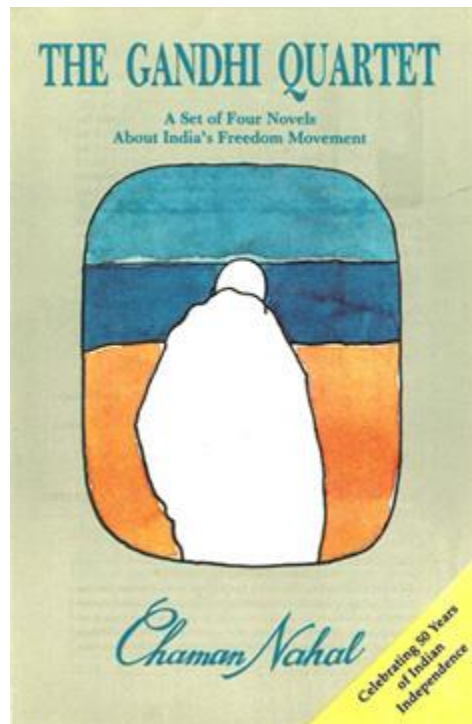


Portrayal of Gandhi in *The Gandhi Quartet* by Chaman Nahal

Rasak Annayat

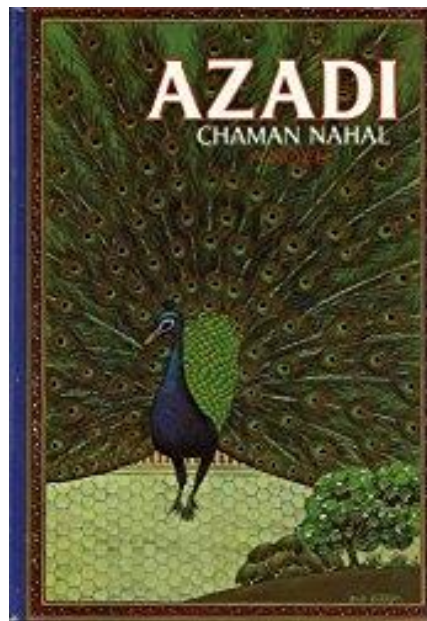


Abstract

Chaman Nahal's sequel of four novels: 'The Crown and the Loincloth', 'The Salt of Life', 'The Triumph of the Tricolour' and 'Azadi' is based on the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi. It is known as Gandhi Quartet. It is a landmark in the annals of Indian English fiction. In *The Gandhi Quartet*, Chaman Nahal has portrayed the character of Gandhi not as an apostle, a god or as a superhuman being, who is always sure of his aims, purposes and opinion, but an ordinary common human being, full of doubts and uncertainties, which were so deeply and abidingly impacted by the forces around. He was not sure how people would react to his political style, yet he was ready to experiment. Chaman Nahal succeeded wonderfully in achieving two objectives: first, he succeeded in portraying Mahatma Gandhi and all that he

lived and stood for and finally died for, including the inevitability of his role in the nation's freedom movement, as a major character, not the protagonist; second, Chaman Nahal succeeded in portraying Gandhi's relationship to the Indian masses and his deep and abiding impact on their lives, and the reactions and responses of his admirers, followers, associates, critics and adversaries.

Key words: *The Gandhi Quartet*, life and style of Gandhi, independence struggle, impact of Gandhi



Introduction

Chaman Nahal, a contemporary novelist in Indian Writing in English has taken up the themes of Indian freedom movement as a major core of his fiction. His *The Gandhi Quartet* deals with incidents of the freedom struggle almost exhaustively. Thematically the four novels may be classified as follows, though the chronological order of publication is not followed. The first novel *The Crown and the Loincloth* deals with the Non-Cooperation Movement during the years between 1920 and 22. This is followed by the second novel *The Salt of Life* dealing with the incidents from the Civil Disobedience Movement to India's involvement in the Second World War during 1920s and 30s and the third novel *The Triumph of the Tricolour* deals with the incidents from the Quit India Movement to the Cabinet Mission which visited India during the period between 1942 and

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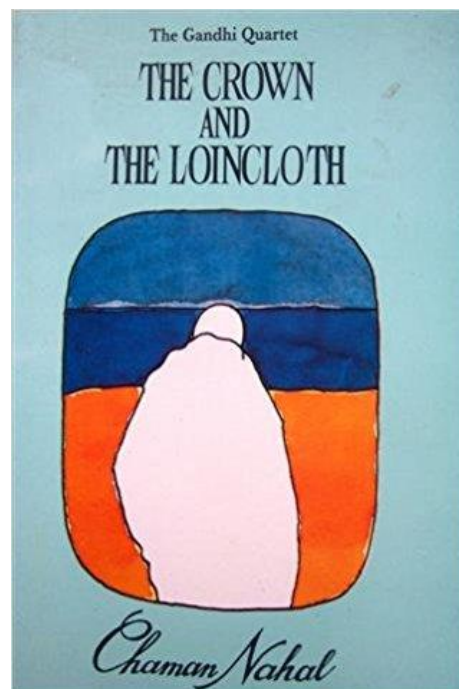
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46 and the fourth novel *Azadi* mainly deals with the riots that resulted from partition during the period between June 3rd 1947 and January 30, 1948 (Chaman Nahal, 1990).

The Gandhi Quartet - Gandhi as a Colossus Figure

Chaman Nahal's sequel of four novels: 'The Crown and the Loincloth', 'The Salt of Life', 'The Triumph of the Tricolour' and 'Azadi' is based on the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi. It is known as ***The Gandhi Quartet***. It is a landmark in the annals of Indian English fiction. The novelist presents Gandhi as a colossus figure who shaped the course of history of his age. These novels present the stupendous drama of the Indian Freedom Struggle under Gandhian leadership in all its aspects. The portrayal of the formative period of the Indian history has been provided authentic support of social situations through a variety of characters through these novels. 'The Crown and the Loincloth' is the first volume of the Quartet series. It presents the historical events of Indian freedom struggle from 1915 to 1922, keeping Gandhi at the centre. The novelist portrays Gandhi as a symbol of moral and spiritual strength overcoming physical odds. The plot of the novel moves around two planes – The portrayal of Gandhi with humanizing touch and the impact of Gandhian ideology to usher the socio-political and cultural regeneration of India.



Gandhi in South Africa

The novel begins with Gandhi's arrival from South Africa. Using the flashback techniques, the major events associated with Gandhi's social & political activities in South Africa are presented in a style that keeps the attention of the reader. They provide the readers the chronological growth of Gandhi as a spiritual & ideal political leader. The novelist highlights Gandhi's views & attitudes through various experiments like – his vows not to use salt, not to drink milk, tea and the observance of celibacy etc.

The Triumph

The third novel in the 'Quartet', *The Triumph of the Tricolour* was published in 1993 after the remaining novels in the Quarter were published already. The novel covers the gap between *The Salt of Life* and *Azadi*. *The Triumph of the Tricolour* deals with the incidents beginning from the 'Quit India Movement' to the Cabinet Mission's visit to India during the freedom struggle. Unlike the first two novels, the major part of *The Triumph of the Tricolour* deals with the revolutionary activities in the freedom struggle.

Use of Biographical Mode

The details of the activities of Gandhi from his arrival from South Africa to the Congress session in Amritsar are presented in a biographical mode. Gandhi's extensive travel in the country getting acquainted with the masses and their situations, his personal experience of poverty in states like Bihar (sharing clothes to go out) and Andhra, snubbing of Maharajas for their ostentations display of extravaganza in the inaugural function of the BHU, have been mentioned. However, Gandhi seethed with indignation after the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. It "... had killed Gandhi's faith in Englishmen" (137). There were protests throughout India over what had happened in the Punjab and a new system of fighting with them was evolved. The weapons like Non-cooperation & Satyagraha were found.

Prudent Merging of Historical and Fictional Elements

Thus, we find that Nahal in this novel has handled both historical and fictional elements with delicacy and prudence. He is successful in projecting Gandhi and the Indian freedom struggle

within the framework of a fiction. And the novelist in its setting needs to add some imaginative qualities even in historical characters in order to accommodate them in the organic growth of the work. As a novelist he is not supposed to keep a mere record of history, but he needs to create and to reveal the hidden life at its source. In his portrayal of Gandhi and other historical characters, Nahal has used various techniques like focusing on the personal details, touching the humanistic side, making them interact with the fictional characters etc. He has added imaginative elements in them maintaining the historical accuracy. The fictional characters like Shanti Nath, Sunil, Sukhbir, Shyama, Rehana etc. have been portrayed meticulously to fit in the texture of the historical part of the novel. Thus, we can say that Chaman Nahal's *The Crown and the Loincloth* is a fine fictional product of the Post-Independence Indian writing in English.

An Extra Ordinary Leader, An Ordinary Common Human Being

In *The Gandhi Quartet*, Chaman Nahal has portrayed the character of Gandhi not as an apostle, a god or as a superhuman being, who is always sure of his aims, purposes and opinion, but as an ordinary common human being, full of doubts and uncertainties, which were so deeply and abidingly impacted by the forces around. He was not sure how people would react to his political style, yet he was ready to experiment. Shyamala Narayan very rightly points out: "For the first time in Indian fiction, Gandhi is presented as a frail human being, troubled by doubts; he wonders whether people are ready to accept his methods, whether what he did is right." (Shyamala S. Narayan, Rev of *The Salt of Life*, *Indian Book Chronicle*, Vol. 17 No. 4, p. 405)

Conclusion

Thus, we can say that in this *Quartet*, Chaman Nahal succeeded wonderfully in achieving two objectives: first, he succeeded in portraying Mahatma Gandhi and all that he lived and stood for and finally died for, including the inevitability of his role in the nation's freedom movement, as a major character, not the protagonist; second, Chaman Nahal succeeded in portraying Gandhi's relationship to the Indian masses and his deep and abiding impact on their lives, and the reactions and responses of his admirers, followers, associates, critics and adversaries.

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