



# The impact of Gandhian principles on Indian English novels.

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**Abstract:** Mahatma Gandhi dedicated himself to the cause of Indian freedom and progress. He became a significant inspiration across various disciplines and influenced writers in philosophy, politics, history, literature, sociology, and more. Renowned Indian authors like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao incorporated Gandhian ideals into their works. Their novels reflect Gandhi's principles of non-violence, truth, brotherhood, satyagraha, and his stance on untouchability. This study examines how Gandhian philosophy is portrayed in R.K. Narayan's "Waiting for the Mahatma," Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchable," and Raja Rao's "Kanthapura." "Waiting for the Mahatma" portrays Gandhi as a compassionate leader deeply connected to the struggles of ordinary people. "Untouchable" presents Gandhi's ideals as a beacon of hope for the oppressed. Meanwhile, "Kanthapura" illustrates Gandhi's influence on a small village during India's struggle for independence.

**Keywords:** Gandhism, Influence, Impact, Leader, Downtrodden.

## Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi was a complex figure, initially a national and later an international leader of profound political and philosophical importance during India's pre- and post-independence eras. He championed the cause of freedom and the nation's development, leaving a significant impact across various disciplines such as philosophy, politics, history, literature, and sociology. K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger suggests that Gandhi's stature is so immense that portraying him in a novel risks overshadowing other elements unless his influence is subtly integrated rather than directly emphasized. Before and after India's independence, Indian English literature underwent significant influence from Gandhism, leading to the emergence of Gandhian literature. Writers like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and others delved into Gandhi's ideas in their works. Gandhian philosophy, encompassing principles such as truth, non-violence, satyagraha, simplicity, love, and brotherhood, is vividly depicted in novels like R.K. Narayan's "Waiting for the Mahatma," Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchable," and Raja Rao's "Kanthapura." These novels' characters are deeply rooted in Indian ethics and philosophy, embarking on journeys in search of truth and meaningful living. Their successes or failures often hinge on their adherence to Gandhian principles, illustrating the profound impact of Gandhism on their lives and narratives. R.K. Narayan skillfully blends reality with fantasy in his literary works, integrating his personal philosophy and perspectives with finesse. His treatment of Gandhian ideology in fiction is distinctive, exploring various dimensions of Gandhism through his characters, each embodying Gandhian principles in their own way. His novel "Waiting for the Mahatma," written in 1955, seven years after Gandhi's assassination, prominently features Gandhian philosophy.

The novel revolves around Sriram, initially depicted as a carefree young man living with his grandmother in Malgudi. His life undergoes a transformative journey when he encounters Bharti, a follower of Gandhi Ji, and falls in love with her. His pursuit of Bharti leads him to attend a Gandhian camp, initially driven by romantic interest but evolving into a deeper engagement with Gandhian principles. K.R.S. Iyenger observes that the romance between Bharti and Sriram gains new meaning against the backdrop of their shared commitment to Mahatma Gandhi.

Sriram's encounter with Gandhi Ji profoundly impacts him, providing clarity and purpose in his life that was previously lacking. Immersed in the Gandhian camp, Sriram learns from fellow disciples like Gopad, who expands his understanding of Gandhi Ji's philosophy and its objectives. Sriram's dedication to Gandhi Ji and his ideals becomes evident to his grandmother, who remarks on Sriram's reverence for Gandhi Ji as akin to worshipping a deity. Sriram's experience witnessing Gandhi Ji's compassion towards the marginalized further solidifies his commitment to Gandhian principles.

Despite initially renouncing his luxurious lifestyle to stay with the untouchables of Malgudi during his campaigns, Sriram fully embraces Gandhi Ji's principles and philosophy. He actively participates in movements such as "Quit India," "Satyagraha," and "Swadeshi" with immense dedication. However, his path intersects with Jagdish, a revolutionary who advocates violence, contrary to Gandhi Ji's principles of non-violence. Initially drawn to Jagdish's extremist activities, Sriram soon realizes the superiority of Gandhi Ji's non-violent approach in achieving independence from British rule. After experiencing imprisonment due to his involvement, Sriram undergoes a reflective period where he listens to his inner voice. Your actions must stem from deep inner faith, not solely from external observations or understanding. Let your conscience be the compass guiding every decision. Trust it completely, as it will lead you correctly. Act according to your inner voice, for it guides you towards fulfilling your duties.

After being released from prison following India's independence, Sriram and Bharti plan to marry, with their union hinging on Mahatma Gandhi's blessing. They await Gandhi at the Birla Mandir in New Delhi for this blessing, but instead receive news that a young man has shot him. Mulk Raj Anand's works prominently reflect the profound influence of Gandhian ideology, particularly in his emphasis on the social issues faced by the impoverished, oppressed, and marginalized lower castes of Hindu society. His novel "Untouchable," published in 1935 during the pre-independence era, vividly portrays the prevalent issues of poverty, caste discrimination, superstition, and the inhumane exploitation faced by untouchables.

The novel focuses on Bakha, a protagonist belonging to the sweeper caste, detailing the challenges he faces in a single day of his life. Bakha encounters pervasive exploitation due to his lower caste status; he is forbidden from entering temples and other public places, and anything he touches is considered polluted. He is subjected to discriminatory treatment, such as being forced to alter his path or stop moving if higher-caste individuals approach. The novel starkly depicts an incident where Bakha is physically assaulted by a high-caste Hindu merely for accidentally touching him, provoking a violent reaction from Bakha.

When Bakha's sister informs him about the priest's attempt to molest her, Bakha is enraged but realizes their voices won't be heard due to societal indifference. He feels powerless and disheartened by the discriminatory treatment towards the lower classes. However, hearing Gandhi Ji speak about the welfare of untouchables brings him solace and renewed hope for a better future.

In Gandhi Ji's speech, he addresses the historical injustice towards millions of people, calling untouchability a moral and religious issue that must be addressed. Initially confused by Gandhi Ji's words, Bakha begins to understand their significance when Gandhi Ji denounces untouchability as the greatest stain on Hinduism. He becomes deeply influenced by Gandhi Ji's commitment to the emancipation of untouchables and the protection

of cows. Bakha's optimism is momentarily shattered when N.N. Bashir, a Barrister-at-Law, criticizes Gandhi Ji and accuses him of deceit. However, a young poet named Bashir, who edits *Nawan Jung*, comes to Gandhi Ji's defense, acknowledging his elementary approach while noting his principles' validity. Bashir argues that Gandhi Ji's advocacy for self-sufficiency through spinning may seem impractical in a global context but rightly identifies global inequities as responsible for India's poverty, not inherent Indian fault. He tells Bakha about the invention of the flush toilet system, offering a glimmer of hope to the distressed and marginalized Bakha and his community. He elucidates how this flush system is significant, as it allows sweepers to escape the degrading stigma of untouchability and reclaim the dignity that rightfully belongs to them as valuable members of a casteless society. "Kanthapura," published in 1938 by Raja Rao, portrays the influence of Gandhi's ideas on a small village. The novel opens with Achakka, a woman from the village, describing its setting. Rao employs oral storytelling to immerse readers in Indian history, illustrating both the past and the impact of societal transformation. Achakka emphasizes the significance of local deities like Kenchamma, highlighting the village's adherence to tradition and culture while also embracing change. Kanthapura is depicted as a traditional village bound by caste divisions, distanced from modern ways of life and progress.

In "Kanthapura," set against the backdrop of urban developments, the village is believed to be under the protective blessings of the deity Kenchamma. The protagonist, Moorthy, a Brahmin, discovers and installs a half-buried linga in the village. His journey takes him to a city where he becomes acquainted with Gandhian philosophy. Inspired by Gandhi, Moorthy adopts khadi clothing and actively opposes untouchability. After his mother's passing, he resides with Rangamma, an educated widow who participates in India's freedom struggle. Moorthy's adherence to Gandhian principles is evident when he faces physical assault without retaliating, adhering strictly to non-violence. Continuing his crusade against injustice and inequality, Moorthy emerges as the embodiment of Gandhism, leading his fellow villagers. His activism leads to his arrest, and despite Rangamma's efforts to secure his release on bail, Moorthy declines, leaving the women of Kanthapura to spearhead the freedom struggle. Rangamma exemplifies true Gandhian ideals, inspiring other women with stories of figures like Rani Lakshmi Bai and Sarojini Naidu, promoting principles such as Truth, Non-violence, and Swadeshi. The people of Kanthapura increasingly embrace the Gandhian movement, viewing Gandhi not as a mere individual but as a spiritual presence whose words and teachings resonate deeply. Moorthy emerges as a Mahatma for the village, akin to Gandhi's national stature, symbolizing transformative change. The villagers become fervent supporters of Satyagraha and eagerly participate in the Dandi March, but Gandhi's arrest shifts the movement's leadership to local figures. Moorthy plans a non-cooperation movement in the village, resulting in many men joining Satyagraha, leaving Kanthapura temporarily without its male population. Towards the novel's conclusion; Moorthy's convictions evolve under the influence of Nehru's principles, marking a nuanced progression in his ideological journey. R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao are prominent figures in early Indian English literature whose works offer valuable insights into the influence of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhi aimed to eradicate poverty, casteism, untouchability, and emphasized that political freedom without a strong social foundation is futile. Novels like "Waiting for the Mahatma," "Untouchable," and "Kanthapura" exemplify this influence by portraying Gandhi's principles of Non-violence, Truth, Brotherhood, Satyagraha, and his critique of superstitions prevalent during India's struggle for independence. In "Waiting for the Mahatma," Gandhi is depicted as a compassionate leader deeply connected to the struggles of ordinary people. "Untouchable" reflects Gandhi's vision of a dignified life for the oppressed, particularly through his stance against untouchability. "Kanthapura" illustrates how Gandhi's movement for India's independence resonated in a small village, highlighting its transformative impact on the local community. These novels collectively showcase how Gandhi's ideologies permeated Indian literature in English, influencing narratives that sought to address social injustices and advocate for a unified, liberated India.

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