CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION
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In the foregoing chapters we have analysed Untouchable, Kanthapura, Waiting for The Mahatma, The Vendor of Sweets, The Crown and The Loincloth, and So Many Hungers in terms of the Gandhian image, they dramatised. But the terms of the Gandhian image in these texts emerges out of a social political milieu. In discussing the images of Gandhi, we have taken sufficient care to interpret the foreground, the background that concretise and vivify the image. Since the present study doesn't lend itself to a few aesthetic interpretations, not a much has been said on the narrative mode and the enunciating modalities adopted by the novelists. The emphasis throughout has been on the significance of the image and how each image differs from the other. For example, the image of Gandhi we have in Waiting for The Mahatma and The Vendor of Sweets is different from the image we have in So Many Hungers. Although the texts operate formal realism to render and regard the significant human experience, the perspectives differ. Consequently, in Narayan, we have an ironic image and in Bhattacharya the actual image. Narayan's sense of irony seems to emerge from the juxtaposition of what Gandhi in himself is, and what interpretation his followers and admirers given to the master's ideas. Moreover we notice a gap between the Gandhian theory and the
way in which it is practised by characters like Sriram and Jagan. In Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers*, the image of Gandhi is seen in terms of the words and deeds of the character, Devesh Babu, affectionately called Devata. The word 'Devata' conveys to us the feeling of the masses not only for the character under consideration, but for the idea on which the character models himself. Whether Gandhiji deserves to be worshipped as a devata is not the point. The point that the masses actually worshipped him, is suggested by the veneration, Devesh Babu receives in *So Many Hungers*. Another point of significance that can be mentioned in this context is the psychological make up and the socio-economic milieu of the characters. Narayan’s characters are involved in the problems that they have to negotiate as members of family and society. Sriram and Jagan in their own way are more absorbed in the socio-economic life of Malgudi than Devesh Babu and Kajoli. Bhattacharya dramatises the life of his characters within the vast frame work of the natural calamity, the Bengal famine. To negotiate with a tremendous crisis like famine, dynamism, will and courage are necessary. These qualities are very much there in Devesh Babu and Kajoli. Narayan’s Sriram is interested in seeking a bride that may confirm to the standards set by his grand mother. So he drifts and encounters Gandhi by accident. Given his
characteristic view of patience he doesn't show the sort of awareness that one achieves in the presence of a master. Jagan's Gandhian theory does not help him to meet the family crisis that his son, Mali creates. As we have suggested in the relevant chapter Waiting for The Mahatma is ironic in its implication in the sense that waiting does not mean to any concrete result either social or political.

II

From a historical perspective it may be said that most Indian novelists were creatively and culturally mature, when they first encountered the national movement under the leadership of Gandhiji. Some of them had in fact, participated in the movement and had first hand knowledge of Gandhiji and his personality. But the nation as a whole has undergone incredible change. As one critic of the Indian novel in English says, "Change has manifested itself in many forms and disguises, in the myriad impulsions of contemporary history. The impact of the west, the arrival of the machine, the city and industry, the struggle for independence woven out of the fabrics of Renaissance and the reformation, the Enlightenment and the counter-enlightenment, radicalism and liberalism, violence and non-violence, and above all, the climatic symbolism of the Gandhian personality, a curious
admixture of folk lore, history, legend and mythology.\textsuperscript{1} (Emphasis added). The preceding citation suggests that the symbolism of the Gandhian personality that we come across in some of the Indian novels in English is a curious mixture of folk lore, history legend and myth. While discussing the image of Gandhi in Kanthapura we have pointed out that Moorthy and his friends have absorbed imaginatively the symbolism of Gandhian personality. Critically speaking more than Untouchable, Kanthapura highlights the malice of Indian society before the advent of Gandhi. Organised caste-wise society was disharmonious and thrived on the principle of exploitation. Moorthy exemplifies the authentic Gandhian ethic by resolutely opposing the principle of caste. But the socio economic compulsions are such that his exemplary protest does not go far enough so as to create psychic stability among the village folk. Raja Rao seems to be more at ease in fabricating the Gandhian myth than in creating a live image of Gandhi among the rural population. Moorthy's struggle to lead a society, the roots of which are located in the shackles of economic and social bondage is inconclusive if not insignificant. As we have indicated in the relevant chapter, the image of Gandhi we have in Kanthapura

is not characterised by the possibilities of what is real. On the other hand it exemplifies some of the ways in which people tried to understand or misunderstand what Gandhi meant in terms of their past and the present.

III

The Hungarian Marxist critic George Lukacs in "The Meaning of Contemporary Realism" argues that "The problem of perspective in literature is directly related to the principle of selection. Let me go further. . . . Underlying the problem is a profound critical complex reflected in the composition of work itself. Every human action is based on the pre-supposition of its inherent meaningfulness, at least to the subject. Absence of meaning makes a mockery of action and reduces art to naturalistic description." Commenting on Lukacs' observation, John Halperin says, "The search for values in a degraded world, the opposition between a conventional society and a hero, who must keep searching for what cannot be found, defines for Lukacs, the epic structure of the realistic novel." Mulk Raj Anand wrote Untouchable at a time, when these ideas were the integral part of the social literary


milieu in England. His Bakha is not as intelligent and educated as Nahal's characters. What radically distinguishes him from others is his awareness of his lack of identify and an irrepressible hope, that he would some day attain it. It is in this context that the image of Gandhi is to be judged and understood. Although Gandhi of history had incessantly fought for the identity of an untouchable in the caste ridden Indian society, in the novel, he seems to offer nothing substantial to Bakha. Although Gandhi appears as a character in the novel, his role is very limited. What gives epic dignity to the novel is Bakha's search for identity in a conventional society, which is unsympathetic if not hostile to him. What makes the novel significant and relevant 55 years after its publication, is its graphic dramatization of a situation that is still a part of the country's social life. Anand could establish a necessary distance so as to make us see a situation objectively. The political situation in the country seems to be irrelevant to the situation in which Bakha is placed. As we have stated in the relevant chapter Anand's Gandhi is simple, affectionate and deeply involved in the socio-political life of the country. But, in terms of the awareness of the hero of Untouchable, the solutions, Gandhi gives to overcome the problem of untouchability,
are not pragmatic. But the irony of it, is, that Bakha does not lose hope. At the same time it must be said that he is not depressed when he could become aware of the limitation of Gandhian ideology.

IV

As we have observed in the relevant chapter, Chaman Nahal seems to have in mind the image of Gandhi propagated by official historians. Gandhian ideals and activities are very well dramatized in the novel. But filtered through Kusum and Sunil relationship, the domestic disharmony that the Gandhian movement brings in its wake is not fused with the total meaning of the novel *The Crown and The Loin Cloth*. The two strands that are noticeable in Nahal's image of Gandhi, narratively speaking, overlap so as to make the image rather fluid. The novel has a large and sweeping canvas in which the minor characters lose their sense of identity. As the title suggests the reader is supposed to comprehend not just a way of life under stress and crisis but the mutations that occur in a given historical period dominated by a personality with a strong will. Imposing his own point of view, Nahal's narrative method is committed to highlighting the significance of an epic character.
To sum up, the authors of the novels that are under review have a first hand knowledge of Gandhi's personality. But this narrative perspectives have made them evolve an image of Gandhi, which suited their fictional concerns. For example, Anand's fictional concern is to dramatize the meaning of untouchability. Narayan is interested in dramatizing the foible and fortunes of Malgudi characters so as to make the reader see for himself the comic vision in which characters and situations are significant in themselves. Without character and situation, the vision is incommunicable, Sirees and Jagan do not receive any realisation. But they pass through a variety of experiences in which Gandhi, as a character, seems to play a meaningful part. Raja Rao, Bhattacharya and Mahal are interested in the fortunes of a community encountering a crisis, which itself is meaningful within a vast historical frame work. As we have stated in the introduction what impresses us when we reread the novels is their vivifying and dynamic image of the country and the man who gave a new lease of life to that country.