Chapter III

THE GANDHIAN WAY OF AFFIRMATION

While the presentation and interpretation of historical facts, is the domain of the historian, the historical novelist none the less is obliged to delineate the events and characters of history in such a way as to conform to the known facts of history. The life and works of Mahatma Gandhi is a subject that concerns our immediate past of which many of our contemporaries have vivid recollections. Gandhi's own life story, *My experiments with Truth*, and such authentic and elaborate biographies of Gandhi like D.G.Tendulkar's eight-volume *Mahatma*, and Pyarelal's *The Early Phase* and *The Last Phase* will come to the help of any ardent seeker of the Mahatma's real personality. As such, Chaman Nahal feels that one could not, in any way "give a new twist to that life."\(^1\)

It is the sporadic spurts of the national spirit that prompt people to search for the glories of their nation's past. Such stages in the development of nationalism are also an endeavour at self assertion, which finds its culmination, sometimes in an attempt at the re-reading
of history or in the emergence of historical fiction. Besides trying to assert the true identity of the nation through history or historical fiction, the people of a nation may, as K.R. Minogue observes, use these two as tools by which "political and historical consciousness of the nation"\textsuperscript{2} could be roused. Though history and fiction belong to two different genres, there is always the possibility of some sort of an overlapping. Fiction hitches\textsuperscript{on} to historical facts to merit a semblance of authenticity and so, perforce has to leave the essentials untampered. Novelists seeking truth, as Rama Jha observes, do often make "special investigations into socio-political conditions"\textsuperscript{3} or as in the case of George Eliot, try to connect the course of individual lives with the historic stream. Chaman Nahal, in his \textit{Gandhi Quartet}, delineates the Gandhian saga, spread over an expanse of thirty three years, which incidentally had been the most turbulent period in the immediate past history of the Indian sub continent.

The credit of perfecting the genre of Historical novel goes entirely to Sir. Walter Scott, though novelists like Maria Edgeworth in \textit{Castle Reckrent} (1800) and Jane Porter in \textit{The Scottish Chiefs} (1810) had shown some inclination towards setting up their plots in historic milieu. It may also be mentioned that the Gothic novelists too had attempted to breathe into their novels the spirit of some historic
events. Unlike these writers, Scott did not use the past as a springboard from which to leap into a world of fantasy. What makes Scott distinctly different from his predecessors, as Edward Wagengt observes, is his exceptional knowledge and imagination which enabled him to "think and feel his way back into an alien mode of life."\(^4\) Scott, like an enchanter, walked through the tombs of time and "quickened into life their ghostly inhabitants."\(^5\) The wide acclaim Scott received, even during his life time, prompted Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot to recreate the past epochs of history with colour and life. Balzac, Stendhal and Thomas Mann in Europe, Tolstoy and Pasternak in Russia, by giving new dimensions and personal touches, made this art form real celebrations of life.

Some critics have misgivings concerning the suitability of interpreting contemporary reality for fictional projection. They hold the view that happenings of recent history may still be in a flux and hence likely to pose problems for a writer to discern them in quite an objective manner. C.Paul Varghese says:

An artist who turns recent events into fiction however clear and ordered the grouping of events and the gradual uncovering of their causes and origins are, cannot easily
succeed; for the unconscious mind requires much time to perform its wonder of transmitting incident into art.5

A true artist to whom the recent political history becomes a dominant emotion of his creative mind need not wait for a time lapse through which incidents can percolate into crystal-clear realities. Writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya feel, what is important is, whether the present has become meaningful for the artist to the extent of provoking in him an emotional response. "Why should a writer put those feelings in cold storage, as it were, and leave them there until the present time has slipped into the vista of his yesterdays?"5 Bhattacharya asks. What matters is whether the historical novelist is endowed with a fecund imagination to recreate the events of the past and is capable of infusing life into the dry bones of history. He should sweep back into the past, flushing the milestones of history with colour and brightness and recapture the atmosphere and the spirit of a period. The artistic value of a work of art need not in the least be diminished by reason of its milieu being a contemporary one. On the contrary, it may even help in sharpening the sensibility of the creative artist.

Almost all of the first generation Indian English novelists had come under the influence of Gandhi, some time during their
fictional career for reasons mostly historical. Gandhi was making history and his ideals, way of life and popularity with the masses made an immediate and lasting impact on the intellects and emotions of these writers. The newly created renaissance of national feelings made them conscious of the need for realizing a national identity. Refreshed by the breath of fresh air from the West, these writers tried to rediscover the elements of the once vibrant native traditions, hitherto marginalized, owing to political and social subservience. In Gandhi they saw a synthesis of these native traditions and Western ideals: Gandhian ideals were stirring the slumberous Indians and these novelists tried to depict the impact of this slow but steady revolution taking place in the Indian towns and villages. Thus novelists like K.Nagarajan, Mulkraj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayanan and Bhabani Bhattacharya either introduced Gandhi or created characters who moved and talked like Gandhi in their novels. Whatever be their mode of depiction of the Indian social scene, their world view got modified by the Gandhian thought according to their predilections. In Nagarajan it manifests itself in the form of zest for improving the village life, in Anand it blends with his radical humanism and progressivism and in Bhabani Bhattacharya it comes to clash with the concept of mechanisation. In Raja Rao Gandhian ideals provide an impetus for the novelist's search for religious and philosophical relevance while
R.K.Narayan finds the Gandhian view of life the only way to restore harmony and balance in this life.

It is to Gandhi's credit that he could project a secular view of man, which, in turn, influenced the Indian writers, who, till then were mostly concerned with man's spiritual occupations in their creative writings. Gandhi's holistic view of life always had the individual at the centre, enjoying every kind of freedom necessary for his moral autonomy and his status as an ever evolving entity. But he also maintained that man should willingly submit himself to social restraint for the sake of the well-being of the whole society. Such willing submission for the larger good can only enrich and ennoble both the individual and the society of which he is a member. To him, political theory which does not start from a theory of human nature tends to become either pretentious or trivial. Man, he maintained, will ever remain imperfect, but "it will always be his part to try to be perfect." By his very nature, Man is a progressive being and yet through mental inertia, is unable to see that the universally valid rules of conduct are fundamentally simple to carry out. The rationality of human nature is the pre-condition of its theoretical perfectibility. As such, it is expected of man to have a thorough understanding of his own powers of head and heart to realize his faith in himself. Like
Robert Browning, he believed that being limited by the bounds of the flesh, we can attain perfection only after the dissolution of the body. He asks,

"where would be room for that constant striving, that ceaseless quest after the ideal, that is the basis of all spiritual progress, if mortals could reach the perfect state while still in the body?"\textsuperscript{10}

Gandhi was much concerned with the ceaseless striving after an ideal and not the end result as such. This concept is in perfect tune with the great teachings of the Bhagavat Gita which had a great influence in shaping Gandhi's ideology. While fully acknowledging the fact that life is a series of compromises and that it is not always easy to achieve in practice what one holds to be true in theory, he was quite unwilling to lower his theoretical sights vis-a-vis human development. "Let us be sure of our ideal" he said, "we shall ever fail to realize it, but shall never cease to strive for it. The pleasure one should derive is in making the attempt, not in its fulfilment."\textsuperscript{11}

The first generation Indian-English novelists who came under the magic spell of Gandhi were too eager to cast their themes in one or the other mould that the new awakening provided them with. While Mulk Raj Anand took up the course of untouchability as the
theme of his first novel, Raja Rao's 'Kanthapura' is concerned with the impact of the Gandhian movement on the village life of India. R.K.Narayan's 'Swami and Friends' has for its background, the Non-co-operation Movement of 1921. Bhattacharya in Shadow from Ladakh focuses on the theme of mechanisation to the detriment of Nature. Curiously enough there was little attempt on the part of these novelists to realise that Gandhian thought embraced various facets of human experience-social, economic, spiritual and political and that it presents an integrated view of life which is quite illuminating and reassuring. It is to Nahal's credit that he attempts to bring into focus this integrated, holistic view of life propounded by the Mahatma by portraying his life against the backdrop of the most turbulent period in India's freedom struggle.

Chaman Nahal, who belongs to the second generation of Indian-English novelists, has vivid recollections of the 1947 communal riots when he had to flee the place of his birth in Pakistan and migrate to India. As a youth he used to attend the prayer meetings of Gandhi at the Birla House. Many of those who attended these meetings were refugees like himself who had lost everything in Pakistan. He remembers how he was attracted by the "immense humility" of Gandhi:
Many of us amongst his listeners were angry youths who had lost everything in Pakistan, including the dear ones who were assassinated in the riots, and we asked Gandhi angry questions. He never gave an answer without making us feel that our pain was his pain too-I also saw how plain and ordinary Gandhi was to look at: short-statured, thin with rather common features. This man with these handicaps had gone that far. So could others.\(^\text{12}\)

The image of Gandhi, Nahal wanted to project in his novels on Gandhi is that of an affirmationist, who in spite of the physical, social and political odds set against him is ever ready to wage a relentless war against the forces of darkness that engulfed the Indian socio-cultural scenario. Gandhi once qualified himself as an 'irrepressible optimist' as he had complete faith in himself. He firmly believed that untiring efforts to realize a noble goal cannot but yield positive results. He said:

\textit{Man often becomes what he believes himself to be. If I keep on saying to myself that I cannot do a thing, it is possible that I may end by becoming incapable of doing it. On the contrary, if I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it, even if I may not have it at the beginning.}\(^\text{13}\)
Nahal wanted to convey the immensity of Gandhi's ideology through a series of novels based on the life of Gandhi. Gandhi's political life in India falls into three neat phases—the Non-cooperation Movement of 1920-‘21, the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-‘31 and the Quit India Movement of 1942. **The Crown and The Loincloth** focuses on the first of these peak periods of the Gandhian age. **The Salt Of Life** deals with the implications of the Salt Satyagraha and the vigour it gave to the freedom movement. The novel also analyses how, the intense urge for freedom and nationalist fervour got infected by the virus of communalism which slowly enfeebled the liberation movement. **The Triumph of the Tricolour** is set against the period of the Quit India Movement, while **Azadi**, the crowning piece of the Gandhi Quartet is a novel on the theme of partition and chronologically covers the last phase of Gandhi’s epic life.

Chaman Nahal in an article recalls how, his researches into the history of India’s freedom struggle enabled him to view history as a ‘myth’ or ‘metaphor’. It is in this perspective that Nahal has created the image of Gandhi, clad in a loin-cloth waging a relentless war with the British Crown. This dichotomy of opposites runs through the structural design of the **Gandhi Quartet**, not only in the historic context, but also in interpersonal relationships and even in the realm
of ideologies. In order to encompass these polarities and to place them in juxtaposition it becomes obligatory on the part of the novelist to first of all trace the impact of the major incidents and influences that went into the making of Gandhi. He does so in the *Crown and The Loincloth*, the first book in the Gandhi Quartet, by present Gandhi on the deck of the ship 'S.S.Arabia' bound for Bombay. There is a storm raging outside and Gandhi, given to introspection, is in an equally turbulent state of mind. The whole of the first chapter is set apart for a summing up of the life of Gandhi in retrospect and for the unveiling of some of his inner conflicts. The readers are provided with an array of incidents which bring to light the basic qualities associated with Gandhi like fearlessness, love of truth and non-violence, and above all, his absolute faith in the essential goodness of human beings. The use of the flash-back method as a fictional technique in the very beginning of the novel becomes organic to the novelist's vision of reality. Further, it enables him to place himself at the top of all events, viewing all that leads back to the bottom, from a totally objective stance to achieve an aesthetic distance. This disorientation, in fact, forges "an order, a "concord within a complex structure" and contributes to the sequential development of the plot."
In Gandhi's vision characters emerge who hold him responsible for making their life miserable. His own son Harilal, his brother Laxmidas, the two girls at the Tolstoy Farm whose hair he had shorn for being indiscreet with boys and Valliamma, whom he had sent to prison, all point accusing fingers at him. Gandhi is only sorry about their inability to grasp his message properly and tries to reason with them. However, the apparitions of Mir Alam and Kallanbach present a pleasant contrast to this unhappy episode. Mir Alam, who had mercilessly struck him down, and who later became his follower, now recollects the incident:

....there was not a trace of hatred on your face. Your brow did not wrinkle in anguish. Your lips remained even. You uttered no oath or abuse. That cut me sharper than a knife. Till the last second you kept reasoning in hope, and when we felled you, you still did not hate us (The crown-23)

To Kallanbach, who came to Gandhi out of faith, he had said that "living for others is a real privilege and the highest good any man can do."(The crown-35) Nahal brings in these two incidents to highlight Gandhi's views on suffering. Gandhi believed that suffering only purified its victims. When suffering came to exist as a continuous phenomenon, the aggressors too would realize the predicament of the
sufferers, which would ultimately lead to a change of heart. This in course would compel them to modify their line of action and behaviour towards the sufferers.

The novelist recalls a few incidents mentioned in Gandhi's autobiography to trace the gradual evolution of his normal and spiritual philosophy. As a child, Mohandas with his big ears, thick nose and thin tottering legs was looked upon as the ugly child of the family. Only his mother took him seriously. Later, the school he went to made him painfully conscious of his physical weakness. At the Alfred High School of Rajkot, where everything was decided on a show of strength, he felt completely helpless. To add to his woes, this man who fought relentless battles against the forces of darkness was afraid to move about in the dark. It was to overcome his physical infirmities that he yielded to the persuasion of his friend to eat meat. His marriage provided him with an opportunity to show off his power and force. Only later did he learn that his child bride had suffered meekly as a dutiful wife. Later, his search for the identity of the weak and the humble in the world leads him to realize the superiority of the spirit over the physique. Slowly he comes to the realization that, even though "you could not change the face you were born with, you could change your inner face" (The crown-35)
Having arrived at the conclusion that strength does not come from physical capacity, but from an indomitable will, he was no longer bothered by his physical status or bodily comforts. This revelation leads him, not to a negligence of the physique, but mastery over it. It is this perfect control over the body that enabled him to take up vows and perform penances. He believed that man can transcend the obvious only in voluntary self abnegation and that "a truly noble spirit pierced through all barriers and kept on moving higher and higher."(The crown-35)

This self-denial that he perfected in the laboratory of his own life, he now wanted to apply to the masses, knowing the great potential it possessed in orienting them for a great mission. Gandhi wanted the Satyagraha movement to be a movement triggered and controlled by a force which is born out of a deeply-felt desire to stick to the path of truth. A moral wrong can be set right only by a moral right. He had won significant victories in South Africa by using this weapon. Now he had the whole of India to play his role in. Much bigger issues and much bigger forces were involved, and it meant much bigger effort on his part. He identified truth with God and held that the pursuit of truth, which involves sufferings, sometimes even death, only was true devotion or the correct path that led to God. Gandhi
maintained that it is not enough if we are truthful only in our speech. There should be truth in thought and truth in action too. Manmohan Chowdhari observes that for Gandhi, truth and non-violence were not factors that imposed constraints on human behaviour, but forces that helped human beings to face life more effectively.¹⁵

Nahal presents a quick survey of the major incidents in Gandhi's life in South Africa, to show his uprightness and unrelenting bend of mind, when confronted with injustice. The Durban magistrate had a taste of it when Gandhi refused to take off the turban before him in the court room. Again in Maritzburg, when he was ordered by a white man to vacate the first class compartment, he would not budge an inch. He knew that the footpath of the street where president Kruger lived was forbidden to the coloured people. Yet he dared to walk through that street. What if the palace guards kicked and abused him? His moral courage never failed him while facing all these unpleasant incidents and he had never given much thought to his physical comforts, as he had "trained his mind to function independently of his body, nay, in defiance of it". (The crown-12) That the frail little body of the Mahatma that carried great moral courage had impressed the author is evident from his own words. Nahal says:
"It was while matching the greatness of the man with his apparent physical smallness that I saw Gandhi as a symbol of moral and spiritual strength triumphing over physical odds."

Kasturba is shown as the only person who had a deep insight into the workings of the great man's mind. She could more or less predict the vagaries of his conduct. She for one knew that nothing could deter Gandhi from a course of action, once he had taken a firm resolve. This applied equally to his actions that had wide national implications and to the daily chores of his life.

In the Crown and the Loincloth, Nahal is chiefly concerned with the building up of Gandhi's image, more or less in conformity with the historic facts. The gradual unfolding of the personality of Gandhi is achieved through the introspections Gandhi is subjected to, from time to time. Having thus established Gandhi and his mission, the author in his second novel, The Salt of Life provides more occasions for the interaction of Gandhi with the other characters in the novel. It is so designed as to give the reader a further insight into the practical applications of Gandhian ideals. Thus Gandhi in this second novel becomes more dynamic and humane.
Gandhi is presented as heart-broken at the miserable plight into which the freedom movement had fallen. Even the widespread popularity of the spinning wheel, which he introduced back in 1919 is on the decline. The Congressmen too seemed to be in low spirits. Gandhi wonders whether they have lost sight of their ultimate goal. He feels that it is high time he quit his enforced inaction and gave the Organisation and the nation a new sense of purpose and a new course of action. Nahal thus provides the reader with an opportunity to observe Gandhi at close quarters and marvel at his unfailing optimism and zest for life. Gandhi is shown as scoffing at his physical death, as he had absolute faith in the 'Gita', which proclaimed that the "atman had to move on, there had to be a renewal."\textsuperscript{155} The single sentence spread over forty two pages (The salt 175-216), accomplishing a nuclear fusion of time, place, character, mood and atmosphere, as K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar notes, "is a veritable `tour de force' not unworthy of a practitioner of Joycean stream of consciousness."	extsuperscript{115} Nahal gives a fitting finale to this multifaceted introspection, by Gandhi's resolve to be instrumental in 'tapping the vast source of energy lying dormant in the Indian mass and channelising it in the right direction to realize the long cherished goal of freedom.
Nahal's Gandhi is at once a symbol and major character in the novel, though not the protagonist of the story. Along with the delineation of the fortunes of the other characters of the story, the novelist provides detached fragments from the life of Gandhi to highlight the basic features of his essential nature.

In the *Triumph of the Tricolour*, which is designed as the third part of the Gandhi Quartet, Nahal continues the Gandhi saga, but this time with a difference. Though Gandhi continues to be the dominating presence, the novelist's chief concern seems to be weaving the fabric of the freedom struggle with the crimson strands of the revolutionary trends. These trends and movements which the British Raj was determined to crush with an iron hand, now began to gain momentum with the declaration of the second world war. Nahal narrates how, the divergent streams of the freedom struggle get merged at some point to spearhead for a grand finale:

Even the Marxists wore khadi, which had some how become the trade mark of any revolutionary. But along with the khadi clothes, they also put on a bit of Gandhian ideology which now permeated every nook and corner of the country.(16)
Kasturba's death comes as a rude shock to Gandhi. She had all along been his prop, sometimes the lone voice cheering him up, while even those who were close to him seemed to distrust his words. But Gandhi would not allow his personal loss to come in the way of his vowed goal. Nahal presents the average Indian's faith in Gandhi's infinite capacity to surmount calamities and hostile circumstances. It is as if the people themselves had imbibed the Gandhian spirit that went on striving, never to yield before an adversary;

He had survived the death of his beloved secretary, Mahadev Desai, in 1942. He had survived a twenty one day fast in 1943... And he would survive his wife's death as well (106)

The novel also presents how the congressmen competed among themselves to trample over the ideals of Gandhi. Abha, a representative of the new generation, echoes the feelings of the power-crazy leaders when she says, "the struggle for freedom is over. Gandhian methods have little relevance today." (24) However, Gandhi was making himself relevant in yet another situation. The arson and looting that came in the wake of the communal riots had rendered thousands homeless orphans. Gandhi moved around the streets of
Delhi with a few of his followers to spread the message of love and
tolerance among the warring communities.

The Triumph of the Tri Colour ends on a prophetic note; Gandhi was conducting his prayer meeting on the historic day on which the interim government under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in. It was the last day of his stay in Delhi, for he had decided to leave for the riot-torn Naokhali the very next day. There was an unusual crowd waiting to hear what Gandhi would say on such a historic occasion. Nehru, along with the top leaders of the Congress party were seated on the dais. Gandhi spoke about his disappointment about a divided India. He felt that the Hindus being the majority community, should show more tolerance towards their Muslim brethren. He was convinced that, then alone, "the tricolour will truly flourish in India." (486) Most of the assembled were Hindus who were much embittered by the Muslim atrocities. A youth among the audience stood up and hurled a stone at Gandhi, shouting abuses. Another threw a stone that hit his chest. The young man shouted, "Love and non-violence and all that bunk....others before you have talked of this as well. Did they get anywhere with it?" (488) Gandhi, though feeling dizzy with a bleeding face, spoke with full affirmation of his faith." That is why..... that is why it has to be said again and again." (489)
Having cast Gandhi in an immensely historical frame work in these three novels, Nahal proceeds to focus on the general human drama by tracing the fortunes of an upper middle class family of the Punjab. This parallel strand of the Gandhian saga centres round the large eight member family of Thakur Shanti Nath, a loyal subject of the British Crown. Sunil, Thakur Shanti Nath's college-educated youngest son comes under the charismatic spell of Gandhi. This family in the small village of Ajitha is getting sucked in by the Gandhian whirlwind. As a foil to Sunil is presented Rakesh, a confirmed terrorist, who is in love with Sunil's sister, Shyama. Certain crises in the personnel destinies of these characters coincide and interweave with the determining context of the historical crisis occasioned by the Gandhian movement.

Nahal's portrayal of the lives of his fictional characters, as they are conditioned by history is of equal importance to the understanding of these novels. Sunil's destiny in particular, since his exposure to the Gandhian ideals, affects the lives of his dear and near ones, especially Kusum, his wife. After the death of Sunil at the hands of a revolutionary, Kusum takes refuge in Sabarmati with her only son.
Kusum's story is continued in the Salt Of Life. She devotes herself wholly to the Gandhian movement. She gets acquainted with Raja Vishal Chand, ruler of Lambini, who also is a follower of Gandhi. They get married with the blessings of Gandhi and leave for Lambini. A son, Amit is born to them, but their happiness is short lived as Raja Vishal Chand dies in an accident. Kusum once again returns to seek solace from Gandhi.

In the third part of the Gandhi Quartet, The Triumph of the Tricolour, Vikram is shown as growing up in the Asram. Vikram, though unwilling to compromise his faith in non-violence, is seen aiding the revolutionaries in their anti-government activities. Kusum takes to social service and sets up a home for the destitute women in Banaras. She too becomes a sympathiser of the revolutionaries who are making preparations for a final encounter with the British Raj. Amit, Kusum's second son gets himself involved in the tribal movements for liberation. He even marries the daughter of a tribal chief. Vikram, is offered a seat in the elections to the interim government, but he declines the offer and accompanies Gandhi on his mission to restore peace amidst the warring communities.
These characters who find themselves caught in the Gandhian whirlwind are instrumental in trying to translate the Gandhian ideals into practice. With their inherent human foibles and setbacks they sometimes stumble against the boulders that destiny provides in profusion in their path. Nahal makes a rough sort of Gandhi-Sunil equation with their respective fields of activity as well as by the almost similar situations in which they are placed. K.R. Sreenivasa Iyengar makes the observation that "Sunil is confessedly ordinary, and Gandhi claims to be even more ordinary: And both make discoveries all the time while groping for solutions: 15 Perhaps there is also the implied parallelism between Kasturba and Kusum. While Sunil plays a few characteristic roles like husband, father, sly lover of Rehana, sensualist losing himself in the tribal woman Priti and also as Khadi salesman and Satyagrahi, the perspectives change with time and place and the grand affirmation of martyrdom by Sunil is matched, after his death, by Kusum's similar affirmation at Sabarmati. That the novelist also wants to bring forth this parallelism is evident when he says, "while Sunil was stumbling and making discoveries, Gandhi, great though he was, was making his own discoveries." (420) K.Venkata Reddy also stresses this strain of juxtaposition when he says that Nahal's attempt is to project "Gandhi
at the macro level and Sunil at the micro level - each carrying out his
own destinies and making individual affirmations of truth."^{20}

The character of Kusum assumes epic dimensions as she
is cast against the varied and mutually incongruent roles like the bride
of a patriarchal family, mother of a Gandhian and a revolutionary,
queen of a princely state, a satyagrahi and a social worker. As she is
passing through this metamorphosis, ceaseless suffering seems to be
her inevitable lot. She is greatly impressed by Gandhi as he is "willing
to stand up on his tottering legs and affirm yet again, a new choice, a
new direction." (The crown 406) It is ironical that Kusum affirms
Gandhism, though it is Gandhi who has brought great upheavals in
her life. She is shown as fully conscious of this irony of fate, when she
contemplates: "Affirmation, said Sunil, was the coming of a new
mantra to fight despair and it struck her that her declaration of faith
should perhaps centre round the very symbol that had brought about
that upheaval in her life." (The salt 407)

Kusum's two sons taking different paths - Vikram
following the Gandhian and Amit that of the revolutionaries reminds
us of the general trend set by the 'heroic age'. Both the Gandhians and
the revolutionaries were fired by the same zeal for action, motivated by
patriotic fervour and they had the same end in view. They differed only in their means to achieve the avowed target. Such mutually incongruent forces struggling to realize the same end - the termination of the British rule in India - has been depicted in Indian-English fiction before also. Jagdish the terrorist in R.K.Narayan's _Waiting for the Mahatma_ is one such example. But whereas Jagdish functions merely to offset the Gandhian Sriram in the novel, Rakesh's is a more comprehensive characterisation which "brings into relief the working of human predicament."21

The depiction of the principal characters of the fiction is in such a way that, the course of action they follow in their lives is to a great extent conditioned by the peculiar milieu in which they are cast. But each one of them puts in his best to rise above his limitations and scale supreme heights to assert his individuality. Thus Sunil is so steeped in the Gandhian philosophy that even when he allows himself to be carried away by his inherent sensuality he is keen on following the guide lines set by Gandhi for a social worker. Likewise it is significant that Kusum returns to the solace of the Gandhian Ashram, every time she suffers a major setback in her life. Gandhi is, for her, a perennial fountain head from where she draws her courage. Thus towards the close of the _Salt of Life_, we see Kusum returning to
Wardha after the death of her second husband Gandhi tells her: "You know Kusum, my supreme remedy for all worries, for all anguish is work. Immerse yourself in work....... Affirmation in acceptance. You must not lament what's come to pass".(545) Even though it is partly because of his sense of being rejected by his mother and elder brother that Amit becomes involved in the tribal movement, it is significant that instead of wallowing in the luxuries and liberties that his position affords him, he opts to lead a life of peril for a noble cause. He too finds his affirmation in working with out prospect of any personal gains.

Azadi which enacts "the hopeful dawn of Indian Independence" won Chaman Nahal, the coveted Sahitya Academy Award in 1977. It was not initially meant as the last part of the Gandhian saga. It is essentially a novel on the theme of partition and its aftermath. But incidentally it is also concerned with the last phase of Gandhi's career, and so later on added as the fourth piece of the Gandhi Quartet, with an epilogue to tie up the loose ends together, as Nahal himself explains. in the epilogue (311) The novel tells in gripping style, how the unasked for partition came as a thunderbolt on the peaceful life of Lala Kanshi Ram and his family and their flight across the border in the most macabre circumstances. The story
progresses through two different perspectives, provided by the minds of Lala Kanshi Ram and his son Arun.

Kanshi Ram is a wholesale grain merchant of Sialkot. His interest in politics is only skin deep and his only deviation from routine business is to attend the meetings of the Arya Samaj. He has been living in Sialkot for years and is unwilling to leave even after the partition is announced. So great is the compulsion to stay on in his native town that, at one stage, the thought of converting himself to Islam crosses his mind. He is of an amiable nature and has always got on well with his Muslim friends; in fact his best friend is a muslim, Chaudhari Barkat Ali. Never does it occur to him that he can be ever unwanted in his own native place. In the wake of the partition, Kanshi Ram is forced to leave his birth place along with other Hindus and Sikhs. Like millions of other Punjabis, he travels on foot to India with his wife Prabha Rani and only son Arun. His married daughter and son-in-law get killed in the communal riots. In fact there is no family that is left intact, no family that could retain all its members till the end of the holocaust. On his arrival in Delhi, after having been subjected to untold miseries, he suffers humiliation from the Indian authorities.
Though conventional in nature, the plot of Azadi is, structurally speaking, symmetrical and well-organised. The novel is divided into three parts. The 'Lull', The 'Storm' and The 'Aftermath' are all suggestive and symbolic of the three distinct stages in the development of the plot. The narrative begins with an idyllic picture of the peaceful and leisurely life of Kanshi Ram and his family. Soon their sense of security is shattered by the much dreaded announcement confirming the partition of India. A sense of betrayal grips one and all as they find themselves refugees in their own place of birth, which soon will become Pakistani territory. With the influx of Muslims into the city, crying hoarse their tales of woe and destruction at the hands of Hindus at the other side of the border, communal tension mounts up and the sporadic acts of violence explode into murder, rape and looting on a massive scale.

The sudden and unexpected change in their fortunes totally unnerves and baffles these characters. But it also provides them with an opportunity to muster courage and to make use of all their might to surmount adverse circumstances. The death of his daughter Madhu comes as a rude shock to Lala Kanshi Ram. But he feels that he has to somehow or other get over his grief and carry on with life.
And yet not once did Lala Kanshi Ram admit defeat. He was benumbed by event, he fretted, but in the next instant Arun could see him pulling his shoulders up. (210)

The greatest problem with Kanshi Ram, even after his temporary settlement in Delhi, is his "loss of ability to communicate with his family." (363) His wife Prabharani, son Arun, and a number of other victims of the partition feel likewise. The suffering caused by this loss of identity is too deep for tears and the novel can be interpreted as a plea for the realization and assertion of identity in a world that pushes people into the oblivion of anonymity.

The novelist brings into focus the fact that the sufferings of these characters stem out of man's inhumanity to his fellow beings. In spite of these pitfalls, life goes on, as is suggested by the picture of Sunanda depicted at the close of the novel. Sunanda plying her sewing machine is quite suggestive of the imperishable will of a people to carry on life surmounting personal and national calamities.

Kanshi Ram stands outside the galvanic influence of Gandhi in the first half of the novel. Later on, when he has seen enough of the evil forces at work, he gains in wisdom. Disheartened by the atrocities both communities were perpetrating on each other, he
comments: "We have sinned as much. We need their forgiveness."(340)
This is the one occasion when he rises to sublime heights, reminding us of the words of Gandhi that, "highest perfection is unattainable without highest restraint."(23) Unlike Kanshi Ram, Chaudhari Barkat Ali who lived the life of a true Muslim and believed in the nobility of all religions, is a true Gandhian. Narrow minded sectarian thoughts have no place in his mind. Even under compelling adverse circumstances, he exhibits great fortitude and is not swayed by communal considerations.

To Gandhi, the word 'Freedom' or 'Azadi' had a greater connotation than mere freedom from a colonial rule. To him, the word signified Man's freedom from all sorts of bondages that stifle his growth. This message of love and friendship, incidentally, is the motto of the novel which Nahal gives in the words of Rabindranath Tagore at the very outset of his narrative. Perhaps the best tribute to Gandhi is provided in the novel by Sunanda, when she says, "men like him come once in centuries."(366) It is immensely significant that of all the characters in the novel, the author has hand picked her to utter these words.
Inspite of the harrowing experiences that Nahal describes, there is an underlying current of healthy optimism and a sort of moral vision that illumines the otherwise dark horizon of communal frenzy. When the majority are subjected to fits of fury, thereby losing their reasoning capacity, a few retain their essential goodness and sense of basic human values. When the horrifying procession of naked women passes through the streets of Narowal, Arun notices a Muslim who prays fervently for the souls of those helpless women. The train carrying the refugees passes through Kurukshetra and we are reminded of the historic battle fought there for the restoration of Truth and Dharma. The birth of a child to Isher Kaur in the train compartment ushers in a ray of hope. Kanshi Ram's declaration, "I have ceased to hate"(338) carries the weight of the agony he went through in reaching such a state of mental poise.

A careful scrutiny of the novels dealing with the Gandhian era will reveal a recurring pattern running through them. By way of lending a semblance of authenticity to their creative works, they bring Gandhi on the scene either personally or by report. R.K. Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma, K.Nagarajan's Chronicles of Kedaram and Mulk Ran Anand's The Untouchable are novels in which Gandhi appears as a character. In Raja Rao's
Kanthapura, and in K.S.Venkataramani’s Kandan the Patriot, Gandhi is the driving force represented by idealised characters. These Novels have Gandhi as a mere backdrop, so as not to disturb the main stream of the novel. Mrs.Sudarsan Sharma notes that this is because the novelists concerned feel that too prominent a role for Gandhi could turn the novel into a biography, and that Gandhi, "was too important to be given only a minor role."24 However, the success of such an endeavour varies with the craftsmanship of the author concerned. Chaman Nahal also can be seen as towing the line of these authors in Azadi. We are introduced to Gandhi addressing a public meeting. He speaks on the importance of communal harmony and non-violence, which have immense relevance in the setting of the novel. Gandhi, thereafter is kept in the background and it is only towards the end that the author makes his presence felt once again by way of a radio report on his assassination.

Nahal, like Gandhi, thinks that political freedom is meaningful "only when it brings with it the freedom of the spirit and mind, the freedom of happiness."25 Azadi scores in realistic portraiture, but more vividly than this, it is the portrayal of the multifarious responses of a people in the grip of forces that are formidable. It is quite reassuring that even when weighed down by
heavy odds, these characters bend, but never break. There is also the ever re-juvenating presence of 'life in-death', which provides the transfusion of moral and spiritual values. The cosmic pain and bloodshed are, "but a prelude to the birth of a new humanity, however weak its voice at present may be."25

The emergence of Gandhi as a symbol of national pride and moral uprightness prompted many Indian-English writers of fiction to introduce characters drawn on Gandhi, in their novels dealing with the theme of the Freedom struggle. Moorthy of Kantapura Jaydev in Music for Mohini, Satyajit in Shadow from Ladakh are all veiled representations of the Mahatma. The novelists take particular care to see that these characters seldom stray from the Gandhian path. Chaman Nahal, however does not take it upon himself to create a character in the true Gandhian mould, in any of these four novels. In fact, the focus is very often on his characters' incapacity to adhere closely to the teachings of the Mahatma, in spite of their proximity to him. Sunil and Rehana who betray their respective spouses can never be true Gandhians. It is the disappointments and the sense of frustration in her personal life that drive Kusum to seek solace in Gandhi's Ashram. Once a ray of hope is kindled in her by Raja Vishal Chand, she is only happy to leave the Ashram, even
though his death once again brings her back to the Mahatma. Musafir Ahamed, an ardent Congress activist, who lets his wife actively participate in the movement and court arrest, comes to suspect Gandhi's sincerity and is even driven to the other extreme when he becomes a member of the Muslim League. Even Jawahar and Vallabhai Patel, whom Gandhi had nurtured in his philosophy, are shown as entertaining serious doubts regarding the viability of some of the Gandhian ideals. Rehana's words, "no one can be a perfect Gandhian, one can only hope to be a partial one (The crown 250) are quite as much Nahal's as Rehana's.

The technique of introspection that Nahal makes use of in the case of all major characters has the sole purpose of revealing the depths of their inner conflicts and to give a logical conclusion to their actions. The rather lengthy introspections Gandhi is shown as indulging in, is in reality a summing up of his epic struggle. Gandhi is shown as an impartial observer and a critic of his own actions. The novelist infuses into these revelations of Gandhi such colour and philosophical insight that, like the spirit of a lyric or the melody of a song, these outpourings of the inner self linger in our memory, our conscience, even after we close the novel after reading.
The stigma of being born and brought up in a slave nation constantly haunted Gandhi. He felt that India is a nation won by the sword by the Englishman. Only brute force helped him hold on to it. The self-denials he had rigorously imposed on himself were part of the search for his own identity. He wanted to set an example by asserting himself and questioning the unjust practices of his oppressors. He wanted first of all to make his countrymen aware of their miserable bondage to their colonial masters.

Frantz Fanon, analysing the relationship between racism and culture, speaks about a kind of 'cultural racism' which makes the colonised hate his native language, value systems, historical past and religion. Having been thrown out of the history-making process, the colonised suffers from the loss of personal dignity and comes to accept the myth of his intellectual, social, cultural religious and even physical inferiority. Nahal in the Crown and the Loincloth makes Gandhi recollect two incidents to show how the educated Indians had come to view themselves as their colonizer, viewed them. Gandhi was invited to speak at the opening ceremony of the famous Banaras Hindu University. The anglicised Indians, occupying the rostrum wanted him to speak in English, as they thought, "one could not properly express oneself in Hindi." Later, he was disheartened by the
Congress session he attended, where the meeting procedures were conducted in English, by Congressmen clad in western clothes.

Lala Kanshiram and Thakur Shantinath are typical representatives of those servile eulogists who pampered the British to win favours from them. Kanshiram is convinced that the British are "an absolutely invincible race"^(22^) and marvels at the pomp and show with which they administer justice. When communal riots break out in the wake of the partition, he longs for the presence of British military; which alone, according to him, could bring matters under control. He tries to please the English Superintendent of Police by sending him fruits and bottles of Scotch whisky, even while posing as a staunch believer in the technigs of Arya Samaj. Thakur Shantinath, who is ever ready to pay lip service to a system that had enabled him to become a man of riches, had only contempt for those "dhoti wallas and topi wallas"^(113^) who wanted to pull down the British crown. Even when he comes to know about his son Sunil's whipping by Dyer, he does not protest, as "his whole edifice had been built on the munificence of the British"^(113^). To keep people like Thakur Shantinath servile and obsequious to the British rule, they were allowed to conduct themselves like feudal lords.
Nahal places this kind of total submissiveness and the feeling of elation the upper class Indians flaunted in such an act, in juxtaposition with the typical Englishman's contempt for everything that is Indian. This high-brow attitude ranges from the mild and sympathetic attitude of Celia Ashby to the spiteful and evil bend of mind of colonel Dyer, "the erratic general.( The crown 80) Celia Ashby, who holds that the Indians are "incompetent and innocent (The crown 183) thus says in exasperation, when she totally fails to 'civilize' her Indian dog:

Oh, get along spindle, go away, You are only an Indian dog, illiterate and mannerless. Not willing to learn either (The crown 187)

Even the sedate and sensible I.C.S. Officer, Kenneth Ashby, who has tender feelings for India, considers Gandhi as a "seditious rogue"(215) Sergeant Bill Davidson (Azadi) who maintained that "local cultures get destroyed due to continued foreign domination"(115), is still apprehensive about the Indian's claim of the right to self rule. A false faith in their racial superiority over the natives led the English administrators to view themselves as guardians of the socially fragmented, and heterogenous masses. Octave Mannoni sums up this attitude as "Prospero Complex", an
attitude emanating from a combination of pride, nervous impatience and the urge for domination. Prospero at his best stands for many a man conscious of power" he cannot exert to the full among his peers", and resort to magic to "display his illusory power in order to impose himself."25 The audacity Percy Wand displays in forcefully occupying the seats reserved for Kusum and family (The salt-267) is born out of such a complex. Having taken an unjust stand, he is quite unwilling to give in, as he thinks that "his honour, Jennifer's honour, the British honour was at stake"(253) The reluctance on the part of the British to consider the natives as normal human beings is reflected even in the words of Sarah the four year old daughter of Ginger Barnes, when she asks with ill concealed glee, "will we be able to see the shooting, Daddy?" (The crown 285) However, it is in the person of Edward Harry Dyer, a historic figure, whom Nahal pictures as the epitome of white arrogance that we come to witness the most de-humanising treatment of Indians by the British. Though born and brought up in India, Dyer held the Indians in utter disgust, calling them "the brown-black creatures."(54) It is quite significant that even when entertaining a sympathetic feeling for the Eurasians-those half-breeds fathered by Europeans, Dyer had no patience for the white women who married wealthy Indians, as he was afraid, such practices would belittle the Englishman in the eyes of the natives.
Reviewing the bulk of fiction written on the theme of Gandhian ideology in the Indian writing in English, N. Radhakrishnan, the eminent Gandhian scholar and critic wrote in 1984 that, while Gandhi has been exploited for fictional purposes, the real Gandhi seems to have eluded portrayal in these novels. This observation becomes all the more relevant in the case of the four major novels on the Gandhian theme; viz-Waiting for the Mahatma, The Untouchable, Chronicles of Kedaram, and the Shadow from Ladakh. It can be seen that there is no conscious attempt in these novels to project the full potential of the holistic view of Gandhi. But at the same time it can be said in defence of these novelists that their purpose in bringing in Gandhi on the scene or creating characters in his semblance was, to serve certain specific ends in their fictional techniques. Narayan’s Waiting or the Mahatma, is designed as a fictional representation of the influence of Gandhi on two of his followers. The hero Sriram represents the hundreds of half converts that Gandhi produced and who were lured to the national movement on the spur of the moment, but could not be sustained by it. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes that, Narayan merely studies an ordinary young man's reaction to an issue, "much larger than the young man's comprehension." P.S. Sundaram also feels that Narayan was "not concerned with projecting a Gandhi image." Mulk Raj Anand,
likewise, in his *Untouchable* brings in Gandhi to serve a specific purpose. The theme of the novel itself is the exploitation of the hapless untouchables by the cast Hindus. Gandhi, in the novel, is seen making a vehement speech against the curse of untouchability, which stirs Bakha, an untouchable. Thus the introduction of Gandhi on the scene as the champion of the oppressed, helps the novelist to set the mood of the narrative.

K. Nagarajan, in his *Chronicles of Kedaram* wanted to show how, the image of a great man like Gandhi is exploited to serve petty ends by unscrupulous politicians. The role Gandhi plays in the novel is so superfluous that Srinivasa Iyengar opines that, it would have been better, had Nagarajan "not introduced Gandhi overtly into the story." Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) deserves a prominent role among the novels written on the Gandhian theme. The novel can be viewed as a strong indictment of the pseudo-fight against Gandhism, unleashed by the self-styled champions of technology and industrialisation. The ending that Bhattacharya gives to the novel- Gandhigram realizing the value of technological progress and the steel town learning the value of love and co-operation, is too distinct to dispel any doubts regarding the thematic concern of the novelist.
Thus we can see that in all these novels, Gandhi or characters modelled on Gandhi serve specific ends which at once absolves the novelist of the need to go deep into the many faceted implications of Gandhism in its totality. Chaman Nahal is fully conscious of the fact that the delineation of the life and message of a stalwart like Mahatma Gandhi, with the intention of bringing into focus his integrated view of life is, if anything, an uphill task. But Gandhi, more than any one else, had exerted such a great influence on Nahal's vision of life that he wanted to project Gandhi as "a symbol of moral and spiritual strength triumphing over physical odds." Nahal in the *Gandhi Quartet* takes meticulous care to bring in characters and situations by which he is able to highlight the main features of Gandhian ideology. Nahal's Gandhi in the *Gandhi Quartet* is never a static character. The gradual unfolding of his personality is carried out with the focus always on his inner development, consistent with the great ideals he cherished and which he put to harness for the great purpose at hand. Nahal brings out in vivid colours instances of his essential tactfulness, his immense capacity to move the masses, his unrelenting bend of mind in upholding the values he cherished, his concern for the seemingly unimportant matters of life and his intense personal conflicts that led him to the core of truth.
Most of the novels on Gandhian theme were written when Gandhi was a living inspiration or soon after his assassination. How far these novelists have succeeded in interpreting the Gandhian ideology in consonance with the changing times, is worth looking into. The contemporary scene, however, is not much encouraging. It may be because the present day writers do not have the benefit of the living presence of Gandhi or even Gandhians worth emulating. The contemporary Indian-English writers of fiction, as Kai Nicholson observes, are more concerned with the disintegration of "those ideals which had banded together the writers of the 'Heroic Age."34 However, this does not absolve the Indian writers of the sin of ignoring the teachings of Gandhi, which by their very universality, transcend ages. "Just as the Bhagavat Gita relates to all historical periods", notes the Australian-born Gandhian, Stephen Murphy: equally the principles and beliefs for which Gandhi stands belong to no one period of history. They are equally timeless.35

Viewed in this context, The Gandhi Quartet of Chaman Nahal acquires a greater significance, as it reminds us in unflinching terms, of the need to hold fast to the Gandhian ideals in a world torn apart by narrow sectarian and communal considerations.
Notes


23. M.K.Gandhi, *Young India*. (9 March, 1922)
24. Mrs.Sudarshan Sharma, *The Influence of Gandhian Ideology on Indo-Anglian Fiction*


35. Stephen Murphy, *Why Gandhi is relevant in Modern India* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1990) 19