CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The foregoing study of Gandhian ideology and its influence on the novels of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan has brought us some conclusions. This chapter contains a brief summary of the major findings and conclusions of the study.

Throughout his life Gandhi remained a learner who learnt a lot from various sources. Reading of Tolstoy, Ruskin, Carlyle, Plato, Thoreau, Mazzini, Nardau, Emerson, Dadabhai Naoroji, Romesh Chander Datt, Gokhale and many other writers played a vital role in formulating his philosophy. Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God is Within You* left an abiding impression on Gandhi for its independent thinking, deep morality and truthfulness. Tolstoy’s work made him realise the infinite possibilities of universal love. Gandhi discovered some of his deepest convictions reflected in *Unto This Last* and he realised for the first time that life of labour is the life worth living, all professions are equally respectable and the good of the individual is contained in the good of all ‘Sarvodaya’ or ‘welfare of all’.

Thoreau taught him that poverty is preferable to possession of power when government is unjust. He did not find anything wrong in breaking the law the observance of which would be more disastrous. Thus, Tolstoy’s love force and Thoreau’s idea of civil disobedience formed the base of Gandhi’s passive resistance movement. R Dutt’s *Economic History of India* made Gandhi aware of the economic exploitation. The economic ideas of Ranade, Gokhale and Tilak resulted in his
demand for the abolition of salt tax, the khadi movement, the cry for the revival of the village industries and the policy of prohibition.

Gandhi regarded Gokhale as his political ‘Guru’ and the identification of religion with politics he learnt from Gokhale. The spiritualization of politics came as a result of Gandhi’s thorough study of the Bhagavad-Gita. He knew most of the Gita by heart and it became his infallible guide of conduct. He learnt the doctrine of non-possession and equality and dedicated himself to the service of the community. It was motivated by his desire for self realisation through the renunciation of the fruits of action. That renunciation was the highest form of religion was, further fortified after the reading of Sir Edwin Arnold’s *The Light of Asia* and *The New Testament*—the realisation of Gandhi to take up fasting as a means of self-restraint. The first lesson of ‘brahmacharya’ Gandhi had already learnt from Rajchandra who had also enlightened him about the subtle and profound thought of Hinduism, its vision of the soul and its charity. The Sermon on the Mount, Surdas and Shamal Bhatt taught Gandhi the principles of humanity and goodness (even for evil).

Not only had these writers but the Bhagavad-Gita, The Bible and the Koran also played a significant role in formulating his principles. Gandhi thus picked up all that was good, assimilated it, practised it and then preached it. In a way what is known as Gandhian ideology is nothing but what is good and noble in life. It has, therefore, achieved universality and is what it was during his lifetime. It stands for truth, non-violence, fearlessness, self-help, simplicity, honesty, voluntary poverty, love for all and hatred for none, religious toleration, decentralization of power, equal status for women and self realization through self-restraint and self abnegation. It also
advocates a life of celibacy and considers fasting to be a necessity as an external aid. It is for the use of Hindi or Hindustani and regional languages. It encourages the establishment of cottage industries so that the villagers may become self sufficient by learning different handicrafts and be thus untainted from the glamour and foppishness of city life. It is against the use of foreign goods, untouchability, economic suppression and deep rooted prejudices and superstitions.

Gandhian ideology has its roots in the eternal human values handed down to us over centuries, such as love, truth, non-violence, righteousness, and tolerance. His ideology accommodates many contemporary issues like untouchability, religious harmony, rural poverty and the status of women in society.

Gandhi influenced millions of people all over the world during his life time and still continues to influence people. Under his influence major Indo-Anglian writers wrote in simple, coherent and direct style. They dealt with rural people- rural life. In this way these writers projected plight of the poor and protested against the evils of untouchability, superstitions, uncharitable rituals, backwardness, orthodoxy, tradition bound and cliché ridden practices, slavery of spirit, caste system and all types of exploitation.

Gandhian ideology which pervaded the contemporary political scene had a tremendous impact on Indian writing in English, in general and Indian English Fiction, in particular. Gandhi is not only an Indo-Anglian writer in his own right but a colossus who bestrides almost over the entire field of Indian writing in English in several forms, appearing either as a character or as a subject or as a pervasive influence upon the social and political scene depicted by the writer.
From the discussion in the second, third and forth chapters of this study, it can be said that Raja Rao, Mulk Anand and R. K. Narayan have absorbed Gandhian thought in different ways, each according to his own intellectual predilections and artistic needs. These three novelists reflect certain common elements as they witnessed Gandhi making history in India. For example, untouchability, which was one of the main targets of Gandhi’s social progress, is the major theme of Anand’s *Untouchable*. The impact of Gandhian movement on Indian villages is the theme of Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*. R K Narayan’s first novel *Swami and Friends* registers the impact of Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement of 1921 on a school going boy. Narayan’s theme is the artificiality and futility of western system of education in India. Education was one of the major constituents of Gandhian thought. Narayan’s first three novels project a critique of the western education system.

This awareness of the futility of western education and the need to go back to one’s own cultural roots is felt by all these three novelists. Whether it is the problem of education or economic exploitation or cultural emancipation from an alien power, these novelists share similar points of view.

Since the thirties, particularly the salt satyagraha of 1931, the Indian novelists in English related the cultural issues with the political ones. For the first time in history of Indo-Anglian Novel, politics as it affected the lives of Indians during those two turbulent decades also became a major thematic concern of the novelists. Gandhian ideas not only played the dominant role, they also became the major focal points of these novels. The political milieu of the thirties and the forties inevitably forms the background of these novels.
A study of these novelists reveals that these novelists remain quite distinct from one another so far as the manner of fictional treatment of the Gandhian theme is concerned. Anand’s novels are realistic in technique and absorb Gandhian ideas in terms of an accurate portrayal of the workings of the social institutions and their relationship to individuals. Raja Rao in his Kanthapura absorbs the spiritual aspect of Gandhian thought. R K Narayan extends the theme of education to the philosophical experience of the self-deceived person’s education which adds an extra dimension to his characterization.

Narayan in the early novels deals with the subject of education. He criticises the western system of education with a view to vindicating the Gandhian concept of basic education which, Narayan shows in the novels, is the only way to achieve cultural, spiritual and more important, in personal liberation.

In his novels Narayan chooses the common man of Malgudi in various professions. It is on this common man of a small town society that he shows the impact of Gandhi and his ideas. Although R K Narayan does not present Gandhi in his characteristic ironic vision in his Waiting for the Mahatma, he shows how even his close followers like Sriram have not properly understood Gandhian ideology and how Gandhi’s name is exploited by people like Natesh, the Municipal Chairman, for their own selfish ends. In The Vendor of Sweets, R K Narayan goes a step further by caricaturing the present day Gandhians like Jagan who pose and pretend to follow Gandhi. The comedy in The Waiting for the Mahatma, for example, arises from the readers’ awareness of Sriram’s incomprehension of the true import of Gandhian ideas in spite of his earnestness to follow Gandhi in entirety. This incomprehension of
Gandhian ideas is also shared by Bakha in *Untouchable* and Rao’s Moorthy in *Kanthapura*. Though Narayan models his characters after Gandhi, especially in his later novels, the ambivalence of his approach to these characters distinguishes him from Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao.

However, be it humanistic aspect of Gandhian thought that Anand has absorbed or the spiritual aspect that Rao assimilated or the social aspect that Narayan found more suitable for his characterisation, it is the Gandhian vision of life that ultimately emerges from these novels. Moreover, the historical perspective and the pan-Indian identity that Gandhian thought symbolised helped Indo-Anglian writers to see the present in the context of the past and link it with the future. Moreover, this historical perspective and the realistic approach in their novels derive from a live myth that Gandhi provided to these novelists. They, in a sense mythologized the history that Gandhi was creating both in the realms of thought and in active politics in India of these two decades.

There is a good reason why Gandhian thought made an immediate and strong appeal to Indo-Anglian novelists even more so than to Indian language writers. The latter, when inspired by new renaissance of nationalist feelings, could more readily fall back upon, and derive sustenance from, the long indigenous sanskritic tradition than the former. By their education, reading, personal contacts and preoccupations, the Indo-Anglian novelists had lost touch with those traditions, and got more familiar with the western ideas. In Gandhian thought they found a way back, as it were, to the native traditions via modern western ideas. They could respond more creatively to Gandhi and his thought, because they shared his intellectual and emotional journey.
through the modern western ideas back to the reinterpretation and renewal of the life of Indian traditions. This helped them reconnect themselves more creatively to the social milieu they lived in, and the people they wrote for.

Though he does not have much faith in Gandhian political ideology, Mulk Raj Anand is impressed by Gandhi’s genuine interest in the welfare of the downtrodden so he introduces Gandhi as a character in Untouchable. Some of the characters in the novel Untouchable remarked that Gandhi was a saint and an reincarnation God Vishnu. Gandhi was more concerned than any other leader with the welfare of untouchables. While he was prepared even to sacrifice his life in the process of eradicating untouchability, Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi’s political heir, is believed to have complained that the Mahatma was choosing a side issue for his final sacrifice. The Mahatma speaks to the people about untouchability which he considers as the greatest blot on Hinduism. Bakha is thrilled to be one of the crowd before the Mahatma whom he surprisingly finds a black like himself. His simplicity, purity, warmth and childlike smile keep haunting the sweeper boy. Similarly, Lalu, the revolutionary hero of The Sword and the Sickle, is struck by the Mahatma’s appeal when he meets him in person. He is greatly impressed by Gandhi’s sincerity, humanism and forceful personality. The Mahatma tells Lalu, “The first thing that I can say to the peasants… is to cast out fear… the real relief is for them to be free from fear” (Anand 1955: 201). But Lalu refuses to be convinced of the effectiveness of Gandhi’s non-violent struggle. The irreverent remarks of Lalu and other revolutionaries on Gandhi reflect Anand’s attitude to Gandhi’s non-violent struggle. Both in Untouchable and The Sword and the Sickle, Anand questions the
effectiveness of Gandhian solution to the problems of the untouchables and the peasantry.

In Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, we find, the finest picture of Gandhi’s impact on rural India. Though Gandhi does not appear as a character, the novel shows how “the whirlwind of Gandhian revolution” shakes a South Indian village to its roots. Some novelists, dealing with the themes of struggle for freedom, civil disobedience, non-cooperation and Quit India movements make references to him rather than bring him personally on the scene. We do not meet Gandhi in flesh and blood in the novel but he is constantly there through reports and by proxy. Moorthy, the hero of the novel, while distributing ‘charkhas’ obtained from the Congress Head Office, tells Nanjamma that Gandhi spin for two hours daily and that it was as sanctifying an exercise as prayer itself. The famous Dandi March is graphically described and the residents of Kanthapura are kept informed of the pilgrim path of the Mahatma from day-to-day.

The novelists have also referred to the controversy that has been raging in the minds of the people regarding Gandhi’s views on the use of machinery. Gandhi was against the blind popularization of machines so that the poor peasants and workers might not be deprived of their right to earn a living. In fact, he was quite pragmatic in his approach and advocated dependence on machines where it could not be helped. A layman could not understand the intricacies of his theory. Somehow the word had gone round that the Mahatma was against the use of machines. In Mulk Raj Anand’s *The Village*, we find that Lalu’s father pronounces the machine to be a devil and the age of science to be the age of darkness. In Anand’s *The Big Heart* Janaki calls
Ananta a machine man as he is a protagonist of the use of machines. In the true Gandhian spirit he feels that the machine is only a neutral tool to be put to the right use by man. Anand, however, exposes the other side of the picture in the novel. He describes how machines can become a death trap which alters the whole character of man. He goes on to elaborate how it has also become a tool in the hands of the exploiters to tyrannise the under privileged. The issue here is not between the higher castes and the lower castes, but between the ‘thathiars’ and the capitalists. The latter set up a factory and as a result the former are thrown out of employment. The machine has thus deprived them of their only source of earning. Black God Viroo shouts, “I will change my name if they do not break under the weight of those machines, as Mahatma Gandhi said they will all those who trust themselves to the machines.” (Anand 1980: 25)

Mahatma Gandhi did not aim at eradication of all machinery but their limitation. Some years later he further elaborated that the heavy machinery for public utility has its inevitable place and all that could be owned by the state and used entirely for the benefit of the people. Therefore, what is generally given to understand is that Gandhi was not at all in favour of industrialisation is wrong. In fact, he could clearly and correctly visualise the significant role that machinery would play in the industrial economy of India.

Gandhi’s love for Hindi- Hindustani and his desire for its popularization along with the development of regional languages have also been dealt with quite objectively by Indo-Anglian novelists. Mulk Raj Anand tells us how his personal contact with the Mahatma, at Sabarmati Ashram made him aware of Gandhi’s
“constructive advocacy” of Hindi and other languages. Anand is known for the transliteration of Punjabi expressions and this he attributes to the Mahatma. “The old man wanted me, as far as possible, to translate from the mother tongue” (Anand 1970: 172) writes Mulk Raj Anand. In Kanthapura Ascetic advocate Sankar speaks nothing but Hindi to his daughter. If by chance he happens to speak an English word, he drops a coin into a box by way of penalty and also insists on his friends doing the same. He opens the box every month and donates the money to the congress fund.

In Waiting for the Mahatma Gandhi’s speech in Hindi is translated into Tamil by Mr. Natesh, the municipal Chairman. At the outset the Mahatma said that he would not address them in English as it was the language of their rulers. It had enslaved them. He very much wished he could speak to them in their own sweet language Tamil.

For Gandhi learning each others language was neither too late nor did it amount to wastage of time. He wanted to reach the hearts of the masses directly by speaking their own language. Though he encouraged the use of Hindi and other regional languages, he at no stage, bore any ill-will or hatred towards the English language. When asked to discontinue the English edition of Harijan, Gandhi replied:

I cannot stop the English edition…. My relations with the west are increasing everyday… I cannot cast out the English language from my small store of language. I do not wish all Indians to give up or forget it… English is the language of the world. Its international position cannot be disputed. Imperialistic rule of the Englishman will go because it was and is an evil. But
the superior role of the English language cannot go (Cited in Bhattacharya 2000: 193).

Thus, the novels of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan could be read as an exposition of Gandhian principles and ideology. The novelists have not used Gandhian Ideology as a back-drop or setting but have rather articulated the impact of Gandhian thought. The novels of these writers present a true picture of the life in India influenced by Gandhi and his intellectual, spiritual, moral, ethical and religious hold on masses. Reading literature in this light leads one to believe that literature could play a role of commentary on influential ideologies while mirroring them.