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Gandhian Values in Colonial and Post Colonial Indian English Literature

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In the beginning of 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 Bhagwat 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 Muk Raj Anand were the significant writers of this period and they were considerably influenced by the philosophy of Gandhi. Raja Rao's *Kanthpura* is testimony to this and R.K. Narayan's novels *Waiting for the Mahatma*, *The Financial Expert*, *The Vender of Sweet* and *The Guide* and clearly delineate the influence of Gandhian values, in the first the influence is seen clearly while in the last the influence is subtle.

The writer as well as common man cannot escape the social, cultural and political realities of his time. When R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao were writing, the struggle for freedom was at its peak. The people were participating in this struggle regardless of the consequences. To be imprisoned was no cause of the insult. It was rather a matter of pride. Women, children, old persons all participated in this "Mahayajaya". The story of *Waiting For The Mahatma* delineates the struggle for freedom and through the heroine Bharti and Sriram, Narayan depicts the common persons taking part in freedom struggle which forms the backdrop of romance between the two. Bharti is involved in Mahatma Gandhi's Movement. Sri ram loves her and join the movement in the course of time he comes in contact with anti British extremists and lands in jail, after coming out of the prison Bharti and Sriram are reunited. The revolutionary ideas of Mahatma Gandhi are contrasted with the conservative ideas of the locals. The locale is the same like his other novels i.e. Malgudi, the fictional town.

The influence of Gandhiji is quiet noticeable when Shiriram beleavees in the sanctity of Khadi when a shopkeeper at salour, asks Shriram to have biscuits when he purchases two plantain and a bottle of soda. He was traveling in connection with Quit India Movement. When a shopkeeper says:

"Purely English biscuits which you cannot get for miles around. In these days no one else can get them".

"have you no sense of shame?" Shriram asked

“Why ,why what is the matter?” the other said taken aback and then said, “Hey, give me the money for what you took and get out of here. You are a fellow in khadi, are you?” Oh! Oh! I didn’t notice. And so you think you can do what you like, take as you like, and behave like a rowdy”.

“You may say anything about me but don’t talk of this dress-it is – too sacred to be spoken about in that way”.

The Vender of Sweets depicts Jagan leading his life in accordance with Gandhian principles. Jagan is a man of high principles. He is proud of his son, Mali. He recites *The Bhagwad Gita* to his minions, spins the wheel. He goes by the word but not by the spirit. He thinks he is leading his life according to Gandhian principles. Later, he becomes aware of his shortcomings and tries to live by the message of *The Bhagwad Gita*. He says to his cousin “conquer taste and you will have conquered the self”, said Jagan to his listener, who asked, “why conquer the self ?” Jagan said, “I do not know but all our sages advice us so.”(7). He tries to influence Mali to lead his life according to Gandhian philosophy but to no avail. He has to bear the consequences of his karma and he lands himself in jail for drunk driving. Jagan realizes that all his life he had been chasing false ideals. He realizes that his salvation lies in realizing the ultimate truth. Jayant.K. Biswal thinks that it echoes Rosie’s idea of karma and he must suffer for his Karma(27) . Jagan may not be successful in his goal but he starts his quest for the truth. The theme of attachment and its consequences is prevalent throughout the story.

To spin, to wear Khadi, to use swdeshi things and to read *The Bhagwad Gita* all had become a part of Gandhian Philosophy and to take part in kirtan to participate in social reform activities, parbhat pheries all had become a part of struggle for freedom. Jagan firmly believes in all these things and practices these in his daily routine which his son Mali does not like. Jagan is living embodiment of Gandhian principles. *The Vender of Sweets* and *Waiting for the Mahatma* are steeped in Gandhian values. Even Jagan’s appearance and his procuring hide for his shoes described by the author clearly demonstrate the influence of Gandhi ji.

He wore a loose jibba over his dhoti ,both made of material spun with his own hands; everyday he spun for an hour, retained enough yarn for his sartorial requirements (he never possessed more than two sets of cloths at a time), and delivered all the excess in neat bundle to the local handloom committee in exchange for cash. Although the cash he thus earned was less than five rupees a month he felt a sentimental thrill in receiving it, as he had begin the habit when Gandhi visited the town over twenty years ago, and he had been commended for it(page 9).

And the process of procuring hide is described in following lines;

He draped his shoulders in a khaddar shawl... and shod his feet with thick sandals made out of the leather of an animal which had died of old age . Being a follower of Gandhi , he explained, “I don’t like to think that a living creature should have its throat cut for the comfort of my feet.(page 9)

The protagonist in *The Guide* and *The Financial Expert* are attracted by materialist galore of money. Margyya of *The Financial Expert* does whatever he can to earn wealth. His mad pursuit of wealth cannot give him satisfaction. The story line of the novel conforms to the truth that wealth and the fulfillment in life are not directly proportional to each other. Sometimes renunciation of worldly good can also help one achieve peace of mind. The main aim of his life had been the well being of his son and the wealth he earned through fraudulent means turned out to be performing the exactly opposite function. Gandhi ji was influenced by *The Bhagwad Gita* to a great extent and he always advocated that person need to lead his life according to the principles propounded in *The Bhagwad Gita*. The right action is very important in life and Margyya discovers this only after his financial collapse.

The Financial Expert actually is not financial sound when the novel ends. He is poor in the beginning and end of the novel, but he has learnt his lesson towards the end of the novel. The wealth is important on to the extent when it helps one to fulfill the necessities of life. Otherwise it itself becomes only an obsession. One cannot use it for the well being of others obsessed by the idea of collecting and hoarding it only for his own satisfaction. It ultimately leads to the undoing of a person. The excessive attachment to wealth leads to one's downfall. According to ancient wisdom of India and Margyya suffers the same fate, he however, comes out of the test fully chastened. The self realization not in spiritual sense but in worldly sense at least, puts some sense into his head and he is really to behave sensibly. He decides to lead his life based on religious and cultural values of India.

Raju of *The Guide* leads his life in materialistic pursuit of wealth in the beginning and he is fairly successful. He wants full satisfaction of his senses and in this process takes advantage of chink in conjugal life of Marco and Rosie, he seduces Rosie and establishes illicit relation with her. He is not troubled by any guilty conscious that he was having an affair with another man's wife but the basic goodness of his nature asserts itself towards the end is essentially religious in character. Every religious endorses some spiritual values.

Kanthpura a unique novel by Raja Rao written in the tradition of legendary history is narrated by Achakka a wise woman in the village. The Village Goddess Kenchamma and Lord Siva are remembered and story of *Kanthpura*'s transformation under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi is related. It is traditional caste ridden village of India where Brahmins have an upper hand the chief protagonist Moorthy, a Brahmin, discovers a 'linga' and a temple is built more. The traditional Hari Katha session is used by Jayaramachar to narrate Harikatha based on Gandhi and he is arrested. Moorthy leaves for the city gets familiar with Gandhian philosophy, follows Gandhian philosophy in letter and spirit, wears home spun khadi, discards foreign clothes and fights against untouchability. A village priest turns against him and complains to the swami, a supporter of foreign Govt.. He is excommunicated. But he is not deterred. Then Bade Khan, a police officer is brought in *Kanthpura* to subdue people. Moorthy is supported of non-violence. He is invited by the clerk to create awareness among the coolies of coffee estate. Bade Khan resorts to atrocities. The coolies stand by Moorthy but Moorthy is accused of creating disturbance in the village. The background of Indian freedom struggle and Dandi March are in full focus. Moorthy is sent to prison and the educated widow with whom Moorthy lived (Rangamma) leads freedom struggle in his absence. The atrocities on women become the everyday routine and the villagers of *Kanthpura* leave the village and settle at Kashipura.

Several novelists have exploited the magical touch of Gandhi's name and presence into their novels. In the novel *Waiting For The Mahatma* Gandhi's name is not used in background. He plays major role from beginning to the end. The influence of Gandhi is spread in the novel from beginning to the end in *Kanthapura* of Raja Rao, it is clear from the following example:-

“Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai !” he rang the bell and spoke to them of spinning and ahimsa Truth. And then he asked, “Who among you will join the panchayat?” and the voices came from the Sudra Corner and the pariah corner and the Brahmin corner and the weavers' corner and to each one of them he said, “ stand before the god and vow you will never break the law...”

In *Untouchable* Mulk Raj Anand gives Gandhi a place towards the end. According to K.R. Srinivasa Gandhi is too big to be given a minor part; on the other hand, he is sure to turn the novel into a biography if he is given a major or a central part. The best thing according to him for the contemporary novelist would be to make his influence felt indirectly (372).

Mulk Raj Anand has delineated the plight of a person belonging to lower caste in his novel. Gandhi ji was agonist the exploitation of people in the name of caste. M.R. Anand has explored various ways of abolishing this evil but the protagonist finds Gandhi's solution to the problem the most acceptable. Gandhi called these people *Harijan* which means people of God and wanted that there should be no exploitation of people. He was against the caste system. The Gandhian principles and the direct and indirect influence of his philosophy finds place into the works of these novelist and gives an aura of historical authenticity to these works

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