

DIMINISH OVER REVOLUTIONARY IN CHAMAN NAHAL'S THE TRIUMPH OF THE TRICOLOR

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Abstract

Indian Freedom Movement is reservoir for Indian Writers in English to compile their fiction. Chaman Nahal, a contemporary novelist composed *The Gandhi Quartet* an experiment to compose historical fiction in Indian writing in English. The third novel *The Triumph of the Tricolour* deals with the Noncooperation Movement in Indian national Movement. Kusum, the fictional protagonist of the quartet plays a well-known role in the novel. Kusum along with her son Arun, the staunch followers of Gandhi attracted towards revolutionary activities and induced those revolutionaries in the major part of the novel, but at the end of the story they realised their folly and accepted the path of mahatma at the end of the novel. Thus the Moderates get triumph over the Revolutionaries in *The Triumph of the Tricolour*

Keywords: Quartet, Nonviolence, Griffith, Lambini, Himmat, Islam, Wavell, Gomp, Sabarmati, Moderates and Revolutionaries.

Introduction

Chaman Nahal, a contemporary novelist in Indian writing in English has taken up the themes of Indian freedom movement as a major core of his fiction. His *The Gandhi Quartet* deals with incidents of the freedom struggle almost exhaustively. Thematically the four novels may be classified as follows, though the chronological order of publication is not followed. The first novel *The Crown and the Loincloth* deals with the Non-Cooperation Movement during the years between 1920 and 1922, this is followed by the second novel

The Salt of Life dealing with the incidents from the Civil Disobedience Movement to India's involvement in the Second World War during 1920s and 1930s and the third novel *The Triumph of the Tricolour* deals with the incidents from the Quit India Movement to the Cabinet Mission which visited India during the period between 1942 and 46 and the fourth novel . *Azadi* mainly deals with the riots that resulted from partition during the period between June 3rd 1947 and January 30, 1948. The third novel in the 'Quartet', *The Triumph of the Tricolour* was published in 1993 after the remaining novels in the Quarter were published already. The novel covers the gap between *The Salt of Life* and *Azadi*. *The Triumph of the Tricolour* deals with the incidents beginning from the 'Quit India Movement' to the Cabinet Mission's visit to India during the freedom struggle. Unlike the first two novels, the major part of *The Triumph of the Tricolour* deals with the revolutionary activities in the freedom struggle. The fictional characters of Chaman Nahal in the novel are attracted towards Subash Chandra Bose rather than Gandhi. But ultimately those characters accept Gandhi and his Principle of non-violence. The major part of the novel runs in the fictional world than the historical. Vikram's attachment with revolutionary activities, his marriage with Julie, a Eurasian, Kusum's life in Benaras, Amit's misconduct in Lambini, Naval's attachment with Bose in Singapore, Santhi Nath's death, the serial murders by Griffith and the communal violence in the end are the major incidents in the novel. As a part of the 'Quartet' Nahal continues his fictional characters from *The Salt of Life* to *The Triumph of the Tricolour*. Kusum plays a prominent role in all the first three novels. Though Vikram and Kusum attract the revolutionary activities in the novel, finally they accept Gandhi's path to restore peace among the people of the county. The activities of Bose abroad for the Indian National Army form the major historical background in the novel. The novel starts with the passing of Quit India resolution in August 1942. The Congress decides that the British should leave from India at the earliest. All the National Congress leaders participated in the special

session in Bombay and pass the resolution. Bipin Chandra says, the historic August meeting at Gowalia tank in Bombay was unprecedented in the popular enthusiasm it generated. Huge crowds waited outside as the leaders deliberated on the issue. And the feeling of anticipation and expectation ran so high that in the open session, when the leaders made their speeches before the many thousands who had collected to hear them, there was pin-drop silence. Kusum accompanies Gandhi. Darbara Singh the Himmat leader asks Gandhi about the part played by the revolutionary groups in the freedom struggle. Kusum now a forty-four middle-aged woman buys a house in Benaras, which gives shelter to many women. Gandhi had gone on a twenty-one day fast early this year to protest against the government's barbaric handling of the situation when the people broke the salt law (Tara Chand, 1972).

Vikram now a twenty-six year old young man is in love with Julie, the daughter of Colonal Fogelson. Vikram meets her first at Lambini, where she is studying. Vikram meets Darbara Singh at the hotel Alma. They plan to liberate the Japanese war prisoners who are to be transported in a train from Sialkot to Jammu by the British officers. Vikram and Darbara bribe the train driver and the train leaves before the British security get into it. The war prisoners escape miraculously from the incident. Vikram is successful and plays an important role in the escape of the war prisoners from the British jail, whereas Rakesh failed to liberate Bhagat Singh a Charulatha in *The Crown and the Loincloth*. Vikram leans towards terrorism. It is an astonishing thing how this Sabarmathi inmate brought up under the shadow of Gandhi in the earlier novels is attracted towards terrorism. Perhaps it is his youth seeking action and the slow activities of the Congress prompted him to turn to terrorism. Moreover the long absence of Gandhi in society and his confinement in the jail may have forced Vikram who is hesitant to take this decision. All the top leaders were in jail; so were the second and third line of leaders who functioned at the provincial or the district level. Vikram had never sought such command no, he was not a leader.

The Second World War the government holds war preparations in Sialkot. Lala Kanshi Ram explains to the panic ridden people about the mock bomb blasting. Kanshi Ram sits on the terrace with Bibi Amar Vatiand Gangu Mull for a chat. Bibi explains to him the history of Sialkot and she narrates how The Pandavas founded Sialkot in the Mahabharata. She says that she has some scrolls of history and gives them to Kanshi Ram. Kanshi reads the scrolls day and night and finds that many people were buried in Sialkot at the time of 1857 mutiny. Hindus and Muslims claim the area. The government had decided to dig the area to find out the truth. Under the supervision of Ashby the places are dug. Some moth eaten corpses are found, but they are neither Hindu nor Muslim but British. Nahal's artistic craft is seen where people from all over the country send food and clothes to Bengal, where the great famine occurs in 1943. Bose reaches Tokyo.

These historical incidents always contribute to the development of the main plot where his fictional characters play prominent roles. Abha attends the marriage of Vikram and Julia in Ajmir. After graduating in medicine from Bombay, Abha starts her practice in Delhi. For a time she faces the enigma as to which religion to follow and finally decides to follow Islam. Vikram aggress to the duty but is averse to killing anyone as a Gandhian. All top Congress leaders are arrested at this juncture. The British begin to collect donations for the World War. A team led by Griffith comes to Mohalla Ballimira, in Delhi where Abha lives. Vikram, Abha and Julie protest against the collection of donations. The local people support them. Consequently Vikram is sentenced to two years hard labour in a jail. Gandhi is released from jail on 6th May, 1944. Kusum induces the revolutionary parties. It is again a surprise that Kusum a staunch follower of Gandhi also supports and helps the revolutionary activities, but again it might be the same case as with Vikramnamely the absence of Gandhi and his other followers. Matthew Craig, a teacher of Lambini high school comes to Kusum to discuss the founding of a charitable trust in memory of Celia Ashby. Matthew is the inheritor of

Celila's property. Kenneth Ashby reaches Benaras and pleads with Kusum to realise that the Japanese want to rule India like the British, if they win in the war and he makes an enquiry about the revolutionary parties. Kenneth wants to settle at Lambini even after the British quit India. Gandhi meets Jinnah at his residence in Bombay. Jinnah demands for a separate country called Pakistan, which is the main demand of the Muslim League. Gandhi pleads for unity, as he does not like partition. Jinnah having accepted the proposal to meet, the talks began on September 9, at the house of Jinnah on the Malabar Hill in Bombay. The talks continued till September 27, when Jinnah announced their termination as a result of failure to reach an agreement. Kusum comes to Lambini along with Gurinder with the idea of constructing a temple in the honour of Vishal. Amit comes to receive her. Amit kills two pigeons with his whip. Kusum finds that he is intoxicated.

On the way to Lambini in a car, they are stopped by Griffith, a sergeant, to check the vehicles for the lost maps of the proposed construction of a bridge. Amit comes out from the car and whips to strike the sergeant. Kusum comes to know of the torture of the suspected people by Griffith. Kusum is upset by the behaviour of Vikram. The car driver tells her that Amit takes bhang, a drug. Kusum slaps Amit when he speaks against Gandhi. That night Kusum learns of the rabbit hunting of Amit with Kapil a Bihari friend and a servant and another friend. The next day she goes to school and makes an enquiry about the hostels from the Principal, Angela. She writes a letter to Vikram to look after Amit. The British government also brings to the notice of Kusum the revolutionary activities of Amit. The world war is going on. Bose with Japanese general Togo and other Japanese officials watch a film of war scenes, which is projected by Naval in Singapore. They watch the construction of a bridge in the war.

The people of Indian origin who are living in Singapore, Malaya, Siam and Burma contribute to the Indian National Army. Bose wants to attack India via Tibet. Some of the

Indians request Bose to come back to India when they meet him at an Indian benefactor's daughter's marriage. Darbara Singh reaches Singapore and meets Bose. Naval and Darbara spend two days in a jovial mood singing and dancing. But the very next day Darbara commits suicide. Bose wants to leave for Germany by special arrangements made by the Japanese government. Unfortunately he is killed in a flight accident on his journey. Majundar says, Netaji left Saigon with a single companion in a twin-engine. It arrived safely at Taihoku in Formosa at about 2 P.M. on August 18. After lunch it left Taihoku. This is all that is definitely known. What happened after this is uncertain. The Japanese official version, issued at that time, was that almost immediately after the plane had taken off, it caught fire. Netaji badly burnt, somehow came out of the plane, and was removed to a hospital where he died that very night between 8 and 9P.M. Attlee, the new Prime Minister of England sends a three member Cabinet Mission under the leadership of Cripps to India to settle the problems before giving independence.

The people surround the mission wherever they go and very curious to know about the diary of the Mission. Communal violence erupts in many parts of the country. Gandhi decides to walk at Bhangi colony a communal affected area in Delhi, along with Kusum and Vikram. Nahal describes the scene graphically as follows. The dead lay in streets and back lanes. The houses stood burned. The cattle lay dead in the fields. The water wells poisoned; many of dead lay slumped inside those wells. The village tanks showed bloated bodies floating in the foul-smelling water. The shops were all closed; the streets deserted. Horrified faces looked down from some of the houses. And when they saw Gandhi come, they ran out, slumped against his legs, and broke down. Kusum stays at Abha's house and every day she follows Gandhi in the disturbed areas.

Gandhi and Nehru appeal the people again and again to maintain peace in the country. People from different religions meet Gandhi and explain him of their plights. Kusum

goes into a street alone where the inmates have fled. She witnesses as some parts of the human bodies are being eaten by vultures. She stands on a terrace and watches the massacre. All of a sudden she is attacked by some vultures. Fortunately Vikram and others save her and she is hospitalized. She does not recover easily from the shock. She says that the path which Gandhi follows is the right path. Gandhi speaks to the British officers to maintain law and order and the problems of administration. Nehru speaks to Wavell for interim government. It is difficult to arrive at a conclusion as to which character is the protagonist in the novel, unlike Sunil in *The Crown and the Loincloth* and Kusum in *The Salt of Life*. However, the dominating character Vikram could be considered as the protagonist of the novel. Though he is attracted towards the revolutionary activities at first, finally he sacrifices his political gains, not to contest in the election, and is selfless, in following the footsteps of Gandhi.

As a noble soul, like his father Sunil, Vikram always aspires to work for society. He does not yield to his carnal desires of conjugal life with Julie, his wife, and decides to follow the footsteps of Gandhi and to work under his command. Vikram had insisted on traveling third class after marriage, Julie would do what he wanted her to, and she didn't argue. He wasn't going to suspend his usual activities. He was a Satyagraha first and foremost and he would go on with the national struggle. Bapu had sent him a wife from the prison, giving him his blessings, but he added; now there would be two of you to fight for India. As a true Gandhian, he does not like to indulge in violence when Joseph gives him an assignment in the revolutionary activity. Vikram is an example of the round character. Vikram protests against the collection of donations by Griffith for the World War. He gives an inspiring speech which moves the people of the mohalla. Even children and women support him.

His shrewdness in misleading the British officials at the railway station is striking. Though the police interrogate him, they cannot find any fault with him. Vikram is virtuous, selfless, shrewd, determined, duteous, responsible, amiable and amicable. Kusum comes to

understand that every child must have parental care. Though she is disappointed initially with the behavior of Amit finally he becomes a good gentleman after the long care taken by her. She slaps Amit when he speaks against Gandhi and she stands for a guide to mothers to rear their children. Kusum goes to Gomp along with Amit and others to fulfill the desire of Amit, who aspire to construct a temple where his father died which is described in the last pages of *The Salt of Life* (Gandhi, 1992).

Kusum's disinterest in worldly possessions is proved when she does not aspire to have thrown share of Sunil in the property of Thakur Santhi Nath. Her tender service to the sick Thakur Santhi Nath is her show of gratitude to him. She never forgets the purse which was gifted by Santhi Nath at Amritsar railway station, when she was leaving from Ajitha to Sabarmathi after the death of Sunil. Kusum first of all is not in favor of Vikram's decision not to contest in the election, but in the end she agrees with the path chosen by Vikram as the right path. Her courage to go alone in a lane of disturbed communal areas is proof of her willpower and her sacrifice to society. Kusum is Sakthi and stands for generous, kind, selfless, determined, and a great soul. The women as shakti, as power, as force, as strength, as authority, was becoming truly pronounced in her. Bhawani, Naina, Mansa, Vaishno, Kalka, Jawala and Durga, all seven of them, the fierce mothers of humanity, were reborn into her at a stroke one full moon night.

Naval, the grandson of Thakur Santhi Nath is attracted towards revolutionary activities in the freedom struggle and works with Subash Chandra Bose in Singapore. Though three important characters Vikram, Amit and Naval are attracted towards revolutionary activities in the novel, only Naval actually works with Subash Chandra Bose. He works fulltime for the activities like Rakesh, the father of Abha in *The Crown and the Loincloth* and in *The Salt of Life*. Gandhi's role in the novel is less, when compared with the first two novels in the 'Quartet'. But the influence of his principles and himself attracts the main characters

towards his ideology at the end of the novel. His talks with Jinnah have failed, and he is personally defeated by the arrangements for partition and the communal violence. He maintains a personal touch with Kusum's family and sends his blessings through telegraph greetings for the marriage of Vikram and Julie. Gandhi's heart is wounded when he witnesses the carnage in the communal violence at Bhangi Colony in Delhi. He wanders many a street in Delhi to restore peace along with Kusum and Vikram. He listens to the plights of the victims of different religions in the communal riots. His idea of an ideal non-violent state is demolished before his eyes. He cannot endure violence but is helpless. Gandhi's character in the novel *The Triumph of the Tricolour* as a part of 'the Quartet' plays a key role in drawing the attention of the main characters Kusum and Vikram.

Subhas Chandra Bose, another historical character also plays a significant role and many characters in the novel revolve around him. Even Vikram, a Gandhian and Sabarmathi brought up is influenced by Bose. Naval helps him in his activities for some time is also influenced by Bose. Though Bose does not come in contact with Kusum, Vikram and Amit, they are attracted towards his revolutionary activities in the novel. Surprisingly even mild people like Kusum and Vikram are attracted by the revolutionary activities. Like Kusum and Vikram some thousands of freedom fighters were in hesitation whether to support the ideas of Gandhi or Bose. Some people who had a lot of patience and strong determination for Gandhi's principle had stood by the side of Gandhi whereas the hot blooded youth like Bhagat Singh and Chandra Sekhar Azad in history and Rakesh and Naval in fiction had supported the ideas of Bose's terrorist activities.

Some people like Kusum and Vikram who have lot of faith in Gandhi have followed the foot-steps of Gandhi, but they also have been influenced by the terrorist activities for some time, maybe, because of Gandhi's absence in society said only truth can win ultimately, Kusum and Vikram follow Gandhi to the last. Kusum cries in the sick bed, there was a

conflict between the followers of Mahatma Gandhi and the followers of Subhas Chandra Bose in Indian Freedom Movement.

Revolutionaries and Moderates are seen separately in Indian Freedom Movement but where as in the Gandhian experiment of Chaman Nahal the staunch followers of Gandhi, Kusum and Vikram; the Moderates helped the revolutionaries and indulge in their activities. The long absence of Gandhi, who was there in prison, leads his followers to induce the ideas of revolutionaries both in history and in Chaman Nahal's *The Gandhi Quartet*. But at the end of the story they realize their folly and understand the real path. Thus, the Moderates get triumph over the Revolutionaries in *The Triumph of the Tricolour*.

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