CHAPTER VI

CHAMAN NAHAL - THE ACTUAL IMAGE
Chaman Nahal and the Actual Image.

"The Crown and the Loin Cloth" deals with Gandhi, the man and Chaman Nahal's adoration for Gandhi and his dislike for revolutionaries made him draw an ideal image of Gandhi. Even his blemishes (foibles) are projected as assets. It can safely be said the Gandhi of Chaman Nahal is a true replica of the Gandhian image propagated by official historians. Even though the novel was written in 1981, it is surprising, that Chaman Nahal could not distance himself from the euphoria created by congressmen during and after the National movement projecting Gandhi as the man who got independence single handedly, to paint an impartial picture of Gandhi.

The novel is of an epic dimension dealing with the events in the life of Gandhi during the period from 1915 to 1922. The novel starts with the arrival of Gandhi from South Africa. It is Kasturbai who reads the human aspects of Gandhi well. Gandhi is almost a stoic in his personal life. He gave up drinking milk in 1912.

He practised "Celibacy, not taking meat, not smoking, not wearing shoes, not eating on certain days".

According to Chaman Nahal "On the surface these look that he denied nature in many of his acts and deeds. Yet he was actually going beyond nature; he was adopting nature to the needs of the human soul. Not denying it but restructuring it. Carrying it along with him to new heights and dimensions. But it is the other way round with ordinary human beings who aspire for a better life and for the fulfilment of their desires. It may be, Gandhi wanted to attain his control over his physical desires because of inferiority complex he suffered from, during his child-hood and school days. Rajaji, a chief devotee of Gandhi in his interview with Ved Mehta says "He (Gandhi) was one of the hungriest men I have ever known. That is why he thought of fasting as a penance ...... actually he was highly sexed. He tried to control his sexual desires because he was convinced - and rightly so - that sex fritters away human energy". Even if one does not agree with Rajaji's orthodox idea of sex frittering

2. Ibid, p.15
away human energy, Gandhi's early life proves that he suffered from inferiority complex due to his frail and weak body and so Gandhi wants to assert his superiority by showing the world that he can conquer bodily needs which no body can. The narrator in the "The Crown and The Loin Cloth" points out "The self denials he rigorously imposed on himself were largely in search of his identity ......... he had trained his mind to function independently of his body, nay in defiance of it". Even for his wife Kasturbhai it was difficult to understand the whimsicalities of Gandhi. As a dutiful Hindu wife she was worried of his health. She appealed to him to desist from such vows denying himself the meagre to physical necessities. She said soothingly "I know you are greatman, you must be, the way you have fought for Indians in South Africa. Only you forget that you too, like every one else, are entitled to some joy in life. You drive yourself too hard, and it hurts one". She even rebuked him for he did not know how to be gentle with himself. But as the narrator says, Gandhi "liked power and force" he


liked people and things to obey him and submit themselves to him. For he cannot assert himself physically Gandhi exhibited his power through his domination on his wife and later by his iron grip on the Congress organisation. The narrator points out that Gandhi’s various actions of self denials have roots in his self pity. "His ugliness bothered Mohandas when he was a child". He knew his mother Putlibai was fond of him but part of that fondness was only her pitiful attempt to protect him and "Mohandas was so weak in the body he could not fight the poorest fighter in the school". "He partook pleasure in Kasturbai in the hope that at least there he would find the power and the force he had been hurting himself". Perhaps his feeling of remorse that he was in bed with his wife when his father was dying might have resulted in his vow of celibacy. He might have controlled his sexual desires. But Gandhi had always taken pleasure in treating his eyes with the beauties of his wife. Chaman Nahal again

6. Ibid, p.27
7. Ibid, p.32
8. Ibid, p.33
9. Ibid, p.34
describes how odd Gandhi's behaviour was, inspite of his vow of celibacy. "He had taken the vow of celibacy in 1906 but that did not prevent him from feasting his eyes on her body or from touching her. And what particularly carried him away was the way she melted at the slightest physical contact with him. Her moon like face quivered and she started flowing out to him through her eyes, through the tip of her pointed nose, through her petally lips, through her chin, through her arms and her tapering fingers, through each of her fingers. It is not clear why we are given such a vivid description of Kasturba's reactions to her husband's touch. Does it not reflect upon the protagonist's character? Why should Gandhi who took a vow of celibacy put his wife in such a predicament, rouse her passions and then withdrew from satisfying her. Not only that, Gandhi's remembering of Valiamma, a Satyagrahi at South Africa also did not suit to his ideal image of a man, who had control over himself. "Mohandas look at Valiamma. She was darker than the average south Indian; no, she was as black as midnight. Yet

10. Ibid, p.25
she looked like a rare piece of ebony-smooth and durable. Her hair was so long, it fell from her head towards her waist like waterfall. And her shoulders were so youthful, so youthful many would have given up all they had, to possess them. Do they betray Gandhi’s suppressed carnal desires? The picturisation of Gandhi creates doubts in the novelist’s faith in Gandhism. Gandhi treated women as a source of sin. In his hallucination in the ship he found two girls screaming. They were none other than the girls whom he punished for being indiscreet with boys. Gandhi got their heads shaved but he did not punish the boys. Now they question him why he punished them for it was the boys who took liberties with them. Gandhi’s reply was characteristic of his idea of woman. “The source of evil was in you. Something in you excited the boys, and I wanted to disfigure you.” The girls then rightly point out “you don’t know much about human nature Bapu, do you?” Their utterance was proved correct for the same crime was committed

12. Ibid, p.16
13. Ibid, p.16
once again inspite of shaving their heads and Gandhi's fasting for seven days. The action of Gandhi was once again a proof that Gandhi was trying to blot out his excessive sexual desire in his early years of marriage. For Gandhi, Kasturbai was only a medium to satisfy his carnal desires. He never tried to know her mind. True to the Hindu tradition, a wife is meant to serve her husband meekly without any questioning. Even in South Africa when Gandhi started earning his regular income it was not for Kasturbai he sent, instead he invited Shaik Mehtas, his childhood friend with whom he ate meat. Shaikh entertained prostitutes and Gandhi reluctantly had to send him out. Chaman Nahal also says that "there was not much harmony between Mohandas and her (Kasturbai). She resented the long separation to which he subjected her. She resented the wayward spirit in him." Gandhi was always dictatorial. Once he feels that he is right he never consulted any one. "When had he taken any one's advice unless the advice matched what he


15. Op cited p 23
himself wanted to do?\textsuperscript{16}. Gandhi tried to impose his will on his wife. She, as an obedient Hindu wife, followed him. Gandhi of course penanced for his imposition by fasting, but he also knew that her obedience was merely a facade to humour him. The novelist finds it difficult to convince his readers of the supremacy of Gandhi after narrating all these events. So he justifies those acts by saying "on the surface, these look that he denied nature in many of his acts and deeds. Yet he was actually going beyond nature; he was adapting nature to the needs of the human soul. Not denying it but restructuring it. Carrying it along with him to new heights and dimensions\textsuperscript{17}. Of course there is no quarrel at the personal denials of Gandhi. But it is questioned how far is it justified to make his wife a guinea pig by his act of celibacy and rousing her physical desires. Historically also it is said that Gandhi tried to test his control over his physical desires by sleeping naked with two young girls. One may not doubt Gandhi's purity but what about the finer feelings and sensations of those young girls?

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p.27
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p.15
Chaman Nahal's attitude towards women itself is rather questionable. He depicts his women characters as persons of straw without moral virtues and gullible. They also fall an easy prey to men. Even the prototype of Gandhi Sunil has illegal relationship with Rehana, the wife of his friend. Even if Chaman Nahal tries to treat this love affair as platonic love, Sunil appears to be too eager to possess her physically. Sunil also indulged in sexual act with Priti, the wife of a labourer Durichand at Simla. The narrator comments that Sunil when felt isolation from home and society made his wife a target of his unspent fury. "His (Sunil's) father would not listen to him. He out of tune with his brothers and if only he were clear in his own mind, but he was so muddle-headed about what was happening in their own home and in the country at large ....... Each might now, he did not make love to her, he ravished her."18 For Sunil in his helplessness, everything in man appears to be "crude, coarse, un-refined"19. He

18. Op cited, p.115
19. Ibid, p.115
links his hurting his wife Kusum with British suppression of Indians - what a strange logic from a Gandhi's follower! There is a streak of Gandhi's own attitude towards Kasturba in Sunil's attitude to his wife Kusum. Both try to assert their superiority. When Kusum returns to haveli after being neglected by Sunil, Sunil questions her "Why did you return to the haveli without my consent?" But Kusum is not meek to take the questioning silently. She retorts "your consent? What care have you taken of me during the last one year - you have just abandoned me! And now you talk of rights over me?" Then Sunil reminds her that she is a Hindu wife and so should obey her husband's orders without questioning. She is clever enough to point out that he has not performed his duties as a husband. This reminds us of Gandhi's own encounter with Kasturba in South Africa when she refuses to clean the chamber pot of a clerk. He was angry and tried to push her out of the house. She rebelled. Of course Gandhi later felt ashamed of his behaviour.

Gandhi's image is also shown through his interaction with the Britishers and people. Through the character of a British police officer, the novelist tries to estimate the reactions of the Indians. Gandhi knew fully well that unless the political leader could involve the people at large, not merely the elite, there was no chance of India gaining independence. India once again seethed with anger after the Rowllat Act was passed in March 1919. Gandhi called for a hartal all over the nation. The British retaliated with brutal repression and all the political leaders were arrested. At the 1920 session of Congress there was a call for non-co-operation. The entire India showed their anger against the British suppression by violent demonstration all over the country. On February 1922 suddenly the movement was called off by Gandhi on the plea that the villagers of Chauri Chaura has burnt down a police station and many policemen have died. Gandhi's action shocked the entire country. There was so much mobilisation of the people that the British were unable to control the mob fury. Many almost questioned "If the success of Satyagraha depended on
one hundred percent compliance with the creed of non-violence, then there was an inherent flaw in that creed, since no system of thought could be that perfect. Gandhi had to admit the failure of his theory of non-violence for it is against natural human nature. Once people were thrown into action and they, anger against their oppressors. When the call for hartal and non-co-operation movement was given, people vent their anger against the local oppressors. "In Andhra the ryots had started a signature campaign against the Zamindars. In the U.P. tenants were refusing to pay illegal cesses. In Bihar, tribals like the Adivasis had threatened non-payment of rents. In Orissa they were declining to pay the irrigation tax. But this was all against Gandhi's creed. Of course, Chaman Nahal could not be blind to the events that went out of Gandhi's control. His own followers flouted the credo of the congress. Gandhi knew fully well when to stop the mass movements. As the authors of

22. Op cited p.331
23. Ibid, p.325
"Fighters for National Liberation" rightly point out
...... no one in India knew better when the mass
non-violent movement should be stopped in order to
prevent it from becoming mass revolutionary violence
and ultimately a social revolution against the ruling
class and foreign congress*. Of course it is against
the creed of Gandhi to fight against local feudal
lords or the industrialists. But his own ardent
supporters also could not stomach this sudden
withdrawal of the mass movement. It was almost a
shock to Jawaharlal and Motilal who were in Lucknow
jail then. Bose felt "To sound the order of retreat
when public enthusiasm was reaching boiling point
was nothing short of calamity". For Nehru, the
beloved Chela of Gandhi "The reason he (Gandhi) had
given seemed to me an insult to intelligence and an
amazing performance for a leader of the national
movement*. Gandhi's withdrawal almost made Motilal
and C.R. Das to revolt and part ways with him to
form Swaraj Party. But still Gandhi adhered to

24 & 25. Satyavrata Ghosh "Gandhi and Bose":
The Titanic Clash" (The Illustrated
Weekly of India), March 12, 1989-26
CWS. Vol.14, p.38
non-violence, according to Chaman Nahal and other historians. Chaman Nahal's image of Gandhi is true to the traditional historian's image. It is forgotten to take into account of Gandhi's own assurance to the British during the war period. In the war conference on 28.4.1918 Gandhi assured the Viceroy "I consider myself honoured to find my name among the supporters of this resolution (on recruitment of soldiers for the British Indian Army). I realise fully its meaning and tender my support to it with all my heart". Of course Gandhi fully knows his capability as the recruiting agent. "In his letter to the Viceroy's private secretary on 30.4.1918 he revealed ...... if I become recruiting agent-in-chief, I might rain men on you". So Mahatma's non-violence is double edged. Violence by the British was justified but counter violence by his people was immoral. Suniti Kumar Ghosh rightly points out this dichotomy in Gandhi's ideal "The Mahatma, who denounced the crimes of Chauri-chaura and discontinued the non-co-operation movement in early 1922 for the sake of his creed of non-violence, did not hesitate in 1918 to call for

26. CWG Vol.14, p.38
27. CWG Vol.15, p.17
“twenty recruits for every village” to serve as a cannon fodder to defend the empire.”

Chaman Nahal conveniently drops out the inconsistencies in Gandhi’s utterances on various occasions and chooses those events which served the novelist’s purpose of creating an ideal image of Gandhi. In his letter to V.S. Srinivasa Sastry on 18th July 1918, hailing the Montague and Chelmsford Report of 8th July 1918 Gandhi asserted “The gateway to our freedom is situated on the French soil. No victory worth the name has yet been won without shedding of blood.” So is it not justified to doubt whether Gandhi really was hurt by the non-violent incidents of Chauri-chaura and withdrew the struggle? or whether he was actually afraid that the non-co-operation movement might turn into mass movement against local suppressors, the Zamindars and the comprador industrialists who were the pillars of British imperialism? Of course Gandhi knew how to pacify the angry congressmen. The New Delhi session of the All India Congress Committee endorsed Gandhi’s

29. CWG Vol.14, p.489
suspension of the non-co-operation movement. Gandhi had to swallow the bitter pill of the resentment. Chaman Nahal is at least true in expressing the mood of the session. "No organisation could have been more hostile to its leader as that of AICC. Though eventually Gandhi won, throughout, the delegates hurled abuses at him. The delegates from Bengal and Maharashtra openly opposed Gandhi at the session. They even objected to his linking of non-co-operation with khadi and untouchability. Sociological reform could not be viewed with the same urgency as the political struggle. If in the end they endorsed his resolution, he felt it was more out of regard for him, more out of pity. The majority clearly was not with him. They endorsed his decision only because they had no one else to turn to". However, Gandhi could not take this nation wide resentment lightly. He was self critical. But his heart could not agree with the fact that his principle of non-violence was a failure. At the same time he could not blame the people. "It was past Gandhi to openly

blame another. No, the masses were not to be blamed. It was either Gandhi who had failed or the Gandhian principle. The principle was too fine, too exalted, like refined gold to fail. No, it was he, the so-called Mahatma who had failed. His saint hood was tainted with evil, conscious evil or unconscious evil. Then what was the decision he took after analysing his action. Gandhi always shocked his followers with his impulsive decisions. Chaman Nahal says that "...... in the face of nation wide abuse of his ideas, the only way to redeem his respect was to kill himself. That might be the jolt this country men were waiting for". Of course it was once again his wife Kasturbha who stopped him from that idea of self immolation. But "As a punishment for having misguided his nation, he was imposing a continuous five day fast when he would take nothing but water". Of course Gandhi toyed with the idea of abdicating the leadership. But by then Gandhi was the only person who was projected and established as a leader. This kind of vacillation in Gandhi and
wrong analysis of the public reaction by him are strange when we compare his mass appeal and knowledge of the pulse of the people. Nahal, here, is at least historically true about Gandhi's control over masses. He rightly points out "At least he (Gandhi) had succeeded in making the congress a body of the masses. This had been his real achievement so far to dislodge the British from the rural areas. It was a mistake to imagine the British ruled India from their civil lines or their contornents. They rule it from their hold on the peasantry, through institutionalised hierarchy like the princes, the rajas and the Zamindars. He had, he believed, smashed that hold. More than 50% of the people at the AICC session were men of plough..."34. But here again the novelist in his desire to eulogize Gandhi attributes to him the quality which was not there. Gandhi was never against the Zamindars nor had he allowed people to revolt against them. One wonders how Nahal can say that the AICC consisted of 50% of the men of plough. Of course it is true that after the

34. Op cited p.371
entrance of Gandhi Congress had acquired the nature of mass organisation reflecting the aspirations of all sections of people even if they were mutually incompatible. It was only because of the force of circumstance. Unless more and more people were involved, it was difficult to face the might of the British empire. To be true it was the most maligned character in the novel, Rakesh who had the correct perception of the roots of British empire. Mr. Nahal, inspite of his dislike for the terrorists strangely, attributes this knowledge of things to Rakesh. Rakesh correctly explains to Shyama, the sister of Sunil "The British rule is based on exploitation. It starts with the Viceroy of India. No, I should say with that damn king in England and is passed down to the smallest functionary, even a village patwari. Your father is a cog in the same system. He does nothing else but exploit. If these men have to one day throw bombs at the white English men, they must first learn to destroy their native exploiters." 35.

35. Ibid, p.59
Unless these native exploiters were removed from power and pelf it is impossible to attain real independence. Of course one need not agree with the view that individual annihilation leads to a society which is free from exploitation and suppression. Another thing is that Mahal wanted to prop up the image of Gandhi by contrasting it with so called revolutionary character Rakesh. In the process the novelist makes the most impertinent comment on the Marxists "Marxism might or might not succeed in India, but Marxism would have played the greater role in the introduction of free love in the country. The girls abandoned all ties and ran away with the revolutionaries. Posing as sisters, posing as cousins"36. To prove his comments, Mahal introduces two characters, a young girl and a young boy, the terrorists who indulge in sexual acts. Mahal may have in his mind the elopement of Shyama with Rakesh, abandoning her house and parents. Mahal does not even care to recognise the sacrifice, even if it is blind and misplaced

one, those revolutionaries made for the freedom of the country. Apart from it the novelist failed to show that non-Marxists are very pure in their personal relations. The Gandhian Sunil indulges in extramarital relationship not with one but with two married women. And Nahal himself narrates how "In Vijayawada, a couple of congress volunteers raped a young college girl and in the congress office her offence being that she had come to offer herself as a satyagrahi. 37. Now who should be blamed for their acts, not really the Marxists? Nahal should have been careful of his history of Indian National Movement and Communist Party. There was no Communist Party as such in that period and even the revolutionaries of those periods were not influenced by Marxism. The CPI was formed in India only on December 26, 1925 at Kanpur. So it was impertinent to blame the Marxists even if young girls left their houses and ran away with the revolutionaries. The revolutionaries of that period belong to upper middle class Hindu youths who indulged in terrorist

37. Ibid, 332
actions to counter state terrorism. It was only in the later period the terrorists (they should be called revolutionaries) formed Hindustan Socialists Republic Association at the end of August 1928, the president of which was Azad. Its manifesto "The Philosophy of the Bomb" ..... a hard hitting answer to Gandhi's vituperation liberally showered on them - is a remarkable document" which of course, need not be discussed here. When the CPI itself was not formed and the influence of Marxism, after the success of first proletarian revolution in Russia was hardly felt, it is strange that Nahal accuses the non-existent Marxists of moral indulgence and levity. Does he want to project himself as more Gandhian than Gandhi?

Gandhi's ideals of spinning, removal of untouchability and inter communal harmony are well projected in the novel. Sunil was asked to start a khadi store in his own village. Then he was sent to Simla to help the workers there. For Gandhi spinning is a means, to reach the villagers. Neither the Extremists nor the Moderates reached the masses of India. "Shrewed as he was Gandhi saw in an instant
on his return to India from South Africa in 1915, how no resistance to the British could succeed unless it was offered at the national level where not only the brilliant leader took part, but the petty farmers also. Gandhi observed that the British had destroyed the local industry and village economy. That is why Gandhi decides to revive village industry and make them the base of his campaign. According to him "...... lawyers, teachers, legislators and the spinning wheel taken together could generate wars that would rock the British Empire to its very foundation." Gandhi's spinning wheel programme is a shrewed tactics which gave a lethal blow to the British economic interest and also gave fillip to the village economy. Chaman Nahal's Gandhi is thus a shrewed politician and Commander who knows pulse of his army. Gandhi reveals his intentions clear when he says "No, when I am asking you to learn spinning, I am really asking you to learn a new language. A language that touch the chord of an Indian peasant every where - in any corner of

38. Op cited p.321
39. Ibid p 130
India. Chaman Nahal has highest appreciation for Gandhi's discriminating powers. "What a sifter of human beings he was. He had the jeweller's instinct for the precious stone, or the wine-tasters' nose for the rich vintage. Over the years this had been his main concern. Catch his men and put them to the yoke. What Gandhi looked for in them was variety. Some said he was a dictator - his sons said as much. Yet instead of imposing himself on others, what he did was to bring out the best in them, then separate hidden worths, their separate merits. As far as Gandhi's instinctive capacity to correctly guess the programmes which can mobilise all sections of people, Nahal's depiction is quite true. But in regard to whether Gandhi behaved like a dictator or democrat it is better to refer to historical facts. Even the narrator himself said "Mohandas liked power and force; he liked people and things to obey him and submit themselves to him. As Sunith Kumar Ghosh points out in his article "It was Gandhi who, prodded by. Home Rule League gave call for an all India hartal as a mark of protest against

40. Ibid p.131
41. Ibid p 132
41A. Ibid p.31
the Rowalatt Act (in 1921) without consulting the Congress or the Home Rule League. All the instructions he issued and the decision for withdrawal of the satyagraha were entirely his own. It was Gandhi who inaugurated the non-co-operation movement on 1 August 1920 under the banner of the Khilafat Committee without waiting for the decision of the Congress, which was to meet at a special session in the first week of the next month. Though the Congress programme of non-co-operation included boycott of British goods, Gandhi never ceased denouncing it, except boycott of foreign cloth. Similarly he openly condemned the independent resolution adopted at the 1927 congress session. Gandhi insisted on the strict observance of discipline by others but he was not bound by it. To continue Suniti Kumar Ghosh's versions "By a resolution moved by Gandhi himself, the Ahmedabad session of the congress, held at the end of 1921, appointed him the sole executive authority of the Congress. Even Gandhi's dearest disciple Nehru called Gandhi "permanent super-president of the congress party). He made and unmade presidents. Jawaharlal wrote that at the time

42 & 43. Suniti Kumar Ghosh "India and the Raj 1919-1947" (Calcutta: Brachi) - p.88-89.
when Gandhi thrust the presidency of the Karachi congress on Vallabhai Patel. It was pointed out to the Mahatma "that he wanted to be Mussolini all the time while others were made by him temporary kings and figure heads". Even if one has to take the words of Jawahar as the comments of a disgruntled person irked by the selection (or is it election?) of Vallabhai as the president of Congress, Gandhi's reaction to the election of Subhas Chandra Bose did not reveal his democratic nature. In Tripura Congress in 1939 Subhas Bose trounced Gandhi's candidate Pattabhi Seetaramaiah by a huge majority of 1580 against 137, for the post of presidency, Gandhi considered the defeat of Pattabhi as his own: "The defeat is more mine than Pattabhi's". According to Satyavrata Ghosh" the ouster of Bose from the presidency by Machiavellian politics is a shameful chapter in congress history! The appeal from Tagore also fell on deaf ears. On his own admission, the resolution to unseat Bose was drafted by Gandhi himself. Even Nehru urged Gandhi "You should accept Bose as President. To push him out seems to

44. Ibid 451
45 & 46. Satyavrata Ghosh'Gandhi and Bose - The Titanic Clash' (TIWOK - March 12, 1989).
be an exceedingly wrong step. After going through all these facts it may not be unjust to say that Chaman Nahal portrays Gandhi, as a true democrat, based only on the distorted official version of Indian History.

Even in regard to Champaran agitation of 1917, the Ahmedabad mill hand strike and Kheda satyagraha of 1918, Nahal points one sided picture to highlight the greatness of Gandhi. At Champaran the ryots were demanding complete refund of illegal enhancement in rents. Gandhi went there, simply recorded the statements of ryots and thus checked the spontaneous militancy of ryots. The planters even refused to record their statements. The final outcome was that the commission decided to abolish 'tinkathia' (forcing the ryots to grow indigo on 3/20th of their land). This was not out of sympathy for the ryots. It was because the demand for indigo fell and the planters were quite willing to reduce indigo growing. The other result was planters should refund 25% of illegal enhancement in rents, which was a drastic compromise of the peasants' demands: (Gandhi try accepting to that agreement effectively legalized the illegal rent hike.

47. Satyavrata Ghosh 'Gandhi and Bose—The Titoic Clash' (TlNOX - March 12, 1989)
That the ryots were not satisfied with Gandhi's compromise was clearly revealed in the fact that they refused to pay even the reduced rent enhancement by late 1917. In Ahamedabad strike, the workers were demanding 50% wage hike due to price rise during the war period. Gandhi reduced the demand to 35% of wage hike. Gandhi's good friend Ambalal Sarabhai, who donated huge funds to Sabarmati Ashram was the mill owner. Naturally the workers, according to District Magistrate's report records, "assailed him (Gandhi) bitterly for being a friend of mill owners, riding in their motor cars and eating sumptuously with them, while the weavers were starving". Even in Kheda episode it was nothing but compromise. While the peasants were fighting for remission of land revenue, Gandhi was reluctant to take a no-revenue campaign. By the time he finished hesitating (March 22, 1918) the poor peasants had already been coerced into paying their revenue. What all Gandhi achieved was a secret order that revenue should be collected from those who could pay (that meant who could be made to pay). Gandhi was too much worried of Government prestige even to make the order

48. "Indian National Congress. How Indian? How National?" (Research Unit for Political Economy - Bombay)
public and thus unilaterally withdrew the struggle. These are what Chaman Nahal considers as the struggles which were feathers in the cap of Gandhi. Perhaps Sunil was also influenced by Gandhian formula of Champaran agitation for he did the same recording of statements of labourers when he was sent to Simla to solve the workers' problems.

Chaman Nahal also built up the image of Gandhi through the comments made by other characters. While Sunil had nothing but adoration for Gandhi, he was not as much Gandhian as Moorthy in 'Kanthapura' is. However, he has unflinching faith in Gandhi. But when Gandhi withdrew satyagraha, Sunil like Moorthy is in dilemma. Atleast Moorthy had Nehru, then, to turn to. But Sunil has no one. Sunil says to the sympathetic Ashby "Satyagraha has been withdrawn by the author of the scheme. And I would much rather be a medicine man". Kusum, the wife of Sunil reacts, as an ordinary middle class Hindu wife does, to Gandhi's satyagraha. She is more worried of her husband's separation from her. "Gandhi talked too much,

and in the process took away sons from their parents, husbands from their wives, brothers from their sisters. Muzaffer, a sympathiser of Gandhi and congress gradually drifted from it for he thought that congress was turning into a communal Hindu organisation. Of course his fears turn true by later events. Gandhi's mixing of politics with religion might have drawn the ignorant villagers into the movement. But it certainly created suspicion in the minds of Muslims. Muzaffer tells Sunil, "You have only to look at the rituals with which the congress functions or any of its activities begin; they are Hindu rituals, sanskrit hymns, palm leaf decorations, yantras inscribed on walls, the sacred fire, the breaking of coconuts at opening ceremonies all these have Hindu origins. Naturally this kind of over emphasis on religious rituals gradually created gulf between the two communities exploited by the cunning vested interests. If lead to the partition of the country and to the communal holocaust in 1947. The opinions expressed by other characters on Gandhi

50. Ibid. p.246
51. Ibid. p.247
are a mixture of awe and suspicion. Rehana, the wife of Muzaffar considers Gandhi a freak "He is too honest, too bold, too daring, too resolute, too defiant, too fearless, too indomitable, too astute, too quick, too intelligent, too truthful. Only a freak can have these qualities in such extreme and none of us can match him. We can only hope to go to some where near him. So it is perfectly all right if I eat meat or have a few other, what Gandhiji would call, flaws". To some extent it can be said here Rehana is the mouth piece of Nahal himself. It is this kind of super human nature of Gandhi's character and his fads made people think that they could not follow the norms set by Gandhi and hence they could follow their own instincts. That is why the non-violent movements of Gandhi were always violent for people could not restrain their anger against their suppressors.

Chaman Nahal's building up of Gandhi's image has two strands. At personal level Gandhi has all the human weaknesses of an over dominating husband.

52. Ibid, p.258
and father. That he could not convince his wife and children of the efficacy of his methods or justify his actions is clear from the words of Kasturbai and Harilal, his son. "There was not much harmony between Mohandas and her. She resented the long separation to which he subjected her. She resented the wayward spirit in him. Then in his efforts to coach her and improve her he was officious" you be my disciple, and I will be your guru. Sit at my feet. Follow me, obey me; And while resenting Kasturbai had sat at his feet, followed him, and obeyed him. Of course this domination over women, more so by their husbands was nothing but the traditional influence of Hindu household. Gandhi, according to Mahal, did repent for his behaviour. But still, Gandhi was like any other Indian husband in his attitude towards his wife. His son Harilal was more hurt "Look at the record, you made the simple job of living so complicated for me. No, for all of us - for my other brothers and for my mother as well .... Did you ever give me any love? Did you send me to

54. Ibid p.26
school." 55. Gandhi had no answer. Even his brother Laxmidas complains of neglecting him in his old age.......". No, I can't forgive you, you gave me a lot of pain in the last days of my life'....... "You stopped sending me any money from South Africa - you took no care of me at all." 56. He questions the ingratitude of Gandhi saying that it was he who educated him in England but he was disowned by Gandhi. Nahal shows us all this through the hallucination of Gandhi. Gandhi had certainly a packed conscience in regard to his unfulfilled personal aspirations. He is so human that the reader feels a close affliction to him.

Then second strand of Gandhi's image is that of a shrewed politician who knew his cards well and played them with great aplomb and intelligence surprising his opponent with his sudden moves. Here Nahal has culled historical events that suit to his portrayal Gandhian image, sometimes with distorted truth and half truths. It is pity that he has not

55. Ibid p.17
56. Ibid p.
referred to books on the National Movement which were written from the angle of people's participation instead of solely depending on the official version. Gandhi is made a demi God and is ascribed with so much sanctity that even to raise genuine doubts of his various actions, is treated as sacrilege and slander. But still, this novel, appearing as it is in 1981, could have depicted the image of Gandhi taking into consideration of various historical studies that appeared on Gandhi. Nahal's political Gandhi is the Gandhi that has been projected by official historians, and which has been taught to us from our elementary school days to the universities. It is true Gandhi proposed many theories to suit his mode of action. But an impartial observer has to analyse them whether they resulted in the welfare of the needy or not? Nahal's projection of Gandhi through his characters is similar to that of other novelists like Raja Rao. People interpreted Gandhi's actions each according to his own personal outlook. Gandhi of national movement is certainly not that of Chaman Nahal or even of Raja Rao either.