

Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta and Gandhi in Indian English Writings

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Abstract

Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta is the Spiritual dictionary and also considered the key guide for the saints and the philosophers of the world. Mahatma Gandhi the key figure and the father of nation of India is the one who read and followed Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta in his life. He always said that to enter in the heart of Indian people, we have to take a help of Bhagwat Geeta. It helps us to understand everyone and also gives the solution of the complex problems. Gandhi Ji said that his principle of “Satyagraha” came from the teachings of Geeta. The understanding about religion was based on the truth which is an essentially part of every religion. The writers in English writings used Gandhi Ji as a tool in their writings. Gandhi Ji helped them in every aspect of life to understand the different problems. The success of Gandhi Ji in independence movements is based on the philosophies which he learnt through Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta. According to Gandhi, The Gita teaches about karma (duty), bhakti (devotion), jnana (knowledge), satya (truth), brahmacharya (celibacy), aparigraha (non-possession) and asteya (non-stealing). In this paper we discussed the impact of Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta on Gandhi’s life and on Indian English Writers.

Key Words: Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Inner-peace, Self-Knowledge, Gandhi, Politics

Introduction

‘Bhagavad Gita’ which is literally known as the “Song of Lord”, it is one of the essential Indian ancient scriptures like Vedas, Puranas and Upanishads. It guides us by showing various spiritual paths through which we can enhance our self-knowledge as well as divine inner peace. It is as acts as a medicine for modern human life and

provides all that which is required to develop the highest level of consciousness.

Mohan Dass Karamchand Gandhi, a well-known political leader of Indian national movement is known as Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi became Mahatma because of his political, social and religious understanding. Gandhi’s political philosophy was guided by the religion. But Gandhi’s religion was not a particular religion but

it was the gist of all religions. His understanding of religion was based on ethics and morality. Gandhi was equally influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity. His understanding about truth, non-violence, peace, and duty was guided by the gist of these religions. The book that influenced Gandhi, was the *Shrimad Bhagwat Gita*. Gandhi learned this book in his early political carrier. This book played significance role in the development of Gandhi's understanding. It influenced his whole political and social carrier. In this paper, the attempt will be made to understand the significance of the philosophy of the *Gita* in the construction of Gandhi's political philosophy.

Lord Krishna preached 'Bhagavad Gita' to Arjuna for motivating him to perform his task and duty when he was facing an ethical dilemma whether not to defeat and kill his relatives and friends in the war field of 'Kurukshetra'. 'Bhagavad Gita' is like the river Ganga, in which knowledge, duty and deed are emphasised upon. As river Ganga has been flowing for many eras on this Earth, it quenches the thirst of every thirsty man without asking him about the caste, colour and creed or to which country he belongs to, so also Bhagavad Gita, like the river Ganga, is flowing for the welfare of mankind irrespective of the caste, creed, religion and country.

Gandhi was one of the most important non-western thinkers whose political theory was grounded in experiences. Gandhi placed new questions on the political agenda and used new methods to tackle old agendas. Gandhi's philosophy was influence by rich Indian tradition of non-violence. Gandhi's philosophy was rooted in both, Indian ways of life and thought and the western thought. Gandhi was a man of thought and action. Gandhi criticized modern British civilization because he was of the view that British

civilization could be better in British conditions, not in Indian conditions. Gandhi was of the view that Indian civilization was pluralistic in nature which has unity in diversity. Gandhi was a living example of spiritual soul. For him, religion was mainly concerned with how one should live rather than what one believes. (Parekh, 1995. 1-83). Gandhi is seen either as a saint or a politician. Gandhi could receive world-wide attention among his contemporary leaders. Many scholars consider Gandhi as mahatma but he himself denies this view. Some scholars were of the view that Gandhi was a saint among politicians and a politician among saints. Gandhi read *Yogasutra* of Patanjali in 1903 which provided him the basis of the ethical discipline.

Gandhi's developed his political methods in South Africa and almost all of his concepts such as Satya, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Swaraj and Swadeshi were formulated in his mind before his participation of Indian national movement. His moral and political thought was influenced by his religious and ethical beliefs. Gandhi's moral and political philosophy developed because of five reasons. The first reason is that Gandhi's personality attracted the scholars to write on him on the place of his writings. Second, Gandhi's philosophy can be understood after reading his thirty years activities in India from 1915 to 1948. Third, Gandhi was not an intellectual and academician. He himself accepts, "I am not build for academic writings. Action is my domain." Therefore, Gandhi could not write any systematic book which could give very clear picture about his political and ethical philosophy. Fourth, his moral and political thoughts are influenced by his religious and ethical beliefs. Lastly, very few serious attempts have been made to understand Gandhi's moral and political ideas both in India and outside of India. Gandhi was critique of

modern civilization. He has explained his view about civilization in his book „Hind Swaraj . Gandhi was in the favour of moral and ethical politics. He was of the view that politician should have some ethics (Iyer, 2000. 1-39).

Gandhi talks about self-realization, seen God face to face, and attaining moksha. Gandhi was of the view that for getting moksha, one should have control on impression and passion. He felt that he was not fit for getting moksha because he could not control on his passion. Gandhi believed in the practicality of his thinking. He claimed that his experiments were spiritual, moral and had essence of religious morality. Gandhi was deeply influenced by the Bhagawad Gita. He wanted to live at peace with both, friends and foes. Gandhi considered bhakti as an important instrument for patience. He was of the view that one cannot do every think, therefore, one should know their limitations and limitations can be understood by bhakti. Gandhi talked about bhajan which was sung in his Ashram daily. Gandhi was of the view that instead of talking about moksha one should focus on bhakti. Gandhi wrote in Young Indian on 3rd November 1927 about the message of the Bhagwad Gita. According to Gandhi, The Gita teaches about karma (duty), bhakti (devotion), jnana (knowledge), satya (truth), brahmacharya (celibacy), aparigraha (non-possession) and asteya (non-stealing) (Brown, 2008. 1-27). Gandhi was of the view that almost all religions believe on any super power which is God. The Jews believe in Messiah or the messenger, the Christians believe in the son of God, the Muslims believe that the prophet is the messenger of the God (Allah). But Hinduism believes that the God descends as man. Gandhi is of the view that all human beings are the incarnation of the God but because of engagement in mortal activities, they cannot understand their power. Avatara theory

believes that the God was born before and will born again. In karmayoga, Gandhi argues body and mind, both are active. Sometime, body becomes inactive but mind is always in active mode. Gandhi is of the view that Jnanayoga (philosophy of mysticism) makes us understand that what we have to do and karmayoga forces us to do action. While explaining about dhyanyoga and bhaktiyoga, Gandhi is of the view that dhyanyoga is more difficult than bhaktiyoga. In dhyanyoga, the devotee has to see himself and absorbed himself for the welfare of all. Dhyanyoga needs spiritual and moral thinking. Bhakti is devotion of devotee to the God. Gandhi is of the view that the Gita teaches selflessness, detachment, knowledge, self-sacrifice etc (Desai, 1946. 1-117).

Gandhi's understanding of society was influenced by the Gita, therefore, he tried to pass his life according to the path, shown in the Gita. He failed many times to pass his life according to the Gita but he did not leave hope. Gandhi was of the view that the Gita does not teaches physical war but it teaches the irrelevance of the physical war. Gandhi said that those who believe on the philosophy of the Gita, they follow the truth and non-violence in their nature. The follower of the Gita follows truth and non-violence because it teaches the philosophy of detachment from the result. In the presence of detachment from the result, one does not need to tell a lie or to do violence (Gandhi, 1967. 8-15). Gandhi followed the philosophy of the Gita in his personal as well as political career. Gandhi actively participated in Indian freedom struggle. If we see his movements, it becomes clear that he emphasized on truth, non-violence and duty. A movement may be based on violence or non-violence. As far as the peasants movements are concerned which happened under the Gandhian ideology, they

were based on non-violence. If Gandhi saw that any movement was going on violently, he withdrew that movement. Gandhi had a very clear view about non-violence. Indian National Congress, under the leadership of Gandhi, tried to initiate the movement through non-violent way. Gandhi focused on non-violent methods because he was of the view that violence took us away from the truth. So for him, everyone should follow the non-violent path to know the truth (Tiwari, 2019. 25).

In Indian English writers, so many of them used the teachings and philosophies of Gandhi Ji and Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta. Raja Rao was one of them who used Gandhi Ji as a tool in his novel *Kanthapura*.

The Gandhian ideal of non-violence is practically preached by him at the time of his arrest when he exhorts his followers to contain violence. Moorthy goes through life like “a noble cow, quiet, generous, serene, deferent and ‘brahmnic’ as is evidenced in his exhortation to Rangama :

The Greatest enemy is in us. If only we would not hate, if only we would show fearless, calm affection towards our fellowmen we would be stronger.

To explain the nature of redemption suffering in human society, Raja Rao “takes the myth of suffering more directly self-imposed to absorb the evil of others.”⁸ Moorthy, like Gandhi, feels that fasting is good for the mind and he undertakes fasts for the purpose of penance and self-purification. He admonishes Ratna: “Pray with-me that the sins of others may be purified with our-prayers”. He thinks that he is not pure, that is why, so much of violence has taken place at the Skeffington Coffee Estate. He purifies himself through fasting which, he feels, would enable him

to practice Gandhian principles of love, truth and *Ahimsa*. Not only this, he preaches the adversary’s conversion by the concept of self-purification and considers it a non-violent weapon to fight the British.

Just as in a myth, “some of the chief characters are gods and other beings larger in power than humanity”. In *Kanthapura*, too, Moorthy is presented as an exalted being and his character as well as the whole situation is mythicized. In mythicizing the central character, Raja Rao adheres to the Indian classical tradition. By accepting obligations and higher values in an ideal character, man gains dignity and serenity. “The serious (work) ... which seeks enduring human significance should, thus, deal with the idealized man, because it seeks to make man nearer to the ideal.”

In *Kanthapura*, “the impact of Gandhiji is seen as mythological”¹¹ because he is described as the reincarnation of Rama who has taken birth to get back his Sita, i.e., political freedom. His psychological, rather than physical, presence in the novel lends a mythical aura around his saintly figure. As in Ravana’s Lanka, so in *Kanthapura*, the vices, greed and hypocrisy were rampant. Since 1857, the British had been sucking the blood of innocent Indians and the exploitation by the British was as immense as it was during Ravana’s regime. Like Ravana, the British had come to kidnap political freedom, strangulating all their emotions.

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