

Gandhian Ideology in the Fiction of Chaman Nahal

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Gandhi is not only for India a hero of national history, whose legendary memory will be enshrined in the millennial epoch. He has not only been the spirit of active life which has breathed into the peoples of India the proud consciousness of their unity, of their power, and the will to their independence. He has renewed, for all the peoples of the West, the message of their Christ, forgotten or betrayed. He has inscribed his name among the sages and saints of humanity; and the radiance of his figure has penetrated into all the regions of the earth. (Rolland 206)

The impression gained by one of the greatest European thinkers strongly shows why Gandhi is regarded as one of the greatest personalities of the last two millennia. Gandhi was a revolutionary thinker and a great social reformer. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (2nd October 1869 – 30 January 1948) was a prominent political and ideological leader of India during the freedom movement. He is the father of the nation and the maker of the modern independent republic. As a man of action, he practised what is moral, truthful and non-violent after a thorough examination with great insight. A pioneer of *Satyagraha*, he resisted tyranny through mass civil disobedience. His philosophy was firmly based on *Ahimsa*, or total non-violence. “Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed” (Gandhi 166). Gandhi led India to independence and inspired various movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. He is internationally esteemed for his doctrine of non-violent protest to achieve political and social progress. Gandhi defines *Satyagraha* as a relentless search for truth and a determination to reach truth. It is based on the principle of love and believes in ‘love for all’ and ‘suffer for all’. It excludes the use of any form of violence since it is based on the philosophy that man does not know the absolute truth and therefore, cannot punish anyone. There are three things of great importance in *Satyagraha*. “These are *Satya* (Truth), *Ahimsa* (Non- Violence) and *Tapas* (Self-suffering)” (Ray 65). Although Gandhi was not the originator of the principle of non-violence, he was the first to apply it in the political field on a large scale. *Swaraj* is Gandhi’s term for liberation. For Gandhi, *Swaraj* meant the freedom of the lowliest. He says, “*Swaraj* for me means freedom for the meanest of our countrymen ... I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange ‘king log for king stork.’”(Gandhi 195). *Swaraj* means the sum total of *Swaraj* (self-rule) of individuals. *Swaraj* can be attained by sensible and dedicated citizens with their notable contribution for the nation. It has a moral foundation and is consistent with the principle of *Ahimsa*.

Gandhi believed in universal brotherhood and mutual understanding among people. Gandhi is often referred to as Mahatma or ‘great soul’, an honorific title first conferred upon him by Rabindranath Tagore. In India, he is also called *Bapu* and officially honoured as the Father of the Nation. His birthday, 2 October, is commemorated in India as Gandhi Jayanti, a national holiday and worldwide as the International Day of Non-violence. Gandhi made significant contribution to the world by his revolutionary ideas and concepts such as *Satyagraha* (truthful force), *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all), *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Shantisena* (peace brigade). Gandhi’s efforts for emancipation of women would help to alter the age-old values of inequalities, because they are the agents of transmission of the culture to the children. Thus Gandhi wanted to transform, the cultural, social and personality systems to bring about systemic change to establish a social order in which there is justice, social and economic.

Gandhi was an ardent supporter of Hindu-Muslim amity. The study of many great religious scriptures helped Gandhi to find good precepts contained in them which are capable of attaining a moral and religious life. “The root of religion is ‘that which binds’. The root meaning of its *Sanskrit* equivalent *Dharma* is ‘that which holds’. It sustains a person as nothing else does. It is rock-bottom fundamental morality. When morally incarnates itself in a living man it becomes religion, because it binds, it holds, it sustains him in the hour of trial” (Gandhi 7). Gandhiji believes in the equality of the principal religions the world. He prefers to call it as “equality of (all) religions” to “tolerance of (all) religions”. We should not consider other religious beliefs as inferior to our own. We have to give respect to all religions. Gandhi not enjoins equality of respect for all religions, but pleads for the incorporation of good features of other faiths into one’s own. The seekers of truth should have an equal vision of all religions. To Gandhi, the different religions are “beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree. Therefore they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect” (Gandhi 407). Gandhi believed in the equality of all religions and held that all religions in essence are one. He writes:

I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another. (Gandhi 5-6)

Harijan Upliftment is one of the salient components of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhiji maintained untouchability as the sin of the Hindus. Untouchability stands for the idea that a man is polluted if he touches someone who is born in a so-called low family or does some menial work. Gandhi was deeply aggrieved to witness the plight of *acchuts* (untouchables) in our society. He considered untouchability as a black spot on the face of our society. To quote his words:

I am proud to be a Santana Hindu. I have read the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Gita*, the *Bhagawata*, the *Manusmriti* and the *Ramayana*. I claim to have understood the spirit of Hinduism. I believe that untouchability is not a part of Hinduism. If it is so, such Hinduism is not for me. (Gandhi 64)

Untouchability is a cruel and inhuman institution. It violates human dignity. Gandhi called upon high caste Hindus to make all the sacrifices necessary for the removal of untouchability. According to

Gandhi, to remove untouchability is a penance that caste Hindus owe to Hinduism and to themselves. His love and compassion for the untouchables touch our heart He called them *Harijans*, the children of God, and his campaign for India's Independence, therefore, necessarily incorporated his movement for the emancipation of the untouchables. His words impregnated with the Empathy for our Harijan brothers need to be quoted:

I do not want to be reborn, but if I have to be reborn I should be reborn as an untouchable so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled against them in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from their miserable condition (Gandhi 3).

To Gandhiji, the removal of untouchability was a bigger problem than that of gaining Indian Independence. Gandhiji wanted every Indian to take a vow to work for the removal of untouchability. He relates untouchability to truth and non-violence. Removal of untouchability means love for and service of, the whole world, and thus merges into *ahimsa*. Removal of untouchability spells the breaking down of the barriers between man and man, and between various orders of the Being. All life springs from God, so that the barriers existing between man and man are unnatural and harmful

The Gandhian concepts, in varying degrees, have found expression in Anglo Indian fiction of the Gandhian age and continued to inspire the novelists even after independence. The period 1920-1947 is generally designated as 'The Era of Gandhian Revolution' in Indian literature. M.K. Naik, an eminent critic regarded this period as "Gandhian Whirlwind" with an unprecedented awakening of "an all-pervading national consciousness" (Naik 129). Freedom movement in India "was not merely a political struggle, but an all pervasive emotional experience of all Indians in nineteen twenties and thirties... That was an experience that was national in nature" (Mukherjee 14). The ideology of Gandhi was the moving force behind the national upsurge. Gandhi's image, his personality and his philosophy, influenced millions of people in India including a large number of poets, novelists, and other men of sensibility. They regarded him as their literary and spiritual mentor. Mulk Raj Anand, a renowned Indo-Anglian novelist, writes with regard to Gandhi:

This strange man seemed to have the genius that could a single dramatic act, really multi-coloured, multi-tongued Indian to himself. (Anand 19)

Gandhi was a prolific writer both in English and Gujarati. He tried to educate people collectively and individually through his writings in journals. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar seems quite justified in considering Gandhi as a "formative influence on writers of the time"

The personality of Mahatma Gandhi affected the people of India as powerfully as his pen. It exercises a potent influence on our language and literature, both directly through his own writings in English and Gujarati, and indirectly through his movements generated by his revolutionary thoughts and practice. The several Indian regional languages acquired a new versatility and power... No apology is needed for considering Gandhiji as a writer and as a formative influence on writers of the time. (Iyengar 252)

Gandhi arrived in India from South Africa with a penetrating insight into the social, political and economic conditions of India. Gandhi's personality projected the essential Indianness of India which no

other leader of his generation could do, and symbolized the common man in India, his aspirations, his hopes and dreams, his unshakable faith in tradition with roots embedded deep in the native soil. The far reaching influence of Gandhi reached nook and corner of the country and inspired a kind of writing which touches heights of the sublime by virtue of its lofty ideals. The influence of Gandhi on Indian literature during this period was two-fold. First, as a writer, he evolved chaste, lucid and simple style which influenced contemporary writing. Secondly, he influenced the thematic content and structure of Indian English fiction. With regard to the Gandhian influence on it, K.R Srinivasa Iyengar observes:

The stress was on simplicity and clarity and immediate effectiveness rather than on ornateness or profundity and artistry, and this has been as marked in English writing as in writing in the regional languages. As regards the choice of theme and portrayal of character the Gandhian influence has been no less marked. There has been a more or less conscious shift of emphasis from the city to the village, or there is implied a contrast between the two – urban luxury and sophistication on the one hand and rural modes and manners on the other”.(Iyengar 228)

It was in fact, that during this Gandhian Era that “Indian English novel discussed some of its most significant themes – freedom struggle, East-West relationship, quest of identity, the exploitation of the underdog, the search for justice and fair play, the treatment of the rural life etc.” (Kumar 25).No discussion of Indian English fiction would be complete without the assessment of the all pervasive influence of M. K. Gandhi. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly comments thus:

“The most potent force behind the whole movement, the Mahatma is a recurring presence in these novels, and he is used in different ways to suit the design of each writer. He has been treated variously as an idea, a myth, a symbol, a tangible reality, and a benevolent human being. In a few novels, he appears in person, in most others his is an invisible presence” (Mukherjee 61).

Gandhi is an immense source of writing and has influenced different disciplines and many writers from different fields like history, politics, philosophy, literature, sociology, and so on. All throughout his life he believed and lived as a man of ideals. This was instructed and educated to all the individuals of India, through the writings of various writers. K.S.Venkataramani, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and also many other Indian writers explore Gandhiji’s view in their writings. The influence of Gandhian philosophy on Indo-English novelists continues to be in evidence even in the works of post-independence novelists such as Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandya, Nayantara Sahgal, Manohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal. The main thing which attracts these writers to write about Gandhiji is that, truth, *satyagraha*, simplicity, suffering, affirmation and last but not the least his non-violence.

Chaman Nahal is one of the outstanding novelists of the seventies (1970’s).He was born in Sialkot in 1927.He received Sahitya Academy award in 1977 for his classic ‘**Azadi**’. Teacher of repute, scholar-critic of wide-ranging interests, seasoned reviewer, broadcaster, short story writer and novelist in English, Nahal has several distinctions. His **A Conversation with J. Krishna Murthy (1965)**, **Drugs and the other self (1971)**, a collection of essays edited by him, his English rendering the **Bhagavad Gita (1987)**, and the many philosophical questions brought up explicitly in his fiction, all reveal his abiding interest in philosophy. His literary critical works, **D.H. Lawrence: An Eastern View (1970)**,

The Narrative pattern in Ernest Hemingway's Fiction (1971), and The New Literatures in English (1985) testify to his critical acumen. However, it is an Indian Novelist in English of longstanding and distinction that Nahal deserves particular attention. His creative output is both considerable and impressive. To date he has eight full-length novels, **My True Face (1973), Azadi (1975), Into Another Dawn (1977), The English Queens (1979), The Crown and the Loincloth (1981), Sunrise in Fiji (1988), The Salt of Life (1990) and The Triumph of the Tricolour (1998)**, a short novel titled **The Boy and the Mountain (1997)**, and a collection of short stories called **The Weird Dance and other stories (1965)**. All these works were written over a period of three decades and more, and at considerable intervals. Nahal as a creative writer is content to write over a period of three decades and more, and at considerable intervals. This means that he is content to write steadily and at his own pace. Nahal's **The Gandhi Quartet** nearly covers four decades of India's history from 1915 to 1952, running into 2000 pages with its spectacular setting stretching from the Punjab to the Andamans. And in his other notable writings, he realistically presents human life and society so that the readers can easily grasp the contents; as well he wisely fuses history and fiction and divides them into separate sub-heads. He is undoubtedly a major Indian novelist because of his remarkable fiction writing- eight fine novels, in addition to criticism and fiction for small children. He has taken up the themes of Indian freedom movement as a major core of his fiction.

The Gandhi Quartet is a landmark in the annals of Indian English fiction and historical work which consists of the novels like **The Crown and the Loincloth, The Salt of Life, The Triumph of the Tricolour**, and **Azadi**. The novels in the Quartet have appeared in India in response to the massive political movement and events such as Civil Disobedience movement, Non-cooperation, Dandi yatra, Quit India Movement and Partition of the country. The historical period he is dealing with is the past which he himself has lived and experienced. The fictional characters created by him intermingle with the real historical figures like Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Bose and Jinnah. The first novel **The Crown and the Loincloth** deals with the Non-Cooperation Movement during the years between 1920 and 22, this is followed by the second novel **The Salt of Life** dealing with the incidents from the Civil Disobedience Movement to India's involvement in the Second World War during 1920s and 30s and the third novel **The Triumph of the Tricolour** deals with the incidents from the Quit India Movement to the Cabinet Mission which visited India during the period between 1942 and 46 and the fourth novel **Azadi** mainly deals with the riots that resulted from partition during the period between June 3rd 1947 and January 30, 1948.

Chaman Nahal's **The Gandhi Quartet** which is a 'Gandhian Saga' deals with most of the major incidents and movements of the freedom struggle. The first novel in the quartet **The Crown and the Loincloth** deals with the first phase of the freedom struggle, the Non-Cooperation Movement during 1920 and 1922. O.P. Mathur opines: "... clearly in this novel, Nahal has taken upon himself a difficult and challenging task to portray Gandhi both as an individual and as a symbol, to follow the lives and fortunes of a large number of fictional characters and to project the whole as a metaphor of the multifarious strands of those tumultuous years of struggle generated by the opposing forces of the foreign government (the crown) and the popular uprising symbolized by Gandhi (the loincloth)". (Mathur 330)

The Salt of Life, being second novel in **The Gandhi Quartet**, deals with the second phase of the freedom movement, from 1930 to 1941. Actually this novel deals with some historical incidents such as Gandhi's life in the Ashram, his mass movement against the British, role of Subhas Bose and his attitude

to Gandhian movement, and Jinnah's demand for Pakistan. Within this historical reference, Nahal creates the image of Gandhi in this novel. Such image is projected through the eyes of Indian as well as British characters. *Ashramities* are deeply reverential about Gandhiji. He is a father figure for them. Kusum, the wife of Raja Vishal Chand, respects Gandhi as a father. When Raja Vishal Chand tells her that the Government wants him to arrest Gandhi when he comes to Lambini, she becomes nervous: "Gandhi had been like a father to her for many years. He would be their honoured guest in Lambini. Would they stab a father and a guest in the back? (*The Salt of Life*, p.460). In **The Salt of Life**, Kusum, another protected daughter of a rich family and widow of a revolutionary, joins Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram. Here, she responds to the call of self-suffering and identifies herself with the greater cause of independence. Her marriage with Vishal Chand, the Prince of Lambini, is symbolic of her entry into the world which waits for her redemptive actions. In **The Salt of Life**, Kusum energizes, and recreates everyone she comes across in her march to liberation. Gandhian actions and methods find reinforcement in Kusum's life.

In **The Triumph of the Tricolour**, the third novel of **The Gandhi Quartet**, Nahal deals with the third phase of India's freedom movement, the 1942 Quit India period. Gandhi is the central figure even here, though the violent revolutionaries now play as significant a role in the challenge to the British rule. The novel deals with Kusum's two sons, Vikram and Amit who adopt different postures. Vikram, being the product of the Gandhi Ashram where he has lived from the age of five, follows the Gandhian path. Amit, Kusum's son by Raja Vishal Chand, is more inclined towards the violent revolutionaries. The British Raj was determined to crush with an iron hand now began to gain momentum with the declaration of the Second World War. The divergent trends of the freedom struggle get merged at some point to spearhead for a grand finale:

Even the Marxists wore *Khadi*, which had somehow become the trade mark of any revolutionary. But along with the *Khadi* clothes, they also put on a bit of Gandhian Ideology which now permeated every nook and corner of the country. (Chaudhary, 19)

Historical circumstances force the British to announce an interim Indian government in 1946 before India's full freedom. While most of the Congress leaders accept office in that government, Vikram declines the honour. Instead, he joins Gandhi in the latter's effort to offer healing touch to the victims of communal frenzy. Here Vikram, a fictional character, represents Gandhi in his unselfish, virtuous and honest leadership, because though the Government was formed, Gandhi did not share the power.

Azadi (1975) is considered as Chaman Nahal's magnum opus. It deals with the problems of rootlessness, nostalgia and economic hardships of those Hindus and Sikhs who leave for India after the Indian partition in 1947. The novel covers a period of eight months, from June 3, 1947 to January 30, 1948. It tells the heart rending story of five closely-knit families—Hindu and Sikh – of Sialkot in Punjab which, due to partition, becomes a part of Pakistan. However the greater focus is on the family of Kanshi Ram. It makes for coherence in the narrative. In the words of Bijay Kumar Das, "Though Nahal concentrates on Lala's family his mind like a computer multiplies the horror into numerable folds to get at the correct picture of holocaust" (Das 108). This novel narrates the horrible experience of a Hindu family during the Partition – its displacement and trauma and presents an ideal picture of Gandhi. We can read it by all means as a Gandhian novel. 'Azadi' which is devoted to India's partition is "neither a

romantic nor a political tale, but an intensely moving human saga of displacement and loss of identity” (Reddy, 165). Nahal describes in detail the detestable inhuman acts committed both by the Hindus and Muslims against one another. The harrowing events associated with the partition are presented mainly through the family and friends of Lala Kanshi Ram of Sialkot. They lose everything including the ability to communicate. During their journey to Delhi, they are shocked to see how “a section of humanity occasionally lapse into a wild and barbaric state of mind and betray their heritage by inexplicably indulging in fiendish behavior towards their fellowmen less powerfully placed” (Dhillon 30). In ‘Azadi’ Nahal celebrates Gandhian values through the suffering saga of Lala Kanshi Ram. The novel portrays two images of Gandhi: one, the image of Gandhi as responsible for Partition and his failure to avoid it; second, the image of Gandhi as a messenger of Hindu-Muslim amity. Like many Indians of the pre-independence time, a few characters in the novel too expect that Gandhi would never accept the Partition plan. For the Lalas the only ray of hope is Gandhi who would never agree to a division of the country. This kind of expectation from the Mahatma resulted in blaming him as being responsible for the division of the country; he could have prevented it. The spirit of the novel does not endorse this view. At the basis of the writer’s vision in the novel is the Gandhian ideology. The protagonist - Lala Kanshi Ram, a grain merchant - is a Gandhian hero. His motives in the entire narrative are guided by the Gandhian principle. His attitude that India must win freedom without the division of the sub-continent represents that of an average Indian of the time influenced as he might be by the Gandhian whirlwind. Lala’s friendship with Chaudhari Barkat Ali that symbolizes communal harmony is further invested with the idea of Gandhian secularism. In spite of the harrowing experiences that Nahal describes, there is an underlying current of healthy optimism and a sort of moral vision that illumines the otherwise dark horizon of communal frenzy. When the majority is subjected to fits of fury, thereby losing their reasoning capacity, a few retain their essential goodness and sense of basic human values. The birth of child to Isher Kaur in the train compartment ushers in a ray of hope. Lala Kanshi Ram’s declaration, “I have ceased to hate” (Azadi p.338) carries the weight of the agony he went through in reaching such a state of mental poise. Like Lala Kanshi Ram, Chaudhary Barkat Ali who lived the life of a true Muslim and believed in the nobility of all religions, is a true Nahal defines the meaning of ‘Freedom’ in a typical Gandhian idiom: that ‘Azadi’ means “self-discipline” and “self-sacrifice”, which can be achieved through Hindu-Muslim unity. To Gandhi, the word “freedom” or “Azadi” had a greater connotation than mere freedom from a colonial rule. To him, the word signified Man’s freedom from all sorts of bondages that stifle his growth. The message of love and friendship incidentally is the motto of the novel which Nahal gives in the words of Rabindranath Tagore at the very outset of his narrative. Perhaps the best tribute to Gandhi is provided in the novel by Sunanda, when she says, “men like him come once in centuries” (Azadi p.366).

Azadi thus, deals with the ‘great betrayal’, the consequence of which are however, borne by millions of people of both religions. The novel depicts the betrayal of the people by the political leaders who are responsible for the ill-fated partition. Nahal shows how political parties and their power hungry leaders agree to the plan of partition without even thinking of the future of the minorities living on the Indo-Pak border. Time and again Jinnah, Nehru, Rajaji and Kriupalanti are blamed by the Lala, for the partition.

Kanshi Ram Lala and Chaudhari Barkat Ali are friends. Their families make regular exchange of visits. Barkat Ali’s daughter Nur and Kanshi Ram’s son Arun both are the students of Murray College. The fact of belonging to different religious communities does not deter them from loving each other.

The declaration of the partition of India appears to be a shock to both of them. The relationship between Hindus and Muslims is like the harmony in disharmony. Hostility and friendliness are simultaneously present in the Hindu Muslim relationships. It is a fact that both Hindus and Muslims have been living together in peace centuries after centuries though animosity between the two communities is a phenomenon. In **Azadi** Chaudhari Barkat Ali and Lala Kanshi Ram represent Gandhi's feeling of amity and brotherhood. Chaudhari Barkat Ali represents sensible and humanistic Muslims.

Nahal's **Azadi** is about man's menacing madness, bestiality and savagery which, according to him, may be the metaphor of the Indian partition and at the same time of the assertion of some basic goodness of some individuals belonging to both Hindu and Muslim community. In Pakistan, Hindus and Sikhs are brutally killed during the time of population transfer. The same extent of brutality and barbarity takes place in the Indian side when Muslims living in different cities in Northern India start journeying by train towards Pakistan. Chaman Nahal shows the extent of brutalities taking place in both sides of India-Pakistan border. He describes the atrocities committed by both the Hindus and the Muslims, without any discrimination. He provides an insight into the strange contradictions of human nature, the queer complexities of human mind, the nature of the politics based on communalism, the hypocrisy of the political leaders and also the grain of humanism that lurks in human heart.

In Nahal's **Azadi**, the crisis of both Hindu and Muslim identities are foregrounded as fictional reality. Here the crisis of identity is caused by the rootlessness and nostalgia following the traumatic partitions of a nation. The suffering caused by this loss of identity is too deep for tears. Lala Kanshi Ram experiences the essential spiritual loneliness of man and the final encounter with his own self which is part of the Absolute. However, he continues his life in Delhi with a sense of resignation. His son Arun starts going to a local college of Delhi. Life goes on as is suggested by the picture of Sunanda depicted at the close of the novel. Sunanda plying her sewing machine is quite suggestive of the imperishable will of people to carry on life surmounting personal and national calamities. In the end of the novel they reconcile with the situation due to the partition on the national level, they have to undergo a lot of trials, tribulations. **Azadi** manifests the psychology of the victims of partition as exemplified by Lala Kanshi Ram and others like Barkat Ali, Arun and Nur. Nahal's role in the novel is like a political historian. He explores the nature of azadi and the accompanying partition through the protagonist's reaction to the horrors of the partition.

Jinnah's stubborn demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims in India and some Congress leaders' strategy to win quick freedom from the British rulers even at the cost of the partition of India makes Gandhi exasperated. But, unfortunately, the general impression of the common people is that it is Gandhi who plays the major role in the drama of partition. In **Azadi**, we come across this type of outlook towards Gandhi on the part of the people. Bibi Amarvati's reaction to Gandhi's death is typical of many who had suffered in every way by the partition. The novelist however has made Arun to advocate Gandhi.

Gandhi, the epitome of peace and communal harmony, by all means, opposed Jinnah's two nation theory, the basis of the great divide. When violence erupted across illogically and hastily drawn borders Gandhi took the mission of restoring peace. Gandhi spent the rest of his life to repair the damage caused by the partition of India to its political and social fabric. He fasted to restore communal harmony in Delhi. In **Azadi** it is suggested that it is not Gandhi but the other leaders of the Congress are

responsible for the partition. Further Nahal, too, like Manohar Malgonkar points out that the failure of the non-violent agitation of Gandhi lies mainly with the kind of followers he had.

Azadi depicts the action immediately before and after the partition. It shows that man is essentially sincere, committed to helping community to survive and sustain itself. A few characters in **Azadi** indeed stand for universal goodness of mankind. A few Good Samaritans from the warring communities as well as from the ruling British, form a class by themselves. Lala Kanshi Ram, Barkat Ali, Bill Davidson symbolize goodness on the seamy background of the partition tragedy. Lala Kanshi Ram attracts our attention due to Gandhian ring about him. The novelist, however, demonstrates that even after Partition, some Muslims stand for communal harmony. Chaudhari Barkat Ali is one such large hearted person who does not support any anti-Hindu violence in Sialkot. Through these various characters the novel **Azadi** depicts the conflict between communal ego and humanism, revenge and compassion, anger and tolerance and selfishness and sacrifice. The novel makes a strong appeal to eschew hatred and violence and to follow the philosophy of love and non-violence. The message of the novelist is that it is only by peaceful co-existence, tolerance and mutual trust that the world is going to survive and not by hatred and violence.

Mahatma Gandhi was not only a great political leader but also a passionate lover of humanity, an implacable enemy of all injustice and inequalities. He had almost an instinctive understanding of women and their problems and had a deep abiding sympathy for them. He placed before the nation a far-reaching agenda for the regeneration of Indian women, who were suffering from various oppressive and dehumanizing and exploitative social practices such as child marriage, *Sati Pratha*, ban on widow remarriage, prostitution, *devdasi* system, etc. He writes:

I shall work for an India, in which the poorest shall feel it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability or the curse of intoxicating drinks and drugs. Women will enjoy the same rights as men. (Gandhi 15)

Gandhi was unambiguous in the recognition of the fact that women clearly had a positive role to offer in the reconstruction of the society. He declared himself uncompromising in the matter of women's right because in order to bring about social justice, the recognition of the equality of women was important. Gandhi sincerely wished to deliver real honour and rights to Indian women entangled in the shackles of superstitious patriarchal society. In this process he vehemently criticized the traditional ideal, which equated femininity with passivity, weakness, dependence and subjection and emphasized upon the courage, strength, self-confidence and self-reliance among women needed to break these chains of slavery. As early as 1921, writing in the *Young India*, Gandhiji said:

Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex. It is the nobler of the two, for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge. (Gandhi 292)

Gandhi had tremendous faith in women's inherent capacity for non-violence. Therefore, he assigned to women a distinct and crucial mission in the nationalist quest, which was perhaps the most significant and creative aspect of his vision. Nahal's women protagonist exhibit great fortitude and defiance when they are confronted with adverse circumstances. They are ever ready to brace up and challenge the social evils that deny them their rights. Nahal brings in the mythological image of 'Shakti' as a replacement model for the emerging new women of India. Kusum in 'The Salt of Life' exemplifies 'Shakti', the Goddess of power and creation, when she halts the train in defiance of an alien supremacy, demonstrates Salt Satyagraha, leads the picketing etc. These encounters develop in her the brave qualities of spiritual sustenance: inner vitality, independence, and affirmation. Nahal's female characters reveal great sense of freedom and free will even when crushed down by adverse circumstances. Irene in '**Into Another Dawn**' resists till the last her husband's attempts to confine her to the seclusion of a fortress - like mansion, and to efface her individuality. Malti in **My True Faces** becomes intolerant of a life of innumerable adjustments and walks out boldly on her husband. Kusum gets married a second time, incurring thereby the displeasure of her father in law and her own father. Shyama exhibits great courage, first in her decision to marry a revolutionary and then in her bold determination to continue life with dignity when betrayed by the man of her choice. Abha, Shyama's daughter grows up to become a doctor. She succeeds in emancipating herself from the claustrophobic enclosures and dependency syndrome and decides to lead an independent life as a doctor. She dedicates her life to the upliftment of the poor and downtrodden. Abha opts to remain unmarried and yet adopts an orphan girl, ignoring the norms laid down by Islam in such cases. The women revolutionaries in general are a shade better as partners than conventional wives with the total freedom and sense of equality they come to enjoy with their male counterparts.

Sunanda of **Azadi** represents the transitional stage of Indian womanhood—the period of disillusionment caused by changing value systems consequent on social and political upheavals. As daughter-in-law of the tradition-bound household of Bibi Amarvati, she leads a contented life, in spite of her husband being a good for nothing fellow. She is impeccable in her roles as wife, mother and as daughter-in-law. Partition comes as a nightmare in her life and she flees with the whole lot of the village to the Indian border. During this journey, she is abducted, raped and humiliated by a Pakistani military officer. Instead of submitting herself to her ill luck or committing suicide like some of the conservative Hindu wives did to save their honour, she emerges unscathed to surmount the tribulations with renewed fortitude. Like Rukmini in **Sunrise in Fiji**, she believes that chastity is a thing of the soul rather than a physical attribute. Sunanda, though defiled, has still her honour intact and becomes the very epitome of nobility. She has endured all hardships with a dignity quite in keeping with the Indian womanhood, bringing to our mind the very image of Mother India, emerging jubilant, breaking the shackles that had bound her for generations.

In **The Gandhi Quartet** Nahal portrays women as dynamic forces who render valuable service under the guidance of Gandhi in Indian Independence. Nahal's women characters have shown unlimited fortitude and turn the tormented episode of freedom struggle into a beautiful epic. They can be the ample role models for the new generation and their vision of life assures and reminds the contemporary women that they too can change the destiny of the nation if they have sufficient courage. A woman is a dawn of light where all the darkness disappears. She is the sun that enlightens everyone and beholds the ability to vanish all the fear that grows in darkness of mind. The woman strengthens the foundation of family as a mother, daughter, sister, and wife embracing everyone with the unconditional love. If allowed to grow

their potential they not only enhance a women's world as writers, entrepreneurs, mystics, painters, counselors, scientists but can also provide a better vision to the men's world. The need of the hour is to create an environment that ensures the dignity of women, which could help them to overcome feeling of powerlessness, face the challenges of autonomy and enjoy fully their human rights. Moreover, women have to realize their inner potential and inner strength as emphasized by Gandhi.

The great *Bhagavat Gita* exhorts us to follow the path of '*Karma Yoga*' unmindful of the material rewards it may bring. Gandhi is a *Karmayogi*, a saint dedicated to the service of humanity. As an introspective visionary par excellence, Gandhi makes serene inroads to humanism not from without but from within where solemn phoenix of human reawakening is reborn in the holy urn of consciousness and evolution. Diverse and multidimensional as the Gandhian strategies of humanism are, the socio-cultural aspects of humanism side by side with religion in the form of *Sarvodaya* as an unparalleled aesthetic force of human welfare bring forth a luminous and unending exposure of Gandhi as an ardent humanist. The inherent spirit of humanism as Gandhi believes, lies in endearing one and all – *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*-irrespective of caste, creed community, colour, race, religion etc. A humanist *par excellence*, Gandhi finds the source-point of humanism in non-violence, which, according to him, bears a long tradition. It is nothing new because the spirit of non-violence is dormant in every human being. This necessitates a spurt to be ignited, a method to be practiced in perfect harmony and poignance. A 'soul force' as Tolstoy terms non-violence, it is a sort of resistance that has its roots within us.

An apostle of eternal humanism Gandhi upholds the worth of humanity in terms of little acts of immense importance. His holistic view of life always had the individual at the centre, enjoying every kind of freedom necessary for his moral autonomy and his status as an ever evolving entity. But he also maintained that man should willingly submit himself to social restraint for the sake of the well-being of the whole society. Mohit Chakrabarty observes:

One of the fundamental objectives of Gandhian humanism is to be empowered with the weapon of self-restraint. This will enable an individual to guard himself against disrupting forces. It is an inner force that quickens his judgment to take action against all ills and evils however undesirable and unexpected. (Chakrabarty 25)

Chaman Nahal is one of the distinguished Indian novelists known for his substantial corpus, range of thematic concerns and artistic integrity. He has been fascinated by Gandhi's humanism, which has at its core, the dignity of the individual that refused to surrender before evil. The novels of Nahal reveal his deep human concern and his faith in an affirmation of life. As a true follower of Gandhi, he is thoroughly humanitarian in his approach to life and has a deep faith in basic human values. His major characters in certain situations express their profound commitment to the humanitarian principles and Gandhian ideology. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Nahal expresses his faith in the equality and dignity of womanhood by creating many female characters who assert themselves as "*Shakti*" through their affirmation of 'self'.

Nahal's novels mainly belong to the humanistic tradition of social realism established by Mulk Raj Anand and continued chiefly by Bhabani Bhattacharya in the fifties and sixties. In his novels Nahal projects a positive view of life steeped in Indian Philosophy. The novels of Nahal work out the universal

themes of love, compassion, understanding and authenticity of feeling in social, national and international contexts. The story of *The Crown and the Loin Cloth* moves around the protagonist Sunil Kumar. Sunil sacrificed everything including his life to save the honour of the country. Sunil remains as an immortal soul in the fictional world of Indian Writing in English. In *Azadi*, Lala Kanshi Ram is Gandhi incarnate and goes through identical ordeals and sufferings. The novels where Nahal has chosen politics as a metaphor, it is Gandhi who becomes a symbol of affirmation. For Nahal, Gandhi stands as an embodiment of affirmation. He introduces Gandhi as one of the characters, who acts as the guiding principle, motivating the protagonist and those who accept his point of view, to dedicate themselves to their country in particular, and humanity at large. A striking feature of Nahal's novels is the variety of themes ranging over personal, social, national and international contexts. The themes are dexterously dealt with and subtle exploration of human life, calling for understanding, sympathy, love, forgiveness and acceptance of life are also profusely present in Nahal's major novels. Through these novels Nahal gives a veiled plea for a return to the sustenance and peace provided by one's traditional, moral and spiritual founts. His protagonists find their individual peace and fulfilment through affirmation, hereby fortifying their faith in man's ability to survive as man despite all odds and challenges.

Nahal's four 'quest' novels (***My True Faces, Into Another Dawn, Sunrise in Fiji and The Boy and the Mountain***) reveal his positive attitude to life, acceptance of it in its totality, including its joys and sorrows, not in the abstract but in relation to individual lives. Gandhi was in the profoundest sense of the term a seeker, a ceaseless quester all his life. His quest took place simultaneously in the inner and outer worlds. It is most significant that Gandhi titled his autobiography as ***My Experiments with Truth***. Every activity that the adult Gandhi undertook even from his student days in England was a quest. As he grew older and widened the sphere of his activities, every one of his activities, social, political, religious and spiritual, became a quest, a search into the depths.

Affirmation is a survival strategy. It is a notion of acceptance and approval, an index of positive frame of mind and a creative attitude. Ever since the dawn of life man has been involved in a struggle of existence and might have led a perilous life with myriad hostile agencies lurking in the dark. Affirmation has been the motivating principle and the sustaining factor behind every history of human civilization. Commitment is a pre-requisite for affirmation. In harrowing circumstances, it is necessary for man to reassure himself by asserting his indomitable will to tide over hardships and to keep the torch of life burning. Since crisis demands affirmation of faith, affirmation becomes a means of self fulfillment and self realization. What marks out Chaman Nahal's novels is the streak of optimism running through their fabric, upholding the positive values of life. What marks out Chaman Nahal's novels is the streak of optimism running through their fabric, upholding the positive values of life. Affirmation is the nucleus of his creative ethos and the core of his vision of life. Nahal as a novelist believes in an affirmation of life. He told B.S. Goyal in an interview:

I believe in an affirmation of life in spite of all odds and setbacks. Life is, perhaps, a series of crises until one emerges powerful and resplendent. I don't have a commitment with a slant; I am only committed to the affirmation of life. Life consists in taking on the challenges, and in the refusal to be beaten down. (Goyal 98)

Nahal was fascinated by Gandhi's humanism, which had at its core, the dignity of the individual that refused to surrender before evil. Gandhi's optimistic view of life, built on the rock basis of Upanishadic

precepts had endowed him with the quality of fearlessness. Taking a cue from the *Gita*, Gandhi upheld the value of ceaseless striving for realizing a noble ideal.

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Nahal's vision of life is essentially affirmationist. His faith in the principle of affirmation and humanism is quite deep. In the shaping of his affirmationist vision of life, Gandhi's influence is obviously the profoundest. For Nahal, Gandhi was the embodiment of affirmation of life. The protagonists of **The Crown and the Loincloth**, **The Salt of Life**, **The Triumph of Tricolour** and **Azadi** are seen affirming themselves in the moments of crisis caused specially by the political situations during the period of struggle for freedom and the subsequent fateful tragedy of partition. Sunil, Kusum, Vikram, Lala Kanshi Ram and Sunanda affirm their commitment to timeless social values and Gandhian ideology. Through the affirmation, they find their individual peace and fulfilment, thereby fortifying their faith in man's ability to survive as man despite all odds and challenges.

Chaman Nahal presents a deeply realistic, highly convincing and a candid portrayal of Gandhi in **The Gandhi Quartet**. He builds up Gandhi's personality highlighting his essential human characteristics. Gandhi is presented not as a super-human hero, but as a human being, as an "ordinary" individual. He does not refer to the saintly and mythical qualities that Gandhi came to be invested with later, especially in popular imagination. Nahal does not elaborate on Truth, Non-Violence, *Satyagraha*, *Sarvodaya*, *Swaraj*, strict harmony between ends and means, and other cardinal issues of Gandhi. But they are unobtrusively and effectively present in the narrative. This is the image of Gandhi—the essential Gandhi as Nahal portrays in **The Gandhi Quartet**. This is the man who became the arch mover of India's history in the first half of the last century. Albert Einstein pays homage to Mahatma Gandhi, an Indian born world mentor in the most befitting words.

Gandhi,...a man of wisdom and humility, armed with resolve and inflexible consistency, who has devoted all his strength to the uplifting of his people and the betterment of their lot; a man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being, and thus at all times risen superior. Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth. (Quoted in Tendulkar 286)

Gandhian ideology is multifaceted. It encompasses almost all aspects of life and society. In a very wider sense, it can be said that Gandhi has left no aspect untouched which affect our mind and the life of a nation. He has seen life from all angles. He has incorporated people from all the classes of

society in the direction of freedom movement. Gandhi's belief in the unity of human life implies that all problems, social, political, economic, educational, and personal are intertwined and have to be seen as a complex whole. That is why the basic tenets of Gandhian philosophy embrace various areas of human experience. These tenets in brief are: *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), *Satya* (Truth), *Asteya* (Non-stealing), *Brahmacharya* (chastity), *Asangraha* (Non-possession), *Sharirshrama* (Physical labour), *Aswada* (control of the pallet), *Sarvadharmasmanatva* (equality of all religions), *Swadeshi*, removal of untouchability and caste system. With all these traditional Hindu ideas, he blended the concept of nationhood and work ethics which he imbibed from western philosophy. The cardinal principles of Gandhi are not only inter-related, but also inter dependent. Here lies its strength. The texture of Gandhian ideology is thickly-knitted. One cannot see one aspect in isolation.

As a foreseer of humanism, Gandhi believes that the future of humanity depends on eliminating hatred against the down-trodden and the deprived, the weak and the mute millions. The dignity of human beings is to be nursed with mutual love and sympathy. Gandhi regarded 'untouchability as a greatest blot on Hinduism'. Being a Gandhian, Nahal has also given a true account of the evil practice of untouchability in **The Gandhi Quartet**. In **The Crown and the Loin Cloth** Sunil is shocked at the cancer that afflicts Indian society, i.e., untouchability. When Sunil approaches 'Doms', the untouchables' village near Rohru, he finds them in a miserable and pathetic condition. Wherever Sunil goes, he finds the untouchables living in segregation and face to face with the odds of life. When he tries to mix up with them, they do not respond because they seem to accept their low social status as their fate. They also seem to realize that they would get nothing better than segregation, low social and economic status, unhygienic conditions to live in, rags to wear and food-remainders to eat. The novelist has nicely observed the abjectness of the untouchables in following lines:

Everywhere he (Sunil) found them in conditions that could only be called inhuman. As he entered their enclosures, they lined up in the street and bowed in obeisance. It was not their poverty that hit him — appalling though it was. It was the abject manner in which they seemed to accept their status — without protest, without murmur, with their heads lowered, as though they deserved nothing better than this. He asked them for a glass of water and they were afraid to serve it to him. He asked them for a cup of tea and they begged him to think better of it. He wanted to spend a night with them in their huts and they resolutely refused (*The Crown and the Loincloth*, p.235)

Sunil's heart is filled with indignation and hatred for the caste Hindus for the age—odd practices of racial discrimination, segregation and untouchability. He feels so much obsessed and humiliated that he drafted a long letter to Gandhi about this blot on Hinduism to which Gandhi replies,

"I too live in the same shame and humiliation. Only I shouldn't let the larger issue, the fight for freedom, be clouded by it. When we become a free nation, abolition of untouchability will be the primary aim of my life — as long as I last. In the mean time, think of yourself as an untouchable and befriend these lonely children of God. If they won't let you live in their midst out of fear, why not bring one of them to live with you? "My blessings." The letter was signed 'Bapu' — 'Father' (*The Crown and the Loincloth*, p. 238)

As a humanistic visionary, Gandhi hopes for a regeneration of India in the elimination of economic and social disparities. Sunil feels that the poor oppressed sections of India cannot understand the true significance of political freedom and realises the need for achieving economic freedom. He comes to know that what is immediately required is liberating the common man from the shackles of poverty, disease, illiteracy, superstition:

Their souls were buried in the earth under their soles, and they had to be resurrected before they could have a sense of the soul-force. If they could keep themselves clean, if they could earn their daily bread with dignity, if they could look upon each other with respect -those would be achievements enough for them. (*The Crown and the Loincloth*, p 264)

Chaman Nahal as a celebrated novelist depicts Gandhian spirit in his novels through his characters like Sunil, Kusum, Vikram, Lala Kanshi Ram, Sunanda and mould them practical idealists like Gandhi. As humanitarian values found in Mahatma, the spirit of *Bhagvad Gita's Karma Yoga* guided him in his endeavours for freedom. He considered it his duty to help his countrymen and fellow human beings. The same spirit is instilled by Nahal in the protagonists of his novels. The novels which comprise **The Gandhi Quartet** are to be read as exercises in imaginative recreation and enactment in terms of fiction of the eventful years of the freedom struggle, tumult, tribulation, transition and the personalities involved in it, with Gandhi at the centre. Nahal succeeds in his attempt to chronicle the modern heroic age which is identified with Gandhi and how under his impact, his followers like Sunil, Kusum, Vikram and Lala Kanshi Ram are transformed from the ordinary to heroic.

Chaman Nahal is one of the outstanding writers who assure the continuity of life on earth. He is on the side of Life and reveals himself an avowed propagator of a positive approach to life, from an individual and a collective point of view. Nahal's protagonists are all on the side of life. They make life meaningful and valuable. They are preservers of positive ethical and philosophical values, which when adopted in life, can speak for life's continuity on earth. The exquisite expression of the unstifled voice of humanity and the portrayal of ever-reviving affection marks out Nahal from the majority of Indian English novelists. In novel after novel, he gives this message of a happy synthesis of suffering and rejuvenation which is the core of his philosophy of life. Chaman Nahal can be considered as a celebrated Indian English novelist by virtue of the clear directions he presents through his affirmative principles, which find explication in his novels, for the building of the future on the rock foundation comprising love, faith, compassion, tolerance, non-violence, truth and spirituality, and also by virtue of his innovative techniques, which match the themes, thereby rendering his novels valuable and meaningful.

Indian culture is a composite one. It is a synthesis of various cultures and traditions. Communities of different religions maintain their identities independently in India; at the same time they are all Indians. The pluralism is the fabric of Indian society. Like Gandhi, Nahal's concept of Indianness is the integration of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and others living together for centuries. Nahal abhors the Hindu-Muslim riot, atrocities on women, looting and burning of properties, and colossal loss of human lives. He exposes the utter meaninglessness of the barbarity, falsehood and hypocrisy of the people, involved in partition violence in the name of religion. Partition was unavoidable and a matter of past. But there should not be any 'mental partition' in the name of caste, language and religion among Indians

now. To make India developed and a peaceful abode for all, every Indian should adopt the teachings of Gandhi. We, the Indians, should not forget that India attained freedom from the shackles of slavery by following the ideals formulated by Gandhi.

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