

# GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY IN INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

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## ABSTRACT

Gandhiji, a socio-political figure, struggled for the sake of India's development and independence. He is an immense source of writing and has influenced different disciplines and many writers from different fields like history, politics, philosophy, literature, sociology, and so on. He served as a central figure for their writings. Gandhiji not only struggled for India's independence but also taught the people of India to love one another and advised them to show bitterness towards non-violence. In this principle of non-violence Gandhiji introduces technique of resistance to evil and untruth. His Satyagraha is inspired by boundless love and compassion. It is opposed to sin and evil. Gandhiji was the speaker of truth and he does not like falsehood. These principles of Gandhiji were very well exhibited in the novels of R.K. Narayan. Gandhiji himself or his views. For example, in a novel called Waiting for Mahatma Gandhiji, himself has participated as a character. Bharati an important personality in the novel serves as a disciple of Gandhiji. The famous novels of R.K. Narayan were Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The English Teacher (1945), Waiting for Mahatma (1955), The Vendor of Sweets (1967) were all set in Narayan's imaginary town, Malgudi. It is not a place but an experience of soil and soul of India. The paper aims at analysing the novels of R.K. Narayan on this backdrop and it concludes that his novels serve as a panorama for the future generation, to know Gandhi as a whole R K Narayan's novel Waiting for the Mahatma covers in considerable detail the years of political turmoil preceding the Partition of India, taking Mahatma Gandhi as one of its leading characters.

**Keywords:** *Waiting for the Mahatma, R. K. Narayan, Gandhian philosophy & Nationalism*

## Introduction

The period between 1920 and 1947 is noted for spreading Gandhian philosophy in Indian Writing in English. M.K. Naik, an eminent critic regarded this period as "the Gandhian whirl world" (Naik 114) with an unprecedented awakening of "a distinctive national unity" (Naik 116). "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em." (Twelfth Night Act II Scene5) This is very applicable to Gandhiji. He is born and brought in a normal background, but his principles gained from his experience made him a great and best individual. He is an immense source of writing and has influenced different disciplines and many writers from different fields like history, politics, philosophy, literature, sociology, and so on. All throughout his life he believed and lived as a man of ideals. This was instructed and educated to all the individuals of India, through the writings of various writers. R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and also many other Indian writers explore Gandhiji's view in their writings. The main thing which attracts these writers to write about Gandhiji is that, truth, satyagraha, simplicity, and last but not the least his non- violence.

These Gandhian philosophies were well established by R.K. Narayan, one of the best writers of Indian English. His characters in the novels, namely, Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The English Teacher (1945), Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) and The Vendor of Sweets (1967) one or in another way exhibits Gandhiji himself or his vision

The protagonists or the characters of these novels were rooted and flourished in the Indian ethics and Indian philosophy. And they are in search of truth who exhibits Gandhiji, a man of truth in their own particular manner. When the characters failed it is because they haven't followed Gandhism and if they were hailed, it is all because of following Gandhism. Like Gandhism, Malgudi, an imaginary town plays an important role in Narayan's novels. Most of the novels of Narayan are set in Malgudi. Malgudi is not a place but an experience of soil and soul of India. It is a town which combines traditionalism and modernism. William Walsh correctly asserts that, "The Mysore of his personal life, the Malgudi of his novelist's life, becomes an intense and brilliant image of India itself. What happens in India happens in Malgudi and whatever happens in Malgudi happens everywhere." (Walsh 59). R.K. Narayan's Swami and Friends is a systematized attack on Indian cultural values. Swaminathan is a protagonist of the novel. He was educated in Albert Mission School where Hindu Gods and their rituals were considered as an object of laughter. Swami hates such attitude so he wants to quit from the school in protest. Swaminathan and his friends show aversion towards western culture. They were struggling to protect the Indian culture. Gandhi wrote in Young India, "My resistance to Western civilization is really a resistance to its indiscriminate and thoughtless imitation based on the assumption that Asians are fit only to copy everything that comes from the West." (Gandhi 1928).

Gandhi advocated for the use of khaddar clothes, so Narayan makes use of the situation to keep up the spirit in this novel. When Swaminathan wears a foreign cap on his head, someone states that, "Young man, do you want our country to remain in eternal slavery?" (Swami 97). Hearing this, he felt ashamed and removed the cap and throws it into the fire with a thought of saving his country. Burning of "foreign cloth" in the novel is the representation of Gandhian ideology and the friendship English novels were developed by the Trio of Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao. Narayan has enriched the Indo Anglian fiction with his prolific writing. He has written novels and short stories on village life, college life, domestic issues and political issues at some extent. In 1958, he won the Sahitya Academi award for his novel The Guide and became the first Indian English writer to win the Sahitya Academy Award. He was also awarded Padma Bhushan(1964) and Padma Vibhusan(2001). Narayan belongs to the era which is known as Gandhian Era in Indian English Literature. Almost all his contemporaries were directly or indirectly influenced by the Gandhian Ideology and Narayan was not the exception. Raja Rao's Kanthapura(1938), Mulk Raj Anand;s Untouchable(1935), and Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma(1955) these three novels are remarkable for gandhian influence on Indian English Literature. Waiting for the Mahatma is a most political work of R. K. Narayan. An interesting feature of this novel is the participation of Gandhi as a character. he is not the central character but his ideology is central in the novel. In this novel, Gandhiji brought up one orphan girl named Bharati and she becomes the main cause of Gandhiji's influence on the protagonist Sriram, a reckless fellow who is transformed into a patriotic young man and true follower of Gandhian ideology. This research article presents Waiting for the Mahatma as a Gandhian novel keeping in mind how the presence of Gandhi as a character in the novel and the Gandhian Ideology prevalent in the novel for the development of the protagonist Sriram from irresponsible young man into a passionate lover and a patriotic young man.

## Objective

1. Mahatma as a Gandhian novel.
2. Gandhi's greatest contribution to humanity
3. Gandhi. Almost all the actions of this novel centre around his philosophy

## Gandhian Ideology

Gandhian ideology is a set of religious, spiritual, political, economic, individual and social ideas adopted and developed by Mahatma Gandhi to transform the individual and socially simultaneously, in accordance with the principles of Truth, Nonviolence, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya, Trusteeship, Swadeshi, and so on. Gandhi believed in truth, and that ultimate truth is God as God is also truth. He regarded nonviolence and love as the highest law of humankind. To win people love is the best weapon he believed. Satyagraha is a method of securing rights from others in a nonviolent way, without being harmful even to enemy. To fight against injustice, exploitation and oppression with the purest soul force

## Gandhian Ideology in Indian English Fiction:

The period from 1920 to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 is noted for spreading Gandhian Philosophy in Indian English Literature. M. K. Naik, an eminent critic regarded this period as “the Gandhian Whirl World” (Naik 114) with an unprecedented awakening of “a distinctive national unity” (Naik 116). The influence of Mahatma Gandhi one can find in almost all texts written during those days. “The most potent force behind the whole movement, the Mahatma is a recurring presence in these novels, and he is used in different ways to suit the design of each writer. He has been treated variously as an idea, a myth, a symbol, a tangible reality, and a benevolent human being. In a few novels, he appears in person, in most others his is an invisible presence.” (Mukherjee, Meenakshi The Twice Born Fiction).

## Waiting for the Mahatma as a Gandhian Novel:

Indian English novels which show the shadow of Gandhi on all aspects of late colonial India are known as Gandhian novels. The novel Waiting for the Mahatma is set in ‘Malgudi’ a fictional town created by Narayan in which almost all his works are set. It is not just a place but an experience of soil and soul of India. Unlike his other works, this novel is not set entirely in Malgudi, it moves to Delhi which is significant for political events presented in the novel during the colonial period in India. The novel shows how Gandhi was working for Independence movement and how his thoughts which later on came to be known as Gandhian thoughts influence other characters especially the protagonist Sriram and they join the movement.

Narayan’s treatment and manner of narrating Gandhian Philosophy can be studied in three phases

## Presence of Gandhi as a character:

Raja Rao’s Kanthapura, the protagonist Moorthy is presented as an embodiment of Gandhian thoughts. In Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable, Gandhi appears as a crusader of the evil of untouchability. But in Narayan’s Waiting for the Mahatma, Gandhi appears as one of the characters. Though he is not the protagonist, he is the main cause of the drastic change in the life of the protagonist Sriram. Gandhi is shown in this novel not just as

a freedom fighter but a very kind and gentle human being. Bharati had lost her father in Indian Independence Movement. Then Gandhi raises her as his own daughter and when he comes to know about Sriram and Bharati's wish to marry each other, he thinks a lot and at last, he gives permission to them and get ready for the Kanyadan of Bharati. But, before he could do so, he is shot. Gandhi is portrayed as compassionate, straightforward and very perceptive. True to how history books speak of him, not being attached to any kind of materialism and following a strict diet and schedule.

### **Influence of Gandhi on other Characters:**

Gandhi is not the central character of the novel, but he dominates the ideology of other characters even. Bharati, a young girl had lost her father in one Satyagraha against British during the first Noncooperation Movement. She was adopted and raised by Gandhi and his group and she was known as the daughter of Gandhi. In this novel, she has no independent existence but she is an embodiment of Gandhian thoughts. Sriram came into contact with Gandhi through Bharati. When he first met Gandhi he is advised to drive out all the hate from his heart before he can think of driving out the British. Then he became the official member of Gandhi's group and joined the "Quit India" movement. Gandhi was thrown into jail for giving speech against British. Bharati decided to join Gandhi even in jail but Sriram refused to do so. During that period of time when Gandhi and Bharati were in jail, Sriram came under the influence of Jagdish, a revolutionary man determined to engage in anti-colonial, anti-British subterfuge. But soon Sriram realised that Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent weapon was superior to the violent weapon. Earlier Sriram being an irresponsible young man, and not being conscious about his duty towards his nation, he used to get attracted towards foreigner goods, now he dislikes the things though attractive and cheap but made in other countries outside India. At one level, therefore, Waiting for the Mahatma is a story about the transformation of the life of Sriram, a young, reckless fellow into a patriotic, truthful and nonviolent young man under the influence of Gandhi and his ideology through the medium of Bharti the great follower of Gandhi. The novel shows the impact of Gandhi and his thoughts on ordinary people of our nation.

### **Gandhi's Message of Nonviolence**

Gandhi's greatest contribution to humanity is his message of nonviolence as the way to peace, justice, and God. Gandhi took seriously the biblical commandments, "Thou shalt not kill" and "Love your enemies," along with the Hindu tradition of *ahimsa* (non-killing), and applied this rejection of violence to his own heart and life as well as to South Africa, India and the world. But he taught that nonviolence is not just refusal to kill: it is the action of love and truth as a force for positive social change. Indeed, he insisted that nonviolence was the most active and powerful force in the world. Since he saw it as the force of God, the method of God, the power of God at work for good among the human race, he concluded that nonviolence is more powerful than nuclear weapons.

### **Non-violent Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience**

Non-cooperation movement guided by the principles of Satyagraha during 1920s was derived from Gandhi's idea that the British were able to rule India due to the cooperation of Indians (Hind Swaraj 34). Therefore, maintaining non-cooperation with the government could be an effective way to go a step further to the path of

India's independence. He denounced Western products asserting that Indians were helping bring poverty to their own country by buying the British products and in this way Indian money was being looted (Hind Swaraj). A way of self-purification for the Indians would be to start making their own provisions and products. Therefore, the followers of Gandhi were urged to weave their own clothes with the help of "charka", a spinning tool.

### **Revisiting Gandhian Philosophy in Waiting for the Mahatma**

Like other major novels of Narayan, Waiting for the Mahatma is set in the fictional town Malgudi. Sriram, the protagonist of the novel is a high school graduate who lives with his grandmother after his mother and father passed away. Sriram is little informed of the outside world. His immaturity or naivety is apparent in the very first of the novel where he is engaged in conversing with his granny - "It's going to be your twentieth birthday, although you behave as if you are half that" (Narayan 9). On an occasion he is attracted to Bharati, a girl of his age who is active in Mahatma Gandhi's "Quit India" movement, and becomes an activist himself not for his devotion to Gandhi's political ideology and principles, but for his irresistible attraction to the Gandhian activist Bharati. Narayan seems to experiment with an ordinary folk like Sriram who is involved in almost all the major events leading to Indian independence in order to underscore whether Gandhian philosophy was able to transform most Indians.

The first arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in the plot of the novel is quite dramatic amidst a large number of audiences waiting eagerly on the bank of Sarayu River in a South Indian fictional city Malgudi. He addresses the crowd who has yet settled down to pay attention to his speech. "'I notice two men there talking,' boomed Gandhi ji's voice. 'It's not good to talk now, when perhaps the one next to you is anxious to listen. If you disturb his hearing, it is one form of himsa.'" (Narayan 28). So, Gandhi is there to speak about ahimsa by explaining to the audience how to lead a disciplined life and strengthen moral qualities so that they can attain independence for their country.

### **Conclusion**

Waiting for the Mahatma is a rewarding read as the major historical facts regarding India's independence and subsequent events in the presence of Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy are presented in a lucid narrative. Through the novel Narayan suggests that after the Partition the message of the great leader was cast aside by the personal passion and self-interest of many of his followers. The consequence of deviation from Gandhi's idealism implies the post-partition turmoil of religious riots, hunger and unscrupulous politicians like Natesh and Jagadish. However, Sriram's portrayal as an ordinary Indian man turning into a man of self-restraint and self-sacrifice through an eventful journey of selfdiscovery is quite comprehensive. Gandhi's presence as one of the major characters in the novel opens up scope for revisiting Gandhian ideology. Besides, one can aptly claim that Narayan's depiction of a female protagonist Bharati with great success conveys Gandhian philosophy in the most loyal manner. Placing her in all the process of independence movement and naming her Bharati symbolising India itself, Narayan presents a loyal follower of Gandhian teaching unlike other characters of the novel.

could not but reiterate what Gandhi claimed about himself, that his life was his message.

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