Impact of Mahatma Gandhi on Indian writing in English with Special Focus on Raja Rao’s Kanthapura

Suresh Kumar
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Govt. College, Bhiwani (Haryana)

Abstract
Mahatma Gandhi who fought for the struggle of India was a great source of writing and influenced many disciplines and writers from various fields like literature, history, politics, philosophy and sociology. Indian literature in English has great impact of Gandhian ideology. The great Indian trio R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao has expressed thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi in their novels. Their writings follow Gandhian ideology and his principles of Non-Violence, Truth, Brotherhood, Satyagraha and his views on untouchability. Mahatma Gandhi is one of them who is a gift to the humanity, belongs to line of great men who continued to influence every aspect of human life. He left the lasting impression on human mind, irrespective of their nationality, social status and religious affiliations and commands the universal appeal. This research paper aims at finding the influence of Mahatma Gandhi on Indian writing in English with special focus on Raja Rao’s Kanthapura. It is also aimed to show how Raja Rao in Kanthapura shows the influence of Gandhi’s struggle for freedom of India and its impact on the people of a small village.

Index Terms: Impact, Mahatma Gandhi, ideology, India, English, Kanthapura, and Influence.

1. Introduction
Great men are born to fulfil the aspirations of people who await them and improve the life of fellow human beings. They are capable of leaving lasting impression on human mind, irrespective of their nationality, social status and religious affiliations and command the universal appeal. India is a country where many geniuses have been produced. Mahatma Gandhi is one of them. He is a gift to the humanity in modern times. He has been rightly called a prophet and a Politician of the rarest kind who has been romanticized,
mythologized but never properly conceptualized. Being called “the father of nation” his secret lies in the goodness and oneness of human life. His philosophy, thinking and ideology have influenced the literatures of all languages. This research paper aims at finding the influence of Gandhiji on India fiction writing in English particularly on Roja Rao’s Kanthapura.

2. Gandhian ideology on theme, structure and style

The novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan show the wide and deep influence of Gandhian ideology on theme, structure and style. Mulk Raj Anand, with his social determination, attempted to fuse the ideological base of Gandhism with his historical humanism. Anand’s sociological commitment was so perceptive that he became the advocate of downtrodden and underprivileged. One can find conspicuous contrast to Narayan and Raja Rao in many respects. Unlike R.K. Narayan’s psychological revelations and Raja Rao’s metaphysical explorations, Mulk Raj Anand is more committed in his outlook and is enormously experimental in his technique and style. His novels are concerned with all forms of social determination and he attempts to telescope Indian milieu and its structure. R.K.Narayan is the master in fusing reality with fantasy. He mingles his personal philosophy and his views in his literary work successfully. He was deeply influenced by Gandhism. His treatment of Gandhian thought in his fiction is different. His work highlights the multifarious facets of Gandhism. His characters are Ganhian in their particular ways. His novel waiting for the Mahatma has reflection of Gandhian philosophy in great amount. It was written in 1955 after the seven years of Gandhi’s assassination. Sitaram is the protagonist of the novel who propagates Gandhian views and advocates the Gandhian philosophy as a way of life. This novel places Gandhi at the centre of text. It shows the process of transformation in Sitaram in his search for truth and self-realization. He is portrayed as a careless boy in the beginning of the novel who lives with his grandmother in Malgudi. His life gets its meaning when he first sees Bharti, disciple of Gandhi. He falls in love with her and goes to the city for his education where he gets familiar with Gandhian philosophy. He participates in Quit India, Satyagraha and Swadeshi movements with great passion and commitment. He completely follows the step of Gandhi and becomes true representative of his thoughts and philosophy.

3. Focus on Raja Rao’s Kanthapura

Raja Rao’s Kanthapura, published in 1938, deals with Gandhian impact on a small village called Kanthapura. The novel begins with the village description by a woman Achaka. Achaka highlights the importance of deities, especially Kenchamma which shows the importance of tradition and culture and at the same time welcoming the change. Kanthapura is a traditional caste ridden village that is far away from all modern ways of living and development. It is believed that the village is protected by goddess Kenchamma. Moorthy is the protagonist of the novel who is a Brahmin. He discovers the half buried linga from the village and installs it. He goes to the city for his education where he gets familiar with Gandhian philosophy. He
becomes a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He wears khadi clothes and fights against caste system. He starts living with an educated widow Rangamma who takes part in India’s struggle for freedom, after the death of his mother. His belief in Gandhian philosophy can be seen when Bade Khan hits him. He does not react on it and follow the principle of non-violence. He continues his fight against injustice. He leads the villagers as the representative of Gandhian philosophy. He is arrested for his participation in struggle for freedom. When he was in prison women of Kanthapura take charge of the struggle for freedom. Rangamma is a true Gandhian who is not only courageous but also becomes an inspiration for other women. She tells the village women about Rani Laxmi Bai, Sarojini Naidu etc. The people begin to have strong faith in Gandhian Movements in Kanthapura. Gandhi is not present as a person anywhere but he lives in the hearts of people. His speeches and teachings are the words of god for them. Moothy is the Mahatma for this small village as Gandhi for whole nation. He becomes the symbol of change. People of Kanthapura are filled with the spirit of Satyagraha and want to take part in Dandi March. But Gandhiji is arrested by the British Government and all the responsibilities of the movement come on the local leaders. Moorthty plans to start a non-cooperation movement in the village. Such feeling was common to most of the ignorant people and women folk of the village who went on chanting stories and songs about Mahatma without even properly understanding them.

4. Conclusion

In fact Mahatma Gandhi has influenced the literature of all languages and English writers of India in particular. His ideology, philosophy and principles are base of many authors and their novels. Gandhian thoughts are visible in the novels of Raja Rao, Mulkray Anand and R.K.Narayan. Gandhi’s vision was to eliminate untouchability, castism and poverty which were deeply rooted that time along with India’s freedom. Novels like Kanthapura, Untouchable, and Waiting for Mahatma follow Gandhian philosophy. Gandhiji insisted on high thinking and simple living which was reflected in and highlighted by the literary English authors of the time. It would not be an exaggeration to say that he had performed many miracles during his lifetime and his message was a source of inspiration strength to the people for all times.

5. References