



Heroes as Victims in Chaman Nahal's the Crown and the Loincloth

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loincloth, metaphor, motherland, demonstrate, immortal soul and noble cause.

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ABSTRACT Chaman Nahal's *The Quartet* which is a 'Gandhian Saga' deals with most of the major incidents and movements of the freedom struggle. The first novel *The Crown and the Loincloth* deals with the first phase of the freedom struggle, the Non-Cooperation Movement. Gandhi is not deeply involved with his family. He spends most of his life in fighting against the problems of society exploitation, slavery and untouchability. Sunil the protagonist of the novel struggles like Gandhi in his life throughout the novel. He enters the freedom struggle against the wishes of his father. He is beaten to death by General Dyer. The novel concludes with the tragic death of Sunil. Both these two heroes sacrificed everything including their lives for the sake of Indian Freedom Movement. No doubt they are heroes as well as victims for the sake of the noble cause.

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 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's 'The Quartet' which is a 'Gandhian Saga' deals with most of the major incidents and movements of the freedom struggle. The first novel in the 'Quartet' *The Crown and the Loincloth* deals with the first phase of the freedom struggle, the Non-Cooperation Movement during 1920 and 1922.

O.P.Mathur opines: "... clearly in this novel, Nahal has taken upon: himself a difficult and challenging task to portray Gandhi both as an individual and as a symbol, to follow the lives and fortunes of a large number of fictional characters and to project the whole as a metaphor of the multifarious strands of those tumultuous years of struggle generated by the opposing forces of the foreign government (the crown) and the popular uprising symbolized by Gandhi (the loincloth)." (p.330)

Chaman Nahal creates a large family consisting of a father, mother, four sons and four daughters, who suffer deeply in the freedom struggle. He moulds all the characters with proper justification. Gandhi influences the actions of all the fictional characters in the novel. The story is a battle between the mighty British 'Crown' and Gandhi, who wears a symbolic 'Loincloth', where the large family becomes a scapegoat. Gandhi's character is portrayed as a symbol and as an individual. His portrayal of fictional characters is remarkable in their personalities, struggles, prejudices, affections and fortunes.

Gandhi is not deeply involved with his family. Sometimes he

feels guilty of his lack of love and affection towards his family. He spends most of his life in fighting against the problems of society exploitation, slavery and untouchability. He does not have enough time to look after his own family. The guilt of negligence towards his family is reflected in the first episode of the novel. He spends most of his time in agitations for social justice among the people. The British government takes him into custody for many years. So, naturally, he does not have enough time to look after his family as a good husband and a good father.

Thakur Santhi Nath is a landlord in a village called Ajitha in the Punjab. Ajitha is a typical north Indian village. People from different religions live together in Ajitha with peace and harmony. As a landlord and gentleman, Santhi Nath is honoured among the people of the village. Dhan Vanti, the wife of Santhi Nath, a typical hindu wife serves their large family consisting of four sons Rughubir Nath, Sukhbir Singh, Kanthi Nath and Sunil Kumar and Amba, Rukmani and Mala – married daughters and Shyama, the younger, an unmarried daughter.

Nahal takes a challenging task to justify his fictional creation. There is no wonder if one says even the British or the American novelists never dare to take such large fictional creation in one novel. It is not an easy task to weave for proper justification for all the characters in one story. But it is inevitable to Nahal to take a family in the early decades of the twentieth century from north India because the majority families in those days were joint families.

Ajitha is a nearby village of Amritsar, and the villagers are aware of the activities of the Congress in the freedom movement from time to time. Sunil as a curious freedom fighter attends the meetings of Gandhi in Amritsar. His life takes a different turn after his meeting with Gandhi as does Sriram in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. Unlike Sriram, who has a selfish idea to marry Bharathi, Sunil plain heartedly follows the foot-steps of Gandhi after sacrificing his teacher job and a comfortable life to serve the nation. He replies "Yes" with confidence to the question of Gandhi who asks, "will you give up all that you have to follow me in the cause of the motherland?" (P-128)

People at Ajitha frightened to hear of the holocaust of Jallianwalla Bagh. They worry about Sunil who is beaten black and blue by Dyer. At last Sunil is carted to Ajitha with severe wounds. Fate deludes Santhi Nath in two ways at this juncture; one is the half-dead son and the other is the elopement

of Shyama with Rakesh. Santhi Nath is bedridden from these two unexpected blows.

Sunil recovers after proper medical care by his family members. Dhan vanti and Sunil try to console Santhi Nath. Some villagers sympathize with Santhi Nath whereas some others, who have prejudice against him, enjoy the scandal of Shyama's elopement.

Out of his interest in the activities of the congress, Sunil happens to meet Gandhi at Amritsar. Gandhi asks him to give up his job and establish a Khadi Bandar at his village. As a loyal disciple of Gandhi, Sunil does the same. Consequently he has to leave his father's house with Kusum and Vikram and lives separately amidst the Muslim families in the village. As an educated Sunil knows the value of democracy. Indians have been crushed under the feet of tyrannical kings for so many generations. For the last one and half centuries they are under the boot of the British 'Crown'.

As Kandan gives up his job and joins in the freedom movement in S.Venkataramani's *Kandan the Patriot*, Sunil leaves his job and joins in the freedom struggle, where Kandan does it voluntarily, Sunil does it at the behest of Gandhi. Like Sunil, some hundreds of patriots had given up their jobs in response to the call of Gandhi during the freedom struggle. Sunil establishes a Khadi Bandar at Ajitha. Spinning being a household craft in the villages of Punjab, the people respond favorably to the Khadi Bandar.

Sunil has confidence that he can draw the attention of the people as Moorthy does in Raja Rao's *Knathapura*. Moorthy is called as local Gandhi by the villagers at the typical south Indian village Kanthapura. Sunil gets recognition gradually as Gandhi followers at Ajitha.

Now it is time for British government to show the loyalty of the people everywhere in India during the tour of the Prince of Wales. The prince's visit to India is an opportunity for the congress to demonstrate their disloyalty and to show the intensity of the freedom movement. The government in its turn makes elaborate arrangements to conduct the tour peacefully.

People all over the country demonstrate against the British by burning foreign clothes in their towns and villages. The police beat the demonstrators severely in order to stop the burning. Thousands of people are wounded and some of them are killed. The participation of a large number of women is a new source of strength to the congress.

This was first time that Indian women

Had come out of their homes to demonstrate

In the streets and the police manual provided

No direction for handling them.(p.180)

What happens at toddy shops with a huge crowd under the leadership of Moorthy in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, the same happens at Hall Bazar. The government fears the interference of a large number of women in the agitation. Celia is amused at the show and wants to know what "Inqlab zindabad" is. She meets Rakesh at this juncture. As an American citizen she does not take objection to the revolutionary ideas of Rakesh. She knows well how Americans got independence through their civil war and what are the products of the French and the Russian revolutions.

As an American, Celia Ashby couldn't object

To that. The American war of revolution had

Been fought on the same principles.(p.185)

Thousands of people respond to the call of Gandhi's non-cooperation at a session of congress in 1920. Gandhi does not accept the reforms of Montagu- Chelmsford, which are not proper at this juncture. The British government fears his power of speech and charisma that would intensify the Non-Cooperation movement:

Gandhi had known of coming reforms and

Had denounced them as offering to little,

Too late; he had particularly objected to the

Clause of British review of the Indian

Situation after every ten years, telling his

Audience, dramatically enough, that he

Could take them to freedom, to swaraj, in one

Calendar year. It was not the force of his

Arguments that worried the british; it was his

Mass appeal, his charishma.(p.314)

Violent incidents occur here and there and now and then in various parts of the country in support of the movement. Twenty- two policemen are perished at Chauri Chaura in the U.P. The Khadi Bandar at Rohru on Simla Hills, which was established by Sunil, is set on fire by the police.

Gandhi never accepts violence in any circumstances. He points out the Chauri Chaura incident where forty people were engulfed in fire. Many leaders oppose the argument. They believe that it is not a major reason to call off such a great movement. Some others question as to whom Gandhi consulted before calling off such a movement. Only one person in the entire nation believes in Gandhi – Gandhi himself. This act may be considered that Gandhi as a great personality in human history as he never withdraws from his principle 'Non-violence' in any circumstances.

Thousands of people gather around Bunkinghom palace. The next day the newspapers report on the dramatic attack on the life of Prince of Wales in Lahore. The reports reveal that three tongas rushed to the dais, where the Prince of Wales was sitting, there is a lot of commotion and chaos. And it also reports:

At that instant, a young Indian forced his

Way through the ring of the officers and friend

Poin blank at the Prince of Wales. Only

Another Indian threw himself between the

Prince and the assassin, and it was that

Indian and not the Prince who was killed.(p.392)

The villagers of Ajitha come to know that the Indian who sacrificed his life to save the life of The Prince of Wales is Sunil Kumar. Misery prevails everywhere in the village. The village women come to Kusum and participate in the communal mourning. But they never see even a tear from the eyes of Kusum. She decides to leave for Sabarmathi Ashram with Vikram, even though the family members oppose her decision. Santhi Nath meets her at Amritsar railway station when she is about to leave and gives her a purse.

Sunil the protagonist struggles like Gandhi in his life throughout the novel. He enters the freedom struggle against the

wishes of his father. He is beaten to death by General Dyer. The novel concludes with the tragic death of Sunil. The elopement of Shyama with Rakesh, is tragic to some people and farcical to some others at Ajitha. As Srinivas Iyengar opines:

...the variety of character and action, the mingling of historical with the fictional, the play of the tragic, ironic and farcical and the moving multiplicity of scene and incident, all succeed in making the novel a forceful recordation of the first of the three great phases of the Age of Gandhi.(p.752)

Gandhi decided to protect the people of his country from the clutches of the British Crown. As a prosperous lawyer and the responsible husband of his wife and the responsible father of his children Gandhi knows his responsibility of his family. But, as a selfless soul he wants to shoulder the responsibility of the people of the nation. His prime duty is to save

the country under the boot of the British. Gandhi's capacity to draw the attention of the people towards the freedom struggle is proved once again with his call for the Non-cooperation movement. His motivation from common and to the intellectual towards the destination can be in the lives of thousands of freedom fighters. There is no doubt, the father of the nation and the great soul (*mahatma*) is the hero of the nation. His heroism makes him a victim to look after the welfare of his own family.

The story of *The Crown and the Loin Cloth* moves around the protagonist Sunil Kumar. His character is portrayed by Nahal up to the hero of the novel. Sunil sacrificed everything including his life to save the honour of the country. Sunil remains as an immortal soul in the fictional world of Indian Writing in English fiction. This hero is victimized to the circumstances in Indian freedom struggle.

Thus the historical hero Gandhi and the fictional hero Sunil Kumar play key roles in *The Crown and the Loincloth*. Sunil plays the role Moortyh in *Kanthapura* and turns as the local Gandhi of Ajitha in the novel. Both these two heroes sacrificed everything including their lives for the sake of Indian Freedom Movement. No doubt they are heroes as well as victims for the sake of the noble cause.

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