

The Spiritual-Moral Principles of the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā: a Genesis of Gandhian Ideology of Satyagraha

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Mahātmā Gandhi's ideology of Satyāgraha is not only a political phenomenon, but a spiritual mission too. The main objective of the Satyāgrahī is to win the opponent's mind. Mahatma Gandhi relied immensely on moral spiritual guidance and religious thought of the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gita to unite the people of India. He inspired by the principles of love, truth, affection, non-attachment, selfless action (nishkama karma) and spiritual liberation and selfsurrender of the Gita deeply and tried to impinge these moral principles within the Satyagrahis. Gandhi got an unflinching source of strength and solace from the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gita. In the Gita, Sri Krishna advised Arjuna to follow the way of selfless action to gain knowledge. The essence of selfless action or Karma Yoga is to gain knowledge and liberate oneself from doing good deeds by sacrificing oneself. The key concept of the Gita is to seek salvation through selfless action. Gandhi also emulates to selfless action in his concept of Satyagraha. The main objective of the present article is to explore how Gandhi influenced by the principles of the Gita and how he molded Satyagrahis by the spiritual-moral principles of the Gita.

We all know that the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gita is one of the sacred and well known Indian Mythological books. It contains 18 chapters and 700 verses. The Gita was written by Vedavyasa who had compiled Mahabharata. Gita is the 700-line section of the epic

Mahabharata which tells the story of a legendary conflict between two ruling families the Pandava and the Kaurava that may have taken place between 1000 and 700 B.C. The content of the Gita is the conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna. Arjuna was the general of the Pandava army and Lord Krishna was the charioteer. The conversation took place on the battle field of the Kurukshetra. The conversation was held before the start of the war between two clans of brothers-the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Each Chapter of the Gita contains different aspects of the material world and its relation to human life. If we observe deeply, we can find that our Indian Independent movement was a combination of activities that can be explained well with the applied knowledge of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. Lord Krishna's played the role of advisor in the Gita and his opinion is used in the Indian Freedom movement in a disguised way by Mahatma Gandhi. Before explaining this, it is required to know what the Gita is. Following the dictionary, the word 'Gita' is a song or poem which contains an inspired doctrine and the word 'Bhagavat' means a blessed or adorable or venerable or divine One. Therefore, Srimad Bhagavad Gita is called as 'the Song of God'. 3

Mahātmā Gandhi is the pioneer of the non-violence freedom movement in India. The other contemporary leaders had chosen direct fight against British Rule in India, he had chosen peacefully protest to win the heart of the opponent. The Srimad Bhagavad Gītā was the guide book of Mahatma Gandhi's life. It will not be exaggerating to say that the Bhagavad Gita was treated like his mother who paved the way to go ahead with his duty to the nation, his commitment to the native Indian brothers, sisters and children for unforeseen future. Gandhi was highly influenced by the guiding principles of the Gita like truth, self-less activities or nishkam karma, non-violence, tolerance, tapashya, and temperance. Gandhi applied these principles of the Gita in his idea of Satyagraha. He used the principles of Satyagraha for the non-violence movement against the British Colonial Rule. The Satyagraha is not only a political weapon, but also religious-spiritual feelings. Gandhi used this principle as a strategy against any type of violence and evil. He said that the law of satyagrahi is the law of love and is an eternal principle. And, he also said that Satyagraha is a non-violent method to fight against evil.

As a spiritual tool, satyāgrahī regulates satyāgrahī to obey some glorious virtues which were already existed in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. These virtues were truth, non-violent restraint, and patience, power of the soul, love, forgiveness, greatness, and release of the soul. Enlightenment or 'Moksha' was observed in both in the Bhagavad Gita and Gandhi's view of Satyagraha. Gandhiji is the teacher who taught us by dissolving ego, anyone can achieve a state of Self-realization. According to Gandhi, Śrīmad Bhagavad Gitā shows us the way of self-realization. The Bhagavad Gita is also teaching us to defeat fear, anger, and attachments to gain an altitude of higher consciousness. 'Love' works there as a driving force.

The core principle of satyāgrahī is truth or stick with truth or holding on the truth. Gandhiji influenced deeply by the concept of truth from the Gita. The Second Chapter of Gita is enriched with the discussion of truth. Shri Krishna has explained Arjuna the meaning of truth. In this chapter, Shri Krishna distinguishes between the real and the unreal. It cannot exist; the soul is the universe, eternal, indestructible and immeasurable. Shri Krishna also tells Arjuna the body changes and the mortal body is destroyed. But there is no change in the soul. Likewise, truth is the key essential elements of Gandhiji's satyāgrahī policy. Followed the Bhagavad Gita, Gandhijī said that the truth is eternal and unchanging. Mahatma Gandhi considered this universal truth to be synonymous with God. He explained the truth as God. Gandhiji viewed God as truth and truth as God. Truth is the main objective of a good human life. In verse number sixteen of the Second Chapter, it is said that,

**Nasato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate satah,
Ubhayorapi drṣto ntastvanayostattvadarshibhiḥ (Gita 2/16)**

It means the unreal has no existence. The Real never ceases to be (never ceases to exist). Men possessed of the knowledge of the truthfully know both these.

In the Third Chapter of the Gitā, which entitled Karmayoga, Shri Krishna advised Arjuna to follow the way of self-less activities or nishkama karma. In the seven verse of the Gita, Sree Krishna advised Arjuna that,

**Yastvindriyāṇi manasā niyamyārabhate' rjuna
karmendriyaiḥ karmayogamasaktaḥ sa viśiṣyate (Gita 3/7)**

It means who restrains his senses with his mind and directs his organs of action to work, with no feeling of attachment - he, O Arjuna, is indeed superior. Shri Krishna advised Arjuna that he should perform his Kshatriya Dharma through appearing in war selflessly. And, when Arjuna performs his Kshatriya Dharma, he should remember that these activities are not his sole activities, but these activities are the activities of All Mighty God. So, in the case of selfless activities, Shri Krishna advised Arjuna to restrain himself from jealousy, greed, and attachment. Mahatma Gandhi influenced deeply by the principle of selfless activities and he advised the satyāgrahīs to perform their duty selflessly. Gandhiji advised satyāgrahīs to follow the message of the Gita that work should be done but do not expect a result. So, Gandhiji told satyāgrahīs to stick with their goal of changing the mind of the British Government non-violently but not to lose their patience.

Now the question arises that how non-violence is related to the Gita and how Mahatma Gandhi was applied this principle of the Gita in practical life. In the Second Chapter and Sixteenth Chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, we come to know about 'Ahimsa' or Non-violence is the best virtue. The Sixteenth Chapter is entitled as daibasursampadbivagyog'. As a follower of spiritual and political guidelines, Gandhi always firmed his view on the protest with 'ahimsa' or nonviolence. In Mahatma Gandhi's view, the central teachings of the Gita are to follow truth and ahimsa or non-violence. And, if there is no ambition of fruit or result, then there is no temptation for untruth or himsa or violence. As an effect of non-violence, we can see disguised 'love' even to the others including rival or opponent parties. And who can deny this factor that non-violence protest demands damage to societies concerning lives or property or monetary aspect?

The Sixth Chapter of the Bhagavad Gita teaches us about the control of mind and self-control or temperance. This chapter shows us that when the mind wanders, diffuse & restless in search of satisfaction, then it is needed to stay in self and calm. And, through tapashya or meditation self-control or full control over the mind is possible. 10 Following the Gita tapashya or meditation is a strict discipline to attain salvation, which frees a person from the taint of conscience. It is said in verse twenty of the sixth chapter of the

Gita,

Yatroparamate cittam niruddham yogasevayā

Yatra caivātmanātman paśyannātmani tuśyati (Gita-6/20)

It means when the mind, restrained by the practice of yoga, then it attains quietude and when seeing the Self by the self, he rejoices in his Self." Now, Gandhi has applied it in his life when he was twenty years old. He was practicing meditation as guided by the Bhagavad Gita and in the future, we can see that he was always living and working without interfered by an external power. Gandhiji applied the concept of meditation of the Gita in the Indian freedom struggle and advised the Satyagrahis that they should not surrender to the will of the wrongdoer but to resist in a non-violent adjust way even though they have to get constant physical violent torture from the British Government.

As per Gandhi's thought, evil depends on goodness. For example, in Bhagavad Gitā, we can see that the evil armies of Duryadhana hold each other's hands on the virtue of courage, loyalty, and friendship. This is the reason why the evil armies were containing persons like Drona, Karna, and Bhishma. If goodness from evil is removed somehow, it could be collapsed, which was the ultimate target of the Non-cooperation movement of Gandhi. If Non-violence activity is analyzed, we can see that it is attached to the duty of sacrifice even death because it was not guided by life but truth (Satya Graha) only.

The Eighteen Chapter of the Gita discusses spiritual liberation or Moksha. As a man of action (Karma Yogi), Gandhi never had chosen the path of Sanyasa to achieve spiritual liberation or Moksha. Instead, he insisted on the path of 'Niskama Karma' which is nothing but the keep own duties continue without the expectation of its result. It leads to 'Sthitaprajna' (as per Bhagavad Gita) which is the good establishment in wisdom who is detached, desires less and fully devoted to God. 12

Gandhi took the main flavor of the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gita that is the forces of righteousness versus non-righteousness (Dharma and Adharma). In Chapter 12 of the Bhagavad Gita, it describes the "Bhakti Yoga" where Sri Krishna discussed truth or Satya, knowledge or Gyana, action or Karma and meditation or Yoga. For the forces of righteousness, a man needs to adhere to some of the basic virtues like truth, work, and dedication towards completeness of his duties. Gandhiji, throughout his entire life, had adhered to all these things as described in the Bhagavad Gita.

Conclusion:

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that Mahatma Gandhi was deeply influenced by the principles and ideals of the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gita, the ancient scriptures of the Hinduism. Gandhi realized the principle of the Gita in his personal life and he applied these principles and ideals in the Satyagraha principle for freeing India from the British colonial rule. His entire life was devoted to the truth. Non-violence or Ahimsa is nothing but a form of truth. He was devoted his entire life to mankind and most of his activities are guided by the Srimad Bhagavad Gita in different forms. Gandhi wrote, "Cowards can never be moral. Where there is fear there is no religion." 13

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