Chapter Five:

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THE VENDOR OF SWEETS: QUEST FOR TRUTH

In *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), R. K. Narayan seems to problematise the viability of a pure tradition (here embodied in the Gandhian spirit of living) in the culturally hybridised society in postcolonial India. This novel testifies to Narayan’s complex use of the text which projects to some extent, a dialectical structure of values between pre-colonial purity of tradition and the postcolonial hybridisation of culture. Narayan’s presentation of Jagan, the sweet vendor as a Gandhian, serves the purpose of positioning the character within a ready made structure of ‘attitude and reference’ to problematise culture in the context of ideological values.

‘Experiment with truth’ forms the principle of life for a Gandhian. Michael Pousse thinks that ‘Narayan’s characters are literary incarnations of the Gandhian ideal. They are people in quest for truth’. But truth being a psychological finality of perception and a philosophical construct of ‘reality’, is essentially a question of relativism. Even in Gandhian ideology, the word is imbued with complex implications. Michael Pousse prefers to equate ‘truth’ with ‘sincerity of heart’ and even the “soul-force”(62). In the context of a fiction, where according to the author, ‘an individual lives his life’ ‘in a world imagined by the writer’, and ‘performs a set of actions (upto a limit) contrived by the writer’, a character’s search for truth finally turns out to be a quest for a permanent space for his true identity, the métier of his belonging, the framework of surviving values in his own tradition that he can rely upon. In the variegated spectrum of experiences in a changing society that Narayan’s characters face, the perception of truth encompasses some ‘larger experience’ that projects a search for the discovery of one’s authentic selfhood. However, the incorporation of the dominant Gandhian motif (in the person of the hero) and a problematic use of the same (revealed in the experiences of the
individual), seem to help the writer to contextualise the issue of identity within the matrix of some cultural contemporaneity and continuity. Now, to be objective, Gandhism, which Pousse terms as ‘part of India’s past through its Vedantic origin’, forms an inalienable part of Indian tradition and culture. The incorporation of the appellation – ‘search/quest for truth’, ostensibly a ‘derivative discourse’\(^3\) from the canon of Gandhian ideology, strategically serves Narayan to project the journey of an individual’s self through experiences that show a cultural veracity of lived existence in the timeless ethos of Indianness. But what is significant here is that, Narayan shows in this novel how an ordinary individual’s naïve concept of truth matures from a level of skin-deep perception to a veritable height of realisation. A thorough analysis of the novel presents how an imperfect idealist conducts his search for his true identity in a society of prevailing cultural hybridisation and in this process, reaches his goal through self-discovery true to the spirit of Narayan’s art of characterisation.

In *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), Jagan, the hero, is seen at the beginning of the narrative, to belong to a double space of a syncretised culture. An arch-traditionalist at heart, Jagan, a veteran Gandhian is found also to run successfully a sweetmeat shop in the urbanising, profit-oriented society at Malgudi. Jagan’s life at the personal level is a happy, uncompromised extension of his past activities that were directed to the cause of the nation. On the one hand, he brings up his son Mali almost with a motherly obsession of love and care, to be loyal to the code of familial responsibility which Indian tradition views as a sacred duty. On the other, he maintains a most humble style of living that is prescribed along the indigenous tradition of an exclusively *swadeshi*\(^4\) style of life that has been exemplified and encouraged by the Mahatma who is Jagan’s life-force. The following lines from the text will show how Jagan tries to modulate his daily life to a *Swadeshi*, Gandhian mould of existence:
He wore a loose *jibba* over his *dhoti*, both made of materials spun with his own hand; everyday he spun for an hour, and produced enough yarn for his sartorial requirements. He never possessed more than two sets of clothes at any one time and he delivered all the excess yarn in neat bundles to the local handloom committee in exchange for cash; although the cash he thus earned was less than five rupees a month, he felt a sentimental thrill in receiving it, as he had begun the habit when Gandhi visited the town over twenty years ago and had been commended for it.(274)

Strikingly enough, Jagan’s arduous observance of this Gandhian norm of activities do not show any real bearing upon his psychic as well as ‘intellectual self’. Jagan performs the activities more or less mechanically without any ostensible awareness of their real implications, concerning one’s spirit or self-realisation. The rigorous exclusion of luxury and comfort from his life at home is therefore, not necessitated by any spiritual urge for dispelling earthly attachment, but by a spirited struggle for freedom under the guidance of Gandhi. The element of humorous excess in the predicament of Jagan, where values are seen to be observed mechanically without their spiritual / intellectual assimilation, can be traced in Narayan’s characteristic ironic thrust in the narration:

His chin was covered with whitening bristles as he shaved only at certain intervals, feeling that to view oneself daily in a mirror was an intolerable European habit. [...] he shod his feet with thick sandals made out 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 would have its throat cut for the comfort of my feet’ and this occasionally involved him in excursions to remote villages where a cow or a calf was reported to be dying.(274-275)
Being a staunch Gandhian in his dress and food habits, Jagan has given up rice and cooks ‘a little stone-ground wheat’ and takes it with ‘honey and greens’. Jagan is also seen to be a zealous promoter of nature-care as the key to a long, healthy life. As the writer puts it: ‘Regularly at five in the morning Jagan got up from bed, broke a twig from a margosa tree in the backyard, chewed its tip, and brushed his teeth’(282). He is dismissive of the use of tooth-brush simply out of his belief that the ‘bristles are made of the hair from the pig’s tail’ and his partiality for margosa does not change even after the advent of the nylon: ‘nylon had an adverse effect on the enamel’ (283). For Jagan, margosa is a divine gift with immortal properties for man: ‘...he called it ‘Amrita’ – the ambrosia which kept the gods alive; and sometimes he called it ‘Sanjeevini’, the rare herb, mentioned in the epics, which held at the nostrils could bring the dead to life’(283). Jagan acknowledges with gratitude, his being grafted to tradition as a right of inheritance: ‘He never ceased to feel grateful to his father for planting a seedling in his time and providing him with a perennial source of twigs – enough for his generation and the next, ...’(283). Thus, Jagan sees himself in his domestic world with a cultural authenticity of tradition: ‘Everything in this home had the sanctity of usage,’(282).

So the private space of Jagan’s identity is marked by an ethos of complementary values -- acquired both from familial roots and sociological impetus (here the influence of Gandhi). Narayan here specifies Jagan’s own dissection of his cultural entity:

> It was impossible to disentangle the sources of his theories and say what he owed to Mahatmaji and how much he had imbibed from his father, who had also spent a lifetime perfecting his theories of sound living and trying them on himself,[...].’ (283)

Notwithstanding Jagan’s articulate efforts to preserve the purity of his traditional self, his public identity suffers from a sort of basic problematic - a
binarism of confused values. The opening lines of the novel addressed by Jagan to his cousin, point to a confused approach to values, an approach originating from the lack of, what Santosh Gupta thinks, a ‘critical self-awareness’:

‘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 our sages advise us so’.

It is humorous to note that, himself a confectioner, Jagan advocates the spiritual goal of restraint over gluttony, though when asked to clarify, he fails to realise either the cause or purport of the scrap of supreme knowledge he has uttered. Obviously, Jagan lives in a space where his perception of cultural values undergoes a kind of forced syncretism that shows a penchant for traditional values along with a craze for a postcolonial re-positioning of the cultural identity. In a characteristic ironic tone, Narayan delineates Jagan’s activities in his shop that show a precarious antithesis between his professed idealism which proposes his business to be a ‘service’ to his country men, and his shrewd business acumen to earn money. The following excerpt from the text amply presents Jagan’s spontaneous urge for tradition.

Jagan sat under the framed picture of the Goddess Laxmi hanging on the wall, and offered prayers first thing in the day by reverentially placing a string of Jasmine on top of the frame; he also lit an incense stick and stuck it in a crevice in the wall. The air was charged with the scent of Jasmine and incense and imperceptibly blended with the fragrance of sweetmeats frying in ghee, in the kitchen across the hall.

But Narayan, in his usual ironic mode, has also exposed the element of affectation in Jagan’s make-up. Jagan sits on his ‘throne’, with an open copy of The Gita at his hand. Though his eyes roam over the holy lines of the scripture,
his mind is always busy with the developments before the counter or in the kitchen:

As long as the frying and sizzling noise in the kitchen continued and the trays passed, Jagan noticed nothing, his gaze unflinchingly fixed on the Sanskrit lines in a red bound copy of the Bhagavad Gita, but if there was the slightest pause in the sizzling, he cried out, without lifting his eyes from the sacred text, ‘what is happening?’ The head cook would give a routine reply, ‘Nothing’, and that would quieten Jagan’s mind and enable it to return to the Lord’s sayings until again some slackness was noticed [...].(276-277)

When the counting-hour approaches around six in the evening, the cousin knows that ‘he should move’ as ‘Jagan did not like his cash to be watched’. He agrees with a slight misgiving at the head cook’s proposal to pulp the left over sweets into a new shape on the next day on a sheer commercial consideration: ‘...after all, one had to take a practical view, with the price of foodstuff going up’(278). After settling the problem with the leftovers, Jagan makes a final count of the day’s cash and makes entries in a small notebook. It is interesting that he makes ‘more elaborate entries in a ledger which could be inspected by any one’(278).

The separate arrangement for the cash received after six is made only to keep it out of the range of tax, as an independent category to be viewed as ‘free cash.’ This ‘free cash’ is viewed by Jagan’s shrewd commercial self as ‘a sort of immaculate conception, self-generated arising out of itself’(278). This slashed amount out of the day’s earning is ‘tied into a bundle and put away to keep company with the portrait of Mr. Nobel in the loft at home’(278).

Obviously, this Jagan, as found in the first two chapters in the novel, is a man with a duality of self. He now belongs to a space that bears a syncretic
concoction of a balance between the claims of tradition on the one hand, and
the contrary pulls of a rapidly urbanising and commercialising postcolonial
reality in the society of Malgudi on the other. Krishna Sen finds in this
existence of Jagan, Narayan’s ironic hint at the ‘presence of a multifarious
strata within a single personality’ (182). But this trait of ambivalence according
to Krishna Sen, is not to be regarded as ‘deliberately hypocritical and sinful’,
but ‘as a lower stage in the character’s spiritual development’ (182).

However, a forced syncretism out of the apparent illogicalities, may show the
measure of compromise made by an individual to live in this complex modern
world, but it paradoxically marks, in the case of a typical Narayan character,
the point of a search for one’s true self — for a fusion out of the confusion of
lived experiences. Jagan’s quest for truth begins with his misadventure with his
son Mali who betrays a propensity for the lures of a wayward Westernism that
repudiates the call of one’s inherited culture. Mali’s waywardness of outlook
gives the first jolt to Jagan’s rooted self when Mali declares his intense dislike
for the formal education system in India. Interestingly, the shock necessary to
initiate Jagan’s search for a surviving set of values comes from no other corner,
but his family, which in Narayan’s conception, forms a major portion of one’s
roots in one’s original, inherited culture. Theoretically speaking, Jagan’s shock
at the waywardness in Mali creates in him that sense of alienation which results
in the quest for the true métier of cultural identity in a major character in
Narayan’s fiction. Jagan’s conflict ensues with Mali’s open disapproval of
college education and his firm decision to discontinue. To an out and out
traditional father like Jagan, Mali’s ways of thinking are completely baffling
and unintelligible and his reaction shows a helplessness and indeterminacy
coupled with filial weakness. Narayan has poignantly presented the interaction
between resolute Mali and submissive Jagan:

The boy paused while swallowing his breakfast. ‘I can’t study any
more’ [...]. ‘Tell me what has happened’. ‘Nothing’, said the boy, ‘I do
not find it interesting, that’s all’, and he went on munching his food with his eyes down. Jagan had never seen him so serious. The boy seemed to have suddenly grown up. He had never spoken before in this tone to his father.[...] he had become brusque and aggressive.[...]. ‘So early in the morning, and the boy showing such a temper!’[...]. ‘All right, get on with your eating. We’ll talk of these things later’, he mumbled when he should have said, ‘Swallow your food and run off to your class’. He was a cowardly father and felt afraid to mention class or college.(285)

Mali’s reluctance to continue education reminds Jagan of his own discontinuation of studies, though it was accepted for a greater cause of service to the nation under Gandhi’s influence. He thus confides to his cousin not only his disillusionment with Mali’s educational outlook (‘Mali is displaying strange nations’), but also his wistful attitude to education with a considerable measure of self-defence behind his own discontinuation of studies:

If I had passed the B.A., I could have done so many other things.[...]. I had to leave the college when Gandhi ordered us to non-cooperate. I spent the best of my student years in prison,[...].(288)

Narayan’s ironic hint (‘his reminiscential mood slurring over the fact that he had failed several times in the B.A... long before the call of Gandhi’), Jagan feels conflicted to read the motive of Mali: ‘But what excuse can these boys have for refusing to study?’(288).

Jagan’s frustration about his son’s motive in abjuring the safe and time-tested traditional way of and attitude to life, further deepens as he learns from the cousin of Mali’s future plan - to adopt the career of a writer. Jagan’s confused reaction articulates his utter inefficiency in negotiating the modern ideas regarding the fluidity of choice in making a career. Mali’s unconventional
approach to profession, theoretically speaking, points to a veritable phenomenon in the social reality of postcolonial period, brought in by the globalisation of culture. As for Jagan, the very idea of the profession of a ‘writer’ wrings out his conservatism of outlook, his rooted allegiance to the stratification of profession as prescribed by India’s traditional *Barnashrama* system. The following extract from the text amply points out Jagan’s conservative outlook:

‘Writer’ meant in Jagan’s dictionary only one thing, ‘a clerk’ – an Anglo-Indian, colonial term from the days when Macaulay had devised a system of education to provide a constant supply of clerical staff for the East India Company. Jagan felt aghast. (289)

Jagan’s confusion in his choice of Mali’s profession indeed suffers from a problematic in so far as, his ambition regarding Mali is indicative more of a postcolonial urge for cultural appropriation than of an identity rooted in the matrix of tradition:

Here was he trying to shape the boy into an aristocrat with a bicycle, college life, striped shirts and everything, and he wanted to be a writer! Strange! (289)

Yet, Jagan’s commitment to tradition comes out in categorical terms, when he feels frustration at Mali’s idea of going to America to learn the art of story writing:

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 “Shyamaladandakam”, and wrote *Shakuntala* and so on. (292)
Jagan’s reaction to the very idea of learning the art of story-telling from America underscores his faith in the time-old oral tradition of literature in India; where the idea of story is rooted in the indigenous matrix of imagination which is wielded into a classic expression in the epics and puranas: “Going there to learn storytelling! He should rather go to a village granny’, he said, all his patriotic sentiments surging”(302).

But it is obvious that in his search for truth, Jagan shows a range of acculturation, at least in his own world of a confused perception, where commitment to tradition and a vague, unclear pull of social distinction in the modernising society jointly project a ‘cultural fluidity’ in his life. As has been pointed out, this search in Jagan is initiated by his changing relation with Mali, and here the quest for surviving values matures in the form of Jagan’s strivest for acculturation that operate initially in the field of blood-relation, but ultimately move beyond it. As has been pointed out by Krishna Sen, Jagan’s attempts at renewing the relationship with Mali, his only son, substantiates Noel Perrin’s detection of some ‘responsibility towards blood-relations’ which is important in the process of identity-formation in Narayan’s characters. The same urge in Jagan, an urge to level up the growing differences between him and Mali, can however, be traced even earlier, when Jagan is seen to have got rid of his initial frustration regarding Mali’s freaks – such as, burning his college books or toying with the idea of going to America. Jagan reconciles himself to the possibility of Mali’s writerly life. This kind of self-adjustment within Jagan comes to the fore when he guesses by plying on the keyhole of Mali’s room, that the boy ‘seemed to be moping in dejection and boredom’. As the writer has put it, ‘Jagan realized the time had come for him to forget college education and get completely identified with Mali’s fantasies, at least until he came out of his gloom’(293). But Jagan’s overbearing obsession with Mali fails to draw a feeling reaction from Mali and the following exchange between the father and the son ironically serves to illustrate the point:
‘What are you writing now?’ asked Jagan with the humility of a junior reporter interviewing a celebrity.

‘A novel,’ said the boy condescendingly.

‘Oh, wonderful. Where did you learn to write novels?’ Mali did not answer the question; Jagan repeated it.

‘Are you examining me?’ Mali asked.

‘Oh, no, I’m just interested, that’s all. What story are you writing?’

‘I can’t tell you now. It may turn out to be a poem after all. I don’t know.’

‘But don’t you know what you are going to write when you sit down to write?’ ‘No’ said the boy haughtily. ‘It’s not like frying sweets in your shop’. This was completely mystifying to the junior reporter. He said pathetically, ‘Tell me if you want my help in any matter.’ The boy received that in sullen silence. (293-294)

In spite of an earnest effort to strike a better understanding with his son, Jagan feels hurt at Mali’s insentient behaviour and his bafflement helps him presently to arrive at an awareness of a reality in his personal, familial space: ‘Secretly his mind was bothered as to why there was always an invisible barrier between them’ (295).

Obviously, Jagan’s quest for truth starts ironically with his total disillusionment with his son. But before this phase of disillusionment, Jagan’s initial despair about his son, owing to his ‘lack of intellectual self-realisation’ gets subdued by his growing affinity for illusions that show neither any ostensible truth behind them nor any promise of fulfilment. Jagan, who has been primarily displeased with Mali’s unorthodox choice of vocation, now begins to believe in his potential as a blooming writer and feels a ‘peculiar thrill’ in speaking of his son as a writer. He also imagines that Mali’s option for a writing career is, to some extent, a continuation of family tradition since Jagan himself is also a sort of writer though his book titled “Nature Care and Natural Diet”, has been in
Nataraj’s Truth printing press for years. Jagan relishes in exposing to folks like the head cook and his cousin, Mali’s extraordinary choice of being a writer. When the cousin mentions Jagan’s family tradition of writing as the chief inspiration behind Mali’s plans, Jagan’s optimism about Mali catches fire: ‘I hope he will also emulate my philosophy of living. Simple living and high thinking, as Gandhi has taught us’ (297). Under the impact of flattery (done on the part of the cousin at intervals of his tasting of varieties of sweets), Jagan also shows a philosophic tolerance in justifying Mali’s unorthodox ways of thinking:

There are bound to be changes of outlook from generation to generation. Otherwise there will be no progress’, he added in a sudden outburst of theorizing, once again a vestige of his Satyagraha days. (297-298)

Jagan’s forced acculturation in his present predicament shows in the reader’s eyes, a range of self-delusion in terms of his intellect and self-awareness in particular. Jagan’s peace at home prevails only at the cost of losing propriety of blood relation, ‘with speech reduced to a minimum between father and son’ (299). Narayan here has presented Jagan’s illusory judgement of Mali without any ostensible reason that can endorse such a judgement:

Mali seemed to have brightened up at the fact that he wouldn’t be expected to study. Jagan continued to feel gratified that his son was pursuing a fresh course, all his own’. ‘Instead of reading other people’s books, he is providing reading for others’, he often reflected with a lot of pride. (299)

In Jagan’s naïve perception, Mali’s identity as a promising writer would become a ‘service’ in its own right as Jagan views his own life as a ‘service’ to the nation. Jagan’s steady growth in illusion about Mali ironically foreshadows his consequent disillusionment as the story shows. Jagan’s confusion blurs his
power of judgement in so far as, his mental stability in connection with his usual role-play, seems to get affected by his overbearing concern for Mali. The following lines from the text amply justify this problem with Jagan:

He had a passing misgiving about his son’s experience of life, his equipment to be a writer. He had uneasy thoughts sometimes when he sat on his throne in the shop looking at the pages of the Bhagavad Gita. However profound the lines before him, his own thoughts seemed to be stronger and capable of pushing aside all philosophy, while revolving round the subject of Mali’s manuscript.(299)

Jayant K. Biswal in his criticism has found that Jagan here ‘shares the fancies of Mali leaving his own emotional moorings’ (101). Thus, Jagan is seen to plunge deeper and deeper into self-delusion until the stage comes when his urge for self-realisation takes its origin. Jagan’s progress into self-delusion with a forced, and somewhat inclined reconciliation of self (owing to his filial weakness and lack of intellectual self-analysis) with changing circumstances, becomes discernible in his exposure to experiences that come in connection with Mali. The writer has pointed out the reaction of Jagan after he gets the information from the cousin that Mali is finally going to America: “The first shock of the impact blanked out Jagan’s mind for a time, and he caught his breath as he had a momentary panic at the thought of his son removing himself so far geographically”(302). A traditionalist at heart, Jagan disapproves of the very idea of Mali’s going to America (‘They eat only beef and pork in that country’). But it is remarkable how Jagan’s outlook makes a compromise when the cousin voices his own prejudiced view of American life (in terms of ‘intoxicating drinks’ and women mixing freely with men and snapping off marriages and busking in the sun without clothes):
Jagan went on, 'It may not all be true', not wishing to think a country to which Mali was going was one to corrupt his body with wine, women and meat, and his soul with other things. (303).

Jagan is also ‘shocked’ to know from the cousin that Mali has chalked out all his plans without the father's help or permission but he hides his despair with a happy look' saying:

'See, how self-reliant he has grown! I have always believed in leaving the entity to develop by itself, without relying on extraneous support. As they say in the *Gita*, 'Every soul is God....' [...]. 'That's the whole point,' said Jagan. 'That's why I never wished to interfere when he suddenly decided to end his education. I said to myself, “perhaps he wants to educate himself in the school of life,” and let him free' – echoing various tit-bits of banality he had picked up in the course of his life and haphazard reading.(304)

The expressions -‘tit-bits of banality’(picked up in course of Jagan’s life) and ‘haphazard reading’ point to the lesser quality of intellectual realisation in Jagan whose very entity undergoes a cultural depassement as a result of his overbearing concern for the well-being of Mali. Though it testifies to the element of tragic undertone in Narayan’s comic character, in the present context, Jagan’s value-confusion and emotional rootlessness, notwithstanding his inner commitment to tradition, come to the fore and problematise the crisis of culture. Jagan’s self that has a naïve faith in tradition without sufficient support of empirical knowledge or conviction, naturally proves to be inept in negotiating the unpredictable ways of modernity as embodied in the life of Mali. The confusion emerging out of such a mishmash of belief and experience is quite natural in Jagan’s case, but what is important is that, at the behest of proving an ideal guardian in the eyes of the cousin (who proves a better accessibility to intractable Mali than Mali’s own father), Jagan primarily makes
a show-off; but impelled more by the father’s instinct than by intellectual and imaginative power, ultimately believes in his own showmanship and theories though these only show a pathetic rupture with truth. To put it simply, Jagan shows a considerable range of self-positioning in order to win Mali’s confidence; and his conscious efforts of appropriation at the cost of his emotional and intellectual moorings, only turn out to be an awkward progress in self-delusion that is fated sooner or later, to end in disillusionment.

Jayant K. Biswal has detected in Jagan two primary obsessions – money and his son Mali. It is notable that filial weakness gets the better of his attachment to money in course of his compromises made under the spell of self-deception. Even though he detects Mali’s theft of ten thousand rupees from the bundled currency left hidden in his loft, Jagan, instead of launching a protest, digests it as if under some thraldom and rather becomes engrossed in the thrill of finding his son in the States. The writer has aptly described this world of Jagan:

HE HAD NEVER thought that he could feel so superior about it. Now it seemed to him worth all the money and the pangs of separation. ‘My son is in America’, he said to a dozen persons everyday, puffing with pride on each occasion. It delayed his daily routine. On his way to the shop he had only to detect the slightest acquaintance on the road, and he would block his path, and instead of discussing weather or politics, as was his custom, would lead the talk on gently to the topic of America and of his son’s presence there.(306)

It is only natural that gradually Jagan’s reading of the Bhagavad Gita becomes ‘replaced by the blue air mail letters’ sent by Mali and this automatic amnesia of his old habit that has been related to his traditional self, points to the optimum extent of his self-delusion. The following extract from the text convincingly captures Jagan’s cultural dislocation from his native roots since
the idea of America practically appears to unhinge Jagan’s mind. Narayan here refers ironically to the effect of Mali’s letters on Jagan:

From their study he formed a picture of America and was able to speak with authority on the subject of American landscape, culture and civilization. He hardly noticed to whom he spoke; anyone on the road seemed good enough. His acquaintances feared that he was afflicted with the Talking Disease.[...]. It was a matter of luck for another, whether he could slip away in time or get entangled in American lore.(309)

Now such a sort of cultural dipsomania, so to say, induced by Jagan’s pride in his son’s stay in America, shows the height of self-deception in Jagan who is basically a traditionalist at heart. The expected disillusionment occurs soon with Jagan’s knowledge of Mali’s taking to beeffs. Before he has sufficient time to digest this invaluable knowledge, he has to receive Mali at the Malgudi station with an unknown girl whom Mali introduces to Jagan as his wife Grace. The extremity of his experiences -- the strange exoticism of Mali’s airs and words, his casteless wife (whom he later knows to be half-Korean and half-American), a strong gaping crowd around, spells a belittling effect on Jagan (‘uneasiness and a feeling of inferiority’) and the disillusionment in Jagan sets in with infallible signs:

He began to avoid people.[...]. He walked hurriedly to his shop with down cast eyes. Even his cousin found great stretches of silence when they met. Jagan had grown unwilling to talk about his son. Everything about him had become an inconvenient question.(312)

It is significant to note that, this disillusionment in Jagan paradoxically causes a simultaneous resurgence of his old, familiar world of thought in which The Gita had always been a steady source of reference along with Gandhism. For
example, when the cousin cunningly asks Jagan about the type of food that Mali and Grace have been taking at Jagan’s traditional household, Jagan replies: “I can only provide what I’m used to. If they don’t like it, they can go and eat where they please”. To make his point clear, Jagan further says: ‘...one can only do one’s duty upto a point. Even in the Gita you find it mentioned. The limit of one’s duty is well defined’(313). It is obvious that with disillusionment, a sort of detachment has crept in Jagan and this shift in interest in the protagonist has been hinted under the veil of Narayan’s characteristic humour:

As long as Mali’s blue airmail letters had been the theme, the Gita had receded into the background. Now it was coming back, which showed that Jagan was becoming mentally disturbed again. (313)

Though Jagan gets a little used to Grace’s docile attitude to him and feels the ‘extreme air of orderliness that the feminine touch’ imparts to a household, Mali seems more and more to belong to an absolutely different culture.

Mali never wore a dhoti at home, but a pair of dark trousers over a white shirt, and always had his feet in slippers. He hardly ever left his room, or visited any part of the house.[...]. He carried himself like a celebrity avoiding the attention of the rabble.(314)

Jagan’s disillusionment leads to his detachment from his own household and his knowledge of Mali’s plan to manufacture a story-writing machine further baffles him. When he wants to talk to Mali about it, Jagan’s experiences unravel a radical change in the domestic space: ‘For a moment Jagan felt as if he were a petitioner in his own house,[...]’(324). Mali’s demonstration of the story-writing machine to the father is also not illuminating to the latter. To Mali, such a machine, if used on large scale, would surely dispel the cultural backwardness of this country where there has been no modern work of
literature except those old stories like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Jagan’s firm faith in the oral tradition of Indian literature and its surviving vitality (‘the great books lived thus from generation to generation by the breath of people’) receives a snobbish reaction from Mali who appears to be lured by the cultural iconisation of the West: “Oh, these are not the days of your ancestors. Today we have to compete with advanced countries not only in economics and Industry, but also in culture”(326). Obviously, such cultural oratory from one who has severed the umbilical chords of his native culture, fails to convince Jagan who is a traditionalist at heart and Jagan begins to suffer now from a whetted sense of disenchantment:

While on the one hand Jagan felt delighted at the way his son seemed to be blossoming after years of sullen silence, he was at the same time saddened by the kind of development he noticed in him now.(326)

The information that Mali wishes his father to finance the lion’s share of the scheme, disappoints Jagan greatly and his predicament ushers in him a pathetic sort of discovery: ‘Money is an evil’ (328). This realisation makes disillusioned Jagan alert to the schematic moves of Mali and Grace who are keen to broach upon the subject of the novel-writing project on any pretext; to further the deal with Jagan. But Jagan now shows an immaculate reading of the situation with an unprecedented clarity of vision: “‘Here is a scheme to make me bankrupt’, he said to himself whenever he heard footfalls approaching his room. ‘Fifty one thousand dollars! I am not growing over-fond of money, but I’m not prepared to squander it’ ”(329). To Jagan, the only viable key of negotiating the cold war peacefully, is to become ‘sneaky’ in his arrival and departure and such a change in attitude in him is imperative since there is a strange development in his private space. Jagan feels that his domestic life has lost its original innocence:
He had lost the quiet joy of anticipation he used to experience whenever he turned the Statue Corner. He felt nervous as he approached the ancient house. The expectant stare of Grace when he opened the door and, the significant side-glances of Mali got on his nerves. He was aware of a silent tension growing. (332)

But Jagan’s motivated moves of non-cooperation do not hold good for long; and the tension brewing within the family, meets the inevitable conclusion with an outburst of despair, a veritable tantrum on the part of Mali which delivers a fatal blow to the fatherly self in Jagan. Being embarrassed one day, Jagan confesses his inability to finance Mali’s scheme with such a big amount of fifty thousand dollars as he thinks himself to be a poor man. Seeing the despair in the other two, Jagan tries to confirm his views by saying, ‘Gandhi always advocated poverty and not riches’ (334). When Mali taunts Jagan’s earning thousand rupees a day, Jagan mildly answers: ‘If you feel you can take up the business and run it, do so; it is yours if you want it’(334). Mali’s unfeeling reply to Jagan does not only show the trauma of generation-gap, but also problematise the socio-moral concept of ‘duty’ that a son ought to feel to his father who has brought him up with years of love, care and sacrifice: “you expect me to do that? I have better plans than to be a vendor of sweetmeats”(334). For Jagan, Mali’s reply is ‘the unkindest cut of all’:

The recollection of the scene, he felt, would overwhelm him; he might break down and it would be silly to be seen in tears while he was occupying the throne. He had a mental picture of himself standing, like a ragged petitioner in the presence of Mali and the Chinese girl, being sneered at for his business of a lifetime, a business that had provided the money for Mali to fly to America and do all sorts of things there.(336)

In Hindu philosophy, the search for truth (which implies supreme Knowledge) is prescribed to undergo stages of illusion (Maya) or self-delusion. In Jagan’s
case, his experiences form a part of his continuing experiments with truth, his true identity so far filtered through his dual sources of authenticity – his native tradition and its complementary aspect, Gandhism. It does not escape one’s notice that Jagan’s quest for truth continues in his experiments with reality where every experience accrues a dividend of growth in his realisation. The emotional debacle in personal life, objectified in his ideological clash with the only son, serves to unhinge, bit by bit, Jagan’s mind from the long charm of attachment. His power of judgement, now recovered from the bias of personal attachment, can diagnose the malaise once more: ‘Money is an evil’ (336). He now has the clarity of vision to detect money as the root of his unhappiness; the exclusive pursuit of which in his own case, has paradoxically led Mali astray by intoxicating him with utopian schemes that have no connection with one’s native cultural roots. Jagan’s revelation is important also in his possible realisation that in his earnest ideal of money-making, the true ideal of ‘service’ which should be the watchword of life for a Gandhian like him, has got eclipsed: “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”(337). It is as if in a bid of expiation, that Jagan decides in favour of an astonishing reduction of the price of his sweets though this experiment is prompted more by the emotional than the intellectual self of Jagan. When the head cook, unable to read the motive of Jagan who has proved himself a crafty businessman, expresses his apprehension (‘At this rate, we will be swamped’), Jagan cannot explain ‘what he was doing or why’. But Jagan’s abrupt decision like this (though without the necessary intellectual motivation), carries with it at least two positive impacts. First, the decision helps in generating in him a spirit of an impersonal urge for service. It is important to note that this urge in Jagan grows with a parallel advance in his disillusionment regarding his son. When the cousin proposes to talk to Mali, one sees Jagan for the first time in his life, to show a deliberate aloofness from any thing related to Mali:
'By all means speak to him on any matter you like, Jagan said and added with firmness, ‘but not on my behalf.’ (337)

Apart from being a marker of an ideological experiment without proper intellectual motivation, Jagan’s selling of sweets in a reduced rate is also important in another respect. It paradoxically brings him into contact with that bearded sculptor cum hair-dyer Chinndurai, who proves to be the ‘way-shower’ in Jagan’s arduous quest for truth. Chinnaurai happens to visit Jagan at his shop as a companion of some established confectioners of Malgudi who come to protest against Jagan’s decision of price-reduction the populist effect of which might upstage their business. After the confectioners have departed, the bearded man discloses to Jagan in a conversational mood, the identity of his master who has designed almost all the idols of Hindu pantheon in temples all over the South. His descriptions of Gods and temple friezes at once create a transcendent effect on Jagan’s mind:

Jagan was impressed by his elocution [...] it was at least a relief from the talk of butter and frying. His description of the gods made Jagan regret that he had not gone near the temple for months, being wrapped up in this monotonous job of frying and cash-counting. (346)

It is obvious that this new acquaintance at least brings immediately, a perceptible thaw in Jagan’s awareness that has remained so long confined within the limits of interests in his known, narrow world: “For years his fixed orbit had been between the statue and the shop, his mental operations confined to Mali, the cousin and frying” (347). In order to get beyond the sphere of his monotonous, drab existence, Jagan visits the place where this image-maker’s master once lived and planned to design a new God in the form of five-faced Gayatri, the deity of Radiance. This experience casts a transporting effect on Jagan who senses a dislocation with his ignoble present and a continuity with a happy past that fades into eternity:
it was difficult for Jagan [...] to believe that he was in the twentieth century. Sweetmeat vending, money and his son’s problems seemed remote and unrelated to him. The edge of reality itself was beginning to blur; ... (351)

Jagan’s prolonged quest for identity in the form of truth seems at this stage, to reach the stage of finality as his identity undergoes a shift from a concoction of reality to a conflation of sensibility. As the bearded man is hunting out odds and ends of sculptural pieces from beneath the weed and keeps muttering some holy verses in memory of his ‘guru’ (‘we should not let the body deceive us as to the true nature of our being/ one is not really bone and meat.’), Jagan as if feels a thrill of transmigration — a prerogative of the mythical and mystical tradition of Indian philosophy. Narayan has duly accentuated this encroaching realisation in Jagan:

 [...] Jagan listened agape as if a new world had flashed into view. He suddenly realized how narrow his whole existence had been — between the Lawley Statue and the frying shop; Mali’s antics seemed to matter naught, ‘Am I on the verge of a new janma?’ he wondered. Nothing seemed really to matter. ‘Such things are common in ordinary existence and always passing’, he said aloud.(352)

The bearded man’s recovery (with Jagan’s help) of the original stone-slab with which his master planned to design the idol of Devi Gayatri before his death, urges the man to spend the rest of his life to fulfil the unrealised dream of his mentor. This generates in Jagan, a similar urge for some commitment, some active move to satisfy his inner being. The bearded man’s chanting of the sanskrit song ‘Mukta-vidruma-hema...’ as an invocation of the goddess, his fervid conception of the the deity of radiance and illumination that dispels all
darkness and evil and encompasses all beauty in the universe, sets Jagan’s consciousness in motion so as to generate in him, an urge for emancipation. The bearded man’s casual proposition to Jagan (‘I only thought it would do you good to have a retreat like this’) brings out the immediacy of Jagan’s recognition of the truth that his identity has to embrace in the traditional codes of existence:

[...] God knows I need a retreat. [...] at some stage in one’s life one must uproot oneself from the accustomed surroundings and disappear so that others may continue in peace.(357)

In this connection, G. S. Amur has discussed the significance of the Hindu ideals of Purushartha and Ashramadharma to Jagan. One finds in Jagan’s recognition of the ideal state of his existence, the reinforcement of the ‘Vanaprastha’ concept of India’s traditional Ashramadharma where a middle aged man, after doing his quota of familial responsibilities, is recommended to undertake renunciation, the life of a spiritual recluse that announces retirement from the usual round of familial activities. Here Jagan’s escape has become mandatory (in his realisation) as a result of unexpected developments in family life:

[...] he wanted to explain why he needed an escape – his wife’s death, his son’s growth and strange development, how his ancient home behind the Lawley Statue was beginning to resemble hell on earth[...].(357)

Back home from the eventful visit to Nallappa’s grove with the bearded man, Jagan has a ‘feeling that his identity was undergoing a change [...] he was a different man at this moment’(358). Jagan’s spiritual identification with the ideal of a new life comes, as Santosh Gupta has pointed out, via ‘introspection accompanied by spinning and look back into the past’(54). But presently,
Jagan’s vision of truth being accomplished, only the decision-making is to be done and this takes place after his last encounter with Mali and Grace that delivers the final boost to Jagan to sever his link with his family and renounce his familiar world in pursuit of his chosen life of a retreat. He discovers his continuity with his own culture through an enlightened vision into the past and this enlightenment follows his ultimate exchanges with Mali and Grace. Unaware of the recent development in Jagan (who feels ‘I am a new personality and have to speak a different tongue’), Mali intends to know Jagan’s final decision regarding the financing of his scheme and Jagan plainly refuses. Mali’s baffled reaction in announcing that Grace would have to go back in case the scheme does not realise, further confuses Jagan to read any meaning of the connection between the failure of the scheme and the return of Mali’s wife. The receptacle of his experience soon becomes full to the brim with another piece of knowledge - a shocking form of truth revealing that Mali and Grace were never married at all. This shocking discovery removes the last trace of Jagan’s illusion or attachment, if any, of his private life in his ancestral house. He confesses to the cousin: ‘I feel my home is tainted now. I find it difficult to go back there’(371). Jagan’s decision to leave the house for good is preceded by the cousin’s counter suggestions for adjustment (‘what is all your study of the Gita worth if you can not keep your mind untouched by all this?’) and a proposal of a formal marriage ceremony of Mali and Grace. Jagan’s non-committal acceptance of the proposal for marriage leads him to take an initiative towards that direction but in vain.

This practically marks the point of no return. The ‘puzzle created by Mali’ absorbs all his mental labour and, it is at this stage finally, that the past resurrects with all its meanings and messages in Jagan’s reverie. His recollections of -- how he got married to Ambika under the ‘inflexible’ protocols of his family, how they enjoyed hours ‘in a world of their own’, how he spent time in love-making leading to his consequent failure in the Intermediate, how the absence of a child created a tension in the family which finally relaxed with the birth of Mali after Jagan and Ambika both were taken
by Jagan’s parents to the Badri Hills to offer ‘puja’ to the Gods, -- help Jagan
rediscover his continuity with the past. Jagan’s rumination of the past, in
particular of his experiences as a married man in a joint family, confirms his
conviction of his own cultural roots in community-affiliation and allegiance to
tradition. To Jagan’s revelation now, the living together of Mali and Grace
seems only an unedifying prospect in point of one’s native culture. Santosh
Gupta has justifiably described that, Jagan’s looking back into the past gives
‘the whole of his being a new pattern. He discovers his own connection with
his culture, the past of his society which he had accepted uncritically as a
youngman. The rituals that had been handed over by his parents acquire a new
significance as he finds his son rejecting them uncritically”(54 ). Standing on
the pedestal of the Lawley statue, where Jagan has just rediscovered his past in
a state of trance, he now beholds the unhappy look of his house that has lost
‘the light and laughter of other days’ and feels that “it would be impossible for
him to get back to that house”(400). Jagan’s resolution of renunciation is again,
a marker of another form of self-discipline on the part of a Satyagrahi like him,
in so far as, he has by now learnt the art of mental withdrawal from the world
he is going to renounce:

[…] it is not my house that’s tainted. It is his, who am I to
grumble and fret? I am sixty. […] I have probably outlived my
purpose in this house.[…]. At sixty one is reborn and enters a
new janma.(400)

If Satyagraha⁹ stands for ‘a relentless search for truth’, it is no wonder that
Jagan’s actual retirement from worldly affairs is fated to face ordeals till the
last moment. As he steps out with the chakra, (a part of his existence) and also
his cheque-book (to resist further degradation of Mali), he gets from the cousin
the news of Mali’s arrest on the charge of carrying liquor in a car. Initially, the
severity of the news has a writhing effect on Jagan’s fatherly self that worries
over Mali’s physical discomforts in the prison, but in no time, the re-awakened
Satyagrahi in Jagan gets over the spell caused by the illusion of attachment and impels Jagan to reassert his faith in the omnipotence of truth: ‘If what you say is true, well, truth will win’ (406). Initiated into the cult of truth, Jagan is now able to read the gist of real life experiences in terms of one’s inner development: ‘A dose of prison life is not a bad thing’ (408).

Jagan’s identity has now awakened to recognise the meaning and form of truth in his predicament: ‘a new interest – different from the set of repetitions performed for sixty years’ (407). It is an interest that elevates him from the gross level of sensibility to the transcendent joy of discovering the governing spiritual reality. It is an ethos of something ageless where age lives, where the essence emerges from the vesture symbolically as a goddess comes ‘out of a stone’. Jagan has attained total detachment from the life of worldly engagements as he says to the cousin:

I wish you all luck; you and your lawyer and his distinguished client [...] don’t expect me to take any part in it. Leave me out of it completely [...]. Everything can go on with or without me. The world doesn’t collapse even when a great figure is assassinated or dies of heart failure. Think that my heart has failed, that’s all.

(407)

One finds here a new Jagan, one whose vision has discarded the veneer of naivety, self-deception and lack of intellectual awareness of his early days. It is this Jagan whose Satyagraha is no longer an adopted policy applied to petty issues of life, but an empirical mode of existence sanctioned by tradition, an existence where one’s self abjures duality of every sort. Jagan now discovers himself at the threshold of a new janma, a new form of existence in India’s traditional Ashramadharma after he has found out Paramartha (the true goal of life) and as a result discards in the process artha (mainly money and other worldly interests). A Satyagrahi turned Vanaprasthi, Jagan finds the true
metier of his identity in his own tradition which recommends a life of a spiritual quest after the stage of Āranyastha, the life of a householder. Ramesh Dnyate has analysed that Jagan's renunciation despite his ambivalent attitude to the image-maker and other traits of eccentricities, is nevertheless, a marker of the Hindu way of life, that recommends a shift from Ārṣhadharma to Sannyas through Vanaprastha. Dnyate observes: "Although Jagan plays an eccentric and a 'sannyasi to be' with equal felicity, he seems to have been cut out to play the latter under the guise of the former"(147). William Walsh also in "Narayan's Maturity", has identified Jagan (in the final stage of his life) with an astute would-be-sanyasi and he perceives in Jagan's predicament the confluence of truths, both of character and tradition when he finds Jagan to be "observant of customs, scrupulous about rituals"(158) and that "Jagan's renunciation of the world, [...] is of a piece with the Indian tradition"(161).

Some critics however, seem to take different views regarding the truth of the transformation in Jagan. They seem to believe that Jagan's personality retains its ambivalent nature till the end and therefore the ingenuity of his transformation is subject to question. M. K. Naik for instance has observed: "If old Jagan's Gandhism is only skin-deep [...] , his renunciation can not be authentic either"(Ironic Vision 82). A clue at hand that lends support to such explanations may be the fact that Jagan takes his cheque-book with him at the time of his retreat from worldly engagements. But Naik's opinion fails to discern the changed attitude of Jagan to money (and Mali as well) that has come to him as a dividend of his detachment. He might have taken the cheque-book for, what Ramesh Dnyate has termed, 'spiritual investment' (to help the sculptor in the realization of his vision) that he values more than 'material investment' (ie, to help Mali launch his dubious project of producing the novel-writing machine)(100). Besides, he is seen to be giving money to the cousin so as to cover the trial expenses of Mali and also assuring the cousin of monetary help in any case – whether it is to buy Grace an air-ticket or to meet some other exigency of situation. At least one point is clear that Jagan, in the process of his
experiences, has discarded his earlier identity as a shrewd businessman engrossed in money-making. Santosh Gupta has traced this point admirably: ‘The money has a function, and it is not used by Jagan as a bride any more. Jagan is also more restrained in his actions – for he neither gives up everything to Mali, nor does he become indifferent to him’(55). It is obvious that M. K. Naik’s opinion apparently fails to touch a major tissue of Jagan’s development in the realm of realisation. In a different vein of criticism, V. S. Naipaul in his characteristic way, doubts the ingenuity of Jagan’s renunciation and prefers to consider it as a sign of cultural inferiorisation typical of an Indian like Jagan. Jagan’s deliberate withdrawal from this social life is regarded by Naipaul, as a pathetic failure: “Chaos has come to Jagan’s world, his act is an act of despair, he runs away in tears”. In the opinion of Naipaul, such an withdrawal from a world that seems to have collapsed at last, symbolises the ultimate Hindu retreat. Naipaul further considers Jagan’s withdrawal as an escape from responsibility and ‘a retreat from civilization and creativity [...] to magic and incantation’(Wounded Civilization 389). Naipaul’s observation can be refuted simply by the fact that in spite of knowing fully well his inability to regulate his son’s activities, Jagan, even on the eve of his retreat, shows his utmost care for the erring son though retaining his non-committal, detached attitude that becomes a Vanaprasthi. Offering money for the legal expenses and sincerely thinking about the well-being of his son (‘truth ought to get him out’) show that Jagan, even at the threshold of a different life, does not shrink from his worldly responsibilities. Moreover, Jagan’s discovery of his continuity with his past, his perception of the importance of rituals and his ultimate recognition of the ideal, sacral space of his identity in his traditional Bhrnasrarna – project an authentic concept of his dharma in the context of which ‘magic’ or ‘incantation’ does not figure as any decisive issue. That Jagan’s realisation has transcended the charms of any so called magic or incantation, will be clear with only a single instance. Jagan’s decision of retreat confuses the cousin and he tries to dissuade Jagan saying, “I know that place near the cremation ground. Has that hair-dyer been trying to sell it to
you? Forgive me if I say, “Keep away from him”. He is a sorcerer…”(407). Jagan’s reply seems to be a clear indication of an independence of spirit that comes in the wake of the authenticity of his realisation: “I don’t care what he does. I am going to watch a goddess come out of a stone. If I don’t like the place, I will go away some where else. I am a free man”(407). The last two sentences unmistakably project almost the vision of a pilgrim who progresses in his quest for truth without retrospection. Clearly, Jagan has got over the initial spell induced by his mentor Chinna Dorai as his journey to self-discovery has revealed to him the essence of his search – the truth; and in this state of realisation, only the present remains with the frontiers of the past completely blurred out. Jagan’s conscious discovery of self (‘I am a freeman’) marks him out as a Vanaprasthi who makes sure that his role in garhyastha (family life) is over without any more interest in this social life and who is all set to begin a new phase true to the doctrine of Ashramadharma in Indian tradition. Jagan’s state now fulfils the norm of life in accordance with the stages of experience as prescribed in The Gita, the sacred text he read for years before receiving its belated synthesis in his life:

“Kamanam Karmanam nyasam Samyasam Kavayo Viduh”
(Renunciation is the relinquishment of all actions goaded by passion.) Bhagavadgita, XVIII-2.

Jagan’s quest for truth confers on him now an Advaityan non-duality of existence, as different traits of tradition fuse into an organic whole to re-establish his true identity. Santosh Gupta has observed: ‘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’(55). Here Jagan’s renunciation confirms in his own setting, the ‘renunciation of desire’ as per Gandhi’s conviction, without which Gandhi thought renunciation to be ‘short-lived.’

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In the final analysis, Jagan’s quest should be analysed in the light of the remarks made by the authors of *Empire Writes Back*, a seminal book on the theory and practice of postcolonial literature. With reference to the postcolonial text and R. K. Narayan’s fiction in particular, Bill Ashcroft et al think: “It is inadequate to read it either as a reconstruction of pure traditional values or as simply foreign or intrusive. The reconstruction of ‘pure’ cultural values is always conducted within a radically altered dynamic of power relations”. They are of the opinion that ‘within the syncretic reality of a post-colonial society it is impossible to return to an idealized pure pre-colonial cultural condition’(109-10). Now, Jagan’s experiences partly affirm and partly deny such an observation. As it has been hinted at the very outset, his quest for true identity no doubt takes off in a society of cultural syncretism where allegiance to tradition (even though rendered skin-deep in application owing to individual weaknesses) and a craze for Westernisation (symbolized by Mali) problematise the issue of culture and system of values. But the strenuous journey of Jagan towards his self-realisation (and thereby self-discovery) in terms of the Hindu way of life as prescribed in *Ashramadharma*, goes against the impression that ‘within the syncretic reality of a post-colonial society it is impossible to return to an idealized pure pre-colonial cultural condition’. Jagan’s retreat from society is no schizophrenic withdrawal and instead, with his own armour of ideology (here Gandhism), he plumbs the depth of his own experiences and in the process re-discovers his native cultural roots. He comes to a realisation of truth only after a heroic negotiation of cultural upheavals and changes of his time. Jagan’s quest for truth, thus, far from being an overt manifestation of a nativist attempt at constructing an Indian view of life, becomes technically a strategy of postcolonial resistance. It presents a predicament of alienation which seeks outlet through a search for a truly authentic self-definition (in the idiom of one’s native tradition) in a hybridised cultural milieu that is consequent upon the experience of colonisation. In his perceptive analysis, Afzal Khan has discovered in Narayan’s novels a ‘realm of mythic realism’ where a character’s maturity and authenticity (the goals of Western realist
mode) co-exist with the mythical and mystical traditions of Indian life. In Jagan's retreat (consequent upon his quest for truth), Afzal Khan finds the acquisition of an authentic identity though with, as the critic suggests, 'a rejection of unity'(53). In defence, it must be said that the virtues like authenticity or unity of a personality are not the monopolies of the Western realist mode of fiction. In the Indian way of life, such traits are traced to the principles of Advaitan Philosophy which exalts the acquisition of non-duality of existence as the pre-requisite for the attainment of truth, the supreme knowledge.

In a way, Jagan’s quest for truth is a tale of his transition from confusion to recognition with 'extraordinary clarity', of 'his goals in life', justified in the matrix of his own tradition. It can also be added that Jagan’s quest for an authentic space in India's traditional Ashramadharma system proceeds through a constant dialectic of tradition and modernity. Therefore, Jagan's search for an authentic identity, instead of being an autistic exercise of nativism on Narayan's part, rather subscribes, strategically speaking, to the mode of postcolonial reverse-narrative in which, the writer celebrates ad via negative, the inner reserves of Indian life, the emancipatory aspect of Indian culture that defines the truth of one's identity through the possibility of a reintegration of the self with the sustaining forces and timeless values of tradition. Perhaps it is this emancipatory aspect of Indian tradition and culture that leads Elleke Boehmer to detect in Narayan's India, 'an internal comprehensibility', a 'capacity for survival', 'a way of life' that 'eventually absorbs the forces of history,...'(177).
NOTES

1. The expression is taken from Leela Gandhi, Postcolonial Theory.(p- 68).


4. The term denotes attachment to anything related to one’s own country. It stands for an attitude that in political terms, induces an affinity for indigenous goods/life-style with a simultaneous eschewal of foreign goods and culture. It worked as a prominent strategy of nationalism in India’s struggle for freedom in the hands of leaders like Motilal Nehru, C.R.Das and most of all, Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji’s use of khaddar and the Charka are are instances of Swadeshiana, the ideal application of the principle of ‘Swadeshi’ that articulates a nativist protest against the Cultural Imperialism of the West.

5. Santosh Gupta thinks that Narayan’s novels like The Vendor of Sweets and Waiting for the Mahatma are examples of the writer’s fictional treatment of the effect of Gandhism on ‘ordinary’ and non-intellectual characters such as Jagan and Sriram whose response to Gandhism do not show ‘intellectual self-awareness’.

6. Traditionally, the concept of ‘Varnashrama’ stands for the four stages of life Bramhacharya (celebacy), Garhasthya (married life), Vanaprastha (indifference to familial/social existence with a retirement to the forest), and Sannyasa (renunciation) prescribed in Hindu philosophy. It is said in Treta Vik.T polys as circulated in oral tradition of reference:
‘Barnadharmashramacharshastra jantrena yojito’. (An enlightened soul, attaining *mukti*, i.e., salvation, has transcended the system of ‘Varnashrama’.


8. The third stage of life as recommended by Indian philosophy that is characterised by a total retirement from worldly duties and responsibilities after a certain age.

9. It is a cardinal aspect of the Gandhian philosophy. ‘Satya’ means ‘truth’ and ‘Agraha’ stands for affinity for a thing (here truth). A follower of ‘Satyagraha’ is called ‘Satyagrahi’, with Gandhi as the ideal example. Generally, the term implies a relentless desire/quest for truth. Theoretically speaking, Satyagraha means – a firm and resolute stand to face till the end all the odds like exploitation, injustice and unholiness in order to reach the goal of protecting truth, justice, wellfare and one’s *dharma*. In addition to working as an agent of moral regeneration of the colonised nation, ‘Satyagraha’ as a policy was used by Gandhi to legitimise the anti-Colonial protest of India and claim freedom in the rhetoric of right and inheritance.

10. The ‘Advaitya’ philosophy preached by the great seer Shankara proposes that ‘Bramhan’, the Imperishable being, the creator of the world, is one and indivisible. It is identical with Truth, the Supreme knowledge, and the world is only illusion, a *maya*. This philosophy advocates that man should forgo attachment (which results from illusion) and aspire for the supreme knowledge of the ‘Bramha’ as the goal of life. The true knowledge that assures perception of the only reality will help man to shed appearance as unreal, *maya*. It is said in as per oral tradition, ‘Advaityameba Satya’ in an ananymous text *on Shankaracharya*. 235
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