

Gandhian Ideology of Republicanism in Chaman Nahal's *The Gandhi Quartet*

Dr.M.Kannadhasan, S.Sudha Devi

Abstract:

Indian writing in English like all other new literatures of the world in English has been the outcome of national ferment and upsurge, which manifested itself as much in the socio-political life of the country. Of all the Indian writers who have used Gandhi for their creative purposes, Chaman Nahal is the most significant. His The Gandhi Quartet is a landmark in the annals of Indian English fiction which consists of the novels like The Crown and the Loincloth, The Salt of Life, The Triumph of the Tricolour and Azadi. The Gandhi Quartet successfully reconstructs the three stages of India's struggle for freedom- the non-cooperation movement, the civil disobedience movement and the Quit India movement of 1942. It also gives a moving account of the division of India into India and Pakistan, and the disaster that follows it. In the end, Nahal seems to suggest that a return to Gandhi is the only solution to the problems people face today. It is hoped that a critical analysis of The Gandhi Quartet, the most expensive commonwealth novel, in terms of its themes and techniques, would help gain fresh insights into Nahal's fictional art. Viewed in this context, acquires a greater significance, as it reminds us in unflinching terms, of the need to hold fast to the Gandhian ideals in a world torn apart by narrow sectarian and communal considerations.

KEYWORDS: Struggle for freedom, Non-cooperation movement, Techniques, Fictional art.

Chaman Nahal gave expression in their fictional writings to the impact of Gandhi on the masses and the freedom struggle led by him. However, as has been pointed out in the course of the discussion, these novelists absorbed Gandhian thought in different ways, each according to his own intellectual predilections and artistic needs. All the same time, he maintains that he belongs to the second generation of Indian English novelists. Of all the Indian writers who have used Gandhi for their creative purposes, Chaman Nahal is the most significant. No one has written so extensively on Gandhi as Nahal. The Gandhi Quartet successfully reconstructs the three stages of India's struggle for freedom- the non-cooperation movement of 1920-22, the civil disobedience movement of 1930-31 and the Quit India movement of 1942. It also gives a moving account of the division of India into India and Pakistan, and the failure that follows it.

Nahal portrays nearly two hundred characters representing different ethnic groups and the enigmatic personality of Gandhi. Taken as a single entity, The Gandhi Quartet constitutes the most extensive Commonwealth novel. Nahal shows how looked plain and ordinary with his short stature and lean body and with rather common features. But Nahal also shows how, in spite of these physical handicaps, Gandhi becomes "a symbol of moral and spiritual strength" triumphing over his physical odds: "By associating himself with politics, he moderates and humanizes them. 'I should rather say he 'divinizes' them, as the 'human' left to itself is not far from the animal.

Chaman Nahal's diligence, inspired objectivity and his detachment make him present not only Gandhi's "spiritual splendor, moral luminosity" but also "political warts and personal failings of which the Mahatma was only too well aware." Nahal describes at length Gandhi's failure to judge people's inability to remain non-violent in the thick of the agitation. In spite of his vow of celibacy, he cannot help looking at Kasturbai with desire. Nahal also shows Gandhi as impulsive.

The violent incidents at Chauri Chaura and other places in the wake of the non-cooperation movement make Gandhi sad. Nahal gives a moving pictures of Gandhi, even before India gained independence, become a disillusioned man because of the growing indifference of the congress intellectuals to his programme of non-violence and Khadi. No one has written so extensively on Gandhi as Nahal. His The Gandhi Quartet is a

Assistant Professor, Department of English Thiruvalluvar, University, Vellore, Tamilnadu
Ph.D Scholar, Department of English, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, Tamilnadu

landmark in the annals of Indian English fiction which consists of the novels like *The Crown and the Loincloth*, *The Salt of Life*, *The Triumph of the Tricolour* and *Azadi*.

The Crown and the Loincloth, the first volume of the *Quartet* series, narrates the conflict between the British Government represented by the crown and national movement for freedom led by Gandhi, represented by *Loincloth*. Gandhi decides to purify himself further and leading lead the nation against the government. Then Nahal symbolically suggest the impending victory of Gandhi by describing the “a curious phenomenon”. It describes how Gandhiji revitalizes the having forty winks spirit of the Indians and opens their eyes to the need and effectiveness of fighting the British government disorderly it establishes Gandhiji as a leader of the masses, par excellence. It projects Gandhi at the macro level and Sunil at the micro level. Nahal vindicates the nobility of non-violence over terrorism by making Sunil sacrifices his life while trying to save the Prince of Wales the figure-head of the repressive government.

The Salt of Life, second volume of *The Gandhi Quartet*, which describe Gandhi’s epoch- making Dandi March of 1930. Gandhiji’s shows deep concern for his followers, including women, and his persistent faith in them. *The Salt of Life* is arranged in a logically ordered sequence and they arouse interest and suspense. There is a continual interaction between the characters and the incidents portrayed. Nahal narrates how Kusum, “a devoted follower” of Gandhi, marries Raja Vishal Chand and leaves Gandhi’s Ashram, while Vikram, her son by Sunil, stays with Gandhi. Vikram though a teen ager, walks with Gandhi to Dandi and breaks the salt law. After the Raja’s death, Kusum returns to Gandhi.

The Triumph of Tricolour, which is designed as the third volume of *The Gandhi Quartet*, Nahal continues the Gandhi saga, but this time with a difference. It deals with the Quit India movement laying bare Gandhi’s firm belief in the ultimate success of non-violent struggle for freedom, as also his disturbance over the division of people on the basis of religion, caste and creed. Though Gandhi continues to be the dominating presence, the novelist’s chief concern seems to be weaving the fabric of the freedom struggle with the crimson strands of the revolutionary trends. It shows the rise of Subhas Bose and the violent revolutionaries “in the challenge to the British rule”. Amit, Kusum’s son by Raja Vishal Chand, joins the revolutionaries while Vikram is inclined towards the Gandhian path. Vikram refuses to accept office in the interim government. Instead, he joins Gandhi in the latter’s effort to offer healing touch to the victims of communal frenzy. These trends and movements which the British Raj was determined to crush with an iron hand now began to gain momentum with the declaration of the Second World War.

Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi*, which forms the fourth volume of *The Gandhi Quartet*, mainly deals with the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. It represents the how man is a victims of forces of history and how religion, at times arouses mind numbing bestiality 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. 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. 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. Nahal is essentially an affirmations. He is of the firm view that life is worth living with its entire vicissitudes. He does not fail to project his affirmation of life even in a grave novel like *Azadi* dealings as it does with the holocaust of partition.

Even after the announcement pertaining to the partition is made over the radio, he hopes that at least for economic reasons, he will be allowed to stay in Sialkot, which is now a part of Pakistan. 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”

The Epilogue gives a brief description of the post-Independence political India at the end of *Azadi* successfully connects all the four volumes of *The Gandhi Quartet*. Nahal arranges the incidents in the Epilogue in such a way that it acquires an analyzable form and meaning. The partition of India and the awful and ghastly experience of millions of refugees and *The Crown and the Loincloth* which narrates the first mass movement, even in 1985 he said that he would be writing two more novels narrating the second and third phases of India’s struggle for freedom and complete the trilogy. After writing *The Salt of Life* which concerns itself with the

historic Dandi March, he said that he was working “on The Triumph of the Tricolour, the last of his novel based on India’s freedom movement.

The Gandhi Quartet is the story of the freedom movement led by Gandhi, it is the story of Kusum, The fictional heroine, as well. Nahal devotes almost the entire “Epilogue” to Kusum. It tells us how Kusum is once again a disappointed woman because Vikram decides to stay in Sevegram and continue the work that is dear to the late lamented Gandhi. Amit goes against the wishes of his mother and marries a tribal girl. As a result, Kusum begins to feel hurt and lonely. She even contemplates suicides. At this juncture, Bapu’s voice tells her to “have faith” The words help her regain her composure. Moreover we feel that we decide what a character is like when we observe him or her behaving in front of us, we can use our critical intelligence and our knowledge of human beings to reach an assessment of them. Thus, it is evident that though Kusum is the leading fictional character in The Gandhi Quartet, Nahal has no intension of idealizing her. She says:

I used to be so firm once, had such firm views, they
called me cold and unfeeling for that firmness, but now I
seem to falter, may be it’s my age, may be it’s my fears. (363)

But soon, the maternal affection for her children makes Kusum forgive their son’s perfunctory attitude to her. She prays to god: “please have a mercy on my boys, please have mercy on us one and all, please have mercy on Shalini, please let Amit and Shalini be happy” At this stage, she hears someone telling her: “Her faith .” She, at once realizes that it is Bapu’s voice.

Azadi, like other novels dealing with the holocaust of India’s partition, occupies a special place in Indian English fiction. Chaman Nahal in The Gandhi Quartet takes meticulous care to bring in characters and situations by which he is able to highlight the main features of Gandhian philosophy. Nahal’s Gandhi in The Gandhi Quartet is never a static character. The gradual unfolding of his personality is carried out with the focus always on his inner development, consistent with the great ideals he cherished and which he put to harness for the great purpose at hand. Nahal brings out in vivid colours instances of his essential tactfulness, his immense capacity to move the masses, his unrelenting bend of mind in upholding the values he cherished, his concern for the seemingly unimportant matters of life and his intense personal conflicts that led him to the core of truth. Gandhian ideology in consonance with the changing times is worth looking into.

The contemporary scene, however, is not much encouraging. It may be because the present-day writers do not have the benefit of the living presence of Gandhi or even Gandhian worth emulating. Thus Nahal presents a deeply realistic, highly convincing and an unusually candid portrayal of Gandhi in The Gandhi Quartet.

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