

## GANDHIJI'S INFLUENCE ON WRITERS IN ENGLISH

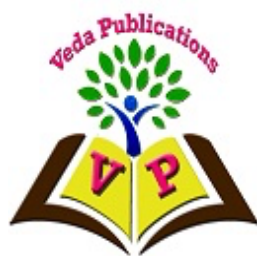
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### Abstract



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Gandhiji needs no introduction to anyone as he created history in the political panorama of the world by not only advocating the philosophy of non-violence but also proving its success by implementing it in India and South Africa in letter and spirit. Indian freedom movement reached its zenith under his efficient leadership and consummated with the pronouncement of independence on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947. There was no field unaddressed by him, or in which he had not his strong impression felt by way of either experimenting or experiencing. The moral standards that he had demanded of the political leaders made them undergo self-reform and put them on the right track. That's why, the first-generation leaders were bent on bettering the budding nation despite religious conflicts which split the independent country into two different nations, Hindustan and Pakistan. For about thirty long years, Gandhiji had his sway over Indian politics with his unswerving character and devotion to duty. In fact, he was an ordinary man rose to greater heights and became an extraordinary person, by dint of his unflinching personality, shrewdness, competence in dealing with the pestering issues, honesty and perseverance. On his way to success, he took the support of the common people, encouraged their participation in all activities and turned them into people's activities. Gandhiji was an iconic writer who has captured the imagination of writers of different genres. In this paper, I want to show how, like the blowing air that touches all the objects, Gandhiji influenced different writers in English to pen their thoughts in alignment with Gandhiji's ideology, and contributed their share in steering the nation towards the path of freedom.

**Keywords:** *Leadership, Self-Reform, Indian Politics, Unflinching Personality, Thoughts etc.*

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## **Introduction**

Having been born in a small village called Porbandar in Gujarat state of India on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1869, Gandhiji scaled great heights and won world wide recognition with his outstanding policies like non-violence and satyagraha. He created an era by greatly influencing millions of people with his words and deeds in purifying their hearts and souls. Enchanted by his magnetic personality, simplicity, truthfulness, honesty, self-reliance etc, many educated youth joined the freedom movement irrespective of caste, creed, religion and sex. His belief that the soul of India lies in the villages made him connect with the villagers and suggest remedies to redeem them from poverty. His idea to promote Khadi / hand-spun cloth made village economy grow and villagers empowered. His policies are still being adopted in various countries for peaceful living. Global leaders and thinkers around the world like Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr., inspired by his actions, followed his non-violent path and received Nobel Peace Prize. Right from Champaran movement down to Quit India, he had his strong mark felt deeply on the minds of Indian people. Gandhiji's social reforms like eradication of untouchability and picketing toddy shops and Sarvodaya ideals received the attention of one and all.

Writers like Romain Rolland, M.R. Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Nagarajan, Sarojini Naidu, were a few among many who were influenced by Gandhiji. Let's have a glimpse at the association of various writers with Gandhiji.

## **Romain Rolland and Gandhi**

Romain Rolland, a pacifist French writer, influenced by Gandhiji's ideology, made the West know Indian spiritual and political thought. He admired Gandhiji for his unique approach to life and human well-being. He popularised Gandhiji's principle of non-violent civil disobedience movement, showing it as a powerful tool for political and social change. He liked Gandhiji so much that he wrote his biography titled "Mahatma Gandhi: The Man Who Became One with the Universal Being". He developed interest in Indian Mysticism, and became fascinated with Indian spirituality. Though he found it difficult to embrace the spiritual basis of Gandhiji's thought, he was deeply impressed by Gandhiji's non-violent approach to achieving social and political change.

Gandhiji's impact was so great and deep that it shaped Indian literature in English during the pre-independent days. His philosophy inspired writers to incorporate his ideals into their narratives.

### **Gandhiji and Mulk Raj Anand**

M.R. Anand, the champion of the downtrodden, was very much influenced by Gandhian thought and lived in Gandhiji's ashram for some time to understand Gandhiji's ideology and the lives of the untouchables. Then he decided his role as a writer dedicated to the plight of the oppressed. Influenced by Gandhi, Anand in his work often critiqued the dehumanizing effects of Industrialization on Indian society. Moreover, his work focused on many themes like casteism, struggles of the untouchables, coolies, social injustice and so on. He wrote the famous novel "Untouchable" in 1935 taking the spirit from Gandhiji's ideology. His association with the Mahatma made him adopt humanist philosophy and critical portrayal of social inequalities prevailing in Indian society. Both in *Untouchable* and *The Sword and the Sickle*, Anand questions the effectiveness of Gandhian solution to the problems of untouchables and the peasants.

### **Gandhiji and R.K. Narayan**

R.K. Narayan, the famous Indian English writer was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. His novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*, written in 1955, features Gandhiji as a central figure and explores Gandhian ideals through many characters embodying the themes of nationalistic spirit, moral integrity and simple living. He uses Gandhi's philosophy and movement as a backdrop for his story of a common man's (Sriram's) journey to becoming a satyagrahi. He integrated Gandhian philosophy with his narratives indirectly and artistically. Influenced by the prevailing Gandhian ethos of his time, he adopted a literary style depicting the tension between the pursuit of individuality and societal demands. Gandhian principles, ethics and spiritual practices are seen ringing throughout the novel. Besides this, Narayan, moving away from Western influences, adopted Indian style of dress and lifestyle. In the novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Sriram becomes a follower of Gandhiji for the sake of the woman he loves. So also, Jagan in the *The Vendor of Sweets* becomes a follower of Gandhiji because he ardently desires to be revered as a follower of Gandhiji. Gandhiji's speech at Malgudi explaining the significance of human action and service inspires Jagan. That's why, by giving up his studies,

home and normal life, he joined the movement for freeing India from foreign yoke. Neither the prison life nor the police beatings prevent him from participating in the movement for doing service. He wears only ahimsak chappals, spins every day for an hour, and wears hand-spun cloth. But his true colour is revealed by Narayan at last.

### **Gandhiji and Raja Rao**

Raja Rao, a famous Indian writer, is known for his contribution to Indianizing the English novel by incorporating traditional Indian narrative techniques. He was greatly influenced by Gandhiji, and the proof of it is his magnum opus *Kanthapura*, as well as his many short stories. His book *Experiment in Honesty* is Gandhiji's biography, depicting modern retelling of Bapu's life in puranic style. In *Kanthapura*, a microcosm of India's journey towards freedom, he showcases how Gandhian movement had changed villagers' thinking and made them think about socio-religious and economic aspects of their remote village, Kanthapura. Behind the villagers' participation in the non-violent freedom struggle, Gandhiji's ideology serves as the driving force. The protagonist Moorthy embodies Gandhian principles, and he organizes villagers for non-violent resistance, hunger strikes, Satyagraha in line with Gandhiji's ideas. The oppressive government uses brute force against the villagers, some of them die and others leave and settle in a new village. The villagers believe, "He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall be happy." In his short story collection, *The Cow of the Barricades*, India's freedom struggle and Gandhiji's impact on people can be seen. In line with Gandhiji's movement, on the advice of the Master, people stop buying foreign cloth, refuse to pay tax to the Government. When the workmen were about to build barricades, the Master says, "No barricades in the name of the Mahatma, for much blood will be spilt. No, there shall be no battle, brothers." When the situation turns serious following the entry of Gauri, the cow, the workmen begin to shout, "Victory to the Mahatma, Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!" The angry chief of the army, fires a shot and kills Gauri. The cow symbolizes Mother India.

### **Bhabani Bhattacharya and Gandhiji:**

Bhabani Bhattacharya in his novel *So Many Hungers* presents the impact of Gandhiji on people through the idealized character, Devesh Basu, a truly Gandhian character-both in precept and in practice. Like Gandhiji, Devesh Basu stands for love, truth, and non-violence.

So, he is called Devata by the villagers. Devata is non-violent in thought and action. Though he is above seventy, he is energetic and is always inspired by Gandhian ideology. Like Gandhiji, he dislikes the British rule in India but not the British. The young Rahoul in the novel, sacrifices his job for the sake of the country. A peasant girl named, Kajoli, joins the liberation movement. She seeks shelter in Calcutta after her village is destroyed by the police. She is not helped by anybody there, but when she hears the call of Devata asking the villagers not to betray the flag, she decides to be strong and becomes a newspaper vendor and remains as a “living tricolour.”

### **Nagarajan and Gandhiji**

Nagarajan in his *Chronicles of Kedar*, presents two diverse characters like Vanchi, who subverts Gandhian ideals to feather his own nest, and Nirmala, who adores Gandhiji and adopts his teachings in her daily life to the end. Gandhiji appears in just two scenes here. He accepts the invitation of Vanchinatha Sastri, the president of the local Congress Committee and visits Kedaram. Then, he addresses the people and resolves the long-standing dispute between the two Iyengar sects. Nirmala, being influenced by Gandhiji, begins to work for Harijan welfare. She gives away all her possessions for the welfare of Harijans and joins Gandhiji in Sabarmati ashram.

### **Sarojini Naidu and Gandhiji**

Both Gandhiji and Sarojini Naidu shared a close bond of friendship and mutual respect during India's Independence movement. Naidu actively participated in various nonviolent protests with Gandhiji and was a constant advocate for India's freedom. She joined Gandhi's Satyagraha movement of nonviolent resistance and supported his non-cooperation movement in 1920. Their partnership as a powerful testament to their shared commitment to Indian independence and a remarkable example of leadership and collaboration during a crucial period in India's history. Being influenced by Gandhiji, Naidu infused artistry and poetry into the national struggle, merging her personal vision of freedom with the quest for female selfhood. Many of her poems were inspired by the events of the time and were written as a protest against British rule in India. In her poem, *Coromandel Fishers*, she artistically presents the need to wake up when there is an urgency to fight against the British.

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