

Picturization of Gandhi in Literature



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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi was a prominent personality in the Indian national freedom struggle. His philosophy and strategies not only shaped the course of India's destiny but influenced the minds of millions of people. This also served as the core theme and gave birth to a number of literary works. Infact any literature would not be complete without the study of works on Gandhi. Writers who have taken Gandhi as their subject of writing had varied opinion on the leader. Some critics have an elevated opinion of the mahatma, while a very few writers were highly critical on Gandhian philosophies questioning its relevancy towards the development of a society.

Keywords: Gandhian Philosophies, Indian Literature, Dalit Literature, Diaspora Literature.

Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi also known as Mahatma Gandhi played a prominent role in the Indian independence movement against the British people. As a part of freedom struggle Gandhi began to boycott foreign goods. Gandhiji's civil disobedience movement inspired the masses triggering freedom struggle in many parts of the nation.

Gandhiji has a high esteem in the minds and works of every writer including the Indo-Anglian and the diaspora writers. This image is manifested in all the works either through some characters portrayed or by mentioning the principles of Gandhism. Gandhi had such a great influence that he plays a prominent role in Indian Writing in English. The impact created by Gandhi and his philosophies managed to create an irreplaceable image in the literature and opened scope for new style and matter.

Brief Life History of Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October, 1869 at Porbandar in Gujarat. He was born and brought up in a Hindu merchant family. Gandhi belonged to a normal middle class background and dropped out of his college. But later a Brahmin priest, one of their family friend advised Gandhi to pursue law from London. After completing law Gandhi started his first civil disobedience as an expatriate lawyer in South Africa. Later when he returned to India in 1915, he gathered the farmers and rural labourers to protest against the excessive tax imposed on them. Slowly Gandhi started nationwide campaigns fighting against various social issues and attempted to achieve self-rule or a democratic country. For this he had various approaches and this in turn had various kinds of review from writers all over the world.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to present a picture of Gandhi in different literature. This article aims at an overview study of Gandhi in various literatures like Indian literature in English, Regional languages, Dalit Literature and Diasporic literature.

Review of Literature

Gandhiji played a prominent role in Indian independence struggle. The approach he had towards the British rule and steps adopted by him made him a prominent figure not only at the national level but at an international level. He became a Universal icon and became the central theme in Literature. A study of any literature, be it Indian writing in English, Regional Literature or Diasporic Literature would not be complete without the study of Gandhi.

Haridas T Mazumdar, in his book "*Mahatma Gandhi A Peaceful Revolutionary*" mentions that Gandhi was neither intended to impose his views or his life style on people nor follow others path blindly. He had his own philosophy and principles. It is also said that there were three types of people according to Gandhi: 1. The coward 2. The brave 3. The superior. The coward in order to save himself from any mishappening is ready to do

anything, the brave people put up a strong fight against the wrong doers while the superior class forgives the wrong doer.

Surabhi Varma in "Mahatma Gandhi – A Literary and Spiritual Mentor" opines that Gandhi was a literary as well as a spiritual mentor. Gandhiji was a source of inspiration for volumes of books in various regional languages as well as English. Gandhian philosophy of truth, non-violence and the pragmatic approach which he had towards the social issues played the theme of many fictional works. Gandhi's idealism and the saint-like life style invoked a sense of national pride and patriotism among the people. Not only Indian Writers in English but writers from various regional languages like Assamese, Bengali, Malayalam, Marathi, Kannada, Gujarati etc., depicts the splendour of Gandhi and his philosophy. Gandhian writers in Gujarati literature were closely associated with Gandhi's philosophy and played a prominent role in spreading Gandhism. One among them was Mahadev Desai, who was the personal secretary of Gandhi and wrote fluently in Bengali, Gujarati and English. He has penned down all the contemporary events and his personal experience with the great man.

Gandhiji in Indian Literature

Gandhiji occupies a vast part in literature and any literature is not complete without including Gandhi and his principles. Gandhiji is of prime importance as he has opened new genre in literature and critical discourse. In Indian literature Gandhi was given a Godly status during the days of freedom struggle by many writers. But later on he was criticized for his principles and eventually by the end of 20th century the image was nearly distorted with all sorts of contradictions and rejections from various quarters.

One who attempts to study Gandhiji in literature must have a clear and complete understanding of Gandhism. Gandhi was a staunch believer of Hinduism and Bhagvad Gita. Truth, non-violence, simplicity, vegetarianism etc, were the main ideology of Gandhi. These principles of him served as the main theme in many literary works.

Literature on Gandhi is classified under three segments as during Gandhi- a period from 1890-1948, post Gandhi- from 1941-1990, and finally the last decade of twentieth century. All these segments includes the works of R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Chaman Lal, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Sudhir Kakkar etc. Works of all these writers have a varied opinion and Gandhiji is described differently in different phases.

Gandhiji is portrayed as "a people's man" and a savior of the Indian farmers. Gandhi was greatly revered both as a leader and as a preacher by the Indians during his period. But even then certain writers did not fail to bring out the flaws of the great man. Nehru being one among them expressed that Gandhi was not efficient enough to handle the economic issues of the nation.

Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, an eminent leader and a politician also was against the way Gandhi handled the social issue untouchability. Gandhi was very stubborn in following a caste system or varna system.

Ambedkar was in strong opposition against the principles of Gandhi and felt that it will merely hamper the development of the nation.

Thus a study on Indian Writings in English gives us an idea of how Gandhi was considered in Different periods. At one stage he is considered as a mahatma and at other level he is a common man with all his flaws.

Portrayal of Gandhiji in Regional Languages

Gandhi being a great personality was highly placed in the minds of every Indians. Gandhi and his principles had a great impact on people all over the country. This could be clearly witnessed as Gandhism was the theme of many fictions, non-fictions and poetry in various regional languages of India. Gandhiji is given a divine status in the regional languages unlike the works in English.

Many literary works of renowned authors like Sureshchand Shukla, Rameshwar Shukla, Sumitranandan Pant etc., depicts Gandhi as 'The mahatma'. Meena Alexander in her work 'Letters to Gandhi' describes Gandhi as a light born to illuminate knowledge and clear the ignorance in the minds of people. His lofty ideals taught people to be tolerant and display love and kindness even to those who showed hatred.

In current scenario Gandhi and his principles are completely forgotten and it is the need of the hour to revive those ideologies. Issues like Kashmir terrorism shows that ahimsa and non-violence has completely become extinct from our society.

Among all regional languages Gujarati literature should be given core importance as various writers who contributed to it were closely associated with Mahatma Gandhi and gave way to new philosophy in their literary expressions. One prominent writer of this literature is Kaka Saheb, who wrote abundantly in Gujarati though his mother tongue was Marathi. There were many other writers of the Gandhian era who enriched Gujarati literature with their tremendous work.

Gandhiji as Described by Expatriates

Diasporic Literature is completely based on the incidents that took place in one's motherland or a reflection of the nostalgic feel of the writer. Each and every diasporic writer have a great earning towards their nation and could not return due to a several reasons. They connect their stories towards the homeland by using religion, historical figures and political personalities as symbols. Mahatma Gandhi himself is considered as a diaspora as he spent a considerable period of time in South Africa. A study on diapsora literature is incomplete without including the works on Gandhiji as he plays a prominent role in it.

Gandhi being a universal personality serves as a main subject in diaspora writings and is manifested in different ways. In some places Gandhi is considered a mahatma whereas when criticized he is lowered to a great level. Raja Rao, Meena Alexander etc., were the few diasporic writers who considered Gandhi as an ideal person while writers like V.S.Naipaul, Salman Rushdie and Ved Mehta subjected him to a lot of criticism. The sect of

expatriates who revered Gandhi gave him a divine status and according to them Gandhi came as a redeemer of the poor and under privileged people. He also fought against untouchability, colonialism and many other social issues. Gandhi's ideologies were so relevant to the entire world irrespective of time.

Raja Rao had a strong relationship with Gandhi and supported the ideas of Gandhi and Gandhism. He clearly exhibits the ideology of Gandhi in his first novel 'Kanthapura'. This occupied an important place in diasporic literature and helped in spreading Gandhian philosophy to all parts of the nation. Harikatha style was adopted to elevate the image of Gandhiji.

Thus Gandhi is a very important subject in the diasporic literature. Some writers consider him as a great personality while some writers criticize him and consider him to be a failure. Some people find Gandhi's principles to be very relevant and admire him, whereas some scorn him for being a hindrance in the development of the nation. All these reviews increase the myth of Gandhiji to a great level.

Gandhiji in Dalit Literature

Etymologically the word 'Dalit' is taken from Marathi Literature and it means broken and exploitation of the oppressed. The term 'Dalit Literature' was coined in the year 1958 at a conference called 'Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya'. Most of the works in Dalit literature criticizes Gandhi on his principles, especially non-violence and varna system. V.D.Ghate, Damodar Savarkar, Pradeep Dalvi and Keshav Meshram were the few Marathi writers who firmly criticized him. This is evident in the works of 'Gandhi Gondhal', 'Nathuram Godse Speaking' etc. The theme of the play 'Nathuram Godse Speaking' centres around the assassination of Gandhi by Godse in his own words. Here Godse justifies himself by saying that Gandhi's philosophy was a hindrance to the development and progress of the lower class people of the nation. Thus people considered Godse as their emancipator and ultimately Gandhi's image went down in the minds of the people.

Conclusion

Gandhi has been a great source of inspiration for a wide range of literary works in various languages describing his life, ideas and philosophies. Literature created in the later part of nineties was not influenced by Gandhiji or his principles. A shift in the opinion of the people could be seen where Gandhi was celebrated as a man of principles in the initial days and in the later part he was subjected to lot of criticism. He was openly challenged by the critics to show how his principles and ideology were related to the upliftment of a society. Thus Gandhian study is important even in the modern times as there is a varied opinion on Gandhiji.

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