she cannot accept Raman’s marriage with a modern lady belonging to a different religion and caste. Since Raman will marry only Daisy and she will be living with him in his house, the aunt wishes to escape from the house to Banares and then to Kasi. Moreover as a devout Hindu she knows that it is high time for her to enter Vanaprastha and finally her body will be dissolved into the Ganges, the holy river. Thus in the conflict between materialism and spirituality she could conquer materialism and hug spirituality.

When Raman’s aunt knew that her nephew was planning to marry a woman of different religion and caste, she sought consolation in going to temple to listen to the priest reading and explaining Krishna’s own wedding. “She does not even try to find out whether Hindu scriptures provide an answer to her moral problems which they do . . .” (Pousse 5). She is so religious-minded and spiritual that she can not digest such unorthodox marriages.

Narayan has proved to be very much in sympathy with woman. Pousse writes:

Not one is a villain, however unconventional she might be. Not so much can be said of the male characters. Narayan is a religious man and his novels have often been interpreted as modern illustrations of mythological fables. . . Narayan does not believe in any would be Westernization of India. The West must stay where it belongs and India will do the same but this can only happen if India lives up to her original values. Clearly
Hinduism provides the answer to every problem. . . . But the answer is to be found in the respect and, possibly, rediscovery of the spirit of Hinduism, which, like Christianity in the West, has suffered from being associated with social mores. (5)

Raman falls in love with Daisy and wants to marry her. She becomes ambivalently or ambiguously attracted to him and then agrees to live with him in a relationship revoking the Hindu conditions of marriage and accommodating her principles of liberation and professional priorities. Syd Harrex writes, “The essence of this situation, then, is that the old myths of arranged marriage, wifehood, and love symbolized by Sita and Radha are opposed by the ways of modern marriage and the independent woman” (75).

The aunt’s departure to Banares shows the sagacity of the traditional Indian philosophy. “By withdrawing in good time, the old woman avoids conflicts—interpersonal with Daisy (if she were to marry Raman) and intra-psychic (since the old aunt could not have accepted her). When Raman wails over her departure, Daisy takes a cool rational view. . . . For daisy separation is the law of life. Commensurate with her philosophy, she leaves Raman toward the end of the novel without any qualms” (Bande 106).