



Impact of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian English Literature : In Special Reference to the Selected Novels of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi was the most influential leader in the Indian national movement for its independence and upliftment of the society and politics with the Indian perennial ideological values like truth and non-violence. He was himself a prolific writer who had impacted numerous writers and academicians who worked on his life on a variety of topics, including history, politics, philosophy, literature, sociology, and so on. He had an important role as a focal point in their writings as he had a great impact in the shaping of Indian history after his return from South Africa. Gandhiji made use of a unique strategy to oppose the deep rooted British Raj in India with the help of his conviction in the concepts of nonviolence and Satyagraha. His Satyagraha is motivated by an inexhaustible love and compassion for others. It stands in opposition to sin and everything that is bad. Many living litterateurs like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K Narayan have depicted his impact on the Indian psyche in rising against the Raj and social evils prevalent in Indian society. The man known as Mahatma Gandhi was a truth-teller, and he despises those who tell lies. The novels written by these illustrious authors are excellent examples of how these ideals advocated by Gandhiji may be put into practise. In some capacity or the other, the protagonists of these works bear the impact of Mahatma Gandhi or his worldview. For instance, R.K. Narayan carves a role for Mahatma Gandhi as a character to play in the novel titled "Waiting for the Mahatma". A character in the novel named Bharati follows Gandhiji's footsteps as one of his disciples. Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The English Teacher (1945), Waiting for Mahatma (1955), and The Vendor of Sweets (1967) are the novels written by R.K. Narayan that took place in his fictional village of Malgudi, and all these novels bring out the impact Mahatma left on common men. Mulkraj Anand's "Untouchable" is the story of Bakha and his clan, who suffer in Bulashah, a small North Indian town, and it depicts the ray of hope in the lives of these untouchables that comes with the speech of Mahatma and their belief in his words. Raja Rao's "Kanthapura" also depicts the impact of Gandhi in remote South Indian town Kanthapura, where the small villagers hardly knew Hindi or English, but they are filled with the trust in his leadership and ready to follow his ideals. These books were all published between 1935 and 1967. The purpose of this study is to analyse some of the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao in the context of this background, and the conclusion is that his writings serve as a panorama for the next generation, allowing them to know Gandhi in his whole.

Keywords: *Gandhian ideology, impact of non-violence and truth, Indian Writing in English, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan., Raja Rao, novels.*

INTRODUCTION

Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), written by R.K. Narayan (1906-2001), is considered to be the author's most politically charged work. Narayan is widely regarded as one of the pioneers of South Asian writing in English. The novel was published eight years after the partition of India. Narayan in this novel presents the Mahatma as a real character, depicting different dimensions of his political and philosophical ideologies. Although some of his contemporary novelists, such as Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, brought an image or presence of Gandhi in their respective novels, such as *Untouchable* (1935) and *Kanthapura* (1938), Narayan is the only author to present Gandhi as a real character. When one considers the vibrancy and vivacity of Mahatma the person, attempting to portray him as a character in a work of fiction is undoubtedly a significant challenge. The story presents a number of different interpretations of Gandhi over its pages.

The portrayal of Gandhi, on the other hand, is up to interpretation by the readers since Narayan, who was not a politically dedicated storyteller, left it up to them. Gandhi was not an ordinary philosopher since he was both a political thinker and a man of action. His life was an embodiment of his philosophy, which he put into practise by guiding his people, the Indians, toward the development of particular moral characteristics in order to fight British colonisation. During his time spent in South Africa between the years 1893 and 1914, where he was subjected to racial brutality and persecution, his philosophical ideas began to take shape. After spending 1908 in London as a member of the Indian Delegation, he authored the book *Hind Swaraj* (1909) in Gujarati while he was travelling back to South Africa on the ship. The book was released the following year and its English translation was published in 1910. In this book, he outlined his political theory by coining the word "Satyagraha" and providing an explanation of its meaning. The book, which was written in the form of questions and answers, was a response to "the Indian school of violence and its prototype in South Africa" (Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* 13), which advocated for the attainment of national independence through the use of acts of violence in retaliation for the violence committed by colonial authorities. In response to this, Gandhi resolved to adhere to a nonviolent approach to politics throughout the entirety of his life, regardless of the conditions. He continued by providing an explanation, saying, "I got into contact with every known Indian anarchist in London. Their boldness left an impression on me, but I couldn't help but feel that their enthusiasm was misplaced. My impression was that violence was not the answer to India's problems, and that the country's advanced civilization necessitated the employment of a new and more potent kind of self-defense". Importantly, Gandhi saw that violence was one of the social or national maladies that would lead to an increase in violence, division, disorder, and discrimination and would not deliver genuine freedom to Indians.

In this light, the purpose of the article is to argue that the current disordered world needs to be aware of the values of 'ahimsa, satyagraha, and nonviolent resistance' by conducting an analysis of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Narayan's novels. This is done in order to make the point that Gandhi's philosophical ideas and actions continue to have relevance even today. The current study is now comprised of two distinct parts. The first part of this work comprises of the most important political and philosophical ideas that Mahatma Gandhi had propounded. These ideas are collected mostly from his own writings and activities during the independence struggle in India. The second section presents a textual analysis of the chosen novels to evaluate how far, how elaborately, and how authentically his philosophical, ideological, and political concepts are presented in the text. This evaluation is done in the context of determining how well the novel conveys the author's ideas. In order to accomplish this, we

will look into his speeches, his activities, the attitudes of his followers towards his views and acts, and the general reactions of Gandhian philosophy among the ordinary people. This will be done with reference to the novels.

The Indian English authors who worked in colonial India throughout the twentieth century are often considered to be the "ambassadors" of Mahatma Gandhi, his ideology, and of course, his fight to win independence for India. The teachings of Mahatma Gandhi have been disseminated around the world by many authors. Novelists like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, and Mulk Raj Anand through their novels and short tales have tried to depict the impact of Mahatma. Through the works that they produced, these authors played an important part in the development of a concept of "nationalism." They adhered to the Gandhian way of life, which places a strong emphasis on nonviolence, Satyagraha, love, simplicity, and other topics including societal problems. Gandhi served as a source of motivation for them, and they contrasted his outlook on life with those of Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis. All of these authors absorbed the ideas of Gandhi, and they looked to Gandhi for the driving, moral force that they needed.

The novel 'Waiting for the Mahatma' by R. K. Narayan is all about the indulgence of Mahatma Gandhi in the movement for Indian independence. Despite the fact that the book was published in 1955, the events, storylines, and characters all lead us to believe that it is a Gandhian novel. In the novel, Gandhi appears as a character in several of the chapters. The novel provides a comprehensive analysis of Mahatma Gandhi's life, focusing on his battles, political figures, and philosophical beliefs. The story creates a connection between the everyday people of India and the leaders of the Indian independence movement. The leading characters Sriram and Bharti are presented to the reader right at the beginning of the book. As things continue to evolve, their relationship with Gandhian philosophy and their participation in liberation movements grows and becomes more intertwined. Gandhi painstakingly brought people together on a single platform to fight for Indian independence through the practise of nonviolence, like in Narayan's portrayal of him in the novel, where Narayan writes the impression of Gandhi upon the listeners in the crowd in these words: "At this moment, Mahatmaji ascended the platform, and Sriram hastily took his eyes off the ladies and joined in the hand clapping with well-timed devotion, and then in the singing of Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram. Afterwards, Gandhi gave a speech about nonviolence and described how it might be implemented in day-to-day life. As long as you have confidence in the process, it is a really straightforward activity. If you feel that you have been wronged or that someone else has done anything that you consider to be bad, all you need to do is pray for the annihilation of that evil. You will discover that you have the ability to influence a change in the individual if you cultivate an increased amount of affection for that person. When Jesus Christ said the phrase "Turn the other cheek" two thousand years ago, he was referring to the same concept."

In his speech, not only Bharti and Sriram, but also the self-centered Chairman of the Municipal Committee, Natesh Kumar, found themselves following the path of truth and nonviolence when he goes to a public gathering at Nallappa's Grove in Malgudi and listens to Gandhi's exhortation to practise nonviolence in order to persuade the British to leave India. This experience has a profound impact on Natesh Kumar. When Natesh Kumar learns that Gandhi encourages Indians to refrain from harbouring any animosity toward the British, he is taken aback but reverses the idea. This is Mahatma Gandhi's one-of-a-kind strategy, which he used in all of the campaigns he led, including the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Dandi March, the Champaran Movement, the Khilafat Movement, and eventually the "Quit India Movement." Gandhi's primary goal was to achieve nonviolence in all of its forms. This was the Mahatma's biggest asset in terms of strength. Both Bharti and Sriram agree to support and follow

him in this endeavour. Another revolutionary action that Gandhi performed was to demand for the elimination of the caste system which was prevalent in Indian society. Not only was he a freedom warrior, but he was also a social reformer who fought against all of the terrible practises that were common in the contemporary Indian society.

Gandhi himself evolved into a model icon of uncomplicated living. If he preached something, he did start it first with himself. He would initiate in doing menial tasks like cleaning the sewage and the toilet, washing his own cloth, and manufacturing his own cloth on a handloom that was often referred to as a "Charkha." Narayan has fictionalised him to have travelled in the famine-stricken villages close to Malgudi, which provided a glimmer of hope to hundreds of farmers who were suffering. Narayan's fictional Malgudi becomes any small South Indian town and he enlivens it with all his observed and imagined incidents, that may prevail in the society. Mahatma Gandhi was a staunch opponent of the caste system as well as the untouchability prevalent in the time. When Mahatmaji spoke of untouchability and caste in his speech delivered in Malgudi, Sriram reflected, "There must be a great deal in what he says. That ragged scavenger who comes to our house every day to clean the backyard is subjected to constant harassment by Granny. As Granny adhered to strict orthodox moral standards, she would not allow the scavenger to go any closer than 10 yards to her, and she would routinely talked to him in a condescending manner. Sriram never gave the tiniest bit of consideration to the scavengers' feedback, and to put it in a candid way, he got a perverse kind of delight in taking part in the baiting and finding fault with the job that they had done. He would observe the menial worker going about his task as usual, pushing his broom with great effort, and the only time he broke his train of thought was to inquire, "When will master give me an old shirt he promised me so many years ago?" This kind of self analysis generated in a person demonstrates Gandhi's care for the Harijans. All of these considerations motivated Sriram, along with hundreds of thousands of other Srirams all over India, which contributed to Gandhi's achievement in effectively leading the struggle for the emancipation of poor untouchable underdogs.

R. K. Narayan has portrayed Gandhi as someone who became a source of inspiration as well as a ray of hope and support for millions of people who were penniless and socially ignored. The history of colonial India in the 20th century is portrayed in 'Waiting for the Mahatma' in a hypothetical form that can easily be seen in this novel. Through the fictional character of Gandhi in the novel, R. K. Narayan was able to successfully bring awareness to the historical figure Mahatma Gandhi, who travelled all the way from South Africa to India to protest against the treatment of Indians at the hands of the British. The relationship between Sriram and Bharti has been used throughout the novel as a vehicle for conveying the milieu of the times, which is the political climate of colonial India.

Another prominent figure in Indian English literature is Raja Rao, who lived during the same time period as R. K. Narayan. The year 1938 saw the publication of his debut novel, Kanthapura. There have been references made to three distinct kinds of experiences throughout this book: the political, the religious, and the social. The influence of Gandhian ideology and his fight for the independence of India can be found throughout the book. In contrast to 'Waiting for the Mahatma', Raja Rao's 'Kanthapura' does not have a character who assumes the role of Gandhi; nonetheless, Gandhi's virtual presence, his views, and a significant number of his ideological allies can be found throughout the book. This book is all about rural India, specifically an obscure Indian town called Kanthapura, and how its residents are inspired by the ideas of Gandhi and his movement for Indian independence, although they hardly understand Hindi. Moorthy, a young villager who is greatly influenced by Gandhi, is the main

character of the novel and serves as its protagonist. "The impact of Gandhi on our villages was the impact of a dynamic religion through one of its supreme practitioners; of idealism and a sense of purpose and urgency on a people who had virtually ceased to live, with resignation written large on their faces," C.D. Narasimhaiah writes in the introductory note to 'Kanthapura'. It is a testament to Gandhi's grandeur that he was able to inspire hundreds of younger followers across the country.

At a very young age, Moorthy joined the movement, despite the fact that he was a devoted disciple of Gandhi and his philosophical ideas. He is of the firm belief that the Gandhian philosophy of truth and nonviolence is the correct one. The novel *Kanthapura* is not only about the struggles of Mahatma Gandhi to make India free from the brutal regime of the British, but it is also about Gandhi's concept of how to cater to the complex problems of lingering poverty, illiteracy, and inequality in the society. The novel was written in the early 20th century. There is no doubt that Gandhiji was the leader of the movement for Indian independence; however, after reading *Kanthapura* and even Gandhi's own autobiography, one can easily believe in how Gandhiji worked significantly more toward the improvement of the social, economic, cultural, and political state of India's rural areas. The point of view is supported by the fact that he was working to strengthen the economy of rural areas by fostering khadi and village industries. According to Raja Rao, Gandhi Ji had a strong aversion to the drinking of toddy and liquor by the average people living in rural areas. His pleading was considered to be the message of the God. People in *Kanthapura* and the surrounding areas began making oaths in his honour that they would abstain from drinking toddy and liquor. Traditional songs of the people were written by themselves:

"Our king, he was born on a wattle-mat, and he ruled over us all."

He is not the master of the opulent velvet bed.

He's not very big, but he's spherical, and he shines brightly, and he's holy.

You are our king, and we are your servants, Mahatma. O, Mahatma, Mahatma.

The foam on top of the toddy, the toddy, is white.

And the Mahatma will transform venom into sweetness with perfect clarity.

The colour white will turn blue, and the colour black will turn white.

To my brothers and sisters, my dearest friends,

The tree known as the toddy-tree is a crooked one.

The toddy milk, on the other hand, is scorpion milk.

When will you arrive, O King, when will you arrive?"

All of these things are a reflection of Gandhi's influence on the people of India and Indian English authors. Raja Rao was one of the Indian writers who was highly influenced by the charismatic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi

and who made use of Mahatma's impact on Indian psyche. In his novel 'Kanthapura', we see evidence of the influence of Gandhian philosophy. This influence was significant enough for Raja Rao to portray Gandhi as a social reformer in his works. And Gandhi's movements helped him achieve his dual goal of making India free by uniting people from all walks of life on a single platform of nationalism and bettering the economic, social, and political condition of rural India. He did this by bringing people from all walks of life together at a single platform of nationalism.

Therefore, 'Kanthapura' bears a practical impact of Gandhi on the people of rural South India, encouraging them to renounce all forms of harmful practises, join forces to fight for a greater cause, and acknowledge Gandhi ji as their saviour.

Another prominent Indian author who wrote novels in English, Mulk Raj Anand was a supporter of the Gandhian socio-political philosophy. His novel, "Untouchable," had a significant influence of the Gandhian philosophy of "untouchability," including its origin, its effect on society, and Gandhi's simultaneous efforts to eradicate all such evils from society. All of these aspects are carefully described in the novel. The concept of societal inequity based on casteism is also explored in 'Untouchable'. Bakha, the protagonist of the story, eloquently symbolises millions of underprivileged and oppressed people in India via his experiences throughout the novel.

Mulk Raj Anand has demonstrated the brutality that the caste system has shown towards the Dalit society. They were called "untouchable," which sparked in Mulk Raj Anand an anguish to become the voice of millions of people who were considered "untouchable" by the so called upper classes. According to Anand, members of higher castes of the Hindu religion, known as Brahmin, preyed and victimized the members of lower classes. Anand makes a recording of a famous speech given by Mahatma Gandhi in which he discusses the rights of untouchables. In the speech, Mahatma Gandhi 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 regarding these individuals is one of moral and theological significance. The Mahatma is quoted as stating, "I see untouchability as the biggest stain on Hinduism."

Bakha, an uneducated and oppressed Indian, can hardly comprehend what Gandhi intended to convey on the untouchable caste system and what his goals were for the people of India who had been forgotten by society but he finally came to the realisation that Gandhi was his saviour. Bakha comes to the realisation that there is a person who speaks up openly in support of Bakha and the community he lives in. The part of Gandhi's speech when he says, "Two of the strongest desires that keep me in the body are the liberation of the Untouchables and the preservation of the cow," leaves him with a profound sense of awe and admiration.

Bakha's admiration for Gandhi wanes as the well-known advocate and poet N.N. Bashir expresses scepticism regarding Gandhi and the philosophy he promoted. Later on, Bashir comes around to the idea of the Gandhian worldview and embraces the Gandhian way of life, saying, "He has his limits, but he is essentially correct. It's possible that he has the incorrect idea when he wants to cut India off from the rest of the world by preaching the resuscitation of the spinning-wheel, especially given the current state of affairs, which makes this goal impossible to achieve. However, even with reference to it, he is correct. Because it is not India's fault that it is impoverished; rather, it is the fault of the rest of the world that the rest of the world is wealthy."

CONCLUSION

The Mahatma did not pass away after all. A person's physical death does not mean that he has lost his soul. In post-colonial India, Mahatma Gandhi is often regarded as the most inspirational figure. He never stopped preaching about the need of brotherhood and humanity. The Mahatma had a significant effect on not only the Indian National Movement, but his ideas of non-violence as a tool for political resistance against oppression and discrimination got global recognition and could influence several global movements such as the liberation movement led by Martin Luther King in the United States and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. All his endeavours for the independence of India and towards the cultivation of our Nation had deep impact on the leading litterateurs, and his image and influence is seen in innumerable works of literature. The Indian National Movement is comprised of a number of different movements, including the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Quit India Movement, and the Salt Tax Movement. The ideas of Gandhi hold a great significance even for today's younger generation. In the 21st century, Mahatma Gandhi continues to have an impact on a variety of spheres, including the media, society, politics, tradition, custom, and commerce; and his ideals, values and herculean tasks for rebuilding of the nation establish his image of an unbelievable leader who waked the nation with his simple yet firm voice.

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