

HAS GANDHIJI FALLEN ON EVIL TONGUES?

A LITERARY POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to do away with the cobwebs surrounding Gandhian ideologies, an effort to remove misunderstandings about him and project the Mahatma in right perspective. At one point of time whatever was associated with Gandhiji was considered controversial and calamitous. Even men of letters have also had their share in this game. This is an effort to find out real Gandhiji. His real strength lies in the fact that he made the Indians who were till then the object of history became the subject of history. Gandhiji made them the subject of history. Einsterin once said about Gandhiji, "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked on this earth". This is the tribute one great soul paid to another. Despite this eulogy, the most star-crossed leader in Indian freedom movement was the Mahatma. He died metaphorically on 15th August, 1947, when his followers threw his teachings to the wind and left Gandhiji a lone voice to trail the glory of love, truth, non-violence and so on. Gandhiji's personality is so complex that one Freud or a Jung cannot unravel all its strands. What really baffles the writers is the fact that he impressed one person differently at different times. There is no denial of the fact that such antithesis did exist in Gandhiji. This amalgamation in one and the same person resulted in some contradictions. It should be remembered that mediocrities are of one piece and uniformly consistent, Bhabani Bhattacharya also could not catch this Gandhi in "The Shadows from Laddakh". There are many who whet their tongues on Gandhiji's philosophy, namely K. R. Kripalan, Praful Dave, V. R. Narla and so on. Some writers blame Gandhiji as he disagreed with Karl Marx. Once U. R. Ananthmurthy, in a lighter vein, said, why we did not make Gandhiji a hero of a novel as Marx is made in 'Fantamara' and 'Man's Fate'. There is no fun in stiching Khadi patch on siken shirt. Let's not forget. "Hiten Sahitam Sahityam".

Key words: *Ideologies, literature, beauty, truth, occident, orient and perspective.*

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Introduction

Einstein is reported to have said about Gandhiji I quote, unquote “Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked on this earth” (Nayak, *Gandhiji in Indian Literature*). People observing contemporary situation in India would hardly believe that the man called Gandhi, striding this country for over four decades, its enormous territory, like a colossus, controlled its political convulsions and strove to change its age old social and economic disabilities by reviving its old institutions. He breathed new life in the Indian masses. As Jawaharlal Nehru has rightly pointed out,

Then Gandhi came, he was like a powerful current of fresh air; that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breath, like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes, like a whirl wind that upsets many things but most of all the working of peoples’ mind (Nehru, *Discovery of India*).

Despite this eulogy, the most star-crossed leader in Indian freedom movement was Mahatma Gandhi. Great persons like Mahatma Gandhi, though they are governed and controlled by the Socio-Political determinants in the beginning of their career, appear like effulgent stars towards the end, rule the destiny of men, control events and movements of a nation. Gandhiji’s character was multi-dimensional encompassing politics, religion, society, culture and the metaphysics of the non-violence. In spite of all this he died metaphorically on 15th August, 1947 when his followers threw all his qualities to the wind and left Gandhiji a lone voice to trail the solitary glory of love, truth, purity and non-violence. May be, the presence and proximity of Gandhiji prevented the aesthetic distancing necessary to

evaluate his character. Due to this we fail to understand him in right perspective and call him anachronism which would be a sin. In a symposium organized by the University of Mysore to celebrate the birth centenary of Mahatma Gandhi, scholars from all over the county presented papers on various aspects of Gandhiji's life and the most pungent criticism came from his home state of Gujarat. This humble attempt is not a bravado to defend Gandhi but a point of view to analyse the issues raised against him and his influence on Indian art and literature.

Admittedly, Gandhiji's personality was so complex, so unique and so baffling that not even a Freud or a Jung can unravel all its strands. To some he was a faddist, a crank, a charlton, a mountback and a chatur baniya, whereas to some others he was a saint, a superman, and a Mahatma. What puzzles us all is, he impressed the same person differently at different times. Gopal Krishn Gokhale, Gandhiji's political mentor, addressing a gathering in South Africa said, "A man among men, a hero among heroes". The self same Gokhale called Gandhiji 'Crude', 'Strange', when he was commenting on his book *Hind Swaraj*. Annie Besant, who according to Jamnadas Dwarkadas, gave him the title of Mahatma, called him 'the queerest that ever was'. Mulk Raj Anand in his novels *Untouchable* and *The Sword and the Sicklle* scoffs at Gandhiji as does Manohar Malgaonkar in his *A Bend in the Ganges*.

Gandhiji's personality is described as the epitome of contradictions. Truth is a permanent and indivisible whole, but Gandhiji told that his life was a series of experiments with truth. In spite of its negative denotation non-violence was a positive attitude. He lived and died a perfect Hindu, yet tried for the unity of all religions. He believed in absolute God, but insisted upon collective prayers. He condemned caste system, but believed in Varnashrama. He was a socialist in out look but supported capitalists. He fought for democracy but aimed at Rama Raj, a benevolent kingship. There is no denial of the fact that such an antithesis did exist in Gandhiji. But why such contradictions sprang from Gandhiji's life is an important question to ask. First of all, there was an element of revivalism in Gandhiji was regard to his philosophy of life, and he was a revolutionary in his socio-political philosophy. This amalgamation of revivalism and revolution in one and the same

person is bound to result in some sort of contradiction. But this apparent contradiction never defeated his social-political ideologies. There are other men in history, in whom we can find still worse types of contradictions. It should be remembered that the mediocrities are of one piece and uniformly consistent.

Secondly, these are not contradictions in one individual, but they are the contradictions of Indian social and cultural life itself. Gandhiji with his sensitive mind and comprehensive intellect absorbed these contradictions into his personality.

Another charge brought by K. R. Kripalani against the Gandhian influence on Indian art and literature is, "It is in-hibitive and unhealthy, and resulted, without meaning to, in an irritating sactimoniousness" (Jevanji, *Gandhiji's letters*). It is further argued that the aim of literature is to seek joy. This joy, in any form, is denied by the Gandhian philosophy. K. R. Kripalani writes that the Gandhian preachings are full of thou-shall-nots. The most vociferous writers who supported Kripalani's arguments on Gandhiji are Praful Dave, who spoke about the Gandhian influence of Gujarati literature and V. R. Narla who represented Telgu literature. Praful Dave, who belongs to this class of critics of Gandhiji, writes in his paper on the Gandhian influence of Gujarati literature, "Gandhiji lacked the instinctive raw love for his fellow men which in Freudian system is called Id. His love was phony or pretended, which humans acquire through super ego" (Praful, "Gandhiji in Gujarati Literature"). The two charges brought against the Gandhian influence are; it denies aesthetic pleasure and it is marred with the horror of sex.

Gandhian aesthetic is the logical extension of his metaphysics. In Indian value system aesthetic, like ethics and metaphysics, is dependent upon philosophy and aims at influencing life in its entirety. The Gandhian concept of joy and beauty depends upon the doctrine of Anand expounded in the Taittiriya Upanishada. This scripture has given a three fold classification of Anand. The first kind is Priya which is a simple experience of the beautiful. The second variety is Moda, which is a conscious enjoyment of beauty. The last variety is Pramoda, the loftiest joy.

Gandhiji loved the trinity and 'Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram' i.e. truth, goodness and beauty. So the thesis is, the absolute idea as conceived by the intellect is the highest truth as raised in practice is the greatest good as manifested in man and nature is the supreme beauty. This is, in brief, Gandhiji's understanding of beauty. He thought beauty should lead to the heights bliss of soul. Of all the fine arts Gandhiji had a liking for music, especially the devotional songs of Mira. He found in them the realization of the trinity of truth, goodness and beauty. For Gandhiji literature was 'Atmabhivyakti' or the expression of the soul, and its purpose is Atmanand or the bliss of the soul. Thus Gandhiji enlarged the area of the experience of joy of art. He sublimated the beauty concept. Then how could it be said that Gandhiji had a stifling effect on art and beauty. The popular concept of joy takes into account the first two varieties of 'Anand' or bliss, the 'Priya' and the 'Moda', where as Gandhiji aimed at the 'Pramoda', the loftiest joy.

These critics try to gauge Gandhiji's concept of art and beauty through Western artistic values. According to the Western value system the beauty has following qualities, harmony, uniqueness, unity in diversity, symmetry and proportion. This is an objective perspective of beauty, but Gandhiji's was the spiritual perspective. His was not a stifling effect but liberating and ennobling effect. The ultimates such as the truth, the goodness and beauty form the core of the Gandhian concept of art and beauty, where as symmetry and proportions are important aspects of beauty according to the Western point of view.

With regard to the second charge that Gandhiji had a horror of sex, this should be noted that Gandhiji prescribed certain strict measures for his Ashramites participating in the freedom movement. One of these vows was Brahmacharya or celibacy. If the volunteers get married, they become the members of a social institution called the family which has its restraints limitations and worries. So, celibacy is not a mechanical control over desires of our body but restraining from lust and sensuality.

Sex is energy! What Gandhiji opposed was not sex but sexuality, not senses but sensuality. He did not permit sex to become a habit, a regular physical necessity like hunger

and thirst. A new definition of conjugal love emerges from his subtle analysis of the sexual attitudes of men and women, with fine distinction between the urge of the body and the mind. Had he hated sex, he could not have become father himself.

I think, novelist Bhagabani Bhattacharya, a Gandhian himself, has also failed to understand the Gandhian point of view. His hero Satyjit in *The Shadow from Ladaks* tells his wife Suruchi to seek divorce from him and to marry some other young man who can give her more pleasure. Did Gandhiji ever ask his followers to divorce their wives? Is it not an insult to a married woman? Can Gandhiji allow heaping such shame upon a wife? Is it really the Gandhian? The point to be noted is in the onward march of spiritualism and nationalism, sexual involvement might hinder a person. So Gandhiji cautioned his followers, but he did not ask his followers to divorce their wives. What Gandhiji himself could not do, how could he ask his followers to do? It is not Gandhism but satyajitism fathered upon Gandhiji. It is sad to note that anything that is associated with Gandhiji, ultimately turns into an apology for degeneration and distortion.

With regard to the charge of Praful Dave stating that Gandhiji lacked the instinctive love for his fellowmen, it should be said that this charge is based on lack of understanding of Gandhiji. Since this issue is frequently raised, it needs careful study of human psychology. The Id is the dark, in accessible part of our personality. It is the centre of the primitive instincts and impulses, reaching back to man's animal past and is animal and sexual in nature. It is uncon, scious. Its sole purpose is the gratification of desires without reckoning the consequences. Gandhiji had an indomitable superego. Therefore his id, the animal instinct was repressed. This is a natural culmination in the man of Gandhiji's stature. So the repression of Id in Gandhiji's psycho-physical life is not such a lamentable loss, as these critics have made and issue of it. On the other had Gandhiji always tried religiously to efface the ego in its complete merger with humanitarian attitudes. His life was a continuous effort to achieve this goal. This is invariably true of the persons like the Buddha, the Christ and the Prophets. Their instinctual raw love, which is the product of Id, becomes controlled and channelized and finally merged with the humanitarian attitudes.

The norms of sexual life of common people cannot become the standard for such people. Therefore it is better to close our Freuds and Jungs here.

More than anything else, the point often raised by the people like K. R. Kripalani and V. R. Narla is that Gandhiji, "Narrowed the writer's loyalties and by narrowing them encouraged Puritanism" (Narla, "Gandhiji in Telgu Literature"). They mean to say that the Gandhian influence arrested partly perhaps greatly, the process set in motion by Ram Mohan Roy, Vidya Sagar, Madhusudan Dutt, Bankima Chandra, Bhartendu Veereshlingam, Kehavsut and Fakirmohan Senapati. These writers in various Indian languages breathed Western civilization in our country and it is argued that the Gandhian influence arrested this process. Gandhiji was himself introduced to the Western civilization and education. With the strength gained through that education and culture only he started fighting against the Britishes and the bad customs in our country. Then how can he hate the Western education. He only opposed the blind imitation of the West. He opposed the cruel rule of the British but loved British people as a whole. He opposed the domination of the Western culture over our culture. He did not want to break the frame work of Indian Society, while bringing in new changes.

Marx and Gandhiji fundamentally differed here. The German wanted to destroy the existing society and to reconstruct a new social order, but Gandhiji knew that Indian society is standing on the deep rooted religious and cultural tenets which should not be up rooted. This revolutionary change of Marx Indian people could not tolerate. Therefore Karl Marx's method is called the dialectic of material change; where as Gandhiji's method was the dialectic of spiritual change. Which of the two was better for India then can be a matter of dispute. But it cannot be concluded that Gandhiji narrowed writer's loyalties. He opened up many more aspects and attitudes of Indian social life which was not at all touched by the writers. His voluminous writings in 'Young India' and 'Harjijan' are a proof that Gandhiji himself being a writer, did not narrow the writer's loyalties.

U. R. Ananth Murthy raised yet another problem saying that Marxism has given birth to the famous novels like Silone's *Fantamara* and Marlaux's *Man's Fate*. Where in these two writers have presented the whole dialectic of social change. Murthy asks whether Gandhiji has given birth to such novels. According to him this could not happen because Gandhiji's philosophy of life is more ethical than spiritual-mystical. It has little room for beauty as a value in itself. Therefore Indian writers have not whole heartedly accepted Gandhian ideology. All our writers have profoundly respected Gandhi's God-like personality, but they have never wrestled with his ideology in their works of art.

It is true that Gandhism, like Marxism, did not produce great novels like *Fanramara* and *Man's Fare*, why? Gandhiji was a moral Prometheus and his politics was an activity of a moral man; an inevitable extension of his deeply held subjective moral sense to the public life. If a novelist were to treat the Gandhian politics, then it would become a structure of moral tension. The present form of novel is mainly of story telling with the stale romance of men and women.

Secondly, we should not expect literature to propagate any 'ism'. In that case it turns to be propaganda than art. Therefore, however, great works *Fantamara* and *Man's Fate* might have been, in future they might turn into Marxist propaganda. It is for good that Gandhism has not been treated thus by the Indian writers, as is done by the Marxist writers, lest art might degenerate into artifice.

Then where is real Gandhiji to be found in Indian art and literature? His contribution lies in the re-orientation of the values of life and literature. So far the poor and down trodden were the object of history, but now because of Gandhiji they became the subject of history. This is his contribution to the Indian art and literature. They would appear distorted, if we try to look at them through the Westernized value system. Therefore M. K. Naik has rightly observed, "Even if Gandhiji had not written a single line in English he would still have had a secure place in Indian writing in English" (Naik, "Gandhiji in Indian Writing in English").

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