

## **Gandhian Impact in Indian English Novel: A Study of the Select Novels**

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### **Abstract:**

*Mahatma Gandhi struggled for the sake of Indian freedom and development. 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. Indian English literature has great impact of Gandhian philosophy. The great Indian trio- R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao has explored Gandhian thoughts in their novels. 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 impact in R.K. Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma, Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable and Raja Rao's Kanthapura. Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma portrays Gandhi as a great leader who is deeply connected with the problems of ordinary people. In Anand's Untouchable Gandhi's views give a hope to the downtrodden for a good life. And at the same time, Rao's Kanthapura shows influence of Gandhi's struggle for Independence and its impact on the people of a small village called Kanthapura.*

**Key Words:** Downtrodden, Gandhi, Impact, Leader, Untouchability.

Mahatma Gandhi is not only a universal figure but also an immoral one. 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 Indian freedom and development. 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. According to K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger:

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 (101).

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'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 in fusing reality with fantasy. He mingles his personal philosophy and views in his literary work successfully. He was deeply influenced by Gandhism. His treatment of Gandhian thought in his fiction is different. His work highlights the multifarious facets of Gandhism. His characters are Gandhians in their own particular ways. His novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* has reflection of Gandhian philosophy in great amount. It was written in 1955, after the seven years of Gandhi's assassination. Sriram is the protagonist of the novel who propagates Gandhian views and advocates the Gandhian philosophy as a way of life. This novel places Gandhi 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 in the beginning of the novel who lives with his grandmother in Malgudi. His life gets its meaning when he first sees Bharti, disciple of Gandhi. He falls in love with her and goes to attend Gandhian camp in order 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 apparently Bharti and Sriram's romance which, however, gains a new dimension in the background of their common allegiance to Mahatma (372).

When he hears Gandhi's speech, he feels the need to change his life style. His meeting with Gandhiji 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 Gandhiji, Gorpad. Gorpad adds new dimensions to his knowledge and tells him the aims and object of the Gandhian spirit. He visits famine affected area and helps people. His passion for Gandhi 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" (83). When he sees Mahatma's love for the underdogs 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 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 Gandhiji. Sriram comes in his contact and starts assisting him in his extremist activities.

But soon Sriram realizes that by destroying things and following non-violence they cannot throw the British rule from India. He feels that Gandhi's non-violent weapon was superior to the violent weapon. His Gandhism fails after an initial fervor and zeal. He could not fulfill 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 (127-28).

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 shot Gandhi dead.

Mulk Raj Anand's works reveal prominently the deep influence of Gandhian ideology. He has emphasized more and more on social problems of 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, casteism, 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 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 from 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 behavior of people towards the lower class. He gets peace of mind when he hears Gandhi talking about the welfare of untouchables. His speech gives him a hope for the better future. In his speech Gandhiji 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.... (136)

Innocent Bakha did not understand these words in the beginning and got confused. But soon he got the meaning when Gandhi says; "*I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism*" (137). He feels that at least someone is there for him and his class. He gets fully influenced by Gandhi 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...*" (140).

But soon all his hopes are seemed broken when N.N. Bashir, a Barrister-in-law criticizes Gandhi and his philosophy. He calls Gandhi humbug. But Bashir, a young poet who edits Nawan Jung comes forward favoring Gandhian philosophy. He says:

He has his limitations but he is fundamentally sound. He may be wrong in wanting to shut India off from the rest of the world by preaching the revival 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! ... (142)

He tells Bakha about the invention of flush system. It gives a ray of hope to the disappointed 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 careless society*" (146). The novel ends with the hope of the better life of the untouchables.

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* was published in 1938. It deals with the Gandhian impact on a small village called Kanthapura. 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 in order 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 city where he gets familiar with Gandhian philosophy. He follows Gandhi 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 believe in Gandhain philosophy can be seen when Bade khan hits him. He does not react on it and follow the principal 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. Rangmma 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 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 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 Gandhiji 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 Stayagraha 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 analyzing how Gandhian philosophy influenced the Indian writing in English. Gandhi's aim was to eliminate poverty, castism, untouchability and superstitions which were prominent that time along with India's freedom. He believed that 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 his views on untouchability. *Waiting for the Mahatma* portrays Gandhi as a great leader who is deeply connected with the problems of ordinary people. In *Untouchable* his views give a hope for a good life for the downtrodden. And at the same time *Kanthapura* shows influence of Gandhi's struggle for India's Independence and its impact on the people of a small village.

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**Rishi A. Thakar, Asst. Professor & Head, Department Of English, Aroma College Of Commerce, Ahmedabad.**