

THE ESSENCE OF GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY IN R.K.NARAYAN'S FICTION

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ABSTRACT

R.K. Narayan is not only an Indian author but also a writer who carried the ethos of India into his fiction. Rasipuram krishnaswami Iyer was born on 1906 and died on May 13th 2001. He writes in English. 'R' in his name represents the name of his village and K, the name of his father-Krishna swami. He was fond of reading different kind of books. After completing his early education he went to England to complete his higher education. He passed his B.A from Maharaja College, Mysore. He later on became a news reporter for the newspaper called "THE JUSTICE". He published over a dozen novels,two hundred short stories and four books of non-fiction.K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar rightly pointed out:

"Whereas Anand finished his education in Cambridge and London,Narayan had his education entirely in south India:he uses the English language much as he used to wear dhotis manufactured in Lancashire-but the thoughts and feelings, the stirrings of the soul, the wayward movements of the consciousness, are all of the soil of India, recognizably autochthonous. He is one of the few writers in India who take their craft seriously, constantly striving to improve the instrument, pursuing with a sense of dedication."(IYENGAR 359)

R.K.Narayan who in almost all novels portrayed real picture of the then Society:influence of Gandhi in Indian villages and towns. Gandhi's teachings were highlighted often in his fiction.Some of it are:

- 1) Unity among Hindus & Muslims.
- 2) To follow non violence.
- 3) To stop evil practices of un-touch ability, casteism, hatred against each other etc.
- 4) To stop consumption of tobacco smoking, ganja smoking,
- 5) Stop swearing, using slang whoring and beating women folk at home.
- 6) Boycotting foreign goods, educational, economic and legal institution.
- 7) To take the initiative to spin, weave cultivate, study, learn and teach.
- 8) To lead a simple life, self sacrifice, self purification, family planning etc.
- 9) People will not betray their help-seeker.
- 10) Believe in truth and apply it in life.

No doubt Gandhi's philosophy was well taken by many great leaders inside home and outside too. Dr. Martin Luther King Junior was greatly inspired by Gandhiji.

Dr. King said, "...If Humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived thought, acted and inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony."

Barrack Obama, the ex president of U.S. according to him Gandhiji was an apostle of peace. He commented, " In my life, I have always looked to Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration, because he embodies the kind of transformational change that can be made when ordinary people come together to do extraordinary things.

Aung San Suu kyi, the Burmese leader who was under house arrest for many years. According to her she has learnt a great deal of teaching from Gandhi's doctrine of peace and this gives her power to fight all fear.

Albert Einstein gave tribute to Gandhi in his own unique way: " Generations to come, it may well be , will scarce believe that such a man as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.

The phenomenon of nationalist movement was made strong in the fiction of R.K.Narayan. We can say that his complete life focused on Gandhian philosophy. Mostly all his protagonist somewhere or the other charmed by Gandhian thoughts and molded their life from high to low from special to general whether its swami from Swami & friends ,Raju from Guide, Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts etc. Gandhiji insisted about "simple living and high thinking". R.K.Narayan put this philosophy in almost all his novels very strongly. His protagonists with their middle class value struggled and at the end they came out with flying color. We all know that Narayan is one such great star in the firmament of Indo Anglian literature. Nearly eighty two stories in eight volumes have been

published so far. R.K.Narayan came under the Gandhian influence when he was at SABARMATI ASHRAM and left western lifestyle and culture. He gained from this influence and his complete thinking style towards the poor and the downtrodden of India changed. It started reflecting in his literature. He made nonviolence, truth his main subject and in almost all his literary works we found Gandhism.

“Partition of India shook every Indian. A detached writer like R.K.Narayan could not keep himself aloof from the grim realities of Indian life at this moment. Another community is the result of such a mood of the writer. Narayan appears to be a different man in this story. He is serious and has forgotten his burlesque and jocularly which he is so famous far.”(Dayal 127)

In swami and friends we have seen the fervor of Gandhian influence on swami and even the whole village was caught in the same phenomenon. He is quite familiar with Gandhi’s name not only as a political leader but also a great human being. The important place where we witnessed Gandhian influence was the scene of laathi charge and also by the huge gathering near Sarayu. Narayan never allow losing Gandhian influence from Swami. He makes sure that through Swami we will get the aura of that period.

“The mention of the police had sent his blood boiling. What brazenness, what shamelessness, to talk of police— the nefarious agents of the Lancashire thumb cutters!” (NARAYAN 100)

Swami didn’t care for the western style of school with so hatred inside his heart he left the school. His rejection from the western kind of institute is some of the author’s showing the phase and mood in few of his novels. Swami doesn’t like the way Ebenezer mock at Hindu god and goddess. He tells the Principal of Albert Mission School in anger.

“I do not care for your dirty school.”

This gives the glimpse of Gandhi like protest against the British educational system in India. We get the glimpse of this type in another protagonist of the same Chandran in Bachelor of Arts. It is after the rejection of cross cultural dominance of west that the heroes of Narayan get their full potential and we found tremendous changes in their personality.

Swami with his friends involved in hartal and closed down the school. They pelted stones on the school window panes. They move to another place, the police lathicharged them and they got hurt

“The white dust stirred up by the procession hung like the mist in the air and choked him. He could see before him nothing but moving backs and shoulders and occasionally odd

parts of some buildings. His throat was dry with shouting and he was beginning to feel hungry” (100).

Next day headmaster cane did not spare him for his misdeeds. The Gandhian wave engulfed nook and corner of the country. In one of the scene Swami was panic stricken at the sight of seeing policeman with lathis, charging crowd without any mercy.

“The policeman came towards them with upraised lathis. Swaminathan shrieked to them, ‘Don’t kill me. I know nothing’. He then heard a series of dull noises as the lathis descended on the bodies of his neighbors. Swaminathan saw blood streaming from the forehead of 148 one. Down came the lathis again. Another runner fell with a groan. On the back of a third the lathis fell again and again (NARAYAN,102).

The second to the series is ‘Bachelor of Arts’ in which we find the grown up swami turned out as Chandran. The fight of Chandran against British imperialism, slavery, distortion of history, injustice etc. Chandran’s life after graduation and settling as newspaper agent in Malgudi. Chandran’ romantic life was vividly woven by Narayan. He sketches the man woman relationship and which is very close to the Indian social realities. Narayan portrayed Chandran...

But Chandran’s renunciation was not of that kind. It was an alternative to suicide...He was a sanyasi because it pleased him to mortify his flesh. His renunciation was a revenge on society, circumstances, and perhaps, too, on destiny (Narayan 1975:108).

In ‘Bachelor of Arts’ the old social norms was questioned again and again in the light of modernity and education. We have seen in this novel how the protagonist tried, struggled to come out of the phase of orthodoxy, he failed miserably but he didn’t left his effort. Chandran’s return to Malgudi from an aimless sanyasi embodies shows the strength of the age old values. His anger, frustration towards society and after his entire acceptance to the reality shows the innermost conflict of good and evil inside the common man.

“R.K.Narayan stands as a milestone in the Indo Anglian short stories literature. He is an oft quoted name among the common wealth writers. Besides Graham Greene and William Walsh, other English and Indian critics also, recognize his contribution and uphold his artistic gift. He will always be remembered by the posterity for his simple and lucid expression, hilarious humor and consummate art. (DAYAL,161)

The Gandhi’s colored Narayan’s vision of life in 30s and 40’s and after the assassination of Gandhiji, Narayan unravel ‘WAITING FOR MAHATMA, which echoes the influence of Gandhian philosophy. The plot is laid in imagery land of Malgudi. Sriram comes under the charm of Mahatma Gandhi which Bharti already experienced. Gandhi was treated as a

good human-being who changed the lives of two young souls for forever. The novel depicted the communal riot of communal riot of Noakhali. Gandhi's ideology influenced ordinary men and women in rural and urban India of that time. Sriram's meeting with Bharti and his personal interest in helping and assisting Bharti catches our attention and at the same time brings the national movement feelings inside us. Sriram's infatuation towards Bharti pushed him to work with her. Bharti insisted to take him to Mahatma if he is really interested to be his disciple. She says:

"he is not going to examine you like an inspector of schools. You don't have to talk to him unless you have something to say. You may keep your mouth shut and he won't mind. You may just be yourself, say anything you feel like saying. He will not mind anything at all, but you will have to speak the truth if you speak at all (NARAYAN40).

In Narayan 'Waiting for Mahatma, he has presented the character of Bharti more powerful than the character of Sriram. K.R.SRINIVASA IYENGAR beautifully compared it with the SHAKESPEARE'S characters.'

Waiting for Mahatma is an ambitious effort and impressive feat...Bharti herself is a masterpiece young heroine, a Malgudi rich Portia only in her natural endowments whereas Sriram can easily qualify for a Malgudi Bassanio. It is Bharti who makes a patriot and a man of Sriram and in marriage he is certain to find in her the savior that is woman's shakti(IYENGAR:373)

Sriram waited for Gandhi to come and bless them and the couple waited for five years to start their new life , their new beginning after getting the blessing from Mahatma.

We are waiting for your blessed permission to marry." Mahatma looked from one to the other with joy. "Did you like each other so much? Shri Ram burst out, "I have waited for five years thinking of nothing else." "What about you Bharati? You are saying nothing" Bharati bowed her head and flushed and fidgeted." "Ah, that is the sign of a dutiful bride..." "Does this silence mean yes?" Sriram looked at her for a moment and said: It'd be a very unbecoming bride, who spoke her mind aloud! Good, good, God bless you. When is the happy occasion, tomorrow...? Very well, tomorrow morning 'the first thing I do will be that...I will be your priest... I will come and present the bride.After a few steps Gandhiji stopped and said, "Bharati, I have a feeling that I may not attend your wedding tomorrow morning" (49).

Bharti role as a non stereotyped heroines lamented Sriram. He expected Bharti to be like the next door girl, but to her utter dismay she is completely different. Whether its Rosie of Guide ,Bharti of Waiting for Mahatma and Daisy in Painter of signs', gives us a clear sign

of a their strong mindedness. Even at one place sriram was lamenting that why can't Daisy be like other girls:

“The thought of her produced in him a certain uneasiness..he heartily wished that she had not been such an uncompromising zealot. Everything that she thought or said or expected was set in grooves and hard to practice...why was Bharti causing him worry even in his dreams? Why couldn't she make herself agreeable and amenable like any other normal sweet hearts?”(PAINTER OF SIGNS,4)

Gandhi 's thought of non violence and ahimsa was so vividly portrayed in Waiting for Mahatma that he stressed all Indians to show good conduct to Britishers in sending them out of the country instead of having any bitter feeling against them.Gandhi's universal love for human beings is also worldwide known to everyone. His urge and insistence to hate the British rule and not the Britishers is clearly reflected in lines given below:

“It is 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 you are watchful, it will come to you naturally. 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 that 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’ (18).

Inlaternovel Raju paid a heavy price when he chooses to be a Mahatma.Guide won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1960. Raju is a corrupt Indian guide. Who falls in love with a beautiful dancer Rosie. Her husband doesn't approve of her passion for dancing and this becomes the secretive liaison between Raju and Rosie. He was infatuated by seeing Rosie when she first alights at the railway platform:

“She was not very glamorous, if that is what you expect, but she did have a figure, a slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion not white, but dusky, which made her only half visible as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice.”(SRINIVASA 379)

Marco favored women literacy and overlooking all the barriers of casteism, he married Rosie because of her good academic background but he couldn't take the things that Rosie can also think of her career. He expected her same stereotyped role of a woman-cook, governess, and maidall rolled in one

“perhaps he married out of a desire to have someone care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong, this girl was herself a dreamer...the new type of girl”(GUIDE100-101)

Discouraged by her husband Marco and encouraged by Raju, Rosie decides to start her dancing career Raju became her stage manager but her possessive nature towards Rosie betrays him into a criminal offence. After spending his years in jail he cut off his connection from everyone and decided to leave a life of a saint. He obliged to take himself 12 days fast to save the people from severe drought and on the last day of his fast he dies like a Mahatma:

“He went down the steps of the river, halting for breath on each step, and finally reached his basin of water. He stepped into it, shut his eyes and turned towards the mountain, his lips muttering the prayer. Velan and other held him each by an arm. The morning sun was out by now; a great shaft of light illuminated the surroundings. It was difficult to hold Raju on his feet, as he had a tendency to flop down. They held him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his eyes, looked about and said, ‘velan, it’s raining in the hills. I can feel, it coming up under my feet, up my legs-’ and with that he sagged down.(Narayan)

With Raju’s end we can see a new beginning. From a life of a rogue to a rustic. He showed the world that anyone can be a Mahatma, the only thing needed is a leader’s influence and the person’s capability to adopt and follow the same.

In ‘Vendor of sweets’ Narayan presents a typical Gandhian follower. He follows the Gandhian doctrine like spinning charkha, taking natural salt, wearing khadi, reading Gita etc. He stopped to take rice, salt and sugar. He make his own food which comprised of wheat, some drops of honey mixed with water and vegetables. He was not fond of taking ghee. He used twigs of trees as his brush instead of tooth brush. Jagan is a naturalist and he wants his son also to follow ‘simple living and high thinking’ philosophy.

Jagan, The chief character in the novel, Narayan has created a person close to his own image. Like Narayan Jagan has also lost his wife at an early stage. And more important Jagan and Narayan were both sixty years old at the time the novel was written. Besides Jagan was of the same caste to which Narayan himself belongedwhatever chief characters we come across in his Malgudi, they all belonged to the upper upper caste(RAMTEKE,78)

Like the true follower of Gandhi, he spins oftener to relax his agitated mind. Jagan portrays Gandhian philosophy not only in words but also with his deeds.

“When I was in jail, I was given kitchen duties and after coming out this seemed as good a business as any other... I wanted to serve the public in my own way by making available pure sweets, particularly for poor children” (97).

In English teacher we have seen how Krishnan reacted against Britishers. In the beginning his disagreement with Mr. Brown, Principal: Albert Mission College about English language and its vowel. He believed in Gandhian vision of imparting education in mother tongue. He doesn't want to continue the false western education system and so he wants to resign from his post. He believed on Gandhian philosophy of 'self realization'.

“R.K. Narayan supports Gandhism and he said in an interview with Susan E. Croft, “I liked Mahatma (Gandhi) personally and I wanted to somehow recount this. He was a very impressive person. I did not know him personally but I went to many gatherings he addressed” (Susan 31).

In his 'PAINTER OF SIGNS' we have watched out the story of Raman, a young rationalist and sign painter and his lady love Daisy, of the family planning center. Raman is so much infatuated with her charm that he accepted her 2 conditions which was given by her. The 2 conditions were:

“One that they should have no children, and two if they mischance one was born she would give the child away and keep herself free to pursue her social work.....if you want to marry me, you must leave me to my own plans, even when I am a wife. On any day you question why and how, I will leave you.”(PAINTER OF SIGNS,1976-PG-5)

Raman complete surrender as a love stricken infatuated youth and the way Daisy presented herself as self willed strong woman is well projected here. She denied completely filling the gap of the traditional Hindu housewife.

Daisy was so obsessed of her duty towards Mother India was that she bluntly refused Raman to accept that life which he has dreamt off. She explained in 'PAINTER OF SIGNS:

“Married life is not for me. I am not cut out for the life you imagine. I can't live, except alone. It won't work.”(PAINTER OF SIGNS,P179)

Gandhi's words mesmerized people with his theory of non violence and Ahimsa.

“I see before me a vast army. Every one 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 nonviolent 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 ‘Charkha’ .

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The ‘FINANCIAL EXPERT’ Narayan’s sixth novel is a real piece of art which gives a glimpse of real India about a greedy money lender from south India. It is about the rise and fall of MARGYYA , A money lender of Malgudi. He sits under the shade of a banyan tree in front of the Cooperative society.

“his tin box, a grey discolored knobby affair, which was small enough to be carried under his arm, contained practically his entire equipment; a bottle of ink, a pen and a blotter, a small register whose pages carried an assortment of names and figures, and above all the most important item, loan application forms of the co-operative bank(2)

The writer Narayan make the character of Margayya so realistic and its greed very natural. The common man is trying all his shrewdness in making his life comfortable .He thinks that MONEY is the real God if we have money we can buy anything in the world..

“There was probably no other person in the whole country who had mediated so much on the question of interest. Maragyya’s mind was full of it. Night and day he sat and brooded over it. The more he thought of it, the more it seemed to him the greatest wonder of creation. It combined in it the mystery of birth and multiplication. Otherwise how could you account of the fact that hundred rupees in the savings bank became one hundred and twenty in course of time? It was something like the ripening of the corn, every rupee Margyya felt, contained in it seed of another rupees and that seed in it another seed and so on and on to infinity. It was something like a firmament endless stars and within each stars and endless firmament, and within each one further endless. It bordered on mystic perception. It gave him the feeling of being part of an infinite existence(94)

When Margayya business was at its peak then also his way of living was not sophisticated. He was too miser to spend lavishly on him. May be because he knew that how difficult it is to earn money and when person knew this fact he will spend money wherever it’s required genuinely not extravagantly. Narayan has caricatured the character of Maragyya so intensely and minutely that he became a person next door type in Indian society.

CONCLUSION:

Gandhiji's ideology simply focused on intolerance, humanity, universal brotherhood, non violence, but it seems we all have forgotten all these values. Bharti's sayings at the last when India got independence

“On the 15th of August when the whole country was jubilant, and gathered here to take part in the Independence Day festivities, do you know where Bapu was? In Calcutta where fresh riots had started. Bapu said his place was where poor people were suffering and not where they were celebrating. He said that if a country cannot give security to women and children, it's not worth living in. He said that it would be worth dying, if that would make his philosophy better understood (165- 166).

Throughout his life Mahatma practiced what he preached. Bharti presented heart rending picture of riot affected area:

“He walked with a bowed head... and he spoke to those who had lost their homes, property, wives and children. He spoke kindly to those who had perpetrated crimes- he wept for them, and they swore never to do such things again. I have seen with my own eyes aggressive rowdylooking men making a vow to protect the opposite faction...Bapuji forbade us to refer to anyone in terms religion as Muslims, Hindu, Sikh, but just human beings (166).

Sriram apprehension in not allowing Bharti to visit riot affected area is shown clearly and Bharti answered that there might be chances of being assaulted”

“Yes, sometimes, but Mahatmaji had advised women as a last resort to take their lives with their own hands rather than surrender their honor. There was no sense of fear where Mahatmaji was. But ... if any unexpected thing happened, I was always prepared to end my life” (166-167)

Gandhiji rightly said“I have nothing to teach the world, Truth and non-violence or as old as the hills. R.K Narayan elaborated this theme of non violence in his fiction, mingling different characters their shortcomings and their success.In my opinion human being is a combination of virtue and vices and we sometimes forgot that we have some responsibility towards society and nation too.

In R.K.Narayan's fiction we have seen that almost all his characters were influenced by GANDHIAN philosophy as that was the hour of need of that era. The non violence and truth prevails and it makes distinct everything from small to big from rich to poor. We all knew that to live a saintly life one should hold the Indian traditional norms which is so

much imbibed in our Indian culture and it's also true that the moment we leave these norms we will miss out our individuality, our distinctive **UNITY IN DIVERSITY**.

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