INDIAN TRADITION REFLECTED IN GANDHIAN THOUGHT

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The Upaniṣadic literature has a vast and pervasive influence in Indian life and tradition. The Upaniṣadic philosophy and moral teachings stand supreme as regards Social and intellectual influence especially in the modern period. In the renaissance period Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ramakrishna Parama Hamsa, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Acharya Vinoba, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi etc. have reinterpreted the essence of Upaniṣadic thoughts with the humanitarian Orientation, i.e., the need and demand of the society. The Upaniṣadic teachings and ancient traditional works had more influence on the renaissance movements of social, political and philosophical arena during the ninetieth and twentieth centuries. They were all stimulated and influenced by the western culture, but their fundamental adherence to the Upaniṣadic tradition consistently is undeniable. It is the theoretical exegesis on the Universal brotherhood.

Gandhiji was a great man and a respected personality all over the world. He was a great practical philosopher, educator, thinker and a social reformer of India. His ideas and thoughts permeated the entire human community especially the lower caste people of the society. He made successful attempts to eradicate the untouchability that had existed within the Indian Society. He was a social reformer who preached every thing for the benefit of human life. To him religion has got practical importance in life. His aim was to spiritualize all aspects of human life for through this only there will be recognition of universal oneness according to him.

The central theme of the philosophy of Gandhi and his life is integral humanism. To prove the conceptual thinking on integral human-

ism as the central theme of Gandhian thought, it is necessary to inquire into whether this had existed in the Upaniṣadic philosophy as well. The Universal message of the 'oneness' is, no doubt, the central teaching of the Upaniṣads. The peculiarity of Gandhiji is that he added a social dimension to this Universal method. The Upaniṣads had disclosed to us the message of non-violence. The Chāndogyopaniṣad had declared that non-violence is a necessary ethical quality of man.

Hindu ethics since the time of the Upaniṣads had always laid stress on the virtue of 'ahimsa' towards all living beings, human or other wise. Further the Upaniṣadic philosophy can also be said to be deeply entrenched in Indian culture and way of thinking. It is significant that Gandhiji in a way strongly epitomizes the ancient Indian concept of non-violence and the life of renunciation, which are in fact reflections on the crux of Upaniṣads. He said "I believe in the Vedas the Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas and all that goes by the name of Hindu Scriptures and therefore in avatāras and rebirth".[1]

Gandhiji declared explicitly that he was a believer in Advaita, for it declares: "the essential unity of God and man and for that matter of all lives.[2] This ground of Upaniṣadic tradition and the Bhagavatgīta forms the quintessence of Gandhian life and thought. He for the first time read the Gīta, a translation of Sir Edwin Arnold. He was ashamed of this and then he read the original Sanskrit text and many translations. This was the first Vedantic influence on Gandhiji's life. His philosophy and life was influenced by different systems like Vaiṣṇavism, Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity. But to a great extent the Upaniṣadic tradition and the philosophy of Śankara influenced the life of Gandhiji more.

The period of Upaniṣads is the most glorious era of Indian ideal Humanism. The Upaniṣads assert the existence of spiritual unity behind all the physical existence. According to Gandhiji - "One must give up attachment to things and dedicate one's all to God and make use of his gifts to serve him only". In the first mantra of Īśāvāsyopaniṣad it is

declared that "all that moves in this moving world should be known as enveloped by God. Leave the transient and find joy in the eternal. Do not covet what belongs to others".[3] Gandhiji said that one is asked to dedicate every thing to god and then use it to the required extent. He also said "The prayer is not restricted to one's caste or community, it is all inclusive. It comprehends the whole of humanity and welfare of the society". The ancient seer prays the social happiness;

"Sarve bhavantu sukhinaḥ

sarve Santu nirāmayāḥ

sarve bhadrāṇi paśyantu

mā kaścid dukhabhāg bhavet"

i.e., may all of us become happy and healthy in life; May all attain the good thing, may none suffer any moment. This is a lofty, noble and elevating idea of Universal brotherhood. This shows that all are equal in the eyes of God.

The Seer's vision and sympathies are not limited to humanity alone but overflow to all beings - "lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu". This can be showed that the social happiness as a necessary condition for cultural growth and development. The Upaniṣadic seers and tradition also realized that social happiness should be within the reach of each and every member of the society.

"bhadram karṇebhi śruṇuyāma devāḥ

bhadram paśyemāh....." [5]

These are the universal concepts of the ancient Indian "Sanātanadharma". Gandhiji applied pragmatic measures to achieve the fulfillment of Universal brotherhood and humanism. He indulged only in realistic methods in every walk of life for the welfare of mankind. He believed that, God is an indefinable mysterious power that pervades every thing.

God as Saccidānanda

Gandhiji defines God as 'Saccidānanda'. In his view God is present in everything and everybody and he is undetachable and also

pure and infinite spirit. It is this spirit that exists in all creatures, both living and non-living. In this view he accepts the Śvetaśvataropaniṣad principle. "The one God, hidden in all things, all pervading the inner soul of all things".[6] This principle is fully accepted in the Gandhian thoughts. He also describes God as the nameless and the formless, this idea may be compared to that of Śankara, who describes that Supreme power though "Neti", 'Neti'.[7] He said that in God there is no duality.[8] He describes God as the essence, pure consciousness, force, truth, goodness, love etc.. God according to Gandhiji is undefined power pervading all life, the spirit, the formless, the nameless, Truth.[9] This God is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the Universe. The Taittirīopaniṣad also elaborates this idea related to Brahman i.e., "That varily from which these beings are born, that by which, when born they live, that into which, when departing, they enter. That seek to know, that is Brahman".[10] Here we can assume that the concept of Upaniṣadic Brahman and Gandhiji's God are one and the same.

He says, "And where there is truth, there is also knowledge which is true. Where there is no truth, there can be no true knowledge. That is why the word 'cit' or knowledge is associated with the name of God. And where there is true knowledge, there is always 'ānanda', i.e., bliss. There sorrow has no place. And even truth is eternal, so is the bliss derived from it. Hence we know God as 'Saccidānanda'. Thus the ultimate reality is known as 'Saccidānanda'. Brahman is infinite (anantam). This infinite power is the Absolute truth. That is "Truth is God". The Taittirīopaniṣad 'Śruti', "Satyam jñānam ānandam brahma" is fully absorbed in the Gandhian concept of God.

According to Gandhiji, he who follows the absolute truth can get mokṣa. This was the fundamental thrust of the Upaniṣads i.e., knowledge for liberation. "Jñānādeva tu kaivalyam". He says there is one absolute truth, which is total and all-embracing. He believed every living being as a spark of the ultimate truth. He also knew that the sum total of all these sparks were of the supreme truth. These facts were impregnated in his thoughts from the help of the aitareyopaniṣad,

"Sarvam khalvidam brahma".[13] He expressed the Upaniṣadic view that truth and reality are not different. He pointed out that God or Brahman described as the ultimate reality, is knowledge, infinite bliss etc.. For Upaniṣadic seers and Sri Śankara, truth and reality are individual entities and long before the emergence of Gandhian thinkers both western and eastern philosophers treated truth as identical with reality or God[14]

Influence of the Bhagavadgīta

The Bhagavadgīta is no doubt the quintessence of the Upaniṣads. The Gīta constitutes the quintessence of the doctrine of dharma. Gandhiji was very much influenced by the Bhagavadgīta. It was to Gandhiji the unfailing guide in all circumstances. Gīta is the most revered scripture for Gandhiji. He said that "the Gīta inspires us to do our duties, neglecting the suffering and the torture that we receive in course of our action".[15] He considered Gīta as his spiritual dictionary where he found solution for his problems at the most crucial moments of his life. He said " when doubt haunts me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the Bhagavadgīta and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of over whelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and if they have not left any visible and indelible effect on me, I owe it to the teaching of the Bhagavadgīta.[16]

According to Gīta 'Karmayoga' is one of the highest paths to liberation. Gandhiji believes in the law of 'karma'; this belief obviously has the source in the Upaniṣadic doctrine. The Gīta preaches that we have a right to actions, but not to their fruits, i.e., Karmaṇyevādhikarasthe ....."[17]. The second and eighteenth chapter of the Gīta gives us the central teaching as their way to self-realization and the idea of 'niṣkāmakarma' that is action without desire for the result. This proved for him to be of priceless worth.

No other book influenced him as deeply as the study of Gīta. He learnt a good deal about 'aparigraha' and 'Sambhava' from this moral text only. The Gīta teaches the cultivation of 'Samattva' and the

means of doing service to every living creature without any thought of reward. He treates Gīta as a work on religion, ethics and philosophy all combined in to one. Thus, through out his life, the Gīta remained the source of his pleasure and joy, solace and strength and the reference book for resolving all knotty problems both in personal and public life. Thus the Gīta proved to be a decisive factor in shaping Gandhian life and philosophy in the right path.

To elaborate further it can be found that the Advaita philosophy had great influence on Gandhiji's thoughts and activities. His view of ultimate reality as an all inclusive spiritual one reminds us of idealistic monism. "ekam sad viprāḥ bhahudhā vadanti" i.e., that which exists is one, men call it by various names. This śruti had deeply impressed the Gandhian life and thinking.

Gandhiji, like Sri Śankara, says that nothing exists except truth, which the Upaniṣads and Śankara calls Brahman. Where there is truth, there is also true knowledge (cit) and where true knowledge exists there is also bliss (ānanda). The impersonal Brahman and the personal God were adopted in Gandhiji's philosophy, like Advaitin who distinguishes between 'paramārthikadṛṣti' (absolute stand point), 'Vyāvahārikadṛṣti' (practical stand point). According to the metaphysical stand point of Gandhiji, God is the only reality who manifests himself in the various existing entities and is only apparently real. He also said that moral and spiritual disciplines are essential for knowing God.

According to the principle of 'niṣkāmakarma', Gandhiji dedicated his life to the Indian society. He was against the practice of any kind of untouchability and the social evils which existed among the Hindus. He considered all human beings as equal and one in spirit. This was based on the inspiration of the Universal message of oneness of the Upaniṣadic thought. Thus Gandhiji, no doubt, can be considered as a man of peace and sacrifice. Millions of people over the world accepted his teachings which indeed came to constitute a separate religion namely 'Gandhism'. Thus Gandhiji has become the greatest pragmatic social revolutionary of the present century.

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