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Gandhian Ideology In The Novels Of R.K Narayan

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Abstract

R.K Narayan is one of the most prominent novelists of Indian writing in English. His novels are full of realism and a present mirror image of microcosmic India caught in the conventions traditions and social changes. He is a novelist of international repute. R. K. Narayan, being a social reformer. His novels are thematically based on the well-known classical myth because of the inevitable victory of good over evil. His novels have also reflected the concept of karma and the cyclical existent as well as the four ages of human life. In his later novels, he reflects his extraordinary fictional imagination. Some other novels are shown ironically to throw light on the religious and cultural glory of Indian society.

Keywords: Gandhian Ideology, R.K Narayan, Indian Writing in English, Swami and Friends, Malgudi Days.

INTRODUCTION

R.K. Narayan begins his career as a novelist by writing on the atmosphere of schools and colleges and therefore his early novels. When the first novel, *Swami and Friends*, was published in London in the early 1930s, that period lacked an organized publishing industry and few writers, who got published in newspapers or periodicals, were paid essentially small change. So, Narayan was among very few Indians of the pre-independence day who could attempt to write in such a difficult and adverse situation.

Narayan in his unique style of writing in the deceptively simple language. He has mainly focused on the social and cultural life of Indians particularly Hindus, in a very realistic way. *Waiting for Mahatma* (1955) is a political novel written under the influence of the Gandhian whirlwind which has influenced the entire country and Gandhi's leadership had already assumed an all-India character. The non-cooperation movement launched by Gandhi, after the demise of Tilok in Bombay has created an unprecedented awakening among the people of India.

Narayan highlights various social evils and people's sufferings. But there is nothing in his works of angry reformist feelings which is found in the fiction of Mulk Raj Anand, with his positioned concern for the villages with the ferocious poverty and cruelties of cadet, with orphans,

untouchables and urban beggars and labours, Narayan's work contains no scalded sense of social injustice, no artificial anguish, no colonial indignation. The novelist

It is hotly debated where Gandhiji is to be put up during his Malgudi tour. The Municipal Chairman, Mr Natesh, a calculating opportunist, understands that he stands to gain by posing as a patriot and associating himself with the emerging national leader, Gandhiji. So he offers his palatial bungalow Neel Bagh to Gandhiji, himself staying in the Circuit House temporarily.

A writer's work is sustained by the intellectual, social, political, religious and cultural milieu to which he belongs. Indian thought and life were greatly influenced by the powerful impact of the nationalist movement and the ideology of Gandhi. All Indian literature showed a marked impact of Gandhian thought and reverberates with the glorification of truth, non-violence, village uplift, charkha, prohibition, communal harmony and abolition of untouchability. The political milieu is the dominant setting of Indian literature of the period and Gandhian ideology as its intellectual background. Indian writing in English as a branch of Indian literature too was not left untouched. It succeeded in catching the widespread popularity of Gandhi and his movement throughout the length and breadth of the vast subcontinent. Of all literary forms fiction is the most vitally concerned with social conditions and values. The artistic Indian fiction in English has given a very comprehensive and vivid account of Gandhi's personality, philosophy, popularity and movement. There is hardly any phase of Gandhi's life and movement since 1920 when he looks up the leadership of the people in their stupendous struggle for freedom till his harrowing death that has not been mirrored truthfully and successfully.

R.K Narayan came under the influence of Gandhi at Sabarmati Ashram and discarded all his English styles which he had adopted in England. He became an Indian in his dress and lifestyle. He could also gain a closer and sympathetic understanding of the socially and economically exploited poor Indians. As a result of his contact with Gandhi, R.K.Narayan could gain a closer and sympathetic understanding not only for the social exploitation of Harijans but also of the poor Indians in general-an an exploitation which was embedded in the political system of the colonial rule of India by the capitalistic British.

Furthermore, he was influenced by the nineteen-thirties- the pink decade when Gandhi dominated on the Indian scene as K R Srinivas Iyengar writes:

The nineteen thirties were the seed time of modern independent India: the Gandhian Salt Satyagraha movements in 1930 and 1932, the three Round

Table Conferences, the passing of the Government of India Act of 1935, the introduction of Provincial Autonomy in 1937, the Gandhian movements of Harijan upliftment and Basic education (Iyengar 1962: 332).

In an interview with R K Narayan, V Panduranga Rao asked him, "Considering your Waiting for the Mahatma, were you greatly influenced by Gandhi?" Narayan replied, "No." He was a rare man. But I don't agree with his political or economic thinking. But- Truth- and he was transparent" (Rao 1971: 81). So far as truth is concerned he was consistently influenced by Gandhi. It is Gandhian thought that brought the colonial encounter to the fore. It is in this social situation created by the Gandhian thought that, Narayan, like other contemporary novelists, found his subject matter. When Narayan talks of politics pushing fiction out, perhaps he means that politics and political issues have become ends in themselves rather than aspects of wider social issues. He does not mean that political issues would be forbidden for the writer. For Narayan, the end is art, but the spirit remains naturally political. He achieves his end through characterization but his characters derive their authenticity from the social-political scene of the 1930s and the 1940s in India. His major preoccupation as a novelist is with this social scene. Although the social problems in his novels belong to the realm of manners and conventions; his characters are viewed in the context of and about these social problems. Nearly all of Narayan's subsequent novels involve characters and readers in such chaos. Srinivas is a rather aimless

young man who has finally been driven by his family to choose a profession and who comes to Malgudi in 1938 when war clouds hang over the whole world to found a newspaper that has “nothing special to note about any war, past or future,” but is “only concerned with that war that is always going on between man’s inside and outside” (128).

He falls into the hands of a printer, Mr Sampath, who takes a proprietary interest in the success of the paper, but who is lured from his printing trade into a film-producing venture. Even Srinivas is briefly tempted to abandon his paper and take up scriptwriting. Despite frantic activity and great expenditures, however, the movie-making venture collapses. Only Srinivas emerges unscathed. He finds another printer and returns to publish his paper, reflecting on one of the men involved in the catastrophe he has witnessed Swami and Friends relates to the subject of education which is one of the important aspects of Gandhian thought. The novel reads like an adventure story of an adolescent W S Swaminathan and a group of his friends. The protagonist’s protest is focused, of course, on one aspect of colonization, that is, the education system. The inability of the child to cope with the examination system, his inadequate involvement in the process of learning is shown to be due to the unreal and mechanical system of the education system. Right in the first paragraph of the novel, we find young Swaminathan shuddering “at the very thought of school: that yellow dismal building; the fire-eyed Vedanayagam, his class teacher and the Hindu-Master with his long cane” (Narayan 1983: 3). Life in the classroom is monotonous: bored, “he felt sleepy” (4) These first-few paragraphs have a vital significance in the scheme of the novel, for, Swami’s apathy and non-involvement in his classroom are shortly going to be channelled by the Gandhian movement of 1931 in which he and his friends participate.

In mock-heroic style, Narayan describes Swami’s adventures through the crowds, till panic strikes him at the sight of the lathi charge. The plain, factual language of Narayan portrays the police violence without any melodrama. There is nothing extraordinarily new in what Gandhi said, believed or did. He once accepted this fact when he said: “I have nothing new to teach the people. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills” (Gandhi 1936: 49). Gandhi has become an iconic figure, a symbol of many things for many people. In the words of Rammanohar Lohia: “tens of millions thought the world saw in him their spokesman, the solace and the remedy for their sufferings and distress” (Lohia 1963: 121).

His technique of civil resistance which he developed had a powerful effect against the white rulers in South Africa, and later, opponents in India. The technique has universal appeal. It is not only relevant today but it is relevant for all times and ages. Gandhi’s ideology is relevant because it is positive, constructive and practical- for example, Sarvodaya- the rise and well-being of all. While it is the duty and responsibility of society to plan for the fullest development of the best in the individual, it is equally necessary that the individual render back unto society what he owes to society. Thus, there has to be a balancing of rights and obligations between the individuals and the society which they compose.

His principles and technique of Satyagraha are highly efficacious instruments of peaceful, economic, social and political change whenever and wherever it is required. His gospel of peaceful means for resolving all conflicts is the only way to escape the disaster of nuclear war. In its totality, Gandhi’s teaching is a highly inspiring one and serves as a signpost to humanity marching towards a better, happier and more harmonious world.

Conclusion

Narayan approach to his characters is both analytical and dramatic. His characters are presented through their speech and action. He is less the pure describer than Smollett, Dickens, Thackeray. Their method is rather that of the reporter, Narayan’s of the dramatist. As an analytical writer, his character speaks, and act, and leaves the rest to our fancy. Waiting for the Mahatma is a serious novel

about India's struggle for freedom and the riots that were sparked off in Noakhali soon after India won freedom. Intermixed with this is the humorous account that R.K Narayan gives of Sriram's maturation.

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