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Impact of Mahatma Gandhi's Thoughts on Indian English Literature and its Relevance

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*"From my background, I gained my regulating Christian ideals.
From Gandhi I learned my operational technique".*

– Martin Luther King (Norman; 1969 : 14)

If we try to look back the pages of world history, we may realize that the greatness of man must be measured not by the amount of adulation accorded him but by the impact of his life on others. When this yardstick applied to the people of India, Mahatma Gandhi's major place in history is instantly apparent.

"When I think of Gandhi, I think of Jesus Christ. He lives his life; he speaks his word; he suffers, strives and will someday nobly die for his Kingdom upon earth." – John Haynes Holmes.
(Norman; 1969 : 15)

These are some great thoughts of unique personalities about the Father of India Mahatma Gandhi.

In my own words- "Man is mortal but his deed is immortal".

No person can achieve a due respect from his Nation and from the world, unless he is not having his contribution for the human being. Mahatma Gandhi is among those great men who spent their lives for the sake of human being and for the development of the society. To know Mahatma Gandhi in few pages is like to judge the elephant, putting cloth on the eyes.

Through this paper, it is my sincere attempt to focus some relevance of this man on Indian English Literature. Before I would enter into the literary aspects of Indian English Literature, I would like to clear some basic principles of Mahatma Gandhi's life. The intention behind it is that the reader should be aware to some realistic approach to this subject.

Very clearly I would like to focus on the issue that Literature is not person oriented. 'Mahatma Gandhi' means not Indian English Literature but the principles which he followed in his life and then his disciples till now are following is the part of Indian English Literature. As a learner of Gandhian study it is our basic requirement to know what is Gandhism?

'Gandhi' is a person and '-ism' is 'a belief'. In other words we can describe the term 'Gandhism' in following words- "The belief that Gandhi put in his life". More suitable illustration can be, "The Philosophy which Gandhi has given to the world."

In few words I would now try to focus on the principles which Gandhi has followed in his life. These are Satya (Truth), Ahinsa (Non-violence), Vishvashanti (World peace), Asahakar (Non-cooperation). Weaving these principles in his life he practically implemented in his life. These words are easy to utter but very difficult to handle in the practical sense. Once if we are able to handle this philosophy, we can conquer the world without any bloodshed. It is a great miracle which this man has shown to the world.

This Gandhian impact is having a large relevance on Indian English Literature and on world literature. It is a difficult task to focus on Gandhian impact on Indian English Literature in a single paper. This paper is an attempt to focus on some of the chief exponents under Gandhian influence. Major novelists and their novels are as follows: Mulraj Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, Raja Rao's *Kantapura*, R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma*,

Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides A Tiger*, *So Many Hungers*, *A Goddess Named Gold*, *Shadow From Laddakh*, *A Dream in Hawaii*, *Music for Mohini*, Manohar Malgaonkar's *Distant Drum*, *A Bend in the Ganges*, Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning*, *Situation in New Delhi*, *Storm in Chandigarh*, and so many other novels and stories are based on Gandhian philosophy.

Here, I am going to make a brief analysis of some of the novels which are mentioned above.

Impact of Gandhian Ideals on R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* :

Waiting for the Mahatma, is a novel which has a theme of Indian independence. The protagonist of the novel is Sriram who is a young man living with his grandmother. Several times he was asked by his grandmother for his marriage but never showed any interest. Though he was a young man, was workless and homesick. Occasionally he was bringing some vegetables from the market which grandmother told him. Once he was in the market and suddenly saw a huge crowd in the market. Then he was told that Mahatma Gandhi was coming in the town to deliver a speech to the people. Sriram attended the speech and it had become a turning point in his life. In the crowd he met a young girl Bharati who was then engaged with Mahatma Gandhi's Swaraj movement. Sriram also joined this movement and he became disciple of Mahatma. At the time of these activities he was deeply connected with Bharati. They were in love with each other. Sriram asked Bharati for marriage. Bharati who was then under Gandhian influence answered Sriram that for her Indian Freedom is more important after that she is ready to tie up with him.

Both Sriram and Bharati contributed for Indian Freedom Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and finally India got its freedom. Mahatma who promised Bharati and Sriram that he will arrange their marriage ceremony was shot dead by an anti activist. Sorrowfully, Sriram and Bharati got married but they were then waiting for the Mahatma for blessing but he left them forever.

Impact of Gandhian Ideals on Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* :

So Many Hungers! Is a novel written by Bhabani Bhattacharya. It deals with hunger for freedom, food, power, sex, wealth and fame. Its central theme is The Quit India Movement of 1942. It also witnesses the Bengal famine of 1942 which is so horrible and harrowing. The novel has two plots. The first plot depicts the story of Samarendra Basu's family along with young Rahoul who is the central character. The second plot depicts the story of a peasant family along with the young girl Kajoli who is the major character. These two stories are linked by Desesh Basu (Devata) who is the grandfather of Rahoul. The novel depicts the extreme level of poverty caused by the famine. Kajoli tries to become a prostitute for the sake of money but she is saved from it. Finally, Devata projects the vision of Gandhi the Mahatma whereas Rahoul projects the vision of Gandhi the man.

Impact of Gandhian Ideals on Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Music for Mohini* :

Music for Mohini is another novel written by Bhabani Bhattacharya under the influence of Gandhism. The novel deals with political freedom. It also affirms that the social freedom is important for the real progress of the people because without attaining it political freedom is useless. Jaydev, the central character of the novel is dedicated to social freedom which is essential for India after she has achieved political freedom. He is a social reformer who wants to make his village Behula a good village society. He knows that it is not an easy task. He thought that his wife Mohini should teach the poor villagers. The novelist also gives a reference of Bengal famine of 1942. The famine affects the village Behula badly. The villagers are saved by the good deeds of Jaydev. Finally, Jaydev thought that the responsibility of the country should be taken by young generation. Jaydev's zest for development of his village is one aspect of Gandhian ideal.

Impact of Gandhian Ideals on Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh*:

In her novel *Storm in Chandigarh* Nayantara Sahgal strongly depicted the underlying disgust at the insane violence erupting in Punjab. She was of the view that non violence is the only source to stop the bloodshed. It is a perfect solution for the peace and prosperity. These thoughts of Sahgal are the indication of her attachment to Gandhian cult in *Storm in Chandigarh*. She portrays the veteran Home Minister last surviving figure of Gandhian era, who realized wisely that he was an antique in the new crop of politicians breeding on mercenary power exerting chairs. The novelist defines Gandhism in these thought-provoking words. " Gandhian politics had meant open discussion, the open action. No stealth, no furtiveness and therefore, no shame. Every act proudly performed in the sunlight." Vishal Dubey, the protagonist mused over such thoughts and was happy to note that in spite of the darkness all around there were believers like his associates, in the cult of non-violence.

Impact of Gandhian Ideals on Manohar Malgaonkar's *A Bend in The Ganges* :

A Bend in the Ganges is an epic saga of the decade leading to partition and the forces which engineered its bloody consummation plunging modern India into its darkest hour; where over three million people died, over a million women were raped, abducted and mutilated, and several million rendered helpless refugees, left to fend for themselves in the quagmire of post partition existence teeming with poverty, disease and death.

The opening chapter 'A ceremony of purification' describes burnings of Foreign clothes. Gandhi appears and the sky is rent with cries of 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jay'. In the last chapter too there is a burning but it is cities which are on fire, Hindus and Muslim killing each other, is this a ceremony of purification too?

Manohar Malgaonkar in *A Bend in the Ganges* portrayals Gandhi, as an upholder of Hindu Muslim unity, an apostle of non-violence.

Conclusion :

In the last part of this paper I would like to put the relevance of Gandhian Literature for contemporary age. Gandhism is the need of every age. If the world is interested in its survival and development, then there should be peace. Gandhism basically believes in non-violence. It tries to give the prosperity to the individual and to the Nation. Before some years I have read a news in the news paper. A criminal named Laxman Bhole was put in front of the Judge and without any argument he accepted all his crimes. The Judge was shocked and has summoned the punishment. Before that he asked the criminal how it was possible for him to be so sincere. The criminal answered him that in prison he read Gandhi's Autobiography *The Story of My experiment With Truth*. If a notorious person can change his life after reading a thoughtful autobiography, what more should be the power and relevance of Gandhian Literature?

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