CHAPTER VII
The Movement for Purna Swaraj

As a reaction to the liberal leadership of the Congress that saw in the British rule a 'divine dispensation' by the end of the nineteenth century, a new attitude towards the British Government grew. Even the old leaders gradually came to realize that India was getting poorer and poorer every day in spite of their faith in the goodness of the foreign Government. Eminent moderate leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Dinshaw Wacha and Gopal Krishna Gokhale held later the British Government responsible for the economic ruin of the country and began to blame the Government for it. Out of this dissatisfaction of the liberal leaders of the Congress of the old phase, came a new leadership with a new trend of thinking. The old liberal leader Naoroji's book Poverty and the Un-British Rule in India became a handbook for the new leaders who soon brought about a change of outlook and a change of goal to the party.

The foremost of these new leaders were Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose. They were generally known as Extremists in contrast to the old leaders who now came to be known as Moderates. Instead of the faith of the old leaders in Western culture and philosophy and in the British sense of justice, the new leaders asserted their faith in the culture, tradition and philosophy of their own country. They held in high esteem Indian civilization and Indian values of life. They attacked the old leaders as imitative, self-
forgetful and artificial and blamed them for their aim at a re-
production of Europe in India. To them, the old leadership was
'unnational' - as Sri Aurobindo called it in his series of arti-
cles called New Lamps for Old (1893-1894).

Discarding the old method of petitioning and prayer
through public meetings, the new leaders called it 'mendicancy'
and urged, "We must act and not only hold meetings. ... Govern-
ment has no respect for the opinions expressed at meetings of
lakhs of people" - as Tilak said it. Tilak asked the people of
India to raise their voice in favour of self-reliance and self-
help and dissociate themselves from the Government. This call
for action and non-co-operation became the motto of the new phase
of the Indian freedom struggle. By action, however, these nation-
alists did not mean violent action. They meant by it only passive
resistance, mass agitation and will to suffer - the weapons wielded
by the Extremists against the Government.

Freedom to these Extremists meant again something quite
different from what it meant to others before them. By self-
government or swaraj they meant absolute independence or Purna
Swaraj from the British rule. Freedom for India must needs bring
to an end, according to them, all sorts of colonial relations with
the British.

1. Quoted in B. Prasad, Changing Modes of Indian National Move-
ment, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1966, p.79.
This phase of the freedom struggle also saw the rise of another movement for the same goal. It is commonly known as the Terrorist Movement. Though the goal of the Terrorists was the same as that of the Congress Extremists, i.e. attainment of complete freedom, they differed from the Congress in their method for winning that goal. Inspired with an ardent love for their country, these revolutionaries wanted to wrest freedom quickly from alien hands. And the method they employed for this was violent resistance. These militant nationalists were up for waging war against the British domination. They got themselves trained for the armed revolt, terrorized the government officials, and went occasionally to the extent of killing some of them.

The Terrorist Movement was, however, an offshoot only of the main Indian freedom struggle, not a regular growth. The regular phase of the Indian struggle for freedom that followed the Extremist phase began under the leadership of M. K. Gandhi. Gandhi and his followers also wanted Purna Swaraj or complete freedom from the British rule through non-violent passive resistance like Tilak and others of the earlier phase. Thus Gandhi's main objective and method do not differ much from those of Tilak and others. The two phases are, therefore, not very distinct from each other and can be treated as one, at least for my purpose here.

Gandhi differed from Tilak in the sense that he insisted more on moral elevation of the people of India for winning freedom than Tilak had done. Non-violence was the weapon for winning freedom for Gandhi also as it was for the earlier leaders. But to it,
he added a new meaning and a new significance. He philosophized and idealized these and other allied terms to the farthest possible extent. For example, non-violence meant for Gandhi a deep faith in love for all, whether friends or enemies and a complete dissociation from the evil and abstention from such brutish spirit as retaliation or revenge. As for non-co-operation, for Gandhi, it was only a new name for suffering. It was to him an acid test for people's sincerity, because it required silent sacrifice. He thus gave the new name Satyagraha to non-violent non-co-operation. Passive resistance for Gandhi was a restraint undertaken voluntarily for the good of the society. Swaraj also meant to Gandhi something more than mere political independence from the foreign rule. Swaraj to him was a state of being in which all people live in peace and harmony, getting rid of fear, helplessness and other evils.

Now, in view of the fact that we have quite a few novels and stories reflecting vividly the Indian freedom struggle under the leadership of Tilak and Gandhi, I shall draw a pen-portrait here of this phase of the national struggle so that it may serve as a background to my discussion of those novels and stories.

In the Lucknow session of the Congress in 1916, two very important events took place, viz. the re-union of the two factions of the Congress and the pact between the Muslim League and the Congress. Another very important development of the freedom struggle to take place about this time was the establishment of the Home Rule League by Tilak and Annie Besant. The objectives of these two Leagues which acted independently but which were not
opposed to each other, were to persuade the British people to grant full self-government to the Indians.

As the agitation of the Congress and the Home Rule Leagues was going on, there was a major development in the Congress party. It was the coming of Gandhi to the Indian political scene. He had lately returned from South Africa, and then joining the Congress, looked for the first time to the economic condition of the working class and tried to heal their economic ills. Thus he soon became the doyen of the vast masses of the Indian people. Identifying the economic interests of the peasants and the workers with the national cause, Gandhi drew the peasants of the villages and the workers of the towns to the vortex of the national movement soon.

An event that gave the freedom struggle a jolt about this time was the Khilafat Movement of the Indian Muslims. When the Khalifa of the Islamic world lost his temporal authority, the orthodox section of the Muslims grew indignant with the British who were responsible for this state of affairs and to whom the Muslims in India were so far lending support in a very docile manner. The Indian Muslims thus organized the movement which came to be known as the Khilafat Movement. Gandhi, as the leader of the Congress, supported this movement and called upon the Muslims to adopt the Congress method of non-violent non-co-operation in their jehad against the British. The Muslims responded to his call; and thus there was a sympathetic co-operation between the two communities.
The next important event of the time was the Powlett Act of 1919 which authorized the British Government of India to try and punish people found guilty of the offences against the state summarily without giving them any chance for appeal. Gandhi and other Congress leaders gave a call for a countrywide hartal, fasting and prayer on 6 April 1919 in order to launch a movement against this Act. Both the Hindus and the Muslims responded to the call and made the movement a success. But the Government attempt to repress the non-violent movement with violence gave a critical turn to the situation. The worst example of this was the Jallianwala Bagh incident where hundreds of unarmed, peaceful people were massacred brutally.

The Indian National Congress was then totally disillusioned about the British. Meeting at Amritsar that year, the Congress urged the British Parliament to arrange for the establishment of full responsible government in India. It had also decided to launch a non-co-operation movement throughout the country. Gandhi as the leader of the movement called upon the people to renounce their titles, offices of honour and emoluments etc. Soon there was a spontaneous response from all quarters. Even students gave up British government schools and colleges. Bonfires of foreign clothes were made all over the country, foreign goods were boycotted and people took khadi and all that was swadeshi.

The British Government tried to repress this movement with iron hands and declared the Congress Volunteer Organization illegal. Gandhi in his turn appealed to his people to disobey
that unjust law and join the Volunteer Organization in thousands. The non-co-operation movement thus took a turn for Civil Disobedience and thousands of people courted arrest and overfilled the jails.

The movement was not, however, successful as a non-violent one, at least according to Gandhi. Some people at Chauri Chaura turned violent against the police which Gandhi regarded as a failure of his people to understand the spirit of non-violence. He, therefore, suspended the movement at its very height and became rather unpopular with the majority of the people. The British Government took this chance to arrest him and he was sentenced to six years' imprisonment.

But the period of suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement also saw a Hindu-Muslim communal riot. Under the newly evolved democratic constitution of the time, the Muslims apprehended that the Hindus would be too overwhelming a majority to give the Muslims their due rights. The Hindus, on the other hand, were against the weightage and the special safeguards to be given to the Muslims. Thus wide scale communal riots broke out, and Gandhi went on his historic twenty-one day fast.

Later there was again a great nation-wide stir in the country over the Simon Commission for the review of the working of the Indian constitution. The British Government was compelled to invite opinions of Indians, too, about the working of the constitution when a convention under the guidance of Motilal Nehru was
formed. The Congress while adhering to its earlier resolution for complete independence, accepted the constitution drawn up by the Nehru convention which sought dominion status for India instead of complete freedom. The Congress acceptance was on the condition that the Government also must accept it within one year (before 31 Dec 1929). The Government failed to do so; and the Congress session at Lahore meeting under the Presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru demanded complete freedom again and decided to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Gandhi launched this Civil Disobedience Movement by his historic march on foot from Sabarmati to the sea-coast village of Dandi, a distance of 200 miles, on 12 March 1930. His object was to prepare salt at Dandi from sea-water in defiance of the Government Salt Law. People throughout the country once again followed Gandhi and took resort to disobedience of law, non-payment of taxes, boycott of foreign goods and clothes, and strikes and demonstrations. Gandhi was, of course, arrested and imprisoned, but not before he completed his intended violation of the Salt Law.

Then came the Communal Award of August 1932. It provided separate electorates for Muslims, Europeans, Sikhs and Depressed Classes. It was a great blow to the Congress aspirations and Gandhi who had been working devotedly for the uplift of the Depressed Classes was especially piqued at this Award which sought to divide the Hindus on the basis of castes by giving a separate electorate to the Depressed Classes. He took a fast against this Award in the Yeravda prison. Consequently, the Government had to
amend the award. Gandhi then laid more emphasis on the uplift of the oppressed low castes of the Hindu society, especially the sweeper caste regarded by the Hindus as untouchable. He called them Harijans or men of God.

The next important episode in the history of the freedom struggle was the government decision to hold election according to the India Act of 1935 and the Congress decision to fight the election, not to co-operate with the Government but to reject the new Act in favour of the demands raised by Gandhi in the second Round Table Conference. In the election the Congress won victory in seven out of eleven provinces. The Muslim League offered to form coalition ministries with the Congress which the latter turned down. Jinnah the leader of the Muslim League then declared that Islam was in danger with the Congress ministries in so many provinces of the country.

Then fell the shadow of the second World War over the scene of national struggle in the country. The British Government wanted Indian co-operation; and the Congress resolved not to co-operate with the British Government in its war preparation. It is not that the Congress had no sympathy for the British involved in this war between Fascism and Democracy. But in order to lend support, it wanted from the British Government a clarification about its attitude to Democracy and Imperialism and the new order that was envisaged. The Congress had also wanted India to be declared independent before it could help the British in their war against Fascism. There was a difference of opinion between the
Congress and Subhas Chandra Bose at this stage over the issue of Congress supporting the British in the war.

Be that as it may, Germany had begun to win landslide victory in the war and Britain was on the verge of ruin. Then the Congress with its faith in Democracy could not wait any more. It expressed its eagerness to join the British in the war if only they agreed to form a Provisional National Government in the centre. The British Government did not concede even that whereupon the Congress launched once again the Civil Disobedience Movement in October 1940.

The Muslims in the meantime demanded a completely separate state for them; and they also decided to non-co-operate with the British unless their demand was fulfilled. There was thus a deadlock in the administration.

The British Government had by now many more reverses in the war and Indian help for them became essential. Therefore, the British Government sent Sir Stafford Cripps, a member of the British cabinet, to India to bring about a compromise. But this mission also had failed, the Muslim League re-iterating its demand for a separate Muslim state and Congress demanding immediate end of the British rule in India with that famous resolution commonly known as 'Quit India' resolution adopted on 14 July 1942. The Viceroy of India took a very stern view of this resolution of the Congress and he refused to have any discussion with the Congress on the issue. Gandhi in his turn gave his non-violent war cry : "We shall either do or die. We shall either free India or die in the attempt."
Then on 9 August 1942, Gandhi and all other prominent leaders of the country were arrested. The people, all leaderless, got furious and turned violent in reaction to this, cutting telegraph wires, damaging railway tracks and destroying other government property. The Government had also taken violent repressive measures, going to the extent of machine gunning and aerial fighting.

Subhas Bose meanwhile had escaped to Berlin with the hope of winning German help for fighting against the British. He then formed the Indian National Army in South East Asia with the Indians residing there and with the Indian soldiers of the British Army captured by the Japanese. With the war cry, Chalo Delhi or 'March on to Delhi', his National Army or Azad Hind Fouz marched towards India, reached Assam from Burma and hoisted the Indian flag at Kohima (then in Assam, now in Nagaland) in 1944. When the Japanese were defeated, the Azad Hind Fouz had also collapsed; and almost simultaneously this 'Springing Tiger' Subhas Bose disappeared mysteriously.

On the Indian scene, Gandhi was released from prison in May 1944, when he wanted to come to terms with Jinnah. Jinnah was, however, as adamant as ever in his demand for the separate Muslim state Pakistan, which he wanted before independence. Meanwhile, in the British General Election of 1945, the Labour Party came to power. The new Labour Prime Minister Attlee was then keen on granting freedom to India. Accordingly, election to the central and provincial legislatures took place for forming the Constituent Body.
Then in March 1946, a British Mission consisting of three members of the British cabinet came to India to seek an agreement on the constitutional issue. There was, however, no agreed formula evolved, the Muslim League standing for a separate Muslim state and the Congress insisting on an undivided secular India. The ultimate result of this was the partition of the country into two sovereign states on 15 August 1947 with the communal riots breaking out throughout the country on its eve, with Gandhi - the father of 'the nation' weeping and treading on the solitary paths of riot-torn interior villages of the country, and Nehru making his memorable speech as the first Prime Minister of India at the Special Constituent Assembly Session in Delhi: "A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history when we step out from the old to the new, when the age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance."

Indo-Anglian novelists and short story writers of this period who had witnessed the scene with their own eyes and felt the spirit in their own veins have depicted these movements in their writings. And we shall see now how the events and situations of this phase of our national struggle have found place in fiction and how the spirit behind this phase of the struggle has found expression.

The first novel to reflect an aspect of the freedom movement under the leadership of Gandhi is Murugan, the Tiller by 2. K. S. Venkataramani, Murugan, the Tiller, Simpkin, Marshall & Co., Stationers' Hall Court, London, 1927.
K. S. Venkataramani. It deals with the Gandhian ideal of rural reconstruction as a step towards winning swaraj. The novel is not, therefore, directly political. To its first critics and appreciators also, it was political only remotely. It was to them mainly a documentary novel depicting South Indian life and manners. Thus C. R. Reddy in his Foreword to a monograph on Venkataramani, observed, "He presents South Indian life both in its traditional, conservative and its dynamic aspects with convincing sincerity and fascinating power." Manjeri Isvaran the writer of the monograph, has appreciated the inclusion of Murugan, the Tiller in The Overseas Empire in Fiction, an annotated bibliography by Vinifer Hill to guide readers in their choice of suitable books dealing with the overseas British Empire in its various aspects, "... for there is none other novel besides Murugan which portrays so simply and realistically the life and manners of the South Indians." Manjeri Isvaran, however, does not fail to recognize the political aspect of the novel and he writes that the novel "affords the author with ample scope for description of scenery, for delineation of national types and characters, for reflections of social, political and economic problems"... To the later critics, of course, this novel of rural India is unmistakably a novel depicting the 'back to the village movement' of the Gandhian era. K. P. Srinivasa Iyengar has discussed the novel under the heading Gandhian Literature, and has dubbed Murugan, the titular hero of the novel, "an

4. Ibid. p.7.
5. Ibid. p.6.
exponent of Gandhian economics. To H. H. Anniah Gowda, again, living in stirring times, Venkataramani in this novel concerns himself with agrarian problems, highlighting the evils of Western education, the Rule of Law and the racial difference in the country.

There is no doubt that the novel contains many descriptions of Indian life and manners; but even then these do not form the main theme of the novel as these do in a way form the main theme in Govinda Samanta. These are not even as conspicuous as these are in The Young Zemindar. The pictures of life and manners come to Murugan, the Tiller only to expound the main theme more markedly, the main theme here being the rural reconstruction of India after the ideal of Gandhi. The novelist wants to show here with the Gandhian spirit that this alone will prepare the country for real freedom - freedom not in the political sense alone but also in the economic sense. The story of the novel in brief will make this point clear.

Ramachandran, the owner of a little coconut garden and a plot of agricultural land on the bank of the river Cauvery, has failed B.A. and has returned from Madras to his home in the village Alavanti. He is repentant now for going to the city for Western education. When he expresses his sorrows before his family servant

Murugan, "the most valued of the hereditary tillers of the soil"\(^8\), Murugan, like the Good Angel in a Mediaeval play consoles him and advises, "Give up the Madras education which has drained our little wealth, and settle down in the village and look after the lands as your forefathers did."\(^9\) In the first flush of repentance, Ramu promises to follow Murugan's advice; and as a preliminary, he decides to settle down at Alavanti in his ancestral estate.

But soon he receives a letter from Kedari, his most intimate friend in the city who has passed the same B.A. examination with distinction and who is now a student-at-law. Kedari, like the Evil Angel, exhorts him to go back to Madras, and writes, "It is no use remaining in your village and preparing for the B.A. as a private candidate. It will destroy the unity and growth of your culture."\(^10\) Ramu is tempted and he wavers in his decision to settle in the village.

Ramu's Good Angel Murugan then holds the bait of the fertile soil of his estate waiting to be ploughed, and he says to Ramu:

Come and see the fields to-day. I turned last night the reddish floods from the hills into the tope nathangal, the finest fields in the village. This morning there is an inch deposit of silt which means a splendid crop this year.\(^11\)

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8. K. S. Venkataramani, Murugan, the Tiller, Svetaranya Ashrama, Madras, 1929 edn., p.1.
10. ibid. p.9.
11. ibid. p.11.
But Ramu yields to the temptation of the city, leaves behind his fertile soil to the care of Murugan, and arrives at his friend's lodging in Madras.

He prosecutes his study again, and at the same time marries a city girl of Madras, the only daughter of a widow chosen by his friend who has also married in the meantime. This marriage of Ramu was not approved by Murugan who wanted Ramu to marry a village girl. Then Ramu fails the B.A. examination for the second time and returns home once for all with his city wife, a doubly repentant man.

He now devotes himself to the development of his ruined economic condition by engaging himself in the tilling of the soil. Murugan is very happy at this; but his city-bred and ambitious, though poor mother-in-law Meenakshi hates her son-in-law taking to such a lowly profession. Meenakshi makes a grim determination to bring Ramu to the right path and make him give up his agricultural profession. A conflict between the two forces thus grows - the force of town life represented by Meenakshi and the force of village life represented by Murugan.

Ramu's paddy-field is heavily flooded and all his crops fall ruining further his economy which he wanted to build up. This is an opportunity for his mother-in-law to take him back to town again, and she pleads for her cause. Ramu finds no alternative and accepts a camp-clerkship in the office of the Collector of Cuddapah, a town far away from his village. He makes his servant Murugan a lessee of his land and leaves for Cuddapah with his wife and
mother-in-law who has been his dependent, she having no other to support her, and no permanent house of her own. Soon Ramu finds that he is unable to maintain the standard of living in the town as expected by his mother-in-law and wife with the poor salary of a clerk. But he must satisfy the women; and he goes to his village, sells his cultivable land there to the village money-lender to whom he had been in debt, and his coconut-garden to Murugan.

Ramu's mother-in-law is happy now. But not so Murugan, though he is now the owner of a little estate and a real tiller of the soil, not a mere servant or a tenant as before. After all he had served not only Ramu but also Ramu's parents so devotedly and had no occasion to be unhappy at any time.

Murugan as the independent tiller of the soil, however, finds his income enhanced beyond his need; and he, too, thus falls a victim to temptation. He forgets his devotion to the field, opens a toddy-shop in the village on the advice of a town-brat, Thoppai. As the wealthy owner of a coconut garden and a toddy-shop, Murugan had made enemies around him who involve him in a riot, get him arrested and imprisoned along with Thoppai and others. The convicted prisoners, however, escape from jail, led by a fellow prisoner who is a robber chieftain. They find their way to Nagalapuram hills to lead a life of outlaws. Soon this gang poses as a threat to the Government.

As for Ramu, his honesty and simplicity impress the Collector of Cuddapah, Mr. Cadell so much that he is soon promoted to
the post of the Deputy Tahsildar at Dusi. Cadell is also promoted the first Member of the Revenue Board in Madras. In this capacity he can easily help Ramu in the execution of a welfare plan prepared by Ramu himself for the backward, rural area around Dusi. The scheme is for irrigation of the area by renovating a lake. If the Government accepts this scheme, it will have to spend a vast sum of money in its execution. But this vast sum is still smaller than the sum they have to spend in maintaining law and order in that area where the people, all poor and starving often revolted and created chaos. The Government, therefore, accepts the scheme gladly and executes it. Soon Ramu's success in the reconstruction of the rural economy around Dusi makes his name a household word in that area as well as amongst the top government officials of Madras.

Ramu now gets an invitation from the Government to investigate the causes and nature of the criminal activities of the outlaws of Nagalapuram hills who have made the Government, the government officers and the Britishers the targets of their attack and have thus become a headache to the Government. Ramu has no experience of police work, of course. But the Government trusts only him, and offers him police help. Ramu takes a select band of policemen and arrives at Nagalapuram hills. Ramu's idea was to make a surprise attack on the dacoits, and after rounding them up, compel them to surrender by love and generous treatment. But as Ramu and his band were resting in their camp, it was they who were rounded up by the dacoits and made prisoners. But Murugan who was
one of the gang soon recognizes his beloved master and bows down to surrender.

Ramu with his affectionate mind and habitual simplicity impresses all the dacoits and he offers to them a rehabilitation plan if they agree to go back to normal life. The dacoits agree and Ramu comes back to secure food and citizenship to the outlaws. For rehabilitation of these outlaws, Mr. Cadell appoints Ramu the sole officer-in-charge of a big irrigation scheme for a new agricultural settlement on the banks of the river Arni. With the active help and co-operation of the outlaws now made lawful citizens, Ramu converts in a year the huge flat area covered with brushwood on the two sides of the Arni into a fertile region. Then still another year's strenuous work by them completes the settlement scheme of a little garden city there where every member will have a three acre holding for cultivation and a garden site with a house.

Ramu is very happy with this work as he completes it; and the foot of the Nagalapuram hills as a garden city now smiles with a new life. There "when Murugan turned the first sod of the virgin soil in his own three acre holding, his own for ever, he felt a divine thrill of joy which only a farmer knows."12 In such a world, in the author's words,

Work was light and play for everyone .... For it was work for their own joy. None slaved for another. And labour was

12. ibid. p.334.
the kind which nourished body, mind and soul. Life was simple and joyous, and man was happy in the lap of Nature, like a babe in the bosom of its mother.  

After the execution of the scheme is completed, Ramu is promoted to the post of a District Collector with the hope of a further promotion to the Membership of the Executive Council. Ramu, however, refuses all those with his usual humbleness; and resigning from the government service, settles himself down in that new settlement as a farmer with a three acre holding.

It is thus seen how the author portrays here an ideal man who will build the India of Gandhi’s dream - a rural India where “none slaved for another. And labour was the kind which nourished body, mind and soul”. It is in this sense that Murugan, the Tiller is a novel with a nationalist theme. The Gandhian idea of going ‘back to the village’ was very much in the air of the time throughout the country; and it is for this that K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar calls it “a tract for the times.”

The novel, however, does not reflect in any other way, the national picture of the time. It does not reflect at all the Indian struggle for freedom though there is a reference to it in a place where we see Ramu’s support for it. For example, Mr. Cadell once asks Ramu, “But how could you aspire for full citizenship or swaraj when things are yet so unripe?” Ramu’s reply to this is,

13. ibid. p.335.
15. K. S. Venkataramani, op.cit., p.147.
"For they can never ripen without Swaraj. We can never learn to swim without getting into water."¹⁶ Except for this stray discussion of or reference to the freedom struggle of the time, there is nothing political in the novel. Even the spirit behind the story seems to be against a political movement against the Government. We see here Ramu, the hero never disillusioned about the Government or the system of administration. He finds the Government always co-operative and sympathetic and always ready to help him in his welfare works; and the domination of the foreign Government does not mean anything to him.

But though the story does not make any appeal as a political novel, the author’s insistence on the reconstruction of the national economy through the development of the economic condition of the villages and his appeal for a love for the country’s tradition become abundantly clear not only from the story but also from the conversations of the characters idealized by the novelist. How the author insists on the country’s tradition through the conversations will be clear from the following.

Coming back from Madras as a repentant man for his Western education, Ramu narrates his misfortune and quotes an English proverb. Then Murugan who is deeply rooted in the Indian tradition as a tiller at once retorts, "There is also one in Tamil, swami: the injured toe injures itself." And the author gives his own comment, "Murugan who was ever anxious for the prestige of his mother-tongue had a secret contempt for the foreign for reasons of his own."¹⁷

Again in the same context repentant Ramu asks Murugan who had put him to an English school in his childhood against their family taste and tradition. "The thing is not in our blood"\(^{18}\) - he says. Murugan's answer here is:

Your father protested that his only son shouldn't speak the foreign tongue lest he utter wrongly the Sandhya prayers or pour the funeral oblations with an alien accent or a scientific disdain. Your were meant for Sanskrit by your father - and I sided with him.\(^{18}\)

Murugan says that it was only for his mother that he had to be sent to an English school.

How the author emphasizes through the same device rural reconstruction like Gandhi would be understood from the following examples. When Cadell read the views of Ramu on rural reconstruction, the former, though a British government officer says, "I agree with your creed that in an agricultural country like India rural reconstruction is the primary thing."\(^{19}\) Later in the same conversation, Ramu observes:

We are powerless in our own land. Just see what happens in a village. By direct taxation, Government takes one third of the gross produce, and yet another third goes in the wake of civilized needs, cloth, kerosine, coffee and sugar, and but one third is left in the village. The rest we have to export.

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We need shelter both from the howling trade winds of civilization and enormous cost of Government. No wonder we are ill fed. And the lands don't yield well. A hungry man is no thinker. He does not and cannot plan his future.  

Such an opinion is, no doubt, Gandhian. That the novelist wants to give a Gandhian tinge to the character of Ramu who holds such views becomes evident when we find Ramu speaking thus to Kedari, his friend:

The glory of motion will be nourished on a painless and non-violent food, dripping from nature as sunlight drips from the sun. The soul of Science is ahimsa, the redemption of all sentient life from violence to others and to itself and from the dull pain of muscular labour.

In the same conversation Ramu later says, "Kedari, half of our misery is self-inflicted and man-made. It springs from lack of courage to utter the truth in thought, word and deed." These are unmistakably Gandhian ideas expressed also in Gandhian idiom.

Murugan, the Tiller is thus a novel depicting primarily the Gandhian ideal of going 'back to the village', and secondarily emphasizing the need for the traditional Indian way of living.

20. ibid. p.175.  
22. ibid. p.289.  
K. S. Venkataramani's next novel Kandan, the Patriot 23 is on the other hand a novel depicting the political aspect of the national struggle of India of the same period. In K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's words, "Murugan is an exponent of Gandhian economics as Kandan is an exponent of Gandhian politics." 24 It reflects the national movement for political freedom under the leadership of Gandhi. The story through which this is shown reflects the influence of Gandhi on the movement; but Gandhi himself is not introduced here as a character. And the novelist seems to have done it with a purpose. He wants to show how every village or town during that period had one Gandhi of its own to lead the people by staying in their midst according to the ideal of the Mahatma who belongs to the whole nation. It is for this that Kandan, the leader of the movement in the novel says to Rajeswari Bai, a dedicated freedom fighter:

Men like Gandhiji, instead of being a world phenomenon to be worshipped like the sun, must grow on every hedge like blackberries. At least every cottage must have one Gandhiji working for its renovation till it is restored to healthy life and needs no Gandhiji for a trumpet call to pure, selfless public work. 25

Let us go to the story for further details. Kandan, the leader of the freedom struggle in a village called Akkur, has given

23. K. S. Venkataramani, Kandan, the Patriot, Svetaranya Ashrama, Madras, 1932.
up his I.C.S. at the probation period and has joined the Indian national movement. Akkur is inhabited by low caste Hindu peasants who are mostly the workers in the estate of a Mirasdar (landlord). The poor, hard working tenants are given to drinking in the toddy-shop of the village landlord; and Kandan wants to reform them according to the ideal of the Congress. The peasants are impressed deeply by Kandan's rare honesty and saintliness. Thus they cannot disobey him when he appeals to them to give up drinking. But the toddy-shop owner grows hostile to Kandan for this.

Another patriot in the novel is Rangan, the I.C.S. officer who was contemporary to Kandan at Oxford. Though an I.C.S. officer, his love for the country and sympathy for the national struggle are deep; and he helps the freedom struggle in his own way. For this, he is transferred from Guntur which was in the thick of the fight to comparatively calm and quiet Tanjore. It is thus a punitive measure against him; and he does not like it. While at Oxford, he loved a Marathi fellow girl student Rajeswari Bai, the daughter of a Bombay millionaire. They had to be married when they were back in India. But coming back, the girl joins the national movement, becomes an active freedom-fighter and postpones the marriage. Rangan now invites her to Madras to discuss his problem of service as well as of his marriage. Rajeswari Bai comes and urges him to give up the government service and join the national movement. She says that only then she would be his. Rangan pleads his case emphasizing the fact that he, too, has been fighting, though his fight is from within. Rajeswari Bai insists on his fighting from without like her and says:
The world is in a ferment, though you see it not with your official eye. We are breaking everything old that we may build something new on a higher valley of life. ... It is a sin for an Indian to toil at the desk in these critical days when the making of a new India is going on before our eyes under the glorious leadership of the greatest living man in the world. 26

Her final words to Rangan are:

You will gain me and your country if you lose the I.C.S. Resign your job and join the Congress work for the masses. If only you have seen the brimming tears of sorrow running down their pale cheeks! Brave imprisonment and lathi-charges and carry the flag of our country to the undreamt of heights of honour - then this frail hand and body is yours for ever - so that the children sprung of our loins may see the light of day in a free country. 27

Nothing is decided, but Rangan proposes to go with her for rest to Tranquebar, a beauty spot in the Coromandel coast so that they may come to a decision there. Rajeswari Bai agrees to go, though in a third class railway compartment only.

The train from Madras to Tranquebar runs along a branch line and Akkur is a railway station on the way. The workers in the estate of the Mirasdar of Akkur are getting restive because they are not receiving their salary for the last three weeks. In

26. ibid. p.22. 27. ibid. p.25.
protest they have burnt the estate of the landlord and set fire to his hayricks. As the train carrying Rangan and Rajeswari Bai stops at that station, the landlord succeeds in persuading Rangan to get down and halt at Akkur to be his guest. At his house, he requests Rangan to make as the Assistant Collector a non-official enquiry into the loot and arson in his estate. The landlord hoped to take revenge upon Kandan who was a god for his workers, with this opportunity. It was, however, found that the landlord’s hope could not be fulfilled, Kandan and Rangan being intimate friends. The Mirasdar was rather won over to the side of Kandan by Rangan’s influence.

All of them including the landlord now leave for Tranquebar where they spend a week. Here the landlord made a final attempt to put down Kandan. But failing, he converts himself into a perfect nationalist. A bad news comes to Rangan at this time. It is that Rangan has been transferred to Palni Hills as an Assistant Settlement officer, and his transfer to Tanjore as the Assistant Collector has been cancelled. This is a degradation for Rangan and it is the result of Rangan’s sympathy for the Indian national struggle. Rangan, who was so far in a dilemma, can then resign his post easily. He now decides to join the freedom struggle actively. He decides forthwith to address a public meeting at Tranquebar to rouse the people of the place to action. All like the idea, though Kandan wants more action than speeches. The meeting is held, and all people of the town and of the nearby villages muster strong at the meeting. The villagers from Akkur including the workers of the landlord’s estate, too, have come with a great enthusiasm. The people have come well ahead of
the time and the meeting bids fair to be the largest one ever held in the town. But soon Police Reserve Forces armed with guns and batons arrive at the place in addition to the local police already deployed as if the Government authority is determined to stop the meeting at any cost.

The Mirasdar of Akkur goes to assure the police that nothing untoward will happen if the meeting is allowed to be held. But the Reserve Police Forces stop him on the way when a scuffle takes place between the police and the people. The police takes resort to lathi-charge and firing and Kandan is mortally wounded by a police bullet. He falls down and is at once surrounded by his friends, co-workers and hundreds of other people who gathered there to hear him, their worshipped leader. As he is dying, he advises them all to devote their life to the cause of freedom and the upliftment of the poor. As Kandan succumbs to death, all people assure him, "We will think of no earthly pleasures till the freedom of the country is won." 28

Besides this main story, there are a few sub-stories also in the novel, all projecting one aspect or the other of the freedom struggle. For example, there is the story of two brothers Raghu and Padma of a village town Shiyali. They run away from home to join the freedom struggle under the leadership of Kandan, Padma leaving his studies even as an under-matriculate, and Raghu the elder leaving his government job of a clerk and his wife, child and mother at home. As he says to his mother when informing her of his

resignation, "Yes, mother, drunk, with the wine of freedom. No more am I a slave at the desk grinding accounts for an alien rule to keep a pampered system going." The mother cannot believe it when Raghu affirms, "Truth, nothing but truth, mother. Are you not proud of me to-day that I have won my freedom so that I may work for the public cause? Mother, the thing is in the air - who can escape it?"

Then there is the story of Sundaram and Saraswati - the Railway Stationmaster of Akkur and his wife. Saraswati feels the urge for joining the national struggle actively and says to her husband, "... in these glorious days when a new India is in the making, you and I must do some noble work for the country." She gets the desired change when she comes into contact with Kandan. Since then, she becomes an active worker winning the deep faith of Kandan as a nationalist worker. Sundaram also catches the spirit; and as he loses his job because of a train collision in the station, he joins the editorial staff of the nationalist paper Swarajya of Madras.

In the same way, there is the story of Kamakshi, a young, poor, helpless maiden of Akkur, devoting her life to the cause of freedom for the country and winning ultimately the Mirasdar's love when the Mirasdar also joins the national struggle. Even Ponnan, a British Government spy whose espionage was the root cause of Rangan's demotion in his service, turns later a nationalist and an active freedom fighter.

29. ibid. p.224. 30. ibid. p.84.
But though in this way, the author shows a cross-section of the national struggle of the Gandhian era, he remains vague in showing in clear terms the activities to which the followers of Gandhi in the novel want to devote themselves. We hear others calling them great nationalists, sincere workers, saintly patriots and all that, but we see them hardly doing anything constructive. We find them lecturing about the struggle in public and in private; but we know little about the exact things they want to do. We once saw Kandan mixing with the village peasants of Akkur in the toddy-shop, appealing to them to give up drinking. But we find him later neither organizing a concrete movement against the British nor doing anything effective for the uplift of those peasants. Even when the tenants of the landlord take resort to loot and arson, Kandan is a silent spectator, helpless and moody. In the public meeting at Tranquebar, too, when the police takes resort to lathi-charge and firing, Kandan is a silent spectator, standing with "wonderful calm and preserve of mind." Thus, though the peasants of Akkur find in him a "reforming saint", a "noble soul", sees "a magnet glow in his eyes", a "glow of kindness in his face", and find a "purifying fire in his speech", Kandan remains for us a mere shadow of a leader with no definite programme of action and no definite leadership.

Rajeswari Bai, too, with her unique sacrifice for the cause of the nation remains a shadow for us in the same way. We hear

about her Oxford education, her father's vast wealth, her active part in the freedom struggle and her indifference to worldly possessions. But we see her seldom in any definite action or taking up any definite programme. She urges Rangan and others to join the struggle, but what exactly is to be done has never been made clear by her.

It must, however, be admitted that though the novelist has failed to show what exactly the nationalist leaders were doing at the time or what they wanted to do, he has been able to make clear what freedom during the Gandhian era meant to the Indians through the conversations of the characters. For illustration, Rangan says to Kandan:

The greatest danger is that the vineyard of liberty reclaimed, tilled and pruned by the labour of the patriot, and manured with the blood of unknown volunteers may be annexed at the harvest time by a few at the top, the merchant, the landlord and the usurer. They may use the gathered power against their own fellow men and exploit the million poor. That must be made impossible in our swaraj. 37

This same Rangan said earlier to Kandan also:

The evil that paralyses our life, Kanda, is not our religious or tribal discords, but the most inequitos and irresponsible system of land tenure which sucks the blood of the poor in a hundred ways. ... The shrivelled hand that plucks the cotton

37. ibid. p.244.
on miles and miles of rich, black acres, does not own even a piece of cotton cloth to cover the shame of a slave's birth. ..., Sweated labour of another, Kand, is the most ancient sorrow of man, but in this sacred land it is the most bitter salt-sea flood, as we lost our freedom both within and without. 38

When Saraswati assures Kandan about what she wants to do, the same spirit is reflected. "Two things we should work for locally; the toddy-shop must go, and Mr. Mudaliar must change from the oppressor to the protector of the poor" 39 - she says. It may be mentioned here that this is the only concrete programme of action chalked out by a character in the novel in clear terms.

In the conversation of Kandan and Padma, too, we see the reflection of the Gandhian spirit of swaraj as in the above quotations. Kandan speaks here against the contemporary system, "Skilled labour is honoured with a surplus gift of money and unskilled which produces the true wealth of the world is coldly treated with a handful of rice so that the body may be kept alive for tomorrow's toil." 40 Padma supports it and says, "Yes, sir, the whole system must be smashed and a new world be built for all, where freedom and equality shall be the base of life." 40 Kandan then adds, "All I care for is economic equality and no chance for one to exploit another." 40

Kandan later sums up his views about swaraj which shows the Gandhian influence on him very clearly:

38. ibid. pp.244-245. 40. ibid. p.183.
We must build our *swaraj* in such a way that we produce no brokers at the top, like worms in cheese, who deal carelessly with the lives of the millions. The tyrant and coward shall not grow in this ancient land of courage and love. The difficulty is not in getting *swaraj*; for we are surely getting it. For ours is a fight to the finish; to live or die as a nation. The test of our new life is not in winning freedom; but in applying it selflessly and courageously to the freedom of all, even to the humblest in the land.⁴¹

As a work of art, *Kandan, the Patriot* is more successful than *Murugan, the Tiller*. The story of *Murugan, the Tiller* was too idealistic to be convincing, its hero Ramu's plans and deeds being more ideal than real. But idealization is not carried that far in *Kandan, the Patriot*. Kandan and Rangan who have given up their covetable and glamorous I.C.S. to fight for the freedom of the country were not quite rare among the Indians during the British rule. Rajeswari Bai's sacrifice at the altar of freedom is also one of the many examples of such sacrifice in the history of the freedom movement in India. The writer's credit lies in his ability to transform these realities of Indian life during the freedom struggle into amusing stories.

The plot of the novel is very skilfully constructed. The love-story of Rangan and Rajeswari is very successfully linked with the story of participation in the freedom struggle. These two stories are again connected well with the story of the involvement

⁴¹. ibid. p.246.
of the village Akkur in the national struggle. All the stories reach their climax in the meeting at Tranquebar where Kandan dies with the assurance of all present that they will not rest until freedom is won. The author's power of telling the story with spontaneity and ornaments of gay, humorous comments and poetic metaphors also contributes to the success of the novel as a work of art.

Lastly, it must be mentioned here that K. S. Venkataramani is the first really successful novelist in whose writing propaganda and artistic skill attained a happy, harmonious combination in the history of Indo-Anglian fiction. In all the novels written before 1927, the date of publication of Murugan, the Tiller, there was no harmony of art and propaganda. Therefore, Venkataramani is the first Indo-Anglian novelist with a true literary urge and true literary gift.

Indira Devi by A. Subrahmanya is another novel which professes to be "frankly political", as we know it from the author's Preface. The sub-title to the novel is also A Romance of Modern Political India. A study of the novel, however, reveals that it is neither really political nor is it a real romance. There are reflections of contemporary political scene. But these are too superficial an addition to deserve the sub-title added to the novel.

42. K. S. Venkataramani has also a collection of short stories to his credit, viz. Jatadharm and Other Stories, Svetaranya Ashrama, Madras, 1937. According to K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar (op. cit., p.226) and H.H. Anniah Gowdah (op.cit., pp.55-57), these stories also express the Gandhian ideal of Indian nationalism. I could not find the book anywhere and read at first hand.

The story which is placed in a little township in a corner of South India is about a girl, Indira. She is the daughter of a Brahmin scholar, the Rao Bahadur who is liberal minded and has considerable hold on the society. Indira, who loves the son of an English I.C.S. officer now dead, is loved by Nabab Kamaluddin, an English educated social democrat. Since Indira does not love this Muslim social democrat, she is disturbed by his audacious advances.

The national movement for abolition of caste system, Hindu-Muslim unity, development of a liberal society - all these have come to the story. A Marriage Bill is passed by the legislative council making inter-caste and inter-religious marriages legal. This Marriage Act gives Kamaluddin's case an edge and he becomes more audacious. Besides, soon the lower caste Hindus who had borne a hatred for the Brahmins now come forward and force the Brahmins to marry their sons and daughters to the sons and daughters of the lower caste Hindus. Indira's father soon chooses a Brahmin youth for Indira; but this disturbs Indira who is in love with an English youth, still more.

An ascetic with the insignia both of a Hindu sanyasi and of a Muslim fakir visits the town at this stage and lectures about the ideas of Indian nationalism as well as about political freedom. Indira hears him and is impressed. In her restlessness, she meets him privately and expresses her desire to be an ascetic like him. He asks her then to join a particular ashrama of that town. She soon joins it; but it is only to find that this is a trap for her laid by Kamaluddin.
An English girl Agnes who was her rival in love with the English youth, takes pity on her. Agnes informs the English youth who is a military Captain of Indira's troubles. The youth Captain Arthur soon hurries to the ashrama and restores Indira from the clutch of Kamal. Indira, all grateful to Agnes, now sacrifices her love for the sake of Agnes. Agnes and Captain Arthur are then married.

With such an artificially contrived love story, the author perhaps wants to reflect the bad effect of a hurried attempt to reform caste system and religious intolerance in the society - an idea of the nationalists which was very much in the air especially in the South about the time when the novel was published. But neither the urgency for such a reformation nor its bad effect has found effective expression in the novel. Indeed, the issue has not been properly assimilated into the texture of the novel. The speeches and dialogues of the characters to this effect do not seem to serve any purpose in view of the fact that inspite of the urgent call of the nationalists for the reformation, Indira suffers piteously when the Bill is passed. And besides, we see that the great exponent of the nationalist idea of a casteless society, religious tolerance and social democracy is nothing but a rogue. Does then the novelist want to show that the desired reformation cannot be brought about by an Act of the Council? We cannot suppose this, too. For Indira's father who did not support the idea behind the Act, did not willingly come forward to give Indira in marriage to the youth of her choice. How can we suppose then that the author's intention is to show that the legislation is not called for, and the people
will willingly reform themselves? The novel, therefore, seems to be without any specific nationalistic or political theme inspite of its sub-title and the Preface.

Despite this lack of purpose, the novel is full of speeches and conversations on social reforms and nationalist ideas of the time. For example, the ascetic lectures at Rao Bahadur's house before some invited guests:

It is not necessary to be of one religion or one community or of one equality to be united, to feel as a nation, as if as a nation you do not want to feel. There is a simpler and larger watchword, to which everyone of you may acknowledge allegiance, and that is 'Country'. Go, engrave it on your banners and hoist the standards. You shall march forward as a nation; for you who inhabit India is the Indian Nation. 44

On another occasion, he lectured:

I have no message but one that Mother India has handed down to her children from the immemorial past. The Great Lord Parameswara is only One. Live into the idea. See, I bear the symbols of the Mahomedan Fakir, his stone beads and the grey ash of the Hindu ascetic. To me both are the same. Fools quarrel about religion. India's ideal of life is service. We are all children of the same mother, Mother India. 45

But as it has been already pointed out, inspite of many such lectures, the novel does not fall into the category of a

44. ibid. p.131. 45. ibid. p.109.
political novel. Neither is it a successful work of literary art. The author’s portraiture of the characters are all failures, the characters being all unconvincing and unreal. The language of the novel is also dull and drab.

But when we come to Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable, we come to a really great work of art dealing with an aspect of the Indian national movement under the leadership of Gandhi. Like Murugan, the Tiller and Indira Devi, it also does not directly deal with the political aspect of the national movement. Its theme is the prejudice of the Hindus against their brethren of the lowest sweeper class as pointed out earlier. But the writer has dealt with this problem of the Hindu society against the political background of India of the thirties of this century; and the background and the theme are so harmoniously related in this social novel that it can be treated as a political novel of the time as well.

It is already shown how for strengthening of the Indian nation, Gandhi insisted on eradication of the prejudice of the high caste Hindus against the low castes especially against the sweepers who were regarded as untouchables. It has also been shown how the Communal Award of 1932 gave a political edge to the problem; and the movement for eradication of untouchability from the Hindu society came to be included as a part of the national movement of the time. Mulk Raj Anand has shown in this novel the magnitude of this problem both from national and social considerations.

The novel depicts a story of the time when Ramsay-MacDonald Award of 1932 was announced and Gandhi went on a fast in protest
against it because he, with his great sympathy for the lowly castes of the Hindu society had been working tirelessly for their upliftment, lecturing in public meetings, writing essays and editorials, collecting funds for their welfare and living often with them and sharing their sorrows and sufferings. As Gandhi himself as a character in the novel speaks in a public meeting after his fast and subsequent release from the jail:

I have emerged from the ordeal of a penance, undertaken for a cause which is dear to me as life itself. The British Government sought to pursue a policy of divide and rule in giving to our brethren of the depressed classes separate electorates in the Councils that will be created under the new constitution. I do not believe that the bureaucracy is sincere in its efforts to elaborate the new constitution. But it is one of the conditions under which I have been released from gaol that I shall not carry on propaganda against the Government. ⁴⁶

Through the depiction of the eighteen year old sweeper-boy Bakha's bitter experiences from morning till evening of a day of his life, the author shows very clearly and appealing his "sympathies for this character because of the centuries of exploitation and suffering that has been his lot" ⁴⁷ as well as his "indignation at the society that so treats a fellow human being." ⁴⁸

⁴⁸. ibid. p.111.
All the bitter experiences of the boy in the Hindu society make him realize, "They think we are dirt because we clean their dirt." With a feeling of irredeemable humiliation and servility, Bakha goes out in the afternoon to a solitary place, "utterly given up to despair." He finds then hundreds of people going to a public meeting which will be addressed by Mahatma Gandhi. He at once starts moving towards the meeting ground. And the author shows in this context the influence of Gandhi on the people of the time. As for Bakha, "He had not asked himself where he was going. He had not paused to think. The word 'Mahatma' was like a magical magnet to which he, like all other people rushed blindly."

On the way, in his attempt to make a short cut to the meeting place, Bakha jumps a fence into a garden when hundreds of others, all mesmerized like him by Gandhi's influence, follow him. While straightening their way over the garden they damage "the beautiful garden bowers planted by the ancient Hindu kings and since then neglected." Anand looks upon this as symbolic and writes:

It was as if the crowd had determined to crush everything, however ancient or beautiful, that lay in the way of their achievement of all that Gandhi stood for. It was as if they knew, by an instinct surer than that of conscious knowledge, that the things of the old civilization must be destroyed in order to make room for those of the new. It was as if in trampling on the blades of green grass, they were deliberately,

50. *ibid.* p. 100.  
52. *ibid.* p. 115.
brutally trampling on a part of themselves which they had
begun to abhor, and from which they wanted to escape to
Gandhi.  

Arriving at the meeting place, he as an untouchable
waits for Gandhi in a little thinly crowded part at one end of the
ground.

He was in the midst of a humanity which included him in its
fold and yet debarred him from entering into a sentient,
living, quivering contact with it. Gandhi alone united him
with them, in the mind, because Gandhi was in everybody's
mind, including Bakha's, Gandhi might unite them really.  

As Bakha waits, he hears people around him talking about
Gandhi, and from these talks the author shows the deep influence
of this undisputed leader on the minds of the people. He was to
them "a legend, a tradition, an oracle." As Bakha is waiting
for Gandhi, he recalls what people say about this extra-ordinary
man:

Only recently he heard that a spider had woven a web in the
house of the Lat Sahib (Viceroy) at Dilli (Delhi), making a
portrait of the sage, and writing his name under it in Eng­
lish. That was said to be a warning to the sahibs to depart
from Hindustan, since God Almighty Himself had sent a message
to a little insect that Gandhi was to be the Maharaja of the
whole Hindustan.  

53. ibid. p.115.
55. ibid. p.117.
Bakha further remembers how people say that no sword can cut the Mahatma's body, no bullet could pierce his skin, and no fire could scorch him. Bakha hears then a 'rustic' ask a 'Babu' if Gandhi will be able to overthrow the Government. The 'Babu's' reply is, "He has the shakti (power) to change the whole world. The British Government is nothing." 57

Gandhi comes at last with flower petals showered upon him, garlands hung around his neck and amidst cries of Mahatma Gandhi Ki-ai, Hindu-Mussulman-Sikh Ki-ai and Harijan Ki-ai. As the meeting is about to begin, the Mahatma raises his right arm from the folds of his shawl and blesses the crowd. At once "the babble of voices die out, as if he had sent an electric shock through the mass of humanity gathered at his feet." 58 And the author comments, "This strange man seemed to have the genius that could, by a single dramatic act, rally multi-coloured, multi-tongued India to himself." 58

Gandhi's topic in the meeting was untouchability, apparently a harmless topic for the British Government. But he opens this social subject against the background of contemporary Indian politics:

As we all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of the foreign nation, we have ourselves for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse for our inequity. 59

Some of the things Gandhi says against the Hindu society in the course of his speech are: "The fact that we address God as 'the purifier of the polluted-souls' makes it a sin to regard anyone born in Hinduism as polluted - it is satanic to do so." Then again:

I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should wish to be reborn as an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from their miserable condition.

Towards the end of his speech, he says:

All public wells, temples, roads, schools, sanatoriums, must be declared open to the untouchables. And if you all profess to love me, give me a direct proof of your love by carrying on propaganda against the observance of untouchability. Do this, but let there be no compulsion or brute force in securing this end. Peaceful persuasion is the only means. Two of the strongest desires that keep me in the flesh are the emancipation of the untouchables and the protection of the cow. When these two desires are fulfilled, there is swaraj, and there lies my soul's deliverance.

The novel thus deals with the Hindu social problem of untouchability against its political background of the time, depicting

at the same time people's faith in Gandhi as their leader in the national movement and his magnetic influence on the people.

Many novelists and short story writers have introduced Gandhi as a character; but whereas most of their novels and short stories remain simply in the documentary level serving at the best the purpose of portraying the superficial political scene only and at the worst, satisfying the craving of the readers to know more and more about this phenomenon called Gandhi, this novel transcends these levels. The introduction of Gandhi serves a very significant purpose here in both the aspects of the theme, political and social. Without the appearance of Gandhi in flesh and blood and without his speech, Bakha's oppressed mind would not have been soothed; and in that case the novelist would not have been able to show this illiterate, untouchable boy's nationalist feelings inspite of his own problems of life in the society. The novelist's success lies in the fact that the portraiture of Gandhi has been quite real and faithful and the speech given in his lips has also been in the exact idioms in which Gandhi spoke in reality.

What makes the novel really great is that the wounded feelings and sufferings of a particular Indian untouchable have attained a universal significance. The use of the method of stream-of-consciousness has been quite effective and this has also contributed to the success of this 'great little' novel, to borrow a phrase from the novel itself where the author has used it to describe Gandhi.63

63. ibid. p.120.
The Sword and the Sickle by Mulk Raj Anand is another novel where there is a reflection of the Indian freedom struggle during the twenties and the thirties. But unlike other Indo-Anglian political novels which reflect the main trend of the Indian national struggle led by the Congress with approval, this novel reflects a trend of the movement which is not based on any clear political philosophy or which is not sanctioned by any of the political parties of the country of the period. The author himself does not depict it with a spirit of approval. To be concrete, the novel depicts a peasant movement, the unenlightened leaders of which are as much devoted to Gandhism as they are to Marxism. And the goal they aim at is as much freedom from foreign rule as it is from exploitation and oppression of the Indian Rajas and zamindars. Of course, the Indian Rajas and zamindars are also shown here as agents of the foreign rulers; and freedom from the oppression of these agents is considered possible when freedom from the British rule is won.

Lal Singh, a Punjabi youth who comes back to his village after being freed from a German prison camp in the first World War, quits his village again, eloping with the landlord's daughter and led by a political leader of a peasant movement in the U.P. They arrive at a village, thirty-seven miles away from Allahabad, and become the guest of a 'Count' - the elder brother of the Raja of Rajgarh. This 'Count' Kanwar Rampal Singh refused to succeed to the landlordship; and thus his younger brother became the Raja in his place. Rampal Singh remained a commoner, a benevolent leader of the poor peasants whom he rouses to put an end to the tyranny
of the rich over the poor. He caught this spirit of Marxism
when he had been to Germany.

With Prof. Verma and Lalu, Rampal Singh organizes the
peasants of Rajgarh as well as those of the nearby Nasirabad es-
tate for the revolution to end tyranny, oppression and exploita-
tion of the landlords who, to them, are the agents of the British
Government. In their thought, belief and method, they are inclined
to communism though consciously they appear to follow the Congress
policy of that time. Their revolutionary plans and activities are,
however, foiled again and again by the reactionary forces of the
two estates which are backed by the Government until at last their
movement dissipates and Rampal Singh, Lalu and the chief peasant
workers find themselves in jail.

Through such a plot, the author has depicted a very clear
picture of the movement amongst the peasants though as already hin-
ted at, this picture does not represent the main trend of the con-
temporary national movement. It rather reflects a side trend of
the national movement - the communist movement of the time as it
gained ground in the villages. The author’s purpose is, however,
not to depict the communist movement also clearly and sympatheti-
cally. He has reflected the peasant movement in the village with an
admirable detachment bringing to the picture all the follies of its
leaders, their lack of discernment and understanding of the situa-
tions, and want of proper study of the 'ism' they have followed.
The author is equally detached to the Congress movement of the time,
though he has suggested the great influence of it on the people.
Even Gandhi who has been introduced into the novel as a character has been an object of mild satire, just as the communist leaders of the movement in the village have been.

For example, the great leader of the communist movement at Rajgarh, the 'Count' who has forgone his landlordship, poses as a communist dedicating his life to the emancipation of the oppressed peasants, quoting 'Comrade Lenin' and Marx frequently, and celebrating the anniversary of the Russian Revolution with the peasants. But at the same time, he retains his feudal love for authoritarian power, commanding not only the peasants under his leadership but also trying to command the government police. Though devoted to Lenin and Marx, when he has to choose between the supporters of a Marxist Trade Union and the supporters of Gandhi, he with his peculiar wrong headed policy chooses the latter. Quite naturally, he fails to win Gandhi's support for his revolution. He then tries to win Nehru's support, Nehru being regarded by him and his followers as an ideal revolutionary, though none of them knows what type of a revolutionary Nehru is.

Gandhi has mostly been shown here through the eyes of these peasant leaders and workers who do not have real faith in Gandhian ideology and cannot understand him properly. It is for this that the portraiture of Gandhi, too, has not been a very bright one here. The author has not allowed himself to be swept away by the emotional adoration for this great leader. For example, when the peasant movement at Rajgarh has received a set-back, a labourer being dead while doing forced labour in the Nawab's estate,
and one revolutionary peasant worker killed in the hands of the Manager of the Nawab's estate, the peasants have the fortune to meet Gandhi at the Anand Bhawan, Allahabad. As Lalu has an interview with Gandhi with a hope to find a solution to the serious problem they have faced, he finds the Mahatma too much preoccupied with such conservative things as Sanatani Hindu religion and protection of the cow. In the author's words:

Lalu had not quite expected the Mahatma to define his religion so narrowly as to call himself a Sanatani Hindu, a sect which was notorious for its conservative fanaticism. And he wondered how this man, who had been to Europe and who had imbibed so much learning could talk like that.64

Then Lalu hears the Mahatma dictating to one the words, "Suffering is the mark of human tribe. It is an eternal law. The mother suffers so that the child may live."65 To Lalu who had gone to seek the Mahatma's advice for alleviating the sufferings of the peasants, this is intolerable. Then comes the Mahatma's refusal to go to Rajgarh at Lalu's invitation. Lalu and his party are then completely embittered with Gandhi; and their later comments on him, his words and deeds are rather critical.

In contrast to this, Nehru appears as an idealized character. But even this has been done through the eyes and minds of the peasant revolutionaries who do not properly understand Nehru either. They admire Nehru not for his ideas which they do not understand, but because they know him as "the solemn young son"66 of Motilal

64. ibid. p.192. 66. ibid. p.201.
65. ibid. p.192.
Nehru, and because he is "known to be a 'revolutionary'." Anand thus maintains an ambivalent attitude to this aspect of the national movement of the twenties and thirties of the century. Indeed, the main theme of the novel is more a criticism of the peasant movement of the country of that time than an approbatory picture of it. As the Marxian leader Sharar in the novel itself criticizes it:

You people may have the best intentions, but, then they say in English, the road to hell is paved with best intentions! And, laziness of the kind, which goes on believing in primitivism and does not lay stress on intelligent organization and solidarity among the workers, betrays not only a lack of confidence in the revolutionary movement of the people but also a kind of unconscious contempt and hatred of the masses.

No such criticism of the Gandhian movement which, of course, remains away from the main theme of the novel. The Sword and the Sickle, therefore, depicts the phase of the Indian national movement under discussion in the sense that here we see one trend of the movement in its vortex and in its dissipation very clearly, though the main movement itself is seen here only from a distance. This particular trend has been depicted with a critical attitude so that through the demonstration of the follies of its romantic heroes who merely refurbish their own egos while staging the revolt, people can be made aware of a danger which is likely to

67. ibid. p.201. 68. ibid. p.338.
befall them as they fight for their freedom. And once we accept this interpretation, Meenakshi Mukherjee's charges against the novel that here "irony and deadly seriousness are mingled in much confusion" and "the reader cannot be sure if the fantastic 'Count', his comic aspirations, and Lalu's absurd undertakings are at all to be taken seriously", would ring false. Her contention is based on her consideration of the novel as a social novel like The Village while it appears to us to be a political novel depicting the political ambivalence of the time.

Shankar Ram has two volumes of short stories, viz. The Children of the Kaveri and Creatures All and a novel Love of Dust to his credit. All the three deal with rural life in South India. Love of Dust depicts a story of the peasants in an interior village on the bank of the Kaveri. Though Srinivasa Iyengar in his Indian Writing in English and P. P. Mehta in his Indo-Anglian Fiction find the Gandhian influence in this work, it is very difficult to find where this influence lies except perhaps in the love of the peasants for their fields. The story of the novel is a common story of love and hatred, joys and sorrows of the peasants, and in this we see nothing which reflects the impact of Gandhi. To me, therefore, Love of Dust reflects no Gandhian influence, though for writing such

71. Shankar Ram, Creatures All, A. N. Purnah, Madras, 1931.
a story, the novelist might have been inspired by Gandhi's appeal for going 'back to the village'.

The next novelist who uses the national struggle of the Gandhian era for his novel is Raja Rao, a great Indo-Anglian novelist after Mulk Raj Anand, and his novel is *Kanthapura*. In technique, *Kanthapura* which is the author's first novel, stands at a peculiarly advanced position as does Anand's *Untouchable*; for it is written in the technique of a dramatic monologue as *Untouchable* is written in the technique of the stream-of-consciousness. In most places, its prose verges on poetry. An old grandmother goes on narrating her experiences of the struggle for freedom of the thirties of this century, as it took place in her village. Her narration is not in the form of a well-knitted story. It is more a string of memories wet with ardour and emotion than a well-shaped story.

What she narrates, however, as her own experiences in her village Kanthapura, situated in an interior part of the Mysore state, are the common experiences of all the men and women of the country, especially of the villages, during the freedom struggle led by Gandhi. The credit of the author lies in the fact that he has been able to express so very appealingly and successfully this common story of all the villages of the country as a particular story of an individual woman. No novel till 1939 expressed so distinctly all the various aspects of the freedom struggle of the

period together within its compass. Here we are shown, or rather
told of, all the major political activities of the Congress during
the thirties, i.e. the Dandi march of Gandhi and his followers in
1930 to inaugurate the Civil Disobedience Movement, the response
of the villagers to the Movement by way of launching satyagraha on
their part, observing non-co-operation by not paying taxes and
showing disloyalty to the Government, the formation of the Cong­
ress Committees in the far-flung villages and their constructive
programmes, Jawaharlal Nehru's social programmes, the decision
of Gandhi to attend the second Round Table Conference, and above
all, Gandhi's all-pervading influence on the nation from the begin­
ning of the story till the end. And then we find here the various
social programmes of the Congress during the period, viz. emphasis
on the removal of untouchability, on spinning as a step towards
self-dependence, propaganda and demonstrations against drinking,
and the like. While showing these, the satyagraha of the Congress
volunteers, fasts by Gandhi's followers, police atrocities on
the Congress demonstrators - these are also very vividly shown.
What makes this novel a distinctive success is that all these pic­
tures have not remained mere pictures showing the freedom struggle
in the surface alone, but they have all combined together to reveal

75. ibid. pp.182-201.
76. ibid. pp.206-209.
77. ibid. pp.100-111.
78. ibid. pp.256-257.
80. ibid. pp.57-66.
81. ibid. pp.28-33.
82. ibid. pp.182-200.
83. ibid. pp.182-200.
84. ibid. pp.90-99.
the true spirit of the age of Gandhi — the spirit that strived to win freedom both politically in the common sense and morally in the Gandhian sense.

In order to show how this spirit of the age has been revealed in the book, I shall analyse a few aspects of the novel. The first aspect is, of course, the setting of the story in a village which has given the author an opportunity to show the traditional Indian "religious life which supports an elaborate social structure and preserves its organic character through the ages and serves as a sure foundation for the success of the national movement in Gandhi's hands and, therefore, in the hands of his followers like young Moorthy of the novel."

Kanthapura is a village situated in the hilly region of Mysore towards the Malabar coast. It is a village with "narrow, dusty, rut-covered roads" that wind through the hills and connect this interior village with the outside world. All the inhabitants of this village, whether they are Brahmins or pariahs, are steeped in the Hindu religious beliefs and superstitions, Rama, Krishna, Siva and other Hindu deities being to them still living realities. As the author himself puts it so nicely in the Foreword to his novel:

There is no village in India, however, mean, that has not a rich sthala-purana, or a legendary history, of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village — Rama might


have rested under this pipal-tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow tree, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one by the village gate.

In the temple they observe different religious festivals where religious scriptures are read out, explained, and heard with reverence. But to such regular religious functions gradually come Gandhi-bhajans, talks of swaraj, Hindu-Muslim unity and Khaddar to alternate with traditional religious talks. Moorthy, a young man of noble character who has given up his college education to follow Gandhi is the leader of these uneducated but sincere men and women of Kanthapura. Thus the villagers of Kanthapura who only know their religion and their paddy fields gradually come to know Gandhi, not as a political leader, not as one standing against the foreign rule, but as a Krishna or a Rama. As they hear from the village bard at the Harikatha in the temple:

You remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four, had begun to fight against demons and had killed the serpent Kali. So, too, our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of our country. And as he grew up and after he was duly shaven for the hair ceremony, he began to go out into the villages and assemble people and talk to them, and his voice was so pure, his forehead so brilliant with wisdom, that men followed him, more and more men followed him as they did Krishna, the flute-player. 88

88. ibid. p.22.
Or, as later, the grandmother the narrator of the story says:

They say the Mahatma will go to the redman's country and he will get us swaraj. He will bring us swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall all be happy. And Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravana will be slain and Sita freed. 89

Gandhi is thus their Krishna the demon-killer or Rama the slayer of Ravana. Such a race of people who see their religious tradition everywhere is entangled in the political movement of the country for freedom and they fight the battle — men and women alike with all innocence and sincerity, daring baton-charge, bayonet-charge and gun-firing, courting arrest and suffering imprisonment under the spell of those cries with magic effect as Mahatma Gandhi Ki-ai and Vande Mataram.

And what a leader these people have found among them in Moorthy, a saint among men, a veritable Gandhi! As the people of Kanthapura say:

He is our Gandhi. The state of Mysore has a Maharaja, but that Maharaja has another Maharaja who is in London, and that one has another in Heaven, and so everybody has his own Mahatma, and this Moorthy who has been caught in our eyes playing as a child, is now grown up and great, and he has his wisdom in him and he will be our Mahatma. 90

For his honesty, nobility and sincerity, he won love and affection from all from his childhood. To the villagers, he is "as honest as an elephant" who, in the words of the villagers again, "was a nice brahminic boy" who had "neither smoked nor grew city-hair, nor put on suits and hats and boots", "a deep voiced god-loving person." Religious by nature like other villagers, he establishes a temple in the village with the co-operation of all and starts holding Sankara-Jayanthi, Harikatha etc. regularly; and he intersperses these religious functions with the new politically biased religious functions like Gandhi-bhaian and Gandhi-katha. Though his Gandhian ways of living - going from house to house, visiting all the quarters of the villages including the Sudra quarter and the pariah quarter and advising people to throw off caste-rules shock many of the villagers deeply rooted in their tradition, yet at the same time he wins the heart of all. There, of course, remain a few self-centred, incorrigible British supporters who pretend to be saviours of Hinduism and go against the Gandhian ideal of a casteless society. These men excommunicate Moorthy; but he remains firm in his own mission.

He keeps in touch with the Congress Committee of the nearest town and organizes the villagers according to the Congress principles - distributing spinning wheels and cotton free from the Congress and exhorting them to put on home-spun khaddar only. As he says to the villagers:

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91. ibid. p.18.  
92. ibid. p.48.  
93. ibid. p.48.  
94. ibid. p.51.
Millions and millions of yards of foreign cloth come to this country, and everything foreign makes us poor and pollutes us. To wear cloth spun and woven with your god-given hands is sacred, says the Mahatma. And it gives work to the workless, and work to the lazy. ... Our country is being bled to death by foreigners. We have to protect our Mother.  

After he forms the Congress Committee in his own village, gets it affiliated to the Provincial Congress Committee and works whole-heartedly for it, he is arrested and given three years' rigorous imprisonment. As he undergoes trial, advocates and barristers with national bias come forward to plead for him, students form a Defence Committee and raise fund for their beloved leader's defence, and merchants and businessmen come forward with open hands to secure his release. But Moorthy said with all humility 'no' to them. "I shall speak that which Truth prompteth, and Truth needeth no defence."  

"... if Truth needeth a defence, God Himself would need one, for as the Mahatma says, Truth is God."  

After the release of Moorthy, Gandhi launches the Civil Disobedience Movement with his historic Dandi march. And the Kanchapura people hearing with all devotion the story of this great pilgrim's progress in his march get exalted and want their leader Moorthy to give signal to them for similar action. As one of the villagers says:

I do not imagine the Mahatma like a man or god, but like the Sahyadri Mountains, blue, high, wide, and the rock of the

95. ibid. p.29.  
96. ibid. p.125.  
97. ibid. p.126.
evening that catches the light of the setting sun. That's what he is. High and yet seeable, firm and yet blue with dusk, and as the pilgrims march up the winding path, march through pickles and boulders, thickets and streams, so shall we march up to the top.

Moorthy launches the campaign in the village by taking out a procession to the toddy-grove to offer satyagraha there when the innocent, unarmed processionists including Moorthy become the victim of police atrocity. In their next campaign, they lead out a procession to the toddy-booth at the coffee-estate where they are again subjected to police atrocity. As the part of the same Civil Disobedience Movement which they call 'Don't-touch-the-Government' Campaign, the villagers take resort to non-payment of revenue to the Government. And then, quite unexpectedly Moorthy disappears; and none knows where he has gone or what has happened to him.

On the basis of such activities performed by the hero within such a short span of his life, the author has created an idealized character after the image of Gandhi like Kandan of Venkataramani. Both play the part of Gandhi in their own villages and stand amongst the villagers as pillars of Gandhian ideals, firm and yet humble. But Raja Rao's Moorthy is more distinct, more real and more of an active leader with a definite programme of the movement before him.

98. ibid. p.176.
The next aspect of the novel that contributes to its success as a political novel is the depiction of the national movement itself during the particular period. The depiction is so real, vivid and masterly that the novel may be called a small mirror of the age itself. When Moorthy the college student is inspired with the Gandhian ideal, he propagates the ideas of social reform by breaking the caste-bar, introducing inter-caste marriage and widow-remarriage, abolishing child-marriage and such other evil practices. He also helps spread Congress ideals of reconstruction of national economy.

As the peasants of the village come thus under the spell of Gandhi, so also the coolies of the nearby Skeffington Coffee Estate. When the coolies hear that the Estate authority would set police upon them, they say in defiance, "What is a policeman before a Gandhi's man?" — and wait eagerly for Moorthy's coming to them almost with a religious ardour. As Moorthy comes, police do not allow him to speak and the result proves disastrous. Though Moorthy faces the police calmly, he loses control of the coolies; and in the police-coolie encounter, many are hurt. Moorthy goes consequently on a three day fast which is a replica of Gandhi's self-purificatory fast of 1933 against violence at Chauri Chaura. His words in support of his fast remind us of the words of Gandhi in support of his own fast. Moorthy says that much violence has been caused because of him and that "were he full of radiance of \textit{ahimsa} such things should never have happened."\footnote{ibid. p.84.} \footnote{ibid. p.90.} During the
course of his fast he explains to his people like a true disciple of Gandhi, "If only we could not hate, if only we would show fearless, calm affection towards our fellow men, we would be stronger, and not only would the enemy yield, but he would be converted."  

When Gandhi launches the Civil Disobedience Movement by marching to Dandi, Moorthy keeps telling his men about "the pilgrim path of Mahatma from day to day; for day after day the Congress Committee sent him information."  

The night preceding the morning when the Mahatma is to make salt at the sea, the people of Kanthapura cannot sleep in their eager waiting for the success of the Mahatma. In the morning at five when the Mahatma has to make salt, all the people of Kanthapura - men, women, boys and girls, find themselves in the river crying out Mahatma Gandhi Ki-jaai and taking a dip in the river in token of their co-operation with the Mahatma. And the following morning they hear about Gandhi's success, about how he had taken a handful of salt after his ablutions and brought it home and then how "everybody went to the sea to prepare salt, and cartloads and cartloads of it began to be brought back and distributed from house to house with music and clapping of hands."  

After this comes the sad news to the village that the Mahatma has been arrested; and the people of Kanthapura are stunned, and they do not know what to do. Moorthy advises them to go on fast for the day, hold meetings and Gandhi-bhalans and get

101. ibid. p.96.  
102. ibid. p.172.  
103. ibid. p.174.
ready for 'Don't-touch-the Government' Campaign from the next week in their own village. And as the campaign is launched, Moor-
thy exhorts his people:

... remember each one of you is responsible for the harm done by another, and the first time violence is done against the Police or those that are not with us, we shall stop the movement and wait for six months and more in penance and in prayer that our sins may be purified. Brothers and sisters, remember we are not out to fight the white man or the white man's slaves, the Police or the Revenue officials, but against the demonic corruption that has entered their hearts, and the purer we are, the greater will be our victory, for the victory we seek is the victory of the heart. 104

Soon not only Kanthapura but also the whole country is charged with the spirit of satyagraha and Civil Disobedience.

It is the same from Kailas to Kanyakumari and from Karachi to Kachar, and shops are closed and bonfires lit, and khadi is the only thing that is sold, while processions and songs and flag salutations go through the streets, picketings and prabhat pherries, and the Police will beat and soldiers open fire, and the millions and millions of our brothers and sisters be thrown into prison. 105

The movement at Kanthapura depicted by the author thus shows us very well how the ancient people in the villages of the

country were roused to the new national consciousness through the electrified impact of the great leader of Indian nationalism.

The last aspect of the novel that focuses some light on Indian nationalism is that of the technique. An old woman narrates her own experiences before some silent listener or listeners; and through her narrative, the whole movement is brought before the eyes of the readers. The woman's own narration of her own experiences in her own village has given a verisimilitude to the story. Because of this technique, the reader has been able to see and be convinced of the woman's participation in the movement not only physically but also morally and mentally.

The same nationalist zeal of the author can be seen in two stories of the book entitled The Cow of the Barricades, viz. in Narsiga and The Cow of the Barricades. Narsiga reflects the impact of Gandhi on the Indian mind, especially on the child-mind during the period of freedom struggle under the leadership of Gandhi. The Cow of the Barricades, the title story of the book, on the other hand, shows the essentially religious nature of the Indians which got mixed with their newly awakened national spirit.

The next novelist to come after Raja Rao is K. Nagarajan with his novel Athawar House, a family chronicle in the tradition of Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga. The author tells here the story of

107. K. Nagarajan, Athawar House, Higginbothoms, Madras & Bangalore, n.d. (The Bombay University catalogued it at 1940 and thus it must be published in 1940 or before. Iyengar puts it at 1939 while Dorothy Spencer puts it at 1937).
a Maratha joint family in a Madras Presidency village and a town of the twenties and thirties of this century, and of their gradual transformation from the traditional conservatism to modern liberalism. But while showing this through the story, the author has also shown the influence of the national struggle under Gandhi on the town and on the family. The author, however, has shown no attachment of his own to the nationalists of his story; neither has he made the national movement the theme of his novel. The picture of the national struggle has come here only as a background to the story of the family. In one aspect, however, the novelist seems to be consciously occupied with Indian nationalism. It is the aspect of the integration of the people of different regions of the country into one compact nation.

But though the novelist's main theme is not the political movement of the Indians for freedom, the scenes of the freedom struggle that find place here are all quite vivid; sometimes they are even drawn from real history. The three parts into which the family chronicle is divided are also arranged according to the history of the Indian freedom struggle. Part I starts at 1919 when the Rowlatt Bill was passed; and it ends in 1921 when subsequent to the landing of the Prince of Wales at Bombay, there were an all-India hartal and arrests of Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, Lajpat Rai and 25000 other Congress workers. Part II begins at 1925 when the Members of the Swarajya Party were directed to walk out of the Legislatures at Kanpur session of the Congress. It ends at 1928 when the Congress session at Calcutta accepted the constitution as drafted by the Motilal Nehru Convention. Part III begins
at 1929 when the Terrorists threw a bomb at the Assembly at Delhi, the Viceroy declared Dominion status for India, and the Congress session at Lahore declared complete independence as its goal. This part ends in 1934 when the Civil Disobedience Movement was withdrawn by the Congress. It is, however, not that the author has always made direct mention of the importance of all these events in the novel itself. But his reference to and even descriptions of many of the important events of the national struggle and the division of the novels in reference to above mentioned particular dates point to his consciousness of the political events of those particular years.

But what are the references to or descriptions of the freedom struggle the author makes in the novel? In the first chapter, the author introduces the political aspect through Raghu's political consciousness. He, a young member of the Athawar House, a graduate who could not get a job under the British Government, is critical of the British rule and a supporter of the Home Rule League of Dr. Annie Besant. He is very critical of the Rowlatt Bill passed at the time. In the same part we see the I.C.S. officer Anantakrishna Aiyar's teenager son Venkataramani's involvement as a school-boy in the freedom struggle. The I.C.S. officer is worried with his little son's conduct and asks him, "... what is your Headmaster doing about that he does not put a stop to all this nonsense?" And the boy's reply is, "What can the Headmaster do? He can't prevent boys from staying away. What power has he to do that? He is not a greater man than Mahatma Gandhi." 108

108. ibid. p.71.
In the same part we also see the organizational activities of Laxman Doss, the Secretary of the Congress Committee of Gandindi. He has invited Chandrakanta De of Bengal who has a fine record of public service and had been a fellow worker with Gandhi in the past. De who has a very fine oratory, is one of Gandhi's most trusted men in the present. When Chandrakanta De who reminds us very much of Surendranath Banerjea, arrives at Gandindi, thousands of people throng at the place where De has to address them. The meeting is, however, banned in time and the people dispersed by the police. De does not care for and he still addresses the public in defiance of the police order:

Adopt the creed of non-co-operation, which is the only means of our national salvation. Eschew the law courts and Government aided schools and boycott foreign cloth for all you are worth. Above all, remember the doctrine of ahimsa and decline to have any truck with violence. Go, good men of Gandindi, fight the good fight by peaceful means and help Mother India to come to her own. 109

De is soon arrested; and his trial reminds us of the trial of Surendranath Banerjea in Calcutta for Contempt of the Court. On his trial day, the people of Gandindi observe a complete fast and collect at the court. The students also abstain from their classes and come out in a body to the court. As for De himself, he refuses to participate in the proceedings of the court in keeping with the spirit of the non-co-operation movement. The case

109. ibid. p.76.
gives him one month's simple imprisonment; and as the crowd hears it, they lose control over themselves in their protest. At once a scuffle takes place between the police and the people.

In Part II, Gopinath, an elder member of the Athawar House wants to seek election to the District Board of Kedaram, and Raghunath, his younger brother with a nationalist bias forbids him. Raghunath "hated the idea of an Athawar seeking election at a time when the whole country has declared for (sic.) non-co-operation, and had gone in for wholesale boycott of Councils of every description." 110

In Part III, the author depicts the launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement by Gandhi with his march to Dandi. He had marched to the sea-coast, exhorting the people all along the route to break the salt law. Clad in a loin cloth, staff in hand, he marched along, followed by a ragged band of followers, the whole thing looking like an Old Testament picture come to life. ... Government, however, considered it as a direct challenge to the authority and proceeded to deal with it accordingly; and early in May, Gandhi shared the fate of many of his lieutenants and was put away in jail. 111

Under the leadership of Lakshman Doss, Gandindi also participates in the Civil Disobedience Movement. As the first step,

110. ibid. p.110.  
111. ibid. p.225.
a public meeting in the town condemns the imprisonment of Gandhi and others. Besides, Lakshman Doss launches a vigorous propaganda for the boycott of foreign cloth withicketing parties to prevent people from making purchase in the shops of foreign cloth dealers.

But inspite of all these, the novelist himself does not show any leaning to the movement in these depictions. This is best seen in his portraiture of the character of Venkataramani. In the earlier part of the novel, he has shown Venkataramani the school boy as an ardent follower of Gandhi and the Congress, acting as a Congress volunteer and listening to the speeches of the nationalist leaders. When Chandrakanta De is arrested and his father the Sub-Divisional Officer says that it is he who would have to try De and send him to jail, the son shrugs his shoulders and says, "What a shame!" 112 On the trial day of De, Venkataramani is arrested, though later released. His father is perturbed over this and the boy is sent away to Kedaram to be with his grandfather. On the way, he is met by Raghunath who encourages him calling him "little Gandhi" and consoling with the words: "Don't be downhearted, my dear fellow. You have done nothing to be ashamed of. You need not have begun so early, still it does not matter. I hope, people older than you will follow your example." 113

When Venkataramani himself grows older, however, he does not follow the example of his own childhood. He, who as a school boy followed Lakshman Doss and even adored him, tries him later as

113. ibid. p.103.
a Magistrate and sends him to jail without any hesitation. Before the trial, the Government asks Venkataramani the young Magistrate if he would himself try the Secretary of the Congress or would want somebody else to do it. Venkataramani replies that he is determined to do his duty. And he really does it without ever faltering. And yet there is not a word of contempt or ridicule for this character from the writer's pen; and not even a suggestion of such a censure. This which makes this character more faithful and realistic perhaps, shows at the same time that the author brings the nationalist aspect as a background only to this family chronicle.

But though in this way, the author does not intend his novel to breathe a spirit of political nationalism, he has taken conscious care to preach through it the idea of national integration. He has shown the mixing of the people of different regions of the country showing it as an ideal. He has shown even inter-caste and inter-state relationships in the story. For example, the Athawars are Marathi Brahmins of the Madras Presidency. Gopinath of this family has got his daughter Uma married to Ananda Rao's son Jeswant Rao of Mysore. The man who acts as a go-between in this marriage is a Tamil Brahmin, Anantarama Aiyar who can speak Marathi very well. Chandrakanta De, again, is a Bengali. And yet what a great enthusiasm is shown by the people of Gandindi, an interior town in the Madras Presidency, for him! And what indignation of these people with the British Government at his imprisonment! Then there is Venkataramani whose father wants him to marry Gopinath's daughter Sona. Gopinath first hesitates because their
castes are not the same, besides the fact that they are Marathas while Venkataramani is a Tamilian. Venkataramani himself cannot hope for such a marriage though his Bengali friend Chatterjee who himself has a U.P. lady as his wife, encourages him much for such a marriage. The marriage at last takes place with the consent of both the families.

The overtone of inter-caste and inter-state relation, and of friendly mixing of the people of different regions is too much conspicuous in the novel to be missed; and this points to the novelist’s emphasis on the emotional integration of the peoples of various regions of the country.

From K. Nagarajan we come to another great novelist and short story writer R. K. Narayan. But though his contribution to Indo-Anglian fiction is great and profuse, and though he has portrayed the Gandhian freedom struggle rather elaborately in his novel Waiting for the Mahatma published in 1955, he has only one story to be published till 1947 with the nationalist theme. It is Gandhi’s Appeal, a short story collected in the volume Dodu and other Stories. It depicts very nicely the irresistible appeal of Gandhi to the commoners of India, how even those who wanted to be disloyal to him could not do so when they came into contact with him.

From R. K. Narayan we now come to K. A. Abbas. His first novel Tomorrow Is Ours presents a picture of the turbulent period

114. Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Tomorrow Is Ours, A Novel of the India of To-day, Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1943.
of our freedom struggle. But the picture is only hinted at, and not fully or vividly drawn. The novel is more concerned with the individual life of a dancing girl in the conservative Hindu society than with the contemporary political scene of the country. But the author successfully hints here at the international political scene of the time disturbed by the second World War, and the way the average Indian mind felt about it.

Parvati is the daughter of a lawyer of Allahabad who joined the non-co-operation movement launched in 1920 giving up his lucrative practice, and suffered imprisonment and ultimately died when jail diet told upon his health. Parvati who was a medical student had to give up her studies at the death of her father; and went from city to city as a dancing girl to earn her livelihood. In course of her roaming, she is married with a doctor. But her married life, too, turns out to be unhappy. Meanwhile the Indian people feel a sympathy for the Communist struggle in China and Russia, and Parvati also grows sympathetic towards the people of those two countries. She now comes into contact with a Communist leader of Bengal and becomes his companion. About this time, the Indian National Congress decides to send a medical mission of four doctors to China in token of the Indian people's sympathy for the suffering people there; and Parvati becomes happy to find her husband selected as one amongst the four. Parvati who parts with him with sorrow feels at the same time in this parting that "from the east a rosy dawn is breaking, holding forth the promise of tomorrow."

For such a tomorrow, many hoped in India at that time when Imperialism and Fascism threatened the liberty of people all over
the world. The novel deserves a place in our discussion here especially for depicting this Indian reaction to the then world situation. It is, however, not a novel with any serious purpose, neither is it a successful work of art. The story is full of extravagance aimed at amusing the average mind with dancing feats, sex appeals and scenes of social cruelties—all coming to the story with little sense of logic or coherence.

Defeat for Death, the second work of fiction by K. A. Abbas is more satisfactory as a work of art and more serious in purpose than the first. But it is a peculiar work of fiction that defies classification. The book consists of thirteen small chapters narrating three different stories—one about a child, another about an old man, and the third about a city. Though these stories are distinct from one another, places of occurrence of them, too, being three different parts of the world, yet if they are read serially from the first chapter to the last, a link is noticed in them. All the three stories deal with one theme, the theme of oppression of the imperialists; and two of the stories—those of the child and the city contribute indirectly to the development of the third story—the story of the old man. All the three stories are narrated in phases, and each phase forms a chapter. Moreover, each phase is independent of the other, thus each phase or chapter resembling a short story, too. This book may thus be treated both as a novel with one main plot and two sub-plots and as a collection

of short stories. Abbas himself has called it 'A Story'.

But whether this is a novel or a story, the little stories here are not told in a formal way through plot and characters. They express the author's feelings and emotions about a few incidents of the War years of the early forties just as in a poem. Indeed, the whole book is as if a prose-poem about the spirit of man in chains struggling to be free.

The city of the story to which the author has given four chapters and which he has not named, his story being 'a story without names', may be Stalingrad. The author shows how for one month it was besieged by the enemies of freedom and then how at last it came to be free. Historically, too, there was siege of this city by Germany in 1942. The little boy of the story to whom the author gives five chapters is, however, difficult to be identified with any real boy of history. In the author's story, he is a Negro boy who is wounded in a racial riot and is undergoing treatment in a hospital. He loses all hopes of life in this world oppressed by the imperialist race. He may thus be a Negro boy of South Africa colonized by the imperialist countries of Europe.

As the city is passing through the ordeal of a siege and as the boy is undergoing a turmoil in his mind in the hospital in two different parts of the world, in another part of the world, an old man at seventy undergoes a fast. He can easily be identified with Gandhi in his fast in 1942 in the jail. The old man's fast gives the little boy a hope for living; and he goes on hearing from the radio about this wonderful and great old man who also has
suffered like him at the hands of the imperialists, but who has conquered most of his enemies through a unique method of his own. As he hears about the successful end of the old man's 21 day fast fulfilling his own purpose, the boy grows so optimistic about life that he asks for his medicine which he refused to take formerly, and says, "I don't want to die." Just before it, as he heard about the old man's successful completion of the fast, he had also heard about the city being freed when the nurse explained to him, "Those who fight for freedom can never suffer defeat." 116

Defeat for Death may, therefore, be called a nationalist story for its theme. But it is nationalist in another aspect, too - the aspect of Gandhi's 21 day fast. The author has described the condition of Gandhi, though without ever naming him, in every stage of his fast in the prison, the influence of this fast on the national scene of the country which was then tense with the freedom struggle, and on the international scene which was ravaged by the second World War between Fascism on one side and Democracy on the other. The author's description of Gandhi is sympathetic and reverential, and his faith in the efficacy of such a fast by such a saintly man is very deep. A few examples of his narration of the fast will be enough to prove the author's sympathy for the great man.

Giving a background to this fast, the author writes,

For years the old man had been holding back the tide of revolutionary violence. With him in prison, the floodgates were

burst open, the dykes were breached, the whole country was flooded with violent activity. No man was more grieved than the old man. For him it was the undoing of a life-time's patient work of moral reconstruction. And yet this "life-time devotee of non-violence was represented as a blood-thirsty perpetrator of violence." His soul was in torment to find such accusations hurled at him. How to explain himself and vindicate his principles against all these accusations, especially when he is in prison?

There was only one way open for him. He must punish his body with self-inflicted starvation. He must, if necessary, face death. It was weapon both of defence and of attack peculiar to himself. He had used it on many occasions before, and every time he had emerged from the ordeal, morally strengthened and spiritually uplifted.

The author wants to make his story historically authentic so much so that though his story is nameless throughout, he has reproduced a portion of a letter Gandhi had actually written to the British Government explaining reasons for his fast. The following portion of that letter would give an insight into Gandhi's mind:

You have left me no loopholes for escaping the ordeals I have set before myself. ... If I do not survive the ordeal,
I shall go to the Highest Judgement Seat with fullest faith in my innocence. Posterity will judge between you as a representative of an all powerful Government and me as a humble man who has tried to serve his country and humanity throughout.119

After the twelfth day of the fast, the doctors declare the old man's condition serious and the author narrates the repercussions in the country and the world:

The old man's fast was focal point not only for the country but the entire world. Crack reporters from distant lands had been rushed by aeroplane to 'cover' the fast. Every few hours the doctors issued bulletins about the old man's waning strength. Eight hundred million eyes were anxiously turned in this direction. By telegraph, by telephone, radio, newspapers; - the news of the fast was being broadcast every hour of the day and night.120

And the author comments, "Life was flowing out of the frail body of the old man. Life was flowing into the anaemic body of the nation."120

Days pass and the old man's condition causes still more anxiety, though he is all the while saying to his worried wife beside him, "Don't worry. I won't die." People demand from all quarters their leader's release by meetings, resolutions, processions, telegrams, telephones, newspaper letters and statements.

And on the other side of the globe, the black child on his hospital-bed hears over the radio:

During the last thirty years I have reported over half a dozen titanic conflicts - the last world war, the invasion of Manchuria, the Abyssinia War, the Spanish Civil War, the Sino-Japanese War, and the new second World War. But today I will tell you about the strangest war waged in the long history of man. This is not a war fought with bombers, tanks and guns. This is the battle between Life and Death. And the battle field is the frail body of an old man of seventy who had not eaten a grain of food for seventeen days.\footnote{ibid, pp.31-32}

More days pass, and there is little hope of the old man's life. And the author writes:

... in mosques and in temples, in chapels and in churches, in the agiaries of Parsis and the synagogues of the Jews, prayers were being offered for his life. After namaz, old Muslim women prayed to Allah, after puja and Gita-path, old Hindu women prayed to Bhagwan: 'You are merciful and beneficent, O God. Have mercy on our land. Spare the life of the old man who is the father of this nation.'\footnote{ibid. p.33}

The author writes further:

Festivals and celebrations, marriages and engagements, meetings and conferences had been postponed till the end of the
old man's fast. The nation held its collective breath in an agony of suspense. 123

The old man at last comes out successful completing his 21 day fast; and the nation is freed from all its anxieties.

In such a depiction of the nation's love for their leader and his influence on the whole world, the author's nationalist spirit is clearly revealed. Though small, this book is certainly the best by Abbas till 1947 in its exposition of theme, seriousness of purpose and in its poetic way of expression.

C. N. Zutshi's Motherland, 124 on the other hand, is a downright failure in its treatment of the nationalist theme, characterization, language as well as in its technique. The novel professes to be frankly political as its sub-title An Expository Novel of Modern India suggests and the author's Preface and the patriotic song with the title Bande Mataram added before the beginning of the novel indicate. The author writes in the Preface:

This expository novel is an attempt to portray a picture of certain aspects of actual life in Modern India, and has been written with the definite purpose of awakening my own countrymen to their political plight under the foreign yoke.

A nationalistic purpose, no doubt. But this purpose has hardly been fulfilled by the work since the things here, though "founded

123. ibid. p.33.
on facts" and drawn from "the existing literature on the subject - speeches, press-reports, articles and books written by European and Indian authors" - as the author informs in his Preface, remain so dry and drab that they are unable either to delight or to move the readers. Therefore, the author's claim that by weaving the factual material into the texture of a story, he has made the narrative "ring with reality and the exposition more palatable to the readers" does not appear to be justified.

The theme he has chosen, and the matter he has used are, of course, from contemporary history - as stated in the Preface. Mahatma Vikrama who resembles in his words and deeds Mahatma Gandhi, has prepared the nation for a non-violent movement against the Government for the freedom of the country; and his greatest disciple in this onerous task has been Trilok, who in his devotion to his master and in his countrywide, and even in worldwide fame resembles Jawaharlal Nehru. By speeches, writings and editorials in a newspaper which he edits, Mahatma Vikrama has awakened the people to join his intended movement when Trilok has left for South Africa to fight there against the disparity shown to the coloured people by the white ruling race - a task which in reality was done by Gandhi in his early political career.

Both Vikrama and Trilok complete their intended work of the first phase in India and South Africa respectively; and then they go on a world tour to mobilize public support for the Indian freedom struggle. They lecture in public meetings, hold interviews with rulers and statesmen, and give press interviews in Britain, France and the U.S.A. Then they return to their country and
launch the Civil Disobedience Movement by making salt from seawater, first by Vikrama and then by others in defiance of the law.

Within this framework of the plot, there is, however, little political action. There are only talks about action which have made the novel dull. The subject-matter of the conversations of the characters, even the words and phrases of the conversations or of the author's narratives are, however, drawn from reality. For example, there are talks about or references to 'untouchables', 'uplift of the depressed classes', 'South Africa', 'colour Bar Bill', 'doctrine of soul force and passive resistance', 'calling the Government Satanic', 'Khilafat question', 'Punjab massacre', 'Defence of India Act curbing liberties of people', 'Rowlatt Act', 'steel frame speech of Lloyd George', 'swarajya for the freedom of self-expression, to preserve our ancient culture, our religion and social order, to revive our decayed industries, and finally to put an end to the injustices of the tyrant', 'communal representation', 'principle of divide and rule', 'scheme of Pakistan', 'Hindu Mahasabha', 'Muslim League', 'Montague-Chelmsford Act', 'Dominion status', 'Ransay-McDonald', 'Lord Birkenhead', 'Hindu-Muslim unity', 'Simon Report', 'Round

125. ibid. p.6.  
126. ibid. p.18.  
127. ibid. p.29.  
128. ibid. p.31.  
129. ibid. p.32.  
130. ibid. p.33.  
131. ibid. p.48.  
132. ibid. p.59.  
133. ibid. p.60.  
134. ibid. p.61.  
135. ibid. p.63.  
136. ibid. pp.64, 110.  
137. ibid. p.65.  
138. ibid. p.97.  
139. ibid. p.100.  
140. ibid. pp.108, 111.
Table Conference', 'non-violent methods', 'Civil disobedience', 'boycott of foreign goods', 'non-payment of taxes of rents by the peasants' and scores of other things that were household words in India in the twenties and thirties of this century. But reference to these and discussions on them alone cannot make a story realistic. The author lacks the artistic skill to make all these vibrate with any sense of reality.

To this political theme, the author has added the love story of a young man and a girl of two different castes; and the author has claimed in his Preface that by such a "mingling mangling of romance and politics in the field of fiction" he has "produced something really novel in political literature." Nothing can be more exaggerated than such a claim. First because, the love story has hardly any romantic element to please the reader; and secondly because, such a mingling is not at all novel. It only points to the author's ignorance not only of other literatures but also of the novels written before him in his own domain of Indo-Anglian literature.

As for characterization, the author seems to be quite incapable of this. The characters of Vikrama and Trilok remain mere names only though the author has written a lot by way of comments on their greatness besides making others comment admiringly on them. About other characters, the less said the better.

141. ibid. pp.108, 111.
142. ibid. p.145.
143. ibid. p.146.
Aamir Ali's *Conflict* is better than Zutchi's *Motherland*. Ali shows particularly two things of the Indian freedom movement - the involvement of the student community and the involvement of the villages. In so far as it shows the involvement of the college students in the freedom struggle, it can easily claim a special place in the history of Indo-Anglian fiction. For no other political Indo-Anglian novel shows exclusively the involvement of the college students in the freedom struggle.

Shankar is a seventeen year old boy of a backward village in Maharashtra. Coming to a college in Bombay, he gradually develops a political interest and becomes a nationalist in spirit. For this, the political atmosphere of the country is responsible. The second World War has broken out and the people of India are undecided about supporting the British in the war. At Shankar's college, a debating competition is held on the topic - 'The war in Europe is not our concern'. A brilliant student leader of the college, Mehta opposes India supporting the British in the war and observes:

... the war in Europe today is a war between rivals whose interests have clashed. ... One side professes high-minded principles of liberty and democracy, the other, the Nietzschean dogma of the super race. ... The only difference between the two is that the latter are more frank and honest about the principles, while the former believe in camouflage.

What we see in war-torn Europe to-day is not good fighting against evil, not God against Satan, but merely the unworthy and petty squabble of two lions over a kill, of two dogs snarling over a bone. ... We are the satellites of one of the combatants. ... Why should we spoil Indian blood in a cause that is not even remotely ours? 145

Shankar who hears this debate is drawn towards Mehta very much after this and soon finds himself an active political worker as a friend of Mehta. Mehta with his brilliant oratory and clear understanding of the political situation in India and the world soon carries to his side all other students of his college. Even the Congress leaders and workers of the city show interest in him.

Soon, however, police is set upon Mehta and his fellow students; and many of them including Mehta are arrested. The student movement in this way gets rife. The movement in the country as a whole culminates in the All India Congress Committee session held in Bombay on 7 and 8 August 1942 as a reaction to which all the prominent leaders of the people including Gandhi, Nehru, Azad and Patel are arrested and put to prison. At once there is a spontaneous protest throughout the country in the form of meetings, processions, hartals and strikes. All the student leaders of Bombay who had observed the historic Congress session and took active part in the protest-demonstrations against the arrests of their beloved leaders are soon arrested.

145. ibid. pp. 32-33.
Shankar, however, is left alone, a restless, brooding soul. According to Congress directive, he then goes back to his village to organize the movement there. He soon rouses his villagers and forms a very strong organization. Consequently, he has also to encounter the police; and in the police action, the whole village electrified with the spirit of freedom, is reduced to scrambles, many killed in the process, and many sent to prison. Shankar escapes somehow; but it is only to see the heart-rending sight of the body of the girl he loved floating on the river - a victim of police raping and atrocity in his village.

One aspect of this novel has also added a new dimension to the theme of Indian nationalism as reflected in Indo-Anglian fiction. It is that of Muslim participation in the Indian freedom struggle led by the Congress which is reflected in the novel through the character of Rashid. Though it is a minor aspect of the novel, it is very important since it is only in this novel till 1947 that we see the participation of the Muslims in the national struggle under the Congress. The firebrand student leader Mehta has his best and most stalwart lieutenant in the person of Abdul Rashid. A very faithful Congress worker, Rashid is arrested by police when there is an anti-British demonstration in the College. When the Congress session is held in the city, Rashid is an ardent listener and observer. After the session when the city witnesses the great protest demonstration, Rashid is an active demonstrator who soon finds his way to the jail. His sincere service as a freedom fighter under the banner of the Congress represents thus the service of many Muslim freedom fighters of India under the Congress. That Aamir Ali
the creator of this character is a Muslim, makes the participation of Rashid in the freedom struggle more convincing.

The author's language is vivid and straightforward though occasionally his English is faulty like that of many other Indo-Anglian fiction writers. His dialogues are bookish. Even the peasants in Aamir Ali's novel speak bookish English.

When we come next to Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers*, we come not only to the last political novel about the freedom struggle of this period but also to the best of all of this kind published till 1947. Of course, when I give such an encomium to this novel, I exclude Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* from my purview, *Untouchable* belonging in reality to the category of the social novels where it certainly stands as the greatest till 1947. Anyway, what is the particular quality that goes to the making of *So Many Hungers* as a great novel? It is the quality of the novel that gives the reader the feel of the real agony of the age it depicts. No other novel of this category can give the reader the feeling of this agony of the age, not even Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* which dumbs the reader in astonishment at and praise for the age rather than ache him in his heart.

Showing the injustice of the foreign rulers and creating a pathos in the reader's heart is the novelist's purpose in *So Many Hungers*. And it is the credit of the novelist that he has been able to fulfil this purpose with a superb technical skill. He has done it by telling the story of two families against the dismal background of the Bengal famine of the war years in the early

forties. This novel does not depict the freedom movement of the country as do most of the other novels discussed in this chapter, though there are occasional flashes of the struggle in this novel, too. The story of the novel goes to the root - the real cause which was responsible for such a movement, instead of merely depicting the movement itself.

On the surface, *So Many Hungers* is a story of the Bengal famine of the early forties of this century. To be more precise, it is a story of the sufferings caused by the war and the consequent famine to the members of a family in particular and to all the villagers of Bengal in general, first in the villages and then in the metropolitan city of Calcutta. The second World War had by that time spread to India and Bengal was apprehending the fighting in her own soil. The Japanese war fleet had cordoned Bengal in the Bay, and any moment the province could be attacked from the sea. The Government had sieged and destroyed all the boats of the villagers along the coast as a protective measure, though boats were the only kind of transport of this region and means of livelihood of a large section of the population of the area. After the boatmen and fishermen communities, the cultivators were affected when the Government had sieged their paddy without controlling the prices of paddy and rice. The peasants in this way were soon reduced to paupers.

Same is the fate with Kajoli, her mother and her little brother Onu. Kajoli's father and elder brother are already in jail as a consequence of their participation in the national movement. Thus this little peasant family of the village Baruni is
quite helpless. Kajoli was married to a young man who was staying with Kajoli's family. But when the village was famine-stricken and he could not maintain the family, he went out in search of job when he was killed in an accident without the knowledge of Kajoli or any other members of her family who all think that he is still alive somewhere. When the young man left the house Kajoli was five months pregnant. It is as a pregnant young woman now that she has to leave her village for the city with her mother and the little brother. Other people of their village have already left it for the city where they expect to find some means of livelihood somehow.

On their way to the city, Kajoli falls a victim to a sex-hungry soldier who later becomes kind enough to arrange to send the girl in her unconscious state caused by abortion, to the city in a military van. Her mother and little brother are also allowed to accompany her. The military authority gives treatment to the unfortunate girl in an army hospital in the city while the mother and her son eke out their living by begging as pavement-dwellers. Living was, however, by no means easy in the city for them even as pavement-dwellers, the whole city being full of famine-stricken destitutes coming out of the villages. As Kajoli is released from the hospital, she joins her family in the pavement. But soon she realizes that it is impossible to live long on charity as a chaste woman. Thus she decides to be a prostitute and maintain her mother and brother with the lucrative earning of that ignoble profession - a living which has become the way for hundreds of village young women pouring into the city. The night Kajoli takes that painful decision after a serious conflict in her mind, her mother, however,
commits suicide to relieve herself of the unbearable pain of seeing her children starve, all ignorant of Kajol's drastic resolution.

Beneath this surface story of famine, the author tells the story of war thrust upon India by the foreign rulers, letting loose untold miseries in the process. This story takes place as much in the soul of an intellectual of a very fine sensibility as in the affected material world of Bengal and the rest of the country. This story engages more attention of the novelist, and consequently of the readers than the story of the famine which only serves to give an intensity to this main story of war and its disastrous effect on the country.

The story of war is the story of Rahoul, a young scientist, a Cambridge D.Sc. working as a Professor of Astrophysics in the University of Calcutta. This intellectual busy in study, research and teaching is disturbed badly in his sensitive mind by the World War gradually spreading to Bengal. It is, however, not that the war has come unexpectedly and as a surprise to him. Right from his Cambridge days he had been expecting such a war, a war against the evil of Fascism.

But now that the war has broken out, should he, should his country, join the Allied Powers and fight?

Indian opinion was at one with the progressive forces the world over. But how could a people step out into a war said to be waged for democratic freedom, so long as that very
freedom was denied to them? The Indian people's opinion, too, was indecisive about it. But soon they decide to lend support to Britain. "Its fight was with England's diehard rulers, not with her people, who, defeated, would face enslavement, adding to the miseries of human kind." India, however, wants in return "recognition of the Indian people's right to freedom." In response, Britain sends the leader of the Indian nation to prison, because he had "decried the attempt to drag his people into a war that was none of their seeking, as they were the humblest of slaves." This arrest of Gandhi gives Rahul a shock.

That leader had often expressed Rahul's own thought in words and images more beautiful and forceful than he himself could devise. Rahul was no hero-worshipper. His ideas had been shaped on the anvil of reason, and emotion had no visible place in the process. Yet that one personage whom India knew to be her man of destiny stirred his depths.

Over and above this, the British Government has indulged in many more thoughtless activities like arrests of many thousands of Indians, callousness in controlling the prices of goods and in rationing, and letting loose a ring of black-marketers and hoarders.

Taking advantage of this situation, Rahul's father, a conservative diehard with his influence in the government quarters

148. ibid. p.41.
149. ibid. p.41.
has opened a rice supply agency and has become one of its directors. He has earned money hand over fist, making his sensitive scientist son unhappy with him. Yet Rahoul cannot hate him also from his heart. It was this father after all who had sent him to Cambridge and made him one of the top-ranking scientists of the country.

Following the 'Quit India' resolution when the country suffers a cataclysm, the people showing a spontaneous outburst of wrath against the arrest of Gandhi and other prominent nationalist leaders, and the Government unleashing a reign of terror, Rahoul who was so far engaged in a very serious research work, can no more confine himself to his laboratory and study. At last, when he sees one day from his laboratory window thousands of his countrymen marching down the street in procession with national flags in their hands, and the army men falling upon them, charging them, kicking them, and trampling down the national flags underneath their jack-boots, the young scientist in his laboratory forgets himself and his research at once, rushes out of the University laboratory into the street and thrusting his way through the jostle of the crowd, challenges the military men. The result is, of course, the immediate experience of lathi-charge and prison-cell for a day with many of his students as his co-prisoners who ask him even in the prison-cell, "Is it the hour at last?"150 - and to whom he replies with all firmness, "The hour is not as yet, but we are apart from it by a hair's breadth. We must stand ready to carry out Gandhi's command, 'Do or die.'"150

150. ibid. p.67.
Free again, when Rahoul looks around in the street, he sees the city scarred as though by battle, streets deserted save for men in uniform, armoured cars dashing by, troops standing by street corners with machine guns, burnt out motor cars lying about in dead heaps and wreckages of tram cars towed off to clear the lines. Rahoul realizes the situation. But once in the movement, he cannot persuade himself to come out of it. Leaving his laboratory neglected and abandoned, neglecting the comfort of his home and love of his wife and little daughter, he comes out to the streets like thousands of students, teachers and other freedom-fighters.

The war meanwhile has caused the famine; and it has wrought havoc in the villages. Hungry masses have rushed to the city with the false hope of finding food and shelter there from the Government. The Government remaining callous spectators to this suffering humanity in the pavements of the city, private welfare organizations are formed; and Rahoul the scientist becomes an organizer and secretary of such a welfare society for the destitutes. As the Secretary of the relief society, he addresses his students one day with a smouldering rage in his heart against the Government:

This war, he had said, was just a repetition of other wars in history. The Four Freedoms did not include the freedom to be free — not for Asians. This famine, this brutal doom, was the fulfilment of alien rule. The final commentary. Imagine two million Englishmen dying of hunger that was preventable, and the Government unaffected, uncensured, unrepented, smug.
as ever. "Quit India", cried the two million dead of Bengal. The anger was warm in his voice, and he had paused till his speech was cool again. "Quit" cried all India. "You have done us some good along with much evil. For the good you have done you have been paid in full. The accounts have been settled. Now for God's sake, quit." 151

The consequence of such a speech is, of course, his arrest and imprisonment. His conservative opportunist father received the news of his son's arrest at the relief centre with a sorrow, not so much for the separation as it was for the attitude his sons had taken. "It was as though they were aliens speaking a language that he did not know. What need had Kunal to join the Army? And Rahoul, could he not serve his country best as a scientist?" 152 The sorrows of Rahoul's wife were of a different sort - sorrows which, while aching her, had also elevated her. She who had once asked Rahoul not to join the war with the words, "Your true place is with your books, your mathematics, your strange instruments in your college room" 153 now speaks to him over the phone as Rahoul contacts her immediately before he is taken away by police from the relief centre, "I too shall go your way soon. ... I am not the silly thing I used to be, you know that." 154

In this way, this story unfolds the agonies of mind one felt during the war period because of the misrule and wrong policies of the British Government that did not care for the good of

151. ibid. pp.212-213.
154. ibid. p.213.
the country. Instead of merely depicting the famine or the war or the national movement superficially, this novel goes deeper unlike others of its kind and reveals the agony of slavery of the whole nation.

The novelist's credit in technique lies in the skilful linking up of the apparently linkless two stories of the peasant family and of the scientist. It is a matter of rare skill not simply because it links up the two stories, but especially because the linking up of the two independent stories intensifies the nationalist spirit behind the theme of the novel.

The two stories have been very nicely linked up with the story of Devesh Basu, Rahoul's seventy year old grandfather, an ardent nationalist, a devoted freedom-fighter as a follower of Gandhi. Altogether different from his own son - the father of Rahoul, he was looked upon in the city as an eccentric. After his retirement as a teacher, he leaves the city for the coastal village of Baruni where he lives like a true peasant, living up to the ideal of the national movement which has given priority to the rural reconstruction programme. He soon wins the love and respect of all the villagers there whom he organizes for the freedom struggle. The Congress launches the Civil Disobedience Movement at this time; and the old man also finds himself deep in it. He forms a band of volunteers of peasants and fishermen and lead them to the Bay of Bengal for preparing salt from sea-water defying the law.

Even as a school boy Rahoul was proud of his grandfather whom he took for his ideal. Fresh from college when Rahoul stood
on the edge of the national movement and his father, alarmed, held out Cambridge before him as a bait, the grandfather protested and said "his voice mild as always, yet ironlike, 'Cambridge can wait.'"\textsuperscript{155} Cambridge did not wait, however, as desired by the old nationalist, and Rahoul's father had carried the day. But coming back from Cambridge, he goes out to the village Baruni to see his beloved grandfather. He finds him as an integral member of the family of Kajoli, looked upon by all in the village as their god - their Devata, not Devesh Basu. It is thus that Rahoul develops a love for the peasant folk and forms an intimacy with the family of Kajoli.

Later when the villagers under the leadership of Devata take resort to satyagraha against the Government, the old man, Kajoli's father and elder brother along with many others of the village are arrested and jailed. The family of Kajoli thus becomes helpless. And then comes the famine. Not knowing what to do, the three helpless members of the family want to meet Rahoul the grandson of their Devata, though they do not know his address. When they leave for the city, they have a faint hope that they might meet their Devata's kind grandson accidentally when their problems would be all solved. Their fond hope was, of course, belied by circumstances.

Thus, as this old man is the link between the two backgrounds of the story - the city and the village, so he is the link between the story of the famine and the story of the national movement and the war.

\textsuperscript{155} ibid. p.18.
As for characterization, the novelist attains a very high level of success here, too. Through the three main characters of the novel - Devata, Samarendra Basu and Rahoul, all of whom belong to the same family, the author has very skilfully revealed before us all the three forces of the society that were at work during the period covered by the story. And yet all the three are distinctly human in the novel, not mere ideas or types.

Devata or Devesh Basu is a type of man who loves his country sincerely and is ready to face any consequences for it. With the author's mastery of character portraiture, this man, always uncompromising and unyielding in living a life of his own ideal, comes before the reader's eyes as a real man of flesh and blood.

Then there is Samarendra Basu who, though the son of a man like Devata, is given to money-making and raising the standard of the family materially, while, of course, pleasing the British Government. He is one of those men of the British period, who were influential in the society with the strong backing of the Government. And yet it is a credit of the novelist that for some of his personal traits as a householder, he, though deserving hatred in the circumstances in which he is placed, manages to draw our sympathy and even admiration. When the war breaks out, he exploits the situation as an opportunist and accumulates fabulous wealth. And yet he himself remains a simple man, his only anxiety being the welfare of his two sons. Nevertheless, his tragedy is that even when his two dreams - that of earning a title of honour from the British Government and that of accumulating vast wealth
for his sons, are fulfilled, he finds himself an unhappy man. For those two sons of his for whom he had planned and toiled so hard had never understood his sentiments, and he could never understand theirs.

The portrait of Rahoul is another piece of success. He is one of the few characters in Indo-Anglian fiction that cannot be forgotten easily. With his fine sensibility as a man and judicious acquisition of all that is best in the Western civilization, he has a great love and respect for his country and all that she stands for. And in this respect, he reminds us of Rama the famous hero of Raja Rao's novel *The Serpent and the Rope*, though, of course, Rama is of a completely different mould - a spiritualist while Rahoul is a scientist. Rahoul is out and out an intellectual. But born at a time when his country's main aspiration to be free is trampled upon by the alien rule, and when throughout the world freedom is at stake, he is dragged into politics by his subtle conscience. And plunging deep into the movement, he finds himself locked up in the British jail.

But even to such a character of a selfless nationalist, the author has given a fine human touch that has made him so lively. He is devoted to his mother as an ideal son, to his wife as a loving husband, and to his little daughter as a kind father. And yet when the shadow of the war looms large before his eyes, he feels like joining the side he supports and fighting. By way of seeking his wife's consent, he tells her:

Six months before I left England, fascist rebels were destroying the Government of Spain elected by the people. Madrid
besieged, strangled. Then volunteers from many lands rushed to save freedom in Spain. I had an urge in those days to join the army of liberation. ... And I came back to my homeland. Some sore in me throbs now and then. A greater war of liberation has started, the greatest ever. What am I to do this time? 156

Later the conflict arising out of the thoughts of joining the national movement or not rages so high in his mind that one day in his laboratory he asks the research student who was working under him if he has ever gone to jail, because he himself is afraid of going to jail then leaving his family behind. But he learns from the student that his father is already in jail and he has been supporting his family with his meagre income from his private tuitions and the research scholarship. The nationalist scientist is then at once full of pity for the boy; and he feels that if ever he has done any good in his life, it was the recommendation of this research scholarship for this boy. Rahoul is always like this - his character a fine combination of sentiment and reason, domestic dutifulness and nationalist and internationalist ideals. It is this quality that has made the character of Rahoul so human and so real.

Another very remarkable quality of this novel is its style. In short, impassioned sentences weighed with emotion and meaning, and each balanced against the other, the novelist grips the attention of the reader from the beginning till the end.

156. ibid. p.13.
Indo-Anglian fiction, Bhabani Bhattacharya's style is indeed a distinguished one, though it lacks the brilliance of Indian rhythm and sensibility which abound in Raja Rao's.

Such then are the novels and stories which depict the phase of the Indian national struggle under the leadership of Tilak and Gandhi, when political workers left for the villages and worked for rural reconstruction, when nationally roused people followed Gandhi's call to remove untouchability and other evils from the society for the evolution of a better and stronger nation, and when people in towns and villages left their homes and hearths and fought for Purna Swaraj or complete independence of the country.