

## M.K. Gandhi's Personal Libraries: A Literary Legacy of Satyagraha

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### Abstract:

This article attempts to study M.K. Gandhi's personal libraries, aiming to understand the influence of various literature on his life and politics. A personal library in Library science reflects the beneficial information about the owner and his reading history, highlighting their inclination and inquisitiveness. The article also discusses Gandhi's personal libraries, arranged events chronologically from his early days in Rajkot to his last days in Delhi. The research concludes that Gandhi had a splendid library comprising classical and contemporary World literatures.

**Keywords:** Personal library, Gandhi, World Literature, English literature

### Introduction

The study proposes to study Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's library and analyse his interests, education, political thoughts, and philosophy. M.K.Gandhi (1869-1948) was a renowned figure of the 20th century; his philosophy of Satyagraha gravely influenced the world and its politics, and he gradually reached the title of Mahatma; he was not born Mahatma, but he became Mahatma through learning, reading and adapting. (Guha, 2014) Individuals develop through their choice of books, their interests and actions. Hence, it is crucial to have an insight into Gandhi's library as it provides valuable historical and political evidence of his political philosophy.

The study of the personal library of a political or artistic person is rarely studied aspect of librarianship. Gandhi, a prominent political figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was an avid reader, writer and translator; his philosophy and politics developed as Satyagraha. (Makwana, 2022) Gandhi had a rich library from when he was a child in Rajkot to Mahatma in Sabarmati Ashram. (Devji, 2012) A significant amount of research has been conducted on Gandhi's reading, writing and communication. Yet, there needs to be more research on his personal library and the influence of it on his life.

The paper studies Gandhi's personal library in four parts: his school days in Rajkot (1877-1887), his studies in London for Barrister (1888-1891), his stay in South Africa (1893-1915), and his time in India (1917-1948). Moreover, it classifies his books by genre, themes, author and language to understand interest, influence and friendship. The research uses the *Bibliography of Books Read by Mahatma Gandhi* (2011) by Kirit K. Bhavsar, Mark Lindley, and Purnima Upadhyay to analyse Gandhi's personal library. (Bhavsar et al., n.d.) It also studies Gandhi's educational curriculum to understand the academic purpose of books in his library.

### Review of Literature:

Several research studies have been conducted on personal libraries and how these libraries influence the owner's life. Peter Sabor recreated Jane Austen's library in virtual form; the primary purpose of his project was to provide bibliographical information on books Austen read and left a remarkable impact on her writing. (Barry, 2019) Alma Braziūnienė's research on 19th-century Lithuanian personal libraries of religious figures, politicians, and

nobility reveals contemporary intellectualism. Similarly, Caitlin Stone and Berryman studied former Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies's library using nontraditional technology. (Stone & Berryman, 2014) Instead, they connected the books from his collection to his life and times. Additionally, Kotryna Rekašiūtė takes the Lithuanian personal library further by individually studying cultural activist Hugo Scheu's personal library and collection, connecting it with the destruction of the Second World War. (Rekašiūtė, 2022) There are several aspects to analyse and annotate concerning the personal library, as Nadine Giron, in her research, analysed the literary process from his presentation notes and draft of his writings to the sticky notes of Philip Roth. (Young, 2016) This study discusses the research gap in Gandhi's

### **Rajkot (1877-1887)**

A seven-year Mohandas Gandhi shifted to Rajkot in 1876 as his father, Karamchand Gandhi, was appointed as a Diwan (Prime Minister) of Rajkot state. Mohandas started his education at a local school and learned Gujarati geography and arithmetic. (Gandhi, 1925) Within two years, he joined Alfred High School for English education, where he studied English literature, Language, Geography, History, Mathematics and Translation. The syllabus of that time included a few English novels, poems and a few Gujarati textbooks. (Joshi, 1994)

Aside from his school work, Mohandas' parents had a rich library of religious and Gujarati literary and historical books on Saurashtra. During this period, he developed values and morals, which he carried for his personal and political life. (Nandy, 2010) The personal library of Karamchand includes *Ramayana*, *Manusmriti* and Gujarati translations of *Harishchandra*. (Bhavsar et al., n.d.) The play *Harishchandra* changed the life of young Gandhi, emphasising the great value of Truth and non-violence. Gandhi attended Shamaldas College, Bhavanagar, in 1887, where he studied for the matriculation exam; the curriculum involved Sanskrit, Gujarati, English grammar, and other essential subjects.

### **London (1888-1891)**

Gandhi went to London in 1888 to study Indian colonial law and legislation. Despite his course readings, he also took an interest in theology, philosophy, and vegetarianism. During his stay in London, he made meaningful connections who stayed in touch with him throughout life. These connections also shared many books with him, including Annie Besant and Helen Blavatsky. (Chanchani, 2010) Gandhi joined the Vegetarian Society of London and the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society. Gandhi read *Gita's* English translation by Edward Freitgard, *The Song of Celestials*, Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, and Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, hero-worship, and the heroic in History*. (Gandhi & Suhrud, 2019) His readings include books on vegetarianism, Henry Salt's treatise *A Plea for Vegetarianism*, published by the Vegetarian Society and *The Ethics of Diet* by Howard Williams. (Brown & Parel, 2011) Gandhi's curriculum for his law degree included many books, such as William Alexander Hunter's *Introduction to Roman Law*, Herbert Broom's *Commentaries on the Common Law* and Joshua Williams's *Principles of the Law of Real Property*. (Zitzke, 2017) Gandhi couldn't develop his library there, but he certainly read several texts from his friends and society's library.

### **South Africa (1893-1915)**

Gandhi stayed in South Africa for 21 years; during his stay, he accomplished extraordinary achievements, from being a successful lawyer to being an Indian leader on foreign soil against colonial oppression. (Chanchani, 2010) He established the Natal Indian Congress to fight against discriminatory legislation, which aimed to secure the rights of Indians in South Africa and create a collective Indian diaspora. (Gandhi & Desai, 1995) It is noteworthy that there were Gujarati, Tamil and Bengali populations in South Africa; hence, it was necessary to establish the Natal Indian Congress. The building of NIC consists of an extensive library with precious texts in various languages. (Vahed, 2000) Gandhi shared his thoughts in the article published in *Indian Opinion* newspaper, stating that the library should be free of charge, serve the large population living in Natal, and be open on Sundays and after hours to serve as many readers as possible. (*Indian Opinion*, 14-1-1905)

Gandhi established two settlements in South Africa influenced by John Ruskin and Leo Tolstoy: Phoenix Ashram (1904) and Tolstoy Farm (1910). (BHANA, 1986) In these settlements, Gandhi followed both great thinkers' thoughts on political economy and socialism and, with his friends, created extensive libraries and a printing press that published the *Indian Opinion* newspaper. (Hofmeyr, 2013) On his journey to South Africa in 1888, Gandhi brought a few Gujarati books, including George P. Taylor's *The Student's Gujarati Grammar: With Exercises and*

*Vocabulary* and Manilal Nabhubhai Dwivedi's *Maniratnamala*. (A. Desai & Vahed, 2016) Later, Gandhi's collection of Gujarati literature in South Africa grew; when Gandhi's daughter-in-law was pregnant, he ordered a few books on pregnancy in Gujarati from India. (Adhar, 2016)

Remarkably, Phoenix and Tolstoy's farms had multilingual settlers; hence, these establishments had multilingual libraries in Indian and European languages. These libraries contained vast themes, genres and writers, starting from Gujarati translations of the *Bhagwat Gita* and *Kuran*; they also included books on the history of Natal and India. Indian diaspora in South Africa had many Gujarati Muslim merchants; Gandhi was a good friend, philosopher, and prominent figure in that community. (U. Desai, 2000) Therefore, Gandhi's library consists of many Islamic texts, such as Washington Irving's *Lives of Mahomet and his successors*, Thomas Carlyle's *The Hero as Prophet*, Ghulam Ahmad Mirza's *The Teachings of Islam* and Claude Field's *Mystics and Saints of Islam*. His collection also included the classics of World Literature in English translation, Russian short stories by Leo Tolstoy, such as *Ivan the Fool*, French work *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo, Plato's *Apology* and George Uglow Pope's *A Tamil hand-book of Language and Literature*. (Vahed, 2000) Gandhi was sent to jail in Johannesburg for organisation opposition against the Asiatic Registration Act; from the prison's library, Gandhi issued a few books on Chinese communism, Plato's *Apology & Crito* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. (Makwana, 2022)

These books and libraries inspired Gandhi's Satyagraha in South Africa against discriminatory legislation for Indians. Gandhi was influenced to die for Truth by Socrates, Non-violence by Tolstoy and Thoreau, and Love for All by *Gita* and Tolstoy. (Guha, 2014)

### India (1915-1948)

Gandhi returned to India in 1915 from South Africa with a mission to fight for home rule; upon his return, he travelled across the country to understand the culture, history and problems of colonial India. Meanwhile, he established Kochrab Ashram in 1915, which was gifted to him by his friend Jivanlal Desai. (Rothermund, 1970) Kochrab Ashram, later located near the bay of the Sabarmati River, is known as Sabarmati Ashram. Both establishments witnessed the freedom movement very closely; they also had been the centre for literary activities in Gujarati and India.

Gandhi was a vivid reader. He enjoyed English and vernacular literature. His library in Kocharab Ashram contained works by renowned world authors such as Jonathan Swift, Francis Bacon, Joseph Doke, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and George Bernard Shaw. (Bhavsar et al., n.d.) Gandhi wrote about the importance of vernacular literature and said he wanted a library of all books of vernacular literature; hence, he asked friends for financial aid to form libraries consisting of Puranas, Vedas and other contemporary works in various Indian languages. The collection includes Indian classical literature such as Jnaneshwar's *Jnaneshwari Gita Bhavarthadipika*, *Ishopanishad*, *Markandeya Purana* and *Manusmriti*. (Gandhi & Suhrud, 2019) His collection included Bengali literature in Gujarati or English translation, such as Misar Kumari, a Gujarati translation of 'Cleopatra Egyptian Princess' from a Bengali play, Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, along with Tagore's translation of Kabir's poems in English. (*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: Volumes 1 to 98: Gandhi Literature*, n.d.) Moreover, Gandhi knew that the Gujarati merchant class held a priceless collection in their libraries and beautiful collections of Jain literature wrapped in silk cloths. The condition of these books made his heart sore as there were hardly any readers.

Gandhi wrote a column titled 'What I Read' for the *Young India* English newspaper; he shared his reading suggestions with readers. (Gandhi Mahatma, 1927) Among these, the eye-catching suggestions are Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Krishnacharitra*, Anand Shankar Dhruv's *Hindu dharma ni balpoth*, Govardhanram Tripathi's *Saraswati Chandra* and Charu Chandra Mitra's *Untouchability and temple-entry*. (Casolari, 2022) These readings are representations of Gandhi's personal politics and social cause, which he believed to inspire in colonial society in India.

The more significant collection of Gandhi's libraries consisted of American and British literature, from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* to Upton Sinclair's *The Cry for Justice*. The themes and genres of his reading included political philosophy, religious texts, transcendentalism and political theories. (Guha, 2018) Gandhi read Karl Marx's *Das Capital* while in jail; he believed that Marx's thoughts were outdated as the world moved forward. (Varma, 1954) However, Gandhi believed that Marx understood the industry, even though he did not come to a proper conclusion or solution for the problem.

**English Literature:**

Gandhi's personal library included many genres, from poetry to political essays; his interests were vast; his collection involved contemporary writers and English classical writers, from Jane Austen to Alfred Tennyson. Moreover, Gandhi's readings impacted his thoughts and writings as he read J.S. Mill's *The Subjection of Women*; Gandhi mentioned this text of Mill in his Gujarati translation of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* to enhance his understanding of political economy. (Mawkana, 2021) Additionally, Gandhi greatly appreciated the English romantic poet's manifesto, 'Back to Nature,' and has Wordsworth's biography in his library. (Singh, 2024) Gandhi urged Gujarati writers to write about Indian villages and their lives, similar to Romantics, who wrote about the countryside. (Pachegaonkar & Shirwadkar, 1999) He also encouraged Gujarati writers to write in the most straightforward and evident language for readers.

Sr. No.	Book Title	Author	Genre/ Theme	Language
	<i>Pride and prejudice</i>	Jane Austen	Romance novel	English
	<i>Sense and sensibility</i>	Jane Austen	Romance novel	English
	<i>Wordsworth</i>	Myers, F.W.H.	Biography	English
	<i>The Subjection of Women</i>	J.S.Mill	Political essay	English
	<i>Boston</i>	Upton Sinclair	Political fiction	English
	<i>Vanity fair: a novel without a hero</i>	William Makepeace Thackeray	Social criticism	English
	<i>The column: a novel</i>	Charles Marriott	Novel	English
	<i>All Things Are Possible: A Novel</i>	Henry Neil	Novel	English
	<i>Bars and Shadows: The Prison Poems of Ralph Chaplin</i>	Ralph Chaplin	Poetry	English
	<i>A Wandering Harp: selected poems</i>	James H. Cousins	Poetry	English
	<i>Enoch Arden</i>	Alfred Tennyson	Poetry	English

Table 1 English literature in Gandhi's library

It is inevitable that we will overlook the importance of English education on Gandhi and his thoughts; Gandhi was a polyglot through education and culture, which is visible in his writing and reading choices. (Vanita, 2002) He was introduced to translation courses as a part of his school curriculum and received the highest grade in his class. (Meena, 2015) The translation course was introduced to create a class between the coloniser and colonised for effective communication. Therefore, Gandhi grew up with an inclusive understanding of translation and translation practices, and he translated a few works of Leo Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Socrates into Gujarati. (Skaria, 2016). English education in India has created translators and Indian writers in the English language. Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo, Nehru and Gandhi are ideal examples of Indian writing in English. Gandhi possessed a few works of Indian writing in English. (Bakshi, 1990)

**Gujarati Literature:**

Sr. No.	Book Title	Author	Genre/Theme	Language
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	<i>Vanaraj Chavdo</i>	Mahipatram Rupram Nilkanth	Novel	Gujarati
	<i>Dharmavichar</i>	Narmadashankar Lalshankar Dave	Essay	Gujarati
	<i>Himalayno Pravas</i>	Kakasaheb Kalelkar	Travel	Gujarati
	<i>Karanghelo</i>	Nandshankar Mehta	Historical Fiction	Gujarati
	<i>Jivanshodhan</i>	Kishorlal Mashruwala	Essay	Gujarati
	<i>Shankh ane kodi</i>	H.E.Valiani "Koipan"	Drama	Gujarati
	<i>Prithvivallabh</i>	Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munshi	Historical Fiction	Gujarati
	<i>Nandabatrasi</i>	Shamal Bhatt	Poetry collection	Gujarati
	<i>Okha Haran</i>	Premanand	Narrative poem	Gujarati
	<i>Nalakhyan</i>	Premanand	Narrative poem	Gujarati
	<i>Ishucharita</i>	Valaji Govindji Desai	Essay	Gujarati

Table 2 Gujarati literature in Gandhi's library

In 1919, Gandhi returned to India and decided to contest the election of the Gujarat Sahitya Parishad; sadly, he lost to Hargovinddas Kantawala, a teacher and writer.(Suhrud, 2010) Since his days in South Africa, Gandhi advocated straightforward language and themes concerning ordinary Gujarati men in literature; with the same agenda, he contested the election for the literature society. (U. Desai, 2000)

Gandhi's institutions, such as Ashrams and Gujarat Vidhyapith, were always an epicentre for literary activities, gifting Gujarat with extraordinary writers such as Kaka Kalelkar, Meghani and Valaji Desai. (Yashaschandra, 1995) Gandhi often received an earlier draft of their writings for comment or writing preface. His personal collection of Gujarati literature consists of Premanand to Narmad and Shamal Bhatt to Munshi. (Isaka, 2002) The diverse genres and themes of Gujarati literature influenced Gandhi, and he also left a remarkable impact on Gujarati Sahitya and its theme. As a result, Gujarati literary periodisation regards the period from 1915 to 1940 as Gandhi Yug. (Isaka, 2002)

In addition to his libraries and column on reading suggestions, Gandhi recommended books to his friends and wrote about them in his diary. (Posted by Prof. Dr. Yogendra Yadav on July 11 & Blog, n.d.) Gandhi, an avid reader of Gujarati literature, praised Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munshi's historical novel *Prithvivallabh*, writing that the characters appealed to him in a way that Shakespeare or Kalidas could never. Munshi also created *Gujarat and its literature from early 1852*, a literary survey for Gandhi to read. (Kothari & Kothari, 2023)

#### World Literature:

Sr. No.	Book Title	Author	Genre	Language
	<i>Shravanpitribhakti Nataka</i>	Shastri Gokulji Pranjivan	Drama	Gujarati Translation from Hindi
	<i>Garibaldi</i>	Lala Lajpat Rai	Essay	Gujarati from Urdu
	<i>Bhagyano paras</i>	Imam Ghazali	Non-fiction	Gujarati translation from the Arabic original
	<i>Muktadhara</i>	Rabindranath Tagore	Drama	Gujarati translation from his Bengali
	<i>Abhang</i>	Tukaram	Bhakti Poetry	Gujarati translation from his Marathi
	<i>Gita Bhavarthadipika</i>	Jnaneswari	Non-fiction	Gujarati translation from his Marathi
	<i>Margopadeshika</i>	Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar	Non-fiction	Gujarati translation from Sanskrit
	<i>Panchtantra</i>	Vishnu Sharma	Short Stories	Gujarati translation

	<i>The kingdom of God is within you</i>	Leo Tolstoy	Short Stories	English translation from Russian
	<i>The Persian mystics: Jalálu'd-Din Rumi</i>	Frederick Hadland Davis,	Poetry	English translation from Persian
	<i>Bacon na nibandho</i>	Francis Bacon	Essay	Gujarati translation from English
	<i>The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam</i>	Edward Fitzgerald	Poetry	English translation from Persian

Table 3 World literatures in Gandhi's Library

Besides his collection of English in Gujarati literature, he also had world literatures in translations, starting from his mentor Leo Tolstoy's English translation and his friend Ravindranath Tagore's works in Gujarati translation. (Atkinson, 1983) Ironically, Gandhi was gravely influenced by Goethe; in his address to Sahitya Parishad, he mentioned the importance of translation and world literature, stating that most contemporary European literatures are translated into German without delay. (Sebastian, 2024) As a multilingual country, India should develop translation practices to circulate great literature beyond its literary and linguistic borders. (Robinson, 2016) He had Marathi literary works in Gujarati translation, whether Tukaram or Jnaneshwari and the Urdu work *Garibaldi* of Lala Lajpat Rai in Gujarati translation. (Bains, 2024)

The world literature in his library was predominantly in Gujarati and English, as well as Russian, Persian, Bengali, and Sanskrit works. He read the poetry of Rumi and Omar Khayyam in English translations, but he couldn't comprehend the Persian language, so he opted to read translations. (Rahbar, 2012) Apart from European literary works in translation, his library had much vernacular literature in translation. (Dominguez, 2022) His collective comprehends a significant section of translated works from respective languages. (Feitlowitz, 2023) He understood the importance of translation in the circulation of literature. (Devy, 1999)

### Conclusion

The study concludes that Gandhi was a global citizen and a lifetime political, philosophical and religious learner. These thoughts were enhanced by his extensive and diverse reading of world literatures. However, it is difficult to conclude that it was Gandhi's personal library, as he believed in Trusteeship. Hence, it is challenging to distinguish between Gandhi's individual and collective libraries in Tolstoy Farm, Phenoix Ashram, Kochrab, or Sabarmati Ashram. Gandhi's philosophy of earthly possessions prevented him from using the term 'library' for his collection of books, as he believed in Trusteeship. Despite avoiding the term 'personal library' for his collective, it has undoubtedly impacted his life and politics. His non-violence, passive resistance and Satyagraha were shaped by his diverse readings. The collected works in this study are recommended reading lists for future generations, such as Jane Austen, Philip Roth, and Hugo Scheu's personal libraries.

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