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## Gandhian Philosophy in Indian Literature

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### **Abstract**

Gandhi has been one of the major sources for literature writing in India, his philosophical reflections can be found in a large number of writings, this involves writers of not only one language or ideology, but of multiple different languages and time periods, all of them have tried to encapsulate his ideology in their writings. These writers are mostly who have deliberated upon social issues or problems prevalent in their respective societies and the most prominent personality, who had a great impact on mitigating and alleviating them is Gandhi, hence his incorporation is an inalienable part of such Literature. The research paper studies and understands the impact of Gandhian philosophy on Indian literature, with a special emphasis on the writings of Premchand and Raja Rao, it analyses their writings, relevance to the then society and Gandhian philosophy incorporated in them.

## Keywords

Gandhian philosophy, social issues and rights, Premchand, Godan, Raja Rao, Kanthapura.

## Introduction

After end of the nineteenth century, an literary revolution was initiated and introduced by a large number of Indian writers and the intellectual class of the society, this included people from various backgrounds, comprising of writers from different languages, genres, various societal aspects, themes and many more such dimensions of literature which brought a transformative evolution and change the face of Indian Literature forever.<sup>1</sup>

In this stage also there remained some major themes on which generally all these literature was based or at least was emphasized by many prominent writers, these were focal about social issues like caste system, untouchability, racism and many such evils and practices followed and propagated in the then Indian society.

The caste system present in the Indian society is historically one of the most prominent dimensions in the Indian literature, where people are socially differentiated through class, religion, region, tribe, gender and even language. The Indian caste system is considered as a close arrangement symbolically based on stratification meaning that a person's social,

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<sup>1</sup> Le Thi Bich Thuy. Castle Issue in Early Twentieth – Century India in the Novels Godan of Premchand and Shrimp Season of Thakagi Sivaskara Pillai (Volume 4 Issue 2) World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities. 2018, pp 119-125, <http://www.sciepub.com/WJSSH/content/4/2> (visited on 25 March 2020)

economic and political and even to a greater extent religious status or position is determined and obligated to which caste he or she has been born into, caste creates a barrier between the people themselves, there are limits on interaction, conduct and intellectual exchanges among people, this practice can be historically and hugely derived and related to prominent religions present in our country, this has been enhanced and promoted in different ways through religious preaching, scripts, revolutions.<sup>2</sup>

Although this form of social immoralities exist in all most each and every human civilizations present around all the world, but this social problem further intensifies in the Indian perspective, because here in the Indian society there is not only this dimension present but here there is an overlap of more than one dimension, this includes the aspect of untouchability having a strong and solid presence in the then Indian culture. This also has an age old historical background and practice prevalent among the people.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile at the same time they were several prominent writers and personalities, who have throughout this period ranging from late nineteenth century to mid twentieth century have been working tirelessly, opposing such norms and have always stood in defiance of these social evils, and the greatest figure among these is of Mahatma Gandhi, his larger than life personality surely had an immense impact on such reformist

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<sup>2</sup> Manali S. Deshpande. HISTORY OF THE INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIA TODAY, <https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1043&context=socssp> (visited on 24 March 2020)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

writers present not only in India but throughout the world<sup>4</sup> One such writer is Munshi Premchand, his deep understanding of rural India and its customs followed is unbeatable, his writing always have the ground level analysis and carries the essence of Indian culture, along with him there are many contemporary writers who have written on these social issues, but his philosophical contradictions in the Indian society along with the concept involved and the most important is the influence and reflection of Gandhian thoughts and ideas in his writing along with all other writers.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this research project is to understand the impact and influence of Gandhian teachings in the Indian literary writers, with special emphasis on literary works of Premchand, some other Gandhian writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand etc., this will explore the aspects of casteism and untouchability in their writings.

## **Research Objectives**

1. To understand and analysis the aspects of social problems of untouchability and caste system present, in the works of Gandhian Literary writers, prominent based on the works of Munshi Premchand.

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<sup>4</sup> Le Thi Bich Thuy. Castle Issue in Early Twentieth – Century India in the Novels Godan of Premchand and Shrimp Season of Thakagi Sivaskara Pillai (Volume 4 Issue 2) World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities. 2018, pp 119-125, <http://www.sciepub.com/WJSSH/content/4/2> (visited on 25 March 2020)

<sup>5</sup> Lalita, Gandhi. A Never Ending Inspiration: Reflection of Gandhian Thoughts in Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable and Raja Rao's Kanthapura, (Volume 16 Issue 2) in Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education - 2019, pp 469-472, <http://www.ignited.in/l/a/89105> (visited on 25 March 2020)

2. To explore the incorporated or reflection of Gandhian philosophical thoughts and to understand the impact of these thoughts and ideas, in the works of Indian writers.

### **Scope and Limitations**

The research paper deals and is based on the literary works of prominent Indian writers mentioned above, it explores the Gandhian philosophy envisaged and incorporated by these writers (Premchand and Raja Rao) in perspective of the social issues prevalent in the then Indian society, the research paper explains about the Gandhian aspect of their writings only.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology defines and denotes what is called as the activity of research, It provides and elaborates us an advancement and progress of wealth of human knowledge, machinery of intellectual exchange to carry out the research, tools to look at things in life objectively - scientific deduction and inductive analytical skills of research. Also it defines and promotes the method in which the data is collected and assessed in a research project. For covering various sources of the topic, doctrinal method of research was adopted. Doctrinal method which is also known as library or secondary data based method focuses on reading and analysis of available information on this concept, while reviewing a number of text books to the relevant topic, the majority of their content was were concerned with identifying and analyzing these resources which help for making the assignment. It concerns about the historical background regarding the presence of rigid caste system and the practice of untouchability, its strict opposition by writers and eminent personalities, such as

Gandhi and his thoughts then adopted and later written down by prominent Indian writers like Premchand through his literary novels like *Godan* and it also includes the works of other writers who also have written on similar lines.

## **Reflection of Gandhian Philosophy in Indian Literature**

Indian literature is indebted to Mahatma Gandhi, for his ideology, teachings and principles, which have been one of the major source of inspiration and encouragement to various Indian writers, who have worked on social issues of the society, the philosophy portrayed in their writings has been greatly influenced by him, the deep structural thoughts of Gandhi on almost all the problems prevalent in society, including social evils, inequality, standard of living etc. has made his teachings a distinct field of literature in itself (known as Gandhian literature). It is impossible for a single author to pen down all these related aspects in his writings, hence there are many prominent Indian writers who have tried to incorporate these teachings in their prospective literary works, in this series of writers<sup>6</sup>, the research project has taken into account two of the most important Indian writers (that is Premchand and Raja Rao), who in their literary works have significantly depict and reflect Gandhian philosophy.

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<sup>6</sup> Lalita, Gandhi. A Never Ending Inspiration: Reflection of Gandhian Thoughts in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, (Volume 16 Issue 2) in *Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education* - 2019, pp 469-472, <http://www.ignited.in/l/a/89105> (visited on 29 March 2020)

## Gandhian Philosophy in Premchand's Writings

Premchand is one the greatest Indian writer of all times, along with him there are many such writers whose writings in English were highly and deeply influenced by Gandhian thoughts and his ideas and they have explored and expressed Gandhi's thoughts in their writings.<sup>7</sup> The inspiration and the deep influence which our literatures of all most all the Indian languages and scripts have imbibed from him (Gandhi) is recognized and well noted in the form of theater, conventions, intellectual exchanges and literary writings based on his life, thoughts, opinions, ideologies, practices followed and most importantly was his vision of improving the standard of life of the people in all the related aspects.<sup>8</sup> This was the reason that such a medium produced an overwhelming and an immediate impact on the people not only around him but throughout the country. This had a huge and a long lasting impact on the Indian minds especially among the rural and semi urban population of India, who were basically unaware and unknown to such thoughts upon the social issues faced by them on a daily basis.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Le Thi Bich Thuy. Castle Issue in Early Twentieth – Century India in the Novels Godan of Premchand and Shrimp Season of Thakagi Sivaskara Pillai (Volume 4 Issue 2) World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities. 2018, pp 119-125, <http://www.sciepub.com/WJSSH/content/4/2> (visited on 29 March 2020)

<sup>8</sup> Koyel Chakraborty. "Gandhian Influence on Indian Writing in English: An assessment of the effects of developmental Communication, as used in the Political Campaigns by Gandhiji, portrayed by the Contemporary Indian English Novelists.", [https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/g\\_writing.htm](https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/g_writing.htm) (visited on 29 March 2020)

<sup>9</sup> Lalita, Gandhi. A Never Ending Inspiration: Reflection of Gandhian Thoughts in Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable and Raja Rao's Kanthapura, (Volume 16 Issue 2) in *Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education - 2019*, pp 469-472, <http://www.ignited.in/1/a/89105> (visited on 29 March 2020)

The literary writers of that period were also no exceptions to the above mentioned phenomenon, the writers working on various literatures in those days (pre-independence period) were generally the ones who were either part of the freedom movement or in some way or the other related to it they were directly or indirectly influenced with his ideals. Their writings immensely contained the Gandhian idealism, lifestyle, teachings, nationalism and views propagated by him. There was almost every element of him incorporated in their writings.<sup>10</sup> As noted from the words of famous Gandhian writer and activist Krishna Kripalini he states that "In almost every Indian literature of that time a wave of change and a new thinking emerged, leading to a paradigm shift of emphasis from rich to the poor, from the intellectual or elite 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"<sup>11</sup>

Under the influence of the thought and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, followed by some other prominent thinkers and social reformers writer Premchand had consistently made contributions to the literature from the perspective of the working and nominal class of the people for their struggling spirit, opposition to caste discrimination, social injustice, untouchability and tried to contain realist approach in his writings. He used his deep and sharp literary skills to depict meticulously and authentically Indian rural life during the pre-independence period, the cruel aspect of untouchability and the harsh rule of caste regime, tyranny of the poor peasant

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<sup>10</sup> Bhabani Bhattacharya. *Gandhi the Writer*, 2002, pp. 226.

<sup>11</sup> Krishna Kripalini, *Modern Indian Literature: A Panoramic Glimpse*, 1972, pp. 79.

class which is the most affected by it and finally about the low status of the working class.<sup>12</sup> Premchand's greatest and most prominent novel of all times is Godan. Since its inspection, Godan has been accepted, embraced and considered as the most valuable asset of Modern Indian Literature. The theme and structure of this novel is based on the issue of caste discrimination or distinction in Indian society in the early twentieth century. Premchand proficiently has drawn a realistic and an observable picture of rural India with farmers, migrant workers, illiterate class and women who are subjected to harsh and backward religious laws and the caste discrimination supported by the elite section of the society, the novel highlights the vivid contradictions present and criticizes the Indian society which only encourages and supports the upper class intelligentsia<sup>13</sup>. He had commented on the most painful social practices of Indian society in his works. The novel Godan is one of the best of Indian realist literature. The author potentially through this novel has described the delicate balance between the social issue and its relation with Gandhian thoughts, while highlighting the issue of exploitation of marginal farmers, their struggle for survival, social repercussions, by the elite section of the society the novel has imbedded itself with Premchand's artistic idealization and disillusioned realism pertaining to the

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<sup>12</sup> Munshi Premchand, <https://www.studymode.com/essays/Munshi-Premchand-1765918.html> (visited on 30 March 2020)

<sup>13</sup> Le Thi Bich Thuy. Caste Issue in Early Twentieth – Century India in the Novels Godan of Premchand and Shrimp Season of Thakagi Sivaskara Pillai (Volume 4 Issue 2) World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities. 2018, pp 119-125, <http://www.sciepub.com/WJSSH/content/4/2> (visited on 16 May 2020)

character traits of all the classes and castes present in the society.<sup>14</sup>

## **Gandhian Philosophy in Raja Rao's Writings**

Raja Rao is considered to be one of the most famous Indian writers of English language, he is recognized for promoting Indian literature works on various platforms throughout the world<sup>15</sup>, being associated with various national movements, his writings have been influenced by Gandhian thoughts in most of his literature works, for example Gandhi's biography Great Indian Way: A life of Mahatma Gandhi 1998, Changing India 1939, books on major social issues of that time etc. has been testimony to it, but his most significant and recognized contribution to the realm of Gandhian literature is through his novel Kanthapura 1938, often called as Gandhian novel of South Indian literature. Thematically, Kanthapura deals with Gandhi, his revolution which shakes the very root of social problems present and assesses its impact.

The novel sketches down the step by step social development of a small South Indian village, which has a deep caste system imbedded in it, the marginal class of people are the most effected, they are forced to face the social evils of untouchability, casteism, illiteracy and starvation. While on the same side there are elite class of people, belonging to the upper castes, are benefiting from all these social evils, as they exploit the lower classes, there is colonial regime, people are

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<sup>14</sup> Le Thi Bich Thuy. Castle Issue in Early Twentieth – Century India in the Novels Godan of Premchand and Shrimp Season of Thakagi Sivaskara Pillai (Volume 4 Issue 2) World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities. 2018, pp119-125, <http://www.sciepub.com/WJSSH/content/4/2> (visited on 30 March 2020)

<sup>15</sup> Raja Rao. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raja\\_Rao](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raja_Rao) (visited on 27 March 2020)

unaware of tier basic human rights, based on this background the novel further moves focusing on the anti-colonial movements happening across the county<sup>16</sup>.

These nationalist movements are centered on Gandhian sprit and ideology, these movements gradually become more wider and eventually expand its scope leading to more inclusion and association of people with them, as Gandhian principles garner support, suddenly people start questioning the age old system of caste, they understand the dire effect of this structure on their social wellbeing, there is a wave for change and unity among the various classes and sections of the society, the entire village experiences a total reformation, where there is no caste discrimination, political awareness among the people, they start understand the importance of been educated and the role of women in defying backwardness of society<sup>17</sup>.

The enthusiasm generated by Gandhi, through his ideology and principles, the expectations desired by him to the masses, aroused a sense of responsibility and togetherness, this helped in intensifying the nationalist movement, but the most important element attached to it is the acceptance and dedication of these people in the effective incorporation of Gandhian teachings in their lives. The novel conceptualizes all these minor and major changes with linguistic articulation, which makes it one of the most remarkable works, influenced by Gandhian ideology.

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<sup>16</sup> Lalita, Gandhi. A Never Ending Inspiration: Reflection of Gandhian Thoughts in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, (Volume 16 Issue 2) in *Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education- 2019*, pp 469-472, <http://www.ignited.in/1/a/89105> (visited on 29 March 2020)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

The impact of Gandhi on Indian literature is immense, his larger than life dimensions of his principles, his aura to capture the attention of the masses and finally his dedicated effort and ideology has created altogether a different landscape for literature writers of that time, there have been several books and novels related to his ideology or which talks about any social aspect associated with him, at the time of nationalist movements there is hardly any writers who has not been influenced by his philosophy, based on this approach there were several writers who have worked on it, but the research paper took into account the prominent works of Hindi literature writer, Premchand who with his novel *Godan* has created a unique position for himself in the field of Indian literature, famous for his realistic approach towards society and prominent English writer Raja Rao, his book *Kanthapura* which systematically records the various aspects in a small village, which slowly transforms completely attracted by teachings of Gandhi. There are still many aspects of Gandhian literature to be connected with the modern day literature as this idealization of his principles is ever expanding its scope.

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