

**Gandhi as a National Hero portrayed in Nahal's Novel, *The Crown and the Loincloth***

**Mr. Pawar Baliram Pandurang<sup>1</sup>**

Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil College, Vashi Navi Mumbai

(Affiliated to Mumbai University, Mumbai)



**Abstract:**

*Chaman Nahal, the great Indian writer, who exploited his power of pen to portray the pains of Indians during the partition. The Gandhi Quartet deals with four novels; all of them concentrate Gandhiji as a central character. They are concerned to the issue of the freedom of India and the problems of the partition. They depict the arrival of Gandhiji in India in 1915 from Africa and the series ends with his death. Meanwhile, the writer attempted to expose every minute issue regarding the struggle of freedom. Every novel in the quartet is complete in itself and yet writer succeeded to introduce each one as one of the flowers in the garland. In the series, The Crown and the Loincloth is the first novel which deals with the struggle of Indian people for freedom during 1915 to 1922. It covers a period of only seven years. It occupies a big panorama of Indian psyche. The main purpose of the novel is to bring in light the first phase of Gandhian struggle which was based on the non violence and non cooperation movements.*

**Key Words:** struggle, freedom, Gandhiji, non violence, non cooperation etc.

**Introduction**

The novel, *The Crown and the Loincloth* touches to the different issues concerned to the life of Gandhiji; particularly how he came to India in 1915, how he spent his time in the journey of India to know or understand the Indian society and its mentality, how the impact of Gandhi made on the common human beings, how his writing encouraged the people to participate in the battle of the freedom and at last how he got a success to turn the mind of people against the Rowlett bills which was by opposed by Gandhiji and his followers. One more important issue exposed in the novel through

Gandhiji was concerned to the women and how Gandhiji brought them in the mainstream against the British Raj. Gandhiji was at one hand trying to transform the mind of the people through his speeches, journey and writings; on the other hand, he was making the minds of Indian people to explain the importance of spinning and weaving in achieving self sufficiency in women at least in clothing.

In the first phase of Gandhi's life, he spent almost fifteen years in South Africa. His experience was really better in South Africa because he was treated by the British government in South Africa as a Slave or

black man. Since then he thought that it would be his prime ambition of the life to destroy the existence of British government in India and establish our own government. his arrival in India in 1915, proved a Karishma for Indian people because he began his journey all over India and tried to understand the lifestyle and way of thinking of Indian people. He was advised by Gopal Krishna Gokhale to voyage the country to understand the fact. In his journey, he just concentrated on educating the people and explaining the importance of non violence, struggle against the British rule in India. He was a regular contributor in the magazines like *Young India* and *Navjeevan*. His speeches and writings had been published which encouraged the people to participate in the non-violence movement which was started by Gandhiji.

Gandhiji's reaction against the Rowlett Act was really critical and complex. He didn't like the bill passed in the Parliament by the British government against the Indian people. He asked the people to observe the hartal and fast for one day. Actually it was a way of Gandhiji to protest against the Rowlett bill. Chaman Nahal selected a typical hero for this novel who is a silent follower of Gandhiji's principles. Sunil is a protagonist who is the son of Thakur Shantinath and lives in Ajitha, a small village in Punjab. He was influenced by Gandhiji's screed of nonviolence; so he actively participated in the hartal against Rowlett Act with the advice of Gandhiji. He promotes himself to make the villages take interest in spinning and weaving. He was joined by Rihanna; the company of Rihanna was really supporting

and encouraging to him. They open a shop of Khadi.

The butchery of Jallianwala Bagh affected a lot on the mind of Sunil so he decided to go to Shimla Hills to redress the grievances of the plantation workers. His ultimate aim of life was to achieve the freedom for the Mother India. When he observed the terrible situation of the untouchables, he diverted his ultimate aim of life from achieving the freedom to mother India to the upliftment of the untouchables. He decided to spend his whole life to bring the light in the lives of the untouchables. He didn't have any ability to observe the sad plight of the untouchables because they had been treated like the animals; they haven't any kind of rights in the aristocratic society. They were just the slaves and had a value of talking animal. The death of Rihanna brought many positive as well as negative changes in the behaviour of Sunil; even he at one moment thought that his life is useless and he cannot give the best potential for bringing the change in the society. The same event caused due to see his sister Shama and her husband Rakesh, who was a member of the Himmat a Revolutionary outfit.

We have other major characters in the novel, Rakesh and Charulata who were against the British government in different sensors. They didn't like the arrival of Prince of Wales in India, so they decided to assassinate him. At one side, the whole nation was busy in boycotting the visit of the prince and observing non violence, non cooperation movement. At the same time, Rakesh and Charulatha were busy in making the plan against the Prince of Wales and how they

would be possible to assassinate him. But Sunil very systematically diverts their mind and saves the prince but unfortunately dies in the process.

Nahal divides the novel into three parts; the first part is love which exposes the love of people for their Mother India. Another part is called Perspectives which exposes how different perspectives affected on the movement of freedom. The third part is called a permission which focuses on the inner power of Gandhiji and how it affects on the building of the mind of the common people. These three parts are weaved in this way that one cannot come to the conclusion without reading all three together. In this way, the three parts make a complete novel in totality.

The first part is really tempting. Nahal exposes how Gandhiji loved his motherland and dreamt to have the country its own government. In the same part Nahal systematically focuses on the love between Shama and Rakesh and love between the married Sunil and Raina and Kenneth as a lover of India and Indians. The second part deals with the different perspectives of various characters portrayed in the novel. Nahal provides a plenty of perspectives of various characters, particularly concerned to the freedom, nonviolence, betray and at last the terrorist activities. Perspective on freedom is really mind blowing. He undergoes a sea change after his stint with plantation workers. He changes his perspective when he observed the miserable situation of the plantation workers in Assam and at the same time his observation of the untouchables led him away from the

participation to get the freedom. On the other hand, he turned his perspective to give the justice to the untouchables and the workers in the plantation.

Rihanna was very close friend of Sunil. She had opened the shop of khadi with his help and became a good sales woman. Her participation in Satyagraha under the influence of Gandhiji was remarkable. Unfortunately her husband Muzaffar grew critical aspect about Gandhi and protested that the perspective of Congress is becoming one sided and giving more justice to Hindus rather than Muslims. Even he thinks that congress is a party of the Hindu people and Gandhiji just supports to only The Hindu ideology. He deliberately neglects to the Muslim community, but in fact there's no such aspect of Gandhiji. He was always trying to bring the harmony in Hindu and Muslims. Rakesh is one more character portrayed the novel. He is shown brilliant active and intelligent. He doesn't believe in the efficiency of Gandhiji's movements particularly the non-violence movement so he declared:

And there can be no revolution except through the barrel of a gun ... Those in the higher echelons would never willingly surrender or give up their rule until they are dethroned, until they are pushed out. There will have to be a blood bath. (202)

Sunil's perspective about the love is really different one. He is in love of Rihanna. Though he was already a married person, he

likes the company of Rihanna so he expects to have a physical Union with Rihanna to prove his love. But Rihanna denies his perspective to look at the love and confesses that she really loves him; the love is very precious emotion and it can be kept alive only by not coming too close physically. Even she contributes that spiritual love is better than physical love. Sunil has been focused by two perspectives; love for Rihanna and the affinity about the principles of Gandhiji. His own perspective to look at the love had been created in his mind by Rihanna. Actually Rihanna loves him a lot but her love is not only a physical love; she doesn't want to be sexual partner of him. She knows that Sunil is a married person, yet she keeps relationship with him when she gets married to Muzaffar. It was really a great shock for Sunil but she helps him indirectly to come out from such a nasty thought to have a physical union.

We have one more a different perspective which is portrayed in the second part of the novel. It is a perspective concerned to failure by Kenneth, American aunt who is objective in her view of Indian freedom movement. She feels affinity about the movements particularly non-violent and non cooperation which have the ability to give the freedom to the Indians.

Third part of the novel, concentrates on how Sunil sacrificed his life to save the Prince of Wales but he couldn't save himself. The effect of Gandhiji had brought many changes in his life. He is bent on making an affirmation. His death in trying to save the Prince of Wales proved him the good person and Prince the symbol of repressive

government. His wife Kusum became lonely after his death and decided to fulfill the incomplete desires of her husband by joining the movement of Gandhiji with her only son Vikram at Sabarmati. Kusum declares that her whole life would be for the service of the untouchables and the faceless people. She believed in the principles of non violence and non cooperation deeply, so she became a favourite follower of Gandhiji. She thought that Gandhiji is a messiah who can bring the light in the lives of the common and untouchable people. It was a dream of her husband to work for the untouchables. So she was in the company of Gandhiji who always tried to concentrate a lot on the service of the untouchables and gave them the proper justice. The novel tries to concentrate on the peculiarities of the nature of Gandhiji. He introduces a few episodes with concrete purpose of exposing the situations and character of Gandhiji and others in first part of the novel. Gandhiji's sublime exposure has been exposed through his adventures in South Africa. When he came to India, he is honoured all over India and found how the Government of the British is intolerable and how it made propaganda about him among the different communities of India so he talks about this government as:

Moral right was the only answer to moral wrong. Satyagraha was the term he coined for it — truth-force. And he was soon going to test it on a much wider scale ... Now he had the whole of India to play his role in. Much bigger issues were involved,

much bigger forces; it also involved a bigger effort on his part. (38)

One more tempting episode has been introduced by the writer in the first part of the novel. It is revealed how the young Shama was unable to sufferer her desires particularly the love and needs of the body. As a result, she is ok with Rakesh. The love between Shama and Rakesh became a legend for all the lovers because in any case or situation they never wanted to lose one another. They are sublime to become a symbol of true love throughout the novel.

We have one more episode through which we come to know the nature of Gandhiji. When Nehru was born and participated actively in the politics of India, his father didn't like Gandhiji's uncanny perception and persuasive skill. But he was such a Mahatma who systematically diverted the mind of Motilal Nehru and brought in the mainstream to Jawaharlal by exposing how he is able and active to lead the nation successfully. Even he succeeded to convince Motilal Nehru that his son has a good personality and can lead the nation very effectively so he should be allowed to participate actively in the battle of Indian freedom. The novel has a well knit plot because writer succeeded to put up the ordered and organised sequence of events and actions throughout the novel. it exposes the skill of giving a justice to the complex plot. The plot is particularly concerned with Gandhiji's arrival in India from South Africa in 1915.

When Gokhale advised him to travel around the country, he quickly followed the

advice and the journeyed throughout the country and created the active atmosphere among the people to protest against the Rowlett bills. Through hartal and fast Gandhiji got the tremendous response from the people. It was his attempt to make the rural India self sufficient at least in clothing; so he promoted for spinning and weaving. He attempted to eradicate the social evils like superstitions, untouchability and the exploitation of the poor people. The visit of The Prince of Wales was confirmed under the leadership of Gandhiji but he himself had called off the non cooperation movement. It was one of the remarkable moments in the three phases of India's struggle for freedom. after the violence at Chauri Chaura, the writer tried to give the justice to the violence which took place in Chouri Choura which transforms Gandhiji to turn to the non violence, non cooperation movements. We come to know that Chaman Nahal succeeded to create the good and versatile characters in his novel. His focus is more on delineation of characters in dealing with events and situations done on just the description of the incident. While creating the characters Nahal has given more emphasis on the greatness of the characters which may become more active and better than Gandhiji. He gave justice to the role of Gandhiji and never tried to make create any character which may surpass the quality of Gandhiji. We have different perspectives concerning to Gandhiji. Most of the critics comment on the weaknesses of Gandhiji. Actually Nahal tries to strike out all these opinions but he doesn't have any solution except setting. The actual opinions concerning Gandhiji were negative

in some extent. Mohan always tortures himself.

There are two girls whose operations reveal how Gandhiji punished them though they didn't commit any mistake. His eldest son Harilal also talks negative about his father and calls him a monster. His elder brother also accuses that Gandhi is an ungrateful fellow; but in fact Gandhiji was not such a man who can be criticized by the common persons. Nahal tried to give the accurate picture of Gandhiji throughout the novel. He fairly elaborates the account of the people who appreciated Gandhi's trip for in South Africa. The role of Gandhiji is equally important in South Africa because when he was just thrown out from the train in Africa, at the same time, he had taken out that he would throw the Britishers out from his country. We have one more operation of Kallenbach who tells him that he has come out of faith in him. He exposes the fact about Gandhi that his forgiveness has made him fall over because Gandhiji was not such a person who could think about the revenge on anybody.

One more character who exposes her opinion concerning the spirit of sacrifice that Gandhi inspired even in a sixteen year old girl. Gandhiji had a strong desire to serve the nation particularly, the people of misguided or a depressed whom Gandhiji called Harijan. He always wanted to lead the people but he thought that he needs some courage and inner power by which he can motivate the people and its effect will be visual before he decided to lead the national movement for freedom. He decided to purify himself so that his fight will be strong and more able. He will not

hesitate due to either immense pain or pleasure. After purifying himself with different activities, he became the disputed leader of the crores of the people living in India either in villages and towns. But his main concern was the people living in the villages. His mantra became fruitful to go to the village because he thought that only the people living in villages are strong mentally and physically; so they can support him from their heart. He believed a lot in the people of the villages. He knows that the British government would adopt any kind of policy against the Indian people and he needs to have the courage to oppose the policy of the government. In real sense, he was such a person who always thought about the well being of his people and country. He was a leader of unique qualities. He thought that any work can be done not by only one way; it can be many ways to solve the problem. He always was conscious about the little things. He didn't believe anymore in the plans which are long term. On the other hand he always planned for a small time to solve the problems.

Roulette Bill brought horrible changes in him. He thought that this bill is really troublesome and torturing to the lives of the common human beings. With the release of the Rowlett Act, Gandhiji thought that this is the best opportunity to wake the people up and make them conscious about how the British government is tyrannical and not able to fulfill the expectations of common Indian people. He believed a lot in the actions of the villages because he found the ability and capacity of doing anything in the muscles

of the villagers. He was such a strong person the writer described him as:

They may beat the life out of him, but they couldn't bend him. He would actually touch the feet of the lowliest, as before God they were all equal; no one was high, no one low. But when they came and slapped him across his face or tried to crush him otherwise, they achieved nothing. His spine remained erect and firm. (29)

In this novel, the image of Gandhiji has been portrayed not only just as a great political leader but a good writer too. Nahal presents him as an influential writer as he had the ability to use the step of words on a massive scale. Sunil reads Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj Indian Home Rule* which had been started in 1908. This book contains more than hundred pages and exposes how Gandhiji repudiates Western Civilization for all humanity. According to him, love has its ability to overcome any kind of Evil in the world. He must be registered with the love, the personal suffering; self sacrifice and Soul force are some solutions to overcome the evil power. When Sunil completes to read Hindu Swaraj, he realises that non violence is such a force and power which may transform the lives of the crores of the people living in the villages. It is a best remedy on the violence because violence can cause only the tyranny, bloodshed and cruelty while non-violence can give the birth to affinity, Brotherhood and closeness. He tries to save the Prince of Wales. Gandhiji was conscious about the

cunning game of British government. Yet he didn't want to create any dispute in the arrival of Prince of Wales. Even he was conscious that some people in India are going to attack on the prince but he made consciousness among the people not to behave rudely with the prince.

Gandhiji's concept of Satyagraha is also a central issue throughout the novel. When General Dyer attacked in Jalianwala bagh, Gandhiji lost his belief in the Englishman and appealed oral or written to the government to seize the step of nonsense activities because Gandhiji had a strong belief in non violence. When he observed the effects of Jalianwala bagh, he thought that he must invent a new system of fighting with them. As he believed in the philosophy of nonviolence, he didn't give the importance to the violence in his whole life. Non violence is an invaluable a gift to the people in the various parts of the world. According to him anything can be achieved through the principle of nonviolence.

Satyagraha is also a major issue discussed in the novel. Satyagraha means to be conscious about the truth and not to move away from the truth to indulge for the truth and to worship the truth. When Muslims and Hindus came together and participated in Satyagraha, its credit went to Gandhiji's harmonious thoughts and ability to bring all these people together. The movements had been occurring all over India and the lovely picture of nonviolence and Satyagraha reached to every corner of the world. The image of Gandhiji also spread all over the world and quickly this image transformed into Mahatma as people began to call him

Mahatma and worship him like a God. He was aware that spinning and weaving clothes. He thought that villages will become self sufficient. It can help them to earn some money by selling the clothes, so he asks Sunil and Rihanna to teach spinning to the villages as both of them had been influenced by the advice of Gandhiji. They opened the stores of Khadi.

Gandhiji was a famous among the masses and his Karishma was increasing day by day so the British worried a lot about his increasing importance in the country. When it was a time of the visit of Prince of Wales to India, almost all of the Indian people boycotted the visit of him because Gandhiji had suggested people of the boycott call in 1920. There's no solution to the British government except arresting the major leaders because they hoped that the leaderless masses would not respond to the boycott. But the plan of the British government failed because though the leaders were in the prison, the people came on the road and greet The Prince with black flags. The shouts of go back home in 1928 worked a lot. Gandhiji found a good diamond in the politics of India. This Diamond has nothing but Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru because Gandhiji thought that this person can really lead the nation successfully. So he made it to his father Motilal Nehru and requested him to allow his son to participate actively in Indian politics. In this way Jawaharlal Nehru is Gandhiji's valuable gift to Mother India. The portrait of Gandhiji throughout the novel is not just the collection of the good qualities and always the winner in every fight and struggle. On the other hand, Nahal deliberately exposes some

failures of Gandhiji in the way of his life. He exposes values or disappointments of Gandhiji very frankly because he never wants to make Gandhiji as god. He agrees to call him Mahatma because his actions were really out of the reach of common human beings.

So Nahal preferred him to call Mahatma but not ready to give him the place of god. Gandhiji failed to judge people's inability to remain nonviolent. Whenever it was a matter of the struggle against the British government, he failed to catch the subconscious mind of the people because he found that whenever there is a mob and a matter of argument, people are unable to control themselves. They quickly dive to the violence. Nahal was a witness to the massacre which took place in Bombay. Gandhiji advised the people to welcome The Prince of Wales with the black flags and the slogans against the British government. Unfortunately, the process got the violent return and the principle of Gandhiji of nonviolence sank very quickly. It is his failure to understand the mob psychology. When the moment got the different return, it began to go to the violence. Gandhiji quickly announced to stop the moment. Actually, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru didn't like the decision of Gandhiji to stop the moment because he thought that it was a time to expose and create a consciousness in the mind of British government about the Indian freedom.

If Gandhiji wouldn't stop at the moment, there's a possibility of the freedom which may be given by the British government to the Indians so it was the first event in the life of Gandhiji as well as Nehru



who became against to each other regarding the end of the movement. Gandhiji requested and announced to wear the hand spun cloth and eradicate untouchability. But the dominant class in the society was not ready to do both of the things. The people in the aristocratic family had engaged in some nonsense activities. They just were pretending that they are following the rules and regulations of Gandhiji, in fact, they had never followed the principle of Gandhiji. They were dominant in the work of the National Congress. Even they had been calling themselves as the true political leaders of the Congress, but it was a failure of these people to understand the principle of using hand spun clothes and the eradication of untouchability. Gandhiji thought that it is only a way to break down the economic backbone of the British government by denying on the use of the imported goods. He encouraged the people to ban on the use of the British-made goods. Khadi was a best alternative to use instead of any kind of clothes which had been coming from the Britain. There was one more disease in the society; untouchability. It would help to discriminate the people, so Gandhiji stepped against untouchability and picked up the people from downtrodden classes.

These two things became most important in the life of Gandhiji. The first thing was to encourage the people to use the Khadi and to boycott on the production of Britain. Another thing was to eradicate the untouchability. In both of the cases, Nahal focuses that Gandhiji didn't get the enough success because majority of the people didn't obey the order of Gandhiji to use the clothes

of khadi. Even the high class society was not ready to accept the religion as human beings. They thought that these people are just the animals who have the ability of human beings and who can talk like the human beings. But in real sense, they are not human beings. This issue always attracted Gandhiji and he is supposed that it is one of the ultimate aims of his life to bring the changes in the social status of the India. He began to call the downtrodden people as harijans. He even attempted to do the justice in their life. One more weakness had been pointed out by the writer. Gandhiji was not able to get angry on anybody. He had a company of all those people who would commit any kind of nonsense mistakes. Gandhiji didn't get angry on anybody; even some people had a nature of violent and some of them were deliberately breaking the principles of Gandhiji. He didn't either angry on those people who tried to stop them from doing such nonsense. Gandhiji thought that he has not enough knowledge about the psychology of human beings. He doesn't blame to anybody; on the other hand, he blames himself and tries to understand the spirit and the inner mind of the human beings. He decides to purify himself so that he may be capable to give the proper justice to the human beings. When he failed to understand the inner spirit of the human beings, he thought that he would wear loincloth and remain bareheaded. Reluctantly he agrees to wear a shawl when it would be the time of the cold, when he was unable to bear the shield. In this way, he proved himself to be such a man who cannot be changed with any obstacles in the way of his and fight against the British government:

It is in the possession of the virtue of detachment from self that, I suggest, lies the source of Gandhi's authority... The detached man has power over his body because having effected its separation from the true self, he is enabled to use it as an instrument for the purpose of the self. That it is no accident that Gandhi can sleep at will at a moment's notice for any period that he likes to prescribe, no accident that he can deliberately lose or gain weight without altering his weight. (10)

Nahal thought that people were able to understand the inner and the voice of the soul of Gandhiji, but he was not totally able to identify or listen to the inner voices of the people around him. Gandhiji was conscious that only few of the people around him were able to understand his ideology. He believed in people and the ultimately succeeded in the non-violent, non cooperation movement. National Congress was established in 1885 but it was not enough importance in the lives of the common human beings.

### **Conclusion:**

Nahal thought that people were able to understand the inner and the voice of the soul of Gandhiji, but he was not totally able to identify or listen to the inner voices of the people around him. Gandhiji was conscious that only few of the people around him were able to understand his ideology. He believed in people and the ultimately succeeded in the non-violent, non cooperation movement. National Congress was established in 1885 but it was not enough importance in the lives of the common human beings. When Gandhiji gave the impetus to the Congress, people accepted quickly the rule of the

Congress and way to just the people. He became happy because of Congress's concentration on the masses. He always liked to increase his rural membership rather than the urban membership because he thought that the energy of the rural people is greater than the urban people. The event of the visit of The Prince of Wales is a major thing in the novel. Nahal systematically exposes how all other leaders think how Gandhiji failed in following the non violence movement. Gandhiji believed a lot in diagnosing the true reason for the violence that erupted during the boycott of the visit of the prince. Unfortunately the movement turned into the violence. So he quickly stopped this moment which smeared the image of Gandhiji among the common people. He tried to make his people fearless and face the British government with firm decisions.

### **Works cited:**

- Nahal, Chaman. *Crown and the Lioncloth*. The Gandhi Quartet Volume No. 1. Allied Publishers Limited, New Delhi, 1993. Print.
- A. F. Scott, *Current Literary Terms: A Concise Dictionary of Their Origin and Use* London: Macmillan, 1965 Print.
- Asani, Shyam M. *New Dimensions of Indian English Novel*. New Delhi: Doaba House, 1987. Print.
- Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, the new one volume edition London: Thames & Hudson, 1976. Print.

Greenblatt, Louis Montrose and Stephen. *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veesser 1989, Print.

Jinnah, quoted in Rajendra Prasad, *India Divided* Bombay: Hind Kitabs Ltd., 1947. New Delhi: Penguin Books.1990. Print.

Marjorie Levinson and others, *Rethinking Historicism: Critical Readings in Romantic History* 1989 Print.

Pechter, Edward. "The New Historicism and Its Discontents," PMLA 102 1987. Print.

Sheppard, Alfred Tresidder. *The Art and Practice of Historical Fiction*. London: Humphrey Toulmin, 1939. Print.

\*\*\*\*\*