



Study on the Gandhi in Creative and Critical Imagination

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Abstract: Mahatma Gandhi is not only a universal figure but also an immortal one. During the preIndependence phase of India, Gandhi became first a national and soon enough an international leader of immense political and philosophical significance. Gandhian literature began pouring in from all corners, native as well as outside. Even today Gandhi continues to have a dominating presence in the literary world and in fact literature that ignores Gandhi attracts critical attention. Though his treatment in the post-Independence phase has undergone changes from that in the pre-Independence times, nevertheless, what is certain is that Gandhi can never be separated from writing. India in contemporary times is a set stage for Gandhi and Gandhigiri. Be it as the historical figure or creator of Gandhism or as a symbolic Gandhian cap. Mahatma Gandhi permeates fiction as well as non-fiction in Indian writings both in English and other languages. These include works written from within and outside India. In creative works from India and the space of diaspora, whether it is his reverence or lampooning, Gandhi is redefined in ways that are quite contemporary. Whereas in some cases there is an attempt to grapple with Gandhi and ultimately accommodate him, in other instances nothing of Gandhism remains unchallenged. Whatever be the case, in creative writings there is a sense of strong involvement as the writers pen Gandhi and Gandhism.

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Introduction

The development of Gandhi from the beginning till date in Indian literature with emphasis on Indian diaspora along with his treatment in the western literary space. An exhaustive study of Gandhi literature is not possible therefore selective works have been chosen to present a critical survey of Gandhi in literature and prove that Gandhi is not only alive in literature but has opened up new chapters of literary and critical discourse. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section deals with works in Indian English from the native space followed by the second section that deals with Gandhi in indigenous language literature including dalit literature. The third section deals with Gandhi in Indian diaspora and this is the focus on the chapter. Lastly, a brief survey of western literary thought on Gandhi has been included to make the study comprehensive enough and to prove the significance of the subject. An attempt has also been made to study each of the sections in three phases namely—the during—Gandhi period in which Gandhi was usually treated as demi-God, followed by after-Gandhi period which saw the beginning of critical reviewing of Gandhi and Finally the Post-nineties phase wherein Gandhi is being caricaturised with all

sorts of contradictions and rejections. This categorisation into different responses with each phase is not rigid, the broad categories are only given to show the development of Gandhi as a subject with each passing phase. Before a study of Gandhi in literature is undertaken it is necessary to be familiar with the basic principles that Gandhi stood for in order to capture the essence of his portrayal in different works. The main ideas that Gandhi propagated were—Truth, Non-violence and swadeshi besides—simplicity, vegetarianism, preference of manual labour and faith in Hinduism, especially Bhagwad Gita. An ideal of these principles helps in familiarising ourselves with the various parameters that writers have chosen to approach Gandhi. If at one time he is seen as the cultivator of Indian nationalism, then at other times he is a lover of mankind; sometimes he is a leader of Swadeshi; and at other instances, he is the mahatma only to be revered and imagined.

Gandhi In Indian English

In Indian writings in English from within the homeland, both Gandhi and Gandhism have undergone semantic alterations, redefining Gandhi's relationship with the domestic imagination. From

being a metaphysical persona in the during-Gandhi era, we come across him now as a historical being with all human vulnerabilities. Though Gandhi receives critical attention in most writings of post-nineties, yet he is not caricaturised with as much vehemence as it has been observed in writings written from the space of diaspora. The current section dealing with Gandhian literature includes a survey of fiction as well as non-fiction works on Gandhi during the three phases—during-Gandhi from 1990 to 1948-49, post Gandhi from 1948-1990 and finally the post-nineties. Some of the works studied in the first phases include those by Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and others. In the post-Independence phase, the works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Chaman Nahal and others have been studied while post-nineties section include Uma Dhupelia Mesthrie, Ashish Nandy, Sudhir Kakkar and more. A few writers may be common to two or all three phases, depending on when their works on Gandhi have been created. An attempt has been made to place the works chronologically as the emphasis is on portrayal of Gandhi in works during the different phases and study how attitudes towards him have changed with passing times.

V.S. Naipaul on Gandhi: Mahatma as a Failed Reformer

The responses that emanate from the diasporic space towards home, homeland and native ethos are not homogenous for a number of reasons. One, Indian diaspora as such is not a monolithic category. The distance that each diasporic travels in space and time away from his homeland, in a way decides his responses towards both his filiative and affiliative spaces. Also the different native backgrounds of the diasporic writers also impinge a lot upon their poetics of negotiation in the alien land. Indian diaspora, spread as it is across space, time and native languages, reveals a range of response towards the homeland, its institutions and nationalist icons. Gandhi is one of the most prominent icons of India and its Indianess, and almost without exception has been the perennial subject of diasporic re-visiting. Gandhi emerges as India's hope as well as despair in the revisionary diasporic writings. The present chapter undertakes an extended study of one such account of Gandhi as it emerges in the writings, particularly the travel writings of V.S. Naipaul. Often described as an Indian who is not quite an India, Naipaul has made a number of critical comments on Gandhi. Naipaul's credo lies in his prose works as well as fiction. Born in Trinidad, having spent most of his adult life in England when bearing ancestral roots in India. Naipaul dangles between the neo-colonised and the developed nations as a writer in self-exile. Prompts his

attitude towards the homeland. His travelogues on India— *An Area of Darkness*. *India : A Wounded Civilization* and *India : A Million Mutinies Now* and party his India-based *The Overcrowded Barracoon*, believed to have been written during the darker phase of his career, bring forth a disappointment attitude towards life, as they exhibit Naipaul's critical fixations with India. In this chapter Naipaul's attitude towards Gandhi in his non-fictional writings has been graphed. The travelogues mentioned above have been placed chronologically as far as possible so as to reveal the changing Naipaul treatment of Gandhi over a period to time. Towards the end of reference has also been made to the treatment of Gandhi in Naipaul's fictional works as well. As a British citizen to an Indian origin with a West Indian address, Naipaul is a postcolonial subject of multiple affiliations who is not obliged to look at any space, be it native or foreign with unqualified adoration, or romantic indulgence. A descendant of indentured labour, and a third generation diasporic, Naipaul is may times away from the homeland both in space and time, Gandhi is his favourite icon for it offers him a ready frame to approach, understand and subsequently indict India.

Naipaul's diasporic ideology transcends root fixity unlike that of diasporic writers as Raja Rao, Despite the melange of cultures, attitudes and religions, Naipaul encounters fixities of attitude in India and that is what perplexes his postcolonial psyche. Naipaul's writings sum up his experiences as an expatriate searching for an identity beyond the easy writings sum up his experiences as an expatriate searching for an identity beyond the easy binaries of the colonised and the colonial, the native and the alien, the home and the abroad. During his initial visits to India, Naipaul was taken back by the sense of historical amnesia, orthodoxy ad a community in India that was intellectual flawed and was obliterating individuality owing to Ganshism. And thus Naipaul began what can be describe as the anti Gandhi drive in his writings, especially non-fictional. Either this contempt is evident in direct attack on Gandhi or though character that exhibit pro-Gandhi attitude who then do not come across as enlightened or matter-of-fact individuals. Critics time and again comments on Naipaul's fascination with Gandhi. His Gandhi is a dramatic character standing amidst as figure of national tragedy. Gandhi represents a pious approach leading to a vicious failure. Naipaul is an itinerant observer scrutinising the postcolonial world. In fact Amit Choudhuri (Choudhuri, Amit: online) frames Naipaul for making the colonised societies to bear the burden on being ever vibrant, Naipaul's journey through India is rather an account of a colonial experience, In fact, he has often been hailed as the minion of neo-colonialism. And it is perhaps his

colonial toning that leads him into categorising Indians. He too is a distant observer. In Naipaul's own words, the books he wrote about journeys to India have taken him to unthought-of realms of emotions, giving him a fresh yet startling world-view and making him realise the colonial schizophrenia he was suffering from in his writings.

Raja Rao on Gandhi: Gandhi as Mahatma

About Gandhi winter/lawyer C.S. Dharmadhikari writes: Gandhi was the most normal of men. He was universal. Such a man cannot be measured, weighted, or estimated. He is the measure of all things. Gandhi was not a philosopher, nor a politician. He was a humble seekers of truth. Truth unites, because it can be only one. You can cut man's head, but not his thought, Nonviolence is the only other aspect of the sterling coin of truth. Non-violence is love, the very content of life (Dharmadhikari: online). These words best define the reverential attitude towards Mahatma Gandhi that still rules the roots not only in India but also throughout the world. This is despite a vehement critical as well as creative re-visioning of the saint-cum-politician in recent times. This segment consisting of Gandhi's admirers, by and large, particularly positions Gandhi as an amazingly successful leaders who touched the world both spiritually and politically. The very reasons that Gandhi is criticised for happens to be the very points for which he is admired as well. He is defined as a moral, spiritual leader whose religion was a means to invigorate the sentimentally sensitive people, especially Indians. The spiritual approach he used was a means of implementing his revolutionary ideas through a more accessible mode. His inner voice of illumination guided him throughout in the selfless process of seeking welfare of other through the medium of his very own self. He was the right combination of the supple and the firm, a shrewd politician, and a humanitarian, a spiritual guide, all at the same time. In contrast to diaspora writers of the likes of Naipaul, Rashavan N. Iyer and Bikhu Parekh whose presentations of Gandhi border on careful scrutiny and unsparing attitude, we have, a positive or rather meditative invocation of Gandhi emanating from another space of diaspora, Raja Rao who has been a diasporic for more than 70 years is a prominent figure of this space. Most of Raja Rao's fiction and non-fiction delves into the religious and mystic roots of India, and can thus be considering a very strong example of the above-mentioned space of Indian diaspora. In all his works—non-fiction and otherwise Rao exhibits a tendency to romantically indulge with the persona of Gandhi who he seems to consider one of the most significant of icons representing India. His treatment of Gandhi in his biographical masterpiece.

The Ideal And The Actual In Gandhi's Philosophy

The question: "How is the ideal related to and distinct from the actual?" is crucial to the understanding of Gandhi's philosophy. The failure to appreciate this has led his critics either to misrepresent him or to call him inconsistent and full of contradictions. Gandhi has often been quoted against himself. Dr. Bondurant writes: "Gandhi's political philosophy is, indeed, elusive. To the scholar who seeks internally consistent, systematised bodies of thought, the study of Gandhi is unrewarding."¹ She attributes this to the "result of his thinking in public."² Another recent writer, Dr. Paul F. Power, writes: "Divergent and sometimes conflicting positions can be traced throughout most of his public life, although one may dominate the others during particular phases."³ He tries to classify Gandhi's idea into different categories at different times and concludes that they "cut across."⁴ At the same time, later on he observes: "And if one of Gandhi's characteristics was rigid adherence to principle, another, equally notable, was his capacity of adaptation to people and circumstances." But how he made this "adaptation to people and circumstances" is not explained. To Mr. Hiren Mukherjee, an Indian communist, Gandhi was a Utopian "running what he imagined were model settlements".

There are, however, others who think differently. Professor Morris-Jones observes: "The wonder begins to be that over a half century of social change, over a number of diverse situations, so much consistency should remain."⁶ Professor Tinker writes: "Few political leaders have been so fundamentally consistent as Gandhi, with a consistency impossible of achievement."⁷

Understanding Gandhian Philosophy

Gandhi, it is true, was not concerned with constructing a system of philosophy, but mainly with applying the ideals and principles that had become a part of his life. Therefore, we do not find the distinction between the ideal and the actual explicitly stated. One discovers this only when studying his ideas in the context of his background, which was essentially that of Hindu philosophy. Cut off from this source, his ideas sometimes produce the impression of inconsistency; read in the context, they form a coherent whole. He may, therefore, not appear to be consistent with his previous statements, but he is, in his own words, consistent with truth as it may present itself at a given moment. He explains it further: "Whenever I have been obliged to compare my writing even fifty years ago with the latest, I have discovered no inconsistency between the two. But friends who observe inconsistency....should try to see if there is not

an underlying and abiding consistency between the two seeming inconsistencies.”⁸

Although for understanding Gandhi’s philosophy it is necessary that the concepts be understood in the context of Hindu philosophy, it is equally important to bear in mind that Gandhi’s connotations of terms are different from the prevalent ones. Quite often they sound national or geographical, when in fact they are universal. He never seems to have realised that this could sometimes have the effect of damaging his own purpose.⁹ The ultimate ideal for Gandhi, as he repeated several times, is unrealised and unrealisable; its value consists in pointing out the direction. According to him, there must always be an unbridgeable gulf between the ideal and its practice. The ideal will cease to be one if it becomes possible to realise it. He argues: “Where would there be room for that constant striving, that ceaseless quest after the ideal that is the basis of all spiritual progress, if mortals could reach the perfect state while still in the body?” Striving after the ideal is the very essence of practising Gandhi’s philosophy. To the extent we make this effort, to that extent we realise the ideal.

Truth and Nonviolence

Two basic principles, Truth and Nonviolence, are the foundations of Gandhi’s philosophy. At the highest level of experience they merge and become one with God. The ideal of reality is also the ideal of value - a distinctive mark of Hindu philosophy. God, therefore, has been referred to by Gandhi as Truth or Love (nonviolence in its perfection). His ideal of life, self-realisation, therefore, is couched in ideal terms, when the Unity of Man and God has also been achieved.

Gandhi, however, is fully aware that in actual fact, at the present level of human experience, there is a gulf between man and God; indeed, this gulf will never be completely bridged as long as we are in this body. “Being necessarily limited by the bonds of flesh we can achieve perfection only after the dissolution of the body.” But while in this body, the gulf can certainly be narrowed. Thus recognising the imperfect nature of man, Gandhi’s prescription would be to follow the relative truth persistently which he called “satyagraha”.

This shows the dynamic character of his ideas. In order to achieve this ideal, he prescribed an ethical discipline - the observance of vows which he defined as “doing at any cost something that one ought to do”. But taking of a vow does not mean that we are able to observe it completely from the very beginning, but it does mean “constant and honest effort in thought, word and deed, with a view to its fulfillment”. It is no doubt true that in this way the practice of the ideal becomes very slippery indeed - anything could

be justified as following the ideal. But this is unavoidable as is the fate of all ethical ideals whose observance can hardly be a matter of strict objective scrutiny; it would ultimately depend on the spirit of the person who observes it and which no outsider can determine fully. At the same time, it does not condone the moral lapses of the individual; rather, this consciousness should make one strive to overcome the imperfections. Gandhi’s adoption of nonviolence as a method of pursuing truth is due to the fact that man, imperfect as he is, can only strive, he cannot command the result. Perfect nonviolence, being the attribute of God alone, cannot be practised by human beings.

Being a part of society, man cannot but participate in “himsa” that the very existence of society involves. Gandhi, therefore, would consider a person true to his faith if “there is an effort to avoid the violence that is inevitable in life”. That is how Gandhi’s ideal of nonviolence is translated into actual practice. In essence, it consists “in allowing others the maximum of convenience at the maximum inconvenience to us, even at the risk of life. Everyone has to determine for himself the amount of inconvenience he is capable of putting up with. No third party can determine it for him.” Gandhi believed that one should rather be conscious of one’s imperfections than that one should lower one’s ideal; this would spur the individual to perfect himself. The application of nonviolence and satyagraha to social and political fields has been a subject of great controversy.

So complete was Gandhi’s faith that he considered it a remedy against all social evils. What makes it a unique method of bringing about change is the transformation of the whole atmosphere, satyagrahi and the opponent included. Its success or failure is not to be judged in terms of victory or defeat of one party but in terms of a change of heart of both. It is not merely a form of persuasion which is aimed in one direction only. If, in spite of the best efforts of the satyagrahi, some moral coercion is felt by the opponent, then such coercion is unavoidable because of the imperfect nature of the satyagrahi. However, he is obliged to try his best to reduce this unavoidable coercion to the minimum. That alone would make it different from passive resistance. Ideally not even a group organisation is necessary. “A man or woman who is saturated with ahimsa has only to will a thing and it happens.” This is because a perfect satyagrahi would be nearer to God; and what is beyond His power! Since such a perfect satyagrahi is not available, Gandhi realised the necessity of group action.

Also satyagraha has its educative purpose, which is to bring about confidence in the community. Gandhi’s method strongly emphasizes the need of ethical discipline, whose essential ingredient is

courage - the courage of dying without killing. Having decided upon the rightness of a situation, Gandhi would not like one to be a passive spectator to evil. That would be participation in the evil itself. If one does not have sufficient nonviolence to die without killing one should not shamefully flee from the danger in the name of nonviolence. Rather, Gandhi would advise killing and being killed. While for himself he did not believe in the use of arms at all, he would not hesitate to advise their use by those who had no faith in non-violence. "If there was a national government, whilst I should not take any direct part in any war, I can conceive occasions when it would be my duty to vote for the military training of those who wish to take it.

For I know that all its members do not believe in nonviolence to the extent I do. It is not possible to make a person or a society nonviolent by compulsion." Under certain circumstances, nonviolence may be only a matter of policy, as it was with the Indian National Congress. But this cannot be identified with the level of nonviolence which Gandhi personally was capable of. There is not a uniform pattern of application of nonviolence for all individuals and societies. Gandhi is sometimes talking in terms of the ideal, sometimes from his personal level; and sometimes from the point of view of what he considered the Indian masses were capable of doing. It is this distinction, which is not always made explicit, that gives the impression of inconsistency. Sometimes a confusion is made between the acts of the individual and those of the State, and it is expected that Gandhi's State is to be nonviolent. But how is the State to act nonviolently, when for Gandhi it "represents violence in a concentrated and organised form"? Indeed a nonviolent State is a contradiction in terms. Ultimately, when nonviolence is the governing principle of society, we could not call it a State - it could only be called a nonviolent stateless society. And that is the ideal for Gandhi. In such a society people would simply grow accustomed spontaneously to observe their social obligations without the operation of the state. The necessity of legal enforcement arises because of human imperfections. The more the individuals have imbibed the spirit of nonviolence, the less the necessity of the state. This is the implication of Gandhi's concept of Swaraj.

"The attempt to win Swaraj is Swaraj itself." It is a developing ideal and is "better than the best". Gandhi calls it "indefinable". In the context of the Indian National Movement, he said that Swaraj did not mean merely political independence but "many other things". A Western style of parliamentary government he would accept as Swaraj for the time being only. While in the ideal society there is no room for the military and the police, yet in the actual State there is

provision for it according to the moral level of its citizens. That is to say, a predominantly non-violent State is the practical possibility and is the second best ideal of Gandhi. Failure to recognise the levels in Gandhi's thought results in such confused statements as this: "It is indeed clear that Gandhi held essential ideals in common with anarchists, that he was willing, as they are not, to accept a degree of state organisation and control. He believed that government to be best which governs least, and yet he held that 'there are certain things which cannot be done without political power', even though there are 'numerous other things which do not at all depend upon political power'....It would, of course, be incorrect to suppose that Gandhi thought of retaining the state as some intermediate step in a determined progress towards anarchical society."10 Gandhi's actual State does concede the desirability of using the military and the police to deal with anti-social elements and defend the country. What, however, distinguishes his approach is the admission of weakness not of the doctrine of nonviolence or of satyagraha, but of the individuals who practise it. Whatever political institutions Gandhi accepted, he did so only as a transitional device, to be transcended by better ones. No institutional device is final. They must evolve with the evolution of individuals.

In actual practice, it would be a mixture: "A government cannot succeed in becoming entirely nonviolent because it represents all the people." He expected that the national policy would incline towards militarism of a modified character. While fighting for the independence of India, Gandhi was conscious all the time of the necessity of moral upliftment of the individuals who were to work the institutions after independence. In directing his energies towards political reform his method was equally directed "to educating the individuals to rise to a moral stature". He says: "Responsible government, which is a gift without the will and power of the people behind it, will be a mere paper responsibility hardly worth the paper on which it may be printed. If it is a fact that the atmosphere for immediate self-government among the states is not propitious, and the people are not ready to pay the price, it follows that they should have the proper training." When, therefore, Gandhi is criticised as a politician, such criticism is mainly based on his having one end in view, viz. the national independence of India; it ignores the other important principle of Gandhi, namely the moral training of the individual. In the economic field, Gandhi holds to the ideal of Trusteeship. Ultimately he subscribes to "non-possession". But in actual life he admits that some possession is unavoidable for the maintenance of the body and its needs so that it may be used for

performing its duties. But property must always be held as a trust for the people and must satisfy this instrumental character. While absolute trusteeship is no doubt an abstraction and is unattainable, like Euclid's point, an effort in this direction will remove the hardships of inequality. In the actual world, Gandhi would not even mind State regulation, but with the minimum use of power - by which he means constitutional machinery. He goes to the length of saying: "Every vested interest must be subjected to scrutiny and confiscation ordered where necessary - with or without compensation, as the case may be." This is what he said in 1932 at the Round Table Conference in London. As a part of a civil disobedience movement in 1942 he could expect "the peasants to stop taxes" and even "to seize the land". But this was not a matter of "advance", as Mr. Mukherji terms it; nor "a signal change in Gandhi's ideology" as "dictated by politics"¹²; it was indeed the application of his philosophy of property when trusteeship had failed. Gandhi never failed to emphasise the need for his ideals, which sometimes even seem to blur the distinction between the ideal and the actual. He talked of independent India adopting - with qualifications - the satyagraha technique against aggression if India could acquire enough nonviolence. He knew very well that the people of India did not have nonviolence of his standard even to expel the British government: why then did he continue to talk of repelling armed aggression nonviolently? For Gandhi, non-violence was not merely a weapon to achieve self-government: for once independence was achieved, a constant effort was to be made to reach the ideal when it would, of course, be possible to defend the country nonviolently. Such an ideal, it is true, was not to be realised immediately after the British government withdrew, but was to be striven for.

Conclusion

Gandhi's philosophy lays down moral ideals for individuals and groups to strive for - their value consists in pointing out the direction, not in their realisation. They cannot be enforced from above but depend upon their voluntary acceptance. Unavoidable use of force he considers to be a necessary evil - but an evil all the same. The extent to which these ideals can be practised depends on the ethical capacity of individuals or groups. Accordingly, the actual practice of these ideals cannot be uniform. As a social and political reformer, Gandhi spoke from different levels at different times. But three levels mainly dominate his writings: first, that of the perfect ideal (unrealisable); second, that of his own personal point of view (admitting himself to be far from perfect, yet sufficiently advanced to practise his ideals); third, that of the point of view of the Indian masses. Yet what is

implied throughout is this: that even though the ideal may be impossible of attainment, the very act of pursuing it generates the goodwill essential for the well-being of the corporate life.

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