

The Protagonist's Evolution through *Ashramas* (Life Stages)

**To Surmount the Entanglements of *Maya* (Material Goods) In 'The *Vendor of Sweets*': A
Critical Analysis**

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Abstract

Human life is an important phase in the spiritual journey of a soul. This life is the right time to meet the Creator of the Universe. The blessed souls are very rare who feel the quest for self in their mind and strive to walk upon the spiritual path. Vedanta philosophy assures the humble seeker that it is the grace of the Almighty that whosoever treads one step towards Him, His divine light guides the seeker to discover the real self. R.K. Narayan's profound and thorough study reveals that his works are the reservoir of Indian philosophy. Every component is handled and illustrated with great skill. The quintessence of Indian values and beliefs is brought into attention. The quest for self, initiated by the individual spirit culminates in the discovery of self. Narayan's two novels named *The Vendor of Sweets* and *The Guide* taken together substantiate this stage of discernment through the actions of its protagonists.

Key Words: Quest, Vedanta, evolution, entanglements, deeds and liberation

Critical Analysis:

In *The Vendor of Sweets*, Jagan, the protagonist is a whole India in itself and ambassador of its customs in superior and contemptible facets. He carries on full trust in religious convictions and in Mahatma Gandhi too. Jagan obtains his insight and resolution from the old Indian established astuteness whenever he accesses the confusion of standards and morals entrenched in social order and customs. The *Brahamgyaan* of the *Gita* and the *Puranas* offers all the knowledge he wants to unknot the convolution of soul's existence. The philosophy the *Gita* applies a remarkable effect on the mentality of Jagan. The worldly affairs are certainly surplus with him, but in his dealings, he obtains force and

mental nourishment from the holy books. Jagan mentions the *Gita* for corroborating his perspective. He stimulates all his associates to make use of the time by acquiring knowledge from the *Gita* and not to dissipate time by talking about wealth only. Jagan reads the relevant section from the *Gita* where Lord Krishna himself opts to become the charioteer to Arjuna and enlightens him about the requirement to struggle for a righteous cause. Jagan gives sermons on the *Gita*, and these thoughts are so intensely embedded in his perception that every time he faces any problem he rings a bell to the divine knowledge of *Bhagwad Gita*.

The life cycle Jagan's life is corresponding to the ancient Indian religious convictions that proclaim,

“A man's life time is to be divided into four strictly differentiated stages (ashramas). The first is that of the student, he who is to be taught (sishya), he who attends, waits upon and serves his guru. The second is that of the householder (grhastha), which is the significant period of man's maturity and enactment of his due role in the world. The third is that of retirement to the forest for meditation (Vanaprastha), and the fourth is that of the mendicant, wandering sage (Bhikshu). Moksa is for the latter two.”¹

The account of the novel is told from the standpoint of its central character Jagan, who has remained a learner, a householder, and a person of dealings and an austere sequentially. His duration of student time is interrupted by his indifference towards studies. In his reminiscent disposition, Jagan discloses his course through the phase of householder ship. The memories of his marital time are flashing in his psyche, and he fulfils all the stipulations of that stage. Through his stream of consciousness, one comes to know how he was wedded to a girl selected by his parents named Ambika and how the deity on Badri Hill was revered and worshipped following that, he was blessed with a son Mali. Jagan experiences an internal renovation while transporting his concentration the *Grihastha Ashrama* to the *Vanaprastha Ashrama*. According to Manu, “One must enter the third stage when one becomes a grandfather, or one's skin begins to show wrinkles or one's hair turn grey. When one's bodily powers wane, it is time

to depart to the forest and prepare oneself for a genuine life of the spirit. The primary objective of this stage is to escape from the bustle of life into the solitude of the forest to meditate on the higher problems.”²

In Jagan's departure towards *Vanaprastha Ashrama* is provided with an expressively reasonable depiction of the unrelated powers, which make his ultimate withdrawal an expected effect of self-appointed conditions. The Bearded Man does not employ the expression *Vanaprastha*, but that of the garden, where he has discussions with Jagan, brings to mind the reminiscences of the ancient reclusive *ashrams* in forests where the ascetics were living and meditating for the discovery of self. The garden is evocative of the existence of the natural world that the *Vanaprastha* was expected to subsist. The moment Jagan adopts the life *Vanaprastha ashram*, his perception that was set on ordinary affairs in the past, now comprehends the genuineness about him and the temperament of subsistence. The idea of regeneration is surprisingly apparent when he discards the worldly life, disturbed and dishonoured by his son Mali.

In the Vedanta philosophy, the depiction of the *Sthita Prajna* becomes remarkably similar to Jagan's resolution to relinquish the life of the family circle as he feels that at the age of sixty, the human being is reborn and goes through a new nativity. Jagan attempts to attain this perfect state, and his mentality gets an astonishing transparency. He has an understanding of his recently succeeded sovereignty and believes that he has not at all senses more indomitable in his years. The *Sthita Prajna* of the Vedanta

resembles the position of a *Jivan Mukta* that has been delineated in *Yoga-Vasistha* where the divine state is portrayed as,

“The Jivan Mukta is that state in which the saint has ceased to have any desires... He is wise and pleasant and living to all with whom he comes in contact though unaffected within himself and he can take part in the enjoyment of others, he can play like a child and can sympathise with the sorrows of sufferers.”³

Jagan forsakes his son and his withdrawal's reason of becoming a realised self is to,

“live one's life in this world with some measure of tranquility by shaking off emotion when an emotion has become false in substance and fettering in effect.”⁴

R.K. Narayan at this moment reveals that it is merely by incorporating the ancient knowledge and following the olden Indian way of life that one can attain the enlightenment and discovery of self.

R.K. Narayan's works are correlated with the exploration for the gist of existence by the central character and the reasons that forced him to forsake the worldly affairs to develop into a blessed human being. Narayan's novels, *The Vendor of Sweets* and *The Guide*, scrutinise the issues that make an individual abandon the material obsessions and the intensity of this abandonment. In *The Vendor of Sweets*, Jagan's repudiation is indeed the winning and discovery of the true self. Despite this, Narayan's works reveal the individuals who are seeking to combine the mystical Oriental values with the drastic practical thoughts of the western civilisations. His protagonists grant

importation to the monetary facet of living and are open to the elements of contemporary dreams, but sometime in their years, they are helpless to defy the magnetism of mythical elements and Vedanta philosophy of old Indian culture. They recognise the significance of pursuing a righteous living.

The novelist has portrayed Indian traditions, rites and mythical elements in the living of natives. The sacred journey to a holy shrine to make supplication for an heir and even the wedding of Jagan and various observances disclose the mythical and legendary elements in the novel. He depicts the distinctive uniqueness of ideas based on Vedanta philosophy and signifies the higher traits of customs and folklore that proclaims that to comprehend correct awareness an individual has to create him credible by pursuing the virtuous and spiritual life. These noble ideals are based on holy *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Puranas*.

The Vendor of Sweets first appeared in the literary world in 1967. The protagonist of the novel Jagan is a widower and a successful sweet-vendor, who plans to mingle attractive earnings along with Gandhian ideology. He has a strong belief in the *Bhagwad Gita*. For him, the holy book is a foundation of philosophy, ideals. Whenever he finds spare time, he utilises his moments either revolving the wheel or comprehending scriptures. He delivers the discourse to his employees as well. He has a son, Mali born after an extended period of the wedding and simply after a particular pilgrimage to Badri Hills to seek blessings of the deities. Jagan's wife had expired of a brain tumour when Mali was still a child.

Jagan is wealthy, but he follows a plain living. Mali chooses to leave his studies at college and goes to America. He comes back after three years with an American (Korean) partner named Grace. He wishes to promote and sell a book inscription instrument and anticipates his father to sponsor the idea. He distracts to drinking and starts leading his days in a mode contradictory to his father's ethics and morality. The closing split amid the father and the son takes place when Jagan learns that Grace is not the officially married wife of his son Mali.

The Vendor of Sweets is an extraordinary novel. A seller of sweets is supposed to be a person with merely monetary concerns. Jagan, the protagonist of the novel, is a man of elevated beliefs. His thinking and his profession do not go simultaneously. He is overconfident of his son Mali. He believes that his son is a very sensible young man and feels enthralled when he gets his son's correspondence from America. However, to his consternation, he discerns that Grace, his son's friend, actually inscribed the correspondence from which he had fashioned his ideas about Mali. Very shortly, he discovers that Mali and Grace are not even wedded. Disillusioned with his son and disenchanted with his life, Jagan is swayed to procure a ruined garden and temple that is owned by a sculptor who wishes to establish a statue of Goddess *Gayatri* in the temple. Jagan does not prevaricate to discard the *Moh* of his son Mali and to leaves the worldly life of Malgudi. However, before his departure, he discovers that Mali has been detained for intoxication and rash driving of a vehicle. Nevertheless, Jagan declines to be implicated again in the

clutches of *Maya* and provides cash to his cousin for releasing his son. He abandons his trade in an excellent arrangement for his son to occupy and relinquishes the world.

Jagan is an entrepreneur with a distinction. He believes that he is pursuing his life according to Gandhian principles. Jagan recites the *Bhagwad Gita* to his subordinates and wishes them to absorb the principles referred to in the *Gita*. Initially, in the novel, he only follows the expressions and not the quintessence of the scriptures. Soon after, he realises his limitations and strives to lead life by concentrating upon the communiqué of the philosophy of the holy book. At the beginning of the novel he declares,

“Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self. I do not know, but all our sages advise us so”.⁵

The quotations mentioned above evidently identify the premise of the novel. Jagan intuitively discerns that he must discover his self. However, he is unable to break the manacles of the *Maya's Moh* that is apparent in the form of his son.

An Indian philosophical propensity wrecks R.K. Narayan's visualisation. The Indian proclivity promulgates that the whole material shapes and the individual's different connections are various forms of *Maya*, and disappointment on the everyday rank does not necessarily fetch any terrible logic of misfortune. According to Vedanta, the human being is integrated with the cause of formation. The sequence of origin and outcome is in commission from demise to reincarnation, and the mortal is secure of the final divine meeting, so no finishing negativity is feasible in Indian mysticism.

Moreover, the conventional Indian culture through its unyielding societal and ethical cyphers upholds an intense logic of collective consistency, accordingly constructing any separation or dissolution is unattainable. The Indian philosophy is there in the entire works of R.K. Narayan, and *The Vendor of Sweets* is not exclusion.

Jagan understands that throughout his years he has been pursuing counterfeit standards. He has been yearning for deliverance through his worldly legatee, but he is disillusioned by the deeds of his son. Subsequently, he comprehends that his deliverance is positioned not in the transformation of his son Mali. It rests in the discovery of his true self, and this is the eventual intention of human being. Jagan forsakes the possessions for the sake of comprehending the final reality. He has unquestionably started on a fresh spiritual way that he desires to travel around in his new phase of *Vanaprastha*. The release of spirit from *agyaan* throughout lesser echelon of consciousness is the first footstep in the Vedantic practice of philosophy. This reality united with the theory of deeds, relinquishing wealth and assets for sacred quest, affections and afflictions as their corollaries are several impressions of Vedanta philosophy which are persistent in the novel. Ultimately, Jagan becomes conscious that his rescue from the vicious cycle of birth and death is the discovery of self.

The *Aatam Marag* (spiritual path) directing to this consciousness is not unproblematic and smooth. It has its obstacles of five deadly sins. The Indian mysticism proclaims *Kaam, Krodh, Lobhe, Moh* and *Ahankaar* as

five *Vishyas* (transgressions). Jagan is not aware of the way to attain the ultimate divine stage. The hypothesis of over-affection and its outcome is evident in the novel that facilitates the premise of spiritual evolution towards comprehending one's right temperament. This spiritual progression provides liberation from the succession of subsistence, which is the eventual target of human birth. Lastly, the protagonist surmounts the great hindrance on his spiritual path, i.e., blind affection (*Moh*) for his son. *Moh* is one of the five deadly sins that is an immense impediment in the discovery of self. He, who overcomes it, is afterwards at tranquility with himself.

There is a regular progress and an embedded wisdom of folklore in Narayan's protagonists. These characters are innocent individuals who observe the creation with astonishment and admiration. Jagan has high trust in the theory of *karma*. There is a concurrence of Vedantic adherence with an ordinary sweet vendor's real living. Jagan has an intense quest for self's enlightenment when he chooses to relinquish the money-oriented life. The spirit is arousing to attain the ultimate intention of precious human birth. In the novel, we notice the pond filled with blue lotus in a tranquil atmosphere that implies the arousing of the spirit and its' silent melody. There is emblematic going down of the steps into the pond with moss-covered steps and examining with enthrallment the insects brimming over the indigo flower. According to Vedantic mysticism, the *Jivatma* resides within the heart, and the inner lotus is filled with nectar once the seeker can discover the divine light.

Various critics have offered different theories behind Jagan's renunciation of the world. William Walsh observes in his article,

"The constant urge to make this Jagan into a world renouncing was supplied by the Indian religious tradition. Human life is divided into four stages traditionally. These steps are called ashramas. The names of the four ashramas are Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. It was the duty of the Brahmachari to lead a hard life and acquire education. As a householder (Grihastha), he was to perform all those duties that were enjoined on him by law. As a Bhikshu or Vanaprasthi, he had to leave his house and live a life of contentment and devotion to God. As a Sanayasi, he was to live in the forest and subsist on the roots and fruits of the forests." ⁶

The stage of *Brahmachari* was the student life, and *Grihastha* was the householder ship. *Vanaprastha* is described as the partial-retirement, and *Sanyasa* was the total retreat from worldly affairs. Jagan's resolution to relinquish the mundane life is in confirmation with the Vedantic beliefs, even though his conditions as well compel him to take this decision. According to the Vedantic way of life, at some point of human life, the mortal should depart from his environs for the quest of privileged principles of existence. Jagan also believes in the tradition. Indian scriptures recommend the requirement to relinquish the world after discharging his liabilities in the societal system.

Jagan demonstrates conformity with this old antique perception when he compromises silently to the observations of the sculptor,

"It would be the most accredited procedure according to our scriptures that husband and wife must vanish into the forest at some stage in their lives, leaving the affairs of the world to younger people." ⁷

This conviction in the philosophical institution and his conditions, the demise of his wife, his son's delinquency and later on unexpected outcomes induce him to locate a secluded place of withdrawal. His son's bizarre deeds confuse him about his aspirations for his successor. In the opening of the novel, he is extra disposed towards the money-oriented achievements. He maintains even two different ledgers to equivocate government tariffs. However, his alliance with the bearded man transforms him secretly, and he feels a spiritual renovation. He experiences that his individuality is undertaking an amendment although he still looked after the store and his housing. The divinity must have showered blessings on his secluded and wallowing stipulation and sent this white-bearded person as a messenger of gods.

We may well perceive the sway of Ramanuja's interpretation of Vedanta who supposes that for the ultimate enlightenment the hard work of human being is not sufficient. The emancipation of the spirit is not probable by mortal's deeds single-handedly. The Almighty is forgiving, and His celestial benediction assists a *Jivatma* in achieving the divine light. In the novel, Jagan senses that his persona is experiencing a modification for the betterment. Although

his entanglements do not leave him, however, his feelings provide a distinct signal of the commencement of the discovery of self.

Jagan's approach of pursuing his life course is influential in causing an internal renovation in him. Although chasing material goals of existence, an innovative comprehension of living is felt by him. Different reviewers corroborate the similar belief. Michel Pousse is proclaiming the identical idea while he examines in his treatise,

“Any man can be turned into a saint if properly trained. Two of Narayan's novels illustrate this theme which is also Gandhian if we understand by training, not the mere acquisition of a physical or mental routine but the opening of a mind to the dedication of a good cause.”⁸

Jagan may perhaps not have fully developed into an enlightened sage, but he is certainly on the avenue of the awakening of self-consciousness. He means Vedanta philosophy when he talks of Gandhian values of life:

“There is little doubt that this interpretation of life as part of a larger religious experience and as a quest for the discovery of one's true self is the cornerstone of Gandhi's philosophy, itself a part of India's religious past through its Vedantic origin.”⁹

Initially, Jagan narrates the holy sermons from the *Gita* and utters quotations from the *Upanishads* with no knowledge of the actual implications. Nevertheless, a moment appears in his life when he thinks that he has accomplished his pecuniary motives and

realises the inner emptiness and unhappiness notwithstanding his achievements in money dealings. Vedanta proclaims that this vacuity is present in the heart of every individual. Those human beings who feel this blankness are very fortunate and blessed by the Almighty. This discontentment will eventually lead the seeker towards the state of transcendental bliss where only *Paramanand* (supreme ecstasy) will prevail sans any sorrows.

Jagan is sure to attain the spiritual objective in the expedition of human life. The errant conduct of his son Mali destroys his misapprehensions. He disengages himself from the temporal verve and practice. He thinks that this craving for riches has not gratified him internally. He decides to cut the rates of sweet eatables with the intention that deprived citizens too may take pleasure in the sweets. This lessening of rates propels convulsion amid the other sweet merchants. They get in touch with Jagan to convince him to bring to a halt this still. In the gathering, Jagan convenes with the bearded person (Sculptor), who happens to be the cause for internal conversion in him. This incidence unlocks new outlooks of divine knowledge for him. Jagan senses that he is on the threshold of spiritual birth. However, this revolution or renovation is not instant in any manner.

The sacred expedition of discovery of self is a continuing progression with perseverance. Each *Jivatma* has to do steady exertion for realising his divine reality. Then the spirit is enlightened, and his amalgamation with the Supreme Being is initiated. In fact, the human being has an enormous endowment, as he is not merely a collection of impulses

and reactions. The perceptible conduct is merely a small component of his divine individuality. The quest for detection of identity rests in the subterranean subliminal mind, which is the house of sacred opinions plus intellect and imaginings. However, Jagan is not flattened under the burden of mundane connections. He has experienced the *rasa* of *Moh* (temporal affections), and he identifies the outcomes of blind attachment. Once he is liberated from worldly temptations, the divine infinity starts to open up luminously. Jagan forsakes the world, but he does not lose his traction on the ground. He still holds his chequebook with him after leaving the world. This financial status facilitates him to write a cheque for lawyer's payment when his son is detained. He is prepared to arrange an Air ticket for Grace if she wishes to return to her place. Jagan is competent to create equilibrium involving the mundane and spiritual realms. He attempts to surpass the temporal existence even as surviving in it and all set to tread on the path to divine ecstasy.

Jagan's son, Mali, experiences the penalty of his deeds. His haughty conduct towards his father, his lack of discipline, his falsification of fabricating narratives with an instrument, his despicable insubordination to revered practices bring him to penalty. Jagan believes that this reprimand would alarm him reverse to his wisdom. He is confident that one day Mali would manage and run the sweet shop. Jagan progresses to mystical knowledge right from the disciplined obedience of his previous life and the oppression of his store and son. Now, from the elevation of peaceful independence, he

gazes at Mali, Grace and others with compassion, who have gone astray in the dilemma of worldly entanglements. Then Jagan proclaims, "I am a free man".

In the novel, we observe that unawareness leads to an acquaintance and the worldly life surrenders to the perpetual existence. As soon as the protagonist notices that his son was wasting funds and did not have trust in any principles, he feels disillusioned. Then he decides to earn the least income. He believes that the clients should get more worth for their cash. He comprehends that it was not correct to make more money when his son does not follow the right path in life and wastes all earned money. He gives his resolution a serious form. He puts up for sale every package of sweets at reduced rates. Everyone thinks that either he has gone mad or he wants to wrap up his business. The other sweet vendors are upset and consider this move as business tactics. They are unable to understand the real cause behind his relinquishment of high profits and assemble to counsel him, and one individual from the gathering appreciates his right step.

When his contenders had arrived to meet him to persuade him to modify his resolution, a bearded man appeared with them. When he paid attention to Jagan's outlook, he was overwhelmed with amazement. He considered that Jagan would appreciate his work and facilitate him in the attainment of his objectives. The bearded man told Jagan that his master engraved the idols of deities in the temples. He sought Jagan's assistance to give final shape to his master's unfinished idol of Goddess *Gayatri*. He persuaded Jagan to acquire the piece of

land that belonged to his master. However, Jagan replies to other sweet vendors' account, "As Lord Krishna says in The Gita, it is all in one's hands. You make up your mind, and you will find the object of your search. Ah, The Gita is a treasure a treasure-house of wisdom; I never spend a moment without reading it" (VS 99). Now, Jagan has started to comprehend the real essence of the teachings of the *Gita*. The bearded man took him to the place where his master used to work. Jagan felt very much impressed by the silence and tranquility of the site.

At last, Jagan can overcome his unsighted affection for Mali, the final impediment in his discovery of self. In the novel, the bearded man and Grace are other two characters who appear to be determined towards some perception about their goal in living. They are sincere persons who progress with the advancement of the novel. One critic Jayant K. Biswal estimates that,

"Narayan attempts vision of life which is a mixture of opposing dualities. Behind the narrative facade of his novels, Narayan attempts at a view of life, a life of opposing dualities of appearance and reality, beliefs and betrayals."¹⁰

The model of R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* is reflective here when Jagan relinquishes the temporal life faithful to the essence of holy sermons, which presents the highest point of Narayan's truth-seeking attitude. In *The Guide*, the thief acts as if a saint; he is received in this disposition by the villagers of Mangla and by Velan who is acquainted with his character. Later on, manifestation and truth amalgamate, and the crook becomes the real saint. In *The Guide*, the

disguise turns out to be the facade of the hero. Likewise, in *The Vendor of Sweets*, the sermons transform the persona of the seller intensely absorbed in the realm of affection. The physical sphere is left in the rear, and the empire of the soul is obtained. As propounded by Vedanta philosophy, this type of renovation is plausible as spiritual knowledge is more significant than emotions and feelings.

In Narayan's characters, the duality in the persona of the protagonists is mirrored. Jagan is no exclusion as he is a bouquet of variations. He adeptly mingles the Vedanta philosophy of the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* with the proceeds of trade. Different ambiguous qualities are present in great concord in his temperament. He handles his mundane and sacred dealings concurrently. He administers his shop while reading sermons from the holy book. The method of stream of consciousness is employed here. It is also utilised in *The Guide* effectively. His gentle reminiscences are put together with passing instants and quick shifting ethics. The conflict with life's peripheral truth is accessible which reveals the profound connotations of life in different shades. Surprisingly, Jagan carries the bank chequebook while forsaking the world. Various critics have observed this move of Jagan in different versions. The words of K.R.S Iyengar that, "... the demon has been worsted, but the Deity hasn't arisen yet"¹¹ reveal that the final discovery of self by the protagonist is still distant.

Jagan has started shifting to mystical experiences from temporal reality, and life brings for him an innovative set of standards. This quest for self is substantiated

that in spite of all the worldly advancements, the earliest viewpoint cannot be just rejected. Mali's story inscription instrument is a burlesque of inventive procedure of own mentality. Narayan functions in a spiritual structure where the philosophy of India is additionally prominent. Jagan's transmutation is reminiscent of Narayan's assertion in the old principles. The venerable strength of mystical values and philosophy continues in the subterranean subsistence of the natives Malgudi and reinstates the imperative inner might in their days.

We find an issue in the works of Narayan about the clandestine linkage that adjoins the present rational beliefs with the eternal being. Undoubtedly, these types of matters baffle the human psyche, but the vagueness is the excellence of unrestricted ending of R.K. Narayan's novels. Similarly, in *The Vendor of Sweets*, one may ask whether the makeover in the personality of Jagan is valid or is it a ruse or hoax. Has he surpassed the obstacle of *Moh* to his son and trade? However, these are the traits coupled with an open-ended novel with numerous levels of implications. A novelist knowingly uses indistinctness as a mechanism to compose a multifaceted work of fiction. If we consider the contemporary hypotheses of criticism, we find that each interpretation is disclosing an original perspective on the literary piece. One cannot put up the shutters on a literary composition for advanced analysis and elucidation by proclaiming a concluding denotation. Generally, in Narayan's works, Irony is considered to be dominating idea, but it is only one stratum of grasping the essence of the novels. The pervasiveness of the Vedanta philosophy in Narayan's works

is incontestable. Now, the reviewer has to choose the most appealing connotation for his analysis as a great piece of literature recommends new questions so that the quest for the discovery of self is not brought to a standstill.

A work of literature is always evocative not decisive in real nature. The researchers have strived to find the solutions of some matrix, and the exploration will go on in coming times. In the literary field, many new perspectives are put forth, out of which some viewpoints are acknowledged, and some are refused. However, it does not diminish the significance of the creative literature. Patrick Swinden says in his essay "Gods, Demons and others in the Novels of R.K. Narayan" that R.K. Narayan's novels,

"later, Narayan was to find more efficient ways of bringing Hindu Mythology from the background into the foreground of his novels."¹²

Indian mythical elements are prevailing through the novels of Narayan and assist in the comprehension of philosophical connotations hidden in the layers of sentences. The quintessence of his novels may not be realised simply by the emotional elucidation of reason and consequences. The references to gods, demons, deities and devils form the background of the novel structures. In Narayan's works, mythical elements are auxiliary forces in the better comprehension of Vedanta philosophy. In the Indian context, mythology and religious convictions are inseparable. The holy figures of *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, are immersed in the mentality of Indian populace who worship them as Sarguna (apparent forms)

of transcendental God. However, the critics consider them as mythological figures, but the Indian perception has immortalised them, and this awareness is visible in the works of Narayan.

In *The Vendor of Sweets*, the action happens on two levels concurrently. The average reading of the novel reveals ordinary connotation but a profound scrutiny divulges the fundamental philosophy and a deep stream of Vedantic standards is apparent. The book discloses its account in the present and returns to the past intermittently when Jagan summons up his past. From these past reminiscences, we find out regarding his marriage, his diminishing affection for his spouse, her annoyance and his inclination for natural medication as compared to new remedy. He was a novice learner when he was married to Ambika. His learning suffered after the wedding, and he was continually unsuccessful in his studies. Jagan and his wife remained childless for ten years after their marriage. It was a tough time for the couple. Eventually, after visiting the holy shrine at Badri Hills, they were blessed with a son named Mali.

However, Jagan was not fortunate enough to have family happiness for a long time. Mali was still a child when his wife died, and Jagan had to take care of Mali. Jagan wanted Mali to be a graduate, but soon Mali decided to cease his studies and chose to go to America to be trained in the novel-inscription skill. Jagan soothes himself by assuming that novel writing is, nevertheless, welfare activity to the humankind. Mali, conversely, disheartens Jagan by leaving for America with funds stolen from Jagan's reserves. He tolerates even this misconduct

of Mali as *Moh* for his son makes him sightless to all other concerns. He feels conceited that his son is being educated in a developed country like America. He reads aloud Mali missives to his friends, though; his son's homecoming with a Korean young woman Grace isolates him even additionally. Jagan shortly builds up a kinship with Grace, but this connection fades away when he finds out that Mali and Grace were not still wedded. Jagan's Indian responsiveness obtains a surprise. Mali additionally annoys him with his poorly envisaged scheme to establish a plant of novel-writing instruments. These *karmas* (deeds) of Mali provoke Jagan to re-examine his past decisions and plans. Then he senses that *Maya* (wealth) is the core source of his despair and its influence should be abridged.

In the novel, it is comprehensible that despite his religious convictions and faith in the philosophy of the *Gita*, he is suffering from the malady of *agyaan* (bogus comprehension) and his evolution on the path of *Brahamgyaan* (divine knowledge) is slow. Though he is a devoted admirer of the *Gita*, he appreciates it in words, not in essence. At the outset, he does not even recognise that why one should discover one's real self. Steadily he appreciates the quest for the discovery of self. As soon as the sculptor escorts him to the secluded garden, Jagan is allured by its ambience. In a condition of exultation, he discovers that the deeds of Mali are trivial. Jagan finds himself at an elevated height of consciousness. Then he comprehends that it was neither wealth nor any material articles that were the basis of all tribulations but the cravings for the mundane life are real manacles. This

consciousness is the central premise of the narrative and the quintessence of Vedanta philosophy.

Jagan's determination to retreat into isolated life at the age of sixty has the confirmation of age-old knowledge. The ancient holy books also support separate life in the mature period (*Vanaprastha ashrama*) of individual's years. R.K. Narayan's heroes evaluate themselves when they face a calamity in their existence. In this procedure, they assess themselves for their limitations. This self-evaluation results in spiritual enlightenment and divine illumination. Jagan is unusual in his ways, but he is someone with chiefly admirable traits. Regarding Vedanta, Jagan may be declared a person with the domination of *Satva-guna* (truthful nature). His disenchantment with his son and his repulsion to the worldly connections does not direct him to the terrible outcomes. These happenings, relatively, accomplish the necessity of timeless design of things, and the ending of the book turns out to be the discovery of self.

Conclusion:

This discovery of the self results in the realising the bliss of ultimate being that may be too little or indefinite but it is the truth.

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4. A. N. Kaul, "R.K. Narayan and the East-West Theme," *Considerations* Ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee, p. 61.

When Jagan recognises himself with the essence of holy discourses that he used to proclaim, then he is on the threshold of a new consciousness. In *The Vendor of Sweets*, there is a conflict amid secular and sacred ideals and a point in time emerges when the central character discards the reasonable standards. Through the assessment of his life actions, he comprehends his omissions and strives to make himself accurate. He discerns that the *Moh* is his biggest flaw and is successful to conquer his last failing while recollecting his earlier period of life. In the ending of the novel, the monetary atmosphere does not become the priority. The decision of the protagonist with his truth-seeking inclination dominates the mood of the work. The hero can surmount the entanglements of *Maya* (material goods). Whether this escape from the clutches of *Maya* is temporary or perpetual is an unending query of a truth seeker. The soul has to undergo a cycle of births and death before the final merger with the Absolute Being. Jagan's quest for the spiritual meaning of life and discovery of self is evident in the novel that is undoubtedly based on the principles of Vedanta philosophy. The protagonist has made this human life as a successful journey.

5. R.K. Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* (Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1967), p. 7.
6. William Walsh, *R.K. Narayan* (London: Orient Longman, 1971), p. 43.
7. R.K. Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* (Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1967), p. 120.
8. Michel Pousse, *R.K. Narayan: An Anthology of Recent Criticism* (ed.), C.N. Srinath (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2000), p. 65.
9. R.K. Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* (Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1967), p. 64.
10. Jayant K. Biswal, *A Critical Study of the Novels of R.K. Narayan: The Malgudi Comedy* (New Delhi: Ninnal Publishers and Distributors, 1987), p. 1.
11. K.R.S. Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1973), p. 383.
12. Patrick Swinden, "Gods, Demons and others in the Novels of R.K. Narayan." *R.K. Narayan: An Anthology of Recent Criticism* (ed.), C.N. Srinath (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2000), p. 38.