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इतिहासाचार्य वि. का.राजवाडे संशोधन मंडळ, धुळे



इतिहासाचार्य वि. का. राजवाडे संशोधन मंडळ, धुळे

विद्यमान पदाधिकारी व कार्यकारी मंडळ

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या संस्थेचे त्रैमासिक

॥ संशोधक ॥

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'संशोधक त्रैमासिक राजवाडे मंडळ, धुळे' या नावाने पाठवावी.

अक्षरजुळवणी : अनिल साठये, बावधन, पुणे २१.

महाराष्ट्र राज्य साहित्य आणि संस्कृती मंडळाने या नियतकालिकेच्या प्रकाशनार्थ अनुदान दिले आहे. या नियतकालिकेतील लेखकांच्या विचारांशी मंडळ व शासन सहमत असेलच असे नाही.



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Relevance of Gandhian Philosophy in Post-Independence Indian English Fiction

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Abstract :

There seems to be shift of emphasis in the perspectives in the Post-Independence fiction. Most of the novelists give the impression to have felt that, after the achievement of freedom which was the cause worth fighting for, and the early ecstasy that went with it, much of the uproar was lost. However, it is not to suggest that Gandhian ideology that sustained the pre-independence fiction, lost its relevance, nor was it relegated to the background.

Key words : freedom, partition, philosophy, suffering, kindness.

With the dawn of freedom, an age of uncertainty seemed to have practically ended. The vast subcontinent engaged in the world's largest democracy experienced a period of relative tranquility after the traumas of subjugation for nearly two centuries. The post-independence fiction befittingly endorsed the luxuriant moods of the nation that awoke into freedom and literal transformations it underwent as a large Republic. The subsequent partition of India, based on the two-nation theory, once again opened the floodgates of anger and resentment, for it was an experience that caused lot of heart burns. The changing political scenario and the changing contexts of social reality had unleashed this uneasy accommodation in national conscience which ensued in the rich proliferation of fiction that was at once passionately self-critical and corrosively cynical. Literature is the portrayal of a real society with addition, omission and modification of certain aspects. Dr K.R. Rao observes :

In the post-independence fiction, there is however, a shift of emphasis. The writers who came after 1947 express a sense of disenchantment and frustration although their anger includes humanistic compassion. Their work is burdened by an adverse and contrary awareness of the

contemporary reality, so full of hatred, violence and orgiastic self-seeking. (Fiction of Raja Rao 5)

To quote K. R. S. Iyenger, again :

No literature based on hate and prejudice can really be great. It was a drama of degradation and shame, a drama of human decay, showing how the minds of the two communities poisoned by the dogma of two nation theory. (Indian Writing in English 324)

K. A. Abbas's *Inquilab* (1958) is primarily concerned with the Gandhian ideology. *Inquilab* was written between 1942-1949, in parts, partially when struggle for freedom was at its height and partly after the achievement of independence. Anwar, the protagonist of the novel, tries to comprehend the inherent contradictions in Gandhism, and is baffled by the efficacy of Satyagraha as a political weapon.

His father explains to him the relevance of Gandhian economics involved in putting on the home-made cloth :

He also comprehends the significance of 'Satyagraha,' both as a creed and as a political expediency as he matures into experience. Those were the days when Gandhiji's struggle for freedom was at its peak, when Gandhiji enthused people into political activism. Anwar, who is still young and impressionable, decides to court arrest-and discard foreign clothes. He is much pained to notice the violence that the civil disobedience movement has unleashed in its early phase, and when the Hindu-Muslim riots rocked the country, he dares to approach Gandhiji with a request to subdue the violence, and bring peace in the sub-continent. He announces his intention to go on a fast, for twenty-one days, to instill confidence both in the Hindus and the Muslims. Anwar finds the Mahatma completely tranquil in spite of the inner turbulence.



As the novelist describes :

On his face was a look of such suffering, kindness and pity, as if he personally felt the misery, of every single human being. But there was also infinite calm and serenity and the boy's spirit revolved as he looked into those gentle eyes. (Inquilab 116)

Anwar finds it difficult to resist the contradictory pulls of politics and the creedal philosophies, represented by both Gandhiji and Nehru but comes to conclude that the greatest triumph of the Gandhian strategy is the merging of these contradictions into harmony.

He comes to Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram in order to cover Gandhi's Dandi March, which is a nation-wide campaign meant to rouse the popular feeling against the colonial rulers. Anwar's another encounter with the Mahatma clarifies some of the confusing issues which troubled him all along. As the novelist says :

Could it be that there was a design in the odd circumstances of his birth and up bringing? He was.... The natural-born son of a Hindu, born out of a woman of the most unfortunate and despised class, and brought up in a Muslim family? He was a strange symbol of unity, a human 'Sangam' in which such diverse streams of blood and cultures had met. (Inquilab 348)

At the end of the novel, Anwar is annoyed to notice the growing recurrence of communal violence. As the novelist writes :

Could it be that he who by birth, was neither a Hindu nor wholly a Muslim or rather who was both, an oddly symbolic son of India, was in a peculiarly advantageous position to understand both communities and to work for the synthesis that was already symbolized in his person, which the memory of his mother, would ever be there to identify him with the cause of the unfortunate, the under-privileged and the oppressed? (349)

Abbas keeps up the authenticity and retains the fictional veracity as close as to the real incidents that took place during those momentous periods of the freedom struggle.

K. Nagarajan's *The Chronicles of Kadaram*, (1961) is a much more ambitious work than his earlier novel *Athwar House* (1939), which introduces Gandhi in person, and deals with the national resurgence at length. It is concerned with the life of an orthodox Brahmin Youth, Gokarna, popularly known as Koni who is in the words of Henry James, "the central consciousness" of the novel. Though Koni does not approve of Gandhiji's economic and social reforms, he cannot but acknowledge Gandhiji's greatness. Even Vanchi, in his own way, uses his name to win the support of the masses, and even writes to Gandhiji to visit Kadaram. Gandhiji did later visit Kadaram and addressed the people.

The entire action of the novel is thus polarized, between the old and the new, the British rulers and the Indians, between Congress and Justice Party, between the Hindus and Muslims, between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins, between Tengalis and Vadegalis. It is Gandhiji again who intervenes to settle the internal feud between these two factions. Thus, the novel is truly an sinister projection of the two Tamil factions which add to the triviality of the whole affair. Nagarjan's passion for the particular and the 'illustrational' is lost in the depiction of infelicitous factional wars which contribute to diffuse his perspectives.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) is set against the backdrop of the Chinese aggression of India in 1962 and deals with the conflicting ideals and ideations represented by Satyajit, an old timer, and Bhaskar Roy, an egregious, outward-going, westernized Indian.

Bhattacharya says that *Shadow from Ladakh* is 'rooted deeply in Gandhian thought'. Though the Gandhian ideology as presented by the novelist stands questionable, his intentions cannot be disputed. He seems to say that India needs 'a blending of divergent sets of values if she is to cope with the challenge of the times'.

Thus, preserving the best in our own traditions, particularly those treasured in the teachings of



Gandhiji, is a way out. The theme of the novel centers round this synthesis of the spinning wheel and the spindle, a synthesis of Gandhian and Nehruvian ideals, and of asceticism of Gandhiji and the aestheticism of Tagore.

Gandhigram and steel town are the two polarizing worlds. Satyajit, a Cambridge educated man represents the simplicity of the rural life on Gandhian lines. There is an intimate account of the traumas of Chinese aggression, and Satyajit's leaning to take a delegation to Ladakh to plead with the Chinese Government to recede and followed by Suruchi's transformation-from an ascetic to the life of continence, and her total immersion in life by choosing the 'Karmic' ends. This restores peace in the life of Satyajit. And on the other side of the spectrum, Bhaskar and Sunita are deeply involved in love-life and they even decide to enter into a marital alliance thus warding off all speculations that they would drift apart. Thus, the novel ends with a happy note, after a series of epiphanic transformations.

It is Satyajit who holds the attention of the readers by virtue of his engaging naivete, self-certitude, and intellectual bravura. He is a true Gandhian and is given to simple living, and lives with an abiding faith in human perfection, exactly in the manner in which Gandhiji had held his life. Though Satyajit and Bhaskar exemplify two contrary modes of life, the clash between them whittles away gradually, thus, effecting, a true transformation. As the novelist observes :

There could be no easier intermingling, when the visitors had crossed the threshold of the homes, all barriers between city and village were gone. The slogan of brotherhood, enriched with emotional content, because real... The divisions were gone. Gandhi gram was a frieze carved on the slab of the rock. And it was rock that lived. And would make itself deathless through death. (Shadow from Ladahak 352)

After the 1950's and 1960's there has been a rich harvest of novels. Indo-English novel seems

to have acquired a definite edge of appropriateness and concinnity, both in theme and form, and in its all-encompassing vision. After 1947, when the partition of India became a certainty, which unleashed the orgy of violence let loose upon the innocent people, the novelists attempted to endorse all the facticity in fiction. The two-nation theory as propagated by the politicians is pooh-poohed by common man, and the actual demarcation between India and Pakistan which became the line of control became a line of perpetual controversy.

Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan (1956) is s an epic of suffering. As a legend of untold miseries that visited the whole of the Indian sub-continent, the novel derides all our sympathy. It is pitiless in its exposure of the sham and cynicism of the two-nation theory which most of the politicians conveniently used for propagating their own warped ideas of the nations involved. The holocaust, death and mutilation that engulfed the whole subcontinent only speaks of the sheer shallowness of the politicians. Khushwant Singh writes of the horrors let loose by the communal frenzy that visited even a most remote village like Mono Manjra which turns out to be the very eye of the storm.

The people - both Muslims and Sikhs considered the genocidal killings as a ritual, and offered prayers to-God to grant them victory, while Gandhian ideals do not approve of the violence because it is basically against the main tenet of the principle of non-violence. But Khushwant Singh in fact attempts to focus his attention on the value of non-violence. As he writes :

The (Sikh) boy cleared his throat, shut his eyes and began to recite the names of Gurus. He ended by asking for the Guru's blessings for the venture. The assembly went down on the knees and rubbed their forehead on the ground loudly proclaiming.... By the grace of God.... 'We bear the world nothing but good will.' (Train to Pakistan 151)

He wanted to ask God to forgive these people and felt that human beings, with no faith in God,



were animals. Only such people would indulge in communal frenzy, and indulge in killing thousands of innocent people.

All the world respects religious men look at Share and the angel along with his Vedas and Shastras. People sing his praise in the four corners of the earth. I have seen pictures in the newspapers of Gandhi's prayer meeting. It showed a lot of white men and women sitting cross-legged. One white girl had her eyes shut. They said she was the Big Lord's daughter. (Train to Pakistan 152)

Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) is another significant work that throws up flood of light on the agonies of the partition, and the lacerations that went by it in the whole of the sub-continent. Malgonkar turns his attention to the turbulent years of the pre-independence phase of Indian history to celebrate a set of passing values and to probe the ideology of Ahimsa, the non-violence, which Mahatma Gandhi offered to the world as a gift. The mood of the novel is one of celebration and denunciation, and is laconically pointed out by the novelist himself in the epigraph:

This non-violence, therefore, seems to be due mainly to our helplessness. It almost appears as if we are nursing in our bosoms the desire to take revenge the first time we get the opportunity. Can it be true, that the voluntary nonviolence coming out of this seemingly forced non-violence of the weak? What if, when the fury bursts, not a man, woman or child is safe and every man's hand is raised against his neighbor? (*A Bend in the Ganges* 291)

The novel shows how violence is self-consuming and self-destructive, and how love transcends both violence and non-violence, and brings about freedom and fulfilment to the individuals. This is the value that Gian Talwar, the unheroic hero, and, Debi Dayal the heroic hero, discovered in their acts of living out their separate, and yet involved lives.

The whole action of the novel is appropriated by the two pivotal characters, Gian Talwar and Debi Dayal, who represent the two sides of

Gandhian ideology. Gian is evidently a Gandhian, at least in the initial stage, and believes in the rule of non-violence, until he is transformed into an agent provocateur by the sheer force of exigency. On the other hand, Debi Dayal, who is associated, right from the beginning with violence, begins to see its futility at the end of the novel, when it becomes too late for him to set things right. Debi Dayal symbolized the ineffectiveness of violence that breeds violence and prefers to undergo the gyrating processes of transformation to give up the creed of violence. These antipodal valuations in terms of character and incident and the emerging vision only shows the utter futility of Gandhi's non-violence as a political creed. In fact, this is what Malgonkar wanted to reveal and hence the elaborate fictionalization of the historical events, which verily build up his thesis. As Prof G. S. Amur points out:

A Bend in the Ganges, is a highly satisfying account of an individual's attempt at survival and search for moral identity and read as such. offers but critical problems. The novel is not content to operate on a purely personal level. It is intended to be a political and philosophical allegory as well. (Manohar Malgaonkar 108)

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) is a novel dealing with the horrors of the partition of India. Chaman Nahal is more interested in presenting the partition tragedy than Gandhism per se. Thus, the focus is more on the people who are otherwise peace-living and who have been ruthlessly misused by the unscrupulous politicians for their selfish ends than on the projection of Gandhian values.

Arun, the central character of the novel, finds fault with both Jinnah and Nehru, besides Liaquat Ali Khan, for creating Pakistan which led to the fissiparous tendencies. Niranjana Singh, another character, is very angry with Nehru, for his part in hastening up 'Azadi' which would ruin and destroy its unity.

It is as though the people have forgotten the Gandhian values when they indulged in all kinds of heinous and nefarious activities, thus heaping



humiliations, sufferings and hardships on one another. All this is attributed to the needless suspicion of each other. As Lala Kanshi Ram says: "Whatever the Muslim did to us in Pakistan, we are doing it to them here" (Azadi 200). This is basically against the Gandhian tenet of Ahimsa which is no solution to harmony and unity. But at a later stage, people seem to realize their mistakes and give vent to their magnificent ways of forgiveness, a quality which Gandhiji held in great reverence. As one of the characters in Chahal's second novel, *The Crown and the Loincloth* observes :

We have sinned as much. We need their forgiveness.

This is the greatest awareness of Gandhian values. Even Arun also feels that the tragedy of partition with all its holocaust will eliminate all the barriers of caste and class that alienate man from man and turn them enemies of one another. Really it is a fond hope, in Gandhian terms, but the hopes are yet to be realized. In the process of such a realization, the character like Arun found a new identity for himself, an identity which had partly been thrust on him by the surge of events, and which partly he had worked out for himself metaphysically. (*The Crown and the Loin Cloth* 190)

Chaman Nahal's novel, *The Crown and the Loincloth* (1981) deals with general Dyer's ruthless methods of suppression and ruthless persecution. 'The Loin Cloth' is symbolic of Gandhi who used to wear it as a sign of Indian poverty. Together these novels, dealing extensively with the terror of the partition, have successfully projected the tragedy of the partition days. Khushwant Singh endeavours to chart out the cruelty and cynicism, the brutality and utter inhumanity on the part of the racist groups who brought about the national holocaust in the

wake of the partition of India. The massacres and mayhem which are perpetuated by the Hindus and Muslims left deep scars on the national consciousness. Since Khushwant Singh is so near to the tragedy which is perpetuated with obvious relish, the novel acquires the immensity of an epic whose parameters are to be located in the intensity of collective suffering. Manohar Malgonkar, on the other hand, is more interested in the evolution of the character and is more concerned with the fictionalization of his pet thesis than in the efficacy of nonviolence. The contrastive juxtaposition between the two modes of nonviolence as a personal creed seem to have been overplayed by the novelist, though he succeeds in presenting the ineffectiveness of the Gandhian ideology as amoral percept. The novels of Chaman Nahal, though operate on a low key are yet significant achievements in terms of their acerbic contemporaneity.

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