REVIEW OF LITERATURE-

Literature is the chronicle of man’s attempts to make a sense of external reality ever since man came to imbibe the sensitivity to perceive in incompatibility between the forces within and without. According to this perspective novel is the most obvious literary form. Here the individual is pitted inexorably against the large social reality at a particular juncture of history and the novel, in a way, becomes the saga of individual efforts to comprehend and adjust to the larger reality. The three cycles of historical romances social, and political realism, and psychological case studies are followed more or less uniformly in all literatures including Indian English literature.

The Indian novelists in English have chosen themes and situations that have relevance all over the country or even the world. These themes are not many, since there is a variety of social structure, values, conventions and customs in different parts of India.

The Indian English fiction of the post-independence era is free from social and political overtones and there is a shift of interest to the individual and self-identification.

Literature is the product of a writer’s reaction of life, the writer himself belongs a production of the conditions of life around him consciously or unconsciously. All Literature articulates the spirit of the time which is an accretion of all the political, social, cultural and religious characteristics of a particular age. Intrigued by the existential question like Who am I? baffled by complex situations, the writer sets out to understands his roots.

The quest of self-realization has been there since the very down of the creation, more precisely since man attains consciousness. Man wants to unravel the mystery of the self and has attempted to realize it through various modes. All religions and philosophic thoughts are attempted at the realization of the self. This quest is central not only to philosophy and religion but to literature too. A bulk of contemporary literature deals with an individual search for ‘the self’ in the ruthless society. An individual develops a social identity or a self-definition which conforms how he conceptualizes and evaluates himself. For each individual this identity including unique aspects such as his name, family, occupation, racial trait, culture and nation.

V.S. Naipaul’s (1932) novels reveal an intense yearning to realize the self identity and roots’ what gives unity to his work is the theme of searching his roots and identity. The main concern of my dissertation is to explore this thematic unity in his novels.

Gandhi in Creative and Critical Imagination: A Survey

Mahatma Gandhi is not only a universal figure but also an immortal one. During the pre-Independence phase of India, Gandhi became first a national and soon enough an international leader of immense political and philosophical significance. Gandhian literature began pouring in form all corners, native as well as outside. Even today Gandhi continues to have a dominating presence in the literary world and in fact literature that ignores Gandhi attracts critical attention.

Though his treatment in the post-Independence phase has undergone changes from that in the pre-Independence times, nevertheless, what is certain is that Gandhi can never be separated from writing.

India in contemporary times is a set stage for Gandhi and Gandhigiri¹. Be it as the historical figure or creator of Gandhism or as a symbolic Gandhian cap. Mahatma Gandhi
permeates fiction as well as non-fiction in Indian writings both in English and other languages. These include works written from within and outside India. In creative works from India and the space of diaspora, whether it is his reverence or lampooning, Gandhi is redefined in ways that are quite contemporary. Whereas in some cases there is an attempt to grapple with Gandhi and ultimately accommodate him, in other instances nothing of Gandhism remains unchallenged. Whatever be the case, in creative writings there is a sense of strong involvement as the writers pen Gandhi and Gandhism.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to graph the development of Gandhi from the beginning till date in Indian literature with emphasis on Indian diaspora along with his treatment in the western literary space. An exhaustive study of Gandhi literature is not possible therefore selective works have been chosen to present a critical survey of Gandhi in literature and prove that Gandhi is not only alive in literature but has opened up new chapters of literary and critical discourse. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section deals with works in Indian English from the native space followed by the second section that deals with Gandhi in indigenous language literature including dalit literature. The third section deals with Gandhi in Indian diaspora and this is the focus on the chapter. Lastly, a brief survey of western literary thought on Gandhi has been included to make the study comprehensive enough and to prove the significance of the subject. An attempt has also been made to study each of the sections in three phases namely—the during-Gandhi period in which Gandhi was usually treated as demi-God, followed by after-Gandhi period which saw the beginning of critical reviewing of Gandhi and Finally the Post-nineties phase wherein Gandhi is being caricaturised with all sorts of contradictions and rejections. This categorisation into different responses with each phase is not rigid, the broad categories are only given to show the development of Gandhi as a subject with each passing phase.

Before a study of Gandhi in literature is undertaken it is necessary to be familiar with the basic principles that Gandhi stood for in order to capture the essence of his portrayal in different works. The main ideas that Gandhi propagated were “Truth, Non-violence and swadesi” besides “simplicity, vegetarianism, preference of manual labour and faith in Hinduism, especially Bhagwad Gita”. An ideal of these principles helps in familiarising ourselves with the various parameters that writers have chosen to approach Gandhi. If at one time he is seen as the cultivator of Indian nationalism, then at other he is a lover of mankind; sometimes he is a leader of Swadesh; and at other instances, he is the mahatma only to be revered and imagined.

**Gandhi In Indian English**

In Indian writings in English from within the homeland, both Gandhi and Gandhism have undergone semantic alterations, redefining Gandhi’s relationship with the domestic imagination. From being a metaphysical persona in the during-Gandhi era, we come across him now as a historical being with all human vulnerabilities. Though Gandhi receivers critical attention in most writings of post-nineties, yet he is not caricaturised with as much vehemence as it has been observed in writings written from the space of diaspora. The current section dealing with Gandhian literature includes a survey of fiction as well as non-fiction works on Gandhi during the three phases—during-Gandhi from 1990 to 1948-49, post Gandhi from 1948-1990 and finally the post-nineties. Some of the works studied in the first phases include those by Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and others. In the post-Independence phase, the works of Jawarharlal Nehru, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Chaman Nahal and others have been studies while post-nineties section include Uma Dhupelia Mesthrie, Ashish Nandy, Sudhir
Kakkar and more. A few writers may be common to two or all three phases, depending on when their works on Gandhi have been created. An attempt has been made to place the works chronologically as the emphasis is on portrayal of Gandhi in works during the different phases and study how attitudes towards him have changed with passing times.

V.S. Naipaul on Gandhi: Mahatma as a Failed Reformer

The responses that emanate from the diasporic space towards home, homeland and native ethos are not homogenous for a number of reasons. One, Indian diaspora as such is not a monolithic category. The distance that each diasporic travels in space and time away from his homeland, in a way decides his responses towards both his filiative and affiliative spaces. Also the different native backgrounds of the diasporic writers also impinge a lot upon their poetics of negotiation in the alien land. Indian diaspora, spread as it is across space, time and native languages, reveals a range of response towards the homeland, its institutions and nationalist icons. Gandhi is one of the most prominent icons of India and its Indianess, and almost without exception has been the perennial subject of diasporic re-visiting. Gandhi emerges as India’s hope as well as despair in the revisionary diasporic writings. The present chapter undertakes an extended study of one such account of Gandhi as it emerges in the writings, particularly the travel writings of V.S. Naipaul. Often described as an Indian who is not quite an India, Naipaul has made a number of critical comments on Gandhi.

Naipaul’s credo lies in his prose works as well as fiction. Born in Trinidad, having spent most of his adult life in England when bearing ancestral roots in India. Naipaul dangles between the neo-colonised and the developed nations as a writer in self-exile. Prompts his attitude towards the homeland. His travelogues on India—An Area of Darkness, India: A Wounded Civilization and India: A Million Mutinies Now and party his India-based The Overcrowed Barracocon, believed to have been written during the darker phase of his career, bring forth a disappointment attitude towards life, as they exhibit Naipaul’s critical fixations with India. In this chapter Naipaul’s attitude towards Gandhi in his non-fictional writings has been graphed. The travelogues mentioned above have been placed chronologically as far as possible so as to reveal the changing Naipaul treatment of Gandhi over a period to time. Towards the end of reference has also been made to the treatment of Gandhi in Naipaul’s fictional works as well. As a British citizen to an Indian origin with a West Indian address, Naipaul is a postcolonial subject of multiple affiliations who is not obliged to look at any space, be it native or foreign with unqualified adoration, or romantic indulgence. A descendant of indentured labour, and a third generation diasporic, Naipaul is may times away from the homeland both in space and time, Gandhi is his favourite icon for it offers him a ready frame to approach, understand and subsequently indict India.

Naipaul’s diasporic ideology transcends root fixity unlike that of diasporic writers as Raja Rao. Despite the melange of cultures, attitudes and religions, Naipaul encounters fixities of attitude in India and that is what perplexes his postcolonial psyche. Naipaul’s writings sum up his experiences as an expatriate searching for an identity beyond the easy writings sum up his experiences as an expatriate searching for an identity beyond the easy binaries of the colonised and the colonial, the native and the alien, the home and the abroad.

During his initial visits to India, Naipaul was taken back by the sense of historical amnesia, orthodoxy ad a community in India that was intellectual flawed and was obliterating individuality owing to Ganshism. And thus Naipaul began what can be describe as the anti-
Gandhi drive in his writings, especially non-fictional. Either this contempt is evident in direct attack on Gandhi or though character that exhibit pro-Gandhi attitude who then do not come across as enlightened or matter-of-fact individuals. Critics time and again comments on Naipaul’s fascination with Gandhi. His Gandhi is a dramatic character standing amidst as figure of national tragedy. Gandhi represents a pious approach leading to a vicious failure.

Naipaul is an itinerant observer scrutinising the postcolonial world. In fact Amit Choudhuri (Choudhuri, Amit: online) frames Naipaul for making the colonised societies to bear the burden on being ever vibrant, Naipaul’s journey through India is rather an account of a colonial experience. In fact, he has often been hailed as the minion of neo-colonialism. And it is perhaps his colonial toning that leads him into categorising Indians. He too is a distant observer. In Naipaul’s own words, the books he wrote about journeys to India have taken him to unthought-of realms of emotions, giving him a fresh yet startling world-view and making him realise the colonial schizophrenia he was suffering from in his writings.

**Raja Rao on Gandhi: Gandhi as Mahatma**

About Gandhi winter/lawyer C.S. Dharmadhikari writes:

Gandhi was the most normal of men. He was universal. Such a man cannot be measured, weighted, or estimated. He is the measure of all things. Gandhi was not a philosopher, nor a politician. He was a humble seekers of truth. Truth unites, because it can be only one. You can cut man’s head, but not his thought. Non-violence is the only other aspect of the sterling coin of truth. Non-violence is love, the very content of life (Dharmadhikari: online).

These words best define the reverential attitude towards Mahatma Gandhi that still rules the roots not only in India but also throughout the world. This is despite a vehement critical as well as creative re-visioning of the saint-cum-politician in recent times. This segment consisting of Gandhi’s admirers, by and large, particularly positions Gandhi as an amazingly successful leaders who touched the world both spiritually and politically. The very reasons that Gandhi is criticised for happens to be the very points for which he is admired as well. He is defined as a moral, spiritual leader whose religion was a means to invigorate the sentimentally sensitive people, especially Indians. The spiritual approach he used was a means of implementing his revolutionary ideas through a more accessible mode. His inner voice of illumination guided him throughout in the selfless process of seeking welfare of other through the medium of his very own self. He was the right combination of the supple and the firm, a shrewd politician, and a humanitarian, a spiritual guide, all at the same time.

In contrast to diaspora writers of the likes of Naipaul, Rashavan N. Iyer and Bikhu Parekh whose presentations of Gandhi border on careful scrutiny and unsparing attitude, we have, a positive or rather meditative invocation of Gandhi emanating from another space of diaspora, Raja Rao who has been a diasporic for more than 70 years is a prominent figure of this space. Most of Raja Rao’s fiction and non-fiction delves into the religious and mystic roots of India, and can thus be considering a very strong example of the above-mentioned space of Indian diaspora. In all his works—non-fiction and otherwise Rao exhibits a tendency to romantically indulge with the persona of Gandhi who he seems to consider one of the most significant of icons representing India. His treatment of Gandhi in his biographical masterpiece *The Great Indian Way* is particularly unique. Rao does merely compile the facts from Gandhi’s life but tries
to weave an essence around each of these facts and ends up with a presentation of Gandhi as more of a mahatma than a man.

In the current chapter an attempt is made to sketch the idealised presentation of Gandhi in Raja Rao’s works from the space of works from the space of diaspora in contrast of Gandhi-bashing discussed in the previous chapter. A detailed study of Gandhi in Rao’s non-fiction work The Great Indian Way has been undertaken along with references to The Meaning of India some of his fictional works as well. Rao loves to play with ideas and has treated Gandhi in a similar fashion in his writings but all the while his dealing of the leader is a reflection of his affinity to the subject. For Rao, duality makes the world and his intended purpose is to exert on duality in order to abolish all contradictions and reach non-duality. This is exactly what he does with Gandhi—presenting him not only as the player but the game itself, both a learners as well as a teacher. Thus, Gandhi is The Great Indian Way. A poem on Raja Rao entitled “To Raja Rao” by polish Nobel laureate Czeslaw gives an ideal of the basic ideology of the winter who idealises Gandhi like no one else does. Czeslaw writes:

Link, if you wish, may peculiar case
(on the border of schizophrenai)
To the messianic hope
Of my civilization.
……I hear you saying that liberation is possible
And that Socratic wisdom
Is identical with your guru’s (Czeslaw: online).

From these lines we have an indication of Rao’s tendency of idealisation and optimism. And this is what is depicted in Rao’s treatment of Gandhi. Rao has been nourished with faith and reverence for his roots, culture and nativity and his approach to Gandhi comes from this domain. He is strongly influenced by Gandhi and sweats to pen the persona of Gandhi in ardently idealistic terms. Gandhi is a combination of man and mahatma but the latter weighs more. The Great Indian Way or The Meaning of India are not a mere compilation of facts from Gandhi’s life but rather they diffuse these facts to give an refreshed comprehensive meaning to Gandhism and state the essence of all facts of happenings from Gandhi’s life, big or small, thereby making things appear bigger and also superior. It is the way and how behind what Gandhi did and the great impact left behind that is the source for learning in all times to come. It has been rightly observed regarding The Great Indian Way that here Rao weaves together the whole chronicle in epic dimensions. It is as if a glorious parable on Mahatma’s life unfolds as we read the biography further.

**Gandhi—the Mahatma**

Besides idealising Gandhi, Rao is also trying to eternalise Gandhi and Gandhism, perceiving them through his Indian eyes, Rigorous Gandhian devotion perhaps propels Rao to perpetuate Gandhi’s persona though words often soaked in deep spiritual content. Rao nurturing unqualified adoration for Gandhi weaves him into his symbolic association with India. There is an assertive attempt to dehumanise Gandhi and elevate him to the stature of a superior being, an oracle. He was for the commoners and of them, yet he was above.
Rao is found of giving his writings a background or some reference in order to take the reader slowly to the genesis of situation. In The Great Indian Way before introducing Gandhi, Rao discusses other heroes such as Mahavira, Buddha, Harishchandra in order to categorise him. By referring to Gandhi’s parents as the holy couple in the beginning of the biography, Rao is able to approach Gandhi in Vedic terms so as to both inform and prepare the reader for the magnanimity of the subject to follow. He takes up the characters of Rama, Krishna Harishchandra, Buddha and Ashoka to provide that of Krishana go side by side. Rao draws analogies ion their birth, their childhood mischiefs, their mother and descrives both as incarnations, acknowledging the presence of god in them and in them and at many instance both become the one “Cloud–blue Lord” (Rao, 1998, 37). Rao even describes the history behind Gandhi’s place of birth; it is referred to as the holy land that bore him. He mantions that is was but natural that Gandhi’s birthplace had to have a history and thus he narrates the tale of Krishana and his friend Sudhama to reveal how the city Porbander got its name. It was “haven” city—a city befit to produce Gandhi. Gandhi’s childhood, his parents, to Rao, is an empire that gods themselves protected and he describes the Gandhis themselves as a scrupulous people. While referring to Gandhi’s home in the book, Rao writes, “But who can destroy what God has built and established” (Raim 1998, 25). Gandhi, born to a wise father and pious mother, was to be led by God as the protector of Dharma fighting in the great Indian way of Mahabharta. Thus, from Mohania to Mohandass Karamchand Gandhi to Gandhiji to Gandhi-swami and finally to Rama, the trajectory of the prophesy of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as the future Mahatma is narrated in theological loops and leaps of imagination. And Rao feels the need to mention Putli Ba’s words, “Oh Mohania!..... Where have you come from? And who taught you all this? What were you before you came to me, Son” (Rao,1998,40)? And if this was not enough, later he mentions that Mohandas’ first unborn child was a superior being. Rao too joins in the call for Ramrajya that could only be attained by Gandhi us evident in the lines: “yes, he had led them rightly, he, this thin and deep-eyed man, soft-voiced and silent, and he would take us where we have to go, to that Rajrajya, the Kingdom of Rama, which is ours. And like Sri Rama he only speaks of the truth and of love…..” (Rao, 1998, 304).

Here one is reminded of Basavraju Appa Rao’s poem on Gandhi. He dubs Gandhi as reincarnation of Jesus who by using the weapon of-violence defeated his foes1. In The Meaning of India while writing of Nehru in the Book Rao is careful not to bestow him the title of lord Rama as that is for Gandhi alone. Nehru, who had ascribed Gandhi with the title of Saint King, has to settle down for the status of Bharatha. Rao has commented that without Gandhi there could be no world of tomorrow. And to him, not only the Indian messes but also the British could feel the empowering influence of Gandhi. Rao’s heightening of the historical significance of Gandhi evident of his own Ghandian loyalties.

Rao’s Gandhi seems more than a man and definitely beyond ordinary comprehension. Rao’s references to his personal mystical experiences in the presence of Gandhi further strengthen the above view, as the writer discloses the awe, the fear that he experiences when in the company of Gandhi. It is as if god has come alive for him. This is because Rao does not approach Gandhi as writer alone but also to make other aware of the greatness that Rao has experienced and perceived in the man and his ideals. Rao states that to attempt Gandhi’s biography requires courage and dare2. It is a story that Rao has felt from within and penned down. Every world is an experience.

Religious pacifist John Heynes Holmes’ words may be applied to Rao too. Holmes (Holmes: online) has said that his real life as a teacher began with Gandhi and ended with his death. In
Rao’s case, however, the association with Gandhi has been unending. Being a man of ancient Brahmin descent and deep Indian spiritual concerns, Rao experiences Gandhi or rather “Gandhi-swami”; Gandhi is the divine Rama in Rao’s soul symbolising the ultimate greatness, the saviour Rama of India

Rao considers life as bigger than history. Kathleen Raine has rightly commented that Raja Rao uses his work as a philosopher and his writings become instruments of exploring profound themes. For Rao, Gandhi has transcended history, has already become a myth, a divine person carrying the fruits of his previous life. In The Meaning of India Rao mentions at various places that has Gandhi lived long enough, the intricate problems that India is facing would have been resolved better for if Socrates was the progenitor of the modern world then Gandhi was the founding architect of the world of tomorrow (Rao, 1996, 77). In the biography, Gandhi’s kingdom is that of Sri Rama and Ayodhya comprises the Indian messes. This Ayodhya celebrates all of Gandhi’s victories and weeps for his sufferings. Thus, liking spirituality to motherhood, motherhood to truth and so on, Rao places Gandhi in a splendid cycle of celestial-divine cosmos. Bay play of gods, Gandhi was born in the land of bondage so as to liberate and guide. Rao defines Gandhi as the Visvamitra.

R. Parthasarathy’s description of the Great Indian Way is only a proof of Gandhi’s divine influence on Rao. Parthasar defines it as:

….a sprawling oral history interspersed with tales from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Raja had lived at Sevagram for six months in 1942, and every page of the book speak of his honest justification of such an experience of Gandhi (Parthasarthy: online)

The book is rather an invocation of Gandhi following the harikatha3 traditional of his Gandhi based fiction work Kanthapura. Rao does not merely present the facts from Gandhi’s life but rather is working on the rasa of Gandhi’s life. Each fat of his life has to be presented against history. Against time and various other coordinates. The normal is transformed into mighty and further Gandhi becomes a myth.

Moreover, it is not only in the two afore-mentioned non-fiction, but Rao’s fiction too is replete with innumerable references to Gandhi as “Mahatma”. Rao’s The Cow of the Barricades also reflects the role of Gandhian principles in helping redeem the evil world of history. And then there is his masterpiece Kanthapura where the mahatma is discussed through the harikatha tradition. The bookportrays the rise of Gandhian nationalism as a voluntary mass movement with people jointing in numbers, from all walks of life in a small Indian village representing a microcosm of India. Here Gandhism does not merely represent a fight against the British rule but also comes across as means to deal with the evil of the caste system, especially untouchability and for supporting women participation in politics. The movement brings about unity, sense of responsibility; there are sparks of social transformation. Thus, Gandhism is offered as a spectrum functioning at so many different constructive levels. Some define it as addition of an ethical dimension of the social and political movement with precedence of moral concern over the political ones. Rao’s treatment of character in the novel elicits the mesmerising effect of Gandhian magic on the masses.

Iyengar (Iyengar, 391) in the study of Kanthapura concludes Rao’s approach to Gandhian politics as half-poetical and half-whimsical. He evaluates Gandhi in the book as the invisible lord. He is Rama himself in this Gandhi Purana. Not only in Kanthapura, but rather in all of Rao’s works that deal with Mahatma Gandhi, Gandhi’s life is discussed in the typical sthalapurana5 style and by extension of the of the same logic Gandhi himself become the
legend. Critics have observed the “master” in Rao’s story “Narsiga” and The Cow of the Barricades as symbolic figures for Mahatma Gandhi. In the story entitled “Narsiga” we come across a young lad bewitched by mahatma by his very description given, though never heard of or seen before. Mystrey surrounds the reality of this Mahatma—is he a great saint or is he an incarnation of god. Through words heard alone, Mahatma becomes a god as seen in the lines below:

Auntie said, there was a bit, big man called Gandhiji….An old man- a bewitching man, a Saint, you know!... He looks beautiful as the morning sun, .....They say he is an incarnation of God, ....when you touch his feet you feel as though the body has sunk to the earth, and you are nothing but a mere ant before an elephant (Rao, 1947, 106)

Nevertheless, the mahatma is also a man who walks among the masses and pats them on the back. If on one hand he is Rama flying to Ayodhya and an object of daily worship, then on their other he is also permeating the varied and almost all aspects of life. He is presents in a moral preaching conversation between a teacher and his pupil, in social gatherings, in grandma’s stories, in books and comics: myths get associated with him. He becomes a way of life! In this work On the Ganga Ghat, Rao discusses the legendary vulture Krodha and mentions that it “was seen by man at least since the last 20 years—so people say, since a year or two after Mahatma Gandhi assassinated (Rao, 1989, 22). In another story entitled “A Client” we seen Gandhi permeating even a common day-to-day talk—“it is because of these examination that we have become such slaves, losing our ancient traditions and our self-respect. Do you know what Mahatma Gandhi thinks of it? He thinks of it....” (“Myths of the Nation”:online). Also, Rao does not attempt to compartmentalise Gandhi and render artificially to his presentation. Instead he portrays him to be a many-sided personality in order to make his character more believable. He does not impose the mahatma upon the readers straight away. His treatment is that of transition of a common man to mahatmahood.

Thus it is on a higher plane consciousness that Rao attempts to explore Gandhi at multiple levels while putting him in religious dimension and trying to explore him metaphysically. Rao’s elevation of Gandhi has been done with a strong Indian flavour. Rao’s Gandhian works are, to use Robert D. King’s (King: online) expression from the article “Raja Rao’s Works”, appear as a “subdued discourse on Gandhism”, making it seem a tradition. Rao, experiencing Gandhi in total realisation, personalises him and offer Gandhism as a so-called mighty field of energy capable of gigantic social transformation starting from a scratch and taking on epic dimensions. He exhumed power the could heal or correct all. He is only seen within the cosmic paradigm. Gandhism implies a way of life as Rao writes, “But what is Gandhism? It is not a creed; it is a perspective on life (darshana)” (Rao, 1998, 173). This cosmological force inevitably by virtue of its principles took over the world. Gandhi thus become a legend, a perspective and is therefore analogue through epic/historical character. Thus, where a section of the diaspora tends to colonise Gandhi, Raja Rao, rooted in Brahmnnism and Hunduism, on the other hand, nativises him all the more. He give a fabled version Gandhism, which otherwise as a task has been undertaken by indigenous writers largely. For instance, Humaun Kabir6 has written a sonnet on Gandhi in which his evocation of Gandhi from the indigenous space is in total analogous to that of Rao.

Gandhi—an Indigenous Product
Another aspect of Gandhi’s life that has been keenly explored in writings on him is the fact that he spent a lot of time abroad and was trained outside India. Naipaul says that London made Gandhi a colonial, he developed an outsider’s attitude whereas on another plane, Gandhi is more often described as an indigenous-cum-universal man—for all places and for all times. Raja Rao has indigenised Gandhi in and out. There was wonder and amazement for Gandhi on entering a new world in London and Rao justifies it by describing the beauty and the mystical essence of England that makes an outsider realise one’s own awkwardness all the more. Rao mentions in the biography, There’s a splendour about England that seems almost mythological. The barges, the Thames, the ships, the high buildings, the palace of Westminster, the lean and quiet ways of a civilised land” (Rao, 1998, 86), Naipaul condemns Gandhi of ignoring London at the cost of attending to himself all the while, Rao, on the other hand, turns this the other way round by explaining how London was responsible for creating conditions that made it impossible for Gandhi to orient anything but his self. The wonder and amazement of London never escaped Gandhi’s attention. Rao writes, “The landscapes, the houses, and the people, seemed just as the pictures in textbooks. When you see what you’ve imagined and it’s found true, you always have a secret sense of self-assurance” (Rao, 1998, 86). Defending Gandhi’s stand on vegetarianism he says that vegetarianism was not an obsession but rather “The most civilised way of eating, and also the most scientific one” (Rao, 1998, 90). Each and every act of Mohandass was in fact a part of his efforts to best fit in the society of London with his limitation.

Rao refers to Gandhi’s strenuous efforts in his quest for survival out of India. Gandhi has to endeavour hard and Rao adds that there is always a sincere effort, persistence, strong well power, resilience on his part be it for keeping the vows that he took in front of his mother or adjusting to new society. Of course, Rao does conclude that ultimately there was success. Gandhi was told that in England etiquette was morality and thus he emphasises on befitting the society in the best possible manner—the dress, speech, music, dance, attire—all was a part of his sincere effort. And Rao writes that an Indian out of India becomes, as it were, an Englishman, the universal man (Rao, 1998, 112). England was an amalgam of financial metropolis and political megalopolis and this it was obvious that after London, Bombay would look so provincial, so parasitical. The Indian were bound to seem so thin, so drab. The British looked the master race that can rule a country with high elegance, with shrewd competence (Rao, 1998, 101). Rao further explains how London was responsible for making Gandhi realise that the Gita was scientific and Bible religious; that the inner voice has its significance and it was the source to comprehend God (Rao, 1998, 96-97). He writes, “But above all he was the edge of finding God. This trip to London has become a pilgrimage” (Rao, 1998, 100).

Rao does explicate that Gandhi by comparing India with London was not trying to support the maintenance of British control over India but rather voicing the need of an inter-cultural translation resulting in betterment of India. Gandhi was at no point suggesting a surrender of Indian to British manufacture but rather Rao asserts that Gandhism was a challenge to colonialism. Explaining that Gandhi’s attitude towards things has changed but not the person within him. Rao writes, “England has not made him forget his Hindu instinct” (Rao, 1998, 102). He has learnt to make better sense of his life and segregating priorities. Rao mentions that Gandhi’s life in London made him aware of the things he wanted and those that he did not. He explains that if Gandhi rediscovered India on his return it was but a natural reaction to the disparity between the fast-paced progressive people of London who are “hard-working, united, silent and love to get things done” (Rao, 1998, 277) and the sluggish of things in India in the
biography, bound to move any thinking mind. He comments, “And naturally the delegates when on living in their own filth and odours. Who cares? This is India” (Rao, 1998, 240).

Gandhi has acknowledged that the British taught him to be a gentleman. Amidst an Indian that was used to living in filth and odour, here was Gandhi with his sanitary instinct. His exposure to a methodical world has made him conscious of the lack of order and Methodism in his native land. Some critics question as to why Gandhi was not moved by the plight of Indians in India but rather in the foreign land of South Africa. B.R. Nanda in his article “Tarring the Mahatma” discusses the genesis of Gandhi’s struggle in South Africa, with his primary focus on interrogating as to why Gandhi’s struggle began for the indentured Indians only and not for the entire black community of Africa. He adds:

….if the back population did not figure in Gandhi’s campaign, it was partly because it did not suffer from the disabilities against which the Indians were protesting... Moreover, it is doubtful whether, at the turn of the century, the black population in South Africa would have readily accepted a young Indian barrister as its leader (Nanda, B.R.: online).

Rao justifies the concentration of Gandhi concern on the Indians alone in Africa. He concludes that the political circumstances were such that Gandhi felt the urgent need to attend to the Indians in South Africa. Rao describes South Africa as nations within a nation. It is a colourful land of splendour and Gandhi entered this land at the tender age of twenty-four “carrying with him the multiple riches of India, recognised and unrecognised, with a thousand little understandings from the British…..”(Rao, 1998, 112).

Gandhi’s supporters ignore the fact that it was South Africa and not India where his struggle began. They are rather appreciative of the fact that South Africa prepared Gandhi to struggle in India. Africa was the nursery of satyagraha. In The Great Indian Way, Rao gives a detailed accountant of the genesis of Gandhism in South Africa. Unlike Naipau, Rao is not concerned where this genesis took place. He is simply scripting the birth and development of Gandhian ideas that were unleashed later on a much larger scale in India. Africa became the testing ground for Gandhian resistance that was to later brings about political transformation in India. Rao has in fact dedicated a major portion of the book to Gandhi’s life in South Africa with very little reference to the movement in India. By giving a reverential and fable-like treatment to Gandhi’s experience in South Africa, Rao has made the country a battleground that prepared Gandhi for a much bigger fight in India. Scripting Gandhi’s political and spiritual enrichment in Africa, Rao is only expressing amazement and wonder as his book progresses along with Gandhi in Africa. Gandhi has gone there to earn a livelihood but the bitter experiences that he underwent in Africa had to be an eye-opener. He was thrown out of railway compartments, kicked on the pavement. Rao comments that the whole encounter changed something within him. It made him realise that he was a British subject. And so on his second return to Africa, Gandhi haggard by the misery of Indians there finishes his task of rousing Indians to heroism and prestige in Africa through his lordly games. In Rao’s words, he realised that the evil committed was for the purpose of bestowing good. He writes that “Evil is only a round about way of affirming good” (Rao, 1998, 122). Sita’s imprisonment brought about Ravana’s liberation (Rao, 1998, 122). Rao even adds that Gandhi helped Indians in Africa to better themselves, teaching them English and trying to make them better civilised. He expresses gratitude for Gandhi because it was due to him that good was happening for the Indian community there.

Thus, according to Rao, South Africa changed Gandhi from within. His experience there gave him inner radiance. He became loyal to the British constitution. And as he return to
India, his mind was preoccupied with the plight of Indians thought he knew that from a distance things looked exaggerated and his first attempt would always be to reason out with them. On his second visit to South Africa when the British were at war with the Boer, he retained his royalties as a British subject and offered to nurse the wounded British soldier. Rao described how this act won India great pressing in South Africa. He mentions that when Gandhi decided to stay back in South Africa to fight his first barrel it spelt the death of colonialism. In fact, he lauds at the success achieved and the impact left by Gandhi in Africa as he writes, “Auspicious the waters of the ocean will feel, father, and holy the earth wheresoever she will see you. May you live amongst us a hundred years” (Rao, 1998, 434). Gandhi has planted the tree of satyagraha in Africa. By citing the individual success stories of Gandhi in Africa, Rao happily graphs the development and growing success of Gandhi there. At one place he writes, “The principle of the colour bar was dropped. Here Gandhism won” (Rao, 1998, 207) while at another he mentions, “The bill was passed, But Sir John and Gandhiji became friends. Thus Gandhism won again” (Rao, 1998, 208). And thus Rao indigenises Gandhi in a foreign land. The essential Gandhism never lets go off its hold on him and for Rao that as much a measure of his nativity, as it is of Gandhi as well.