

Element of Conflict in R K Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets*

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Abstract: *The renowned Indian author, R K Narayan, beautifully explores the multidimensional aspects of conflicts in his critically acclaimed novel, The Vendor of Sweets. This paper aims to analyze and unravel the complexities and various layers of conflicts embedded within the text. In doing so, we endeavor to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these conflicts contribute to the overall theme and appreciation of this literary masterpiece. As we delve into the story of Jagan, an orthodox Brahmin and businessman, and his son Mali, we will uncover the contrasting ideals and dreams that create a rift between the two, serving as the primary source of conflict in the novel.*

Keywords: Conflict, Relations, Society, Fiction, Orthodox.

I. INTRODUCTION

In R.K. Narayan's novel *The Vendor of Sweets*, the tension between old and young India is the backdrop against which a father and son clash. Jagan, a 55 year old man who is steeped in tradition, is a bundle of contradictions. He is a passionate follower of Gandhi, embracing non-violent cooperation and an ascetic lifestyle. However, he is also boastful when it comes to his own self-control. It is not enough that he has renounced sugar and salt, he is compelled to tell others about it. Furthering the irony is that Jagan works as the titular vendor of sweets. Although he believes indulging in sugar is both unhealthy and contrary to Gandhi's teachings, he earns his living selling sugary confections to others. More complicated yet is the fact that Jagan skims a portion of each day's profits, hoarding it away so that he will not have to pay taxes on his unreported income.

Jagan's son Mali throws Jagan's life into tumult when he announces that he no longer wants to study at the university. Mali has been a great source of pride to Jagan, but this is largely because he has never shown signs of independence. His decision to leave school threatens Jagan's ideas about his son, and the example that he has set for him. But Mali reveals that he is quitting school to become a writer. Jagan has also written a book—a compendium of natural cures—that has been in limbo for years with a local printer. It is revealed that Jagan's insistence that his wife not take traditional medicine for a headache led to her death from a brain condition. Mali has always blamed Jagan for her death. The growing separation between them becomes literal when Mali announces that he is going to America to study writing. He has enrolled in a class that teaches novel writing. Jagan is anxious about his decision, and greatly saddened when he sees that Mali has been secretly stealing money from him to pay for his trip. They correspond sporadically by letters for the next three years. Then Mali suddenly announces that he is coming home. Not only that, he is bringing someone with him.

When Jagan meets his son at the train station, Mali is with Grace, an American woman. Jagan is astonished to learn that they are married. Grace is an amiable bride and quickly inserts herself into Jagan's life. She cleans his house, asks to cook for him, and so threatens his self-satisfied air of self-reliance that he quickly grows uneasy around her. But Grace is the least of his challenges. Mali has come back from America with an idea for a company. He wants to invest in the manufacture of what he calls story-writing machines. In the West, he says that 10,000 books are published every season. His company will allow India and other eastern countries to compete in the literary arena. All he needs is for Jagan to invest in the company. Jagan does what he can to ignore the request, but soon Mali forces the question on him. Will you help me or not? Jagan says that the best he can do is to leave the sweet shop to him. Mali is mocking and furious in his condemnation of his father's low aspirations.



When Jagan meets a hair-dyer named ChinnaDorai, he finds an unexpected peace. Chinna is a sculptor. It is his life's ambition to finish a sculpture of the goddess Gayatri. He takes Jagan to the secret grove where he resides, and where he pursues his art. As Jagan sees the tranquility of Chinna's life, his own problems suddenly seem trivial. He agrees to buy the grove and become Chinna's patron, allowing him to finish the image of the goddess.

At the novel's climax, Jagan learns that Mali and Grace never actually married. Ashamed at the moral pollution they brought into his home, and angry at his own inability to see it, Jagan retires from his business and flees to Chinna's grove. His superficial renunciations—his abstinence with salt and sugar, for instance—are now realized in the path of an ancient Hindu tradition: Vanaprastha. He will no longer have any connection to the world of material objects.

His commitment is briefly tested when he learns that Mali has been jailed for public drunkenness. India was in a state of prohibition during the period in which the novel is set, and Mali has therefore committed a crime. Jagan does not change his plans to retreat to the grove. He asks his cousin to help Mali when it is time, but to ensure that Mali spends enough time in prison that he will learn from the consequences of his actions. As the story concludes, he buys a ticket for Grace that will allow her to return to America.

The Vendor of Sweets is both serious and playful, which is common to Narayan's literary work. It is both a challenge to India's resistance to change, and an affectionate portrayal of the comfort that traditions and rituals can provide.

II. CONFLICTS

Integral to our analysis of conflict in R K Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets* is the examination of the opposing values and beliefs held by the protagonists. Jagan, a traditionalist who adheres to the Gandhian principles, finds himself at odds with his son, Mali, who aspires to western modernity and technological advancements. This divergence in perspectives becomes the crux of their strained relationship, highlighting the generational gap that seems to widen throughout the narrative. Furthermore, the novel also delves into the societal and cultural conflicts that underscore the broader themes of identity, individuality, and the struggle for personal authenticity within a rapidly changing global landscape.

One significant aspect of conflict in *The Vendor of Sweets* lies in the cultural and generational disparities between Jagan and his son, Mali, which serves as a reflection of the larger societal shifts happening in post-independence India. As a traditionalist, Jagan adheres to the old ways of life and holds onto his Brahmin principles with a sense of pride. On the other hand, Mali represents the new generation, embracing modernity and seeking opportunities for an unconventional life away from his father's rigid ideals. This clash between the conservative father and progressive son creates a vivid tableau of the broader struggle to reconcile tradition and modernity within Indian society.

In addition to the generational conflict, *The Vendor of Sweets* explores the impact of external forces on the characters and their relationships, further highlighting the intricacies of the conflicts present. Jagan's business, a symbol of traditional Indian life, faces numerous challenges from competing forces of modernity and globalization, further straining his bond with Mali. At the same time, Mali's pursuit of his ambitions leads him to confront his own internal conflicts, ultimately testing the strength of their father-son relationship. The novel masterfully weaves these interpersonal and societal conflicts, presenting a multifaceted examination of the struggle for balance and harmony amidst rapid change and evolving values.

The exploration of conflict in R K Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets* goes beyond the personal realm, as it also touches upon the economic and political dimensions of post-independence India. Jagan's adherence to Gandhian principles of simplicity, self-reliance, and spinning the charkha is challenged by Mali's pursuit of material success and his venture into the world of machine story-writing. This discord illustrates the larger debate between the proponents of indigenous and sustainable economic policies and those of industrialization and modernization. Additionally, the novel delves into the inevitable conflict between capitalism and traditional values, shedding light on how social progress often necessitates a dissonance between old ideologies and new aspirations.

As the narrative unfolds, R K Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets* skillfully portrays the psychological implications of the various conflicts experienced by the characters, ultimately presenting a profound commentary on human nature and the complexities of personal identity in the face of change. Jagan's struggle to reconcile his traditionalism with the evolving landscape of post-independence India exposes the inevitability of contradictions in the quest for individual authenticity. Simultaneously, Mali's internal conflict between his desire for personal freedom and the weight of his cultural heritage



reveals the tension ingrained in the process of self-discovery. Through this rich exploration of conflict on multiple levels, the novel provides a thought-provoking examination of the human experience in a rapidly transforming world.

III. CONCLUSION

R K Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets* masterfully encapsulates the multidimensional conflicts experienced by individuals navigating the ever-changing landscape of post-independence India. Depicting the challenges and complexities of generational, societal, economic, and personal identity shifts, the novel provides valuable insights into the innate human struggle for balance amidst rapid progress and shifting values. Narayan unveils the contradictions and intricacies that underpin evolving relationships and identities, urging readers to reflect upon their own experiences, aspirations, and cultural heritage. Ultimately, *The Vendor of Sweets* serves as a compelling testament to the enduring nature of human resilience and the quest for authenticity in an uncertain world.

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