

The Gandhian Influence on Malayalam Journalism

M.V. Thomas

Research Scholar

*Dept. of Communications And Journalism
University of Kerala*

Abstract

Gandhiji was a born journalist committed to social service. His journalistic activities influenced the Indian Press. As a part of it all major Malayalam newspapers during freedom struggle, associated with Mahatma Gandhi and his movement. They gave wide coverage to his operations and full support to his ideals. Malayala Manorama the highest circulated daily in Malayalam wrote respectful editorials on Gandhiji's works in South Africa even before his arrival to Indian politics. Mathrubhumi the second highest circulated daily in the language adopted Gandhiji's 'Young India' as the best model, when it was started. Kerala Kaumudi, the wardrum of backward classes had high esteem and respect for Mahatma Gandhi. In this study, many interesting facts are presented on the influence of Gandhiji on Malayalam Journalism and the subject is analyzed thoroughly.

Introduction

The struggle for freedom in India from British rulers is a unique event in human history. The war of the people against the mighty empire was more or less with out arms or ammunition. The weapons they used were peace, non-violence and non-co operation. The supreme leader of the peoples movement, Mahatma Gandhi

was a sage rather than a politician. Further, Journalism was one of his main arsenals in the struggle. A number of national and local leaders of the freedom movement were also journalists. Hence newspapers took an active role in the freedom struggle of India.

Gandhian Era

When Tilak, the topmost leader of the Congress died in 1920, Gandhiji emerged as the supreme leader of the country. Eminent leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabha Bhai Patel, Rajagopalachari and Sarojini Naidu followed his path of non-violence, non co-operation, sathyagraha and social re-construction. He attained and ensured support and participation of millions of people in the struggle for the freedom of the country. He was reverently called 'Mahatma' and later acknowledged as the 'Father of the Nation'. He led several agitations including the Salt Satyagraha (1930) and Quit India Movement (1942) in every nook and corner of the country. Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, Communist Party and the extremists in the Congress under the leadership of Nethaji Subhash Chandra Bose were against his approach due to different reasons. Gandhiji tried his best to build up his rapport between Muslims and Hindus. Unfortunately at the fag end of the freedom struggle communal violence between these communities immersed India in a bloodbath which worried him extremely. Finally against his wishes the country was divided in to two on the basis of religion when freedom was given to these countries on 15 August 1947. He was shot dead by a Hindu fanatic on 30th January 1948. It is noted that rarely in the World's history has a Nations destiny been so inextricably linked with that of a single individual as has been the case with Gandhi and India.

Gandhiji's Contribution to the Indian Press

Mahatma Gandhi honoured as the 'Father of the Nation' was a veteran and committed journalist. He considered journalism as an effective tool to convey his ideas to the masses of India. Gandhiji defined journalism as follows, "One of the objects of a newspaper is to understand popular feeling and give expression to it, another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments and the third is to fearlessly to expose popular defects"¹

In order to keep away from external influences, he avoided advertisements in his papers. He used clear and easily comprehensible language which could touch the hearts of the readers.

Gandhiji's periodical publications were *Indian Opinion*(1904: a weekly in English, Tamil, Hindi and Gujarati published in South Africa). *Satyagrah*(1919) an unregistered weekly in Hindi and Gujarati, *Navajeevan*(1919, Gujarati weekly), *Young India* (1919, English Weekly) and (1919, February, Bilingual Weekly in Hindi and English).

Gandhiji's journalistic activities influenced Indian press tremendously in the following ways:

1. Gandhiji's motto that the sole aim of journalism should be service, inspired many patriotic editors.
2. Set example for instructional journalism or 'views papers'. According to him views papers are not for amusement but for instruction and regulating conduct. They(the readers) literally take their weekly lessons in non -violence through its columns. He said that he had taken up journalism not for its sake but merely as an aid to what he had considered to be his mission of life.
3. His journalism kindled the spirit of freedom among people and gave them courage to fight against the colonial rulers in India(and in South Africa also).

4. Contributed to the development of Gujarati language. His clear and simple style, direct and free from all flourishes gave Gujarati a strength and vividness of expression which was a valuable contribution to the development of the language.
5. Prevented sensational journalism in India during freedom struggle under his leadership. He advised people to guard against sensationalism and obscenity in journalism and to refuse patronizing poisonous journals.
6. Influenced the launching of journals in Indian languages and English in order to promote the Gandhian style of freedom struggle in the country.
7. Provided opportunity to get world wide publicity not only to his actions and opinions but also to the development of the struggle in the country.
8. Focussed on the dangers of unnecessary and immoral advertisements by avoiding advertisements in his journals.
9. Gave top priority to weaker sections of the society including poor, rural, untouchables and the women
10. Besides politics, he dealt with almost all subjects relating to the day to day life of the people giving a model to other newspapers.

Through journalism Gandhiji got opportunity to deal with hundreds of problems faced by Indians and to propose remedies to them according to his vision and perspective.

The eventual Gandhian impact on Indian journalism during the freedom struggle is described as follows by Aruna Sapthirishi.

“Mahathma Gandhi’s ascendancy in Indian politics and his assumption of the leadership of the national movement for freedom acted as an elixir to Indian journalism. The nationalist press marched shoulder to shoulder with the Satyagraha in the non-violent struggle for freedom. It shared the toil and sweat, the joy and agony, the trials and attributions and the triumph and tragedy of millions of

men and women who responded to the call of the Mahatma and filled the prisons of the British Raj again and again. Like them, it sacrificed its all and refused to bend to the foreign rulers who employed every weapon in their armoury to suppress it and to annihilate it. Many valiant papers died never to rise again, but many died only to rise again and then to die fresh and to be reborn. There were also many who survived the nightmare and the dark night of despair and threat of extinction to share in the joy of freedom when it dawned at last. It was the finest hour of Indian journalism and the golden era of the Indian newspaper. Never before or after independence was there such a tremendous outburst of patriotic fervour and total dedication to the liberation of the motherland. Many are the newspapers and journalists whose names will be written in letters of gold in the history of the freedom movement and many who will be remembered for all times to come for their heroism and sacrifice. In the period between 1919 and 1947, the Indian Press was permeated with Gandhiji's message and his leadership was unchallenged. It was like an army marching under the command of the liberator".¹

Gandhiji and Kerala

Gandhiji was very much interested in the social reformation and political struggles for freedom in Kerala. He was closely associated with them through guidance whenever necessary. In almost all struggles in the State including Khilafath Movement, Vaikom Sathyagraha, Guruvayur Sathyagraha, agitation for Temple Entry and the struggles for Responsible Government. Pre-Independent Kerala was comprised of three political entities called Malabar under direct British rule and two princely states Travancore and Cochin. The struggles in Malabar were part of the national struggles led by Indian National Congress and Mahatma Gandhi, against the British Govt. meanwhile the struggles in princely states were not

against the British rule, but for social justice, civil rights, clean and efficient administration and responsible government. They were led by local organizations like Travancore State Congress and Cochin Rajya Praja Mandalam. Congress and Gandhiji gave guidance to the organizers of the struggles so as to connect them indirectly with the national goals. Gandhiji, visited Kerala five times i.e. in 1920, 1925, 1927, 1934 and 1937.

Gandhiji and Malayalam Newspapers

All major newspapers in Malayalam during freedom struggle were associated with Mahatma Gandhi and his movement. They gave wide coverage to his speeches, writings and political activities. The newspapers were respectful to him and gave full support to his ideals and programmes.

Malayala Manorama

Gandhiji returned to India and started to participate in the freedom struggles on 9th January 1915. While he was leading the struggles in South Africa, *Malayala Manorama* is the highest circulated daily published from Kottayam since 1890. It published an article on his habit of charity and patriotism on 29th January 1908. It published another editorial 'Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi' on 29th November 1913. In it his biography and personal qualities were narrated. The editorial says: "Gandhiji's principle is that if the white people implement any rule to destroy the Indian people, their caste based *dharma*s and patriotism they should not oppose it by a weapon of violence or injustice but to break its back bone by entering into jail and by suffering. It is also necessary to state that by his long acquaintance with Gandhi, the big leader Gokhale considered him as a great statesman and patriot having very good capability for thinking, far reaching vision, efficiency and administrative skill'.²

Here due respect is given to Gandhiji by *Manorama* at a time when he was not well known in India and describes him as a great statesman and patriot with the authentication of the great national leader's words. At early times Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Mr. Gandhi and Gandhiji were used to mention him. After 1923 the term 'Mahatma' became common and popular.

The following editorials published by *Malayala Manorama* were entitled specifically using the words Mahatma, or Mahatmaji, or Gandhiji

Malayala Manorama Editorials on Mahatma Gandhi

Title in Malayalam	Meaning in English	Date of Editorial
1. Mahatmajiyude Nirahara Vatham	The Fasting penance of Mahatmaji	23 September 1924
2. Mahatma Gandhi	Mahatma Gandhi	Mahatma Gandhi
3. Mahatmajiyum Parasyangalum	Mahatmaji & Advertisements	8 April 1926
4. Mahatmajiyude Thiruvithamkoor Sandarshanam	The visit of Mahatmaji in Travancore	13 October 1927
5. Mahatma Gandhi	Mahatma Gandhi	29,31, May 1930
6. Mahatma Gandhiyum Adhakritharum	and the depressed Class	14 September 1932
7. Gandhijyum Ayithochadanavum	Gandhiji & Removal of Untouchability	24 September 1922
8. Mahatma Gandhiyum Harijanodharanavum	Mahatma Gandhi & the uplift of Harijans	9, 10 November 1932
9. Mahatmajikku Swagatham	Welcome to Mahatmaji	18 January 1934
10. Mahatmajiyum Harijana Prasthanavum	Mahatmaji & the Harijan	8th August 1934

On the occasion of the first visit of Gandhiji in Travancore *Manorama* wrote an editorial entitled "Mahatma Gandhi" to welcome him: It said "He is considered first in importance among who are living in the world today. He is considered one among who are ever lived in the world. The whole world praise him so irrespective of caste or religious differences. We must think about the reason for it.. It is

sure that any emperor, head of religion, literary man or any other person living in the world has not acquired one percent of fame, love and respect Mahatma Gandhi is getting from the people".³

In the editorial "The Visit of Mahatmaji in Travancore" *Manorama* wrote:

"It will be a considerable virtue if we all try to eradicate the trouble making untouchability from the country respectfully accepting the messages of Mahatmaji.⁴ In every editorial and article relating to Gandhiji' *Manorama* honoured his greatness and directed people to accept and implement his advice and guidance in the socio-political struggle conducted in the state. The autobiography of Gandhiji and his letters to various persons on various issues were translated and published in *Malayala Manorama*. During all visits of Gandhiji in Travancore a representative of *Manorama* accompanied him from the beginning to the end. K.P.K. Pisharady, Asst. Editor of *Manorama* was the only journalist followed him in all programme at the time of Gandhiji's last visit in Travancore in 1937. The report was published with the title "Gndhiji's Pilgrimage'.

On the day of the martyrdom of Gandhiji *Manorama* wrote an editorial entitled "The extinguished Universal Light": it says:

"We are unable to think about the cursed moment of tragedy. The pen is not moving forward while writing on it due to unaffordable weight of emotions. Mahatma Gandhi, respected by the whole world is surprisingly dead physically. Yes, it has to be specially state that literally it is only a renouncement of body. Because the unique personal greatness fully filled in the lean body the embodiment of the wonderful spiritual revolution power that the world has not seen ever before - continues to be eternal. The ever biggest empire in the world surrendered before him. The world was slowly moving forward in the darkness by the help of the light spread from him the glowing globe. Meanwhile the full moon was covered by the black clouds of dark religious hostility".⁵

From this discussion it is crystal clear that Manorama under the editorship of K.C. Mamman Mappillai was respectful to Gandhiji even before his arrival to Indian Politics. It has been continuing and growing until his death in 1948.

Mathrubhumi

Mathrubhumi published from Kozhikode since 17th March 1923 was a product of the freedom struggle in Kerala. It was the mouth piece of Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee. K. Madhavan Nair, President of K.P.C.C was its first Managing Director. K.P.KesavaMenon, the Secretary of the Party functioned as the founder Editor of *Mathrubhumi*. He says: "When *Mathrubhumi* was started, the best model to run a newspaper was 'Young India' published under the editorship of Gandhiji . We decided to accept it as a guide *Mathrubhumi* an institution started as a supplementary to the national movement has brought up the movement along with it".⁶

The first issue was published on the eve of the first anniversary of Gandhiji's imprisonment for six years on 18th March 1922. In the early stage it was published on all Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. *Mathrubhumi* started to publish as a daily newspaper on the same day of starting the Salt Satyagraha by Gandhiji. *Mathrubhumi* weekly was started on 18th January 1932, with the cover picture of Mahatma Gandhi . The weekly published so many articles and poems written by well known persons on Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhiji visited *Mathrubhumi* on 13th January 1934 in order to unveil the photo of its Managing Director and a veteran freedom fighter K.Madhavan Nair. Then Gandhiji said:

"My friends have told me that *Mathrubhumi* is an institution living by standing on its own feet. It is a rare thing. Even in India very few newspaper are able to do so . Therefore *Mathrubhumi* has a unique position among the newspapers in India"² . *Mathrubhumi* was the only newspaper Gandhiji ever visited in Kerala.The newspaper was

so much associated with Gandhiji, Indian National Congress and the freedom struggle.

Kerala Kaumudi

Kerala Kaumudi started from Mayyanad near Quilon on 1st February 1911 as a weekly newspaper it was the wardrum of social renaissance and upliftment of backward classes especially the Ezhava community in the state. Therefore it strongly supported freedom movement in Kerala particularly in Travancore. "The contributions of *Kerala Kaumudi* and its founder Editor C.V. Kunjuraman in the area are invaluable and precious. It is the pioneer newspaper promoting free- thinking in Kerala. In the history of the first half of the 20th century of Kerala, especially that of Travancore, *Kerala Kaumudi* and its Editor have an important position".⁷

Kerala Kaumudi had high esteem and respect for Mahatma Gandhi as he fought fiercely against untouchability and for the upliftment of depressed classes and the poor people. "In those days *Kerala Kaumudi* reported with out any omission about Gandhiji's Kerala visit and his speeches against untouchability. It also fully reported his meeting with, Sree Narayana Guru at Sivagiri. It is doubtful whether there is any newspaper which has given so much publicity to the messages of Gandhiji on eradication of untouchability, other than *Kerala Kaumudi*".⁸

Gandhiji's speeches even from outside Kerala were also published. A report of a speech by Gandhiji at Madras beach after his Kerala visit during Vaikom Sathyagraha was reported with the following passage.

"If possible I will travel from Punjab to Kanyakumari and from Assam to Zind for attracting the attention of all Hindus to this issue alone in order to formulate their opinion in favour of it"⁹.

Gandhiji's meeting with Sree Narayana Guru in March 1925 at Sivagiri was a historical event. C.V. Kunjuraman, an eye witness of it wrote a report on the meeting in *Kerala Kaumudi*. It contained a

verbatim reproduction of the conversation between the Guru and Mahatma Gandhi. A passage from the report is given below:

“Mahatmaji- “Swamiji, do you know whether there is any citation in Hindu scriptures ordering untouchability?”

Swami - “No”

Mahatmaji- “Have you any difference of opinion about the Sathyagraha going on at Vaikom?”

Swami- “No”

Mahatmaji - “Do you think that something should be added to the movement or some changes may be made in it?”

Swami- “As far as I know it is going on correctly. I have no opinion to make any change in it”¹⁰.

The report of the meeting between Sree Narayana Guru and Mahatma Gandhi was helpful to clarify the attitudes of these great men on the fight against untouchability, especially the Sathyagraha going on at Vaikom. *Kerala Kaumudi* wanted to motivate people by publishing the report. It also reveals its respect to these great men and the high regard between them.

However, there were some differences of opinion between Guru and Gandhiji on some religious issues. *Keala Kaumudi* highlighted them while reporting the speech of Gandhiji at Aluva Advaita Ashrama. The report says:

“In the speech at Advaita Ashrama, Mahatmaji was not hesitating to discuss the differences of opinion between himself and Sree Narayana Guru. He said that the difference was on the concept of ‘One caste, One religion’ and such differences would be there on the whole period of human existence. It is impossible to unify different castes and religions by mixing them. But it is possible to attain unity and peace through a vision of equality and tolerance. In this way he established his argument logically.”¹¹

Even though Gandhiji disagreed with Sree Narayana Guru on the concept of 'One caste, One religion' *Keala Kaumudi* published the speech of Gandhiji prominently. Instead of criticizing Gandhiji's comment *Kerala Kaumudi* praised it as a logically presented argument. Because Gandhiji was able to see his favouritism to the oppressed classes contained in Guru's dictum. "When we read between the lines we can understand that later on Gandhiji gave preference to the upliftment of Harijans due to the influence of Sree Naraya Guru"¹².

Al. Ameen (1924-'39)

Al-ameen (1924-39) was a Kozhikkode based pro-nationalist newspaper started publication on 12th October 1924 by Muhammed Abdu Rahiman, a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He was associated with the Khilafat Movement and Indian National Congress in Malabar. *Al-Ameen* tried to strengthen the national movement by fostering a spriti of nationalism among Muslims in Malabar. Puthuppally Raghavan says:

"The declared aim of *Al-ameen* was to strengthen the national movement. To foster nationalism among Muslims and to promote timely reforms and changes in the Muslim Community were also included in its aims. What was the result of all these? While other newspapers faced opposition from government only, *Al-ameen* had to face it both from the Government and the conservatives among the Muslim community. To some extent *Al-ameen* was a leftist newspaper."¹³

Deenabandhu(1942-'63)

Deenabandhu was the most prominent newspaper in Cochin which tok active role in the freedom movement in that state. It was the official organ of Kochi Rajya Praja Mandalam, the leading political party of the Cochin state during the final phase of freedom struggle in India. It was started as a weekly on 26th January 1942 from Thrissur. V.R. Krishnan Ezhuthachan, the founder General Secretary of the Praja Mandalam was the editor of the newspaper. The name

Deenabandhu was given to honour *Deenabandhu* C.F. Andrews (1870-1940), an English Priest. Considering his contributions to social reformation and the freedom movement in India, Gandhiji gave him the title *Deenabandhu* (Friend of the poor).

Six months after the starting of *Deenabandhu*, the Quit India struggle was declared in August 1942. The newspaper strongly supported it by publishing reports, articles and editorials on it. The newspaper re-published an editorial from 'Sachithan' on police atrocities at Thrissur. The Editor V.R. Krishnan Ezhuthachan was arrested along with other leaders of the quit India Struggle. They were released in 1944.

Deenabandhu re-started its publication in March 1944. But in December the government of Travancore banned its entry into that state. A column titled 'Thiruvithamcoore Kathu' (Letter from Travancore) was the provocation behind the action.

On 26th January 1946 *Deenabandhu* turned into a daily newspaper. News dispatches of news agencies APA and Reuters were in it for the first time in Cochin State. A Malayalam edition of Gandhiji's Harijan was also published under the auspices of *Deenabandhu* company.

Conclusion

From the above discussion it is crystal clear that Mahatma Gandhi influenced Malayalam newspapers in many ways. Almost all major newspapers including the dailies mentioned above strongly supported his ideals, agitations and programmes whole heartedly. There were so many small and short lived newspapers in Malayalam committed to the cause of freedom and the ideals of Gandhiji. Swarat of Barrister A.K. Pillai, Malayala Rajyam of K.G. Sankar are good examples for it. K. Ramakrishan Pillai, Editor of Swadeshabhimani who was deported from Travancore in wrote in 1913 a biography of Gandhiji in Malayalam¹⁴. It may be the first biography of Gandhiji written in any Indian language, before his return to India from South Africa.

References

1. Aruna Sapthirishi, *History of Journalism, Dominant Publishers*, New Delhi, 2005, P. 199-200.
2. Malayala Manorama, Editorial (Malayalam) dt. 9 November 1913.
3. Malayala Manorama Editorial (Malayalam) dt. 10 March 1925
4. Malayala Manorama Editorial (Malayalam) dt. 13 October 1927.
5. Malayalam Manorama Editorial (Malayalam) dt. 30 January 1948
6. Kesava Manon K.P., *Introduction, Mathrubhumi Charithram (Malayalam)*, vol. I Mathrubhumi Publications, KOzhikkode, 1998.
7. Raghavan Puthuppally, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram (Malayalam)*, D.C. Books, Kottayam, 2001, P. 158.
8. Gopalakrishnan Nedumkunnam, *Kerala Kaumudi Charithram (Malayalam)*, Vol. I, Kerala Kaumudi, Trivandrum, P. 196.
9. Kerala Kaumudi, Report (Malayalam) dt. 3 April 1925.
10. Kerala Kaumudi, Report (Malayalam), dt. 12 March 1925.
11. Kerala Kaumudi, Report (Malayalam) dt. 25 March 1925.
12. Gopalakrishnan Nedumkunnam, *Kerala Kaumudi Charithram*, Vol. 1, P. 255.
13. Raghavan Perthuppally, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram*, P. 216.
14. Ramakrishna Pillai K, *Mohands Gandhi (Malayalam)*, ARP Press Kunnamkulam 1913.