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## Gandhiji's 'Religious Thought' in R.K.Narayan's selected Novels.

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to show how Gandhiji's religious thoughts and beliefs influenced R.K.Narayan's thoughts in his novels and how they both mingled together. Mahatma Gandhi is both a man and an age. He followed Indian traditions and also strengthened them with modern spirit. About religion Gandhiji himself declares "I couldn't live for a single second without religion. My politics and all other activities of mine are derived from my religion." R.K.Narayan's name is like a fresh shower in the mind of the readers specially Indian Novels. R.K.Narayan seems to reflect the Gandhian religious view in his novels to a large extent. To serve my purpose I have selected the following novels of R.K.Narayan- '*The Guide*', '*A Tiger for Malgudi*', '*The Financial Expert*', '*Waiting for the Mahatma*', '*The Darkroom*', '*The Man-Eater of Malgudi*'. The religious thoughts of Gandhiji can be divided into the following components: 1. Indomitable faith in the divine 2. Belief in the supernatural 3. Truth and non-violence 4. Immorality as a menace to religion 5. Love for all life.

**KEYWORDS:** Indian tradition, Religion, Politics, Super Natural, Non-violence.

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India has a long tradition of achievers. It has produced and producing figures who are very influential in all the segments of our society, literature is not an exception of this. Our "Father of Nation" Mahatma Gandhi who was popularly known as 'Bapu' enlightened us with his philosophic as well as religious thoughts. If we make a list of Indian novelists writing in English probably R.K. Narayan would one of our best choices in that first list.

In view of the first component, indomitable faith in the divine, Narayan's novels seem to share an equal faith in the divine. In the words of Gandhiji "I can live without water and air but cannot live without him, if you pluck my eyes I will not die but if you blast my belief in God then I shall die." In Narayan's novel *The Darkroom* Savitri declares, "I have always performed my daily pooja without fail". In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* thousands of Malgudians on a certain festival sing devotional songs, pray and place their offerings to the images of Radha and Krishna in the temple of Lord Krishna.

Significantly, the names of Narayan's major characters have scriptural echoes. This intensifies the religious dimension of his novels. In *The Dark Room* Savitri bears the name of Satyavan's wife from the Savitri-Satyavan myth. Sriram in *Waiting for the Mahatma* is the name by which Lord Rama is reverentially addressed in the Ramayana. Even Jagadish, an extremist in *Waiting for the Mahatma* bears one of the names of the God.

In view of the second component, belief in the supernatural, R.K. Narayan's novels seem to share this belief. The marriages in his novels cannot take place unless the horoscopes of the prospective bride and groom get matched. In *The Financial Expert* when Balu's horoscope does not match the horoscope of the daughter of a very rich planter, Margayya, Balu's father, out of selfish gains, asks Dr. Pal to find a different astrologer to rearrange "the stars of Balu to suit the circumstances". Further, in *The English Teacher*, Susila's illness leads her mother to believe that Susila is haunted by an evil spirit. And she brings in a Swamiji to cure Susila through mantras, whereas, Susila's illness is diagnosed as typhoid by the doctor. But, faith in the supernatural often borders on the belief in a superstition. Mr.Sampath: The printer of Malgudi presents a similar example. When after his outburst in the studio of sunrise pictures, Ravi becomes docile

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and uncommunicative, his mother is led to believe that Ravi is haunted by a ghost and can only be brought back to his normal self through exorcising.

Moreover, in *A Tiger for Malgudi* the belief of the villagers in the supernatural strikes humours. The decrease in the number of their animals day by day makes the villagers think that their animals are eaten away by a devil. So, they prepare to “perform propitiatory ceremonies in their villages” whereas the animals are killed by the tiger. Narayan’s novels are primarily concerned with Indian way of life. As Chetan Karnani observes: “Narayan’s themes are usually built round Indian beliefs and superstitions.”

In view of the third component, truth and non-violence, it is significant to maintain that Narayan’s novels refer to the principles of truth and non-violence to a large extent. K.G. Saiyidain, “the basic foundation of religion of Gandhiji rested on the twin pillars of truth and non-violence.”

Novels like *The Vendor of Sweets*, *The Guide*, *The truth*, *Waiting for the Mahatma* champions the Gandhian doctrine of truth and non violence. The character of Gandhi in *Waiting for the Mahatma* while addressing a large gathering on the sands of Sarayu in Malgudi advocates “the practice of absolute truth and non-violence”.

But the Gandhian doctrine of non-violence seems to find an elaborate treatment in Narayan’s novels. Even as an apostle of non-violence Gandhiji himself admits that violence is an inborn instinct in human beings. Moreover, the Gandhian movements like satyagraha, Civil Disobedience, Non-Cooperation, Dandi March and Quit India, referred frequently to Narayan’s novels, are based on the doctrine of non-violence. P.S. Sundaram observes: “Violence in any form, Narayan feels, is evil, a thing to be avoided.”

Einstein, Martin Luther King Jr., Pearl s. Buck, Jawaharlal Nehru and Dalai Lama interpreted Gandhian non-violence as a unique weapon to combat violence. To quote Einstein: ‘Revolution without the use of violence was the method by which Gandhi brought about the liberation of India.’

In view of the fourth component, immorality as a menace to religion, it is to be argued that often the Western and the Indian ways of life interact, influencing many lives. The spread of Western ways and their alluring effect on Indians posed a threat to Indian religion. Gandhiji notes: “The tendency of the Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless; the former is based on a belief in god.”

*The Bachelor of Arts* however, contrasts the Western mode of living with that of Indian in moral terms, indicating the demerits of traditionaly orthodox Indian society. In *The Guide* Rosie’s educational qualification as M.A., her derivation from family tradition as temple dancer to perform public shows, even her Western name, altogether seem to pave a way for her moral

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degeneration. Similarly, Raju's rejection of traditional jibba and the lace-edged dhoti for dashing bush-shirts, corduroys, hair- and face-lotions and perfumes of all kinds in order to impress Rosie, paves a way for his moral degeneration. In the same vein, Mali, influenced by the western ways in *The Vendor of Sweets*, takes to beef-eating, lives immoral life with grace and later gets arrested by the police on the charge of keeping half a bottle of wine in his car.

To safeguard Indian religion against the onslaught of Western civilization, Gandhiji advises "every lover of India to cling to the old Indian civilization even as a child clings to the mother's breast". That is why, Rosie in *The Guide* eventually returns to her husband and in *The Vendor of Sweets* Jagan sends excerpts to Mali from the shastras and Gandhiji's writings on the cow to restore Mali to the Indian religious tradition.

In view of the fifth component, love for all life, it is useful to learn that Gandhiji himself was an apostle of love. The Gandhian love has an all-embracing nature. Narayan's novels seem to express this all-embracing nature of love. They also record love for animals. In *Swami and Friends* Swaminathan's love for ant is revealed the way he is anxious to save the ant's life. And when he fails to save the ant, Swaminathan utters "a prayer for the soul of the ant". Besides, the Swamiji, the master of the tiger in *A Tiger for Malgudi* retorts the school teacher for using the word 'brute' for the tiger. Moreover, the Swamiji enlightens people by telling them that the tiger "has only the appearance of a tiger, but he is not one-inside he is no different from you and me".

Narayan's novels echo Gandhiji's love for children also. The headmaster in *The English Teacher* loves his school children very much. When he watches them he gets "a glimpse of some purpose in existence and creation". *Waiting for the Mahatma* presents vivid example of the Gandhian love for children. The fictional Gandhi distributes the garlands and fruits presented to him, among children. He is "very keen that children should be free and happy." Moreover, he makes a dirty untouchable boy sit beside him on the divan and then smooths out the boy's matted hair with his fingers. And Bharati's love for children is evidenced in the refugee camp in New Delhi where she is found nursing the refugee children devotedly. Thus, Narayan's novels share Gandhian love for animals and children.

Narayan's novels manifest the Gandhian faith in God through various ways- prayers, pilgrimages, religious discourses, references to scriptures and the characters figuring in them, preponderance of the temples of various deities, the scriptural echo in the naming of the major characters.

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