

Gandhi on the Silver Screen: Shifting Iconography of a Legendary Life

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Abstract

With the opening of new media platform, life writing has entered into a novel realm of iconography that reflects re-writing of history into visual codes as a conscious cultural effort. It not only involves a deliberate move to investigate historical authenticity but also showcases changing cultural perspectives on biographical history. Cinematic representations give a vivid visual imagery of legendary figures like national hero Gandhi, wherein real life personalities are transformed into a loaded metaphor. On screen, Gandhi remains not just a man but turns into a cultural signifier. The present paper investigates connection between real-life human figure and its artistic representation on screen in terms of changing cultural scenario. Undertaking a select study of cinematic texts on Gandhi, the paper examines how films use visual code to depict Gandhi as a force and, thereby, comment on the shifting sociopolitical realities and corresponding cultural values. While navigating the artistic representation of Gandhi ranging from Sir Richard Attenborough's famous biopic *Gandhi* (1982), to [Kamal Haasan's Hey Ram](#) (2000), Rajkumar Hirani's *Lage Raho Munnabhai* (2006), and Rakesh Ranjan Kumar's *Gandhi to Hitler* (2011), the paper attempts to bring out complexities involved in representing a historical figure in its authenticity. It also attempts to decode semiotics of film that reincarnates Gandhi, Gandhian ideas and Gandhian values through visual imagery. The paper attempts not only to indicate altering historical contexts but also show contemporary relevance of biographical history.

Keywords: Cinema; Culture; History; Iconography, Life writing; New Media.

Introduction

Eminent American author Emerson once said "There is properly no history, only biography." It is a subtle revelation, because what constitutes

history of a nation is actually documentation of great human actions. Nation remembers actions performed by eminent personalities, who led the course of history and formulated cultural realities of place and time. Indian socio-political spectrum is also defined by its national heroes, who are not only absorbed by various art forms for objective representation of life history, but are also used to convey nation's shifting ideological orientation and impart social message. Such artistic revisits have turned life writing into a dexterous manoeuvre for generating new symbols and culturally signifying codes. In this regard, Indian media texts appear to consciously recount the great players of Indian socio-political arena with a subtle socio-political purpose.

In fact, by presenting behaviour and actions of chosen historical figures, these texts define the very idea of 'Indianness' itself. In the series of such re-writing of auto-biographical and biographical history, the name Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi emerges as a loaded signifier. In wide cultural discourse, the name Gandhi enters and re-enters through various iconic representations through created semiotics present in diverse literary and media texts. Whether appropriated by literary textuality as a backdrop figure or presented in a carefully crafted iconography of celluloid, Gandhi stands as a colossal figure and Gandhian consciousness provides enormous scope for understanding mass sentiments. Gandhi turns into an emblem of Indian nationhood, which encompasses various socio-political, religious, moral, historical and cultural connotations. In a number of fictionalised re-workings of factual details, the personality of Gandhi is used to throw light on his biographic reality more than just an individual man. The artistic endeavour of life writing, both consciously and unconsciously, allows his life history to get modified into a new cultural experience, such as a renewed political statement, or an account of all pervasive ideology or an indication of irresistible cultural force that reconfigures the nation's memory. It is interesting to see how Gandhian ideas and ideology percolate in artistic consciousness to resurface in scores of cinematic representations.

Writing Life History, Traversing Textuality

Life writing constitutes both autobiographical and biographical accounts. Gandhi ji's life comes on page with his attempt to share his experiences as persuaded by many of his friends and co-workers. His life history was meant to be an autobiographical account, through which he wanted to connect with the common man. What he began with, was an honest revelation of how he held his life so closely in the variety of ad-

ventures he underwent. There were motivations as well as doubts about the ventures proposed. He initiated a creative attempt to transform his life experiences into textuality. He found it almost like knowing himself more deeply. It proved to be more of 'self-realization,' to him as announced in the "Introduction" to his autobiography:

But it is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography, I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments, it is true that the story will take the shape of an autobiography. But I shall not mind, if every page of it speaks only of my experiments... The more I reflect and look back on the past, the more vividly do I feel my limitations. What I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pinning to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *Moksha*... There are some things which are known only to oneself and one's Maker. These are clearly incommunicable. (Gandhi, xii)

With the publication of *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927), M. K. Gandhi's life became a public account. Corresponding to his social and political actions, his personal life experiences were also absorbed as a part of collective national memory. His life story did not remain confined to just an authentic account of chronological arrangement of various incidents occurred. On the contrary, it paved the way for fictionalization of facts and artistic appropriation of the great man's true tale. The genre of life writing facilitated other literary genres foreexperimentation and new representations. Gandhi, an individual man turned into an artistic trope, a cultural force, a literary site to communicate various ideas and formulate new themes. His life is interpreted and reinterpreted in the discursive domain of a nation's culture. There are a number of Indian English authors whose fiction depicts Gandhi as a force that connects various parts of Indian landscape.

Gandhi and Gandhian values are imbibed in the works of many authors such as Venkataraman's *Murugan, The Tiller* (1927), *Kandan, The Patriot* (1932), Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947), R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), K.A. Abbas's *Inquilab* (1955), Lambert Mascarenhas' *Sorrowing Lies My land* (1955), Anand Lall's *The House at Adampur* (1956), Nayantara Sahagal's *A Time to be Happy* (1958), K. Nagarajan's *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961), Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in*

the Ganges (1964), *The Men Who Killed Gandhi* (1978), Chaman Nahal's *The Gandhi Quartet* (1993), Ramchandra Guha's *The Years that Changed the World, 1914-1948* (2018) and many more. It illustrates how Gandhi turns into a perspective to map the cultural realities of India in the fixed as well as altering contexts.

From Text to Screen

With the availability of new media platform, life histories got a new realm to navigate. It allowed live witnessing of legendary actions in the form of motion picture. The spectacle of Gandhi also came alive on screen in audio-visual codes. The artistic representation of Gandhi as a great historical figure and Gandhian consciousness as a pervasive influence resulted in various screen productions that demonstrated a variety of ways to look at his life history. It also provided an opportunity to bring forth diverse perspectives for reinterpreting his ideas and actions. On the one hand, this new media brought Gandhi's *Experiments with Truth* in audio-visual form; on the other hand, his ideas were evoked in contemporary setting for establishing their everlasting relevance.

Sir Richard Attenborough's famous biopic *Gandhi* (1982) illustrates one of the most sincere attempts to re-write Gandhi's life in audio-visual code, wherein the director attempts to recuperate Gandhian aura. Whereas, films like Raju Hirani's *Lage Raho Munnabhai* (2006) epitomize the influential role of popular media, which could successfully reincarnate the lost values drawing upon the life history of a great man. There lies a number of on-screen representations such as Mark Robson's *Nine Hours To Rama* (1963), Shyam Benegal's *The Making of Mahatma* (1996), Kamal Haasan's *Hey Ram* (2000), Jahnvi Barua's *Maine Gandhi Ko Nahin Mara* (2005), Feroz Abbas Khan's *Gandhi, My Father* (2007), and Rakesh Ranjan Kumar's *Gandhi to Hitler* (2011), which draw upon Gandhi's life history. These films are not just an attempt to recollect his biographical details to refresh the nation's memory but they also become instrumental in depicting the ever changing cultural sentiments of India as a nation with regard to Gandhi. He is known as a legendary historic-political figure and his ideas and ideology are seen as a mark of Indian cultural identity.

The artistic shift from textuality of life writing to new and popular arena of media iconography reflects re-writing of history as a conscious cultural effort. It not only involves a deliberate move to investigate historical authenticity but also showcases changing cultural perspectives on biographical history. These cinematic representations give a vivid visu-

al imagery of national hero Gandhi, wherein his real life personality is transformed into a loaded metaphor for both commendation and critique. On the new screen media, Gandhi appears not just as a man but turns into a cultural signifier. A select study of cinematic texts on Gandhi helps one to examine how films use visual codes to depict Gandhi as a force, and how his auto/biography is used to comment on the shifting sociopolitical realities and corresponding cultural values.

Real versus Reel: The Question of Authenticity

When a life history is transferred from text to audio-visual mode, the spectrum of presentation becomes more immediate and vivid, bringing both advantages and disadvantages. Texts have more scope to leave the task of imagining 'people' and 'places' on the reader. However, a screen presentation is bound to work out additional details in terms of set, costume, persona, and overall spectacle to match the viewers' expectations. It evokes a vivid visualisation of known facts. Richard Attenborough had to face this challenge when he first ventured to bring the legendary figure of Gandhi on screen. He directed the famous biopic *Gandhi* (1982), which was expected to be an authentic representation of Gandhi as a national hero leading the Indian freedom struggle.

The project required a carefully chosen cast as well as a well-defined line of actionshots to meet the expectations attached with the genre of 'biopic'. Attenborough cast Ben Kingsley for the role, who gave a life time performance to reincarnate Gandhi on celluloid. His appearance, voice, expressions, mannerism and actions all rehearsed to such level of perfect replica that many of the audience were mesmerised by Gandhian aura created on screen. Gandhi became 'alive,' stirring individual and collective memory. He was presented with all historical drama to be witnessed in action by those, who were not even born when the nation was struggling to attain independence. What could be a better way to remember the national hero Gandhi than watching him 'live' in action with all other great historical figures present around? It was an attempt to recuperate history on a new media platform enhanced by sophisticated technological apparatus.

The movie, despite being a wonderful specimen of cinematic art, was chiefly committed to the expected attribute of 'fidelity' in its screen adaptation of Gandhi's autobiography. It also drew upon other historical sources to collect the relevant facts and fill the gaps for an authentic representation of an individual person's history inevitably to be in sync

with the nation's history. Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982) was the first film on Gandhi that achieved an unprecedented success with a run time of nearly 191 minutes, accompanied by a 240 page book and about twenty years of research. Attenborough learned about Gandhi, reading D. G. Tendulkar's *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi* (8 vols.), Louis Fischer's *Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, and Gandhi's own books (Gandhi 1928, 1982). The director appointed three scriptwriters in succession to develop the character of Gandhi for his film. And, the final script was written by Jack Briley, which kept the core essence of Fischer's narrative structure.

Richard Attenborough's *In search of Gandhi* (1982) published by Bodley Head, London, illustrates how hugely these texts contributed to create a dream configuration of cinematic iconography that can do justice with the genre of life writing. The movie was critically acclaimed for its best re-production of life history on celluloid. It was appreciated for the historically accurate portrayal of Gandhi's life and various historical events that shaped Indian freedom struggle, which included Gandhi's expulsion from the first-class compartment of a train in South Africa, his non-violent protest campaign for Indians in South Africa, his leading of non-cooperation campaign such as Quit India movement, the occurrence of Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, his famous Salt March, Partition of India and so on. The real history was recuperated through reel to be watched by the viewers. The movie made a brilliant experience of history re-lived. Moreover, not only Ben Kingsley was applauded for his excellent performance but other technical elements such as camera work and costume design were also much-admired for bringing a life history so authentically on new media platform.

The Play of the Plot: History Fictionalized

Kamal Haasan's celluloid presentation of Gandhi as a key figure amidst numerous political developments is captured in the movie *Hey Ram* with a very strongly embedded symbolic meaning. The plot of the movie deliberately chooses a few historical moments to convey specific meaning through images and, thereby, the scenes correspond to selective events for framing a historical backdrop. It places the figure of Gandhi in the context of India's decolonization and its birth as a new nation. India as an emergent political entity on the world map is not shown celebrating hard-won freedom. On the contrary, the movie foregrounds subsequent chaos as well as sufferings that reflect an upcoming challenge. The post-independence scenario was worsened by the then on-going political play. The country suffered due to misguided mob sentiments induced by different power pl

ayers. India being a multilingual, multireligious, multicultural country had its trials and tribulations. The evocation of history is executed in the film through various visual codes that create its semiotics. In fact, the screen narrative interweaves deep meaning through symbolic events and figures corroborated by the spectrum of Gandhi as the father of the nation.

Individual characters become representatives of class like Saurabh Shukla as Manohar Lalwani represents a specific displaced community that was forced to fall down from riches to rag due to partition, Vikram Gokhle as Maharaja is a residue of ruling aristocracy of erstwhile princely states, Atul Kulkarni as Shriram Abhyankar symbolizes extremist Hinduism, Shah Rukh Khan as Amjad Ali Khan represents a liberal muslim who sacrifices his life to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi, quite convincingly played by Naseeruddin Shah, stands amidst these anarchic forces as a part of mise-en-scene but he is rendered helpless in controlling collateral damage. The director uses powerful tropes to portray this ensuing damage. It is worked out through symbolic characters and epiphanic dialogues. For example, a blind Muslim girl murdered in Calcutta riots indicates an all pervasive blindness with a strong impression of senseless killing of innocent people in the Hindu-Muslim riots. The entire visual spectrum is writ large with meaningless frenzy and violence creating an iconography that stands in complete opposition to Gandhi's philosophy and beliefs. The semiotics of the film deliberately creates an irony entrusted to the father of the nation. Paradoxically, Gandhi, the most vehement opponent of violence, is blamed for the sectarian violence of partition, which destroyed the life and dignity of uncountable innocents.

The film narrative highlights India's postcolonial challenges. It includes the challenge of leading a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-linguistic country standing at the dawn of independence. Centre staging a host of pertinent questions, the whole spectacle created by the movie asks-- where does Gandhi stand with regard to this lived reality of a nation? Being the mass leader, how far is he responsible for this historical moment? How do we, as the people of this nation recapturing the past from a different temporal zone and evaluating history twice removed from reality in the form of a film narrative, judge him or any other historical figure for that matter? How far could we hold him responsible for what happened, accounting to his tenacity as a person? The movie is an example of alternate historical fiction, which uses an artistically construed 'double' frame as the plot of the movie is set both in the 1940s (the time of India's partition) and the present time. It reaches to its culmination with the actual historical assassination of Gandhi by Nathuram Godse in the past and the death of

its fictionalised protagonist Saket Ram in the present amidst sectarian violence. Much has not been changed since then. The old Saket Ram as a residue of the past dies in a street of Madras amidst the violence of Hindu-Muslim communal riots occurring in the present time, repeating history.

The film draws upon Gandhi's life but does not present him just as an individual; nor does it densely incorporate his personal experiences, which Gandhi had tried to share in his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Projecting a number of other aspects of his multi-dimensional personality through an iconographic presentation of the man merged into a nation's history, the film narrative explores Gandhi's close engagement with India's political spectrum. He is eventually transformed into a cultural metaphor in terms of his ideology, political position, and beliefs. The metaphorical significance of his life and values is revisited, reinterpreted and re-established from a contemporary perspective. Gandhi emerges as a mass leader, a strong political force, an inescapable cultural influence, a firm ideological stance, a harmonious vision, a humanitarian approach and furthermore a 'person' of utmost political interest. In such representation, his personality and life actions are not captured in chronological details sticking to complete authenticity but he is comprehended as a political 'person' singularly pointed out for certain historical happenings.

Despite the figure of Gandhi looming large in the background, the chief narrative of the movie runs in the form of a fictionalized story of Saket Ram, the protagonist of the film. However, Gandhi remains the focus of action because he is not just a 'person' but incarnates an idea, a vision, a political thought, an ideology and a cultural force. The movie presents Gandhi as a controversial 'individual' who is looked at by different people from different perspectives both in positive and negative light. Unlike Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*, which tries to create 'real' Gandhi on 'reel' and transfer Gandhian aura to celluloid glaze, Kamal Hasaan's *Hey Ram* evokes a sense of fictionalised history. Attenborough's *Gandhi* attempts to bring back the Gandhian era alive through a faithful presentation of Gandhi's personal, social and political life, which makes it more of a period movie. On the contrary, *Hey Ram* uses various Bollywood elements including its typical sound tracks and scenes for giving a spectacular vision of Gandhi as a legend. Moreover, many scenes are intentionally incorporated to showcase the symbolic significance of Gandhian ideas and values. The movie represents Gandhi more as a political ideology and a cultural force than as an individual. In fact, some of the scenes appear pretty dramatic in terms of projected spectacle with a Bollywood tinge. In conclusion,

one may state that the movie's iconography is implicitly symbolic and it is strongly encoded with deep semantics. The overriding symbolic messages imparted through parallel time-frames evoke a spectral feel and create dramatic twist at places. Indubitably, contrasting to Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*, the movie *Hey Ram* appears to fictionalize history while being projected with special effects and overflowing emotions on the big screen. It aims to contemporize Gandhian values for understanding the nation's multi-religious and multi-cultural fabric in equally troublesome postcolonial era.

Shifting Context: Gandhian Values for the Millennials

Unlike Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* and Kamal Haasan's *Hey Ram*, Rajkumar Hirani's *Lage Raho Munnabhai* introduces the historical figure of Gandhi to the new generation of millennials. Gandhi is seen as an envisioned dream. The director turns the colossal figure of 'Mahatma' into a figment of imagination which, paradoxically, appears 'more' than real. The director dexterously uses the said cinematic play for imparting his intended social message. Certainly, Rajkumar Hirani acts as an auteur. Taking creative liberty, while moving across the medium from life history to film script, he re-writes the text with chosen biographical details. These particulars are deliberately placed in an altered context. Capturing the historical reality of Gandhi as the most established national leader, who is revered by many, but at the same time, criticized by others, the film narrative hinges to Gandhi's reverential side. Gandhi is projected to be more of a custodian of truth, a symbol of self-sacrifice, a proponent of non-violence as well as an everlasting inspiration for humanitarian values. The movie turns real Gandhi into a fanciful visualization of its protagonist. The hero feels Gandhi's presence around him as a result of psychiatric disorder, which is later disclosed as the part of the plot itself. The film narrative re-contextualizes Gandhi with regard to the present time.

The local goon Munnabhai, who is a Mumbai underworld don, finds himself gradually impressed by Gandhian ideas and becomes his staunch follower. The audience is well aware of the fact that Gandhi is no more 'alive' yet his ideas persist, and so do his followers. This assumption validates the film narrative for its verisimilitude. Interestingly, the question which the film narrative addresses is not whether Gandhi is 'real' or 'unreal' therein, but how far his ideas are relevant in the contemporary time. For millennials, it is modern time. However, the director proposes that Gandhian values need to be introduced to the millennials. Hence, the setting is not bygone pre-independence India, wherein the whole country was

swept away by nationalist sentiment but contemporary time, in which India has forgotten his legendary hero. Gandhi may be history and so are his ideas and values, but history needs to be revisited for fixing present corruption and moral degradation. The said conflict lies at the core of the film and is very perceptively evoked by the director. The movie compels one to re-think about it. It showcases the 'workability' and 'efficacy' of Gandhi's functional methods.

The protagonist of the movie is a local goon. However, his life gets transformed in his attempt to follow 'Gandhigiri' as he becomes instrumental in spreading Gandhian values of truth, non-violence, cleanliness and so on. It is post-independence India, which is unfortunately marked with many vices. The movie questions the whole idea of 'freedom' and 'civility' in the postcolonial Indian context by revoking Gandhi as a spectral figure. The long deceased Gandhi laments over the loss of true 'civility' and the act of undermining 'freedom'. Isn't it deplorable to see Indians embracing colonial attributes of falsehood, deception, violence, exploitation and oppression? Post-independence indulgence in power makes Indians act more like colonizers' representatives than the true citizens of nation. Thereby, Gandhi returns in the form of Munna bhai's 'Gandhigiri'. It has same efficacy what it showed during colonial time. The plot of the movie portrays Gandhian ideas in such a way that they appeal to the audience for their contemporary relevance. 'Gandhigiri' works. Moreover, it becomes a silent threat to those who imitate colonial attitude and incarnate corruption. The iconographic presentation of Gandhi's mysterious return as an apparition, who is continuously engaged in long discursive dialogues with Munnabhai is like making a physically 'incredible' phenomenon intellectually 'credible'. The actor Dilip Prabhavalkar's entry as the familiar figure of old Mahatma with stick, walking down at slow pace, mostly in sombre mood, not only gives a picturesque presentation of Gandhi's implausible return but also triggers a postcolonial discourse on the Gandhian dream of Independent India.

Besides making a statement about contemporary relevance of Gandhian ideas, the movie also serves as a very good example of creativity. Mass media uses this creativity for reformative purpose. It introduces the historical figure of Gandhi as a metaphorical concept vested in popular culture. It defines what Gandhi does stand for as an individual man, and how his ideas are still significant to revamp present social behaviour. He is one of the masses, speaks for the masses and works for the welfare of masses. The excellence of iconographic presentation of Gandhi lies in his time-

less placement. He repetitively 'reappears,' amidst the present day-to-day problems of the society. The film projects a number of such scenes, which bring forth contemporary challenges and how Gandhian ideology proposes a solution.

The movie is an interesting experiment as the film visuals correspond to day-to-day experiences of common masses rather than firmly following the framework of a biopic. Thereby, the visual cues configured around the development of the plot are not historically portrayed. The film narrative does not feature the historical chapters of Champaran agitation, or Non-cooperation, or Quit India Movement. On the contrary, the entire visual projection is created around the 21st century local goon's life. He is engaged in underworld activities, and is hired by an influential business man for extortion and other wrongful acts. But his life changes with the practice of 'Gandhigiri'. He starts envisioning Gandhi and, interestingly, Gandhi appears and reappears to respond to his queries. Gandhi may be portrayed as an old and fragile figure, yet he is shown tremendously strong in his spirit and values. The protagonist not only gets impressed but changes his entire approach to life and people around him.

The iconographic representation of Gandhi as a part of modern cityscape is a very creative experiment on the part of the director. Since thenegative forces are bound to resist the 'return' of Gandhi as it did in the past, 'Gandhigiri' is also viewed as a threat to corrupt people. Hence, they dismiss the whole phenomenon of Gandhi's 'reappearance' as delusional. The movie ends with a public debate on the authenticity of Gandhi's actual presence. What is experienced by Munnabhai stands contrary to what is desired by the influential class of the society. Hence, they try to reject Gandhi's 'return' by gaining reasonable ground. And, as expected, the presence of a historical figure like Gandhi in the present time is rationally dismissed at the end. His 'reality' is denied on the basis of psychosomatic schism. Munnabhai experiences a mental split between physical and psychological reality due to his obsessive research on Gandhi. However, the movie succeeds in contemporizing Gandhi's significance at metaphorical level and establishing his beliefs as valuable guidance to the modern civil society.

Conversing Within: The Convergence of Parallel Narratives

Rakesh Ranjan Kumar's *Gandhi to Hitler* (2011) is an interesting movie that experiments with two biographic accounts simultaneously for projecting one of the most significant cultural debates of the day. It

involves entire humanity as the recourse to violence leading to world wars is placed against the non-violent Indian freedom struggle. The movie introduces an epistolary frame wherein the historic but controversial correspondence between Mahatma Gandhi as a champion of non-violence and Hitler, the most powerful dictator of the world takes place. The said correspondence represents two contrasting worldviews and its implications. The screen narrative chiefly portrays Hitler's last ten days, yet the incidental reference to the letters written by Gandhi addressing the German Chancellor as "Dear Friend, Hitler" brings in Gandhian ideology in contrast to the dictatorial principles followed by Hitler. Hitler was an autocrat, whose policies resulted in the destruction of his country, whereas Indian freedom struggle led under the leadership of Gandhi, on the principles of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Satyagraha* (Insistence on truth) ultimately succeeded in fulfilling its aim. It finally resulted in attaining political independence for India. India emerged as a promising nation on the world map.

The movie touches upon one of the lesser known facts of Gandhiji's life. It infers how the genre of life writing is used by mass media for new meaning and creative interpretations. The main plot interweaves various subplots with other historical references to sharpen the contrast between violence versus non-violent measures to attain a political goal. In one of such sub-narratives, a small battalion of *Azad Hind Fauz* is shown strayed and devastated. All of its soldiers, who so enthusiastically undertook the cause of their motherland's freedom, underwent sufferings. They pay the price of being associated with the wrongful path of 'violence' despite fighting for a right cause. The movie validates Gandhian ideology and values through parallel narratives, which feature on the screen by creating vivid images of gradually gripping despair, defeat and devastation as a result of militant approach.

The exchange of letters between Gandhi and Hitler lays down the ideological foundation of the movie. The film narrative evolves through many iconographic scenes showing wounded soldiers, blood spilled all over, Hitler's mad anger as well as frustration, and his egotism etc. The screen representation of these impressions works quite effectively, through strong performances by Raghavir Yadav in the role of Adolf Hitler, Neha Dhupia as Eva Braun, Nalin Singh and Nikita Anand as Joseph and Magda Goebbels. Avijit Dutt as Gandhi and Aman Verma as a wounded Indian soldier named Balbir Singh. The movie is chiefly shot at the set, meant to be Hitler's underground shelter during his last 10 days. However, many intervening outside shots capture the collater-

al damage, done by Hitler's tyrannical moves. The camera frames wider picture of the world War II by showcasing arson, evacuated grounds, wandering soldiers and their sufferings on the one hand; and portrays the failed dictatorial leadership of Hitler through capturing the close rank talk taking place in Hitler's secret chamber on the other hand.

The main narrative foregrounds Hitler's autocratic behaviour and his supporters' blind faith in him. Their commitment to dictatorial militancy proved to be a wrong choice. In fact, the whole drama symbolizes political failure that also becomes the greatest crime to the humanity. One of the most moving scenes is the senseless killing of one's own children by Magda Goebbels, while they were in deep sleep. The whole cinematic panorama projects irrationality and brutality of 'dictatorial' approach. The movie evokes a debate that occurs at both individual and social levels. This debate is a part of larger cultural discourse that presents two legendary figures standing across the projected ideological debate. The movie exemplifies that the genre of life writing does not enfold only chronological details of real life incidents of a person but it allows one to understand different points of view and divergent perspectives. It has immense creative potential for discursiveness and multiple perceptions. The parallel narratives interwoven by the director strengthen the central thesis laid down by the movie both through connection and contrast.

Conclusion

The adaptation across genres has always been a creative overture since the inception of literary art. With the evolution of media, it has entered into a new arena of artistic projection. The genre of life writing has paved the way for many successful biopics and period films. Gandhi being one of the most popular, reverential as well as controversial figures has always aroused interest of creative artists and directors. His life history is seen almost equivalent to the annals of Indian freedom struggle. The initial attempt of presenting Gandhi on silver screen by Attenborough brought great applause as the eponymous movie was credited for presenting a historically accurate portrayal of Gandhi. It was praised for its production value and costume design. Ben Kingsley brought Gandhi alive on screen, much for the awe and amusement of the audience. However, it was not an easy task for Attenborough as he has been quoted stating, "... when the life story of a non-violent freedom crusader from India was pitched to the producers, their response was, 'Who the hell will be interested in a little brown man wrapped in a sheet carrying a beanpole?'" Yet, the cinematic iconography of the great man's life history instantly caught the imagina-

tion not only of the masses but also of the film critics.

Since then, the journey of presenting Gandhi on silver screen has been an interesting artistic venture and a creative experiment with Gandhian ideas and ideology. The celluloid has expanded the living legend of Gandhi from political domain to wider cultural discourse. It has allowed Gandhi and Gandhian ideas to be absorbed in the new artefacts of popular culture specifically in the mass media presentations. Gandhi and his ideas are not served just as an abstract theory but are reviewed through visual codes and symbolic cues in screen narratives. The cinematic iconography has a major role to turn the historical figure of Gandhi into a cultural metaphor. A review of life writing as a genre for the other art forms ranging from Attenborough's authentic *Gandhi* to the fictionalized history of *Hey Ram*, to the shifting context of *Lage Raho Munnabhai* to the parallel narratives of *Gandhi to Hitler*, proves efficacy of audio-visual medium in passing life time messages across generations. No doubt, the film iconography has created a massive visualization of Gandhian values not only in its contemporary significance but also as an aesthetic source for novel artistic experiments and popular cultural discourse.

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