

GANDHI IN CREATIVE AND CRITICAL IMAGINATION: A SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

Nonviolence isn't just for activist. We all need to transform ourselves so that we embody nonviolence. This is a challenge because our society surrounds us with violence. The culture of violence encourages us to engage in violent thinking, violent work, violent relationships, and violent media. So, too often, unless, we are trained to consciously strive to unlearn all these habits of violence. Our first response to a crisis is violence. We need to practice becoming better practitioners of nonviolence every day, just as a doctor needs to practice medicine. Sometimes people who aren't necessarily trained in nonviolent struggle will try a particular nonviolent action, will face opposition, particularly violent opposition, and then too quickly conclude that nonviolence can't work. We need to practice building our every day repertoire of nonviolence so that when we do face crises we can draw upon these practical, ethical, and spiritual nonviolent resources. (Gandhi, Arun: online)

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi is not only a universal figure but also an immortal one. During the pre-Independence 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 Gandhigiri¹. Be it as the historical figure or creator of Gandhism or as a symbolic Gandhian cap. Mahatma Gandhi permeates fiction as well a 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 writer's pen Gandhi and Gandhism.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to graph 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 he is a lover of mankind; sometimes he is a leader of Swadesh; 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 Dhapelia 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.

AIM OF THE STUDY

Major metaphoric dimensions are applied to its study, more so, related to experience of unsettlement rather than of dislocation and relocation. It is no longer looked upon as a mere demographic shifting but rather greater emphasis is laid on the implications of such a shift. The crossing of borders is significant in

terms of cultural changes that it entails, as well as the transformations that the dislocated self undergoes from within and without. The discourse of the diaspora entails so many aspects, such as loss of homeland and longing for it, alienation in new land, fixities, sacrifices, adversities, compromises and redefining identity; therefore it needs to be approached from different stances. And post-nationalism is often seen as the poetics of space against time. Thus, there is an evident shift of interest from the physical to psychological and cultural nuances of diaspora. In the thesis, the term diaspora has been used as a marker of movement across cultures and the dislocation such movement causes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature is the chronicle of man's attempts to make a sense of external reality ever since man came to imbibe the sensitivity to perceive in incompatibility between the forces within and without. According to this perspective novel is the most obvious literary form. Here the individual is pitted inexorably against the large social reality at a particular juncture of history and the novel, in a way, becomes the saga of individual efforts to comprehend and adjust to the larger reality.

The three cycles of historical romances social, and political realism, and psychological case studies are followed more or less uniformly in all literatures including Indian English literature.

The Indian novelists in English have chosen themes and situations that have relevance all over the country or even the world. These themes are not many, since there is a variety of social structure, values, conventions and customs in different parts of India.

The Indian English fiction of the post-independence era is free from social and political over tones and there is a shift of interest to the individual and self-identification.

Literature is the product of a writer's reaction of life, the writer himself belongs a production of the conditions of life around him consciously or unconsciously. All Literature articulates the spirit of the time which is an accretion of all the political, social, cultural and religious characteristics of a particular age. Intrigued by the existential question like *Who am I?* baffled by complex situations, the writer sets out to understand his roots.

The quest of self-realization has been there since the very dawn of the creation, more precisely since man attains consciousness. Man wants to unravel the mystery of the self and has attempted to realize it through various modes. All religions and philosophic thoughts are attempted at the realization of the self. This quest is central not only to philosophy and religion but to literature too.

A bulk of contemporary literature deals with an individual search for 'the self' in the ruthless society. An individual develops a social identity or a self-definition which conforms how he conceptualizes and evaluates himself. For each individual this identity including unique aspects such as his name family, occupation, racial trait, culture and nation.

V.S. Naipaul's (1932) novels reveal an intense yearning to realize the self identity and roots' what gives unity to his work is the theme of searching his roots and identity. The main concern of my dissertation is to explore this thematic unity in his novels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Basavaraju Appa Rao's poem on Gandhi

A new Jesus Christ that incarnated

By not hurting him,

He melted his foe's arrogance

Born in Hindu paigambar.

(qtd. In Das, Sisir Kumar, 65-66)

2. R. Parthasarthy while discussing metaphysical speculation of Raja Rao notice the writer's awe of Gandhi in every page of The Great Indian Way, while Mulk Raj Anand defines the evocation of Mahatma Gandhi as the essence of the book. Sometimes Rao makes Gandhi a compulsive intrusion into the text. And only occasionally there is a Naipaul-like reference to him –... Walls, Walls, makes my son good. Make him eminent. Don't make him a Gandhi-gander. He must be virile and bright... (Rao, 1989, 70). K. Unnikrishnan finds in Raja Rao a keen awareness and consideration of the –Guru principle operating in the Indian social psychel (qtd. In narasimhaiah, 2000, 142). He adds that Rao values the guru-disciple relationship and this is also evident in Rao, the writer's relation to his subject Gandhi. The guru stands for source of strength and inspiration and Rao's works, the treatment of Gandhi as mahatmais similar. R. Parthasarathy in –The Example of Raja Rao while reviewing The Chessmaster and His Moves, observes that –the guru as light giver for his disciple, takes up many forms, one of them being of Gandhi besides of Krishana, Buddha, Sankara and others. The guru shall clarify all doubts as he leads from _the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality (Parthasarthy, –The Example of Raja Rao. online) A spiritual discipline and self-control is required. Knowledge becomes supreme and ultimately there is deliverance with the attainment of immortality. (Hardgrave, 1998, 24). Infact, Rao himself seems sometimes a guru narrating and preaching Gandhism to his readers and propagating Gandhian ways as a form of spiritual awareness into our daily lives. G.V. Gupta in his article entitled –Myths behind the Mahatma's Methods, says that the book is a –sagar manthan the unfolds the story of the development of the mahatma in the backdrop of Indian tradition. (www.tribuneindia.com).

CONCLUSION

Marked by multiple trajectories and negotiations, the space of Indian diaspora is thus very complex. And the problem lies in the impossibility of compartmentalising these negotiation as there are not only diasporas within diaspora, but also their negotiations are never static or conclusive. Indian diaspora does not forms a huge canvas flanked by writers who are out of India as either first generation or successive generation of diasporics. As this diaspora becomes more dynamic across not just nations, but culture and civilisations, both native and non-native, evolution dispersal of self takes place. The more they travel in and out of the homeland, the more they strike new relation with it.

The strong diasporic literary entity from its –out of India position, produces literature that is as much Indian as it is a critique of it. Multiple themes emanate from the varied negotiations that these writes have in the –third space. Mahatma Gandhi, himself a diasporic, is perhaps the most prominent and frequent

subject that pervades Indian diasporic literature. Thought, very few biographies have been written on Gandhi from the outer space of diaspora, but in fiction and critical works Gandhi receives maximum attention.

The purpose of the project is not as much to compile the various responses to Gandhi from the space of Indian diaspora as it is to map the two possible extremities of responses towards him. This is to underline that since the composition of diaspora is different, therefore, the responses to Gandhi also very, not just very they are oppositional as well. The diaspora is not a settled category. It is eternally debating with itself. Therefore, it does not respond to Gandhi singularly and often all kinds of extremities—from total eulogisation to absolute vulgarisation—to into defining of the diasporic responses towards him. Gandhi is both a subject of adoration that borders on metaphysical deification, and of gross denunciation, which at times is vituperative and unparliamentarily. But this does not imply that the structure of responses is binary. Rather it brings forth a range of responses to Gandhi. These responses from a huge spectrum but do not end there. There are in-between responses also.

The study has identified the extreme responses that Gandhi has invited from the perch of diaspora. The purpose is to bring to light the dramatic polarisation of responses, along with other shades that perpetually enrich the discourse of Gandhi. Raja Rao and Naipaul offer us two contrasting ways to understand Gandhi from the subject position of diaspora. Yet as they portray distinct Gandhi in their own ways, they suggest the broad trends that Indian diaspora has towards native things/institutions/ icons. Rushdie is not Naipaul. Tharoor is not Naipaul. Yet, they from one category as all of them is varying degrees take a critical if not utterly caricaturised view of Gandhi. Similarly Meena Alexander, Haridas Mazumdar and other are can be bracketed with Raja Rae for these writers still tend to spiritualise Gandhi as Mahatma. Therefore, at time the findings seem repetitive and the task simplistic and even bland. (On one side the response is too patriarchal and spiritual while the other border on gross degradation).

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