

# Mahatma Gandhi -An Inspiration in the Literary World

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**Abstract** - Mahatma Gandhi is the world's greatest teacher of mankind. Gandhiji was an iconic writer who has captured the imagination of writers of different genres from poetry, prose, fiction to non-fictions. He is an immense source of writing himself and has influenced different disciplines. Mahatma Gandhi, a man who has been much discussed and written about, authored many works of literature. They were collections of his articles and speech on truth and Ahimsa, Swadeshi and Charkha or of his addresses to women, students and princes. Many writers from different fields like history, politics, philosophy, literature, sociology etc. have Gandhiji as their central themes. His style of writing was simple, precise, clear and devoid of artificialities as his own life. Gandhiji's writings convey his earnest desire that the world should follow his beliefs and non - violent techniques for world peace and harmony. His journalistic writings upheld him as a classic media man. A.S. Ayengar wrote, "There was not only a new thought but a new language in newspaper writing and what he wrote was the best in political thought and finest in journalistic writings. No editor could escape being influenced by Gandhiji's writings".

**keywords** - Writer, Media man, Journalistic, Truth, Non-violent.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Amidst political unrest, economic inequality and social discrimination, human race seeks some rays of hope. And it was from the life and works of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi a ray of hope emerged at the time when the Indians had been suffering in the hands of the colonial rulers. Mahatma Gandhi has come to be known as the 'Father of India' and a beacon of light in the last decades of British colonial rule, promoting non-violence, justice and harmony among people of all faiths. He is the world's greatest teacher of mankind for all time to come. As a humanist, he is an idol for people around the world. He has become a symbol and a myth. Yet none has acquired the status of this 20<sup>th</sup> century's most enigmatic and remarkable personality. Interpreters see him as a spiritual paragon, a witty politician, or as a critic of modernity. Gandhiji is the epitome of ethical leadership. People from different societies and cultures all over the world draw strength from his ideas and work, especially during crises. He has influenced every aspect of human thought. There is hardly any discipline that he has left uncommented. He is an immense source of writing himself and has influenced different disciplines like history, politics, philosophy literature, sociology and so on. Many writers from different fields wrote books revolving around theme Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji was an iconic writer who has captured the imagination of writers of different genres from poetry, prose, fiction to non-fictions. Courses in Gandhian Studies have become popular in academic institutions in India and abroad. He was one of the supreme communicators who could bring ignorant out of doors; make illiterate sing one song, gather all women at a venue and make children chant his name as God, at his single call.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

- Understanding Gandhi from his literary works.
- Study the influence of Gandhiji on Indian writings and of the world.
- Bring to light Gandhiji's ideology about patriotism, communal harmony and sympathy for the Untouchables and downtrodden, pertinent for the prosperity of the nation through the development of villages, and how it can be a source of inspiration for the youth.
- Study how the thoughts and ideas contained in Gandhi's journalistic writings contributed towards the development of different regional journalism and literatures of India.

The methodology which we have applied in preparing this paper is analytical and descriptive methodology, as the content of this paper is based on the secondary data available in some books, journals and articles and a few of his texts and journals as primary data.

## III. RELEVANCE OF GANDHI'S TEACHINGS

Relevance of Gandhi's teachings in the modern world is indisputable. As a freedom fighter, as a philosopher, as a moralist, as a spiritual practitioner of truth, the Mahatma's teaching is relevant not for today only but for all the time to come. Gandhiji will inspire generations of individuals fighting for the betterment and welfare of society with his doctrine of peace and non-

violence. The main concerns today are intolerance and hatred leading to violence, politics without principle, crisis of leadership, oppression against girls, women and children, and it is here the principles and values of Gandhiji need to be sincerely adhered to.

#### IV. GANDHI THE AUTHOR

Mahatma Gandhi, a man who has been much discussed and written about, authored many works of literature. Majority of Gandhi's works - the collections of his articles and speech on truth and Ahimsa, Swadeshi and Charkha or of his addresses to women, students, princes etc. were all compiled into books. Gandhiji had a forceful style of his own which mirrored his hope and faith, his sorrows and disappointments. His style of writing was simple, precise, clear and devoid of artificialities as his own life. He was a creative person and believed in simplicity. His creativity gets expressed in a simple manner in his writings. Gandhiji's skill at transforming ancient wisdom into modern scientific wisdom gets manifested in his writings, and, there lies the beauty of his works. He was straight and expressed himself in brilliant English. Perhaps Gandhi's love and passion for reading English writers and the Bible made him adept at using proper words. As a teenager, Gandhi endeavoured to write a booklet, 'London Guide', for Indian students. Next came his two pamphlets - 'An Appeal to Every Briton', bringing to light the general condition of Natal Indians, and the 'Indian Franchise', a history of Indian franchise in Natal. These were followed by the Green Pamphlet. Gandhi's experiments in diet were recorded in 'A Guide to Health'. It was an English translation of his articles printed in the Gujrati 'Indian Opinion' and was widely read in India and abroad, and translated into English, European and Indian languages. For decades he edited several newspapers including Harijan in Gujrati, Hindiand, Young India in English and Navjivan in Gujrati. In 1933, Gandhiji started the newspapers Harijan, Harijan bandhu, Harijan Sewak, to fight against untouchability and poverty, and disseminated his ideas for the development of Indian villages, and the country as a whole.

When any idea crossed his mind, Gandhiji penned it down with conviction, without any fear of being ridiculed. His earnest desire to write made him scribble while travelling in trains or ships. 'Hind Swaraj', a severe criticism of modern civilisation was written while on a voyage from England to South Africa. Tolstoy read it and said, the question of passive resistance was "of great importance not only for India but for the whole world". 'Constructive Programme', a booklet on nation building work, followed it. Inspired by John Ruskin's 'Unto this Last', Gandhiji adapted Sarvodaya to propound his principles for universal upliftment of all. He also translated portions from Carlyle and Kemal Pasha into Gujrati. His 'Story of Satyagraha' is a paraphrase of the 'Défense and Death of Socrates' by Plato. Gandhi translated into English the Ashramam Bhajanavali and some poems of the saint-poets of India, entitled 'Songs from the Prison', during his imprisonment. He wrote his autobiography in Gujrati. The English rendering of his autobiography, "The Story of My Experiment with Truth" has been deemed as a good piece of literature. Apart from showcasing the human personality of a world - famous figure, the portrayal of his parents, wife and friends, of dramatic events and his accounting records and interweaving of stray dialogues in this book hold up the interest of the readers. It was translated into almost all Indian languages and also into English, French, Chinese etc. All his writings cherish truth and high moral values that he tried to live up to. For children he wrote 'Balpothi' and a book on ethics, 'Niti dharma'. He did not want to preach children something they cannot practise. His letters to the ashram children from jail were both amusing and instructive. Letters written by Gandhi, numbering about 100,000 forms vital part of his writings.

#### V. INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED GANDHI'S THOUGHT

It is true that Gandhi's thought has an originality and a freshness about it, but it was shaped by a number of influences. He was a voracious reader. He read books on economics, ethics, philosophy, ancient Indian books. The ancient Hindu tradition had a strong impact on Gandhiji. He often referred to incidents, examples and morals found in the Indian epics, the Vedas, the Gita, the Vaishnava and Jain literature. While in England he got acquainted with some of the intellectuals of the time and learnt about Christianity. Tolstoy's emphasis on the power and dignity of suffering inspired Gandhi to develop the concept of Satyagraha. Gandhi envisaged an enlightened anarchy where every citizen becomes his own ruler. He was also greatly influenced by the American thinker, David Thoreau's 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience' and also the works of Ruskin, that helped him in solving problems in social and political life. He also had a first-hand knowledge of Zoroastrianism and Islam. Gandhi's thought is an outcome of the various experiments he carried on moral, religious and existential issues.

#### VI. UNDERSTANDING MAHATMA GANDHI

Gandhi's life is a vital message, which has been a great source of inspiration to writers not only in India but abroad also. Descriptions of the events of the Indian freedom movement and his role in the freedom struggle, anecdotes of non-violence and the volumes that Gandhiji wrote have been achieving a dominating presence in the literary world. From Ruskin Bond to Sarojini Naidu, Dominique Lapierre to George Orwell and Khushwant Singh to V.S. Naipaul, all have referred to the life of Gandhiji, reverently called him Bapu, in their writings, elucidate his sayings differently, sketching imaginary characters upholding his high principles, composing verses on his ideologies and messages. Viceroy Mountbatten feared, "India, indeed the world, will not see the like of him again, perhaps for centuries" [1]. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, "If humanity is to progress, Gandhi is inescapable. He lived, thought and acted, inspired by the vision of humanity evolving toward a world of peace and harmony" [2]. Nehru described him as "more a man of people" and as "warrior of the Indian peasant". The most outstanding contribution of Gandhiji lies in his successful transformation of the principles of non-violent resistance into an effective technique for establishing and promoting the democratic values - liberty, justice and peace. He referred to the world beyond India in his writings and conveyed the message that his non-violent beliefs and methods are equally relevant for India and the world beyond for peace and harmony to prevail. He was optimistic that the fragrance of non-violence would permeate the whole world.

For Gandhiji, all art had to be based on truth, and literature that teach, enrich and transform are worth reading. He wanted books to draw out the best in the child and man, and develop the body, mind and spirit. His ultimate aim was self-realisation, the knowledge of truth and God in one's life. For the half-starved people he felt the need of simple good stories to forget their pains and abuses. In a literary conference, Gandhiji asked: "Did you have any thought of these dumb million's aspirations? For whose sake we are going to have literature? What am I to read to them?"

Gandhiji had the bread and butter aim of education in mind, supplying the basic needs of life. Gandhiji remarked that education should be 'a kind of insurance against unemployment' [3]. It may be remembered that he wanted a child to learn while he earns and to earn while he learns.

## VII. GANDHIAN INFLUENCE ON INDIAN WRITINGS

Mahatma Gandhi permeates fiction as well as non-fiction in Indian writings, both in English and other languages. Mr M. K. Naik explains that Indian writing in English (Fiction), in fact, discovered some of its most compelling themes during the Gandhian era. Gandhiji is a mine of themes for writers and commentators, though he himself never worked on any literary topic or genre. From Mulk Raj Anand to Sarojini Naidu, the life of Gandhi has inspired every writer, who later gave different interpretations to his sayings. Dramatic reconstructions of Gandhiji's life in film and fiction range from Richard Attenborough's academy award winning film, 'Gandhi', in 1982, to Indian English novels like that of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. Nehru's 'Discovery of India' sketches a picture of Gandhi, as the need of those times. Acknowledging Gandhi as the "symbol of India", Nehru had upheld the Mahatma for his principles of truth and non-violence. Sarojini Naidu, describes him as an eternal lotus, who is a guiding star for millions of people: "O mystic Lotus, sacred and sublime". The writers working in different languages in those days either were mostly persons who had come directly under Gandhiji's influence, many had even taken part in the Indian independence movements, or they were immensely inspired by his ideals. Their writings were laden with Gandhian idealism, lifestyle, his teachings and anti-colonial attitudes. Gandhi as a character appears in many dramas, novels, stories and poems. Mulk Raj Anand's 'Untouchables' revolves around Bakha, an untouchable, as the hope of emancipation for the untouchables, whom Gandhi called Harijans, children of God, and long worked for their emancipation. Bhabani Bhattacharya specially sums the elements that the writers incorporated from Gandhiji: "In every Indian literature a new thinking emerged. There was to be shift of emphasis from the rich to the poor, from the intellectual to the man of character and inner culture, from the educated to the illiterate and the voiceless, and deep rooted in these revaluations was social reform"[4].

Gandhiji's golden principle of high thinking and simple living was highlighted and got reflected in the works of English authors like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, who in their novels and stories depicted the real picture of the then society, showing how Gandhiji influenced the people living in Indian villages and towns. A belief that Gandhi, the Mahatma's words must be adhered to, was predominant among the ignorant humble villagers, especially, the women folk, who went on chanting stories and songs about this father figure; such is the scene in R.K. Narayan's "Waiting for the Mahatma", where we find Sriram becoming the blind follower of Gandhiji and inspired to join the freedom movement. In Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchables", Bakha, after hearing the speech of Gandhi as a counsel from God, began showing tolerance from the next day.

## VIII. WESTERN PICTURE

Gandhiji was a great experimenter and perhaps that is why he fascinated the inquisitive western minds. Early foreign writings on Gandhiji include the works of French writer Rolland Romain, Danish writer Allen Horrup, American and English writers like George Orwell and Edmund Jones, among others. Romain, in 'The Man who Became One with the Universal Being' saw Gandhi as an ideal nationalist and called upon him to enlighten the youths of Europe. George Orwell, puts Gandhi to trial until proved innocent, describing him as "humble naked old man, sitting on a praying mat and shaking empires by sheer spiritual power"[5] The greatest contribution of Gandhi, according to most western writers, is his fight against non-violence. William Rose Bennet has highlighted the significance of Gandhi's non-violence by criticising the brutality of violence. Thus, there develops a common understanding between the East and the West as they continue to seek inspiration from Bapu.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Gandhiji lives in myriad ways today. He is universally acknowledged as the greatest man of his age. He has supporters following in his footsteps, his various ideologies and movements from local to global levels. He never claimed to be a thinker, and yet his philosophy engages the best minds of the world. He never called himself the messiah and yet the troubled human beings seek solace in him. The issues and questions he raised and the ideals he tried to implement are of crucial importance to mankind. Gandhiji's writings aroused the spirit of nationalism among the Indian masses, that was seen in an upsurge of faith, unity in action, unified will, community feeling and social development from the grass root level. That Gandhiji was a classic media-man, is proved by his use of journalistic writings throughout his life to reform India and the world and serve humanity. A.S. Ayengar wrote, "There was not only a new thought but a new language in newspaper writing and what he wrote was the best in political thought and finest in journalistic writings. No editor could escape being influenced by Gandhiji's writings" [6]. He appropriately used the nationalistic press, and his own journals, Young India, Navjivan, Indian Opinion and Harijan, to reach the common people living in both urban and rural areas. S. Natarajan writes that many of Gandhiji's followers were inspired to write in regional language and "regional journalism began to acquire an importance".[7]. Pearl. S. Buck had rightly put forward to the future generations of our country, "Oh India, dare to be worthy of your Gandhi" [8]. To most English educated youth, Gandhi was a person rooted in the tradition of rural India with a deep urge to uplift the poor. They regard him as a good soul but are not sure of his relevance in a modern globalising world. Little do they realise that however

hard vested interest may try to suppress Gandhiji's views, he and his ideology will keep popping up to guide the destiny of the world. Let the youth of India rekindle the lost spirituality by upholding the ideals and teachings of Gandhiji, that embedded his literary works.

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