

A Generation Gap Enacted in Ajit Dalvi's Mahatma Vs Gandhi

Vinod Dhanraj Ghule

Research Scholar Dr BAMU, Aurangabad Dr. R. T. Bedre (Research Supervisor)
Director, UGC- HRDC, Dr. H. S. Gour Univ. Sagar MP, India

Abstract

The present article attempts to portray M K Gandhi as an unsuccessful father as he could not recognize and admit the generation gap between him and his son as drawn in Ajit Dalvi's play in English, *Mahatma Vs Gandhi*. It selects episodes from the play to highlight how M K Gandhi treated his family members to show the world how impartial person he was. It becomes a tragedy of a son who tries to prove himself, at one point a *Chhota* Gandhi and at another in quite rebellious way, a person independent of M K Gandhi in which he fails utterly. His acts in depression appear against Gandhi which led him to tragic and unnoticed death. At the end of the play, neither son Harilal nor M K Gandhi seems to have won. At some level, the conflict takes place more within than without between Mahatma the public figure and Gandhi, the father. The generation gap has always been there in the lives of common men and extra ordinary men as well.

Introduction: -

Mahatma Gandhi's multi-dimensional personality has affected all modes of Indian life and literature. His influence on Indian fiction in English is studied on large scale but in drama it seems to be unexplored. There is immense writing on Mahatma Gandhi and Gandhian influence in Indian writing. Most of the critical writings and researches on Gandhi have concentrated on the aspect like Gandhism, his role in Indian politics, but Gandhi's influence on Indian drama is seldom studied.

The present article focuses on the familial life of M K Gandhi and how he treated his family. The play revolves around his bipolar conflict with his wife Kasturba and his eldest son Harilal. The play seems to prove that Gandhi treated his family members as the soldiers or objects for his tools like personal sacrifice, *satyagraha*, non-violence and penance. As the result, he could never be a loving and caring father for his children- finally he turned into a failed father but both adamant not to admit it. The conclusion one draws is identical what Raosaheb Kasabe in his book Marathi, *Gandhi: A Victorious Saint but a Defeated Politician*.

In Ajit Dalvi's play in English, *Mahatma Vs Gandhi*, Bapu had some more expectations from his son Harilal that he should follow his father's principles like economical life, self reliance, and aversion to worldly pleasures. Gandhi expects his 25 year old son to understand and practice these things what he practices in his mid forties.

Ajit Dalvi opens the play with very frank discussion between Bapu and Harilal. Bapu is convincing Harilal and make him realize his philosophical stand but Harilal is ready with his negation to these:

BAPU: Hari, temptation, worldly pleasure. I kept telling you, not to sacrifice yourself on the altar of evil, but you

didn't listen. Now at least do you agree that your path was wrong?
HARI: No Bapu
BAPU: No?
HARI: Not at all
BAPU: Strange...
HARI: Bapu don't you believed that a question of great significance kept us apart? (Dalvi, *Mahatma Vs Gandhi*. 1-2)

Gandhi seems to deny the very basic expectations of his wife and children. He wants them to live life like other members of the *Ashrama* like working together, eating together and having no sense of ownership. He does not spare enough time either his wife or children. Harilal is quite vocal to put his displeasure thus:

HARILAL: I never asked for this family. All I wanted was some warmth, a touch that felt my face. Ba, Bapu and brothers I could rightfully call my very own. Then I would have chanted every word you spoke like the Gospel truth. But out here we have Ashram rules, everything belongs to everyone and nothing belongs to anyone. Bapu is a public Bapu, everyone has a small share of him, Ba despite her wishes could never be only our Ba, Chhagan, Nayadu, and the others would be hanging around all the time interfering and discussing every private family matter of ours. You won't speak lovingly to us because you fear that others might feel bad. (Dalvi, 39-40).
HARI: You have embarked on the mission of being a father to all the children of the world and showering them with your love. But as far your own children are concerned; you have been like a circus ringmaster. The only difference being that a ringmaster carries a whip in his hand, you carry it on your tongue (Dalvi, 54)

In the hope of entering into the shoes of his father, Harilal gets himself involved in the Ashram work and non-violent protests against the South African govt. He gets appreciations from his fellow activists and is delighted. He is given credit of discovering the weapon like fasting to death. Ajit Dalvi makes Bapu admit it:

BAPU: Finally, you decided to revolt, you refused to eat anything. Others joined you. You fasted for seven days and seven nights at stretch. The officials were in a quandary. They exerted themselves and arranged to move the prisoners to a better prison. Hari, you won. A new weapon called fasting was born. You've accomplished something that. I'd never even thought of.
HARI: You have often, fasted, Bapu
BAPU: Yes, to cleanse the soul. You were the first to use it as a weapon. (Dalvi, 27)

Every expectation of Harilal is met with Bapu's strong approval. Bapu's refuses to offer him some capital to start a business and to ask for share in the ancestral property. These acts on the part of Gandhi distance him from his father. The final stroke he meets when Bapu second time recommends someone else for law study in England on the sponsorship offered by Mehta.

HARILAL: What does Mehata kaka feel? Is he willing to offer this opportunity once again?
BAPU: He has informed me that his proposal still stands.
HARILAL: In that case. Bapu, I'm interested to going. I'll suggest my own name. I'll live there, get a degree. I'll work for the movement; I won't leave off way like Chhagan, Bapu, before you propose someone else's name.
BAPU: But I already have Hari.
HARI: Who? Maganlal?
BAPU: How could I do that? We have already given his brother one chance.
HARI: Then?
BAPU: Sorabji, Sorabji Shapurji Adajania. I have suggested his name. If I propose a Parsi name, it adds to the glory of Hinduism (Bapu continues speaking, Harilal is speechless.) (Fade out) (Dalvi, 33)

Harilal tries his hand at every possible business within his limit and beyond his limit, but every time he fails. He becomes bankrupt and is blamed for cheating people. Kasturba request Gandhi to bail him out which Gandhi plainly refuses. Harilal time and again returns to Gandhi but is disappointed every time. He has courage to question Gandhi why the latter is denying the same rights which he himself enjoyed:

HARILAL: Despite unanimous opposition, you left the shores of the country, crossed the seas, went abroad, did what you desired and then with complete satisfaction abandoned all the worldly pleasures. But we have no such freedom. It's not that we are obsessed with pleasures, But Bapu, how ironical that someone who travelled to England to study against the wishes of his entire community, now denies the same opportunity to his own son? (Dalvi, 39)

Finally Harilal gives vent to his agonies as a son in a quite philosophical way.

HARI: After all what do fathers expect from their sons? Who knows? For trees, it's very simple. They let their seeds travel; they let them flow with the wind; they tell them, go seek, new lands, cross new boundaries, become a tree yourself, and give shades to the travellers who take shelter of your presence, make fruits and sprinkle flowers. Go there and expand the song that's singing in my mind. Go, just go! Why don't human beings do the same? (Dalvi, 41)

In depression, his rebellious and unguided acts like conversion to Islam, resorting to drinking wines, going to brothels, Harilal tries to degenerate Gandhi. He writes open letters to the contemporary leaders against his own father. But finally at the end of the play, the playwright enacts their meeting after death, where Harilal admits to Bapu:

HARI: Bapu. There is something I must admit. I did everything I could to break you, wrote open letters, drank in public, and changed my religion. But even at the zenith of your glory, you never attempted to hide me or stifle my voice. Bapu you are great not because millions around the world consider you a Mahatma, but because you don't surrender to please others. You never give up your search. You are ready to walk the path all alone. (Dalvi, 97)

Even after death, Harilal has his own arguments and denies to have failed in his life:

HARI: Bapu, don't you believe a problem of great significance kept us apart?

BAPU: Come, we've been here too long. Let's go to the bank of the *Jamuna* and continue our discussion. (98)

Conclusion:-

With this the play ends where it begins. Even after death, they do not agree with each other's points of views despite the fact that Harilal knew well what his father is and Bapu never tries to hide to Harilal as his son. What mattered between them was the universally persisting generation gap in the lives of all fathers and sons which is finely portrayed by Ajit Dalvi in the present play.

Work Cited

*Dalvi, Ajit. *Mahatma Vs Gandhi*. Manuscript, (Unpublished.) 2010.

*The research acknowledges the unpublished manuscript was made available for study by the writer himself.

Iyengar, K. R. S. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1995. Print.

Khan, Shafaat. *Shobhayatra*. Mumbai: Popular Publication, 2002. Print.