

Gandhi- a Never Ending Inspiration: Reflection of Gandhian Thoughts in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*

Lalita*

Research Scholar, IGU, Meerpur, Rewari, Haryana

Abstract – When we try to look back the world's history, we may realize that the greatness of a man must be measured not by the amount of veneration accorded him but by the impact of his life on others. Around a century ago a leader was emerging who changed the course of a country's struggle for independence. He inspired people from different caste, class, religion and language who become united to gain their freedom together. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, famously known as Mahatma Gandhi is a gift to the humanity in modern times, belongs to the line of great men who continued to influence every aspect of human life and tried to uplift them. He is a socio-political figure who is barely impossible for someone to forget or ignore. A writer's work is sustained by the intellectual, religious, social, political and cultural milieu to which he belongs. From 1920 onwards Indian thoughts and life were greatly influenced by the powerful impact of the nationalist movement leads by Gandhi and Gandhian thoughts and philosophy. Indian English literature too was not left untouched with the popularity of Gandhi and his thoughts. Gandhian thought had a deep effect on the Indian writers especially on the Indo-Anglian writers. It helped them to connect with the contemporary society, the people and their problems like untouchability and caste system. Gandhi insisted on simple living and high thinking which was reflected and highlighted by the literary English authors of time in their novels, short-stories and poems. The Gandhian writers, presented Gandhi an important guest character or they presented a local Gandhi replica and presented him in the light of Mahatma and also as a god like Rama or Krishna. The great Indian English writers R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, and many other writer explored Gandhian thoughts in their writings. Their novels follow Gandhian thoughts and his principles of Truth, Non-violence, Brotherhood, Satyagraha and his views on untouchability. This paper aims to explore the Gandhian thoughts and inspiration in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*.

Key Words: Gandhism, Inspiration, Influence, Thoughts, Casteism, Downtrodden, Untouchable.

-----X-----

"Lives of great men all remind us, We can make our lives sublime, And, departing, leave behind us, Footprints on the sand of time."

Longfellow "A Psalm of Life"

If we look back the world's history, we may realize that the greatness of man must be measured not by the amount of education accorded him but by the impact and inspiration of his life on others. There was hardly any area in the pre or post-independence era that Gandhi had left without touch for the sake of Indian development and independence. This would not be an exaggeration to say that Gandhi had performed many miracles during his lifetime and his messages were source of inspiration and strength to the people for all times. Gandhian thought had a deep effect on the Indian writers. This helped them to connect with the contemporary society, the people and their problems like untouchability and caste

system. Almost all of their novels represent events, which were the examples of actual incidents and teachings that Gandhi encrypted in real life during his visit at various places. M.K. Naik says- "Gandhi is a colossus who bestrides almost over the entire field of Indian writing in English in several forms either as a character or as a subject or a pervasive influence upon the social and political scene depicted by the writers." (370) There are about a dozen or more Indian novels in English in which Gandhi appears as a character or as a ubiquitous influence on the political and social scene. Gandhi's intention was to remove the social inequalities, untouchability, caste arrogance, occupational prejudices. He also tried to give new life to literature and language. According to K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger:

Gandhi is too big to be given a minor part: on the other hand, he is sure to turn the novel in a

biography if he is given a major part. The best thing for the contemporary novelist would be to keep Gandhi in the background but make his influence indirectly. (Indian writing in English)

Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand are the greatest Indian writers writing in English were highly influenced by Gandhian thoughts and his ideas, and they explored Gandhi's thoughts in their writings.

Mulk Raj Anand's works reveal the deep influence of Gandhian philosophy. He has emphasized more and more on social problems of poor, downtrodden, oppressed, low caste of the Hindu society and their inhuman exploitation. For Anand literature should be an interpretation of truth of people's lives and it should be written from felt experience not from books and other sources. His novel *Untouchable*, published in the year 1935, it shows impact of Gandhi and his thoughts in marvellous way. It was based on Gandhian voice against untouchability. It covers the time of pre-independence era when poverty, casteism, superstition and exploitation of untouchables were predominated. Anand has also taken the theme of inhuman exploitation of the lower class by the higher section of the society. He started the new trend of realism and social protest in Indian English fiction. The influence of Gandhi on Anand was remarkable. He was drawn towards Gandhi for his sincerity, love of truth, humanity, especially his great love for poor and the suffering and his tireless efforts to uplift them materially and spiritually. Anand has dealt with the various aspects of Gandhian thoughts. Both Gandhi and Anand were against caste system and class distinction. Gandhi was against untouchability on political, social and humanitarian grounds. He said that the age old untouchability is a curse and a kind of disease to Hindu society. Anand's had personal contact with Gandhi which made him aware of Gandhian principles. He got a chance to stay in Sabarmati Ashram; there he came closer to Gandhian philosophy. His stay in Ashram also gave him a chance to come closer to the exploited-particularly the untouchables. He also gained a closer and sympathetic understanding of the social and economically exploited poor Indians. He showed Gandhi his novel's draft. After Gandhi's suggestion he revised his book and when Forster read this book he was happy because its subject will go straight to the heart of people.

In this novel Gandhi ji makes a cameo appearance and he inspired many people, while some other characters work and think under his influence. It is a realistic novel, a story of a socially crushed protagonist Bakha a sweeper boy. It shows Bakha's suffering and various processes of social determination and religious orthodoxies. Through the character of Bakha Anand depicts the poignant condition of untouchables, their inevitable hardships and physical and mental tortures. Bakha is forced into the traditional profession of sweeper. His chief

duty is to keep the three rows of public latrines clean. He hates his job and society. His day starts with his father's voice who always shouts on him; "Get up, oh you Bakhiya, oh son of pig!... Sure as the daylight, from the midst of a broken, jarring, interrupted, snore get up and attend to the latrines or the spays will be angry". (*Untouchable*15) The people of his caste were not allowed to go to temple and other public places. If they touch anything even unintentionally that thing gets polluted. They have to stop or change their direction if someone from high class is coming or going from the same way. Due to the series of incidents troubled, reminded as bitter experiences, made Bakha consider himself as an untouchable. Bakha felt very hurt and become violent when he heard about molestation with his sister. She was denigrated by the temple priest who shamelessly tried to molest her while she was cleaning the lavatory of his house. The priest not only disgraced her but also accusing Bakha of having polluted him. The sweeper has to keep physical distance from Hindu and has to shout: Posh, Posh, sweeper coming so that they save themselves from his touch. Bakha once slapped by a high caste Hindu because he touched him and according to him Bakha polluted him. He shouted on Bakha: "Why don't you call, you swine and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, now I will have to go to take bath to purify myself?" (*Untouchable*53) Everyone whom Bakha meets- the sweet vendor, the soldier, the temple priest, the teacher, and the bullock-cart driver- sees him in relation to the ritually polluting profession that he has inherited from his forefathers.

Bakha hears a poet- Iqbal Sarshar's remark about a proper drainage system which simply would eliminate the whole problem of untouchability. The poet says that we must destroy caste system; we should destroy inequality of birth. We all should believe in equality of rights and opportunities for everyone. Mahatma Gandhi is presented in this novel to establish a transformation in human rights. Gandhi was not presented much in the novel. He arrived to Golbagh in this novel to address a meeting. He delivered a speech on the need of ending untouchability from India. He is very keen for uplifting the untouchables. He calls them 'Harijans' (men of god). He regards untouchability as greatest latch on Hinduism. He also prays that he gets to reborn as an out-caste untouchable. In his speech Gandhi ji says:

As you all know, while we are asking for freedom from the grip of a foreign nation, we have ourselves, for centuries, trampled underfoot millions of human beings without feeling the slightest remorse of our iniquity. For me the question of these people is moral and religious.... (*Untouchable*136)

Bakha also went that place to listen Gandhi's speech. He finds the Hindu, Lallas, the Kashmiri Muslims and many more people from outcaste colony together in the crowd. This reflects Anand's consciousness towards Gandhi's principles of equality, love for helpless. Bakha realizes that it is only Mahatma Gandhi who could bring unity among all classes and castes. He gets peace of mind when he hears Gandhi talking about the welfare of untouchables. His speech gives him a hope for the better future. Gandhi says; "I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism" (*Untouchable* 137). Bakha feels that at least someone is there for him and his class. He finds relief in Gandhi's words. He dares to hope, his chosen route to emancipation lies in the sphere of dress. Gandhism- it brings the Hindus, the Musalmans and people of other sectors less than one umbrella cries for humanity, gives a new sense of identity to Bakha that he is not an untouchable but a human being. Gandhiji's announces that he regards 'untouchability as a sin' give a new sense of hope to the whole text and a hope that Indian will build up as a nation of humanity and fraternity. Gandhi finished his speech by declaring that all public wells, temples, schools, roads and sanatoriums must be made open to the untouchables. Bakha notifies that through Gandhi ji's presence he is given a real possibility of recognizing himself a human being in his own society. This novel expresses immense influence of Gandhi on MulkRaj Anand and his thought provocation to pen his view of equality. According to Anand adoption of the modern technology of the flush toilet, this offered as a solution to the problem of untouchability. He also expresses the right to education throughout Bakha's impulse for paying a boy an anna per lesson because he always wished to learn how to read and write. The sun sets and Bakha emerges from the grassy area that housed the tree he sat on during the Mahatma's speech onto the dusty road. As the Indian twilight flashes through the sky Bakha comes to a decision. He says that he will tell his father what Gandhi and the poet said about untouchables. The novel ends with the hope of the better life of the untouchables.

Raja Rao a prominent Indian writer writing in English has explored Gandhian thoughts in his writings. His first novel *Kanthapura* published in 1938 when the freedom struggle of India was its peak point. There were youth across the nation who willing to join the freedom movement and willing to fight for their country. Thematically *Kanthapura* deals with Gandhi, Gandhian revolution and its impact on a small south Indian village Kanthapura. It depicts how the whirlwind of Gandhian revolution shakes the little village to its very roots. He shows the change by portraying the type of village that Kanthapura is before Gandhian ideas make their impact on it. Kanthapura is a traditional caste ridden village which is far away from all modern ways of living and development taking place in the cities. In this novel there is description of Brahmin Quarters, Pariah Quarters, Potters Quarters, Weaver's Quarters and

Sudra Quarters. The idea behind showing these socio-economic divisions of the village in the very beginning of the novel is only to emphasize the gradual transformation it undergoes through the impact of Gandhian philosophy. Moorthy, the protagonist of the novel, was inspired by the Gandhian philosophy of unity and non-violence and that every person is equal and they must unite to gain the freedom. He leads Gandhian movement in Kanthapura. He goes to city where he gets familiar with Gandhian philosophy and came back to the village. Like Gandhi he also has self-sacrificial nature and he was also dedicated himself to the progress of the village. Though he never met Gandhi yet he follows Gandhi in high spirit. He wears Khadi clothes and fights against untouchability. Moorthy counsels a woman;

To wear cloth spun and woven with your own God given hands is sacred, says the Mahatma. And it gives work to the workless and work to the lazy. And if you don't need the cloth sister, 'give it away to the poor'Our country is being bleat to death by foreigners. We have to protect our mother. (*Kanthapura* 23)

Like Mahatma Gandhi, Moorthy also observes fast, organizes Satyagraha, also like him undergoes punishments and gets arrested by police. In early parts of novel we find Gandhi's tale interpreted with Harikatha. Jayaramachar, the narrator of Harikathas, narrates the stories every evening based on Gandhi and his ideals. He equalizes Swaraj with Siva. He says; "Siva has three eyed and Swaraj too has three eyed: self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity, Khaddr." (*Kanthapura* 10) He manages to bring Swaraj in his every topic of discussion. Jayramchar connect his story with Hindu mythology and tells;

You remember how Krishna, when he was but a babe of four, had begun to fight against demons and had killed the serpent Kalya. So too our Mohandas began to fight against the enemies of the country.... More and more men followed him as they did Krishna the flute-player and so he goes from village to village to slay the serpent of the foreign rule. Fight, says he, but harms no soul. Love all, says he..... He is a saint, the Mahatma.... you know how he fasts and prays. And even his enemies fall at his feet." (*Kanthapura* 18)

Moorthy then proceeds to bridge the gap in society created by untouchability and casteism. This was Gandhi's biggest challenge to bring untouchables into the mainstream life. He said, centuries of caste practice had stiffened into people's mind. It is an arduous task to remove rigid blocks so that humanity could freely flow. There is a quote regarding Moorthy;

"So Moorthy goes from house to house and from younger brother to elder brother and from elder to

the grandfather himself and what do you think? He even goes to the Potters' quarters and the Weaver's quarter and the Sudra quarter, We said to ourselves, he is one of these Gandhi-men, who say there is neither caste nor clan nor family, and yet they pray like us and they live like us. Only they say too, one should not marry early, one should allow widows to take husbands and a Brahmin might marry a Pariah and Pariah a Brahmin." (*Kanthapura* 15)

Though Gandhi was not a character in the novel, his presence was immensely felt. The Gandhiji's programme of Swadeshi, abolition of untouchability and casteism and the economics of Charkha and Khadi spread in *Kanthapura* with enthusiastic men and women who formed voluntary corps. *Kanthapura* sketches the step by step social development of a small village and its people, who following Gandhi and his thoughts become successful in redeeming their village from the social evils of untouchability, casteism, women backwardness, and disunity.

No one can achieve respect and faith from his nation and from the world, unless he is not having his contribution for the human being. Gandhiji is among those great men who spent their life for the sake of humanity and for the development of the nation. He called "the father of Nation", and his secret lies in his complete faith in the goodness of human life, in his perception of oneness in all caste, races, truth and non-violence. Indian history or we can say that world's history never saw such an upsurge of faith, united will, and unity in action, social development and community feeling without any expensive spending as in the Gandhian Age. The above mentioned novels are best for analyzing how Gandhian thoughts and his philosophy inspired both the writers and Gandhi's influence in Indian writing in English. Gandhi's aim was to eliminate poverty, casteism, untouchability and superstitions which were prominent that time along with India's freedom. Both the novels-*Untouchable* and *Kanthapura* follow Gandhian thoughts and his principles of Non-violence, Truth, Brotherhood, Satyagraha and his views on untouchability. In *Untouchable* his views give a hope for a good life for the downtrodden. And at the same time *Kanthapura* shows influence of Gandhi's struggle for India's Independence and its impact on the people of a small village.

WORK CITED

Anand, Mulk Raj (1992). "On the Genesis of *Untouchable*" A Note, in *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1992. Print.

— — —. *Untouchable*. New Delhi: O.U.P., 8th edition. Reprint 2002.

Gandhi, Mahatma (1927). *An Autobiography or the Story of my Experiments with Truth*,

Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927. Print.

Iyenger, K.R.S. (2005). *Indian Writing in English*. Delhi: Sterling Publication, 2005.

Karkani, Chetan (1974). "Mulk Raj Anand: The Novelist as a Socialist Chronicler", *Thought*, 23 August 1974. Print.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth (1838). *A Psalm of Life*. Selected Works. New York: The Knickerbockers magazine, 1838. Print.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi (1971). *The Twice Born Fiction*. New Delhi: Heinemann Educational Books, 1971.

Naik, M.K. (1982). "A History of Indian English Literature". New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1982. Print.

Rao, Raja (2004). *Kanthapura*. Allahabad: Meera Publication, 2nd edition. Reprint, 2004.

Sharma, Govind Prasad (1978). *Nationalism in Indo-Anglian Fiction*. New Delhi: Sterling Publisher Pvt. Ltd., 1978. Print.

Venkateswari, I. (2003). *The Impact of Gandhism on Indo-English Fiction*. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 2003. Print.

Corresponding Author

Lalita*

Research Scholar, IGU, Meerpur, Rewari, Haryana