

Gandhian philosophy and the national movement

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Abstract

Gandhiji is the most revered person in India and also abroad not only for his struggle for Indian freedom but also for his personal impeccable and immaculate character. During his Age, two world wars took place. At the end of the First World War, Indians were discontented and frustrated as they could not realize their hope of attaining freedom. The Montage-Chelmsford Reforms proved futile. The Muslims too were disappointed with the treatment that has been meted out to Turkey at the Versailles Peace conference.

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Introduction

Prof KR Srinivasa Iyengar pointed out

The Jillian Walla Baugh massacre of people who gathered to make a peaceful demonstration poured fresh oil on the flame of discontent till it burst into a binding blaze of national agony and resentment. It was the phoenix hour, and Gandhi the Mahatma gave the signal, and a whole nation awake from the suspended animation and felt the bloodstreams of a new life coursing through its veins (2005:249).

People from all echelons realized the waking up call given by Gandhiji. Consequently life could not be the same as before. Every sector and segment of our national life-politics, economics, education, journalism, religion, social life, language and literature acquired more or less Gandhian ideology and philosophy. He exercised a potent influence on our languages and literatures, both directly through his own writings in English and Gujarati and indirectly through the movements generated by his revolutionary ideas, ideals and practice. In 'Young India' he explained his experiments in the political field. His principles of non-violence, satyagraha or passive resistance, non-cooperation and truthfulness penetrated deep into every individual and had tremendous impact on the public at large. His ceaseless efforts for launching non-cooperative movement gave his ineffable mental peace. Gandhi's life was the life of the nation as well. The writings of Henry David Thoreau, John Ruskin, Leo Tolstoy and a few others had influenced and molded Gandhian outlook on life and his philosophy.

Gandhi made a strong plea for decentralization. He thought that the village was the safe same unit of human association. On the other hand, the city was but a hideous cancerous growth that bred evil fast and spread pestilence faster and faster. Our ancestors saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. So, they dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. Gandhiji's philosophy was passive resistance. It is a method of securing rights by personal suffering. It is the reverse of resistance by arms. If people do not obey the law, and accept the penalty for its breach, they have to use soul-force, which involves sacrifice and self. Gandhiji felt that anarchy under home rule was better than orderly foreign rule. In 1942,

Gandhi was to tell the British 'Quit India', and leave us to God or anarchy.

All his reading thinking and experimenting with truth culminated presently in the composition of *Indian Home Rule*. In Gujarati, its title is *Hind Swaraj*. Evidently Gandhi had anxiously sought corroboration for his innermost convictions in the writings of others so that he might not be misled himself or mislead his countrymen. His reading was selective, not voracious, and his mind was a rich receptive soil to the seeds of creative thought that aimed at the regeneration of man. *Hind Swaraj* is verily the locus classic among Gandh's writings. It is cast in the form of twenty brief dialogues between 'Reader' and 'Editor'. Gandhi himself, who was the de facto Editor of *Indian Opinion*, covers subjects such as India, civilization, *Swaraj*, machinery, Hindu-Muslim unity, law and medicine, education, violence and *ahimsa*, and the doctrine and practice of satyagraha, the only true way to *Swaraj*. While talking of Western 'civilization', Gandhiji talked like a Moses from an eminence. He said that we would certainly fight them (the English) tooth and nail, but we would never do so by disregarding religion. Gandhi emphasized on the significance of chastity, voluntary poverty, truthfulness and fearlessness.

Wherner Heisenberg says

The idea of non-violence is the quality of the means, e.g. the intention of suffers for the good ends but not to inflict suffering upon others which provides the justification of the ends. (as qtd. By Iyengar, 2005:255)

The Gandhian theory and practice of Satyagraha was directly issued from this acute sense of personal moral responsibility for day to day actions, irrespective of the distant goals. To Gandhi, national realization included the ending of political subjection and economic degradation. It includes the removal of social inequalities and abuses like untouchability, caste arrogance, occupational prejudices, etc., the reform of education, and giving new life to language and literature. These were of course, largely inter-related problems, though they had to be attacked individually also. *Satyagraha* was to be the weapon that would win political freedom, and with it the other freedoms should come. They would come only if

the necessary efforts were put forth. If idleness is given up and industries are set up, people can enjoy a standard of life equal to that now enjoyed by a few Western nations and by Japan among the Eastern.

Gandhi pleaded for simple living, because he thought it was wise living. He pleaded for India's village industries, because he thought they would avoid the peculiarly ruthless forms of exploitation and misery inherent in large-scale factory production. This aspect has been properly and adequately dealt with in the works of Mulk Raj Anand, the champion of the underdog, the pariah, and the hapless.

Gandhi's philosophy espoused truth and defied violence, banished fear and unfurled the flag of Sarvodaya, which was later continued by Vinoba Bhave. Gandhi's arrival on the Indian political scene meant a revolution in our ways of life and thought. The novels of Mulk Raj Anand are in direct succession to the period and philosophy of Gandhism. Anand was aware of the anarchy produced both by the feudal oligarchies and the alien British rulers. And growing up in the era of struggle for freedom, he could visualize the terrible face of facts in the ruthless suppression of the untouchables by the caste Hindus, and of the brutal impersonal violation of every hope by the imperialists. As a novelist Anand concentrates on single characters, the individual caught in the maelstrom, symbolizing the hero as a prime person.

Anand himself says

I was natural, after I had probed the soul of the sweeper Bakha in my novel *Untouchable*, and reproduced each wound of the heart and body of the hill boy Manu in the folk epic *Coolie*, that I should record the journey of the hill man Gangu through the vicissitudes of his later life, after his eviction from the story half acre in the Punjab, Himalayas and his enticement as an indentured laborer to the tea estates of Assam. All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth'. *Preface to Two Leaves and a Bud.*

It was not just a question of one leader displacing another; the entire outlook itself seemed to undergo an extraordinary change. Politics came out even more decisively than in the preceding Age of Tilak and Besant from the conference hall and committee room into the wide open spaces where the masses were striving with their destinies. Gandhi was a man speaking to men. He was more than an agitator or politician; he was the liberator, the Messiah, the Great Soul. If he was the 'Mahatma', he was also 'Bapu' everybody's friend and mentor. He asked not for votes or for intellectual approbation alone, but for sacrifice. Like Jesus Christ, Gandhiji asked the people and the leaders and they followed him sincerely, and whole heartedly.

Thousands of students gave up their studies and joined Gandhiji's struggle for freedom. And Moorthy, the central figure in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is one among them, the Hindus and Muslims worked for a time together as one band of noble brothers. Gandhiji was successful in gathering the masses against the British rule. His weapons of satyagraha, civil disobedience, but the concept of 'Swaraj' eluded realization. Indians became intensely patriotic, fearless and they knew that freedom might be delayed, but it could not be withheld forever. What makes the slave is not the prison or

the ill-treatment meted out to him, not even poverty, nor physical debility, but fear. And when fear left the people, they were already free potentially free.

This happens in the case of Bakha in Anand's *Untouchable*. Bakha being an educated young man thinks that he is superior to his fellow outcasts. This feeling of fearlessness is an essential feature of his personality. It is this fearlessness which differentiates him from his father, brother and others, who passively accept the humiliations and hardships to which they are subjected by the caste Hindus who treat them as faceless creatures of dirt.

Gandhiji's influence on the Indo-Anglian novelists is enormous and philosophy beneficent. His preachings and philosophy, his political, economical, educational and ethical thoughts became evident and popular through the novels of Indian writers in English, especially of Rajarao and Mulk Raj Anand, who portrayed freedom struggle and the economic and cartelistic inequalities in Indian society. Silone's novel had perhaps given Rajarao a necessary impetus and perspective to probe into the violence and the waste that engulfed India in her historic struggle for freedom. The novel traces the impact of Gandhian ideas and ideals on a remote South Indian village called Kanthapura. The waves of revolution surround this little bucolic village and the villagers, under their impeccable leader, Moorthy, launch on the passive resistance in response to a call from Gandhi.

The villagers of Kanthapura owing to Gandhiji's call for freedom movement launched on the passive resistance which was visualized by Rajarao as he was well versed with Gandhian philosophy, even earlier than the Quit India call given by Gandhiji in 1942. The Kanthapurians in particular (and the people all over India in general) had to go through the most anxious period of terrorism as a result of their opposition to the Red-Man government. The fighting proves unequal and the chief leaders of the movement are incarcerated. The whole village is demolished, and at the end of the novel, we have the suggestion of a new village being built on the broken debris, thus symbolizing the unbroken continuity of the Indian tradition. The novel clearly appears to be motivated by impulses rather than the artistic; however *Kanthapura* is in a way, not a political novel though surely politics becomes its dominant theme. Its economic and social concerns and the religions undertones are subsumed into myth and legend. All this is precisely done in the manner in which Gandhi attempted to spiritualize politics.

As Amaury de Reincourt points out

With Gandhiji, it was the history less masses of India who rose to political power and attempted to withdraw from contemporary history, to hark back to the immutable past. With Gandhiji, for a time, being eliminated becoming political action did not take place in the continuous flow of time, but in a series of spasmodic presents unconnected with one another. He spoke to the masses of India in the language of the timeless religious myths. He abstracted in true Indian tradition, the element of eternity from time, sought for religious truth, not historical significance (1938:287).

The ethos and action of *Kanthapura* accurately traces this pattern, although the dramatic texture is characterized by the tension between 'an immutable past' and 'contemporary history'. Kanthapura is India, but Moorthy is a modern Indian

struggling to be an individual in the historical situation. And he is taking a plunge into the struggle for freedom and moving, as it were, into the eternal flux of life. The destruction of the village of *Kanthapura*, and its re-emergence symbolize the indomitable power and potency of the collective will and the indefatigable continuity and iridescence of the Indian spirit. Between these two still-points of the beginning and end of the novel is traced the whole arc of development. In the larger sense, it is a metaphor for human life. Life continues unabated although the individual experience might undergo alterations. This gives the novel a larger perspective and significance and lifts it into a dream of human motive and behavior. Ending of the novel which depicts the changes which the history of Indian nationalism suffered, prefigures the poignancy of such transformation.

All Gandhian principles and ideologies can be found in *Kanthapura*. Self-rule, self-mastery and self-realization come first. And these are called for inner purification through celibacy or chastity (Brahmacharya), dietetic restrictions, fasting, silence, prayer, and the adoption of a simple life, the ready acceptance of manual labor, the cultivation of courage and fearlessness and truth, and the voluntary rejection of material possessions. Of course, this steady ascent to the Satyagrahi's peak of realization is not an easy task.

Moreover, Gandhian ideology always insists on fair means to achieve our goals. God really sanctioned us some limited control over the means, but we have none over the ends. Gandhiji asserted in his philosophy of life that ends and means were convertible. It implies that the far vision and the near vision are complementary, and one should not be set up against the other. If the means of an objective are proper, the end can be justified. To maintain our purity, we need God's help. Every person should have an acute sense of personal moral responsibility. He was the first and foremost person who endeavoured hard to travel by first-class ignoring the hardships he had faced. Then only he conceived the idea of Satyagraha, implying and employing moral energy, soul force or the secret presence of God in the heart of every individual. It was not the application of a novel method, but the understanding of ancient spiritual teaching and firm faith in its truth of course; Satyagraha is faith in its truth. Of course, Satyagraha is not for skeptics. This concept has become renowned freedom fighter with the ideal of *Ahimsa* and people at international level recognized our spiritual values and ethical principles.

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