Chapter 4

Gandhi: Mohan versus Mahatma

Contemporary literary writings confront the usual one-dimensional nationalist formulations while attempting to deconstruct and restructure them by looking into the diverse and multifarious narratives. The figure of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi that became first a national and soon enough an international one of immense political and philosophical significance comes under scrutiny. The Gandhian mystique that consists in the subtle interplay of tradition and modernity is seen as a construction of two sources of Indian past – the historical Mohandas Gandhi and the hagiographical Mahatma Gandhi. The rich and diverse legacy he left behind has provided a seemingly inexhaustible source for researchers. The present study not only focuses on Gandhi’s image of a Mahatma but also his share of criticism that he received in and after his lifetime. Before looking at the persona’s theatrical reconstructions which is critically assessed in terms of the historical and the hagiographical narratives, it is significant to have a detailed view of such narratives.

I

Mahatmization of Gandhi

Variously seen as the great opponent of European colonialism; a champion of civil rights for religious, racial and other minorities, an important critic of industrial system of production, a great pacifist who stood for the need to resist injustice non-violently, Gandhi received veneration in life as in death by millions of his compatriots. The popular image of Gandhi holds him a liberator, a messiah and a prophet who defied violence and espoused the virtue of truth. Considered a unique combination of a prophet and a political genius with the knack of infusing new meaning into old words, he was primarily an activist who knew how to tap and mobilise the regenerative resources of the tradition. His greatest merit is seen in his being the most modern type of mass leader. He, by mobilising the people into the political process and in his championship of change
appeared as a puissant social and political worker for the redemption of sins, sufferings and deprivations of Indian people.

Examining the cultural process through which Gandhi became a Mahatma, one locates how his Mahatmization went through a gradual course of action. Though the masses in general played considerable role in making a Mahatma out of a plainly historical figure, Gandhi himself has much appropriated the image by breaking the usual frames of history and entering the hagiographical ones. He played with the myths and metaphors, symbols and idioms with such ingenuity and authority that he was accepted by the people all over the country as the ‘Mahatma’. Besides his influential words, he spoke the language that the common man understood. When his devotees credited him with supernatural powers calling him the messenger of God, he then like a humble seeker of truth would modestly refuse to accept the reverence. Such a response was taken characteristic of the Mahatmas who with utter humility would reject the title of being great. Stirrings of boundless self-confidence is observed when Gandhi wrote to Esther Faering in 1919; ‘I am the one man who can today preserve the peace of India as no other man can’ (Gandhi 1965, Vol.15: 210).

Gandhi’s denouncement of material needs, self-abnegation and ashram mode of living further fed to his image of a Mahatma. He depicted himself never a seeker of wealth and material welfare. Yet again his frequent vows, fasts and prayer meetings aroused the interests of the masses in him. Gandhi’s impersonal universal ideals and practices that he applied to himself and even propounded for other human beings framed him as a saint. His technique of satyagraha which he defined to be a relentless search for truth and his determination to reach that truth was applied to all his mass struggles. Truth, he stated was above everything for him, and he even remarked once that he was ready to sacrifice even national freedom for the sake of truth and non-violence. He declared his aim as not to be consistent with his previous statements but with the truth as it may present itself to be at a given moment. Gandhi advocated ‘Truth’ to such an extent that he even spoke:

Let Gandhism be destroyed it stands for error. Truth and ahimsa will never be destroyed, but if Gandhism is another name for sectarianism, it deserves to be destroyed. (qtd. in Iyer 12)
Linking his principles with the religious and the metaphysical, made Gandhi a central feature of Indian politics. It provided strong counter to the power of colonial state and following its own rituals with marches, fasting, and symbolic violation of selected laws. His non-violence rooted in altruism and compassion towards fellow humans placed Gandhi on a higher plane.

Importance of Gandhi lies not in his principles but in the remarkable way he directed them, contributing at large to all domains – political, social, economic and religious. Emphasising the importance of temples, regarding prayer as infallible sources of strength and inspiration, ennobling asceticism, poverty and ignorance rather than material welfare, culture and knowledge; advocating celibacy; talking of cow protection as a religious duty and displaying his believe in divine dispensation according to which god shaped events in the world – all helped Gandhi receive appreciation from the masses and get in tune within the hagiographical frame. The philosophical basis of Gandhism became further disclosed when he tried relating visitation like draughts, floods and earthquake as somehow connected with man’s morals, a visitation for the sins of man.

Gandhi’s attempts at certain reforms were again understood as his real desire to find grievances and to cure them. Along with many he realised the necessity to resuscitate the villages in India and update the education policy for this purpose. His emphasis on the use of Hindi rather than English language brought him closer to the illiterate majority. In challenging the age old notions and prejudices with impunity, invoking traditional concepts and imparting them a new social content, he did not hesitate to reinterpret traditional beliefs and reject practices that were repugnant to his reason and conscience. For his religious, social views, Gandhi was at times likened to the Vivekananda. His condemnation of child marriages, expensive marriage celebrations, dowries and the practice of purdah system elevated him from his historical being.

Gandhi like many Hindu saints before him denounced untouchability and expressing his concern for their upliftment he went on a Harijan Tour in 1933. He pleaded that the untouchables be given access to all public institutions and also entry into the temple. Several great Indian leaders besides Gandhi went in to fight for the cause of the peasants and labourers but it was Gandhi who emerged more distinctively as their saviour. The secret of his mass appeal seems to lay in his renunciation of an elitist life in
order to perceive ground realities and his ability to reach out the poor and oppressed. In this context, words of an Indian political leader Rammahohar Lohia are pertinent: “tens of millions throughout the world saw in him their spokesman, the solace and the remedy for their sufferings and distress” (121). His visit to Champaran village in Bihar to inquire into the plight of the indigo labourers was a remarkable success throbbing the area with new vitality. His application of the technique of satyagraha in Champaran was considered the first mass struggle that Gandhi led in India against injustice. This new language of protest with its triumph became a shining example for the others to follow and greatly helped Gandhi in forming a matchless image among the masses. The changes that Gandhi introduced in his lifestyle were partly a response to his inner urge for austerity and partly his desire to identify himself with the least, lowliest and the lost. His humanitarian attitude and believe in humanity which he considered above all systems furthered the process of his iconization. Gandhi propounded the supremacy of an individual and his role in politics to be based on one’s conscience.

Gandhi in Hind Swaraj gave a severe condemnation of modern civilisation considering it a hindrance rather than helping the needs of human soul craving for better life. He said, “this civilisation takes note neither of morality nor of religion “(Gandhi 1965, Vol 10: 20). Holding that material progress was in inverse relation to moral progress and that modern civilisation worshipped body more than the spirit, he wrote in an article:

Mechanization is good when the hands are too few for the work intended to be accomplished. It is an evil when there are more hands than required for the work, as is the case of India. (qtd in Keer 603)

His refusal to accept technological developments and modern system of transport, printing press, etc and concentration of power and riches in the hands of the few again brought him closer to the subaltern rank of people who took Gandhi to be their spokesman.

One main characteristic that popularised Gandhi as Mahatma was his interest in spiritualizing the political life and institutions of the country. He held politics divorced from religion as debasing, and observed that political life must be an echo of the private without any split between the two. While Gandhi was shaping and purifying the political
movements and making history in India, his image was casting a shadow over the world. His politics and philosophy were now being discussed everywhere in India and abroad. He displayed his interest in challenging the conventional nature of politics, widening the concept of power and above all destroying dichotomies between public and private morals; religious values and political norms; ethical principles and political expediency. When accused of being too political he justified his entry into politics as a religious attempt. Learning from Iyer’s version, Gandhi spoke to a group of missionaries in 1938:

“I could not be leading a religious life until I identified myself with the whole of mankind and that I could not do unless I took part in politics” (41). Gandhi’s policies and practices resting on metaphysical belief system helped him in moulding not only his personality but also his political technique with which he first confronted racialism in South Africa and colonialism later in India. It was Gandhi’s identification of the spiritual with the political that formed one of the supreme factors in his headway towards Mahatmization.

Rightly observes one of his biographers, what Gandhi did to South Africa was less important than what South Africa did to him. His fight against racialism and injustice in South Africa provided him the laboratory for his experiments which he could later apply to his Indian struggle for Independence. Origins of Gandhi’s satyagraha is traced back in South Africa when in 1906 the Transvaal government passed an ordinance asked the Indians and other Asians living there to register their marriages which would otherwise be deemed illegal. Influenced by Thoreau’s philosophy of civil resistance Gandhi founded a new body of passive resisters to fight this racial abuse revolting against the discriminatory law and ran the full gamut of racist abuse in an epic journey from Durban to Pretoria. Tolstoy remarking upon his actions said in a prophetic voice:

your work in the Transvaal, which seems to be far away from the centre of the world, is yet the most fundamental and the most important to us supplying the most weighty practical proof in which the world can now share and with which must participate not only the Christians but all the peoples of the world. (Gandhi: 1965, Vol 10: 512-3)

Opposition to authority became the first source of his publicity. One such experience came to him when on his way to Pretoria, Gandhi was unceremoniously thrown out of the first class carriage at Martizburg station3. In retrospect, this incident seemed to him one
of the most creative experiences of his life when he resolved not to accept injustice rather fight against racial arrogance. Thus his struggle that began in South Africa laid the foundation and sowed the seeds for the national struggle that followed in India.

After tremendous success and popularity in South Africa, Gandhi arrived on the Indian scene in 1915 with a philosophy of his own and a new technique of social and political agitation. His views on non-violence, idea of Hindu-Muslim unity, his love for religious tolerance, profound faith in God and insistence on leading an ascetic life were settled, fixed and predominant. The governing passion of Gandhi’s political life was direct action which brought him into direct touch with the masses. His arguments and deliberations were thoughtful, his success was spectacular and moves were tactful. It was Gandhi’s predominantly political aptitude that helped him develop a revered image among the masses. His idea of being non-violent, non-cooperative was a novel one, simple, thrilling, attractive and engaging. Becoming the master of the Congress and leader of the nation he completely captivated the people’s interest. It was Gandhi’s views, ideas and even his appearance that were catering to the Indian image of a saint and a Mahatma allowing him enter the hagiographical mode of recognition.

Gandhi’s charisma was largely seen through his three major mass movements; the Non-Cooperation movement in 1919, the Salt Satyagraha in 1930 and the Quit India movement in 1942. His image of a Mahatma kept on maturing along with his political struggle against colonialism in a manner that was defined by Gandhi himself as religious. His influence can be judged when we read how his imprisonment by the British resulted in holding mass protests and demanding the release of their national hero. In this context Dennis Dalton notes the Viceroy’s predicament:

To arrest Gandhi is to set fire to the whole of India. Not to arrest him is to allow him to set the prairie on fire. To arrest Gandhi is to court a war. Not to arrest him is to confess defeat before the war is begun….In either case, Government stands to lose, and Gandhi stands to gain…..That is because Gandhi’s cause is righteous and the Government’s is not. (112)

Therefore Gandhi in jail created unrest making him a symbol of national martyrdom and bringing a constant stimulation to the national cause of fighting its way to freedom. When
Gandhi was imprisoned after Chaura-Chauri incident, his people prayed and fasted for the speedy restoration of their leader.

Gandhi’s boycott of foreign goods and promoting *swadeshi* that is home made goods, again caught people’s imagination. When Gandhi talked of hand spinning and weaving, the vast majority of unemployed and downtrodden found in him a person who could understand their predicament. Gandhi considered all his moves in the political field to be completely spiritual. His success at Salt Satyagraha brought a new spirit of rebel and added to the great faith and belief that the masses now exceedingly displayed in him. His display of a secular outlook by supporting the Muslims during the Khilafat movement and his complete identification with their agitation further enabled him to enter the hagiographical domain. His earlier disapproval of the partition made the people consider him as a genuinely religious man who like Lord Buddha or Mahavira aimed at uniting the masses. B.R. Nanda here points out that though Gandhi could not prevent the division of the country but he has done all he could to mitigate the ravages. Gandhi’s fast unto death during the Calcutta riots to show his disproval of violence created great commotion. And was rather reckoned amongst the greatest miracle of modern times, that had the magical effect of quenching the flames of hatred and violence.

It is from his autobiography too that people tend to trace the development of Gandhi’s belief in God and self-realisation and also the influence of Jainism and Vaishnavism in his living. It records that as a child when he saw the play Harishchandra, he got extremely fascinated by his devotion to truth and his vow to fulfil his words through all the ordeals. It was only after he read the ‘Gita’ that his faith began to develop. He himself admitted that the ‘Sermon of the Mount’ greatly influence him and went straight to his heart making him realise that without acceptance of god eternal peace was impossible. Turning to theosophical literature, Gandhi’s thoughts on religion started maturing. He read scriptures of various religions and works of several writers as Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson that helped him in forming his philosophy of life and deepen his faith thereby increasing his spirit of self-sacrifice and self-reliance. Influence of Jainism and Buddhism was great on him as both the religions laid considerable stress on non-violence, celibacy and non-possession. Because of his extreme principles of absolute non-violence and *ahimsa* which were more in keeping with Jainism than Hinduism many
including Tilak even thought Gandhi to be a Jain at heart. Gandhi’s religious philosophy is seen as a result of his personal quest and experiences. His consideration and unreserved acceptance of the validity of all existing religious faiths further fed to his greatness:

In spite of my being a staunch Hindu I find room in my faith for Christian and Islamic and Zoroastrian teaching, and, therefore, my Hinduism seems to some to be a conglomeration and some have even dubbed me an eclectic. (Gandhi: 1955, 23-4)

The image of Mahatma easily fired the imagination of writers and made him enter the folklore too. He became the theme of new patriotic-nationalist literature in all genre forms that emerged after the advent of Gandhi in Indian politics. The popular folklore and oral culture got heavily loaded with the iconic image of the Mahatma. He is idealised as well as idolised by people from all cultures and beliefs. In Profiles on Gandhi, a collection of American tributes, Gandhi in most cases is sensed with presence of an aura surrounding him. He is called a naked weaver who transformed religion into a powerful force and went ahead to change the entire world. The combination of renunciation and practical politics in Gandhi made him a unique force seldom seen before. According to some writers the greatest contribution of Gandhi to the world was his fight against violence. Sarojini Naidu exemplifies unquestioned Gandhi-reverence typical of that age. Though she was closely associated to Gandhi yet there was a guru-disciple distance maintained as she writes on him. Her sonnet on Gandhi “The Lotus” is a supreme example of Gandhi-devotional trends. Describing Gandhi as an eternal lotus who is a source of guidance and strength for many, Naidu attempts to bring in the point that all efforts to drain Gandhi of his immortality is futile as he is among the lords themselves. For her, standing for ageless beauty and supreme glory, he is a reincarnate of Brahma:

To devastate thy loveliness, to drain
The midmost rapture of thy glorious heart.
But who could win thy secret, who attain
Thine ageless beauty born of Brahma’s breath,
Or plucked thine immortality, who art
Coeval with the lords of Life and Death? (qtd in Iyengar, “The Lotus” 289)
When it comes to the treatment of Gandhi’s non-violence it would be apt to refer to Mahapatra’s poem quoted in Bijay. K. Das’ *Postmodern Indian English Literature*, where in the poet has represented non violence as a mystical yet beautiful and assuring light:

> It is a world in itself
> this ahimsa,
> with its mysterious shadows,
> lurking under ancient places,
> that assumes the clear, self-sustaining light of suns:
> a redefinition of beauty. (23-24)

There have been a good deal of literature both prosaic and poetic appreciating Gandhi and paying due reverence to the Mahatma. Basavraju Appa Rao’s poem on Gandhi further calls him a divine being sent on earth for the welfare of human beings:

> A new Jesus Christ has incarnated
> By not hurting him, he melted his foe’s arrogance
> Born a Hindu pigambar. (qtd in Das, Sisir Kumar 66)

By equating him with the prophets of religions the poet emphasis the intensity of faith people had in him and believed him to be a messenger of God.

However, it is not the writers, who created the Gandhi myth, but it is the people who constructed it and the writers in their turn used it effectively. This historical persona with his marked prominence has immensely influenced several writers. One great impact was observed when Raja Rao came with his biographical work on Gandhi *The Great Indian Way* that sustained Gandhi’s hagiographical image. This work is seen a landmark in Gandhi literature as it idolises Gandhi as an absolute in the words of his unquestioning blind follower, Rao. Through deification of Gandhi he raises him far above the critiquing planes as is evident in the following lines:

> He who achieves the impersonal, the principle, he the great being, the Mahatma.
> He it is that’s become the Law, from the Laws that hold (*dhru*) the sun and the moon, the negative and positive in electricity, man and woman, the good and bad, and the law that makes the waters go down the sea and the waves are seen as water you see greatness. (Rao 11)
Rao seems to be strongly influenced by Gandhi and sweats him to pen in ardently idealistic terms thereby contributing to the hagiographical constructions on Gandhi. In his presentation of this persona the Mahatma weighs more upon him than the historical Gandhi. This brief survey depicts how Gandhi has permeated fiction and non-fiction in all languages and literatures and the extent to which Gandhi has been sanctified and positioned at a consecrated place.

Gandhi’s death was seen by many of his admirers as an end to his unique pilgrimage and making them believe that the divinely-appointed instrument has ceased its work. It made him a mythical being, one who kept struggling with problems of nationalism and imperialism and tried eradicating miseries from all walks of life. Because Gandhi was made a demi-god, his assassination had a cathartic effect throughout India. Gandhi dying at the hands of a Hindu fanatic and extremist made him a martyr. People took it as the sacrifice of the great men for the welfare of the nation. His death brought an end to his political journey which was coupled with his metaphysical beliefs and practices but after he died people held that the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi will live and grow and his influence will increase with the years. Gandhi is identified by the world as a rare man, a man of simple and austere living, a seeker after truth, attempting to free his nation from imperialism. He is in fact been deemed a Mahatma through a steady process of his very human experiences. For his exceptional qualities he was then and even today considered being superhuman. Raghavan Iyer rightly remarks:

What is undeniable is that as a saint he was all too human and as a politician he possessed a charisma that seemed to be superhuman. He was patently good but also extremely astute, a combination that is normally believed to be impossible.

(8)

Gandhi exercised such fantastic influence upon his patriot and fellow men that Mahadev Desai, his secretary once cried:

To live with the saints in heaven
Is a bliss and a glory
But to live with a saint on earth
Is a different story. (qtd in Keer 645)
Such remarks itself reveal of the magical spell and the charisma that Gandhi exercised over him and several other thousands and millions. Jamnalal Bajaj, a successful businessman of Gandhi's time held him to be the greatest national asset which needs to be sustained. For his supreme human qualities he is made an allegorical hero and is said to have embodied the best qualities of the mythological heroes of the past with the celibacy of Rama, the statesmanship of Vidur, the ahimsa of Buddha, the love and tolerance of Christ, thus considered a living myth. Such comparisons bring in the wide variety and multiple roles that Gandhi played upon in his lifetime and which greatly amplified his deification and contributed much to his Mahatmaship.

II

Gandhi as a Historical Character

As no great man has a blameless record so he must also take his share of reproach. In this section an attempt is made to assess Gandhi as a historical character, undergoing a series of political dilemmas, conflicts and private turbulatuons. Gandhi who has been a subject of much heated debate has come in for a larger share of both admiration and criticism than any other historic personality. The entire gamut of his social, political and religious philosophy has a touch of tradition and modernity that lends itself to oriental as well as occidental interpretation. As held by many historians, Gandhi belongs to an era when a sense of empirical history writing was missing. What we largely employed were metaphysical apparatus due to which Gandhi's history was lost among the several myths and beliefs taking him towards the hagiographical imagination. As classic characters were easily taken to the position of pantheon Gods, so was Gandhi. Despite being not so remote in historical time there are arguments coming up till date questioning the accuracy of Gandhi's historical facts.

Historians and writers in postcolonial times realising the inadequacy in foregrounding Gandhi in completely empirical terms now attempt at a balanced approach towards his persona. They try to first bring him down from the consecrated image of a Mahatma and then examine his life and philosophy as a political actor and not a sage. Penetrating beneath the sainthood of Gandhi, David Hardiman, one of Gandhi's historian,
attempt to examine him as a figure whose life and works represent a dialogue between many complex strands of thought of his day, as well as his legacy in India and the world since his death. W.H.Hole’s contention is that:

There were really two Gandhī’s, that the humble humanitarian and the Hindu monk was almost overnight transformed into a political revolutionary completely obsessed with a worldly aim. (qtd. in Iyer 7)

As we move beyond the hagiographical what we unearth is a series of contentions and conflicts that existed in his times and even later questioning his ideas and acts. Such conflicting versions allow a re-study of this figure in more humane terms and know his history along with his hagiography. By countering upon his saintly image, the attempt is to bring forth some of the issues and situations where Gandhi was appreciated or accused for his role as a politician. We observe how his ideas were adopted as well as contested upon by his contemporaries. Though Nehru, who shared with Gandhi a partnership of exceptional energy and integrity, yet there were numerous occasions when Nehru was assailed by doubts about Gandhī’s policies – in 1932, on his fasts against separate electorates for the untouchables; in 1934, his withdrawal of Civil Disobedience; in 1942 on Quit India movement and finally in 1947 on partition. It was only the cause of India’s freedom that brought the two together. Nehru observed that Gandhi was an extraordinary paradox. Because his idea of socialism had nothing to do with the economic framework of society, Nehru considered Gandhī’s attempt at socialism as a kind of muddled humanitarianism. Gandhi held God as the master of the world whereas socialists believed in man being the master of the world. Unlike socialists who took up scientific mode of thought, Gandhi adhered to religious mode of thinking.

Ideological differences existed between Tagore and Gandhi, though both grew up in the same invigorating and challenging atmosphere but were destined to go different ways. This is how Mazumdar’s estimate the two. Tagore for him is a poet and an aesthete, who “preferred the life of contemplation and became India’s interpreter and ambassador of goodwill to the western world”. Whereas, Gandhi is “dedicated to God, and as a man of action, became India’s trumpet voice, bearing the message of healing and reconciliation while he offered non-violent battle to entrenched injustice both foreign and domestic” (46). Gandhi was also charged of being a dictator to which he denied. His
views were not fully acceptable to many congress workers either. Another dissension as noted by Dennis Dalton existed between M.N. Roy and Gandhi. Roy gave his first detailed Marxist critique of Gandhi in his work ‘India in Transition’ (1921) and asserted that Gandhism has reached a crisis and its impending wane. Roy held that Gandhism was seen as a temporary obstacle in the path of history which would soon be swept aside, not by the British, but by the masses themselves, once they became conscious of the progressive movement of history. In his essay entitled ‘India’s Message’ he contemptuously dismissed Gandhism as a political philosophy considering it only as a ‘mass of platitudes and hopeless self contradictions’ that emerged from “a conception of morality based upon dogmatic faith” (qtd. in Dalton 84). But attempting to give an unbiased approach to the historical Gandhi, Dennis Dalton, notes another biographer’s remark as well who states that Roy has underestimated Gandhi’s political potential.

Besides criticism, there arose a legion of articulate Indian sympathizers who came not to criticise but to extol his virtues. He was seen as a blend of a mystic and politician who has long stood as a symbol of struggle for material autonomy. Ghokhale, his contemporary displayed the influence that Gandhi exercised over him:

He is a man who may be well described as a man among men, a hero among heroes, a patriot among patriots, and we may well say that in him Indian humanity at the present time has really reached its high watermark. (qtd. in Dalton 66)

Again B.R. Nanda writing of the inescapable influence that Gandhi had upon his mind is worth noticing: “I asked myself how Gandhi entered into my bloodstream without my realising it and was determined to find out” (3). Reading such favourable remarks projected with equal fervour and conviction leave us in utter deception thereby making the retrieval of Gandhi’s history all the more difficult a task. Subsistence of such conflicting views has always made Gandhi oscillate between the image of a hagiographical Mahatma and the historical Mohandas with no charisma or greatness attached to it. Postmodern critics pointed out that the writings of Gandhi carried vagueness and contradictions which made it easier to accept him as a saint than to fathom the challenge posed by his demanding beliefs. But Gandhi himself saw no harm in contradiction as far as it is consistent with truth. He was sharply contrasted to Tagore for his religious belief as Tagore spoke for the joys of life, freedom of spirit and delight of
existence whereas Gandhi took a grim and austere attitude. Some even held that Gandhi’s interpretation of Hinduism was considered overstretched and over emphasised to suit his theory.

Learning from Dalton’s account, Tagore challenged the dominant political belief of his age and of modern politics; the gospel of nationalism which he considered as the greatest menace and thus his critique of nationalism in modern India and his desire for international harmony came as an indictment of Gandhi’s leadership. On this Tagore mentions: “This nationalism is a cruel epidemic of evil that is sweeping over the human world of the present age, and eating into its moral vitality” (69). He added that the greatest disservice that nationalism, as propagated by Gandhi, has done to India was to have directed its attention of the country from its primary needs. The real problem according to Tagore was social and not political. However Gandhi was quick enough to reply to Tagore’s criticism: “Indian nationalism is not exclusive, nor aggressive nor destructive. It is health-giving, religious and therefore humanitarian” (71). A contentious ideological belief between the two is also discussed by Hardiman as he mentions how Tagore could see only greed and non-violence in nationalism. And when Gandhi launched his Non-Cooperation campaign in 1919, Tagore stated that the Mahatma was playing with fire and urged him to exercise caution. For Tagore, power in all its form is irrational and to him Gandhi’s Non-Cooperation did not seem to represent India’s moral superiority. He further deplored of the Great China Wall being built between India and the west through Non-Cooperation. However Hardiman also pays attention to what Gandhi has to say as he argues that he was trying a forge a nationalism of a very different sort, different from the violent and aggressive forms found in the West. And further his idea of nationalism was in nature of Indian religion which was submerged with the principle of ahimsa.

Another great Indian fighter against colonial rule was Subash Chandra Bose who after talking to Gandhi felt that there was a deplorable lack of clarity in his plan and that the Mahatma did not himself had a clear idea of the successive stages of the campaign which would bring India to her cherished goal of freedom. Bose’s interview with Gandhi ended in a disagreement between the two which recurred at intervals in future. Many including the congress working committee realised that Gandhi’s plan was never properly
designed. Raghavan Iyer too uncovers the viewpoints of some marked people who were disillusioned by Gandhi’s campaign. He records that Mr. Weatherly in 1924 held Non-Cooperation as a way of violence, not of love; appealing in the end to violence rather than reason. Annie Beasant also expressed her doubts about Gandhi’s campaigns of mass satyagraha. Furthermore in 1931, Jamshed Mehta, criticised the consequences of satyagraha movement that engendered hatred, indiscipline and the habit of indiscriminate law breaking among the people. Tagore too held similar feelings and criticised satyagraha as a doctrine of negation and despair; narrowness and separation.

Another criticism that Gandhi faced during Salt Satyagraha was that his Hindu style of thought and actions had alienated the Muslims. However Gandhi could not wholly satisfy the Hindu’s either who rebuked him for sacrificing their interests at every emotional impulse. His support to Khilafat movement had especially come in for much uninformed criticism. He was also questioned as to why he did not fast unto death on a critical issue as partition of the country although he scarified his whole life for Hindu-Muslim unity. Sardar Patel too, another great revolutionary did not at times approved of Gandhi’s nature and type of leadership that was inclusive. The differences between the two became manifestly irreconcilable over the issue of partition in India.

As regards his promise of swaraj in one year Gandhi was rebuked by his contemporaries like Tagore who failed to fall in line with him in understanding the Mahatma’s far fetched target. Nehru observed that when Gandhi spoke of swaraj in one year he was “delightfully vague on the subject” (Nehru: 1936, 76). However Gandhi came up to his own defence stating that if people had followed his principles and methods that underlined Swaraj, the target would have been achieved. Though Gandhi’s mass campaigns did not brought immediate success, he was yet happy to see thousands of common man all over India involved in the national struggle giving expression to growing discontent and anti-British feeling. Judith Brown tried analysing how the organisation of the country managed to form a united body with Gandhi’s mass campaigns and writes in this context:

Gandhi saw non-cooperation as a way of involving the whole spectrum of Indian society in a political movement. ...for the first time he made contact with groups
of subcontractors who found in the techniques he offered ways of defending and promoting their local interests. (1972, 322)

And this worked through three distinct levels – the educated elite, the middle level political operators of law, business and finally the vast majority of millions of poor peasantry. Gandhi’s influence on this last group was substantial.

Fixing Gandhi more in historical time than the metaphysical one, Shahid Amin in “Gandhi as Mahatma” analyse how the peasants of Gorakhpur District viewed Gandhi revealing the swiftness with which he was transformed into a Mahatma. Amin looks at peasant perceptions of Gandhi by focussing on the trail of stories that marked his passage through the district. Some of them, he records, imagined the Mahatma having fantastic powers to defeat the Raj and that their faith in Gandhi’s power was indexed by ‘fantastic rumours’. It’s interesting to read the recorded stories that relate to testing the power of Mahatma, opposing him and his creed and even to the miracles performed by the Mahatma thereby suggesting the incredible process of Mahatmization at work. One of the many interesting rumours that circulated widely in Gorakhpur district was as follows:

Plague was raging through Sonaura village. People were living in outlying huts. The water in a well at this place was so shallow on 27 April that even a small drinking vessel (lota) could not be fully submerged in it. Seeing this one Misaji offered to distribute rs.5 in the name of Gandhiji. Subsequently, water began to rise slowly. By the afternoon of 28 April the well had filled up to five cubits, the next day it was eleven cubits deep’. (44)

The story underlines that the Mahatma’s image took form within pre-existing patterns of popular belief and rituals. Writers of the post 90’s thought such as Shahid Amin, Dennis Dalton, David Hardiman and Judith Brown believe that part of this charisma came from Gandhi’s skill as a communicator and especially his ability to use symbols and images in the language for and of the people.

Gandhi’s attempt to spiritualise politics again brought him in controversy with many other national leaders. The prominent one was with Tilak who alleged that politics could not be regarded solely from religious standpoint. As quoted by many historians, the heated arguments that went on between the two in 1920 is attention-grabbing. Drawing here from Iyer’s account, Tilak wrote to Gandhi:
Politics is a game of worldly people, and not of sadhus, and instead of the maxim ‘akkhodhenajine kkhodham’ [conquer anger by non-anger] as preached by Buddha, I prefer to rely on the maxim of Sri Krishna, “ye gatthaa mam parapadyamthe thaams-thattaiva bhejaamyaham” [in whatever way men resort to me, even so I render to them]....both methods are equally honest and righteous but the one is more suited to this world than the other. (50)

To this Gandhi reverted:

With deference to the Lokamanya, I venture to say that it betrays mental laziness to think that the world is not for Sadhus. The epitome of religion is to promote Purushartha, and Purushartha is nothing but a desperate attempt to become a Sadhu, i.e., to become a gentleman in every sense of the term. (51)

Such exchange of remarks kept occurring between Gandhi and Tilak on several other issues as well, as the two adopted divergent modes of contemplation.

Gandhian reforms that forms substantial part of his hagiography are also not completely free from reproach. Michael Edwardes does not consider him a progressive reformer when he writes:

Apart from uplifting statements and a fast or two, Gandhi did nothing to raise the status of the poorest. (260)

Recorded by B.R.Nanda, some of Gandhi’s contemporaries too admonished his advocacy of a rural economy based on handicrafts and argued that it would amount to a ‘massacre’, as the rising population could be fed and clothed by only large-scale industrialization. Tagore once again disagreed with Gandhi for his over emphasis on the use of spinning wheel. He observed, ‘my reason and conscience restrain me lest I should be a party to the raising of the charkha to a higher plane than its due’ (qtd. in Keer 470). Agreeing with the conflict Dalton too informs that Tagore found Gandhi’s dicta on spinning and cloth-burning highly destructive. For Tagore swaraj was not a matter of mere self-sufficiency in the production of cloth, rather a substance of mind and soul, that goes on building swaraj for itself. The socialists also displayed their disillusionment with Gandhi and according to them Gandhism was a system of clemency and charity and not a system of social justice. Nehru was at variance with Gandhi on his social and economic issues as Gandhi’s conception of an ideal village did not appeal to him. Nehru believed that a
village is backward culturally and intellectually and no progress can be made from backward environment.

It was thought that because Gandhi fought for the noble cause of abolishing untouchability, he deserved worldwide fame of being a saint. However, on this issue he received harshest condemnation from his fellow men who viewed him as a caste Hindu pretending to defend untouchables but in actuality advocating phoney reforms that preserved all evils of caste. Latter position was also taken by Dr. Ambedkar who, working on the same issue disliked Gandhi's views intensely and regarded his influence on India as wholly pernicious. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar fought for the cause of the untouchables but from diverse angles, refusing to accept each others outlook. Ambedkar soon grew as a champion of the depressed classes and his social philosophy was an antidote to Gandhism. When Gandhi reacted to Ambedkar's demand of separate electorates in all possible terms, the latter remarked that it was unbecoming of the Mahatma to dissuade other leaders for the demands of the depressed classes. Gandhi who disagreed with Ambedkar warned the British government that if they created separate electorate then he would fast unto death. Nehru on this criticized Gandhi's "sentimental approach to a political question, and his frequent references to god in connection with it" (Norman 271). Furthermore reported by Nanda, Nehru questioned Gandhi as to why he has chosen to campaign against untouchability rather than make a frontal assault on the caste system. Gandhi's defence of caste system was chided by Tagore who was a deadly enemy of outworn traditions and conceited prejudices. Tagore regarded caste as inconsistent with the spirit of truth. The governing fact about Gandhi was that he looked at society and the problem of untouchability from the angle of a humanitarian and not as a social revolutionary or rationalist.

Gandhi's views on civilization and machinery were also seen in opposition to many of his contemporaries. Tagore differed fundamentally in his outlook as he favoured science and stood for victories of human mind and soul over earthly environment but to Gandhi western civilization was an anathema. Ideological difference was observed between Nehru and Gandhi too because Nehru believed in industrialism and socialism and accepted non-violence only as a policy and not as creed. Gandhi however glorified poverty and suffering and ascetic mode of life which was disliked by Nehru. Gokhale
too found Gandhi’s words crude and predicted that “Gandhi would himself destroy it after spending a year in India” (Nanda 60). The argument for and against modern civilization figured prominently between Tilak and Gandhi, as Tilak unlike Gandhi favoured scientific, technological and industrial education. Furthermore David Hardiman accounts for the criticism that Gandhi received for shunning labour saving devices in favour of older style labour intensive methods of production that have historically condemned the poor to long hours of back breaking labour. Partha Chatterjee revealing his view on the subject writes that what appears on the surface as a critique of western civilization was a total moral critique of fundamental aspects of civil society and also Gandhi’s plea for a return to the simple self-sufficiency of traditional village life.

Gandhi’s approach to the question of women emancipation was one that he shared with many nationalists and social reformers of his day namely that women should receive education, should not be married off early and be allowed to remarry if widowed. However, his views on the subject were understood by some of his critics as framed in patriarchal setup. Hardiman too attempts to examine Gandhi’s practice of patriarchy which he considered monologic and demonstrates this by examining Gandhi’s own family life which was troublesome and often distressing. Hardiman holds that both from psychoanalytical and feminist perspective there was much in Gandhi’s practise and belief that was problematic in the extreme. Despite claiming that he regarded his wife his equal, Gandhi compelled her to do things that she believed to be wrong. He did not practice his principles adequately and was at times querulous, intolerant and not open to dialogue in more important respects. Hardiman indicates that in his own family he acted as a high headed patriarch, coercing his wife and sons to follow the path he decreed as true and running his ashrams in an autocratic manner, disciplining those who did not accept his dictates. His relationship with his family especially his eldest son Harilal is revealed to be a sad affair. He did not let his sons go for higher education and thought of compensating it with virtues like simplicity and spirit of service. Harilal often felt that he was the victim of his father’s experiments and when he married Gulab without his father’s permission, Gandhi reacted by disowning his son altogether. This was evidently seen as an example of patriarchal bad manners that characterised Gandhi’s relationship with his son. It is
popularly believed that the sufferings of his family had greatly contributed to the Mahatmaship of Mohandas Gandhi.

Though Gandhi expressed his inflexible opinion about sex and dissection; he himself kept struggling to curb his urges. Shackles of sexual passions kept encircling his mind since his childhood as he records an incident of ‘double shame’ in his autobiography. When his father lay dying, Gandhi was engaged with his pregnant wife in satisfying his carnal desires. It was only later in 1906 that Gandhi interpreted it as detraction from his duty and therefore took a vow of celibacy. Hardiman examines how despite his vow he himself was always in doubt about his success in achieving full mastery over his passions. Believing that he has not entirely conquered his desires he even went in for an experiment in 1946-47, when he sought to test his celibacy by sleeping with naked and nubile young women without feeling any sexual stirrings. His success in this respect may have enhanced his spiritual powers but he was not concerned with the psychological effects that this experiment might have on the young women with whom he slept. Further some years past, he was censured in some quarters for his practice of putting his hands while walking on the shoulders of grown up girls or women. They held that it offended their sense of decency and set a bad example. In the context Vinay Lal writes:

Though Gandhi took the vow of brahamcharya, he did not thereby cease to mix in the company of women. Quite to the contrary he almost adored their presence and was almost surrounded by many women disciples and initiates. Gandhi had a considerable female entourage and conducted a number of what in the West be understood as “platonic” relationships. (113)

Another severe accusation against Gandhi was that he staked the whole nation for his individual self evolution and treating Indians like test tubes in his experiments of truth and non-violence. Nanda writes that his critics; the communists, the socialists and even the radicals in the Congress party did not appreciate the long intervals between the satyagraha campaigns and chafed on Gandhi’s emphasis on truth and non-violence with his precondition that the atmosphere in the country had to be peaceful and conducive to a non-violent struggle. They were constantly clamouring for an aggressive strategy and
were furious when Gandhi halted the campaign in 1922 because of a violent incident at Chauri-Chaura.

A more serious criticism against Gandhi’s notion of *ahimsa* is recorded by Raghavan Iyer who brings in a critic’s argument that it is merely a guide to individual conduct and cannot be taken as a practical technique of universal application in the social and political spheres. Difference in thoughts are also noticed between Gandhi and the Congress when Gandhi remarks:

> Non-violence is my creed. It was never of Congress. With the Congress it has always been a policy.... The Congress had every right to change it when it found necessary. A creed can never admit of any change. (qtd. in Dalton 42)

Gandhi’s insistence on the importance of vows was challenged by his contemporaries. C.F. Andrews, one of Gandhi’s closest admirers could not see eye to eye with him on the issue and felt that it is not good to bind one’s whole life by vows (which pledge the future) as it may overshadow the truth and obscure it, for life he believed is always a growth into something new and unexpected (Iyer). Hardiman points out that there were times when Gandhi did not himself live up to his principles, as he treated B.R. Ambedkar with disrespect in their initial meetings, or sought to coerce members of his family. However Hardiman makes a balanced approach towards his history when he also credits him for successfully building up such an alternative politics, as seen in the modern ubiquity of *satyagraha* in India and outside. His study reveals how Gandhi tried to incorporate subaltern politics into an alternative by purging it of its violent aspects. He gave it a strong moral superiority, as against the coercive and violent politics of both colonial state and the indigenous elites. Several Gandhian loyalists believed that if humanity is to progress, he is inexorable and we may overlook him at our own risk.

Looking at the diverse perspectives on Gandhi brought in by various people in history we see that such re-readings of Gandhian history shall take place endlessly, as the writers attempt to locate the historical Gandhi completely sifted away from the hagiographical one. Some historians argue that Gandhi’s significance was limited to a specific historical situation – that of the decline of European colonialism at a time when it was in any case a waning force. But, rejecting this view, the others argue that Gandhi’s particular brand of nationalism was important in mobilising the masses. We find a series
of contradictory statements and beliefs held by his historians and his contemporaries making the retrieval of Gandhi’s history a complex phenomenon. Despite being loaded with a lot of admiration and reverence he is also likewise rebuked for his ideas and principles that he adhered to. Thus, there can be no denying the fact that the common image of Gandhi in India as in other parts of the world has largely oscillated between the image of a whimsical saint and a wily politician.

III

Gandhi as Sammy

The central concern of postcolonial dramatists is no longer to represent a homogenous mass of likeminded people but to look at the hotspot of conflicts, negotiations, bargains and manipulations of all kinds. Where Indian theatre has come of age and is a cultural force in contemporary India, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, an eminent historical persona who has permeated all forms of writings – literary and non-literary, provided the subject for many nationalist dramas too. Gandhi’s persona attracting attention of several writers both pre-colonial and postcolonial has been caricaturised with all sorts of contradictions. More recent studies however are trying to probe into this Gandhian whirlwind. While repositioning him in the postcolonial context through a deconstructive approach towards this character, these studies delve deep into his Mahatmization. The playwright of my study is another modern Indian dramatist, Partap Sharma whose plays are often based on historical and philosophical themes that bring a new ‘turn’ to core concepts in Indian thought and put them in a contemporary setting. Sharma in his latest play *Sammy! A word That Broke An Empire* (2005) employs theatrical conventions to recount the story of Gandhi’s inner thoughts and life. Before exploring how Sharma projects Gandhi’s life history it is pertinent to observe that besides this one writer there have been many other writers/playwrights who have re-written the myth of Mahatma.

Theatre fraternity seems to have developed an obsession with the Mahatma who also keeps on inspiring cinema as ever. Gandhi the most widely viewed cinematic portrayal of a historical figure continues to be a source of enthralment, for it presents the
lone moral individual triumphing over the conventional forces of authority in society. The first ever film on Gandhi that aroused the masses interest in him and added much to his hagiographical image was Richard Attenborough’s *Gandhi*. Then came Shyam Benegal’s *Waiting for the Mahatma* that held Gandhi in a critical mode and tried analysing his life and thoughts not as saint but a political personality. Recently seen Feroz Khan’s *Gandhi, My Father* is again exposing the contradictions that Gandhi had with his eldest son, Harilal. The film is a departure from the usual celluloid homage to Mahatma Gandhi. The movie by the very nature of its story telling captures the undivided attention of the audience and moves them completely. Feroz himself describes the story as a clash of convictions, values and family aspirations.

There exists a range of plays focussing on one or the other aspect of the Mahatma’s life; *Gandhiji’s Sadhana* (1969) by K.S. Rangaapa, *Barrister-at-Law* (1977) by Ahmed Abbas, *Riding the Storm* (1990) by S.K.Ojha, *Gandhi – A play* (1983) by Trivedi and *Dear Bapu* by Mohan Maharishi, have all been developing upon his much accredited image. However, of late, there is also seen an emerging trend of anti-Gandhi plays that questions the historical claims and takes Gandhi off his pedestal, abandoning the halo around his neck. Coming up first, Feroz khan’s *Gandhi Vs Mahatma*, then Chetan Datar’s *Gandhi-Ambedkar* and then again Pardeep Dalvi’s *Me Nathuram Godse Bolte*. However the three theatre stalwarts chose to focus on three different aspects of Gandhi’s life; in *Gandhi Vs Mahatma* the audience watched the battle between a son whose father has given birth to a nation and a father who has no time for his own flesh and blood. The same audience watched in wonder *Gandhi-Ambedkar* where India’s greatest statesman took intractable strands. And with Pradeep Dalvi, the audience were trying to understand Godse who thunders in the play that assassinating Mahatma Gandhi was a national need. Thus we see how in postcolonial context the dramatists now puncture the grand claims of history by giving recognition to some of the historical as well as hagiographical beliefs, rather than simply adding to the existing faiths.

Dalvi’s play *Me Nathuram Godse Bolte*, turns into battle over beliefs, marking a sharp turn in Gandhi-inspired theatre and exploring unknown parts of history. As the play has Godse saying that Gandhi did not utter the words ‘Hey Ram’ when he fell as commonly believed rather Gandhi only said ‘huh’, it sparks off the debate on artistic
licence. Then again Feroz khan’s powerful and highly emotional play *Gandhi Vs Mahatma* dwells more on human side of Gandhi, giving a disturbing, turbulent account of Gandhi’s relationship with his wife and children on many issues. Exploring the personal anguish of the Mahatma and his troubled son Harilal, the play depicts how the brunt of Gandhi’s experiments in his journey towards a Mahatma was borne largely by his family. The play is a saga of a man who transformed the soul of the nation but could not save the soul of his own son.

Though Feroz khan develops upon Gandhi’s history skilfully, however his focus remains largely on his uneasy family life. Whereas the playwright of my study Partap Sharma, as one would notice, brings in a wide range of issues and events related to the life of Gandhi both as Mohandas, an ordinary human being who knew no art of impressing people and the other as Mahatma, whose charisma was so great that he even overpowered his real self. Although both these plays are in tune with revealing the politics of hagiographic formations, Sharma in his play draws attention to the emergence of the entire legend of Gandhi and acknowledging the conflict that Gandhi went through with his own inner self. While he puts in an episode or two, agreeing with Gandhi’s disturbed family life but his central concern is not bounded up with any one particular issue of Gandhi’s life rather an all round projection of his journey looking at his transformation from a tongue-tied lawyer in South Africa to a great soul later in India.

Gandhi has been subjected to both historical and hagiographical reconstructions with a frequency that invariably postpones his persona from being grasped or received in one particular way. Partap Sharma, a modern Indian playwright, in his play *Sammy!* lucratively draws Gandhi out of his history and hagiography and takes him into the lucid arena of dramatic understanding. Through this intricately crafted play, set against the background of India’s struggle for freedom, he brings alive Gandhi’s philosophy, pragmatism, and sense of humour. By staging the dramatic relationship between Mohan and the irrepressible Mahatma whom he could not ignore, Sharma allows us to witness the constant tensions between the spiritual and the mundane. Where the play is seen as a clear-cut shot to recreate history taking incidents from Gandhi’s real life story, it is also meant to denote the historical-hagiographical linkage that subsist within present-day India.
Seen as a vibrant piece of theatre with its dynamic style of presentation, the playwright has an interesting way of carrying the play forward that is through the two incompatible selves of Gandhi. His portrayal vacillates between the historical Mohandas Gandhi and the hagiographical Mahatma Gandhi emphasising that the history of Mohan was different from that of the Mahatma. The study places the two images in a parallel mode thereby exploring the conflict between Mohan and the irrepressible Mahatma with his ‘inner voice’ constantly confronting him. As hagiography is the instinctual process of creating Mahatma out of the dry stuff of history into the minds of people, the play shall reveal how Mohan, the historical figure who led the freedom struggle is transformed into a Mahatma having hagiographical inclinations. Within the context, where Gandhi is looking for liberation for a whole nation, the play makes us unlearn and learn anew, the meaning of words like truth, purity and sacrifice. This fast moving and complex play has been played to a wide and varied audience. Partap Sharma through a witty, lively debate between two actors (one Mohan and the other Mahatma) traces the development of the young Mohandas Gandhi from being a protestor in South Africa to that of a shrewd politician and finally into an enlightened person – a Mahatma or Great Soul.

A play in two acts, it covers a span of almost forty-five years of Gandhi’s life. Act one, comprising of eighteen scenes, introduces us to the line of action that Gandhi undertook against imperialism in South Africa. And we learn something of his philosophy here when he talks of satyagraha, truth, non-violence and about his vow of celibacy. Back at home in India, that covers entire act two, the play touches upon some of the important milestones in our struggle for Independence like the Champaran agitation, the Dandi March, the massacre in Jallianwala Bagh, and the ‘charkha’ as a weapon to fight the British. The pros and cons of the movement itself are discussed between Mahatma (the inner voice) and Mohan. As we reach the end of the play the playwright discusses in depth the role of different leaders like Jinnah, Nehru and Gandhiji on one hand and the Viceroy and his advisor Clancy on the other. In short, the play is a kaleidoscopic presentation of our freedom movement with Gandhi’s philosophy thrown in.

Revealing it to be an expert work of art, Sharma does not state history plainly. Rather by using the potency of dramatic mode of presentation he dazzles its audience by introducing a fictional element in the form of a separate character of the ‘Mahatma’
(coming on stage as shadow) and rendering a unique feature to the play. What is remarkable is his treatment of Gandhi’s conflicting view with his own inner self. As an interesting piece of work on Gandhi’s life, it carries series of events happening one after the other and Gandhi negotiating Mohan and Mahatma at all times. Initially we see two characters, Mohan and Mahatma (in form of shadow) discussing Gandhi as the lost leader.

Mohan: What was he?
Mahatma: Ah, that’s the point. He spent his own life trying to find out. (12)

Gradually as the play progresses the two are gradually drawn closer and conflict arises between Mohan, the reason and Mahatma, representing idealism. Progressively the Mahatma wins and takes over:

Mahatma: …No one before this has attempted to use individual moral force as a vehicle of group action. You are trying to turn personal ethics into a political possibility. You are forging a new weapon. You can change politics forever. Go now. Address them. (44)

Partap Sharma in his play is consciousness of the mass of Gandhiana and the iconization of Gandhi as he opens his play speaking through his ‘Actor’ who talks of Gandhi:

One great monumental figure (nods in the direction of the Mahatma) looms large out of events as though he came readymade for history but all the little fellows and fillies who may have shaped him are remembered only incidentally – as if they took life for, and by, that brief interaction! (6)

He points out to the process that goes in the making of the history where minor characters are usually ignored. By doing this, Sharma is probably directing our concern towards the likelihood that the Mahatma’s subsistence was a possibility due to several other minor historical figures who contributed much to his greatness but remains unrecognised. All the characters and events in the play are largely historical and Sharma makes no effort in tampering with its authenticity. Sammy!, a result of several years of research on Gandhi by the dramatist, and proposed as an innovatively conceived piece of theatre, unfolds to recount Gandhi’s story from his earliest days to his final assassination. The play also explores the story of Mohan’s life starting from South Africa to his death bringing to life different events in his fight for Independence through a dramatic conflict.
The protocol used by Sharma of bringing two selves of Gandhi on stage, one Mohan, his real self and the other as the Mahatma, acting as Mohan’s conscience helps the playwright to question and reveal how the Mahatma through his idealistic philosophy persuaded Mohan to follow him. This well turned-out witty portrayal of Gandhi both as historical and hagiographical simultaneously, immensely aided in the exploration of Mohan’s journey towards his Mahatmization. Act one itself opens with the ‘Mahatma’, appearing in form of shadow, saying: “I am a shadow. (As the lights come up). The shadow of an actor.” (5). From here, till the last scene Mahatma puts forth his idealistic beliefs enabling Mohan to gradually acquire his superlative self. Asks Mohan: “Are you trying to play my ideal?” (12). And soon again when Mohan tell Mahatma: ‘Anyway, you’re not my ideal’, Mahatma replies back: “Not at the moment perhaps. But later.” (13). This exchange of dialogue taking place in his early South African days, depicts that Mohan is completely ignorant of his inner self with no traits of being a Mahatma and does not wish to become one. The technique is not that new, but it is the way the playwright uses it, makes all the difference. In Gandhi’s own life too, he was said to have been plagued by his ‘inner voice’ which is given tangible form in the play where the realist, Mohan, and the idealist, Mahatma, are dramatised visually through two actors debating about Gandhi. The two voices (as the historical and the hagiographical) never quite agree with each other and thus the action is driven on. This device enables us to understand the decisions that Gandhi took in life after battling them out in his mind, the arena of right and wrong. Mohan asks his inner voice in South Africa when he confronted with his first problem, “Would you have played it differently?” Mahatma replies, “Of course. More diffidently” (11). And when Mohan further questions as to how to go about his life, Mahatma talks of “simultaneity” which he describes as the “ability of the mind to contain contradictions” (11). However, Mohan is in constant conflict with his conscience which sounded highly philosophical to him.

Mohan: We have no arms, no ammunition, no power, no authority, no skill. Only the will to fight.

Mahatma: The spirit is enough.

Mohan: In philosophy.
Mahatma: Do you separate that from life? Then God and life are two things to you. Then spirit and action exist in two different spheres.
Mohan: You dictate like a Buddha embalmed in centuries but how can an ordinary person like me tackle such a vast-?
Mahatma: These are human beings too. Remember that. Reach out to them.
Take away the blindfold. They will see. They will be ashamed.

Pointing towards the existence of both hagiographical and historical modes of Gandhi’s acceptance, the conversation brings to light the ideal trying to overpower the real. Mahatma knows that his way to greatness will begin with his acquaintance with the masses, the common public. It is the Mahatma’s smart way of combining life with philosophy that led to his massive recognition. And it is through his ‘inner voice’ that Mohan later learned to lead the masses and become their saviour. Mahatma here compared to ‘Buddha’ itself reveals the hagiographic formations so abundant on Gandhi. He is depicted to have great faith in God and would rely on his guidance blindly in all his moves. The dramatist refers to a historical incident when the government in South Africa deemed Indian marriages as illegal and denies the acceptance of heathen rites. At this, Mohan got completely disappointed finding a dead end to the problem. But here gain it’s his conscience which guides the helpless Mohan advising him to include women in his struggle who are most affected by it. And earlier too in South Africa, when Indians were required to carry permits and denied their right to vote, Mohan thinks of organising public meetings and groups to fight injustice but realising that he need means to lead them, it was Mohan’s inner voice as always who directed him to rely on God again saying:

Mahatma: You don’t have to feed them. God will provide.
Mohan: God, God, God! We can’t leave everything to God.
Mahatma: Indeed we can. Vast crowds follow Buddha, Mahavir, Jesus. They led men without worry. If you want to model your life on theirs then –
Mohan: Stop it! Stop quoting their example. I am only me. Poor little me –
Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. (43)
We see how in the early phases of his life he kept on resisting his conscience and could not follow the Mahatma’s inclination without hesitation. The Mahatma in Mohan insisted him to follow the great saints whose influence on him was profound. The incident when Indians in South Africa were revolting against carrying permits, holds great historical importance as it is here that the Mahatma in Mohan first postulated his concept of satyagraha to the masses asking them to follow him. Mohan speaks, “we shall fight injustice non-violently by asserting the truth and converting our opponents through self suffering” (45).

Acknowledging the importance of history, the playwright dramatises the entire story of Gandhi’s life and thought unfurling his journey in South Africa that laid the basis for the struggles awaiting him in India. By mentioning an incident in South Africa when Gandhi was unceremoniously thrown out of the first class railway compartment and forced to travel third class as a matter of racial abuse, the dramatist adheres to an important historical event because it was this experience of injustice that led Mohan to resolve and fight it back. Another scene coming straight from Gandhi’s history and placed early on in the drama is the Mohan’s experience of the violent mob that lynched him after his return to South Africa with his family. Here, the frightened Mohan is enthused by his conscience:

Mohan: But why are they violent with me?
Mahatma: They are afraid- of you.
Mohan: Of me? But I wish them no harm.
Mahatma: You would destroy the vicious god enshrined in their minds. (25)

The reasoning that Mahatma puts up, indicate towards the role that he is going to play among them, by destroying the evil which they are by now so accustomed to that they would not like to part with it. Finding Mohan who is trying to understand his conscience, the Mahatma on stage tells him, ‘You are evolving’ (25). The words seem to mark the beginning of Gandhi’s epic transformation and the development of his hagiographical self which the Mahatma in him so ardently wished for, as a scene earlier in the play the Mahatma depicts his fascination at attaining the pedestal of being called great. He speaks: “And to think I ended up being called the Great Soul, Mahatma, the Mahatma! That is really what I was looking for – salvation” (16). The scene of violent mob attacking
Mohan carries great value with the playwright as it is here that the title of his play gets explained. The word ‘Sammy’ was used as a derogatory term by the white proponents of apartheid in South Africa to insult Indians and other coloured people. Its origins could be traced to the word *swami*, which means *master* or *guru*. When Mohan first hears an angry mob in Durban shouting the word to insult him, he smiles and harbours the hope that some day, he may actually be able to live up to the positive origin of the name. Turning to the men who are standing about watchfully Mohan comments, “Thank you, gentlemen. I shall endeavour to live up to that” (27). Indeed, a masterly way of explaining the title of the play.

Within the backdrop of another historical event when Indians in South Africa were denied the right to vote, the dramatist brings in the ‘Mahatma’ again who guides Mohan while he and Abdullah discuss upon the solution to the problem. Instructed by his ideal, Mohan here is set towards his first mass movement to fight racial abuse, further depicting his secular attitude by asking Abdullah to involve people from all race, religion and origin: “Sign them on. Christians, Hindu’s, Muslims, Jews, Parsees, agnostics, atheists, blacks, browns, the whole lot. And any white person who may wish to join” (21). Gandhi’s conscience that has always aided him in his life’s experiments (as read in his hagiographies too), troubled the British authorities so much so that General Smuts talks to Aasvogel;

Smuts: We need to find someone who has influence over him. Tel me Aenoch, who does he consult? Who guides him?

Aasvogel: They say he gets it all from ... (A bitter laugh) ... his “inner voice”. (50)

Smuts further reveals his dilemma talking to Mohan, “The problem is that you are a man of peace. Had you been otherwise I would have dealt with you...otherwise. But how can I go on harassing a peaceful man” (54). General Smuts, influenced by the man’s ability to alter things to his own understanding once remarked: “I dread to think of the fate of any politician or administrator who might dare oppose you.” (56). Indeed, a great compliment for Mohan who was by now climbing smoothly the ladder to his Mahatmization.

The play furthermore brings to light how Mohandas trying to resist his conscience (holding hagiographical leanings) yearns to be more rational. It was only later in the play
as in life too, that Mohan comfortably acquires the mantle of his ideal self. Sharma allots several scenes to bring in the discussion between Mohan and Mahatma and one such scene that also closes act one portrays Mohan resisting the Mahatma with all force. When he writes a letter to Lord Crewe offering voluntary help at the British hour of need, the Mahatma acting as a constant mentor to him intervenes to accuse him of his errors and failings. The conversation that goes on between the two is quoted thus:

Mahatma: You made the offer to Lord Crewe in haste. You didn’t consider, you didn’t consult.

Mohan: Why should I always consult you?

Mahatma: Ah ha, rebelling against your own conscience? A true anarchist torn apart within yourself. (66)

Mohan now tired of listening to his inner voice, which he finds too idealistic and philosophical, looks for ways of avoiding it but could never get rid of it. Further we see that Gandhi is troubled and torn within his twin selves; the ideal and the real, the historical and the hagiographical, the real and the imagined, finding it difficult to carry the two together. This scene that depicts a long debate between the two conflicting selves also marks the end of Gandhi’s role in South Africa. The technique used by the playwright is so flawless that when the Mahatma goes on rebuking Mohan and taming him to his own ideals, the audience at times start taking the two as completely different characters. The idea of Salt Satyagraha again was an outcome of Mahatma’s effective guidance to Mohan in forging new techniques:

Mohan: But what action?

Mahatma: Something simple, direct, forceful, that unites the country behind you.

... 

Mohan: We have tried selling banned literature.

Mahatma: Too intellectual. The peasants must take part. The illiterate masses must wake.

...

Mohan: What shall I do?

Mahatma: Break the salt law. Momentously. And let the country join in. (103-4)
Sharma probably considers this technique of talking to oneself as characteristic of great men. He speaks of it through Mohan in the play who says: “It is the prerogative of madmen and mahatmas to talk to themselves” (127).

Partap Sharma does not overlook the much talked about Gandhian principles especially of ‘truth’ and ‘non-violence’ which greatly aided in his ‘Mahatmization’. Mohan in the play declares, “I am only the channel for the truth” (56). Very early in the play does the playwright gives way to the Gandhi’s ideal of truth as the Mahatma is seen talking to his real self Mohan: “So my concern is not God as it may turn out to be, but the Truth” (25). Again in South Africa while talking to Polak, one of his closest friend, Mohan who has learnt the art of speaking truth from his ideal self by now talks of lust and passion as a hindrance in their progress and tells Polak:

Lust or concern could have made me rush back to my wife, abandoning the sick and the wounded. I know it embarrass you that I speak like this but I have always believed it is better to be frank, otherwise the truth slips away in politeness. (36)

Truth, which was the most important and dearest principle to Gandhi, is developed upon a number of times by the dramatist who makes Mohan again talk of it by the end of the play and prioritize truth to national interest. When there was a controversy during partition on paying a sum of five hundred and fifty million rupees to Pakistan, Mohan articulates:

I am told that it is not in the national interest to pay the money. But I tell you there is no national interest highest than abiding by the truth. However, much it may seem to hurt us, we must stick to the moral principle. (139)

Here in respect to this principle of ‘truth’, Sharma also points out to the fact that initially the definition has varied with Mohan as his real and ideal self argues:

Mohan: God is Truth.

Mahatma: Truth is God. (13)

Besides the concept of truth, his theory of non-violence is also taken note of which he applied to all his mass struggles first in South Africa and later in India. Sarojini Naidu brings Gandhi the news of the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh. Gandhi though disturbed at this tragedy refuses to employ non-violent means in revenging the Britishers and even
quotes an English poet, Shelley, to explain his idea. It's worth reading those meaningful lines here that Mohan quoted to explain himself:

"With folded arms and steady eyes,
Little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.
"Then they will return will shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak
In hot blushes on their cheek." (82)

And yet again when Sarojini informs Mohan of the riot that has broken out in various parts of the country and asks him to give the clarion call, he immediately refuses to agree and rather insists on controlling their violent means. For him freedom won on the wings of violence need not be intended.

The play is full of gems of wisdom taken mostly from Gandhi’s writings and put into a discussion among various characters. In South Africa, Mohan tells Polak, that “passions prevent us from concentrating on our work” (36) and therefore took a vow of celibacy as a way of self-restraint and move towards self realisation. Listening to Mohan on his views on celibacy and his desire to serve mankind, Polak is left impressed at his thinking. He observed his religious inclinations and remarked in the context: “Startling. But in line with the highest religious thinking.” (37). Gandhi undertook fasts as a matter of penance and also to show his variance with certain issues. These fasts created great sensation among the people and were equally condemned. His two important and highly talked of fasts finds due mention with Sharma’s script. When the riots broke out as a result of Gandhi’s first civil disobedience movement, he fasted for three days as atonement for the violence that occurred. But on this, as recorded in history too, he was criticised for this act. The other leaders found that when the nation was arising and revolting Gandhi was trying to stop them, and Jawahar, Gandhi’s intimate friend, speaks to him on the issue: “We’ve got to talk. We’ve got to understand each other. Sometimes you leave me completely bewildered” (85). And again when the British government issued separate electorates, Gandhi whose charisma has now engulfed the entire nation
and was revered highly, declared his ‘fast unto death’ to revert the government’s
decision. Listening to the talks that go on between the Viceroy and Clancy:

   Clancy: He’s announced a fast unto death, sir.
   Viceroy: Unto death? By Jove!
   Clancy: News of it is spreading like wildfire all over the country.

...  
   Viceroy: If he dies... (Sighs) ... there’ll be hell to pay.
   Clancy: There could be civil war.

...

   Viceroy: And what does Ambedkar call it?
   Clancy: A political Stunt. (118-119)

The playwright here exposes the duality in Gandhi character. One was the charisma that
he exercised over millions who would react most annoyingly if Gandhi died, and other
was the criticism that he received from his contemporaries while he resorted to such
moves.

Gandhi’s fine tuning with the peasants and the subaltern rank of people is a
distinguished historical veracity that Sharma does not fail to see giving instances in the
play depicting the same. Its interesting to note the witty remarks that Gandhi gave to
General Smuts while in South Africa when he ridicules him of his baldness and his
dressing sense by comparing it to ‘Hindoo labourers’; “Exactly. To show solidarity with
their suffering.” (53). And later again in one of his remarks when interviewed by a
journalist after his return from Round Table Conference he said: “if I appear today before
the British public in my loin-cloth, it is because I have come as the sole representative of
those half-starved, half-naked, dumb millions” (115). Gandhi identified himself with the
ordinary and considered one with them. Noted furthermore is another historical incident
of a peasant, Rajkumar Shukla, coming from Champaran to persuade the Mahatma to
accompany him to his village in order to assist and solve their problems. Through this
one incident, the playwright tries to impress upon the great faith that people had in
Gandhi. His efforts at other reforms like removal of untouchability, education of
minorities, village upliftment, bringing about Hindu-Muslim unity were quite eminent.
The dramatist too does make direct references to some of his significant and highly
discussed reforms. Showing his dissatisfaction at the issue of separate electorates Mohan speaks to a group of prisoners while he himself was in jail:

But I may assure you that I have always spoken for Hindu-Muslim unity and the removal of the untouchability. So do not dismiss it merely as a craze of my old age. My heart is confident that God will grant me that opposition when I may speak for the whole of India, and if I have to die striving for my ideal, I shall achieve the peace of my heart. (117)

Gandhi’s patriotic fervour and the zeal of a reformer are facts not eclipsed by the playwright. He allows the Mahatma in Mohan show his reformer’s proclivity. Nonetheless, making a fair approach to history, Sharma concurrently admits the views of his contemporaries like Ambedkar, Jinnah and Jawahar who were at times critical of Gandhi’s extreme philosophical dealings. Jinnah says to Jawahar:

But really I do think many of Gandhi’s actions are wrong. For instance, he’s trying too hard to become a spokesman for the muslims of India. He is leading India to calamity. (94)

Partap Sharma gives history its due when he does not disregard the ideological differences that Gandhi had with many of his contemporaries on several burning issues of the day. His mode of combining religion with politics, criticised by many of his contemporaries is not discounted by the dramatist who allows Jawahar in the play to voice his resentment, “You bring religious, indeed biblical, terminology into a description or denunciation of a horrendous aspect of our political reality” (86). However, justifying his point of view Mohan asks Jawahar: “Shouldn’t ethics enter politics and indeed govern it?” Jawahar who was a socialist in view and different with Gandhi’s attempt at solving social problems answered him: “we have to confront social reality into a socially realistic way. But you carry it into the epic dimension by turning it into a struggle between good and evil” (86). The differences between Jawahar and Gandhi are voiced prominently in the play with Gandhi treading along a path of mere idealism rather than logic and Jawahar being more practical in his dealings. He find great difficulty understanding Mohan’s methods as they “seem more like morals than means of achieving a goal” (86). The long talk between the two further underscore another historical issue of Gandhi’s
critique of modern civilization. Gandhi held that the real struggle for freedom is to be free of materialism. Mohan observes in the play:

It is modern civilization with its exploitative system of railways, telegraphs, telephones and almost every invention which has been claimed to be a triumph.... Today, unfortunately there is no such thing left as Western or European civilization; it is only modern civilization which is purely material. (88)

After discussing upon their individual beliefs and views, it’s interesting to read the note at which the two ended their talks:

Jawahar: Frankly, Bapu, your views seem to me to be completely unreal.
Mohan: (Smiles) Then why do you follow me?
Jawahar: Because your idealism moves me and I see it means no harm to anyone and I haven’t the heat to disillusion you. And there seems to be nothing better on the horizon. (88)

The conversation reveals on how Mohan’s techniques were the only option available to Jawahar and several other millions who besides carrying a mind that was different from that of Gandhi followed him with a hope to exit colonialism.

Jinnah as well, the leader of the Muslim league is recorded in history to carry ideological differences with Gandhi. Jawahar reports in the play that Gandhi-Jinnah talks have failed. Jinnah never liked Gandhi’s meddling with the Muslim lobby and criticising his support to the Khilafat movement tells Jawahar: “Now, Gandhi, in order to get a hold of the emotions of the Muslims has taken up the Khilafat movement as his own” and further says, “I have never been staunch or religious. But the more of a Mahatma he becomes, the more of a Muslim I must be” (95). And again the Partition of India which Gandhi did not wish for was a matter of great controversy with the other leaders. Critiquing his proposal of making Jinnah instead of Jawahar, the head of independent India, Patel said to Gandhi, “Beware, dear Gandhiji, you are making yourself redundant” (134). Envisaging the bloodshed that would follow partition, Gandhi made every possible effort to avert it. But Jawahar and Jinnah, not realising its implications went for it. When told to celebrate freedom at last, Mohan retorts:

Celebrate what? Riots have already broken out at the announcement of partition.
What I feared is happening.... Millions will be uprooted, rendered homeless.
Already, whole caravans of refuges are being butchered. Trainloads are being massacred. I am going to Calcutta to try and quell the rights there. This is not the Independence I sought. (135)

The touching lines effectively disclose Gandhi’s personal, mental and moral conflict. Towards the end after projecting the journey of Mohan into a Mahatma and attaining a consecrated image among his people, he is shot dead by a Godse who before assassinating Mohan realises that despite going all wrong, “he’s a mahatma, after all” (141) and getting his blessings before shooting him is necessary. The manner Godse and Pahwa plan his murder mocks at his Mahatmization as also held by many Hindu fanatics who disliked him for many of his acts. The dramatist allows Godse to give an outlet to his feelings towards Mohan as he goes on to say:

He is a mahatma. (Then with growing anger) But he’s making weaklings of us Hindu. All this non-violence is not good for us. He sides with the muslims. He’s destroying this country. He let partition happen. Why didn’t he fast against partition? But no, he threatens to fast for Pakistan’s right to our money. (141)

The lines reveal Gandhi to be a breakdown among those extremists whose hearts and minds he could not conquer. Consequently, the playwright does not only yield to the sainthood of Mohandas but evenly divulge those parts of history that holds him in a questioning spirit thereby allowing the persona of Gandhi astray from the existing hagiographical beliefs. Sharma does not make a biased or opinionated attempt towards Gandhian history rather we find him making a disinterested approach and giving due recognition to all aspects attached to the persona of Mohandas Gandhi.

Gandhi’s sway over the masses was enormous. People both in India and South Africa readily followed the Mahatma’s footsteps. His impact over them is accredited even by the British, as the Adc says to Smuts in South Africa finding Mohandas emerging as the leader, “I think, sir, they are moved by the example of Gandhi who has come among them and made their struggle his own” (46). And while leaving South Africa, when Mohan gifted a pair of sandals made by himself to Smuts, he felt amazed by Gandhi’s great persona and makes a humble remark; “But I am not worthy to stand in the shoes of so great a man” (57). His words disclose the pedestal at which Gandhi is placed, and praised by one and all. And Sarojini calling Mohan “the greatest wonder of the
world” and yet again “the great Gandhi, vanquisher of General Smuts” (58), admitted of the great man’s ability to electrify people. She once remarked: “No wonder Gokhale says that you have the capacity to mould heroes out of common clay” (65). Gandhi’s popularity travelled all parts of the world and yet again Sarojini Naidu appreciating his reformer’s ability hailed him as the only man who gave us the confidence to fight injustice.

Gandhi ensnared the Indian people since the time he broke into the political arena in 1915. His charkha, his satyagraha and most importantly his ability to arouse the nation into Independence without piling up arms is an epic tale that would continue to fascinate artists and literary writers anywhere. Through the talks of Clancy and Viceroy in act two we are familiarised with the magnetism that the Mahatma in Mohan was able to hold over everyone. When Clancy tell the Viceroy, the “only one with real mass backing is Gandhi”, the Viceroy questions; “How do we defuse Gandhi?”. But finding an answer to his own problem he observes, “You can’t pressure him except through his conscience” (99). Gandhi’s spectacular success in South Africa with his satyagraha struggles enabled him to play his role in India with immense precision. Mohan himself conscious of it, tells Smuts that still greater tasks were awaiting him. And indeed Gandhi’s presence on the Indian scene is marked with even greater spirit and success as Jawahar calling him a ‘Phenomenon’ speaks of the sweeping influence that he exercised through the countryside. Mahatma’s charisma over people of all castes, races and class was tremendous. Admitting of the Mahatma’s influence, Sarojini Naidu says: “One snide remark from him and I’m a different creature. That’s his forte, changing people” (77). And later again she holds, “We are all caught in the web of love spun by the mystic spinner” (106).

Gandhi’s association with the common, his way of reaching out the masses and helping them in every possible way, immeasurably added to his hagiography. Talking of his influential personality Sarojini speaks to Jawahar:

Oh, he’ll change you. Whether you agree with him or not. I’m told that the young English officers newly arrived in India are warned, “Stay away from Gandhi or he’ll get you!” (78)
Observing the play closely, one finds that it is the Mahatma in Mohan who is always applauded for his ideals. While addressing a public meeting (helped herein by the promptings of his inner voice), Gandhi is able to receive appreciation from the people who shouts at the end saying, “Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!” (80). Mohan, following his inner voice is ready to go to Noakhali and Bihar where Hindu-Muslim riots have broken out, and finding no one accompanying him out of fear, this lone individual sets outs all alone inspired by a song of Tagore that he even quotes in the play. His concern for peace makes him go to Calcutta and later Punjab, another riot stricken area. The Mahatma’s charisma is observed by Lord Mountbatten who says:

Isn’t it amazing? In Punjab, we have an army of 100,000 and we have riots and bloodshed. In Calcutta there is a one-man force in the shape of Mahatma Gandhi and we have absolute peace. (137)

And yet again during riot in Delhi, Jawahar too realises the need of the Mahatma’s presence as he observes, “What we need is the calming influence of Gandhiji and his multi-denominational prayer-meetings. I’ve begged him to come here soon and I hope he will” (138). Gandhi’s desire to serve people featuring largely in his hagiographies finds mention in the play too. Earlier in South Africa, he worked for the sick during the Zulu rebellion, and in India too he strived for the upliftment of the subalterns. Another aspect taken of Gandhi’s greatness was his selfless approach towards his profession and work. In the play, while he was able to settle Abdullah’s case outside court, Abdullah finds his way of dealing most unlike a lawyer as lawyers like to prolong cases so that they can collect more fees. But Mohan’s considers that this real job was to breach a rift and not to further it. Listening to Mohan’s plan of organising the public for a collective fight against injustice, Abdullah says to Mohan; “That’s a stroke of genius. You are not so naïve after all” (19). Through Abdullah’s words the dramatist draws attention to the tactfulness that Mohan had in his dealings and that his mind worked extraordinarily. His fearlessness for prison life that comes from the advocacy of his principles further added to his greatness. As we find the Adc revealing,

Gandhi advocates celibacy, vegetarianism, fasting, denial of any enjoyment of any kind. He recommends prison diet...would even like them to do without the mattresses which we provide. (46)
Well-informed by Sarojini, Gandhi’s call for *satyagraha* was readily responded; “In answer to Gandhiji’s call, thousands – no, millions – of people are offering *satyagraha* on the streets of India to protest the presence of the British Raj” (125).

When Gandhi’s fasts forced the British to revert the decision of the government on the issue of separate electorates, the Viceroy finds the personality of Mohan incredibly dominant and speaks to Clancy on how the centre of power in India was now shifting. His charm was high even on the British who would not refrain from comparing him to their god. When Gandhi was saved from his ‘fast unto death’, Clancy speaks of him, “It would have been sad to loose the silly old coot to his own stupidity. It would have been a bit like Christ crucifying himself” (122). Like Clancy, Gandhi’s persona was thus elevated and frequently compared to their personal gods. Judging it as a way that would provide self-reliance and self-sufficiency, Gandhi emphasised the use of spinning wheel considering it the “peasant’s women friend. The farmer’s secondary occupation. The poor man’s source of income” (91). The relationship between Gandhi and Nehru comes into particularly sharp focus when Gandhi talked of attaining *swaraj* within a year with the use of *charkha*. Jawahar as a matter of historical piece of information too, criticised Mohan on the subject saying:

> The chakra – the spinning wheel! I don’t understand. Is this some kind of mystical symbolism?... What does he mean – India can be rid of the British government within a year if the whole country takes to non-cooperation but it can only be free economically if it takes to the spinning wheel? Sometimes I wonder if the whole world isn’t going crazy, following this man who comes up with peculiar new concepts. (92)

Sharma does not depict his hero a man without human failings. Along with his appreciation of Gandhi’s hagiographical beliefs, he looks at his flaws too. As we go along the play we have some most touching scenes between Mohan and his wife. Evincing his understanding of the disturbed relations that Gandhi shared with his wife and sons, he allots an entire scene to Mohan and his wife Kasturba. As revealed in historical narratives too, the playwright foregrounds how Mohan dictated his principles and persuaded his family to follow in line with him. Outburst of anger is seen when Kasturba comments:
It's you who will ruin us, the whole family. Our children are being educated to be sweepers. It wrenches at my heart to see them working with brooms. Why can't they go to a proper school? (29).

But Mohan, who deemed himself right, refuses to send his children to school believing that schools teach all the wrong values. And yet again Kasturba who is still not satisfied with her husband's reasoning reproach him: “Have you no sense of family? ... You are good to the world but harsh on your own flesh and blood” (30). And after a heated debate between the two, Kasturba finally remarks annoyingly at Mohan; “so we are sacrificed to your public image!” (31). The entire scene brings to us Gandhi's turbulent family relationship and also that his becoming of a Mahatma was to a great extent at the cost of his peaceful family life. Harilal, his eldest son, often felt a prey to the experiments of the 'Mahatma' and finally broke off with his father. However making an impartial move towards history, without appreciating one or criticising the other, Partap Sharma depicts Mohan equally disturbed by Harilal's behaviour as towards the end of the play Mohan speaks: “Why does he wound me so?” (123).

Gandhi's passionate inclination with regard to women is another historical issue carrying much debate and controversies. Sharma depicts his character of Gandhi of holding lust for his wife but through his inner voice and not the real figure himself. Indeed a smart way of portraying. Mohan's inner voice rebukes him of all the wrongs he has committed. Criticising him first on sexuality says the Mahatma:

You were disgusted by the fact that your father was so highly sexed that he had to get himself four wives....you yourself enjoyed sex so much that you were lost in the pleasure of erotic contortions with Kasturi, caught up in the ecstatic mists of lust, unmindful that your father was dying in the next room and calling out to you. (69)

And again accuses him of theft as a child when he stole money to buy cigarettes. Listening to what the Mahatma says to Mohan: “You have been hiding yourself from yourself” (70), we find that his inner self tries to make Mohan confront his conscience and make a clean breast of his wrongs. Mahatma, who tries persuading Mohan to confess his weaknesses, finally wins over as Mohan harmonizes saying: “I shall state it all, write it all, publish it. 'The truth shall set thee free'” (70).
This technique of presenting the inner voice in form of a shadow facilitates the playwright in bringing forth adequately several issues otherwise deemed contentious. Had Sharma allowed any other historical character in the play speak on Gandhi’s failings, the impact would have been less and even measured as an offence to his hagiographical image. This fictional strategy has greatly aided him in depicting the epic transformation of an ordinary Mohandas Gandhi into an extraordinary figure called the ‘Mahatma’. Gandhi who has triggered a number of writings and creative artists to think and write of him over and over again unsatisfactorily, is paid due gratitude as the play ends marking the historical words of Jawahar speaking high of Gandhi:

The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere....for that light represented something more than the immediate present, it represented the living, the eternal truths (143)

Considered one of the best explorations on Gandhi’s inner thoughts and life, the play brings alive a man whose influence\textsuperscript{15} changed politics forever. There is great reverence in the way the subject has been handled. Gandhi’s life may have moments of high drama but the playwright does not allow it to denigrate into melodrama. Leaving Mohan to his inner voice in the last scene after his assassination, the playwright skilfully brings to end the long, arduous journey of an ordinary man becoming a great soul. Says Mahatma to Mohan here, “For a frightened little boy scared of the dark, you have scaled the greatest height – yourself” (142). As the play ends with Gandhi’s death, the shadow Mahatma says to Mohan, “You are in time for history” (142), and asserts for himself:

I am a shadow. The shadow of an actor. (\textit{The Mahatma reaches down and helps Mohan to rise.}) An actor in a drama beyond time. (143)

The words produce a resounding effect upon our minds as we realise that the Mahatma, being a shadow can never leave and will forever live with Mohandas’ persona. This duality makes Gandhi a complex domain, as Gandhi the Mahatma cannot be completely isolated from Gandhi the man.
End Notes:

1. Believes some of his compassionate biographers as Rolland and Fischer that Gandhi carried the task of a reformer with utter humility and whole heartedly without any desire of recognition as for him social reforms were a means of self purification.

2. Focussed on his reforms of caste and untouchability, Gandhi in 1933 is said to have stated his purpose clearly, “It is the whole of Hinduism that has to be purified and purged. What I am aiming at is the greatest reform of the age” (Gandhi 1965, Vol 50: 352).

3. Infact his lifelong obsession to travel third class that again helped Gandhi to form a reputation of being a humble soul and show his solidarity with the subalterns, probably originated from this incident.

4. Gandhi’s impact was so inexorable that his circulars and letters, appeals and petitions for the welfare of the Indians in South Africa involved the Indian leaders’ interest in him.

5. Humayun Kabir too wrote a sonnet dedicated to the Mahatma, and quoted below are lines from the same: A lone figure stands upon the sands of time…

Launched India’s restless caravan
into adventures new, a perilous path
where out of life’s substance must be carved
new values, new direction, order new –
Gandhi, mahatma, India’s leader, India’s soul (qtd in Iyengar, 238)

6. Rao in his novel Kanthapura (1938) too employs the impact of Gandhi, his power to create hundreds of Gandhis’ throughout the country its subject.

7. Nehru’s words on Gandhi’s martyrdom are worth recalling:

For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine this country for many more years and a thousand years later that light will still be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts. For that light represented something more than the immediate present; it represented the living truth...the eternal truths,
reminding us of the right path, drawing us from error, taking this ancient country to freedom. (127-8 1941)

8. Rajmohan Gandhi, in his book The Good Boatman commented upon Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj which was his first critique on modern civilization and industrialism calling it is a text for its time and not a text for all times, and furthermore that it is Gandhi’s first and not the last word.

9. Bakhtin has defined the term monologic as the voice of an entrenched authority that denies any meaningful dialogue with another person or group.

10. His autobiography recounts one such instance that occurred in 1898 in South Africa; as when he insisted her to empty the chamber pot used by a guest who was a dalit Christian, his wife, Kasturba Gandhi refused to do so and then the argument between the two got heated up with Gandhi even abusing his wife. Gandhi is said to have been fortunate that his wife was gifted with remarkable powers of endurance of an ideal Hindu wife. She with all the troubles and insults beyond endurance followed in his footsteps dutifully and patiently.

11. Though the film projected the saint with his journey from South Africa till his last days, “Attenborough has repeatedly maintained that his film is not a history and it is true that he appears more interested in the metaphor than in the reality of Gandhi” (Patwardhan online).

12. The play is a dramatised version of the correspondence that took place between Nehru and Gandhi over thirty years. Written and produced by Mohan Maharishi it gives us a direct glimpse into a historic confrontation between the two well defined personality types and philosophies of life.

13. Originally written in a novel form in Gujarati titled Prakashno Padcchayo and then adapted for the stage in Marathi, Gujarati and Hindi.

14. However, V.Gangadhar, gives his own interpretation to the issue and writes that since his childhood he has heard and read of Gandhi’s love and compassion for all and therefore he fails to believe in the playwright’s version that Gandhi did not love his own children and brought them up like strangers.

15. His influential persona has set in motion the journey of others like King Martin Luther and Nelson Mandela.