

CHAPTER - IV

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A writer of a historical fiction is a historian as well as a novelist, which imposes limitations on his handling of historical characters. As a historian, he cannot distort historical facts, and as a novelist his aim is to imaginatively recreate history and try to explain the motives, tensions and compulsions which guided the actions of the historical characters. While doing this the writer consciously draws upon his own experiences, his interpretation of history, his ideology or vision and his gut feelings towards the events and characters involved in them, specially when he himself has been the witness of the contemporary history which he is using to write his fiction. This dissertation has borne out this assumption in its study of the Indian national leaders in Chaman Nahal's The Gandhi Quartet and Paul Scott's The Raj Quartet.

As already pointed out in chapter I of this

dissertation, both Nahal and Scott had witnessed the freedom movement as young men. Paul Scott was in a way a representative of the Raj being a British military officer, and Nahal was an impressionable young teen-ager brought up in the electrifying atmosphere of the freedom movement. The titles The Gandhi Quartet and The Raj Quartet are suggestive of the focus of their novels. In The Gandhi Quartet, Nahal makes Gandhi a focal point of his novels, while Paul Scott makes the decline and fall of the British Raj as the focal point. Even the titles of the individual novels in these two Quartets are symbolic or metaphorical. Nahal's first novel, The Crown and the Lioncloth, suggests confrontation between the mighty empire and the lioncloth-clad Indian national leader, Gandhi, who was the sole actor on the field of operations. Other leaders followed him as did the huge masses of the Indian population. Nahal's second title, The Salt of the Life, refers to the central incident in the novel, the salt satyagraha, in which again Gandhi is at the centre of action. The third novel, The Triumph of the Tricolour, refers to the victory of the freedom movement and the British Raj in its dying stage. The fourth novel, Azadi, is a gruesome

account of the bloody days of the partition and how again Gandhiji emerges as a selfless, saintly figure, who was worried about the united India and who suffered for the victims of the partition.

The titles of the four novels of Scott in The Raj Quartet are metaphorical and suggest the coloniser's attitude of Scott towards Indian freedom movement and Indian national leaders. Since the focal point is the British Raj, the Indian national leaders figure in these novels only in the specific political context. The Jewel in the Crown is a metaphor for India as a jewel in the crown of the Queen, a prized possession of the British Empire. Scott looks at the relationship between the Empire and India as paternalistic - protective as well as punishing. From this point of view the Indian freedom movement is an aberration, and Indian leadership is hardly equipped for self-rule. The Day of the Scorpion is a metaphor for the British Raj in the state of decline and death - a scorpion in the circle of fire. Here Scott is critical of the Indian leaders for their non-cooperation in the War. The Towers of Silence is a metaphor suggesting madness and decay of the old Raj, and the last

volume, The Division of Spoils, suggests all evil let loose. The title underlined the squabbles and enmities between the Indian leaders and madness that took possession of the Hindu and Muslim population. Scott indirectly emphasises the failure of the Indian leadership.

From the detailed discussion of the images of the Indian national leaders in Chapter II, based on the novels of Chaman Nahal, we arrive at the following observations:

1. Nahal mostly makes use of omniscient narrator technique to tell the story. However, he does make use of dialogues to dramatise situations and present his characters. He has also made use of a few letters. He makes Gandhi use monologues to present his innermost thoughts at some places.
2. Gandhi appears as a major character in Nahal's novels, and deeply influences the life of the fictional characters by Nahal. As a result the image of Gandhi in The Gandhi Quartet is many-sided.
3. Other national leaders are presented by Nahal as they appear briefly in the context of Gandhian movements.

Nahal presents situations in which the differences between Nehru and Patel, Maulana Azad and Jinnah or Rajagopalachari come out in flashes. But the images of these leaders are not dealt with extensively.

4. In the novels of Nahal the moral and spiritual aspects of Gandhian image and the movements of Gandhiji have been brought out to a great extent. Nahal's Gandhi is a very human figure, sometimes full of doubts, introspective, susceptible to human weaknesses and passions. He is loved as well as hated. His image is varied and enigmatic, ranging from a shrewd baniya to a great spiritual master.
5. In general, Nahal is historically objective. He is not the Indian national leaders. Though he appears to revere Gandhiji, it does not prevent him from showing his weaknesses.
6. Nahal has presented Gandhiji in particular and Indian leaders in general from the British point of view also. The British military officers hate Gandhiji and consider the activities of the Indian national leaders

as seditious and inimical. They specially resent the non-cooperation movement at the time of War, when the Japanese army is at the doorstep of India. Some British Civilian officers, like Mr. Ashley do show understanding of the Gandhian principles and are sympathetic towards the freedom movement. Like the British officers, the Indian revolutionaries also dislike Gandhiji and other national leaders for the principle of non-violence.

Paul Scott's presentation of the images of Gandhi and other Indian leaders is basically different from that of Nahal, except perhaps the British attitude to Indian leaders which is similar in both. From the discussion of it in Chapter III, we come to the following observations:

1. Scott's focal point in his novels is the decline and fall of the British Raj. He seems unconsciously to adopt coloniser's attitude towards the Indian leadership and Indian freedom movement.
2. Neither Gandhi nor any other Indian leader is a major character in Scott's novels. The Indian national leaders appear in The Raj Quartet only in the specific

political context. The Indian leaders hardly appear in person. They are more talked about than talking. There are impressions of the Indian leaders through the British military officers, civilian and other fictional characters like Edwina Daphne etc. The British military officers uniformly accuse Gandhi as indulging in seditious activities. This is what they do in Nahal's novels also. They think that in his Swadeshi movement Gandhiji is taking Indian economy backward.

3. Compared to Nahal, Scott makes use of a variety of points of view in presenting his story. About twentytwo of his characters narrate their personal experiences and views through letters, pages of diaries, extracts from personal records, etc. Scott also makes use of omniscient narrator technique at some places. Most of these narrations come from white men and women. Scott also makes use of dialogues, depositions before police or military officers, which lend to dramatic presentation and create impression of authenticity.

4. Gandhi and other Indian leaders appear in Paul Scott's novels in very formal situations. Scott's Gandhi is meeting a governor or a viceroy or he is mentioned in the context of his movement in the unpublished memoirs of some British military officer like Brigadier Reid. Gandhi or Nehru or Patel is a static character in Scott's novels. They have just one context, which is political.

5. Scott is hardly aware of the moral and spiritual aspect of Satyagraha and non-violence, which we can see the way he makes his British characters talk about Gandhi. Even his omniscient narrator does not betray understanding of these aspects.

There is also a basic difference between the British fictional characters drawn by Nahal and those by Paul Scott. In the novels of Nahal, there are a few characters who have sympathy and understanding for the Indian and their freedom movement. For example, Kenneth Ashby, the Assistant Commissioner of Amritsar, in The Crown and the Lioncloth, is a sensible, sedate I.C.S. officer who is a contrast to

General Dyer. While General Dyer was a vampire thirsty for the blood of 'Slimy Indians', Ashby shows love and sympathy for Indians. He protested against the killings in Jallianwallah Bagh on the ground that many people at the meeting might not be rebels. They might have come from other parts of the country either to bathe in the Golden Temple or to see the cattle fair or for the Baisakhi. He firmly holds that " India should get its freedom, but only through the goodwill of England and not by opposing it "¹

Nahal has presented another character, Celia Ashby, an American widow of Tom Ashby who is Kenneth Ashby's Uncle. Indians for her are " the darlingest race on Earth. Incompetent and innocent like small children."² She is very happy to see the British goods being burnt and asks Kenneth Ashby not to take action against the Indians. She has no fondness for British royalty. She, too, throws her hat into the bonfire as a protest against the British rule. She appreciates Gandhi's views of Swadeshi. Further, she encourages Indians also to cast off their foreign clothes. Wishing good luck to Rakesh she hopes that " the Indians would be able to drive the British out."³

The British Characters, fictional or historical, drawn by Scott are mostly military officers like Reid, who hardly have any sympathy for the Indian freedom movement. The images of other Indian national leaders like Nehru, Subhas Bose, Jinnah and others in the novels of Nahal are faithful to the history of Indian freedom movement. They are appreciated or criticised by the common people's representatives like Lala Kanshi Ram. Nahal also tries to expose the conspiracy of the Indian politicians and their intentions behind the partition. He not only holds the English responsible for the butchery, but he is equally critical of the Indian national leaders as well. As rightly pointed out by K.R.Srinivas Iyengar :

"The 'leaders' had sowed the wind of communal suspicion and partition was the result, like a whirlwind, the mad act of partition was uprooting masses of humanity, mangling them and throwing them across the border heap after heap." ⁴

One has only to read the Congress committee meeting with the Muslim League delegation to understand the

truthfulness of the remarks of K.R.S. Iyengar.

At the outset it is clearly seen in The Raj Quartet that Scott believes in certain values which govern his novelistic vision. According to Scott, the English are experts in every practical matter under the sun. He appears to believe in the racial superiority of the British :

*"India looks like a source of riches to be exploited, a land of heathens to be led to the light, a country of unbridled criminal passion to be subdued, and corrected a bastion to be held against the yellow peril or the Russian bear; or the home of simple uncultured peasants who need help and guidance."*⁵

He also believes that the British were sent to India to accept India as their divine burden. It was their moral duty to look after the Indians to make them civilised. He criticises Indians because they could not understand the noble intention of the British policy. It is in the context of these values that the images of the Indian national leaders have been analysed.

As said earlier Scott's point of view is coloniser's point of view. Scott does not consider Gandhi as a moral force determined to make Indians realize their national identity. As rightly pointed out by Gomathi Narayanan,

"The primary image in the Indian's mind associated with the name of Gandhi is that of a leader who fought for freedom from alien rule and thought he stood for many ideals, these were all incidental to his first concern..... the revolt against British domination." ⁶

Paul Scott is oblivious to this image of Gandhi and presents Gandhi and other national leaders only from the point of view of the British officers.

Compared to Chaman Nahal, Paul Scott's treatment of the Indian leaders is scanty and biased. His history is the British history of India, not the Indian history. Nahal's point of view is post-independence and post-colonial. He looks at the Indian leadership critically, apportioning praise and blame through his fictional characters.

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