
Significance of *Ahinsa* or Non-Violence: A Study of R.K. Narayan's *The Man- Eater of Malgudi* and *A Tiger for Malgudi*

Dr. Priyanka Kaushal

Assistant Professor of English, Career Point University, Hamirpur (H.P.) and
Research Scholar, Ph.D English, Himachal Pradesh University, Summer Hill, Shimla (H.P.)

&

Dr. Dipali S. Bhandari

Assistant Professor of English, Govt. Degree College, Nahan (H.P.)

Abstract:

The study explores portrayal of freedom struggle especially in Ahinsa or Non-violence in R. K. Narayan's The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961) and A Tiger for Malgudi (1983). The research examines pre- colonial Indian and post-colonial Indian freedom activities in these novels. Ahinsa or non-violence as a weapon of Indian freedom struggle finds in the story of novels with their live characters through Nataraj and Sanyasi. Both characters follow Gandhian's principles with moral values. Influence of Gandhian's thoughts on various characters of novels comes with reality and emotion of common man. Gandhian's ideology and philosophy in truth and non-violence also find in writing contexts of novels. The study also explores patriotism in the novelist's writing.

Keywords: *freedom struggle, Ahinsa or non-violence, pre- colonial Indian, post-colonial Indian, Gandhian, common man, ideology, philosophy, truth, patriotism.*

Introduction

Narayan dreamed of an India that was free from vices and inequalities. He had strong opinions against the orthodox traditions and societal norms that created rifts among the people and did not let them live a happy and simple life. He was a true nationalist also who did not take down the ideals and ways of life which colonialism imposed on Indians.

The Man- Eater of Malgudi

Narayan's novel *The Man- Eater of Malgudi*, often regarded as his greatest work, is the perfect representation of the Gandhian principles of peace and non-violence. The serious intention of the writer here is to immortalize and reassert the Gandhian views on *Ahimsa* or non-violence. Hilarity and seriousness are yoked together to support the eternal truth of non-violence in the novel. Prof. K. R. S. Iyenger has aptly remarked:

The Man Eater of Malgudi jumbles the ingredients of comedy to excellent purpose and provides ample entertainment, but the undercurrent of serious intention cannot also be missed. (MEM 40)

The Man-Eater of Malgudi is a close parallel to the mythological story of Mohini and Bhasmasura. The human values and demonic values are represented by Nataraj, the printer, and Vasu, the taxidermist respectively. Nataraj with his meekness and altruistic activities occupies a respectable position in the placid and calm world of Malgudi. Narayan has depicted violence as an evil and vehemently exposed and criticized it on all levels – physical, psychological, mental, racial and cultural. But *The Man- Eater of Malgudi* is exclusively centered on the conflict between violence and non-violence. Here, violence and non-violence are represented by Vasu and Nataraj respectively. Everything is peaceful and orderly before the coming of Vasu, who is a symbol of destruction and demonic activities. He is the product of neo-colonial ills; he represents industrialization, competition and economic modernization on the Western hegemonic pattern. The Malgudians have their inherent traditional code of conduct. They are not exclusively motivated by the motif of

material prosperity, but adhere to the moral values of their ancestors. Social harmony, universal love and brotherhood are greatly treasured. Vasu, the power hungry taxidermist, indulges in poaching and womanizing and has apparently no respect for the values and sentiments of the people around him. Nataraj tells Vasu about the importance of non-violent speech, as did Gandhi during his life time. He says:

Aggressive words only generate more aggressive words. Mahatma Gandhi had enjoined on us absolute non-violence in thought and speech, if no better reason than to short-circuit violent speech and prevent it from propagating itself. (*MEM* 70)

Nataraj, in juxtaposition to the materialistic Vasu, genuinely believes in non-violence and avoids all kinds of confrontation and conflict. He confesses that he could not be a successful enemy to anyone. Any enmity causes him discomfort day and night like a tooth ache. When his neighbours complain about the indecent, illegal and violent activities of his tenant Vasu; Nataraj seeks to evacuate him on other grounds, instead of straightforward telling him the reason why he should vacate. Vasu, however, does not concur with the pleas of Nataraj and continues with his licentious activities.

After Rangī, a woman of the temple, reveals the insidious plan of Vasu to kill the temple elephant Kumar, Nataraj devises his own plans to check this nefarious intention. After considering all his options, Nataraj ultimately surrenders to the non-violent ways of Gandhi. He says to himself:

Non-violence would be the safest policy with him. Mahatma Gandhi was right in asking people to carry on their fight with the weapon of non-violence; the chances of getting hurt were much less. (*MEM* 213)

Narayan's repeated emphasis on the main motto of the novel i.e. 'evil flourishes to destroy' is categorically Gandhian. Gandhi also believed that evil actions and wrong means, always lead to disastrous end. The Gandhian epithet – as the means, so the ends – is marvelously highlighted through the novel.

A Tiger for Malgudi

The Sanyasi in *A Tiger for Malgudi* upholds the Gandhian values of non-violence, love, understanding and sympathy. The central theme of *A Tiger for Malgudi* is Gandhian in the sense that the novel presents the victory of the Gandhian virtues over violence and rudeness. Narayan presents two sets of contrasting relationships between Raja, the tiger and the Captain at first and between Raja and the freedom fighter turned Sanyasi later in the novel.

The relation of the captain and the tiger is that of the master and the slave – the ruler and the ruled. This binary relation is mechanical, materialistic, momentary and compulsive; administered and monitored through cane and fear. These relations are polarized in a way similar to that of the colonizer and the colonized. But the relationship between the tiger and the Sanyasi is founded on love, mutual understanding and sympathy; hence it is eternal and enduring. The complete transformation of Raja, the tiger at the end of the novel suggests the victory of good over evil, of non-violence over violence. Raja, a transformed animal at the end says:

I tried to attain some kind of purification by reducing the frequency of seeking food. Nor did I kill recklessly as I used to in my jungle days.... Nowadays, I went into the jungle and stalked the littlest game, just sufficient enough to satisfy my hunger of the moment and not my gluttony. (*ATM* 159)

The tiger is uncannily tamed by the Swami. He is purified and taught the noble truths of the Buddhist doctrine and is ultimately transformed into a creature who is an animal in its physical form only. His soul becomes pure and enlightened, like his master. Towards the end of the narrative, we see a tiger, who can understand his master's discourse on God (*ATM* 157), has the feeling of gratefulness (*ATM* 158) willingly suffers hunger for consecutive days and feels nobler (*ATM* 159) and has attained the supreme Satva as advocated by Gandhi. By presenting the most brutal animal as the protagonist and by showing a great internal transformation in the character, Narayan succeeds in conveying the message of non-violence. In his Preface to *A Tiger for Malgudi*, he writes that, "with the right approach you could expect the same response from a tiger as from any normal human being" (Narayan 10).

The main theme of the novel is non-violence which is the cardinal principle of Gandhi. The Swami who ultimately tames the tiger with love and spirituality was at one point an activist of Mahatma Gandhi's Quit India Movement. It is noteworthy here that R. K. Narayan has chosen a Gandhian character to impart the

message of non-violence and love. Swami in an attempt to tame the violent tiger, Raja, explains the importance of non-violence in life. His words spoken to Raja are echoes from Gandhi. He says:

Violence cannot be everlasting. Sooner or later it has to go, if not through wisdom, definitely through decrepitude, which comes on with years, whether one wants it or not. (ATM 145)

R. K. Narayan has presented an encompassing view of Gandhian ideology and philosophy. The theory of *Karma*, spirit of oneness with all, the theme of transformation from materialism to spiritualism, the concept of non-violence are discussed in the novels discussed here, namely, *The Man- Eater of Malgudi* and *A Tiger for Malgudi*. Narayan probably never met the Mahatma and didn't know him personally but he has superbly grasped and mastered the quintessence of Gandhian philosophy. In an interview with Susan E. Croft, R. K. Narayan avers:

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. (Croft 31)

Non-violence or *Ahimsa* is another cardinal principle of Gandhian ideology. Subrata Mukherjee writes in this regard, "Gandhi made the technique of non-violence the powerful weapon in his fight against British imperialism"(Mukherjee and Ramaswami XI). Gandhi acknowledged the principle of non-violence common to all religions. He believed that *Ahimsa* is an integral part of all the religions and non-violence had found the highest expression and application in Hinduism. A living faith or belief in non-violence is impossible without an unflinching faith in God. Gandhi remarked that "non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute" (Sharma and Sharma 286). As the advocate of the political philosophies of passive resistance and constructive non-violence, Gandhi spent most of his time in political arena devising ways to better the daily life of ordinary people.

Non-violence for Gandhi is not a cover for cowardice, on the contrary, it is the supreme virtue of the brave and its application requires much more courage than violence. He writes in Harijan:

Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man. Destruction is not the law of the humans. (Fahey and Armstrong 172)

Ahimsa is a science and its application and results are also scientific. Moreover, Gandhi relates the concept of non-violence with spiritualism. He writes in Harijan:

The victory of *Ahimsa* has only one fear, the fear of God. He who seeks refuge in God ought to have a glimpse of the *Atman* that transcends the body; and the moment one has a glimpse of the imperishable *Atman* one sheds the love of the perishable body. (Battin 5)

Gandhi applied the principle of non-violence to the society, state and the entire world. "In *Swaraj* based on *Ahimsa*, people need not know their rights, but it is necessary for them to know their duties" (*India of My Dreams* 19). *Ahimsa* for Gandhi was not the goal but the means to realize Truth. In this respect, he remarks:

A steadfast pursuit of *Ahimsa* is inevitably bound to truth – not so violence. That is why I swear by *Ahimsa*. Truth came naturally to me. *Ahimsa* I acquired after a struggle. (Johnson 318)

R. K. Narayan focuses on the concepts of *Ahimsa* or non-violence in two of his novels; *The Man Eater of Malgudi* and *A Tiger for Malgudi*.

Conclusion

Ahimsa or non-violence reflects the life of Narayan's Characters. Gandhian's principles follows through Nataraj with his meekness and altruistic activities occupies a respectable position in the placid and calm world of Malgudi. Here, violence and non-violence are represented by Vasu and Nataraj respectively. Industrialization, competition and economic modernization on the Western hegemonic pattern are presented by Vasu. The Gandhian epithet – as the means, so the ends – is marvelously highlighted through the novel. Another side, the central theme of *A Tiger for Malgudi* is Gandhian in the sense that the novel presents the victory of the Gandhian virtues over violence and rudeness. The relation of the captain and the tiger is that of the colonizer and the colonized. This binary relation is mechanical, materialistic, momentary and compulsive;

administered and monitored through cane and fear. These relations are polarized in a way similar to that of the colonizer and the colonized. But the relationship between the tiger and the Sanyasi is founded on love, mutual understanding and sympathy; hence it is eternal and enduring.

Works Cited:

-) Battin, Margaret Pabst, Eds. *The Ethics of Suicide: Historical Sources*. London: OUP, 2015.
-) Print.
-) Croft Susan E. R. K. *Narayan: A Critical Spectrum*, ed. Bhagwat S. Goyal. Meerut: Sulabh Book House, 1983. Print.
-) Fahey, Joseph and Richard Armstrong. *A Peace Reader: Essential Readings on War, Justice, Non-violence, and World Order*. New York: Paulist Press, 1992. Print.
-) Gandhi, Mahatma. *India of My Dreams*. New Delhi: Rajpal and Sons Press, 2008. Print.
-) Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling, 2001. Print.
-) Johnson, Richard L. *Gandhi's Experiments with Truth: Essential Writings by and about Mahatma Gandhi*. New York: Lexington Books, 2006. Print.
-) Mukherjee Subrata & Sushila Ramaswami. *Facets of Mahatma Gandhi*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publication, 1996. Print.
-) Narayan, R.K. *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1968. Print.
-) ---*A Tiger for Malgudi*. Mysore: Indian Thought, 1986. Print.