

Book Review

R.K. Narayan The Vendor of Sweets

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Published in : 1967

Literary Period: Postcolonialism

Genre: Novel

Language: English




Introduction

I chose *The Vendor of Sweets* by R.K. Narayan because I heard about the author's reputation for writing human stories rooted in Indian culture. Furthermore, I became more eager to read this book because it shows the relationship between father and son and also mentions their stories which are very relatable to our societies.

Moreover, It is very interesting how Narayan portrays the characters in similar manner. I expected simple and relatable things from this book- and I wasn't disappointed at all. Apart from this, The book's title "The Vendor of Sweets" grabbed my curiosity and made me more eager to read this book.

Summary

The story starts from an imaginary town of Malgudi, the story is centered around Jagan(55), who is a traditional Indian sweet vendor and a follower of Gandhian principles. He is Devout Hindu and has a sweets shop in southern India. He lives a very simple and peaceful life , grounded in rituals and simplicity. Also he has left using salt and sugar and puts on hand stitched clothes . He was also associated with Gandhi in the struggle for freedom in 1947 . Jagan is a timid man, not notably wealthy or poverty-stricken. He was one who had a belief in natural remedies only. But his life is disrupted when his only son, Mali, comes back from America after 3 yrs and after studying creative writing with new values, aspirations and even a foreign partner whose name was Grace who was half American and half Korean . The tension between father and son forms the emotional core of the narrative . Jagan's wife Ambika died early due to cancer.




Jagan, deeply rooted in Indian customs , struggles to understand his son's modern outlook and also his thoughts don't resemble his son's aim of starting a storytelling machine business. Mali, in contrast, considers his father as old-fashioned and narrow minded orthodox. This ideological and generational difference creates conflict between them. The novel gently explores themes like Tradition vs modernity, Communication vs Fear, East vs West, Generation gap, Parenting and Wealth. Through subtle humor and simple scenes, Narayan paints a clear picture of a man stuck between his past and the fast-changing world around him.

Analysis & Opinion

What stood out the most in *The Vendor of Sweets* was Narayan's ability to balance humor and emotion. The language is very simple, but the emotions it conveys are complex and layered. The novel captures the silent turmoil of a father watching his son and not directly interacting with him but through his cousin friend who was very close to him - not through some dramatic situations but through subtle gestures.

Jagan's character is the heart of the story. His beliefs on natural remedies than English medicines and mentioning Gandhi at every possible situation - are both inspiring and entertaining. He is not able to accept modern thinking yet he is lovable and his confusion about modern life is relatable to many older generations in our society. Mali blames his father for his mother's death because his mother had brain cancer, and he only treats her with natural remedies but couldn't save her. Also we can observe these things in our family and



society easily. Mali, on the other hand, feels a bit ignored and less understood, which reflects Jagan's own lack of understanding of his son.

A moment of direct speech comes when Mali tells Jagan, "I'm going to start a storytelling machine factory. That's the future!" This moment leaves Jagan in shock because he wanted Mali to carry his family business. An example of indirect speech comes when Jagan reflects that his son has said he would never return to the sweets business, which made him feel very upset and betrayed.


The important message from the story indicates the habit of letting go - of control, of expectations, and past. It teaches us to accept change according to time, however uncomfortable it may be.

Personal Connections

While reading this book at every moment I was relating situations with my own family situations. I could see shades of my own family dynamics in Jagan Mail's relationship. Like Jagan , many parents in my society have very strong beliefs on somethings that they can't adjust with others doing different from it and they disapprove of modern things and thoughts. This novel made me realise how important it is to communicate across generations and try to understand in their way, rather than assume or judge.

One important lesson that really hit my mind is that sticking to the past can become a double-edged sword. As Jagan learned to “cut the cord” with his expectations, I realized that growth sometimes comes from letting things go rather than holding them every time.

From this book , we can learn not to run away from problems but to face them courageously.



In addition to it, it taught me how important it is to learn to go with the flow, even when things are not in our favour. I've often tried to hide my emotions, but this taught me that silence isn't always golden-it can be a sign of giving up.

Conclusion

After reading this book, I would recommend ***The Vendor of Sweets*** to anyone who is interested in Indian culture, problems due to generation gap between parents and child , emotional storytelling and dynamics of families of Indian societies. Narayan's gentle humor and deep understanding of human nature makes this a timeless read. I would especially appeal to those who enjoy character-driven stories and emotional scenes. This novel is not for the thrill of action-packed plots, but it more than makes up for it in emotional depth and cultural richness.