

Indian Fiction in English
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Lecture – 10
Waiting for the Mahatma

So can you tell me a few things very quickly about the, the author, the novel or something, a few things that you gather from here and there. Does this belong to the 1930s and 40s? This novel? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** This man is talking about? Yes, this is before 55, yes **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** And but still, you know, this is always discussed along with the 30s, 40s novel because of the theme.

Because it is also a literal depiction of Gandhi, Nationalist struggle in a very different form altogether, some even say that this is the sequel to Kanthapura and it is also been seen in a different way compared to Kanthapura and Untouchable. Gandhi figures in both, all 3 novels, Kanthapura, Untouchable and Waiting for Mahatma but it is generally said that in Waiting for, Waiting for the Mahatma, it, the character of Gandhi is portrayed in a very different way, not in a symbolic way like in the other 2 novels, like Kanthapura and Untouchable in a more.

Gandhi is a real character in Waiting for the Mahatma, yes. A quick plot summary even if you are there, just half way through, I think. You will be able to share that. **“Professor - student conversation starts”** So this novels is about Sriram. Yes. He is born and brought up in Malgudi by his grandmother. Yes, Malgudi as you know was also this fictional village in which most of, almost all of Narayan's novels are set, yes.

So his father died in a war in Mesopotamia and mother delivering him, first line says that, while delivering him. So he is very dear to his grandmother and every month the pension comes and she saves it for him in the nearby bank so that she could someday hand over the passbook to him when he grows up. Okay. So, it goes on and then suddenly after the, there is Mahatma Gandhi's program to visit Malgudi and then he arrives in villages and he, he, before that in the market, he saw, he sees a girl named Bharati.

So he, there is also likening for her and when at the program she, he sees her on the podium and that is, that is the reason why he joins Mahatma Gandhi and the, and the group for, like and the like, it was around the villages and just because he wanted to be with her. It is okay. Did he have any idea of Gandhi and the Nationalist movement before that? Not really. Not really. Yes. So, the program goes on for few days and he travels around the villages and develops some sort of liking for what Mahatma is doing and develops some reverence towards Mahatma Gandhi.

It is okay. This will do for the time being, yes. Anybody else with any other detail that you found interesting in the first segment? How does this protagonist come across in comparison to Murti of Kanthapura? Sriram is most human. Yes. He is very infallible and, no I mean, he is not infallible and he is throughout... Not infallible that is what you meant. Yes. Yes. And throughout he is, he is just blundering along basically. Yes.

And you see the movement through his eyes which I suppose is most people at that point who were unaware of the politics behind. Yes. And, and I think Narayan throws an interesting detail. There is a scene where the Mahatma comes and they have a palatial house ready for him and, and I think, that is the area where he talks about cast. Right. But yes, it is just that she runs very very befuddled throughout the novel. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

Yes and also the novel shows us how ordinary people respond to the movement, yes, not an idealist, not the Gandhian and he is not even sure. We do not know, do not even know whether he has a political position or not, yes. He is just you know, just drifting through life in, so to speak and the only thing which motivates him is meeting Bharati, having a relation with Bharati, yes.

So other than that we do not find him very passionate about anything, yes and along the way, of course, you know, he developed certain sorts of political knowledge as he puts it and he also, you know, his way of thinking also changes, yes and other than that when we compare it to the other 2 novels, in fact, this is not a very well informed protagonist, yes, like she said, you know, a very more human protagonist, more ordinary, yes.

Somebody who is not thinking about the right response to either to Gandhi or to the nation, yes.

Who is also conscious of his own limitations, yes. The same reason has made this novel very popular as well as, you know, not so enduring to a number of critics. They thought it was too simplistic portrayal of the movement and Gandhi and the, the consequential opinion remains quite divided in that respect.

This is a, because of all the 3, the triumvirate, Raja Rao, Anand and Narayan, he was the most popular and more successful in the sense that, you know, in terms of the readership that he enjoyed and all, but he was also seen as the most apolitical of the 3. Be it, the political commitments in the writings of the other 2 writers, Raja Rao and Anand's, we will see shortly when we take a look at Untouchable. so their political commitments were very clear.

They were, there was no ambiguity about it but Narayan except for this novel. This novel is concerned, Waiting for the Mahatma is seen as a most political of all of his novels. Yes. Which are the other novels of Narayan that you are familiar with? Guide. Guide. Swamy and his friends. Swami and, Swami and his friends, yes. We do not see a sense of overt political activity, overt political ideology, any of those things, you know, prevailing his, except for this one.

How would you talk about the politics in this work? Is there an overt celebration of anything? There is Gandhi in the beginning, towards the end, you know. Who is the other nationalist character who emerges towards the end, towards the latter half of the novel? There is no character. We only hear the voice. Who is that? Subhash Chander Bose, yes. So and, and may be you know, he also had the advantage of looking back and having a different viewpoint altogether given that, you know, this is the post-independence period, 1954-55 was the period when it was published.

So in all, this is also like some 6 years after Gandhi's death, yes and again 6-7 years after the Movement of independence. So maybe he also has the advantage of having a different vantage point altogether and this is something that even Srinivasa Iyengar wrote about this novel that Gandhi is too big. In any novelistic scenario, Iyengar says, Gandhi is too big to be given a minor part.

On the other hand, he is sure to turn the novel into his own biography. He is given a major central part, yes. So in that sense, he thinks Narayan's writing is quite a success in the sense that Gandhi is there as one of the major characters but the story is not about Gandhi either. The story continues to be about Sriram and the way, you know, he journeys through this turbulent period, yes.

It, the focus was not even for a moment shift from Sriram story and his, and the romance with Bharati towards, you know, placing Gandhi as the central figure of the entire novel. But at some level we know that Gandhi is also a major character who influenced his decisions, who influenced, you know, his and whatever he was going through at particular points of time and unlike Untouchable and Kanthapura, like I said, many have argued that Gandhi is a real character and not a symbol over here.

Yes, there is a certain kind of romanticisation of Gandhi, a certain kind of, you know, iconic state is given to Gandhi which I do not think any writer during that period would escape from. Apart from that, we do not see much of a Gandhi worshipping rhetoric throughout the novel. There is, there are certain occasions when we, you know, we quite find this Sridhar's humour and response is very endeavouring, yes.

The way he participates in certain things. You remember there is the scene where he meets an ordinary person on the road and, you know, that person is saying, you know, he is pulling a cart and he says why are these Gandhi people making lot of noise and disturbance for us. He is asking, Sridhar is asking do you why, not Sridhar, sorry, Sriram. Sriram is asking, yes, why are you, I mean, why are you saying all, all of these things?

Do you know why Gandhi is in Jail, yes? It is for people like you to make you a freeman and you are not a freeman, yes. He also gets the irony of it. Sometimes, you know, he is we feel, Sriram is not talking to the others, but he is talking to himself, yes. We do not know because otherwise we do not get any sense of them being under fetters under, you know, we do get any sense of the ordinary person being under slavery under the British.

On the other hand, Sriram in the beginning comes across as someone who is enjoying all of those things, yes. Remember one of the scenes in the beginning when he goes to the shopkeeper that he is very fond of, yes, the neighbourhood shop and he asks for a portrait, yes, like whose portrait is that and, you know, the shopkeeper says may be it is queen Victoria, I do not know but that has brought me good luck, yes.

And he also says, you know, at any point when you planning to give it away, yes, I will be willing to take it. So it also shows the, the kind of interest and the kind of, you know, enthusiasm he also has for all kinds of foreign goods, yes. But after Bharati comes in to his life and through that, you know, he encounters Gandhi, we find him a totally changed man. But we are not very sure whether that is a real change of heart or, you know, whether that again undergo a change at some point or the other.

And this event if, you know, in terms of the action which is set unlike the other novels of Narayan, this is not entirely in Malgudi. The action strays a bit and goes to Delhi at some point and so it is also, you know, we do not know whether like we discussed in the earlier session about whether it is important for one to move out of the home space to be able to participate in the nation, yes.

So we do not know whether you know that acts as compulsion here also and unlike other, the other novels which do not talk about the nation. Here we find the actions straying a bit to Delhi. Yes V. S. Nelson? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** But depend somewhat different from the Indulekha like where he was outside. Yes, yes. I think that is a different like when, when, what was the character, Madhavan. Yes.

Was leaving from his hometown and going to that Bombay and Kolkata. It seems like when he was talking about the diversity of the Bombay or something that, it seems like we are visiting some place like in the, during the French revolution, somebody visiting the, I mean, France and like observing everything and you get a lot of enticing ideas and all. It seems like that in that because there was no sense of, I think, that time before Gandhi came, there was no sense of national.

Nation, yes, yes, yes. He was and, and in this case, it has already, Gandhi has become so popular. Yes. It is very interesting in that other is where the chairman were, he was going to get. He also wanted like they were converted to like to Indianness, like they wanted to redecorate their house with khadi, like they wanted to wear the khadi. Yes. It was like some kind of popular culture started, I think.

Popular culture started through Gandhi. Yes, yes, yes. It is interesting. Right, that... How he brought everyone together. Yes. Because may be his popularity but yes. Yes, yes. Also taking of from what Nelson just said, in Kanthapura, Gandhi is not the character. He is being, you know, showcased through the figure of Murti. Here also though Gandhi is a real character, we find that there is a certain way in which, yes, some Gandhian culture is being, you know, imparted to every village, yes, through certain set of things. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

Yes people behaving in such a way as if, you know, if you have these set of things, if you have Khadi, if you have, you know, if you have, you know, home spun clothes, yes. If you have a certain kind of an image, that is a guarantee that the Mahatma is going to like it, yes. And also talking in a certain language using certain, certain register, yes. Remember, you know, he initially the character Sriram feels that, you know, I do not know the right.

I do not have the right kind of language to talk to Gandhi and then he gets himself schooled in a certain political rhetoric and then he says now I think Mahatma is pleased, yes. He uses those sort of words, you know, the right kind of words about surveyors, about the attitude, about being non-violent, yes. So the, the, the image of, the metaphor of non-violence is invoked so much that we do not even know whether he actually believes in that by himself or not, yes.

Sriram, at various points in fact, we do not know whether he is putting up all of this act where he is deceiving himself, yes because there are only certain points after his encounter with Gandhi when, when he is allowed to be his own true self. That instant when his grandmother dies and comes back, yes and that time, you know, there is a certain section in the novel which has, you know, that moment he could not think of anything. Not the British, not Bharati, not Gandhi, yes.

So there are, there is a way in which Gandhi enters his life and dominates in such a way that, you know, he does not even know whether it is proper to behave in the other way after in his own, you know, apolitical, totally ignorant way, after having met Gandhi. So also there is question whether he will be actually able to go back to that status of, you know, extreme naivety where he only new about what was going on in this life, what grandmother was telling him, yes, those sort of things, yes.

There is a lot of criticism against Narayan that he is not a politically committed novelist, yes. What do you think about that? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Completely unnecessary for a novelist view. And also while today's standards, even if you are apolitical, it becomes political in the sense that it is everybody else's that makes you eligible to be a apolitical I will say.

So from that point of view, how would you analyse the politics which we see in, the apolitics that we see in Narayan's novel. This one. Yes. Do you think it is political in any way? Whether Narayan was conscious of it or not, that is a different question altogether. He may or may not be committed to a political stance here but he talks about politics but I do not think he is committed. It is all like a character (()) (16:05) of somebody to then in political analysis of that national.

Yes. That itself could be seen as a different kind of politics that he is employing though again, you know, inadvertently because Gandhi, reducing Gandhi to a character, yes, I hope you are getting what I am saying, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** Reducing him to just another character and not like, you know, a divine, religious, iconic, visionary figure, yes. So this set of a reduction from that status to just that of a character was something most, many critics were uncomfortable, right.

And also Narayan plays a lot with irony, that is a very nice blend of humour and irony which the other 2 novelists, Raja Rao and Anand, they had not really, you know, toyed with these things when they were talking about the nation or about Gandhi. Very briefly, you know, in there is this story by Raja Rao, Cow and the barricades, yes. There, you know, he does employ a sense of

irony and humour when he talks about the nationalist movement because the story is about a cow.

It is a very interesting story but other than that, you know, we do not find many of them playfully engaging with Gandhi, yes. They, that is also in a certain way, you know, we can attribute it to the different kind of political belief system that Narayan had. If you go through the other novels of Narayan, also we find that, you know, he is deliberately going against many of the traditional belief systems and he is best in it be order of the society, yes.

So it is a very different rhetoric we get altogether from Narayan's novels but again, you know, personally it has also been said that he was very staunch traditionalist. We do not find him straying away from any of those, you know, set rules of the society or of the religion or cast, yes or even in terms of the politics, we do not really get to know what his commitments were. Just, you know, drawing your attention to a couple of instances in the novel where certain things which were part of the nationalist slogan are being used with, you know, a lot of irony.

Like we are an infant nation, yes and the Sriram, the character tells us, you know, nobody really knew what it meant but it sounded very good, yes, that we are an infant nation, yes and about the use of that Quit India episode, yes, where he is, you know, he is painting, not painting, he is doing this, what is he doing? Yes, the graffiti on the wall, Quit India and what does he think about the letter Q? **“Professor - student conversation starts”**

He is trying to convert the Indians out of that ranking and (()) (18:50). Yes. That kind of influence. Yes, yes, yes. So he is actually, Narayan is even mocking the way in which the nationalist rhetoric is being used to. Actually the way he is mocking is, he has this peculiar way of like expressing the people's lives. In that like the there comes a time when there is a class of ideas and nationalism coming to those lives.

So it is like, so in any view it will look like that irony and all those funny like how we see that. It will become like that because he is not political. Yes. He is serious about the nationalism if you cannot see in that way but in this, in this peculiar way of telling the stories of this common

people. So he gets to express such kind of expression like in such forms. What do you think about, you know, the, the language which is used in that sense?

Yes, language in the sense not being language of the novel but the language of politics which is used in the novel. The nationalist rhetoric which is built into it. Can we say that, you know, it is more often in an ironical way, in a satirical way then in a very matter of fact serious way. Whenever nationalism is being talked about, yes, we also will find some ironic twist towards the end.

Either, you know, one of the characters, they will make a blunder or Sriram himself will not be convinced of what he is saying, yes. And even when he is trying to convince the others. It sounds as if, you know, Sriram is actually trying to convince himself, yes and thinking about, you know, after he says something, he is also in his mind he is weighing the responses of Bharati and Gandhi.

Will they be pleased, should I say something more about, it is all about non-violence so that they will be pleased. They will also fit very perfectly into this, you know, ongoing nationalist movement, yes and this character Bharati, yes, what does that novel tell us about the name, Bharati? What does it stand for? She is the daughter of... **“Professor - student conversation ends.”**

Yes she, Bharati tells this, tells Sriram about how she was named. Just when I was born when he learnt of it, Bapu ji who had come down south made himself my godfather and named her Bharati which means I hope you know that, yes, Bharati is Indian. Bharati is the daughter of India I suppose. Yes. So there is a very direct connection of the name. We do not know whether you know this is being given to us in an ironic sense, yes, to show that, you know, the nation is also an important character in the novel.

And what do you think about this character Bharati? She comes across as this perfect contrast to Sriram. She is also an orphan just like Sriram. Sriram was raised by his grandmother but Bharati was raised by an almost like a set of people who shared the same set of values with nationalist

movement and she was brought up with that, yes. She comes across just as the other extreme who is not really aware of, you know, northern side of the society which is not in close touch with the nationalist movement, yes.

And both of them in fact, you know, they both of them represent 2 extreme positions where there is a compulsion to, on the one hand, you know, Bharati thinks this is the ideal life that anyone should be living and on the other hand, Sriram thinks that yes may be this is the ideal life but I do not know like how I do? Why I do not feel committed enough which is why, you know, he meets this character towards the, in the latter half of the novel who introduces him to Subhash Chander Bose.

What is the name of the character? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Jagadish, yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** And just when Jagadish says, you know, I do not see any point in going to jail, suddenly he feels, oh finally I am meeting my quintet soul, yes. He begins to bleb eye. I have always been telling Bharati that she is a fool and, so he is also like suddenly excited that I am not really, not really because of my own limitations.

But there is another position also that I can same have it, yes with a little bit of violence, with a little bit of, you know, natural responses. So I think Narayan was also trying to show as the dichotomy over here about, you know, the complete inability to adopt Gandhian standards and also the need to bring in someone like Subhash Chander Bose. How he also appeal to be a nation, certain set of people in some form or the other.

But you also get to realise, you know, how the politics work here, works over here. Like how one could be very very open about their allegiance to Gandhi but that sort of an openness is not possible when it comes to Subhash Chander Bose, yes. How, you know, I hope you have reached those scenes, those episodes where, you know, he has to hide the radio and he is taking down notes for Jagadish about, you know, the various addresses that Subhash Chander Bose is making to the nation, yes.

And finally what happens to the character, to Sriram? What happens to him? Have you reached

that stage where he gets jailed, does that experience change him in anyway? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** (()) (24:05) becomes more independent to movement and once he is out of jail, he is a very independent, I mean India has become independent at this time. Yes, yes.

And he feels it is so strange, stricter on the path. He is a kind of but again I think after that it was a, goes back to his production where he is, yes and there is this part when he tells them that I just miss you all and prince and all as a matter of fact like in (()) (24:47). Yes. It is like more lure them. Yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** So I was also wondering given the way in which the dominant nationalist politics is being engaged within the novel, can we really say that this is an apolitical novel, yes be it regardless of what Narayan's original intentions were, yes?

Because we are being introduced to a novel where Gandhi is the major figure and at the same time, there is no overt glorification of Gandhi or the nationalist politics. There is this protagonist who gets enthralled into the Gandhian politics and the novelist is allowing the character to become the solutioned. The novelist is allowing the character to feel a sense of irony towards many things that he is practising as part of the Gandhian politics, yes.

So I think that thing is also very important but it has been not been really talked about much in the critical oeuvre of Indian writing in English, may be also because, you know, it will take us away from the focus of how the story of Indian writing in English has been told, yes about, you know, Indian writing, specially novel emerges as the, as the genre which can very effectively deal with the nation, yes, which can very effectively bring the nationalist movement closure to the masses.

And suddenly talking about this novel which stutters those sorts of narrations. May be, you know, it is a bit problematic as well. May be the most convenient thing then is to say that, you know, he is apolitical, yes. Not to talk about, you know, the ways in which the dominance accorded to Gandhi is being overturned in some form or the other. We do not have a perfect character at all over there.

And in a certain way, we can even say that he is better story teller than the other 2 writers when it comes to the depiction of Gandhi as a character and in a certain way, in such a way that Gandhi is actually allowed to be a mere character, yes. Because we do get to, if we are not conscious about, you know, the nationalist movement and the back, the political background and this, you know, high iconic figure, high iconic image which is being attributed to Gandhi.

And if me acts as Gandhi only through the eye, only through the eyes of the protagonist, yes, it becomes entirely possible to look at Gandhi in a different way altogether. I think that is a very important difference that Narayan brings in in the context of these other literary novels which talk about Gandhi and nationalist movement, yes. So I want you to think about how this, the labelling of the novel as being apolitical.

The labelling of Narayan as a non-committed writer when it comes to politics, yes, I want you to rethink those aspects with, with your own reading that you would bring in and also later again perhaps we can look back at this novel through a post-colonial lens, yes, how, how, you know, different sort of a narration of Gandhi is being enabled by this entire thing and, overall we can say that, you know, there is a generous doors of irony which is being employed right from the beginning till the end, yes.

And also it is being brought in in such a way that, you know, we are not even too conscious of it, yes. It is being, you know, woven into the narrative of the novel without too many, any means of, sort of being too presumptuous about that, yes. Even though the way in which Gandhi becomes a character in the novel, it is not a major event, yes. Gandhi is just able to walk in through the novel, yes.

It is not being presented as the major event which really, you know, turned the life of the Malgudi village upside down. It turned the life of Sriram upside down not because of the nationalist movement again but only because Bharati was there, yes. So which again, you know, underscores this use of irony over here as if, you know, you take Bharati out of the picture and you do not have Sriram emerging as devout Gandhian in any form, yes.

Maybe it is also trying to tell us that a lot of others who were following Gandhi, maybe we all had Bharati's in life, yes, where they all pursued Gandhi and the nationalist movement or where they all pursued their own interests, yes. Was Narayan trying to say that as well. Because he is also writing in the early 50s when, mid 50s, when there is also a growing disillusionment with the independence which is just come to the nation, yes, sudden realisation that, you know.

Things are not really how we thought it would be even after the British had left, things are not getting better. So that is this disillusionment which is growing, this you know, reaches its peak in the 1960s, yes. So we do not even know whether he is trying to be critical in a certain way without again not trying to be overtly critical about it either. And what about the character of Gandhi, what kind of Gandhi, forget about the other things that we always already know about Gandhi.

How does Gandhi emerge as a character in the novel? Does the novel talk about any supernatural qualities that this leader has? What are the ways in which Gandhi is being presented? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** He can read the thoughts of others, that is what the novel says. Other than that he is quite a like normal human being. Yes. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** He is being presented more or less like a human being with whom you can have all kinds of conversations, yes.

And of course, you know, there is a way in which Gandhi is situated as an infallible person who can judge others but still, you know, he would refrain from judging others because he is also benevolent, generous. There is a way in which the common ideas about Gandhi have also fed into the novel but it makes it possible to engage with Gandhi as a just another ordinary character of any novel, yes.

Do you think the novel would make a sense if you are not aware of the nationalist movement at all? If somebody is reading the novel, yes, a non-Indian who is not familiar with the nationalist movement or the various undertones of it, if such a person is reading the novel, would it make sense to him or not? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** Most probably not because when we release the other fiction like for fiction which has the history, does not make much

sense unless we do not know a bit.

But if Gandhi is only a character over here, why would it not make sense? Because you need to know the Gandhi before you really come up. Can you elaborate? I mean we should be aware of the god like Gandhi before we read this novel to see that this is the human like Gandhi. Because if we do not know about Gandhi, then it will not make much sense. Like the irony part, it is not like innocence.

You will not find it ironical because you are encountering Gandhi as human for the first time, does not make. Good. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** That also brings faith to this point if you are reading the novel and the moment you realise that there is a visit of Gandhi which is happening, yes, as a readers, we also have a set of images propping up, yes. At every point, even when Gandhi is being consciously presented as a novel, may be the novelist.

And the readers are always already aware that no, this is not just about Gandhi, yes. There is more to him. There is more to all of those things and at some point, you know, we even feel that it is just that Sriram is not able to really grasp entirely what Gandhi and nationalist movement is all about, yes. So like Anand, Sid was saying, we do not know whether Narayan was also playing around with this feeling of the audience that even if he does not tell us who Gandhi is, the reader will have a god like image of Gandhi.

So the moment Gandhi arise, we also like wonder, okay, so what is Sriram going to be, going to do there, yes. Because he has got nothing to do with nationalist politics. He does not even have an inclining about, you know, protesting or oust of protesting against the colonial power or ousting them, yes. He is got no affinity towards any of those things, yes. So the contrast is very evident in our own mind even when we are reading it, yes.

And when Subhash Chander Bose emerges, his voice emerges as a character again, you know, we know where to place all of them, yes. So even the, at some level, the author does not have to judge any of those characters. We already do that, yes. We already have these towering images, yes so that it becomes easy for us to slot them into, conveniently slot them into different groups,

yes.

And may be because of that, many critics also find it convenient to talk about at least certain kind of politics, yes. The moment it is not eulogizing Indian National Congress, not eulogizing Gandhi entirely, that seizes to be political, yes and this is again, you know, something which is built into the critical framework of Indian, fictional English I would say because earlier when tracing the genealogy of the novel, yes.

The movement, any kind of political activity is being talked about, any kind of political attitude is being talked about, which is not from, which is not an offshoot of Indian National Congress, which is not an offshoot of Gandhian politics, that moment we find Meenakshi Mukherjee as an other critics also saying yes that is just a politics of some simplistic variety, yes. That is not real politics that we are talking about, yes.

So may be this thing was there in Narayan's mind as well when he was talking about, you know, because he did not want to be overtly politically committed at all, yes. But on hind side, now that we have the advantage of looking back from a post-colonial, through a post-colonial lens, it becomes also evident that even through this apolitical stunts, yes, there is a certain politics that he is inadvertently projecting.

He does not, you know, take it to a greater length. For instance, you know, the chapters where they talk about untouchability, yes. How Gandhi could not really bring about the change in the minds of the people, yes. He does not take it to the other, you know, take it to a next step by the, Narayan does not take the novel to the next step by trying to analyse what is really in Gandhi's mind, yes, that would have become a real kind of a play of politics.

But in the followers of Gandhi, in those, you know, visible acts of obedience that they are showing towards Gandhian ideology, towards Indian National Congress, we find that it is not really in depth. It is a very hollow kind of display of many things, yes. That seemed that you were, that instance we are talking about, about the municipal chairman, yes. The moment, you know, Gandhi begins to give away those oranges to the children and Gandhi is also inviting one

of the dirtiest boys in the groups, in the group yes, to come over.

The municipal chairman, he just, you know, he even for a moment he did not, he almost hated Gandhi for that but he also felt guilty for feeling that way. He was wondering of course one should love the poor but why to invite them. He is also very dirty. Why to invite them into the veranda, yes. So this is again contrary to what Gandhi really believed in that, you know, he can eventually bring in a reform in people's hearts when it comes to cast, yes because he strongly believed that it would not be useful to bring a law against untouchability, yes.

The reform should come from within, yes. This is also exposing many of those things about, you know, how the, the reform or the change will not always come from within and it is always easy to put up ourself, yes, put up a show even without being entirely transformed. Yes, Nelson? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** I think I tend to disagree within that it would like say, it will not make sense.

I think for anyone it would make sense because Gandhi does not started off suddenly in, like, as very, it is like through the lens of people like how we wrote before Gandhi comes, how people reacted in meeting like how or everyone and he himself was surprised. So for other readers who did not know anything about this, it was more addressing because it is some kind of mystery like some kind of, these guys coming in this way, like some give, like some very popular guy and to the lives of Sriram and, slowly slowly you came to know what Gandhi is, what he represents like that.

So I think it was, I think it will be more interesting. I feel like it will make sense to anyone who did not have any idea of national movement. Okay. Any responses to this. Do you agree with him. More or not. Like anybody reading, it would be okay but I do not know like, what is this then this. **“Professor - student conversation ends.”** Yes. I get your point Nelson but again I am asking even after having read the novel without any background knowledge about Gandhi.

And nationalist movement, the moment you begin to know about it, yes, you come across, if you are reading this as a non-Indian or someone who is not familiar with this historical background

and then you again back to get your historical facts right, would not it bring a different sort of a reading altogether in the sense, you know, it would not be irony be more pronounced then, yes, of course, you know, this is a coherent work even without knowing the background, yes.

I agree with you, yes. I am asking you, would the knowledge of history make a difference in appreciating the use of irony over here or is it always already evident even without that? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** That is why I think, I was telling what interesting, what can be interesting for like very, a reader who did not know anything about National movement, like how it was expressed like.

Like through, like, it was Sriram himself did not know anything about National movement. So through that he is like slowly, he is curiously, becomes curious. So I feel like the reader will also be curious who is this guy. That is just like Sriram, like, the reader will go along with Sriram, that means the whole novel. So I felt like yes, so this will make sense to the guy because Sriram himself did not know anything and he is like, he started then.

He did not have any idea what Gandhi represented, that sort of. So like, so he will go along and it does not, is not it interesting to go along with that character like what the reader himself. Right. Yes. How useful or important is the prospective of Sriram, the perspective through which he is looking at the Nationalist movement, Gandhi, non-violence and everything that is in the part and parcel of Indian National Congress and Gandhi?

How important is that perspective? It is, actually it is very important in this novel because see the, suppose if we look from the lens of the National movement, somebody, like there will be a some kind of judgement for why he is not committed like. In this case, he is not committed because he did not know anything. He was trying to like converting themselves with whatever he arise.

So it is kind of, for me it is interesting like. For a normal guy, how it will react in which way. If we have known the national movement, then he is like why he did like that, there will be some kind of judgement or somethings like that which will be, I think, less interesting. **“Professor -**

student conversation ends.” Yes, and for the novel, I think, this perspective of Sriram becomes all the more important because it allows the or just to play with the number of things.

There is this plays where we know it does, Sriram has this conversation with one of the British people, yes, Macpherson, yes and about belonging, about national identity and Sriram is saying, I am an Indian, yes and this British man is asking how will they, how old are you? I lived in India more number of years than you have ever lived, yes. So I am an Indian too. He is very confused. He does not know how to engage with it, yes.

So the novel actually opens up a number of questions which are not really resolved within this space, yes and also about, you know, the use of non-violence always always, yes. There are moments when suddenly he will come with these things about, you know, one has to shoot all the British and then somebody will tell you no, no, that is against Mahatma's thing. Yes, then he also feels a little guilty.

But the moment, you know, he finds an almost skindred soul in Jagadish, he finds very excited, get oh I am glad that somebody is there who is also thinking outside the framework of what Gandhi is talking about but he is also not willing to go to that extreme, yes. So what is the position that one should be adopting. It also talks about perhaps the ambivalent positions within the Indian National Movement where one had to always, you know, affiliate oneself with one or the other, yes.

So which was this position away from all of these things? Yes, was it, you know, being as naïve like Sriram or does somebody like Sriram, a more informed Sriram, was there a possibility for such a person to inhabit another space, space of politics away from Gandhi, away from Subhash Chander Bose, yes? One does not know. May be he is also toy, may be the novel is also allowing us to toy with these, you know, different kinds of options, yes and there is this place where somebody is asking about his father and until that point, he was very proud that, you know, he was soldier, he died in the war.

There is this other person who is asking him, then he was serving a soldier in the British army.

Gorbet said with the touch of contempt in his voice. Sriram moves with it but accepted it with (()) (43:23). He added as a sort of compensation. They say he was a great soldier. Possibly, possibly said the other with patronage in his voice, yes. Sriram bore it as a trial, yes. So everything that he believed in is being questioned.

And this is certainly not a position that he is really comfortable with, yes. But he does not know. He does not have. Sriram comes across as a character who does not really always know how to respond to that, yes. He is also perhaps the typical image of, may be a number of people like this who have been waved down by these dominant ideologies and does not always have been, they do not always have the right kind of response.

And they do not know what their affiliation exactly is, yes. Whether say owning up Nationalist movement also becomes, you know, disowning a legacy that he is proud of, yes. That is certainly not a, he is not comfortable with that trait of, yes. He does not want to, he certainly wants to be associated with Gandhi for whatever reasons but he does not want to disown that legacy that from because the normal begins with that, yes, about how his father died in war in Mesopotamia.

We do not find him romanticising about his parents but that legacy is certainly is something that he is proud of, yes. So how do we accommodate all of these differing things? Yes, and I also that place where he goes to buy biscuits, yes and he suddenly launches into this fiery attack about, you know, how dare you sell English biscuits, right and we know that is not very natural. He is not committed in that position.

And the shopkeeper, yes, think of how the shopkeeper who had been selling English biscuits as one of the finest things that he has in his store and he is kind of bewildered, yes. Why are people talking like this, yes? So this novel also draws your attention to this multifaceted society in, under Gandhian Nationalist leadership where, you know, half of the people they are not even aware that they were being exploited, half of the people were not even aware that they were not free, like, you know, he is telling the, that cart puller, yes.

Gandhi will, Gandhi's movement will make you a free man and he acts, yes, you are not a

freeman now. Just in case you think you are free enough, yes. So these, different ambivalence, you know, these dichotomies which were inherent in the Nationalist movement are being talked about but I do not why this is still being seen as an apolitical novel and number of people have talked about that.

What do think? Because we can see a way in which different kind of politics, a possibility of a different kind of politics has been enacted. So is it because the novelist, the personality of the novelist does not gel with, you know, whatever is being talked about because otherwise, you know, he did not live up very radical life, yes, say if you compare Raja Rao with Narayan, yes. Narayan lived a very conservative life, yes and he lived mostly in India.

He only kept, you know, these occasional relations that he had with Graham Greene who also helped him publish his novels, help him, you know, get this international fame. Compared to Raja Rao, but Raja Rao was rhetoric, you know, and Kanthapura will give us the feeling that he has not even moved out of his village Kanthapura, yes. That is the kind of tone and that is the kind of words that were, one of you mentioned in the beginning that Raja Rao writes as if, you know, he is directly translated from Kannada too.

He was thinking in English, thinking in Kannada while he was writing the novel, that is the kind of feel that he is trying to bring in, yes. But Narayan on the contrary, he lived a very different life but questioned a number of things through his work but in the critical space, Raja Rao and Anand are seen as, you know, more serious novelist who would engage with serious things and Narayan is seen as a the popular one, the more enduring one but a very non-committed political, apolitical, a non-committed writer, yes.

So we now, it is too early to respond to these questions, yes. As and when we go through more novels, I also want you to think about the way in which critical opinions are shaped, yes. How certain relaxes the financials of the nation or about identity about politics, they also come to inform the way in which a writer is being labelled, yes, a work is being judged or analysed, yes. So let us wind up with this for today.

Tomorrow we will also look at some more instances from the novel, yes and talk about what are the major themes that this novel talks about, yes? How it differs, you know, from say a novel like Kanthapura where nationalism is seen as this big thing which can unite people, yes. Here we do not get that feeling at all, at least the protagonist is not himself convinced about it because had it not been for Bharati, may be he would not even have taken those steps, venture.

And also there is other question, is this fascination, yes, the passion that he has for Bharati is, was it the soul thing which lead him all the way till the jail? He also lands up in jail, yes and Bharati was not really responsible for that, yes. It was not Bharati's, you know, instigations which led him to do the kind of things that he did and yes made him imprisoned. Think about those things, how you know the plot cleverly uses certain people.

And is the novel deluding us into believing that it was all about Bharati, yes? Is there a different politics that perhaps the protagonist wants to engage with and he is not aware of it? Yes, the way, you know, he responds to Jagadish, yes and a sense of, you know, a sense of almost like a, a surveillance that he feels towards Jagadish, yes. What would Jagadish if I do not do this right.