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R.K. Narayan's: "Waiting for the Mahatma"

Q:- Critical note, Theme, Structure, Plot-Construction of the novel, "Waiting for the Mahatma".

Ans:- According to E.M. Forster, Plot is the ordering of action. Naturally the plot or the structure of the novel will determine the theme. In "Waiting for the Mahatma" R.K. Narayan showed how the subtle love-affair of Soiram and Bharati developed against the background of the struggle for freedom started by Mahatma Gandhi. The love and struggle went together because Soiram loved Bharati whose first loyalty was to the Mahatma. It was Soiram through whose eyes R.K. Narayan presented the great mass movement launched by the Mahatma.

Soiram, a young man met Bharati, a young girl who was collecting funds for the Mahatma who was coming to Malgudi during the struggle for freedom. The Mahatma would also tour the famine stricken village of Malgudi. Soiram fell in love with Bharati madly. He attended the meeting of the Mahatma. The Mahatma wanted unity, discipline and love among the non-violent India Citizens. All the citizens were soldiers of a non-violent army. They must adopt the system of "Rahm Dhan", spicing the 'Charkha' and the practice of absolute truth and non-violence. People should purify their hearts. They should give up bitterness. Although Gandhi inspired the Malgudians, Soiram always interpreted his speeches in terms of Bharati. Soiram met Bharati who

took him to the Mahatma. He began to love the girl so much that he felt his house at Kabir Street and became a non-violent soldier of Gandhiji. Soiram, Gropad, Bharati poured the famine-stricken village near Malgudi.

Then Gandhiji left Madras making Bharati a lover of Soiram. Soiram became an underground non-violent soldier. Bharati taught her to spin. Soon Soiram became a master spinner. He made his own clothes of khaddar. Then he asked to write "Quit India" on the walls of the forest villages. He used to love in a temple on Mempi hills. While he was writing "Quit India", he came across many kinds of people. Some were even loyal to the British Government. He thought it was useless to do anything for those people who did not rise to the occasion.

In the evening confused Soiram received Bharati. He became emotional and embraced Bharati and kissed her. But Bharati said she would marry him if Bapuji would permit. After a few days she came with Bapuji's message. They were not blessed then. Soiram thought that Bapuji had asked everyone to court arrest before the police. Soiram avoided the arrest by saying that he had to look after his grandmother first and then he would surrender himself before going to jail. Bharati promised that she would marry only him if Bapuji permitted.

Bharati's departure created a vacuum in Soiram's life. But it was filled

up by Jagdish who was a photographer of Malgudi. He was a terrorist and follower of Subhas-Chandra Bose. Sooram was very much influenced by that glamorous patriot. Jagdish left a small transmitter-cum-receiving set. One day Sooram caught Tokyo Station. He received the address of Subhas Chandra Bose. But he missed the great message. As a violent soldier he did many destructive works under the spell of Jagdish. He set fire to the records of law-courts of villages. He paralysed the works of schools. He derailed trains. He thought that he was shaking the backbone of Britain in India. The police were out to find him out. One day as a wholesale rice merchant he went to the Cold Slaughter house where Bharati was kept as a prisoner. Bharati did not meet him by breaking the laws of the prison. She sent a note.

The note asked Sooram to see his grandmother who was seriously ill. Sooram went to his house and heard that his granny was already dead. Next day at the Cremation ground Sooram's grandmother came back to life miraculously. Her death and recovery were enough to draw the attention of the people. Police also came and arrested Sooram. Sooram was arrested under the Defence Rules of India. He spent his days with veteran criminals like forgers and murderers.

One day he met the manager of the fund office before the chief of the prison. He came to know that his granny was in Benares and his house was rent out to a yarn merchant. In the prison he passed his days in a miserable way. He always thought of Bharati and this made him nervous. But one day he was released. He walked in free India. He gathered much news about the post-war confusion from a waiter of a hotel. He met Jagdish

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At his Studio. Jagadish told him that things were still disorganised. In fact the peace of freedom did not suit him. He told Soiram that Bharati went to Noakhali the moment she was released. Riots had broken out there. After correspondence Bharati invited Soiram to Delhi. In Delhi Bharati took Soiram to her hut. She narrated the terrible conditions of the riots - periods. They went to Noakhali, Bengal and Bihar, Gandhiji went there with a mission of peace.

Next day in the evening before the prayer Soiram and Bharati met the Mahatma and got his blessed permission for the marriage. He wanted to present the bride himself. But unfortunately on that evening the prayer at Birla House was shut dead by a man. There was a loss at the national level in the death of Mahatma Gandhiji. But there was a sense of fulfilment in Soiram's personal life. Those waited for the Mahatma to get freedom, got it. After independence riot stricken places waited for the Mahatma. He went to those places barefoot with a mission of peace. Thus the theme of the novel presented the plot or the structure of the novel. R.K. Narayan presented the theme with complete objectivity. Thus R.K. Narayan wrote his novel out of materials and incidents that were neither heroic nor extraordinary. He presented his hero, Soiram who saw a great mass movements through his eyes. Soiram agreed with the development of the plot. In fact "Waiting for the Mahatma" was a novel about the limited individuals' growth and maturity. At the end of the novel there was a loss which told aforesaid. Moreover the tone of the novel was comic. R.K. Narayan wrote with complete objectivity, with a sparse mixture of humour and irony and an underlying sense of beauty and sadness. As in this novel the character and action developed simultaneously and both influenced each other it was a well plotted novel too. The end