CHAPTER - I

GANDHI, THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT, AND THE INDIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH
Prof. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar says, "With Gandhian revolution in our political life, there came about also a revolution in our writing. Gandhi was not in sympathy with the view that art or literature was absolutely autonomous and was far more inclined to make it a hand maid to life. Like Tolstoy, Gandhi too erred in denying art its particular autonomy and pre-eminence. But at least their views have been a corrective to some of the abstractions of those who hold that Art is for Art's sake alone or even that Life itself is only for Art's sake. On the other hand, their theories notwithstanding, Tolstoy was himself the creator of the world of imperishable values, while Gandhi readily responded to mystic poetry, and one of his favourite poems was The Hound of Heaven, to which at his request Rajaji prepared a Gloss. ¹ The preceding critical observation, apart from suggesting the Gandhian view of art, gives fair indication as to how literature that is inspired by Gandhi or that emerges from the Gandhian thought has to be evaluated. Ever since Gandhi's advent on the Indian socio-political scene, there have been a number of novels in all Indian languages and English that have the national

awakening as their theme, sometimes as their background. Since most of us are familiar with the background including the present generation, any assessment of the literary and aesthetic significance of the novels may be cliché-ridden and tepid. But this should not prevent us from attempting an evaluation of novels like *Untouchable*, or *So Many Hungers* because they embody an experience that is significant not only in terms of the present social malice but in terms of the perennial human values, they dramatize. To label these novels as Gandhi literature is to reduce them to the level of social documents and deprive them of their increasing significance and relevance.

The national movement and the national awakening have received significant artistic recognition even before Gandhi arrived on the scene. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Ananda Math* preached the gospel of patriotism at a time when most people were insensitive to it. As Ananda Fankar Ray says, "when Bankim wrote, the chief question was how to restore the national respect." But it is Gandhi's influence that made novels like K.S. Venkata Raman's *Murugan*, *The Tiller* and *Kandyan, The Patriot* possible. After the quit India movement one notices a definite change in the politics of

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2 Quoted by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in *Indian Writing in English*, p. 317.
As one critic of the Indian Novel in English says, "Almost all the Indo-Anglian novels have one or more of the following nuclear ideas, prominent in them: the Evil of partition; the cult of Quit India; and the Gandhian Myth." From our point of view what is interesting in the preceding citation is the Gandhian Myth. Given the formal realism of most Indian novelists in English one has to be wary in elevating the multiple image of Gandhi we have in various fictional works to the level of a myth. Mythic orientation in fiction leads us away from formal realism to poetic or symbolist fiction. Most Indian novels in English, let alone the Gandhian novels, are not poetically or symbolistically oriented. The point may be illustrated from the following passage:

A week later on March 18, 1922 a British Judge sentenced Gandhi to six years' imprisonment on those charges. For the time being, the lion in the loin cloth was caged.

Although, Mahal compares Gandhi to a lion he does not make him a symbol. Most of Mahal's observations on Gandhi, the character are factual and form an integral part of the man, the moment and the milieu he tries to re-present in the novel. If we closely attend to some of the views of the alien and the native observers of Gandhi, the man and his

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effort to bring about a change in the thinking of the masses we notice that the narrative has roots in immediate social reality and not in myth. The following passage exemplifies the point...

It was this philosophy that Kenneth Asby had brought with him to India, when he joined the Indian Civil Services. And the great divide in India, he was quick to see, was not between ethnic groups but between social and economic ones. Hindus and Muslims as communities posed no threat to the Raj; their communal frenzies could be easily controlled and channelised in useful directions (useful to the British). The real divide was between the intelligentsia, off and on, produced a Raja Rammohun Roy or an Aurobindo Ghosh, a Tagore or a Gandhi. Never mind. The so called reforms that those Indians introduced did not touch more than an infinitesimal segment of the community. But when what a Roy, a Ghose or a Gandhi said travelled beyond the city walls of Indian villages, then it was time to watch out.

_The Crown and the Loin Cloth_ in terms of its theme dramatises the way in which how Gandhi's words travel beyond the city walls and reverberated of the walls of Indian villages. Interpreted from an anti-bourgeois point of view Kusum's implicit acceptance of the lion image to which a reference has been made earlier does not carry any tremendous conviction. But this does not mean that the image of Gandhi we have in the novel is feeble.
II

In the entire range of modern Anglo-American and the continental fiction we do not come across novels by different novelists converging on a single dominant image. But in modern Indian fiction in English we come across novels by different novelists converging on the image of Gandhi. It is easy to interpret the significance of novels like Paul Scott's The Raj Quartet because they deal with the interaction between imperialism and man's urge to achieve freedom and the national dignity. In a number of novels by Indian writers the national movement is foregrounded so as to make the characters live in great excitement. For example the family and social tensions that agitate a body politic are dramatized in K.Nagarajan's Athawar House, and Chronicles of Kedaram and Inquilab by Khwaja Mohammed Abbas. Although these novels may be labelled as social novels their frame work and reference is within the fold of Gandhi and the national movement. From the point of view of a historian of the Indian novels in English like K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, "one result of the Gandhian influence has been a general preference for the mother tongue or the regional language, and occasionally a purposeful bilingualism, the same writer handling with mastery his own mother tongue as well as English. Besides, whatever the language medium chosen, the stress has been more on simplicity and clarity and immediate effectiveness than on ornateness or profundity.
or laborious artistry and this has been as marked in English writing as in writing in the regional language. As regards the choice of themes and the portrayal of character the Gandhian influence has been no less marked. There has been a more or less contrast shift of emphasis from city to the village, or there is implied a contrast between the two urban luxury and sophistication on the one hand and rural modes and manners on the other. Kamala Markandaya's Some Inner Fury or A Handful of Rice seems to conform to the observations made in the preceding citation. But there are a number of novels in which Gandhi himself is presented as a fictional character or the Gandhian view of the possibilities of life and human values are foregrounded, that is, they become an integral part of the thematic complex of the novel. In the following chapters, an attempt has been made to analyse these novels and evaluate the sort of Gandhian image that emerges from the analysis.

III

The critical focus in the following chapters is on Anand's Untouchable, R.K.Narsyan's Waiting for The Mahatma and Vendor of Sweets, Raja Rao's Kanthasura, Pattacharya's

So Many Hungers and Chaman Nahal’s The Crown and The Loincloth, the texts have been deliberately chosen to discover whether a reading of these texts would yield a composite image or images of which differ in meaning and symbolic suggestion. In some of the texts the narrative focus seems to be on Gandhian way of life and its pragmatics. Raja Rao and Narayan are more interested in the implications of the Gandhian ethic so that when we read Kanthapura, Waiting for The Mahatma and the Vendor of Sweets, notice in Kanthapura an exemplary image of Gandhi and in R.K. Narayan an ironic image of Gandhi. In Bhattacharya’s So Many Hungers the Gandhian ethic is integrated with a great national calamity – Bengal famine. Here, the basic values that are associated with Gandhi, the man, are brought to a central focus. Devendra Babu affectionately called ‘Devata’ by his followers and the village girl Kajoli attain a symbolic resonance and specificity. Surprisingly enough in Kanthapura, So Many Hungers and Vendor of Sweets Gandhi does not appear as a character. Although he appears as a character in Waiting for The Mahatma his role in the action of the novel is very marginal.

In Anand’s Untouchable and Nahal’s Crown and The Loincloth Gandhi is a character and an organic part of the fictional discourse. In Untouchable he doesn’t play an active role. Anand dramatizes the life of Bakha in such a way as to make him think about himself in a dialectical
fashion, Gandhi and his message become a part of Bakha's dialectical exercise to confront and possibly find a viable solution to his own problems. In *The Crown and The Loincloth* Gandhi is a major character whose influence on a society, plagued by caste and communal prejudice is dramatized within the framework of a specified historical period. This makes Mahal present an actual image in the sense that there is no trace of myth or mystification in the image of Gandhi.

Methodologically speaking there are a number of critical approaches in analysing fictional texts. The most popular approach which is favoured by the academic establishment is the one associated with Markschorer's "Technique as Discovery". But the problem with this approach is that it is too formal to give much scope to spotlight the historical and cultural significance of a work. Without totally discarding this form of approach we have tried to read the texts under review giving more importance to their socio-political implications.