# CONTENTS

## Humanities and Social Science Section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Most Favoured Child Hypothesis and Schooling Achievements of Children: A Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>3-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Sumanash Dutta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Development Scenario in North-East India: A Study of Human Attainment and Human Deprivation</td>
<td>13-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golab Chandra Nandi* and Niranjan Roy**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Of Speaking, Writing, and Developing Writing Skills in English</td>
<td>26-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anindya Syam Choudhury</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. THE TRADITIONAL ERCULTURE IN ASSAM AND ITS PRESENT STATUS</td>
<td>31-48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Kherkatary* and P.C. Dutta**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. THEME OF GANDHISM IN R.K. NARAYAN'S NOVELS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA</td>
<td>49-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramyabrata Chakraborty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF MANIPURI NATA SANKIRTANA: SEMIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE</td>
<td>61-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manidhan Singha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Quality Assurance in Higher Education (A Brief Overview)</td>
<td>73-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Nag</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THEME OF GANDHISM IN R.K. NARAYAN'S NOVELS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA

Ramyabrata Chakraborty
Deptt. Of English
S.S. College, Hailakandi.

ABSTRACT

Gandhism in R.K. Narayan's novels is one of the most expanding areas of scholarly study. At the time of India's struggle for independence, Gandhi's image and personality and his socio-political philosophy influenced million of people in India, including a large number of poets, novelists, and other men of sensibility who looked up to him as their literary and spiritual mentor. Indian literature in the form of novels, essays and patriotic poetry played an important role in exhibiting Gandhism, both in pre and post Independent India. Coming to Indian English novel it will be found that a good number of them reflected the theme Gandhism. However, the reflections of the theme varied with the writers and also the changing scenario of same writers. R.K. Narayan, one of the 'big trio' of the Indian English novel along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj
Anand, is a penetrating analyst of Indian motifs and culture. Many popular superstitions, rituals and beliefs are frequently exploited in his novels. ‘Sadhus’, ‘Sanayasis’ and ‘Swamis’ are ever recurring characters in his novels like Waiting for the Mahatma, The Guide and The Vendor Of Sweets the novelist presented the theme of Gandhism with an ironic touch. The present study specifically highlights Gandhism in R.K. Narayan’s novels with special emphasis on the novel Waiting For the Mahatma and tries to find out the ironical and humorous treatment of the same because of its commonplaceness.

INTRODUCTION

Literary historians have designated the period 1920-1947 as “The Era of Gandhian Revolution” in Indian Literature. During those fateful years of India’s struggle for independence, Mahatma Gandhi dominated the Indian national scene, and Gandhian strategies, techniques, and approaches shaped the course of India’s destiny. Gandhi’s image and personality and his socio-political philosophy influenced millions of people in India, including a large number of poets, novelists, and other men of sensibility who looked up to him as their literary and spiritual mentor. They regarded him as an ‘avatar’ of the gods Rama and Krishna, who descended upon earth to destroy the monster of foreign domination and to set Mother India free from the ‘Ferungi Sarkar’ (British Rule). It was this magical impact of the Mahatma and his image on the Indian mind that captured the imagination of many Indian English novelists and inspired them to express, to reflect, or to probe his ideas and ideals, either directly or metaphorically, in their works. It was only with the Gandhian struggle for freedom that Indian English novel really came to its own. The novels of K.S.Venkataramani such as Murugan, The Tiller (1927) and Kandan, The Patriot (1932) reflect the ideals of the Indian struggle for freedom. These two novels are written after the occurrence of Gandhi on the Indian horizon. Murugan is an exponent of Gandhian economics, as Kandan is an exponent of Gandhian politics. Venkataramani’s other writings too reflect the theme of Gandhism. His Jatadharan, a collection of stories and The Next
Rung, a critique of modern civilization bear sufficient influence of Mahatma Gandhi. With the publication of Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable (1935) and Coolie (1936) and Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1938), the Indian English novel started a new journey. This journey achieved success with the arrival of R.K. Narayan in the realm of Indian English fictional world. These three constitute the big trio of the Indian English novel. All the three were profoundly influenced by Gandhian ideas and ideals in different ways. Whereas Narayan is ironical in the depiction of Gandhism, the other two are less ironical but they portray Gandhiji either as a freedom-fighter (in the case of Raja Rao) or as a social-reformer (as in the case of Anand).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1) To describe the theme of Gandhism in R.K.Narayan’s major novels.
2) To evaluate R.K.Narayan’s technique in presenting Gandhism in Waiting For the Mahatma.
3) To investigate whether there is any clash between Gandhism and anti-Gandhism in this novel, and if so then how can he handles the problem.
4) To identify whether there is any latent irony in this novel which will be helpful to understand the reality behind the great emotive and philosophic thought like nationalism in India today.
5) To suggest a new interpretation of R.K. Narayan’s novels, especially, Waiting For the Mahatma, for further study.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. For the purpose of collecting primary data the novels of R.K. Narayan has been consulted. Again Modern Academic Library like Central Library of Assam University, Silchar Campus has been used for collecting and evaluating the secondary data. Moreover web sources and various journals and articles relevant to the topic have been consulted where necessary.
DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM

Gandhi’s message of peace and non-violence, his ethical idealism, and the saint-like austerity of his personal life counterbalanced these foreign influences and awakened among Indian writers a new sense of national pride and purpose. Bhabani Bhattacharya sums up Gandhi’s impact on Indian writers thus:

Inspired by him, they turned towards the depiction of the life of the common man, the poor and the illiterate, particularly in the villages. Their prose style became less ornamental, less designed for the highbrow scholar. Simple, direct, natural, the literature of the Gandhian era aimed at appealing not to the classes alone, but to the masses as well. There was a reaction against obsolete values. The writers drew largely on life for their themes and new horizons opened up before them. (Gandhi the Writer, pp. 228-29)

In this connection it is worthy to be mentioned that Gandhi did not build an original system of thought, for many aspects of Gandhian philosophy were borrowed from popular Hinduism and Jainism. Further, he kept on modifying, developing, or challenging his own concepts in the lights of his experience. Nevertheless, the core of his philosophy lies in a few central concepts around which the entire Gandhian system revolves. These concepts are: ‘Satya’ (Truth), ‘Ahimsa’ (Non-violence), ‘Swadeshi’ (made in one’s own country), ‘Swaraj’ (self-rule), ‘Satyagraha’ (truth-force) and ‘Harijan’ Uplift (removal of untouchability). These concepts, in varying degrees, found their way into the Indo-English novel of the Gandhian era and continued to inspire the novelists after Independence.

In the novels of R.K. Narayan the theme of Gandhism is an excellent topic for scholarly discussion. In the three novels of R. K. Narayan, namely, Waiting for the Mahatma, The Guide and The Vendor Of Sweets the novelist presented the theme of Gandhism with an ironic touch. What the novelist intends to point out in these novels is actually a panoramic vision of modern India where the imitation of Gandhism has become a fashion. In an article on “The Fiction Writer in India”, R.K. Narayan stated that during the period of India’s struggle for independence the subject matter of fiction “became inescapably political”
and he hoped that after independence the writer in India would “express through his novels and stories the way of life of the group of people with whose psychology and background he is most familiar” so that his “picture will not only appeal to his own circle but also to a larger audience outside.” (Quoted by Lyenger, p.360)

**The Guide** is R.K. Narayan’s eighth novel. It was published in 1958 and won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1960. Gandhism is not presented directly in the novel but the idea is implicit here and there in the novel. The novel portrays

The transformation of a Railway Guide to a Spiritual Guide and in this process Gandhism, ironically, makes its appearance in the action of the novel, but not directly, like **The Waiting for the Mahatma**. Here no Gandhi occasionally figures in the story, or, from background, revolving the action of the story. But here the story deals with the fake imitation of a fraud who wants to exhibit Gandhism to hide his previous guilt as well as to create a grand image in the minds of the simple, rustic folk of Mangala, a small village.

R.K. Narayan’s novel **The Vendor of Sweets** was published in 1967. It is the story of Jagan, a sixty years old prosperous widower and a vendor of sweets. He is religious minded and has been considerably influenced by **The Gita**.

He is a conservative one and a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi and tries to live up to Gandhian way of life. He wears khadi and spins charka and some profits with high-minded Gandhian principles. The central character’s imitation of Mahatma Gandhi as well as exercising of Gandhian principles without knowing real depth of this grand ‘moral and ethical principle’ is nothing but an implication of the whim of both pro and post independence India where it has become a fashion to imitate Gandhi. The ironical presentation of the various activities of Jagan helps to expose his fake practice of Gandhism. We also come across such typical figures in our day to day life. They, in reality, hide their immoral lifestyle under the disguise of Gandhism.

Padma Bhusan R. K. Narayan’s novel **Waiting for the Mahatma** was first published in London in 1955. Gandhism is the very
essence of the novel. The very title of the novel indicates that the novel is a political one. But ironically it is a love story. Though the Mahatma figures in the novel again and again it is the love-story of Sriram and Bharati against the background of the political life of India during the years that immediately preceded the Independence of the country in 1947. The novel Waiting for the Mahatma is exceptional in two respects. One is, the action of the novel strays out of Malgudi, the common locale of R.K. Narayan’s writings and it goes as far as Delhi. Another exceptional trait is the two central characters of the novel—Sriram and Bharati are extremely engaged in politics.

In Mulk Raj Anand’s novel Untouchable, Mahatma Gandhi is given a part towards the end delivering his speech in the open field against untouchability and measures to be adopted to abolish the evil from Indian society. Other Indian fiction-writers, not only in English but in other regional languages, often utilize the image of Gandhi in their writings. But none of them has presented Gandhi in the total action of the novel. The two problems persist here. Gandhi is too big to be given a minor part; on the other hand, if he is given a big role then there is a chance for the story to transform to a biography. The golden mean would be to keep Gandhi in the background but make his influence felt indirectly. In Waiting for the Mahatma, the theme is apparently the romance between Bharati and Sriram. But it gains a new dimension in the background of their common allegiance to Mahatma Gandhi. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar in his book, Indian Writing in English, points out:

Since the stress is not merely on Gandhi’s influence but on Gandhi himself—we see him in Malgudi stationed in Nallappa’s Grove and we see him, years later, in Delhi on his way to prayer on the fatal day, 30 January 1948—the novel develops a duality of interest which is not wholly resolved by the compulsion of art.

The central protagonist of the novel is Sriram who lost his parents at an early age. His grandmother brought him up. Having received over-affection and indulgence from his grandmother Sriram turned into a worthless young man. Out of the pension of the father his grandmother deposited an amount of over thirty-eight thousand rupees
in a Bank for his future guidance. Bharati, the female protagonist of the novel was the daughter of a patriot who was killed by a policeman. So she was adopted by the local Sevak Sangh. She was brought up and educated on Gandhian principle. In course of time she became a true follower and devotee of Gandhi. In the portraiture of Bharati we can easily make an assessment of Gandhi’s attitude towards women. Mahatma Gandhi has paid special attention to the emancipation of women in India by drawing them into the freedom movement and trying to remove various social and economic obstacles which stand in the way of their progress. Although women occupied a high social status in ancient India, we must concede that in course of the past centuries the women have suffered gross social and economic injustice at the hands of the community. Gandhiji, therefore, has espoused the cause of women with great concern. It is mainly due to his untiring efforts in this direction that women in free India occupy high positions in national life. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi:

Woman who knows and fulfils her duty realizes her dignified status. She is the queen, not the slave, of the household, over which she presides. (Harijan, October 12, 1932)

And here Bharati is a perfect Gandhian ‘queen, not the slave of the household’. But in the portrayal of Bharati a fleeting touch of irony is easily visible. She is a devoted and disciplined follower of Gandhi, but once again, a follower whose extreme devotion to the master makes her little more than a puppet whose all actions are manipulated by the strings in the master’s hand.

Sriram met Bharati when one day she approached him for contribution to the fund which was being collected for the reception of Mahatma Gandhi in Malgudi. The good for nothing young Sriram fell in love with the beautiful young lady Bharati at the first sight. To show his love for her and with a view to being closer to her Sriram joined Gandhiji’s group of followers of which Bharati was a member. On the day of the meeting Sriram was present there. When Mahatma Gandhi started to deliver his speech Sriram got the first hand knowledge of Gandhism from Mahatma Gandhi’s own voice:

Mahatma Gandhi said: ‘I see before me a vast army. Everyone of you has certain good points and certain defects, and you must all strive
to discipline yourselves before we can hope to attain freedom for our
country. An army is always in training and keeps itself in good shape by
regular drill and discipline. We, the citizens of this country, are all soldiers
of a non-violent army, but even such an army has to practice a few things
daily in order to keep itself in proper condition: we do not have to bask
in the sun and cry "Left" or "Right". But we have a system of our own to
follow: that's Ram Dhun; spinning on the charka and the practice of
absolute Truth and Non-violence." (28)

At the next evening's meeting Gandhiji spoke on non-violence and
explained how it could be practised in daily life. Gandhiji said:

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. If we are
watchful it will come to you naturally....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." (30)

Sriram found it impossible to follow the deep philosophical words
of Mahatma Gandhi. He could not grasp what Gandhiji was saying, but
he looked rapt, he tried to concentrate and understand the inner
meanings of Gandhiji's words. This was the first time he understood the
necessity to try and follow something. With the passage of time Sriram
became a close devotee of Gandhiji. People began praising him finding
a true Gandhian in him.

After the departure of Mahatmaji both Sriram and Bharati
engaged themselves to fulfil the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi. Bharati
taught Sriram how to use the spinning wheel. Nearly twelve weeks after
Gandhiji had left, Sriram had stationed himself for his novitiate at one
of the spinning centres, about fifty miles from Malgudi. Bharati was
perfectly at home there and proved herself to be a task-mistress of no
mean order. Until Sriram had spun enough yarn free from entanglement
for a dhoti and a short shirt, Bharati did not let go her grip on Sriram. It
was a result of continuous work over weeks. But it was worth it. She
became very excited at the success of his efforts. Sriram too started to
feel that he was the inhabitant of a magic world where one created all
the things one needed with his/her own hands.
After some time the historic movement of 1942 (i.e., Quit India Movement of 1942. Gandhiji regarded the presence of the British in India as an invitation to Japan to invade India. So he launched the movement) broke out and

Gandhiji was arrested. The Gandhian young Sriram retired to a deserted temple on the slope of Mempi Hill to escape police. His devotion to Gandhian policy, his love of Bharati seemed to be forgotten history. Now he started carrying on the propaganda of the revolutionary and radical national workers. He joined the new friend Jagdish in his terrorist activities. Sriram helped Jagdish first in noting down the messages and speeches of Subhas Bose from Tokyo and Berlin. He began to distribute cyclostyled copies of them among the Indian soldiers. Afterwards he started overturning and derailing trains, cutting telegraph wires, setting fire to the records in law-courts, exploding crude bombs. He became a terrorist in the true sense, indulging in such other acts of violence which are against all Gandhian principles. As a result he was arrested and sent to jail. The suggestion in this picture is quite plain. Narayan is perhaps hinting at the fact howsoever unpalatable it may be—that a large section of the Indian public did not understand Gandhism properly at all.

After India got independence in 1947 Sriram was released from jail. He was a free man now. So the memory of his lady-love Bharati again began to knock at his closed door. He went to Delhi and met her when she was staying with Mahatma Gandhi in Birla Bhavan. Both were happy to meet each other after a long gap. Sriram begged her to marry him. Bharati gave her consent. The two then went to Mahatmaji for his approval. Mahatmaji approved of their marriage and gave his blessings to them. Gandhiji at first promised to them that he would be present on the occasion of their marriage, but on a mysterious premonition expressed his unwillingness to do so. After a brief talk with Mahatmaji, Sriram and Bharati accompanied him to the prayer ground in Birla Bhavan and witnessed the ghastly scene of his murder by a misguided youth (i.e., Nathuram Vinayak Godse, an ultra-nationalist who murdered Gandhiji on 30th January, 1948.)
IMPORTANT FINDINGS

In this novel Narayan’s depiction of Gandhism is three dimensional. From one point of view, it is to be said that the novel beautifully reveals Gandhism by the presentation of the character Bharati and here Sriram is nothing but an imitator of the principle for the sake of establishing a permanent impression in the mind of Bharati. This view paves the way for the second one, that is, the ironical implication of the theme of Gandhism. Thirdly, by the presentation of the revolutionary principles of Subhas Bose and Sriram’s partial acceptance of these principles the novelist somehow raises the conflict between Gandhism and revolutionary theories of the extremists like Subhas Bose, Balgangadhar Tilak etc which is a debatable subject till today from the time of its origin, i.e., at the time of Indian’s struggle for Independence.

CONCLUSION

It is surprising to see Narayan turning to the last phase of Mahatma Gandhi’s life and using it as the background for his novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*, published eight years after independence. Before 1947 Narayan published only one story called “Gandhi’s Appeal” dealing with the nationalist theme. This story deals with the irresistible appeal of Gandhi for the masses of Indian people and shows how the Mahatma’s magical charm disarmed even those who wanted to be disloyal to him. Thematically, “Waiting for the Mahatma” could be regarded as an extension of this short story. Narayan calls it “A Novel of Gandhi”. We see Gandhi in person staying at Nallapa’s Grove in Malgudi and years later in Delhi on the fatal day of his assassination. Gandhi occupies a pivotal position in the plot of the novel because the main love story of Sriram and Bharati revolves around him. The dominant image of the Mahatma is that of a warm, loving, and good-humored Bapu, as his disciples affectionately called him. Who, with his “unaffected graciousness” could put even strangers at ease. Narayan’s picture of Gandhi’s activities and his daily routine is authentic through Gandhi’s words and actions, he brings out the major concepts of Gandhian philosophy—spinning of the charkha, the practice of absolute Truth and
non-violence, the idea of purity, self-discipline, and self-reliance, and the removal of untouchability—and shows how Gandhi, through his personal example, touches and transforms the lives of the common people, including Sriram and Bharati. The underlying irony that Sriram cannot see the difference between the non-violent way of Gandhi and the violent methods of the terrorists simply points to the sad fact that, though the common people were irresistibly drawn to the magical personality of Gandhi, most of them failed to understand the heart of Gandhi’s message.

Our conclusion is that in his novels like “Waiting for the Mahatma” Narayan’s treatment of the theme of Gandhism is both ironical and humorous. Only a subtle understanding of the misuse of Gandhism by the common people enables the novelist to write in a self-reflexive mode, i.e. the comic mode.

Bibliography

7. Iyengar, K.R. Srinivas. Indian Writing in English. New Delhi:


---

There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something. You certainly usually find something, if you look, but it is not always quite the something you were after - J.R.R. Tolkien (Author of epic fantasy. The Lord of the Rings, 1892-1977)
APPENDIX 2
Pursuits
Annual Journal of Research and Publication Cell under IQAC, 2011
S.S. College, Hailakandi, Assam (India)
ISSN 0976-4593

Published by: Research and Publication Cell under IQAC
S.S. College, Hailakandi, Assam (India)

© 2011 Research and Publication Cell.

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

Dr. Amalendu Nag
Chief Editor
Dept. of Pol. Science

Dr. P.C. Dutta
Principal i/c
Chief Advisor

Dr. Arunima De (Bhattacharjee)
HOD, Dept. of History
Advisor

B. C. Pradhan
HOD, Dept. of Pol. Science
Advisor

Debadutta Chakravarty
Dept. of History
Co-ordinator, IQAC
Advisor

Rupam Sen
Dept. of Physics
Member

Abhijit Nath
Dept. of Chemistry
Member

Arabinda Kherkatary
Dept. of Economics
Member

Debasish Guhathakurata
Dept. of Chemistry
Member

A. H. Choudhury
Dept. of Mathematics
Member

Ramyabrata Chakraborty
Dept. of English
Member

Printed at:
Prasongik Printer & Publications
Hospital Road, Silchar - 5
DTP - Amar Sinha, Kinkar Das.

Price: ₹ 150/-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. R. K. Narayan’s the Vendor of Sweets: A Study of Cross Cultural Interactions Ramyabrata Chakraborty</td>
<td>11-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Peasant Movement in North East India P. C. Dutta1 and B.C. Pradhan</td>
<td>18-41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Assertion of Dimasa Identity Bidhan Barman</td>
<td>42-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Election and state politics Assam Assembly Election, 2011– An Analysis Dr. Amalendu Nag</td>
<td>51-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Violation of Women’s Rights in India: Its Issues and Challenges Golab Chandra Nandi</td>
<td>57-67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Access of Rural Poor Households to Banking System- A Case study of Karimganj District Chandan Das</td>
<td>68-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Origin and Growth of Politics of Immigration in Assam during 1874-1947 Abdul Mannan Mazumder</td>
<td>80-87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
R. K. Narayan’s The Vendor of Sweets: A Study of Cross-Cultural Interactions

Ramyabrata Chakraborty

Abstract

This paper is intended to examine R. K. Narayan’s attitude towards the cultural interactions in a post-colonial setting as reflected in his novel The Vendor of Sweets (1967). Narayan (1906-2001) was born and grown up in a period when cultural hybridisation was already institutionalised in the Indian Subcontinent. Like other Indian writers in English, such as Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, he is seen to scrutinise colonialism and depict the Indian society continually under change due to the colonial rule. Narayan’s position in this regard is deemed quite ambivalent and complex—he is aware that westernization is the ultimate reality of the post-colonial scenario, yet he is found to have accepted the traditional Indian culture as the real asset for the Hindustani. That is, his attitude towards the cultural colonisation appears to have resulted from and shaped by the reality prevailing in the postcolonial setting.

Key words: R.K. Narayan, attitude, postcolonial literature, diaspora, self-reflexive, hegemonic formations, cultural hybridization

Introduction

“Indian English fiction emanating out of Indian diaspora has presently been found to deliberate upon self-reflexive and highly novel strategies for re-evaluating hegemonic formations embedded in the dynamics of cross-cultural rela-...
tions and interactions. R. K. Narayan’s *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) follows such a trend in depicting the experiences of an Indian sweet vendor, the follower of Mahatma Gandhi in the company of his only son, who is the product of culturally hybridized 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 post-Independence hybridization of culture. On the light of cross-cultural interactions, Narayan tries to unfold how an ordinary individual’s naïve concept of truth matures from a level of skin-deep perception to a veritable height of realisation. The present paper attempts to present how an imperfect idealist conducts his search for his true identity in a society of prevailing cultural hybridization and in this process, reaches his goal through self-discovery.

Albeit unconsciously, R.K. Narayan is a novelist with a message. A witness to more than half a century of contemporary India, he does not make do with keeping his pen neutral and objective witness. R.K. Narayan probably is just as much of a propagandist as his revolutionary contemporary Mulk Raj Anand. What makes them stand poles apart is that while the Punjabi novelist advocates a violent revolution based on foreign socialist ideals and destructive of most inherited social Indian traditions, R.K. Narayan pleads the case of salvation resting on the restoration of local values. At the root of R.K. Narayan’s fiction lies a deep and unquestionable humanism which allows him to express his conviction that everyman can only belong to one culture: that of his ancestors. There is no escaping this law of nature. Accepting one’s own culture as the ultimate value is no intolerance at all. Quite the opposite, it is the proof that cohabitation is possible when no interference is sought. This will be seen in the case of his novel, *The Vendor of Sweets*. With a gentle, unpretentious style and straightforward plotting, Narayan portrays in this novel an ordinary people struggling to make sense of his life as Hindu cultural tradition clashed with modernity and a nascent nationalism eroded a colonial mentality.

**Objectives of the study**

1) To interpret the text in the light of cross-cultural interactions.
2) To investigate whether there is any clash between East and West in this novel, and if so then how the novelist handles the problem.
3) To suggest a new interpretation of the novel for further study.

---

1 (Sarbojit Biswas’s “Re-defining the Dynamics of Cross-cultural interactions: a Study of Amit Chaudhuri’s *Afternoon Raag*)

12
Volume: IV-2011
Data and Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. For the purpose of collecting primary data the novels of R.K. Narayan has been consulted. Again Modern Academic Library like Central Library of Assam University, Silchar and Diphu Campus have been used for collecting and evaluating the secondary data. Moreover web sources and various journals and articles relevant to the topic have been consulted where necessary.

Discussion of the Problem

*The Vendor of Sweets*, from the general point of view, is the story of Jagan, a sixty years old prosperous widower and a vendor of sweets. He is religious minded and has been considerably influenced by *The Gita*. He is a conservative one and a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi and tries to live up to Gandhian way of life. He wears khadi and spins charka. He wants to devise some ways and means to earn handsome profits with high-minded Gandhian principles. Being a true Gandhite, Jagan uses only “non-violent footwear”, chappals made out of animals dying a natural death and not butchered for the purpose. Beef-eating to him is a sin. It is similar to the five deadly sins,¹ according to Hindu Shastras. A faddist and believer in the profound wisdom of our ancestors, margosa is to him an ambrosial plant, its leaves and fruit always to be preferred to aspirin. Twigs of trees made ideal tooth-brushes, not bristles made out of pig’s tails. He maintains a most humble style of living that is prescribed along the indigenous tradition of an exclusively swadeshi type 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. The novelist writes:

He wore a loose jibba over his dhoti, both made of materials spun with his own hand; everyday he spun for an hour,… he had begun the habit when Gandhi visited the town over twenty years ago and had been commended for

¹ According to Hindu Shastras, the five deadly sins are drinking of wine, killing of Brahmin, marrying a Brahmin by a Sudra, stealing of gold, molesting the wife of the Guru.
In his self-oriented world Jagan sees himself with a cultural authenticity of tradition: ‘Everything in this home had the sanctity of usage...’(282) He 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 postcolonial re-positioning of the cultural identity. In fact, he lives in an idealized traditional India of long ago incongruously conflated with the modern present.

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. As a traditionalist, Jagan is frustrated at his son’s knack for abjuring the safe and time-tested, traditional way of and attitude to life. Mali fully lives in the modern world, not only of India but of America as well. Dropping out of college, (as Jagan had as a young man out of misconstrued loyalty to Gandhi), Mali, without consulting with his father, enrolls in a creative writing program in Michigan and helps himself to Jagan’s attic stash of rupees in order to pay his expenses. Narayan consistently portrays Mali as a son who has lost all the traditional Hindu virtues while Jagan spoils him and makes excuses for him.

After three years Mali returns from America with “another person” whom upon arrival at the train station he introduces as his wife, Grace. Jagan suffers a severe shock. His son has not only gone to America, where he in fact does begin to eat beef, but married there without informing his family. Soon Grace transforms the part of the nineteenth-century house in which she and Mali live with modern Western paintings and furnishings. In one of the few revealing statements by Mali, “with a gesture of disgust,” he says to his father, “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.” Satirizing the trash creative writing programs churn out in America, Narayan underscores simultaneously the gulf between father and son, traditional and modern.

The relationship between the father and the son is hashed, based on mechanical exercises and utilitarian expectations from the son by the father. There is little or no warmth in their relation and there is no attempt to develop one such, especially on part of Mali. Jagan is shown to be inquisitive about the strain in their relation but is also burdened by the guilt conscience when he recalls the fact that Mali had stopped talking to him on the very day when his mother expired on account of Jagan’s refusal to provide her with antibiotics. Since one cannot change the past, Jagan ultimately accepts his position as a money lender for his son, with no other duties or responsibilities.
There is another form of cross-cultural interaction in the novel apart from father-son relationship. Here the colonizer is embracing the culture of colonized. Grace, the woman who Mali has 'supposedly' married, is a woman of duty, responsibility and sensibility. She is the one who is charmed by the Indian traditions, finds it fascinating and makes every effort to bide by the customs and traditions, at times, even more than the Indians themselves. She promptly wins Jagan’s (her father-in-law) heart with her extreme sweetness and rational temper. She soon becomes a medium of conversation between Jagan and Mali from being looked as an averred foreigner when she stepped on the platform of Malgudi for the first time.

A shocking form of truth revealing that Mali and Grace were never married at all, delivers the final boost to Jagan to sever his link with his family and renounces his familiar world in pursuit of his converted life of a retreat. It is at this stage finally, when Jagan fails to make a meaning out of his traumatic present, that the past resurrects with all its meanings and messages in Jagan’s reverie. He sits in the dark by the Sir Frederick Lawley statue, a relic from the British past, and meditates on his own arranged marriage in a richly embellished chapter that brilliantly evokes the traditional marriage customs of the joint family system in India and devastatingly insinuates the decayed state of his own house and modern India.

Jagan awakens in the dawn from his night of memories, fantasizing again of entering “a new janma.” In regard to the traditional ceremony marking a man turning sixty, the narrator honestly concedes again that Jagan himself “had had his fill of these festivals.” In his own way, the narrator frequently intimates, Jagan has picked over and repudiated various customs from the past. So one relative is imagined as saying how could the son Mali be different with “a father like Jagan.” Narayan suggests a subtle, logical, and culminating connection of decline between father and son. Although, at the end of the novel the real transformation comes in Jagan’s life. The cousin is amazed at the transformation in Jagan who does not blame Grace for the muddle created by his son, Mali and is willing to buy her a ticket if she desires to return to her homeland America. Thus at the end of the novel the fake Gandhiman learns the real values of forgiveness and tolerance which are the real asset of Gandhism.

Conclusion

V. S. Naipaul has remarked of Narayan’s *The Vendor of Sweets* that it is “a novel in which his fictional world is cracked open, its fragility finally revealed, and the Hindu equilibrium . . . collapses into something like despair.” In his “On Alternative Modernities,” Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar has similarly ob-
served, “Everywhere, at every national or cultural site, the struggle with modernity is old and familiar.” Narayan has so thoroughly undermined and complicated Jagan with the tensions of twentieth-century life, deep within the structure of the narrative voice itself, only the most shallow or tendentious reading can fail to perceive the scathing critique of both the antedated and bankrupt, traditional and modern, values of India and Western civilization.

Thus in hindsight one may feel that R.K.Narayan’s *The Vendor of Sweets* is a brilliant attempt at interweaving the cultures of both pre-colonial and post-Independent India, both past and present, by following the protagonist to both in his home dominated by hybridized second generation and his retreat on return, so as to able to take a microscopic look at human life from multiple angles. But in defence of Narayan it can be affirmed that Jagan’s retreat from society is no schizophrenic withdrawal and instead, with his own armour of ideology (here Gandhism), Jagan plumbs the depth of his own experiences and in the process re-discovers his native cultural roots in a society of Post-Independence socio-cultural confusions. He comes to a realization of truth only after a heroic negotiation of cultural upheavals and changes of his time.

**References**


