Chapter - III

WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA
Chapter - III
WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA

R.K. Narayan is one of the most favourite authors of not only Indian readership but also the World readership. Narayan has created his own type of narratives with humour as his major fort. He is a founder of Sthala Puran with his imaginary land called 'Malgudi'. Malgudi is the backdrop of his novels and short stories. Hence, Narayan is fondly identified as 'Malgudi' writer.

Narayan has written several novels and short stories. His novels include, Guide, The Bachelor of Arts, The Financial Expert, The Painter of Malgudi, The Vendor of Sweets, The English Teacher, Waiting for the Mahatma and others. His short stories dwell upon day-to-day aspects of the middle class family and are the middle class family and are the readers' favourite. R. K. Narayan's narratives are embodied with mixed flavour-politics, religion, myth and commonplace things. With these qualities, Narayan has captured a distinct status for himself and is regarded as one of the major trio in Indian English Fiction.

In this part, Waiting for the Mahatama (1955) is taken up for a detailed examination to find out the theme of Freedom Struggle has been treated.
R. K. Narayan is identical with Raja Rao not only with regard the cultural and religious aspects but also with regard to the attitude towards Freedom Movement. In a way *Waiting for the Mahatma* is a sequel to *Kanthapura* as *Waiting for the Mahatma* also dwells upon the theme of the transformation of Freedom Movement into a mass movement and the narrative is expanded up to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhiji. In order to arrive at the desired results, this study is divided into the following:

1. Transformation of Freedom Movement into a Mass Movement.
2. Treatment of Freedom Struggle.

Transformation of Freedom Struggle into a Mass Movement

*Waiting for the Mahatma* is woven around how its protagonist, Sriram, is changed from the state of ignorant and aimless youth to an acute and committed disciple of Gandhiji and a stern Freedom fighter. Sriram stands for those masses of youths that followed the path of Mahatma Gandhiji during his tenure as the leader of the Freedom Movement.

Sriram is in a way, an orphan because he has lost his parents while he is a child, “His mother, who died delivering him, and his father, who was killed in Mesopotamia, might have been figures in a legend as far as Sriram was concerned.”1 He is left to the care of his grandmother who
rears him with pension amount of Sriram father. Sriram is brought up without being exposed to the outside world. His world begins from his house and ends at the window-sill: "...comfortably reclining on the cold cement window-sill, and watching the street. He had sat there, morning to night, ever since he could remember."^2

Things do not improve when he grows to adolescence. He is exposed only to the shop infront of house. He becomes a good customer to Kanni who runs the shop. He is impressed by the beautiful picture which is hung in the without knowing-whose portrait it. Even the shopper does not know it. All the customers are attracted by the picture about which the description goes humorously as:

‘Whose is that picture?’ He asked once, pausing between sips of a coloured drink.

‘How should I know?’ Kanni said. ‘It’s probably some queen, probably Queen Victoria’ although he might with equal justification have claimed her to be Maria Theresa or Ann Boleyn.^3

This has got a symbolic relevance. The portrait represents the foreign goods. And in the people being fond of the picture, there is a strong suggestion that Indians are under the influenced of Western
culture. It is a subtle introduction of the theme of colonialism in the narrative against which the plot is strewn.

The author introduces the theme of freedom struggle in an unusual manner. Gandhiji’s public meeting is scheduled in Malgudi. On the day, Sriram also goes to hear Gandhiji’s speech without being aware of who Gandhiji is and what Freedom Struggle means without being aware of who Gandhiji is and what freedom struggle means.

At this juncture, the romantic element is incorporated. He witnesses not only Gandhiji but also a woman disciple by Bharati. He is impressed by both which is noted by Geoffrey Kain:

When Gandhiji speaks to a gathering in Malgudi the orphaned young man Sriram is in attendance and, while he is moved by Gandhi’s message, he is much more entranced by Bharati, one of the young women followers of the mahatma who line the dias.4

Sriram does not miss even a single meeting of Gandhiji after this. The master stroke of irony in this regard is that Sriram attends all the meetings of Gandhiji not because of his interest in Gandhiji’s speech, nor his love for nation but because of his passion for Bharati. Subsequently the seed of patriotic is sown in him about which Kain aptly observes:
Sriram becomes drawn into Gandhian activism only through his passion for the Bharati; in order to be closer to her, becomes one of the Satyagrahi. Ironically, his physical passion (which he scarcely keeps in check) and his love-obsession (which hardly qualifies as Swaraj) lead him, ultimately, to become serious in his commitment to self-denial, self-control, and a deep sense of service.\footnote{5}

Mahatma Gandhi is a central character in the narrative which obliviously foregrounds the fact \textit{Waiting for the Mahatma} is a narrative of Freedom Struggle. The content of his speech in Malgudi endorse this assumption:

Now a mighty choral chant began; \textit{Raghupathi Raghava Raja Ram, Pathitha Pavan a Seetha Ram}, to a simple tune, led by a girl at the microphone. It went on and on, and ceased when Mahatmaji began his speech... At the outset Mahatma Gandhi explained that he'd speak only in Hindi as a matter of principle. 'I will not address you in English. It's the language of our rulers. It was enslaved us. I very much wish I could speak to
you in your own sweet language, Tamil; but alas, I am too hard-pressed for time to master it now, although I hope if God in His infinite mercy grants me the longevity due to me, that is one hundred and twenty-five years, I shall be able next time to speak to you in Tamil without troubling our friend Natesh?

After having opposed English as the language of the colonial rule, Gandhiji’s favourite principles such as spinning on the charka, the practice of absolute Truth and Non-Violence – are subsumed in the narrative. In a way, it echoes Kanthapura, which also dwells upon them. The definition of non-violence is skillfully inducted in the narrative:

Presently MahatmaJI ascended the platform and Sriram hastily took his eyes off the ladies and joined in the hand clapping with well-timed devotion and then in the singing of Raghupathi Raghava Raja Ram. After that Gandhi spoke on non-violence, and explained how it could be practiced in daily life. It is a perfectly simple procedure provided you have faith in it. If you watch yourself you will avoid all actions, big or small, and all thoughts, however obscure, which may cause
pain to another... 'When someone has wronged you or has done something which appears to you to be evil, just pray for the destruction of that evil. Cultivate an extra affection for the person and you will find that you are able to bring about a change in him. Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ meant the same thing when he said, "Turn the other cheek."

Gandhiji's philosophy of disregard for the practice of untouchability follows the doctrine of non-violence. Sriram is influenced by Gandhiji's ideology, which is presented as:

When Mahatmagji spoke of untouchability and caste, Sriram reflected, 'There must be a great deal in what he says. We always think we are superior people. How Granny bullies that ragged scavenger who comes to our house every day to sweep the backyard!' Granny was so orthodox...Sriram also took a devilish pleasure in joining the baiting and finding fault with the scavenger's work, although he never paid the slightest attention to their comments. He simply went about his business driving his broom vigorously and
interrupting himself only to ask, 'When will master give me an old shirt he promised so long ago?'

One can notice not only the doctrine of Gandhiji being incorporated in the freedom movement but also the freedom movement itself being transformed into a mass movement. It is evident in the change that takes place in Sriram who was earlier, "not having any definite aim."

Sriram's priority undergoes a significant change after he has heard Gandhiji's sermon on men's conduct towards women. He has been burning with passion for Bharati but he is able to overcome from it gradually. He achieves self-control and begins to concentrate not on Bharati but on Bharata. He is inspired by the suggestion of his teacher who says that, "I am proud to see you here, my boy. Join the Congress, work for the country, you will go far, God bless you...." Sriram obeys to his teacher's advice and associates himself with the Congress as he is already under the spell of Gandhiji.

The narrative dwells upon Gandhiji's stay with the untouchables in their huts, which enhances the theme of the transformation of freedom movement into a mass movement. Gandhiji declines the invitation of Mr. Natesh to stay in his palatial house on which he has already spent two lakh rupees. On the contrary, he prefers the huts of the untouchables,
though they lack the basic amenities. Gandhiji prefers the love of a small boy belonging to the caste of untouchables to the extravagant gesture of Natesh. Subsequently, Gandhiji accompanies the boy to the latter's hut. This explains how Gandhiji transformed the freedom movement into a mass movement. To the effect of this factor, the following is provided;

Gandhi occupied a hut which had a low entrance. He didn't like to oust anyone from his hut, but chose one facing the river sand, after making certain that it had been vacant, the occupant of the hut having gone elsewhere.11

Sriram is a character who represents the multitude of the youth that responded to the call of Gandhiji to fight against the British. Through him, the novel gives the vivid picture of the mass movement at the advent of Mahatma Gandhiji.

Sriram's initial movement to associates himself with Gandhian movement are depicted dramatically. He visits the hut in which Gandhi is sheltered during his visit to Malgudi to seek admission to the campaign. He fails to draw the attention of Gandhi and has been asked a leave hut by Bharati. The dialogue between them dramatizes Sriram eagerness to join the congress:
She said rather grimly: 'Don’t you know that when Bapuji sleeps, we have to leave him?' He felt like asking, 'Who is Bapuji?' But using his judgement for a second, he understood it must refer to the Mahatma, and not wanting to risk being chased out by the resolute girl said, 'Of course, I knew it. I was only waiting for you to come out.'

'Who are you? I don’t think I have seen you before?.

This was the question he had been waiting to be asked all along, but now when it came he found himself tongue-tied. He felt so confused and muddled that she took pity on him and said, 'What is your name?

He answered 'Sriram'.

'What are you doing here?' She asked.

'Don’t you remember me?' he said irrelevantly. 'I saw you when you come with a money-box in the market, the other day . . . .'

'Oh, I see', she said out of politeness. 'But I might not remember you since quite a lot of people put money
into my box that day. Anyway, I asked you what you are doing here now?'

‘Perhaps I am one of the volunteers,’ Sriram said.

‘Why “Perhaps”? ’ he asked.

‘Because I’m not yet one’, he replied.¹²

The conversation between explains the horns and disciplines, which are to be imbibed in those who wish to be volunteers in the Gandhian movement. There are also clues for the mutual liking between Sriram and Bharati. Sriram touches the heart of Bharati by explaining that he is an orphan.

At this juncture, the narrative projects Bharati not just a character but also symbol of child of Mother India. Her biographical details occur and show that Bharati too is an orphan. Her father was a freedom fighter and died in 1920 movement for the nation’s cause. Her mother also passed away due to which she has been adopted by the local Sevak Sangh. Since then, Bharati has been associated with Sevak Sangh which is one of wings fighting for freedom:

I do whatever I am asked to do by the Sevak Sangh.

Sometimes they ask me to go and teach people spinning and tell them about Mahatmaji’s ideas.
Sometimes they send me to villages and poor quarters. I meet them and talk to them and do a few things. I attend to Mahatmaji’s needs. Thus the narrative highlights one more of dimensions of Gandhiji’s struggle for freedom.

Taking the advantage of Bharati’s tenderness, Sriram expresses his love for her. Bharati dismisses his proposal by reminding him that he would be thrown away if he had persisted in that direction. In the ensuring conversation, he makes her see in him the urge to work for the campaign of Mahatma Gandhi. On Bharati’s invitation to meet Gandhi, Sriram becomes panic strikes for he knows that he is unworthy of being in the company of such a person as Gandhi. When he is reluctant to agree, Bharati’s response plays a turning point not only in the plot of the novel but also in the life of Sriram. It is worthwhile to cite this scene:

‘...If you wish to meet me come to Bapuji, the only place where you may see me. Of course, if you don’t want to see me any more, go away’.

This placed him in a dilemma. ‘Where? How?’ he asked.

‘Come to the door of Bapu’s hut and wait for me’.
‘When? Where?’

‘At three a.m. tomorrow morning. I’ll take you to him’.

Saying this, she jumped to her feet and ran off towards her hut.14

Sriram is present at the door of Gandhi hut at the time fixed by Bharati the next day. While awaiting Bharati, Sriram’s mind is subjected to a conflict as whether he should will goodwill of his grandmother or that of Gandhi and Bharati. Then the unusual thing happens. He is called by Gandhi to go and sit close to him. Gandhi asks him to take a vow that he would wear only cloth made out of his own hands each day to which Sriram agrees instantly as if he is under a spell. Subsequently, he becomes so intimate to Gandhi that:

When the gong in the Taluk Office struck four, the Mahatma invited Sriram to go out with him for a walk.

He seized his staff in one hand and with the other supported himself on the shoulder of Bharati, and strode out of the hut- a tall figure in white. He had tucked his watch at his waist into a fold of his white dhoti. He pulled it out and said: ‘Half an hour I have
to walk, come with me, Sriram. You can talk to me undisturbed'. A few others joined them. Sriram felt he was walking through some unreal dream world.

The Mahatma was in between him and Bharati.¹⁵

The role of Gandhi is given a focal point at this juncture. Gandhiji’s concept voluntary poverty has been duly represented in this part of narrative. Gandhi stays in a hut, which obviously imposes on his followers to forego the basic comforts as well despite the fact that they are wealthy. One more character called Gorpad is introduced in the narrative and he explains the sacrifices of his brother and Bharati’s father. Sriram comes forward to share the experience of Gandhi and his followers with regard of the voluntary poverty. There are glimpse of the development of the theme of mass movement at his juncture.

Sriram attitude undergoes a rapid change and is how prepared to get absorbed into the campaign of Gandhi against the British in full spirit. He expresses his willingness to take another vow to oust the British from India. Gandhi enquires him how he would help the campaign to oust the British. Sriram replies that he needs the blessings and guidance of Gandhi in this endeavour. Gandhi is pleased to observe the devotion in Sriram

91
and blesses him: "Well, young friend, if God wills it, you will do great things, trust in him and you will be all right."  

Gandhi prescribes him some more principles, which are regarded as prerequisite for the task of ousting the British. They are:

(1) he should drive vestige of violence from his system.

(2) he should forget the term ‘Enemy’ and must think of him as a friend who must leave him.

(3) he should have an overpowering love at heart for his enemy.

(4) he should become a hundred percent ahimsa soldier.

(5) protection of animals. The advice of Gandhi represents his mode of war against the foreign rule in its miniature. This makes the narrative as the narrative of freedom struggle beyond doubt.

Subsequently, Sriram is admitted to Gandhi’s campaign. He joins Bharati and Gorpad and they, in turn, from a trio in the campaign. Gorpad plays a pivotal role in making Sriram in understanding the impact of the British rule on the life of the villagers. His comment on the foreign rule reflects the injustice meted out the native people:

‘See what the British have done to our country: this femine is their manoeuvring to keeps us in enslavement. They are plundering the forests and
fields to keep their war machinery going, and the actual sufferer is this child', pointing at any village child who might chance to come that way, showing its ribs, naked and pot-bellied.\footnote{17}

Gandhi is about to complete his four of campaign in the south. The narrative dwells upon how Gandhi could fool the British officials in order to keep them away his campaign and the style of his tour. Regarding the former, it is described that Gandhi has defeated the calculation of officials by refusing to give a programme of his four and by visiting unexpected places. Through this method, Gandhi is able to undertake the campaign more effectively.

With regard to the latter, it is described that Gandhi has toured the villages of foot, stationed himself at the lowliest hut in the village and traveled in third class compartment in the train. These behaviours of Gandhi play a great source of motivation among the mass of the village to participate in the struggle. As a result, the freedom movement could emerge as a national movement in its true spirit.

On the completion of the tour, Gandhi provides some moral tips to Bharati and Sriram to sustain the campaign in Malgudi in his absence. They boost up the courage in them to become prepared for sacrifices if
required for the cause of the nation. This reflects the apprenticeship given to the youth by Gandhi which helped the whole nation to participate in the freedom struggle.

In the absence of Gandhi, Sriram becomes more devoted and committed to the task assigned to him Gandhi. He begins to adopt the principles in every walk of life. It is manifested in:

He was going through a process of self-tempering, a rather hard task, for he often found on checking his thoughts that they were still as undesirable as ever. He had thought that by practicing all the austerities that he had picked up in Gorpad’s company, he could become suddenly different. Mahatmaji had blessed his idea of self-development. He had said: ‘Spin and read Bhagavad Gita, and utter Ram Nam continuously, and then you will know what to do in life.’

Sriram carried a change of dress and went downhill to a brook and bathed. He felt so invigorated after the cold bath that he sang aloud all alone in his wilderness. He went on repeating: “Raghupathi
The narrative reflects the Quit India Movement launched Mahatma Gandhi to a considerable length Gandhi's message to the people to participate in the Quit India Movement spreads across the country like a wild fire. The novel depicts how it becomes popular among the youth through the deeds of Sriram. He responds to this call instantly and gets into the action to campaign for the Quit India Movement in his village. This is described as follows:

Sriram dipped the brush in paint and fashioned carefully, 'Quit India' on the wall... all their armament being this brush and black paint and black walls... It also seemed to him possible that Britain had imported the letter 'Q' into India so that there might be a national drain on black paint. He was so much obsessed with this thought that he began to do write a modified 'Q' expending the very minimum of paint on its tail so that it read, until one scrutinized it closely, 'Quit India'. The villagers asked: 'How long ought this to be on our wall, sir?'
‘Till it takes effect’

‘What does it say, sir?’

‘It is “Quit”—meaning that the British must leave our country.’

This holds mirror to the transformation freedom movement into a mass movement subtly.

Sriram elevation from ignorance and aimlessness to a matured nationalist is represented in his act of tackling the opposition to call for the Quit India campaign. People like a school teacher and a carter object to the campaign of Sriram. The teacher argues that the natives are not yet ripped to the country themselves. Hence he endorse the continuation of the foreign rule. The carter sees the campaign as an unnecessary interruption in the normal life of the village folk. He educates them in following manner:

‘Do you know Mahatma Gandhi is in jail?’

‘Yes, master’.

‘You know why he is there?’ The man shook his head. ‘So that you may be a free man in this country.

You are not a free man in this country now.’
Then Sriram visits the location of timber yard and appeals to the contractor that sending our woods to the foreign country is unpatriotic. Here also Sriram's intervention is viewed as nuisance by the workers. But Sriram does not lose heart. He persists in his campaign to take the message of 'Quit India' to the mass. His undiminishing enthusiasm in seeing India free is reflected in: "We will spin charka, wear Khadi, live without luxury, and we shall have India ruled by Indians."21

Sriram moves on to another village called Solur. He indulges in educating the people of this village against buying and selling the foreign goods. On this occasion, the purpose of Gandhi's Dandi march is highlighted. He dissuades the people from the consumption foreign goods by citing examples of Gandhi's sacrifice by walking three hundred miles across the country to boil the salt-water on the beach of Dandi and help anyone to boil salt-water and make his own salt. He reminds the people that it is a symbol of boycotting the foreign goods. Subsequently, he makes a raid to a local grocery shop and exposes the sale of foreign goods in that shop to the people.
Sriram’s conversion from the extremism to Gandhism

In the career of Sriram as a freedom fighter, a significant change occurs. Though Sriram is introduced to the freedom struggle by his attendance to the meetings of Gandhi, his career in the freedom struggle is not just characterized by Gandhian ideology. He happens to be influenced by the ideology of extremists for quite sometime before he emerges himself as a thorough Gandhian. In a way, the author tries to incorporate the freedom struggle in its whole by depicting not only the struggle of moderates but also that of the extremists.

The author goes about it by creating a character called Jagadish. He shames as a photographer in Malgudi and claims that he has got a formula to jeopardize the Britain in India. In reality, he is an extremist freedom fighter and has arrived here to install a small radio set which is expected to transmit code messages.

Sriram falls prey to his influence on two accounts. First, his mind has become imbalanced due to the departure of Bharati from him. Second, Jagadish coaxes to him that he and Bharati are good friends and birds of same feather. To dejected Sriram, they ignite his mind with the passion to join Jagadish, which is humorously depicted:
'I am Jagadish. I used to know Bharati also. We all are doing more or less the same work'.

'This was enough to stir Sriram out of his lethargy. He sat up and welcomed the other profusely with a great deal of warmth.'

Jagadish makes use of Sriram’s weakness in his deep love for Bharati and provokes him to opt out of Gandhian mode of struggle. The conversation between Jagadish and Sriram reveals it clearly:

'Are you going to court imprisonment?'

'No, I have other things to do. That is why I have come here'.

Sriram was happy to find a kindred soul and at once poured into his ears his own feelings. 'I told Bharati not to be a fool....'.

'Don’t say that. In this matter we all judge and act individually. Those who cannot follow Mahatmaji’s orders are free to act as they think best'.

The other said, 'This is a war in which we are engaged, we are passing through abnormal times, and we do what we think best.'
As a result, Jagadish installs the radio in Sriram’s room. Then he chooses the temple as the center of his activities by transforming it into a fortress. Sriram obeys to the instructions of Jagadish as if he is under a spell. It becomes evident in the depiction of Sriram who “had become a blind slave of Jagadish.”

After this Jagadish’s real identity is revealed. He is not a photographer in Malgudi as he has introduced himself earlier, but is a staunch follower of Subhas Chandra Bose. He has been secretly carrying out the agenda of propagating Bose’s ideology and drawing the cadets to this campaign. [Sriram’s interest in Bose’s] The author has skillfully managed to include the imaginary speech of Bose in the narrative thus as:

Subhas Chandra Bose’s voice said, ‘Men of the Indian Army, be patriots. Help us free our dear Motherland. Many of your friends are here, having joined the Indian National Army, which is poised for attack on your borders. We are ready. We shall soon be across, and then you can join the fight on our side. Till then don’t aim you guns at us, but only at the heart of our enemy’. And then followed a ten-point programme of
National Service that the men of the Indian Army should undertake.25

Sriram gets drawn towards the Bose’s campaign gradually. The influence of Bose’s radio speech upon Sriram and his response are manifested in the following:

‘This is Subhas Chandra Bose speaking’, Sriram sat up respectfully. ‘What good fortune that I should hear his voice!’ At the sound of it, Sriram felt reverence for this man who had abandoned his home, comfort, and security, and was going from country to country, seeking some means of liberating his Motherland...

Sriram wrote at breakneck speed. He felt as if the commanding presence of Subhas Chandra Bose itself was at his elbow dictating. He filled up several sheets of the pad in respectful silence.26

Sriram takes down the speech of Subhas Chandra Bose broadcast but gets disappointed at the end of the speech due to lack of clarity in broadcasting the message of Bose. Sriram feels hurt for being unable to hear the message of Bose. He meets Jagadish and asks him as what would
be Bose’s last words. At this juncture, a friction seems to creep in the coordination between them due to Jagadish’s indifference.

However, Sriram remains faithful to Jagadish and obliges to perform the duties of sticking pamphlets in the Army quarters, which Jagadish assigns to him. Though this job dangerous, Sriram does not hesitate which is portrayed as follows:

Before parting Jagadish said, ‘We shall probably all three of us get shot in this enterprise. But don’t bother. Our lives are not very important. Our work is more important.’

‘I don’t care whether I live or die,’ said Sriram.27

Sriram sets out to the army quarters following Jagadish’s directions. He catches a bus and reaches the destination. When he is about to cut a portion of the barbed wire fence, a strange thought mixed with panic occurs in him. For the first time, he begins to reconsider his decision of taking risks for the cause of freedom. He realizes that he should not invite death in the hands of unknown persons. As a result he withdraws himself from the active involvement in the extremists campaign. In this regard it is worthwhile to note what Dr. M.K. Naik observes:
His lack of genuine faith in the cause of the freedom-struggle also makes Sriram a coward and cowardice and freedom go ill together. Thus, he is asked to distribute copies of Subhas Chandra Bose's message to the Indian Army in the army camp at Belliali, but he loses his nerve when he approaches the barbed wire fence.28

Later, a turning point takes place in Sriram's association with Jagadish. He grows anticipation to meet Bharati but gets only a letter from her instead of her personal arrival. In the letter, she asks him to pay a visit to his grandmother at once. As a result, he arrives at 14 Kabir street only to learn that his grandmother is dead. Actually, she has been mistaken to be dead and put on the pyre. Unexpectedly she rises from the pyre. After this, Sriram surrenders himself in the police station and subsequently is put in detention at the Central Jail. This paves the way for Sriram to part ways with Jagadish and his extremism. Harish Raizada sums up the whole episode in the following:

While leading a lonely and dejected life in the ruined temple hidden from public gaze, he meets Jagadish, a terrorist and a zealous national worker. He joins his
new friend in his terroristic activities and helps him first in noting down the messages and speeches of Subhash Bose from Tokyo and Berlin and circulating cyclostyled copies among the Indian soldiers and afterwards in overturning and derailing trains, cutting telegraph wires, setting fire to the records in law courts, exploding crude bombs, and indulging in such other acts of violence. This makes the police announce heavy price on his head. One day as he goes to see Bharati in the prison house and his dying grandmother at his own house, he is traced by the police and put behind the bars.29

The episode of the Sriram’s company with Jagadish throws light on some significances of the theme of ‘Freedom Struggle’. Firstly, it reflects that Waiting for the Mahatma dwells upon the theme of freedom struggle comprehensively with due scope for the extremist and moderate factions of freedom fighters. Second, it shows the influence of extremism on Sriram and his escape from violent to non-violent mode of freedom struggle. Third, it indicates that Sriram is superficial in his commitment as a freedom struggler. Sriram’s response to Jagadish’s invitation to join his
campaign is governed not by his genuine interest to espouse Subhas Chandra Bose but by his dejection at that time. He has been isolated from Bharati by the latter’s departure to Delhi. When he suffers from desolation, Jagadish’s mention that he and Bharati are of the same vocation, he mistakes that Jagadish is a follower of Gandhi and volunteers himself to support subsequently. P.K. Singh elaborates it thus:

His separation from Bharati (after her arrest) deviates him from Gandhian path to the way of terrorist movement. The agony of the separation turns into the fire of violence and his peaceful protest into the turbulent agitation.  

Last, it shows the inclination of narrative as being towards Gandhian freedom struggle by depicting Sriram to have returned from Jagadish to Bharati.

In the subsequent narrative, the struggle of Subhas Chandra Bose to free India through non-violent mode is depicted through the creation a character called Jagadish. He arrives at the place and provides the transmission of Bose’s speech through a radio. Sriram gets an exposure to the attractive method to Gandhi’s to free the nation for the first time. He is impressed by the speech of Bose too. The depiction Bose’s mode of
freedom struggle adds a wholistic picture to the theme of struggle in the novel:

Britain will leave India with a salam, if we crush the backbone of her administration’. He was always talking in terms of backbone... Sometimes he said:

‘Britain’s backbone is, you know where?’31

Yet this phase is not developed fully in order to confine only to the Gandhian movement. Hence only the theme of a national movement under the leadership of mahatma Gandhi becomes dominant in the narrative.

In the forthcoming episode Sriram is arrested and kept in detention at the central jail. Sriram asks for privy arrangements in the jail on the ground that he has not yet been tried and proved guilty in the court. But his request is denied to him. He is regarded neither as Gandhi’s man nor a criminal but as a dangerous person by the I.G. This explains the crude attitude of imperialism in India.

Subsequently more and more people are brought to the jail and Sriram makes use of this chance to convert the jail into a platform for the discussion of nationalism in the jail. Thus, the novel portrays the strength gained by Gandhian ideology in jail in this part of narrative.
Sriram is not able contain his being away from Bharati. So he contemplates an escape from the jail. While he is in this state of mind, the situation becomes favourable for the freedom of India. The British has decided to Quit India. As a result, the political prisoners are released from the jail. But Sriram’s name is not found in the list of persons to be released. On the advice of the chief he submits a representation for his release. Subsequently, Sriram is let free the prison and the nation has also become free from the British rule by now.

Sriram returns to his place and finds that Bharati has gone to Delhi to join Gandhiji. A letter is lying from Bharati to Sriram asking him to come to Birla House in Delhi. Sriram board a train and reached Delhi. Bharati is present in the railway station to receive him. While the travel in the tanga to Birla House, Bharati briefs the developments which took place when he was in the detention.

The plot of love story of Sriram and Bharati and the plot of the story of freedom struggle are skillfully merged together towards the end of the narrative Sriram and Bharati succeed to the consent of Gandhiji for their marriage. Gandhiji is portrayed to agree not only for their marriage but to perform the marriage rituals himself. He assures them that he would conduct their marriage the next day and proceeds to the stage for the
prayer in Birla house. Sriram and Bharati become satisfied at the decision of Gandhiji. At this juncture, a sudden change is brought into the plot that Gandhiji is assassinated while he is in the prayer. Thus the narrative ends with an anticlimax. In a way the climax is deliberate to sustain the novel not as a novel of love but as a novel of Freedom Struggle.

Waiting for the Mahatma contains several movements of Indian Freedom Struggle not only under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi but also under that of Subhas Chandra Bose, under the leadership of Gandhiji such programmes as Khadi movement, Quit India Movement, Dandi march, Boycott of Foreign goods, Salt Satyagraha, Voluntary Poverty, Courting arrest and non-violence movement etc., are incorporated in the narrative pattern. In addition, Gandhi has been includes as a central character in the novel. Under the banner of Subhas Chandra Bose, the campaign of military and the concept of the Indian National Army are subsumed in the narrative. Finally the novel has successfully depicted the transformation of freedom struggle into a mass movement or national movement and its subsequent triumph to win a freedom. Therefore Waiting for the Mahatma can be regarded as true narrative of Indian Freedom Struggle beyond any doubt.
Perspective on the Theme of Freedom Struggle

The response of critics to *Waiting for the Mahatma* is characterized by diversity. C.D. Narashmaiah grades it so low that the novel has to be withdrawn by the author. Dr. M.K. Naik considers this novel as a double failure – failure as a political novel and failure as a love novel. A.N. Kaul regards this novel as Narayan’s ‘weakest’ novel. On the other hand Walsh appreciates *Waiting for the Mahatma*. Harish Raizada calls the novel ‘the most ambitious of R.K. Narayan’s works’. Haydn Moore Williams views it as Narayan’s most mature novel.

The criticism of the former group of critics seems to be emanated from two important factors. First, the novel has been perceived from the genre dimension namely political novel. In this regard, the charge of the critics serves no purpose on the account that the genre of political novel has got no definite form and if at all there is this genre in Indian English Fiction it is only at its infancy. The novel is not a political novel in and out and the depiction of Gandhi as a marriage priest for Sriram- Bharati has annoyed these critics who have held Gandhi high in their respect.

The appreciation of the latter group critics is born out of their detection that R.K.Narayan has provided multiple aesthetic pleasures in a
single novel. It is narrative of love, Gandhian national Movement, farce on the ignorance of Indians, etc.

R.K. Narayan has written *Waiting for the Mahatma* seven years after the assassination of Gandhi. R.K. Narayan's inclination in this novel is to depict the national movement not as a history but as a story. He does not fight shy to deploy as many recipes as possible in narrating the national Movement. It is the employment of irony that blurs the boundary of the novel. There is love but it is not a novel of love exclusively. There is theme of freedom struggle but it is not political novel exclusively either.

The author has mixed both liberally in the narrative. Yet the image of the National Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi has been guarded with dignity. Amidst the love between Sriram and Bharati, conservatives like Srirma's Granny, dissidents of freedom struggle and extremists the narrative never fails to enoble Gandhi and his ethics in his campaign through the glorifying depiction of ahimsa, salt satyagraha, fasting, fighting against the notion of untouchability and above all through the depiction of Gandhi as martyr at the end. Therefore, the perspective of the novel on the theme of Freedom Struggle is governed by the note of reverence.
Conclusion - I

Waiting for the Mahatma is an experimentation of Gandhian novel. R.K. Narayan has made a bold venture not only in incorporating Gandhi as a character but also in portraying Gandhi dynamically. Gandhi appears twice in the narrative. In the first instance, he is portrayed as a master campaigner, champion of the untouchables and guardian of his disciples. His influence on the people helps to transform the freedom movement to the People's Movement or Mass Movement. Various activities of the Gandhian Movement get momentum. At the same time the narrative does not turn a blind eye to dissidence that prevailed against Gandhian Campaign especially with regard to the eradication of untouchability and rejection of foreign goods.

In the second instance, Gandhi appears on the grave day in the Birla House in Delhi. He assures to Sriram and Bharati that he will certainly conduct their marriage himself. But he gets assassinated. The narrative provides a comprehensive picture of the national movement at the advent of Gandhi and dignifies Gandhian Movement in a romantic manner.
Conclusion - II

In this part raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* is analysed in Chapter II. The analysis has revealed that *Kanthapura* dwells upon the theme of Gandhian Movement. The narrative depicts the various oppressions to which India has been subjected by the British. It creates the impression that the relief is possible to India only through the incarnation of God. As a result, Gandhi is born as a saviour of Bharata.

Though Gandhi is a character in the novel, his alter ego is created in the character of Moorthy. Through him, *Kanthapura* is evoked to participate in the national movement. It echoes the emergence of national movement under Gandhi’s leadership in every nook and corner of the country. It holds mirror to various dimensions of British imperialism. Everything has been portrayed through a spiritualistic mode which makes ‘Kanthapura’ a Gandhi purana. The treatment of freedom struggle is governed by piety dignity, nobility and reverence.

In Chapter III, R.K. Narayan’s *Waiting for the Mahatma* has been examined. It has shown that the theme of the novel is again freedom struggle. The text deploys romance to narrative the theme of freedom struggle especially Gandhian Struggle. Sriram falls in love with Bharati who is a committed disciple of Gandhi and a daughter of a freedom fighter.
who sacrificed his life for the cause of the nation. Sriram too gets involved in the freedom campaign. In addition, Subhas Chandra Bose's faction's struggle has been incorporated in the narrative through the creation of Jagadish. Various dissidences to Gandhi's campaign are embodied in the narrative, which, in true gives a wholistic view Indian freedom movement.

Sriram undertakes several tasks and is put to detention. At the end, India is freed and Sriram and Bharati wait for Gandhi to perform their marriage. Unexpectedly Gandhi is assassinated and Sriram and Bharati remain in their hope to be blessed by Gandhi. The novel constitutes several strategies of Gandhi's national movement as nucleus of the narrative. Though there is love, dissidence to Gandhian movements, which are ironies of Gandhian campaign the treat of freedom struggle is governed by the features of reverence and dignity through the mode of romance.
REFERENCES

5. Ibid. 426.