

The Celebration of the Indigenous Culture and Identity in Waiting for the Mahatma

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Abstract

Postcolonial writers reject the colonialist ideology of superiority and containment, disassociate themselves from cultural imperialism and celebrate the indigenous culture and identity in all forms and shapes, to assert the native identity and culture. They also touch upon the issues of mimicry, assimilation and hybridity experienced by the native cultures and people. R.K. Narayan in *Waiting for the Mahatma* has dealt with all these aspects of the postcolonial writings. The present study intended to investigate the portrayal of the celebration of the indigenous culture and identity by Narayan in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, in the light of postcolonial critical theory. The study found that Narayan has celebrated the Indian culture, traditions, identity and above all the status and stature of Gandhi as Mahatma in the novel, thereby, reinforcing his credentials as a postcolonial writer.

Keywords: celebration of indigenous; mimicry; identity; oppression; hybridity; colonialist ideology.

1. Introduction

The colonialist discourses present and project the ideology of the superiority of their race, culture and civilization. The objective is to reinforce and perpetuate this image of superiority. On the other hand, the postcolonialist writings reject such contentions and claims. These writings highlight and celebrate the indigenous culture and identity. R. K. Narayan, a postcolonial writer, has celebrated the different aspects of the Indian culture and identity in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. The novel is in particular the celebration of the different dimensions of the personality of Gandhi. His works are located at a fictional place called Malgudi. It is "a place of ancient myth and history" (Garebian, 1975) but without the disadvantages, V.S. Naipaul associates in his writings with myth and history. Crane (1992) very rightly describes the invention of Malgudi, by Narayan as going one step further than other Indian writers. He maintains that Malgudi is a fictional world in which Narayan can play out the political events of the continent.

2. Literature Review

Waiting for the Mahatma has been commented upon by many critics like Crane (1992). Crane understands the Indian culture, but there are many assertions on his part which need to be taken care of. R. Cronin (1989) totally misreads the novel because of his lack of touch with Indian culture. F. A. Khan (1993). She has done a good job, but her many assertions are based upon misunderstanding. There are also some gaps in her study. T. Rehman's handling of this novel is very casual. (1991) The present study intends to take care of these gaps in these research works and rectify many unfounded assertions.

3. The Research Methodology

The present study is based upon the exhaustive analysis of the text of the selected novel in the light of postcolonial critical theories. The study is oriented to answer the following research questions, which have been designed in the light of suggestions given by Tyson (2006):

- 1) How does the writer portray the colonialists, their ideologies and culture?
- 2) How does the writer portray and tackle the indigenous culture and identity?
- 3) How are the native heroes portrayed?
- 4) How is the colonialist oppression and exploitation portrayed?
- 5) What is the attitude of the writer towards mimicry and hybridity?

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 *The portrayal of colonialist ideology of superiority and The British culture*

Waiting for the Mahatma starts with the portrayal of complete dominance of the British and their culture. Sriram's father is killed in Mesopotamia, while fighting for the British. This is extremely significant. Sriram is fathered by an Indian soldier of the empire. The pension from the service of his father for the empire is saved by Granny for Sriram. This reflects the total and complete internalization, and assimilation of the imperial culture and colonialist ideology by the Indians, who, in evidence and proof thereof, would lay down their lives for the sake of their masters. Sriram is also shown to be under the complete influence of the British culture and ideology. He regards everything associated with the British culture, race and civilization as superior. The picture of the British queen in the shop of a Hindu banya, Kanni, fascinates Sriram. She has apple cheeks, curly hair, and beautiful large, dark eyes. (6). Sriram, a true mimic, desires to possess the picture of the British queen, who stands for the supremacy of the British culture and race. This reflects the cultural emasculation of the subject race, a necessary correlate of the colonialist entrenchment. Like the Fanonian native, Sriram desires to become one with the British culture, in other words, to "marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness" (Fanon, 2008). Sriram offers to buy the picture from banya whatever the price. The banya refuses to part with the picture because he himself regards it as a sign of good luck and fortune. Sriram is introduced to the reader, as a man who has no sense of his own identity, and is

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not conscious of the distinct nature of the Indian culture or its customs and traditions. He wants his own beloved late mother to have the looks of the British queen, with rosy cheeks and curly hair (1). This conforms to what Fanon (2001) calls the assimilationist phase.

4.2 The Celebration of the Ancient Indian Culture and Identity

Narayan, along with the portrayal of the dominance of the British culture, also asserts and celebrates the Indian identity and the ancient traditions of India through the character of the grandmother of Sriram. Like India she is very old, no one has any idea of the exact age of the grandmother. She is an embodiment of love, care and sacrifice. She has saved every single penny she received as pension of her late son, so that her grandson could use it when he is old enough (5). Narayan shows the character and identity of the Sriram's grandmother. She stands for ancient Indian culture, traditions and Indian identity. She is the Grand Mother India, who loves her children and will render any sacrifice for their sake. In the person of grandmother myth and reality co-exist. Narayan presents the positive aspects of the ancient Indian culture, and traditions, unlike Naipaul, who asserts the mythic aspects of the Indian culture and identity as "petrification" and as "restricted lives" (Naipaul, 1984). The ancient and old nature of the Indian identity and culture is also celebrated by Narayan through a reference to the centuries old neighborhood where Sriram lives with his grandmother.

The celebration of the indigenous can be seen throughout the novel. Granny offers Sriram food on a leaf, while Sriram sits on the floor, in the true Indian fashion, rice is presented in bronze pot. He drinks water from a brass tumbler (84). Narayan celebrates the Indian foods, like, Badam Halwa , Idlies , Vadai , Chicken Pulaw and Chappatis (195).

Grandmother of Sriram celebrates the twentieth birthday of her grandson. This is a momentous day in the life of the grandmother and Sriram. This is as important for India as well. Sriram and India are to shake off the assimilation phase. They both are to attain the age of maturity. Granny in true spirit of Indian grandmother is steeped in Indian tradition and culture. She gets sugarcane for the birthday, because the Indian traditions and customs regard the presence of sugarcane as auspicious. She also hangs a string of mango leaves across the door and sprinkles the coloured rice powder on the threshold to celebrate the birthday of her grandson (10).

The grandmother celebrates the New Year with jaggory and jasmine for the puja. This is the portrayal and celebration of the indigenous Indian and Hindu culture and traditions. Sriram still exists at the naive individual level; he is not yet initiated into the traditions and customs of India and is away from social phenomenon and responsibility. The grandmother wants to invite his friends to the birthday celebration, but Sriram refuses. The celebration of Indian identity is done when Gandhi is shown demanding of everyone to "spin and read Bhagavad Gita and utter Ram Nam and wear khaddar" (96). Narayan focuses upon Gandhi's mission and the celebration of the indigenous Indian identity and culture. Gandhi wants his volunteers and workers to learn Indian languages

while in jail and to read Tulsi Das Ramayana and busy themselves with spinning charka (138). This is the portrayal of Gandhi's deep involvement with the ancient Hindu culture and identity. It is the rejection of the Western culture and the celebration of the Indianness. Interestingly, this portrayal of Gandhi's religious dimension by Narayan in a positive sense was to be later described as "religiously provincial character" of Gandhi, responsible for the Partition of India, by Jaswant Singh (2009).

Narayan celebrates the love, devotion, sacrifice and loyalty of Indian, Hindu girl for her man (236). Sriram is nervous and confused due to his dirty appearance after the long train journey. His hair is disheveled and standing on end. He himself is grimy, grisly and unsightly. He wishes he could improve his appearance before facing Bharati. He wishes he could skulk away with the crowd and see her later. Narayan shows that his fear and anxiety are put to rest, when Bharati sees him. Her seeking eyes spot him in the crowd. She waves her arms and comes running to him. She grips his hands, and says, "Oh, how good to see you again!" (236). Sriram loses himself, forgets his own appearance, and griminess. He complements her for her beauty. Narayan shows, she gives him his life and happiness. Bharati's kindness, love, affection, her loyalty over the years, transports him into another world. She as an Indian, Hindu girl, immersed in tradition and rooted in Indian heritage, is an embodiment of sacrifice and negation of self, she offers to fast instead of her lover. Narayan celebrates the achievements of a Hindu, Indian girl, Bharati, the way Sidhwa celebrates the beauty of a chocklate brown Hindu Ayah (1989).

Narayan shows that both India and Sriram start drifting away from the colonialist ideologies of containment and the domination of imperial culture.

4.3 Portrayal of the Adoption of Indian Culture and Identity

Sriram, comes out of his infancy and the influence of the imperial culture. He makes his first contact with Indian identity and the beauty of Indianness, in the form of Bharati—the daughter of Bharat. She is collecting contributions on behalf of Congress for the national cause. Bharati is the celebration of the Indian culture, traditions and identity. She is all social phenomenon, deeply rooted in Indian tradition and culture. If Granny is the ancient India, Bharati is the modern India. Narayan celebrates the beauty of this Indian girl. Naipaul would have dismissed Bharati as a mere black girl, wearing khadi. Sriram is struck by her dazzling, breathtaking beauty. She is slender, and young. Her eyes sparkle with happiness. Sriram finds her far more attractive and beautiful than the British queen (22).

This is the rejection of the colonialist culture and the ideology of containment along with their assumptions of superiority. This is the portrayal of the adoption of national culture, at individual and national level. Sriram wears his dhoti and jibba and pours kerosene oil over his mill-made clothes and sets fire to them (99).

Narayan highlights the charm and beauty of India and Indian people through the infatuation of Sriram for Bharati. The girl has the steps of a dancer. He yearns for an opportunity to touch her. He compares her to a bird gliding on its wings.

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Sriram wants to sing a song for her. He regrets for not emptying his whole pocket into her money box. He finds himself totally inadequate as compared to that “other worldly creature” (24). He wishes he had done his B.A. He wishes he had the refined manners to come up to the level of Bharati. For Sriram, Bharati is like an angel, a goddess (Deveta) . Sriram is head over heels in love with this “sweet-smelling creature” (132). She is clad in khaddar but looks gorgeous . Narayan’s narrative reads like a romantic poem full of admiration for an Indian girl, who is dressed up not in a suit from the “new world”, but in a home spun. He like a charmed moth, driven by the personal desire, reaches the camp of Gandhi as desired by his beloved Bharati at 3’O’ clock in the morning. He, as an individualist, wants an immediate marriage with Bharati, but she being the daughter of Bharat, is deeply rooted in Indian traditions and customs and cannot take such decision in isolation. Through this, Narayan highlights her wholeness and completeness. Therefore, she cannot marry without the approval and sanction of her Bapu (Gandhi). Cronin (1989) also notes the significance of this development. Cronin believes it is imperative for Sriram to come out of the Western ideal of a woman and fall in love with Bharati . Sriram discovers that the girl is associated with the cause of Gandhi; therefore, Sriram also comes in contact with the icon of social responsibility, Indian traditions and Indianness and joins the camp of Gandhi.

4.4 The Celebration of the Stature of Gandhi

Malgudi prepares itself for the visit of Gandhi. Narayan shows that everyone is not genuinely with Gandhi in his battle against the empire. The chairman of the municipal committee, Mr. Natesh, is least interested in Gandhi or his politics. He is driven by his personal snobbish desire to show off his wealth and his palace and he hopes to bask in the glory of being the host of Gandhi. He makes all the necessary alterations and changes in his house and its decoration, for the suitable reception and accommodation of Gandhi. However, Gandhi decides to stay in the sweepers’ colony . Gandhi, is portrayed as a man who cannot maintain his difference from his people. He rather, eliminates it and becomes one with his people. Gandhi, who, once was described by the prime minister of the British Empire, as the “half-naked-fakir” of India (Collins, 1975), and as a little bastard by John Masters (1983), is celebrated as the Mahatma. Even the title of the novel is the celebration of Gandhi as Mahatma and also the celebration of the indigenous Indian, Hindu traditions and identity. Sriram and Bharati have to wait for the approval of Gandhi for their marriage. Narayan makes the fictional characters wait for the central historical figure. This also establishes the superiority of tradition and the social phenomenon over individual in the Indian culture. Mahatma is deeply immersed in Hindu and Indian mythology and history. Narayan portrays Gandhi’s campaign to shake and awaken the Indian people and ready them for battle for freedom. He speaks to them in Hindi and rejects the language of the masters (27). Fanon (2001) very beautifully describes the situation of one time subjects, like Gandhi. “Suddenly, the language of the ruling power is felt to burn your lips” (178). Gandhi is shown as aware of the assumptions of superiority, and the ideology of containment of the colonialists and the ruling power, associated with English language. He is also aware of the

deep link between language and culture, as is very eloquently expressed by Macaulay (1972).

Gandhi conforms now to what Fanon calls, cultural nationalism and the nationalist stage or the fighting phase (2001). He awakens the people and becomes the mouthpiece of reality in action. Gandhi fashions his revolution and struggles with the help and support of the people. He urges his force consisting of the Indian people to practice, “Ram Dhun, spinning of the charka and to practice absolute truth and non-violence” (28). Narayan portrays Gandhi’s rejection of the labels and stereotypes, empire had invented for the Indian heritage and identity. He, through these efforts, aims at the “crystallization of national consciousness”. Gandhi literally strips himself naked to study the history of his body (Fanon, 2001). Narayan shows that Gandhi wants to build the new identity of his nation on the foundation of its ancient culture. Narayan’s portrayal of Gandhi as an anti-imperialist and his efforts to make India and Indians proud of their past and culture is in line with the ideas of Martin Green (1980). Narayan’s portrayal of Gandhi’s emphasis upon non-violence is actually a resistance of the Indians to the colonialist representations of the colonized, as barbaric people, who understand only violent measures like flogging or death. Gandhi wants to tell the empire back that the Indians are the civilized people and only they can practice truth and non-violence as the most civilized nation and they are not the inferior stereotypes as pointed out by Said (1993).

Crane (1992) questions and doubts the portrayal of the reality by Narayan in the novel, as not being, “a fully rounded picture”, due to the exclusion of the British from the novel. But the British are not missing from the novel, though they do not and cannot occupy the center stage, like they do in the British novels about India. They are also not portrayed as glorious figures as is done by colonialist writers like Masters when he portrays a colonial officer, Savage (1983). They are presented as exploiters and oppressors. This is quite in keeping with the spirit of the empire writing back and this establishes *Waiting for the Mahatma* as the postcolonial text which needs to foreground the reality from the perspective of the native people.

Narayan shows that the collector, who is the custodian of the prestige of the British Empire, addresses Mahatma as only Gandhi (39). Narayan also highlights the presence of the Raj, through the collector and his refusal to give freedom of expression. Gandhi’s speech is first censored by the district collector (41). The collector represents the Raj; therefore, he exercises his authority to suppress the voice of Gandhi. Said (1993) focuses upon the oppressive nature of colonialism. Narayan presents Gandhi as an iconoclast, to free Indians from “petrification and restricted lives”. Gandhi is shown as reaching out to the untouchables, thereby dismantling the century’s old taboos of ancient Hindu culture, without maligning the Hindu culture, like Naipaul does. Not only Gandhi spends his time in the colonies reserved for the untouchables, he invites a child belonging to this community to share oranges with him (48)

The reader gets a glimpse of the very tough routine of Gandhi’s life. Narayan celebrates the devotion, extraordinary commitment and “more than a man” like dedication of Gandhi to his work. It is very difficult to agree with Cronin that

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Gandhi is “only an occasional actor in the story” (Cronin, 1989). However, Crane is right when he contends that the fictional story revolves around Sriram and “the historical elements of the novel revolve around Gandhi’s role in the National Movement”. Gandhi, an historical figure, occupying the center stage, is described by Crane as a “significant departure from the generally accepted criteria of historical novel” (1992). Gandhi is shown doing several things at the same time . “He spoke while his hands were busy turning the spinning wheel, drawing out a fine thread” (66). He is also reading a letter and dictating a response to a man sitting in a corner with a pad on his knee. Interestingly, Cronin misreads the significance of the spinning, when he contends that “charka, functions like a religious implement, like a rosary” (1989). Cronin is very unfair when he describes charka as “wickedly frustrating little machine” . Probably, being an outsider to the sub-continent, he does not understand the real history and culture of India. Crane rightly describes the spinning of charka and the practice of absolute truth as “the way to defeat the British” (1992). Interestingly Rehmanvery unjustly describes the presentation of Gandhi in *Waiting for the Mahatma* as controversial (1991).

Narayan celebrates Gandhi’s love for the beauty of the Indian rivers, its landscapes, its sun and air, the same are negatively portrayed by a colonialist novelist, Forster (1981).The child narrator of Sidhwa(1989) also narrates her encounter with Gandhijee. Lenny’s description of Gandhi reinforces and strengthens the image of Gandhi as portrayed by Narayan .

Narayan portrays Ghandi’s emphasis on the importance of the elders as the custodians of the traditions. Narayan shows Gandhi’s focus upon the social phenomenon, unlike the thrust of the modern Western civilization upon individual and individuality. Sriram can join the camp of Ghandi only after he gets the permission of his grandmother. Gandhi makes Bharati the Guru of Sriram, and asks him to show respect and reverence towards Bharati (93). Bharati, an embodiment of social phenomenon, has utmost respect and reverence for Ghandi. Gandhi wants her to write him often. She responds like the true daughter of Bharat.

4.5 Portrayal of the Raj

Narayan shows the “real benefits”, “the light of civilization” brought by the British Raj for the Indians. Seven hundred thousand villages are affected by the famine under the British Raj. Narayan deliberately mentions the seven hundred thousand villages to emphasize the native Indian identity, mythological and historical past of India. Rao in the foreword (1963) contends that, “there is no village in India, how so ever mean, that has not a rich sthalapurana, or legendary history of its own”. Narayan shows the hard work of Gandhi and his volunteers to bring courage and hope to the victims. Narayan shows that all the able-bodied men of India, its corn and timber are dispatched to a vast war reservoir in the Western Europe (88). Gorpada, a character in the novel, says, “See what the British have done to our country” (89). The famine has affected everyone including the children, who are pot-bellied, naked and with their ribs visible. Gorpada concludes, “There is no one to look after them, everyone is engaged in this war. The war machine buys it (corn) at any price. It’s too big a competitor

for these poor folk” (89). The portrayal of Second World War by Narayan is more than a shadow, like for example, it is portrayed by Sidhwa (1989). Narayan provides yet another picture of India under the Raj highlighting, the hunger, poverty, misery and suffering of the Indians. Narayan proves Fanon right in his analysis of the evil nature of colonialism and the inherent inadequacies of the colonial machine (2001).

Narayan throws light on the status of the Indians under the Raj. India is like a prison, and the Indians have no rights or human dignity. He seems to echo the words of Kent in *King Lear* by Shakespeare (2000), when Kent says that freedom lives hence and banishment here. The status of the Indians is like that of prisoners or slaves. Shah Nawaz also refers to the Defence of India Rules, under which Zohra, a Muslim Congress activist, is arrested without any trial or charge (1990). The police under the Raj has no regard for the proper and due process of law. The remnants of Raj contend that they can keep Sriram under detention without trial or framing any charge (191). A similar colonial attitude towards the Orientals is expressed by V.S. Naipaul (1984). Naipaul “already knows” that the natives in Ivory Coast lead “petrified” and “restricted” lives (90). Indians under the Raj fear the collector, because he can detain anyone of them under the Defence of India Act.

A fellow prisoner of Sriram, wanders into the world of myth and unreal in the face of very cruel present reality, human degradation and oppression (195)

Cassirer (1979) contends that in the critical moments of man’s political and social life, myth regains its hold, especially if the other binding forces of the social life lose their relevance and influence. Silence, oppression, isolation and alienation are portrayed as the “benefits” of the Raj. “He was amazed at the isolation that had been devised—inhabiting the same planet people were completely cut off from one another” (199). The hour gong brings the prisoners back to the real world of work in the quarry.

It is difficult to agree with Cronin when he contends that *Waiting for the Mahatma* avoids and evades politics (1989). In reality, *Waiting for the Mahatma* is steeped in politics. This is the portrayal of the Gandhian style of politics. Similarly, it is hard to agree with him that the novel is partly a comic bildungsroman. However, he is right when he says that it is partly a religious fable of national origin.

Through Sriram we also get a glimpse of Gandhi’s salt march to Dandi in 1930 (120). That is a violation of the English salt laws and a defiance of the might of the empire. Narayan shows that India is stripped off its forests and timber, so that ships and rifles can be built for the war of the empire. Sriram, though not yet fully initiated into social phenomenon and still driven by his individual, personal desire for Bharati, does undergo a change, from his worship of the personal god of desire, to his final submission to the social tradition in the form of Mahatma. His voyage is slow but convincing. He moves now towards completeness and wholeness. He spreads the message to the Indians against the exploitation of the Indian resources by the Raj (107).

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The luxurious and colonial life style of the British in the midst of hunger, disease and absolute poverty of the Indians is portrayed by Narayan in the novel. Sriram arrives at a plantation 4000 feet above sea level. There he finds himself outside the Mathieson Estate, owned by an English gentleman. The English welcomes Sriram while he is smoking his pipe. The Indian servants at the estate wear the white uniforms with a lot of buttons to emphasize the imperial status of their master. Sriram refers to the presence of wicker chairs, covered with beautiful chintz. There are decorative plants. Sriram contrasts it with his own dwelling; a ruined temple building built thousands of years ago, full of snakes and scorpions and with only a mat to sleep on. "All this while millions of people here are going without food or shelter!" (107). The British owner of the estate employs five thousand field labourers, two hundred factory hands and office workers (114). This is the portrayal of the British India. This also answers the objection of Cronin. Conrad (2005) also shows the luxurious life style of the colonialists in the midst of hunger and poverty.

4.6 Portrayal of the Significance of the Indian Traditions

Bharati goes to jail in total obedience to the will of her Master, Gandhi. She submits herself to the collective and social demands of the nation. She is like the romantic heroine Viola, following her lover Orsino, in *Twelfth Night* by Shakespeare (2000). Sriram still an individual, driven by individual and personal considerations, prefers personal interest to national interest and avoids arrest.

Narayan shows that Sriram is also gradually initiated into the sphere of the Indian traditions and customs. Sriram makes an adjustment and concedes his ground and acknowledges the role of tradition. "Will you marry me after we are out of this, will you promise, if Bapu permits" (141). He is on his track towards wholeness and completeness.

Sriram, away from Gandhi and Bharati, forgets the lesson in non-violence and gets deeply involved in terrorist activities. Narayan shows the dangers of being cut off from the roots and traditions. Bharati represents the social phenomenon and the importance of tradition.

The death and rebirth of Granny is extremely significant. Khan (1993) describes it as a "truly comical scene". It is none of such things. At one level, it reflects the influence of mythology upon the Indian culture and the celebration of the Hindu belief system. This is Narayan's deliberate rejoinder to the assumptions of superiority and the ideology of containment and the defenders of Western civilization, like Macaulay, who contemptuously described the Indian heritage, culture and history not worth of one book shelf of Western philosophy (1979).

It is also the celebration of the resilience of Mother India. Narayan shows that Mother India finally recovers from the shock of colonial experience. Kanni contends, "She is like a mother to us. We shall take care of her" (187).

Narayan portrays the feelings of Sriram on getting freedom from jail. It coincides with the independence of India. He is free to do whatever he wants to do, he is free to be himself. Earlier, everything was controlled and regulated by the colonial rulers, both inside and outside the jail. "This is an independent India into which I am walking now" (219). He sees buildings hung with the tricolor

flags, the charka in middle (220). “I am free. No one can come after me now. No one will bother whether I have clean-shaven face or a hairy one” (221). Sriram is extremely happy on being left alone after all these years of being pursued and hunted by his oppressors and recalls the views of the British war-time prime minister about Gandhi.

This is a reference to the classic example of the representation of the Orient and its leaders as the lowliest “Others”, by the empire and its leaders. Said (2001) refers to this practice of the colonialists of making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.

4.7 Portrayal of the Partition Massacres and the Role of Gandhi

Narayan like all the writers on Partition and independence focuses upon the riots and violence that accompanied it. The massacres by the Hindus and the Muslims are portrayed. He shows that the gangs of the killers are looking for their targets belonging to the opposite religions. Even Sriram can save his life miraculously, after the killer gangs get the evidence that he is a Hindu (234). Sidhwa (1989) also portrays a similar situation.

Narayan highlights the peace mission under taken by Gandhi during the Partition violence (231). Gandhi goes everywhere, Noakhali, Calcutta, Bengal. Narayan depicts burning homes, children orphaned, men killed and women carried away. Narayan shows the pain of Gandhi at the suffering of women, who lose their homes, children and honour. Narayan shows that on 15th of August 1947, the Indian day of independence, Gandhi does not participate in festivities in Delhi. He goes to Calcutta. “His place was where people were suffering and not where they were celebrating” (243). Gandhi walks through villages barefoot on his peace mission, through the swamps of East Bengal. He consoles the victims and reprimands the perpetrators of the crimes. Gandhi risks his life and stays longer at places, which are worst affected by violence. Narayan is justified not to “glorify” the new nation in the midst of such misery and suffering which accompanied the Partition and independence. Crane does take a notice of this omission (1992). Sidhwa (1989) also does not focus upon the celebrations of independence.

Narayan shows that Gandhi, who is deeply immersed in religion and mythology, wants religion to be finally down played; because of the violence it can cause. The children in the camps are named after the flowers, without any discrimination on religious grounds (245).

Even before marriage Bharati is “mother” to thirty children (250). We get a glimpse of Gandhi before his death, in whose person, man and more than a man, change and tradition co-exist. Narayan depicts the human, man like aspect of this more than a man. Narayan shows that in the person of Gandhi personal and political co-exist.

Gandhi inquires about the health of orphan children. One little girl, Anar, is down with cold. He gives a lot of oranges and apples and flowers to be distributed among the children (250). Like a traditional Indian girl, Bharati

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keeps her head bowed and remains silent while Gandhi finally gives his sanction and approval for marriage. “We are waiting for your blessed permission to marry” (252). Cronin (1989) is “surprised” at the transformation that takes place in Bharati when she becomes a traditional Indian bride. Cronin wrongly calls it as the oddest fact of the novel. Actually, it reflects a serious misreading of the character of Bharati by Cronin. Narayan has portrayed her as a person who is modern in every sense of the word but simultaneously is deeply rooted in the Indian traditions and customs. She displays, what Khan(1993), very rightly calls as “a harmonious co-existence symbolizing unity, a wholeness toward which Narayan’s protagonists are constantly progressing” (27-28). She also represents the postcolonial culture, which is ultimately a hybridized phenomenon involving a relationship between the planted European cultural systems and an indigenous reality, coded to create or recreate an independent local identity (Ashcraft, 1989).

This is also applicable, to a lesser degree, of course, to Sriram. He starts from his individualistic approach and gradually moves towards the recognition of the importance of the tradition and social aspect of life. Gandhi represents the Indian customs and traditions when he says, “She would be a very unbecoming bride, who spoke her mind aloud!” (252). The icon of non-violence, love, Gandhi, Bapu to millions, is killed in a very violent way by Hindu extremists (254).

5. Conclusion

The study has shown that R.K. Narayan in *Waiting for the Mahatma* has celebrated the indigenous Indian culture, traditions, customs and belief systems. He has celebrated the person of Gandhi as a great national hero, who as a combination of man and more than a man, worked for the freedom and liberty of his country. Gandhi is portrayed simultaneously as an icon of social and political reform and change and celebrated as a revivalist of ancient Hindu culture and identity. He is shown demolishing the social taboos like untouchability. His emphasis on the equal place for women in the society is portrayed. The title of the novel itself is the celebration of the status of Gandhi as the Mahatma. The study has further shown that the individual is subservient to the Indian tradition. This reflects Gandhi’s vision of the importance of the social phenomenon. Narayan has highlighted the role of Gandhi as a bringer of peace and comfort to the grief stricken people. Narayan has rejected all the assumptions of superiority of the colonialists and has celebrated the pride of the Indians in their culture, tradition, history and identity. Narayan has also portrayed the exploitation of the native resources under the empire. The study has also shown that Narayan has portrayed the scars of the British Raj for the Indians and India. He has highlighted the suffering, misery, famine and poverty, that was the fate of the people under the Raj. Through the fictional characters of Sriram and Bharati, Narayan has traced the journey of the Indians from mimicry to celebration of their culture and identity. He has also shown the link between culture and imperialism and the rejection of imperial culture and colonialist ideology by the Indians. He has used many Indian words, phrases and idioms to emphasize the indigenous identity, culture and Indian English. The study has shown that Narayan has celebrated the Indian beauty, in the form of Bharati and the love and

loyalty of an Indian girl for her partner in *Waiting for the Mahatma* and has challenged the Western negative stereotypes about India and Indians.

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