



VIDHYAYANA

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

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ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

## The Influence of Gandhian Ideology on Indian English Literature

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VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

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## ABSTRACT

The twentieth century Indian English literature is influenced by Gandhian thoughts. Gandhi began to influence both national politics and national literature after his return from south Africa in 1915. Chief among the Indian novelists in English, writing under the influence of Gandhi, are K.S. Venkataramani, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Amil Ali, Ahmad Abbas, Nayantara Sahgal and K. Nagarajan. The present research paper is an attempt to examine the impact of Mahatma Gandhi's ideas on Indian Writing in English in General. This research paper will attempt to portray extensively the basic tenets of Gandhian thoughts in terms of the prevailing social, political, educational, religious, cultural and economic issues and to relate them with Indian English Fiction.

**Key Words: Gandhian Ideology, Influence Study, Indian Literature in English**

### **Introduction:**

Indian writings in English was the historical encounter of two cultures both Indian and western for nearly hundred and ninety years. With this, Indian people experienced the impact of the western culture. The enormous blow gave expression to the feelings and experiences to the writers in English with the establishment of four Universities and Western educational system. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay was the first Indian who published his first novel named "Rajmohan's Wife" which was serialised as "Wife" in the Calcutta weekly, The Indian Field, in 1864. It was published in the book form in 1930. Bankim Chandra was influenced heavily by the British novelists Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens.

*Rajmohan's Wife* is a novel about the sufferings of a middle-class housewife, Matangini, at the hands of her husband Rajmohan. It was the time of social reforms when the novel was published and thus it is not a surprise that it is a social novel. Till the end of nineteenth century, the novels have been mostly published by



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ISSN 2454-8596

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the writers from Bengal and Madras, so it is obvious that the setting of these early novels have been Bengal.

## The Gandhian Age in Indian English Literature

“The novelists of the 1930s and 1940s owed their inspiration and the conditions for their emergence to two contexts: the social and political upheavals of the ‘Gandhian whirlwind’ and the era of late-modernism in Europe.” (Mehrotra 191)

Gandhian era in Indian writing in English began in 1920. Gandhi inspired everyone to develop a freedom consciousness and to struggle for India’s independence. He told people to be fearless and reject slavery. He suggested the path of truth and non-violence. He gave life to every segment of nation like politics, economics, education, religion, social life, language and literature. As a result, it enlightened the literary field along with the political arena. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar writes:

To Gandhi, national realization included the ending of political subjection and economic degradation, the removal of social inequalities and abuses like untouchability, cast arrogance, occupational prejudices, etc., the reform of education, and giving new life to language and literature. (258)

Gandhi inspired the common men to write on the social themes and they got a place in writers’ domain of literature. Indian fiction in 1930s under the influence of Gandhi changed the literary scenario. The love for country, freedom, the problems of common men became the prime issues of the fiction. This came to be known as Gandhian literature.

In the words of M.K. Naik novels became an instrument in the hands of writers focusing on the society with its values thus “Indian society, galvanized into a new social and political awareness, was bound to seek creative expression for its new consciousness” (Naik 57) and to generate expected transformation



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ISSN 2454-8596

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through fiction writing. The writers focused on the themes of nationalism and independence of the country.

During this age, many novels have been written based on the freedom movement.

Gandhi was not actually a writer of the mainstream yet his so many people across the globe were influenced and mesmerized by his writing. Gandhi's autobiography "Experiments with Truth" (1925) is one of the eternal classics that describes his simple life and high thinking. Hind Swaraj is considered best among the Gandhi's writings which present his economical, political, ethical and educational thoughts. He also shared his views through the magazines "Young India" and "Harijan" to the common people. He was the strict follower of non-violence that made him different than other leaders. Thus, he was the man of simplicity and wisdom that attracted the readers and established the Gandhian literature.

### The Influence of Gandhi on Indian Literature

The Gandhian impact on contemporary Indian literature has brought about results at various levels, and in various directions. As regards the writer's choice of language, we have seen that one result of the Gandhian influence has been a general preference for the mother tongue or the regional language, and occasionally a purposeful bilingualism, the same writer handling with mastery his own mother tongue as well as English. (Iyengar 278)

It is believed that the Independence movement in India "was not merely a political struggle, but an all-pervasive emotional experience for all Indians in the nineteen twenties and thirties.... That was an experience that was national in nature" (Mukherjee 14). Not any Indian writer could oversight this national upsurge. The ideology of Gandhiji was the moving force for the national upsurge during this time. The ideology of Gandhi not only remained on the paper but it became the way of life. It became the hopes for the new future of India. A society undergoing resurrection and transformation provided a fertile soil for fiction.



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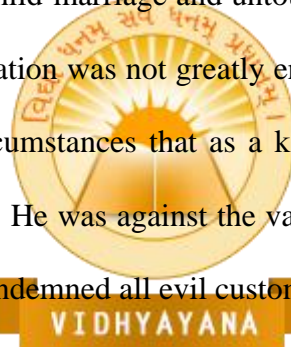
ISSN 2454-8596

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It created the self-awareness among the people during the British rule and it provided variety of themes to the novelists including social and national problems. It was in fact, that during this Gandhian Era that “Indian English novel discussed some of its most significant themes – freedom struggle, East-West relationship, quest of identity, the exploitation of the underdog, the search for justice and fair play, the treatment of the rural life etc.” (Kumar 25)

When Gandhi came on the literary scene, Indian society needed total change and reform. Gandhiji very actively dealt not only with the economic and political problems but also with the social problems of the Indian society. Social reformation failed to clear the society of its deep-rooted evils. The image of India outside its national borders had been damaged and for a foreigner. India was a land of superstitions. Indian society was full of evil customs such as child-marriage and untouchability. Widow re-marriage was resisted in so-called upper castes and female education was not greatly encouraged. Poverty further had deteriorated the social conditions. It was in these circumstances that as a karma-yogi, Gandhi tried to pin-point these social evils and reform the Indian society. He was against the various superstitions found among the Indian people. He also strongly and forcefully condemned all evil customs of the society.



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### Conclusion:

Thus, to sum up, one can say that the novels of 1930s and 40s are based on Gandhian ideology and its impact on society. Gandhi was against “Art for Art's Sake”. He believed in “Art for Life’s Sake”. For him, only art and literature based on truth helped men to rise upward. Thus, all his writings cherish Truth and high moral values. Gandhi created a wave social awakening through his ideology and works. Perhaps the most effective interpreter of Indian thought, Gandhi is a man with an imperishable message to his own countrymen.



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ISSN 2454-8596

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**An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal**

**ISSN 2454-8596**

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

June 2016.

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