CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY
Indian writing in English like all the other new literatures of the world in English has been the outcome of a national ferment and upsurge, which manifested itself as much in the cultural as in the socio-political life of the country. Creative writers like Romesh Chander Dutt, Bankim Chandra, Sri Aurobindo of the earlier times and K.S. Venkataramani, Bharathi Sarabhai, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao of the more recent years were themselves champions of the nationalist cause and spokesmen of the national culture. As K.S.Ramamurti rightly observes:

Political urgency, reformistic motivation, journalistic impulse and creative imagination seem to have criss-crossed in the speeches and writings of the leaders like Surendranath Banerjee, Gopalakrishna Gokhale, V.S.Srinivasa Sastry, Sarojini Naidu and Jawaharlal Nehru and created patterns of writings which carry with them an unmistakable literary quality. 1

Gandhi, who belongs to this class of personalities, has made a powerful impact on Indian thought in general and on Indian literatures in particular. The

impact made by Gandhi on Indian writing in English in general and on Indian English fiction in particular calls for study and critical analysis for, no single man has dominated the conscientiousness of the educated classes during the last few decades as much as Gandhi has dominated. His charismatic personality, both as a man and as the unquestioned leader of the nation during the most turbulent years of Indian history, as one who opened the eyes of the nation and the world alike to the concept and significance of truth and non-violence and as a man whose life was his message certainly affected the thoughts and actions of the last few generations in a very significant way.

In the words of M.K.Naik:

The glory that was Gandhi has left a permanent impress upon many aspects of modern India. Gandhiji's greatness was an unusual greatness in the sense that some men are great at small things; some others are great at one great thing; but Gandhiji belonged to that giant race of great men who are great at a great many things and whose greatness embraces large areas of human experience. 2

Small wonder, no creative writer could escape the influence of Gandhi phenomenon.

Secondly, Gandhi was a writer in his own way. But, he was not a writer in the usual sense of the word because what he wrote has been termed as journalistic writing. But, his writings in *Indian Opinion*, *Young India*, and *Harijan* have their own literary significance. Gandhi's insistence on non-violence, his simplicity and purity not only appealed to many but acted as inspiration to writers. His effective use of simple and direct prose style without rhetoric made the Indian writers in English give up flamboyance in their writings. Gandhi's freedom struggle, his impact on the masses and the optimism that soon India was going to be a free country made the writers of Indian English fiction along with other writers change their opinion of the British 'Raj' and identify themselves with the people who were waging the non-violent struggle against the British. As a result, the Gandhi thought and the freedom struggle gradually found their way into the Indian English fiction. Thus, the advent of Gandhi on the Indian political scene brought about a perceptible change in the subject matter and style of writing of the Indian English novelists.

Indian English novels like Toru Dutt's *Bianca* or *The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878) and R.C. Dutt's *Lake of Palms* (1902); *The Slave-girl of Agra* (1903) and
Rabindranath Tagore's *Home and the World* (1919) and *The Wreck* (1921) were written before the 1930s. But while *Bianca* is incomplete, Tagore's novels are translations from Bengali. So there was no school of Indian English fiction proper, before the 1930s. But in the 1930s, there came a sudden flowering of Indian English fiction and incidentally it was the period in which Gandhi became almost a household name. Naturally, the Indian English novelists were bound to give creative expression to the new political and social aspirations of the people. Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, who started writing during the 1930s convincingly demonstrate the impact of Gandhi on the Indian masses in their novels.

Gandhi is introduced into the Indian English fiction in various ways. He appears as a character in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), K.A. Abbas's *Inqilab* (1955), R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) and Nagarajan's *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961). Though he does not appear as a character in K.S. Venkataramani's *Murugan, the Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, the Patriot* (1932) and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), Gandhi is the driving force and is represented by idealised characters. Gandhi's followers appear in Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* (1947),
Mrs. Saghal's *A Time to be Happy* (1957) and in R.K. Narayan's *Vendor of Sweets* (1967).

Surprisingly enough, there was a lull for twenty years on the part of the Indian English novelists to present Gandhi. After Nagarajan's *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961), no Indian English novelist chose to present Gandhi as a character. Perhaps, Gandhism has been on the wane after the euphoria of Indian Independence.

Even if Chaman Nahal wrote a novel *The Crown and the Loincloth* on Gandhi after a gap of twenty years in 1981 and one more novel, *The Salt of Life* in 1990, it is obviously not with the purpose of writing novels on Gandhi but to enable himself to write *The Gandhi Quartet* after having attempted *Azadi* which dealt with partition in 1975. Nahal's forthcoming novel - *The Triumph of the Tricolour* - which deals with the dawn of independence, together with *Azadi*, which deals with partition, *The Crown and the Loincloth* which deals with the first National Movement, and *The Salt of Life* which deals with the Second Mass Movement completes *The Gandhi Quartet*. Evidently, Nahal's intention in writing *The Crown and the Loincloth* and *The Salt of Life* is to present the Gandhi Saga.
Almost a similar cause seems to have been responsible for Anand's writing *Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi*. His purpose again is not to write a novel on Gandhi but to start an epic novel, *And So He Plays His Part*. *Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi* is clearly the first part of the epic novel in which Anand creates characters from the lower depths from his rememberances of things past.

Anand's *Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi* may inspire the younger novelists to turn to Gandhi once again for inspiration for subject matter as Gandhian thought is gaining currency gradually after what happened recently in Russia and East European countries and what is presently happening in China.