



ASIAN JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

Available online at <http://www.asianjir.com>

Received 15 July 2017;
Accepted 22 August 2017
Online August 2017

Research Article

English

GANDHIAN CONSCIOUSNESS IN R.K. NRAYAN'S NOVELS

P. Prabakaran and V. Govindarajan *

P. Prabakaran,
Research Scholar,
Department of English,
Marudupandiyar
College, Thanjavur
District, Tamil Nadu,
S. India

ABSTRACT

The English Teacher or the pattern that Naipaul detects in Mr Sampath quickly comes to realize that the Gandhian challenge to caste exclusiveness is diametrically opposed to the brahminical psycho-social imperatives, which have dominated Narayan's earlier novels and which have demonized notions of polluted space. Naipaul's argument that Narayan's world is resistant to change is clearly likely to be problematic, when change is personified by India's most revered modern social thinker, and so it turns out. Waiting for the Mahatma is in no sense hagiography, but equally it is never critical of Gandhi and sriram's involvement in the nationalist struggle foregrounds tensions in the fiction between a longing for conservative stability and a recognition, not just of the inevitability of change, but also of its more positive aspects.

Keywords: Gynocriticism, Feminist, Criticism,

Citation: M .R. Vijaya Bharathi and V. Govindarajan (2017). "Gandhian consciousness in R.K. Nrayan's novels". *Asian Journal of Innovative Research* 2(3) 11-12 (2017)

INTRODUCTION

This period of his life informs his behavior in the novel and Gandhian thinking particularly underpins his present-day quest for 'truth' and simplicity in the key areas of diet and dress. As he talks to his 'listener', an ever-present 'cousin' and hanger-on, in the opening chapter, he outlines a regime that has been shaped by his earlier involvement in the freedom struggle. Food has a central iconic role within this. Despite his occupation, he has progressively renounced a range of foods as part of a way of life that has both political and psychoanalytic associations. In line with Gandhi's boycott of imported salt, he has, on the morning when the novel begins, resolved to use only 'natural salt' (VS 6) and as chapter progresses he explains how he has removed sugar and rice from his diet, replacing them with honey and 'a little stone-ground wheat' (VS 7).

This period of his life informs his behavior in the novel and Gandhian thinking particularly underpins his present-day quest for 'truth' and simplicity in the key areas of diet and dress. As he talks to his 'listener', an ever-present 'cousin' and hanger-on, in the opening chapter, he outlines a regime that has been shaped by his earlier involvement in the freedom struggle. Food has a central iconic role within this. Despite his occupation, he has

*Corresponding author
Dr. V. Govindarajan,
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Marudupandiyar
College, Thanjavur
District, Tamil Nadu,
S. India

progressively renounced a range of foods as part of a way of life that has both political and psychoanalytic associations. In line with Gandhi's boycott of imported salt, he has, on the morning when the novel begins, resolved to use only 'natural salt' (VS 6) and as chapter progresses he explains how he has removed sugar and rice from his diet, replacing them with honey and 'a little stone-ground wheat' (VS 7). His dress is similarly influenced by Gandhian 'simplicity': he wears cloths made from material he has spun himself, during daily sessions at his charka; and his sandals are made from the leather of an animal that has died of old age.⁶⁶ Consequently it seems appropriate that his cousin, who has a convenient habit of arriving at times when he can taste Jagan's produce, compliments him on having "'perfected the art of living on nothing'" (VS 7), while nothing the irony that his abstinence has not prevented him from continuing to work as a commercial sweet-maker. Later, when Jagan once again expounds his belief in the Gandhian ethic of "'[s]imple living and high thinking'", the cousin puts his view more directly, saying, "'But what I don't understand is why you should run a trade, make money and accumulate it'" (VS 29).

Vasu's appropriation of the attic is clearly a psychic as well as a physical invasion, particularly since it violates Nataraj's belief in ahimsa ('the Hindu ethical idea advocating non-injury or kindness to other creatures'³⁴):

Generally the regional specificity of his settings argues against this and virtually all the novels show their protagonists facing the changes brought about by modernity. However, *Waiting for the Mahatma* goes further in that Gandhi's advent quickly transforms sriram from a 'contemplative idler'⁴⁸ into someone who actively espouses the new values that he introduces into Malgudi, as always microcosm for south India. Orthodox values are personified by sriram's grandmother who refuses to allow the scavenger, but from the first time he hears Gandhi discourse on caste and untouchability, he is 'assailed by doubts of his own prowess and understanding' (WM 30). So, while his grandmother, who is suspicious of Gandhi, continues to stand for an older view of life, Sriram becomes an interstitial protagonist like Margayya.

The English Teacher or the pattern that Naipaul detects in Mr Sampath quickly comes to realize

that the Gandhian challenge to caste exclusiveness is diametrically opposed to the brahminical psycho-social imperatives, which have dominated Narayan's earlier novels and which have demonized notions of polluted space. Naipaul's argument that Narayan's world is resistant to change is clearly likely to be problematic, when change is personified by India's most revered modern social thinker, and so it turns out. *Waiting for the Mahatma* is in no sense hagiography, but equally it is never critical of Gandhi and sriram's involvement in the nationalist struggle foregrounds tensions in the fiction between a longing for conservative stability and a recognition, not just of the inevitability of change, but also of its more positive aspects.

Before Gandhi arrives in Malgudi, the local dignitaries who form the reception committee appointed to take care of the arrangements for his visit debate where he should be accommodated. One possibility is the town's circuit house, a one-time East India Company building, where Clive is reputed the site of trichinology and subsequently the residence of colonial governors who have ensured that it has remained especially well appointed.

This physical and mental space is directly challenged by Gandhi's visit to Malgudi and when sriram becomes a follower of the Mahatma, his arrested development, which has left him some way short of entering adulthood, quickly gives way to immersion. See him as entering into the second ashrama, since the Gandhian social philosophy that he adopts contravenes orthodox Tamil Brahmin beliefs.

Waiting for the Mahatma maintains a degree of distance from its political subject-matter. It dramatizes the Gandhian ethic and the hero sriram's involvement in the freedom struggle, but offers little direct commentary on nationalist politics and, as always in Narayan, places its main emphasis on a Malgudi Brahmin's encounter with forces that disturb his way of life, which in this case are initiated by the Mahatma's visit to Malgudi.

Works Cited

Raju in the guide (1958) finds himself transformed from a tourist guide into a supposed spiritual guide and sriram in *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) follows an altruistic quasi-spiritual path in his devotion to the Gandhian ethic.