



GANDHI AND GITA

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ABSTRACT

A true devotee of truth, Mahatma Gandhi believed that God is Truth and Truth is God. It was derived from Hinduism while for the belief of non-violence he was indebted to Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity. Thus the basic dement in Gandhian creed was rooted in Hinduism with branches in all religions. Gandhi studied several Hindu books but he was very much influenced with Gita which was his 'eternal mother' whom he esteemed even more than his earthly mother.

Keywords: Ahimsa, Destiny, Gandhi, Gita, God, Karma, Truth.

In the Bhagavadgita Krishna has classified Indian society into two categories of people, the people having faith in orthodox brahmanism and the people opposed to it who did not subscribe to the notion that God had any role to play in determining and shaping human destiny and who had no faith in the varna system. According to Krishna, the people belonging to the former category had divine characteristics (daivi-sampat)¹ and the latter had demonical characteristic (asuri-sampat)² Krishna has shown tolerance, spirit of accommodation and catholicity of outlook for the daivi-sampat people. His discourses on Aryan traditions, and on samkhya, karma, jnana and bhakti yoga are intended for that category of people who, like Arjuna, were deluded and were confused on the issue of their true duties.³ Krishna's statement on equality of living creatures – ranging from the brahmana, cow, elephant to the dog and dog-cater (candela)⁴ – was intended to satisfy their intellectual curiosity. The lord was gracious enough to assure the people that they could be entitled to his supreme bliss provided they would accept him as the supreme deity and honour his commands on varna obligations. Women, vaisyas, sudras and papa-yonis (varna-samkara) all would be entitled to that bliss.⁵ But Krishna adopted a very rigid, uncompromising and fundamentalist attitude towards the asuri-sampat people. He asserted that all their actions were motivated by desire for power, wealth and unrestrained sexual freedom.⁶ They were enemies of the world⁷, were sinful⁸ and wicked people⁹ who had arrogance of power and wealth.¹⁰ They deserved destruction¹¹ and would be either in hell¹² or else would be reborn in the families of asuri-sampat people.¹³

Throughout his meditation on Gita, Gandhi aims to show that the knowledge of the Revelation of Gita can give the correct moral education and the correct moral foundations to people. Only the process of learning obtained through meditating on the whole Gita can give us the knowledge of Truth, of God, of reality, and of ourselves, and only thorough this process are we able to organise and modify our own mind towards goodness. Learning proves to be, therefore, indispensable for strengthening in

ourselves our good component, sattva, and for diminishing in us the influences exercised by our negative components, rajas and tamas.¹⁴ The three factors are in us constitutively, and we ought to decide which factor we want to strengthen. If we wish to strengthen sattva, we ought to follow the learning process which enables us to understand what we ought to know, what we ought to do, and what we ought to avoid. Through and thanks to the Revelation of Gita, education finds the due foundation. Only the morally correct education is the basis of a correct political and social order, since it represents the indispensable foundation of the dialogue between individuals and of the pacific coexistence between individuals.

The learning process of truth and the assimilation to truth are the remedy against the forces of evil present in us; truth gives us the contents, the foundations in order that we can successfully develop the forces of good which are present in us. Gandhi express the general consideration on truth: "...there can be no exception in the matter of following truth, for truth is God and, if exceptions were admitted in relation to it, God also would be sometimes truth and sometimes non-truth."¹⁵

Truth is to be followed by everybody. In order to follow truth, a learning process is indispensable. Learning and knowledge are indispensable aspects of the process of the education of individuals. Gandhi clearly affirms that obtaining spiritual knowledge is open to everyone; nobody is excluded: "It is stated in the Gita itself that everyone, whether a woman, a Vaisya or a Sudra, can acquire spiritual knowledge if they have devotion to God. All the same, learning should not be slighted. To understand any matter, one must have the knowledge which comes from learning."¹⁶ Learning proves to be fundamental. The spiritual knowledge is the foundation for understanding everything. The knowledge of Revelation modifies the mind of the individual; the meditation on and the absorption in the Revelation will modify the individual. Gandhi is moreover seeking a foundation in order to receive directions for political action; the possibility of

coexistence in a society finds its foundation in Atman being the common essence for everybody: "And so Krishna says:

"Though I was never born in time, though I am the Lord of all creatures, I incarnate Myself and am born as a human being". This is the essential nature of the atman. If we realize this truth, we would always act in conformity with that nature; we then act, though born as human beings, as if we were never born. If the atman in each of us is identical with the atman in everyone else, one atman born in a body means all of them born, and all others born means that one born too. This is a difficult idea to grasp. "This is maya," says Shri Krishna, "and through it I incarnate Myself in this world time and again."

We can follow reason only up to a point. What, then, does avatar mean? It is as if God comes down from above. It would be right to say, if we can say it without egotism, that each one of us is an avatar. The atman in everybody is as potent as the atman in any other, though outwardly we see differences. In our awakened state all are one, though in our ignorant state we may see separate existences. In real truth, there are not several, there is only one. If we constantly reflect over this essence named the atman, we shall regard no one as an enemy to be killed and shall have nothing to get angry about. We shall then see that anyone who hits us hits himself too."¹⁷

Gandhiji firmly believes in the power of transformation exercised on individuals by the knowledge of the truth. Knowledge of the truth expressed in the Revelation of Gita successfully modifies men as regards their moral dimension. Knowledge of truth and the learning process needed in order to obtain this kind of knowledge is indispensable in order to reach the foundation both of an individual and morally correct disposition and of a politically correct order.

In the last it can be said that Gandhiji always believed in the theory of Karma which is explained in his words as Anashakti. Gandhiji explained it in terms of the spirit with which one should perform his duties. The person performs his duties with the understanding that it is by the will of destiny that he has been placed in a particular vocation and he must perform his duties with an attitude of total surrender to the divine will, for the benefit of society. We must steadily pay attention to the stability and endurance of our ethical character and we must try to reach, maintain and strengthen it. Gandhi clearly

expressed that we cannot manage in the corporeal dimension to fully follow Ahinsha. That's why moksha is laid down as the supreme end of life. Violence is inescapable. Evil is inherent in action, the Gita says further on.¹⁸ There are clear limits put on human capabilities. Everyone ought to become aware of one's own limitations. In the corporeal dimension, it is not possible to concretise to ourselves a perfect doctrine of Ahinsha.

REFERENCES

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