

## **Politics and Democracy in *The Return of Gandhi***

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Dr. T. Vizai Bhaskar portrays the true scenario of Indian politics in *The Return of Gandhi*. The play is divided into twelve scenes. The play projects the state of Indian democracy and the political situation in the present day in comparison to the period when India won Independence from the British. The play also highlights the corruption among Indian politicians who would go to the extent of attempting murder. The writer laments at the degrading political conditions and creates a hypothetical situation that if Mahatma Gandhi returns to India how would our politicians respond. The devices used in the play are humour, satire, irony and wit to portray the realistic picture of Indian politics.

### **Court Of Yama**

The opening scene of the play takes place in the Court of Yama. This scene is a heart rendering scene as Gandhi is sent to trial. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation is brought from heaven to hell for the trial. In the past, Gandhiji sacrificed his life for the need of independence from British. In the present situation he becomes an accused for the same reason and is prosecuted. The court of Yama emanates a cool fragrance as Mahatma Gandhi steps in and Chitragupta is surprised to see Gandhi. The God of Death, Yama hesitates to sit on

Mahatma's trial. In the past Gandhi was sent to heaven for his noble deeds, but today he is charged for committing a sin. The sin is "He won Independence for India" (21).

Chitragupta elaborates why and how winning independence becomes a sin. The past good deeds of Gandhi become a sin in the present time. In the past, India was a country ruled by kings and people were dependant. Moreover, India is a country divided by different religion and caste; therefore, the people could not understand equality. The rulers were immoral and it resulted in chaos. Hence the charge on Mahatma is that he tried to kill the nation which is a biggest sin. In his words,

The people at large were illiterate, ignorant and innocent. The few educated were careless and irresponsible. The selfish and immoral rulers always indulged in power-game, encouraged factions, and further divided the people in the name of language, region, culture and the like. What kind of rule can the country expect from such rulers? The nation at large was thrown into a vicious circle. Giving independence to such people and power to such leaders naturally proved suicidal. My Lord, killing a person is a sin. But trying to kill the whole nation? The biggest sin. And this man committed that biggest sin. Hence, it is prayed that appropriate punishment be imposed on this man (22).

As Mahatma left the world immediately after committing the sin, he could not understand the consequences of the sin. The sin is he got freedom for an undeserving nation. The following punishments are suggested by Chitragupta: by torturing him, by delivering heavy blows, by elephants, by pushing him into boiled oil. Yama, decides to punish by sending him back to India for thirty days and witness the public and the politicians of the present day. Thus Gandhi was sent from heaven to hell and from hell to India.

### **Politics On Gandhi Jayanthi**

On October 2nd Gandhi Jayanthi is celebrated throughout India. Ironically, the politicians conduct meetings and speak on Gandhian principles, which they never follow. Rajaram pays a visit to the tomb of Gandhi and offers salutes, to his surprise the tomb breaks and Gandhi comes out from the tomb. Thus Gandhi comes back to India on 2nd October rising from his tomb. Gandhi on seeing Rajaram recollects and enquires about the people and leaders. Rajaram, explains to Gandhi how the people misinterpret his words, for example Gandhi's call was not to pay taxes in those days, but today the rich people evade all taxes. Gandhi wonders how the country can run without taxes. Rajaram says that is why the country keeps running to World Bank for funds.

Gandhiji's return to India makes him curious to know about his principles of truth and non-violence. To his surprise Gandhi Jayanthi becomes a platform for political meetings. Many Gandhi statues are made on the occasion. The engineer and the contractor who make the

statue prove how the principles of truth have dwindled. A conversation between engineer and contractor show how the contractor squanders money by making Gandhi statue. The engineer questions, “Does a statue with a cloak and a stick cost three lakhs? And two lakhs additionally for its pedestal?” (29).

The greedy politicians making use of public and government money are well illustrated in the play. The MLA managed to make a statue of his father along with Gandhi’s statue and erected it in a junction. The engineer recollects how in the past the leaders were not greedy for money and spent time playing.

We too know that those days were different. They used to enjoy life thoroughly in the evenings. Clubs, tennis, Shuttle, parties and what not? In contrast, what is that we enjoy today? Enquiries, Commissions, insults, hatreds-and consequently B.P.S, Sugars, etc. No festivals, no celebrations (30)!

The playwright satirically portrays how Gandhi Jayanthi is celebrated by the politicians as political meetings. The MLA, who is packed up with tight schedules arrives in a hurry, garlands the statue and gives a speech. The ignorance of the MLA is evident. Though he looks at Gandhi he says that God has created several people identically. Though Rajaram says he is real Gandhi, he refuses to listen because he only trusts the people who are in power. Thus the MLA proves to be a

person longing for power.

### **Elections**

The play also focuses on the unfair election system. During the elections the opposition party and ruling party fight for fair conduct of elections. They represent chief election commission and the Governor for justice. Mahatma Gandhi watches these issues on the television and wonders if their vote also exists. If so they too would exercise their vote.

### **Polling Booth Station**

The writer captures a picture of the Polling booth station. Rajaram and Gandhi stand in the queue, in the pretext that they would get a chance to vote and they are given slips to cast vote. The manner in which money is transacted for voting is shown in this scene. The common man like Kall Samba gets confused, takes money from both the parties and votes for both. Thus due to ignorance and helplessness his vote becomes a waste. When Mahatma Gandhi was about to vote, he was not allowed to vote as his vote was used already. Thus the issues of bogus votes are addressed. The principles of democracy are broken.

The writer explains how the agents adopt different methods to cheat and win. Agents say how they loot “Open ballot, Rigging, Cycling, Booth capturing, box snatching, Ballot tearing, Water pouring.” Another agent says, “Open Ballot-blank ballot papers will be kept before us and stamping of votes will be done in the open. It is called Open Ballot.” Agent number 1 says “Sometimes we snatch the ballot papers from officers and cast all the votes in our favor, it is called

rigging.” In case if that does not work then the next option would be to make 50 party supporters to stand in queue and cast all the votes in rotation. This will be called as “Cycling”. If the officers notice this then another method would be implemented and that is to seize the polling booth with man power and this technique will be called as “booth capturing”. In case they know that they will lose then follow these such as “snatch the box”. The next one is “paper tearing” and “water pouring”. Thus democracy is misinterpreted and anti democracy prevails.

### **Assembly**

Gandhiji and Rajaram disturbed by the voting system, determine to know about the Peoples Representative hence they visit the assembly only to find chaos. The scene in the assembly is illustrated with humor, wit and satire. The ruling party and the opposition party fight with each other in pursuit of justice. Mahatma Gandhi and Rajaram peep through the gallery of the assembly session and witness the situation. The writer mocks at the MLA and the speaker in the assembly. As the heated argument in the assembly mounts up the MLA happens to see Mahatma Gandhi through the window. Looking at the person resembling Mahatma the MLA plans to deviate the assembly. He instructs to print the photo of Mahatma Gandhi in the news paper. The unending verbal battle leads finally to dishonor a woman. Yadagiri pulls the saree of opposition party MLA mounting to helplessness in the assembly. The speaker’s inability to control the assembly is mocked by the statement “Sit down, please sit down,

silence please” (48).

Thus the play portrays the political disputes between the Opposition party and the Ruling party in the assembly. The opposition party leader says the speaker is either a puppet of the Government or the agent of the deceitful Government. In his words, “Because you always ask the members to sit down. In the last elections, three fourths of our candidates were defeated and all were made to sit at home. And you are making the few elected also sit silent in the Assembly. What’s your intention, Speaker sir” (46)?

The ruling party representative assures the opposition party,

I wish to appeal to the honorable members through you sir. The time of the house is very valuable. We are spending lakhs of rupees for each hour. And all this is public money. Our Chief Minister has gone to Delhi to discuss the issue of getting additional funds for our state. Kindly ask the members not to waste the precious time of the house. Instead let them discuss specific problems. The Government is always ready to answer. Sir, at least now let the opposition members realize or wake up to the reality. If they waste the time of the House, Government will not keep quiet. People also will not excuse them (47).

However, there is no order and the verbal battle leads to manhandling of the other members in the assembly. As a result of the quarrel in the assembly few members are wounded and are in bandages while others are admitted in NIMS Hospital.

### **Sentimental Plan**

Meanwhile, the ruling party leader sketches a plan making use of Mahatma Gandhi. They wanted to cash the innocent people through sentiments.

Our people are sentimental. The more educated they are, the more stupid they become. Did you forget how mercilessly the sheep are slaughtered to stop natural calamities like floods? Don't you remember how small kids are brutally sacrificed in quest of hidden treasures? Don't you remember how people stood in queues with milk glasses to feed Ganesh idols? India is a great country where spirituality is degraded to the level of superstition; and where political leaders and film heroes are made super natural beings and are worshipped on par with Gods. So people will definitely oblige the call of Mahatma and offer donations. Don't delay. If you are late, someone else will knock away the opportunity (52).

The plan is to erect a hundi near Gandhi's house and snatch the money at night time. Their intention is to divert the people. The way the

leaders trick the people is projected in a satirical manner. Various party gather to see Gandhi and Rajaram. Yadagiri comes with the ruling party. Another party leader Ramarajyam party leader too comes. Then the opposition party leader follows and they are ready to bribe the government.

People's party leader says, "Gandhiji alone is the true representative of farmers and labourers! Look at Gandhiji. His clothes are the symbol the scantiness of our nation. The food he eats reflects the poverty of our country. His hand stick is the deadly weapon which provokes people for armed struggle. I straightaway put a question to all of you "can there be a greater revolutionary than Gandhiji? Certainly no" (58).

The ruling party offers to bribe Gandhi in case he supports. The representative member from the ruling party says, "Look here, gentleman! We are not bothered whether you're a real Gandhi or a fake one. But people believe that you are real. They are ready to obey your orders. If you support our party, we will give you a decent house in Jubilee hills with a car and a phone. We will arrange yearly four foreign trips for you. For your benefit, we will turn a profit-making public sector undertaking into a sick unit and privatize it in favour of your people. What do you say (58)?"

Democracy is only a name instead anti democracy prevails. Democracy is mocked at in the play. Rajaram explains to Gandhi

In the name of Democracy, *ANARCHISM* is prevailing. The vast public wealth is being looted by obnoxious, ruthless politicians. The innocent, helpless people have been suffering for many years. But how long still? The fruits of independence gifted by you to the masses are ruthlessly and shamefully eaten away by the political vultures. Can we be silent spectators to the ghastly scenario? Don't you feel like changing the rotten society? Don't you will to improve the lot of the Lots; won't you like the initiate another movement for that (61)?

Gandhi calls for a press conference. How the politicians stoop down for the sake of power is spelled out in the play. He says, "I wish to tell two things. The first one is that all those MPs and MLAs who won through bogus votes by resorting to rigging, should resign. All the people with criminal record like gangsters, rowdy sheeters and those who are involved in businesses like liquor, mutka, gambling should leave politics" (63). He also says that "dynastic monarchy is no more. Hence only one person in a family should contest the elections once in three generations. The party which does not fulfill its poll promises is not qualified to contest in the next elections. The properties amassed by misuse of power should be handed over to the Government" (65).

### **Speech By Gandhi**

Gandhi's speech in the T.V goes as, "Politics without scruples, scientific knowledge minus humanity, happiness without conscience,

worship without sacrifice, business without ethics, wealth without hard work and education without character – are the seven VICES which our politicians have acquired. And they have to shun these VICES” (66). Gandhi makes an appeal that “If politicians do not respond and shun the vices aforesaid within fifteen days, a non-violent war will be declared against them. I will stage Dharna in front of the Assembly with one crore people and demand their resignations” (66).

### **Plan To Trap Gandhi As A Murderer**

Gandhi’s speech in the TV has motivated the people to revolt. The MLA’s ponder on the crucial situation and worry how to face it. They plan to overcome this issue meanwhile; another MLA comes with torn clothes and says that ten thousand people attacked him because of Gandhi’s revolution. The people caught him and demanded to return the land grabbed by him. Meanwhile many party leaders come with suitcases in hand to settle this matter. The party leaders plan how to eliminate Gandhi. They call Police Commissioner and discuss how to finish Gandhi. Thus the cruel attitude of the politicians is shown.

In a plan to trap Gandhi, Yadagiri goes to Gandhi’s house and steals money from the Hundi. Suddenly a man comes and is about to kill him. As Yadagiri shouts Gandhi comes to his rescue of the house and he is surprised to see Yadagiri and takes out the knife from the stomach of Yadagiri. Meanwhile, police arrive and arrest Gandhi on the pretext of killing Yadagiri. Thus the MLA traps Gandhi.

## Prosecuting Gandhi

The most interesting scene in the play is the court scene. The writer makes satirical comments on the lawyers. The public prosecutor produces proof to prove that Gandhi is false and is a cheat. Rajaram is also called into the witness box and examined by the public prosecutor. The Indian legal system is clearly demonstrated with examples of delay in the judgment and also in the lawyer's argument.

The public prosecutor charges Mahatma Gandhi for murdering MLA Yadagiri.

He is a cheat. He is an imposter. He is not only a murderer, but also a traitor – Your Honour! I hereby submit to the Hon'ble Court the exhibits in support of the charges. This is the photo when the accused moved around in the attire of Gandhi. This is the photo when the accused was collecting donations in the attire of Gandhi. This is the photo when the accused was collecting donations in the attire of Gandhi. These are the photos when the accused was giving speeches posing as Gandhiji and these are the relevant newspaper clippings. I request the Hon'ble Court to kindly examine the exhibits, and award appropriate punishment for the crimes of murder and conspiracy against the state (72).

The court orders Mahatma Gandhi to be kept under judicial custody until the case is closed. When the court begins for the next

hearing, the public prosecutor this time has more charges. Gandhi is caught by guards. The prosecutor says, “Sorry your Honour! The accused, Mr. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was produced before you under charges of murder and conspiracy against the state. You have sent him for remand. While in remand, he had beaten up two guards and tried to escape from jail. His mental condition is not sound. He is violent and aggressive. That’s why these additional precautions” (75).

Rajaram argues for Gandhi how he worked to bring change in the political parties. Gandhi address the court and questions why the change before independence and after independence. After independence we are fighting against our own Government for everything. The present political situation is degrading. The leaders are interested in grabbing power. Caste and religion are two tools utilized to reach the goal. Gandhi also raises the issue of taking loan from World Bank in the name of development. The country depends on the quality of the political parties and their policies.

The prosecutor requests the Hon’ble Court to impose severe punishment on the accused. Gandhi attempted to reform the political system in turn he is punished. The judge finally says, “The court convicts him for murder and conspiracy. He is hereby sentenced to death by hanging!” (80).

### **Last Wish Of Mahatma**

The play ends with a punishment scene given to Mahatma Gandhi by hanging. The Judge asks the last wish of Gandhi.

Gandhi wishes to be born again.

All these days my intention has been to bring about transformation in the minds of the cruel. But my observation is that violence, cruelty, selfishness and what not all harmful vices are thriving at the cost of good. The good is getting extinguished day by day. This may lead to total annihilation of virtues leading the society in to anarchy and chaos. This is to be stopped forthwith. During my last birth, I advocated purely non-violence, as I believed *Ahimsa Paramodharmaha*. But tolerance is being construed as inefficiency. This should not continue. Now I prefer to adhere to No-Violence – ‘*Nirhimsa*’, which is greater than Ahimsa in which violence would be tackled firmly to protect the good and innocent. To propagate this, I will come back again, not in the human form, but in the purest form of consciousness - *Chaitanya Swaroopa*. I will be everywhere and anywhere. There will be no barriers and frontiers for my presence. I will be in the green leaves and blooming flowers. I will be in the rays of rising sun and the brightening Moon. I will be in the shining Stars and raining Clouds. In the dawn and dusk, in the air and water and pervade every nook and corner of my motherland. I will become the body, mind and soul of common man to unearth the hidden, illegal

treasures, to prevent the immoral ways of power and to cut down the crooked wings of untruth, the wicked strings of selfishness. Beware! Be careful! I will come like spring thunder! Yes! I will come again. Again and again to this holy land till the end of political turmoil (82).

The playwright throws a glimpse on the present political situation and portrays the true picture of India in a realistic manner. The play focuses on the state of political leaders who fail to accept Gandhi principles. Moreover, the writer shows how given a chance they would even murder Gandhi to succeed in their party and rule the country. The love for power among the politicians is shown in a satirical manner. Thus the writer portrays the society which is in a state of social delirium. It is clear that the Gandhian principles of truth and non violence are only on paper. There is false and violence everywhere. The greediness and selfish attitude of the leaders are illustrated in the play.

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