Chapter IV

GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE NOVELS OF
R. K. NARAYAN

Narayan has incorporated Gandhian ideology and philosophy in his novels, namely, *Waiting for the Mahatma*, *The Vendor of Sweets*, *The English Teacher*, *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The Man Eater of Malgudi* and *A Tiger for Malgudi*. Narayan in his characteristic comical and subtle manner writes novels primarily focusing on day-to-day life of an average Malgudian in the imaginary town of Malgudi. In this domestic surroundings of Malgudi, Narayan has artistically interwoven Gandhian ideology in his above mentioned novels.

"Ideals are like stars: you will not succeed in touching them with your hands. But like the seafaring man on the desert of waters, you choose them as your guides and following them you will reach your destiny." – Charles Schurz

In India 1930s and 1940s was a period of great social turmoil and political upheaval when the Indians, like Schurz’s seafaring men on the desert of water chose Mahatma Gandhi as their guide to sail through the tumultuous times. With a passage of time Gandhi has become a myth, a cult and a religion. Charles Schurz rightly remarks:

“He has become abstract, a historical, post-modern, no longer a man in and of his time, but a free loading concept, a part of the available stock of culture symbols, an image that can be borrowed, used, distorted, reinvented and to the devil with historicity or truth.”

The influence and impact of Gandhi’s ideology in contemporary Indian society in general and on literatures in particular can not be undermined. Gandhian philosophy and ideology has invariably motivated and invigorated
the contemporary Indian writers and a huge corpus of contemporary Indian
writing is fore-grounded on Gandhism. The works of the leading contemporary
Indian writers in English, namely, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Bhabani
Bhattacharya and R. K. Narayan demonstrated the Gandhian impact in their
writings. Apart from these luminaries, K. A. Abbas’ Inquilab, Nagarajan’s The
Chronicals of Kedaram, K. R. Venkataramani’s Kandan, The Patriot describe
at length the influence of Gandhi on the contemporary social and political
scene. M. K. Naik remarks, “Indian Writing in English has also felt the ‘plastic
stresses’ of the Gandhian spirit, in more than one way.” (3)

The hallmark of Narayan’s writing is that he has successfully fused his
personal philosophy in his literary works. Though apparently simple in
content, Narayan’s fiction is distinctive for its fusion of the comic with the
serious. Unlike the novels of his contemporaries, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja
Rao Narayan does not directly promote the Gandhian philosophy, his
treatment of Gandhian philosophy in his fiction is distinctly different. His works
manifest the multifarious facets of Gandhism. His protagonists and characters
rooted and nurtured in the Indian ethics and philosophy are people in quest of
truth who embody the greatest virtues of life and they are Gandhians in their
own particular manner. When they are disillusioned, they epitomize the
disillusionment of the masses who failed to comprehend and assimilate the
teachings of Gandhi to the danger of trivialization of Gandhism.

Gandhi gave the greatest priority to religion. He writes in Young India,
“I hold my religion dearer than my country and therefore, I am a Hindu first
and a nationalist later.” (4) Gandhi did not consider Hinduism as sectarian but
as a universal religion which incorporates the best of Islam, Christianity,
Buddhism and so on. \(^{(5)}\) Hinduism with its message of *Ahinsa* is most appealing and relevant to Gandhi. Regarding this universal religion, he remarks:

“The chief value of Hinduism lies in holding the actual belief that all life (not only human beings, but all sentient beings) is one i.e. all life coming from the one universal source, call it Allah, God or Parmeshwara.” \(^{(6)}\)

Gandhian religion has no geographical or national limits, and is not bound by the constraints of colour or caste. Gandhian religion is not a prison house but has room for the entire humanity. It is not a formal or customary religion, but a religion which brings us face to face with our Maker. \(^{(7)}\) His religion is deeply rooted in the traditional set up, scriptures and old values of India. The Vedas for Gandhi are unwritten, divine in nature and they promoted the “purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave.” \(^{(8)}\) The influence of the *Bhagwad Gita* and *Ramayana* on Gandhi is a well known fact. Apart from these Hindu scriptures, Gandhi firmly believed in the *Bible*, the *Quran* and the *Zend Avesta*. This universal grasping of all religions sublimated Gandhi to a cosmopolitan who could apprehend and empathize with the humanity at large.

Gandhian ethics is correlated to religion. Gandhi firmly believed in *Ashrama Dharma* and *Swa Dharma* but boldly attacked the misconception of *Varnashrama Dharma* that favours castes, colour and creed. Gandhi preached the old Indian values of *Ahinsa* or non-violence, *Satya* or truth, *Astheya* or non-appropriation, *Dhairya* or patience, *Brahmacharya* or celibacy, *Indriya-Nigraha* or control of senses, *Kshama* or forgiveness etc. This belief in the ethical virtues of human beings grants a practical appeal to Gandhian
religion capable of fulfilling the human needs. Gandhi experimented with what he preached synthesizing religion and ethics. He defines religion in the following manner:

“I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound by God, that is to say, God rules your every breath.” (9)

Gandhi rejected the distinction commonly made between economics and morality. “True Dharma always promotes legitimate economic pursuits. For imperfect man, this is the finest test of whether what purports to be Dharma is true Dharma.” (10) Similarly, he redefined the meaning and application of Yagna prescribed in Hindu scriptures in an innovative manner. “Yagna means an act directed to the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature.” (11)

Ramashray Roy finds a parallel between Gandhi’s position and that of the Upanishads which insists on the oneness of all life. In his study of Gandhian thought, he notes:

“Gandhi’s position is identical with the Upanishadic insistence of the oneness of everything, senate and insenate. The adhyatma - adhidaivam system posits a thorough going scheme of correspondence between the subjective and the objective and considers the two as dual aspects of the one sole imperishable entity, known as respectively from the subjective and objective point of view. Gandhi completely subscribes to this doctrine and therefore insists on the oneness of all life.” (12)
Gandhi’s belief in the doctrine of *Advaita* is based on the assumption that all men are born equal. He writes:

“I believe in the rock bottom doctrine of *Advaita* and my interpretation of *Advaita* excludes totally any idea of superiority at any stage whatsoever. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All have the same soul as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of all men that I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves.” (13)

*Moksha* or liberation or supreme bliss can be attained through various approaches and paths. All that is needed is a single-minded devotion to God and a similar respect to His creatures. Gandhi avers:

“I believe it to be possible for every human being to attain to that blessed and indescribable, sinless state in which he feels within himself the presence of God to the exclusion of everything else.” (14)

In short, Gandhian philosophy has close relation with the philosophy of *Karma*, theory of submission, *Varnashram Dharma* and so on. R. K. Narayan has knitted these Gandhian principles in the theme and plot of his novels. His protagonists propagate the Gandhian views and advocate Gandhian philosophy as a way of life. This reflection of Gandhian philosophy is visible in great amount in his novels *Waiting for the Mahatma* and *Man Eater of Malgudi*, *The Vendor of Sweets* and *The English Teacher*.

**WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA: A WAY OF LIFE**
R. K. Narayan’s *Waiting for the Mahatma* was written in 1955, about seven years after the assassination of Gandhi. The contemporary writings of the period, irrespective of the medium of Hindi, English or any other regional language bear the imprint of Gandhian ideology. Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *A Goddess Named Gold*, Mulk Raj Anand’s *The Sword and the Sickle* and *Untouchable*, K. Nagarajan’s *The Chronicles of Kedaram*, Venu Chittale’s *In Transit* and other works center around Gandhian ideology. R. K. Narayan in *Waiting for the Mahatma* examines the influence of Gandhi on an average Indian. Sriram, the protagonist in the novel is representative of the mediocre, middle class Indians with his foibles and faults.

*Waiting for the Mahatma* is the only novel of Narayan which places Gandhi at the center of the text. The novel is not a favourite with a majority of critics. A. N. Kaul regards *Waiting for the Mahatma* as one of the “weakest” novels of Narayan. In his opinion, it is neither a political novel nor a good comedy. Uma Parameshwaran ranks this novel below *The Guide* as it has only weaknesses. She writes, “Unlike *The Guide* which reveals his strength as well as shortcomings, *Waiting for the Mahatma* has very little in its flavor.” In *My Dateless Dairy* an American novelist friend of Narayan named Metro also criticized *Waiting for the Mahatma* for its “weak motivation”. In his opinion, the novel “lacks punch” and is unable to provide the real gist of the teachings of Gandhi. C. D. Narasimhaiah, one of the most influential critics of Narayan believes that Narayan has “made a muddle of the Gandhian principle” and asks, “Is it a serious story or fantasy?” He further states that the novel has not enlarged the readers’ awareness of Gandhi nor has it
offered new insight into the Gandhian themes. But William Walsh praised *Waiting for the Mahatma* as “a rare piece of triumph” in which the genius of Mahatma is exquisitely projected. (19)

To Gandhi, truth or *Satya* is the eternal principle of life, the regulating force in the universe. In the Gandhian context, truth is synonymous to God and amounts to sincerity of heart and inner force of soul that implies the discovery of one’s own self. Gandhiji balanced his social, political and spiritual life on the foundation of truth. In his autobiography, he writes:

“The truth is not truthfulness in world, truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is, God…. But I worship God as Truth only.” (20)

According to the Gandhian concept of truth, “The instruments of the quest of truth are as simple as they are different.” (21) Narayan corroborates this fact in his novels by depicting characters in search of truth and self. There is a mixture of Gandhism and pseudo-Gandhism in his novels. The novelist exposes the class of pseudo-Gandhians like Jagan and Sriram and delineates the process of transformation in the protagonists in their search for truth and self-realization.

When the novel opens, Sriram, the protagonist is preparing to celebrate his 20th birthday with his grandmother. He is an orphan, his mother has died during his birth and his father, a soldier died in Mesopotamia on field duty. Sriram, leads a harmonious and apparently contented life with his grandmother in Kabir Street of Malgudi. He passes his time aimlessly with no worry and hassles of life. 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.” (p. 21) (22)

The journey of Sriram from the mundane life to the Gandhian ways of life begins when he first meets Bharati. When Sriram is planning to celebrate the New Year with his granny, he visits the market to purchase some “jasmine for the puja” and other “sweet stuff” (p. 20) for the occasion. His first meeting with Bharati brings new joy and purpose in his life:

“She (Bharati) looked so different from the beauty of Kanni’s shop; his critical faculties were at once alert, and he realized how shallow was the other beauty, the European queen, and wondered that he had ever given her a thought. He wouldn’t look at the picture even if Kanni should give it to him free.” (p. 22)

His curiosity about the fund-collecting girl leads him to the jiggery merchant, he diplomatically asks him about her. The jiggery merchant informs Sriram about the coming of the Mahatma to Malgudi and about the girl’s proximity to him. This information escalates his interest and curiosity in the girl. Sriram suddenly wakes up from an age old somnolence to the fact that Malgudi is about to have the honour of receiving Mahatma Gandhi. (p. 24)

Initially, Bharati is the driving force who indicts Sriram 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." (23)

Narayan, the keen and perceptive observer has tried to grasp and simplify the Gandhian philosophy in this novel. Sriram serves a double purpose since the name of the protagonist ‘Sriram’ is also the chanting word of Gandhiji. Gandhi has mass appeal, a huge gathering of Malgudian citizens are waiting on the bank of Saryu to receive their beloved leader. Volunteers clad in white *Khadi* guide the people and maintain law and order at the meeting. Despite severe heat, the crowd sat patiently and uncomplainingly on the hot sand. As the Mahatma reaches the venue and delivers his speech, Sriram listens with great passion and is completely mesmerized:

“No good. Not enough. I like to see more vigour in your arms, more rhythm, more spirit. It must be like the drum beat of the non-violent soldiers marching on to cut the chains that bind Mother India…. I want to see unity in it." (p. 26)

Unlike Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*, Narayan presents Gandhi as one of the characters in the novel who not only delivers speeches to the multitudes, but also converses and interacts with other characters. Narayan presents an inside view of Gandhi in action from morning till evening as an individual, this enables the readers to understand and correlate the Gandhian ideology and philosophy.

Although Bharati is the motivating force behind his meeting with the Mahatma, yet in his very first encounter with Gandhi, Sriram feels the need to change his life style. Bharati arranges this meeting between Sriram and
Gandhi in the early morning at 3.00 a.m. in a hut in Nellappa Grove, a colony of the untouchables. During the walk Gandhi advises Sriram to undertake morning walks.

“Gandhi said: By the time we meet again next, you must give me a very good account of yourself.”

“He laughed in a kindly manner, and Sriram said, ‘Yes Bapuji, I will be a different man.’”

“Why do you say ‘different’? You will be all right if you are fully yourself.” (p. 68)

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. Kabir Street, Pyol, Granny, Local shop and other things which have enthralled him till yesterday are replaced by the new world dominated by Gandhi, Bharati and Gorpad. Granny for the first time noticing a fiery earnestness in her grandson comments:

“Oh! He is your God, is he?”

“Yes, he is, and I won’t hear anyone speak lightly of him…. He is not a man; he is a Mahatma” (p. 83)

Gandhi prefers to stay in Nellappa Grove in the untouchable quarters instead of the luxurious residence of the chairman, Natesh. He bestows his love on the underdogs and untouchables of Malgudi. Narayan describes the unhygienic condition of these slums of the downtrodden people, the living condition in the colony is deplorable. The life style of these untouchables is a blot on humanity. Gandhi spots the untouchable boy in Neel Bagh residency
of the chairman and offers him oranges asking him to sit beside him. This greatly discomfits the chairman who can not utter a word in the presence of Mahatma Gandhi. Narayan portrays Gandhi’s loving and humane heart and his love of the common man. His mode of action is exhibited during his three days stay in Malgudi when he rejects the palatial residency of Natesh, chairman for a Harijan’s hut.

Like a true Gandhian, Sriram renounces all luxury and comforts. Just as Gandhi preferred to stay in a Harijan’s hut when he visited the villages, Sriram too finds himself more comfortable with the ordinary people and asks them not to worry for his stay. He says to the District Collector:

“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 many luxuries. Don’t worry, we can look after ourselves. I am not a guest here. I am a host. Why don’t you join us, as our guest?”

(p. 90)

Sriram at this stage tries to emulate Gandhi’s way of life.

From Malgudi, Mahatma Gandhi leaves for the assessment of the draught hit areas. He visits the villages on foot, consoles the villages and collects first hand information about the relief measures there. He boards a train at Koppal village, a tiny station at the foot of the Mempi Hills. He advises Sriram:

“Remember that she (Bharati) is your Guru, and think of her with reverence and respect, and you will be all right.”

(p. 93)

Initially, Sriram is drawn towards Gandhi for ulterior motives. The main driving force in his life is Bharati, the moment he sees her, he falls in love with her. P. S Ramana opines, “Learning that she is a follower of Gandhiji, he decides to
become his disciple to be able to be close to her - neither understanding nor having any interest in Gandhiji’s philosophy.” (24) But once Sriram comes in contact with Gandhi, he drifts towards the Gandhian ideology and philosophy of life knowingly or unknowingly.

However, later Sriram undergoes dramatic transformation, he becomes an “accredited member of the group” (p. 87) visiting villages with Bharati and Gorpad. Whenever the villagers wanted to know anything about the Mahatma, they come and speak to him reverentially. He becomes the representative of Gandhi explaining Gandhian thoughts and values to the villagers. His fascinating imagination of village life is shattered when he comes in touch with the grim, brute, lackluster life of villagers. His romantic illusion of villages is shattered beholding “hungry, parched men and women with skin stretched over their bones, bare earth, dry ponds and miserable tattered thatched roofing over crumbling mud walls, streets full of pits and loose sand, unattractive dry fields.” (p. 89) Thus, he starts having compassion for his people.

Hence, the transformed hero renounced his aristocratic habits and habitat both. His home now is a deserted shrine on the slop of the Mempi Hills. His possession now is a spinning wheel, a blanket on which to sleep, and the couple of vessels, some food stuff, and a box of matches. (p. 95) Sriram passes “through a process of self-tempering” (p. 96) to attain purity of thought. He assumes that by praising all the austerities that he had picked up in Gorpad’s company he will become suddenly different, since Gandhiji has blessed him with the idea of self-development. 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.” (p. 96)

There is a gradual evolution in Sriram as he spins and reads the Bhagwad Gita and utters Ram Nam in a routine manner. When he is assigned the job of painting the message of ‘Quit India’ in the surrounding villages, Sriram performs the task with unforeseen zeal and commitment. He painstakingly endeavors to convey the relevance of the painted messages to the people and to form a public opinion against the British rule. The best instance signifying his Gandhian mode of action is spontaneous Satyagraha against the sale of foreign biscuits by the shopkeeper. He succeeds in creating amongst the simple and naive villagers, a partial if not complete awareness of the Swadeshi movement and the ongoing freedom movement of Gandhi against the British – the boycott of foreign goods, the repeal of Salt Tax, Gandhi’s three hundred miles march to Dandi Beach in 1930 thereby adopting Gandhian philosophy in his way of life.

Sriram attains the height of a true Satyagrahi later in the novel. Besides bringing awareness among the people, he himself turns out a fearless freedom fighter. Overcoming initial hesitation and fear, he writes the message of ‘Quit India’ on the gatepost of Mathieson Estates. Here, too, he confronts the lion in his own den:

“Anyway why was he doing this? The High Command had not instructed him to go and bare his chest before a gun mate. (pp. 110-111)

He is annoyed at his own over enthusiastic actions.

Jagadish, quite contrary to Sriram, epitomizes the class of revolutionaries who believe in violence as opposed to the non-violence of
Gandhi. They adore and adhere to violent activities believing in the power of barrel and bullet. Jagadish installs the radio in the lonely abode situated on the slope of Mempi Hill. There is no fasting or Satyagraha but gun to tame the enemy. Jagadish believes that the British will leave India with a salam if its administrative backbone is crushed. He tells the people:

“Britain’s backbone must be smashed, and lies in the courts and schools and offices and railways lines, from these she draws the strength for her survival.” (p.168)

On account of Jagdish’s indulgence in violent activities, Sriram sometimes feels conscious and guilty about it. He discusses his doubts with Jagadish. “I wonder what Mahatmaji will say about all this!” (p.143)

This deviation from the Gandhian path puts Sriram on a hard slippery path. The police arrest him. His arrest and imprisonment highlights the futility of the contemporary Maxist movement. The sub-text entails the hidden discourse, the viability of non-violence in the Indian context.

Nevertheless, Sriram’s Gandhism is incipient. He refuses to court arrest and goes to jail on the pretext of his old grandmother. He says:

“I am only thinking of my grandmother. I want to see her before I am finally jailed. That is why I asked you how long we should be in prison. She is very old, you know. I will surrender myself after I have seen her. I must manage to see her.” (p.140)

Sriram’s oscillation from Gandism to extremism reiterates that he has not fully assimilated Gandhism. He starts assisting Jagadish in his extremist activities. Thus, Sriram’s incipient Gandhism has many ups and downs. Gandhism does not correspond to spinning wheels, painting captions on the wall or speaking about Gandhian principles of non-violence, truth, non-
cooperation and so on. Sriram’s Gandhism after the initial fervor and zeal fails to withstand and fulfill the daring demands at the next stage. It is unquestionable that the attraction for Bharati ushered Sriram into the Gandhian camp. Once Bharati, the epicenter of his attraction is in prison and out of sight, Sriram deviates from Gandhism. Underneath his new patriotic fervor, Sriram lacks conviction in any cult, ism or philosophy and becomes a toy in the hands of Jagadish, an extremist activist.

Narayan focuses on Gandhian concerns in the novel. Gandhi fought against the evil of religious fanaticism and communalism. After independence when Bengal, Bihar and Delhi are caught in the grip of communal riots, Gandhi personally visits these places and forces people to take the vows of non-violence and protection against the rival group. Bharati tells Sriram that “Bapuji forbade us to refer to anyone in terms of religion as Muslims, Hindu, or Sikh, but just as human beings.” (p. 244) Gandhiji hated the names with religious origin or identification. Dr. John Hayness Holmes remarks about this trait of Gandhi:

“Gandhi, in other words has laid hold upon the divine truth that religion is one and universal – and uses, with equal ease and satisfaction, the holy writ of Hinduism, Mohammedanism and Christianity. The Bhagwad Gita, the Sermon on the Mounts the great Suras of the Kuran – they are all the same in their deliverance from superstition, and their disclosure of what is fundamental to the soul and its destiny upon earth. So Gandhi has found peace, since he has attained – and like Buddha is the Path and like Jesus is the Way.” (25)
For Gandhi, the pith and crux of all religions is non-violence, love, brotherhood and truthfulness. Gandhi never approved of the shortcomings of Hinduism such as casteism, ritualism, superstitions etc. He always backed universal truths that have a lasting and enduring value.

It is in prison that Sriram is accrued the unique opportunity to listen to his inner voice. Gandhi in a note to Sriram writes:

“Your work should be a matter of inner faith. It cannot depend upon what you see or understand. Your conscience should be your guide in every action. Consult it and you won’t go wrong. Don’t guide yourself by what you see. You should do your duty because your inner voice drives you to do it.” (pp. 127-128)

Soon, Sriram becomes introspective and starts talking aloud all his doubts. He asks himself, “Hallo, what are you doing here?” and a reply comes from within, “I am fighting for my country.” (p. 129)

To practice truth, the cardinal principle of Gandhism, one needs exemplary courage. “Say anything, he will not mind it, as long as you speak the truth.” (p. 247) Sriram is gripped with anxiety and fear at the prospect of confronting the Mahatma for whom truth is God. Once in the proximity of Gandhi, Sriram gathers courage to speak the truth and his inner voice grants him that strength.

Symbolically, the marriage of Bharati and Sriram denotes the victory of the religion of love and true understanding. There is no loggerhead barrier of casteism, horoscope mismatching or status problem. Their marriage reiterates that religion based on love can change a twenty year old, raw and careless person to a responsible citizen capable of grasping the essence of Gandhism
within a short span of five years. 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.

“Not yet. I must wait for Bapu’s sanction.”

“How will you get it?”

“I shall write to him tomorrow.”

“If he doesn’t sanction it?”

“You will marry someone else.” (p.133)

Sriram and Bharati represent two facts of Gandhism. A large majority of characters in R. K. Narayan’s fiction belong to the class of Sriram who comprehend and practice Gandhian principles on a superficial plane. But Bharati is an ideal Gandhian in the novel. Narayan presents her as a person who has fully assimilated the essence and spirit of Gandhism. Gandhi truly describes her as Sriram’s “Guru”. However, as an ideal Guru, she does not impose her belief or wishes on Sriram. The best way to know the truth is to learn it on one’s own. It is through the method of the trial and error that Sriram ultimately knows the truth. His marriage with Bharati, his “Guru”, portents a plausible shift in his being towards Gandhism.
THE VENDOR OF SWEETS:
FROM GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA TO VANAPRASTHA ASHRAMA

Like Bharati in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Jagan, the Malgudian protagonist in the post-independence era in *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) is said to be modeled after Gandhi. In the opening of the novel he says to his nephew, “Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self.” 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 – all icons that come to manifest and epitomize Gandhism in the post-independence era.

*The Vendor of Sweets* derives its strength from the transformation which the protagonist undergoes in the course of time, moving from *Grihastha Ashrama* to *Vanaprastha Ashrama* – from the much hyped state of “conquer taste” to learning the lesson of renunciation. However, critics like Bhagvad S. Goyal perceive Jagan’s renunciation as a mockery of the very concept of renunciation. The *Vendor of Sweets* traces the journey of the protagonist from a semi-pseudo-Gandhian to a stage of a mature Gandhian at least in concept and thought, if not wholly in practice.

T. C. Ghai sees the novel as a clash between different value systems where the conflict is between a conservative father and a rebellious son on the one hand and between perennial wisdom of India symbolized through the confused eclecticism which is a curious hybrid of the *Bhagwad*
Gita, the Upanishads and Gandhism of Jagan and crazy modernity symbolized through Mali’s desire to manufacture story writing machine.

Jagan’s declaration of the statement “conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self” (p.13) at the outset of the novel is much in the manner of Gandhi who stated, “Control of the palate is the first essential in the observance of the vow (Brahmacharya).” (29) Jagan is presented as a Gandhian in the post-independence times who has no taste for food and has given up salt and sugar. Jagan’s adoption of Gandhian dietary system serves dual purpose, firstly it restraints his sensual impulses and sexual desires and secondly, it conveniently identifies him with Gandhi.

Jagan’s simplicity, his outlook, appearance and appeal are wholly Gandhian. He wears a loose jabbha over his dhoti both made of material spun with his own hand. Everyday he spins for an hour and produces enough yarn for his “sartorial needs”. (p. 15) He does not wear shoes made of the skin of living animals. A narrow almond-shaped pair of glasses and a khaddar shawl on the shoulder are apparently an animation of Gandhi.

Jagan’s preference for Ayurvedic system of medicine and natural care and his dislike of nylon-bristled tooth-brushes, aspirins and allopathic medicine, his immense faith in the properties of morgosa are an extension of Gandhian philosophy as he says in his manuscript in the press, in which he describes the theories which “he owned from Mahatmaji”. (p. 26)

The contradiction in the personality of Jagan soon begins to surface. He has conquered taste but not his love for his son and his shop. He is still a worldly man guided by worldly concerns and passions. Mali’s letters from abroad relegate the Bhagwad Gita to the background. His Gandhism is
overshadowed by his doting fatherly role. He is willing to make all kinds of compromises and adjustments for the sake of his only son as well as his American – Korean daughter-in-law. Jagan’s rejection of caste system indicates his love for his son and is not an offshoot of Gandhism. His acceptance of Grace and Mali as an “unwed” couple in his house further reiterates this view.

Nevertheless, following the Gandhian principle of denouncing verbal, mental or physical abuse – the purest form of *Ahinsa*, Jagan puts his best efforts in this direction throughout the novel. There is no indulgence in any verbal dual or skirmish in the part of the protagonist who maintains cordial relations with his son, servants and friends. He tries to be in peace with his estranged brothers and sisters though without success.

Jagan, like his counterpart Sriram in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, gradually undergoes transformation from a pseudo-Gandhian to a Gandhian in spirit and actions so as to finally overcome his obsession for his only son Mali. He decides not to cooperate in Mali’s project adopting Gandhian peaceful methods. A reduction in the price of sweets is indicative of acquiring a state of non-possession. Similarly, he finds out the truth of his son’s relation with Grace in a manner of an old “*Satyagrahi*”. (p.138) Unhappy and aghast at the unethical behavior of his son who has declined his father’s advice to marry Grace, Jagan’s subsequent actions to barricade himself, lock the communicating door, shut the ventilator are in the mode of Gandhian *Asahayoga* or non-cooperation. Jagan’s reaction to leave his shop, business, familial and social attachments and take refuge in *Vanaprastha Ashrama* reiterates his faith in Gandhian values and principles. When he hears the
news of the policeman who wants to arrest Mali, he says like a true Gandhian, “If what you say is true, well, truth will win. If it is not true, there is nothing I can do.” (p. 183) He renounces the worldly affairs and like a true Sanyasi leaves his house. When he quits the house, his bundle includes his charkha. He says:

“I will seek a new interest – different from the set repetitions performed for sixty years. I am going somewhere, not carrying more than what my shoulder can bear.” (p. 183)

Jagan symbolizes the orthodox values of the Hindu society, his championing of the Swadeshi is parochial and sentimental. Mali’s plan to abandon college and pursue his business of story writing disturbs Jagan. In his unequivocal praise of indigenous writers, he is a true Gandhian. He tells Mali about the great poet Kalidasa:

“College or no college, I know Kalidasa was a village idiot and a shepherd until the goddess Saraswati made a scratch on his tongue and then he burst into that song, Syamala-dandakam, and wrote his Shakuntala.” (p. 32)

The news of Mali’s prospective visit to the United States is equally disturbing to Jagan. He is very upset when he comes to know of Mali’s plan to visit U.S. to obtain diploma in creative writing. “Going there to learn story-telling! He should rather go to a village granny.” (p. 45) He further asks, “Did Valmiki go to America or Germany in order to write his Ramayana?” (p. 45)

Thus, his patriotic sentiments surge and he declines his son’s idea of going abroad.

When Jagan takes pride in his simple vegetarianism, his son’s praise of beef eating after three years’ stay in U.S. is ironical.
“I’ve taken to eating of beef. Steak is something quite tasty and juicy. Now I suggest why not you people start eating beef? It’ll solve the problem of useless cattle in our country.” (p. 56)

Jagan feels quite outrageous to hear this. He is reminded of the *shshtras* which consider the killing of cow as the most heinous of all sins.

While Jagan is cogitating on how to express his feelings on the subject of vegetarianism and collecting quotations from *Shashtras* and Gandhi’s writings on cow-slaughter, Mali’s letter about beef eating presents a typical Narayanian ironic situation. When Mali’s shaking the very foundation of his father’s Gandhian ideology nurtured over the years, Jagan is struggling to reason with his son peacefully hiding these facts from the Malgudians. When Mali returns from the U.S., Jagan is shocked to see his son’s outfit of a dark shirt, with an overcoat, carrying an airbag, a camera, an umbrella and so on. Jagan feels that he is meeting a stranger, a few seconds later when Mali introduces Grace, Jagan’s discomfiture is obvious. “This is Grace. We are married. Grace, my dad.” (p. 58)

Mali has been presented in the novel as an antithesis of Jagan who upholds orthodox and conventional values. Spiritualism, simplicity and Gandhism of Jagan is juxtaposed to the materialism, utilitarianism and Westernization of Mali who valorizes Jagan in a totally new value system. Thus, the East and West encounter finds an expression in the novel. Traditional India represented by Jagan is set against the modern India represented by Mali. Narayan is aware of the fact that a good number of young men who go the Western countries return as Westernized beings in behavior, speech and thinking. They believe it a privilege to remain ignorant of their native traditions and customs. Gandhi in his writings has raised his voice
against the Westernization in all forms. This is presented through the character of Mali.

Mali in his attitude and values is the epitome of all that is un-Indian and anti-Gandhian. His living in sin with Grace, a half Korean girl, symbolizes cultural violation, while his over-reaching project of producing a story-writing machine on a mass scale is an illustration of the absurd materialistic ambitions and impersonal mechanization of the West which threatens to capture and control the creative freedom of art. When confronted with an embarrassing situation, the sight of the whirring noise of the wheel and the thread growing out of it between one’s thumb and forefinger is very soothing to Jagan’s nerves and thoughts. In such moments of anxiety, Jagan derives consolation from Gandhism. His grooming in Gandhism is instrumental for the internal evolution in Jagan. The total rejection of Hindu values and social system by Mali creates a vacuum in Jagan’s life. His only communicative link is his cousin, his business and domestic concerns have no relevance and meaning to Jagan at this stage.

Dorai Swami, a bearded man is a “visitation from another planet” (p. 128) to Jagan. In the later part of the novel, Dorai Swami, the ultimate alter-ego of Gandhi, occupies a top position in Jagan’s mind to whom Gandhi was “his master”. (p. 112) Jagan becomes the true follower of the white bearded man whose attitude, solitary stance and philosophy impresses the widower so as to enter the next stage of Vanaprastha Ashrama as devised by Manu.

Undoubtedly, the protagonist’s entry into the new life according to Hindu Sutras is hastened by the eccentricities and strange notions of Mali. The rejection of Hindu values and social set up by Mali disturbs the core of
Jagan’s heart. There is only one option left to Jagan i.e. his retreat to a life of solitude leading towards sainthood. Ultimately, it is Dorai Swami who leads him on the path of renunciation. The teachings of Dorai Swami reinforce Jagan’s prior Gandhism which he has assimilated over the years.

Towards the close of the novel, Gandhi is at the core of Jagan’s thoughts in his entire internal and external discourse, when his cousin approaches Jagan with the news of Mali’s arrest and the possibility of the policeman bearing a grudge against Jagan as the plausible reason for Mali’s arrest, Jagan’s reaction is characteristically Gandhian, He says:

“But Mahatma Gandhi trained us not to nurse any resentment.” (p. 189) Mali’s imminent trial does not in the least unnerve Jagan. He remarks, “Truth ought to get him out, if what you say is true.” (p. 190)
THE ENGLISH TEACHER: A SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Unlike Mali in The Vendor of Sweets, Krishnan in The English Teacher rebels against English education and Western ways of living. In The English Teacher, Narayan interrogates the relevance or the usability of Western educational system in Indian social and cultural context and the psychological implications that subsequently lead 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, 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. Michel Pousse opines that Gandhi used the English language as a tool and its perfection lay in its functional skill only but Gandhi’s preference for the vernacular is widely known. R. K. Narayan reiterates this in The English Teacher and also emphasizes it in Waiting for the Mahatma. Narayan states in the novel:

“At the outset Mahatma Gandhi explained that he would speak only in Hindi as a matter of principle. ‘I will not address you in English. It’s the language of our rulers. It has enslaved us.’”

Krishnan, the English teacher interrogates the colonial education system in The English Teacher. At the very outset 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. Krishnan dislikes English language which he states promotes an impersonal education system in contrast to the Guru-Shishya relationship, a characteristic feature of an
ancient education system in India. Krishnan is utterly disillusioned, disturbed and demoralized in his role of the English teacher in his college. An introspective kind of a person with a "singular consciousness", he doubts the use and practicability of English education so much so that he ultimately resigns from his job of an English teacher even though he is a product and promoter of Western education system in India.

Baffled at Brown’s incomprehension because of his “Western mind, classifying, labeling, departmentalizing” (p. 179) approach Krishnan is induced to undertake a new experiment with education. The basic education propagated by Gandhi is invariably an answer to the English education in India. Gandhi writes:

“I have no faith in the so-called system of education, which produces men by learning without the backbone of character. True education is that which helps us to know our true self, our soul, God and truth. Every branch of knowledge should have as its goal, knowledge of the self and exploration of the Truth.”

(34)

Realization of self is a rudimentary feature of Gandhian philosophy of education. Krishnan in his quest for identity could be specified as a Gandhian character who has personal, racial, cultural and national dimensions. He is caught between two worlds - the corporal world where he is engaged as a lecturer of English and the inner spiritual world where he draws strength from the spirit of his dead wife. Krishnan represents the dilemma of an Indian under the imperialistic regime. His resignation from the respectable post of a lecturer from Albert Mission College and his joining the kindergarten school is an attempt to renounce the Western education system.
Krishnan in his search for the inner self and final realization is an autobiographical presentation of Narayan himself. Narayan has confessed this in *My Days*:

“More than any other book *The English Teacher* is autobiographical in content, very little part of it being fiction. The English teacher of the novel, Krishnan is a fictional character in the fictional city of Malgudi, but he goes through the same experience, I had gone through and he calls his wife Susila, and the child is Leela instead of Hema. The toll that typhoid took and all the desolation that followed, with a child to look after, and the psychic adjustments, are based on my own experience.” (35)

Thus, the novel being autobiographical reflects Narayan’s thoughts of his dislike for the Western philosophy of life and promotes the novelist’s staunch belief in the Gandhian philosophy of self realization.

Moreover, Krishnan could be described as a true *Satyagrahi* in a sense that he is fighting an internal battle for truth and self – realization through the rejection of Western system of education. In the gradual process of self-exploration, he learns to renounce the mundane affairs of life which posit obstruction in self-realization.

One of the prominent features of Narayan’s fiction is that he writes with a historic sense and perspective, eulogizing the glorious past of India. He writes in the tradition of anti-imperial cultural nationalism that critiques all Indian literature from the Vedic times to this date. He has thus cultivated a cultural identity in his writing and people who question India’s cultural heritage are reprimanded and rebuffed by him. Ebenezer, a scripture teacher in *Swami*
and Friends refers to the “dirty, lifeless, woolen idols and stone images”\(^{(36)}\) of Hindu culture which were unable to protect themselves when Mohammedans attacked them. On this tirade on Hindu culture, Swaminathan, the adolescent protagonist of Narayan and his friends find themselves on war path with the imperialistic attitude towards Indian culture. In literature, as in colonialist politics, one of the most significant aspects of imperialist self-projection was its misrepresentation of the colonized and their culture.

This systematized attack on Indian cultural values is defended in the novel by Narayan on Gandhian principles and ideology. 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.”\(^{(37)}\)

On 15\(^{th}\) August, 1930, two thousand Malgudians assemble on the bank of Saryu to protest against the arrest of a prominent congress political worker in Bombay. Here a *khaddar* clad leader stirs the lulled emotions and sentiments of Malgudians by highlighting the esteemed past of Indian civilization. He speaks in a resounding voice,

“Have we forgotten the glorious periods of Ramayana and Mahabharata? This is the country that has given the world a Kalidasa, a Buddha, a Sankara. Our ships sailed the high seas and we had reached the height of civilization when the Englishmen ate raw flesh and wandered in the jungles, nude.”

\(^{(37)}\) pp. 94-95
The same nationalistic feelings are expressed in the text by an eloquent speaker who is a congress worker:

“Just think for a while, we are three hundred and thirty six millions, and our land is as big as Europe minus Russia. England is no bigger than our Madras Presidency and is inhabited by a handful of white rouges and is thousand of miles away.” (p. 95)

“Let every Indian spit on England, and the quantity of saliva will be enough to drown England.” (p. 95)

Swaminathan too is deeply stirred by the speaker’s eloquence and shouts, “Gandhi Ki Jai.” (p. 95)

Other incidents in the novel which can be correlated to the Gandhian ideology are the burning of “foreign cloth” (p. 95) and the friendship of Swaminathan with a Muslim boy Akbar Ali “a nice Mohammedan” (p. 108) which is symptomatic of communal harmony. Gandhi advocated for the use of Swadeshi clothes. There was a calculated economics behind Gandhi’s this belief. He wanted the people of India to be self reliant. He dreamt of India where the citizens would adopt and use the things made by their fellow men and women. When Swaminathan wears a foreign cap on his head, somebody remarks, “Young man, do you want our country to remain in eternal slavery?” (p. 97) Hearing this, he feels utterly ashamed, removes the cap and flings it into the fire with a feeling that he has saved his country.

The protagonist’s direct participation in the strike, the atrocities of police on the Malgudians, the harsh treatment of the protagonist by the headmaster of Board High School and his rejection of Western educational
institution – all these incidents directly or indirectly are related to the multifarious economic, cultural, political and social programmes of Gandhi.

Chandran, the protagonist in *The Bachelor of Arts*\(^{(38)}\) is also concerned with the misrepresentation of the Indian history by the imperialists for their own selfish ends. The theme of racial, colonial and cross-cultural conflict presented in *Swami and Friends* posits very simple but deeply sensitive questions with which every sensible intellectual was confronted during the 1930s and 1940s. The presentation of the imperialistic attitude at the outset of the novel leads to other Gandhian issues of social inequality and economic and social exploitation.
THE MAN EATER OF MALGUDI:
THE SPIRIT OF NON-VIOLENCE

Narayan’s novel *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1961), regarded as the “greatest work” \(^{(39)}\) is the perfect representation of the Gandhian principles of non-violence, and peace. The serious intention of the writer here is to immortalize and reassert the Gandhian views on *Ahinsa* or non-violence. Hilarity and seriousness are yoked together to support the eternal truth of non-violence in the novel. Prof. K. R. S. Iyenger has aptly remarked:

> “The Man Eater of Malgudi jumbles the ingredients of comedy to excellent purpose and provides ample entertainment, but the undercurrent of serious intention can not also be missed.” \(^{(40)}\)

*The Man Eater of Malgudi* \(^{(41)}\) is a close parallel to the mythological story of Mohini and Bhasmasura. The human values and demonic values are represented by Nataraj, the printer, and Vasu, the taxidermist respectively. Nataraj with his meekness and altruistic activities occupies a respectable position in the placid and calm world of Malgudi. Narayan has depicted violence as an evil and vehemently exposed and criticized it on all levels – physical, psychological, mental, racial and cultural. But *The Man Eater of Malgudi* is exclusively centered around the theme of the conflict between violence and non-violence. Here, violence and non-violence are represented by Vasu and Nataraj respectively.

Everything is peaceful and orderly before the coming of Vasu, who is a symbol of destruction and demonic activities. He is the product of neo-colonial
ills, he represents industrialization, competition and economic modernization on the Western hegemonic pattern to which the calm and peaceful citizens of Malgudi are not ready to subscribe. These Malgudians have their own inherent traditional code of conduct. Consequently, Malgudians are not exclusively motivated by the motif of material prosperity, but on the contrary, they subscribe to the moral values of their ancestors. Social harmony, universal love and brotherhood are greatly treasured in the Malgudian society.

Vasu, the power hungry taxidermist, indulges in poaching and womanizing and has apparently no respect for Gandhian principles. Nataraj also tells Vasu about the value of non-violent speech, as did Gandhi during his life time. He says:

“Aggressive words only generate more aggressive words. Mahatma Gandhi had enjoined on us absolute non-violence in thought and speech, if no better reason than to short-circuit violent speech and prevent it from propagating itself.” (p. 70)

Nataraj, in juxtaposition to the materialistic Vasu, genuinely believes in non-violence and avoids all kinds of confrontation and conflict. He confesses that he could not be a successful enemy to anyone. Any enemity pains him day and night “like a tooth ache”. (p. 94) When neighbours complain to Nataraj, the landlord, about the indecent, illegal and violent activities of his tenant, Vasu, the landlord endeavours to evacuate Vasu on different pretext instead of dictating terms in a straightforward manner, but Vasu does not budge to the pleas of Nataraj and continues with his licentious activities.

The novel reaches the climax when Vasu decides to kill the temple elephant Kumar. This insidious plan is leaked by Rangi, “a woman of the
temple.” This is a question of great concern for Nataraj and he devises different plans to check this nefarious action of Vasu. After considering all kinds of options to this unique problem, Nataraj ultimately surrenders to the non-violent ways of Gandhi. He says to himself:

“Non-violence would be the safest policy with him. Mahatma Gandhi was right in asking people to carry on their fight with the weapon of non-violence; the chances of getting hurt were much less.” (p. 213)

Narayan’s repeated emphasis on the main motto of the novel i.e. “evil flourishes to destroy” is categorically Gandhian. Gandhi also believed that evil actions and wrong means, always lead to disastrous end. Gandhian epithet – as the means, so the ends – is marvelously highlighted and concluded in the novel.
Contrary to Vasu, the Sanyasi in *A Tiger for Malgudi* upholds the Gandhian values of non-violence, love, understanding and sympathy. The central theme of *A Tiger for Malgudi* is no doubt Gandhian in the sense that the novel presents the victory of these Gandhian virtues over violence and rudeness. Narayan presents a unique relationship between Raja, the tiger and the Captain firstly and secondly between Raja and the freedom fighter turned Sanyasi.

The relation of the captain and the tiger is like that of the master and the slave – the ruler and the ruled. This binary relation is mechanical, materialistic, momentary and compulsive, monitored through cane and fear. These relations are polarized similar to that of the colonizer and the colonized. But the relationship between the tiger and the Sanyasi is founded on love, mutual understanding and sympathy which is in consequence eternal and endurable. The complete transformation of Raja, the tiger at the end of the novel is suggestive of the victory of good over evil, of non-violence over violence. Raja, a transformed animal at the end says:

“I tried to attain some kind of purification by reducing the frequency of seeking food. Nor did I kill recklessly as I used to in my jungle days…. Nowadays, I went into the jungle and stalked the littlest game, just sufficient enough to satisfy my hunger of the moment and not my gluttony.”

(p. 159)
The tiger is uncannily tamed by the Swami. He is moulded, purified and taught the noble truths of the Buddhist doctrine and is ultimately transformed into a creature who is an animal in its exterior form only. But beneath it, there is a soul as pure, innocent and enlightened as his master’s. Towards the end of the narrative, we see a tiger, who can understand his master’s discourse on God (p. 157), has the feeling of gratefulness (p. 158) willingly suffers hunger for consecutive days and feels nobler (p. 159) and has attained the supreme Satva as advocated by Gandhi. By presenting the most brutal animal as the protagonist and by showing a great internal transformation in the character, Narayan succeeds in conveying the message of non-violence. In his Preface to A Tiger for Malgudi, he writes:

"With the right approach you could expect the same response from a tiger as from any normal human being." (p. 10)

The main theme focused in this novel is that of non-violence which is the cardinal principle of Gandhi. The Swami who ultimately tames the tiger with love and spirituality is a one time activist of Mahatma Gandhi’s Quit India Movement. It is noteworthy here that R. K. Narayan has chosen a Gandhian character to impart the message of non-violence and love. Swami in an attempt to tame the violent tiger, Raja, explains the importance of non-violence in life. His words spoken to Raja are the echoes from Gandhi. He says:

"Violence can not be everlasting. Sooner or later it has to go, if not through wisdom, definitely through decrepitude, which comes on with years, whether one wants it or not." (p. 145)
Thus, R. K. Narayan has presented an encompassing view of Gandhian ideology and philosophy. Theory of *Karma*, spirit of oneness with all, the theme of transformation from materialism to spiritualism, the concept of non-violence are discussed in the above discussed novels, namely, *Waiting for the Mahatma*, *The Vendor of Sweets*, *The English Teacher*, *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The Man Eater of Malgudi* and *A Tiger for Malgudi*. Narayan probably has never met the Mahatma and doesn't know him personally but he has superbly grasped and mastered the quintessence of Gandhian philosophy. 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.” (43)

Sriram, Jagan, Krishnan, Swaminathan, Chandran and tiger Raja – all the protagonists in his novels are true embodiments of Gandhian virtues and voice. They all uphold the Gandhian principles of non-violence or *Ahinsa*, absolute truth or *Satya*, self control or *Indriya-Nigraha*, celibacy or *Brahmacharya* and subscribe to Gandhian ideals of simple living, religious tolerance, love for all, brotherhood, untouchability and are devoted to the eradication of social evils like prostitution, casteism, dislike for Western education system and love for the dignity of labour, patriotism and nationalism. P. S. Sundaram remarks:

“It is absurd to suggest that Narayan has not ‘enlarged’ that awareness in the sense of painting a picture larger than life.
But the picture is all the truer for the restraint and fidelity with which it has been drawn." (44)

Gandhi envisioned the Indian utopian society free from the evils and stigmas of caste, class and creed and vehemently condemned the orthodox Hinduism that promoted casteism. He considered untouchability the greatest blot on Hinduism and desired to remove this evil by again reincarnating as “an atishudra”. (45) R. K. Narayan’s heroes like Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets and Krishnan in The English Teacher support the Gandhian ideological stand on these issues. In Waiting for the Mahatma, Gandhi’s love for the downtrodden is widely discussed. Gandhi denounced the prevalent terms of reference for the untouchables and introduced Harijan i.e. ‘People of God’ as the new term of reference for them. “But I have to be born; I should be born an untouchable so that I may share their sorrow, suffering....” (46) The cosmopolitan view of Gandhi that the world is a family (Vsüler ku3uMbkm\) is reiterated by Narayan through assimilating, amalgamating and associating people from different castes, classes, creeds and cross-sections of the society in the imaginary town of Malgudi.

Education was one of the primary concerns of Gandhi. The Macaulean system of education which served the needs of imperialistic regime in India was decried by Gandhi and he preached on the same lines as Tolstoy and Ruskin, the significance of character, human values and spiritualism. To Gandhi, education meant “an all round drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind and spirit”. (47) Character building constitutes a major part of the dynamics of Gandhian ideal of education. He advocated the three dimensional – physical, mental and spiritual – development of a learner. His
plea for national language, vocational training and social service during the
course of education was inclusive of his concept of wholesome education. To
Gandhi, the goal of education was to produce good individuals who would
understand their social responsibilities. Swaminathan in Swami and Friends,
Krishnan in The English Teacher and Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts
interrogate the imperialistic educational system to ultimately denounce it in
conformity with Gandhian ideals of education. Sriram in Waiting for the
Mahatma, Tim in The World of Nagaraj and Mali in The Vendor of Sweets are
some of the ill-products of the British educational system in India.

1900 onwards Gandhi seriously contemplated to take the vow of
celibacy or Brahmacharya and ultimately in 1906 undertook the final
resolution to be a celibate. Gandhi’s views on celibacy and his subsequent
vow of celibacy has been an issue of endless debate. R. K. Narayan in his
depiction of celibate protagonists refers to the problems of celibacy or
Brahmacharya in his typical comical, non-serious vein, a stylistic device for
which he is irrevocably acclaimed. Nagaraj’s ceremonious switch over to
arche robe in The World of Nagaraj is an instance where celibacy is comically
portrayed. In The Painter of Signs Daisy’s efforts for the popularization of the
family planning programme is contrary to the Gandhian sexual ethics and can
be treated as an improvised form of Gandhian principle of celibacy.

Gandhi preached simple dietary system and considered fasting as one
of the essential aspects of Brhmacharya. Fasting is believed to curb animal
passion and assist in the process of self-control. Alcohol and non-
vegetarianism are strictly prohibited in Gandhian dietary system. In the later
part of his life, Gandhi abandoned milk, even salt and excessive use of sugar
in accordance with the requirements of body. Gandhi averred that Brahmacharya germinates discipline, morality, and courage in life. Jagan’s control in his diet to some extent corresponds to Gandhian dietary ethics.

Gandhi was vehemently opposed to modernity and technology. He was critical of any civilization which undermined human beings and moral values. He writes:

“I wholeheartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites and go to the ends off the earth in search of their satisfaction. If modern civilization stands for all this, I have understood it to do so, I call it satanic.” (48)

Gandhi was also against the Westernization in all forms. He avers:

“Europe today represents not the spirit of God or Christianity but the spirit of Satan…. In reality, it is worshipping Mammon.” (49)

He criticized the Europeans for the worship of Mammon as against the gospel and spirit of Christianity. Gandhi considered this contemporary industrial civilization of Europe, a disease and evil for human race. He firmly believed in the ancient spiritual status of India in the world and remarks:

“I would have our leaders teach us to be morally supreme in the world. This land of ours was once, we are told, the abode of gods. It is not possible to conceive gods inhabiting a land which is made hideous by the smoke and the din of mill chimneys and factories.” (50)

Narayan reproduces the same spirit and heritage of ancient India in Swami and Friends.
To countercheck the proliferation of industrialization and technology, Gandhi programmed novel methods and means. He opines:

“I do not believe that industrialization is necessary in any case for any country. It is much less so for India. Indeed, I believe that independent India can only discharge her duty towards a groaning world by adopting a simple but ennobled life by developing her thousands of cottages and living at peace with the world.” (51)

R. K. Narayan in The Vendor of Sweets and The World of Nagaraj interrogates these concepts of modernity and technology.

Non-violence or Ahinsa is another cardinal principle of Gandhian ideology. Subrata Mukherjee writes in this regard, “Gandhi made the technique of non-violence the powerful weapon in his fight against British imperialism.” (52) Gandhi acknowledged the principle of non-violence common to all religions. “Ahinsa is in Hinduism (Jainism and Buddhism) also it is in Christianity as well as in Islam.” (53) Non-violence had found “the highest expression and application in Hinduism.” (54) A living faith or belief in non-violence is impossible without an unflinching faith in God and Gandhi remarked that “non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute.” (55) As the creation of the political philosophies of passive resistance and constructive non-violence, Gandhi spent most of his time in political arena entering daily life of people.

Non-violence for Gandhi is not a cover for cowardice, on the contrary, it is the supreme virtue of the brave and its application requires much more courage than violence. He writes in Harijan:
“Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man. Destruction is not the law of the humans.” (56)

“Ahinsa is a science” (57) and its application and results are also scientific. Moreover, Gandhi relates the concept of non-violence with spiritualism. He writes in Harijan:

“The victory of Ahinsa has only one fear, the fear of God. He who seeks refuge in God ought to have a glimpse of the Atman that transcends the body; and the moment one has a glimpse of the imperishable Atman one sheds the love of the perishable body.” (58)

Gandhi applied the principle of non-violence to the society, state and the entire world. “All society is held together by non-violence, even as the earth is held in her position by gravitation.” (59) He conceptualized Swaraj based on Ahinsa. “In Swaraj based on Ahinsa, people need not know their rights, but it is necessary for them to know their duties.” (60) Ahinsa for Gandhi was not the goal but the means to realize Truth. In this respect, he remarks:

“A steadfast pursuit of Ahinsa is inevitably bound to truth – not so violence. That is why I swear by Ahinsa. Truth came naturally to me. Ahinsa I acquired after a struggle.” (61)

R. K. Narayan also supports the concepts of Ahinsa or non-violence in his two novels Man Eater of Malgudi and A Tiger for Malgudi.

Narayan in Waiting for the Mahatma, The Vendor of Sweets and The English Teacher delineates the Gandhian stream of consciousness that awaken the inner sensibility of both the characters and readers. Sriram in
Waiting for the Mahatma. Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets and Krishnan in The English Teacher finally evolve as true Gandhians. The class of pseudo-Gandhian is comically caricatured and satirized in Narayan’s fiction. Swaminathan and Chandran in Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts respectively share the pre-independence views of an average middle class Indian. Swaminathan, a participant in Gandhian movement, is more aggressive and outspoken in his adherence to Gandhian philosophy, but Chandran’s approach, on the contrary, is moderate and reasonable. In The Man Eater of Malgudi, the theme of non-violence is randomly contrasted with the character of Vasu and the same theme is epitomized through the activities of the wild beast, tiger in A Tiger for Malgudi who ultimately subscribes to the Gandhian way of life under the guidance of his master who is again a devotee of Gandhi. Considering all these aspects of Narayan’s fiction, Shiva M. Pandeya remarks:

“At the level of the broader human issues, of national and international actions of epic dimensions, R. K. Narayan presents Mahatma Gandhi as an idealized hero of almost super human charismatic power.” (62)

Narayan presents Gandhi as primarily interested in liberating the spirit of India, putting a nation of slaves on the road to liberation, initiating the spiritual revolution and rejuvenating the traditional, everlasting values of Indian culture, religion and philosophy.

Rama Jha holds the view that “the trait of renunciation which is common to Narayan’s protagonists is evidently Gandhian, rather than the ancient Brahmical” (63) does not apply in the context of his characters. Gandhi called himself “a sanatanist Hindu” (64) and “a staunch Hindu”. (65) He
believed in the universality of Hinduism and its philosophy. He writes, “For me Hinduism is all-sufficing. Every variety of belief finds protection under its ample-folk.” (66) Gandhi’s own renunciation is totally in accordance with the Vedic and Upanishadic paradigms. He fully observed the restrictions and jurisdiction of the principles of these old scriptures. The protagonists of Narayan also follow the same restrictions in the line of “ancient Brahminical” norms as also prescribed by Gandhi. Narayan’s fiction thus highlights the invisible unity between the life of Gandhi in his teachings and the principles and ideology in his fiction.
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