
Gandhian Ideology and Indian Novel in English

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Abstract

The emergence of Mahatma Gandhi, on Indian scenario, as a world renowned political leader, a social reformist, a man of strong will made a deep and abiding impact on the immeasurable lives of Indian people. Making History with his each n every daring step, Gandhi was a revolutionary experience for every Indian including the Indian literary minds. Not just as a dynamic personality but as a consciousness, Gandhi influenced different disciplines and writers from various fields like history, politics, philosophy, sociology, literature and so on. Gandhi exercised a potent influence on Indian language and literature, both directly through his own writings in English and Gujrati, and indirectly through his movements generated by his revolutionary thoughts and practice. In fact with increasing interest in his personality and ideas, on literary scenario was initiated a new field called the Gandhian Literature.

The present paper is a humble attempt to show that how counterbalancing the foreign influences, Gandhian message of peace and ahimsa, his ethical idealism and the saint-like austerity awakened among the Indian writers a new sense of national pride and purpose. In fact Gandhi's influence on Indo-Anglian literature has been so extensive that even if he had not written a single line in English, he would still have had a secure place in Indian writing in English.

Keywords: *Gandhi, Nationalism, Realism, Literary Sensibility*

Introduction

Gandhian strategies and approaches did shape the course of India's destiny but his impact on Indo-Anglian fiction is also commendable. This impact is beyond the fictional representation of his image and philosophy. He paved a new direction for Indian writers in matters of both style and subject-matter. An international leader of immense political and philosophical significance during the pre and post- independence phase of India, Gandhi and his views provided a sort of framework to these literary geniuses and determined their point of view. Under his charismatic influence, they evolved themselves as literary artists, understood their responsibility towards society and thus clarified their perspective regarding their vocation as novelists. These men of exceptional and subtle sensibility regarded him as their literary and spiritual mentor.

"Gandhi's influence on India's mind has been profound in present age; how long and in what form it will endure, only the future can show. That influence is not limited to those who agree with him or accept him as a National leader; it extends to those also who disagree with him and criticize him".¹

(Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, in *The Discovery of India*)

Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi, popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi is a name known to each and every individual residing on this pious land named *Bharatvarsha*. Hailed as the Father of the Nation, many adore him; worship him as the saviour of enslaved Mother India. Many condemn him; hate him for reasons best known to them. But the fact remains that one cannot just ignore him. As a socio-political figure who is barely impossible for anyone to forget or ignore, he has influenced every aspect of human consciousness and there is hardly any discipline that he has left uncommented.

During India's struggle for freedom, Gandhi dominated the entire Indian national scene. Gandhian philosophy and strategies shaped the course of India's destiny. His image, his personality and ideas influenced millions of people in India, including a large number of poets, novelists, and other men of sensibility. Himself an immense source of writing, he has influenced different disciplines and many writers from different fields like history, politics, philosophy, literature, sociology and so on. They regarded him as their literary and spiritual mentor.

Gandhi has always remained a universal subject throughout the world. Many books and articles are still being published; researches have still been going on with an attempt to bring back Gandhian ideal of peace, non-violence, patience, and non-cooperation in this intolerant world living under the shadow of third-world war and on the verge of Doom. Gandhi was a simple but smart man. He was not just an idealist but a psychologist also. He felt the pulse of India and its people on whom he could exert a tremendous influence and preach his Gandhian ideology. Bharat Muni in his *Natyaveda* has stated the need for '*Sadharanikaran*' i.e. simplification or identification of meaning. Such a sublime thought would appeal to all kinds of people, irrespective of the literary barrier, religion and senses. This kind of communication works the best as the message can reach everyone in its simplest form. Gandhi connected with people. He realized that India being a religion-oriented country with a majority of half-literate and non-literate population can only be motivated and mobilized through some traditional mode of communication and so Gandhian philosophy was mainly based on the traditional and labour oriented technologies. Gandhian ideology lent Indian novelists a frame of reference to look up for their stories. It linked them to their soil. It took them to the roots of Indian culture. It created in them a social awareness and helped them to creatively interpret the social reality. It is acknowledged by all men of literary sensibility that Gandhi's influence on Indo-Anglian literature has been such that even if he had not written a single line in English, he would still have had a secure place in Indian Writing in English. The impact of Mahatma Gandhi on Indo-Anglian fiction is beyond the fictional representation of his own image and philosophy. He paved a new direction for the Indian writers in matters of both style and subject-matter.

Gandhiji's constant insistence on simple living and high thinking was reflected and highlighted by the literary English authors of the time, who in their novels and short stories, portrayed the real picture of the then society from various sides, thereby presenting the influence of Gandhi on Indian villages and towns, letting us a scope to explore how Gandhiji's ways of developmental communication created everlasting effects on human lives bringing a sea change in their thoughts, views and living. Almost all of novels, written

during India's freedom, struggle 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 writers working in different languages in those days either were mostly persons who had come directly under Gandhiji's influence, many had even taken part in the freedom movements, or they were highly influenced by his ideals. Their writings were immensely burdened with the idealism, lifestyle, teachings, and anti-colonial stands of Gandhi. Gandhiji was so much part and form of any literary genre of that period that he made appearance in many dramas, novels, stories and even in poems. Influenced by Gandhi, the novelists and short story writers made him an important character or a guest character or they made a local Gandhi replica and presented him in the light of Mahatma. To the Indian masses, Gandhi was always a legend, a tradition, and an oracle. He was their saviour who had descended upon the earth to destroy the demons of foreign domination and to set *Bharat-Mata* free. This magical impact of Mahatma and his image on India's mind captured the imagination of many Indo-Anglian novelists and inspired them to express, reflect and to probe his ideas and ideologies either directly or metaphorically. He exercised a potent influence on Indian language and literature, both directly through his own writings in English and Gujrati, and indirectly through his movements generated by his revolutionary thoughts and practice.

It was Gandhi's insistence on *satya* in literature and his pragmatic approach that pioneered realism in fiction. The vogue of writing the historical romances, adventure or mystery novels or those dealing with exotic religious cults, came to an end. Instead, the novelists started to turn towards the living reality of the contemporary socio-political scene for inspiration. Gandhi's message of *shanti* and *ahimsa*, his ethical idealism and the saint-like austerity of his personal life awakened among Indian writers writing in English, a new sense of national pride and purpose. Mr. 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." ² He explains that Indian Writing in English (Fiction) in fact "discovered some of its most compelling themes"³ during the Gandhian era. And this influence was not merely in the literal sense but in a metaphorical sense, in the sense of Gandhian consciousness. Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar seems quite justified in considering Gandhi as a "Formative influence on writers of the time" ⁴. Gandhi brought a revolution not only in the social and political lives of people but a revolution in the field of writing too. The act of writing to him was not merely an expression of one's feelings and ideas. Gandhian writings were recognizably functional. He did not believe in the theory or 'art for art's sake'. The change that Gandhiji effected in the prose style of Indian writing in English is his most single contribution to it. Gandhi says:

"For me, all arts must be based on truth. I reject beautiful things, if instead of expressing truth they express untruth. Whatever can be useful to starving millions is beautiful to my mind; let us give today first the vital things of life, and all the graces and ornaments of life will follow"⁵.

Gandhi appeared in the writings of Indian writers in English as a personality as well as a consciousness. In fact K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar has rightly said in his *Indian writing in English*

that; "Gandhi is too big to be given a minor part: on the other hand, he is sure to turn the novel in a biography if he is given a major part. The best thing for the contemporary novelist would be to keep Gandhi in the background but make his influence indirectly" ⁶.

Indian English literature, before and after independence, was greatly influenced by Gandhian ideology. People's interest in his personality and ideology gave birth to a new field called Gandhian literature. The earliest Indo-English novelist to be influenced by Mahatma Gandhi was Venkatramni who wrote *Kandan, the Patriot* and *Murugan, the Tiller* in 1930's. The great Indian trio- R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and many other writers like Kamala Markandaya in *Some Inner Fury*, Shashi Throor in *The Great Indian Novel*, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas in *Inqilab*, K. Nagarjan in *Chronicles of Kedaram*, Bhabani Bhattacharya in *So Many Hungers* and *Shadow from Ladakh*, Anand Hall in *The House at Adampur*, Nayantara Sahgal in *A Time to be Happy*, Manohar Malgonkar in *A Bend in the Ganges* explored Gandhi's thoughts.

k.S.Venkataramni's protagonists in *Murugan, the Tiller* and *Kandan, the Patriot* are exponents of Gandhian economy and Gandhian politics respectively. *Kandan* is the story of an ICS probationer who gave up a comfortable government job for serving his nation. Iyengar even goes to the extent of saying that "Kandan is Gandhi himself - twenty five years old ..." ⁷. Both *Kandan* and *Ramu of Murugan the Tiller* are presented as exponents of various aspects of Gandhian ideology. Exhibiting Gandhian idea of *ahimsa*, Venkataramni's characters show that the redemption of India lies in returning to non-violent way of fighting against the British Empire.

Kawaja Ahmed Abbas' *Inqilab*, based on the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity and dignity of man, was written with the intention of reconstructing Gandhian struggle in all its nuances. Anwar, the protagonist, is a Hindu by birth and Muslim by upbringing. The revelation of his origin comes as a traumatic shock to him but ultimately he discovers himself as an individual beyond these religious affiliations. And the novel ends with the essentially Gandhian optimism that ultimately love n sense of brotherhood will prevail over all narrow mindedness. Mulk Raj Anand in his essay '*Cultural Self-Comprehension of Nations*' talks of the radical transformation of the whole socio-political milieu by the Gandhian thought. As a writer, Anand found in the Gandhian era new kinds of ethos, a new ferment that gave content to the Indian mind and personality. He recalls that under the leadership of Gandhi, "transformation of the body-soul of the Indian people was taking place" ⁸. Talking about Gandhian impact, he says, "it was as though Gandhi had touched the innermost chords of the dormant Indian consciousness" ⁹. In fact Anand is an artist who in his *Apology for Heroism*; very openly confesses what he owes to Gandhi;

"I now sought to be sincere, to practise kindness in my relations with others, to be good, to perfect myself, to search after truth, to know and realize all that was there to understand in the world and feel all there was to feel" ¹⁰.

His *Untouchable* reflects and echoes Gandhi. About the protagonist Bhakha, Anand is of the view that the Mahatma seemed to have touched the most intimate corner of his soul. The impact of Gandhi on Bakha's mind is akin to that of a psychological purging: "... a part of

him seemed to have flown, to have evaporated. He felt he had lost something of himself and was uneasy on account of it, yet thrilled about it, happy".¹¹

Mulk Raj Anand, talking about influence of Gandhi on him, has himself told in his essay 'Why I Write?' about the inspiration behind writing his novel *Untouchable*. He said;

"One day, I read an article in Young India, Gandhiji describing whom he met Uka, a sweeper boy, and finding him with torn clothes and hungry, took him into his ashram... the narrative was so simple, austere, and seemed to me more truthful than my artificially concocted *Untouchable* And, in a sudden fit, ... I decided to go and see the old man ... The Mahatma allowed me to read portions of my novel *Untouchable* to him. He felt that I made Bakha a Bloomsbury intellectual. And he advised me to cut down a hundred or more pages and rewrite the whole. I revised the book and worked hard to achieve sincerity... A religious-minded Welsh person encouraged this almost atheist Anand to follow his decision".¹²

Thus in *Untouchable*, we witness the transformation of Anand, a Bloomsbury intellectual, into a 'more emphatically self-conscious Indian'. Anand, ultimately is a Gandhian for his sense of immaculate cleanliness and his concern with the weak and the dispossessed.

The impact of Gandhi on R. K. Narayan is not as direct and obvious as it is on Mulk Raj Anand. The values Narayan upholds are Gandhian in character. His *Vender of Sweets* and *Waiting for the Mahatma* are steeped in Gandhian values. In *Swami and Friends*, Swaminathan is an enthusiastic participant in the Gandhian protest movement. Marggaya's character in *The Financial Expert* provides Narayan's preoccupation with the Gandhian concerns. Narayan in *The English Teacher* fully rejects the western education and upholds Gandhi's idea of fundamental education. In *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, he upholds Gandhian ideal of non-violence in the character of Natraj. Both the protagonists in *The Guide* and *The Financial Expert* are attracted by materialist galore of money. Marrgyya of *The Financial Expert* does whatever he can to earn wealth. His mad pursuit of wealth cannot give him satisfaction. The story line of the novel conforms to the truth that wealth and the fulfilment in life are not directly proportional to each other. Sometimes renunciation of worldly goods can also help one achieve peace of mind. Raju of *The Guide* during his materialistic pursuit of wealth in the beginning, is not troubled by any guilt that he was having an affair with another man's wife but the basic goodness of his nature asserts itself towards the end is essentially religious in character. *The Vender of Sweets* depicts Jagan leading his life in accordance with Gandhian principles. Jagan is a man of high principles. He recites *The Bhagwad Gita* to his minions and spins the wheel. To spin, to wear *Khadi*, to use *swadeshi* things and to read *The Bhagwad Gita* all has become a part of Gandhian Philosophy. To take part in *kirtan* to participate in social reform activities, *parbhat pheries* all became a part of struggle for freedom. Jagan of *The Vender of Sweets* firmly believes in all these things and practices these in his daily routine which his son Mali does not like. Jagan is living embodiment of Gandhian principles.

Shashi Tharoor established his name in Post-Modern English Literature with *The Great Indian Novel*. The story in the novel is more or less a political interpretation of the India's past since the advent of Mahatma Gandhi. Tharoor retells the story of Indian Hindu Epic *The*

Mahabharata in the context of Indian Independence Movement. At no point of the story, he even tries to conceal the correspondence between the mythical and the historical personages or situations. *Mahabharata's Bhishma* i.e. Gangadatta, commonly known as Gangaji in the fictional work, is an audiovisual variation of Gandhi. The character Gangaji and the real life personality Gandhiji get entwined at various points while going through the novel and it becomes quite difficult for the reader to distinguish between these two characters.

Raja Rao's creative absorption of the Gandhian thought is quite different from that of the Narayan and Anand's. Raja Rao's faith in the Vedic and the Upanishdic values, his idea of goodness and the evil and the resultant moral outlook on life conveys Gandhian influence on him very explicitly. The main force behind Rao's novels is the philosophical aspect of the Gandhian thought. Rao, while confessing what he owes to Gandhi, states, "the humanitarian and romantic perspective of man in *Kanthapura* and *The Cow of the Barricades*- both deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence"¹³.

Raja Rao was a part of the cultural renaissance created by the Gandhian ideas. Novelist with a cause and purpose, Rao in his *Kanthapura* deals with the liberation of Indian spirit by the Gandhian ideology. K. R. Srinivas Iyengar in his *Indian Writings in English* rightly sums up the theme of the novel as "Gandhi and our village"¹⁴. Moorthy, the protagonist agrees to join Congress in the name of Mahatma:

"all I know is that what you told me about Mahatma is very fine, and the Mahatma is a holy man, and if the Mahatma says what you say, let the Mahatma's word be the word of God"¹⁵.

Moorthy asks the villagers in the name of the Mahatma not to be afraid of going to jail and tells them that is 'the true spirit of the *Satyagrahi*'. He makes the whole village resound with '*Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai*'. Practically all the aspects of Gandhian thought like *ahimsa*, *khadi*, *charkha*, Hindu-Muslim unity and untouchability are dealt with in *Kanthapura*.

Another Indo-Anglian novelist Bhabani Bhattacharya's moral and ethical outlook affirmed in his novels is unmistakably Gandhian. A 'socially programmatic novelist', he passionately upholds Gandhian ideas of non-violence and sanctity of Indian traditional values. Gandhian philosophy opened new dimensions in novel writing. The ordinariness of Gandhi's life presented in an unpretentious manner in his autobiography *My Experiments With Truth* had an everlasting impact on him. In his book on Gandhi, he says that, "in English alone Gandhi reached all the corners of the Indian subcontinent across the linguistics frontiers"¹⁶.

Thus emergence of Gandhi as a political leader, a social reformist, a man of strong will made a deep and abiding impact on the Indian writers writing in English. His ideas provided a sort of framework to these literary geniuses. They evolved themselves as literary artists, understood their responsibility towards society and thus clarified their perspective regarding their vocation as novelists. Gandhian thought helped them in accepting their roots and traditions. What is most beautiful and striking about Gandhian influence on Indo-Anglian novelists of 30's is that everyone derived from Gandhi what was in accord with his ideological orientation, temperament and above all his creative needs and vision of life. If Gandhi's plea for Hindu-Muslim unity appealed to Abbas, it is humanism of Gandhian

ideas that Anand found artistically liberating. In Raja Rao Gandhi provides a basis for his search for philosophical and religious relevance.

Thus emphasising various facets of a man's life- social, political, economic and spiritual, Gandhi gave them the sense of identity as an Indian first. It is this sense of social awareness and a quest for national identity that helped Indo-Anglican novelists in evolving their themes and style. A writer's work is all about emotions and sensitivity. Indian Freedom Movement was an extremely emotional experience for the masses of India. Gandhi making History with his each n every daring step was a revolutionary experience for every Indian including the Indian literary minds. Directly or indirectly, they could not escape its effect. Be it the issue of discrimination based on religion, caste n creed, problem of education, economic exploitation, or cultural annihilation from an alien power, it was Gandhian thought that determined their point of view. Gandhi did talk of the need of India's cultural independence as a first step towards its political independence. He was very well aware of the fact that the British rule has crippled Indian psyche. Indian slave minds needed to be free first. Literature has to perform its duty. Indian writers, under the influence of West, the English and their mannerism lost touch with their own traditions. In Gandhian thought, they found a way back to reverence towards their own rich cultural heritage. Being men of intellectual acumen, they responded more creatively to Gandhi and his thoughts. Thus they interpreted and renewed Indian traditions following the path paved by Mahatma Gandhi.

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