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Gandhi's Legacy In Indian Fiction: Exploring Ideals And Interpretations

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Abstract:-

It is well said, "Literature is the mirror of the society." Through literature we can see the real face of a society. Literature and society are influential on each other. Indian literature as such in the first half of 20th century was greatly influenced by her struggle for independence. The present paper is based upon a study on the 'influence of Gandhi and his ideology on Indian fiction nearing her independence and after'.

Key Words:- Gandhi, ideology, fiction, realism, character, theme, struggle, independence.

Introduction:-

The industrial revolution which started in England in the 17th century brought tremendous change throughout the world. Many European countries started colonizing the countries of Asia, Africa and America. India had been a colony of England for more than two hundred years. The Englishmen brought with them western knowledge and education to the country. As a result a large number of educated masses was found in the country. The educated mass was aware of different values of a welfare state and they started to spread this knowledge among the people of the country through various kinds of writing. The advancement of the printing press was very helpful in this regard. As such people started revolting against British rule, the first mass revolt being recorded in 1857. Gandhiji's entry in Indian politics brought a new light in her struggle for freedom. His weapon of truth and non-violence along with his magnetic personality attracted the whole nation towards him and changed their spirit to act with high devotion to achieve independence. Gandhiji himself was not a regular writer, but like a prophet with his ideology inspired the Indian writers to think vigorously towards the reality of India and to shift their focus from Romanticism to Realism.

Gandhi and his Ideology:-

Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi (1869-1948) well known as Mahatma Gandhi was one of the most significant figures of the 20th century. In order to represent an Indian merchant in a lawsuit, he visited South Africa in 1893. South Africa was then under colonial rule in the hands of the Britishers. There he was moved by the bitter discrimination of the native black people and the Indian workers in the hands of the white colonial rulers. So he stayed there for 21 years and fought against the loathsome apartheid system with his weapon of Satyagraha (devotion to the truth) and non-violence. During this period he developed his political views, ethics

and Ideology. In 1915, he returned to India and joined the freedom movement. After that he influenced almost every field in India including literature.

Gandhian ideology includes truth, non-violence and universal love. Gandhi dedicated his life to discover and pursue truth and his ideology of Satyagraha means 'appeal to, insistence on, or reliance on the Truth'. Satyagrah is based on self- realization, ahimsa (non-violence), vegetarianism, and universal love. According to Gandhiji, 'Truth is God' and the term 'God' signifies a non-dual universal force that pervades in all things, in each person and all life. It means all beings have the same one soul and thus are equal. In his book "My Experiments with Truth," Gandhi explains his ideas about Ahimsa (non-violence) as a political means and considers it to be "infinitely superior to violence." All such Ideology provided themes for the literature of the period, thus influencing a number of writers.

Gandhian Ideology and Indian Fiction:-

The Indian independence movement which traversed all the boundaries of religion, caste, creed and language became the most popular theme for Indian fiction in the early decades of the twentieth century. Gandhi's involvement in this struggle with his weapons of Satyagraha and non-violence inspired a number of writers in all Indian languages to write their works keeping in view the Gandhian ideology. Gandhi enlightened the Indian intelligentsia and make them think vigorously towards the reality of India. He provided a strong luminous to shift the focus of Indian fiction from Romanticism to Realism. To show the strength of his influence on Indian fiction, eminent critic K.R. Shrinivas Iyengar writes,

"The period between the two World Wars and comprising them both was the Gandhian Age in India. Every segment of our national life — politics, economics, education, religion, social life, language and literature — acquired a more or less pronounced Gandhian hue."

Another critic M.K. Naik describes this phenomenon as "**The Gandhian Whirlwind.**" Gandhiji influenced Indian fiction both directly through his writings and indirectly through his personality. This influence can be seen at large during the Pre-independent India starting from the thirties. Even after the independence his influence is found in some novels. So it would be better to study his influence in two parts.

1) Gandhi in Indian fiction of Pre-independent period:-

After the First World War, nationalist movement in India was accompanied by literary renaissance and social realism. Literature was used as a vehicle to convey the message of nationalism and revolutionary thought among the people of India. Thus Gandhi and his ideology play a significant role in this regard. In most of the novels of the thirties, Gandhi started to appear as a person or as an unseen presence affecting the theme.

The Gandhian ideology found place for the first time in the novels of the Trio of Indian fiction i.e, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. They began to write after the Civil Disobedience movement of early 1930s. However some minor novelists had tried their hands with Gandhian theme. For example - a novelist and poet K.S. Venkataramani has written two novels. They are - **Murugan, The Tiller (1927) and Kandan, The Patriot (1932)**. In the first novel he has compared the life of two friends one of which was a materialist and the other a Gandhian. Towards the end of the novel the materialist was influenced by the Gandhian and a Gandhian colony was established where the two friends settled down happily. Set during the period of Civil Disobedience movement, the second novel describes the story of an ICS officer Kandan, who being influenced by Gandhian ideology, resigns from government service and joins the freedom movement and was killed at the end. Yet another novelist named K. Nagarajan has written a novel - **Athavar House (1937)**, which depicts the impact of modernity and Gandhism on a Maharastrian Vaishnava Brahmin family. But the real impact of Gandhian ideology was felt with the Trio. They picked up issues like caste discrimination, upliftment of the poor and the downtrodden, modernity and religion, place of women in the society, situation of the village and the peasantry, etc. Mulk Raj Anand's "**Untouchable (1935)**" and Raja Rao's "**Kanthapura (1938)**" are greater efforts in this regard.

Anand's *Untouchable* deals with the ghastly evil of untouchability and portrays the harsh reality of the Hindu society. Gandhi appears as a person in this novel and through his speech discusses thoroughly about the effects of untouchability, providing a possible solution for the eradication of the ghastly evil from the society. Gandhi has been regarded as an avatar or incarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu and Krishna in this novel.

In Raja Rao's novel "**Kanthapura (1938)**", Gandhi does not appear as a person, but his invisible presence is being felt throughout the novel. The protagonist Moorthi of this novel acts as the shadow of Gandhi. He regards Gandhi as his role model and follows his ideology with great enthusiasm. He preaches the villagers of Kanthapura the Gandhian philosophy of truth and non-violence and motivates them to practice it. The villagers of Kanthapura declare themselves as Gandhi's men and join in a Satyagraha led by Moorthy. The Harikatha man, in this novel compares Gandhi with Lord Shiva and Lord Krishna in the similar manner as in the novel *Untouchable*. Like Shiva or Trinetra, Gandhi's Swaraj has also three eyes of 'Self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity and Khaddar'. Just like Lord Krishna or Mohan slays the serpent Kali, Gandhi i.e., Mohandas would slay the serpent of British rule. Here it is remarkable that Gandhi's influence in this period was such high that the novelists offered him with the figure of God. Raja Rao also introduces Gandhi as a representative in his novel "*The Cow of the Barricades (1947)*".

Though R.K. Narayan did not bring Gandhi directly in his novels of the pre-independence period; Gandhian philosophy has influenced him to some extent. However, in his novel "**Swami and Friends (1935)**", there is some description of boycott of foreign things; and this boycott movement is associated with Gandhiji.

Premchand, the noted Hindi novelist was influenced by Gandhian philosophy to such an extent that he resigned his government job in order to put the Gandhian thought into practice and also wrote about it in his novels.

2) Gandhi in Indian fictions after the independence:-

The Trio continued to put Gandhian ideology in their novels even after the independence of India. Some other novelists of the period also followed this trend. Seven years after his assassination, Gandhi appears as a character in R.K. Narayan's novel "*Waiting for the Mahatma (1955)*". This novel portrays the transformation process in its protagonist Sriram in search of truth and self-realization. Sriram is described as a careless boy in the beginning of the novel, but after his contact with Bharati, a disciple of Gandhiji, transformation comes in his life. He also becomes a follower of Gandhiji. Gandhi's speech gives him a new way of living. His meeting with Gandhiji provides him a new dimension to work.

Gandhi, along with other revolutionaries of the Indian struggle for independence, appears as a character in K.A. Abbas's Novel "**Inqilab (1955)**". The novel picks its theme from the Indian struggle for freedom, spanning its period from the Jallianwala Bagh massacre to the Gandhi Irwin pact. Like Moorthy of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Dhuli Singh acts as a Village Gandhi in Mulk Raj Anand's novel "**The Road (1961)**". Mulk Raj Anand repeats the theme of *Untouchable*, but with some differences. Dhooli Singh, inspired by Gandhi's teachings, treats the untouchables as Harijan- the children of God. Similarly, Zeenut Futeally's "**Zohra (1951)**" and Manohar Malgonkar's "**A Bend in the Ganges (1964)**" chose their major themes from the struggle from independence, thus following Gandhian ideology.

Conclusion:-

To sum up, Gandhi figures as a major part in the fictions of India, both before and after the independence. Kali Nicholson rightly says, "**A character who has loomed large in Indo-Anglian fiction during and after his lifetime is Mahatma Gandhi.**" He provided a strong stimulus to the shaping of the literary trend in India and shifted the focus from romanticism to realism. Being influenced by his ideology, novelists of India started writing about the cause of Indian reality and this trend continues even after the independence of the country.

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