

Chapter 4

Negation: The Fallen Angel

As delineated in the previous chapters the roots of the novel written in English in India lay in social consciousness. Under the sheer influence of the strong evolutionary phase of modern Indian ethos that sought not just freedom from the extrinsic yoke, but also liberation from those intrinsic weaknesses that had led India into a pathetic state, writers of all shades and languages immersed themselves in the criss-crossing waters of ideas, ideals and social action. The native writers of fiction in English likewise wore the mantle of activists – intellectually alert, thematically bold and socially committed. Instead of inhabiting a world of their own (like their contemporary British counterparts), their preference was to spearhead social regeneration. The strong currents of intellectual commitment to nation building lasted deep into the post-independence Nehruvian era.

However, a quarter of a century after freedom as the nation-centric consciousness could be palpably felt to be slipping behind, individualistic aspirations started gaining legitimacy. This social drift could be viewed in the mirror that literary creations belonging to this era represent. Writers of fiction of English in India found it lucrative to align their styles and themes to those of their Western counterparts. In most cases their sensibilities led them naturally to west-centrism because of their westernised education. A trend of seeking legitimacy in the opinion of Western readership and its critical canon gained ascendancy.

Gandhi who not only waged a prolonged ideological struggle against political and cultural domination of India by European powers, but also took up cudgels against the idea and practices of Western civilization, has predominantly been a subject of ridicule in the Western world. Whenever such a ridicule emanates from the Indian hinterland or the Indian classes, the

views of the former not only draw legitimacy from it, but they also win vital breathing space. Thus there is a befitting case of quid pro quo between the two. In such a scenario a growing coterie of writers from India has taken up fictional depiction of Gandhi's social, and more specifically personal, life and imputes fanciful dubiousness to it. Since inventing chinks in Gandhian ideology, i.e. the ideology whose subtleness and efficacy have been vindicated by historical tide and time, may well be beyond the creative ken of such writers, what they feel compelled to manipulate is the enigmatic persona of Gandhi the man.

The Great Indian Novel (1989), "a splendid debut by the London-born- India –grown- America –educated author, Shashi Tharoor" (Balaswamy 229) covers the history of modern India that approximately begins with the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian political scenario and comes to an end with Indira Gandhi's coming back to power. The novel "aims at synchronizing of the epic of the Mahabharata and the twentieth century political history of India from the colonial times to the 1980s" (Tripathi 116). The author has artistically interwoven the story of the Mahabharata into the texture of pre and post-independence Indian history. "Tharoor-Ved Vyasa in *The Great Indian Novel* narrates to Ganapati, his script-writer, in pretentious, jocular, garrulous and perky manner the story of modern India" (Tripathi 118). More than half of the novel is preoccupied with Ganga Dutt / Mahatma Gandhi as the central character who is also the Bhishma of the Mahabharata. "The first half of the novel establishes a point to point parallel between Bhishma and Gandhi—from the taking of the terrible vow to the agony of the partition and the final assassination" (Chaudhury 110). This meta-narrator co-opts and converts Gandhi into a diffused political projectile. In this novel Gandhi serves as a mere textual tool to propagate the personal-political prejudices of the author. "He accomplishes this task pressing

into service such known devices as parody and pastiche coupled with irony and satire, not to speak of a host of other verbal pyrotechniques which he employs to achieve his end” (Rao 67).

Ganga Datta was the son of ‘an exquisite Maharani who suffered seven successive miscarriages and disappeared when her eighth pregnancy produced a son” (21) and “that Shantnu had picked her up on the banks of the Ganga” (21) thus he was the son of Ganga and Shantnu. “Years later, inexplicably, the now middle-aged king returned from a trip to the river bank with a handsome lad named Ganga Datta, announced that he was his lost son, and made him heir-apparent”(21). Actually Gandhi returned from Africa in Bombay on 9th January 1915 and he was “an Indian returning to India as a whole-to Indians in their entirety” (Gandhi, R189).

Tharoor presents this novel as an epic “Brahm, in my epic I shall tell of past, present and future, of existence and passing, of efflorescence and decay, of death and rebirth; of what is, of what was, of what should have been” (18). Again he says, “We’re not writing a piddling Western thriller here. This is my story of Ved Vyas ...but it could become nothing less than the Great Indian Novel” (18). In epic style as if the author is telling something about the future of Ganga D/Gandhi.

Ganga Datta didn’t travel alone either. In later years, he would be accompanied by a non- violent army of *Satyagrahis* so that the third-class train carriages he always insisted on travelling in were filled with the elegantly sacrificing elite of his followers, rather than the sweat-stained poor, but on this occasion it was a band of ministers and courtiers he took with him to see Satyavati’s father. Ganga D. would always have a penchant for making his most dramatic gestures before a sizeable audience. One day he was even to die in front of a crowd. (23)

Bhishma/Ganga Datta's vow of celibacy has been equated with the vow of celibacy of Gandhi. "I don't, actually, Ganga Datta replied mildly. 'But I have made a vow, and I'll ensure it's fulfilled. I've just renounced my claim to the throne. Now, in front of all these nobles of the realm, ... I shall not marry, I shall desist from women...'" (23).

Again the concept of celibacy is ridiculed when Shantanu, Ganga Datta's father, expresses his pleasure on the vow of celibacy. "I don't know about this celibacy stuff, but I'm sure it'll do you a lot of good in the long run. I'll tell you something, my son: I've simply no doubt at all that it'll give you longevity" (24).

"This novel uses the great Hindu epic, the Mahabharata to retell the history of modern India. The characters and situations are thinly veiled caricatures of well known elements of myth and politics" (Patil 39). Real personages from history and characters from the Mahabharata have directly been correlated to the characters in the novel. Ganga Datta, the character in the novel, has been correlated with Gandhi, the real figure in history of modern India. There are a host of references which confirms that Ganga Datta, the character of the novel is, in fact, Gandhi, the real figure of the modern history of India. Bhishma, the grand sire of the Kuru dynasty, the iron-willed man who swore and lived by his famous vow of celibacy is "reborn in the novel as Mahaguru Gangaji (Mahatma Gandhi)... " (Balaswamy 231). In the conversation between the British Resident and Ganga Datta the courtiers "heard the words 'South Africa', 'defiance of British laws', 'arrest', 'jail' and 'expulsion' " (25). Again the author in an epical style announces, "One day Ganga Datta would abandon his robes for a loincloth, and acquire fame, quite simply, as 'Gangaji' " (25).

Gandhi was deeply influenced by Vedas, Bhagvadgeeta, and other Hindu scriptures. He read Tolstoy, Ruskin and was greatly influenced by Jainism. "He (Ganga Datta) has been

immersing himself increasingly in the great works of the past and the present, reading the Vedas and Tolstoy with equal involvement, studying the immutable laws of Manu and eccentric philosophy of Ruskin, and yet contriving to attend, as he had to, to the affairs of state”(25-26).

The parodic and sarcastic element always creeps in when the author annexes extra commentary. “Tharoor subjects Gandhi to the most farcical treatment” (Chaudhury 120). The author gives description of the appearance of Ganga and one can easily judge that this is an alibi for caricaturing Gandhi:

Picture the situation for yourself. Gangaji, the man in charge of Hastinapur for all practical purposes, thin as a papaya plant, already balder..., peering at you through round-rimmed glasses....People were forever barging into his study unexpectedly and finding him in nothing but a loin cloth. ‘Excuse me, I was just preparing myself an enema’, he would say, with a feeble smile, as if that explained everything. (35)

Thus it is an established fact that Ganga Datta/Gangaji or the Mahaguru, a celibate spiritual leader and the regent of Hastinapur in the novel has been correlated with Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi/ Mahatma Gandhi/Gandhiji or Mahatma, spiritual leader of the independence movement of India and who advocated celibacy.

Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence has been ridiculed in the ‘First Book’ of the novel. Through the *Swayamvara* ceremony episode the author not only ridicules his principles concerning non-violence and celibacy but he ridicules his physique also.

...When Gangaji, with his balding pate and oval glasses, entered the hall where the Raja had arranged to receive eligible suitors for each of his daughters and indicated he had come for all three, there was some unpleasant ribaldry.

‘So much for Bhishma, the terrible-vowed’, said a loud voice’ to a chorus of mocking laughter. It turns out to have been a really terrible vow, after all’.

Perhaps someone slipped a copy of the *Kama Sutra* a volume of the *Vedas*, suggested another, amidst general tittering.

‘O Gangaji, have you come for bedding well or wedding bell?’ demanded an anonymous English-educated humourist in the crowd.

Ganga, who had approached the girls’ father, blinked, hitched his dhoti up his thinning legs and spoke in a voice that was meant to carry as much to the derisive blue-blooded throng as to the Raja.

... it seemed a deceptively... triumph without violence.(26-27)

Thus the author makes fun of Gandhi’s other activities like taking enemas or his basic principles of celibacy. He comments satirically on Gandhi’s physique through conversation between Amba and Gangaji. “‘What do you think you are doing, girl? the saintly Regent asked, snapping shut a treatise on the importance of enemas in attaining spiritual purity. (The way to a man’s soul is through his bowels, ‘he would later intone to the mystification of all who heard him)’” (28). Tharoor time and again makes comment on Gandhi’s celibacy, “(Ever since his vow Ganga had developed something of an obsession with his celibacy, even if he was the only one who feared it to be constantly under the threat)” (28).

When Ganga sends Amba back to Raja Salva here the author again makes comment on the character of Ganga/Gandhi. “The decrepit eccentric has beaten, humiliated, disgraced me in public. He carried you away as I lay sprawling on the wreck of my car. You’ve spent God knows how many nights in his damned palace. And now you expect me to forget all that take you back as my wife?” (28-29).

When Raja Salva refuses to marry Amba she comes back to Ganga and he asks Vichitravirya to marry her. Here the author remarks ironically and comments even on Gandhi's caste through Vichitravirya, "You can't expect me, Vichitravirya of Hastinapur, son of Maharaja Shantanu and Maharani Satyawati, soon to be king in my own right and member of the chamber of Princes, to accept the return of soiled goods like some Porbandar *baniya* merchant"(29).

When Raja Salva and Vichitravirya reject Amba she comes to Ganga, "Then you must marry me yourself", said the despairing Amba when Ganga had confessed the failure of his intercession with the headstrong princeling" (29). She holds him responsible for her "eternal disgrace and spinsterhood" (29). Ganga/Gandhi also refuses to marry her because of his vow of celibacy. Here the author expresses the futility of celibacy." "Damn your vow', she cried in distress. 'What about me? No one will marry me now, you know that. My life's finished – all because of you'" (29). Ganga exhorts her to live a life of celibacy, "you know, I wouldn't be so upset if I were you, 'replied Gangaji calmly. 'A life of celibacy is a life of great richness. You ought to try it, my dear. It will make you very happy. I am sure you will find it deeply spiritually uplifting" (29).

Here the denigration of Gandhian values can be observed: "You smug, narcissistic bastard, you!' Amba screamed, hot tears running down her face. 'Be like you, with your enemas and your loincloths? Never! And she ran out of the room, slamming the door shut on the startled sage" (29). Here Amba, the character in the novel, not only refuses to accept the Gandhian values but she resolves even to destroy Gangaji/Gandhi also.

The author in an epic style announces the future of Ganga/Gandhi. "...she forgot all but her searing hatred for her well-intentioned abductor, and began to look in earnest for someone who would kill him. By then, however, Gangaji's fame had spread beyond the boundaries of

Hastinapur, and no assassin in the whole of India was willing to accept her contract. It was then that she would resolve to do it herself...” (29).

Historical figure Gandhiji wanted the world to know of his tryst with *brahmacharya* or celibacy and it was the revulsion from sex that forced him to take a vow of celibacy in 1906 but Gangaji/Gandhiji in the novel is the main inspiration of bigamy “...bigamy inspired by Gangaji and sanctioned by religion, tradition, law, and the British authorities. Another instance of Ganga’s failure to judge the real world of flawed men, for his debauched half-brother needed no greater incentive to indulgence than this temple-throbbing choice of nocturnal companions”(30). After the death of Vichitravirya Gangaji is successful to persuade the widow queens to have physical relations clandestinely with Ved Vyas to save the dynasty from the British Doctrine of Lapse. “Between them and, my mother and Ganga obtained the widow’s acquiescence – the issue of dynastic succession is, as every television viewer today knows, a powerful aphrodisiac” (32).

The author considers ideas of Gangaji/Gandhiji about the world around him as radical and dangerous. “But it was not just the Regent’s personal eccentricities that were causing alarm at the Resident’s residence across the hill from the palace. Word was beginning to get around of Gangaji’s radical, indeed one might say, dangerous, ideas about the world around him” (36). When the Resident asked the equerry whether Gangaji/Gandhiji is loyal to the British Raj he says:

He’s not an easy man to place, really. As you know, Sir Richard, there was a time when he was rather well regarded by us. Among the king’s most loyal subjects, in fact. He was a regular at receptions here. Even arranged a major contribution to the Ambulance Association, Sir, during the last war. But of late, he has been

known to say things about swaraj, you know, sir, self-rule. And about pan – Indian Nationalism. No one seems to know what started him off on that track.

(38)

Gandhi believed truth to be the ultimate reality and the search of truth was one of the primary aims of his life. In the novel there is a satirical tone when Gangaji says, “I shall pursue the Truth, in all its manifestations, including the political and, indeed, the sexual. I shall seek to perfect myself, a process I began many years ago, in this very palace” (45).

The author does not feel any need to tell about Gangaji/Gandhiji be it “the strange weapon of disobedience”(46), “the mysterious ammunition of truth force; the strength of unarmed slogan-chanting demonstrators falling defenseless under the hail of police lathis; the power of wave of khadi-clad men and women, arms and voices raised, marching handcuffed to their imprisonment ?” (46). Gandhi himself has written much about his experiences and experiments likes and dislikes in *An Autobiography or The Story of My experiment with Truth*. “Yes, he told us everything, Gangaji, from those gaps in his early years that the British had been so worried about, to the celibate experiments of his later life, when he got all those young women to take off their clothes and lie beside him to test the strength of his adherence to that terrible vow”(46).

The author is of the view that people do not understand Gangaji/Gandhiji; “...Yet how little we remember, how little we understand, how little we care” (46). Tharoor further says that people knew little about Gangaji/Gandhiji:

They talked about his views on subjects he knew nothing about, from solar energy to foreign relations, though I know he thought foreign relations were what you acquired if you married abroad. They even pulled out the rusting wood-and-iron

spinning wheels he wanted everyone to use to spin khadi instead of having to buy British textiles, and they all weaved symbolic centimeters of homespun. (46)

The people do not understand Gandhiji's philosophy of life and they are depressingly ignorant of him. " Ved Vyasa expresses his deeply felt anger at the school children's gross ignorance of Gangaji (alias Gandhiji) not long after his death and blames it on what he calls ' the bastard educational institutions the British sired on us'" (47) (Salat 128). They know little about Gangaji/Gandhiji:

They found that the legatees knew little of their spiritual and political benefactor; that despite lessons in school books, despite all the ritual hypocrisies of politicians and leader-writers, the message had not sunk into the little brains of the lucubrating brats. 'Gangaji is important – because he was the father of our Prime Minister', wrote one ten-year-old with a greater sense of relevance than accuracy. 'Gangaji was an old saint who lived many years ago and looked after cows, suggested another. 'Gangaji was a character in the Mahabharata', noted a third. 'He was so poor he did not have enough clothes to wear. (47)

The author comments that Gangaji/Gandhiji was the person who could be followed. "Let us be honest: Gangaji was the kind of person it is more convenient to forget. The principles he stood for and the way in which he asserted them were always easier to admire than to follow. While he was alive, he was impossible to ignore; once he had gone, he was impossible to imitate" (47).

Tharoor comments ironically on his being a vegetarian:

...and he lived the simple life he had always sought but failed to attain at the palace – which is to say that he wrote and spun and read and received visitors who

had heard of his radical ideas and of his willingness to live up to them. One day, just after the midday meal, a simple vegetarian offering concluding with the sole luxury that he permitted himself – a bunch of dates procured for him at the town market many miles away...a man came to the ashram and fell at his feet. (48)

Historically in April 1917, Gandhiji visited Champaran (Bihar) in the foothills north of the Ganges to see the plight of indigo peasants. The central point of the peasants' problem was the so-called *tinkathia* regulation that forced them to grow indigo on part of their land even though its price was falling. Gandhi was served with a notice to leave Champaran but in a letter to the district magistrate, he intended to disobey the order. "The Raj did not jail Gandhi. Not only was the expulsion order withdrawn, Gandhi was allowed to make his own inquiry and later made a member of an official inquiry committee looking into the peasants' complaints. In October this committee unanimously asked for an abolition of the *tinkathia* system" (Gandhi, R 204).

In the novel this episode has been depicted as the campaign for defying the indigo laws at Motihari. "...of openly defying the indigo laws, as Ganga himself wrenched free the first indigo plant and sowed a symbolic fistful of grains in its stead" (51). When Ganga reaches Motihari he is stopped and serves with a notice: "For it is a message from the district police, banning him from proceeding further on his journey and directing him to report to the police station" (51). Ganga is not ready to comply with this notice: " 'And it is my duty', responds Ganga equably, to tell you that I do not propose to comply with your notice. I have no intention of leaving the district until my inquiry is finished" (51). Ganga is presented before the court.

The author presents the picture of Gangaji/Gandhiji ironically: "Ganga is committed to trial, and you cannot imagine the crowds outside the courthouse as he appears, bowing and smiling and waving folded hands at his public. He is a star – hairless, bony, enema-taking, toilet-

cleaning Ganga, with his terrible vow of celibacy and his habit of arranging other people's marriages, is a star!"(52). The Lieutenant-Governor appoints Gangaji an official member of the inquiry committee which recommends the abolition of the system but Sir Richard does not give any credit to Gangaji/Gandhiji. "That case wouldn't have been withdrawn if the indigo market weren't already in the doldrums. Your nationalist hero simply provided a good excuse to withdraw a regulation that wasn't needed any more, and earn the goodwill of some of these babus" (62).

"When news spread of a possible address by Gangaji on the day of the state's annexation, Bibigarh seemed the logical place to drift towards" (79). The garden was full of people waiting patiently. Apprehending trouble Colonel Rudyard's (actually stands for Brigadier Reginald Dyer) soldiers opened fire indiscriminately, killing a large number of people. The Bibigarh massacre is a fictional representation of the Jalianwala Bagh massacre. Gangaji says, "That's the massacre confirmed for him the wisdom of the principles of non-violence he had preached and made us practice at Motihari" (82). The author comments ironically: "Put like that it might sound a little woolly-headed, ... but don't forget it had worked at Motihari. The hope that it might work again elsewhere, and the knowledge that nothing else would defeat the might of the Empire on which the sun never set, were what made us flock to Gangaji" (82).

Dhritarashtra (Nehru) is Gangaji/Gandhiji's blind and visionary disciple. "He had the blind man's gift of seeing the world not as it was, but as he wanted it to be. Even better, he was able to convince everyone around him that his vision was superior to theirs. In a short while he was, despite his handicap, a leading light of the Kaurava Party..." (85).

After the overwhelming success of Motihari campaign, Budge Budge in Bengal is his next destination where he tests the strength of his truth force and of the weapon of moral war

against the foreigners. He observes exploitation of the indigenous jute-factory workers by Scottish mill-owners. Here, Ganga discovers the strength of his convictions and the potential of fasting as a moral weapon in his struggle against colonialism. “But this time, instead of rural indigo-growing peasants, he was helping suburban jute-factory workers at Budge Budge, outside Calcutta” (93). Sarah Moore, “an enlightened woman, an English woman” (94) persuades her brother Montague Rowlatt and the other mill owners to give a bonus for coming to work during the epidemic. They give a bonus of 80 percent of their normal salaries. After the epidemic they decide to withdraw the bonus but the workers demanded the bonus if not 80 percent, then of 50 percent and ask for a wage rise. Gangaji is moved to pity by the ineffable plight of the lock out workers. The author presents a very ironical picture of the condition of these workers:

When Gangaji arrived in Budge Budge he found a situation verging on the desperate. The locked out workers were, of course, being paid nothing at all. Their families were starving...the sights which met Ganga’s eyes: the foetid slums; the dirt and the despair and the disrepair; the children playing in rancid drains; the little hovels without electricity or water in which human beings lived several to a square yard. This is now the classic picture of India, it is not, and French cinematographers take time off from filming the unclad forms of their women in order to focus with loving pity on the unclad forms of our children. (94)

The author presented the concept of Gandhian truth in an ironical style. “Ganga knew, when he trod through the slush and the shit of the factory-workers’ slums, that this had not existed before the British came, and that its existence was a negation of the idea of Truth in which he so passionately believed” (95). Factually Gandhiji was well aware of the poverty in India but he saw the bad condition for the first time and he was so shocked that he could not

speak for hours. “Gangaji/Gandhiji, master of Hastinapur, veteran of Motihari, saw this for the first time and for hours afterwards he could not speak” (95). Gangaji takes up their cause and he is joined in this mission by Sarah Moore, the sister of a Jute-mill owner but their persuasion failed to move the intransigent mill owners. When Ganga and Mrs. Moore go to persuade her brother and the other mill owners, the author presents them as an odd pair. “They made an odd pair; the determined, strong-jawed, big boned English woman and the slight, balding, frail Indian sage, striding out to bargain for a cause that need not have been either’s. It was a pairing that would raise eyebrows and hackles for years to come” (96).

The author presents Gangaji/Gandhiji as a bargainer and tries to give a new shade to the meaning of Truth. “Very well, “Gangaji said in that bookish way of his. ‘The first thing we shall do is to reformulate our demands. You...have asked for a 50 percent increase in wages. Your employers offer 20 per cent. Since in pursuit of Truth we must seek no unfair advantage over our adversary, I have decided we shall now ask for 35 per cent” (96). However, the workers do not agree with this bargaining but because they have accepted the leadership of Gangaji so they remain silent.

The author presents Ganga/Gandhi in terms opposite to the Gandhian way of protest:

And Ganga waged it in his own peculiar way...Instead he trudged through the slum dwelling every morning, holding a hand here, soothing a brow there. Then he rested, his shrinking frame lost under the covers of the enormous four-poster bed Sarah Moore had given him in a room at her home. Every afternoon, at precisely five o’clock, he arrived in Mrs. Moore’s Overland roadster at the peepal tree... Ganga and his English ‘sister’ – a word that soon came to connote friend, hostess, protector and disciple all in one-would then alight. Ganga, a shawl

sometimes draped over his bony shoulders to shield him from the Bengali winter, his glasses perched on his nose, would proceed to speak to the crowd". (97)

Tharoor depicts Ganga/Gandhi as a very weak fellow whose voice is unpersuasive and does not reach his audience. He is incomprehensible to the afflicted workers. "It almost did not matter what he said, for he rarely raised his voice to harangue them and the words never carried to the farthest ranks of his audience. It is doubtful many would have understood him if they had" (97).

Ganga/Gandhi has been depicted as a person who has no affinity to the workers he is fighting for. He is a person who lives a colonial comfortable life. He does not walk to the people but instead he travels by the English woman's car and has no commitment to these starved workers.

You would have expected him to make his home amongst the squalor of the slum, but Ganga stayed amidst the comforts of colonial civilization; you would have expected him to walk to the people (spell that any way you like, Ganapathi, the idea's the same), but instead he drove in a white woman's car. And yet neither prevented him from preaching to the workers about the importance of holding out for their just demands, even if they had to starve in order to do so. (97)

Ganga/Gandhi has his own strong beliefs and weird ways of fighting but the lives of these workers are in danger due to starvation.

Ganga represented the wise, disinterested leadership the workers had yearned for, but his disinterest was also its own disqualification. By asserting his moral principles, by upholding abstract canons of Truth and justice, he was lying

nothing more than his beliefs on the lime; while they were, if their starvation continued, laying down their lives. (99)

The starving workers begin to lose faith in Ganga's ways of fighting and start questioning his commitment. "But their sullen looks, their half-mumbled responses from averted faces, made it clear that the workers had begun to lose faith in what Ganga was trying to do. And then suddenly one man, cradling his sick infant daughter on his lap, burst out in bitter recrimination: 'It is all right for Gangaji to tell us not to give in. After all, what does it cost him? He eats fine food off Moore-memsahib's plates and travels by a car that is worth many years' wages'" (99). When Ganga is informed that workers have questioned his commitment and they have begun to lose faith in him, he does not react normally because it is not his way. He does not take steps like other modern politicians to stop the loss of credibility.

A modern politician might have sought to address the source of the workers' discontent and tried to find food for their families from wealthy donors but Gangaji had already refused many offers of help from rich Indians, on the grounds that the workers had to fight their own battles. ('If they win despite starving, it will be a far truer triumph than a victory built on the charity of strangers, ... (100)

Ganga reacts suddenly and takes "other terrible vow..., 'I shall not eat or drink, or travel by any vehicle, until the workers' just demands have been met'" (100). The declaration of this unheard method of fighting for justice astounds the starving workers. Saraha-behn and other volunteers are not allowed to join his fast. "Ganga refused to be moved by any entreaties... 'This is my decision, taken by myself alone and for myself alone', he declared... And then, in that mild tone of voice by which he instantly disarmed his listeners, he added the famous words, the

immortal words that now etch his place in every book of quotations : ‘Fasting’, he said, ‘is my business’(100).

The author comments satirically, “Today it has passed into history, a slogan, a caption, worn by over-use, cheapened by imitation” (100). Tharoor clearly gives the impression that people are generally startled by Ganga/Gandhi’s unique way of fighting. They are astonished and unable to understand his philosophy. In this case, however, Ganga achieves his objective though remains incomprehensible.

In the confusion a brocaded Muslim weaver in a brilliant red fez leapt up and pulled out a knife. It appeared that what he was saying was that he was prepared to die immediately for the cause, if need be; but some undoubtedly thought he was threatening to finish off the English exploiters, and a great clamour rose up in support of his gesture. Clearly, Ganga’s philosophy had not been fully understood, but he had achieved his objective. (101)

Tharoor depicts Gandhi as an incomprehensible person, whose philosophy remains unintelligible. He ironically expresses the reactions from various walks of life:

Radical students signaled their support by setting fire to university mess-halls, though some may merely have taken this as a reflection on the cooking. The eminent Scotswoman who headed the Indo-Irish Home Rule League cabled Ganga urging him not to waste his life on so trivial a cause as low wages. The leading English news paper of the Bengal Presidency devoted three inches to the affair on an inside page, just beneath its Nature Notebook. A pleasant American professor came by the peepal tree to ask Ganga whether he had always resented his father. (102)

Tharoor is of the view that Ganga is a very cryptic person particularly for Indians because they find his eccentricities so difficult and only the English bourgeoisie can understand his mysteries. “ ... Sarah understood Ganga intuitively. It was one of the older mysteries of Indian history that the person who most quickly got on to Ganga’s instinctive wavelength was not one of us from Hastinapur, who had all found his eccentricities so difficult, but this English bourgeoisie with complexion of an under-ripe beet root”(102).

The author disparages the Gandhian non-violent protests, fasting and other ethical ways of fighting. This momentous first fast of Ganga/Gandhi achieves very small:

... 35 percent for just one day.... The workers of Budge Budge, who had started off wanting 80 percent, had come down to 50 percent and then reconciled themselves to claiming 35 per cent, finally had to settle for 27.5 per cent. Ganga’s sense of justice, which had led him to split the difference between the two original positions, served only to reduce the ultimate settlement when the arbitrator split the new difference as well. Moral politics, Ganapathi, is not always good mathematics.(104 105)

Thus Tharoor does not agree with the moral politics of Gangaji/Gandhiji. “Since no one starves for long enough to create any problems for himself or others, the entire point of Gangaji’s original idea is lost” (106).

The fast on behalf of the “suburban jute-factory workers at Budge Budge, outside Calcutta” (93) is a parodic representation of the “*Satyagraha* on behalf of Ahmedabad’s textile workers” (Gandhi,R 211) in March 1918. After the abolition of the *tinkathia* system, which forced the peasants to grow indigo on their land in Champaran, Gandhi returned to Ahmedabad and found that the Ahmedabad’s textile workers were in some problems. “...the England-

educated Anasuyaben Sarabhai, sister of Ambalal Sarabhai, the young industrialist... was assisting the workers, who for long had been asking for an overdue increase in wages.” (Gandhi, R 211).

The workers demanded 35 percent increase but the mill owners were ready for a 20 percent only. “Gandhi asked the mill owners to refer the dispute to arbitration. When they refused, Gandhi advised the workers to go on strike if they were willing to abide by his conditions: no violence, no molestation of black legs, no begging for alms and no yielding.”(Gandhi, R 211). The workers and their leaders accepted the conditions and the strikers met daily under the shade of a babul tree. “... Chhaganlal passed on to Gandhi a remark by a striking worker that Gandhi and Anasuyaben, who ‘come and go in their car’ and ‘eat elegant food’, could not understand the agonies of the starving” (Gandhi, R 211). Gandhi realized the rapidly deteriorating condition of the workers and determined to save them. “Gandhi quietly said, ‘I cannot tolerate for a minute that you break your pledge. I shall not take any food nor use a car till you get a 35 percent increase” (Gandhi, R 212). After four days of negotiations a four-step formula took place and ultimately the owners accepted the arbitration by Principal Anand Shankar Dhruva who awarded 35 per cent. “Yet the gains were solid: there was little ill will or bitterness during the struggle, the owners agreed to a standing mechanism for arbitration, and the workers formed the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association, Gujrat’s first union” (Gandhi, R 213).

The author ironically fabricates a situation to project as if many times Gandhi had to fight alone, with even his close associates leaving him at crucial moments. It is note-worthy that Dharitarashtra and Pandu, both the disciples of Gangaji did not play any part in the two significant political episodes, the Motihari campaign and Budge Budge in Bengal. Ved

Vyas/Tharoor narrative emphatically says that they were not everywhere by Gangaji's side, "...for most of the crucial events in Ganga's life and career were those in which he acted alone, resolving the dictates of his hyperactive conscience within, and by, himself"(109). Before the advent of Gangaji, "the Kaurava party had been a distinguished but remarkably ineffective forum for the rhetorical articulation of Anglophile dissatisfaction with the English...When Gangaji turned to politics the Kaurava Party had been in existence for thirty years and the British had not taken thirty steps towards Indian self rule" (110).

Hastinapur princelings joined politics when "Gangaji's spectacularly unorthodox successes" (111) were changing the politics of the whole country. Dhritrashtra/Nehru who had returned from England with "traces of the right accent along with streaks of the wrong ideas" (110). In a very short period he had captured the ideological heights of the Kaurava Party. However, initially Pandu "might have seemed a more natural heir to Gangaji, with his scriptural reading, his personal faddishness, his (albeit enforced) celibacy. Ganga indulged Dhritrashtra and relied on Pandu" (111) but Gangaji made his preferences for his blind protégé very clear. "The Kauravas were left in no doubt that Dhritrashtra was Ganga's man" (111). Due to the incompatibility and the insurmountable differences of their attitudes, the separation was inevitable. Gangaji was aware of the growing differences between his both disciples. "He carried on as oblivious as always to the dilemmas of others, doing nothing to heal the growing rift" (113). Ganga's open preference for Dhritrashtra and undisguised vindication of his stand on all major political issues further alienated Pandu. The author vividly depicts Ganga's prejudice in favour of Dhritrashtra.

It became apparent to Pandu that Dhritrashtra's triumphs were basically of Gangaji's making, and that a large number, perhaps a majority, of the Kaurava

Party were backing his half-brother not because of any intrinsic faith in his ideas but because they came with the blessing of the man Sir Richard had taken unpleasantly to describing as Public Enemy Number One. (113)

The rift was impossible to conceal when the differences between the two came out into the open over the issue of sending a Kaurava delegation to the Round Table Conference in London to discuss the future of India. Pandu was not in favour of being party to it but his plea was not accepted.

But the Working Committee, at Dhritarashtra's glib urging, agreed not only to attend but to send Gangaji as the party's sole representative to the conference. Pandu railed against 'this madness', as he called it. 'If we must go, let us go in strength, let us send a delegation that reflects the numbers and diversity of our following, he argued. Once again he was disregarded; the Committee placed its faith in the man to whom many were already referring in open hagiology as Mahaguru, the Great Teacher. (115)

The failure of the Conference only proved the prescience of Pandu but even then he was still a loyal party worker. "He remained so even when Ganga returned, having bared his chest on the newsreels and taken tea in his loincloth with the King-Emperor ('Your Majesty, you are wearing more than enough for the two of us', the Mahaguru had said disarmingly) but won no concessions from the circular and circumlocutions conferees"(115). Through the depiction of these events the author shows Gangaji \Gandhiji's favour of Dhritarashtra\Nehru and irreconcilable differences with Pandu\Subhas.

The British colonial administrators – depicted by the narrator as "British villains"... "pompous mediocrity" (116) tax the mango, "the one luxury still available to the Indian

masses”(117). The Mango March (‘Forbidden Fruit’) is “a parodic representation of the historic ‘Salt March’” (Tapan70). This announcement of Tax on Mango was received by the people with “Stunned disbelief” (117) and “collective howls of outrage” (117). Being a leader of the masses, “Gangaji heard the echoes and sensed a cause” (117). Mahadeva Menon, a Kaurava Party member, “raised the matter over the Great Teacher’s habitual lunch of nuts and fruit.”(117) When Menon urged him to take some steps, “Gandhi remained silent for a full minute, contemplating the suggestion and his bowl of dried fruit. At last he spoke. ‘Yes, Mahadeva’, he said slowly. ‘I think I must’” (118). Pandu was aghast at this issue which, he felt, would only trivialize the cause of freedom. The narrative emphasizes the quaintness in Gangaji/Gandhiji’s style of functioning.

...no endeavour was too trivial for our hero. And he prepared as assiduously for each, taking the same care to ensure his brushes and mops and soapy water and ammonia (he had a great faith in the cleansing properties of ammonia) were to hand as he did ensure that the reasons for his national *Satyagrahas* were widely known and well-understood. (118)

Tharoor does not spare even a smallest opportunity of mocking Gandhi. He presents the great Salt March in a ridiculous way as Mango March by applying the device of parody. “Gangaji could dramatize and ennoble the most insignificant of causes when he chose to” (121). Before embarking on the famous Mango March which fires the people’s imagination and stirs their hearts, Ganga officially appoints Dhritarashtra as their guide. “...but Dhritarashtra who is your guide. He is blind, but he sees far. He has the capacity to lead” (121). Enraged by Gangaji’s favouritism, Pandu walks out of his ashram, “never to return to his teacher’s side” (121).

Tharoor observes a lot of theatricality in Ganga's/Gandhi's social and political campaigns:

What a brilliant sense of the theatrical Ganga had. Mangoes could be found anywhere, but it was not enough for Ganga to march to the nearest tree and pluck its fruit: he knew that would not make good copy. He wanted to give the reporters with him something to report, and he wanted to inflate the issue to one of national importance by keeping it in the news for as long as possible. (122)

Gangaji undertakes a 288-mile march from his ashram to the grove of a sympathetic landlord to violate the colonial mango law which turns mango into a 'forbidden fruit'; "the king of fruits" (117) into "the fruit of kings." (117). Thus people are convinced that they are led not by a saint "but by a master tactician with his feet on the ground" (122).

Ganga\Gandhi's has not been depicted as a strong personality but he is bald, toothless, naked, old and frail with erratic speed. "There is Gangaji himself at the head of the procession, bald more or less toothless, holding a stave taller than himself, his bony legs and shoulders barely covered by his habitual undress, looking far too old and frail for this kind of thing, yet marching with a firm and confident stride accentuated by the erratic speed of the celluloid." (122).

The depiction of this march shows that the author sketches flippantly. In the procession there are Ganga's grinning waves of benediction, the scenes of smiling women, sprinkling of water and thrusting of bunches of flowers which express joyousness of spirit. Thus in the eyes of the narrator it is not a political march but a sightseeing tour:

Indeed, there is nothing grim about our procession, none of the earnest tragedy that marks the efforts of doomed idealists. Instead, Gangaji's grinning waves of

benediction, the banners of welcome strung across the roads at every village through which we pass, the scenes of smiling women in gaily coloured saris emerging in the blazing heat to sprinkle water on our dusty paths, the cameos of little children shyly thrusting bunches of marigold into our hands, the waves of fresh volunteers joining us at every stop to swell our tide of marchers into a flood, all this speaks of the joyousness of our spirit as we march on. (123)

When the march is so full of joy and the path is so clear and comfortable then there will be “no sign of weariness” (123). However, there was no sign of the police, “though Gangaji confidently asserted to the journalists at each halt for refreshment that he expected to be arrested any day. It was, of course, another clever ploy from the master tactician” (123).

When the marchers reached the mango grove “still unescorted by police, but with notebooks and cameras much in evidence”(123). The landlord greeted and the ladies, washed the feet but “that the sheer number around him would swallow up the dramatic impact of what he was about to do.”(123), a little platform was erected for Gangaji and he wrenched a ripe, luscious *Langda* mango from its stalk. “As the crowd erupted in a crescendo of cheering, he turned to them, his hand upraised, the golden-red symbol of his defiance blazing its message of triumph”(123). It seemed that Ganga was holding “the forces of nature ... and the seed of the people’s future” (123) in his hands. A lot of marchers were busy in “plucking, tearing, pulling and inevitably, biting and sucking; before long the spotless white of the *satyagrahis*’ khadi was stained with the rich yellow of their greed. ...Thus it is...the sublime degenerates into the sub-slime...” (124).

As expected, Ganga along with the offending landlord and scores of volunteers were arrested and imprisoned. The government’s action to arrest the offenders cost them more in

trouble as there was a problem of jail-space and unfavourable publicity more than the mango revenues. “The protesters mocked the authorities by organizing elaborate ceremonies to consume the forbidden fruit” (124). When Gangaji was in prison, he got the news that “their civil disobedience became very uncivil indeed” (125). In Chaurasta the procession turned violent and it led to death of some policemen. The most successful movement of mass civil disobedience was abruptly suspended by an aggrieved Ganga. “...the prison official was surprised to see the Great Teacher’s eyes were brimming with sorrow” (125). Pandu concluded : “The British have got to him at last. Either that, or he has simply become a weak old man and lost the stomach to continue the fight” (126). Ganga has been presented as an adamant who started the agitation without consulting anyone and who unilaterally called it off. “‘That’s what’s wrong with our entire way of running this party’, Pandu declaimed bitterly. ‘Is this a Kaurava movement, or a one-man show ?’ ” (126).

With the agitation suspended, the British dropped all the charges and released the prisoners. In a good gesture Gangaji was invited by the Viceroy and to everyone’s surprise he accepted the invitation. Sir Richard offered him “a chair without the trace of a welcome on his lips” (127) and Sarah behn who accompanied him was not offered any seat. When Gangaji was offered tea he refused to take because it was the time to take Goat milk. He used to take Goat milk because he had resolved never to drink cow milk after that nightmarish dream of the “large, sad-eyed white cow” (129) who cried piteously that milking causes her more suffering. He had to drink milk because of the fear of death as the doctors warned him.

I was agonized at the thought of dying with so much work undone, so much left to do. Yet I was determined not to break my vow. I did not know how to resolve this terrible dilemma inside my heart, my soul. Then Sarah behn said to

me, “You must drink goat’s milk.” There I saw I had my answer. Just as nourishing, just as rich in minerals and proteins, yet free of the pain of the sacred mother cow in my dreams. (129-130)

Ganga’s eccentricity has been depicted by the narrator when Sir Richard asked Gangaji something to eat. “An impish smile slowly spread across Gangaji’s face... ‘I have brought my own food.’ His hand disappeared into the voluminous folds swathing his torso and emerged holding a small, golden yellow, perfectly ripe mango” (130).

Karna joined the Kaurava Party upon his return from London and soon he represented the party on various Raj Committees. “But his view of the national cause was, of course, quite different from Gangaji’s” (137). Karna was isolated in the Kaurava Party due to his egotism and arrogance which would not allow him to accept a subordinate role in the organization dominated by Gangaji and his disciples. “As the struggle for freedom gathered momentum under the dynamic leadership of Ganga Datta, the cause of the Muslim Group (League) led by Mohammed Ali Karna (Jinnah) began to weaken this nationalist resurgence at the instigation of the imperialists”(Tapan 72). His reservations about Hinduism were also responsible for his gradual disaffection with Ganga’s party. Thus the narrative shows that the author holds Gangaji/Gandhiji responsible for Karna’s/Jinnah’s separation from the nationalist cause:

Karna was not much of a Muslim but he found Gangaji too much of a Hindu. The Mahaguru’s traditional attire, his spiritualism, his spouting of the ancient texts, his ashram, his constant harking back to an idealized pre-British post that Karna did not believe in (and was impatient with) – all this made the young man mistrustful of the Great Teacher. (142)

At the time of the failure of the Round Table Conference in London Karna was there and he met the head of the Muslim Group, Ganga Shah who invited him to join his group. “He was introduced into the Muslim Group and made its President with almost indecent haste” (147). Within years, his leadership with the connivance of the colonialists turned the Muslim Group into a major group. “...it was now a nationalist movement in its own right, like the Kaurava Party. The only difference was that the Group considered nationalism to be divisible. ‘Independence without Hindu dominion’ was Karna’s new slogan” (148). Tharoor holds Gangaji/Gandhiji and his miscalculated decisions, and eccentricities responsible for the partition at the time of independence. Ganga’s Kaurava Party, due to their dissent and conflict, could not face the challenge posed by the dividing forces like Muslim Group.

Gangaji “left the political leadership of the Kaurava Party while he devolved his own time to the moral and spiritual values that informed” (165) his politics. As a member of Kaurava Party Pandu wanted to overthrow the British but he was not convinced that Gangaji’s methods, opportunistically endorsed by Dhritarashtra, were effective enough. Dhritarashtra’s anointment as Crown Prince; the abandonment of the most successful campaign of civil disobedience – the Mango March led Pandu to break ranks and revolt against the Mahaguru. He announced his candidacy for the presidency of the Kaurava Party to make it more action oriented. To avoid dissent in the party and let Pandu get away with it, Gangaji put up his own candidate “an untouchable (Pattavi Sitaramaiya) – ...a child of God. He will be a more appropriate symbol for the party...” (167). Through the description of these political events the narrator portrays Gangaji/Gandhiji as a shrewd politician who wants to use the president as mere symbol of the party. “...we shall have just the sort of president we need,” Gangaji said. “A symbol.” Gangaji assured Dhritarashtra of the premiership of the first national government. “The British, my dear

Dhritarashtra, will be less interested in who is president today than who might be prime minister tomorrow” (167).

The narrative dwells on the vicissitudes of Pandu’s/subhas’s career vis-à-vis his relationship with Gangaji/Gandhiji. Gangaji/Gandhiji did little to alter the pattern at the top where a handful always reigned. In the first election Pandu defeated Gangaji’s symbolic candidate and “became, ‘the first President of the plebeians” (171) but “the Mahaguru’s (and Dhritarashtra’s) admirers could never accept” (171) him. Gangaji could not tolerate Pandu’s victory which “posed a threat that could not be allowed to grow” (172). Gangaji was never to tolerate divisiveness and asked the president to trace the roots of the division. Pandu, now the president of Kaurava party answered: ‘Divisiveness and disloyalty do not flourish in the bright heat of the sun, ... They grow in the shade afforded them by the leafy boughs of an old banyan tree” (172). Thus Pandu clarified that Gangaji’s is solely responsible for this divisiveness. Tharoor called it the Boxing “contest between Gangaji and Pandu” (172) in which “no draw was possible” (172).

Gangaji achieves his objective by getting the untouchable defeated candidate appointed unopposed an Acting President of Kaurava Party. The narrator exposes hypocrisy: “The idea of saintly Gangaji, paragon of Truth, ruthlessly squeezing an insubordinate ward out of power... How could the Mahaguru...the Great Teacher, a man of vaulting vision and pristine principle, conduct himself like a Tammany Hall politician?”(174).

Tharoor satirically comments on Gandhian philosophy of truth. He portrays Gandhi as an expert in transforming the untruth into truth:

“If Gangaji believed in Truth, it was his truth he believed in’; by extension the actions he undertook were founded on the same belief The Mahaguru had chosen Dhritarashtra as his

heir, and who was to gainsay his choice? Pandu could have accepted it and continued to serve the cause following the Mahaguru and his own blind brother. He chose the path of dissent instead: the way (as the Mahaguru saw it) of untruth” (175).

He brought immense moral pressure on Pandu through unremitting correspondences, public outcry, press releases and systematic campaigns within the party, thus forcing him to resign. “No violence done, no blood spilled – but oh, Ganapathi, what hurt and humiliation, what sadness and suffering can be caused in the defence of Truth!”(175). Pandu died in a plane crash and he was deeply mourned by his countrymen and his blind half-brother, Dhritarashtra. “The Mahaguru was moved enough to sit in silence and spin for hours, talking to nobody, immersed in reflection. He presented the cloth that emerged from that session to Pandu’s surviving widow, Kunti. But it was practically unusable...which showed that for once Gangaji’s mind had not been on what he was doing” (191).

Throughout the narrative the author creates the impression that politics of aggression and violence is the genuine politics, all else is mere hypocrisy. The failure of Ganga’s/Gandhi’s ideology of non-violence is portrayed when he approbates Jaiprakash Drona’s ‘special skills’ which include : “ The ability to find targets with stones, arrows and (in due course) bullets; the preparation of cocktails to which Molotov would not have been ashamed to lend his name; the uncanny knack of blocking roads, starting avalanches, demolishing bridges” (196). The propensity for violent politics becomes all the more palpable when he venerates Jayaprakash Drona for waging a one-man war against the British. “He blew up two bridges and derailed one goods train before the long arm of the law caught him squarely on the tip of the jaw. He was interned in a maximum-security prison...” (206).

When the British declared war against Nazi Germany, they involved India in the war without the slightest semblance of consultation with the elected Kaurava ministries in the states, the Mahaguru's followers resigned from their offices en bloc. The decision proved counterproductive. With the connivance of the British, the Muslim Group formed minority governments in the provinces where the Kaurava ministries had resigned. Through every means at their disposal, Muslim Group set about increasing their following systematically and the Kaurava Party was reduced to a position of irrelevance and frustration. "Thwarted, frustrated, excluded, the Kaurava Party chafed in its self-imposed irrelevance. Then in a desperate and not entirely well-thought out bid to regain the political limelight, the party met under Gangaji's Chairmanship and proclaimed a new campaign of civil disobedience. The message to the British was simple and direct: 'Quit India'" (206). These two magical words became the new slogan which captured the imagination of people and they spread all over the country like "the heartbeat of a national awakening, the drum roll of a people on the march" (206). This civil disobedience campaign 'Quit India' was crushed immediately by arresting the main leaders. "It was all over before it began" (206). In the background of this suppression of the movement, the author exposes the failure of Gandhiji and his ideology.

Tharoor adores characters that preach and practice politics of violence so much so that they are heralded as the true heroes of our political freedom both in the pre and post-independence India. Pandu's (Bose) armed struggle against the imperial powers in league with the fascist forces kindles the romantic imagination of the author to the extent that he overlooks the question of the sanctity of means towards the achievement of the end. Obviously he favours Bose-type nationalism against the constitutional, moral and peaceful nationalism practiced by

Gandhi: "...as Pandu strove and struggled in Berlin and Singapore, Gangaji and his Kaurava followers languished in prison" (207).

Tharoor presents two different characters who really negate Ganga/Gandhi and his ideology – "two very different individuals moved closer to realizing their ultimate ambitions of thwarting the Mahaguru" (207). While Karna who "was now referred to almost exclusively by the honorific 'Khalifa-e-Mashriq', or Caliph of the East' posed "a threat to what Gangaji stood for politically"(208) while the another person, "a slight, embittered figure was beginning, unknown to all of us, to cast an equally dangerous shadow on the Mahaguru's person. Amba, the slim, doe-eyed princess, whose nuptial bliss the Regent of Hastinapur had once so thoughtlessly blighted, was almost ready to exact her revenge"(208). In the ensuing elections to the provincial governments the Kaurava Party did well and "won a majority of the provinces, but the Muslim Group emphatically carried most of the Muslim seats... and demanded separation" (210) and the Labour Government in Britain was determined to dismantle its Indian Empire. Karna mounted immense pressure on the British and made it clear that "he wanted Karnistan" (211) – a separate land for Muslims. When the British showed their reluctance to divide the dominion, the Muslim Group President "exhorted his followers to 'Direct Action'. Several thousand cadavers, burning vehicles, gutted homes, looted shops and rivulets of blood later, everyone except the Mahaguru began thinking about the unthinkable: the division of the motherland"(211). The narrative takes note of Gangaji's slackening hold on the affairs of the state before independence. He finds himself in such a pathetic condition where he remains incapable of stopping the carnage.

Gangaji refused to be reconciled to the new reality. He walked in vain from riot-spot to riot-spot, trying to put out the conflagration through expressions of reasons and grief. But the old magic was gone. Where he was effective it was in very

specific areas for very limited periods of time; against the scale and magnitude of the carnage that was sweeping across the country, he was broadly ineffectual.

(211)

The author comments satirically on Gandhi's principle of celibacy in general and his *brahmacharya* experiment in particular. Historically, Gandhi's *brahmacharya* experiment which he used to call *yajna* was very controversial at that time. Most of his followers were totally opposed to the experiment. Here the author portrays Ganga\Gandhi as a debile old man who is devoid of energy but keeps himself involved in nocturnal experiment.

It was at this stage that he turned to that unfortunate nocturnal experiment which was to cause so much needless controversy amongst his later biographers. In his despair, in his dejection over the state of the country, and in his resultant ageing, he seemed to have lost that incredible physical self sufficiency that had let him stride up the steps of Buckingham Palace in the English winter in his dhoti. He now trembled as he stood up, needing to lean on both his stick and Sarah-behn; and at night he was given to terrible fits of shivering. (228)

Keeping in mind his "terrible vow of old Bhishma, and the principles of celibacy" (228) he wanted to make an experiment that would help him in rediscovering the moral and physical strength.

But I have asked her (Sarah Behn) to join me in an experiment that will be the ultimate test of my training and self restraint. She will lie with me, unclad, and cradle me in her arms, and I shall not be aroused. In that non-arousal I hope to satisfy myself that I have remained pure and disciplined. And not merely that. It is

my prayer that this test will help me to rediscover the moral and physical strength... (228)

Factually, the *brahmacharya* experiment was so controversial that some of the associates left Gandhi in lurch. Nirmal Kumar Bose, during the Noakhali visit with Gandhi, did not translate the facts of Gandhi's lecture related to this experiment and tried to keep the matter away from the press. Here, Tharoor makes a vituperative attack on Ganga/Gandhi by divulging the possible explanations of his *brahmacharya* experiment.

Various whispered explanations were discussed, from the obvious one of senility – that this was simply eccentricity compounded by age – to the more esoteric one Shunammitism, that Gangaji was decadently seeking his rejuvenation through the ministrations of a younger woman. There was no consensus on the matter, but there was rapid agreement on one thing: the story had to be kept from the press. A tight blanket of loyal self-censorship descended on all of us, covering our own discomfort and our leader's nakedness. (228)

Tharoor presented a very sarcastic picture of “Gangaji's last experiments in self perfection” (228). These experiments attracted the vicious gossips and sincere curiosity and it was out of curiosity that the eminent American psychoanalyst asked in all earnestness. “Could it be that your inability to become the Father of a United India drives you to seek maternal solace in British arms?” (229).

Thus Tharoor's Gangaji/Gandhiji was a complete failure in his life and his ideology concerning celibacy proved futile. While the Mahaguru was seeking solace in the maternal arms of his Scottish disciple, his protégé Dhritarashtra developed a scandalous relationship with the British Vicereine. “Georgina Drewpad (Edwina Mountbatten), amatory adventuress of libelous

renown”, (229) and Dhritarashtra, Gangaji’s disciple “...made a strange pair, those two—the blond patrician and the blind politician ...” (229).

As communal frenzy swept across the country, the British Government appointed a new representative, Viscount Drewpad (Mountbatten) and sent him to India with the sole mandate to expedite and negotiate the transfer of power ‘Drewpad – the last viceroy of India – arrived in New Delhi with his charming wife, Georgine (Edwina), whom he would use as a “secret weapon” (215) to dupe the Indian leaders, particularly the blind, and recently widowed, Dhritarashtra.

To discuss the possible transfer of power from British rule to Indian self government Viscount Drewpad, the last British Viceroy – “superficial and supercilious man” (221) summoned the Indian representatives. It became unmistakably evident that the partition of the country was unavoidable. “At one point Gangaji...suggested that as the price of keeping India united we should simply offer Mahammed Ali Karna the premiership of all India” (221) but it was vetoed by Dhritarashtra. The date for the transfer of power August fifteenth, 1947 was announced which happened to be the wedding anniversary Viscount Drewpad. The narrator ridicules the situation when next day the Kaurava Working Committee goes to the Mahaguru at his place to discuss this serious matter. “It was one of his days of silence, which meant that he would listen sagely to what we were saying, then scrawl a few words on the back of an envelope that Sarah behn would read aloud to the rest of us”(222). Gangaji urged the representatives – “You must never give in’, Sarah-behn read, ‘to the demand to dismember the country” (223). But ‘Ganga’s man’, his power hungry heir apparent, Dhritrashtra ignored his plea:

‘Gangaji’, we understand how you feel,” Dhritrashtra said. ‘We have fought by your side for our freedom, all these years. We have imbibed your principles

and convictions. You have led us to the brink of victory...But now, the time has come for us to apply our principles in the face of the acid test of reality. (223)

The Party, which Gangaji had diligently built up and sacrificed his life for thus went against him. Ganga became irrelevant even before his death. "That evening, the Working Committee of the Kaurava Party resolved unanimously to accept in principle the partition of the country. It was the first time we had ever gone against the expressed wishes of Gangaji. His era was over" (223). Tharoor's version of India's struggle for freedom is unequivocally critical of Gandhi for loosening his control over the Congress Party at a time when it was needed most. Gandhi, in this post modern version, was mistaken in allowing the issue of partition to be decided by leaders like Nehru who were no match for either Jinnah or Mountbatten.

Shashi Tharoor fictionalizes the modern history of India by drawing a parallel account of the carnage at the time of partition. Factually, Cyril John Radcliffe submitted his partition map to divide and declare India and Pakistan as independent nations on 9th August 1947. This partition resulted in the mayhem occurring on both sides of the boundary. In his article *Off track, decades later* Tharoor presents the historical facts concerning the violence and obliteration at the time of partition: "The killing and mass displacement worsened as people sought frantically to be on the "right" side of the lines the British were to draw across their home land. Over a million people died in the savagery that accompanied the freedom of India and Pakistan; some 17 million were displaced and countless properties destroyed and looted. Lines meant lives"

In the novel Tharoor fictionalizes this historical event of partition. The representatives of Kaurava Party and Ganga\Gandhi could not foresee the magnitude of violence the vivisection of the country would result into. A political cartographer, Mr. Nicholas (Cyril Radcliffe) was appointed to hack the country on communal basis and award provinces to either India or

Karnistan. The consequence of this arbitrary and thoughtless attempt to draw shadow lines across the subcontinent proved disastrous:

Fat little Nicholas drew his lines on his maps, and each stroke of his pencil generated other lines, less orderly and less erasable lines, lines of displaced human beings leading their families and animals away from the only homes they had ever known because they were suddenly to become foreigners there, lines of buses and bullock -carts and lorries and trains all laden with desperate humanity and their pathetic possessions, lines too of angry vicious predators with guns and knives flashing as they descended on the other lines, lines now shooting hitting wounding raping killing looting attackers ripping apart the lines of stumbling fleeing bleeding crying screaming dying refugees. ... In those days, ... lines meant lives.(225)

In his article *Off track, decades later* Tharoor portrayed the complete mental picture of Gandhi after the partition of the land at time of independence from the British. With the division of the subcontinent India was free from the British rule and everywhere there was a tremendous excitement, the exhilaration and the exultation of that midnight moment. For others this moment of freedom was the ample cause for celebration but for Gandhi it was the hour of despondency. Gandhi's appeal for Hindu-Muslim unity and fraternity proved futile.

One man did not join the celebrations that midnight. Mahatma Gandhi stayed in Calcutta, fasting, striving to keep the peace in a city that just a year earlier had been ravaged by killing.

He saw no cause for celebration. Instead of the cheers of rejoicing, he heard the cries of the women ripped open in the internecine frenzy; instead of the

slogans of freedom, he heard the shouts of the crazed assaulters firing their weapons at helpless refugees, and the silence of trains arriving full of corpses massacred on their journey; instead of the dawn of Jawaharlal's promise, he saw only the long dark night of horror that was breaking his country in two. (Tharoor)

In the novel, Tharoor fictionalizes the bloody massacre of people at the time of the partition of the sub-continent. Through this fictionalization of the scene of carnage he visualizes Gnadhi's abject failure. His basic principles remained ineffectual proposition. He depicted Gandhi as a disconsolate and desolate old man when even his close associates were not with him.

But one man was not cheering that night. Gangaji sat on the floor of a darkened room, sunk into his white wrap, his lower lip extended in a gloomy pout, his long arms listless by his side. Almost alone among his colleagues, the Mahaguru saw no cause for celebration. Instead of the cheers of rejoicing, Ganapathi, he heard the cries of the women ripped open in the internecine frenzy; instead slogans of the triumph, he heard the shouts of crazed assaulters flailing their weapons at helpless victims, instead of the dawn of Dhritarashtra's promise, he saw only the long dark night of horror that was breaking his nation in two. The bright lights of the gaily coloured bulbs strung across all the celebratory Shamianas of Delhi could not illuminate that darkness. Ganapathi, nor could they shine in his eyes as brightly as the blazing thatched homes of the poor peasants. He had preached brotherhood, and love, and comradeship in struggle, the strength of non violence and the power of soul force. Yet it was as if he had never lived at all, never preached a word. (231)

As far as the chronological description of factual event goes Tharoor sticks to the historical exactitudes and delineates Gandhi as a myopic strategist. It seems a deliberate effort of the writer to malign the image of Gandhi by depicting him as a shortsighted and dejected person at this crucial hour in the history of the sub continent.

The partition carnage, which led to the largest exodus in the history of mankind, was stunning in its magnitude and sheer mindlessness. Gangaji, who moved from one riot torn area to another and prayed for peace and sanity, viewed the violence as a total denial of his teachings and looked suddenly old. “Gangaji recognized this, and took upon himself the tragedy of the nation. He saw the violence across the land as a total repudiation of what he had taught. All his later life he had seemed ageless, suddenly he looked old.”(227) Tharoor depicts Ganga/Gandhi a feeble old man who looks dejected over the state of the land and a deep sense of despair overwhelms him.

In the midst of the exultation and celebrations of Independence, the most dejected man at the end of a prolonged struggle falls victim to his assassin’s bullets. Amba, metamorphosed in Shikhandin (Nathuram Godse) confronts the celibate Bhishma, Gangaji and denounces him for dereliction of duty:

What a wreck you are, Bhishma! The voice went on ‘what a life you’ve led. Spouting on and on about our great traditions and basic values, but I don’t see the old wife you ought to be honouring in your dotage. Advising everyone about their sex, marrying people off, letting them call you the Father of the Nation, but where is the son you need to light your funeral pyre, the son of your own loins?... ‘You make me sick Bhishma. Your life has been a waste, unproductive, barren. You are nothing but an impotent old walrus sucking other reptiles’ eggs, an infertile old

fool seeking solace like a calf from the udders of foreign cows, a man who is less than a woman. The tragedy of this country springs from you – as nothing else could after that stupid oath of which you are so pathetically proud. Bhisma, the pyre has already been lit for you in the flames that are burning your country. You have lived long enough! (232)

The invective sums up Ganga's/Gandhi's life as a waste, a total failure. In order to reinforce the impact of the serious allegation, Tharoor deviates from the popularly known account of Gandhi's death and puts in the mouth of the dying leader not "Hey Ram" but "I...have... failed, 'he whispered" (234).

The narrator does not categorically say whether he subscribes to the view of Gandhi's murderer but his overall tone suggests that the father of nation died as a defeated, desolate and disillusioned man.

Mukunda Rao's *The Mahatma* (1992) "...is a parallel account of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's days in riot-torn Noakhali (now in Bangladesh) in the summer of 1946. It fleshes out those turbulent days before independence when the sub-continent was reeling under communal riots and the mahatma's ideas of truth and ahimsa were severely tested" (Cover page). In the novel, the author furnishes the minute details of the Mahatma's visit to the riot-torn areas of Noakhali and presents the facts in a chronological order in episodic form. The novelist through his perceptive creativity sticks to historical precision as far as the chronological description of factual events goes, the way he delineates, by suppressing or skirting even the critical facts. Historically "On 6 November a special train arranged by Suhrawardy took Gandhi and his party to Goalando in eastern Bengal" (Gandhi, R 567). He tried his best to stop the communal riots but

remained ineffectual. “On 20 February 1947, ... he was making up his mind to leave Noakhali and go to Bihar....” (Gandhi, R 594). The author debunks Gandhian ideology and exhibits Gandhi as rejected, dejected and all alone.

The novel’s opening sentence itself is a pointer to the author’s intentions: “The Mahatma walked with long lusty strides, supporting himself with his five foot long bamboo staff, in a great hurry as if he were running out of time”(1). The opening of the novel renders Gandhi as an eccentric, isolated, full of despair, restless, unwelcomed, unpredictable and a complete failure. His unique way, his eccentricity always surprises even his close disciples. In his visit to Noakhali, he leaves most of his disciples behind in a daze. “His cruel rejection of them, his apathy to all their pleas had left them heart-broken and confounded: never at any time in the past had the Mahatma acted thus” (1). Gandhi forbids his associates to accompany him and “The question why the Mahatma wanted to isolate himself from his close disciples did surprise Shankar....Mitra was puzzled and bothered” (1). The Mahatma walks fast with great energy but his face is full of sadness. “The Mahatma’s lusty strides, his locomotor restlessness and energy seemed to mark at his face which looked sad and forlorn” (1).

Mahatma Gandhi is not only unwelcome but the people protest against him and even try to bar his way by strewing garbage.

Suddenly, the Mahatma stopped: the mud path for a few yards in front of him was littered with human excrement, shards of glass and brambles. The Mahatma smiled but his heart was in agony....Minutes earlier while passing through the bamboo grove nearby they had seen several trees festooned with banners screaming. “ ‘Accept Dinia’; ‘Don’t come here, you have been warned.’(1)

Two days ago in Kalikata they were attacked by a young man but the Mahatma had a narrow escape when "...it had missed the Mahatma's head by less than an inch. Later, taking the professor's palm in his, the Mahatma had said, "No, I will not die so easily, at least not as a defeated man. But if it is the will of God that an assassin must put an end to my life, I would love to fade out doing my duty" (2).

In the novel the author gives a minute detail of the carnage and portrays Gandhi as contrite, seized by madness, standing among the rotting bodies:

Over the past few weeks thousands of men, women and children had been slaughtered like animals in some weird religious sacrifice. It was not a fratricidal strife: it was madness. And now this penitent old man, seized by another kind of madness, was throwing himself into the thick of the Kurukshetra jungles where scores of bodies still lay rotting, worms eating into them.(2)

On the edge of the village Samsarpur, there stood the cottage where the Mahatma was to stay. Nearly twenty men and a woman waited for his arrival outside the cottage. "A puny figure clad in white, a long stick in his hand, emerged from the grove, followed by two men. The crowd rose" (3). In less than twenty four hours the age old place of the village had been shattered by communal frenzy. The Mahatma and his entourage came here to see the riot-torn areas. They walked through a row of demolished mud houses and remnants of half burnt articles and some corpses still lay here and there. "Mahatma's face remained grave, his mind gripped by a growing fear rather than pain. Fear, not of death, but of life, the life that such deaths leave behind" (5). It was a grotesque sight which touched something deep inside the human psyche. "Mitra" looked at the old man, who stood like a statue, gazing at the debris of charred corpses. All eyes were turned on the frail figure, waiting to see how he would react, what he would say. The Mahatma

turned now and without uttering a word went straight into the hut” (5). Here the author portrays Gandhi as an unpredictable person who startles even his associates. During the meetings the Mahatma talks of friendship, fraternity, love but remains ineffectual and finds himself unable to convey his message as there is no one even ready to listen to him.

His first meeting in Kurukshetra began with the readings from the Koran and Gita.” “Mahatma spoke in a low voice, his sentences punctuated with long pauses, ‘Sunno, sunno...’ he said, ‘I have come here as your friend, and not to put one community against the other.’ I have friends among Muslims, Christians, Jews and Parsees and today I can tell you with conviction that the essential message of every religious is love. There was some disturbance at the back of the crowd. The Mahatma raised his voice, ‘Sunno, listen ... means peace ... A loud noise came from somewhere behind the crowd and he stopped. (6)

The author presents the Mahatma as a helpless and buffeted person. Even his old associates have left him alone. The lonesome hour in the meeting commoves Gandhi, an apostle of non-violence, to challenge the audience in his meeting and thus the author tries to reveal the convulsive traits in him. A middle aged man comes to his rescue. “You should know who is speaking to us. ‘He is a messenger of God, a fakir...’ he couldn’t complete the sentence. The crowd started to boo him. A few young men in lungis sprang to their feet and began to shout” (6). People are not ready to listen to him. “He is a *kafir*, we don’t want him here, a young man was shouting, pointing at the figure in white on the dais” (7). Now, it is the Mahatma himself who challenges the crowd: “He raised his hands and shouted, ‘Those who want to challenge me come forward and do it boldly. Don’t sit back there and shout like cowards. You want to kill me, I’m ready, I am not afraid; I fear only God...’” (7). It is such a crucial situation when even his

staunch followers have left him alone. His disciples have betrayed him. Ali Khan, his close disciple, has also deserted him. He used to seek advice even on family matters but now he is not with the Mahatma because of his alliance with Mohammad Azam.

At that time Ali was still a member of the People's Party (Congress Party)" and a follower of the Mahatma; he believed Hindus and Muslims were brothers and they had but one motherland, Bharat. Five years later when Mohammad Azam (Md. Ali Jinnah) stormed back into politics with his refurbished theory of a separate nation for Muslims. Ali Khan crosses over the Islamia Party (Muslim Leagues). Ali Khan became Azam's chief lieutenant in the campaign for Dinia, the lord of believers. This turnaround in Ali's stand had pained the Mahatma immensely. It was as if he had been betrayed by his own son. Ali had called himself his son. (7)

Prof. Mitra recalls an incident: when Ali Khan had problems with his young son who wanted to pursue music not politics and he had sought the Mahatma's intervention. "Calmly and with a smile, the Mahatma had advised the father to let her son pursue his interest" (8). But now such a reversal on the part of Ali Khan perturbs the Mahatma.

Mitra could vividly comprehend how enormous was the influence of the Mahatma on people but now it is completely a changed situation. "Mitra had been completely surprised, was he same master who had urged people to give up their professions, even their families and dedicate themselves to the cause of freedom? And wasn't he the same leader who had called upon the poets to lay down their lyres when the country was in flames and get down to work with the masses?"(8)

Prof. Mitra receives an invitation to accompany the Mahatma during the visit to Noakhali and he resigns his job and plunges into the movement. For a better adjustment with Gandhi he has to train himself to an altogether different routine. After joining the Mahatma, “In three days he had realized that the old man was a difficult person to live with” (10). He has to study the writings of the Mahatma for several months and finds him a paradoxical sort of person.

...he had felt that what the Mahatma stood for in certain matters were in direct contradiction to what he had come to believe in. The Mahatma believed too much in religion while he suspected it too much to think that it could have any value in social transformation. He would have liked to believe that religion would be dead in another 50 years. The Mahatma mixed religion and politics. Politics and not religion was concerned with freedom and justice. But the Mahatma spoke a language that was neither purely religious nor purely political; he spoke of love and justice in the same vein. (9)

Factually, it was the time of transfer of power from British rule to self rule in India. Jinnah demanded for a separate Muslim state but Mahatma Gandhi was not in favour of a partition. To achieve the target with mutual agreement, there were Round-Table Conferences, Gandhi-Viceroy meetings, Gandhi-Jinnah talks but in between there was Jinnah’s announcement of “Direct Action” to achieve Pakistan which triggered a Mayhem in Calcutta” (Gandhi, R 559) and Noakhali in East of Bengal. In this background Mukunda Rao’s novel *The Mahatma* presents the historical picture and depicts Gandhi as a man of vicissitudes and caprices.

At Last The Raj decided to quit the ancient land ... with too many wars on the homefront. Their backs were broken and here in this land of heat and dust, this man called the Mahatma with his spiritual tricks had wakened the sleeping masses

and the Raj had no respite. It was not always easy to handle this slippery, unpredictable old man who claimed to be more Christian than the English. A charming satan. But it was time to quit Bharat. (11)

The Islamia Party leader, Mohammad Azam warns the Raj, “you must divide and quit, give us Dinia” (11), a separate Muslim state. The People’s Party decides against the partition of the land. “For the Mahatma it was heart breaking” (11). The Raj is of the view that the issue should be decided by the people. “Before the transfer of power the Raj invited the leaders of the People’s Party and the Islamia Party to constitute the interim government. Azam refused to cooperate. Lal went ahead and formed the interim government, naturally” (11). Azam reacts against this decision and raises a storm of protest:

The madness began. The Islamia Party declared the next day as a day of protest, to be observed by all the Muslims. Mohammad Azam breathed fire: When the English quit, should we be ruled by the Hindus and be trampled under their heels? ...Today we pledge to realize Dinia, take Dinia even if it means taking it by force. Thousands of leaflets circulated secretly to the Muslims read: ‘This is an open conflict between Islam and heathenism ...Muslims have had the crown and have ruled. Be ready and take your swords... O Kafir ! Your doom is not far and the general massacre will come! Jihad ! (12)

Here the author reveals the dubiousness in different parties at the time of partition and delineates Gandhi as an ineffectual and discomfited person.

The Chief Minister of Bengal, who is also a member of the Islamia Party not only declares the protest day a holiday but he arranges transport and distributes weapons among the protesters. “The madness began in the dark hours. Streets and walls were splattered with blood;

headless bodies, several limbs choked the drains” (12). Thus the Mahatma’s dream of Hindu-Muslim unity is shattered and he feels helpless in this situation. After some time the Mahatma sends some of his volunteers to the riot-torn areas. “Four of them were killed. The news brought no joy to the old man. He was afraid; afraid not of violence, not of death but of the corruption of death; and his own failure. When more news of the riots reached him, he decided he should go; it was a call” (14). Here the narrator depicts Gandhi a complete failure.

Rao describes horror-stricken atmosphere of the area in vivid detail and he exposes the shrewdness and selfishness of the politicians. The Mahatma listens to the victims’ woes and this work of savages fills him with a sense of alienation. The Mahatma reaches Kalikata where the atmosphere is of death and fear. He meets the affected people, workers and journalists and he is shocked by the savagery of the attacks. The Chief Minister of Bengala insists that the Mahatma should not visit Kuruksheetra just now because he is afraid that the latter may get killed. “The Chief Minister did not want the Mahatma’s death on his hands, not at this juncture. After all, the old man, whether or not he was a better Muslim as he claimed, he was certainly their friend and more useful alive than dead” (15). It seems to the Chief Minister that by the riots the Islamia Party has gained political advantage and they are successful to have forced the people, the People’s Party and the Raj into accepting the partition. “Except the incorrigible, unbending Mahatma. But the old man was almost a recluse now; in a few weeks, the old man’s alienation from his own people would be complete” (15). The Mahatma spends much time with the victims, listens the tales of woe and feels their pain in his heart. “The Mahatma trembled as he told himself, I must die to know their sorrow. I must die to expiate their sins” (15). Here the narrator portrays Gandhi a completely disappointed and helpless person.

A messenger hands over a letter to the Mahatma in which Lal had requested him not to risk his life by going to Kurukshetra. The Mahatma feels irritated, sick and finds himself into depths of despair.

The Mahatma smiled wryly and spoke with visible irritation. ‘What do Lal, Bhai and others want to do at this juncture of history? That is the Question, and not the modus operandi of the transfer of power. That can wait.’ Suddenly he felt sick and very tired and before the protégé could know what was happening, the old man slapped himself on the forehead. The protégé blanched with fear; he did not know what to do, he had not seen the Mahatma in such a frightful state. The Mahatma sighed, the image of the woman who had lost her son and had shouted at him tore through his mind. He sighed again and splayed his arms in despair. (16)

Here the author paints a picture of the Mahatma who is frustrated and unable to conceal his annoyance. One day an English Member of Parliament, the father of the Mahatma’s disciple, Magdalene (Medeline Slade) happened to bring a book on the Mahatma written by an American journalist who had called the Mahatma a ‘great man’. “He had become curious to find out what was so great about a man who went round in a loin-cloth, spent most of his time cleaning latrines in his ashram or lying naked in his improvised bath tub and giving instructions to his naive political activists” (18). When the Mahatma sat in conference with members of the Islamia party, the Chief Minister and other members of the party pleaded for the postponement of his visit to Kurukshetra, the Mahatma became very restless. “The Mahatma sighed, his face contorted in pain. He said, looking at Ali Khan, “I can’t wait anymore. Today, in another two hours from now, I’ll start my journey to Kurukshetra. Tell the Chief Minister. He can’t stop me now” (19). The Mahatma started his journey in the stipulated time. He travelled by train and boat and he saw

hatred and helplessness in the eyes of men, women and children. His sense of helplessness could be observed. “Are people doomed to live in hatred and violence? Is there no deliverance from this evil? The Mahatma murmured” (20). In the background of these events the Mahatma is shown as a heavy hearted man easily yielding to chagrin.

Factually, during this period there were occasions when Gandhi harboured doubts about the efficacy of his methods and the meaningfulness of his actions, but he quickly emerged from these nagging doubts. Here the Mahatma does not try to get over his dubiousness rather he remains in the pensive mood.

The horrible sight of those mutilated bodies and the dying men had strengthened the Mahatma’s belief in ahimsa and it was then that the vow of *brahmacharya*, continence, had suggested itself to him.... It was on that battleground, in the face of death, that the Mahatma’s war of ahimsa and *brahmacharya* had begun....

Some distance away, sitting under a tree, the Mahatma fell into deep thought again. (20)

He is shown very dejected and he is becoming increasingly despondent about the way things are going. “The world was coming to an end...There was only corruption and violence everywhere in the world: a celebration of death. What is man ? A cruel joke? What is life? A play of death? What am I?”(20).

The author depicts the Mahatma as a sorrowful person who has been desolated by the death of so many people due to hatred and violence and finds himself completely helpless.

What should I do, God. How should I stem the raging violence? He asked himself several times. At the same time, the thought of his erring son burned into

his mind. I am a sinner, he murmured. I must atone for my sins, atone for the sins of the people; I must repair the damage, close the old wounds..." (20).

He feels so anguished and forlorn in those murky conditions. He finds himself in such a miserable condition as if all of his disciples have left him alone in the battlefield. Here the writer draws a picture of the Mahatma as a disappointed person who is in an agony of hopeless grief.

Another part of him suddenly screamed – It's all over. You are a back number now. Lal, Bhai, Azad, Prasad, every one of them you reared politically, and helped each one become a leader, is on his own now. You are not their master, their surrogate father any more. They don't need you. You are finished. Now get out of everything and find your moksha. Abandon this karma, however, noble and spiritual you might think it is, it'll only tether you to the world of samsara, leave you in endless suffering. (21)

The narrator shows Gandhi a despairing fellow who is afraid of losing his ground and wants to overcome the feelings of gloom and depression. However, Gandhi in real life was a diehard optimist but here he has been fictionalized as a person who has 'fear of extinction'.

His head grew hot, something like an electric shock passed through his body. He wanted to fall, utterly helpless, let everything go. But he could not, whenever he came close to that state, he felt the deep fear of extinction and he would try desperately to take hold of himself from slipping further into the chasm of nothingness. It would be cowardice, a voice cried aloud within him. He should not give up the fight. He should go on. (21).

Historically '*Ekla Chalo Re*' decision was taken by Gandhi himself for giving courage to local Hindus. He split up his group to live there amidst a Muslim majority. "If you want to know yourself, go forth alone'. This, Gandhi said, was his message to himself and his companions." (Gandhi, R 571). East Bengal was now the isolated Gandhi's home and workplace. Cutting himself off from intimate companions was for him a hard step.

Slowly, from that terrible confusion and agony, a new idea, a new resolution took hold of him. Yes, he would continue the journey, he would travel from village to village in Kurukshetra, throw himself between the warring Hindus and Muslims. ...But it was suddenly clear to him; he would not take with him any of his old companions on whom he had depended all these years. ... It would be penance. He would fend for himself, stem the rot and meet his God or death. It was time. (21)

When they reach Dattakhali in Kurukshetra, the Mahatma calls for a meeting and decides that all the workers must work separately. "Vaidi started to say something again. The Mahatma shouted at her to shut up. He was angry.... He would start rejecting them all by first distancing himself from these close disciples. Yes, he would take only Shanker who was not much of a disciple and Mitra, who was no follower of his" (22). Here his dictatorial disposition has been revealed by the author.

The next day the three of them set out in a hand-poled boat towards Samsarpur. It seems that this is the trial period for the Mahatma and his own statement unravels his perplexity.

During the journey he writes:

My life is on the anvil. I am surrounded by darkness and I am unable to discover the truth. There is terrible mutual distrust and the principles I have lived for these

years seem to fail me. I ask myself, is it that my ahimsa has been of the weak? Can ahimsa stop this mindless rage and stem this spreading rot? I am on trial as are my twin principles of truth and ahimsa by which I swear and live. To test them and to test myself. I am going to a village called Samsarpur. Perhaps this will be my last battle and I do not know how long it will last...”. (24)

Rao ironically comments on the efficacy of the Gandhian principles. The Mahatma finds himself in a very tenebrous condition where he does not know whether he will succeed. “I do not know if you’ll come through this battle...” (24). The Mahatma pauses for a few moment and he begins to write a letter to his son:

...I do not know if I’ll succeed; perhaps I’ll not come back. For ten years we haven’t met and we haven’t communicated with each other. Some years back I publicly disowned you because as your father I was angry and as a servant of the people, who has no private life, I had to do it. I could not have viewed your fraudulence and public drunkenness differently because you are my son. (24)

The Mahatma holds himself responsible for his son’s failure in life. “Sometimes I do not understand how all this happened. Perhaps I am responsible. My sins have affected you and I hold myself guilty. If I were pure, and if I were capable of an alloyed love, this shouldn’t have happened” (25). Historically there was an unbridgeable gulf between the eldest son, Hari Lal and Gandhi. Hari Lal wrote a disparaging letter to his father, Gandhi. “It contained bitter charges : ...You have suppressed us (sons) in a sophisticated manner....You have never encouraged us in any way....You always spoke to us with anger, not with love. ... You have made us remain ignorant....Therefore, I have separated from you with your permission.” (Gandhi, R 197). Rao time and again raises this issue reproachfully in the novel.

Jawahar Lal and other congress leaders except Gandhi were in favour of the partition. It was extremely difficult to persuade Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi wanted to talk of tolerance, Hindu-Muslim unity, fraternity but the partition was inevitable and a stark reality for other Congress leaders. Far away in his study, the Mahatma's Chief Political disciple Lal expressed his opinion:

Freedom was at the doorstep and in these days when they were about to make their tryst with destiny, people were plunging into a fratricidal war. ... It was all right for the Mahatma to speak of tolerance and forgiveness, of love and brotherhood. But then why did he refuse to accept reality? Why did he always impose his ideas on them, threaten to go on a fast if people did not accept his plan of action? ... Lal sighed and suddenly he was irritated with himself. Yes, he told himself, as though he needed to be reassured by his own voice, the division of the country was not only inevitable, it was necessary. It was the only way out. (26)

In the background of this incident the narrator reveals the fact that even the close associate like Jawahar Lal Nehru was not with Gandhi on the issue of partition. Here Gandhi is shown as a person who does not want to accept the reality of partition.

Rao's vituperative verdict can be read through the observations of the only objective character of the novel, namely Prof. Mitra. This Prof. Mitra happens to be a fictionalization of the real life of Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose, who accompanied his entourage to Noakhali as an independent, objective onlooker. In the novel, Rao uses Prof. Mitra as the authorial agent.

The old man braved it unaided; Mitra, following him closely, wondering why the old man was trying to prove to himself and to others that he was still strong enough to manage things by himself. Mitra liked to refer to the Mahatma as the

old man. He was no disciple of the Mahatma and it helped to distance himself from the Mahatma and not lose his objectivity. (28)

The Mahatma visits the village, Goparkhali to establish the Hindu-Muslim fraternity. This village is famous for religious schools and priests. “People of Goparkhali were proud of it and of the large number of the *mullahs* and *hajees* who all now, quite expectedly, had kept themselves away from the Mahatma. Except old Hassan, the *hajeer*. An eighty-year old man, ... came muttering : The wrath of God is upon you, o evil man. The hour of doom is near” (31). The old man began the prayer in the village and the villagers had glowered at them with unknown hatred in their eyes. Their reaction was alarming. “It was a moment of truth for the Mahatma and suddenly he was no longer sure of his strength, his strength in weakness” (33). This event depicts Gandhi’s failure on the issue of Hindu-Muslim unity.

Rao discloses the Mahatma’s views on the issue of class conflict. Mitra holds class hatred responsible for economic disparity and the carnage in the area. However, he tries to impress upon the Mahatma but he does not take any interest in class analysis and thus Mitra gets disappointed. Here the overbearing nature of the Mahatma is unmasked by the narrator.

On their way Mitra tried to impress upon the Mahatma that more than religious fanaticism and political instigation, somewhere at the bottom class hatred had contributed to the large-scale killings in kurukshetra...But the Mahatma said, ‘he was not bothered about classes, only the masses, the people. Under the circumstances it was not the economic disparity they had to tackle. The first had to quell the raging madness. Mitra was disappointed. He had again failed to get the old man interested in the class analysis of society, particularly in the understanding of communalism”. (27)

The author visualizes that the Mahatma remains very obstinate when he wants to be or for the time being he wants to ignore the problem rather than try and deal with it. From the *Mullah's* house the Mahatma and his workers visit Ali Khan's house in Chandipur. "As the Mahatma walked up in his ostrich-like manner, Ali Khan folded his hands smiling munificently" (38). They enter the large hall; members of the Islamia Party, the Hindu Sangha and the workers are there to discuss the formation of peace committees. The narrator sums up the views of Hindu *Sangh* :

Evidently they were in no mood to listen to the Mahatma's discourse. The old man talked too much. He thought he was some *avatar* came down to save humanity. Sometimes he could be intolerable, particularly when he mixed his peculiar ideas with elements of Hinduism and delivered it as authentic Hindu philosophy. He was a good man but a danger to *Hindutva*. (40)

Historically Jinnah charged that Gandhi was a Hindu and "the Congress was a Hindu body" (Gandhi, R453) and Gandhi referred Jinnah as "my old comrade"(Gandhi, R 454) and acknowledging his rising stature Gandhi started calling him " 'quaid-i-Azam', 'The People's Leader' " (Gandhi, R 453). Thus Rao presents a very ironical situation that *Islamia* Party accuses Gandhi as 'Hindu' and Hindu *Sangha* considers him as a danger to *Hindutva*.

After the meeting in Chandipur they reached Samsarpur by evening. Gusts of cold wind blew through the window and Shanker saw the Mahatma shivering. He closed the windows, covered the body with a thick woolen blanket and massaged him vigorously. "On such occasions, Maya or the doctor would do the same. Sometimes, when nothing helped, one of them would sleep in his bed to keep his body warm. The body warmth of the other would bring him back to normal and the old man would slip into a quiet sleep" (42). Through the depiction of this

incident Rao portrays Gandhi a feeble old man and ironically comments on his principle of celibacy.

At that time six hundred miles away, Lal and Bhai are busy with the party members in a late night meeting. An elderly person called Acharya informs the members on the basis of the letters from the Mahatma: "...you know full well that he feels neglected, even betrayed by us. He feels we don't care anymore for his ideas.....I don't know how all of you see it" (44). They are not interested to discuss it and some of them even feel "that the Mahatma's decision to camp in Kurukshetra was a blessing in disguise" (44). Thus the narrator exposes the stark reality of Gandhi's relations at later stage with his own party members. Gandhi feels forlorn and the members are glad to get rid of him.

The peace in Kurukshetra was short lived and there were fresh reports that in some villages, groups of Hindus who had braved returning to their houses upon the Mahatma's advice were either killed or driven out. Mitra felt infuriated on the details. "The Mahatma's hopes seemed a mirage, the religious tolerance he preached impossible and even absurd" (44). All it happened because the Mahatma did not want any army to stop the massacre and he considered the army and the police force as the collective violence of the state. "The Mahatma would not work alongside the army and even the police force constituted the collective violence of the state and their use was counterproductive and antithetical to his approach to the solution of communalism"(44). Babu said to Gandhi, "And you know, even the party leaders at the centre no more believe that ahimsa can lead us out of the present impasse" (46). Rao here comments satirically on the efficacy of Gandhi's principle of ahimsa.

There is a long discussion in the narrative between Chaudhari, an official of Hindu Sangh and the Mahatma but he finds the Mahatma incorrigible. "Chaudhari felt there was no point in

arguing with the old man. He always confused you. He called himself a Hindu, a Muslim and a Christian. He would say that to be a good Hindu was to be a good Muslim or Buddhist who could argue with a man like that? He was clever and dangerous” (47). Mitra calls him ‘old man’ affectionately, sometimes teasingly. The novelist portrays the Mahatma as a senile old man, devoid of energy and promptitude.

He looked really aged now; his face wrinkled in sorrow, his neck thin and corded with veins, his chest almost bony and tapering down to the slimmest waist Mitra had ever seen. He looked like an ascetic, emaciated without food or water, plunged into a fierce meditation on the secrets of life and death, and in a relentless battle with mara. (47)

He stays over ten days in Kurukshetra but the condition of the villages does not improve as the Mahatma expected. He is aware that the People’s Party leaders, who are in power now, no longer believe in the need for collective non-violence. “... What has happened to these people? ... Is it that I have reared and nurtured the wrong people to become leaders? ... Tell me Professor ... Am I defeated? ... He could understand the Mahatma’s anguish, the betrayal he felt” (48). Here a complete failure of the Mahatma’s ideology of non-violence is vividly shown by the writer.

Rao unveils the harsh reality of Gandhi’s relations with others when, at last, they desert him. He feels forlorn and the signs of growing disaffection amongst his associates and relatives can be perceived easily. The author depicts the Mahatma looking disconsolate. He depicts the Mahatma as dejected, rejected and abandoned not only politically but socially also. The Mahatma knows that his son was arrested and released on bail but he has not replied.

“His heart ached at the thought of his son. What did I do wrong, he asked himself but couldn’t answer the question. Why are they all doing this to me? They don’t respect me, they have no regard for me or my ideas. They are all just waiting for me to die so that they can bury me and forget me forever. He had never felt so lonely before. Never indulged in such a self-pity. He felt wretched” (49).

After sometime, when the Mahatma settles down to do some work “he was a different man-impatient, overbearing and even furious”(49).In the letters and reports spread before him there is a letter from Maya (Manu) who asks the Mahatma to permit her to come and stay with him. He writes to her. “I expect a lot from you. ... My inner voice tells me I must undertake an experiment. Perhaps it will be my last and the most arduous. And I want you to be a part of it” (50). Maya is the fictionalisation Manu. “Having heard from Manu and her father that she would be joining him, Gandhi resolved on a brahmacharya test in Noakhali, with Manu as his partner.” (Gandhi, R 572). His associates consider the plan dangerous or crazy and they believe that their reputations are at risk but Gandhi discusses the idea “more to inform than to consult” (Gandhi, R 572).

Like his other experiments, his principle of ahimsa also remains unintelligible to the people. When some young boys come to the Mahatma to inform him how some women and girls have been taken away forcibly, The Mahatma prompts the youths to protect them by all means, “... I would have appreciated you and been glad if you had died protecting your mothers and sisters. Aren’t you ashamed of yourselves to come here like cowards? ...If the government cannot protect the minority and if you have decided to protect yourselves and your mothers with arms, by all means do it” (51). The Mahatma clarified, “A non-violent soldier doesn’t fight with arms, he fights with his undying spirit. If he cannot, only then, is violence better than cowardice”

(52). This principle of non-violence is completely incomprehensible to those young men. “Mitra was shocked and worried, imagining the effect of the Mahatma’s words on the belligerent young men. They were no believers in the Mahatma’s non-violent fight; they would completely misread his conditional justification of violence as encouragement to use arms” (52).

When the Mahatma goes to meet the Chief Minister in Chandipur, a middle aged woman whose husband has been killed in riots meets him and begins to cry hysterically : “They say you are a god-man, is it true?... ‘You’ll bring back my husband. Yes, you will, won’t you? Won’t you?” (61). The grief-stricken Mahatma watches the woeful face of the middle aged woman and finds himself completely helpless. “My God ! the Mahatma prayed in despair, I no more wish to live, send me death, take me with you. We have lost our humanity, we have sinned beyond redemption. Let there be an earthquake, he wished, let the land be deluged with floods, we no more deserve to exist” (61-62). After the prayer meeting at Chandipur, the Mahatma is ready for Samsarpur but Vaidi and Gopika urge to come with him. Vaidi pleads “you need someone just to look after you and I am doctor” (66). He turns down their request, “I don’t want any of you, “The Mahatma shouted. ‘Because it is my wish. I don’t owe you any explanation for that” (67). Rao exposes Gandhi’s domineering nature who is not ready to listen even to his associates. Vaidi is the fictionalization of Sushila Nayyar who was a medical doctor and “functioned variously as Gandhiji’s personal attendant, masseur and medical advisor. She became privy even to his innermost thoughts” (Kumar 273).

The Mahatma and his associates reach the cottage a little before midnight and Shanker begins to explain how many the women associates are possessive of the Mahatma. “Thank God, Gopika (Madeline Slade) is not here, ‘Shanker sighed. You should have seen the way she used to behave with Bapu in the Ashram. I don’t mean to criticize her character; no, but only the way she

sometimes treated Bapu as if he were her private property” (69). Shanker is a simple man with rigid notions of life. “Everything about the Mahatma was perfect in his view except his complex relationships with women” (69).

Rao depicts Gandhi as a domineering, stubborn and befuddled fellow. “I do not like the shape that things are taking. No one listens to me, not even Lal, Bhai, let alone Azam. I feel like Trishanku. What should I do? I can’t even mould my own son and they have all become like him: stubborn, narrow in outlook, self destructive. What can I do?” (70).

Mitra finds the Mahatma “a difficult man” (72). At some occasions he has seen the Mahatma “being witty, humorous, and even ludicrous at times. The old man particularly revealed in twisting the ears or pulling the hair of his women companions in mock anger” (73). When a French journalist asks the Mahatma, “Are you happy?” He is surprised at the answer, “Sir, it is unbroken torture, ‘the Mahatma said smiling sadly. It is hell; only from a distance my life might appear beautiful and profound” (75).

On his return from the walk, the Mahatma is pleased to see Maya. “The Mahatma took her hands in his and pressed them fondly as a lover would. Maya smiled a smile that perhaps only fathers are blessed to receive from their daughters. The next moment the Mahatma was twisting and pulling at her ear. She squealed and the old man giggled youthfully” (83).

Rao depicts Gandhi as a complete failure at social level also. Maya informs about Shiv that “he’s disappeared. Nobody knows where he is” (84). Shiv is the fictionalization of Hari Lal, eldest son of Gandhi who “has been for years addicted to the drink evil and has been in the habit of visiting houses of ill fame” (Gandhi, R 398). Gandhi considered him a total “wreck” (Gandhi,R 398). Mitra in his diary writes: “...The old man is in constant pain both in body and mind. Something is happening to him. Sometimes I feel he is trying to do the impossible and is

expecting too much from himself. Naturally then he is also expecting too much from people and from life itself" (90). Rao tries to unmask the aspirational attitude of Gandhi.

Mukund Rao's indictment of Gandhi acquires a high pitch in the second half of the novel. Here he mentions only in passing the successful results of Gandhi's prayer meetings with the local populace, the increasing attendance at these gatherings and the resultant amity created by them. "In four days the Mahatma and his entourage covered three villages ... People turned up in great numbers to listen to the Mahatma, some came out of curiosity"(97). The Mahatma addresses the people and reprimands for their unendurable habits:

...admonished the people for their unclean habits....The old man reprimanded the refugees for their idleness. ... He criticized the officers of the Public Welfare Department for their lapses and exhorted them to give priority to health programme. ... Besides these homilies, the old man chided the Muslim men for their chauvinism that denied even basic human dignity to their women. Of course the women had been willing partners in this foul by oppressing their own sisters. (98)

After the prayer meeting a group of the *Hindu Sabha* members confronts the Mahatma with a barrage of questions.

The Mahatma said he was a good Hindu rather a sanatani and so he was also a Muslim, a Christian, a Buddhist and a Zoroastrian. Some Sangha members lost their tempers and called him names. They said he was crafty, an agent of the Muslims, anti-Hindu and out to destroy Hinduism. ... A member challenged him to define Hinduism. It was as though the Mahatma was waiting for the Question to be asked. His answer sounded like a chant. (98-99)

The author creates a very ironical situation where neither Hindus nor Muslims accept Gandhi while he claims an absolute belonging with both, thus he remains enigmatic to all. When the Mahatma stayed with Maya in the hut of this village, Ishrat, the Superintendent of Police, came to the village to warn against the risk of life of the Mahatma. “With great hesitation, Ishrat asked Mitra one last question before he left, “Is it true that the Mahatma and Maya sleep in the same bed?” (116).

Mukunda Rao exposes the domineering disposition of the Mahatma through the pumice stone episode. The Mahatma and his associates left Fatehpur in the evening and reached Samsarpur around midnight. The Mahatma scanned the toilet articles that he kept everywhere with him. The pumice stone was missing with which he used to rub his feet. It was Maya’s job to ensure the safe transport of these articles. The Mahatma ordered Maya to get it back from the village, Fatehpur. Mitra suggested that some volunteer could fetch it. “But the Mahatma was adamant. He kept staring Maya, controlling his anger. Mitra and Shanker felt helpless” (117). To their surprise, Maya walked out quietly to fetch the stone. “She felt a spurt of energy course through her; yes, it was a challenge, almost like a spiritual journey for the Holy Grail. She walked faster and with long lusty strides, like the old man” (118). She had to cross a maze of dark tunnels in the forest. Maya found the pumice stone behind a bush around the hut, picked it up and was quite elated by her success, but it was really a terrifying experience. Here Rao raises a very pertinent question; “Did Bapu, who loved calling himself her mother, really understand a woman’s mind, her fears?” (119).

Maya is a fictionalized Manu and historically the benign nature of Noakhali was deceptive. “The terror that stalked the land could be gauged from the predicament in which Manu found herself soon after their arrival in Narayanpur on 15 January 1947. Years ago

Mirabehn had given Gandhiji a piece of stone for rubbing his legs during his daily bath. The stone functioned in place of soap which was never used by him. The stone also brought to him memories of old times” (Kumar 324). When it was found missing “Bapu was greatly upset and ordered Manu to walk back to Bhatialpur to fetch the stone. Her request for a male escort was blankly refused” (Kumar 325). She had to cross the winding paths in the forest and when she arrived at Bhatialpur, it had been thrown away by their hostess. “Ultimately it was retrieved. Manu returned safe and sound by noon....For Gandhiji it was a test in which she had succeeded. Unfortunately he was under a wrong impression. Actually Manu had totally failed because she was stalked by fear every minute of her walking expedition” (Kumar 325). In the background of this episode the author portrays Gandhi as an autocrat.

To gain further insight into Mukunda Rao’s personal opinion of Gandhi, his depiction of the issue of Gandhi’s vow of *brahmacharya*, conceptualized in the novel as the *yajna*, comes in handy. The *yajna* and its damaging effects have been described in graphic details, often in cockney idioms. This is where the author employs his creative liberty to exploit the historical facts for the purpose of fictionalization. Maya comes to stay with the Mahatma and she is chosen as his closest companion – fit for the experiment, *yajna*.

He said his inner voice was prompting him to undertake this experiment. This would be his last experiment, he said. On several occasions he and Maya had lain beside each other in the same bed. Now that has to be converted into a spiritual experiment. Through this experiment he would be able to know himself and burn up any vestiges of sexuality if they existed. It would be called the *yajna*—the final oblation. It would liberate them and empower them both. (91-92)

Even Mitra does not expect that the Mahatma will speak so openly about himself in the prayer meeting. The presence of Maya makes some difference now; still at times he is absent minded and irritable and he feels as if surrounded by darkness – “Somewhere deep down the passions still lie alive, unexhausted and untranscended. His new experiment – he called it *yajna* – should flush them out and it should be possible for him to change the hearts of Azam, Lal and Bhai and prevent the coming disaster and to finally come face to face with his creator” (97).

In the evening, during the routine walk “The old man heaved a sigh. Then as if in a dream or some hypnotic state, he said, “The world is maya!”(122). Mitra asks the Mahatma if he really believes in maya which in itself contradicts activism. “Mitra was getting restless, even edgy. The Theory of maya kills the idea of intervention, the very notion of activism. It is not an engagement with life. ... It seemed ridiculous that such a great activist as the Mahatma should be inspired by what he, Mitra, had thought time and again, was a life negating idea”(123). About his real intentions in pursuing the *brahmacharya* experiment, there are no clear answers to be discovered in his entire writings and pronouncements.

No, I wouldn't rely even the authority of the Vedas; I will seek simple empirical evidence in the day-to-day affairs of my life. ... Simple empirical evidence, Mitra reflected. Is that what he is now trying to find out through his new experiment, his *yajna*? It was puzzling. What could an old man find out by sharing his bed with a young girl? (124)

The Mahatma tries to persuade Maya to be prepared for the *yajna*. Maya does not say a word about her participation in the *yajna*.

I must now go beyond. Go beyond the man and woman in me, the Mahatma said as if it was the final and supreme resolution, as if it was inevitable and even pre-

determined. He extended his hands and took her palms in his. He said tenderly and with some urgency: This would be the final stage of our yajna and the most arduous. From now on we must become like children. ... We should sleep naked hereafter...Are you prepared for the great sacrifice? Are you? You must tell me everything you feel, I'll know if you hide anything from me, you cannot fool me ... (126).

Maya is the fictionalization of Manu, "...it seems quite clear that Manu Gandhi was only a reluctant partner in Gandhiji's *brahmacharya* experiment.... She had too much respect for Bapu to refuse him"(Kumar 318). She might have been a victim of her name and fame under the shadow of a great man. "Bapu employed all kinds of strategy to win her over and break down her resistance.... Watching Bapu break the resistance gradually should be a lesson in itself. It leaves no option for the other person except to surrender hands and feet bound, completely brainwashed and in the end entreating for total surrender" (Kumar 319).

Rao depicts Gandhi as a feeble old man, tired and full of sorrow. It is the third death anniversary of the Mahatma's wife. "His face was screwed up in sorrow. He felt a tiredness come over him; suddenly his right palm clawed the air as though to clutch something and if Mitra had not come in time, he would have collapsed on the floor"(129). Here the narrator exposes Gandhi's overbearing attitude because of which even his family suffered. The Mahatma becomes very nostalgic, "knew she was dying—would I be sad, feel lonely? ... She held me responsible for Shukla's death, she held me responsible for Shiv's downfall ... She was sad. She wouldn't come to terms with her life, with her death; she suffered until the end" (130).

Shanker is deputed as a witness to the experiment— *yajna* but he becomes an unwilling witness to the experiment. "The past few days he had been a reluctant witness to the old man and

the girl sleeping in the same bed and tonight, despite himself, he had watched Maya undressing and getting under the covers. The whole operation had taken hardly a minute or two. He could have looked away or tried to forget, but he had been unable to do either” (127). Shanker considers this experiment as a madness. “The Mahatma has lost his head, he told himself, I can’t be a witness to this madness. I must move into the other hut, he thought or I must get out” (128).

The Mahatma decides to walk barefooted and to put himself on a low diet as a part of the *yajna*. He reprimands Maya severely when she pleads that the Mahatma should use his sandals:

Did she not know why he had put himself on a low diet and had decided never to use the sandals again? It was part of the *yajna*. Didn’t she know that when people visited holy places like temples or *masjids* they took off their sandals? They might not going to temples, but they were going to daridranarayana, ... To tread such grounds, to meet such people who had suffered was like coming face to face with God; it was a pilgrimage. (134)

When they were near the village, “saw the mud path littered with human excreta” (134) and they cleared it with makeshift brooms. They reached the village which was the domain of one Hasan who said, “And that the Mahatma was a cunning Hindu and Muslims could never trust him; who could trust a *kafir*? ... On entering the village they observed that most doors were shut... And there were banners across the streets, screaming: ‘Mahatma Murdabad – Death to Mahatma’ (134-135). The members suggested cancelling the meeting but the Mahatma rejected their suggestion. “A tall man with a dyed beard approached the Mahatma with folded hands. He stepped forward and spat on the Mahatma’s face” (135). The unexpected meeting started and Hasan stood up and spoke in a loud voice: “And our Mahatma himself has said that we should build a new society, a *Ramarajya*! We are confused. We are pained” (136). The Mahatma stood

up to address the people in the village. “People wondered if what they had heard about this pitiable figure could be true at all” (137). When the Mahatma was addressing the people Mitra had to translate it in Bengali. “He said there was so much doubt and distrust about him and Maya. She was like his daughter, rather a grand-daughter. Of course, they shared the same bed...Mitra kept quiet deliberately” (138). Through the depiction of the visit to a village where, in spite of the protests, the Mahatma organizes a meeting and speaks of his *yajna* but remains incomprehensible to the people. Here Gandhi is shown deplorably adamant in his refusal to change his mind.

The Mahatma continues unperturbed to justify his *yajna*. “That precisely was his aspiration: to become a God-eunuch. It was in that spirit he had approached this *yajna*, which was an integral part of his search for truth” (138). Mitra considers the gravity of the situation and says, “Things will get out of control” (140). The news of his new experiment leaks out complicating the matter further. Resistance continues to build among his colleagues against his outlandish practices. Due to the hostile responses of Shanker the issue of *brahamacharya* experiments become the talk of the town which must reach the Mahatma’s ears and he is required to defend himself. “Even among the Mahatma’s followers and friends the issue was gaining the features of controversy” (140).

Mitra expresses his displeasure at the breaking of the rules prescribed in the scriptures and he is annoyed at the Mahatma’s observance of the *yajna*. He elaborates the concept of *brahmacharya* or celibacy by making a note entry of the issue in his diary:

...Only this evening when I deliberately censored those parts of his speech referring to Maya, did I realize that deep down I had some reservations about the experiment. ...Generally as I understand, *brahamacharya* means control of body,

mind and speech; it is a means to attain the state of brahman, Truth as Bapu would call it. The traditional religious texts prescribe several rules for *brahmacharya*; a brahmachari must not live among women, animals and eunuchs. He must not talk to a woman alone, nay, he must not even look at any part of a woman's body. He should never use things used by a woman or women. He must avoid aphrodisiacs such as milk, ghee, onions and so on. A *brahmachari* must always have cold baths and never indulge in the pleasures of hot baths and oil massages....The old man not only claims to radically differ from traditional view on this matter; he has broken apparently every rule prescribed in the scriptures. It appears he has turned the practice almost entirely upside down. Yet, with all this is he free of the essential subjectivism of tradition? And for all his openness, isn't he also obsessed with sex? (143)

Most of the Mahatma's associates disagree with the *yajna* and the Mahatma himself seeks the opinion of his close associates before taking the next step of action. The co-workers come in response to his summons. On reaching Samsarpur and noting the Mahatma's pallor and weakness, Vaidi decides that she will never leave the Mahatma's side. "It seemed to her that after ages she was giving the Mahatma his oil massage. She performed the task with a professional touch, engaging him in a stimulating conversation. The forty-five minutes of sunbath followed by a hot-water bath and the old man sat down to his meal of goat's milk and boiled vegetables served by a smiling Gopika"(145). Then the Mahatma meets each one separately to discuss the matter in detail and to get "their personal frank opinion on the already controversial *yajna*" (149). Shanker gathers courage to challenge the reasoning of the Mahatma as "his brand of reasoning was difficult to challenge" (147) and speaks his mind that "the

experiment was unethical, unspiritual and dangerous” (147). The Mahatma rejects Shanker’s views and he is at liberty to leave any time. Shanker leaves the same evening, after paying his respects to the Mahatma and bidding Mitra goodbye, to Ramana Ashram, Thiruvannamalai.

Just then the Mahatma’s old friend Acharya arrives as an emissary and he said:

...that the Mahatma’s ahimsa, his work, had not failed. One should not miss the woods for the trees....But the world, ‘Acharya said with cold logic, ‘does not think of brahmacharya as you do...’I understand perfectly, ‘the Mahatma said severely. He could not, he should not give up what he held to be right, even if public opinion was wholly against him. So there were only two options open to his friends; have faith in him, in his bona fides or part company with him. (149)

Now it is the turn of Maya to express her views on the *brahmacharya* experiment frankly. The Mahatma asks her to “come straight to the point, speak simply, as a woman” (151), and forbids her to speak for others because that irritates him.

...The truth is that I feel you are my mother and I your child. But Bapu, this experiment, the yajna, brings in a discrimination which I hadn’t felt before, and I don’t want to feel now. Why do you see me as a woman? You want me to be a woman in the experiment and that confuses me. This very consciousness of the difference between man and woman is opposed to your idea of *brahmacharya*. So I wonder” (151).

Here, Maya/Manu, the closest associate of the Mahatma, exposes his discriminatory attitude towards man and woman. The Mahatma’s such a stance on celibacy appears in conflicting with his own idea of *brahmacharya*.

The Mahatma asks Mitra to give his personal opinion and “Mitra placed before the Mahatma two points for his consideration. One ..., he should stop his experiment or at least postpone it. Two...he should review his previous decision and perhaps visit Kapila” (155). The Mahatma wants to stop the argument and declares to leave for Kapila. “You must permit me to leave, ‘Mitra said, making a sudden decision and shocking the Mahatma’ I think I’ll go back to my work...I may not be of great help in any special way”(156).

Even the close associates do not agree with the Mahatma and his experiment, Yajna. Gandhi sends Shankar out and Mitra goes out intentionally leaving the Mahatma alone with his principles or ideology. The author picturises the dismal atmosphere in which he visualizes the agony of the Mahatma

“The afternoon was gloomy. The sky suddenly looked besieged by dark clouds. The trees looked sombre, there was no life in the air, everyone looked heartsick. There was something funereal about the whole scene. The Mahatma was in agony” (156).

Mukunda Rao tries to unmask the adamant and the overbearing disposition of Gandhi. All his associates in Noakhali know about Manu’s sharing the bed with him. He fails to recognise the elementary truth that his experiments are against the ethos of the people around him. Factually, “Parasuram, whose efficient, silent service as a stenographer of Gandhi, had repeatedly praised, felt he could not continue his work unless Gandhi ceased the practice” (Gandhi R574). He had praised the full participation by Manu. He tried to justify his act in one of the meetings. “For all his keenness to ‘understand the ‘yajna’, Bose found himself unwilling to translate Gandhi’s word into Bengali when, for the first time, he spoke publicly of it. This was at a prayer-meeting on 1 February 1947 in the village of Annishapara” (Gandhi, R 574). Doubts

begin to assail the associates about his concept of *brahmacharya*. They find Gandhi's justification completely unconvincing.

We have noted that most of Gandhi's associates disagreed with the yajna. Shaken by it Mashruwala and Parikh excused themselves from their Harijan duties. Swami Anand had a similar reaction. Devdas wrote to his father that he was on the wrong track-Vallabhbai commented that Gandhi had left the path of Dharma. Vinobha, however, refrained from offering an opinion. Prasad suggested that Kanu, Gandhi's grand-nephew, replace Manu as an aide. We do not know what Nehru or C.R. thought; it is unlikely that they approved. (Gandhi, R576)

The novelist having brought the story to such melodramatic voyeurism now is faced with the problem of bringing it to a credible ending. How is he to close the novel? He shows the old man sitting all alone, having commanded his followers to leave him in peace, amidst the ruins of a desecrated temple situated in the jungle away from the village where he has been staying.

I am finished, he thought, he had wanted to live longer, to do what perhaps no man had done before....It all seemed plain arrogance now; everything was over, now there was only cause for dying. He thought of his parents, the thought of his mother like a balm on his bruised heart while the thought of his father, a smarting pain, reminding him of his cursed maleness.... He had travelled long and hard, moving from one truth to another...He had mastered his senses and desires—the desire of possession, the fear of death, anger. He had subdued his palate, conquered his tongue, the sense of smell, but he had failed to conquer his sexuality... The mind burst into a violent stream of thoughts. Images marched in and out. (167)

The Mahatma asks himself over and over again only to find his mind going blank with despair. It appears to him that he has come to the end of his journey. “Bhagavan, where are you? How long? Why don’t you end this agony? The anguished voiced came from the depth of his being” (167).

Factually, “Manu has testified to the fact that the anguish over Gandhiji was increasing day-by-day. His cut of misery was brimful on 29 January a day before D.Day. ... His deteriorating physical state matched his spiritual state of mind....Both Bapu and Manu were becoming sentimental and also isolating themselves from the rest of the world in this process. He refused to resume dialogue with his closest associates and well-wishers. Herein lay the basic flaw in his thinking” (Kumar 356).

While Gandhi’s thoughts are in such a tangle, Mukunda Rao, through a parallel scene that can be interpreted as a symbolic externalization of Gandhi’s sexual yearnings; shows a pair of lovers, not far from this temple, locked in an erotic display of passion. Then the focus again returns to the Mahatma who is now shown face to face with a clean-shaven young man who seems to appear on the scene from thin air, brings his palms together in a *namaskar*, spontaneously – reminding the reader of Nathuram Godse. No wonder immediately afterwards, in a deliberate historical and geographical anachronism, gun shots are heard by the Mahatma’s followers and a few villagers, who are waiting for him on the outskirts of the village. The shots make them break into a melee, running frantically in search of the Mahatma. “They all ran, ran as they had never run before, in search of the Mahatma” (169).

Thus the novel comes to an end on a note of utter confusion. The novelist has condemned Gandhi to death eleven months before the event took place in actuality. What else could he do, having created such a tantalising tale? Obviously he couldn’t have brought the novel to a

conclusion, which would have been in contiguity to history. As averred by Beniwal and Mohan in their article, ‘Mukunda Rao’s *The Mahatma : A Marginalizing Mélange*:

...this novel: [E] merges as a reductionist aesthetic muddle. The political ‘pilgrimage’ of Gandhi to Noakhali reduces itself into a form of sexual sacrilege. The universal significance of Gandhian ideology is fragmented into a jumbled heap of personal eccentricities, the contemporary socio-political milieu a pretext for maligning and marginalizing Gandhi. (50)

Sudhir Kakar’s *Mira and the Mahatma* (2004) ... “is a true story of nine years- from 1925 to 1930, and from 1940 to 1942- in the lives of Madeline Slade(aka Mirabehn) and Gandhi, where their lives were entwined more intimately than any other period of their long association. ...Gandhi’s letters to Mira, her letters to Prithvi Singh and his to her were all written by them and can be found in the archives of the Nehru Memorial Museum Library in New Delhi.

(Author’s Note)

These auto-biographical accounts, letters of Mira and the Mahatma and diaries are the basis of the story. The most striking factor of Gandhi’s politics was that it was, above all, about passion. But in his ideal conception of personal life, and in how he wanted others to organize their lives, passion had no place. For a man who abominated bodily temptations, women composed his entire world at one level. From his days in South Africa to the end of his life, however, they walked in and out of his life but he maintained the closest relations with them.

In his middle and later years, a number of young women, attracted by Gandhi’s public image as the Mahatma, his cause, or his fame, sought his proximity and eventually shared his ashram life. These women, who in many cases had left their

well-appointed middle-and upper-class homes to take upon themselves the rigours of an ascetic life style, were all else but conventional. Some of them were not only, high strung, but can fairly be described as suffering from emotional crises of considerable magnitude. ... From women who were a little more than emotional wrecks, he fashioned energetic leaders directing major institutions engaged in the task of social innovation and actively participating in the country's Independence movement. (Kakar 118-119)

Fascinated by Gandhi and his ideology, all his allies were not disciples or followers. Some of them were political associates; others were followers in that they always adhered to his line. Some allies were his financial supporters as well as followers. Other non-political colleagues who enjoyed proximity with him were thinkers, journalists and social activists. Their work and links brought Gandhi strength, and he also enjoyed the stimulating and often frank companionship that many in this group, and his political associates offered.

There were more than a dozen women who came to be closely associated with him at one time or the other. Some of them were foreigners – Millie Graham Polak, Sonja Schlesin, Esther Faering, Nilla Cram Cook, Margarete Spiegel and Mirabehn, Prabhavati, Kanchan Shah, Sushila Nayyar, and Manu Gandhi formed a part of his entourage at various points in time. He called JEKI “the Only Adopted Daughter.” Gandhiji was too fond of Sarala Devi Choudharani, Rabindranath Tagore's Niece, and often displayed her as his mannequin for popularizing Khadi. He called her his “spiritual” wife. (Kumar Cover page)

Millie Graham Polak was the first and Sonja Schlesin was the other woman from his South African days. Two women entered his life after his return to India – Saraladevi

Chowdharani and Madeline Slade from England. There were three other Western women who came in close contact with him but quickly left – the American Nilla Cram Cook, the German Jewish Margaret Spiegel and The Danish missionary Esther Faering. He had high regards for Premabehn Katak, Prabhavati and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. There were several other women who had a long association with Gandhi–Bibi Amuttussalaam of Patiala, his ashram companion, Lilavati Asar, Kanchan Shah, the Mahatma’s role model for practicing *brahmacharya*. Among the younger of the Mahatma’s women associates were Sushila Nayyar, his personal physician; Manu Gandhi, the granddaughter of Gandhi’s brother and above all was the towering figure of Kasturba Gandhi, the Mother courage.

There was a definite attraction in Gandhiji that brought women folk to him. It is quite possible that they were looking for glory and he provided the opportunity. Some like Mira behn were inspired by his ideals and wanted to devote their entire life to his cause. But once they came close, Gandhiji and not his cause became their obsession. They hardly knew this was the next step to losing him, as the Mahatma could not be chained. (Kumar cover page).

Sudhir Kakar’s novel *Mira and the Mahatma* is the story of Madeline Slade who was brooding, withdrawn, philosophical, nature loving, passionate about Beethoven, disciplined and determined yet searching for that elusive figure in whom she could repose complete trust and love. “Madeline, now appropriately renamed by Gandhi after the sixteenth century Indian woman-saint whose infatuation with Krishna was not much greater than Madeline’s own yearning for the Mahatma, was however, a battle field of forces stronger than those amenable to reason” (Kakar 125).

Another character is Naveen who is actually Kakar's alter ego, a Hindi scholar and Mira's general guide, tutor and the narrator of the story. By devising the technique of psycho-analysis, Kakar delves deep into the complex relationship of Gandhi and Mirabehn, thereby unveiling the man behind the Mahatma. The novel purports to delineate the most crucial stage in Gandhi's life, his own personal struggle with *brahmacharya* or celibacy, his growing attraction towards Mira, her all consuming desire to serve Gandhi and desperate need to be close to him at all times. Kakar peels away the deadening layers of godliness that have reduced Gandhi to dust and thus he seeks to recast his image, even if it be for subterranean purposes.

Madeline Slade, daughter of Sir Edmund Slade, Commander in Chief of the East Indian station of the Royal Navy, began her journey by P & O liner from Marseilles on 25 October and she reached Bombay on 6 November 1925. "Unlike most other passengers, fellow Britishers going out to the colonies for the first time or returning from home leave to once again take upon their shoulders the white man's burden, Madeline was not sailing into a parting but into pristine hope" (4). The hope to settle down at Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram for life to be near him, serve him and the cause of humanity at his bidding. "Impatient to reach the ashram, she politely declined the invitation from her host, a rich Parsi Lawyer with nationalist leanings deputed by Gandhiji to meet the ship, to spend a couple of days in Bombay,... Instead, Madeline insisted on taking the train to Ahmedabad the same evening" (19). She boarded the Gujarat Mail to Ahmedabad and reached the Ahmedabad station the next morning. "Gandhiji's personal secretary Mahadev Desai, his trusted political Lieutenant Sardar Patel whose stature in the Congress Party was rivalled only by Jawahar Lal Nehru, and Swami Anand, the Manager of the Weekly 'Young India', had come to receive her"(28).

Madeline came to be acquainted with Gandhiji through his biography written by Romain Rolland in which he had “described him as the second Christ” (Kumar160). “Romain Rolland’s Mahatma Gandhi made Gandhiji the darling of the literati, drawing-room intellectuals and the saloon women all over Europe. Gandhiji became the fashion of the day” (Kumar159). She was a great devotee of Beethoven and a great admirer of Romain Rolland who was an authority on Beethoven. Three great geniuses of contemporary times, Beethoven, Romain Rolland and Gandhiji were her inspiration. “...She had read Romain Rolland’s book about him and had been so moved that she had wanted to leave immediately for India” (12).

When the Working Committee agreed to the suspension of all aggressive activities, they needed an alternative programme of action. Gandhi assembled a team for pushing the constructive programme. “...The year Madeline arrived in India had been unusually uneventful. Completely unaware of the social and political context for events in far-off India, her interest in what was happening in the country channeled only because the British believed that Gandhiji... was a spent political force”(9). Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India “had commented with evident satisfaction, “Poor Gandhi has indeed perished! As the pathetic a figure with his spinning wheel as the last minstrel with his harp, and not able to secure so charming an audience” (9). The author depicts Gandhi as an ineffectual and pitiable personality.

Madeline’s family was flabbergasted and tried their best to persuade her to change her mind and here was the daughter setting out to join someone who was considered the Empire’s most relentless enemy. “Once they saw I was serious”, ‘she writes, ‘that I was fulfilling a deep need of my spirit, both Mother and Father respected my decision....Indeed, the exile was returning home, although her destination was the man, Gandhiji rather than the country”(8). On reaching the ashram Madeline refused to take rest and straightway entered Bapu’s hut. “The

moment I saw his slight figure sitting on his cushion on the floor, I felt a strong sensation of light coming from his direction. It was a light I felt rather than saw...till it exploded behind my eyes” (30). Thus Madeline Slade was admitted into the ashram. Living in a one room hut close to Gandhi’s cottage, Madeline (aka Mirabehn) became a helper, ally and disciple. Kakar prejudices Madeline’s intention of coming to India. She considers Gandhi, not the country, her real destination.

The Sabarmati ashram was located on the bank of the Sabarmati. The buildings were simple structures of mud, brick and wood, their tiled roofs thickly coated with tar to seal them off from rain. Gandhi’s cottage had three rooms, a small kitchen and a store room. “It was from this small space, an area barely measuring two hundred square feet, that he supervised the ashram’s affairs even as he directed India’s freedom struggle” (32). There was a complete time table for the ashram’s daily activities which were regulated by a bell that seemed to wield an authority second only to his own. Gandhiji’s own punctuality was legendary. He hated to waste time. Even in the lavatory, sitting on the commode, he read Gita, learning it by heart. “‘As god is present everywhere, his work can also be done everywhere’, he said” (32). The author comments ironically on Gandhi’s punctuality.

Kakar exposes Gandhi’s ashrams and the life and purpose of the ashramites. The author being a psychoanalyst, analyses the cause and aim of establishing the ashrams by Gandhi. He purports that these ashrams have been set up to create an imaginary past and for the vitality of the freshness of nature but actually these ashrams have been established on illusory sense of idealistic community which never exist in reality, that is why, they do not have any soothing effect. The inmates in the ashrams live not by choice but by other different reasons. The author does not find these ashrams the ideal places for the spiritual upliftment. However, Madeline

came here with the preparation for the life in the ashram but her “experience of the ashram was quite different from what she had expected” (40). Most of the families were living there not by choice but their husbands or fathers had decided to live with Gandhi and follow his ideals. “The Sabarmati Ashram ... like all such experiments, was ultimately based on an illusion. It was an attempt to create an imaginary past for those who found the present unbearable ... that Gandhi himself was gripped by an intense nostalgia ...”(41). Kakar has commented satirically on Gandhi’s ashrams. These ashrams might have been established for:

...a pristine, unspoiled nature that is vital, soothing, for a childhood that was never really as idyllic as it remained in memory, for a lost freshness of vision wherein every experience is not only startling new but also comes garbed in purity and innocence ... His illusion is the memory of a village community that has never existed, the imaginary community of strong emotional bonds and shared values, limited by a common purpose. This nostalgia, the mourning for an imagined loss, animates Gandhi’s ashram ... But illusions are always dangerous, irrespective of their worth for the creation of culture or utopian communities. Moral values need nostalgia but also realism. (41)

The ashram was less a monastic community more a squabbling village where they were attracted to Gandhi for very different reasons. For most of them, it was not the vision that had drawn them to the ashram but the visionary. “If Madeline possessed any illusion of entering an ideal community, she was soon disabused. The ashram was not free of the inevitable discord, petty jealousy and envy” (42). A physical life close to rhythms of nature and a moral life dictated by the strictest standards of truth, honesty and rectitude were the vision of the ashram. “Madeline had embraced the vision whole heartedly two years ago when she read about Gandhiji in Romain

Rolland's book. Now it was only a question of translating it into her daily life ..." (43-44). After a week she asked his permission to take a vow of celibacy and to cut off her hair. The next evening, after the prayers she went to Gandhi's hut and "he went to her and took both of her hands in his own. Looking deep into her eyes, holding them with his piercing glance, he nodded. 'I am pleased for you ... and for myself', he said ... And now I have a present for you – a new name, Mira. She was a princess blessed with great devotion and perseverance" (45). In a very short term she had acquainted herself with all the activities of the ashram. After her duties were over she stayed by herself in her hut on the river bank, spinning or reading. "Within a few weeks of her arrival, the other residents of the ashram began to regard Madeline, now Mirabehn, as someone who was aloof, but no longer mysterious" (47).

A sensational news report about the circumstances under which Madeline had joined Gandhi had been published by a London newspaper and it had been reported in many Indian newspapers also. However, Mira made a statement which had the simultaneous effect to nullify the strong rumour that had been spreading in the ashram after Gandhi had renamed her Mira. "Bapu had renamed the English woman Mira, the ashram gossip went, because her story paralleled that of the legendary Rajput princess, with Bapu replacing Krishna in the modern Mira's heart" (49).

Kakar tries to uncover the inner reality of the *ashramas* where very few inmates could be considered as strong men and women marching shoulder to shoulder towards the creation of the commune Gandhi envisaged as essential for the awakening of a person's spiritual potential. "Some of them were prone to eccentricities" (50). Harenbhai, who ate exactly fifty-five *chapatties* at meals no more or less. Bhansali who had been Bapu's close associate for so many

years, and known for his odd diet. Gandhiji had great respect for the strength of Bhansali's ascetic convictions and the perseverance with which he put them into practice.

On a journey from the ashram to the Himalayas, Bhansali had decided to take a twelve years' vow of silence ... Determined to prevent such mistakes from occurring again, he found a goldsmith who was willing to stitch his lips together with a copper wire so that he could keep the vow of silence even when he was sleeping. Since at that time he was on diet of wheat flour and bitter *neem* leaves mixed with water to make a thick gruel, the goldsmith also made him a copper tube through which he could suck in the gruel from one side of his mouth. (51)

Kakar being a psychoanalyst analyses the human psychology where the follower just imitates without understanding the philosophy or the idea behind the imitated action. The characters like Harenbhai and Bhansali are just types who follow the Mahatma blindly without any perception or comprehension of the Gandhian philosophy. The author depicts such characters to ridicule Gandhi and his philosophy. "The next day Bapu ordered that the wire be removed from Bhansali's lips. It took him a few days more to persuade Bhansali to break his vow of silence. At first, Bhansali insisted on communicating with Bapu using scribbled notes" (52). The ashram's activities were indispensable to Gandhi's running the ashram, or leading the freedom struggle but ashram's activities for Bhansali were necessary because he was utterly devoted to Bapu. When Gandhiji suggested Bhansali to engage himself in ashram's activities his "stubborn response to each of Bapu's suggestions was the same question – 'Why?' ... Finally, Bapu hit on the solution to his obduracy. 'For me', he said" (52).

Kakar's thinking has both been influenced by psychoanalyses and been formative of a psychoanalytic culture in India. Answering a question in one of the interviews he said:

I'll start with the iconoclasm: what attracted me to psychoanalysis was its bold curiosity, questioning zeal, and irreverence. I believe there is no area of human life – including psychoanalysis and its founding fathers-that cannot be questioned. As for what makes it the most coherent and satisfying model of the mind, let me put it this way: it recognizes the amazing complexity of our mental life; it acknowledges the importance of early childhood experiences in the family – that is, recognition of social factors – in forming our mental representations of the world and, finally, its valuable insight that our behavior is based on these internal representations. (Kakar 373)

When Madeline came she “preferred to keep to herself in the ashram ... her reluctance to engage with anyone other than Bapu in the ashram was deliberate. ... Mira’s need for solitude was a part of her character, not a mask which she could take off at will” (54). Madeline was brought up in a great luxury in her younger days. The Slade House spread over twenty acres of farmland on high ground with well-laid garden, cow paddocks and rich flora and fauna. “Even as a child, Mira, Madeline then, had been lonely. Her loneliness though, she writes in her diary, was not isolation. Solitude was what she had chosen, it was not something that was imposed on her” (54). She was a brooding child who loved solitude. She used to roam the vast acres of her grandmother’s estate all alone. “Madeline’s childhood recollections centred on the Milton Heath, her grandfather’s sprawling country house amid the rolling hills and farmlands of Surrey where she spent most of the first ten years of her life”(55). She had preferred the company of plants, trees and animals to that of human beings. She loved to interact with the nature and wondered at the unknowable infinite universe. In her childhood what she most looked forward to were the long afternoon walks through the Downs and these were almost always solitary outings.

“Brooding, withdrawn, philosophical and nature-loving are the characteristics that sum up Miss Slade ...” (Kumar 159). In her busy life at the ashram even privacy was at a premium. She had to recollect the orchestra of night sounds— whistling of crickets, the croaking of river frogs, hooting of an owl— gradually subsiding into silence, she “would often take that walk through the open wrought iron gates of Milton Heath...”(60). Her intimate connection with nature grew stronger with the years. “Among the other houses they lived in, the one which occupied a special place in her heart and the memories above Great Bookham, a village in Surrey. By an extraordinary coincidence, the house had the same name that Gandhiji had given to his first ashram in South Africa— Phoenix Farm” (61).

The author presents a psychological analysis of Madeline/Mira who, in her childhood, used to live in her childhood fantasies. Now she wants to fulfill those suppressed desires and wants to share with Gandhi those feelings which she has never expressed before to anyone else. In the draft of a letter to Gandhi which is next to the diary entry, Mira writes:

Bapu, when I look back at myself as a girl, every now and then there were moments when something would take me away from the world in which I lived and for a while I would not know who or where I was ... In the same way, I could not bring myself to imagine eternity without breaking into a cold sweat ... The grace came through the voice of Nature and it came at quiet moments ... I did not speak of this to anyone. I hear this voice again, though this time it comes through the medium of a human soul – yours. Do I embarrass you, Bapu, when I say that? Did you expect greater reserve from an English woman? (63)

When Madeline was twenty one years old, the voice of nature came to her through another human soul, Beethoven. Now she wants to tell Gandhi about the joy and anguish that she would feel at that time. To Gandhi, she wants to put out all that is there in her heart.

But, Babu, I am English. You cannot know how difficult it has been for me to hold myself back, not to intrude on your privacy, when I long to be with you every single moment of the day. But one day it will happen, an inner voice tells me. I shall be as your shadow and you will accept my nearness as unthinkingly as you do it with the shadow. That vision is my hope. It keeps me glued together. It ...” (64).

At that young age Madeline used to play Beethoven’s music. She purchased all of Beethoven’s sonatas from Angleus Compny, the makers of pianola, and played them daily. She could not find the cause of attraction towards his music but “Madeline perceived unmistakably the heralds of grace during her walk through the woods, and the downs when she was a child” (66). Rolland who won Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915 wrote *Jean Christophe*, an epic novel based on Beethoven’s life and Madeline learnt French, read the ten volumes of the book and met the author at his house in Villeneuve near Lake Geneva. “Romain Rolland had adopted Madeline as his ‘spiritual daughter’. They talked about Gandhiji and the biography ‘Mahatma Gandhi’. She read the book after it became available to her. “Beethoven beckoned her to Romain Rolland who in turn initiated her to Gandhiji” (Kumar 159).

Madeline used to visit London to attend concerts in which Beethoven’s music predominated. She had heard of Pianist, Frederic Lamond who was well known for his interpretation of Beethoven’s music. She had listened to Lamond with such unbearable longing over the years. “The music reverberated in her head, prolonged now, growing suddenly,

stretching without a pause. And then it was as if her soul was convulsively released from its long incarceration in flesh.... Many years later, she would rediscover the same purity and strength in Gandhiji, in moments when Bapu was most himself” (67). Although a Scott by birth and someone who had spent the war years in Holland, married to an Austrian actress, Lamond had made Berlin his home and had lived too long in Germany to be welcomed in England. Even then Madeline arranged Lamond’s three concerts in England and heard him play again after eight years. “When the time came for Lamond’s departure, Madeline realized that her magical fascination was no longer confined to Lamond’s music but had begun to inhabit his person. To put it plainly, she had fallen in love with the fifty-six-year-old pianist who lived in Holland, had a wife and a daughter, and who enjoyed her admiration but was oblivious of her infatuation” (74).

The emotional matrix of Mira could be attributed to myriad explanations. On many occasions, she had been abjectly on the verge of breakdown but quickly she came back to her normal self. Indeed there was hardly a line of demarcation between the states of normalcy and breakdown in her case. She seemed to transit from one state to the other with ease. May be Madeline’s ways belonged to the mother’s side of the family.

Their mother’s great-great grandfather had married a gypsy woman while serving in Hungry (or perhaps Romania). Madeline believed that a wild and unpredictable strain had passed through her mother’s family, manifesting itself in a propensity for unusual behavior in the succeeding generations. It may have lain dormant in most of her cousins, uncles and aunts, but was pronounced in both her mother and herself. (56)

Navin, the narrator, joined Gandhiji at Sabarmati ashram not by choice but by chance “to become his disciple was a matter of impulse” (80). Gandhiji visited Gujarat college where Navin was an MA student of Hindi literature. Gandhiji was talking on cleanliness and untouchability but the students could not comprehend his philosophy of cleanliness.

After a few minutes, however, restlessness began to sweep through the hall. It was signalled by a loud clearing throats, coughing spells and shuffling of feet as the students first looked at each other questioningly and then, in growing disbelief, at the Mahatma. For Gandhiji was saying that the way to attain swaraj was for the students to begin their day by cleaning their lavatories and removing the faeces themselves rather than waiting for the untouchable sweeper to do the job. (84)

The level of noise was very high but Gandhiji kept himself busy in revealing the meaning of *swaraj* and that punctuality he considered godly. There was a scattered and formal applause and he briskly walked out of the college. “The talk did not go down well with the students. Perhaps I was the only one who agreed with all he had said” (86). Later Navin was appointed Mira’s Hindi teacher at Sabarmati ashram.

Mira engaged herself in ashram life with the same zeal with which she had organized Lamond’s concerts in England. She had come to the ashram fully prepared, so it took her no time to adapt herself to the new ambience. She wore Indian clothes, ate vegetarian meals, avidly read about India and Indians but had no intention of becoming Indian. She tried her best to become the ideal ashram inmate. Other inmates:

...were in awe of her, of her background as much as of her special relationship with Bapu. Barely a week after her arrival, she had been given the unheard of privilege of spending an hour every evening with him before he went to

sleep...No one disturbed them while she talked in her grave and warm voice, pouring out all that had over the years retreated into the silence of her heart...This hour was the most precious part of Mira's day, a time when she was most herself, when she felt intensely alive. ... Mira felt that she could drape her cloak of solitude around the two of them, that she and Bapu had become a two-person universe. (100)

Gandhiji continued to reiterate his conviction that the workers needed to be directed to the constructive programmes. Not all Congress workers, especially the educated and urban youth agreed with his ideas on what needed to be done. "After their return from the Congress session, many people in the ashram began to remark on the intimacy that had ripened between Bapu and Mirabehn. ... I would observe their burgeoning intimacy from close quarters. After the obligatory eight hours of attending to ashram activities, Mira spent much of her free time looking after Bapu's personal well-being. She hovered around his hut like a watchful sentinel. ... " (111).

Kakkar comments satirically on Gandhi's experiments which "were as dear to him as the struggle for the country's independence" (116). Shyam was Gandhi's special, not because he was an outcaste but because of his susceptibility to mysterious ailments. "These brought out Bapu's favoured persona, that of the doctor who goes against established modes of treatment to experiment with regimens of his own devising" (116). Stool test was necessary, not only for the treatment of Shyam but for all the poor countrymen who suffer from chronic indigestion and dysentery. Mira was the lab assistant in Gandhi's laboratory. "Mira was now not only Bapu's eyes and ears as far as ashram life was concerned but also his nose ... richly lined with olfactory nerves, sensors that picked up the faintest scent and conveyed it to the brain for a quick and accurate identification"(114-115). There was no lab, no chemical to test but the muslin cloth and

water. “As I ladled the water onto the cloth, Mira carefully stirred the thinning slush with a spoon, washing it slowly, the yellowish liquid draining away through the muslin cloth, leaving behind solid particles of indeterminate origin ... Whenever the matter appeared to be in some doubt, Bapu’s visual examination of the particles was augmented by Mira’s olfactory expertise”(117). In her younger age her nose had breathed in the various animal odours as she had to brush horses, feed the chickens and the pigs, and milk the Jersey cows on her grandfather’s country estate. The test could not be completed unless they dried the matter to be tested. “...Shyam squatting on the ground with a stick in his right hand, keeping watch over the dun-coloured layer of faeces drying out on the cloth spread next to him”(119). The author, here, comments satirically on Gandhi’s system of naturopathy.

Between January and July of that year, Gandhiji stayed at the ashram, he left it only once for a week in May to attend meeting with members of the Agricultural Commission. In addition to other activities at the ashram, he involved himself in writing his autobiography in Gujarati. The job of translating into English was given to Mahadevbhai and Mira assisted him invaluablely. Mira was deputed on another job of cutting a conversation or interview short if she thought it had gone on for too long and Bapu needed to be rescued. Once, when Nehru was staying at the ashram for a day, Mira found him staring at the pretty woman like Amtussalam and she mentioned this to Gandhiji. “He laughed and remarked, “well, Jawaharlal likes two things: Politics and women.”...She did not understand the attraction Nehru held for Bapu ...” (122). In the background of this incident Kakar exposes Gandhi and his ashram. Gandhi set strict rules to be followed by those who stayed or lived at the ashram but for privileged persons like Nehru there were no Gandhian regulations to be observed.

“The relationship between Mirabehn and Gandhiji became intense in the past Saraladevi period. It picked up momentum in the second half of the 1920s and peaked during the late 1930s. There were all kinds of rumours floating about their relationship, which was at best indefinable”(Kumar165). When Gandhiji boarded the train to Bombay to attend the meeting called by the Governor and the guard waved his green flag to signal the Gujarat Mail’s departure,

... the sadness underlying the tears, a peculiar heaviness in her heart she has not been aware of, hit her with the force of a blow to the pit of her stomach. Her eyes blurred by tears that had reclaimed their rightful owner, and almost choking with the effort of keeping down a howl of pain pressing up to force a passage through her throat, Mira did not see Gandhiji look worriedly in her direction and wave at her as the train steamed out of the station. (123)

The fact that Mira was obsessed with Gandhiji and her emotional attachment could be attributed to a many faceted explanation.

She was like the women described by the psychoanalyst Ralph Greenson, who came to analysis not to seek insight but to enjoy the physical proximity of the analyst. Such patients relate a history of achievement and an adequate social life but an unsatisfactory love life characterized by wishes for incorporation, possession, and fusion. Gandhiji’s attitude to Mira, like that of the analyst with the patient,...It further enhanced what analysts would call her transference to the Mahatma, a type of intense love felt for people who fulfill a role in our lives equivalent to the one fulfilled by parents in our childhood. (Kakar125)

Back in the hut Mira becomes nostalgic, she opens Rolland’s biography and immerses herself in his stirring prose. For ten days Bapu is out of Ahmedabad and she writes a letter daily

to him. The first letter she writes in Hindi “Which ended with ‘I miss you’ in English” (124).

The very frequency of her letters is the clear reflection of a prolonged cry of anguish. A few weeks after Gandhi’s return, their relationship again seems to undergo a subtle shift. “With Mira it was different, ... the English woman had intruded into a space that had never been violated by any other woman before her...Ba had silently put up with Mira taking over many of her tasks in caring for Bapu’s personal needs. She had observed Bapu’s unusual animation in the hour Mira spent with them each evening” (126-127).

Ultimately Mira’s obsession becomes her undoing. Other inmates at the ashram are indifferent and cautious with her and consider her to be an intruder. Very soon she realises that the *ashram* is neither a monastery nor a haven of peace. “Much was to change in Mira’s life and in her relationship with Bapu in the next four years. I take the liberty of reconstructing with a novelist’s pen the incidents that took place in that time, since I left the ashram in the latter half of July 1926” (127). Navin is the alter ego of Sudhir Kakar, the novelist, who has reconstructed / deconstructed the story of Mira and the Mahatma. Due to rising inquietude over Bapu’s increasingly erratic behavior towards her, Mira writes again to Rolland:

But more than the lethargy in my limbs, it is my soul that is troubled. As you can guess, this has to do with Bapu. He has always been serious with me. With others, he used to laugh, laugh heartily, and so much. With me, he never laughed. Now he is often irritated and scolds me for the smallest mistake...He continued to ignore me ... Our evenings together, which I have always longed for during the day, no longer bring me the joy they once did. ... In fact, after his return from Bombay I have noticed a certain reserve in him that has progressively increased. (128-129)

The early years were splendid years for Gandhiji and Mira when only a few things went wrong. Gradually, there was a loosening of bonds that had brought them together. Mira made too many demands upon him. She was like that determined woman who wanted to possess and own him. She wanted to have exclusive rights over him. Gandhiji was not a private property of anyone – but Mira was looking forward to one to one personal relationship. Kakar depicts her as an insecure being at the bottom of her heart and very soon Gandhi realises that she is an onerous responsibility. “Bapu’s silence had always been ‘mauna’ but it is no longer so. When I am with him in the evening now, I feel his silence is of the *sannata* kind, the silence of that part of the jungle where a tiger is passing by” (130).

It was the duty of Mira to make necessary corrections in the English version of Gandhiji’s autobiography after Mahadevbhai had translated it from the original. Whenever she suggested a change he was quick to veto the suggestion. “No, Mira’, he says, ‘I *was* obsessed with sex in the early years of our marriage’... “Obsessed” and “wreck” *are* the right words” (131). In one of the passages he wrote that his father was dying while he was making love to Kasturba in the couple’s bedroom upstairs and he could not wash away “ the dark stain of shame”(132). Gandhi called “his own father ‘oversexed’” (132) because his father, at the age of forty, married for the third time a girl who was twenty two years his junior. “His blood pressure remains high and he has become uncharacteristically moody” (133). Rolland entered in his diary: “I am afraid Mira may be heading for heartbreak...” (133). Through this incident of editing Gandhi’s autobiography the Mahatma’s father is reckoned to be ‘oversexed’ and the Mahatma himself is reckoned to be ‘obsessed’ and ‘wreck’.

Kakar unmasks Gandhiji’s failure to control the outbursts of temper and his moodiness.

He does not entertain any suggestion of his co-workers which shows his domineering

disposition. “When he was angry, and this was now often, a particular line in his forehead would begin to pulse with stress born of a barely controllable impulse for violence” (134). When out of curiosity Helen Haussding bent over him to look at the papers, “he swivelled around and slapped the German woman” (135). Gandhi, here, is not the apostle of non-violence rather the narrator portrays him as a violent person who slaps even his female associates.

Gandhiji’s adopted daughter, Lakshmi, had been stealing yarn from others and passing it off as her own. At first, Gandhi wanted to beat her with a stick but she was left on the promise that she would never lie or steal again and would return the stolen threads. Once Ba had broken the rule of the ashram by keeping the personal presents for private use and her action was amounted to theft. “... Bapu’s raised voice coming from inside Bapu’s room ... the fury in his voice was unmistakable. It was less an argument than a tirade, relentless, simultaneously accusatory and condemning, recognizing no defence, allowing no mitigating circumstances” (138). Gandhi did not hide his feelings with those who were close to him although he struggled to control his wrath. Mira wanted to resume their conversations before he went to sleep. Gandhiji accepted her request, although, hesitantly and Lakshmi’s and Ba’s incidents did not dent her idealization of Bapu. Kakar delineates Gandhi and his relations not only with Mira but with other inmates also. Gandhi behaves badly with Ba and considers her a thief. He wants to beat the girl whom he accepts as his daughter and he prefers the company of Mira in place of Ba, his wife.

“Mira’s wish to be close to Gandhiji now transformed into a strong need and, when thwarted, an almost unbearable craving. Lying sleepless in bed on the evenings when she had not been able to spend time alone with him, Mira suffered acutely from the pangs of separation” (141). The ‘pangs of separation’ are almost more than she can bear. She is inconsolable but frank

enough to confess that her mind is in the right place, and that it is her heart which impells her to be near him. She cannot live away from him. He also likes to have her within his eye-sight but from a respectable distance. Her obsession frightens Gandhi and he advises her to come to terms with her own psyche and sends her to live in the Bhagwadbhakti Ashram located outside the small town of Rewari, on Delhi to Bombay route. She writes to Romain Rolland at the end of February:

...In exile, or at least that is how it feels. Before leaving Ahmedabad, Bapu kept on telling me that I should look upon our separation as a preparation for carrying out a sacred task, that what is important is the realization of his ideals, not his person. So I am to carry out his work, but not with him. My mind understands but my heart rebels ... You can imagine the excitement with which I await his arrival, and the dread with which I contemplate the separation that will follow. (143-144)

Gandhiji comes from Delhi to Bhagwadbhakti Ashram, to spend a day with Mira, without his usual routine. Mira spends some time alone at the time of evening walk. Gandhiji asks Mira about her life at the ashram, she loses her nerve and pours her heart out. She tells him that she hates very much to be there without him. "My god has to personal, alive, a palpable presence. He has to permeate my heart, mind and body. He must fill every inch of space in and around me, like Mirabai's Krishna. If I have that then there is no sacrifice I cannot make" (146). Mira could not sleep properly that night. The fact that Gandhiji is going away the next morning agonises her.

When Gandhiji's tour programme to the South had to be cancelled because his blood pressure was still high and he had been advised complete rest. Mira was frantically worried when she heard the news and felt guilty that she also had contributed to his breakdown. "Mira wrote to Rolland imploring him to help her out of her dilemma over my desperate need to be with him,

which sometimes makes me feel that I would wither away and slowly die in his absence, and my fear that my importuning presence not only disturbs him but can even make him physically sick” (149). Here the narrator divulges the intimate relations of Mira and the Mahatma.

The months of April and May Gandhiji spent in Nandi hills in Mysore recuperating from his sickness. Mira desperately wanted to be with him but was held back because Gandhiji wanted her to stay where she was. On 25 April Gandhiji wrote: ...if the separation becomes unbearable, you must come without waiting for an answer or any prompting from me” (150). Disquieted to stay in Rewari, unable to go to Bapu she decided to go to the Wardha ashram for some time. Her restlessness did not allow her to stay in one place for long, after the middle of September she went from Wardha to Bombay and then to Puna. From Puna, without informing Gandhiji, she reached Bangalore by train and then by bus where he was staying. At first, he appeared genuinely happily to see her but within a few hours he seemed unusually troubled. “His intimacy alternated with distance, love with indifference, even anger, and he began to berate her for her lack of self-control” (158). Mira sat in silence and tears were running down her face. After a sleepless night she met him next morning, he was again composed and asked her to immediately return to the Sabarmati Ashram. She felt extremely humiliated when she was told that she was to stay away from Bapu because her visit had raised his blood pressure to unacceptably high levels. In the background of this episode the author shows Mira’s obsession with the Mahatma.

On returning to Sabarmati, once again Mira writes to Romain Rolland:

“This is a letter of my shame. I could not control myself, and frantic with worry about his health went down to the South to be with him. He was furious and sent me back. Like a kicked bitch, with its tail between its legs, I slunk away. How one

despises people who cling! I am one of them. I could clearly see that I was getting on his nerves yet could not stop” (159).

Sudhir Kakar discloses the complex relationship between Mira and Gandhiji. “The presumption that their relationship was not quite one-sided and that Mira too evoked complex, ‘counter-transference’ reactions in Gandhiji is amply supported by his letters to her” (Kakar125). Five days after the letter to Romain Rolland dated 24 September 1927, Mira received a short note from Gandhiji filling her with the bliss she had experienced in her first year with Bapu. “I could not restrain myself from sending you a love message on reaching here; the note said. I felt very sad after letting you go” (161). The note was followed two days later with a post card: “This is merely to tell you I can’t dismiss you from my mind. Every surgeon has a soothing ointment after a severe operation. This is my ointment” (161).

On his birthday, 2 October, yet another letter follows: “I have never been so anxious as this time to hear from you, for I sent you away too quickly after a serious operation. ... You haunted me in my sleep last night. ... ‘And with this I woke up troubled in mind and prayed that you may be free from all harm. And your letter gave me great joy’ ” (161).

In her diary entry for 12 October 1927, Mira writes: “Perhaps I can split myself into two? In his presence and in my letters to him I will be the Mirabehn of *Satyagraha* Ashram, strong, sensible, loyal to his ideals and his vision. And in my diary, the Mirabai of longing and yearning, dedicated to his person” (161).

After Gandhiji’s return to Sabarmati he suggests Mira to choose her own way and she decides to keep the greatest possible physical distance. She leaves Sabarmati ashram and goes to live in Chhatwan, a remote village in the Madhubani district of north Bihar. She devotes herself in helping the women to adopt improved methods of carding and spinning cotton. Mira writes

letters to Gandhiji describing her experiences and takes care to prevent personal references from creeping into her letters. She tries to suppress her craving for the Mahatma, however, seeks some outlet in another way. "Seeking a more apt outlet however, the yearning became intolerable at times, especially when she lay alone in bed at night or woke up well before dawn, unable to sleep. She would then lie on her back, looking up at the night sky imagining that he too was gazing at the same sky from his bed on the veranda in front of his hut in the ashram"(163).

The narrator satirically draws a parallel between Mira and Mirabai. "As I read the letters that Gandhiji and Mira exchanged during this period, the parallels with Mirabai become even more striking. Krishna was the flute player and dancer and Mirabai did his work, wandering around the land singing and dancing to her dark lord. Gandhiji's music and dance was of another kind and Mirabehn followed the way of her lord. Can digging latrine trenches not be a song, teaching new methods of spinning a dance?" (164).

With the invitation to join Gandhi on his speaking tour through North India, Mira's exile ended in the year of 1929. In the absence of Ba, her job was to look after Bapu's personal routine. She could not know that "storm clouds were once again gathering over her life. That, in spite of her best intentions, her feelings toward Bapu, pent up for so long and now further reinforced by their close proximity, were on the verge of overflowing and breaching the dam she had erected in the last eighteen months with such enormous effort"(168).

After their return to Ahmedabad, after dinner, Mira went to meet Gandhiji in his hut. Ba left them alone in the hut. "Mira felt her body begin to tremble. She knew what was coming: Bapu no longer wanted their hour together... Later she could not even recall how she had found her way back to her hut. She only remembered collapsing on her cot, her body racked with sobs that tore her part, demanding a release which only death could grant"(168-169). Next morning,

Mira did not attend the prayer meeting and she did not want to discuss the incident with Gandhiji. Gandhiji was not ready to spare her on this issue. He sent a note through Mahadevbhai:

It is well you do not want me to speak to you on the incident. But I did want... The exhibition is proof of the correctness of my statement. None else would have felt like committing suicide over a simple innocent remark of mine... This disease is idolatry. If it is not, why hanker after my company! Why touch or kiss the feet that must one day be dead cold? Why so helplessly rely on me? Why do everything to please me? Why not independently of me and in spite of me? ... But if I say you have not been able to touch the root, why weep over it? You must rise from this torpor never to fall into it again. (170)

The author divulges Madeline's warmth and tenderness towards Gandhi. She holds Gandhi responsible for her suffering and agony. In response Mira composes a letter but does not send it to Gandhiji. In the letter she discloses not only her disease but the treatment also:

Yes, I kissed your feet, over and over again. Yes, I bathed them in my hot tears. I wept from happiness that I was with you and from agony that you will send me away again. Yes, I pressed my face against your legs even as I hugged them tightly to my breasts... And, Oh, my beloved physician, how wrong you are in the diagnosis of my disease! My disease is my separation from you. Your absence is my affliction. The only treatment for my disease is your presence, your return when you are away. My doctor is the cause of my disease, as he is also its cure and its sole physician. (172)

Whenever Gandhiji was away from Mira, he could more easily express his love and the special place she held in his affections. From a distance, he could also acknowledge the

tempestuous nature of their relationship. He could express his feelings for her more freely when he was safe from her pertinacious physicality. Sending her English translations of Indian hymns; which he does specifically for her, he writes: “In translating the hymns for you I am giving myself much joy. Have I not expressed my love, often in storms than in gentle soothing showers of affection? The memory of these storms adds to the pleasure of this exclusive translation for you” (173-174).

Kakar makes a scathing attack on Gandhi about his relations with Mira. He portrays Gandhi as a short tempered person also. He puts Gandhi in such a critical situation where he loves Mira but cannot reveal it. He tries to elucidate Gandhi’s psychical disposition: “Gandhi could not let Mira get away further than the distance he unconsciously held to be the optimal for his own feelings of well being” (Kakar126). In another letter that followed soon after Gandhiji wrote: “You are on the brain. I look about me, and miss you. I open the charkha and miss you. ... All the time you were squandering your love on me personally, I felt guilty of misappropriation. And I exploded on the slightest pretext. Now that you are not with me, my anger turns itself upon me for having given you all those terrible scoldings” (174).

The situation was complex but it was tragic from the perspective of Mirabehn. Was she really a victim of her doings? She could have been a victim of circumstances beyond her control. Gandhiji kept sending her off on missions to establish and run ashrams all over the country. She found the separation unbearable and her health kept failing as well. Her psychological crises were reflected in her frequent physical breakdowns. Gandhi agreed to recall her at the time when Sevagram Ashram was being set up. Here was the fulfillment of her heartfelt-desire. She was thus returning to Gandhiji. However, Gandhiji managed to keep her at a distance by persuading her to reside in a nearby village. Her world came almost crashing around her. Thus the nerves

were frayed all round with no solution in sight. “This nearly broke my heart, but somehow I managed to carry on, and when Bapu finally decided to come and live in Seagaon, I buried my sorrow in the joy of preparing for him his cottage and cowshed. For myself I built a little cottage a mile away on the ridge of Varoda village...” (214).

The narrator unwraps Gandhi’s failure on other fronts like Hindu-Muslim unity, removal of untouchability, celibacy which later became the main reasons of severe depression and other complications.

For Gandhi, the period between 1936 and 1938 was full of marked swings of mood, including episodes of severe depression and spiritual despair. This was partly occasioned by his failure to achieve the goals of removing untouchability and reducing Hindu-Muslim conflict, ... due to what he considered as shortcomings in his determined efforts to maintain his chastity resulting from incidents of sexual arousal while he was awake which deeply shamed him, plunging him into a ‘well of despair’. (214)

The entry of Prithvi Singh into Mira’s life and the heart, however, was late but its consequences were portentous. The relationship between Mira and the Mahatma can better be understood through her involvement with Prithvi Singh, a legendary revolutionary, whose arrival on the scene changes the show completely. As far as his background is concerned he spent most of his adult years underground fomenting violent resistance to British rule. Gandhiji termed him “a cent per cent model prisoner.” Ultimately he sought the protection of Gandhiji who was thoroughly impressed by his reforming zeal. Prithvi Singh did not believe in Gandhian ideology of non-violence. “While Prithvi believed that Gandhiji was one of the greatest men of all times, he remained unconvinced about Bapu’s philosophy of non-violent resistance. ‘Bapu, you must

admit that you have failed. ... Sacrifice and sincerity on the part of your followers was not lacking by any means. Yet, so many years of non-violent resistance has brought India no nearer to freedom” (228).

The narrator portrays Prithvi Singh as fearless fellow who does not agree with Gandhi’s concept of celibacy and expresses his views on the issue frankly. Gandhiji devotes so much time and effort trying to convince Prithvi Singh of his ideas on sex and violence but he remains unable to convince him. Prithvi Singh exposes Gandhi’s ashram and comments frankly on celibacy. “Forgive me, Bapu, but in your ashram is there place for anything other than sex? During their leisure time, the people here constantly discuss the subject. It seems to me that in obedience to your wishes and in an emotional mood, people may take a vow to lead a celibate life but they have not the slightest idea how passions rock the mind and how to control them”(231-232).

Besides the narrator, Mira also attends Prithvi Singh’s meetings with the Mahatma. Prithvi Singh tells the adventurous incidents from his life. “...Prithvi Singh was the kind of handsome idealist who, even without trying, was more irresistible to women than a good-looking rake with all his seductive arts” (231). Prithvi talks to Bapu, face to face, respectfully, “but utterly without reverence” (232). She is suitably impressed by his seemingly adventurous disposition. “Mira might have fallen in love with Prithvi for the dangers he had overcome but he could not claim that he loved her that she did pity them” (232). Initially, she tries to conceal her natural feelings by convincing herself that it is just the admiration for his frank and undaunted disposition but she admits her true feelings to herself as soon as she becomes aware of them. Gandhiji advises Prithvi to write his memories which may inspire the younger generation and Mira is deputed to edit and polish his English. Mira writes two letters to Prithvi Singh in which

she opens her heart before him. In the first, “God has changed the vague pain of all these years into a burning fire. But the great difference is that now I know why that pain and why this fire. I have found you at last! ...” and in the second she writes about Gandhi’s reaction to her proposal: “...God is giving me strength and understanding and turning my pain into joy, deep joy. ... He said, “I should now like you to be guided entirely by Prithvi Singh. You have understood one another, you need that guidance and he can give it to you” (237). Mira meets Gandhiji to tell him about her feelings for Prithvi. “With him, I can become independent of you, as you have always wanted, “she said” (238). Gandhiji looked at her gravely and said, “If you feel like that it means to my mind that you should marry him” (238) and he further added, “To my mind, your former resolve not to marry should not stand in the way. If you are concerned about me and the vow you took when you joined the ashram, then I absolve you from that vow” (239).

In another letter she writes, “Oh! Prithvi, you do not know what you have been to me. I have been strived and strived to serve Bapu and his cause, but have been weak and wanting in all my endeavours. I have been but half a being. You have made me whole...” (239). Prithvi Singh gradually replaces Gandhiji in her affections. However, Prithvi is quite flattered by her attention but he feels uncomfortable when she becomes obsessed with him. From the very beginning, her excessive concern for him makes him feel uncomfortable but he does not have the heart to discourage her.

In his memoirs Prithvi wrote: “Just like the way Mirabai was absorbed in God, I saw this English lady absorbed in Bapu. Yet I never saw the lines of satisfaction on her face. I was troubled by the question why persons living so close to Bapu did not use Bapu’s *mantra* of life to make their own lives happier”(239-240). Kakar exposes the complete failure of Gandhi and his

ideology when he depicted the most devoted followers of Gandhi who have to lead the life of misery. Further, Prithvi writes in his memoirs:

Till today I have not been able to decide whether I did right or wrong in rejecting Mira's love. Its memory still troubles me...

I could not withstand Mira's love. ... How could I tell him that Mira loves me but I cannot accept her love? ... Finally, I did not know what else to do except sneak out and run away under the pretext of visiting my brother and his family in Burma. (240-241)

Prithvi suddenly leaves for Burma and Mira, therefore, is shocked and heartbroken. She also leaves Sevagram for Punjab and Haryana and where she, like a pilgrimage, visits all the places concerning Prithvi Singh's life.

“The Puranas are full of stories about people carrying out the severest of tapasyas. ... Mira's tapasya to win Prithvi as her husband could thus look back at a venerable tradition in Hindu mythology” (243). Unable to remain any longer in Sevagram, Mira goes to stay alone in a hut on the tea estate of Lala Kanhaiya lal in Kangra District.

For this unsuccessful love story and for the miserable life of Mira, the narrator, somewhere, holds Gandhiji responsible. It is his philosophy of *brahmacharya* or celibacy in the background of what has happened.

Gandhiji's concern for Mira did not end with the letters of consolation and reassurance he sent her regularly. He partly blamed himself for what had happened. He felt responsible for Prithvi Singh looking upon Mira as his sister rather than as a possible wife for, when Prithvi had come to Sevagram, Gandhiji had told him that the women in the ashram should be looked upon as sisters. He

wondered whether Prithvi was only following his wishes in his behavior towards Mira. (245-246)

Here the author debunks Gandhian ideology of *brahmacharya*. Mira and Prithvi Singh love each other but due to Gandhi's principle of celibacy this love remains unrequited.

Prithvi writes from Burma enquiring about Mira but Bapu reassures him that he needs not worry about her. When Prithvi returns to Sevagram, he is in dilemma how to face Mira. On his arrival, he goes straight to Gandhiji's hut and the news of his coming spread fast. Mira runs out to meet him but he tries to avoid Mira. On the last day of his stay, after the evening prayer, Mira asks him to accompany her for a walk so that she can talk to him openly.

She talked to him of her *tapasya* during the time he had been away and of its goal – their union as man and wife working together to fulfill Bapu's dreams for a free and independent India. In her *tapasya* she had at last found God's purpose for her life. Did he still not realize that their connection to each other went back a long time, much before this life time, to many earlier births ?...

Prithvi was upset, as much by her words as the intensity of love that filled them, a love that seemed to set her free but which he found unbearably oppressive.

Perhaps we'll have to wait for our next birth then, he said, ... (250)

Prithvi tells her that he is going to Saurashtra and he wants to travel on his own path. "At least we can be companions on that path, Mira said, comrades who can work together" (251). However, Prithvi wants to escape, knowing he will never come back to Sevagram, he quickly agrees.

A letter comes from Mira, three days after Prithvi's arrival in Bhavnagar. This letter is in the form of the confession/admission of failure. It is not the failure of Mira alone but the failure

of Gandhi and his ideology also. It is Gandhi's discipline and training which undermines Mira's self-reliance and self expression and she becomes incapable of doing independent work.

...Seventeen years ago, when I came to Bapu, I put myself in his hands, and he, with the fullness of his love, took complete possession of me, guiding not only my actions, but even my thoughts and feelings. It was a great disciplining and training out of which I learnt a tremendous amount, but it also undermined my self-reliance and self-expression, and I became incapable of doing any sustained or independent work. Before I came to Bapu I was a person of free energy, enterprise and self reliance. All this I somehow lost. (251)

The narrator depicts Gandhi as a domineering person who is enormously possessive of Mira and directs her life in his own way. Under his direction she becomes the subservient one who has lost even self-expression. She remains unable to become a self-reliant lady. Here the author shows the failure of Gandhi's idea of self-reliance.

It is through her hard *tapasya* involving silent prayers and reading the sacred texts over a long time, she becomes conscious of her real self and gains spiritual richness but it is of no use. "Only when you came into my life did my natural strength reawaken. When I went into the *tapasya* I was conscious of my real self coming back to life. I feel a new strength and freedom added to it during those fifteen months of silent prayers and reading. I gained spiritual riches which were unknown to me before. Having realized all this, what should I do?" (251).

Mira understands that Prithvi's comradeship of heart can enrich her work but in such a complex situation nothing can be done because they have difference of opinion. The only difference of opinion between them is that she believes with all her heart and soul that their strength for fullest service lies in their union and he believes otherwise. Without this union her

tapasya, her strength and spiritual richness will be dissipated. Mira knows if she goes again to Gandhiji for his guidance and training she will reach the same condition of deterioration where failure is inevitable. “If I tried to work again under Bapu’s personal guidance I knew I should fail...” (251). Thus Kakar reveals the reality hidden in the deep recesses of Mira’s mind. Mira is shown as reawakened and rekindled to the realization that she should lead her life independently by starting a training centre for the women somewhere in UP, if possible on the bank of a great river.

Mira writes a letter to Prithvi: “Your letter shows me that, up to now, you have wholly misunderstood my love... You think, because I love you, I am possessed by a mad and selfish passion. Such a notion is totally wrong and a cruel libel on a woman’s love. I seek your love and cooperation, not for my personal pleasure, but for greater strength in service for us both” (257).

All we have Prithvi’s silence after this and Mira’s last despairing attempt to reach him. “Where and when we shall meet again I do not know. When the storm rises, prison and even death may be in store for us. But I do not fear. If God wills it we shall meet again in this life. If He wills otherwise we shall meet in the next birth to serve with fresh strength the India of our dreams” (258).

Gandhiji was arrested on the night of 8 August 1942 immediately after he announced his intention to launch the Quit India campaign and it broke on 9 August with mass scale arrests of Congress leaders. “With all its leaders behind bars, the movement began to lose its non-violent character. Crowds attacked courts, police stations, post offices, railway stations and other symbols of British administration”(259). The revolutionaries were busy in disrupting the communications and transport. “Prithvi Singh’s young revolutionary friends who cut telegraph wires and derailed goods trains by removing fish plates from railway tracks carried out many of

these acts”(259). Gandhi’s trained follower Prithvi and his friends were busy in violent activities. He was active in revolutionary activities as if he had no influence of Gandhi and his ideology. Mirabehn, Ba and Mahadev were arrested along with Gandhi and sent to prison in Poona. Prithvi Singh was also arrested from Saurashtra and was put behind the bars. After his release, he eloped with a woman twenty-five years younger than him and after independence “settled down to a life of comfort and honour in Punjab as a revolutionary icon of India’s struggle for independence...Prithvi Singh and Mira never met again, at least not in this life”(261). These historical events and happenings expose the futility of Gandhian philosophy of non-violence which remains a complete failure even in his own campaigns. Even Gandhi’s follower like Prithvi Singh and his associates are involved in acts of sabotage. Prithvi Singh elopes with a lady and leads a comfortable life. Thus Gandhian principle of celibacy also remains unsuccessful.

Navin, the narrator visited Baden to see Mirabehn who was living in an isolated cottage. It seemed that her need for solitude had remained intact. “Mira had chosen to live in Baden because of its connection to Beethoven” (263). Mira came to India in 1925 and lived thirty three years following the Mahatma in spirit and person.

She lived like a vagabond throughout her stay in India. Her partial gypsy blood must have prompted her to do so. Gandhiji was her entire world but in pursuit of which she got nervous, tensions, depressions and breakdowns. ‘At last, more of Beethoven was on her mind than Gandhiji’. Only one of them was expected to come out victorious. She had the forests outside Vienna beckoning her in the subconscious. Above all Beethovan, like Gandhiji, was a mystic who inspired her to strive for the ultimate. ... She left India on 28 January 1958 to be near Beethoven. (Kumar187-188)

Factually, Sudhir Kakar, the author, visited Mira in 1964 when she was living in a farmhouse in the forests above Baden near Vienna. She was interested to talk about Beethoven, not Gandhi.

I visited her with a friend in 1964, in the forests above Baden near Vienna where she now made her home in an isolated farmhouse with a dog and an old Indian servant from Rishikesh. Gracious but reserved, she offered us tea and biscuits and perfunctorily inquired about current events in India. She refused to talk about Gandhi, claiming that he did not interest her any longer. What animated her exclusively and what she enthusiastically talked about was Beethoven whom she saw as the higher manifestation of the human spirit. (Kakar 127)

Kakar through his “task of psychoanalytic deconstruction” (Kakar 97) claims to bring out the latent meanings of Gandhi and his ideology. He depicts Gandhi as an authoritarian who does not reciprocate love and tries to mould others in his own way. He persuades people to adopt his ideology but remains a failure. Throughout the narrative the author creates the impression that Gandhi was not absolutely free from human flaws. The author exposes Gandhi’s ashramas *and* the ashramites who live there due to their selfish motives. He negates Gandhian ideology of celibacy and non-violence. Kakar’s vituperation of Gandhi acquires a high pitch in the end of the novel when Mira, a close associate of Gandhi, refuses even to talk about Gandhi.