

BEYOND WORDS: UNPACKING GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHY IN 'WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA

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Abstract:

This study explores Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, examining its portrayal in R.K. Narayan's novel "Waiting for the Mahatma." Focusing on the concepts of Satyagraha and ahimsa, the study explores their unique manifestations in the narrative, analyzing their transformative impact on characters, particularly the protagonist, Sriram. The findings reveal the delicate balance between Gandhi's ideals and societal norms, emphasizing the complexities of adopting his philosophy in a stratified society. The study contributes to a nuanced understanding of Gandhi's influence, offering insights into the challenges and transformative power of his concepts within a fictional context.

Keywords: Satyagraha , Ahimsa, Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience, R.K. Narayan

Introduction:

This research endeavors to embark on a comprehensive exploration of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, with a particular focus on its tangible manifestation in his life and its profound influence on individuals. Beyond Gandhi's renowned political strategies, the core of his impact on the Indian independence movement lies in his philosophical framework, notably encapsulated by the concepts of Satyagraha and ahimsa. Gandhi's resonance goes beyond the political realm; as he famously declared, "My life is my message," signaling that his philosophy was not confined to scholarly treatises but intricately woven into the fabric of his daily actions (Gandhi, 1999). This study seeks to unravel the distinctive facets of Gandhi's philosophy, delving into the intricate interplay between his principles and their tangible effects on

individuals. Specifically, it aims to scrutinize the portrayal of Gandhi's philosophy within the fictional narrative of R.K. Narayan's "Waiting for the Mahatma" (Narayan, 1967).

Gandhi's philosophy serves as the guiding force that transcends the conventional boundaries of political doctrines, permeating into the personal lives of individuals. While political strategies may shape the course of history, it is Gandhi's enduring philosophy, epitomized by the twin pillars of Satyagraha and ahimsa, that leaves an indelible mark on the collective consciousness. By choosing to investigate this aspect, the study acknowledges the transformative power of ideas and beliefs, emphasizing the lasting impact of ethical principles on both personal and societal levels. In exploring the portrayal of Gandhi's philosophy within the fictional realm of "Waiting for the Mahatma," the study aspires to unravel the nuances of its integration into the lives of characters, shedding light on the profound resonance of these principles in shaping not only the narrative but also the ethos of the individuals navigating the complex landscape of Indian independence (Narayan, 1967)..

Mahatma Gandhi and Concepts of Satyagraha and Ahimsa:

At the heart of Mahatma Gandhi's profound philosophy lie two timeless concepts that have resonated across generations: Satyagraha, translating to "holding onto truth," and ahimsa, the principle of non-violence. Satyagraha, as envisioned by Gandhi, represents a steadfast commitment to truth, evolving into a force that transcends societal distinctions of age, gender, and affiliation. This universal force, a moral compass for those who embrace it, unequivocally rejects physical violence, finding its strength in ahimsa, the principle of love. A practitioner of Satyagraha, known as a Satyagrahi, willingly adopts a life of non-violence, self-sacrifice, and upholds key principles such as truth, non-possession, and equality. Ahimsa, drawn from diverse sources including Jainism, Buddhism, The Bible, and Leo Tolstoy, intertwines with Gandhi's Satyagraha, transforming it into a modern and politically consequential concept.

Gandhi's strategic applications of Satyagraha unfolded notably in the 1920s through the concepts of non-cooperation and civil disobedience. During this period, he advocated for Indians to boycott British products, urging self-sufficiency and the revival of traditional practices such as weaving one's clothes using the charka. Gandhi's philosophy emphasized that non-violent resistance, far from indicating weakness, represented a conscious choice of

strength, a conviction that this study will closely scrutinize within the contextual framework of R.K. Narayan's "Waiting for the Mahatma" (Narayan, 1967). By exploring the novel, this study aims to unravel the distinctive qualities of these concepts, examining their role in shaping both the narrative and the characters within the intricate tapestry of the story.

In "Waiting for the Mahatma," the narrative intricately weaves Gandhi's philosophical concepts into the lives of the characters, offering a unique lens through which to understand their impact (Narayan, 1967). The principles of Satyagraha and ahimsa become more than theoretical ideals; they are living, breathing forces that guide characters through personal and political transformations. By exploring the nuances of these concepts within the novel's setting, this study seeks to unearth the profound influence of Gandhi's philosophy on the narrative structure and character development, shedding light on their nuanced portrayal and transformative power in a fictional landscape.

Findings:

In "Waiting for the Mahatma," the protagonist Sriram's journey from an immature, uninformed individual to an activist influenced by Gandhi's philosophy is a central finding (Narayan, 1967). The novel portrays the impact of Satyagraha and ahimsa on Sriram's personal life and political engagement. Gandhi's emphasis on self-purification and self-sacrifice, reiterated throughout the narrative, becomes a guiding principle for Sriram and others in the story (Gandhi, 1999). The depiction of Satyagraha principles, such as making vows of truth, non-violence, and non-possession, highlights their transformative nature in individuals' lives.

The novel also sheds light on Gandhi's pragmatic approach, emphasizing the significance of everyday activities like spinning, walking, and talking in the pursuit of a democratic and self-reliant society. The portrayal of Gandhi's interactions with untouchables reflects his attempts to challenge caste discrimination, albeit within the limitations of his time. The study finds that the novel uses humor to humanize Gandhi, showing his earthly existence and engagement with children, balancing his saintly image with relatable qualities.

Discussion:

The study's findings underscore the narrative's effective exploration of Gandhi's philosophy within the fictional context, depicting its impact on characters and society. The novel captures the tension between Gandhi's ideals and the prevailing societal norms, as seen in the resistance to his efforts to integrate untouchables. Sriram's character arc, shaped by Gandhi's principles, serves as a microcosm of India's journey toward independence. The nuanced portrayal of Gandhi's multifaceted personality, blending saintliness with humor and practicality, adds depth to the narrative.

The study suggests that "Waiting for the Mahatma" not only serves as a historical account of Gandhi's influence but also as a commentary on the challenges and complexities of adopting his philosophy in a diverse and stratified society (Driesen, 1986). The novel navigates the delicate balance between idealism and pragmatism, offering insights into the transformative power of Gandhi's concepts and their limitations in the face of ingrained social structures.

Conclusion:

In summary, this research sheds light on the intricacies of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, as depicted within R.K. Narayan's "Waiting for the Mahatma." The study examines the core concepts of Satyagraha and ahimsa, integral to Gandhi's ideology, within the novel's context, unraveling their transformative influence on both characters and the broader societal fabric. The findings underscore the nuanced portrayal of Gandhi's multifaceted personality, capturing the delicate interplay between his ideals and the complex social landscape in which they are implemented. "Waiting for the Mahatma" transcends its role as a mere historical narrative; rather, it emerges as a profound reflection on the enduring relevance and inherent challenges associated with Gandhi's philosophy. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in translating philosophical ideals into tangible societal change, marking the novel as a poignant exploration of the timeless resonance and limitations of Gandhi's profound vision.

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