The journey of the quester has a definite pattern. Spurred by the call to which he responds positively, the quester crosses the threshold of the existing social set-up and sets on a journey with the task of vanquishing the dragons that threaten the forces of the community. Health and strength are restored to the community. Beowulf slays Grendal, David slay Goliath. Sri Rama destroys the ‘Ksmar,’ and demons were killed by the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses.

Northrop Frye provides the frame: "A land ruled by a helpless old king is laid waste by a sea-monster, when one young person after another is offered to be devoured until the lot falls on the king's daughter: at that point the hero arrives, kills the dragon, marries the daughter and succeeds to the kingdom." Frye also finds an elaborate dragon-killing metaphor in Christian symbolism. Christ, the hero, slays the dragon Satan and restores the impotent old kind. Adam who is wounded with the original sin and rescues the bride, the Church.

The central theme of the quest is the dragon-killing. The dragon or the monster that the society and in the quest romances "the sterility of the land is present in the age
an incurable malady or wound ...." In *The Wasteland*, T.S. Eliot bemoans the moral stability of the land:

"I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plan behind me.
Shall I at least set my lands in order?"

Thus the task of the quester is to restore a 'fallen order of nature.'

Combating with and conquering the dragons are feats of uncommon strength and performance of impossible tasks, during the process of which the hero gains more than ordinary powers and is endowed with a nearly divine status. These powers are "developed as responses to the demands and challenges of experience." Thus the slaying of the dragon and the attendant challenges always involve a profound change in the consciousness and personality of the questers.

As a part of the guest myth, the hero leaves his world to descend into the underworld and encounters the dark forces there. Naciketa, a young seeker after truth in the Katha Upanishad goes to the underworld where he persistently questions Yama, the God of Death, on the nature of human soul and destiny.

"The Mythic descent is often depicted as a retreat into a state of temporary madness, as an adventure in the world of dreams, fantasy and science fiction; or as a psychological return to childhood."
The journey phase in classics, assumes a psychological significance in modern literature. The quester escapes from the captivity of mental and spiritual conditioning of a degenerated and a decadent society and searches an identity for self. As in the classic versions, there is a descent into the underworld of the psyche, where the monsters appear as internalized images of the sterile values of the outside world. "The recognition that the dragons exist both as external and an internal force may occur in a visionary moment." The draconic forces may either be the negative images of the self-worth in the psyche of the hero or analogous to the external figures symbolized or simply reinforced as destructive and nurturing messages within. Thus the 'quest' in itself is a movement between dualities and a to-and-fro crossing of the boundaries of human experience and knowledge.

The Indian scriptures view that a search for the self or a spiritual journey to liberate the self, is the quest that every great soul has to undertake.

The Upanishads compare human life to an endless journey and "the soul as the rider, the body as the chariot, the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as the rein." Life as a spiritual journey and the self as the traveller is a common imagery with Indian writers.
The time what my journey takes is long and the way of it long. I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light, and pursued my voyage through the wilderness of worlds leaving my track on many a star and planet. The traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own, and one has to wander through all the outerworlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end.\(^8\)

In the Indian concept of life, every individual must pass through the life's journey through organized phases called asramas. The asramas are four stages of life. They are 'brahmacharya' (the chaste disciplehood), 'Grahasta' (the householdership), 'Vanaprasta' (departure to the forest), and 'Sanyasa' (renunciation).

Each of these, in turn, invites one's unflinching adherence to a set of duties 'dharma'. As Nehru defines, 'dharma' as an Indian concept, was something much more than religion or creed: "it was a conception of obligations, of the discharge of one's duties to oneself and to others. This dharma itself was part of 'Rita', the fundamental moral law governing the functioning of the universe and all it contained. If there was such an order that man was supposed to fit into it, he should function in such a way as to remain in harmony with it. If man did his duty and was ethically right in his action, the right consequences would inevitably follow."\(^9\) For Gandhi, "the rule of Dharma was Ramaraiva, synonymous for the Kingdom of God we are hankering after."\(^10\)
The quest of the self is to be united with the cosmic soul outside. The Bhagavad Gita chalks out four main paths (yogas) to attain this union: 'Gnana Yoga' (path of union through knowledge), "Raja Yoga' (path of realization through meditation and psychic control), 'Bhakthi Yoga' (path of union through love and devotion) and 'Karma Yoga' (path of union through work). These are means to attain union with God. Each of these yogas is an independent path for self-realisation and liberation. When the end is attained, all four seem to join together in one. Each is significant in its own way. A guester may pursue any one path at one time or a combination of paths to realize the cherished goal.

Gandhi is a Karma Yogi who believed that salvation of any kind – spiritual, political and social is through praxis. He broadened the concept of Karma Yoga to meld social service and political action.² Dr. Radhakrishnan wrote of him: "Gandhi was the first in human history to extend the principle of non-violence from the individual to the social and political plane."¹³ It is this sense of Karma Yoga that helped Gandhi to find his religion even in politics and emerge out of its gutters unsullied. As Sivaram Patel explains:

The trials that Gandhi underwent as a Karma Yogi relate to both the inner and outer forces that he had to confront in his quest for Truth. They were expressions of the wounded
society or mauled souls that waited for healing and liberation. The pre-independent 'India' was very sick, both in mind and body. As Jawaharlal Nehru observes:

Politically, there is a great deal of talk of Indian freedom and independence, and yet her people have probably at no time in their long history been subjected to such authoritarian rule and intensive and wide-spread to such as exist today, and out of this today, tomorrow will necessarily grow. Economically, British domination is also paramount, and yet the expansive tendency of Indian economy is continually straining at the leash. There is famine and widespread misery and, on the other hand, there is an accumulation of capital. Poverty and riches go side by side, decay and building up, disruption and unity, dead thought and new. ~

Therefore Gandhi had to wage a moral battle with the dragons which were rampant in the form of economic exploitation, inhuman social practices, uppercaste arrogance, subjugation of women, depletion of indigenous industries and any form of untruth manifesting as inequality, human indignity and exploitation.

The 'means' adopted by Gandhi were unconventional. The moral armoury of Gandhi consisted of atonement, fasting, renunciation, self-mortification, expiation, marches, picketing, dharna and boycotts. Regarding the significance and prime place of 'means' in Gandhian agenda, Nehru remarks:

I have been attracted by Gandhi ji's stress on right means and I think one of his greatest contributions to public life has been this emphasis. This idea is by no means new, but this application of an ethical doctrine was certainly novel. It is full of difficulty, and
perhaps ends and means are not really separable but form together one organic whole. In a world which thinks almost exclusively of ends and ignores means, tuist emphasis on means seems odd and remarkable.

A typical Gandhian hero, therefore, is one who fights the social evils with moral weapons, even as a political endeavour.

Dragons of various kinds have been hiding within the structural folds of the Indian society for centuries in the form of religion, myth, tradition, stories, philosophy, language, rituals, rites, etc. They have been fed, kept alive, growing stronger spreading their tentacles into all institutions. Of all the dragons, untouchability was eating into the very soul of India.

Gandhi considered untouchability as a social and religious problem and not something to be related to the type of Varnashrama that he envisaged:

For me, Varnashrama does not mean a graded system of untouchability. I have explained what I mean Varnashrama. It does not mean to me grades at all. It is not a vertical division. It is a horizontal one. In my view, all Varnashrama stand absolutely on the same plane, i.e. of equality. Hence there can be no equation of untouchability. Varnashrama is a mighty economic law which, if we subscribe to it, would save us from the catastrophe that is in store for the world. I have sufficient warrant in Hindu scriptures for saying that Brahmins and scavengers are absolutely on par in the eyes of god.
Gandhi's vision to equate the Brahmins and scavengers, as realised in Balan, the protagonist of Kasthuri Sreenivasan's *The Light from Heaven*. Balan starts his journey climbing down the social structure. From the elevated status of a Brahmin, he has to reach the foot of the hill where congregate the untouchables. It is not an easy task. He who chanted Gayatri Mantra has been ignorant of the people who clean the filth and eat animal flesh. The Shastras that he has learnt, say nothing about, such a journey down hill, He has to experience it. The same dragons that prowl freely or lie hiding in the crevices of the society confronting a climber up are sure to be there. But all he needs is a spiritual armoury of austerity, penance, prayer, service and sacrifice.

Humility is the first weapon that Balan learns to wield. Though he thought that he had made careful preparations for his journey, he realises that they were inadequate. "He had an extra 'dhoti' and a shirt in his bundle, a towel for drying himself after a bath and his razor. But he did not have pillow for his head, or a blanket to keep out the cold, not even a tumbler or mug for water or coffee it was offered to him. He did not realize that people wouldn't allow their tumblers to touch his lips (in case he was an untouchable) even if they decided to give him something to drink." ¹⁷ A life of poverty makes the person
universal, disengaging him from particularities. He tells proudly that the "earth is my bed; the sky is my blanket." The nomadic life makes him realise that finding a new job was going to be difficult. He asks for work, any work. But the fact is that as a scion of high caste, he has done no manual work. Instead of work, when he is offered a little money, Balan announces proudly "I have not come to beg." But Balan's pride shatters when the gentleman advises him,

"Evidently, your austerities haven't taught you humility", said the gentleman. Don't you know that the first thing you must learn to fulfil such a vow is to be humble?"

Balan, on his pilgrimage of atonement, takes "a pilgrim route to the famous shrines of South India." The journey gives him a glimpse of "a new and different world where he could see human faith, human misery as well as human deceit in forms very different from those he was accustomed to." Pilgrimage in India is not ordinary journey. Nehru points out its significance:

The travelling was not confined to the upper castes; among the pilgrims were men and women of all castes and classes. Whatever the religious significance of these pilgrimages in the minds of the people might have been, they were looked upon also, as they are today, as holiday time and opportunities for merry-making and seeing different parts of the country. Every place of pilgrimage contained a cross-section of the people of India in all their great variety of custom, dress, language, and yet very conscious of their common features and the bonds that held them together and brought all of them to meet in one place. Even the
difference of language between the north and the south did not prove a formidable barrier to this intercourse.*3

It was a motley stream of people that Balan meets on his way. There were "men who had needles pierced through their cheeks and tongues, men who begged as a means of self-humiliation, men who kept vows of silence."24 There was another group of wanderers - acrobats, entertainers, soothsayers, fortune-tellers and the bird astrologers.

Meeting different categories of people is a revelation of the inner life of the underprivileged. To some "nomadism, beggary and craftiness"^5 has been a way of life. Balan has to dispense with his unconscious assumption, that there would be a kind of equality among these people. After crawling on his knees like other pilgrims, Balan understands that physical mortification can give" a curious sense of peace and well-being."^  

Exhausted with hunger and aimless wandering, Balan falls unconscious and lies in the same condition for three days. It reminds one of Jesus who was in the tomb for three days before resurrection. Similarly, it is equivalent to Balan's death to the old order, and his rebirth into a new community. Significantly, he is revived to consciousness by an untouchable woman. Her act of making him drink the gruel mixed with buttermilk has a ritualistic trait of a quest-romance.
Balan's entry into the world of Chakkiliyar is an example for the Leviathan metaphor. The Leviathan is a sea-monster in the Bible described as the enemy of the Messiah, and whom the Messiah is destined to kill in the "day of the Lord." It also represents "the whole fallen world of sin and death and tyranny into which Adam fell", and from this "it follows that Adam's children are born, live and die inside his belly." The Light From Heaven, has all the characteristics of a quest-romance and Balan undertakes the task of killing the sea-monster of untouchability which is at the depth of the Indian caste-structure. The 'untouchables' are born, live and die inside its belly. The image suggests that the hero has to go down the monster's open throat, like Jonah in the Bible, and wrestle with the monster, kill it and deliver "the children of God."

The leviathan is usually a sea-monster and has all the mysteries of the depth unknown to the hero. Hence the hero is inducted into "all forms of life imprisoned within" its belly. Kuppan introduces Balan to the labyrinthine ways of living of the Chakkiliyars.

Kuppan takes up the role of the traditional Guru in enlightening Balan into the realities of the new world, According to the long Indian tradition and even according to Vedas a quester after Truth, should be blessed with a Guru.
from whose lips he hears the external wisdom enshrined in Vedas. "Approach a teacher" says the Mundaka, "with humility and a desire to serve." In the Katha Upanishad, we read "blessed is he who, taught by a good teacher, is able to understand it." Swami Prabhavananda explains the function of a Guru:

The function of the 'good teacher', as Hinduism conceives it, is two fold. He of course explains the scriptures, the spirit as well as the letter; but, what is more important still, he teaches by his life - by his daily little acts, by his most casual words, sometimes even by his silence. Only to be near him, only to serve and obey him in humility and reverence, is to become quickened in spirit; and the purpose of the study of the Vedas is not merely or primarily to inform the intellect, but to purify and enrich the soul. Substituting wisdom of the cheri' to the wisdom of the rishis', one finds in Kuppan an equivalence of a learned Guru. Hence, Balan says: "I accept you as my Guru and wish to learn how to be a good Chakkiliyan." This brings to us the scene of Adi Sankara accepting a Chandala as his Guru. When the Chandala tells Sankara "If there is only one God, how can there be many kinds of men? How can there be any distinctions of caste or creed?" Sankara prostrates before the Guru saying:

He who has learned to see the one Existence everywhere He is my master - be he brahmin or Chandala

Kuppan himself is the leader of his community. In his own inimical way he tutors Balan, the minute details of a
Chakkiliyan's life:
The first lesson you have to learn is to forget that you ever went to school, and to learn to speak like us. No Chakkiliyan ever wears his dhoti down to the ankles like you do. The high caste people will think you are trying to ape them. You pick up the edges, take it between your legs and tuck it at the back. And always avert your eyes when you meet high caste people. They may think you are shifty, but they won't think you are proud.36

In similar other ways, Balan is taught to live in the world of the untouchables which has no clear line of distinction between animals and humans.

Liberation comes to one through the conquest of senses. Balan learns to put up with the smell of leather and of dirt. "For three thousand years, his ancestors had considered leather extremely unclean ... Here it was everywhere."37 Balan is determined to get used to the smell and "to look upon it as a sacred duty, an ordeal he had to undergo before he could purify himself."38

Every little practice of the Chakkliyars is contrary to his Brahmin upbringing, the nauseating smell of the leather, the meat-eating and the uncleanly habits, revolt him. But Balan understands that they are not social barriers but spiritual obstacles on his way to purification. It dawns on him that

... It was not for his sins that he was suffering but for those of his ancestors. Moreover, he had not been forced to suffer, no one had imposed it on him. It was a voluntary penance that was willingly undertaken. If there was any compulsion, it was an inner one ...39
Thus, Balan learns that "the distance that separated the Cheri and the Agraoram was far more than just physical distance. It was like the difference between heaven and hell, only he was not sure which was heaven and which was hell." Gradually, his enquiring bent of mind realises the fact that each life has its own heaven and hell alike. Balan sensed that The Light from Heaven has all the minute details of Chakkliyars' life their dirties, their prostrations, quarrels and humiliations. Yet as Balan senses "these people enjoyed life with a recklessness that was impossible even in conception to a Brahmin - it was an earthy and vibrant living, in total contrast to the pale and insipid life the agraharam people led."

"The reward of the quest usually is or indudes a bride" and the bride is often to be found "in a perilous, forbidden, or tabooed place", and "she is, of course, often rescued from the unwelcome embraces of another." The antagonist is often a sinister figure and winning the reward combines" the ritual and the psychological associations. If Balan is the quester, the villiain figure is the novel in Pitchu and Lachi is the bride. Pitchu is aggressively inimical to Balan, as he desires to marry the girl and turns a sworn enemy to Balan.

Balan could Outmanouere Pitchu in physical combat. He finally marries Lachi. With the marriage "for the first tiine
since his quest, Balan felt he was now truly an untouchable. It was as if his vow had been fulfilled, as if his long, hard, journey was at an end."

The Sadhana's or the spiritual discipline of the self should be undertaken only with the help of Guru. Initiation of Balan is possible only through Kuppan. The root of "initiation" is the mantra. Like the 'Gayatri Mantra' that initiates one into brahminfold, 'Oh, God.' Make me a Chakkiliyan,' is the repeated Mantra of Balan. Four forms of worship are prescribed in the mantras and there one found practised by Balan. He meditates on his identity with the truth that exists outside him. Secondly, he maintains a constant meditation on his chosen ideal to atone for the sins of his ancestors. Thirdly, he repeats the 'mantra,' the words corresponding to his chosen ideal 'Oh, God, make me a Chakkiliya' and finally he turns the most repugnant tasks that the untouchables carry on i.e. cleaning the human and animal dirt, into forms of worship.

OUT CAST

The journey of a terrorist and the journey of his fail is the theme of Romen Basu's Outcast. In the centre of the novel is a mind that is bent on destruction, and seeks ways and means to destroy the social structure of which it forms a part without any remorse or regret. Instead of dispersion
and identification of self, it gradually alienates itself from others. A destructive hero defeats the very purpose for which he has started his journey. The dragon that he aimed at escapes in the end. His kiiler-instinct destroys the good and bad alike. Energy dissipated, deprived of aids, and with vengeance as the sole weapon, the hero collapses in and his quest ends in a fiasco. Thus, the journey of a terrorist is the process of his fail.

Sambal in *Outcast* presents a striking contrast to Balan's journey which is soul-progressive and accomplished. Sambal's journey in life is reductive. Though he strives to achieve the same goal, to win equal rights for his people, he executes his mission with a strong conviction in revenge and violence. When he asks Putki, his love to make up her mind soon to work with him, she points out the anarchic trait in him.

"How can I help? All you do is to plot fights."

"You make me sound like a paid goonda."

"Anarchist, you said last time." He smiled with satisfaction.

"Give it up, you are so clever, success will come whatever you apply mind to."\(^{46}\)

"My mind is set to destroy the temple and I will succeed."

To Sambal, destroying the village temple, is equivalent to demolishing the social structure oppressing his people.
m aggressive adherence to destruction through vengeful means is Sambal's 'hupris'. It is enough to precipitate a tragic alienation and waste of purpose. "The end is morally intelligible if one considers the indictment in Gandhi's words":

A terrorist is not born but created. He is the product of a society where disparities and inequalities are oppressively wide and deep-rooted. Generally, a sensitive, aggressive child that unfortunately witnesses in its early impressionable age the brutalities inflicted on any of its kith and kin by dominant forces, turns into a terrorist later if it is not countered by a higher purpose. The incident gets deeply engraved in its mind so as to refuse absorption of any rational view about it. What torments Sambal is the scene he has witnessed as a child in the Kali temple when his father was thrashed by the upper caste men till he fell unconscious just for placing red hibiseus on the temple steps.

In course of time, as Putki, observed "rapidly he war hardening and becoming indifferent to life. If he had no fear of death, it is more out of despair." The hardening is a process of alienating oneself from society, from his own self, and from all the kindred souls and companions. While Balan in The Light From Heaven attracts a following in his mission, Sambal loses his companions and comrades who
drop out one after the other, unable to convince Sambal or change his maniacal passion. The situation testifies Frye's words: The centre of tragedy is in the hero's isolation, not in a villain's betrayal, even when the villain is, as he often is, a part of the hero himself. The villain to Sambal is Sambal himself.

Sambal realises that the first dragon he has to confront is not the discrimination between the upper and lower minority castes, but the divisions among the lower caste groups themselves, some ranking themselves higher than the others. They all have to be united for electing a member of their community to the Gram Panchayat. Hence, Sambal works towards unifying the lower castes who are divided into many small groups as Mahasyas, Badgis, Cawras, Chamar, Chandal, Doms, and Pods. For unity among the lower caste groups, his suggestion is not well received. He Mahasya labourer indignantly answers that "he could not be placed in the same situation with Bagdis and Pods," Sambal tries to explain to the divided outcast that the landlords who have the powers to control, look upon all of them exactly the same way.

Sambal becomes aware of the fact that his people are divided due to their poverty. The upper castes exploit them in the name of their abject economic situation. As long as their bare needs are fulfilled, the poor will be satisfied
and principles like equality and justice do not matter to them. Sambal is pained to see that those who have been on his side a month ago, have now changed sides lured by the power of money. He complains to Mastermoshai:

Lots of money is changing hands. Those who were on our side a month ago, have switched positions... Landowners are bringing the labourers to their knees. Even the lower castes were complaining that clinging to Sambal and Biresh brought them starvation. They were ready to admit their mistakes before the landowners brought in labourers from outside.

But Sambal is blind to the immensity and complexity of the problems he has to encounter. Mastermoshai is aware of the fact that nothing could be achieved with the labourers unless their hunger is appeased. Sambal is worried that the labourers have been bought and have started defecting. For the past six months he has been trying to organise them to bargain collectively with the landlords.

If Sambal is resentful with the moderate ways it is because he demands a quick solution. In Gandhian terms, it is for 'the magician's mango' that springs up from nowhere. An impulsive and demanding approach like that of Sambal is contrary to the painful climb that a true social reformer should make, requiring patience, intelligence and constructive long drawn effort. Parekh underlines the moral and political courage demanded of a true Gandhian worker:
In Gandhi’s view, building up the pride and self-confidence of a different and long-oppressed people, atmashuddhi as he called it, was an immensely complex and protracted task calling for great patience, hard work and skilful organisation. It required living in the remotest villages, educating illiterate people, organising them, teaching them sanitation, hygiene and habits of cooperation, building up their economic strength, reconciling those long divided by deep cultural, religious, linguistic and other differences and healing wounds inflicted by centuries of oppression.

In the journey of Sambal, his progression from that of a terrorist-in-principle to that of a terrorist-in-action is often checked by Putki, his second self. The ideals that Sambal rejects as undesirable are loaded on to the character of Putki. Characteristic of the 'Double', she is inextricably bound to Sambal both as his 'beloved' and 'opposite.'

As a beneficent love, Putki plays the role of a protective spirit. The incident at one Mahadev’s house is evident of her role. Tagore, Mahadev’s sister, is killed by her own brother and the body was about to be set fire, Sambal intervenes. When Mahadev’s men start assaulting Sambal, Putki falls on him, covers him and bears the blows on her. She advises him to start a business and thus start a new chapter in his life. She suggests:

Everyday, dozens of steamers leave these shores for far-away places and they sail for weeks on end. Surely you can sell them things they need for the long journeys. Groceries, fuel, tobacco. Instead of their having to go to the stores, if you bring these things to the boat, wouldn’t that be helpful?
Sambal pooh-poohs her suggestion as a 'pipe dream'. He says that he wants to devote his life to the good of the village and 'not chase money'. Sambal harps on the gross disparity and discrimination shown to women of the lower caste. They have to walk two miles to get water, while just half a dozen Vaishnava families have a tube-well installed in front of their huts. Putki's common sense tells Sambal: 'If you stay within the law, you can achieve so much more'.

Revenge is uppermost in his mind. Whenever Sambal feels cornered he yells, 'No one can stop me, no one'. In the face of his vehemence, guiding self like Putki is defeated and fades.

The inability of a blind Samson, in the moment of his greatest torment, forces him to scream at Delilah. Sambal forcefully distances himself from Putki, who experiences moments of his outbursts, dissatisfied with what he considers as her non-cooperation in his cause. Sambal seeks the help of Saraaju, a young widow of independent will and ostracised by the Panchayat on moral grounds. Putki feels it is an attempt to supplant her and assumes that Sambal's diffidence and indifference to her is all because of his attachment to Sarauju.
"Saraju is spending seven hours a day for us and you still can't make up your mind when to start". This curt answer from Sambal hurt her. She covered her eyes with her sari, trying to visualise Saraju's features. Not able to find fault with her looks, she consoled herself that, as a widow, Saraju was handicapped ... 

If Putki asked him to explain what the cells he was organising would do, he would evade the question or silence her. "You show little faith in our work", he told her once. Unable to accept the accusation, she called him a high-handed man who had no trust in her. It pained her that Saraju enjoyed his confidence more than she did. 

In his advocacy of violence, Sambal finds temporary companionship with the revolutionary communists. He chooses Manmatha Bose, the local communist leader, as his aid and guide. 

Manmatha supports the candidature of Sambal to the Village Panchayat because, "Sambal has courage, he is incorruptible", and he has been working tirelessly with the peasants to raise their wages. Sambal develops an affinity with the communists who render protection to the untouchables when they are assaulted by Paramesh and his men. Sambal is stabbed in the stomach and is carried to the hospital. When .pake is brought home, Putki stealthily meets him, and tells him how the communists are actively campaigning to form a party organisation in Basuli.
Putki tries to dissuade Sambal from joining the community:

"They are anxiously waiting for you to get better."

"I don't like any of it."

"I am surprised to hear you say that you don't like it," said Sambal with hostility.

"I have always been against violence."

"There is no other way, Putki," Sambal said angrily.

"From now on, for every life they take, we will take two of theirs. The communists are our only friends."57

Initially, Sambal likes the ideas of Manmatha regarding uniting the untouchable communities. He expresses his readiness to recruit himself in the party and the use of force or pressure draws Sambal towards Manmatha. The protection given by the communist party to the Outcast in the event of police search and the social activities taken up by Manmatha are appreciated by Sambal.

The communists have allegiance to their Party commands. The stark 'omnipotent will' of Sambal will not go with Manmatha Bose's willing surrender to the Party.

A new Shiva temple built where all the lower sections of the society could worship becomes the subject of dispute and disunity. The Bagdis want to manage the affairs of the temple on their own while Muchis, a smaller group is denied participation in the temple administration. This is highly
repugnant to Sambal as the divisions among the lower castes continue even in places of worship and Manmatha cautions Sambal not to tamper with a sensitive issue like religion.

He advises Sambal that the time has come to subordinate one's desire to the good of the Party. Manmatha's compromise is disagreeable to Sambal who retorts:

You and I agreed a long time ago that all the money wasted in public pujas could be put to better use in the schools. We don't have enough books for everybody. In the dispensary 'bottles are filled with the coloured water instead of real medicines ... Yet you tell me that' pujas' are more important."

Rightly Manmatha points out the flaw in Sambal which does not permit him to look from to beyond himself and he is not aware that so much is happening in the world beyond Basuli. Otherwise, he will be totally isolated. Sambal calls the Party and Manmatha Bose as opportunists, since they compromise on anything to continue their hold on people. Sambal charges Manmatha Bose as a hypocrite and says:

You talked big about equality and justice ... against religion, now you want to hide behind Party orders. Let me tell you, I don't take orders from your Party and I will fight anyone I have to."

Sambal enters his own created life which is far distant from the existing order of things. He is alone and will be left alone in the end, unless he has the adequate moral
strength to structurally change the attitudes of others. Along with Sambal, walk three people - Mastermoshi, Manmatha Bose and Putki. The first two, go with him to a certain extent and then drop out. Putki exists for him till her death but her death itself is Sambal's doing, wringing off the best redemptive part of his seif. Sambal's character is thus suggestive of the theory that in a tragic hero one finds a "Dionysiac" aggressive will, intoxicated by dreams of its own omnipotence, impinging upon an "Apollonian" sense of external and immovable order. Though Sambal does not meet his death or is killed, there is a spectacle of disintegration and death along his journey.

KHADI AND THE BULLET

Savitri's journey in *Khadi and the Bullet* is an attempt to work out a compromise between "bullet" and "Khadi", i.e., between violence and non-violence. As the very title signifies, two main differential streams of action are responsible for the fictional buoyancy of the novel. Violence is posited against non-violence, and adherents to violence against the followers of non-violence.

An attempt is made to weave together fact and fictions, history and imagination. In the process are introduced famous legendary heroes like Chandrasekar Āzad, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru Sukhdev, Yashpal and Bhagavati Charan.
Historically, Chandrasekar Azad was a legend in his life time in the thirties and a source of inspiration for the youth who were drawn into the terrorist movement. The legend of Azad began when he was arrested at the age of thirteen for distributing seditious congress literature. The scene is imaginatively rendered in Khadi and the Bullet. Azad is brought before the presiding Magistrate and interrogated:

Naime?
Azad.
Swaraj
Address?
The Local Jail

The defiant thirteen-year old was awarded thirteen stripes. With each stroke of the whip, his cry rang out, clear as a bell, "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!" Similar stories went round about Azad's heroism and the legend grew.

Azad was "robust and sturdy, he had muscles of iron and phenomenal strength and agility." He was the 'Commander' of the Hindustan Socialist Republic Association, engaged in violent revolutionary activities to free India. He was a suspect in the Kakori robbery incident when dacoits were reported to have broken the cash safe open from the train and abstracted the cash. Azad escaped arrest during the round-up that followed, with gallows staring him in the face if he got caught. He was not, however, the man to lie low
even for a day. He was a great organiser who continued his work with redoubled energy and together with Bhagat Singh and Sukudeu rebuilt the party of violence. The explosion almost killed the Viceroy while he was travelling in a special train in December 1929. It made the British realise that the situation was still grave and menacing. Failure had failed to cow him down. He was a striking contrast to Bhagat Singh who was calm and collected, never perturbed, never upset. A2ad had nerves of iron. The name of Chandrasekar Azad, simply Azad, sent shivers down the spins of police officials in the pre-independent India. Despite the self-sacrificing efforts made by him and his comrades, the Nationalist Movement did not move into revolutionary channels.

The historical incident of the executions of three outstanding violent freedom fighters - Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukudev led to the picketing by the college students at Lahore. The executions of these outstanding freedom fighters were strongly resisted by the inundation of letters, telegrams, vociferous public meetings, hartal and editorials suggesting that the viceroy exercised his prorogation of clemency and commute the death sentences to life imprisonment. Despite all these, Bhagat Singh and his comrades were hanged and their bodies were hurriedly cremated. Bhagat Singh asked the British court that they are said to have been waging war and are consequentially war
prisoners: "we claim to be shot dead instead of being hanged." These appeals were turned down and the execution shook the whole nation.

It is pertinent here to remember Gandhi's feelings about Bhagat Singh: "One's head bends before Bhagat Singh's bravery and sacrifice. But I want the greater bravery ... the bravery that will mount the gallows without injuring or harbouring any thought of injury to a single soul." Nehru said: "In Bhagat Singh's self-sacrifice, bravery has passed the upper limits. In honouring him, one must not forget the path of non-violence."

While the non-violent doctrine of Gandhiji approves absence of malice or hostility to all living beings in every way and at all times, the youth who resorted to terrorism had their own interpretation of it.

In KMdi and the Buljet, the history of the nineteen thirties provides a platform for Savitri's active journey in conjunction with the protesters. To them, it was a "Yajna or a religious sacrifice*. "Indians needed to be energised, taught to find and given a collective sense of power. Violence by a courageous and committed few was the only way to do so ... When told that a few bombs would not drive away the British, Barin Ghose, a terrorist leader in Bengal, said: We did not mean or expect to liberate our country by
killing a few Englishmen. We wanted to show people how to
dare and die."

In fact, Savitri is not a full-fledged terrorist like
Azad or Bhagat Singh but one in-the-rnake. Hence, her
journey though encompasses all the characteristics of a
terrorist's life, she is not the main agent of action but
her activities and movements are directed, and rnaneuvered by
other - the others being the revolutionaries of fame in
Indian history. Savitri is a mere novice in terrorist
principles and is used in the novel for a purpose other than
her development. She is not a full grown protagonist but
mainly serves as a lens to portray the heady civil
disobedience years of the Indian freedom struggle and
recreate the roie of the party of violence.

The novelist is, therefore, right when she says: This
book is a homage to those who lived and fought and
felt and verbalised an intense involvement with the
concept of Nationhood and Freedom. I have tried to
ulumine a time of national pride. I regret that this
is but a tiny portion of what was an epic drama.

The fact is that though the Indian Freedom struggle has
been an epic drama, Savitri, the creation of Saloni Narang
is not an epic character and her journey not of epic
stature.

The action that precipitates Savitri's exit is the
incident when the Goyernor was shot by Hari Kishan. Sensing
her relationship with Hari/Angad, an associate with
terrorist activities, the police interrogates Savitri. In panic, she flees away from the house.

A terrorist's journey is studded with insecurity, constant fear of the authority, shifting from place to place incognito, strategies to conceal oneself, and surreptitious movements, a burning passion to defy the existing system rather than a futuristic vision of stability and a youthful zeal to attain the ends by whatever means.

From the moment Savitri leaves her house till her return after a short period of eleven months, we are introduced not to her exploits, but to other historically prominent revolutionaries and incidents of the thirties.

Savitri, after fleeing from home in panic on the event of police enquiry, leaves incognito for Delhi with Yashpal, a violent revolutionary. Here, Chandrasekar Azad (fictional), the Commander of the 'revolutionary party', also called Bhaiya meets Savitri and arranges for their stay at the home of Janaki Nath who sympathises with the revolutionary movement. Shanti, Janaki Nath's wife, presents Savitri to the rest of the household as the bride of a debauched son of a wealthy Zamindar.

A terrorist leaves the house after feeling the pressure of alienating environment and home and pulled to the vortex of a fascinating but violently chaotic movement.
surging outside. Savitri being drawn into the main current of terrorism naturally becomes a fugitive like any other revolutionary. She tells Azad, the party leader:

"The problem is," her voice was cool, steady, "that the police are after me. I've run away from Lahore. I have no money. And nowhere to go". She made a helpless gesture. "And ... I don't know who to turn to."

Savitri, the fugitive, is educated in the ways of life which in the end of her journey makes her realise that violence cannot achieve even the limited terrorist goal of independence either.

Gandhi was convinced that the values of the terrorist are not of permanence and cannot win because, "they admired physical bravery and not the apparently passive but really resolute and tenacious courage of the traditional Indian variety, material and not spiritual strength; self assertion not self - abnegations; self interest not self sacrifice, uniformity rather than plurality of beliefs: and value systems; the centralized state rather than a loosely structured traditional polity; affluence rather than a simple life.'"'

Savitri's stay of eleven months in Seth Janaki Nath's household schools her into the complexities of life which she has not known hitherto. Seth Janaki Nath's household where Savitri is taken is a mini representation of the Indian Society itself. This traditional joint family of
forty odd members at first charmed her. Their integrated
closeness impresses her as against the artificial
sophistication in her household. She could never tell whose
child was whose, that the younger ones were bathed
collectively by one aunt, scolded collectively by another,
fed by a third, taught needle work by a fourth. That a
crying baby was immediately picked up and cuddled by
whosoever was closest, that there was always some one to
share or solve a problem someone to talk to, laugh with, go
to for comfort". "part of the integrated whole, a
complement and a supplement to each other."-"- This cosy
feeling lasts only for a short while.

.. A claustrophobic, nerve-taut, silent scream. The press
of humans she lived with no longer a charming,
integrated, happy family. Despair coloured, she saw
only the petty jealousies, the minor intrigues, the
manipulations, and a distasteful deviousness. In such
a densely packed milieu someone. Tensions. (That,
equally, someone was always there to soothe, to
comfort, escaped her harried nerves). So much
mindless gossip, Such unendurable enforced intimacy.
With no concept of the sanctity of privacy. She hated
it all."72

The environment of Janaki Nath's household in Delhi
presents a contrasting picture to her life in her home at
Lahore. A revolutionary cannot think of the very comforts
that he or she has enjoyed earlier. Savitri does not have
the capacity of a matured terrorist. The images of her home
start haunting her and predominantly, the image of Angad.

And often of Angad. Dreams of strolls through Gol
Bagh. And once, a dream of a high, brick wall, an
iron-sheeted gate, with its small shuttered wicket,
And through the wicket Angad. Then Hands Manacled. And she herself, running towards him, Arms outstretched. Laughing. So happy, so happy.73

Savitri is gradually distanced from the goal that she has fixed at the beginning of her journey - to drive the British out of India using arms and violence. The streak of terrorism is less sharply edged in her than the characteristics of a romance heroine. Women of romance have been seized with a passion for love and adventure. At one time in Savitri, both merge, focussed on Angad alias Hari: "Marriage was the last thing in her mind. She was dedicated to a 'cause'. Sometimes the 'cause' and Angad merged, but she was unaware of even that."74

Unfortunately, a terrorist's life is filled with moments of painful awareness of loneliness which Savitri starts experiencing.

At this juncture of her life, Savitri learns another lesson. The paralysing dependence of Indian women on others. The events in the household test her patience and fortitude. The inhuman treatment meted out to the dying daughter-in-law, the one Savitri has tried to befriend in Janaki Nath's place, the proposal of a new bride to the dying girl's husband and the refusal of the in-laws to allow her see her own still born baby, agonised and pulled her down to realities. She feels exhausted and decides not to stay forever in this limbo. A sense of non-belonging sets
in her. The alienation she suffers from and a longing to escape from the present, prepares a stage for her 'Return'.

THE SALT OF LIFE

The journey of an ideal female quester is a quest for reclaiming the female power to its fullest stature. In *The Salt of Life*, Kusum, "twice married once widowed, the begetter of a son called Vikram" matures through different phases of experiences to become "the begetter of countless other sons beside."75 It is a cyclical process through which a woman finds an answer to the question "what is truly womanhood?". Kusum passes through a ritualistic pattern of marriage, motherhood, widowhood and the same phase repeated in remarriage, motherhood, widowhood and then becoming the Great Mother of Power, the Shakti who embraces the whole humanity. Anything repetitive has a mythic base as it moves: "from shape to shape, from body to body, the atman had to move on, there had to be a renewal."76

As a woman, Kusum earns for whole, perfectly healed self, and not to have a female personality fragmented into a daughter, wife or a mother:

Slowly she was getting to know herself - what she was, what she wanted. Once she thought motherhood to be the epitome of womanhood. Once she thought the beloved to be that personification. Or she thought it to be duty. Recently she even thought sensuality to be that personification, the source, the womb, from which life begins and where all life's searches end. She had, at various times, with varying degrees of acceptance,
discharged her obligations. And yet the woman in her
had remained ungratified . . . She had partitioned off
the women into little chambers and mistaken the crumbs
for the whole ... '

Kusum's reward at the end of her journey is, therefore,
her realisation of an autonomous self, capable of expanding
to become a part of Great Energy, a higher cause.

Kusum's quest after 'true womanhood' moves in resonance
with the national quest for liberation. Bharat Mata under
colonialism is Shakti ravaged by the aliens. Like Kusum, she
has suffered widowhood: "No invader of India had ever taken
up this task of annihilating a whole race as the British
had. For them the Indians were not a race, they were a bunch
of disorganised humans."\(^7\) Reawakening demands a spirit
morally upright, pure and unbent.

Kusum has a self-will which cannot be broken or bent
under any circumstances. She is blessed with a rare capacity
for regeneration and rebirth. Her remarriage with Raja
Vishal Chand after widowhood is regenerative and is in
defiance of the negative virtues of the acquiescence and
modesty dinned into her mind as a Hindu woman, Gandhi has
laid strict rules about sexual abstinence for the inmates of
the Ashram. But Kusum gives herself to Raja Vishal Chand and
feels regenerated. For Kusum, true union of a man and woman
is the modesty and virtue of a woman and she strongly
justifies her stand to Gandhi himself.
How do you know what exactly I feel for Vishal?
For you things are divided into a cast-iron right and wrong, good and bad, virtue and vice. Actual life is far more complex than that. Sexuality too has its nobility - which you won't see.

Gandhi in the novel jocularly responds: "When I have a little leisure, I'll teach myself the luxury of complexity."¹⁸⁰

Kusum leaves the Sabarmathi Ashram after her remarriage with Vishal Chand. From then on, her life assumes a dialectic relationship with the Ashram, the centre from where emanates Gandhian ideologies. Like a pendulum that swings between two ends, Kusum's self operates in two centres - Sabarmathi and Lambini. Lambini is the tiny state bounded on the west and north by the territories of Kashmir, east by the state of Chamba, and on the south by the British Punjab and Raja Vishal Chand is the ruler of the State. Whenever her spirits flag, Kusum leaves for the Ashram to replenish herself. She is conscious of the pull exerted on her by Gandhi and she is equally wary not to be overpowered by him. This shuttling should be resolved in the process of realising herself: "each of us seeks to right the balance by constantly moving back and forth in the psychic space between the poles."¹⁸¹ She should choose the Centre, "reducing oneself to a zero"¹⁸² and learn the dignity of being dissolved like the salt in the nobler cause of humanity. Thus, Kusum's journey of discovery means a search for the 'Centre'.
The Centre . . . is pre-eminently the zone of the sacred, the difficult road ... arduous, fraught with perils, because it is in fact, a rite of the passage from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral and illusion to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to the divinity. Attaining the Centre is equivalent to a consecration, an initiation; yesterday's profane and illusory existence gives place to a new, to a life that is real, enduring and effective. 

Kusum links the world of nature and the world of men. The impending Salt March which has coursed through the whole country, like a whisper rising from the valley, gathering strength has reached Kusum. The Dândi Salt March for Gandhi, has a larger significance. As waves after waves of people jöin him, it transforms the spirit of India:

The change, the renewal, the transformation, the change implied, he was unconcerned with immortality, he was not even remotely interested in it, the immortality of his soul, but he was interested in change, and he was inviting his change, this mutuation by choice, he was inflicting it upon himself, holding on to the slenderest of slender thought the change would reshape him, refine him, purify him, this Dândi he was marching to was to prove his phoenix, the phoenix of his renewal . . . 

Gandhi, conscious of the magic effect that the Salt March will have on Indians, regards it not as an act of breaking the Salt law but as a national yagna, with a wonderful restorative power.

History records that when Gandhi planned Salt Satyagraha even some of Gandhi's close friends tried to dissuade him from embarking on such a novel subject. Gandhi did not swerve from salt. It is difficult
stuck to salt. He said: "It is a battle to finish. The Divine Händ is guiding it. It must be prolonged till the last offer himself for Satyagraha."

It is with great artistic ingenuity and imaginative verve that a fictional character like Kusum is linked to the epic march. Lakhs of people swelled as if a sea of humanity had emerged on the side of the road for seven miles for which Gandhi would walk. With his 79 followers, Gandhi started the epic march at 6'0 clock on 12th March; 1930 and as Jawaharlal described it: "Today the pilgrim marchea ahead on his lõng track ... It is not easy to escape from his magic spell and even a man of lay could feel the spark of life pulsating."

Gandhi was moved by the sight of the concourse of people for a distance of seven miles from the Ashram to the Chandola Lake, "a sight for the gods to see." Chaman Nahal, the novelist, at the very thought of such a historical thundering march which east a magic spell on the whole nation goes into raptures. Like a shaman who is in trance, he starts chanting like a priest condueting the Vedic Yagna; so highly ritualistic it is that the chapter "Temper" runs through 31 pages non-stop, as if waves, lap on waves, rising as the orchestrated voice of a soul in a transcendental stage. Gandhi is in a trance. The change he has brought is not his. It is Atman changing, renewing itself.
... Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was dying with this
march, was already dead, in conformity with the
dictates of his religion, where you were ever warned to
be ready for the moment of change, the atman had to
change, the atman had to move on, from shape to shape,
from body to body, they all had to go, their time was
come, the atman was not killed with the death of the
body, it was immortal, but the body was mortal, and it
was killed, and you were admonished to sorrow not for
those who thus departed, for change was the very law of
life, its most basic and inherent law, yes the dictates
were so clear, from shape to shape, from body to body,
the atman had to move on, there had to be a renewal,
the old must give place to the new, the new couldn't
come into being without the old yielding to it the
right of way ... 87

Realisation of Atman, its subjugation under the
British, the condition of Indian children, mothers,
peasants, the sacredness of Indian rivers and the plains,
the secret fragrance of life in a woman, the mystery of life
in our body, and the vast panorama of life in the country
unfold as thoughts run criss-cross in Gandhi's mind, in
fusion and fission.

The vision of Gandhi is, as described in the novel, a
Visvarupa Dharsan of India - so majestically extending,
enshadowing, the head towering above the Himalayas into the
heavens and the feet standing in the mystic depth of the
country - with no beginning, no end. The whole vision is the
transcendental experience of a soul at its heights of
supreme realisation. At the end of the vision, Gandhi
experiences a death-wish, a desire for death of the kind
which will mark the completion of the race that a good
runner has run.
... let me die in harness, in full glory as a man who is busy in your service, in your honour let me die at a prayer meeting if your will, since a prayer in your honour I regard as a journey, but it will be better still if I died on the road, away from my ashrams, which are like fortresses where I am pampered and protected, let me die on my wanderings, in the service of the meek... 

To Chaman Nahal, the Dandi March is a celebration and song of India - the song that the people wanted Mahatma to sing:

... I celebrate and sing of India, I sing of its winds, rivers, trees, temples, dance, music, sounds of joy, sounds of sorrow, pilgrims, peasants, the youth, the old, the children, the men, the women, kings and queens, scents and fragrances, secular and religious teachers, its justice, its tenacity, its will to endure...

The song ends in complete harmony of life, death and liberation of the country. "The Om Shanthi, Om Shanthi, Om Shanthi," chanted at the end marks the fulfilment of the soul.

Kusum has to feel the same mystic vision in her womanhood - the perfection of encompassing everything within herself. Before the soul-force is empowered, she has to reconcile herself with her parental figures. She has to go back to the childhood and start the process of cleansing from her days with her parents. The dignity of her self was assaulted by Viran Vati, her mother. As a tyrannical mother, she has been a symbol of oppressive, negative forces on Kusum while the father has distanced himself from his wife and children. As an outsider to the family, he too was
equally stifling her growth. It is all the more necessary, therefore, that Kusum should reconcile with her parents before becoming a new liberated seif: "Transformation of the seif is difficult because of internalized oppression and the effects of 'slave psychology'."\(^1\) However, internalized oppression and the social conditions that reinforce it daily must be transcended in order to create a new psychology of the seif and to establish institutions (or alter existing ones) that support this new seif.

A chance for reconciliation with her parents comes to Kusum when her mother lies in her death bed. Sick, frustrated, full of hatred, the mother bursts out at the very sight of her father. She becomes aggressive and catty. At the sight of her husband, Viran Vati begins to scream and shout.

... Shriek after shriek did she emit, watching her husband with terrified eyes. 'What's that scoundrel doing here? Take him out of here. This monster, this dog, this unclean pig, this bloodsucker, don't let him come near me, don't let him touch me, I want him out of here, out of my sight, take this foul spirit out of here - ah! ah! - take him away, don't let him touch me! When Laia Dharam Das tried to restrain her, she clawed at his face. 'Don't you touch me! You pig, you monster!' She used worse Punjabi swear words.\(^2\)

In fact, in Viran, the Hindu woman who has been reviling her husband for many years secretly, now openly calls her husband the villain in her life. The mother has been an alien in her own household and the father too an outsider. To whom does the house belong?
... Viran Vati had said to Kusum while they were in the old house in the heart of Wazirabad:

"When we build a new house, I'm going to have a large kitchen."

"How large you want it to be, mother? Even this one is quite large."

"Not for my taste."

A frown passed over her face, and she added:

"This is the only room in the house which belongs to me."

"How do you mean, mother? The whole house belongs to you."

"No, the house belongs to your father. Only the kitchen is mine. That's where I live most of the time."93

The open outbursts and screams and shrieks of Viran Vati is a 'Conscious Raising' moment for both the mother and daughter. Having reconciled in this way, with her suppressed self, death is the end to Viran.

Kusum now takes the role of the mother and gives him the most shameful and agonising moment in life. He is caught by his own daughter with a woman in his bed and that too when his wife is in her death-bed. Choked with anger, Kusum shouts at her father that he has been deceiving the mother all through. The father confesses:

Your mother has driven me to other women. From the first day of our marriage, she has shown nothing but hostility, and anger, and harshness.94

As Dharam Das goes on justifying his act and blaming
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As Dharara Das goes on justifying his act and blaming
her of denying him of the comfort and union that he as a husband would deserve from his wife, Kusum realises that his words are the same words of her first husband, Sunil. It is a moment of her reconciliation too with the dead Sunil. As the father accuses that her mother's sexual frigidity has driven him to other women, she realises that it must be her own sin too!

It is Kusum's consciousness raising session in the sense, that she has made both the parents her 'others' and help her heal her own self.

... Women, after all, have needs for self-esteem, independence, expression of anger and aggression; and men have needs for security, affection and expression of fear and sorrow. While, at present, men may have more diverse models.

Thus, through both the parents, Kusum has introspected herself, has worked inward in order to throw away what is not here.

Reconciled with both the parents and becoming healthy, the self is now endowed with the power to find the meaning, of her existence. In her life as a wife to Raja Vishal Chand, she has willingly related herself to him:

... With Vishal, she did not mind, yielding to the maleness of the man either. Let the Indian sun continue to scorch the Indian earth and ferment its series of endless virtues. For her, at the moment, one virtue outshone all the others put together; to bring fulfilment to the man who meant so much to her. To bring him joy, she would have gone to any limit, stooped to anything. In his case, she might even reconcile herself to a rival, if he did decide to have
thought she had broken with Gandhi. Who could sever a bond so elaborate and convincing? Yes it went deeper than Gandhi; it was the spirit in her that could not be broken, or beaten, or bent - under any circumstance. Yes slowly she was getting to know herself - what she was, what she wanted."  

The moment of epiphany arrives. She is no more Kusum, a wronged wife, a wronged daughter, or a wronged mother. She is more than that. She feels she is Kali, the goddess of destruction and creation. She will destroy the oppressor and become the Great mother to liberate all her children. She is of Kusum; She is Shakti herself.

... it meant neither piety nor licence, it only meant power, the power that was being hailed today, that was being harnessed, being appealed to, the woman as Shakti, the woman as the begetter of mankind, the woman as the principle of energy, the woman as the true heat of the sun, the woman as the true vastness of the sky, the woman as the true depth of the ocean, the woman as the true dimension of the land, without whose guiding hand a man couldn't stand up on his two legs, couldn't breathe, couldn't smile, couldn't flicker his eyes, couldn't see, couldn't hear, the woman who was nothing but power, whose other images were only as many illusions, who was nothing but potency personified, at the twinkle of whose eyes or the flicker of whose smile the universe ran on for another thousand years ...

While Gandhi experiences a dharshan of the Vishvarupa of India, Kusum experiences the mystic union of everything becoming her. It is drawing everything out of her. She is conscious of her transformation to Shakti, the Goddess of energy, and the Supreme Mother of destruction, creation and sustenance.

... Shakti which renewed life and put fresh momentum into the rhythm of the planets and the stars, then each
woman must be accepted for what she was and revered, yes, in that spirit alone could Kusum possibly lead this impetuous, vibrant mob, in the unbiased expression of power, of energy which she had just gotten hold of, which she was sure Gandhi would approve of too, the woman as Shakti, as an intense vital flame of molten lava, demanding her rights...

... was no longer Kusum, no longer a woman, she was all the women mankind had ever known or was likely to know, she was an embodiment a typfication, [sic] an exemplification of womanhood.

Shakti in her is a mother for all. She experiences the spiritual excitement of knowing one's power in guiding herself up to others as a mother and nurturer.

... They could take her arms and hold her figures, who could fasten their mouths to her breasts if they liked who could enter and lodge themselves in her womb, who could smell her, who could taste her, drink her up if they could liquify her, or boil her up and reduce her to salt - ah, that's it, the salt - the woman as the true salt of life, the only true seasoning, the most vital herb, the most luxuriant spice, which treasure the weary travellers sailed the distant seas while the treasure lay spread around them, right where they were . . .

This mother forgives everyone and absolves the sins of her children. Pilled with a surfeit of pity, she first time in many years forgave Sunil, she forgave Rehana, she forgave her mother, she forgave her father . . .

Kusum, the Shakti can outmatch her enemy, the alien power by defying its law, with her children milling around her, 'unaided by anything but her own innate fire, let them all dispense or fail back, she would single— banded see' how the train was able to budg* forward even an inch.
The scene of Dândi March is repeated. Here "the woman Gandhi" leads the mass. In a huge cauldron, the water procured from the engine is poured and Kusum finally lits the fire under it. The crowd of more than one thousand takes the cue from her and several other fires lit way back. Kusum has brought Dândi to Punjab.

To conclude, Kusum's journey is one of integration and expansion. She heals her bruised self through reconciliation with love, with parents, and with the universe. A woman's self has to expand outside her narrow family. The world can be liberated only if it receives her care and nurturance, protection and power. These are gifted by the Shakti in a woman. Kusum has realised the Shakti in her when her cause becomes the wider cause of the nation.

THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL

Shashi Tharoor's facile pen and fertile imagination find no other character than C7andhi himself fit for his masterpiece, The Great Indian Novel. Gandhi, the father of the Nation, is resurrected in the fictional character Ganga Dutta. Verily, the whole course of. Gangaji's journey is a pursuit of Truth.

Ved Vyas (the narrator) dictates the great Indian story (the N#w Hahabharata) to Ganapathi who takes it down. He is explicit about what Gangaji has guested for in his Life :
Truth that he was after - spell that with a capital T. Ganapathi, Truth. Truth was his cardinal principle, the standard by which he tested every action and utterance. No dictionary imbues the word with the depth of meaning Gangaji gave it. His truth emerged from his convictions: It meant not only what was accurate, but what was just and therefore right, Truth could not be obtained by 'untruthful', or unjust, or violent means."

"Therefore, the terribly-vowed Gangaji avows that "I shall pursue the Truth, in all its manifestations, including the political and, indeed, the sexual. I shall seek to perfect myself, a process I began many years ago, in this very palace. And I shall seek freedom."

In the Indian concept of life, freedom is attained only through acts of renunciation. Gangaji enters the last asrama in his journey of life, the sanyasa, and choos the path of 'Karma Yoga'. In other words, it is an act of renunciation of a true politician for whom politics means revitalisation of Indian society, culture and character. Spiritualisation of politics is the task befitting a political sanyasi like Gangaji. Gangaji's life as a political sanyasi is what Gandhi imagined as the best -nurse to attain 'moksha' in our age. Every age has its own road of spiritual effort to attain 'moksha'. In the present context of India, Gandhi suggests spiritual liberation through politics:

... In this age, only political sannyasis can fulfil and adorn the ideal of sannyasa; others will more...
likely than not disgrace the sannyasi's, saffron garh. No Indian who aspires to follow the way of true religion can afford to remain aloof from politics. In other words, one who aspires to a truly religious life cannot fail to undertake public service as his mission, and we are today so much caught up in the political machine that service of the people is impossible without taking part in politics. In the circumstances that obtain today, in following the path of religion they must take into account the political conditions. If our sadhus, rishis, munis, maulvis, and priests realised the truth of this, we would have a Servants of India Society. In every village, the spirit of religion would come to prevail all over India, the political system which has become odious would reform itself.\textsuperscript{103}

For Gandhi/Gangaji then, regeneration of the country is through an austere political 'yatra' which naturally involves a variety of social struggles. Every activity in realisation of truth will be political in nature. It is because modern man has surrendered all his moral and social powers to the state which has become the sole arena of political activity. His regeneration consisted in retrieving them and evolving noncoercive modes.

Thus, politics is turned into a spiritual activity by Gandhi and politics is spiritual in the sense of being a moral activity. Gandhi borrowed the phrase 'spiritualisation of politics' from Gokahle, his political Guru. Hardly any of his predecessors saw it as a vehicle of moksha or liberation of the soul and many of them equated politics with social reforms. "Gandhi was one of the first to define morality in political terms, and politics in terms of active struggle against injustices and oppression."
The oppression of untouchables is his first target and then he moves on to wider causes concerning the peasants in the villages and workers in the factories. The inhuman treatment meted out to them whips up the revolutionary spirit in Gandhi. The strategies and spiritual weapons with which he combats these struggles help him to mobilise the collective force of the people and make them follow him unquestioningly.

The journey of a "political rishi" is not without its agonising moments. The partition of the country into Pakistan and India and the communal violence that followed broke his heart, when the whole country was jubilant over the midnight freedom won, Gandhi was in the mission of a healer, treating the communal wounds of both the Hindus and Muslims. The great journey of a great Indian culminates in his martyrdom. No heroic finale could have matched the stature and life style of a person like Gandhi other than the ultimate sacrifice of his life.

The situations, events and issues in the epic life of Gandhi are recast with bold historic authenticity and deep mythic roots. History and myth become one in the character of Gandhi.

Akin to historical Gandhi, Gangaji the political sanyasi of the novel starts his Yaina which otherwise is his
spiritual Yatra from the basic structure of the Indian society. The dragon he has to slay is the sin of untouchability. As soon as Gangaji founds the Asram, the first thing he does is to collect "a small number of followers of all castes, even his children of God whom he discovered to be as distressingly human as their counterparts." He also proclaims that "Untouchability is no longer legal in Hastinapur."^06

The moral weapon that Gangaji wields is the dignity of labour. The practice of untouchability itself was rooted in the discrimination and devaluation of castes based on the tasks they performed. The scavenging and latrine-cleaning task of the untouchables drew an inhuman treatment from other communities. Hence, for Gangaji, every caste Hindu for his atmasuddhi or self-purification, should scavenge and clean latrines and "there is nothing inherently shameful about the task of the untouchables."^07 Living among the untouchables and cleaning latrines is "a better way of acquiring self-discipline, 'reducing oneself to a zero' and learning the dignity of labour than some of the traditional methods."^08

The moral scientist in Gangaji tests the law of dharma on every situation of injustice that he faces. The best weapon to counter violence is to break the law of injustice non-violently. Gangaji uses non-violence to wrest the
maximum moral advantage. "By breaking the law non-violently he showed up the injustice of the law. By accepting the punishments the law imposed on him he confronted the colonialists with their own brutalization."\textsuperscript{109}

The famous Champaran campaign of Gandhi in the cause of peasants in the indigo plantations is given a literary rendering in the Motihari campaign of Gangaji. Motihari, being the head-quarters of the Champaran District, immediately reminds us of the Champaran campaign of Gandhi.

In Motihari, three-tenths of every man's land is allotted for the cultivation of indigo since the British need cash-crops more than they need wheat and the indigo has to be sold to the British planters at a price fixed by the buyer. Gangaji intervenes and inquires into the social and economic conditions of the people of Motihari, and taunts the government for being unfair to the peasants. Rs part of establishing the moral right of the peasants he defiance indigo laws:

In the interests of justice and of the cause I am here to serve, ... I refuse to obey the order to leave Motihari and willingly accept the penalty for my act. ... I reiterate that my disobedience emerges not from any lack of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience to a higher law, the law of duty."
Gangaji has won his cause and the planters are ordered to pay compensation to the poor peasants they have exploited and the rule requiring indigo to be planted was rescinded. The unique success of Gangaji’s moral feat has lead to the abolition of the injustice in the system.

Gangaji is now confirmed in the efficacy of non-violence as his moral weapon, to slay the dragon of social injustice. He tells Vyas: "there is no point in choosing a method at which your opponent is bound to be superior. You must fight with those weapons that are stronger than theirs - morality and truth."[111]

Debilitated in social and spiritual strength, the country demands a new politics requiring enormous amount of collective forces. Throughout his journey, Gangaji keeps exploring ways of 'releasing', 'conserving', and mobilising popular energy and 'converting and transforming' it into power. He generates spiritual energies in himself and activates them in others. The annexation of Hastinapur by the British on the ground that Gangaji preaches sedition, leads to the upsurge of the people. They pour out on the streets and denounce the "imperialist yoke". People expect Ganga Datta to address a mass rally on the annexation. They flock to the Bibigarh Garden from all over the state: "students left their classes in the city colleges to flock to Gangaji’s side; small town lawyers abandoned the security
of their regular fees at the assizes to volunteer for the cause; journalists left the empty debating halls of the nominated council members to discover the heart of the new politics."

Needless to say that the Bibigarh episode is the re-presentation of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, the most gruesome incident in Indian history when General Dyer and his soldiers ruthlessly fired rounds on an unarmed crowd of men and women. One can easily identify the General Dyer in the character of Colonel Rudyard in the novel.

Gangaji demonstrates the length to which 'Satyagraha' can be used as a moral weapon to solve even the most turbulent and complicated issues like the wage increases for the labourers. The suburban jute factories at Budge Budge outside Calcutta, are owned and managed by the sons of Seoti and-. But it is the 'indigenes' or the native workers who pull the leavers and move the mechanical looms. They are paid a pittance which barely permit them to eke out a living amidst the filth and stench of their slum dwellings. An endemic breaks and those who work are offered a bonus by the millowners. The poverty of the workers drive them to work even in the outbreak of the epidemic. "It took the plague to earn a decent wage, but when they got it the workers braved death and disease to work for it." Rfter the epidemic, bonus is withdrawn and the workers ask for a
wage rise which the mill owners refuse and declare a lock out.

Gangaji intervenes in the dispute. He trods "through the slush and shit of the factory workers' slums and is touched by the utter hopelessness on the faces of the locked-out workers: "that was the closest to nothingness Ganga had seen: no money, no food, no clothes, no work, no salary, no future, no reason in short, to live" and it moved and frightened him as nothing else had. Gangaji undergoes fasting "to strengthen the workers resolve, to show them how firmly they must hold their beliefs if they expect them to triumph." Thus, Satyagraha, a potent sword of truth in his moral armoury, has been an act of affirmation of the cause of justice.

As before, Gangaji wins. The British authorities, through the Governor of Bengal, send a terse message to the Mill owners' association, 'Give in'. When people say that Gangaji has won, it utter humility, he expresses the "they [the worker] have won". In the political bargaining, Gangaji's satyagraha gives a new code for winners: "harm yourself rather than to your opponent."

Satyagraha to Gangaji, is the means to achieve a moral revolution which purifies every individual who partakes in it and thus effecting national regeneration: "the process
of regeneration is a spiritual catharsis of every individual, and an atmashuddhi or purification of the national soul by means of a sustained national tapasya. Unlike a social or political revolution, a moral revolution cannot be undertaken over the heads of its intended beneficiaries. It entails a personal commitment and an intense soul-searching on the part of every India."

The historic 'padayatra' of Gangaji which drew the largest number of people across the country was the 'Great Mango March'. The colonial regime decides to levy a tax on the mangoes. "This dreadful exaction has already caused untold sufferings to the Indian masses amongst whose few humble pleasures is the fruit of the mango trees." The Mango is one luxury and 'humble pleasure' still available to the Indian masses. Hence Gangaji launches a long march against the British to repeal this iniquitous tax. He calls forth all the people across the length and breadth of India to lammmeh civil disobedience of the mango laws.

Gangaji's ambition is to convert the British through non-violence and civil disobedience and thus make them see the wrong they have done to India. As he found the British reluctant to yield, Gangaji starts the mango-march. He is at the head of the procession "baid, more or less toothless, holding a stave taller than himself." The march is the
signal for a nation-wide defiance of the mango Act. "Wave after wave of Khadj-clad Satyagrahis plucked and planted the contraband fruit, openly bought and sold it," thus demonstrating the efficiency of non-violence.

All through the padyatra, people welcome Gangaji and a sea of humanity joyously entreat Him. The padyatra is converted into a never-before witnessed mass movement:

Gangaji's grinning waves of benediction, the banners of welcome strung across the roads at every village through which we pass, the scences of smiling women in gaily coloured saris emerging in the blazing heat to sprinkle water on our dusty paths, the cameos of little children shyly thrusting bunches of marigolds into our hands, the waves of fresh volunteers joining us at every stop to swell our tide of marchers into a flood, all this speaks of the joyousness of our spirit as we march on.

Thus, the great mango march makes Gangaji realise the fertile strength of the Indian soil from which had sprung the Indian soul.

In his epic journey, Gangaji as a quester after truth has to encounter many social dragons including communalism. The multi-religious country witnessed the flaring up of the tentacles of religious disunity, bloodshed, and separation of people on religious lines. The mahaguru's traditional attire, his spiritualism, his ashram and his constant reference to an ideal pre-British past made some young men mistrustful of him. Mohamed Ali Kärna (Jinnah) voiced their dissent:
we are reasonably secure under the British, but we must think of the future, ... A future under Ganga Datta's Kauravas does not bear thinking about. 2

Thus, the aspirations of the Muslims to have a separate country for themselves begins to crystallise.

Mohammed ali Kärna (Jinnah) is not much of a Muslim but he finds Gangaji too much of a Hindu. Independence without Hindu domination is Karna's slogan and he openly calls for the creation of a new political entity where they can rule unchallenged. Gangaj's passion for a united India drives him to offer Mohammed ali Kärna the premiership of all India. In his characteristic vein says 'if you agree to break the country, you will break my heart' and refuses to dismember the country. Moralisation of politics, the singular streak of Gangaji, makes him transcend the divisions of religion into Hindusim, Isalm, christianity, etc. But despite Gangaji's efforts, it is resolved unanimously to accept in principle the partition of the country, the Islamic utopia being called 'Karnistan - the hacked off land.'

While the whole country celebrates with all cheers and exultance the winning of freedom, Gangaji saw no cause for such celebration. The partition of the country into Karnistan and India has seared his heart. The communal violence that erupted due to the partition made him the gloomiest man in the country.
Hence Ved Vyas reports the incident to Ganapathī:

Instead of the cheers of rejoicing, Gangapathī, he heard the cries of the women ripped open in the interencine frenzy; instead of the slogans of triumph, he heard the shouts of crazed assaulters flailing their weapons at helpless victims; instead of the dawn of Dhritrashtra's promise, he saw only the long dark night of horror that was breaking his nation in two. The bright lights of the gaily coloured bulbs strung across all the celebratory 'shamianas' of Delhi could not illuminate that darkness, Gangapathī, nor could they shine in his eyes as brightly as the blazing thatched homes of the poor peasants.  

Gangaji is most powerfully struck with the cruel awareness of his failure to reform his countrymen. "He had preached brotherhood and love, and comradeship in struggle, the strength of non-violence and the power of soul-force". But the terror unleashed seems "as if he had never lived at all, never preached a word."

Amba's hour has come. She is the life-negating revengeful force. The tirae has come for her to overpower the good in which is in throes. She steals into Gangaji's presence, flourishes a gun and three bullets spit out in quick succession. The episode of Amba in the Mahabharata is retold without much change, Bhīṣma in the classic and Bhīṣma (Gangaji) in The Great Indian Novel are killed by the revengeful Amba alike for the same reason. The martyrdom of Gangaji is mythically rendered in the novel. Amba, the life-destructive force, carrying vengeance in her heart has existed solely for the purpose of destroying the Mahaguru or Bhīṣma, 'the terrible vowed.'
To trace the mythic origin of the episode, Amba is focussed as the character who killed Bhisma in the Mahabharata. The incident is recast in the novel. Amba has been seized by force from the royal assembly at her father’s court by Bhisma to marry her to his brother, Vichitravriya. Amba who loved Raja Salva of Saubal persisted on returning to Raja Salva but, unfortunately, was refused by him. Humiliated, she returns to Hastinapur where Vichitravriya also declines to marry her. Amba blames Bhisma/Gangaji as the cause of her ruinage and beseeches him to save her from "eternal disgrace and spinsterhood," by marrying her. To her dismay, Gangaji instructs her on the merits of celibacy and advises her to live a celibate life. Denied of nuptial rewards, the frustrated Amba nurtures vengeance and prepares herself to kill Gangaji.

Amba pours out a trade and abuses Gangaji before shooting him down.

'What a wreck you are, Bhisma!' the voice went on. 'What a life you've led. Spouting on and on about our great traditions and basic values, but I don't see the old wife you ought to be honouring in your dotage. Advising everyone about their sex life, marrying people off, letting them call you the Father of the Nation, but where is the son you need to light your funeral pyre, the son of your own loins? I've been looking everywhere. Bhisma, but he's nowhere to be found!' The visitor spat redly on the floor. 'You make me sick, Bhisma. Your life has been a waste, unproductive, barren. You are nothing but an impotent old walrus sucking other reptiles' eggs, and infertile old fool seeking solace like a calf from the udders of foreign cows, a man who is less than a woman. The tragedy of this country springs from you as nothing
else could after that stupid oath of which you are so pathetically proud. Bhisma, the pyre has already been lit for you in the flames that are burning your country. You have lived long enough.  

Amba, who herself is "the waste, unproductive, barren" accuses the Mahaguru of the country of sterility. Celibacy, a saintly virtue of Gangaji is deprived of its virtuosity and quoted with sexual barrenness. Metaphorically, it makes him upside turn of values and the slow death of everything that Gangaji cherished, preached, and lived for. The end of angaji is full of ominous portents of the disaster that is oeing to befall the country:  

'Thirsty', he uttered in a fading voice.  

A boy brought him a tumbler. 'I am Arjun, Pandu's son,' he said softly. 'I was just arriving when I heared the shots. Look, I have brought some water for you. Pure Ganga- Jal, from Hatinapur. Please drink it'.  

The Mahaguru, Ganga Datta, bent forward greatfully for a sip, placing a weak hand of benediction on the youth's head. Then he turned his cow-eyes of infinite sadness to his constant companion.  

'I ... have ... failed,' he whispered.  

And then he was gone, and the light, as Dhritrashtra was to say, went out of our lives.  

In this fictional rendering, history is made alive, resurrected with living sentiments and intense poignance. Dhritrashtra in the recorded history is Nehru. The final sentence is reflective of the memorable and moving address that Nehru gave to the Nation on the death of Mahatmaji.
Impeccable and unflawed great souls like Gangaji meet their death not due to any flaw in their character but because of the imperfect community from which they stand high and apart. This triggers a question from the novelist and every sensitive reader: Is Amba/Sikhandin truly responsible for the Mahaguru's death, or India collectively?

The answer to this question is to be found in the extent to which we have accepted Gangaji's ideals and made them a way of living. To conclude, the journey of Gangaji starts with the identification of the rampant dragons of social and moral injustices at all levels, fighting them with a new repertoire of spiritual and moral weapons, destroying the life-negating forces, and liberating the enslaved. The whole journey, thus, accrues a mythic significance. Gangaji's journey becomes canonical like the Mahabharata which provided the framework for his life as well as the novel. At every phase of his journey, people join him, wave after wave, and in the end, Gangaji manages to have the whole nation behind him. And on his banner are emblazoned the words 'tapas', 'satya', 'ahimsa' and 'Satyagraha'.

To conclude, the conflictual character of the quester is to be resolved in the journey phase of the quest. The forces, internal and external, that impede the quest are to
be conquered and in the process, the quester is strengthened to heal and energise the community on his return. In the case of Balan, the journey consists in his learning to make an untouchable's life into a religion. It is a religion of the karina yogi to whom identification with the lowliest is the atonement of a sinful soul. He uses the uncompromising spiritual means of humility, self-mortification, expiation, and recognising the dignity of labour and going out of oneself in love for fellow beings. Like a hero of the romance, his journey is into the Leviathan's belly, the world of the untouchables. In contrast, the journey of Sambal is accelerated by violence and aggression in his tragic fail. Though the objective of his quest is social justice for the downtrodden which is similar to Balan's, it is a tragic failure. Deprived of moral values, and gradually shorn of companions, and causing the death of his love Putki, he is alienated from the society and himself. Of the female protagonists, Savitri is motivated by her youthful fantasy to identify herself with the terrorist movements of the time. There is not much evolution in her character except her orientation into the ordinary life going on outside her westernised household. Her case testifies to the fact that a true revolutionary must be motivated by the permanent Gandhian values of Truth and Non-violence lest the revolution becomes a fiasco. Kusum's journey, in its own way is structured on Gandhism. The
novel opens with Kusum in the Gandhian ashram and ends with her return to the ashram. Her life in between is a battle to recover the power of her womanhood to the fullest. Her self-realisation is enjoined with the wider cause of the country. Gangaji's journey is an answer to the questions regarding spiritualising power so that even the lowliest will be liberated. With a unified vision of social and spiritual planes, he attains a status of a political saint in his journey towards realising truth in the most unexpected quarters, that is, politics.