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## Reflection of Gandhian Principles in Indian English Novels in the Gandhian Era

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### **Abstract:**

Gandhi's political views and his philosophy have had a great impact upon many writers, especially the novelists. During 1930s and 1940s the nationalist upsurge had stirred the entire country to the roots and made acutely conscious of its present and past that filled it with new hopes for the freedom and happy future. In the Gandhian Era the themes such as the East-West conflict, nationalist consciousness, Gandhian principles, untouchability, poverty and hunger, concern for the masses and the landless poor found expression in the novels of K. S. Venkataramani, A. Madhaviah, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, K. A. Abbas and a few others. The post-Independence Indian English novel sustained its momentum which it gained during the Gandhian Age. A continuity of social realism established earlier by the big trio is visible in the modern novel. The second generation novelists Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Balachandra Rajan, Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal, Kamala Markandaya, and others have made a tremendous contribution in Indian English novel in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The objective of this paper is to explore Gandhian principles in Indian English Novels during Gandhian as well as post Gandhian Era.

**Keywords:** impact, nationalist, untouchability, momentum, contribution.

The Indian English novel has made rapid progress and decidedly taken many strides forward in the Gandhian Era. From the very beginning, most of the novelists have followed the realistic mode. The First World War instilled the nationalistic spirit in the minds of the Indians. As a result, the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi becomes all India experience. Gandhi's political views and his philosophy have had a great impact upon many writers, especially the novelists. During 1930s and 1940s the nationalist upsurge had stirred the entire

country to the roots and made acutely conscious of its present and past that filled it with new hopes for the freedom and happy future. While commenting on the self awareness of the people during these two decades, M. K. Naik in his *Twentieth Century Indian English Fiction* observes:

A society compelled into self awareness like this provides a fertile soil for fiction and it is no accident that the three major Indian English novelists – viz, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao began their career during this phase. It was in fact during this period Indian English fiction discovered some of its most significant themes such as the ordeal of the freedom struggle, East-West relationship, the communal problem and plight of the untouchables, the landless poor, the economically exploited etc. (13)

In the Gandhian Era the themes such as the East-West conflict, nationalist consciousness, Gandhian principles, untouchability, poverty and hunger, concern for the masses and the landless poor found expression in the novels of K. S. Venkataramani, A. Madhaviah, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, K. A. Abbas and a few others.

Though the novel is broadly defined as a fictitious account of human life, it is already concerned with the representation of life and reality. A novelist should have a clear perspective and awareness of the milieu which he depicts in his novels. For this purpose, the novelist employs many forms of expressions, myths and symbols which help him to invent new forms, techniques and styles, in addition to the exposure of his themes. Being the contemporaries of Joseph Conrad, Henry James and James Joyce, Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao are fairly influenced by these European novelists. They have laid more emphasis on how to say rather than on what to say by not describing the whole life, but by selecting only what was significant from Indian point of view. They convincingly prove that rootedness in reality has many versions and dimensions in the Indian English novel. Their novels which were written during Gandhian Era deal with several aspects of social reform. They interpret the real Indian world distinctive in themes, issues, treatment and temperament in their novels.

With Mulk Raj Anand's emergence as a novelist, the Indian English fiction takes a new turn in the development of social consciousness and social realism. He is a humanist and a novelist of Marxist inspiration. He is the true spokesman of the times. He has made a seminal contribution to the development of the Indian English novel as a social act in the Gandhian Age. He writes from his own experiences and the experiences of the real people. For him, the novel is



the weapon of humanism. He writes about socio-historic conditions, basically about the lower class life. His first novel, *Untouchable* (1935), depicts the plight of the untouchables. It can be treated as the first imaginative rendering of the Indian social manifesto for 'Dalit' liberation and identity. In his early novels Anand has depicted the lower class downtrodden people such as the scavengers, the coolies, the cobblers and the untouchables who form the bulk of Indian society. His choice for the marginalized downtrodden is well-discerned choice against the backdrop of exploitation of the masses and misuse of power at the cost of dignity of the poor. He is convinced that poverty is manmade, and it was a sign of exploitation, marginalization and oppression. Anand consciously opted for committed writing in favour of the poor.

R. K. Narayan, the novelist of middle class sensibility, has added a new dimension to the novel of social realism. Like Mulk Raj Anand, Narayan depicts the pathetic picture of the downtrodden, poverty-stricken people in his novels. He has depicted brilliantly Malgudi and the South Indian life in a realistic manner. In his second novel, *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), the protagonist attacks the traditions and customs and revolts against the superstitions. His next novel, *The Dark Room* (1938), depicts the life of a woman, Savitri, who rebels against her husband's immorality and leaves him in search of her own identity. *The English Teacher* (1946) presents the failure of the educational system in India. There is conflict between the Western educational system and the Indian culture and values. The Western style of education has no idea of Indian culture and values. For the protagonist, Krishna, a lecturer in English, education given to the students in his college is admonishing and useless. In his Sahitya Akademi Award winning classic novel, *The Guide* (1958), Narayan depicts the problems of the devdasis who are almost treated as prostitutes in Indian society. Rosie, the devdasi, rebels against the society and obtains master's degree in Economics and tries to rise above her class. She also rebels against the idea of suppressed traditional Indian wife, leaves her husband in search of her own identity and starts living with Raju, the guide. "Narayan's gifts as a writer are out of ordinary" (K. R. S. Iyengar 384). His style is simple and straightforward that resembles Anton Chekov's style. With reference to his language William Walsh remarks, "Narayan's language is beautifully adapted to communicate a different, and Indian sensibility" (247).

Raja Rao, the youngest and the third novelist of the time, is not as prolific as Anand and Narayan as he has written just four novels. His first novel *Kanthapura* (1938) which explores the theme of social justice and caste system is the best evocation of the Gandhian Era in Indian

English Fiction. His Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), one of the greatest of the Indian English novels, has a strong autobiographical colouring. It is a story of Ramaswamy, the young Hindu, and Madeleine, a French lecturer in History. The themes of East-West conflict, true love and marriage lead to the larger theme of the quest for self-knowledge. His third novel *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) is one more attempt at philosophical fiction. It is a strong satire on the corruption of bureaucracy in the government offices, food corporation and ration shops. Though this novel has rich philosophical content and delightful comedy, it is not as successful as *The Serpent and the Rope*. C.D. Narasimhaiah, while commenting on Raja Rao's novels, says that the novel in his hands becomes "a sophisticated medium of enlarging the frontiers of human consciousness" (63). Even though Raja Rao, like his contemporary Anand, has assimilated Western ideas with the Indian tradition and culture, his rootedness in Indian culture did not decrease or minimize. The call of Indian spiritual life fascinated him throughout his writing career.

The post-Independence Indian English novel sustained its momentum which it gained during the Gandhian Era. A continuity of social realism established earlier by the big trio is visible in the modern novel. The second generation novelists Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Balachandra Rajan, Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal, Kamala Markandaya, and others have made a tremendous contribution in Indian English novel in the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

Bhabani Bhattacharya in his first novel, *So Many Hungers* (1947), continues the tradition of social realism stressing, like Mulk Raj Anand, the necessity of social purpose and protest. As he is strongly influenced by Gandhi and Tagore and having the reformist zeal like Tolstoy and Zola, he attacks social evils in his next novels *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He Who Rides the Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) and *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978). In these novels, he criticizes severely poverty, hunger, casteism, selfishness, conservatism and patriarchal and feudal oppression of women and spiritual decline of the contemporary society. As it is evident in these novels, Bhattacharya uses his art not only to expose the evils and abuses of the society of his time but also to reveal the truth through a dramatic device. According to him art always has an ethical orientation and purpose.

Like Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar is also a social realist but he does not believe that art has any purpose to serve to society except pure entertainment. As he was a man of adventurous spirit in his own life, his fiction reveals Indian social life in its myriad forms. His



first novel, *Distant Drum* (1960), depicts the story of army life with love, lust, passion, infidelity and betrayal by chance. Here army life and civilian life is intertwined within typified contrasting qualities. In his other novels, *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princess* (1963), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), *Spy in Amber* (1971) and *The Devils Wind* (1972), Malgonkar portrays the life of the upper class and exposes a pathetic picture of caste ridden society and exploitations of pitiable lives of labourers of tea estate. In his novels, we find a wonderful mixture of fact and fiction, history and imagination and sound historical sense.

Like Bhattacharya and Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh followed the tradition of social realism in his novels. He is better known for his first novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956). It presents the impact of partition on a small village, Mano Majra on the Indo Pakistan border. The novel is a heart-rending story of how communal harmony of peace loving village is disturbed by political forces. His next novel *I shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959) has continued the theme of partition in a greater authenticity. Like *Train to Pakistan*, it depicts the horror of partition realistically. These two novels are the documentary novels on partition in a realistic tradition.

Balachandra Rajan is known for his realism and fantasy in Indian English novel. However, in his first novel *The Dark Dancer* (1958) realism is less social than psychological. Rajan, in this novel, re-examines the protagonist's awakened consciousness in the East-West cultural conflicts. The East-West encounter is the result of the protagonist's quest for identity. His second novel, *Too Long in the West* (1961) is a parody of the ancient Hindu practice of 'Swayamvara' – the selection of the bridegroom by the bride herself.

Kamala Markandaya, had a great imaginative concern for the poor and the hungry masses. The major themes she has depicted in her novels are East-West encounter and woman in different life-roles. Her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) presents how the rural economics in a South Indian village is affected by industry and modern technology. Her next novels *Some Inner Fury* (1955) and *Possession* (1963) depict the theme of love, unhappy marriages and Indo-British personal relationships. *The Coffer Dams* (1969) and *The Nowhere Man* (1972) deal with the theme of East-West encounter. In *Two Virgins* (1972) and *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), she has beautifully explored the themes of poverty, hunger and exploitation.

Besides the major novelists, there are many more minor novelists who have explored the Gandhian principles by depicting the themes such as the East-West conflict, nationalist consciousness, untouchability, poverty and hunger, concern for the masses and the landless poor,

etc. in their novels in the Gandhian Era. Their contribution to Indian English Novel is also noteworthy.

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