

GANDHIAN INFLUENCE IN INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELS

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi Ji struggled for the sake of Indian liberty and advancement. He became an immense source of writing and influenced different disciplines and writers from different fields like philosophy, politics, history, literature, sociology, and so on. The great Indian trio- R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao has explored Gandhian thoughts in their writings. Their novels follow Gandhian ideology and his principles of Non-violence, Truth, Brotherhood, Satyagraha and his views on untouchability. The present paper is an attempt to study Gandhian strain in R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. "*Waiting for the Mahatma*" illustrate Gandhi Ji as a great leader who is deeply connected with the problems of common people. In *Untouchable* his views give hope for a good life for the ground down. And at the same time, *Kanthapura* shows the influence of Gandhi Ji's struggle for Indian Independence and its impact on the people of a small village.

Keywords: Gandhism, Influence, Impact, Leader, Downtrodden.

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi Ji is multi-layered personality. He became first a national and soon enough an international leader of immense political and philosophical significance during the pre and post-independence phase of India. He struggled for the sake of freedom and development of the country. He became an huge source of writing and influenced different disciplines and writers from different fields like philosophy, politics, history, literature, sociology, and so on. According to K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger: Gandhi Ji 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 present novelist would be to keep Gandhi Ji in the background but make his mastery indirectly.

Indian English literature before and after independence was greatly influenced by Gandhism. Writers and readers' interest gave birth to Gandhian literature. The great Indian trio-R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and many other writers explored Gandhi Ji's thoughts in their writings. Gandhian philosophy includes Truth, Non-violence, Satyagraha, Simplicity, Love, Brotherhood etc. All these very well established by R.K. Narayan in "*Waiting for the Mahatma*", Mulk Raj Anand in "*Untouchable*" and Raja Rao in "*Kanthapura*". All the characters of these novels are rooted and flourished in Indian ethics and Indian philosophy. They start their journey in the search of truth and way of life. Sometimes these characters fail as they have not followed Gandhism but if they are hailed, it is all because of following Gandhism.

R.K. Narayan is the master infusing reality with fantasy. He mingles his philosophy and views in

his literary work successfully. His treatment of Gandhian thought in his fiction is different. His work highlights the multifarious facets of Gandhism. His characters are Gandhians in their particular ways. His novel "*Waiting for the Mahatma*" has the reflection of Gandhian philosophy in great amount. It was written in 1955, after the seven years of Gandhi Ji's assassination. Sriram is the promoter of the novel who promotes Gandhian views and philosophy as a way of life. This novel places Gandhi Ji at the centre of the text. It shows the process of transformation in Sriram in his search for truth and self-realization. He is portrayed as a careless boy at the beginning of the novel who lives with his grandmother in Malgudi. His life gets its meaning when he first sees Bharti, a disciple of Gandhi Ji. He falls in love with her and goes to attend Gandhian camp to meet her. But once he finds an entry in the camp, his primary motive which was to spend time with Bharti transforms into a new relationship. K.R.S. Iyenger notices that; "*In Waiting for the Mahatma*", the theme is the Bharti and Shriram's romance which, however, gains a new dimension in the background of their common allegiance to Mahatma". After Gandhi Ji's speech, he feels the need to change his lifestyle. His meeting with Gandhi Ji first time gives him a clear way to work, which was missing in his life. He stays in the camp and shares room with another disciple of Gandhi Ji, Gorpad. Gorpad adds new dimensions to his knowledge and tells him the aims and object of the Gandhian spirit. He visits the famine-affected area and helps people. His passion for Gandhi Ji and his philosophy is noticed by his grandmother. She asks, "Oh! He is your god, is he?" On this Sriram replies, "Yes, he is, and I won't hear any speak lightly of him...he is not a man; he is a Mahatma". When he sees Mahatma's love for the underdogs

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and untouchables of Malgudi, he also renounces the luxurious lifestyle and preferred to stay with Harijans during his visits for campaigns. He completely follows the steps of Gandhi Ji and becomes the true representative of his thoughts and philosophy. He participates in “Quit India”, “Satyagraha”, and “Swadeshi” movements with great passion and commitment. He comes in contact with Jagdish, who is the representative of the class of revolutionaries. Jagdish believes in violence that is opposite to the non-violence of Gandhi Ji. Sriram comes in his contact and starts assisting him in his extremist activities. But soon he realizes that by destroying things and following non-violence they cannot throw the British rule from India. He feels that Gandhi Ji’s non-violent weapon was superior to the violent weapon. His Gandhism fails after an initial fervour and zeal. He could not fulfil the daring demands at the next stage. He gets arrested and it is in the prison that he gets the opportunity to listen to his inner voice after receiving a letter from Mahatma.

Your work should be a matter of inner faith. It cannot depend upon what you see or understand. Your conscience should be your guide in every action. Consult it and you won’t go wrong. Don’t guide yourself by what you see. You should do your duty because your inner voice drives you to do it.

Finally, he is freed from the prison as India gained freedom. He and Bharti decide to get married and their marriage is only possible on the blessing of Mahatma. Both of them are waiting for Mahatma at the Birla Mandir in New Delhi to obtain his blessing but they receive the news that a young man shoots Gandhi Ji dead.

Mulk Raj Anand’s works reveal prominently the deep influence of Gandhian ideology. He has emphasized more and more on social problems of a poor, oppressed, downtrodden low caste of the Hindu society and their inhuman exploitation. His novel *Untouchable*, published in 1935, covers the time of pre-independence era when poverty, castism, superstition and exploitation of untouchables were predominated. Anand has also taken the theme of inhuman exploitation of the lower class by the higher section of the society. This novel describes a single day in the life of the protagonist, Bakha, who belongs to a sweeper class. He is exploited by everyone on the account of his lower caste. The people of his caste are not allowed to go to the temple and other public places. If they touch anything that thing gets polluted. They have to stop or change their direction if someone from high class is coming or going in the same way. A high caste Hindu slaps Bakha just because he accidentally touches him. He becomes violent

when his sister tells him that the priest tried to molest her. But his sister stops him because she knows very well that nobody is going to listen to them. Bakha feels helpless and disgusting by the behaviour of people towards the lower class. He gets peace of mind when he hears Gandhi Ji talking about the welfare of untouchables. His speech gives him hope for a better future. In his speech Gandhi Ji says:

As you all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse of our iniquity. For me, the question of these people is moral and religious.

Innocent Bakha did not understand these words in the beginning and got confused. But soon he got the meaning when Gandhi Ji said; “I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism”. He gets fully influenced by Gandhi Ji when he hears him saying; “.... Two of the strongest desires that keep me in the flesh are the emancipation of the untouchables and the protection of the cow...”. But soon all his hopes are seemed broken when N.N. Bashir, a Barrister-in-law criticize Gandhi Ji and his philosophy. He calls Gandhi Ji to deceive. But Bashir, a young poet who edits *Nawan Jung* comes forward favouring Gandhian philosophy. He says - He has his limitations but he sounds elementary. He may be wrong in wanting to shut India off from the rest of the world by preaching the betterment of the spinning-wheel, because, as things are, that can’t be done. But even in that regards, he is right. For it is not India’s fault that it is poor: it is the world’s fault that the world is rich!

He tells Bakha about the invention of the flush system. It gives a ray of hope to the upset and helpless Bakha and people of his community. He explains the importance and use of this flush system that with the help of this; “sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and irresponsible society”.

“*Kanthapura*” was published in 1938 written by Raja Rao in which he highlighted Gandhian impact on a small village. The novel begins with the description of the village by a woman Achakka. Rao uses the oral story-telling method to steep in Indian history to relate the past and the impact of change. Achakka highlights the importance of the deities, especially Kenchamma which shows the importance of tradition and culture and at the same time welcoming the change. *Kanthapura* is a traditional caste-ridden village which is far away from all modern ways of living and development

taking place in the cities. It is believed that the village is protected by the blessings of the deity Kenchamma. Moorthy is the protagonist of the novel who is a Brahmin. He discovers a half-buried linga from the village and installs it. He goes to a city where he gets familiar with Gandhian philosophy. He follows Gandhi Ji in high spirit. He wears khadi clothes and fights against untouchability. After passing of his mother he started living with an educated widow Rangamma, who takes part in Indian's struggle for freedom. His belief in Gandhian philosophy can be seen when Bade Khan hits him. He does not react to it and follows the principle of non-violence. He continues his fight against injustice and inequality by following Gandhism. He leads the villagers as the representative of Gandhian philosophy. He gets arrested because of his participation and when Rangamma tries to release him on bail he refuses when he was in prison, the women of Kanthapura take the charge of the struggle for freedom. Rangamma is a true Gandhian who is not only courageous but also becomes an inspiration for other women. She tells the village women about Rani Lakshmi Bai, Rajput princess, Sarojini Naidu etc. and encourages them to follow the principles of 'Truth' 'Non-violence, 'Swadeshi' etc. The people begin to have strong faith in Gandhian movement in Kanthapura. Gandhi Ji is not presented as a person anywhere, but he lives in the hearts of the villagers. His speeches and teachings are the words of god for them. Moorthy comes out as a Mahatma for this small village as Mahatma Gandhi Ji for the whole nation. He becomes the symbol of change. People of Kanthapura are filled with the spirit of Satyagraha and want to take part in Dandi March. But Gandhi Ji gets arrested by the British government and all the responsibilities of the movement come on the local leaders. Moorthy plans to start a non-cooperation movement in the village. But soon the village becomes men less because of taking part in the Satyagraha movement. Moorthy gets more influenced by the principles of Nehru at the end of the novel.

R.k. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao are three leading figures of early Indian English Literature. The three above mentioned novels are best for evaluating how Gandhian philosophy influenced Indian writing in English. Gandhi Ji aimed to vanish poverty, Casteism, untouchability political freedom without a healthy social base is waste. Waiting for the Mahatma, Untouchable and Kanthapura follow Gandhian ideology and his principles of Non-violence, Truth, Brotherhood, Satyagraha and superstitions which were prominent that time along with India's freedom. He believed that and his views on untouchability. "Waiting for the Mahatma" illustrate Gandhi Ji as a great leader who is deeply connected with the problems of ordinary people. In "Untouchable" his views give hope for a good life for the downtrodden. And at the same time, "Kanthapura" shows the influence of Gandhi Ji's struggle for India's Independence and its impact on the people of a small village.

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