

Gandhian Philosophy in Literature: Narrations from Prominent Novelist

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi was the most influencing socio-political figure of early 90's who sacrificed his life for the sake of motherland. He devoted his knowledge and career and struggled for India's freedom and development. He was a contemporary issue to discuss and an immense source of writing for the writers of that era. Different disciplines like history, sociology, politics, literature and philosophy have a great impact of his ideology and he was the central figure for the writings of the novelist who characterized different characters in their writings who were depicting the change in the society due to Gandhian freedom struggle. He taught the people of India to live in peace and harmony, to love all humans and to follow a disciplined life. The non-violence principle of Gandhiji changed the lives of many people and introduced a technique of perseverance, resistant to evil and untruth. He became the center of all socio-political developments. The Satyagraha movement inspired the local people to protest against evils and misconduct. It created a strong bond of love and compassion which united the people irrespective of their caste, creed, colour, religion. Gandhiji was an idol of truth. He was a spokesperson who opposed the inhuman behavior like exploitation of slaves, discrimination of people, abuse of poor and weak and broadly supported equality of all and introduced the new technique to win over the evils. These philosophies and principles of Gandhiji were revealed in the novels of R K Narayan, Munshi Premchand and Raja Rao. The characters of the novel directly or indirectly exhibited the Gandhian philosophy or his views.

Keywords: Freedom Struggle, Gandhian Philosophies, Socio-political Developments

Introduction

Indian writings of the period between 1920 and 1947 can be noted as an era of nationalism with the spread of Gandhian philosophy and M.K. Naik, an eminent critic regarded this period as "the Gandhian whirl world" (Naik 114) with an unprecedented awakening of a distinctive national unity" (Naik 116). "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em." (Twelfth Night Act II Scene 5) This is very applicable to Gandhiji. He is born and brought in a normal background, but his principles

gained from his experience made him a great and best individual.

He became the motivational source of depiction of characters not only in politics but all related areas like sociology, literature, philosophy and many more. He was a man of ideology and dedicated his life for the sake of motherland and became a source of inspiration for the local masses who sacrificed their lives for freedom of India. All the writers of that particular area explored and disseminated Gandhian views for creating a attraction towards the ideology of truth and non-violence. The writers were attracted towards distinctive philosophy and were keen to write about Gandhiji's Satyagrah, simplicity, humanitarian values and the power of non violence. These Gandhian philosophies were well established by R.K. Narayan, one of the best writers of Indian English.

Munshi Premchand era was the era of freedom struggle where the Swaraj Movement was in air and all the Indians rich or poor, male or female, young or old were eagerly participating in the movement on one call of Mahatma Gandhi. This freedom struggle and Swaraj movement can be conceptualized through the writings of the authors of that particular time. The prime time included the non-cooperation movement, Swadeshi movement and other freedom movements carried out in the leadership of freedom fighters to ensure Swaraj. The characters in the Munshi Premchand's novels depict the variety of icons who are dedicated to sacrifice their life for the nation. One of the character Jalpa depicts a matured Indian lady who was fighting against the inequality and injustice offered by the Britishers. One of the Simon observed that women should be an independent creature and should be given rights to lead her own life without any compulsion of man companionship. It should be believed that she can herself find a living and live on her own with freedom and a proper status should be given to her to force her in decision making like participation in freedom struggle.

In Premchand's Karmbhumi, this has been depicted through the female characters like Sukhda, Naina, etc. who had a deep sense of patriotism for their country and were eagerly participating in the freedom struggle. Munshi Premchand has written Karmbhumi inspired from the Satyagraha of Gandhi and beautifully revealed

the participation of middle class Indian women in political movement to free India from the atrocities and brutalities of British government faced by the common person. The middle class women were the real heroes who were exposed to the exploitation of Britishers and were forced to live a suppressed life.

Mahatma Gandhi and Munshi Premchand both had a high respect for females and believed that they are more powerful than males. Both of them considered that women can face the problems of life with more courage and have an instinct to bear challenges. They can tolerate pain and struggle more successfully and so Mahatma Gandhi also insisted to active participation of women in India's freedom movement. One of the greatest poetesses Sarojini Naidu was also present at this time and she herself was a freedom fighter and influenced marked participation of women in Swaraj movement to make India free. She created a positive image of women on the society with a sound belief that this fact should share equality with men and no longer is weaker to save the perils and are more keen to sacrifice their lives for the liberation of the nation.

Munshi Premchand was the renowned novelist of this time and all the women characters were chosen from the real life stories to depict the revolutions against the British government undertaken during the period in Indian society. Some of the important ones are- Karbandi, Shrabbandi, Swadeshi Apnao movement, etc. The most renowned novel Karmbhumi of Munshi, select incredible women characters like Sukhda, Naina, Renuka, Munni, etc. who participated bravely in all the revolutionary struggle.

The Karmbhumi has an incident which shows that after the arrest of Lala Smarkant, Sukhda and Renuka Devi all went to meet him in prison and said that there is no discrimination between rich and poor and both have the right to lead a healthy life. They asked whether poor are not living beings and opposed the powerful rich society.

Sukhda and Naina both struggled to make land free from the government so that houses of poor people could be constructed and set an example before the society. Sukhda was arrested and Naina was shot dead by her husband because she revolted against his wish and after that the

municipality returned back the land to the poor people to cover the sacrifice of Naina. The novelist quoted that the struggle was started by a Devi and ended by the self sacrifice of another Devi. The Karmbhumi novel highlights a progressive and patriotic instinct in the poor employees for betterment. Sarat willingly accepted the powerful status of women and her independent entity but was afraid of taking it beyond the four walls of the family. Resulting the women were kept inside the house and they were unaware of the political and economic conditions of the country and these characters were confined to the narrow social premises. Munshi Premchand's characters in Karmbhumi are well acquainted with the freedom movement and actively participated in all discussions. They arranged meeting and organized people to achieve freedom, but were not allowed to come in forefront. They created a image in the minds of people that freedom is a necessity and we certainly want independent as everyone wants to enjoy a free life, perhaps except the need of women cooperation in the freedom struggle and strongly believed that characters like Premchand, Sukhda and Munni have all the political consciousness to take the movement forward. It was rightly said that women not only have the right to free but also the rights to fight for freedom. It is a moral right as well as a moral duty to claim freedom.

The women in Premchand's novel crossed their family boundaries and entered diverse social fields. The women of all categories from upper and lower class, from urban and rural background actively participated in national movements, for eg., Munni and Saloni Kaki in Karmabhumi. The rural portrayal of women is done successfully by the writer in Karmbhumi. Saloni is a rebellious character who is oppressed by the bureaucrats and revolted against the government officials. She protested and stand firm in front of the bullets and social abuse of the officers and even she spit on the face of the officer in an offensive mood who was bothering the poor villagers for tax payment. She never surrendered and used abused language to the officer on each strike of hunter. The revolutionary women of this time also revolted against tax collection in the rural area and the Zamindari system. The unbeatable characters of Saloni Kaki and Munni laid an important role in village by cooperating against tax collection.

Munni also was sent to prison due to her active protest and participation in such social movements. Thus we can say that Premchand's novel are full of feminine characters who were courageous and bold enough to raise their voice against the brutalities of Britishers as well as Indians who were of ideology that women are only objects to be used. The characterisation of the units in the writings of Premchand depicts the social change in the outlook of women as well as her increased role for freedom.

Munshi Premchand is considered to be the greatest writer who uncovered the real social structure and was consciously writing the reality of the culture of the country. He belonged to Uttar Pradesh which became the hub of the Indian freedom movement. Premchand was interested in political activities of Indian National Congress and he even resign from his Government job to actively participate in the freedom movement in response to Gandhiji's call for non-co-operation. "He regarded himself not as a teacher but as a modest soldier in the battle for the nation's freedom struggle, the soldier whose weapon was the pen" (Amrith Rai 1952). He was a confirmed nationalist and what was a blind follower of Mahatma Gandhi who changed the political scenario of India with non-violence and non cooperation movements. The Jalianwala Bagh Massacre in April 1919 opened the eyes of people who had some illusions in their mind regarding the Britishers. Premchand attended the public meeting held where the influence of Gandhi's personality was magical as well as eternal which gave inspiration to abandon the government job for the sake of motherland. He was influenced by charismatic symbol of self reliance and was filled with national vigor to actively participate in different movements led by Gandhiji. But with all these changing interest he never stopped writing and wrote for various journals, magazines to share his thoughts with the public and influence them effectively. "The events around him were subconsciously influencing Premchand. On the one hand, he was deeply influenced by the events in Russia where the Bolsheviks had captured power and on the other the noncooperation movement started by Mahatma Gandhi had its impact on his mind" (Shahdara, 1981).

Mahatma Gandhi exercised a tremendous influence on him. He made several attempts to

meet him. The first one he made was in 1928, but he came back disappointed. Mahatma Gandhi later on called him for a discussion on the question of a common language for India. He stayed with him for four days in 1935, and he was so deeply moved by his magnetic personality that his faith in his leadership grew deeper and more abiding.

The idealism of that age which was based on humanism had its effect on Premchand, was a part of his nature and not just the effect of a contemporary trend or movement. Therefore, on the human plane, he forgot all the distinctions of caste and creed, or class and ideology and embraced the real man of flesh and blood with all the warmth of his heart. The broad spectrum of Premchand political canvas displayed the fictional socio-political, economic and communal life of three decades of Gandhian era. The Premchand's novels were contemporary with no boundaries and taking edge of all aspects of life. His short stories elaborated the socio economic problems faced by the masses due to political unrest. He has all reference for Gandhi and his socio-political philosophy but he wrote with a rational attitude. He believed struggle as a powerful weapon to fight against the wrong and the balanced attitude is required to win the materialistic objectives which are dedicated to life. The aesthetic values of present social life are merged into socio ethical values and humanism.

Conclusion

During India's freedom struggle many colonial residents took active participation in making India free from the clutches of Britishers so that people could live in free country. Munshi Premchand changed the social picture and delineated female characters who struggled to make India free and participative in all the physical and mental activities and took a daring step to prove themselves equal to man when it came to freedom of the nation. The female characters in the novel tried to create their individual identity by showing self respect but they prove to be socially aware about the political distress of the society and moral conditions of its residents. The people were influenced to a large extent showing need of freedom and women were the best example to explain the miserable condition.

Premchand's espousal of the cause of India's freedom is therefore singularly free him

chauvinism or irrational hatred of the British whom he, in fact, admired in many ways. His sight highlighted the ignorant masses, slavery and superstitions which led the glorious civilization to degrade. He was a man who represented the Indian mind in his writings and a fascinating picture of life was depicted in his short stories.

The Indian novelists of that era propelled the masses to follow the Gandhian philosophy to act and indulge themselves in the freedom struggle. The socio economic development of the people was influenced by the writings of prominent writers and they motivated the general mass to actively participate in the various reforms and movements which took place for the freedom struggle of India. The author tried to compile the best of the writings of three prominent writers of that time namely Premchand who was an influential writer and tried to raise voice against social malfunctions.

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