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A Comparative Study of Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan: In relation to their views on Gandhism

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Abstract

One can be perplexed why I am going to start this Paper with these lines; the answer lies within the eternal verse; like God, literature too serves the very purpose to enlighten our soul; as it is the mirror of society; it never reflects fake world. Though this paper I would like to discuss a comparative analysis of R. K. Naryan and Raja Rao in special reference of their views on Gandhism, first of all, the meaning of ‘Gandhism’ should be clear in our mind– ‘Gandhism’ means the values and gospels liked by Mahatma Gandhi himself and practiced by him throughout his life ; irrespective of whether they are from *Bhagavad Gita*, *Quran* Or *Bible*, whatever he gathered from others; he picked some gems out of them and created his own creed and followed them whole heartedly. Thus Gandhism is a genre of philosophy. Whenever we talk about Gandhism, we refer to all the gospels, faiths, beliefs of Gandhiji .But we should always remember that Gandhiji is not a philosopher in real sense of the word, He did not propounded any philosophy. Whatever he liked, he believed and practiced as well as he preached it to all for the welfare of the society. The story behind Gandhi’s transformation from a common man into a ‘Mahatma’ a pious saint is an interesting one. In South Africa, Gandhiji became acquainted with a British vegetarian, Henry S.L. Polak, assistant, editor of *The Transvaal Critic* . One evening, when Gandhi was taking a train, Polak lent him a copy of *Unto This Last* by John Ruskin, English essayist and art Critic. Gandhi sat up all night reading it *that book* ” he said in October, 1946, “marked the turning point in my life.” Straightway, he decided to settle on a farm and live simply. Along with all great Holy Scriptures; *Unto This Last* too laid a great impact on Gandhi. But Gandhiji was not ready to accept this Title ‘Mahatma’ with him. He often used to say that this word is too divine to be with his name. He always considered himself as a simple seeker of Truth; neither saint nor a wicked man, for him Truth is more respected and welcomed than Mahatamahood.

Keywords: Scriptures, Regionalism, Impression, Depiction

Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, is considered a fatherly figure in literature too. Like in political fields; The Gandhian movement brought in its way a new approach to fiction writing. Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan both are deeply influenced by Gandhian ideals and they portray some memorable characters, which are nourished on the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and shape their lives in the image of great Mahatma.

Both the writers glorified their pen by writing on Gandhi ji. It is interesting to know Mahatma Gandhi, who believed that novels were generally about love, and they told lies and made people gullible with fine words, became, ironically enough, an important figure in Indian fiction in English.

His impact is so profound that we can witness him as a character in a large number of novels and short stories; in many others he is behind the scene, and his influence is felt by the characters and the readers are transformed as well.

R. K. Narayan (Rasipuram Krishna swami Narayan) was born in 1906 in Madras to a school teacher. He displayed Gandhian philosophy not like a politically committed novelist like Mulk Raj Anand nor as a Metaphysical philosopher novelist like Raja Rao. On the other hand he is "Simply the novelist as a novelist". Raja Rao, one of the greatest Indian writers in English, was born on Nov. 5, 1908 in the village of Hansana, in Mysore in a south Indian Brahmin family. At the age of twenty he started doing research work under Prof. Cazamian a great scholar, a literary critic and an eminent writer in English literature.

Both the writer depicts gandhian faith in their writings. It has proved difficult to separate gandhian novelist from the Mahatma himself. By writing gandhian novels they were just paying their homage to freedom fighters. Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan are most alike in handling of the subject- both the writers had great respect for gandhiji's teachings. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) and Naryan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) are truly Gandhian novels. R. K. Narayan's *Malgudi* mirrors time and image of whole India its people, its politicians, its saints and of course Mahatma Gandhi himself. Narayan's *Swami and Friends*, 1935, *The Bachelor of Arts* 1937, 'The English Teacher' 1945, 'Waiting for the Mahatma' 1955 and 'The vendor of Sweets' 1967, are set in the back ground of gandhian consciousness.

In one of his stories lowly Road Malgudy expresses its concern of gandhian influence by nationalizing its streets, parts of the country in honour of Indian independence and that of Indian people, real kids of Mother India. Lawley, was later re- named as Gandhi- Nager.

Gandhi's political movement raised many issues that attacked the British colonial education system which distorted and suppressed the real face of India.

R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* and *The English Teacher* protest on common issues of educational system where Swaminathan, as a student is victimized by the system Krishnan, as a teacher is sufferer against the system and Chandran, as a graduate is a protestant against a system. But their Gandhi-like protests are similar and note worthy.

The Vendor of Sweets (1967) displays a typical gandhian follower a well –to-do widower and a vendor of sweets Jagan, who along with a sale of sweet sells a philosophy of life.

R.K Narayan’s ‘Waiting for the Mahatma’ (1955), lays stress not merely on gandhi’s influence but on gandhi himself. It directly deals with gandhiji’s satyagraha and his assassination in 1948. We can find the seeds of gandhian gospels in every page of his work. Narayan’s gandhism is not limited to one single novel but pervade every page of his work.

R. K. Narayan’s ‘Waiting for the Mahatma’ was first published by Methuen, London in 1955. It describes the romance between Shri Ram, a young boy of twenty and Bharati, a fascinating and idealistic member of Gandhiji’s entourage against the back ground of the political life of India, six years before the independence of the country.

Shri Ram catches the first glimpse of Bharati when she approaches him for the contribution to the fund which is being collected for the reception of Mahatama Gandhi in Malgudi. Driven by his infatuation for her; he joins Gandhiji entourage of which she is a member. In this novel we find Gandhiji as main character; he is present in person here. In choosing therefore, the portrayal of Mahatmaji’s character as a subject for his novel, Narayan chosen something very difficult, it is perhaps beyond his range, Narayan, however overcomes this difficult by writing about the most human side of Mahatmaji’s personality. He shows Mahatmaji not in relation to the great events of Indian politics or with the great National leaders, but in relation to ordinary events and only in the company of children, villagers, Harijans and the volunteers, talking to them about common things of life. By showing Gandhiji in relation to these small things of life, Narayan not only manages to keep himself within his range but also succeeds in portraying Gandhiji as he was in flesh and blood and as he lived his life. A man’s true nature is revealed only in his day to day relations with the common people.

Narayan’s portrayal of Gandhiji is masterly; He draws him as a saintly figure in white; with his watch tucked at his waist into a fold of his dhoti and a smile shining over his face. He observes a strict daily routine and pays equal importance to ‘charkha’ and ‘Ram dhun’. In his very first speech on the soil of Malgudi Mahatmaji is shown describing his philosophy of life in the following words;- “But we have a system of our own to follow: that’s Ram dhun spinning of the Charkha and the practice of absolute truth and no – violence.”¹ Bharti tells us about his faith in humanism about the narrow distinction of caste, creed or religion: “Bapuji forbade us to refer to any one in terms of religion as muslim, Hindu or Sikh but just as human being.”²

The scene of Mahatmaji’s death with which the novel ends has been rendered very artistically. There is not a single melodramatic touch in it. It is the end of truly saintly life:

As the Mahatma approached the dais, the entire assembly got up. At this moment a man pushed himself ahead of the assembly, brushing against Bharati, and Shriram cried petulantly, “Why do you push like that”?

Unheeding the man went forward. "I am sorry to be late today" murmured the Mahatma. The man stood before the Mahatma and brought his palms together in a reverential salute. Mahatma Gandhi re-turned it. The man tried to step forward again. Mahatmaji's granddaughter said 'Take your seat' and tried to push him in to line. The man nearly knocked the girl down and took a revolver out of his pocket. As the Mahatma was about to step on the dais, the man took aim and fired, two more shots rang out. The Mahatma fell on the dais. He was dead in few second."³

More than any other writer, it is Narayan, therefore, who succeeds most in delineating the true and real Gandhiji because he alone shows him as common as we are.

On the other hand Raja Rao's treatment of Gandhi is slightly different. He portrays Gandhi as super human or an avatar; while to Narayan, he is a simple man, a man of flesh and blood just like you and me. It is really very pleasant to see how Raja Rao gives a special charm to his writings by adding in them the grandeur of Gandhiji.

Undoubtedly, in many works of Raja Rao we can feel Gandhian waves; somewhere directly on other places indirectly. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), is based on Gandhian philosophy in the sense that the novel accounts for the effects of gandhian idealism, personality, thoughts and movement on people, living in Kanthapura. Programmers under taken by Gandhiji are followed by Gandhimen living in the village. Thus it is not unjust to state Kanthapura a 'Gandhi-puran'. Raja Rao- depicts Mahatma Gandhi's god like image in the following way:-

.....there was a big ,big man called Gandhiji ; and the master knew him , and had talked to him , and the master worked for him , "who was Gandhiji " Narsiga has asked. "an old man- a bewitching man a saint , you know.... He looks beautiful as the morning sun. And he wears only a little loincloth like a pariah..... He is a great man. They say he is an incarnation of god. That is why everyday touched his feet, even Brahmins my son....."⁴

At some places Raja Rao compares Gandhiji to Lord Rama or Lord Krishna. For him Gandhiji seems to be an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. In the story Raja Rao inevitably mixes fun with fact and fancy. He sees Gandhiji as Rama, the divine one and the Britishers as Ravana. He compares the release of Gandhiji from prison as the Return of Ram from Lanka. ".....the Mahatma is going in the air; with his wife sita, and in a flower – chariot drowns by sixteen steeds;The Mahatma will have the mother on his right and our master at his foot."⁵

Here Mahatma is compared with Lord Ram, Mother India is Sita and the boy's master is Hanuman. RajaRao mixes past and present freely and frankly while portraying Gandhiji as god .he wears a myth behind his birth as a great and interesting story often associated with any incarnation on this earth.

In 'Kanthapura', the harikatha-man builds up myth round Mahatma Gandhi and he is regarded as an incarnation of god. According to Jayaramacharya, the harikatha man in Kanthapura. The sage Valmiki went to Brahma and told him about the suffering of his daughter Bharti (India) and requested him to send a god in human shape to relieve this land of its suffering. Brahma asked Shiva to go to India and he was born as Mohan das Karamchand Gandhi:-

..... There was born in a family in Gujrat a so such as the world has never behold. As soon as he came forth, the four wide walls began to shine like the kingdom of the sun and hardly was he in the cradle than he began to lisp the language of wisdom you remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four, had begun to fight killed the our Mohandas begun to fight against the enemies of the country.⁶

Even when Gandhiji goes to London to attend the second Round Table conference the people are sure that he will bring 'Swaraj' with him. For the grandmother in Kanthapura-swaraj is Sita, the Mahatma is Rama and Jawaher Lal Nehru is his brother. "He will bring us swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall be all happy. And Rama will be come back from exile and Sita will be free. For Ravana will be slain...."⁷

In his short stories we can find Gandhian ideals as well. In '*The Cow of Barricades*', the Mahatma is again in background. In '*Javni*' the protagonist practices all Gandhian faith in her life. In the novel '*The Serpent And The Rope*', Ramaswami or Rama, displays some Gandhi-like traits in his attitude and behavior.

He has a mysterious longing in his heart, is it for god? No he longs for a guru; He wants a true guru; who would show him the path of absolute Truth. For Gandhi, "Truth Is Life". In his '*Cat and Shakespeare*' too we can find some influence of Gandhi.

Both the authors write in English having themes purely Indian in taste and treatment. What defers Raja Rao from Narayan is his handling of the subject in ancient Indian puranic style, this why, while writing on Gandhi, Narayan remains simple Raja Rao displays Gandhi as god himself. For Narayan, Gandhi's faiths are our own faiths. One should practice them in daily life without knowing their origin. They are just like the life force. In '*The Waiting for the Mahatma*' Narayan depicts Mahatma Gandhi as a person himself. We see him talking, counseling and uplifting social issues on the very platform. As for as languages and styles are concerned; R. K. Narayan has been blamed for his simple direct English. In spite of the fact that he was a teacher of English and a journalist; he never used sophisticated or highly complicated language. His language never fails to convey the feelings and thoughts of the writer. He is neither pompous nor vain. In the most ordinary situations and familiar language he can depict the ironies of life. His characterization is real and life-like. He is satisfied with his 'ivory-inch'; like Jane Austen, Narayan can present smiles and tears together. In '*waiting*

for the Mahatma' he develops Sriram-Bharti love affair along with Indian's freedom movement at an ease.

R. K. Narayan has a sound control on his faculty of objectivity. In his novels he does not lose himself into self pathos which is a fault. A novelist is assessed from the point of view of art and technique. As an artist R.K. Narayan is competent if not masterly in approach to his themes.

On the other hand in Raja Rao's creation Gandhi is god himself. He is worshipped in 'Hari Kathas'. People respect him and try to follow his principals just to observe their spiritual texts. Raja Rao uses Indian images and follows epic pattern. Raja Rao is one of those novelists who have earned International fame in Literature. He writes in English in such a natural tone and flow that it seems as if we were reading Hindi in place of English. We find much more wisdom and philosophy in his novels. He himself calls Literature as 'sadhna'. In fact he seems to regard art as a vehicle for odd puranic style of storytelling. He believed in Hindu philosophy and followed typical Indian manner of writing. He brought a new art form of novel writing when asked about the nature of his play, George Bernard Shaw said that they were "Sui generis" – Unique in themselves. This can also be said about Raja Rao's novels. He uses English but with Indian flavor, In 'Kanthapura' people are paying their homage to goddess kenchama in the following way: "Kenchamma, kenchama, goddess bening and bounteous. Mother of Earth, blood of life, Harvest- queen, rain crowned Kenchamma."⁸

Raja Rao uses Indian imagery thoroughly Indian similes and metaphors from Indian life, there are numerous examples from his 'Kanthapura' :

1. Our hearts beat like the wings of bat.
2. As honest as an elephant
3. Range gowda has a golden tongue and leather tongue.
4. British solders cannot stay before a true gandhian just as a boar cannot stand before lion or Jackal before an elephant.

He has translated many Indian proverbs into English.-

1. Every squirrel has his day.
2. You cannot straighten a dog's tail.
3. Only a pariah looks at the teeth of a dead cow.

He is very poetic at some places, the *Serpent and the Rope* is full of passage in which Raja Rao's prose becomes highly poetic: "Woman is the earth, ether, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulation of space, the knowing in knowledge: the woman is fire, movement clear and rapid as the mountain stream."⁹ Raja Rao has a great talent for compressing ideas into the fewest Possible words. A few examples from 'Serpent and the Rope' are given below;

"Love is rejoicing in the rejoining of the other"

"The plane must accept the direction of the radar."

“To wed a woman, you must wed her god.”

“Affection is just a spot in the geography of the mind.”

“India is the kingdom of god and it is within you.”

“Benares is eternal. There the dead do not die, nor the living live.”

Raja Rao is also fond of writing sentences which sound archaic and biblical .One of his devices is to use ‘be’ instead of ‘are’ .Thus we has sentences like following ;

“All brides be Benares born”

“The sorrow of woman be indeed the barrenness of man”

Thus we can say that while portraying gandhiji Raja Rao seems to be writing an epic whose protagonist is Gandhi the mahatma. For the very reason we find Gandhi as a super human in his literary works. On the contrary Narayan is a novelist of real world. He uses simple English and creates an effective impact on readers.

To summarize we can say that despite of all differences in style and having linguistic oddities, both the authors R.K Narayan and Raja Rao portray Gandhian ideology in a very effective and heart touching manner.

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