

CHAPTER THREE

FOOD AS SELF-DISCIPLINE: A STUDY OF GANDHIAN MORALITY

Introduction

M. K. Gandhi has been famously honoured as the ‘Father of the Nation’ by Subhas Bose. The way he raised his voice against the British and exposed as well as subverted them, has been a topic of major deliberation. Appreciating his contribution as an anti-colonial agitator, social reformer, religious thinker and prophet, Ramachandra Guha regards him as “an authentically global figure” (Guha, *Gandhi Before India* 2), and “the subcontinent’s most famous (and most controversial) man” (Guha, *Gandhi: The Years* 653), who devised his methods of combat upon the principles of non-violence and humility. Opposing the drawbacks of modernisation, Gandhi stressed on the beneficial ideals of self-sufficiency, mutual respect, and self-discipline. Besides, he also worked against the oppressive ideals of caste system which eased the colonial doctrine of divide and rule. In addition to his strong nationalist beliefs that resonate across India, he has also gained prominence as a devout vegetarian and a passionate experimenter of food and health. However, while his political and sexual stance has been constantly criticised and commented upon, his stand on dietetics has received relatively less attention (P. Roy, *Alimentary* 75). Food itself has been used as a metaphor all over the world, and in India his dietary ideas and his fasts, have become a prominent tool of literary expression, especially for the postcolonial Indian writers. His ideals garnered an important place in the Indian psyche and gradually, a discourse got formed in itself. This chapter will focus on the forces unravelled by Gandhi’s revolutionary measures against the British – a culture, which devalued, threatened, and misrepresented the existence of the native culture – and the resultant formation of new sets of identities and new strategies of resistance, as a way to restabilise the jolted sense of national identity.

A careful study of Gandhi’s dietetic philosophies would reveal the way he tried to control both his palate and his passions, so as to prepare a disciplined and healthy body, as well as mind, which he believed, would be instrumental in a peaceful subversion of the British, for the freedom of India. With the intention of achieving this objective, a comprehensive examination of Gandhian dietetics, encompassing his vegetarianism, “control of the palate”, and the use of fasting as a “weapon”, will be undertaken (Gandhi,

Autobiography 193, 288). These principles serve as the foundation of his self-disciplinary and self-constructing ideals. The application of these parameters will serve as a yardstick in the analysis of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), R. K. Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Guide* (1958), and *The Dark Room* (1938). This chapter will adopt a food-centric approach, complemented by the methodology of close reading. The research would be substantiated by a constant reference to Gandhi's works on food such as *Diet and Diet Reform* (1949), *The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism* (1959), *A Guide to Health* (1921) and his autobiography entitled, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927).

Gandhi wrote extensively and his oeuvre consists of a monumental number of books, numerous articles published in journals and periodicals run by him, interviews, speeches, and letters, that record his experiments, experiences, struggles and strategies on an endless number of issues. Most of his writings are documented as a project of the Government of India and published under the title *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Guha, *Gandhi Before India* 5). The project began in September 1956 and ended on 2 October 1994, with the issue of the 100th volume. Appreciating his epoch-making magnificence, K. R. S Iyengar terms the period between and including the two World Wars as the "Gandhian Age" in India (248). The frustration and resentment caused by the World Wars, the resultant reforms and acts passed by the government and most importantly the infamous Jallianwala Bagh massacre of peaceful protesters, contributed to an intense national agitation. It was during this time that people began to realise the truth and necessity of Gandhi's endeavour and began to join hands towards the national struggle for freedom. Capturing the whole world's attention, Gandhi's works became an ideal reference to hold fast, during the nationalist movement. This brought about a revolutionary change in "every segment of our national life- politics, economics, education, religion, social life, language and literature- acquired more or less a pronounced Gandhian hue" (Iyengar 248). As such, Iyengar considers Gandhi as a "formative influence" on the intellectual makeup of his contemporary Indian writers (249). Also, witnessing the potency of the "Gandhian whirlwind", M. K. Naik writes that, "it was during this age that Indian English fiction discovered some of its most compelling themes: the ordeal of the freedom struggle, East-West relationship, the communal problem and the plight of the untouchables, the landless poor, the downtrodden, the economically exploited and the oppressed" (124).

Gandhi had always advocated the necessity of self-control and self-discipline as a means to achieve personal freedom and growth. This is because he believed that when an individual is free from his inner demons, it is only then that he/she can achieve national freedom. In his struggle for the nation, food and the body have always been the symbolic tools of protest. While the ideals of self-reliance, non-violence, satyagraha, and conversion by love are well known to the world as the non-violent tools of subverting the British, Gandhi's choice of dietary control and his experiments with truth as well as the body are also remarkable for their ability to manipulate and attract people towards the national struggle for freedom. He devoted a major portion of his work to the concept of diet which put forward a new definition of food for the Indians. His ideas can be read as measures taken to prepare such a disciplined and healthy body, which would be able to match the strength of the British. Associated with austerity and morality, his writings on food, helped in the development of a unique philosophy, which deeply influenced Indian politics, society, theories, and writers.

In order to provide a comprehensive comment on Gandhi, an attentive study of all the aspects of his philosophy is mandatory. An analysis of his motivation by the spiritual, moral, medical, and religious principles, including the various people and the experiences that influenced his philosophical outlook, would facilitate the formation of a firsthand impression of the circumstances under which his dietetic philosophies were conceptualised and practised.

Although he turned vehemently against the colonial rule, it was in England that Gandhi received his formal education to become a barrister. It is also here that he gained new dietetic experiences which strengthened and stabilised his vegetarian principles. He counted Henry Salt, John Ruskin, and Leo Tolstoy, among his principal mentors from the West. He applied the knowledge of living that he gained, to practical use in South Africa, and achieved the honourable title of 'Mahatma' or a saint. With his return to India as a seasoned leader, among other things, he sought to remove untouchability, worked against social taboos and religious corruption, attempted to empower the minority and the underprivileged, and tried to restore India's self-sufficiency by restoring its traditional and local handicrafts. In all these social endeavours he continuously emphasised upon the control of the palate and tried to devise a simple yet nutritious meal. His experiences inspired him to bring in a notion of democracy, and a kind of commonality in food. He

worked hard to put together a wholesome diet, economical and easily accessible to everyone and quite removed from any pretentious divisions, which would ultimately reflect and inspire social equality.

As is evident, there are many facets of Gandhi and many spheres where he engaged in. However, it would be beyond the capability of this chapter to present, analyse, and justify all the arenas to which he contributed. Therefore, this chapter will focus specifically in the consolidation of his dietetic principles and the way it helped in the construction of his transnational self.

The Consolidation of Gandhi's Dietetic Discourse

Nurtured from birth with the art of abstention, Gandhi's commitment to vegetarianism grew and evolved as he embarked on his journey to the West. From his early years, documented in his autobiography, Gandhi's fervour for reform and self-governance spurred him to undertake various experiments. During his time in Rajkot, a trend of dietary reform was underway as people feared that vegetarianism would weaken their bodies and enable the meat-eating English to dominate them. This prompted Gandhi to conduct a meat-eating experiment, a decision he later regretted as a tragedy due to his adherence to Jainism. However, his profound opposition to British rule was so intense that Gandhi was willing to compromise his religious principles in order to fight for his country's freedom. Nonetheless, his unwavering respect for his parents and his commitment to truthfulness prevented him from further transgressions of morality through meat consumption. These principles also enabled him to take vows of abstinence from alcohol, relationships, and meat before his departure for England.

Upon his arrival in England Gandhi faced the practical difficulties of securing vegetarian meals, in a non-vegetarian country. As he had to deal with a spiceless and plain boiled diet in England, it inspired him to research the benefits of a spiceless diet, and devise one such for himself. Gandhi's interest was captured by what Guha called, "a cult of English dissenters", viz. the vegetarians of London (Guha, *Gandhi Before India* 42). His study of books such as Henry Salt's *A Plea for Vegetarianism*, Howard Williams's *The Ethics of Diet*, Dr Anna Kingsford's *The Perfect Way in Diet* and many others, provided him with the needed mental and moral strength. His reading of Salt reinforced the position of vegetarianism in his life, and he turned into "a vegetarian by choice" (Gandhi,

Autobiography 57).

It should be noted however that while Gandhi witnessed and lauded the relevance and necessity of vegetarianism, he was, as Guha remarks, unaware of the “Indian origins of English vegetarianism” (Guha, *Gandhi Before India* 43). In western countries vegetarianism was rather an imported concept, which in its transplation lost its oriental origin among the rush of scientific researches, until it got “muted and eventually disappeared” (Guha, *Gandhi Before India* 43). In contrast, vegetarianism in India had enjoyed popularity since ancient times, becoming so ingrained in daily life that it became an automatic choice for most people. However, the arrival of the colonisers disrupted this norm, as they sought to shame Indians for their perceived effeminate nature, attributing it to their practise of vegetarianism. This notion of effeminate Indians was vehemently furthered by Macaulay, who as Leela Gandhi points out, created a “pervasive imperial critique of Indian physical culture” in one of his “damning” verdicts on Indian civilisation (Leela Gandhi 82). Leela Gandhi further explains that this colonial stereotype was quickly inculcated as a negative self-image, as Indians, and most specifically the Bengali intellectuals or bhadraloks, began to blame the incompatible Indian environment and their inferior national diet, for their inadequate masculinity (Leela Gandhi 82). Among them, Swami Vivekananda was the notable forerunner who furthered this dietetic reformation by his famous proclamation of “Beef, Biceps and the Bhagavad Gita” as the necessary solution to subvert the colonial dominance (Leela Gandhi 82). During this ongoing rumour and sense of diet reformation, Gandhi was also influenced to eat meat (Leela Gandhi 83). These dietetic colonial anxieties were still present in the subconscious of Gandhi as he journeyed towards the West.

In England, Gandhi derived that vegetarianism was ethical, economical, scientifically advisable, and less time consuming, and become its adamant researcher and follower. The idea that man was meant to be a frugivorous animal solidified his choice of vegetarianism into a lifelong mission. He came up with the book *The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism*, where he cautioned that simple abstention was not an end in itself, but only a means to achieve the desired end. He also composed several articles, some of which appeared in the London Vegetarian Society's publication, *The Vegetarian*. Through his writings Gandhi “took apart some common myths and misconceptions” (Guha, *Gandhi Before India* 48) regarding the Indians, most specifically the Hindus. He tried to subvert

the notion of effeminacy attached to them, by holding their custom of infant marriage and early parenthood responsible for their weakness. He also vehemently criticised intoxicating drinks and substances which hindered man's aspiration for inner purification and spiritual evolution, and was a powerful evil propagated by the British Empire in his country.

Stressing the importance of vegetarianism in the consolidation of Gandhi's public life, Guha remarks that, "Gandhi's involvement with the vegetarians of London was far more important to him than is commonly recognized" as his "first, close friendships with English people expanded his mind and his personality" (Guha, *Gandhi Before India* 49). Gandhi's vegetarian friends in England were also, as Leela Gandhi notes, instrumental in dissolving his dietetic colonial anxieties and thereby "defying the physiognomic basis of imperial argument" (Leela Gandhi 83). It was his vegetarianism that also provided the inner strength and a surprising confidence to the tongue-tied Gandhi as his writing career began with the discussions on the foods and festivals of India. As such, Guha precisely comments that, "Gandhi the cultivator of friendships across racial and religious boundaries; Gandhi the organizer and mobilizer; Gandhi the writer, thinker and propagandist- all these Gandhis were first displayed in and through his membership of that famously obscure body, the Vegetarian Society of London" (Guha, *Gandhi Before India* 50). Even Gandhi himself confirms that his stay in England, and his engagement with the vegetarian restaurants, clubs and the Vegetarian Society, sowed the seeds of all his future experiments. Despite Gandhi's recognition of England's role in strengthening his commitment to vegetarianism and the profound influence of his dietary practices on all his subsequent personal and political endeavours, there remains uncertainty among many of Gandhi's biographers, as highlighted by Leela Gandhi, regarding the true significance of his early involvement in English vegetarian circles (Leela Gandhi 71).

During his stay in London, Gandhi also became interested in Theosophy, which set him studying different religions. It should be noted that he gained a major part of his knowledge on Indian philosophy and religion through the translated works that he started reading during that time. For instance, he was influenced to study the Gita (from which he continuously drew upon), as he came across two theosophical brothers who wanted him to explain the original to them. Apart from this, he read books like Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy*, Max Muller's *India- What Can it Teach Us?*, Annie Besant's *How I Became*

a Theosophist, Washington Irving's *Life of Mahomed and His Successors*; Tolstoy's *The Gospel in Brief*, translation of the *Upanishads*; quotes of Zarathustra and so on. The study aroused his self-introspection and he decided to practise whatever attracted him as good. However, his faith in Hinduism remained unsurpassable, as he regarded the Gita as "an infallible guide of conduct" for "a ready solution" to all his problems (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 240). Through all his theosophical readings, the most important of his derivation was that "renunciation was the highest form of religion" (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 75).

Gandhi's contact with the vegetarians as well as the Theosophists saved him from any kind of racial or ethnic discrimination as they "sought affinity of ideas and lifestyles, not skin colour" (Guha, *Gandhi Before India* 47). It reflects the peaceful and holistic nature of the societies that Gandhi engaged with. As he gained a clearer perspective of the concepts of non-possession (*aparigraha*), equability (*samabhava*), and the idea of universal love, his definition of 'family' gradually widened to include the whole community. Probably this is where he got inspired with the ideals of non-violent opposition.

Nature Cure as an Alternative to Drugs

The growing simplicity of his life, influenced Gandhi's dislike for medicine. He emphasised on the cultivation of a strong mind so as to become the master of the body instead of its slave. Just's *Return to Nature* interested him in earth treatment and strengthened his belief that illness can be cured primarily by "a well regulated diet, water and earth treatment and similar household remedies." (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 245) In the chapters "Faith on its Trial" and "Kasturbai's Courage" in his autobiography, Gandhi relates how his strict adherence to vegetarianism, household remedies and mental strength, were put to test when his son Manilal suffered from typhoid, and, his wife suffered from post-operative sickness. Rejecting the doctor's advice of serving eggs, chicken broth and beef tea to the patients, Gandhi somehow managed to persuade both his son and wife to bravely face the difficulties with household remedies, such as milk and fruit diets and hydropathic treatment. His book *Guide to Health* presents a detailed account of his dietetic experiments, some of which were designed to cure illness. Furthermore, Gandhi was meticulous in not proclaiming absolute success for every experiment he conducted. This very aspect of his approach serves as a rebuttal to numerous accusations levelled against him, dismissing him as an indifferent quack.

Fasting and the Adoption of Brahmacharya

As in England, Gandhi's stay in South Africa too, brought newer experiences and resulted in major changes to his diet. In the Tolstoy Farm in 1912, along with his chief companion Hermann Kallenbach, he experimented with routine fasting and renunciation of food items such as salt and pulses. He also gave up milk during this time as it was against animal ethics and was supposed to generate animal passions. Also, to familiarise himself with the life of poor people, he adopted a strict frugivorous diet where he chose the cheapest fruits possible, such as raw groundnuts, bananas, dates, lemons, and olive oil. Details of his experiments on uncooked food are recorded in Chapters 3-7 of Part I of his book *Diet and Diet Reform* which reveal his eagerness to land upon a perfect and nutritious diet.

While serving in the Zulu Rebellion, Gandhi realised the capability of vows to extend protection against any kind of enticement as, "a vow, far from closing the door to real freedom, opened it", as desire and temptation are consciously rejected (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 191). Here Gandhi derived that for a proper service of humanity, devotion of the whole soul was necessary. He realised that it can be only achieved through the adoption of *brahmacharya*, which went on to become one of his major commitments. His decision of taking up *bhramacharya* was also influenced by the poet Raychandbhai.

The three essentials of *brahmacharya* are- control of the palate, fasting, and control of the senses in thought, word, and deed. For the first, Gandhi rejected the use of spices and mostly limited his diet to raw food products. The second essential that is fasting, necessarily helped him to prepare a strong mind free from all temptations, an ideal which he later turned into one of his biggest weapons of non-violent coercion. For the third ideal, which seemed nearly impossible to attain, Gandhi realised that only his faith in God could help him achieve it, as securing the third ideal amounted to the accomplishment of moksha (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 194-195).

A brahmachari's food, he said, should be "limited, simple, spiceless and if possible, uncooked" (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 193) and that fasting is as necessary as selection and restriction in diet which, if properly undertaken, may help in controlling the mind and the senses as well. His adoption of brahmacharya reinforced his habit of fasting. Here Gandhi learned about the complexity involved in fasting, as it might be a powerful weapon "of indulgence as of restraint" (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 288). Accordingly, one must be wary

of indulging in and relishing food after a fast, because pleasure in any form, Gandhi believed, prevented a realisation of truth. It is only in the absence of relish that a body could “begin to function in the way nature intended it to do” (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 289). As such, Gandhi carried on with his endeavours and was able to master the control of the palate as well as passion, and to derive enormous mental strength from fasting. Along with his vegetarianism and celibacy, Gandhi is equally famous for his fasting due to several reasons. While at times it was undertaken as a way of penance and self-purification, at other times it was adopted as a mode of protest. Thus, even his rejection of food is fraught with numerous purposes. Whilst outspoken in other spheres, Gandhi, as Joseph Alter notes in his book *Gandhi's Body*, had little to say about his fasts (41). Although mostly undertaken for political purposes, Gandhi clarifies that his fasting, instead of being a tool of coercion, is a non-violent weapon of opposition, to be used to wade through the periods of difficulty; a moral means for overall purification of the body and soul; and a way to arrive at the right path of Truth. Noting the difficulties in understanding the political nature of Gandhi's fasts, Alter rightly remarks that the enigmatic nature of his actions, led to a contradiction of public attitudes, where some see him as an extraordinary person, and others perceive him as a manipulative politician (29). Nevertheless, summing up the remarkable nature and unusual success of Gandhi's fasts, Alter remarks that:

Between 1918, when he stopped eating in support of a textile workers' strike in Ahmedabad, and 1948, when he gave up food for five days to protest a resurgence in communal violence, Gandhi engaged in at least thirteen major fasts. Many of the fasts unto death he undertook were pivotal in the sequence of events that led up to independence and had the effect, if not the intent, of making him the focus of intense national and international attention. And regardless of his intent, these fasts also forced issues of caste, communal, and colonial injustices to critical points of at least contingent conclusion, if not final resolution. (28)

Stressing the spiritual nature of fasting, Gandhi once clarified that it is, “the last weapon in the armoury of the votary of ahimsa” (qtd. in Alter 44). Being addressed to God, fasting, he describes, intensifies the spirit of prayer and action. It aims to change the opponent's heart and thereby it ensures its permanent effect upon the person for or against whom, it is undertaken (qtd. in Alter 43).

For instance, Gandhi's twenty-one days fast from 10 February 1943 to 3 March 1943, was one of his longest and most successful fasts, carried out as a protest against the false allegations of the government where it accused him and Congress of "being complicit with the Axis powers and of practising 'totalitarian' politics" (Guha, *Gandhi: The Years* 695). The success of his fast is a clear sign of his mental strength and his utmost honesty. The magnitude of his undertaking horrified his opponents as both Churchill and the then viceroy, Linlithgow, sought to verify the authenticity of Gandhi's fast. However, no evidence was found against him and instead it appeared to be a medical marvel (Guha, *Gandhi: The Years* 702–703). Remarkably, it achieved recognition and support from unexpected quarters with the result that Gandhi was acknowledged as a moral force (Guha, *Gandhi: The Years* 706).

Highlighting the significant impact of his dietary principles on his political discourse, Leela Gandhi remarks that Gandhi effectively employed "the metaphors of vegetarianism and anti-vivisection by famously describing the partition of India as a vivisection of the subcontinent, the final and cruellest cut of imperial rationality" (Leela Gandhi 85). Additionally, before Gandhi's assassination, two remarkable fasts took the centre stage in his last days of life. The first took place from 2 September, 1947 to 4 September, 1947 at Noakhali, a district in south-eastern Bangladesh, and the second fast which he termed as his 'greatest fast', was undertaken at Delhi from 13 January, 1948 till 18 January, 1948 to mark his distress over the post-partition communal violence. With his sacrifice of food, despite the physical difficulties that he had to endure due to his old age, Gandhi hoped to prod his countrymen to the right path of morality, even during the last days of his life. Quite sure, although unconcerned of his approaching death, Gandhi remarked during his Calcutta fast that, "this fast will not go beyond ten days. There shall either be peace within that period or else I shall die" (qtd. in Guha, *Gandhi: The Years* 848). Expectedly, people had to end their spate as nobody wanted to be held responsible for Gandhi's death. This is how in the face of death, Gandhi ensured the attainment of his objectives in a non-violent manner by employing the spiritual weapon of fasting. Noting his fearlessness of death, Alter remarks that in his "principled search for absolute Truth", death was as a matter of fact, "an integral facet of the overall experiment" (32).

The Conception of Satyagraha and the Necessity of Self-reliance

Gandhi's experiments in *brahmacharya* also helped him in the foundation of satyagraha, which he deemed to be a non-violent fight for truth. According to him, it was a "sovereign remedy" (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 339) for the freedom of the nation, which was held in the corrosive clutch of the colonial power. The derogatory conditions in which the Indians lived in South Africa, induced him to fight for national self-respect and thereafter, public service became his primary concern. For Gandhi, this very service was religious, a self-rewarding job, through which he strove to realise God or Truth, as his service revealed "new implications of truth at every stage" (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 201).

The removal of Viragram customs cordon has been the advent of his satyagraha in India. Gandhi notes that a nation trying to gain its independence would naturally resort to violence, but satyagraha, he insists, is an "absolutely non-violent weapon" which calls for civility, not only in outward manifestation but "an inborn gentleness and desire to do the opponent good" (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 389). Foremost cases of satyagraha include the abolition of general emigration from India (1916), abolition of the 'tinkathia' system levied on the indigo peasants of Champaran in Bihar (1917), and the suspension of land revenue for the poor peasants in Kheda due to a widespread failure of crops (1918). It should be noted that these three cases of Gandhi's satyagraha in India, revolved around the dilemma of the peasants, as they constituted the backbone of the country and their support would considerably assist the extension of Gandhian politics.

Gandhi continuously stressed the power of self-reliance in his writings. For instance, he used hand power instead of an engine to print out the copies of *Indian Opinion*, a journal without which he believed, the propagation of satyagraha would have been impossible (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 259). Working for the journal created an atmosphere of self-reliance and highest moral uplift in Phoenix (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 274). Also, writing for the journal became for Gandhi, a training in self-restraint (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 259). Gandhi also impressed his idea of self-help while on a visit to Shantiniketan. As an experiment, he suggested the paid cooks to be dismissed and that the teachers and students prepare their own meals which would promote health and "an object-lesson in self-help." (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 340) Commenting on the experiment Tagore remarked that, "The experiment contains the key to Swaraj" (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 340). Gandhi suggested the self-preparation of salt in disregard of the salt laws, as one of the

ways to offer civil disobedience against the Rowlatt Bill (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 410).

One of his greatest weapons of self-reliance has been the reproduction of Khadi (hand-spun cloth) which can act as “the panacea for the growing pauperism of India” by removing poverty and establishing swaraj (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 434). This exercise brought them many experiences as they learnt about the various problems that the workers faced with the steady destruction of India’s traditional industries. According to Gandhi, the money spent in Khadi was actually an investment in gaining new experiences of self-sufficiency. It also promoted women empowerment by providing work to the poor women of India.

The Advantages of Non-Violence and Compassion

Time and again Gandhi stressed on the advantages of his non-violence or *ahimsa*, which is the basis of the search for truth, and an essential part of satyagraha. It made his relation with his caste members friendly and his work comparatively easier in South Africa and India. Thus, the affection and trust that Gandhi enjoyed for his non-violence and truthfulness helped him considerably in his public works.

Gandhi recognised the degeneration of Hinduism into a mere collection of taboos and rituals, which posed a significant obstacle to his nationalist efforts. The traditional concept of caste divisions was often misunderstood by the oriental scholars and deliberately misrepresented by the British to perpetuate its oppressive existence. This led to the division of people based on fabricated differences, resulting in the unjust practise of untouchability. Gandhi made earnest attempts to bring about equality among all castes. One notable example of his efforts was the admission of an untouchable family into his ashram in India, despite being aware of the potential social boycott. Gandhi believed that this act of admission taught valuable lessons to the ashram members. He proudly proclaimed that the contributions made by orthodox Hindus to the ashram were evidence that “untouchability is shaken to its foundation” (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 356). This jolt administered towards the oppressive concept of untouchability was necessary to dismantle the colonial perception of India as a society incompetent of developing into a nation state; and also, to establish the cultural unity of India.

Thus, Gandhian philosophy has been very dynamic and versatile which considered every aspect of the national struggle be it advocacy of self-reliance, the advantages of non-violence or even the advent of satyagraha and the propagation of swaraj. The persons mentioned above are a few among the many others who greatly influenced the construction of Gandhi's figure. Among his numerous experiments with truth and reformation, his engagement with dietetics is quite remarkable. This is because for Gandhi, food was one of the major ways to prepare the soul for new forms of resistance. His control over food becomes a way to maintain a healthy body and mind, which would ultimately be beneficial in devising new methods of resistance towards foreign rule.

Critical Representation of Gandhi

All his principles and philosophies need to be analysed in the light of the contemporary events around that time. This is because as Guha has quite pertinently put it, "What Gandhi said and did makes sense only when we know what he was responding to" (Guha, *Gandhi Before India* 5). Besides, Gandhi himself has remarked upon the "inadequacy of all autobiography as history" due to the inconsistency of presentation (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 253). As such, the need of the hour is to present how the public perceived Gandhi. The writings of his opponents such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Rabindranath Tagore, B. R. Ambedkar, and the numerous published and unpublished works of various writers, along with the contemporary newspaper reports, periodicals and letters, as Guha mentions, provide some idea of the public discourse surrounding Gandhi. Thus, the next few paragraphs would be devoted to a review of some of the noteworthy critical works upon Gandhi.

Ramachandra Guha's dual volumed biography entitled *Gandhi Before India* (2013) and *Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World 1914-1948* (2013), provide a comprehensive study of Gandhi's life and time and the principles behind his works, thus earning him the honourable status of being "Gandhi's finest biographer", according to *The Guardian*. Here Guha attempts to and succeeds in conducting an extensive study of archival sources in five countries, to present a biography of Gandhi starting from his upbringing, reflecting upon his influences and experiments, spanning upon his numerous works, to the catastrophe of his death. In short, Guha's biography, aims to provide, as he himself says, "a social history of his political campaigns, of his reform movements, and of everyday life in his ashram" (Guha, *Gandhi Before India* 6).

Noteworthy critics like Joseph Alter, Parama Roy, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, Partha Chatterjee and Judith Brown among others, put forward critical studies on Gandhi's maintenance of both his vegetarian and political selves. Joseph Alter presents a noteworthy comment in his book, *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (2000), that:

A basic difficulty in the study of Gandhi's philosophy is that it is virtually impossible to reconcile his sincere and completely honest claims about the inherently noncoercive, transcendental nature of fasting as something intrinsically good with the brute fact that by threatening to kill himself he put people in a position where they had to conform to his will (29).

However, he negates Gandhi as a shrewd politician, by assuming that, "Gandhi was as truthful as anyone can possibly be about the nature of his intent, and that he resolutely believed that fasting should not and could not be coercive" (Alter 29). One could agree with Alter's assumption, for the weapons chosen by Gandhi in combating the foreign rule were primarily fasting, satyagraha and passive non-cooperation, all the time keeping in mind the suitability of non-violent resistance. As he mentions several times in his autobiography, this non-violent attitude has rendered his work easier in many difficult situations, where use of coercion might have resulted in negative consequences. The credibility of the non-violent battle goes to Gandhi himself, as it stems from his ideas of truthfulness, humility, and an intense love for the nation.

Gandhi's focus on the ordinary, trivial, and seemingly small aspects of life played a central role in shaping his politics, as evident in his writings. In the book *Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*, the Rudolphs highlight Gandhi's remarkable ability to transform everyday items such as salt, caps, and charkhas into potent political symbols (qtd. in P. Roy, *Alimentary* 78). The Rudolphs write that:

The autobiography . . . must be read with a particularly sensitive ear, one that hears what he has to say concerning his diet, or his relations to his wife, and considers what it might mean for his political style and for how that style was received, to relegate these remarks to the category of personal frills and curiosities that constitute the gossip rather than the serious significance of a great man is to miss what was central to his leadership. (170–171)

Given Gandhi's natural concern and interest in dietetics, one may find it too trivial for an internationally acclaimed leader to be so concerned about food. However, it should be noted that his choices mark his interest in devising a vegetarian and ethical diet, which can be procured easily and producible within the shortest time possible. It is also his way of creating a discourse on India's poverty. It was Gandhi who first brought to the political space, not only a concern for the masses, but also a call for bringing them together as agents in building a free nation. Food occupies a noteworthy position in Gandhian study because it is through his pursuit of vegetarianism and control of his diet, that he found his voice and got initiated into the world's political threshold. The role of Gandhi's dietetic philosophies in the creation of a disciplined national self, reflecting the moral and religious values of India, was his unique attempt in excommunicating the colonisers from the new dawn of a free India.

However, it should be also noted that Gandhi knowledge about Indian dietetics were rather limited and driven by the idea of food hierarchy that maintained that a vegetarian diet was superior to a diet of flesh. In the article "Meat-eating in India: Whose food, whose politics, and whose rights?", C. Sathyamala states, "Though Gandhi was averse to all flesh-eating, his upper-caste Hindu sensibility was particularly outraged at the consumption of beef, and it was the 'untouchable' caste groups which became the target for his reformist propaganda as they were the ones who openly consumed the flesh of cow" (881). For instance, in *Village Industries* Gandhi writes:

Cow preservation is an article of faith in Hinduism. No Harijan worth his salt will kill cattle for food. But having become untouchable, he has learnt the evil habit of eating carrion. He will not kill a cow but will eat with the greatest relish the flesh of the dead cow. It may be physiologically harmless. But psychologically there is nothing, perhaps, so repulsive as carrion eating. And yet, when a dead cow is brought to a Harijan tanner's house, it is a day of rejoicing for the whole household. . . . I know how hard I have found it working among the Harijans to wean them from the soul-destroying habit of eating carrion. (Gandhi 20–21)

While he condemned the tradition of eating carrions among the untouchables, he failed to ascertain why they had to eat dead carcasses of animals (Sathyamala 882). Unfortunately, Gandhi's strong advocacy for vegetarianism had unintended consequences in the current political scenario, leading to an extreme form of militant vegetarianism among the Hindu

Right. This “militant assertion of vegetarianism” (Govindu) targets beef eaters like Muslims, Christians, Dalits, and even some Hindus from states such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Nagaland, and Meghalaya (Sathyamala 884).

Parama Roy in her book *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions and the Postcolonial*, talks about the necessity of a deeper attention towards the “ethics of Gandhi’s vegetarianism, its relationship to ahimsa and *bhramacharya* (celibacy), and its relation to a philosophy of bodily administration, representativeness, and leadership”, than what they have been usually granted (Roy 76). Roy suggests that, a proper understanding of the ambivalence of Gandhi’s vegetarianism, his fasts, his abstinences and his sacrifices, would be impossible without studying his relations with his family members and associates. Roy believes, Gandhi’s alimentary principles were based on modes of “gendered self-staging” (76), where she sees Gandhi as a “vegetarian patriarch”, due to his habit of imposing strict rules of abstinence upon the inmates of his ashram and his family members, as notable in the case of “a gravely ill Manilal and a postoperative Kasturba” (Roy 106). Roy’s study presents Gandhi’s vegetarianism and non-violence as, “less a map of fixed ethical and somatic virtue than an unsettled and unsettling practice” (Roy 115). However, it should be noted that Gandhi’s gastropolitics bore the character of unending refinement, as his theories were mostly based on his experiments. Thus, Roy’s suggestion of Gandhi’s gastropolitics as “profoundly complicated, equivocal and transitional” (76) can be countered by the fact that all his philosophies were based on empirical research, they were liable to changes with time and newer experiences.

Partha Chatterjee in his book, *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993), talks about the insistence of an “essential cultural difference” in the nationalists’ contest with the colonial power. This was necessary so as to “keep out the colonizer from that inner domain of national life and to proclaim sovereignty over it” (Chatterjee, *Nation* 26). Gandhian nationalism was a premium example of “Eastern” nationalism, which as Chatterjee comments in his chapter, “Nationalism as a Problem in the History of Political Ideas”, was marked by:

an effort to ‘re-equip’ the nation culturally, to transform it. But it could not do so simply by imitating the alien culture, for then the nation would lose its distinctive identity. The search therefore was for a regeneration of the national culture,

adapted to the requirements of progress, but retaining at the same time its distinctiveness. (Chatterjee, *Nationalist 2*)

As such, the retention of distinctiveness called for a unique idea, which should be inspired both by a proper understanding of tradition as well as the enduring love for the nation. Gandhi, being a true patriot succeeded in answering this call. He perceived that motivating the largest chunk of population, which included the peasants as well as the Dalits and other grass root level people, would surely help in winning freedom for the nation. At the same time, he was aware of their ignorance and incapability to understand the fact that “their poverty was the result of the exploitative nature of colonial rule and therefore in need . . . of being guided and led into effective political action by a nationalist organization” (Chatterjee, *Nation 159*). Also, receiving support from the rural lot consisted of a high risk of disintegration, as the peasants had diverse interests which could lead to conflicts such as “town against country, cultivator against landlord and middleman, uneducated against western educated” (Brown 463), as Judith Brown mentions in her article, “Gandhi and India's Peasants, 1917-22”. Nevertheless, Gandhi’s noted victory against the European planters and landlords in Champaran (his first satyagraha in India), helped him to place trust upon the political vitality of the peasants.

To sum up, works like that of Joseph Alter, Leela Gandhi, Parama Roy, C Sathyamala, and the Rudolphs, deal critically with Gandhi’s dietary experiments and provide crucial data on how he maintained both his vegetarian and political selves, while works like that of Partha Chatterjee and Judith Brown focus on the way Gandhi impressed and inspired the common mass for his nationalist agenda. However, their work lack in the fact that a study of the artistic representations of Gandhi’s aura has been repeatedly ignored or overlooked. Moreover, the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, which compile an extensive collection of Gandhi's works, letters, and lectures, have, in a way, been a hindrance. This is because while we have a comprehensive understanding of what Gandhi thought, “but virtually nothing at all of what the world thought of him” (Guha, *Gandhi Before India 5*).

The novel which is a faithful mirror of the society represents quite comprehensively, the deep influence that he generated upon his followers. M.K. Naik in his book, *A History of Indian English Literature*, pertinently remarks that, “Indian English novel of the period was deeply influenced by the epoch-making political, social and

ideological ferment caused by the Gandhian movement” (160). However, the fictional representation of Gandhi and the myriad ways of public perception, have been mostly ignored in favour of sociological studies upon Gandhi. As fiction consists of a wide spectrum of possibilities, its representations tend to be more authentic and poignant. The chosen novels, through their exploration of several Gandhian ideologies, represent quite comprehensively how the Indians and the colonisers perceived Gandhi, and the numerous methods by which they supported or even opposed his ideas. Additionally, only Indians’ perceptions of Gandhi are examined in this chapter in order to retain a sharp focus on the intention to present a rereading of the chosen works of Indian English fiction.

Critiquing Gandhi’s Dietetic Ideologies in Select Novels

This chapter examines Gandhi’s “control of the palate” and his use of fasting as a “weapon”, which form the basis of his self-disciplining and self-constructing principles. The novels *Kanthapura*, *The Vendor of Sweets*, *The Guide*, and *The Dark Room* critique Gandhi’s dietetic ideologies and experiments, his necessary employment of irrationalism to counter colonial discourse, the myriad way his followers interpreted his ideas, the political vitality of the grassroot individuals, especially the peasants; as well as the inapplicability and shortcomings of Gandhian ideals in certain situations. Reading the diversions and the constructions around Gandhian ideals, through the lens of food, may help in a broader understanding of the past conditions and the way they continue to influence our present thoughts, beliefs, and affiliations. Additionally, the study delves into the technical aspects of writing employed by the authors, as composition is an unparalleled act with its own tools. Mark Schorer in his groundbreaking article, “Technique as Discovery” contends that, adoption of a proper technique is the only way an author has, “of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it” (Schorer 67). By lending “a point of view beyond his own” (Schorer 81), technique further helps to objectify and analyse, and thereby refine, renew, and enrich the quality of an artist’s content and expression, so as to achieve the desired goal of art, that is the largeness of effect and a heightened perception of meaning (Schorer 85). While technique in fiction has often been considered a method of organising material, Schorer observes that it serves as a means of objectively exploring and defining values within a realm of experience. When talent is combined with a proper technique, it enhances the significance of both the setting and the plot. Indian English fiction writers employ narrative

techniques that merge ideas from Western schools with native methods, presenting the complexities of precolonial to postcolonial consciousness, such as the fluidity of individual identity, the challenges of personal morality, the tension between tradition and modernity, and the allure of materialism. Amid this convergence of forces, if these writers had chosen a singular technical approach to portray the truth, their project would have been rendered unfeasible.

Furthermore, recognising the inadequacy of an adopted language like English to fully capture the fragmented and amalgamated nature of Indian elements, sensibilities, and experiences, authors like Rao sought to create a distinctive and vibrant homegrown dialect, akin to Irish or American English (Rao xxxi). Rao's anticipation has become the foundation of all Indian Writings in English. To serve their purpose, writers like Rao, Narayan, and Anand endeavoured to Indianise the English language by incorporating native words, idioms, expletives, rhythm, metaphors, symbols, and a plethora of transcribed phrases and expressions, thereby enriching the scope of the English language itself. This gave rise to a hybrid version of English, where we witness a rich Indian seasoning infused throughout the narrative. In response to the prevailing forces of nationalism, the creation of a fictional space was necessary. Consequently, both Raja Rao and Narayan situated their stories in their respective indigenous locales of Kanthapura and Malgudi, choosing to engage with Indian concerns rather than solely local or regional issues, thereby contributing to the definition of national identity. While the colonial encounter exposed previously unexplored places to the Western eye, the colonised responded through an inward journey into their roots, narrating hybrid stories with Indian nuances, yet employing methodologies influenced by the West.

Kanthapura, as a work of fiction, is a singular fusion of poetry and politics, which has been valued as “a magnificent guide to India” (Iyengar 397). Appreciating the uniqueness of Raja Rao's narrative approach in this novel, Meenakshi Mukherjee in her book, *The Perishable Empire*, comments, “Not only did he experiment with language in this novel . . . but also with narrative mode, challenging the generic expectations of the novel as prevalent in western Europe in the 1930s” (167). Thus, we find Rao utilising the form of a ‘sthalapurana’ so as to present a legendary tale of Gandhi, as witnessed in a small and remote village named Kanthapura. By his self-reflexive technique of narration, Rao attempts to and succeeds in unifying “myth with history, realism with fabulation, linearity

with a cyclic notion of time long before post-modernism made such enterprises trendy” (Mukherjee 167). As such the novel is evocative of mythical and legendary stories as characteristic of the Indian *Puranas*. Rao’s approach to Gandhian ideologies is as Iyengar remarks, “half poetical, half whimsical” (Iyengar 390), by which he attempts to present “a new species of fiction” (Iyengar 394), a tale which could have been concurrently familiar to many Indian villages. The impressive mixture of his breathless and data-packed narrative style, to match the tempo of Indian life, to his literary indigenisation, remarkable use of vernacular expression, incorporation of folk songs, numerous digressions, back and forth alteration, and phrasal repetitions- all has been perfected and sustained in the novel, by dint of his dazzling poetical undertones. In Achakka’s constant outpouring of words however, there is invariably the presence of a “careful ‘selection’” of words and amid the artlessness, a “consummate ‘art’” (Iyengar 392). Indeed, in the narrative, words flow like “streams of suggestions” to create what Iyengar terms, “a veritable Grammar of the Gandhian Myth” (Iyengar 395–396).

The novels deftly incorporate phrases and idioms related to Gandhi, providing a realistic depiction of the national struggle experienced by Indians, particularly the villagers who placed their unwavering trust in Gandhi's morality and authority. Raja Rao employs Indian words and expressions throughout the novel, effectively blending the English language with native cultural nuances while emphasising Gandhi's influence on the masses. The lexicon of the villagers is enriched with words such as harikatha, Gandhi-bhajans, as well as phrases and slogans such as ‘Gandhi Mahatma ki jai!’, ‘Jai Mahatma!’, ‘Satyanarayan Maharaj ki jai’, ‘Vandè Mataram’, ‘Inquilab Zindabad!’, ‘Don’t-touch-the-Government’, ‘Free spinning wheels in the name of the Mahatma’, ‘No violence, in the name of the Mahatma’. These expressions become ingrained in the villagers' speech, reflecting their familiarity and the widespread influence of Gandhi's teachings. The practise of fasting, self-defence, self-dependence, fraternity, and benevolence also becomes integral parts of the everyday life of the villagers in Kanthapura. These words, phrases, and slogans not only serve as a natural means of communication among the villagers but are strategically “transmuted into English” so as to successfully present Indianness or “a familiar landscape” through a foreign language or “coloured glasses” (Iyengar 391).

Raja Rao skilfully integrates Gandhi's principles of both diet and politics in his work *Kanthapura*, which he aptly refers to as a part of Gandhi Purana. Through the actions of the central character, Moorthy, and his leadership of the common people such as the peasants and the Pariahs, the novel effectively explores the national resistance against the colonisers. Food becomes a powerful tool within the narrative, challenging the prevalent caste system of society (R. Das 63). Significantly, the novel endorses Gandhi's belief in fasting as a weapon and endeavors to showcase his unwavering faith in the strength and commitment of the peasants who support and fight for the national cause (R. Das 63). As a result of Moorthy's influence, the villagers in Kanthapura refuse to pay revenue and other taxes, opting instead to engage in non-violent protests such as picketing toddy shops, practicing satyagraha, and participating in public fasting. These acts symbolise the profound impact of Gandhi's teachings on the impoverished, reinforcing the integral role of the peasants in advancing the nationalist movement.

Narrated through recollection, it is a tale of an agrarian village, which is also known as “the great granaries of trade” (Rao 1). It is famous for its vast supply of agricultural products such as cardamom, coffee, sugarcane and rice which are ultimately exported, in large numbers to the countries of the colonisers. Strictly controlled by the British, traditional occupations in the village are ignored in favour of the ever-increasing colonial demands. Thus, most people such as the village potters, or the coolies sourced from outside the village, are forced to join agriculture and plantation works, which for them is an adopted and unsatisfying occupation.

In Kanthapura, the practise of untouchability and caste-based segregation is prevalent. However, Moorthy, the protagonist, strives to uplift the outcastes and promote equality and democracy. Religion acts as a catalyst for nationalist sentiments, offering a unifying force beyond caste divisions. Through harikathas and bhajans, legendary depictions of Gandhi are shared, enlightening villagers about the deceptive nature of colonial rule. Moorthy's actions symbolically represent Gandhi's life and ideals. He becomes a Congress agent and encourages his supporters to do the same, advocating for the abandonment of foreign clothing and embracing Gandhian principles. He visits different quarters, including the untouchables', emphasising the importance of spinning to reduce dependence on foreign goods. He challenges the fear of caste pollution by redirecting it towards foreign products, aiming to dismantle the corrupt concept created by

those in power, including the colonisers. Moorthy educates the ignorant Brahmin Nanjamma on the workings of the colonial machinery, highlighting how the villagers' agricultural practices ultimately lead to their own economic exploitation:

Imagine, sister,' says he, seating himself, 'you grow rice in the fields. Then you have mill agents that come from Sholapur and Bombay and offer you very tempting rates. They pay you nineteen rupees a khanda of paddy instead of eighteen rupees eight annas, as Gold-bangle Somanna or Mota Madanna would pay. They will even pay you nineteen rupees and two annas, if you will sell more than twenty khandas. Then they take it away and put it into huge mills brought from their own country and run by their own men—and when the rice is husked and washed and is nothing but pulp, they sell it. . . .

You get six seers to the rupee, not to speak of the fodder husk, instead of seven, and your rice does not go into the stomach of Rangi or Madi, but goes to fatten some dissipated Red-man in his own country. . . .

And the next harvest's agents will come and. . . take away all your rice and you will have to go to Subba Chetty and buy perhaps the very rice that grew in your field, and at four seers a rupee too. The city people bring with them clothes and sugar and bangles that they manufacture in their own country, and you will buy clothes and sugar and bangles. You will give away this money and that money and you will even go to Bhatta for a loan. . . . You get poorer and poorer, and the Pariahs begin to starve, and one day all but Bhatta and Subba Chetty will have nothing else to eat but the pebbles of the Himavathy, and drink her waters. . . . (19–21)

The cycle of cultivation, importation, and repurchase of their own produce at inflated prices perpetuates hunger, famines, and dependence on the colonisers. This new economic system also displaces local occupations such as husking and benefits capitalist merchants such as Subba Chetty, as the villagers buy back their own products at exorbitant rates, often ending up with loans. This process of resource drain and impoverishment is a clear example of capitalist profiteering, and the generation of underdevelopment, as explained in the previous chapter. Moorthy's explanation underscores Gandhi's emphasis on self-sufficiency to counteract colonial economic control. Within the exploitative context of

their current farming practices, the resumption of traditional methods of agriculture and village economy become crucial elements in the struggle for independence and self-dependence.

The novel symbolically challenges and confronts caste taboos through the portrayal of food-related incidents. One significant moment occurs when Moorthy accepts milk from a Pariah woman, breaking societal norms. This act of accepting food from an untouchable serves as a testament to Moorthy's genuine belief in and adherence to his own preaching. Conversely, the refusal to break caste taboos is evident in Narsamma's (Moorthy's mother) determination to preserve the sanctity of her kitchen and Waterfall Venkamma's deliberate scheduling of her daughter's wedding feast on the day of Moorthy's return from jail. As a result, Moorthy is served food at the doorstep of his own house and is excluded from the wedding feast. These instances highlight the disrespect and demotion he faces, representing a form of punishment for crossing caste boundaries. Nevertheless, Moorthy remains steadfast in his nationalist pursuits.

Moorthy's "Don't-touch-the-Government" (Rao 70) campaign is designed on Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence. To strengthen his nationalist agenda, Moorthy quite sincerely adopts Gandhi's recommendation of fasting. Like Gandhi he believes that fasting would be a way of penance for the violence done on behalf of him, and would also prepare the body and the mind for his participation in a non-violent fight for the nation. During the three days of his fast, he decides to have only three cups of water, which he would obtain on his own, and asks Rangamma just for a handful of salt, to mix to the water. While fasting, Moorthy works at being calm and tries to send out "rays of love" (Rao 72) even to his enemies, as suggested by Gandhi. It reflects his steady transformation towards the path of non-violence. Although Moorthy has never met Gandhi personally, the vision of the Mahatma was holiest of all for him. This represents the profound impression of Gandhi's aura in the minds of his followers. Fasting plays a significant role in this change, allowing affection and steadfastness to grow within him. To a surprising extent, he begins to reflect Gandhi's philosophical insights, emphasising the paramount importance of non-violence in every aspect of their campaign. Moorthy sees himself and his fellow activists not merely as "soldiers at arms," but as "soldier saints" (Rao 145) following a spiritual path that seeks to bring harmony to the world through truth, love, and non-violence. However, just like Gandhi's ideas sometimes puzzled the public, Moorthy's statements also surpass the

comprehension of the villagers. Nevertheless, he achieves a heightened stature a result of his amalgamation of Gandhian politics, myths, and legends.

The plantation of coffee which is one of the major cash crops of India is the reason behind the steady colonial domination around the hills of Kanthapura. The Skeffington Coffee Estate is actually a colonial machinery which source large number of starving coolies from various places for the heavy plantation work. As their traditional occupations are rendered unprofitable, mostly due to the industrialisation and modernisation of the society, the labourers are forced to leave their traditional businesses in search of new, non-traditional jobs. While their lives are full of hardships, due to their unfavourable jobs, and lack of proper food and hygiene, the coolies are interestingly given free access to the toddy booth. Toddy, as a colonial tool, serves to dehumanise and exploit the coolies, draining the meagre earnings they manage to make. This deliberate tactic ensures that the workers remain perpetually impoverished, preventing them from attaining enough financial stability to break free from their circumstances (R. Das 64). By strategically manipulating the coolies' economic situation, the colonisers effectively trap them in a cycle of artificial poverty, denying them the opportunity to improve their conditions and perpetuating their dependence on the colonisers (R. Das 64). As the narrator ominously remarks, "when one came to the Blue Mountain one never left it" (Rao 62) and "pot after pot of toddy is brought to you, and you drink and you sway your shoulders this way and that, and ... money goes this way and that" (Rao 63). The Skeffington Coffee Estate exemplifies the disturbing motif of objectifying working women as commodities to satisfy the sexual desires of the sahib in charge. Periodically, he selects a new woman from among the coolies to fulfil his sexual pleasures, treating them as mere objects for his gratification. This dehumanising practice reflects the exploitation and abuse of power, perpetuating a harmful and oppressive environment for the women workers of the estate.

Once again, food takes centre stage, this time with the transformation of a seemingly ordinary ingredient like salt into a potent political symbol (P. Roy, *Alimentary* 78). Gandhi's historic Dandi March, where he engages in the manufacturing of salt as an act of civil disobedience against the oppressive salt taxes, ignites a fervent nationalist spirit. The public's solidarity with Gandhi grows, uniting government employees and the unemployed in their shared struggle. Together, they boycott foreign cloth and stage protests at toddy and cigarette shops, which were emblematic of the vices perpetuated by

the colonisers (R. Das 64). With their growing national zeal, they become fearless of everything, and as the narrator describes, “day after day men go out to the sea to make salt, and day after day men are beaten back and put into prison, and yet village after village sends its women and men, and village after village grows empty, for the call of the Mahatma had sung in their hearts, and they were for the Mahatma and not for the Government” (Rao 141). The people become this brave because their fight is directed by Gandhi’s idea of the soul force, which is greater than physical strength, as even the Gita says, “the sword can split asunder the body, but never the soul” (Rao 124).

It should be noticed that the major fights occur in *Kanthapura* regarding food items. For instance, the fight in Skeffington Coffee Estate occurs when the volunteers reach there to stop the coolies from drinking. The fearlessness of the volunteers, charged with the power of fasting and truthfulness, is juxtaposed with the pitiable coolies who poisoned under the regular intoxication of toddy, march out for more, like dumb animals with dark, sweaty faces, bulging stomach, wobbly pace and eyes fixed to the earth (Rao 158–159). Another instance is the people’s refusal to pay their exorbitant revenues for their agricultural fields, whereby the colonisers decide to forcefully harvest their produce as the penalty. It results in the execution of field satyagraha by the villagers, which ultimately results in a tedious battle (Rao 189). Also, resistance is presented through food, as the prisoners refuse to consume the cheap and low-quality food that they are provided and instead vomit it out if they are force fed (Rao 165). In the prison caste divisions are once again broken and recreated with the defence of the nation as their common agenda.

The power of fasting to purify and fortify the soul, as stated by Gandhi, is justified during the final battle depicted in the novel. The volunteers fight relentlessly throughout the day, devoid of food and water, driven by the greater mental energy and agony that propels them forward. Drawing strength from what Gandhi referred to as soul-force, these true satyagrahis willingly surrender their earthly possessions, including their fields and harvest, in the name of the country. The destructive nature of violence becomes evident when a misguided attack from the volunteers involves the unintentional breaking of a gas cylinder, creating a sound resembling gunshots. This critical mistake undermines their non-violent satyagraha, and they come to realise that no mercy can be expected thereafter. Consequently, *Kanthapura* is lost forever, illustrating the detrimental effects of violence, and affirming the validity of Gandhi's theory on the power of non-violence. The narrative

concludes with the political truce achieved through the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. However, many young individuals like Moorthy become disillusioned, harbouring doubts about the truce and subsequently aligning themselves with Nehru, whom they perceive as an advocate of equal distribution. Despite this, the villagers stand united in solidarity with Gandhi, viewing him as an almost divine figure and firmly believing in his infallibility.

R.K. Narayan's contribution as a writer is highly regarded, with Iyengar recognising him as a true man of letters (Iyengar 358). Given Narayan's deceptively simple yet minutely detailed style of narration, and his attempts to constantly defer from the direct use of, or comments on Gandhian philosophy, his works have been the bearer of several critical and misconstrued attacks. Moreover, as no writer, however conscious, can remain isolated from the influences his social environment, Narayan too gave voice to the phenomenon of Gandhi, but the nature of his comments has always been suppressed down to a subtle and minimal level and are encased within the stimulating shells of humour and irony, which are the hallmark of his novels.

Narayan's fictional world, Malgudi, revolves around middle-class characters. His artistic brilliance lies in his focused exploration of limited spaces, revealing the idiosyncrasies and eccentricities of his characters through comical situations. Inspired by small towns and villages in India, Malgudi serves as a metonymic representation of the country itself, with its inhabitants realistically portrayed and demonstrating their kinship with all of humanity (Iyengar 360). In his perfection of English, there is always the emphasis upon Indianness, and his attention is caught not by the intelligentsia, but by the chaotic and polyphonic voices of the middle class and the underbelly. He is drawn in to record the responses to the centripetal forces of nationalism, as communicated from these peripheral parts of the society. The presentation of his characters is devoid of exaggeration, allowing them to shine in their natural humanistic light. Even the seemingly mundane plots of his stories reflect everyday reality, making them universally relatable (Iyengar 365). This simplicity was necessary as Narayan wrote during a time of anticolonial sentiments, where "an even-toned minimalist representation" was essential for a wide reading audience and a pan-Indian appeal (Mukherjee 172).

Narayan's simplicity of art, considered by some as a technical flaw, is in fact the very medium through which he conveys a truthful portrayal of India. His canvas primarily consists of the middle class, and simplicity is crucial in capturing their colloquial speech

and daily lives. Through simplicity, Narayan achieves a technical perfection, enabling his narration to be both local and universal in its artistic dimensions. Like Rao, Narayan subtly incorporates myths and legends into his novels. Irony, mild ridicule, and humour with a touch of tragedy, define his writing, with the essence of his fiction lying in the renewal of life, love, beauty, and peace (Iyengar 385). Hunger serves as a recurring motif, representing various hungers such as physiological, mental, spiritual, physical, and material. In Narayan's novels, Gandhian philosophy is often caricatured, revealing how the common masses perceive and utilise these philosophies for their own selfish ends. The portrayal of food not only depicts materialistic pursuits but also exposes hypocrisies and the desire for subversion among the middle class.

The Vendor of Sweets reflects Gandhi's idea of self-discipline as a means to achieve spiritualism and self-rule at a national level, a philosophy which being too farfetched, remains baffling to most of his followers. As such, Gandhi's rejection of spices and non-vegetarian dishes, is reflected in the figure of Jagan, a sweetmeat vendor who eats only bland vegetarian food, simply for the sake of survival, and uses Gandhian philosophy to tackle various problems in his life. The novel begins with the protagonist's comment on Gandhi's control of the palate, "Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self"—a philosophy only superficially understood by him. The listener enquires about the necessity of self-conquest, to which Jagan answers, "I do not know, but all our sages advise us so" (Narayan, *Vendor* 7). Throughout the novel Jagan keeps on following Gandhi's ideals and applies it in his personal experiments, such as giving up of all spices, salt, sugar, rice and instead surviving on a daily gruel made of wheat, honey and greens. However, it is evident that he fails to understand Gandhi's reasons for this advice of abstention. He also spins his own clothes and sells the extra to the local handloom committee, as advised by Gandhi. At his shop he tries to read the Gita, like Gandhi, but at the same time keeps an ear on all the activities of the kitchen and the front stall. He also avoids full payment of taxes by leaving out a part of his income from entering the record book. His indifference towards the poor and hungry people staring at the sweets in his shop, negates his very declaration of public service, which has been his reason of starting the business in the first place. Thus, Jagan's hypocrisy is evident as he is unable to understand the enigmatic Gandhi, and therefore follows his principles as an end in itself, and not as a means to achieve spiritual advancement. As Iyengar remarks, "It is characteristic of Jagan that good sense and oddity achieve splendid coexistence in him; and even Gandhism and the Gita are applied only

within reason” (380).

From his childhood Jagan has been influenced by his father’s as well as Gandhi’s philosophies, resulting in “his magnum opus on *Nature Cure and Natural Diet*” (Narayan, *Vendor* 15), where he discusses all his proposals on health and diet in detail. However, it has not yet been published, which may point towards the shortcomings and impracticability of his theories. Gandhi’s abhorrence for medicines is reflected in Jagan when he advises his wife fried margosa flowers (Narayan, *Vendor* 21) as a natural remedy of headache, which was later found to be a symptom of brain tumour. Unlike Gandhi, Jagan fails to persuade his wife for natural cures and instead his suggestions lead to clash between the couple.

Jagan’s contradictions are visible when after his wife’s death, Jagan becomes obsessed with feeding Mali, and spends the whole day cooking for him, even though he preaches the benefits of eating less, and eating only for survival. Also, he goes on amassing wealth as he considers continuing his business is his duty, as mentioned in the Gita, and flatters himself with the notion that it is the sole support of his workers, his being “the biggest sweet shop in the country” (Narayan, *Vendor* 41).

Jagan’s quest for the simplicity of life and control of the palate is juxtaposed with Mali’s desire to enrich his life with new experiences and his readiness to enlarge his dietetic boundaries. Thus with Mali’s decision to leave for America, so as to learn the art of novel writing, Jagan suffers from the customary fear of wine, women and meat and other such things which might corrupt both the body and soul of Mali. However, Mali is far to be impressed or controlled either by the philosophies of Gandhi or the theories of his father, as he starts taking meat as a matter of convenience, and also suggests his father the same: “It will solve the problem of useless cattle in India and we won’t have to import food from America” (Narayan, *Vendor* 58).

Mali’s return to India with the foreigner girl, Grace, whom he calls his wife, poses even greater problems for Jagan. He becomes anxious and the earlier proud father starts avoiding people lest somebody stop him “to inquire about his son and daughter-in-law”, as everything about them “had become an inconvenient question” (Narayan, *Vendor* 61). Food being an intimate and sacred matter, people become most eager to learn, “what dietary arrangements were made at home and if they cooked meat” (Narayan, *Vendor* 61).

To soothe his mental turmoil, Jagan has to turn to his reference book, the Gita, which was forgotten earlier in the snare of Mali's letters.

Gandhi's method of peaceful non-cooperation comes to Jagan's rescue when he decides to ignore Mali's demand of fifty-one thousand dollars for his business. With Mali and Grace sneering at his sweetmeat vending business of a lifetime, Jagan realises that his habit of accumulating wealth is the root of all his unhappiness, and its greed has also ruined Mali's senses. A change of attitude towards benevolence, like that of Gandhi, is visible as he decides to reduce the prices of all items from the next day, so as to serve and benefit more people with his high-quality sweets. However, it again becomes a contradictory situation as he personally follows Gandhi's advice of a sugar free diet, but in this case deems it right to wash away his sins at the cost of other people's health, by facilitating more sugar consumption.

Also, Jagan's resolution of reduction lacks a strong ground as confused in the complexities of his own principles, he fails to consider every aspect of his decision. Thus, unable to provide a straight answer, Jagan reads the Gita to his confused workers so as to give a hint of his surprising reduction policy. Inspired by the Gita's advice, and Gandhi's fight against the ills of his nation, Jagan presents his decision to fight the evils of his son, by reducing his own income. Although his decision was hasty and later annulled, it did achieve two positive results. For one, many people were able to have quality products at cheap prices and secondly, it laid bare the food adulteration business that has crept up across Malgudi, and can be a matter of concern in any part of the nation.

In the later part of the novel Jagan realises the narrowness of his existence with his introduction to Chinna Dorai, who came asking for help in completing and installing his master's unfinished statue of a goddess. Fascinating Jagan with his talks, the man succeeds in clearly pointing out Jagan's contradictions as well as his lack of both mental eagerness and physical strength to perform necessary duties. In his presence Jagan's "Sweetmeat-vending, money and his son's problems seemed remote and unrelated to him" (Narayan, *Vendor* 115). And, "The edge of reality itself was beginning to blur" as Jagan focused on the man (Narayan, *Vendor* 115). He finally realises that his existence has been rather narrow, his problems rather small.

His new experience creates in him a sudden but steady change, “He was no longer the father of Mali, the maker of sweets and gatherer of money each day; he was gradually, unnoticed becoming something else” (Narayan, *Vendor* 127). He feels like a new world has been opened to him where he has achieved a “new *janma*” (Narayan, *Vendor* 181). Mali’s presence no longer awes him and he becomes non-resistant to the change of circumstances. It results in the barrier between father and son to grow impregnable. Jagan remembers his days as a satyagrahi and decides to act for the truth in his personal life too. Thus, he gathers courage to talk directly to Grace, as a last trial to save her and Mali’s relationship. Learning about Grace and Mali’s unmarried relationship, actualises Jagan’s unthinkable fears, and shocks him out of his business resolution, so much so that he again starts shooing away the school children saying, there was, “No sense in upsetting the social balance” (Narayan, *Vendor* 140), as people tend to expect considerations forever, due to their lack of self-respect.

Although Jagan champions Gandhi’s fight against the evils of caste system, he himself is not free from the dictates of caste system, as he tries to convert Grace to his own caste by marrying her to Mali. However, when the marriage seems out of the picture, Jagan tries to escape the “evil radiations” (Narayan, *Vendor* 145) of the unmarried couple, by doing everything that is required to insulate himself such as closing their common ventilator and giving up the use of their common passage in the house. That most people were unable to decipher Gandhi’s philosophy or accept his friendship with the untouchables is deftly presented as Jagan is outcasted the moment he joins the national struggle.

Before the conceptualisation of his food theories, a glimpse of his married life tells us that Jagan has been a gormandiser. Given this, it is amazing how he achieved his control of the palate, even though he failed to achieve perfection in other spheres. It realises Gandhi’s very fear of killing the spirit of the vow, by only exercising physical restraint, and thereby reducing the chances of spiritual accomplishment. As a result, Jagan is unable to reach his actual destiny and gets converted into a hypocrite instead.

The novel presents intoxicating drinks as one of the reasons for the downfall of people. Mali’s arrest due to the presence of alcohol in his car, reminds one of Gandhi’s warnings against intoxicating drinks, which generate violence, animal passion and disintegration in human nature and deters the development of the nation. Jagan decides to

counter this problem by supporting the truth. Thus, choosing to be passive towards Mali's needs he says: "If what you say is true, well, truth will win. If it is not true, there is nothing I can do" (Narayan, *Vendor* 189).

Adopting the life of an ascetic Jagan seemingly renounces his earthly possessions as he gives his last orders to the cousin, regarding the responsibility of Mali and his business. For Mali, he says, "A dose of prison life is not a bad thing. It may be just what he needs now" (Narayan, *Vendor* 191). Jagan feels that this incident would be able to etch some amount of changes in the boy. As for Grace he is ready to buy her ticket if she would leave. Thus, Jagan frees himself from all his responsibilities and leaves for Mempi while also ensuring the cousin that he would support them with advice as well as finance, whenever necessary. His offer of assistance speaks of his extreme concern for his employees and his unending love for Mali, even after his utmost betrayal. In doing this, Jagan gets rid of his hypocrisies and grows to achieve his spiritual motive, which has been the sole reason for all of Gandhi's endeavours.

R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* can be read as a critique of Gandhian ideologies of brahmacharya and fasting. The novel presents the metamorphosis of Raju from a corrupt tourist guide to a seemingly honest spiritual guide. The story adopts a dual narrative technique whereby the comments of the omnipresent narrator are strategically blended with that of Raju's own recollections, so as to present a better understanding of the story. Food imageries are used in the novel to provide solidity to Raju's story; to present a flavour of Malgudi and its steady development; and also to display the religious superstitions and the political vitality of the peasantry/villagers of Mangal. The scarcity of food during the draught and its denial during Raju's perpetual fast, is used to reveal the instigative tendency of the peasantry class and the way Raju is led to sacrifice himself so as to dissolve their unrest.

While the omnipresent narrator gives us an impartial access to the working of the villagers' minds, the subjective narration of his own story lets Raju to become more acceptable to the reader, as he strives to justify the reasons of his dishonest nature. What may apparently seem as a half-baked technique on Narayan's part, is actually a ploy to lend a certain intimacy and realism to the story. It is a part of authorial design to humanise the deceptive Raju. Oscillating between the narrative modes, Narayan succeeds in revealing the practicable difficulty of practicing personal morality, and this is an unsettling

facet of our contemporary lives. Although Narayan's spontaneity may not contribute much to the aesthetic sphere, he possesses a replete source of sheer emotional power, by which, he successfully reveals the uncertainties and disjointedness of life, which mark its every stage.

The novel also portrays the impact of modernisation on Malgudi, as it undergoes a gradual transformation. The introduction of railways, though detrimental to the traditional economy, turns Malgudi into a thriving commercial town with a booming tourism sector. Raju, who possesses a talent for thriving in any situation, seizes the opportunity and becomes a busy shopkeeper at the station, as well as a renowned tourist guide. He takes advantage of the financial resources of the travellers. However, his encounter with Rosie becomes a pivotal moment in his life, as their intense sexual attraction disrupts their respective family relationships. Unable to meet the demands of his customers, Raju loses his shop at the station. Determined to capitalise on Rosie's passion for dancing, he helps her achieve local stardom. Yet, driven by insatiable greed for money, he resorts to forging Rosie's signature, leading him to a two-year prison sentence.

Released from jail, Raju finds himself jobless and hungry and the desire to secure an easy food source, drives him to his next mistake to be committed in Mangal, which later on is turned into the site of his forced expiation. He plays upon the blind religious faith and superstitions of the Mangal villagers, and accepts the enforced role of their spiritual guide. There he learns very quickly that, "The essence of sainthood seemed to lie in one's ability to utter mystifying statements" (Narayan, *Guide* 52). As a result, he provides the villagers with metaphorical and roundabout solutions for their daily problems. In this way he assumes the role of corrupt Swamis and takes full advantage of their blind faith. He starts his philosophical discourse very smartly, with the necessity of consuming good food, so as to motivate the people unconsciously, to provide his dietary needs. As the devotees present him with various edibles, Raju devises another clever way to check his cravings as can be seen in the following lines:

He had a subtle way of mentioning his special requirements . . . He enunciated some principle of living such as that on a special Wednesday he always liked to make his food with rice flour and such-and-such spice, and he mentioned it with an air of seriousness so that his listeners took it as a spiritual need, something of the man's inner discipline to keep his soul in shape and his understanding with the

Heavens in order. (Narayan, *Guide* 104)

However, although ignorant and superstitious the villagers are, Raju cannot cheat them for long as he finds himself in a dilemma. Their extreme admiration for his words makes him check his own tongue, while his silence is also accepted by them with utmost gratitude. Thus, Gandhi's recommendation of the choice of words, which is also an ideal of brahmacharya, is twisted and turned around: "A vow of silence was indicated, but there was greater danger in silence" (Narayan, *Guide* 30). As such, although freed from the prison life, Raju finds himself entangled in the prison of his devotees' expectations.

Their constant attention towards Raju wavers when the absence of rain results in a situation of drought. It causes failure of crops and the death of cattle, with the villagers quarrelling for food and water. With their granaries emptying, food prices rise steadily, ultimately leading to a bitter conflict among the villagers. It reminds one of the volatility of the ignorant peasants to initiate a fight even at the slightest provocation. Instigations and litigations appear to be a tradition of the landed gentry, as the narrator remarks: "anything seemed possible in this village. All the brothers in the place were involved in litigation against one another; and anyone might do anything in the present sensational developments" (Narayan, *Guide* 97). As Raju becomes worried of losing his comfortable position in the village, he threatens to fast, until the villagers' fight is dissolved. This declaration results in the development of a base for Raju's sacrifice through fasting.

Velan's brother, unable to connect the sublimity of fasting to their petty quarrels, simply tells the villagers that, "the Swami doesn't want food any more. Don't take any food to him" (Narayan, *Guide* 101). As the villagers misunderstand his theory, and think that he will be fasting to induce the rains, Raju lands permanently on trouble. They compare Raju's enforced fast to that of Gandhi's political fasts as Velan remarks, "Your penance is similar to Mahatma Gandhi's. He has left us a disciple in you to save us", and thereby enlarge his stature on a national level (Narayan, *Guide* 106). This instance also proves the vitality of the peasants and the common man to build or break a man, as they were building Raju's reputation as a saint while terminating his alimentary needs.

With his declaration of fasting, peace is restored and a sense of optimistic excitement and fervour spreads in the village. It makes them forget their quarrels and they flock together in huge numbers to pay respects to Raju, while Velan and others offer to

stay with him at all times of the day. As the news of his fast spread far and wide around the country, Raju finds himself trapped in the “enormity of his own creation” (Narayan, *Guide* 109). With the attachment of fame and glamour to his fasting, the environment of surveillance that Raju experienced during his life in prison is regenerated, as he now finds himself under the surveillance of his followers.

It is pitiable how Raju has to conceal his food intake to protect his image, while food thoughts haunt him constantly. It kills what Gandhi had warned, the very essence of fasting and penance, but Raju is unable to do otherwise. His extreme hunger removes all his cravings for specific food, and even the stale food left over from the previous day becomes palatable to him: “He sat down behind the pedestal, swallowed his food in three or four large mouthfuls, making as little noise as possible. It was stale rice, dry and stiff and two days old; it tasted awful, but it appeased his hunger. He washed it down with water” (Narayan, *Guide* 235).

Through the neutral tone of the narrator, Narayan ironically dramatises the carnivalesque underpinning of life in India, as the common mass become eager to turn any potential situation into a full-blown spectacle. As such, contrary to Raju’s enforced fast, we see “picnic groups” spread around the temple areas with people obtrusively enjoying their meals, with Raju wondering: “what they might be eating- rice boiled with a pinch of saffron, melted ghee-and what were the vegetables? Probably none in this drought. The sight tormented him” (Narayan, *Guide* 234). Raju’s plight is now similar to the shepherd boy whom he has witnessed munching the banana peel, after eating the fruit, which Raju has once used as a bait, to send message to his devotees.

The change of heart that his mother, Rosie, and even the prison life cannot etch in Raju, is ultimately made possible with the lack of food. The unbearable hunger quickly makes him realise the faults of his life and forego all his qualms of aristocracy as he feels tired of the whole situation. As he begins to think clearly, his deceptive thoughts get replaced by compassion and kindness. It reminds one of Gandhi’s idealisation of the cognitive clarity of a fasted body. In this way, Raju is forced to observe all the ideals of brahmacharya, although he constantly tried to subvert it. In his endeavour of fasting Raju is larger supported by Velan, who keeps a sympathetic fast and eats saltless and spice less boiled greens. Velan here can be compared to Hermann Kallenbach who had been Gandhi’s chief companion in his dietary experiments, during their stay at the Tolstoy

Farm. As Gandhi would have said, removal from the harmful food and thoughts, ultimately prepares Raju to live up to his devotees' expectations as he decides:

Why not give the poor devil a chance? Raju said to himself, instead of hankering after food which one could not get anyway. He felt enraged at the persistence of food-thoughts. With a sort of vindictive resolution he told himself, 'I'll chase away all thoughts of food. For the next ten days I shall eradicate all thoughts of tongue and stomach from my mind.' (Narayan, *Guide* 237)

At last, there seems development in his psyche. A life of abstinence brings its positive results, as removed from the lures and lusts of the material life, we see Raju, the lifelong trickster, trying for once, to live up to peoples' expectations. It should be noted that his psychological development is initiated only in the absence of food and the presence of unbearable, unfulfillable hunger, as he ultimately realises the taste of pain, suffering and worry. Thus, strengthened with a powerful control of the mind, Raju decides to go through the ordeal sincerely. As the narrator remarks, for the first time, Raju engages in something in which he is not personally interested. Lack of food and his continuous chant of prayers numbs his awareness (Gandhi mentions experiencing the same feeling during his fasts) and he experiences "a peculiar floating feeling, which he rather enjoyed" (Narayan, *Guide* 238). He feels privileged for what seems like a pure enjoyment of the soul as he imagines that, "This enjoyment is something Velan cannot take away from me" (Narayan, *Guide* 238).

Eventually Raju's fast seems to gain global recognition as various national forces and even an American man, James J. Malone, arrive to witness and support Raju's stunt of fasting, thereby positioning Raju besides the immensity of Gandhi. Saving Raju becomes a top priority of the government, as his health steadily deteriorates. However, Raju's new found sense of duty, prevents him from listening to their pleas as he requests Velan for the last time, to carry him to the river for the scheduled prayer. The novel ends with Raju most probably hallucinating the arrival of rains among the hills, and thus feeling that he has succeeded, he sinks down.

On the other hand, R. K. Narayan's *The Dark Room*, stands in stark contrast as it presents the inapplicability of Gandhi's theories in some aspects of life. It presents women as the major follower of Gandhi's theory of non-violent protest and subversion through

the control of food and fasting. The protagonist Savitri, a prey to conflicting emotions, is tethered to the numerous domestic roles that are usually expected of a woman. Under the pressure of her daily responsibilities, she has to sacrifice her own interests. Despite the sincere performance of her duties, her husband never tires of criticising her. Food in this novel becomes the hot subject of Ramani's disapproval as he wants his meals strictly according to his tastes, thus reminding one of the typical patriarchal male ego. However, he is unable to get what he wishes, as long as the control of the kitchen remains in the hands of Savitri.

The kitchen being her testing ground, remains the only space through which Savitri can exert and validate her power and position in the family. Here the male cook, even though a patriarchal product, is bound to carry out her orders. When it comes to food, she controls everything that is to be prepared and takes charge of safeguarding all the rare and costly food items. As such, the daily menu irks Ramani as he remarks, "“Brinjals, cucumber, radish and greens, all the twelve months in the year and all the thirty days in the month. I don't know when I shall have a little decent food to eat”" and "“Why do you torment me with this cucumber for the dozenth time?”" (Narayan, *Dark 2*). Although these words are aimed to berate Savitri, it brings out his own helplessness in the intimate matters of food.

Thus, the restriction over food can be read as Savitri's way of retorting back to the daily criticism meted out to her by her husband. Seemingly inspired by Gandhi's control of palate, Savitri's frugality in the preparation of the daily menu, becomes her tool to control her husband and keep the household in order. Fed up with her daily humiliations, Savitri periodically retreats to the dark room, a space previously used in Indian households for storing items that also served as a retreat (Iyengar 371). Her fasting during this period is again reflective of Gandhi's theory of non-violent protest, which is in this case staged against the oppressive environment created by Ramani.

However, Ramani turns a deaf ear to her protests as her recourse to the dark room, her fasting and even her absence from her home, fails to move him. Instead of worrying for his wife, we see him adopting a sadistic attitude to hurt her by his sheer ignorance. Also, we see both Ramani and the cook enjoying the freedom resulted by the absence of Savitri, to change the menu or to carry out any reforms that they had previously wished for. Thus, although Savitri seems to be an ardent follower of Gandhi, in this case Gandhi's

theories fail her, thus proving its inapplicability in some aspects of life. Nevertheless, Savitri's return to her home, braving all the humiliation of the past and the future, marks her need for material comforts and familial life. It also at the same time underlines the undying nature of her protest, as it serves to reconstitute the control of the kitchen in her hands, thereby reflecting the unyielding spirit of a brave revolutionary.

Thus, the selected novels epitomise fasting and the control of food, as the methods to calm the senses, to gain perspectives, to bring peace and to spread and sustain Gandhi's message of non-violence. As derived by the analyses of the novels, Gandhi's dietary ideals are presented in Jagan's attitude towards Mali; in the Kanthapura villagers' solidarity against the colonisers; and in the sustenance of peace and dissolution of fight among the villagers of Mangal, and to finally purify Raju's corruptive, opportunistic soul; as a symbol of Savitri's unyielding protest against her husband's vicious nature.

It is remarkable that Jagan, Raju, and Savitri, all of them desired to change, as their dreams buy them a few moments of release from their agonising present. However, as they belonged to the complicated strata of the middle class such dreams were rendered impossible, for they were too scared to embrace the uncertainties of life and at the same time were given to the materialistic pleasures of life and were worried about the maintenance of their status as well as social image, which they found too hard to let go of. This is a major reason of their faux renunciation –renunciation of a kind from which they continuously dreamed to be rehabilitated to comfortable positions.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated the way Gandhi used food as a moral tool of self-discipline, and non-violent subversion. Apart from the ideals of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*, the subversion of the British autonomous culture, could most remarkably be seen in Gandhi's rejection of food- at times partial and at times complete; his choice of diet and vegetarianism; and his bodily experiments- all of which contributed to his political disposition. In his autobiography Gandhi makes it clear that his dietetic philosophies were independent of religious influence, and instead based on his inner principles (Gandhi, *Autobiography* 402) and personal experiences, as well as routine experiments, which mark a deep impact in the construction of Gandhi's supranational self. His choice and maintenance of vegetarianism can be seen as a severe test of his character, of his eligibility

and his integrity to become a world leader. His remarkable success in his control of the palate, guaranteed his natural success in the world scenario. His steadfastness earned him not just fame but also the ideal base upon which his lifelong philosophies were constructed.

While studying Gandhi one can occasionally chance upon the inconsistency of some of his ideas. This is because his ideas were constantly evolving due the new experiences that he sought throughout his life. Appreciating the dynamism of Gandhi's life, Louis Fischer once remarked, "an interview with him is a voyage of discovery, and he himself is sometimes surprised at the things he says" (qtd. in Guha, *Gandhi: The Years* 655). Thus, engaged with a multitude of personal and public concerns, Gandhi made it sure to practise whatever he preached. This fact is precisely summed up by Alter as he says that, "his perspective was at once cosmological, biological, and theological to such an extent that it is almost impossible to make a hard-and-fast distinction between filth, faith, food, and the infinite; almost impossible, that is, unless one reads between the lines of a life which, ultimately, has been construed as all too human" (51).

The selected novels represent how the common people perceived and at times misunderstood Gandhi's dietetic philosophies as a means to achieve national peace and freedom. To summarise, *Kanthapura* and *The Vendor of Sweets* represent the public comprehension of Gandhi and the way they applied his ideas in their personal lives. These applications however, came along with the price of excommunication of those who openly practised it. Examples are those of deeming Jagan and Moorthy as outcastes due their revolutionary struggle for freedom, not only from the colonial crutch, but also from the evil practices and mere taboos of the society. These instances are expectable as historically Gandhi himself was excommunicated due to his decision to go to England. Both the novels reveal how people applied Gandhi's ideal to their personal lives, with a majority of them opposing it. On the other hand, *The Guide* represents the forceful application of Gandhi's ideal of fasting on Raju. Fasting is used as a symbol of sacrifice so as to achieve the desirable end. This novel symbolises the vitality of the people belonging to the grass root level, to build or break a man. Contrary to the above-mentioned novels, *The Dark Room* undertakes a different and remarkable approach so as to present the incompatibility of Gandhian ideals in some domestic situations.

Gandhi does not appear directly in any of the novels, but the charisma of his enigmatic presence is felt throughout the fictions, thus suggesting the place of importance

that Gandhi generated in the minds of Indians. Similarly, the rest of Indian novelists writing during that time have also utilised the nature of Gandhi's aura upon the Indian psyche, but mostly Gandhi's role is included by strong references. This is because as Iyengar quite truly observes, "he is sure to turn the novel into a biography if he is given a major (or the central part). The best thing for the contemporary novelist would be to keep Gandhi in the background but make his influence felt indirectly" (372). Gandhi's presence makes the background of the plot more realistic and also plays the necessary role of reflecting on and responding to the contemporary crises.

As evident, from the study, the control of food was for Gandhi, one of the major ways to prepare the soul for new forms of non-violent resistance. This preparation of the self was necessary for Gandhi believed that, "self-rule at a national level was meaningless without self-rule at the most banal and intimate bodily level" (P. Roy, *Alimentary* 26). As regards to his numerous fasts, Gandhi, as Alter remarks, believed that, "fasting is a form of communication wherein those involved end up articulating Truth, even though they may subscribe to radically different views of reality and antithetical positions on right and wrong, good and evil" (Alter 41).