



FILMS

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MASOOM: Hiding Behind The Innocence of Children

ONCE upon a time there was a king named Dushyanta. One day, while he was hunting in the forest, he lost his way and came to an *ashram* of a *rishi* where he met a beautiful woman called Shakuntala. They felt very attracted to each other at first sight, and performed a *gandharva vivah*. In those days there was no law forbidding more than one marriage so people did not consider temporary sexual liaisons illegal. Therefore it was treated as a form of marriage rather than as a mere “affair.” After a few days, weeks or months, King Dushyanta returned to his kingdom and his home where he had to attend to important affairs of the state. Before he left, he promised Shakuntala that he would return and take her with him to his kingdom. He gave her his ring as a token of his promise.

However, when he got back to the important business of kingship, the brief sojourn with Shakuntala in the forest completely slipped from his mind, while Shakuntala silently pined and languished for him in the forest. One day while she was lost in thoughts of him. Durvasa *rishi* came to the *ashram* to ask for alms, but Shakuntala was so immersed in her love thoughts that she did not hear him. Durvasa felt so enraged by this insult that he cursed her, saying that the one she was pining for would not even remember her. This curse, like the famous biblical curse on Adam and Eve, continues to hold sway and afflict the lives of women everywhere in the world even today.

However the nature of kings and kingdoms has changed. *Masoom* takes us to the kingdom of the modern business firm. The hero is an extremely prosperous architect. He could have easily been an advertising executive or anything of the sort. His life is more luxurious and kingly than that of most kings and noblemen in earlier epochs. The hero also has an ideal type of family of his own—a wife and a couple of cute children. These are his own, his legitimate children. That is exactly what is supposed to make it an ideal family. Unlike kings of bygone ages, this hero from the upper class urban elite cannot keep a harem or condemn his several wives and mistresses to live segregated in the *zenana* part of the household. The Hindu

Marriage Act has declared bigamy illegal.

In the meantime the wife has not only been brought out of the *zenana* but has also been given some “modern” education because this man now needs a “modern” wife, who can fulfil every conceivable function. She keeps herself sexually attractive even ten years after marriage. She is a good fun companion and when he comes home tired, she can give him a massage to soothe his nerves. She is a bright hostess and a suitable partner to go with him to parties where he has to make more social contacts to get more business contracts. Also, the ideal type of family demands that the wife not only be a social asset but also be a perfect modern mother, an efficient manager of the household, who not only feeds husband and children well but after a meal ensures that they take extra vitamins. Indu (Shabana Azmi) is just such a wife, who could easily win a *Femina* or *Eve’s Weekly* “Best modern wife and mother contest.”

So what if D.K. Malhotra (Naseerudin Shah) has procured such an ideal wife and ideal mother for his children? So what if she believes that he is a god on earth, and loves him like one? Like all men, he strays, just as the archetype Dushyanta did. While his wife is pregnant with their first child, D.K. happens to go to Nainital and there he happens to meet a beautiful but sad and lonely young woman who is living in the custody of a modern day *rishi*, a school teacher from St Joseph’s convent. Since she is so lonely and sad, D.K., gallant man that he is, cannot help but oblige her by going boating with her and sleeping with her. After he has thus generously scattered the seeds of his love and passion in her lonely sad life, he departs for his kingdom, and comes back to his cushy job, his ideal wife and home in Delhi. Like Dushyanta, he forgets all about this brief encounter as if it had never happened. Considering what an ideal loving husband he is, there is no question of his bothering his dear wife’s head with such petty trifles. Unlike Dushyanta, D.K. does not have to give any rings or promises to the other woman. She is expected to look after herself now that abortion is easily available. These modern kings and princes have even less time to remember when

they slept with whom.

The trifle, as was inevitable, grows into a pretty looking son, which is the one thing this ideal home lacks. Indu, his ideal wife, has not performed one important function. She has not given birth to a son. However cute the two daughters, they are after all only girls. They need a brother who can help them with their sums because the “modern” mother cannot cope with modern maths which children are made to learn these days. Bhavna, the mother of the illegitimate son, conveniently dies at the appropriate time in order to avoid too many unnecessary hassles and dilemmas for our hero. Suddenly, out of nowhere, the illegitimate son descends on the idyllic household of D.K. Malhotra, ruddy disturbing this love soaked, peaceful life.

Now if D.K. had not been so modern a man, he would have had fewer problems. He could have dumped Bhavna and her child in the *zenana* part of the household and left the two (or more) women to make do with each other as best they could. However, the modern business executive cannot afford to fritter away his hard earned money on maintaining so many wives and children. So the modern man insists on preserving a monogamous marriage of the kind that makes allowances for his affairs and his frailties. The marriage has to be not only accommodating enough to absorb his “mistakes” but also to show his conflict in a truly noble light. If the hero were not such a good modern husband wouldn't he have just dumped the child on his wife and ordered her to take care of him? If she resisted, he could have given her a good husbandly thrashing. But no, our hero is a sensitive soul. He yells and screams only in helplessness. There is anguished shouting and screaming at his wife : “*To ab main kya karoon ?*” (So what can I do now ?), when she accuses him of falsehood and duplicity. There is also the scene where he yells at the incompetent police officer because he insists on knowing the name of the lost child's father. There is generally much self pity and tear shedding over the hero's difficult predicament: “*Zindagi tujhse naraz hai, hairan hoon main...*” (Life has been unkind to you, I'm perplexed...)

Our hero has a real problem to solve. He knows he can probably force his wife to accept the illegitimate son and much more, by being manly, ordering her like the master he is or by threatening to leave her if she does not listen. She will have to accept it just as millions of women are doing every day, all over the world. Modern men, however, are not content with this method. It is bad for their ego to think that they cannot even keep a wife happy and smiling. They must devise ways, however filmi and dishonest, of ensuring that wives stay smiling even when they stick knives into them. It is too much of a nuisance and a disturbance to have an unhappy mistrustful wife around. One really cannot concentrate on one's work and on the business of making more money. Also, such a woman is not a social asset. She could even be a social embarrassment. Instead of dancing to the tune of his drunken revelries at parties, as Indu does in the early scenes of the film, she could mope, sulk in public, and expose him for the hypocrite he has been, which is what Indu is

beginning to do. His social standing demands that he be accompanied by a smiling dolled up wife and not by a miserable wreck. Presenting a smiling wife to the world is the only way men can preserve the myth of the happy marriage and the idyllic family. This little illusion has to be provided to women. Otherwise, how could they bear with such indignities and such double standards? The hero needs therefore not just a compliant wife but one who complies with a smile, a wife who not only resigns herself to her unhappy predicament but also smilingly makes his problems her own : “*Aisi kaunsi tumhari problem hai jo meri problem nahin hai?*” In fact, the film could have been appropriately titled : “How to make your wife smile while you drive a knife into her heart.”

The whole situation is maneuvered so as to make the wife appear a guilty person, an unnatural woman who lacks the true qualities of motherhood if she drives the poor *masoom* child out of the house by not accepting him as her very own. This is indeed a clever gimmick devised by director Shekhar Kapoor. Instead of facing the question of the husband's falsehood, cowardly duplicity, and callousness to the predicament of Bhavna, which he excuses as forgetfulness, the husband is made to hide behind the innocence of the child. The audience is again and again confronted with the poignant question : “How can Indu refuse to love and care for the child, even if he is a constant reminder of her husband's faithlessness and dishonesty? How is the innocent child to blame ?” It is the wife who has to repent for her hardheartedness, and for the lack of real motherly instinct (“*Mummy ko to sab bachey acchey lagtey hain, tum kyon nahin acchey lagoge ?*”) while the poor husband, with tears in his eyes, waits patiently for her belated change of heart. The conclusion is foregone. Does she have any choice but to reform her attitude and lovingly accept the child? Would she not be a cruel mother if she refused to bend and bow with a smile, choosing rather to deprive his child of the love and property of such a noble, cowardly father? She cannot of course imagine leaving the house and depriving her daughters of their father's love.

The director is not content with chastising and reforming Indu. He wants the moral driven home to every woman around, especially those who imagine themselves replete with independence and dignity as does Tanuja. Without a warning and without any provocation, this woman who so far was encouraging every one of her women friends to stand up for their dignity and rights, who had desperately tried to create an independent though not very satisfying life for herself after her husband deserted her, has a sudden change of heart, goes back to her husband, and is made to deliver an unconvincing speech for the benefit of all women, that independence and dignity are worthless, a woman's real place is to be at her husband's beck and call, if for no other reason then for the sake of mothering his children : “*Jab ma jag jati hai, aurat khari nahin reh sakti*” (when the mother awakens, the woman has, to give way).

However, we would feel somewhat compensated if men learnt to be responsible to their illegitimate *masoom* children, even at the cost of the suffering of the exploited women. The word

“bastard” is patriarchy’s gift to humanity. It could not have been coined by women because it goes against women’s overall interests. But that is clearly not on the agenda, otherwise the other *masoom*, Bhavna, would not have to be shooed out of the way by an untimely death. As mother of a bastard child, there is no place or need for her in this society. What the child really needs is a father to legitimize him. Mothers are easy to find and D.K.’s wife can easily be coaxed to play the role.

The film ends up not only exploiting the generosity of the women—on the one hand, Bhavna does not so much as inform D.K. that she has given birth to his child, lest his happy marriage be disturbed, and on the other, Indu ends up assuming the major responsibility for the child so that her husband is not bothered by the burden of having to bring him up all by himself. What is even more shameful is that the film exploits the innocence of the children so that the husband need not have to answer uncomfortable questions. All his irresponsibility and cowardice can hide behind the innocence of the illegitimate child. The logic is : if the child is innocent and therefore cannot be punished, how can the father of such a child not also be innocent and worthy of sympathy ? After all, it happened in a weak moment. The poor man had to observe sexual abstinence for weeks when his wife was pregnant. Since wives do not even have the courtesy to provide substitutes while they are pregnant or sick, can the poor husband really be blamed for having an affair on the side, especially if he conveniently forgets all about it and never even remembers to find out from the other woman how she fared as a result of his bestowing a little spare passion and love on her ?

One will not blame the young director for making such a sickly sentimental soppy family drama in imitation of an equally sickly Hollywood film if one considers the world that he is preoccupied with and which he wishes to present to us. This claustrophobic world of the westernized upper class urban elite that Shekhar Kapoor creates in the film is made even more stifling and oppressive by his leaving out all but the internal drama of the home. There are no real people in it— the characters live in a world of their own fun and games and business parties where no ordinary people are allowed to intrude, except occasionally as a taxi driver if the car is not available, or as a domestic servant who is no more than a convenience whenever food needs to be served. Even kings and queens are not likely to have led such exclusive lives.

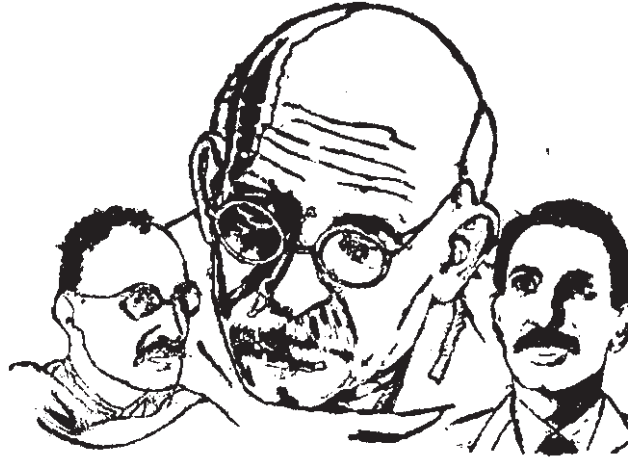
The film tries desperately, even at the cost of seem-ing unreal, to create some flattering myths for the upper class westernized urban elite. It tries to assure them that there is scope for soppy sickly sentimental fantasy despite the reality of their sordid lives of money making and cut throat competition which the film deliberately glosses over.

For the *janta* the glimpses of the opulent life style of the upper classes with their fancy houses, sprawling lawns, imported cars, tennis courts, glittering silks and diamonds, Imported logging children with their imported toys, horse riding, sailboats, scotch, champagne and dance parties, are offered as titillations.

The general *janta* can thus be inspired to fantasize what it would be like to live this version of the “good life.”

Attenborough’s Version Of Gandhi

Richard Attenborough himself admits that the life of a man like Gandhi cannot be encompassed in the bounds of a single three hour narrative film, not only because his life was intimately bound up with a whole nation’s struggle for independence, but



also because Gandhi was a very complex person who defied the understanding of even his closest associates. He was a unique mass leader with a direct relationship to the people. He never occupied any office of power. In fact, he meticulously avoided running for any office. Yet no matter who formally became president of the Congress party, Gandhi remained unquestioned leader of the national movement and of the Indian National Congress. He swayed the hearts of people all over India, more than did all other leaders of the national movement put together.

The film has tried hard to capture the life and being of this man, unique even among the major political leaders in the history of the world. But the outcome is not satisfying, especially considering what a rich and powerful theme Attenborough had in Gandhi’s life and mission. At its best, the film runs its course as though someone put a whole string of photographs from that period in a row, brought each to life for a few seconds, and raced on to the next historical highlight.

The most striking lapse in the film is that there is too much emphasis on Gandhi as a political leader constantly hobnobbing with the political stars of his time. In this Richard Attenborough seems to have been heavily influenced by Mountbatten’s view of the history of India’s independence movement. Attenborough sees the personal political negotiations as a way of defining Gandhi for the film audience. He uses the device of following the sequence of meetings of top leaders as a way of dramatizing and focusing on the issues of the struggle against the British as well as the conflicts within the national movement. These top level meetings COME to substitute for the actual struggle of the people. Every now and then Attenborough attempts something more fruitful by presenting glimpses of Gandhi as a human being

through the use of dramatic moments from his intense personal relationships. But this is rarely done and even when it is presented, it is done in a manner that is singularly unconvincing. The personal and political aspects of his life do not complement each other, as they did in Gandhi's real life.

The film is unable to get across a very basic fact. For Gandhi, the struggle against British rule was a part of a much larger struggle. In many respects Gandhi laid much more emphasis on other aspects of his programme of national reconstruction. Even in 1945 he was emphasizing that "To me constructive work is all sufficient. It leaves no necessity for any other programme." This message seems to have been lost on Richard Attenborough, just as it seems to have had very little impact on most Congressmen, for whom the national movement was essentially a struggle for power. Gandhi's vision of a new decentralized society based on self-reliant villages is scarcely touched upon in the film. The unknowing audience is thus likely to end up in greater agreement with the conclusion of the American photographer when she asks him towards the end of his life if the result of all his efforts only added up to a few yards of handloom.

A large part of Gandhi's energy and thought had gone into visualizing and working out a programme for the regeneration of India's villages. His personal experiments in evolving a new life for himself and other fellow workers around the Sewagram Ashram were also a part of his vision of a new India. But the film makes little use of it. It is clearly not enough to show supposedly cute scenes such as the one where Gandhi gets Nehru and others involved in feeding his goats when they want to talk to him about national affairs. In a way, such a representation can even reinforce the popular notion of Gandhi as primarily an eccentric, despite his being a great leader.

Even the political leadership part is portrayed in a very inadequate way. The strength of Gandhi's politics lay in the fact that he almost always seemed to have his hand on the pulse of India's people, in his ability to have a direct and personal relationship with the masses of ordinary people all over the country. He had a rare ability to create very intimate personal relationships with a very large number of people who came into contact with him. Despite his busy and strained life, he actively participated in even small details of their everyday life, from giving advice on what kind of diet they should be eating, to prescribing various forms of nature cures. However, in this film an overwhelming number of the scenes deal with Gandhi negotiating with the British and with the political nationalist leaders of the day. In comparison, there are not more than three or four episodes where Gandhi is shown interacting with ordinary people. A couple of such scenes are depicted from his life in South Africa where he is able to galvanize them into non-violent action without the use of demagogic speeches. After his return to India, this kind of interaction with the people is rarely shown. There is one very weak attempt made to show this in the portrayal of the Champaran satyagraha, when a poor peasant invites Gandhi to visit the Champaran area to see for himself the miserable conditions of the people. The peasants are presented filmi style, but nevertheless

for all its weaknesses, this is the last time we see Gandhi deeply involved with the problems of the ordinary rural people of India. After this episode Gandhi is never really shown personally discussing the oppressive day-to-day problems of ordinary people. From now on, the people are shown only as mobs, as during the Chauri Chaura episode setting fire to the police station, or as large crowds come to receive him at the station, or come to listen to him at a public meeting, or in large groups holding excited demonstrations; Even at the time of the salt satyagraha, the emphasis is on Gandhi walking vigorously at the head of the march, as though, like the piper, he had hypnotized people into following him. Unlike in South Africa, no effort is made to show how Gandhi actually fires their imaginations, hearts and souls, and galvanizes them into action.

Even his interactions with political stars are carefully pruned to make the national movement seem like Gandhi's arrangements with Nehru, Patel, Maulana Azad, Jinnah and a couple of others, who settle the key issues at private consultation sessions at each others' houses. Except for the time that Gandhi makes his first public speech, at a Congress session, we are shown no other Congress party convention, not even some of those that proved historic turning points due to Gandhi's innovations and influence. Attenborough shows a Gandhi who, because of his personal charisma, overtook and came to substitute for the whole Congress party. To launch a campaign all he had to do was cook up a new idea, as he did sitting by the seaside at Porbander with Walker, an American newsman, and then merely announce to the world what he was going to do. The people would then come swarming like flies, and a few top political stars would appear from somewhere to hang around and follow his lead.

This ahistorical view also is useless in explaining Gandhi's feelings of failure and isolation towards the end. Why did people suddenly stop listening to him? Not only those people who created and participated in riots, but even close associates like Nehru and Patel refused to accept certain conditions which Gandhi proposed in order to placate Jinnah and try to maintain the unity of India. It is this overemphasis on one single aspect of Gandhi's personality, his role as a political negotiator and strategist, at the cost of most other aspects, which leads to the underplaying of very crucial themes in his social and political work, and personal life and philosophy.

To give a couple of examples. Gandhi made vital contributions in drawing national attention to the urgent need for the removal of untouchability and for removing the oppressions of Indian women. His efforts unfortunately remain unsurpassed even today. Not only are we shown literally nothing of the importance of these two issues in his programme for national reconstruction, but we are not even shown how he merged the two issues into the political mainstream of the national movement, and how women, for instance, for the first time came to be galvanized for political action.

The issue of untouchability is dismissed in precisely three sentences. First when he threatens to throw Kasturba out of the house because she refuses to clean the latrines in South Africa at

Tolstoy Farm. Here the emphasis is on the dignity of labour rather than the removal of untouchability. The second time is when he is delivering a speech on swadeshi. He mentions in one sentence the removal of untouchability as an important issue. A third time it is mentioned in one line, among many others, when Kasturba is talking to Mirabehn, explaining Gandhi's life and



mission.

The women's question is treated even more shabbily. In fact, there is not even a mention of the fact that women played a key role in Gandhi's strategy of non violent satyagraha. To give just one instance, in the December 1939 issue of *Harijan*, Gandhi wrote: "I would love to find that my future army contained a vast preponderance of women over men. If the fight came, I should then face it with greater confidence than if men predominated. I would dread the latter's violence. Women would be my guarantee against such an outbreak." Gandhi's writings are full of such observations.

It was as early as at the time of the first struggle he led in South Africa that Gandhi became convinced that women could "become the leaders in satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give, but does require the staunch heajrt that comes from suffering and faith." It was here, without expecting it, that Gandhi came to realize how women's entry into the movement gave it a new moral force and their presence instantly brought out thousands of miners in a protest strike. The women went to jail, bravely bore privations, and kept the morale of the movement alive. He was quick to learn the lesson: "Many of our movements stop halfway because of the condition of our women. Much of our work does not yield appropriate results..." And from the time of the South African satyagraha, Gandhi implemented this lesson in every one of the struggles he led. Women played an active role not only in political actions such as picketing foreign cloth shops and liquor shops, but even more so in the constructive programme of propagation of khadi and swadeshi, and rural reconstruction.

But in this film there is not even a hint of all this. Even in South Africa women are not shown taking part in the protest demonstrations or undergoing imprisonment, except for a mention of four or five women that his wife collected for a demonstration. In fact, women's relationship to the movement is shown in nothing but a negative light. First there is Kasturba his wife, played by

Rohini Hattangadi. Hattangadi plays the part in such a filmi incompetent way that her very presence irks the eye and the ear. Except for one outburst of disobedience on the issue of cleaning latrines, Kasturba has no existence of her own, no reactions, no feelings, except to be a faithful servant. The portrayal of Gandhi's relationship with Kasturba is one of the most disappointing aspects of the film, Even though in some ways Kasturba played out the role of a dutiful wife, Gandhi often acknowledged that she always insisted on holding a view of life different from his. His remark that he learnt his "first lesson in satyagraha" from his wife's capacity for silent but firm resistance to any attempt of his to impose upon her, reveals a far more independent person than the lifeless and dutiful Kasturba that Attenborough has created. The scene in which they reenact their marriage vows for the benefit of the foreign audience with Gandhi chanting the scriptural vows and Kasturba promising in a filmi style to be even more slavish than what some of the scriptures demand, is a scene done in very bad taste. One wonders from where Attenborough conjured up this filmi scene, most uncharacteristic of Gandhi.

Kasturba is joined by another loyal service giver, Mirabehn. Gandhi's relationship to Mirabehn is known to have been a very complex and tortuous experience. Nothing of that is even glimpsed. All we have are scenes of Mirabehn massaging his feet and attending to his other personal needs. In fact one of the major points of conflict between Gandhi and Mirabehn seems to have been his determined attempts not to permit her to "cling" to him personally. He wrote to her in one of his remarkable letters: "You will truly serve me by joyously serving the cause...All the time you were squandering your love on me personally, I felt guilty of misappropriation and I exploded at the slightest pretext." But in the film we are shown a Mirabehn who seems to have no other business except to tend to Babu's personal needs.

Abha and Manu have even less of an existence. They seem to have no business apart from giving support to Babu in walking. There is a glimpse of Dr. Sushila Nayyar but she is not allowed to get her presence registered in any real manner. Only one woman, Sarojini Naidu, is allowed a brief uninspired one minute existence as a fellow worker at the time of the salt satyagraha. The significant realization which came to Gandhi that he could not use yards of cloth to cover his body while India's mothers and sisters went uncovered, has been dramatized in such a filmi manner as to be almost obscene. All that remains, therefore, are the scenes of Gandhi using several wo-men as his personal servants, having them massage his feet, lend him physical support, and so on.

There has been a lot of controversy about why very salient figures from the national movement such as Tilak, Malaviya, Subhash Chandra Bose, B.R. Ambedkar, Rajendra Prasad, the Ali brothers and others do not play any part in the film. The film's creator is no doubt correct when he says that no film of any acceptable length could include all the major parts of Gandhi's life. However an even more disappointing aspect of the film was the way the director could not resist political sycophancy toward Indira Gandhi by overdoing and over presenting the Nehru

family, very often at the cost of distorting history. On his return from South Africa, in 1915, the first person that Gandhi is made to notice and enquire about is Jawaharlal Nehru. "Who is this young fellow?" he asks. Nehru is all over from the beginning, asking him to deliver a speech upon his arrival, making arrangements for his transport, and acting as a general busybody. Even at this early period, he is portrayed as more significant than all the other big political stars, whereas the fact is that in 1915 Nehru was nowhere on the political scene. From then on, at every conceivable occasion, something or the other has to be said or done by Nehru, whether it is to show the poor fellow receive lathi blows like a true satyagrahi at the time of the salt satyagraha while he is peddling salt, or when he is vigorously restraining others from hitting back, or while sitting prominently on the dais when Gandhi is speaking at important political meetings. Mirabeau makes special enquiries after him. He is everywhere. His name is mentioned more often than those of all the other prominent leaders put together. At the time of the Rowlatt satyagraha, he is there to announce that he is trying to stop the violence. At the time of salt satyagraha Nehru assures Gandhi that independence is close at hand because even his mother is willing to go to jail. Again, when we are being told about the repression let loose by the British government, the director does not allow us to forget that even Nehru's mother is in jail! As if this were not bad enough, the little Indira Gandhi too has to be assured of her place. The famous photograph of her with Babu at the Ashram is enacted in order to give the little girl from the illustrious family her due. One wonders how Sir Attenborough managed to resist the temptation of showing a scene with Indira Gandhi's monkey brigade receiving their blessings from Babu for playing their historic role in the national movement.

Roshan Seth plays Nehru so shabbily and makes him appear so creepy looking, whining constantly, that his presence, like Rohini Hattangadi's, irks every time he appears on the scene, contrary to the real life Nehru who was known for his great personal charm. I was surprised how Attenborough got away with the scene when Nehru refuses to give up the prime ministership to Jinnah at Gandhi's behest in order to avoid the partition, Nehru is shown unconvincingly taking shelter behind the plea that Hindus will not tolerate such a concession—not a very flattering presentation of this self-proclaimed godfather of secularism in India.

Ben Kingsley's performance as Gandhi has some good moments, especially when he plays the part of Gandhi in South Africa. However, for the most part, he moves and speaks like a mechanical toy which has been wound up to play his part with doll-like precision for three hours. There are limited variations of expression, no variations of speech. At several points, Gandhi just comes across as a smart Alec, quick at repartee, whose major skill is that he knows how to have the last word in every conversation. He doesn't even seem to pause and think. He has a smart answer for every occasion. In fact at times he even appears

gimmicky. These are qualities quite contrary to what people remember about Gandhi.

Even Gandhi's remarkable ability to forge deep personal relationships with scores of people, involving himself in their problems and needs, and participating in their everyday lives, is reduced to a gimmicky affair. There is one scene in which the director has tried to deal with it. The big leaders have come to consult him in the Ashram about whether or not they should take the offensive against the British in India during the second world war. Gandhi is opposing this tactic of taking advantage of their enemy at a weak moment. He abruptly gets up to go and put a mud pack on the broken leg of a little goat, thus keeping his word to the little Ashram boy who came to inform Babu about it. The great leaders are left gaping at Babu's sense of priorities at such a moment of national crisis. The way the episode is presented makes Gandhi appear to be a man striving hard for dramatic effect, rather than someone who felt a deep sense of concern for the well-being of every creature around him, someone who had the ability to translate this concern into practical action at even those moments when he was in the thick of high political drama.

The film is only able to deal with a very small part of Gandhi's concerns and actions, his overall vision and philosophy. The tragic aspects of Gandhi's life are also seen in that same limited way. The failure of India to progress towards the swaraj of Gandhi's vision is only portrayed in terms of the disaster of communal violence at partition, in the characteristic Mountbatten view of history. The film seems to say that non-violent satyagraha was the only key feature of Gandhi's thought. Therefore the outbreak of uncontrollable violence during partition suggests that this was because Gandhi's message had not been absorbed. But there are other fundamental ways in which Gandhi seemed to have felt a sense of failure towards the end of his life. These are totally absent from the film. For instance, he seems to have felt terribly anguished by the way prominent Congressmen began to greedily grab the same kind of corrupt arbitrary power and privileges over the people that they opposed when practised by the British.

The social and political programmes that Gandhi saw as vital were halted and subverted by Congressmen as soon as they had achieved transfer of power into their hands. The programme of radical reconstruction of society was abandoned overnight. Even though he did not live long enough, Gandhi saw the depressing beginnings of this phenomenon. He was so disturbed and disillusioned that he suggested that the Congress party be disbanded and Congressmen go to the villages to work for a new society. But he was a lone voice, and even those who were considered his devoted followers, such as Nehru, could, in most practical ways, end up safely ignoring him. How did this happen? What happened to the power of the charismatic leader? Why did he become so redundant as soon as the ground was prepared for the transfer of power? These are some of the important questions which are not even raised by the film. In that sense, the film fails to make it possible for the audience to arrive at a critical re-

evaluation of this unique and outstanding person whose life and struggles are so relevant to the awful situation of India and the rest of the world at the present moment.

However, at present we lack even ordinary historical films that attempt a serious depiction of past events. Despite all its faults, this film must be considered among the few serious historical films made on Indian history, perhaps the only one which has at least tried to stick to some historical facts instead of running off into total fantasy. Ironically, it seems to be getting far more attention and appreciation in the west than in our own country.

One of the reasons for the success of the film abroad could be that an underlying feeling behind this whole enterprise seems to be the amazement and wonder that Gandhi seems to have caused in a lot of westerners—that a puny little brown skinned Indian could have something so important to say to humanity. Attenborough surrounds Gandhi with many admiring westerners whose faces assume stereotyped awestruck expressions that

resemble those portrayed in Hollywood Biblical extravaganzas. The film dwells much more on the feelings and reactions of some of these western characters to Gandhi than exploring in depth his relationship with the people of India. Indeed, many of his most personal relationships and friendships are depicted as being with westerners—C.F. Andrews, the American woman photographer, the American journalist Walker, Mirabehn the devotee, are the ones shown with Gandhi at crucial moments in personal intimate scenes more frequently than anyone else, including his wife.

Despite the two decades of hard work that are supposed to have gone into this film, it does not sufficiently enhance our understanding of Gandhi. In many ways, there is no more depth in the film than in most textbooks about Gandhi and the national movement. Of course, seeing famous historical moments enacted on the screen is sometimes exciting.

However, with all its limitations, it is important to see this film, especially since the kind of film that really needs to be made about Gandhi is not likely to be made for years to come. □