CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION
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Although literature was not his field of interest, the inspiration and influence that Gandhi's ideas exerted on Indian literature in English in general and Indian fiction in English in particular is of immense importance. There is a strong reason why Gandhi made an immediate appeal to Indian English novelists. By their education, training, personal contacts and preoccupations, the Indian English novelists had lost touch with indigenous traditions and got more familiar with the Western ideas. They could find a way back in Gandhian thought to the native traditions. They could respond more creatively to Gandhi and his thought because they shared his intellectual and emotional fervour relating to the re-interpretation and renewal of the life of the Indian traditions. This helped them to reconnect themselves more creatively with the social milieu they lived in and with the people they wrote for.

The principal Indian English novelists who came under the spell of Gandhi are K.S.Venkataramani, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, K.A.Abbas, Nagarajan and Chaman Nahal. Each
of these novelists seeks to present Gandhi in his own characteristic way. Some novelists like Anand, R.K. Narayan, K.A. Abbas, Nagarajan and Chaman Nahal present Gandhi as a character in their fiction. Others like Venkataramani, Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya prefer to delineate the impact of Gandhi on certain individuals and on Indian social life at large. Whether Gandhi is presented as a character or as a subject or as a pervasive influence upon the social and political scene, the image of Gandhi is driven home to us in its variegated facets. Gandhi the practical idealist comes alive to us, now with his impassioned idealism, hope and optimism and now with his deep sense of disappointment and frustration.

K.S. Venkataramani was aware that the future of India lay in its villages. Like Gandhi, he believed that economic reforms must be introduced to revive village life. His Murugan, the Tiller can be described as a treatise on Gandhian economics. He describes how many Indians relinquished their glittering posts and became followers of Gandhi. In Kandan, the Patriot, the major characters are inspired by Gandhian ideals and social reforms. The image of Gandhi as presented by Venkataramani is one of an agrarian reformer.
Though he does not have much faith in Gandhian political ideology, Mulk Raj Anand is impressed by Gandhi's genuine interest in the welfare of the downtrodden. He introduces Gandhi as a character in Untouchable. Anand is objective in his portrayal of Gandhi. He makes the innocent victim, Bakha, listen to every word of Gandhi in rapt attention with the hope that his misery and humiliation would come to an end. But Gandhi offers no immediate solution. Instead, it is the machine-flush system, that raises some hope of relief in Bakha. In The Sword and the Sickle he shows how Lalu the protagonist, though impressed by Gandhi's peasant-like appearance and sincerity, refuses to be convinced of the effectiveness of Gandhi's non-violent struggle. The irreverent remarks of Lalu and other revolutionaries on Gandhi reflect Anand's attitude to Gandhi's non-violent struggle. Both in Untouchable and The Sword and the Sickle, Anand questions the effectiveness of Gandhian solution to the problems of untouchables and the peasants.

In Raja Rao's Kanthapura, we find, perhaps, the finest picture of Gandhi's impact on rural India. Though Gandhi does not appear as a character, the novel shows how the whirlwind of Gandhian revolution shakes
a south Indian village to its roots. In *The Cow of the Barricades* Raja Rao reveals how Gandhi wanted India to be a land of peace with an unswerving faith in 'ahimsa'. In Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* Gandhi stands for love, truth and non-violence. This is driven home to us through Devash Basu, a typical Gandhian, with his whole-hearted commitment to village reconstruction. Manjeri S. Isvaran's *Between Two Flags* reveals how even youngsters fearlessly jumped into the freedom struggle inspired by Gandhi. Thus, the image of Gandhi projected in the pre-independence Indian English fiction is an ideal image barring Mulk Raj Anand's note of dissent.

The post-independence Indian English novelists who treat Gandhi in their fiction seem to take a cue from Anand and present Gandhi in realistic terms rather than in an idealistic plane. Though K.A. Abbas presents Gandhi in *Inqilab* as an apostle of non-violence and votary of Hindu-Muslim unity he seems to believe more in Jawaharlal Nehru as the future hope of India. This is made clear to us through Anwar, who though an admirer of Gandhi, is chilled by the religious aspect of Gandhi's 'satyagraha'.

Although R.K. Narayan does not present Gandhi in his characteristic ironic vision in his *Waiting for the Mahatma* he shows how Gandhian ideology has not been
properly understood even by his close followers like Sriram and how Gandhi's name is exploited by people like Natesh, the Municipal Chairman, for their own selfish ends. In The Vendor of Sweets R.K. Narayan goes a step further by caricaturing the present day Gandhians like Jagan who poses and pretends to follow Gandhi.

Nagarajan presents Gandhi in his Chronicles of Kedaram as one who offers a healing touch to the feuding factions and, at the same time, like R.K. Narayan he shows how pseudo-followers of Gandhi like Vanchi exploit him for their selfish ends.

Coming to the latest Indian English fiction in which Gandhi figures as a major character, Chaman Nahal presents Gandhi as a lion in the loincloth in his novel The Crown and the Loincloth. He shows how brilliantly Gandhi, succeeds in rallying the masses round him in his struggle against the British despite their repressive measures. However, Nahal is true to history and never makes any attempt to deify Gandhi. Gandhi's virtues and greatness make people call him the 'Mahatma'. But Gandhi considers himself still an 'alpatma', struggling to make people repose faith in 'ahimsa'. 
In his latest novel, *The Salt of Life*, Nahal projects Gandhi as an embodiment of patience and forbearance with a 'capacity to endure ceaseless suffering'. Even after two mass movements, India continues to be ruled by the British. Communal riots force Gandhi to go on fast as he finds no way out of the impasse. But, at the same time, he realizes that a patriot must endure ceaseless suffering to achieve the goal and thus show his gratitude to the country whose 'salt' he has been eating.

After nearly five decades of writing, Mulk Raj Anand once again introduces Gandhi as a character in *Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi* and presents him as a humanist 'par excellence'. The passing of forty nine years has evidently brought about a perceptible change in Anand's attitude to Gandhi. Anand makes K.C. Azad, the protagonist of the novel, agree with Gandhi that unless people develop character, become fearless and remain united, their struggle for independence would not succeed. Azad, who refuses to call Gandhi Bapu in the beginning, touches his feet and seeks his blessings before leaving the 'ashram'. He leaves the 'ashram' with the conviction that humanism is the panacea for all the ills of society.
The present study which deals with the image of Gandhi in the latest Indian English fiction shows how the impact of Gandhian thought which reached its acme during the thirteens and forties, continues to stir and dominate the imagination of Indian English novelists even today. As Mulk Raj Anand rightly observes, Gandhi is relevant today as he was during the freedom struggle. It was Gandhi who brought, on to the centre stage of political and public life, truth, non-violence and morality. A revival of the Gandhian ideals and bringing them once again on to the centre stage of political and public life alone can resolve the crises the world is facing today.

The question that is often raised is whether the Indian English fiction has done justice to Gandhi and Gandhism. Although quite a few Indian English novelists have striven to present Gandhi and his programmes of freedom struggle and social reform at their best, we cannot possibly say that full justice has been done to the chosen subject. The writers cannot be faulted either. The reasons for this phenomenon are not far to seek. The writers are, perhaps, too near Gandhi and Gandhism to comprehend them completely and what is more, to transmute their understanding of Gandhi into fictional art most successfully.