

MAHATMA GANDHI - A LITERARY AND SPIRITUAL MENTOR

SURABHI VARMA¹ & S. M. P. N. S. SHAHI²

¹Department of English, T. M. Bhagalpur University, Bhagalpur, Bihar, India

²P.G. Department of English, Ranchi University, Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi, during the fateful years of India's struggle for independence, dominated the Indian national scene, and Gandhian strategies and approaches shaped the course of India's destiny. Gandhi's image, his personality and his philosophy influenced millions of people in India, including a large number of poets, novelists, and other men of sensibility. They regarded him as their literary and spiritual mentor.

KEYWORDS: Gandhian Revolution, Strategies, Philosophies

INTRODUCTION

The image of Gandhi is more or less the same in the mind and heart of almost all of us, and the Indian writers in English are no exception. This image has been manifested in a number of novels and short stories written by them, not in the literal sense but in a metaphorical sense, in the sense of Gandhian influence. 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. The impact of Mahatma Gandhi on Indo-Anglian fiction is beyond the fictional representation of his own image and philosophy. He gave a new direction for Indian writers in matters of both style and subject-matter.

ELABORATION

Gandhi has inspired a whole library of books in various languages – books describing his life, discussing his ideas, and the books of creative literature. Gandhi's insistence on truth in literature and his pragmatic approach pioneered realism in fiction. The vogue of writing historical romances, adventure or mystery novels or those dealing with exotic religious cults, came to an end. Instead, the novelist turned to the living reality of the contemporary socio-political scene for inspiration. Gandhi's message of peace and nonviolence, his ethical idealism and the saint-like austerity of his personal life, counter-balanced the foreign influences and awakened among Indian writes a new sense of national pride and purpose.

Mulk Raj Anand, a renowned Indo-Anglian novelist himself, writes with regard to Gandhi:

This strange man seemed to have the genius that could, by a single dramatic act, rally multi-coloured, multi-tongued India to himself.¹

To the masses, Gandhi became a legend, a tradition, and an oracle. They regarded him as an *aviator*, who descended upon the earth to destroy the monster of foreign domination and to set *Bharat-Mata* (Mother- India) free from the 'Ferungi Sarkar' (the British Government). It was this magical impact of Mahatma and his image on India's mind that captured the imagination of many Indo-Anglian novelists and inspired them to express, to reflect, or to prove his ideas,

ideals and inspired them to express, to reflect, or to probe his ideas, ideals and ideologies either directly or metaphorically, in their works.

This impact has been two-fold; first, there are his (Gandhi's) writings. Like other pioneers of Indian Renaissance, Mahatma Gandhi has written in his mother tongue, Gujarati, as well as in English. The major part of his writing, however, had to be in English, for though English alone could Gandhi reached all corners of subcontinent across the linguistic frontiers,

Secondly, he has been what we may call a writers' writer: while he produced no fictional work of his own, he inspired creativity in a number of fiction-writers. In some of the best writings in all Indian language we have his counter-signature. Mahatma Gandhi played the role of a catalyst. He brought about catalysis in Indian literature. Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar seems quite justified in considering Gandhi as a "Formative influence on writers of the time":

The personality of Mahatma Gandhi affected the people of India as powerfully as his pen. It exercises a potent influence on our language and literature, both directly through his own writings in English and Gujarati, and indirectly through his movements generated by his revolutionary thoughts and practice. The several Indian regional languages acquired a new versatility and power. No apology is needed for considering Gandhiji as a writer and as a formative influence on writers of the time.²

Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, in *The Discovery of India*, remarks:

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.

The image of Gandhi is more or less the same in the mind and heart of almost all.

Of us, and the Indian writers in English are no exception. This image is manifested in a number of novels and short stories written by them, not in the literal sense but in a metaphorical sense, in the sense of Gandhian influence. Not only in English but in other languages too the writers had been inspired by his charismatic personality and ideologies. Literary works in Hindi, Gujarati, Kannada, Assamese, Bengali, Marathi and Malayalam measures the height and fathoms the depth of his personality.

Gandhi's insistence on truth in literature and his pragmatic approach pioneered realism in fiction. The vogue of writing historical romances, adventure or mystery novels or those dealing with exotic religious cults, came to an end. Instead, the novelist turned to the living reality of the contemporary socio-political scene for inspiration. That was also the time when many young writers were beginning to feel the impact of Marx and Freud.

Gandhi's message of peace and nonviolence, his ethical idealism and the saint-like austerity of his personal life, counter-balanced these foreign influences and awakened among Indian writes a new sense of national pride and purpose.

Gandhiji's thought had its roots in his Hindu ideology thought we find in his person numerous influences of the thoughts of Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, and others. But his greatest strength lies in his utter sincerity and transparent honesty. It is possible to differ with Gandhiji's view on several controversial questions such as language- problem in India or education; but it is impossible for any reader to finish reading anything written by him and go away unimpressed

by the authenticity of his convictions. It is this authenticity that makes Gandhiji a master of English prose style, though he had no pretensions to be writer. He has himself said:

*My writings should be cremated with my body; what I have done will endure, not what I have said or written.*¹⁵

Gandhiji's words are like Gandhiji's only. He speaks like him only: the great patriot, the great humanitarian, the apostle of Ahimsa, and the prophet of Satyagraha. The change that Gandhiji effected in the prose style of Indian writing in English is his most single contribution to it. With Gandhian revolution in our political life there came about also a revolution in our writing. Gandhiji was not in sympathy with the view that our literature was absolutely autonomous and was far more inclined to make it a handmade to life. Gandhian writing was recognizably functional. The age-old Macaulayan amplitude and richness of phrasing and the weight of miscellaneous than learning were gone. Like his life itself Gandhian writing was as bare and austere, but it never lacked the fullness of fulfillment. Since the Gandhian revolution, Indian writing and speaking in English have tended to be wisely utilitarian. It has the virtues of clarity, directness and brevity rather eloquence and elaboration and exuberance.

Gandhi did not believe in the theory or 'art for art's sake', nor did he care for fictional form. He 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.*²

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