

**Indian Fiction in English**  
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**Lecture - 08**  
**Kanthapura, Mythmaking and Gandhi**

We will get started. I hope you are a little more familiar with the novel by now. Yeah, any quick thing that you want to tell me. Any first impressions? What do you think about the language of the novel? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** It seems like he is thinking in Kannada and writing in English. What makes you think so? Especially the swaya words seem very familiar. Malayalees and Kannadigas were in the same way perhaps.

In fact, you could have seen this in Narasimhaiah’s introduction, he also talks about the language, which was used. He says it is also because he could get into the heart and soul of the Kannada villages, which is where he was not using the proper language as the English use it and he was using. There is one place where Narasimhaiah draws our attention to that. There is expressions like, there are so many things, which are left unsaid, like this you see.

It will be like that. He was saying that was also sort of reflecting the way in which villagers speak, not exactly in a complete full sentences, but leaving things unsaid half way through and he was saying there was also the inability to use certain English words. For example, he was saying cousin is a word, which will not capture the exact sense of relationship that they were to convey.

For example, there is an instance where somebody is talking about he is my wife’s elder brother’s wife’s brother-in-law. What is the one English word that would capture that? Narasimhaiah says that instead of using the convenient term say cousin or a distant relative, he resorts to this very old fashion way of using. That is a good observation. It looks as if it is not a novel written in English, but as if the thought process had been in a more regional language and the rendition is in a more global kind of lines.

That was also been very ironically seen as one of the plus points of this novel. That it does not sound very English. Any other observations that you made, also in connection with reading that you did from the other secondary sources. What do you think about the themes of the novel? Does it talk about any other thing other than Gandhi, nationalist movement? Which are the major national events or part of the national movement, which are being mentioned in the novel.

Dandi March, do you think that really it was rather the nationalist telling a history? Or is it a part from the nationalist telling a history in many way? The image of Mahatma? They did not go through anything or sati or anyone knew Gandhi personally as such. Moorthy was Gandhi, yeah. Anything they did, they said they did it for Moorthy itself. Did anyone know why they were going to matters that (( )) (04:22).

After the bhajan session, there was a session that really speaks over stories and Harikatha. **“Professor - student conversation ends”** Do you think this could have been the case in a number of South Indian villages, because Gandhi has an event, that is a political event; that is a cultural event and also as a social reform movement, that reportedly had repercussions, different sorts of responses from different parts of the country and that is not even an exaggeration and this was true to a very, very large extent too.

There were other undercurrents that is another thing, of course, but do you think this must have been the case maybe in number of places where they just responded to this call without even knowing what it was for without really knowing what it was about, without knowing Gandhi, the figure and maybe there were a number of Moorthy's stationed in different parts of the country. One would not know for sure.

But again the subaltern historians who started writing against the grain of this dominant nationalist history from the 1980s on, what is they talk extensively about how the passive movements in a number of, particularly they were talking mostly from the North Indian villages. How these subaltern movements which is headed by figures who were not really followers of Gandhi, or not officially part of the Indian National Congress.

They were all side line to a very large extent and how the figure of both Gandhi and the image of the Indian National Congress as the sort of force, which would oppose the British Empire, the British government. So all of those were slightly exaggerated so on and so forth. Today what we will do is, I want you to first briefly take a look at what C. D. Narasimhaiah, that is also seen as one of the canonical critics of Indian writing in English, how he positions this novel, Kantapura.

Then I want you to take a look at how there are alternate readings available from a post colonial perspective, particularly from the Priyamvada Gopal. This is the work the excerpt of which I have given as part of your reading material, what is it, Mahatma magic. Priyamvada Gopal's work is titled the Indian English novel nation, history and narration. There is another one, the excerpt of which I have not given you, Rumina Sethi's Myths of the Nation.

Before we go into that, I want you to know what C. D. Narasimhaiah felt about Kantapura, which is also the critical opinion held uncontested for a long time, this has been part of most of the literary history, this kind of possession in Kantapura. He talks about how there are very few Indians who write about villages and he thinks in that sense.

Raja Rao has done a wonderful thing by talking about the villages, though he is also accustomed to all the newer things of the towns, the modern ways of life and in respective of that he does not find it hard to get into the heart of the village and again that also resonates very well with Gandhi's call, was during that time to go back to the villages. He also talks about how the politics in Kantapura is not very important this answer.

He uses this statement, Kantapura is no political novel any more than Gandhi's movement is mere political movement. This was also the dominant motion for a long time that Gandhi cannot be seen as merely as a politician. Gandhi cannot be seen as a leader of political movement. He was much more than that. At that level, when he is equating whatever is happening within Kantapura as not being merely political.

He is saying whatever happens over there, you do not have to see it just as part of the nationalist political movement. There is much more than that. In the same way there was much more to

Gandhi's movement, but again he does not really talk about how that ceases to be merely a political movement or merely a political novel. He talks about how Gandhi's leadership in a very glossing over way.

He takes only very broad strokes when he talks about the nationalist movement or about Gandhi. This statement, Kantapura is India in microcosm. What happened there is what happened in many places during India's fight for freedom. So it is received rather uncritically. The positioning of Gandhi, the way the villages respond, it continued to be like this for a long time that is something that I want you to keep in mind.

Also Narasimhaiah thinks it is a very commendable thing that even before Gandhi is mentioned in the novel, there is tremendous religious activity and he does not consider that, that these religious activities predominantly Hindu, that is dismissed as a very incidental fact and religion is also seen as an extension of the ancient Indian culture and one of the ways in which they can also effectively respond to the colonial means of ruling over.

Because he also believes that C. D. Narasimhaiah in his essay, he also believes that along with Gandhian ideology, this religious basis. Both of that went well together in the anticolonial struggle and he also recalls that this is like a most normal thing to happen because it is in the true tradition of India. The social reformers have invariably profoundly religious men. All of these things have quite unproblematically accepted about the inflects of religion into the political sphere.

This again, by saying right in the beginning, that this is not really merely about politics. It is more than all of that. So it also takes away this compulsion of politics being a so called secular space about the need to separate politics and religion. This mixing up politics and religion in the context of the novel is seen as a way in which the novel responds to the true tradition of the country, the unproblematic acceptance of all of those things.

About how very categorically, he states both the religious persons and the national movement have held the novelist penetrate into a deeper layers of human nature and observe the pattern is

greed, jealousy and in some cases carelessness and inhumanity of the so-called spiritually bent India. That is the standard kind of Indian, which is available. The spiritually bent India who can very unproblematically include both the elements of religion and politics in the struggle against the colonial empire.

This is narrated in the age old tradition of storytelling, so language is appropriated to that effect, even Raja Rao's own foreword to the novel, he talks about how it is not written in English tradition. It is in the tradition of Mahabharata that has verses and Ramayana 48,000 and puranas are endless and innumerable and we do not have the punctuations and the touches at's and on's in English to bother us, we do this in our own pace and in Indian style.

The Indianism is evoked not just by the author, but also by the early critics who were writing about the novel. Narasimhaiah also talks about this distinctive Indian sensibility, one it has got the power to say accommodate religion and politics together and then it is also a peasant sensibility. Here we also find that there is this glorification of the village, glorification of the peasant consciousness and that is also being used as an effective tool to count a colonism.

Which is why he also choosing deliberately or we do not know whether this happens inadvertently, Raja Rao chooses to set this novel in a village, which is away from all kinds of modern things, except for their engagement, their response to Gandhi. We do not find them in the heart of activity at all. They are really away from all the centers, in that sense, away from the political center, away from the economic center.

They could very well be an isolated self-sufficient community and it is so organic that we do not even have to see them as part of the larger India, which was struggling against the colonial rule. These are some of the ways in which Narasimhaiah thought. This novel needs to be elevated as proper Indian national novel.

And it does not bear any kind of resemblance to the English tradition that is written in our own tradition and the theme that the novel discusses are also in tune with the spirit of the times, in tune with the politics of the times and in tune with the way in which the nation or the villages,

particularly were responding to the call of religion and politics simultaneously. I also wanted to take a look at some of the alternate readings available.

There are 2 works as I mentioned, 1 is Rumina Sethi's myths of the nation, the other is Priyamvada Gopal's the Indian English novel, Nation, History and Narration.

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## Gandhi and literary India

- o From Priyamvada Gopal's The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration (2009)
- o "What does it mean that the world reads and believes that it comprehends 'India' through Rushdie and Roy rather than Kamleshwar (Hindu) or Ambai (Tamil?)"
- o Questions of privilege
- o Not all forms of anglophone writing are equally prolific or visible - one single and specific genre 'the anglophone novel' that has won for Indian writers 'working in English' the global currency

Where they talk about the Indian fiction being a space where there is this overt narration of history right from the beginning and in order to set the states for this discussion, in this chapter Gandhi and literary India, Priyamvada Gopal asked this question, what does it mean that the world reads and believes that. It comprehends India through Rushdie and Roy rather than Kamleshwar writing in Hindi or Ambai writing in Tamil.

So even today, there is a way in which the dichotomy between national and regional, even in that nomenclature, it is very much evident. One has been accorded a regional status, while the other is seen more national in terms of the language, in terms of the leadership or even in terms of the kind of themes that the Indian English novel generally impresses. She says that is not just about the themes, not just about the narration.

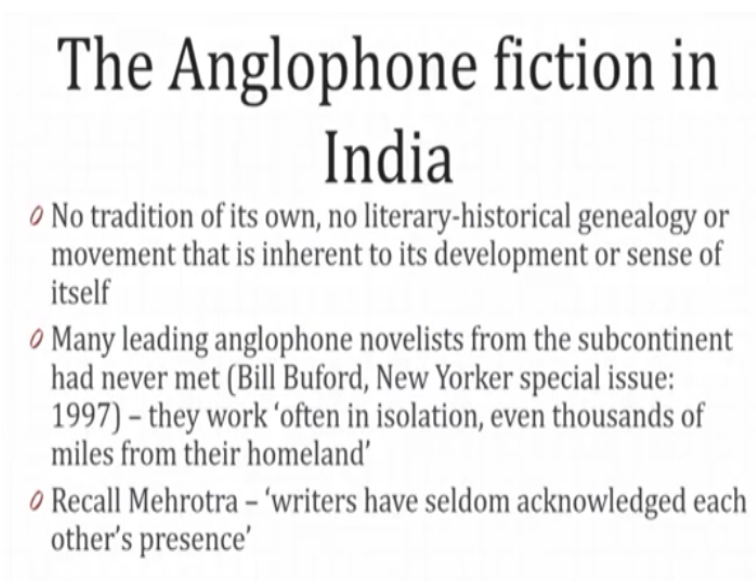
It is also about questions of privilege, which is associated with English language and the kind of elite status that it's speakers, it's consumers have in the society by extension of works in the

space of Indian English fiction as well. Again, within that, she says, there is another kind of privilege, another kind of prioritization that is at work. It is not as if all forms of Anglophone writing, that is the term that she uses.

It is not as if all forms of Anglophone writings are equally prolific, and visible and it is only one single and specific genre, as she puts it. The Anglophone novel that is one for Indian writers working in English. That is the phrase that Rushdie uses the global currency. This is also way in which we know how today Indian English novel surpasses all kinds of other writings in terms of poetry, drama, and other all forms of output, which comes from any of those writers working in English.

This also could be attributed to the market conditions, the global visibility that many of these authors have received and very briefly locating the Anglophone fiction in India in historical situation.

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## The Anglophone fiction in India

- o No tradition of its own, no literary-historical genealogy or movement that is inherent to its development or sense of itself
- o Many leading anglophone novelists from the subcontinent had never met (Bill Buford, New Yorker special issue: 1997) - they work 'often in isolation, even thousands of miles from their homeland'
- o Recall Mehrotra - 'writers have seldom acknowledged each other's presence'

She also tells us there is no tradition of its own, no literary historical geniology, or movement that is inherent with development or sense of itself. She is not worried in a gating what Meenakshi Mukherjee spoke about, only trying to draw attention to the fact that unlike many other kinds of genres, novel is also very young genre whether we take the case of India or the western traditions of any young genre.

At all points of time, when the novel emerged, there was no specific tradition to fall back on. Here again, it is not as if the Indian English novel invariably relied on the western traditions and it is not as if it could really take off from the native traditions either. So in that sense she is arguing that there is no specific tradition of its own. Also there is another curious thing, which Mehrotra also tells us about how these writers seldom acknowledged each other's presence.

Except for say Allan Sealy talking about (()) (17:27), otherwise he says there is very little acknowledgement of each other's presence in the same way Gopal also quotes Bill Buford. He had written an article in 1997 at New York a special issue, that most of the leading Anglophone novel is from the subcontinent had never met. They walk in isolation even 1000s of miles from their homeland. Only in the recent times, in fact, were these literary festivals coming up.

There is at least a 4 of these writers come together, but even then it is not as if there is like the regional writing scenario, it is not as if they come together often. There are no circles that you can identify very specifically of their own or spaces that they inhabit collectively on a frequent basis.

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## National literature

- o A genre that has been distinguished from its inception by a preoccupation with both history and nation - they come together to shape 'the idea of India' (Nehru)
- o Ineluctably postcolonial - the concern has been with the postcolonial entity, the nation-state
- o English in India - simultaneously rootless and pan-Indian
- o Nation-narration link - Timothy Brennan (1990) - a familiar discourse
- o The range and variety of the anglophone novel's engagement with 'India' as imaginative concern

Then, Gopal takes us to this idea of national literature and how this genre, Indian fiction in English, that has been distinguished from the beginning with a genre, which was always



preoccupied with history and nation and how they come to get to shape the idea of India, which is phrase that Nehru often used to use and here I also want you to understand that it is not to say that. Again one of the questions that Ranjani asked in one of the first sessions that we had.

Was not this the case with all kinds of novels that emerged in all nations? Were they not always responding to or the narrations wherein they are always about the nation in some form or the other. But here is a distinction that I want you to be aware of in the case India, only in the case of Indian fiction in English, we find this marked pronounced recurrent and very forceful engagement with the nation, right from the beginning of its emergence.

If you take the case of regional novel, for example if you take the case of Indulekha for instance, which is again the first novel arguably the first novel written in Malayalam. We do not find that sort of an engagement with the nation. The engagement with the set of other things. On Friday, we will also have Shruthi talking to us about some of the aspects of Indulekha and how the regional tradition is entirely different from the tradition of Indian writing in English.

Also from the beginning the concerns were very, very post colonial and in that sense it was trying to engage with the nation from a non-colonial and non-oriental point of view from the beginning. That is a different thing that you can identify different strands of this post colonialism and conveniently different post colonial moment, which has arrived as well. About how English language in India, it has to be seen as simultaneously being rootless as well as Pan-Indian.

This problematic is something she states when we look at Indian fiction in English, this is not something about the English language in India being simultaneously rootless and Pan-Indian, not something that we need to feel essentially proud of, but something that needs to be problematized. As an offshoot of this positioning of being rootless and Pan-Indian at the same time, maybe some of the politics, which are at work in the case of Indian fiction in English as well as regional writing, maybe we will be able to engage with them in a better way.

This nation narration in English again reminds us, it is not an unfamiliar discourse at all. Timothy Brandon started talking about how all nations are narrated into being in 1990 itself and since then

we have had a number of texts and number of discourses about exploring this link and problematizing this idea of nation in additive, but she says in the space of Indian fiction in English, what is very pertinent?

What needs to be engaged with is the range and variety of the novels engagement with India as an imaginative concern. How it actively played a role from the 1930s onwards to imagine this nation into being. It was as if the owners rested entirely upon them and not on any other genre or any other language.

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## What's different about IFE?

o "The idea of a modern 'nation' was, arguably, articulated in English-language fiction before literature in other languages began to engage with the idea. As a literary concern, the idea of India was also tied in to two other challenges: writing prose and writing national history"

She tells us what it is different about Indian fiction in English. The idea of a modern nation was arguably articulated in English language fiction before literature and other languages began to engage with the idea. As a literary concern, the idea of India was also tied in two other challenges, writing prose and writing national history. So this can also be dated back to some of the discussion that the west already had, about how prose was the most significant medium to write the nation's story.

Here when it comes to play in Indian fiction in English, it branches out into many different ways and not just about these 2 challenges, in fact, though she tries to zero them down into these 2 challenges, we begin to see that it has got a far more impact than just addressing these challenges. The more significant aspect of this sort of nationalist telling you of history.

Nationalist telling you any sort of story in this pace of Indian fiction in English was that the inaugural moment was that of Gandhi.

This has also been off discussed in a number of other historical and sociological documents.

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## Gandhi and nationalism

- o "The Mahatma gave a nation to the country" (Percival Spear: 1965)
- o "Gandhism provided for the first time in Indian politics an ideological basis for including the whole people within the political nation" (Partha Chatterjee: 1993)
- o Gandhi's own prolific prose output - his capacity to 'dramatize himself' - his ideas with an 'unerring instinct'
- o The subject of oral and and written literature (p.45)

This is work Percival Spear in 1965 where he illustrated that Mahatma gave a nation to the country. So regardless of whether we are in agreement with the Gandhi, say as regardless of whether we totally accept what Indian National Congress was foregrounding, there is no 2 ways about the fact that Gandhi unified the nation in that sense and Partha Chatterjee's essay in 1993.

He talks about Gandhisim provided for the first time in Indian politics and ideological basis for including the whole people within the political nation, which is what we see in that novel also to some extent because nobody has seen Gandhi. They have not read anything written by Gandhi. They have absolutely no idea about what happens at the political center, but we are willing to be coopted into this project, this nationalist project of ousting the colonial employer.

Though again, they are not really not victims of colonization. We do not find any direct bearing on them at any point of time in the narrator. Priyamvada Gopal does another interesting thing. She draws our attention also to Gandhi's own prose output, about his capacity to, I like these terms that she uses, dramatize himself and also present his ideas with an unerring instinct.

Because of this capacity, Gandhi's image, Gandhi's work has always been the subject of oral and written literature from the early 20th century onwards.

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## Two things

- o The heightened sense of nationalism
- o The presence of a figure of such legendary proportions - with a penchant for both narrative and performance

Two things that she says came together to produce such a literature. It was not just about the nationalist movement. It was not just about the movement, which was going on against the colonial empire, 1 was heightened sense of nationalism, which was also giving a sense of being to the nation and secondly it was the presence of a figure of such legendry proportions, with penchant for both narrative and performance. This is Priyamvadha Gopal's own words.

Here Gandhi emerges as a subject or a certain kind of a novel for a very long time to come. That is know a small thing given the fact that, they are experimenting with a kind of fiction. They could have written about just about anything. The reason that they choose to write about certain things which are happening then, there is no historical way of looking, they do an experiment with those sort of things, it is not futuristic.

They are talking about a set of things which are happening and they try to record it in the same manner, and also position as the subject or real character and also trying to present that character, the legendary figure of Gandhi in a not entirely in a fictional way, which is what, you know sets these novels entirely up. They do not try to play with the figure of Gandhi much. The state is Gandhi remains as a figure which is perhaps more or like forever frozen in history.

They only try to talk about the many ways in which the nationalist movement benefited from that. Kanthapura is a stellar example of that kind of writing and though Gandhi never wrote any kind of literary manifesto as such, Priyamvada Gopal tells this, there is a way in which we can talk about some of his writings as kind of literary manifesto, because many of the writers felt that they were those sort of articulations were addressing them.

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## Gandhi's 'literary manifesto'

- o The need to "understand the popular feeling and give expression to it . . . To arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments; and . . . Fearlessly expose popular defects"
- o Freedom had to come from within
- o Colonialism - an opportunity to cleanse and regenerate Indian self and society

For example, in one of his journals used to write in this journal Swadesh, Swaraj, there he wrote about the need to understand the popular feeling and give expression to it, to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments, and fearlessly expose popular defects. So the writers thought that, they do have a responsibility to stir the feelings of the people, if they have understood something about the nationalist movement, about what Gandhi is trying to do, it is their responsibility to also convey it through the medium of novelistic expression.

So we do not find these novelists even talking about other things, may be for the same reason there is this, have you heard of a G. V. Desani. G. V. Desani was writing in the 1940's. He was located abroad then, and he wrote a novel titled all about H. Hatterr. And that is also seen as a novel which pre-dates the post-modern moment. It is a very post-modern narrative, which does not talk about the nation, it does not talk about the concerns of modernity or post- coloniality.

Rudhdie has acknowledged that he perhaps learned a thing or two from G. V. Desani and from (()) (27:38). So this novel was out of print for a long time and even today it is very difficult to get hold of a copy of all about H. Hatterr, G. V. Desani does not really figure in the literary map of India either, he was also legitimately an Indian because he was also of Indian origin. If we take the criteria of, you know they have to live in India even Raja Rao was not living in India after 1929.

So perhaps one thing which was operative over here was whether they were talking about the nation, whether they were using the medium of the novel responsibly, because Kanthapura exactly had fit into this mould. There is nationalism going on, here is a novel which would also encourage people to do that right thing at that point of time. So if you bring in another narrative such as G. V. Desani's all about H. Hatterr, one does not know where to fit that in.

It is neither very Indian, nor does it serve any purpose appropriating G. V. Desani's novel does not serve the purpose, just like it would if you appropriate a novel like Kanthapura. It is a definite starting point. It does not have to stutter the story telling mode that we are on, that is the story of the nation and in between, yes Kanthapura also works in tandem for the same kind of nationalistic goals that the others were pursuing.

About the foregrounding of these sort of ideas, that freedom had to come from within, the society needs to be cleansed, and also about using it. Eventually it becomes not so much about a struggle against the colony, but it gets presented as an opportunity to cleanse and regenerate Indian self and society, which is why we find a lot of investment on recalling the reform movement, on recalling the need to cleanse oneself, cleanse the society again keeping into another Gandhian rhetoric of anti-colonialism.

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# Gandhi on English language

- o Gopal, p.45
- o Not beneficial
- o 'enslaved us'
- o Gandhi used English frequently
- o (Gandhi and Nehru belonged very much to this 'polyglot' tradition of bilingualism - Sethi 39)

Gandhi did have a thing or two to say about the use of English language. If you come to that essay in page 45, towards the end, I think I have given that as part of the material. This is what he believed in, Gandhi stated view that English language was not beneficial to the regeneration of Indian civilization, did not prevent the Anglophone novel of the 1930's and 1940's from evincing recurrent interest in him and his influence.

He considered that English language is not beneficial. He also wrote somewhere that it may only help to further the slavery that Mc-Colley had initiated, but regardless that it is also important that to know Gandhi was a person who used English quite frequently. He wrote in English as well and in that since Rumina Sethi's work, in her introduction she also draws our attention to how Nehru and Gandhi together belong to this polyglot tradition of bilingualism.

So there is also this dilemma which is setting in not just with the novels but also about the leaders who were at the hem of all of us.

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# Kanthapura

- o Rendering 'this' India
- o A successful literary attempt to imagine - from the perspective of Hindu elite - the impact that Gandhi as Mahatma might have had on individuals and on the collective psyche of a small village

The challenge in writing Kanthapura perhaps was that, he has to render this India, he had to be, he was certainly aware of all of these complications which are at work. But he also had to render it in such a way that it would come through as very nationalistic. We are perhaps you know attributing many things to Kanthapura, but that is how the narrative emerges eventually. Priyamvada Gopal also agrees that there is a successful literary attempt to imagine India, but the problem is at the flip side.

The imagination is from the perspective of a Hindu elite, the impact and what are they reviewing, what are they imagining. The impact that Gandhi as Mahatma might have had on individuals and on the collective psyche of a small village. So this is all the objective of the novel is. What is the implication of this sort of an attempt, that cannot be limited to a political level, that cannot be limited to the story of a village, because here as one of you mention in the beginning, it is as if Gandhi is like a vision.

Nobody really knows what exactly it is about, but it is important to follow that vision and be in an agreement with what that vision is speaking to them.

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# Deifying Gandhi

- The religiosity of the framework through which Gandhi and his message were interpreted
- Gandhi's idioms – Sanskrit-Hindu concepts – Hindu religious practices
  - Shahid Amin's "Gandhi as Mahatma" – how this registered in peasant consciousness
- "It's not for nothing the Mahatma is a Mahatma and he would not be Mahatma if the gods were not with him" (Kanthapura: 2004, 125)

So that is the way in which the novel defies Gandhi throughout, and the religiosity of the framework through which Gandhi is presented, his message is presented, that is almost unapologetically that is being conveyed to us. And it resonates well with the idioms that Gandhi himself used about talking about the Sanskrit-Hindu concepts, or she mentions a Hindu religious practice about fasting or non-vegetarianism.

All of these things are incorporated into the novel as nationalist elements and very uncritically as well. We do not have within the space of the novel any voice which is uncomfortable with this sort of a presentation. I want you to be familiar with this work by Shahid Amin. Shahid Amin is one of the subaltern studies historians. And he wrote an essay "Gandhi as Mahatma", that was a case study based on the Gwarakpur district in the Eastern U.P., and what happen, recovering certain archival materials from the 1920-21.

So he talks about, he begins by the narration of a certain event that happened way back in 1921. So I read from his essay. Gandhi visited the district of Gwarakpur in Eastern U.P. on 8th February 1921, at the monster meeting variously estimated at between 1 lakh and 2.5 lakh, and return the same evening to Banaras. He was accorded a tumultuous welcome in the district, but unlike in Champaran and Kedha, he did not stay in Gwarakpur for any length of time to lead or influence a political movement of the peasantry.

Gandhi the person, was in this particular locality for less than a day, but the Mahatma as an idea was thought out and reworked in popular imagination in subsequent months. Even in the eyes of some local congress men, this deification of the unofficial canonization as the pioneer put it. Assume dangerously distended proportions by April, May 1921. So really it was not about whether they knew Gandhi, whether they had read Gandhi, there was some magic about his presence and about the tumultuous fans that followed.

He says there was this ramp in spread of rumours about Mahatma's Prathap, the power and glory of Mahatma. And they were also reported in the local press between February and May 1921, and here in this essay what he does is, he samples some 50 elaborate stories of this period and one I will read out to you. Stories about Gandhi's occult powers, it first appeared in the local press, in the newspaper in fact.

In January 1921 an issue of Swadesh which announce his arrival in the district also carry the report under the heading Gandhi in dream, English men run away naked, a local driver presumably an Anglo-Indian who has dozed off while reading a newspaper at Kasganj railway station in Eeta district woke up at a nightmare at 11 p.m. and ran towards a cluster of bungalows occupied by English and some Indian railway officers shouted "man, run man".

Gandhi is marching at the head of several strong Indians decimating the English. This caused a panic and all the local white population emerged from their bedroom in a state of undressed and ran towards the station. The key to the armoury at the station was asked for, but could not be found as the officer in charge was away. English women were locked up in boxes and almirahs and some English men were heard saying, man the cries of jay, jay are still reaching us here.

We shall not go back to our bungalows. In the morning Indians who heard of this incident in the city had a good laugh at this example of English self confidence. This story first published in the Banaras daily Aaj and then story in the sense it is a press story not a fictional story, first in Banaras daily Aaj and then in Swadesh as the illustrative of the wider tendency of the times to berate English power and boost Indian power by contrast.

The British emerging tales of this kind has a weak need race mortally afraid of the non-violent Mahatma. So this is just one among the many instances that occurred only in one district, in Gwarakpur. So think about the enormity of this situation, so Shahid Amin also draws our attention to the inability for us now to know what is fact and what was part of such kind of generated stories, again which is why, we really do not know where to situate Gandhi to some level as a political leader or as a sage, or as a visionary.

So one really would not know, because whether he was occupying all these roles by himself or not. That is how he has been presented in popular imagination. So this novel at some level is also about the effect of Gandhi on the peasant consciousness. We do not really get to know about an authorial voice, and we do not even know whether Raja Rao had meant to critic this in some form or the other, but we have very little evidence to believe that.

Given that his own personal stances, they could be position in corollary with the dominant nationalist sentiments of that time. In the novel also whenever people are critiquing Mahatma, Moorthy and others they always rise up to his defense, this is one of the thing that Moorthy says, "It is not for nothing that the Mahatma is a Mahatma and he would not be Mahatma if the gods were not with him."

So this sort of bringing together the political and religious, rather seamlessly and this is not magic realism. This is the rendition, which was considered as very part of the common sense during that time, and we do have a lot other evidences to collaborate that as well.

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# Rumina Sethi's Myths of the Nation

- To consider 'how history slides into fiction'
- Historical fiction - will allow more room for imaginative speculation without having to deal with the anxieties of historians
- Kanthapura - Constructed by a 'national intelligentsia' grounded in the study of English language and literature, and cop-opted, to a large extent, by Western thoughts and ideas"
  - The intelligentsia remains separate from the subaltern

In Rumina Sethi's *Myths of the nation*, she pretty much reads a similar kind of a reading, and she shows how history slides into fiction, how historical fiction has more room for speculative imagination and it also does not have to deal with the anxieties of the historians. So she does give some matter to *Kanthapura*, but she problematizes the novel from different angles. In fact, this work *Myths of the nation* is a book length work on a single novel.

In terms of its methodology, at some point when you start working on your term paper or your making a presentation, if you want to take a look at the methodology that Rumina Sethi uses, if we have time we will even devote one session to talk about how from a single novel, she is able to diverge in a various post colonial aspects to bring in many things into discussion only by starting from *Kanthapura*. She views *Kanthapura* as a product of the national intelligentsia.

She says even the studies on *Kanthapura* could be located as products of a national intelligentsia grounded in the study of English language and literature and coopted to a large extent by Western thoughts and ideas. If we examine our own critical standards, very critically, we would know that we can also very well fall into this category of a national intelligentsia who is grounded in the English language and literature and coopted by Western thoughts and ideas.

There is a way in such we continue to borrow a number of frameworks from the west to analyse that in text, which are available to us. She also further qualifies this intelligentsia, it remains separate from the subaltern. We are not looking at individuals, we are not talking about one set of

novel is another set of novel, we are talking about the entire institution, which produces certain kinds of novels which sustain certain kinds of knowledge and critical opinions.

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## The context of the study

o Postcolonial cultures – not simply at interrogating nationalist history but in showing *how* it gets written

Maybe in the post-colonial world we do have an advantage of looking at things from the other point of view as well. So the context of the study she situates in such a way, she talks about Kanthapura because it is important to look at the postcolonial cultures, not just for interrogating the nationalist history but in showing how it gets written. So again with the novel also it is easy to perhaps to be very dismissive with Kanthapura.

To say that he should not have written it in that way, but it is more important and a more useful exercise for us would be to try and understand why was it written in this way, was this directed or used even to create a nationalist historiography and I will just read this quote and then we will talk about.

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# Myths of the Nation

- o Within the double discourse of nationalism that was both hegemonizing and modernizing, the village was India's answer to western domination. It symbolized indigenous cultural standards as well as the power of antiquity that could stand up to the modern" (23)
- o The past - unchanging Sanskrit Indic civilization (like the Orientalists?)
- o "the real India is constructed by enshrining the novel in Gandhian ideology"

This is from Rumina Sethi's *Myths of the Nation*. Within the double discourse of nationalism that was both hegemonizing and modernizing, the village was India's answer to western domination. It symbolized indigenous cultural standards as well as the power of antiquity that could stand up to the modern. So it is very important to situate the novel in the village, because village was not just a geographical space, it was not just about Kanthapura.

It was about what it symbolized, and also about how village also allowed you to talk about the past in a certain way and this past was always based on the unchanging Sanskrit Indic civilization. We do get a sense of that in the novel as a lot of invocations of religious symbols, religious icons, a way in which it is seen as a Christian form of culture which could be used to counter the western culture.

In this novel we see the real India is constructed by enshrining the novel in Gandhian ideology, village offers the perfect setting for that, the Harikatha renditions, and all of that gives us a perfect setting to comfortably enshrine the novel in the Gandhian ideology. There is Gandhian ideology, there is this village and the novel is placed at the heart of it. So the novel performs a legitimizing role, the novel also gets legitimation on account of this sort of a narration.

So it works both way. Now about Rumina Sethi, I am only talking about certain aspects of the novel and what Rumina Sethi talks about.

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# The village

- o Remained 'permanent' and in a state of cultural stasis
- o Homogenous group?
- o A pre-historic inner world, economically self sufficient, and an organic community of peasants -reproduction of this single formula definition
- o The values imbibed from the family, the village, its caste
- o Such constructions - received favorably
- o Gandhi - Indian cultural identity was rooted in its villages

She talks extensively about the village, how there is a possibility when you talk about the village to locate it in the state of permanence and also in a state of cultural status, nothing really more. And also we have given this impression that it is a failure homogenous group, who are comfortable with the hierarchy which is in place. We are introduced to these different quarters and those are just incidental things.

There is hardly anything which would be problematic about the village setting. And here you know even in Kanthapura it is as if, Gandhi is the only event that happens, otherwise in their monotonous life. They do not seem to disagree much about anything. Even when they disagree, there is a consensus about that kind of a disagreement, and the disagreement in terms of gender, in terms of caste. These are all rooted in a certain consensus.

The village also makes it possible to talk about a pre-historic inner world, which is economically self sufficient and an organic community of peasants. So these sort of novel which set the narrative in a village setting, they are also reproducing the single formula definition. If you recall, the village setting in any of the early Indian English novels, we do not find a problematic rendering of the village.

So if you ask me which are those novels which look at the novel which problematize this narrative we may have to go back to some of the writings of the Dalit writers, where they see the village as the space of oppression, where they realized that whether in their memo as they write

about, how they had to run away from the village to Bombay, to get a life. To be aware of their sense of identity.

How the village remains essentially oppressive in terms of its hierarchy unlike the magical vision that Gandhi had about the village and also talks about the values imbibed from the family, the village, its caste, it is not seen in a critical way. It is only trying to reform some of the existing customs, not to get out it entirely. It is not questioning the dominance that the upper caste had. It is only saying, why do not you coopt the lower caste also into this movement.

Because they also deserve something better. The narrative is placed in such a way that discourse does not tell into the hierarchy, which has been there forever, from the pre-historic times. And these constructions, the problem with these kinds of novels is that they have received favourably, the constructions of the village, the value system which is being propagated, the hierarchy which is being uncritically received, all of this is promoted favourably.

It is also a point of view which is endorsed by Gandhi, because he also believes that in Indian cultural identity was rooted in its villages, that was also one of the points on which Ambedkar disagree with Gandhi. Ambedkar believe that they need to get out of the village system in order to pursue a life which promises them all the good things of modernity which would ensure them a better education, that the village was not a favourable setting at least for some sections of the people, some set of people who are also seen this disadvantage as part of minorities.

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# What is at stake?

- o The rhetoric of nationalism built on a Hindu iconography
  - o Ignoring class divisions, economic distinctions
- o The notion of a monolithic Hindu identity
- o The homogenising, essentialising tendency

So what is at stake in this sort of reading in problematising Kanthapura. So what do we lose out on, any problematise a work like Kanthapura. When we begin to say that, may be this is not the right kind of telling, we are actually totally disrupting the flow of the narrator, then we do not really know where to start from, because it is also about criticizing a nationalist rhetoric which is build on Hindu iconography, nationalism built on a Hindu iconography.

So we find these symbols been unapologetically and uncritically used throughout this novel. But again think about how the religious symbol, the images used over here, the religious space it was not accessible to everyone in the village. That is not really very pronouncively mention in the novel, but we know that is how history had been. And it also ignores all kinds of class divisions and economic distinctions.

Things work in a very organic way, as if nothing can really disrupt the frozen state in which they are and it also when we talk about what is at stake? It is the notion of a monolithic Hindu identity, which is also a homogenising and essentialising tendency. This is not something which we can see only in Kanthapura, this is something that runs through most of the Indian English novels if we look at them critically and many others have written about it, some of those we shall come back at a later point.

So at some level both Rumina Sethi and Priyamvada Gopal, they are also arguing that this novel is an extension of the nationalist ideology.

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# An extension of nationalist ideology

o The construction of a Hindu national identity was the nationalist solution to unite a people by appealing to a common consciousness in terms of religious practices  
(30)

That the construction of a Hindu national identity was the nationalist solution to unite people by appealing to a common consciousness in terms of religious practices. So but only when we look at it in a critical way, look at it from a post-colonial perspective we would begin to see that just like the nationalist historiography, the nationalist mode which was there in the 1920's, 30's and 40's, the fiction was also very surprisingly, very alarmingly replicating the same setting.

It was not really allowing the other to come forward. It continued the rhetoric that we get about the lower caste, about the only Muslim character which is villainised, it all shows that there is a way in which the space of Indian fiction in English. They are also party to this nationalist ideology. Either they could not see it, perhaps the more viable reason, the more practical reason that we could go by is that, it is again the choice that they made, because it works very well.

Rather than putting at stake many other things, because if you think if you were Raja Rao, and if you and I were Raja Rao, perhaps we would also think twice before disrupting all of those stories which are dominant. There is no reason for us to believe that Raja Rao was not aware of the dangers in these sort of narration, he looked abroad. He was also one recipients of all kinds of these things at modernity was granting to people like him.

And also even the personal choices that he makes in terms of his decision to live abroad. The decision is that he makes in terms of choosing his life partner, they all show that he had at some

level come out of those rigid sense of hierarchy. But the novel does not give us that impression at all, in that novel he is still like, one of you said right at the beginning of this class, it looks like he was thinking in Kannada and writing in English.

That is not the case at all, because he was, if we had asked him to write in Kannada maybe he would not have been, about his own sensibility, about his own training he talks about how he was inducted to the French thinkers, because during his formative years, he was in France for a long time. So he was an Indian legitimately in that sense but other than that linguistically perhaps the language which worked well for him was English.

So there is a way in which the novel uses nationalism very effectively to create a new kind of national history. It is not as if Gandhi was received uncritically during his life time or at later point of time. But if you look at the novels of the 30's and 40's, we get that these things are very predominant, there is his nationalist ideology which is Gandhian and which is also an extension of the Hindu monolithic world.

So there is this place in the novel, towards the end where Nehru also emerges as a character, just like Mahatma is a character about this hope that Jawaharlal will change it and this is how Nehru is being talked about. You know Jawaharlal is like a Bharatha to Mahatma, and he too is for non-violence and he too is a Satyagrahi. But he says in Swaraj, there should be neither the rich, nor the poor and he calls himself an equal distributionist and I am with him and his men.

It is about Nehru socialism. We shall speak of it when you are here and this invocation of the image of Bharatha, like Bharatha we worship the sandals of brother saint. So all of the images which are being used are predominantly Hindu and that is used unproblematically. It is as if to be opted into this mode of nationalism. You also have to understand the lot of nuances, which are part of this culture, which is uncritically predominantly Hindu as well.

So there are many other ways of looking at this novel how again when we talk about certain other novels which will come back to this point about how Hindu is not just about religion, it is also by extension about caste. At some level it is not even the Hindu is just a convenient term to

be placed at the forefront, at the heart of it, because both the Paraya and the Brahmin both of them belong to the Hindu religion.

But what differentiates Moorthy, from the once who are inhabiting the potters quarter is that there is difference in caste. So this sort of an ideology that the nationalist movement was upholding, that was also glossing over the elements of caste which they thought would be divisive, which is why Ambedkar and Gandhi were also logger heads with each other in terms of their political approach towards the Harijans or the lower castes we call it today.