

Chapter 2

Affirmation: Gandhi as the Motivational Force

The emergence of Gandhi on the Indian intellectual terra firma was like the glowing emergence of the full moon on a dark chaotic night. As the imperialist rulers of India established their strong arm stranglehold over the ruled as their extortionist regime discovered new and newer ways of subjugating the people, voices of resistance to their machinations started growing. Amidst such general chaos Gandhi started his work of political reorganisation of Indians from the far off lands of South Africa. Having reached there in 1894 as an apprentice lawyer he was immediately thrown in the middle of the vortex of socially and politically hostile circumstances. As he accepted the gauntlet of leading the dispossessed community of Indian contractual labourers there, he was led into thinking about the condition of Indians abroad as well as in their homeland in an increasingly engaging way. His persistent desire to deal with issues at deeper and more meaningful levels brought him in touch with Indian intellectuals of various hues. In 1908 he came out with a bold monograph titled *Hind Swaraj* delineating India's condition at the hands of its rulers and possible ways of getting rid of not only the political regime but also civilisational ill effects of India's engagement with the West.

By the time Gandhi returned to India in 1914, his aura had effectively preceded him. Educated people with nationalistic leanings looked up to him with a degree of high hopes. It was in such a milieu that the first novels in India to be written in English were in the making. The writers found a natural icon in Gandhi, an icon who was in dire demand as he had a discerning mind that was not shy of fusing thought and action, ideas and experimentation, philosophy and politics. Gandhi's clairvoyance of separating the good from the bad, the essential from the redundant, pragmatic from the ideal, the viable from the desired, made his ideals of great

fictional value. Thus began the first phase of Indian writers' long association with Gandhian ideas forming the core of their thematic delineations.

Raja Rao's, first novel, *Kanthapura*, published in 1938, is unique in depicting the transforming effects of Gandhi's enunciations on Indian village life. "*Kanthapura* is a work of social realism, yet it is not confined to that plane alone" (Narayana Shyam 43). The eponymous village of the novel is a fictional South Indian village, nestling amidst the Western Ghats, one among many that were imbued with Gandhi's ideas during the period starting with the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930. India's struggle for freedom, with its powerful impact on Indian sensibility, forms the nucleus of the novel. "The theme of *Kanthapura* may be summed up as 'Gandhi and our village', but the style of narration makes the book more a Gandhi Purana than a piece of mere fiction. Gandhi is the invisible God, Moorthy is the visible avatar" (Iyengar 391). Written in a sustained colloquial style inspired by the *Pauranic Akkhyan* tradition of storytelling, as explained in the 'foreword' by the author, its story is narrated in the first person by Achakka, a middle aged woman who is a participant as well as an observer on the unfolding of events in the novel. "She is the witness narrator and weaves the past and present, gods and men together in her narrative" (Sharma, K 16).

At the opening of the novel, *Kanthapura* is depicted as an ordinary Indian village with its caste-based divisions of Brahmin quarter, Potters' quarter, Weavers' quarter, Sudra quarter and Pariah quarter. The inhabitants' lives are structured around their religious beliefs; rituals keep them engaged. Their contacts with the outside world are minimal, a few boys who have got education from the nearby towns being their primary conduits. Among these young men is Moorthy, the Brahmin protagonist, who is introduced as "... quiet, generous, severe, deferent and Brahmanic, a very prince..." (5). With his characteristics Moorthy commands the faith of the

close-knit people of his village. “We know Moorthy had been to the city and he knew of things we did not know. And yet he was as honest as an elephant” (9).

Kanthapura is a novel of action which moves round the theme of the non-violent national struggle for freedom from the British rule. Through the religious ceremony, the villagers are initiated in the Gandhian ideology which ultimately pervades the whole village and in the whirlwind of struggle the village is physically fully destroyed but its spirit remains victorious. By adopting the mythic technique Raja Rao has given a large perspective to Gandhian ideology. He sees him as an incarnation in the tradition of Shiva, Rama, Krishna and Buddha who came upon this earth to liberate it from demons and provide happiness to their devotees. Gandhiji is always in the background of *Kanthapura* which undertakes the freedom struggle under the leadership of Moorthy, who is Gandhi’s staunch devotee. Moorthy becomes the flag bearer of the movement for liberation in Kanthapura. With his university education and passionate zeal, he decides to dedicate his life to the upliftment of his village and thereby contribute his bit to the general regeneration of his country. Moorthy because of his education and discerning nature understands the value of Gandhi’s message. He has come back to the village to work for the welfare of his fellow men. “Moorthy is the ‘Gandhi incarnate’ or you may say a ‘mini Gandhi’ who instills the fire of revolution among the Kanthapurians” (Swain 74). Very soon the young people of the village are with him in following the Gandhian programme:

He went to Dore and Sastri’s son Puttu, and Dore and Sastri’s son Puttu went to Postmaster Suryanarayan’s sons Chandru and Ramu, and then came Pandit Venkateshaia and Front-House Sami’s sons Srinivas and Kitu, and so Kitu and Srinivas and Puttu and Ramu and Chandru and Seenu, threw away their foreign clothes and became Gandhi’s men. (10)

To keep watch on the growing Gandhian activities a policeman, Bade Khan, is posted to Kanthapura. The Congress Committee of the nearby town Karwar asks Moorthy to broad base his social activities and gives him books and spinning wheels for distribution. The village boys get busy in this work cutting across caste-lines: “They went to the Sudra quarters and the Potter’s quarters and the Weavers’ quarters and they cried, “free spinning-wheels in the name of the Mahatma !” (17). Moorthy remains as the head of the boys, painstakingly explaining the importance of spinning: “... because millions and millions of yards of foreign cloth come to this country, and everything foreign makes us poor and pollutes us. To wear cloth spun and woven with your own God-given hands is sacred, says the Mahatma. And it gives work to the workless, and work to the lazy” (17).

He further tells them of the need to retain their paddy crop. Making a ‘social analysis of poverty’ he ‘E-maps’ (Exchange Entitlement Map) the ‘antecedents of poverty’ faced by them in routine:

And the next harvest’s agents will come and bring veritable motor lorries, such as they have in the Skeffington Coffee Estate, and they will take away all your rice and you will have to go to Subba Chetty and buy perhaps the very rice that grew in your field, and at four seers a rupees too. The city people bring with them clothes and sugar and bangles that they manufacture in their own country and you will buy clothes and sugar and bangles. You will give away this money and that money and you will even go to Bhatta for a loan, for the peacock blue sari they bring just goes with Lakshmi, and Lakshmi is to be married soon. They bring soaps and perfumes and thus they buy your rice and sell their wares. You get poorer and poorer, and the pariahs begin to starve. (19)

Thus Kanthapura is initiated on the path of political consciousness. “Moorthy, the mover of action, is a devotee of the Mahatma conceived as an incarnation, a veritable avatar of the divine, born in this earth to end the suffering of Indian people under British rule (Dey 27).” But Moorthy’s progress is no smooth journey. He is fully convinced of the Mahatma’s preaching whom he heard before the action of the novel began. “There is but one force in life and that is truth, and there is but one love in life and that is the love of mankind, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all...” (36). Inspired and instructed by Gandhi to work “among the dumb millions of the villages” (36), he has taken up the duty of social regeneration and restructuring. But he is pitched against orthodox and vested interests. There is Venkamma whose second daughter he hasn’t consented to marry, committed as he is in his work. She openly opposes his “bragging city-talk” (16). Then there is Bhatta, the chief pontifical priest and money lender of Kanthapura. Initially he showed keen interest in Gandhi and sat through public readings of *My Experiments with Truth*, but soon he came to know that “there was no money in it” (27). He used his position to preach word against Moorthy’s work.

When there are boys like Moorthy, who should safely get married and settle down, they begin this Gandhi business. What is this Gandhi business? Nothing but weaving coarse hand-made cloth, not fit for a mop, and bellowing out bhajans and bhajans and mixing with the pariahs. Pariahs now come to the temple door and tomorrow they would like to be in the heart of it. They will one day put themselves in the place of the Brahmins and begin to teach the Vedas. (28)

As Bhatta’s acrimony for Moorthy grows leading to his excommunication, Moorthy’s resolve to serve too grows: “But Moorthy went more and more into the pariah quarters, and now he was seen walking side by side with them” (45). His excommunication leads to his mother’s

death; leaving Moorthy alone in the village. Expunged from clan and family ties, Moorthy dedicates himself further to his task and undertakes to educate and ameliorate the pariahs of Skeffington Coffee Estate (situated far beyond the outskirts of Kanthapura), who too 'wanted to read and to write,' but had none to guide them. Moorthy is invited to the coffee estate by its clerks Gangadhar and Vasudev, who are city-bred like him and feel concerned with the plight of the captive coolies.

It is they that asked our learned Moorthy to come up. They said the pariahs must learn to read and to write, and when they can do this they can speak straight to the Sahib and ask for this and that, money and material and many holidays. Why should not Pariah Rachanna and Sampanna learn to read and to write ? They shall.

(60)

When Moorthy reaches the gates of the estate for the first time, he is prohibited by Bade Khan from contacting the coolie-pariahs. But Moorthy knows the law: "Coolies are men, Police Sahib. And according to the laws of your own Government and that of Mr. Skeffington no man can own another. I have every right to go in. They have every right to speak to me" (62). In the ensuing scuffle, joined by the coolies on Moorthy's side, Moorthy is injured by lathi blows. But Moorthy himself remains non aggressive, a true Gandhian that he is. "Raja Rao seems to believe that Gandhi's faith in God and his not letting evil flourish, led him not to do anything to protect himself and his followers"(Sharma, B 11)." This results in 'Don't-touch-the-Government Campaign,' led by Moorthy at the local level. This is parallel to and coincides with the Civil Disobedience movement at the national scale. Thus Kanthapura comes to be linked to the national mainstream.

The campaign begins with Moorthy's three-day-fast in the temple precincts. When the bewildered widow Rangamma asks him the reason for the fast, Moorthy replies that "... much violence had been done because of him, and that were he full of the radiance of ahimsa such things should never have happened ... The fault of others, Rangamma, is the fruit of one's own disharmony" (65). The fast on the one hand helps to forge an alliance between the villagers and the coolies, and on the other hand makes Moorthy see himself in a new light, shedding vestiges of prurience in him: "He had caught a little of that primordial radiance, and through every breath more and more love seemed to pour out of him" (68).

To conduct the campaign in a meaningful manner, Moorthy forms a Congress group in Kanthapura with the consent of the influential village headman, Patel Range Gowda. The Patel finds it an opportunity to teach his enemies a lesson. But Moorthy makes him see the mechanics of ahimsa:

That must not be done, Range Gowda. Every enemy you create is like pulling out a lantana bush in your backyard. The more you pull out, the wider you spread the seeds, and the thicker becomes the lantana growth. But every friend you create is like a jasmine hedge. You plant it, and it is there and bears flowers and you offer them to the gods, and the gods give them back to you and your women put them into their hair. Now, you see, you hit Puttayya and Puttayya goes and speaks of it to Madanna, and Madanna to Timmanna, and Puttayya and Timmanna and Madanna will hold vengefulness against you and some day this vengefulness will hold forth in fire. But had you reasoned it out with Puttayya, may be you would have come to an agreement, and your canal water would go to your fields, and his canal water to his fields. (73-74)

The people gradually come to understand Moorthy better. He “invariably preaches the Gandhian principles of non-violence, love of mankind and abolition of untouchability” (Dayal 16). They understand the significance of his work and their own lives are touched by his approach as they join his prayer meetings – *Sudra, Pariah, Brahmin* and weavers together. On one such occasion when Moorthy reaches the temple *mandap*, he finds:

Range Gowda was already seated in the mandap explaining to Elder Ramayya and the Elder Siddayya and to others around them about weaving and ahmisa and the great, great Congress. And they all listened to him with respect. When Moorthy entered they all stood up, but Moorthy said, ‘Oh, not this for me!’ and Range Gowda said, ‘You are our Gandhi,’ and when everybody laughed he went on: ‘There is nothing to laugh at, brothers. He is our Gandhi. The state of Mysore has a Maharaja, but that Maharaja has another Maharaja who is in London, and that one has another one in Heaven, and so everybody has his own Mahatma.... (78-79)

Moorthy’s steady success in uniting the villagers and in awakening their self-consciousness brings the police to Kanthapura. As they proceed to arrest him, the villagers rally round him and pounce upon the police, who beat them up in retaliation. But Moorthy calms the people down with the words of peace, love and order. “Kanthapura is the tale of Moorthy, a dedicated and selfless soul, who is regarded by the villagers as the ‘learned master’, the logical Mahatma – “he is our Gandhi”, “the saint of our village”. It is at the call of Moorthy that the whole village plunges itself in the non-violent national struggle of Mahatma Gandhi (Raizada 18).” When he is taken away from the village, the people pray and fast for him, fearing whether their ‘feeble voices’ would be heard. But their prayers seem to be answered as student groups,

advocates and businessmen from far and wide come to Kanthapura, form a Moorthy Defence Committee and hold parleys with the villagers. Though Moorthy politely turns down any aid in affirmation of Gandhi's belief that "a *satyagrahi* needs no advocates" (91), but in the process the villagers pick up a lot of knowledge of how the Raj perpetuates itself by creating conditions for their exploitation, how it gains by frightening them about the 'disorder, corruption and egoism' that were rampant in India before the British came, and by giving protection to natives like Swami who had decreed Moorthy's excommunication. With their awakening, whetted by Gandhi's newspaper that arrives in the village now, they understand the subversive roles played by people like Bhatta and Bade Khan:

'So that is how it is with Bhatta,' and everybody said, 'And so it is!' and Rangamma said, "That is why Bade Khan was so often seen with him,' and Nanjamma said, 'Do you remember, sister, he was nowhere to be seen on that awful night ?' and everybody said, 'Yes, surely and fools we were not to have seen it earlier, and we all felt the kernel of our hearts burn, for Bhatta had walked our streets a copper pot in hand and we had fed him'" (95-96).

When Moorthy returns to Kanthapura after his release his associates are all eyes and ears to him. This makes him pronounce his vision for the village, which is a carefully sketched miniature picture of Gandhi's vision of *Hind Swaraj*.

Now,' said Moorthy, 'we are out for action. A cock does not make a morning, nor a single man a revolution, but we'll build a thousand-pillared temple, a temple more firm than any that hath yet been built, and each one of you be the pillars in it, and when the temple is built, stone by stone, and man by man, and the bell hung to the roof and the Eagle-tower shaped and planted, we shall invoke the

Mother to reside with us in dream and in life. India then will live in a temple of our making. (123)

Moorthy's release coincides with Gandhi's famous Dandi March. He gives his associates day-to-day details of the progress of the march. The event strengthens their resolve further. Moorthy explains to them, in their own idiom, the importance of sticking together dissolving their caste divisions:

Brothers, and this too ye shall remember, whether Brahmin or bangle-seller, pariah or priest, we are all one, one as the mustard seed in a sack of mustard seeds, equal in shape and hue and all. Brothers, we are yoked to the same plough, and we shall have to press firm the plough-head and the earth will open out, and we shall sow the seeds of our hearts, and the crops will rise God-high. (123)

The Congress Committee of Kanthapura now wants to undertake its own march on the lines of Dandi March. The women members, led by Rangamma, start drill practices for the march. They imagine themselves being beaten by the police and not budging 'a finger's length'. When Dore's wife Sundari feels nervous, the young girl Ratna encourages her with perceptible changes in her: "Be strong, sister. When your husband beats you, you do not hit back, do you? You only grumble and weep. The policeman's beatings are the like!" (127)

Moorthy prepares them further by explaining them the purpose and technique of *Satyagraha*:

Brothers and sisters, remember we are not out to fight the white man or the white man's slaves, the Police and the Revenue officials, but against the demoniac corruption that has entered their hearts, and the purer we are the greater will be our victory, for the victory we seek is the victory of the heart...

And remember always, the path we follow is the path of the Spirit, and with truth and non-violence and love shall we add to the harmony of the world. For, brothers, we are not soldiers at arms, say I; we seek to be soldier saints. (130-131)

With such a meticulous, inspired and sustained planning when the time for the march to picket 'Boranna's Toddy grove' arrives, there is little doubt of its success. The one hundred and thirty nine *satyagrahis*, women and children inclusive, are bashed up and mauled by the police, but not one of them dithers from the assigned duty. Word about their courage and patriotic fervour spreads to the nearby places and they are hailed as 'pilgrims'.

With the success of the first civil disobedience programme, the *satyagrahis* are motivated to picket toddy booths in the area. A batch of seventy-seven people go and squat in front of a booth. The police come along with hordes of coolies who are usual customers of toddy and incite them to trample over the squatters. But the coolies instead of this join the *satyagrahis* shouting slogans of "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!"(144). They are showered with *lathi* blows.

As tales of their bravery spread, more and more groups of neighbouring villages picket toddy booths and thus Kanthapura becomes the hub of regional regeneration:

Then the people in Rampur picketed the Rampur Toll-Gate toddy booth, and the people of Siddapur the Siddapur Tea-Estate toddy booth, and the people of Maddur the Maddur Fair toddy shop, and men and women and children would go to the toddy booths and call to the drinkers 'Brothers and sisters friends, do not drink in the name of the Mahatma! (147)

The continual emphasis in *Kanthapura* on the Gandhian view of truth is an important element of the novel's design. The concepts as the purity of means, the nobility of action, the true spirit of *Satyagraha* and all the principles and high moral ideals are embodied in Moorthy

and other politically conscious men and women of Kanthapura. “The novelist profoundly explores the Gandhian ideology of loving one’s enemies, non-violence and abolition of untouchability” (Ojha 77). All the traits of Mahatma Gandhi, nobility, sobriety, honesty, truthfulness, magnanimity, continence and non-violence are found in Moorthy. Moorthy, with his piety, becomes an iconic figure, the local ‘Mahatma’, adding purpose and grit to his compatriots’ lives:

... and when Potter Ramayya came back from Santur he said that in house after house they had a picture of Moorthy, in house after house a picture of our Moorthy taken from city papers, and it seems they said, “Tell us something about this big man ?” and Potter Ramayya would weave out story after story and they would say, ‘You are a happy people to have a man like that,’ And we were so proud that we said we would bear the lathi blows and the prisons and we would follow our great Moorthy, and day after day we said, ‘What next, Moorthy? (148)

As the *satyagrahis*’ campaign touches people’s hearts, toddy sales go down, compelling the booth owners to wind up their businesses. This, in Gandhian parlance, is a natural corollary of proper tackling of evil. *Hind Swaraj* vociferously advocates that when evil is opposed thus, it not only vanishes, but brings a change of heart in the perpetrator of evil. For Gandhi means and ends were inextricably linked. This becomes manifest by this instance from the text:

Boranna said, ‘Now, I am not going to keep a shop where there’s no sale,’ and he closed it, and Satanna closed his shop and said, ‘I am not going to bear in this life and in all lives to come the sin of women being beaten,’ and Madayya said, ‘Why, I am but a servant of the toddy contractor, and why should I see the Police beat our women and men? (150)

It is no wonder that the Kanthapurians eulogise Gandhi's government through insightful songs like: "There's one Government, sister, \There's one Government, sister, \And that's the Government of the Mahatma" (150).

Another front of the villagers' struggle is their refusal to pay prohibitive land revenues. It was through this stratagem more than any other that the 'Red man's Government' perpetuated its rule over India. Over this issue Moorthy is right in warning his collaborators that "the fight has really begun now" (152). He asks them to be well prepared, as the representatives of the power machine would now harass them individually. It is not surprising, though shocking it remains, that the women *satyagrahis*, when they wake up the succeeding morning, find the men-folk of the village, including Moorthy, 'lifted' by the police. Subsequently the orgy of violence unleashed on the women is beyond their sense of comprehension and is graphically described. This is a real test of the *satyagrahis*' character. Gandhi dreamed every 'soul-fighter', pitched against 'brute force' to be his / her own leader and destiny.

Now in the absence of Moorthy and Rangamma, Ratna, exhibiting signs of a "self-realized soul" (159), takes charge of the women-folk. Encouraging the nonplussed Satamma, she reminds her, "You are a *Satyagrahi*, sister, be patient" (159). In her voice the narrator Achakka discovers the voice of Rangamma and the voice of Moorthy. In her manner, she discovers that "she was no more the child we had known"... (158). She leads them to safety behind the temple doors, involves them in *bhajans*, and encourages them through her informed talk:

And she told us of the women of Bombay who were beaten and beaten, and yet would not move till their brothers were freed, and the flag that they hoisted and the carts and the cars and the trains they stopped, and the wires that the white men

sent to the Queen to free them.... And so story after story she told us, of Chittagong and Lahore, of Dandi and Benares. (161)

The rest of the events that follow are like a nightmare coming alive. The villagers' lands are up for auction for non-payment of revenue. The women, since their men are all in jail, put up courageous resistance. They are joined by thousands of *satyagrahis* from the city in an unarmed struggle. They are joined by numerous coolies from the Skeffington Coffee Estate, who come shouting 'Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai', defying orders of their masters. Slogans of 'Inquilab Zindabad' rend the skies. The police reinforcements are taken over by army-soldiers. The women *satyagrahis*, led by Ratna, know that theirs is a losing cause, but they don't withdraw. Their consolation is that they are with the national mainstream in courage and determination and losses:

...And millions and millions of our brothers and sisters have gone to prison, and when the father comes back, the son is taken, and when the daughter is arrested, the mother comes out of prison, and yet there is but one law our people will obey, it is the law of the Congress. Listen, the Government is afraid of us. There is a big city in the north called Peshawar, and there the Government has always thousands and thousands of military men, and our brothers, the Mohomedans (sic.), one and all have conquered the city, and no white man will ever come into it. And they have conquered, sisters, without a gun-shot, for all are *Satyagrahis* and disciples of the Mahatma... (167)

The close quarter army attack that follows with bayonets mounted rifles is described in a medley of sounds: "... Three thousand men are shrieking and slaying, weeping, wounding, groaning, crawling, swooning, vomiting, moaning, raving, gasping..." (183). Not only land but

every house and byre in the village too has been attached. The women fear that they might not be allowed to set foot ever again in the village. Befuddled by such frenzy one woman sets fire to the thatches in the whole village, burning everything down to ashes. At the end men and women are left with “Wounds in stomachs and wounds in breasts and wounds in faces, with bullets in thighs, and bullets in the toes, bullets in the arms...” (185). Maimed and decimated, divested of lands and houses, the remaining women fighters reach another village, Kashipura, to take shelter there. With this the action of novel comes to an end.

The last chapter that follows it is actually a prologue placed at the end. It relates the reader to the narrator’s present. The foregone events are told to have occurred a year back. The narrator and her compatriots have lived in Kashipura since then. Their leaders Moorthy and Ratna are in Bombay, contributing to the national freedom movement. Rangamma, the discerning campaigner, is yet to be released from jail. In such a scenario their circumstances have nothing buoyant in them but that’s where their exposure to the workings of *Swaraj* plays a pivotal role. It has exorcised nihilism and fear of death from their lives. Through their epical losses, their faith in the *Swaraj* ideology of the Mahatma has remained steadfast. “The novel thus ends on the note of hope and optimism. This is symptomatic of the Indian people’s extreme patience and their willingness to accept whatever comes their way” (Niranjan 50). And through their courage of conviction they have substantiated the Mahatma’s faith in the pristine sensibility of the rural masses of India. And that is what the novel is all about. “Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, is perhaps the only novel that goes successfully to the depth of national uprising, the patriotic urge, not to speak of town and cities but in remote villages like Kanthapura. It is fused with religious faith. The storm of Gandhi, with its tremendous influence over the Indians, shakes this little village to its roots. Mahatma Gandhi is placed on the same pedestal as Lord Christ, Rama,

Krishna and the Buddha. The inscription from the *Gita* on the inner title page of the novel:

“Whenever there is misery and ignorance, I come” radiates Raja Rao’s sentiments about Gandhi” (Sharma, K 10).

Gandhi had realized very early in his career that political freedom as a goal in itself would hardly carry any significance for India’s destiny. That’s why in *Hind Swaraj* his focus is on India’s moral and spiritual regeneration, which would a posteriori lead to political liberation. But in the league of India’s political leaders, Gandhi remained a lonely figure in his vision and methods:

The struggle for India’s political independence engaged only a part, probably the lesser part of him, while his ambition and thought ranged far beyond that. He envisaged the total regeneration of India, and by methods, which would be an example to other societies as well. His ideas of change did not stop with the objective of power from British hands to India. If they appeared to stop there it is, because people as a whole, including most of their leaders, can only see one step ahead at any one time, and right up to the time of Gandhi’s death the step that most mattered to all Indians was the transfer of power. They thought his other ideas could wait. (Chopra 1-2)

R.K. Narayan’s *The English Teacher* (1946) is generally considered a love-story or an autobiographical novel but as the opening lines depict the protagonist is Gandhian in being truly self examining and self-critical.

I was on the whole very pleased with my day -not many conflicts and worries, above all not too much self-criticism. I had done almost all the things I wanted to do, and as a result I felt heroic and satisfied. The urge had been upon me for some

days past to take myself in hand. What was wrong with me? I couldn't say, some sort of vague disaffection, a self-rebellion I might call it. (5)

Krishnan, a lecturer in English in the Albert Mission College of Malgudi is a member of a convention-ridden society which is the victim of superstitions, social evils and complacency. He wants a drastic change in the society he lives.

Although in the whole novel there is no direct mention of Gandhi, but the way his enunciations moulded the mood of the times is clearly visible in the actions and views of the protagonist. His habit of "a remorseless self-analysis" (7), his attempt of "controlling my own thoughts" (7) and his awareness of the "lack of exercise and irregular habits" (7) and the harm caused by them are essentially Gandhian in nature. Further he is aware of a filmsy involvement with his pupils the scope of which is set by the Westernised education system with its emphasis on attendance and mugging up of foreign literary authors without any genuine scope of understanding them or imbibing any learning from them.

Gandhian ideology being of universal appeal influenced people of all shades and opinions and 'it is nothing but what is good and noble in life', therefore, achieved universality. Michel Pausse has aptly said:

Gandhi could survive his own message only if its universality were brought into focus. The philosophical value of his teachings had to find a field of application in a context other than that of the struggle for independence. In his gentle novels of Malgudi Narayan proves that the quintessence of Gandhi's teaching is part and parcel of India's daily life, one might even tempted to say of India's folklore. (61)

In *The English Teacher* Gandhian ideology can be found in the contexts other than the struggle for independence. In this novel the author explores the theme of the relevance of the

Western education system in India. “As the analysis of the novel would show, it would take a complete rejection of the value system engendered by the Western education to restore Krishnan to his cultural roots” (Jha 134).

Narayan uses, for the first time, first person narration in this novel and Krishnan, the protagonist, being an introspective kind of person asks himself the question ‘what is wrong with him?’ In the novel the problem takes on the urgency of self-probing and self-criticism and the protagonist is poised for seeking an answer to his question. This immediately puts him up against the system of Western education. It is ironical though that he is both a product and an operator of that system by being a teacher of English. The author presents this conflict right in the beginning of the novel when as an illustration of his discomfort with the system Krishnan relates an incident of how Mr. Brown, the Principal of Albert Mission College, reprimands the teachers of the English department on the importance of the purity of English language. “He mentioned us to our seats and said, could you imagine a worse shock for me? I came across a student of the English Honours, who did not know till this day that ‘honours’ had to be spelt with a ‘u’?” (6) Krishnan feels irritated and the source of his anxiety is in the educational system. He asks, “Why should he think the responsibility for learning is all on our side and none on his? Why does he magnify his own importance?” (6).

In the novel we find multiple references to Western education where the protagonist raises the questions. His experience of teaching English to Indian students generates a sense of meaninglessness in him. The role of a teacher in the impersonalised Western educational system is measured against the old tradition of India where the teacher had a psychological tie with the students. He is aware of the futility of his job as a teacher:

What tie was there between me and them? Did I absorb their personalities as did the old masters and merge them in mine. I was merely a man who had mugged earlier than they the introduction and the notes in the Verity edition of 'Lear' and guided them through the mazes of Elizabethan English. I did not do it out of love for them or for Shakespeare but only out of love for myself. If they paid me the same one hundred rupees for stringing beads together or tearing up paper bits every day for a few hours, I would perhaps be doing it with equal fervor. (12)

Gandhi was in favour of ancient Indian educational system where there was a strong tie between the teacher and the taught. "Our ancient school system is enough. Character-building has the first place in it and that is primary education" (Narayan IV: 184). Gandhi insisted upon the need for a moral revolution among his fellow countrymen, a revolution necessary in itself regardless of the British presence and which would have to be carried on after the occupying power's departure. But India has adopted the Western educational system heedlessly. "Carried away by the flood of Western thought we came to the conclusion, without weighing pros and cons, that we should give this kind of education to the people" (Narayan IV:182). Krishnan attracts the attention of Mr. Gajapathy, head of the department, "... there are blacker sins in this world than a dropped vowel" (6).

Narayan raises the issue of "the need for speaking and writing correct English" (6) in the beginning of the novel. Gandhi was against the use of English language as the medium of education. "The medium of a foreign language through which higher education has been imparted in India has caused incalculable intellectual and moral injury to the nation" (Bose 256). Further Gandhi shares his own experience of schooling:

But the school master's business was to drive English into the pupil's head.

Therefore more than half of our time was given to learning English and mastering its arbitrary spelling and pronunciation. It was a painful discovery to have to learn a language that was not pronounced as it was written. It was a strange experience to have to learn the spelling by heart. But that is, by the way, irrelevant to my argument. (Bose 266)

Krishnan observes that Mr. Brown is not proficient in even one Indian language despite a thirty years stay in India. He asks his colleague Mr. Gajapathy, "Let us be fair. Ask Mr. Brown if he can say in any of the two hundred Indian languages: 'The cat chases the rat.' He has spent thirty years in India" (6).

He feels disgusted with the education system that was introduced by the British in India. He believes in Gandhi who insisted on education being imparted in the mother-tongue and wanted it to satisfy not only the requirements of the mind, but also of the body and the spirit. "Krishnan's innermost self remains satisfied with his search of soul and love of his motherland like a true son of India and a sincere patriot like Gandhi who accentuated for education in the mother tongue" (Misra 107). However, Gajapathy believes, "there is a merit in accuracy, which must be cultivated for its own sake" (16) but like a Gandhian he is also of the view that East should not follow West indiscriminately. He remarks, "... The whole of the West is in a muddle owing to its political consciousness, and what a pity that the East should also follow suit. It is like a weed choking all other human faculties" (16).

Another Gandhian character is the protagonist, Krishnan's father who is an educated person and chose to settle in his village. "He was B.A. of the olden days..., he was fastidious and precise in handling the English language,... after passing his B.A. he refused to enter

government service, ...but went back and settled in his village and looked after his lands and property” (19). Gandhi felt that the real reform that India needed was *swadeshi* in real sense. He wanted proper incentive to be given not only to spinning, but to all the cottage industries. He was not against machinery but against the craze for machinery. Only he did not want industrialization to be so planned as to destroy the villages and the village handicrafts. In fact he wished to revive and encourage all village craft. Krishnan’s father is an educated person but never purchases the ink from the shop. He prepares the ink himself and uses the old brown paper for writing purposes.

He still wrote his fine, sharp hand, every letter put down with precision and care but without ornament, ... from time immemorial he had written only on those pads.... The paper had acquired an elegant tone of brown through years of storing but it was tough as parchment. My father had a steel pen with a fat green wooden handle, with which he had written for years. He had several bottles of ink – his own make from a recipe which was exclusively his and of which he was excessively proud. He would make his store of ink once a year; and we little ones of the household waited for the event with tremendous enthusiasm – all the servants in the house would be present: a special oven was raised in the backyard, with a cauldron sizzling over it all day, and father presiding. (17)

Use of old paper or not wasting it, and use of old pen and the ink prepared by himself shows his Gandhian traits. Narayan’s intentions are very clear in portraying the character of an educated person living in a village and trust in village handicraft.

The Headmaster of the play school is a very prominent Gandhian character in the novel. He believes in purely Gandhian concept of education. Gandhi was of the view that in our

schools, education should be imparted through various activities for the all-round development of children. “Physical drill, handicraft, drawing and music should go hand in hand in order to draw the best out of the boys and girls and create in them a real interest in their tuition” (Bose 274). The headmaster of children’s school invites Krishnan to show his school. The school and its activities reveal the Gandhian model of education. “He had partitioned the main hall into a number of rooms. The partition screens could all be seen, filled with glittering alphabets and pictures drawn by children – a look at it seemed to explain the created universe. In that narrow space he had crammed every conceivable plaything for children, see-saws, swings, sand heaps and ladders”(24). This is a play-school in real sense where children can learn something of substance joyfully. The children in the school “... are all so happy. This is the meaning of the word joy- in its purest sense. We can learn a great deal watching them and playing with them. When we are qualified we can enter their life..., “he said.” (124-125)

Krishnan is highly impressed to see this school of children and gets his daughter Leela admitted to the school. This is the genuine play school where he gets “a glimpse of some purpose in existence and creation.” (125). He asks the headmaster how and when they study in this play school? The headmaster comments on the condition of education where people just talk of the game-way in studies but they do not practice it in real sense.

Just as they play – I gather them together and talk to them and take them in and show them writing on boards. They learn more that way. Everybody speaks of the game-way in studies but nobody really practices it. It becomes more the subject of a paper in some pompous conference and brings a title or preferment to the educational administrator. (125)

The headmaster is against the schools with heavy furniture and elaborate buildings. His school is environment friendly and he is aware of the fact that there is no need of the school full of all luxuries.

It was thatch-roofed. Its floor was covered with clay, and the walls were of bamboo splinters filled in with mud. The floor was uneven and cool, and the whole place of smelt of Mother Earth. It was a pleasing smell, and seemed to take us back to some primeval simplicity, intimately bound up with earth and mud and dust.... This will do for a school. We are a poor country, and we can do without luxuries. Why do we want anything more than a shed and a few mats and open air? (134-135)

The headmaster is against imitating others. He comments against the educational movements. He is not in favour of big and costly buildings for which we have to collect the donations or have to beg the governments for grant. He believes in Gandhian concept: "By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit" (Bose 256).

The headmaster is entirely against expensive schools and mere copying others:

It is all mere copying," he replied. Multiply your expenses, and look to the Government for the support, and sell your soul to the Government for the grant. This is the history of our educational movement.... The main business of an educational institution is to shape the mind and character and of course games have their value.... It is all a curse, copying, copying, copying. We could as well have been born monkeys to justify our powers of imitation. (135)

Some other Gandhian traits we find in the character of the headmaster are like truth and determination to change for the better. Krishnan also has an implicit understanding of speaking truth with the headmaster. “But we had almost arrived at a tacit understanding to be strictly truthful rather than formal” (140). The headmaster renounces his ancestral property, a fine house in Lawley extension. He believes in Gandhian philosophy of non-possession and the dignity of labour with which one can change the condition for the betterment. “Possession implies provision for the future. A seeker after Truth, a follower of the Law of Love cannot hold anything against tomorrow. God never stores for the morrow; he never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. If, therefore, we repose faith in this providence, we should rest assured, that he will give us everything that we require (Bose 75). The headmaster, because of his belief in the renunciation of material possession takes the decision to reside in a laid back, backward street hoping to change it to a better one through his own efforts. “But I chose it deliberately. It is where God resides. It is where we should live. And if we have any worth in us the place will change through our presence. ... We should not despair for even the worst on earth” (147).

The author expresses his displeasure over the present education system which has failed the aim of India’s teeming millions. He highlights the failure of the purpose of existing educational system through the comments of the headmaster.

And then our own schooling which put blinkers on to us; which persistently ruined this vision of things and made us into adults. It has always seemed to me that our teachers helped us to take a wrong turn. And I have always felt that for the future of mankind we should retain the original vision, and I’m trying a system of children’s education. Just leave them alone and they will be all right.

The Leave Alone System, which will make them wholesome human beings, and also help us, those who work along with them, to work off the curse of adulthood. (148)

According to the headmaster our education system turns the children into callous adults and for transforming them into humane adults he has devised a new system of children's education which he calls 'The Leave Alone System.'

The self-criticality with which the novel had begun becomes acute as the story progresses. Experience of Susila's sudden death made Krishnan more acutely aware of the meaninglessness of his job as a teacher of English. However, he tries to get some faith in life from his mystical communion with his wife through a medium. But as Rama Jha observes, Krishnan "needs a total rejection of the system he works in to achieve a complete metamorphosis of his personality. More and more, as we find him struggling with deeper questions of human existence and meaningful realisation of self, he is becoming a stranger to his college job" (136). When a student in the B.A. class rises to clear his doubt and the "awful irresponsiveness of Death overwhelmed Krishnan again"(149), he says:"Don't worry so much about these things – they are trash, we are obliged to go through and pretend that we like them, but all the time the problem of living and dying is crushing us" (149). When Gajapathy informs Krishnan about taking special classes for students in the history of literature he says:

Why do they make so much of the history of literature? ... as if literature could not survive without some fool compiling a bogus history... I see more clearly now between fatuities and serious work... But I will tell the boys what's sense and what is nonsense. I will tell them that they are being fed on literary garbage and that we are all the paid servants of the garbage department. (150)

In the end the protagonist Krishnan acknowledges: “This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage” (178). This acute awareness helps him make up his mind: “I was in search of a harmonious existence and everything that disturbed that harmony was to be rigorously excluded, even my college work” (178). Krishnan is opposed to the perpetuating system of education that crippled his imagination and hence believes in social freedom and independence of mind. “His soul revolted against the British education and hence he gave up and preferred to work as primary school teacher” (Singh 23). Accordingly he decides to resign from college and start working in the kindergarten being run by the headmaster. He feels this will leave him free to experiment and innovate. When questioned by Mr. Brown, the college Principal, he says, “Sir, what I am doing in the college hardly seems to me work. I mug up and repeat and they mug up and repeat in examinations... It is a fraud I am practising for a consideration of a hundred rupees a month.... It doesn't please my innermost self” (179-180).

His courage and idealism is duly recognized when during the farewell function Mr. Brown observes:

Everywhere, under every condition, he has proved himself to be an uncompromising idealist. His constant anxiety has been to find the world good enough for his own principles of life and letters. Few men would have the courage to throw up a lucrative income and adopt one very much lower. But he has done it. Success must be measured by its profitlessness, said a French philosopher. Our college can look upon this idealist with justifiable pride. (182)

Finally, by leading a moral life and with a disciplined mind and more mental strength he seems to be able to realise the ultimate aim of life. When he realizes

that his needs are few and he is not attached to the world, he becomes disinterested in continuing his teaching for material gain only. “At the end of the novel the English Teacher ceases to be an English teacher and achieves freedom to experiment with education on Gandhian lines” (Jha134). He is acting for the benefit of society without any ulterior motive. Now he is ready to live in the world without being attached to it. He leads a type of life which is recommended in the Gita in which Gandhi also strongly believed. He is ready to work for the benefit of others without caring for his self-interest.

Bhattacharya’s very first novel *So Many Hungers* (1947) bears a clear imprint of Gandhi on it. It is easily perceptible from the study of the novel that Gandhi became a source of inspiration for his creative writing in many ways. The novel explicitly depicts the Gandhian love for rural India and her cultural past. “In depicting the influence of Gandhi on his characters, Bhattacharya truly demonstrates how Gandhi’s thoughts and actions cast ennobling influence on the people and inspired many to model their lives on his ideals.” (Gautam 12). The women’s participation in public life, the western educated Indians turning Gandhian and the integration of the different sections of society under Gandhian leadership figure prominently in the novel. Moreover Bhattacharya presents a Gandhian view of history by depicting at large the freedom struggle of India under Gandhian leadership, India’s critical position during World War-II and the inhuman politics of the imperialist government during that time which resulted in devastating famine of Bengal in 1942-43. “...it actually covers the war years with their uncertainties, privations, agonies, cruelties, frustrations. The foreground is occupied partly by the Basu family, and partly by the peasant family, the girl Kajoli, her mother, her brother.” (Iyengar 412).

It is evident that Bhattacharya has derived his themes from the most crucial phase of Indian history, which he himself witnessed from very close quarters. “Bhabani Bhattacharya... grew up in British India, and observed the socio-economic, cultural and political conditions prevailing under the colonial rules and hence could bring out realistically the effects of colonialism” (Iyengar 20). On one hand the novel faithfully reflects the want and hungers of starving millions of Calcutta and the “social evils as pointed by Gandhi” (Jha 153) on the other hand it portrays the Quit India Movement of 1942 and resultant Gandhian impact on the political, social, economic and moral life of the people of India.

All the above mentioned complicated events of national and inter-national and multi-dimensional impact of Gandhian leadership of the people in India are discussed in detail mainly through the life of a village, named Baruni.

In order to present the whole scenario of freedom struggle and famine, from a Gandhian perspective Bhattacharya has portrayed a full-fledged character in the image of Gandhi. Devesh Basu is an ardent follower of Gandhi and a nationalist with Gandhian spirit. Nonetheless he lives his life exactly as lived by Gandhi. Devesh has left his family and home in the affluent Calcutta city to settle down in the small village Baruni. “The eldest member of this family, Devesh Basu, is an earnest Gandhiite. He’s an idealist and a veteran freedom fighter. Above seventy in age, he lives in a village where people are very dear to him” (Sorot 61), and he thinks the villagers as “the core of his being, his blood and bone” (64).

Devesh has also identified himself completely with the peasants and feels perfectly at home with them. It is evident when he says, “I have scores of sons and daughters at Baruni. I am proud of my people” (24).

Not only that Devesh eats and drinks with them but has also become de-jure head of Kajoli's family whose father is in prison for his participation in Civil Disobedience Movement. Many instances in the novel reveal that he feels emotionally one with them and shares all their joys and sorrows. He is addressed as 'Dadu' by the young Onu, Kajoli's brother and Kajoli. Devesh Basu commands similar kind of love and affection from the villagers as Gandhi enjoyed from the masses of India. Popularly known as Devata, the celestial being, Devesh is an object of a kind of reverence for them. "When we call him Devata, our tongue and our soul earn merit. We are only peasant folk, sir" (23).

Gandhi linked up his Constructive Programmes with the freedom struggle of India. He was fully aware of the miserable plight of the peasants and explored into the causes responsible for the situation. Devesh shows a similar concern with the poor peasants of Baruni and views the situation with regret. "On his petty income the landed peasant can have just enough his own rice to eat, no reserve for lean days. And the kisans – they must always be hungry save for a spell of two or three months in the year. ... The hundred million kisans of India must always be hungry" (25).

Gandhi kept on experimenting with the dietetics and considered the vegetarian diet as the best diet. For him only vegetarian diet suited the people of India because even the poor could afford it. Battacharya, keeping in view the fact, gives a description of food served to Devesh in village. The simple vegetarian and nutritious foods consists of "... steamed rice, and lentils, a pinch of salt and a lemon, some baked sweet potatoes and a vegetable curry of sorts, and perhaps some thickened milk in a small brass bowl"(24).

Battacharya makes a Gandhian presentation of freedom struggle of India. The second chapter highlights how Gandhi represented the masses to a supreme degree and became their

voice to that extent. It makes a mention of the nation wide popularity of the Dandi March and how people braved the horrors of prison life for disobeying the Salt Law but none of them budged from the path of truth and non-violence. Men and women took equal part in it as the novel records, “All over India a hundred thousand men-women, too had gone to prison in a month” (17).

Devesh is so much influenced by Gandhi that he becomes the social activist on Gandhian lines. “He’s a true Gandhian and has been deep in the Civil Disobedience Movement and has courted imprisonment several times. He loves villagers and is proud of them” (Raizada 67). Battacharya takes him further and reveals how Devata put all his efforts to channelize the energies of masses: “... he formed a band of volunteers, peasants and fishers all, leading them to the Bay, making salt from sea-water in defiance of the Law” (17). Gandhi’s emphasis was on rural reconstruction work as well as on spread of education. Devata runs an evening school at Baruni to fulfill the purpose of his master. “Mass literacy is a danger for the rulers. It would, they know, make the trampled ones conscious of their birth-right – the right to live as human beings” (26-27).

Devata enthuses the villagers with fearlessness and awakens them against all kinds of exploitations, internal and external, political and economic, social or religious and inspires them to be *satyagrahis* abiding by the principle of non-violence. “A truly Gandhian character- in precept as well as in practice- Devesh Basu stands for love, truth and non- violence (Naik 127).”

Devesh has a strong faith in the principle of ahimsa which in the positive sense signifies the largest love or the greatest charity. It does not have any scope for enmity or ill will against the wrong doer. Translated into political terms it means that *satyagraha* is to be directed against the British rule and not against the British people.

Bhattacharya's treatment of sinners in the novel is also conditioned by the Gandhian aphorism: 'Hate the sin and not the sinner'. Gandhi believed that the primary virtues are worth cultivating even in the meanest of human species. Gandhi held unshakable faith in the fundamental goodness of man. Devata's love is all-embracing as he refuses to hate the people of England; his grouse is against the British rulers, not the British people. It is as if Gandhi himself speaks when he tells Rahoul: "Why should you fight the people of England? They are good people. The people are good everywhere. Our fight is with the rulers of England, who hold us in subjection for their narrow interests" (21-22).

The novelist iterates the same situation here and Devesh is thinking exactly in terms of Gandhi. "Devesh Basu, the grandfather of Rahoul, is modelled on Gandhi as Moorthy is Gandhian in Kanthapura" (Gautam 14-15). The Movement is shown indecisive and uncertain in the beginning not because of the lack of popular support or the courage in people to fight against the British rule but because it offered people sufficient time to understand the policy of the alien government during the War.

Bhattacharya presents the war situation from the Gandhian angle and leads to a Gandhian conclusion that war is incapable of doing any good to humanity. The revelation dawns on Rahoul, the grandson of Devesh Basu, D.Sc. in Astro-physics from America who ultimately grows into a typically Gandhian character.

Bhattacharya shows Rahoul enjoying himself, at Britain's declaration of war on *Swastika*. To him it is an opportunity to fight for democratic forces against Nazism. He regrets to have missed the similar opportunity to fight for the liberation of Spain earlier. Rahoul feels that now it is a big war which will make peace, liberty and security prevail all over the world if the Fascist Forces are defeated. He cherishes high sounding ideals to be the outcome of the Second World

War. “In the agonies of the war the soul of humankind would be cleansed. Humankind after the war would not be the humankind of before” (12-13).

Rahoul, unaware, is thinking in terms of Gandhi and holds the belief that suffering purifies a person and makes him capable of giving up his evil designs after he had undergone all those sufferings. By propounding the philosophy of non-violence Gandhi gave a new dimension to the future of humanity which actually Rahoul wants to see and mistakes the War as the means of converting the very nature of human beings, a nation and then of the whole world society.

In Gandhian scheme of the values means are no less important than the ends. Bhattacharya presents the situation vindicating Gandhian ideas. Rahoul wants peace and liberty to be the share of all but he is not aware that war cannot lead to it. The euphoria of Rahoul vanishes as soon he comes to know the evil designs behind the War. All the information about the War reveals that the Allied Powers are fighting out of the sense of competition and hatred. It is obvious that no higher values are considered in the process of it. The victor will feel self-aggrandized at the most brilliant show of the armed powers he possessed. “The Allies fought for victory and nothing beyond? Only to hang their washing on the Siegfried Line? No higher, ideals were visible in their proclaimed war aims – none” (21).

Gandhi rejected all kinds of violent means even for the attainment of good ends. He was specifically against the use of violence to oppose violence. What Rahoul wants is, a kind of change of heart which seems none of the motives of either of the Powers. The author gives us a peep in Rahoul’s psyche who echoes Gandhian sentiments about war. Rahoul thinks that the blood bath of war will drown with itself its victims and also cause death to a hundred thousand values. “War was a mass murder. You could only commit yourself to mass murder with a clear

conscience only when you were convinced that you would be ridding the world of some pest” (41).

Bhattacharya puts Rahoul in a critical position and justifies Gandhian ideas by restraining him from joining the War. Unlike Rahoul, Kunal, his younger brother takes active part in it without going into the real motive behind it. Rahoul is unable to join the war because he is not convinced about the purity of purpose behind it. “But how could a people step out into a war said to be waged for democratic freedom so long as that very freedom was denied them” (12).

Hence it is not merely the characters Bhattacharya presents are thinking in Gandhian terms; the very situation of India presented as the background is in a manner Gandhi would have liked to see it. Rahoul’s conscience does not allow him to fight for the Allied Powers because of the subjection of India.

Rahoul represents the educated Indian class which could not decide its course of action for quite some time because the British rulers did not even promise to make India free from their bondage. Bhattacharya lashes at the hypocritical attitude of the alien government and the dual political stand taken by them. He makes the ironic comment: “... the champions of freedom abroad were the eaters of freedom in this land” (41). Rahoul confines himself to his research work of discovering the death ray. Participating in war implies subservience to an alien ruler which conflicts with his sense of dignity and love for freedom. Moreover, the very purpose of his joining the war is defeated. Rahoul decides to seek the advice of his grandfather Devesh at this critical juncture to get out of this dilemma.

Deveta advises him to participate in the National Movement. The life of Deveta is an example before Rahoul who is living a life dedicated to the cause of the people. Deveta iterates exactly the position taken by Gandhi. Fired with the love of people he is not afraid of the

atrocities of the British rulers to suppress the movement. Prokash, a student of Rahoul embodies the very spirit of Gandhi as he is prepared to lay everything for the cause of people and goes underground as soon as the Quit India resolution is sponsored. With this the movement reaches its zenith.

Rahoul expresses the best kind of metamorphosis brought by Gandhi in the psyche of an average Indian through the catalysis of experience. It is ultimately the agonies of the people, the destitute from the coastal villages which make him free from confusion or indecision. His luxurious life and warm family ties cannot keep him away from merging into the masses. He identifies himself with their miserable lot and wants to redress their grievances. He is able to rise above his own needs to think about others, in terms of people and their humanity. His choice comes out of an inner awakening and it brings him wholeness and courage. He sheds the fear of sharing agonies of the millions and loneliness.

In a typically Gandhian way he comes to realize that self realization is impossible without the identification with the service of the poor. He leaves his laboratory for the public place where peaceful processionists are being callously *lathi* charged by the alien police. In order to satisfy himself he starts running free kitchens for the benefit of the starving destitute from the villages of Bengal. He has a strong desire to plunge into the freedom struggle and his speech to students makes it clear that he is a man of fiery spirit.

“...with bitter smouldering rage he had been speaking to the students. The anger was warm in his voice, and he had paused till his speech was cool again. “Quit” cried all India. “You have done us some good along with much evil. For the good you’ve done you have been paid in full. The accounts have been settled. Now, for God’s sake, Quit!” (202).

Through the experience and growth of Rahoul the author makes it evident that Gandhi released many a bond that imprisoned and disabled the minds of the people. Rahoul exemplifies the feeling of release and exhilaration that came over Indian psyche.

Towards the ending of the novel Rahoul is taken to the prison in handcuffs with other volunteers. Rahoul is above all kinds of outer fears, wants and miseries because he has gained full control over his senses. Rahoul transforms into a true Gandhian and an ardent follower of ahimsa. He becomes the embodiment of the emancipation of spirit and feels free as he sings, “The more they tighten the chains, the more the chains loosen!”(205). Gandhi believed that real foundation of independence lies in the villages of India. His mission was to send *satyagrahis* to seven hundred thousand villages of India. Deveta, the Gandhian emissary prepares the villagers of Baruni accordingly. The flag-salute ceremony, under the old banyan tree is a part of this preparation. Deveta forges the people of Baruni into *shanty-sena* directing their full faith and energies into non-violent means of struggle. A non-violent army is in a greater need of discipline and training and initiative than an orthodox army equipped with weapons. In contrast to this an untrained following could degenerate into a rabble which will defeat the purpose of the national movement. The villagers of Baruni are trained along the Gandhian lines by Deveta. “... all having made their pronam to the flag; fighters all” (71). Devesh concentrates on training a corps of soldiers for the national movement which was essentially non-violent in its nature.

Gandhi wanted to make a final appeal to the alien government after he had sponsored the Quit India resolution before doing anything drastic but the initiative was taken off his hands. He and other leaders were simultaneously arrested and rushed off to the different places of confinement. Exactly in the similar circumstances Devesh Basu, along with the other nationalists, is arrested by “the Red Turbans” (71).

Strict adherence to non-violence at all three levels – thought, word and deed is the duty of each and every *satyagrahi* to fulfil. Unless non-violence is followed completely by them, they cannot be victorious in the moral struggle against the opponent. The villagers are reminded of Gandhi by the last words of Deveta addressed to them when he warns them that their indulgence in any kind of violence will defeat their purpose. “Friends and comrades do not betray the flag. Do not betray yourselves. There is violence in your thoughts; that is evil enough. Do not make it worse by violence in action” (72). The people who were feeling agitated at the sudden arrest of Deveta, their leader, learn to be in perfect discipline instead of being angry or aggressive. A Gandhian as he is, he believes in changing the heart of the enemy by offering passive resistance.

Deveta, like Gandhi, possesses marvelous power to turn the masses into heroes and martyrs with the help of a few words. His words “Be strong. Be True. Be Deathless” (72) bear magical effect on them and they are prepared to sacrifice no less than their own lives to uphold the honour of Mother India. These people face the worst kinds of atrocities inflicted upon them by the authorities but do not deviate from their path of truth and non-violence. Thus, illustrating the great power which the spirit of man can exercise over human minds and even over physical surroundings, Bhattacharya shows the miraculous change under Gandhian leadership. Many homes are broken in the course of struggle and many families are displaced. Kajoli’s family represents a true picture of that time. Kajoli’s father and elder brother were already in prison and her husband, forced to go to Calcutta city to earn their livelihood is killed on the way by the British soldiers.

The people taken unaware and stupefied for the moment react in a frenzy of despair when the alien soldiers humiliate and injure them by shooting at them and at their flag. “You could call forth strength put up with all, suffer without retaliation, when they attacked your person; but not

when they attacked your mother” (73). The people in a mad rush go and burn a *dakghar*. But immediately they are overpowered by a feeling of remorse and feel guilty for submitting themselves to their impulse though temporarily. Deveta, the Gandhian apostle of non-violence, is in their thoughts as they ponder over the idea “how he would grieve if he knew; they had disobeyed him, and sadness was heavy in their bones” (75). The government made the task of *satyagrahis* much more difficult. Hating to part with power the authorities apply all repressive measures to suppress the movement.

The novelist suggests to fight against the economic bankruptcy and exploitation perpetuated by the colonial system. India does not seek political freedom only but she has to be economically self dependent. This is the Gandhian *swaraj* which is required to make the people, not only politically free but also socially and economically free from all the bonds.

Once again it is Devesh who foresees the future miserable plight of Baruni close at hand and guides them in the right direction. With little money and no food for themselves the peasants are badly caught in hunger. His words to the peasants have something essentially Gandhian in them as Bhattacharya depicts: “The word came, softly spoken, a mere murmur, but it rang louder than the jeep’s loudspeaker.... Deveta spoke, “Do not rush to sell your grain. Think it over.’ So he spoke” (63). The narrator reveals that the word is as good as a command. Rama Jha suggests in this regard that the brief ‘no’ from Deveta to the agents of the imperial government bears so much likeness to Gandhian style of “non-violent non-cooperation” (164).

Gandhi’s love for the village culture and peasants get explicit expression when Devesh compares the village folks with the city dwellers and makes a revealing statement to Rahoul: “They are not bright and knowing and- civilized! - Like the city-breds; but they are good people. Centuries of hardship and strain have not destroyed their faith in human values” (24).

Bhattacharya's villages are a telling picture of the glorious ancient India. They are culturally rich, pure and unaffected by city culture or the western influence.

It is obviously Bhattacharya's Gandhian conviction which is at the back of the depiction of Indian villagers. He shows them rich in cultural heritage of old traditions of India even if they are poor in the material sense of the word. There are various instances in the novel where suffering the worst kinds of agonies the villagers do not leave their goodness of character, the sense of sacrifice, charity and generosity by "keeping their values and spirit by and large uncontaminated" (Jha 153). Highly admirable acts of kindness are performed by Kajoli's family during the devastating famine which had struck Baruni and its neighbouring villages.

Kajoli's mother shows incredible capacity to fight the evil or temptation with the strength of her moral character. She vomits out all she had already had from the procuress without knowing the intention of her visit to their place. She feels guilty of having touched the eatables brought by her. In self reproach she says, "I ate dirt from the hand of a whore." (131) And later in the novel she decides to end her life rather than deviate from the path of goodness.

In a remarkable instance Bhattacharya shows how deeply Gandhian values are embedded in the people. Gandhi held unflinching faith in non-violence and advocated complete adherence to it for it is the law of human race and is infinitely superior to brute force. Even when it is the question of sheer survival the people abide by the Gandhian principles. Despite the growing hunger in their whole beings the starving destitute have not lost their moral leanings. They cannot even dream of snatching the food from others to satisfy their own hunger. "Chih !... How can you take by force that is not yours ? Have you no true principles of living? Are you wild beasts?" (107). A very old man offers a morsel to the hungry youth from his loin cloth but does not let him snatch it from the shop.

Gandhi's call brought awareness and self confidence in the women and it became the starting point for their emancipation. In Gandhi's Civil Disobedience movement and later in Quit India movement the women listed their entry in large numbers. Bhattacharya's ideas about women are in consonance with those of Gandhi. "Kajoli stands beside her brother Kanu in flag salute ceremony. ... it was a business as much of the women as of the men folk, so Devata said". She radiates courage and fearlessness and wrap herself in a manner that she becomes a "living tricolour" (70).

After the arrest of her father and elder brother Kanu she takes up the rugged work of a man in the field. Like a man she shoulders the responsibility of earning the bread for her mother and her younger brother Onu. "Father gone, Kanu gone, Kajoli had to take up a man's rugged work...How many drops of sweat to earn each grain of corn, thought Kajoli in her heart, looking at her wet palm and wiping it on her *sari* for a better grip on the sickle?" (77).

Towards the end, Kajoli represents the triumph of human spirit over famine and starvation and their accompanying degradation. Realizing how her mother and Onu have been half living after she has been released from the hospital, she decides to sell herself to a procuress. For a few moments she is overpowered by misery and suffering. But at the last moment again Deveta becomes a great source of her inspiration when she comes to know that the prisoners of Dehradun have started a hunger strike. And now at the moment of deepest degradation and shame Kajoli recaptures the bravery and power she had felt long ago when her father and other villagers at the bidding of Deveta had struck out against their oppressors. She determines once again to fight with both foreign and native greed and oppression. The words of Deveta 'Be Strong' 'Be True' 'Be Deathless' replenish the new life in her deadening spirit. Her new found courage-to-act arises from the depths of her womanly self. She cherishes a brightly coloured

vision of a better, more worthwhile life of herself and others. She exemplifies the ancient Hindu concept of *Shakti*, the dynamic female energy.

Kajoli is the embodiment of rural spirit and preserves her power and dignity. Monju, Rahoul's wife also undergoes similar transformation. Bhattacharya makes her have a close view of suffering humanity around her which makes her shed her fear of miseries and loneliness. She becomes an evidence of *Shakti* when she says to her husband at the moment of his departure. "I,too, shall go your way soon... I am not the silly thing I use to be you know that" (203).

Monju, who was at her wits' ends having been winked at by a white man shows the courage and spirit to fight with odds bravely. She is prepared to share the faith of the masses without any fear or conflict in her heart. Moreover she also comes out of the bonds of luxuries which her father-in-law Samarendra Basu had knit with all his effort to keep his family away from the lot of suffering masses.

Kajoli and Rahoul reach the same stage of freedom – freedom to be free. Their experiences yield them a new understanding of freedom that follows in the wake of political freedom. They reflect the attainment of Truth in Gandhian ideology and are freed from untruth which stands for the world of Maya. Theirs is a higher kind of freedom above all worldly pleasures and carnal desires. This is the kind of freedom Gandhi meant to be the purpose of one's life.

Gandhi always made attempts to integrate the elite with the masses. His own life was a living example of it. "... he envisaged an elite on rapport with the masses not shying away from the involvement in their destiny believing in the interdependence of ends and means."

(Bhatnagar108).

The positive characters of Bhattacharya are either in close inter-action with the masses or they arrive at a stage of such integration in the course of action. Devesh is one with the villagers and shares all joys and sorrows of the village folk and feels them his own. Kajoli and her mother in the novel keenly share their meals with the *Kisans*. “If we eat, our kisan brethern and their kin shall eat. The rice is as much theirs as ours. ...for it has grown from the pouring sweat of their chests” (102).

Rahoul himself moves to the masses and gets actually involved in their destiny. He feels imprisoned in his luxurious life. His service to the starving destitute arouses in him the hunger for freedom. He leaves the place of distinction (laboratory) for the public place and becomes one with the crowd of agitators for freedom. Rahoul transforms into a true Gandhian and casts off his intellectual snobbery and feels “one clay with common people of the soil”(99) and addresses Kishore, a mill hand *bhai*.

Bhattacharya admires people’s love for old Indian tradition and living their lives accordingly. But he criticises their faith in the unscrutinized beliefs coming from the past. Their blind faith in *Karma* philosophy degenerates them into a kind of inactivity and passivity. They believe that their present miseries are the result of their past evil deeds and hence feel helpless. Gandhi is opposed to this kind of submissive attitude of the Hindus. In contrast to their being dogmatic about past Karmas Gandhi propounds the idea of making one’s fate with one’s own hands. He inspires them to leave *akarmanyata* and be *Karmayogis*.

It is obvious that *So Many Hungers* bears a clear imprint of Gandhi on it. Bhattacharya depicts his themes of freedom struggle, women’s position in society, crusade against the social evils, and his love for the traditions of India from an explicitly Gandhian perspective. We have the intellectuals turning to Gandhian, merging of the different sections of the society under

Gandhian influence. Devesh Basu is a Gandhian leader and a messiah for the people of Baruni. The social, economic, political and moral dimensions of Gandhian thought are reflected in the novel.

All the three novels of the first phase delineate Gandhian aura of a Mahatma, a saint and more significantly a teacher. In these novels all the protagonists are the Gandhian replicas who play the role of teachers in various forms. In *The Kanthapura* Moorthy, the protagonist is a youth in the village who teaches villagers the political and spiritual lessons. Krishnan, the protagonist, in *The English Teacher*, is a middle aged teacher who, first in a college then in a school, teaches the Gandhian way to the students of all ages. Devesh Basu, the protagonist, in the novel *So Many Hungers* is an old and retired teacher who teaches not only Gandhin philosophy but also attains the place of a *Devata*. All these three novels cover all the three stages of life viz. youth, aged and old. India, yet to be born or in her infancy wanted to be educated and the idea of education was conceived by Gandhi in 1808. For Gandhi political freedom was merely a fact and not an objective. Gandhi's main concern was education, primarily basic education through which one could achieve real freedom. This concept of Gandhian education can clearly be discerned in these novels.