
GANDHIAN IDEALS IN INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

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Abstract: One of the most popularly discussed and yet many-a-time controversial figure of Indian politics is Mahatma Gandhi. There is hardly any area in the pre or post-independence era that he had left untrammelled for the sake of Indian development and independence. A socio-political figure, Mahatma Gandhi is impossible for people in India and abroad to forget or ignore. He has influenced every aspect of human consciousness. He is an immense source of writing himself and has influenced different disciplines and many writers from different fields like history, politics, philosophy, literature, sociology. Gandhiji's influence on Indian Writing in English is enormous. He is a mine of themes for writers and commentators though he himself never worked on any literary topic or genre. His impact on Indian English novels can be witnessed in the reputed and coveted authors like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K Narayan. Gandhiji gave new strength and confidence to Indian languages that suffered contempt, neglect, indifference, and disgrace for a long time. Gandhiji insisted on 'simple living and high thinking' which was reflected and highlighted by the literary English authors in their novels and short stories, portrayed the real picture of the-then society from various perspectives, thereby presenting the influence of Gandhi on Indian villages and towns, letting the readers a scope to probe into Gandhiji's moralistic vision. As a result, Gandhi's philosophy created effects on human lives bringing a sea change in their thoughts, views and living. So the presenter attempts to make an in depth study of Gandhi's influence on Indian English Literature.

Keywords: Indian Independence, New Strength, Human Consciousness, Literary Novels, Real Picture, Society, Moralistic Vision, Human Lives.

Introduction: Indian English Literature has attained a unique status in the realm of world Literature. This literature continues to reflect Indian culture, tradition, social values and even Indian history through the depiction of life in India and Indians living elsewhere. India's substantial contribution to world literature is largely due to the creative literary works penned by Indian novelists in English. Their works deal with a range of issues such as nationalism, freedom struggle, social realism, individual consciousness and the like. Post – Independent India has been making quick strides in the field of fiction writing. The great proliferation of the Indian English novel owes its credit to the sudden increase of interest in the new literature of post colonial nations by the west.

Gandhi came on the literary scene, just when Indian social system badly needed change and reform. Gandhiji very exhaustively dealt not only with the economic or political problems but also with the social problems of the Indian society. Social reformation failed to clear the society of its deep-rooted evils. The freedom movement spearheaded by Gandhi inspired a flurry of activity in the literary world. The need for an independent country, lead to an explosion of creativity. Therefore, there was a flurry of novels in both regional and as well as in the national stream. This burst of energy in regional literature, laid the ground work of fine – tuning and enhancing the vibrancy and the scope of the Indian English Fiction. The dual combination of independent movement and nationalist consciousness gave much impetus to the outflow of novels in which affection for motherland was the crux and this served to invoke the patriotic sentiments of the masses.

Gandhism as a district influence on Indian Writing in English has been felt with the publication of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Kamala Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury*, K.Nagarajan's *Chronicles of Kedaram*, Anand's *Untouchable*(1935), *Coolie* (1936), *The Sword and the Sickle*(1942), R.K.Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma*. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*(1938), K.S.Venkataramani's *Kandan*, *The Patriot* (1934) all which revolved around the varying themes of the independence struggle. The trinity

Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan were the novelists who stabilized and fortified the Indian English Fiction with their ample works and unique literary style. Thus, it was aptly noted by William Walsh regarding the Indian writers:

Distinguished not only for their own work but as the inaugurators of the form itself since it was they who defined the area in which the Indian novel in English was to operate, drew the first models of its characters and themes and elaborated its particular logic. Each used its own version of English freed from the foggy taste of Britain. (Walsh, 62)

One of the most popularly discussed and yet many-a-time controversial figure of Indian politics is Mahatma Gandhi. There is hardly any area in the pre or post-independence era that he had left untrammelled for the sake of Indian development and independence. A socio-political figure, Mahatma Gandhi is impossible for people in India and abroad to forget or ignore. He has influenced every aspect of human consciousness. He is an immense source of writing himself and has influenced different disciplines and many writers from different fields like history, politics, philosophy, literature, sociology. Gandhiji's influence on Indian Writing in English is enormous. He is a mine of themes for writers and commentators though he himself never worked on any literary topic or genre. His impact on Indian English novels can be witnessed in the reputed and coveted authors like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K Narayan. Gandhiji gave new strength and confidence to Indian languages that suffered contempt, neglect, indifference, and disgrace for a long time. Gandhiji insisted on 'simple living and high thinking' which was reflected and highlighted by the literary English authors in their novels and short stories, portrayed the real picture of the-then society from various perspectives, thereby presenting the influence of Gandhi on Indian villages and towns, letting the readers a scope to probe into Gandhiji's moralistic vision. As a result, Gandhi's philosophy created effects on human lives bringing a sea change in their thoughts, views and living. He has influenced every aspect of human consciousness and there is hardly any discipline that he has left uncommented. M. K. Naik comments,

Indian Writing in English literature of the Gandhian age was inevitably influenced by these (the then political and social) epoch-making developments in Indian life.

So Indian Fiction in fact has discovered some of its most compelling themes during the Gandhian era. Gandhiji's influence and many had taken part in the freedom movements, or they were highly influenced by his ideals. Their writings were immensely projected with Gandhian idealism, lifestyle, his teachings and anti-colonial stands. Bhabani Bhattacharya specifically sums up the elements that the then writers incorporated from Gandhiji:

In every Indian literature a new thinking emerged. There was to be shift of emphasis from the rich to the poor, from the intellectual to the man of character and inner culture, from the educated to the illiterate and the voiceless, and deep rooted in these revaluations was social reform."

Gandhiji was so much part and form of any literary genre of that period that he made appearance in many dramas, novels, stories and in poems. Gandhiji's social activities were oriented towards progress and his idealism was democratic, rural and homogeneous in nature. It was not only the literary writers who played an active role in reflecting the then Gandhi-mania of the entire country but also the nationalist Press and local newspapers and journals which portrayed the bhakti cult of the Mahatma through different anecdotes, feature articles, soft news and of course, snippets, thereby proving the

immense popularity of the political figure who was slowly turned into a divine entity, a messiah who was sure to bring a revolution in human history as Buddha or Christ could.

Gandhi's ideals became so popular that they were pronounced as everyday bread and butter facts and the more they got discussed the more did they gain in importance, magnitude, and matter. As a result of this many new things got assimilated in the name of the Mahatma and rumours made room in accordingly, thereby increasing his popularity by leaps and bounds, that neither the Mahatma nor the Congress circulated. Stories like Mahatma walking through the fire unhurt, the Mahatma bringing independence in 1921, Mahatma insisting vegetarianism and condemning fish and meat in people etc. were some common subversions made in Gandhi's name.

Many novelists presented Gandhi and his ideals in their works. Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Bhabanhi Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Chaman Nahal, Kushwant Singh, K.A. Abbas, K. Nagarajun, Attia Hosain, Kamala Markandaya, Mulkraj Anand, V.S.Venkatramani, Nayantara Sahgal etc. V.S. Venkatramani has depicted nationalistic revolution and freedom movement under the leadership of Gandhi in his novels, '*Murugan, the Tiller and Kandan, the patriot*'. '*Murugan the Tiller*' deals with the Gandhian ideal of rural construction as a step for winning freedom. In it the novelist has attempted to sketch Gandhian Satyagraha. The central character, Ramu plays the role of an ideal man, having the aim of reconstructing Indian Village. The second novel '*Kandan, the patriot*', deals with the freedom movement under the Gandhian politics. Gandhi is represented by idealized character, Kandan, who leads the village people 'Drunk with wine of freedom.' Kandan becomes to the peasants of Akkur a "reforming Saint" endowed with a "glow of kindness in his face". He envisages a new order:

The whole system must be smashed
and a new wave be built for all,
where freedom and equality shall be
the base of life".

Anand's *Untouchable* deals indirectly with an aspect of Gandhian struggle for freedom in the thirties. It reflects Gandhi's tireless efforts for upliftment of the downtrodden and his view against attitude of the British Government with their 'divide and rule policy'. The novel focuses on the untouchability as a major theme, against which Gandhi was performing to abolish. Prof G. P. Sharma remarks, "The novel thus deals with the Hindu social problem of untouchability against the political background of the time, depicting the same time people's faith in Gandhi as their leader in the national movement and his magnetic influence on the people. The novel ends with three possibilities for the redemption – conversion to Christianity, abolition of untouchability and introduction of flush latrines."

Gandhiji insisted on high thinking and simple living which was also reflected and highlighted by the literary English authors of the time, mainly Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayanan, who in their novels and stories portrayed the real picture of the then society from various perspectives, thereby presenting the influence of Gandhi on Indian villages and towns, letting us a scope to probe how Gandhiji's ways of developmental communication created effects on human lives bringing a sea change in their thoughts, views and living. Almost all of their novels represent events which distinctly correspond to the examples of actual incidents and teachings that Gandhiji in real life encoded during his visits at various places. The crux of the morale or bottom spread of Gandhism, which the novels often portray by vicarious means and events are: Unity among all religions especially Hindu-Muslim Unity, People should not adhere to extremist means of protest, i.e. they should be non-violent and not use domestic arms like lathis, sharp weapons, and stop picketing and looting places, stop the evil practices of untouchability, casteism, enmity among classes, hatred, lying, swearing but spreading of brotherhood, love and unity among all races instead, Take up the initiative to spin, weave, cultivate, study, learn and teach, control sex, family planning, lead a simple living, self-sacrifice and self-purification, believe in the truth, face the truth and apply it in life, realization of Swaraj, grace of God, strength of the united people when motivated towards one goal peacefully.

Kanthapura, by Raja Rao is often called a Gandhian novel since the novelist portrays the process of community development through Gandhian means and social teachings, in rural India, which above all

was backed by the need to be independent from the British colonization and the development of the nation consequently, through effective communicative means and a will to make India a Gandhian country, garneted with everything very 'Indian' in nature.

The most important and common fact that we find in the Gandhi novels is that they talk of a distinct village, a representative of all villages in rural India and the rural folk same as others, immersed in their Gandhi- their savior, their God. Mahatma's image takes form within pre-existing patterns of popular belief and ritual action corresponding to their demographic customs. The channel was automatic trans-creation of religious slokas to Gandhi slokas or Gandhi Puranas, which found way to stages, temples through songs, Keertans and Jatras. Such was his popularity that things associated with him got his name attached to it as a suffix or a prefix like Swaraj was called as 'Gandhi-Swaraj' or 'Mahatma Swaraj' only because of his tremendous influence.

Gandhi is now transformed into 'Mahatma', great souls, whose words are like that of the Lord and must be adhered to, and the authenticity or the purpose, the deep rooted meaning is never to be questioned. Such is the scene in R. K. Narayanan's *Waiting for the Mahatma*, where we find the hero Sriram becoming a blind follower of Gandhiji and joining the freedom movement but not at all understanding what Gandhian is actually about. There are people who still remain a Gandhian even if their leader leaves them or the Mahatma is defeated, severely criticized or if the Sahibs put them behind bars. In Narayanan's *The Vendor of Sweets*, Jagan considers himself a staunch Satyagrahi, spins the charka regularly, and equates himself with achieving Nirvana, like the Buddha, by following the principles of Gandhism. Bakha in Anand's *Untouchable*, is introduced before Gandhism in the end, as redemption from the social evils of untouchability and casteism. After listening to the speech of Gandhiji as a counsel from God, Bakha's life becomes more tolerable from the next day.

Thus the article aims at probing deep into how the Gandhian ideology influenced Indian novelists who wrote the novel in English language; Gandhi's ideals are committed to the task of educating the Indians and the Europeans, about the rich cultural heritage, great history and mythology of India. He preached to the people about non-violence, passive resistance, non-cooperation, and truthfulness, the weapons of peaceful life. The impact of Gandhi on the Indian masses and how his teachings motivated them to stand up to injustices and exploitation of British all drive home the message that Gandhi is an exemplary icon of all nations.

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