

Gandhian Influence on Indian Writing in English

Abstract:

“Gandhi was like a powerful current of fresh air...like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes; like a whirlwind that upset many things, but most of all the working of people’s minds” --Jawaharlal Nehru—

In the beginning of the 20th century India was imbued with the spirit of patriotism. The people were coming out of their houses ; even the women were also taking active part in struggle for freedom under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. He was a man of action. He practiced what he preached . When he asked the people to speak the truth, he himself became the embodiment of truth. He spoke the truth, whatever the cost. He acknowledged his weakness by writing “My Experiments with Truth”. He believed in The Bhagvad Gita. He led a simple life and tried to purge the Indian society of the evil of caste system. His dress was minimal, his requirements were the bare necessities and he preferred spiritual poise over materialism. He bore no ill will towards Britishers and advocated the path of Ahimsa for freedom struggle. His Quit India movement was mainly responsible for the ouster of the British. He had a charismatic personality and he influenced the masses. Whatever he said, people were ready to do. The writers of this era were also influenced by his philosophy Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand were the significant writers of this period and they were considerably influenced by the philosophy of Gandhi.

Keywords: Mahatma, embodiment, preached, spiritual , path ,ahimsa, Freedom, personality, struggle, philosophy, masses, influenced

INTRODUCTION:

My paper tries to establish how Gandhian thoughts are influenced in Indian Writing in English as well as in present India. RK.Narayan and Raja Rao were most celebrated novelists of India in 1930s and 1940s. Both novelists had depicted their novels through the usage of Gandhian theme. “Waiting for the Mahatma” and “Kanthapura” are best for analysing how Gandhian ideologies are influenced in Indian Writing in English.

RK.Narayan was born in Madras in the year 1906. He is one of three leading figures of early Indian literature in English, along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. He is regarded as one Indian greatest English language novelist. The setting for most of Narayan’s stories is the fictional town of Malgudi. It is fictional, semi-urban town in south India, conjured by Narayan. His major works are Swami and Friends (1935),The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The Dark Room (1938), The English Teacher (1945), The Financial Expert (1952), Waiting For the Mahatma (1955).

Raja Rao was born in 1908 in South India, into a well-known Brahmin family. His major works are *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), *Comrade Kirilov* (1976). *The Serpent and Rope* (1960). *Serpent and Rope* is semi-autobiographical novel of Raja Rao.

Mahatma Gandhi's emergence on the political arena of India changed the complete outlook of the society and established certain values. His struggle for freedom introduced some new trends in Anglo-Indian fiction. His appeal for universality was more or less accepted by many of the Indian writers. Between 1930-47, the struggle for independence was at the climax. This struggle was reflected in writings also. Gandhi emphasised more and more on social problems of the oppressed, the poor, the downtrodden and the low caste of the Hindu society. His aim was to eliminate poverty, superstitions, caste system and untouchability which were predominant in the Indian society. Political freedom, he believed, without a healthy social base would lead to disintegration.

Gandhian Influence:

Mahatma Gandhi at that time wielded a great influence on the Indian masses. Gandhi aroused national awakening in Indians with his non-violent struggle for freedom which was strengthened subsequently by the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements in the thirties. The Gandhian movement not only sought political freedom but also aimed at economic independence and spiritual regeneration. Gandhi wanted all the people, the rich and the poor, to lead a dignified life without exploitation of any kind. The Gandhian influence was so vast and so intense that the great writers of all the Indian languages produced some masterpieces in novel, poetry, drama and other forms of creative writing. The socio-economic and political development is fully revealed in Indo-Anglian fiction.

R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, both belong to the Gandhian era and their novels reveal prominently the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. Their earlier novels follow Gandhian ideology and Gandhiji's doctrine of non-violence, Satyagraha, their views on untouchability and casteism, etc, whereas their later novels which we call post-Gandhian novels present Gandhi in the context of free India. Mulk Raj Anand, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, among others, could not ignore the impact of Gandhian ideology. Anand alludes to the vast popularity of 'Gandhi in Untouchable' (1935). In this novel, Gandhi touches the innermost part of Bakha's soul, and the audience at the village gathering feels that the Mahatma has made Hindu and Mussulman one. K.A. Abbas refers to Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, Salt Satyagraha and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in his novel 'Inqilab' (1955).

R.K. Narayan's "Waiting for Mahatma" (1955) and Raja Rao's "Kanthapura" (1938) are intermingled with Gandhian ideology. "Waiting for Mahatma" presents a living portrait of Mahatma Gandhi as a great leader who is so concerned with even the personal problems of ordinary men and woman, at the same time "Kanthapura" is, however, a remarkable rendering of India's struggle for independence which affected even the remotest villages in the country. Both novelists enhance their novels through the usage of the same theme, even though both novels are thematically similar, their representation of novels is different in some aspects. Raja Rao elevates the Gandhian movement to a mythological plane. Raja Rao's mythic design is more effective than that of several other

Indian novelists writhing in English.” In “Kanthapura” Raja Rao was not concerned with the depiction of life of any particular individual but the life of the people of a village called Kanthapura, but in “Waiting for Mahathma R.K.Narayan mainly concerned with a particular character and his Gandhian thoughts. Gandhi has so highly influenced these two writers that not only their novels reveal the Gandhian quality but their characters also personify Gandhi. Raja Rao's character Moorthy in 'Kanthapura' projects the image of Gandhi and RK.Narayan's character Sriram in 'Waiting for Mahathma' depicted as Gandhian follower. RK.Narayan reveals various aspects of Gandhi in this novel through this character. For instance, by taking the theme of the Quit India Movement, non-violence etc. Raja Rao reflects the image of Gandhi, the leader and Gandhi, the Mahatma, through the character Moorthy in 'Kanthapura'.

The Gandhian phase of the anti-colonial movement for India's freedom finds frequent expression in literary representations of the period. There was large-scale support among Indians for Gandhi's intervention in the civil disobedience and Quit India movements. There were many who were impressed by the aspects of the British presence in India and Narayan's own writing came to depend heavily on patronage by British publishers and readers. Kanthapura and Malgudi are the well known villages in Indian fiction. Mahathma Gandhi walked through the mind of the people of Kanthapura to the street of Malgudi.

Waiting for the Mahatma:

RK.Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma was written in 1955, about seven years after the assassination of Gandhi. The contemporary writing of the period, irrespective of the medium of Hindi, English or any other regional language bear the imprint of Gandhian ideology. Raja Rao's Kanthapura(1938) and Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable(1935) and other works centre around Gandhian ideology. RK.Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma examines the influence of Gandhi on an average Indian. Sriram, the protagonist in the novel is representative of the middle class Indians with his faults.

Moreover, the Gandhian movement was not only a political movement. It was a movement that, for the first time in Indian history, generated and raised social issues. The ferment that Gandhian thought touched on issues that affected man as a whole in various stages of life. More importantly, it made Indian men and women aware of themselves. It is this sense of awareness that revolutionized Indians and made them seek their national as also their individual identity. It is Gandhian thought that brought the colonial encounter to the fore. It is in this social situation created by Gandhian thought that Narayan, like other contemporary novelists, found his subject matter. For Narayan the end is art, but the spirit remains naturally political. He achieves his end through characterization but his characters derive their authenticity from the socio-political scene of the 1930s and 1940s in India. His major preoccupation as a novelist is with this social scene. Although the social problems in his novels belong to the realm of manners and conventions, his characters are viewed in the context of and in relationship to these social problems.

Of course, the impact of Gandhian thought on Narayan is not of the same kind as it is on Raja Rao for example. His values include moral uprightness, truthfulness, and other issues that cover man's life in all areas like social, economical, educational and political also.

Waiting for the Mahatma is the only novel of Narayan which places Gandhi at the centre of the text. The novel is not a favourite with a majority of critics. William Walsh praised Waiting for the Mahatma as “a rare piece of triumph” in which the genius of Mahatma is exquisitely projected. Though the novel is based on the Sriram-Bharati love story, the Mahatma remains in the background. Narayan has been careful enough to give the Mahatma neither a minor role nor a major role but to keep him in the whole background of the novel.

In all the five parts of the novel, Gandhiji remains an influential and magnetic personality. Here Narayan has given a realistic picture of Gandhiji’s contribution to the Indian freedom struggle, his ideology of truth, non-violence, his love for untouchables, and spinning on the ‘charkha’. Gandhiji’s first meeting in the novel begins with a mighty choral chant. “raghupathi ragav raja ram, patitha pavan seethe ram”.

Narayan focuses on Gandhian concerns in the novel. Gandhi fought against the evil or religious fanaticism and communalism. After independence when Bengal, Bihar and Delhi are caught in the grip of communal riots, Gandhi personally visits these places and forces people to take the vows of non-violence and protection against the rival group. Bharati tells Sriram that “Bapu forbade us to refer to anyone in terms of religion as Muslims, Hindu, or Sikh, but just as human beings. Gandhi never approved of the shortcomings of Hinduism such as cast system, ritualism, superstitions etc. He always baked universal truths that have a lasting value. To practice truth, the cardinal principle of Gandhism, one needs exemplary courage. “Says anything, he will not mind it, as long as you speak the truth.”

R.K. Narayan has successfully depicted the Gandhi and his Movement in Waiting for the Mahatma. Though he appears at a few places in the novel, but the novelist has been able to make his presence felt everywhere. He has depicted his love for the untouchables. His love for children, his love for the suffering humanity, his principle of non-violence, his call for Quit India, his Dandi March and his peace mission during the Hindu-Muslim riots at the partition, in a simple and realistic way. He has also shown Mahatma’s anxieties about the suffering women after the riots through the character of Bharti.

Gandhian Ideology and its Influence:

If the humanistic aspect of Gandhian thought influenced R.K. Narayan’s treatment of social problems in his novels, it is the spiritual and metaphysical aspect of it that shaped Rao’s creative vision. The difference between Narayan and Rao is clear, Narayan continues to explore in each of his novels man’s relationship to society, Rao progresses from the humanistic stand point to the spiritual and metaphysical, to man’s relationship to the ultimate reality according to the vedantic metaphysical concept. In this regard, Rao’s Brahmanic intellectual background could not be ignored. Moreover, it is in the light of his understanding of the people of India and in terms of the mobilisation and circulation of Gandhian ideology among these people, that Rao registers this impact.

It is relevant at this point to discuss briefly the connection between Gandhi’s ideas and the traditional, religious, folk culture of India. With better understanding of his countrymen, Gandhi is the first Indian national leader to realize that it was impossible to revolutionize them without drawing upon the resources of their religion. He, therefore, invoked the traditional Indian culture with a view to presenting a contrast to the contemporary Indo-British Civilization, a culture with confused identity that obtained in

the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century India. Traditional India was religious India. Gandhi was no dichotomy between religion and politics.

Kanthapura was published in 1938 but it was only after the publication of Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* that he was catapulted into international fame. In course of time, the novel came to be recognised as a classic of Indo-Anglian fiction. *Kanthapura* deals with the Gandhi Movement and its impact on a small village called Kanthapura. The novel depicts the early phase of India's freedom struggle when the Civil Disobedience Movement was at its height. It concerns itself with the Gandhian ideology such as non-violent, non-cooperating movements of 1919-22 and 1930-31 and its impact on the social and political life of the country.

The novel begins with the description of the village and its surroundings and village life is depicted very vividly and realistically. The narrator describes the exact location of this village called Kanthapura. Raja Rao had kneaded the pertinent social customs and conventions in the main dough of the theme so skilfully that one does not feel that one is reading any extraneous material. For instance, the dress of Indian men and women and the social customs of Indian widows keeping shaven head are simply mentioned.

In south India coffee is a common beverage and is served in metal cups. Important guests are served in silver cups. Saris, being one piece of cloth, Indian women carry small things tied to their sari fringes. These examples show how a number of details about Indian social life which could not be incorporate in the novel otherwise have been fused in such a surreptitious manner that the picture of Indian life becomes complete. Through small hints we come to know about the life style and habits of villagers and the way they judge things. They are ignorant and simple people. They are uneducated, superstitious and deeply religious.

Kanthapura dominated by the freedom movement and its impact.. Foreign clothes were rejected and there were bonfires every day, colleges and universities were boycotted by students. Most of the Indian bureaucrats resigned from their positions. Moreover alcohol was also prohibited because the poor people used to waste their hard earned wages in buying alcohol. The British government issued many repressive laws. Gandhi himself organised many demonstrations. One of them was the Dandi March. Salt laws were violated. All these facts are referred to in *Kanthapura* the novel of Raja Rao.

If we examine the current circumstances in India, we can find that Gandhian impact and his ideology is becoming more and more powerful. Gandhian ideologies are powerful tools for Gandhian way of struggle.

Conclusion:

Gandhian way of struggle not only belongs to a particular era or a particular country, and it is neither belongs to a particular person nor a particular group, but it is universal. If we examine some current demonstrations in India we can find Gandhian way of struggle is still relevant and it was not outdated, many people still following Gandhian way of struggle and Gandhian ideologies. Gandhian impact not only influenced Indian Writings, but it has influenced political and social aspects of India. Many political and social leaders have been following Gandhian principles and his ideology. Many social leaders have used Gandhian ideologies to fight against social evilness and corruptions in present India.

Gandhi was against all social evilness and he used his own principles to abolish all social evilness.

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