IMPACT OF BHAGAVADGĪTĀ IN INDIAN INDEPENDENCE

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The Bhagavadgītā has a tremendous impact on the minds of people in India. It has provided a standard basis of beliefs and morals, which influenced not only individuals but Indian society as a whole. Because it has got such a significant role in the history of India this has certainly to be taken into account off and elaborated for its social implications. It is necessary to have a better understanding on what type of society that Gītā promotes an analytical study of the text has to be undertaken. To begin with, the Bhagavadgītā is not only an informative history of ours but it also provides lessons that many of us today still follow and hold in high regard. It is also with joy that Indians as a whole celebrate their Independence day, an event largely connected with Mahatma Gandhi's knowledge of the Bhagavadgītā. The Bhagavadgītā primarily is a symbolic war-time counsel between Krishna and Arjuna. Gandhiji has often acknowledged its profound effect on his life. Throughout history, Religious texts have been widely influential in shaping how society is to be run. A fundamental example of the social impact of religious texts is the society especially in Indian independence is the Bhagavadgītā. It has provided a standard basis for beliefs and morals, which influenced not only individual, but Indian society as a whole. The Bhagavadgītā gives emphasis on swadharma and not paradharma. It says that it is better to do one's own duty imperfectly than to do another's duty well. The key point in this passage is that carrying out the duty of another caste, no matter how well it is done, is never as good as

doing one's own duty. This influential text has played key role in shaping Indian Society. No doubt the Bhagavadgītā is a highly influential religious text and its social implications are echoed in India's culture.

Bala Gangadhara Tilak started applying the Gītā to political issues in 1897, and Aurobindo's intensive study of the Gītā began in 1908. However, Aurobindo's political activities came to a close when he went to Pondicherry in 1910. Tilak died in 1920. So the longest and most significant direct application of the Gītā to India's freedom struggle was carried out by Gandhiji, say from 1919 till 1947. While Tilak and Aurobindo quoted the Gītā to justify the use of force in cases of necessity, Gandhiji interpreted it just in the opposite way. This can be called a qualitative difference between Gandhiji on the one hand, and Tilak and Aurobindo, on the other. Gandhiji made a distinction between violence and fearlessness; in fact he told people that fearlessness is mentioned in the Gītā as the first virtue of daivī sampat. He was against all forms of violence, 'not on grounds of efficacy, but on grounds of moral indefensibility'. His application of the ethical principles, especially the teachings he derived from the Gītā, elevated the national movement to a higher plane.

Gandhiji's main contribution in regard to the application of the Gītā to social and political causes was that he developed in 1906 the satyagraha technique based on ahimsā. But how could Gandhiji feel that in 1906 he had the spiritual courage as well as moral and material support of the community. His intense study of the Bhagavadgītā from 1903 became his infallible guide in conduct. He wanted to put into practice the Gītā teachings. He wanted to practice Aparigraha and Samabhāva, that all his future savings, if any, would be utilized, for the benefit of the community.

Gandhiji wrote in his autobiography about Gītā that 'The verses in the second chapter of the Gītā made a deep impression in my mind, and they still ring in my ears . The book struck me as one of the invaluable worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me with the result that I regard it today as the book par excellence for the knowledge of truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom.' Scholars

agree that the doctrines put forth by both Gandhiji and Tilak taught through Bhagavadgītā were ultimately propounded as Karmayoga and this doctrine of action was expressed most obviously in the realm of religious nationalism and the struggle for Indian independence.

Karma propounded by the Gītā leads to yoga or union with the Lord. In other words, Karma in the Gītā is the worship of the Lord through surrender. All karmas culminate in knowledge. Having acquired that knowledge you will no more be subjected to delusion (moha). The lord has declared clearly in the Gītā that the highest karma is surrender to Him.

Mahatma Gandhi drew impression from the Gītā. His interpretation of the Gītā is an epoch making one in Indian history. Mahatma Gandhi's very struggle for freedom was the result of his deep impact of the Indian philosophy especially the Gītā, which he heard and lived. Gītā was his śāstra. He acted according to the injunction 'work, attachment, prayer and surrender to the will of God'.'The theory of Niṣkāmakarma is based on the fundamental fact of the universality of karma. The Gītā says that, no man can remain still even for a moment without doing some work. Everyone is made to act, in spite of oneself, by the qualities of one's nature.

In work alone lies thy duty never in the fruits there of. Do not work for the fruits; nor should you desist from work. Niṣkāmakarma is the guiding star that makes him realize to do well being. The Gītā ideal of Karmayoga and sthitaprajña is dynamic that he wanted to make the basis of transformed social and political action. It teaches disinterested action for God realization. Gandhiji's concept of sarvodaya and socialism has its foundation in the Vedāntic concept of the spiritual unity of existence and the Gītā. These ideals are already found in the Vedas and Upaniṣads and classical philosophies of India. The terms of Gītā and the Upaniṣads like Karmayoga, Jñāna etc., have also been used by Gandhiji along with Tilak and Aurobindo. The famous verse of the Gītā -

उद्धरेदात्मानात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः।।

had great reverberations in mind of Gandhiji. Inspired by Gītā being a realistic and dynamic leader Gandhiji motivated the people to fight for their causes. He enthused the sufferers themselves to solve their problem by their own efforts. He rightly exhorted the poor and suffering people to aim at their wellbeing and improvement on their own strength. He wanted to revive the villages and towns of India through truth and nonviolence and love.

This was the most significant principle of the Bhagavadgītā that the human society must have its foundation on religion and Gandhiji was influenced by this also. Gandhiji practiced real karmayoga preached in the Gītā and brought freedom to India. Gītā has remained an ever burning torch of spiritual light during the past centuries. Gītā has inspired many scholars and ācāryas during last 2000 years. It has inspired a great soul Mahatma Gandhi. He fought against the powerful British Empire and brought independence to the 700 million people of India. The Gītā told him that all men are equal, all men deserve the supreme blessings of God, the Gītā bars no one from divine attainment that he calls self-realization. The spirit that he had derived from the Gītā made him a life-time servant of and upholder of the rights of the untouchables in particular and the down-trodden of the society in general. He rightly opined that untouchability is a blot on Hindu society and religion and he prided in calling himself a Bhangi. Eradication of untouchability is one of the greatest work of Gandhiji and for this he derived justification from the Bhagavadgītā.

The word dharma is used in the sense of 'Moral Duties' in Hindu scriptures. Religion is linked with an individual self. It is called 'Svadharma' in the Gītā. Good actions bring happiness and bad actions bring unhappiness in life. The study of scriptures teach us what are good and bad karmas. Gandhiji understood the real message of truth, equality and human rights preached in the Gītā. He fought with weapon of nonviolence and brought independence. A practical application of the Karmayoga teaching of the Gītā, as interpreted it, meant the voluntary acceptance and enthusiastic fulfillment of the duties that naturally came ones way- Swadharma.

He believed that if pursued with a sense of detachment and unselfishness, a life of Karmayoga could lead to the attainment of mokṣa.

In the fourth chapter of the Bhagavadgītā Bhagavān says- Whenever morality degrades to the lowest level and immorality is widespread, I create divine souls to uplift the religion. In every era and century I, myself may assume human forms to protect the saints and punish the wrong doers. Like that Gandhiji also was an Avatāra, a prophet and an incarnation of God. All religions believe that human form is the highest gift of God. It is remarkable that absolute devotion to God, total surrender to His will, directing all one's activities and one's very self towards becoming an instrument in the hands of God- these were the most remarkable features of Gandhiji's utterings in his last days. Here also, it is sure that Gandhiji was inspired by the sixty sixth verse in the eighteenth chapter of the Gītā.

Again Bhagavadgītā proclaims that great people, poets, scholars and religious prophets are incarnations of God. They came at different places to guide the ignorant people. If one believes that God assumes human forms then Gandhiji was a man of mental caliber equal to the founders of any world religion. Many of our freedom fighters like Gandhiji, Tilak, etc., influenced much by the message of the Bhagavadgītā. The real message which Gītā contains is about morals and is to fight of the basic rights if an injustice is done to you. Gītā declares that all humans are equal. Thus Gītā is an universal scripture and an ocean of religious wisdom and general knowledge. In brief we can say that Gītā declares equality of all humans and all religions.

Bhagavadgītā shows a path of conviction about God to any man of reason and science. It is a time tested path of self realization, and self study-Ātmajñāna and Swādhyaya, but it needs genuine curiosity and devoted efforts. Other religions talk about God, but the Gītā provides a proof of God. More over Gītā provides answers to many spiritual questions and practical problems arising in day-to-day life. Hence, every one of us has chosen it as a single scripture for study.

At a time when Indian nationalists were seeking an indigenous ba-

sis for social and political action, Bhagavadgītā provides them with an underlying principle for their activism and fight against injustice. Among the nationalists notable commentaries for the Bhagavadgītā were written by Bala Gangadhara Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, who used the text to help inspire the Indian independence movements. Tilak wrote his commentary while in jail during the period of 1910-1911. While noting that the Bhagavadgītā teaches possible paths to liberation, his commentary places the prime emphasis on Karmayoga.

Tilak's new interpretation of the Bhagavadgītā was the topic of the day, because he had explained how Gītā's karmayoga could be applied to the freedom fight. On the need for applying the Bhagavadgītā to the political problem of the country, Tilak and Gandhiji were equally enthusiastic. However Gandhiji's insistence on viewing truth and nonviolence as the basis of all social and political activities, was considered entirely unrealistic by Tilak. No book was more central to Gandhiji's life and thought than the Bhagavadgītā which he referred to as his spiritual dictionary. During his stay in Yarvada central jail in 1929, Gandhiji wrote a commentary on the Bhagavadgītā in Gujarathi. He expressed his love for the Gītā in the following words-'I find a solace in the Bhagavadgītā that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the Bhagavadgītā. I find a verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies and my life has been full of external tragedies and if they have left no visible, no indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teaching of Bhagavadgītā.' The Bhagavadgītā deals essentially with the spiritual foundation of human existence. It is a call of action to meet the obligations and duties of life.

K.M. Panikkar has summarized Gandhiji's ideas as to how the nonviolent fight for independence from a foreign rule had close links with the Bhagavadgītā doctrine of swadharma: It was the Mahatma's conviction that foreign rule, i.e. the imposition of an alien way of life and thought, was not merely sinful because it was an attack on the dharma of the ruled but

it was even more against the dharma of the ruler. That is why all through the twenty-eight years of his fight against British rule and even when he denounced that rule as satanic, he claimed to be a true friend of the British, as they now accept him to have been. The very denunciation of British rule to be satanic is the clue to his approach and can in its full significance be understood only in terms of the Bhagavadgītā doctrine of Swadharma 'or the law of one's own nature.

Notes and references:

1. The Social Role of the Gita : How&Why,Satya.P.Agarwal,P.223-24.
२. ध्यायतो विषयान् पुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते।
सङ्गात्संजायते कामः कामात्क्रोधो/भिजायते।।
क्रोधाद्भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः ।
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद्बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति।। Bhagavadgītā II.62-63.)
3. M.K.Gandhi, An Autobiography or The Story of my experiments with truth, Navajivan publishing House,Ahmedabad.p 62.
4. कुरु कर्मैव तस्मात्त्वं पूर्वैः पूर्वतरं कृतम्।
किं कर्म किमकर्मेति कवयो/प्यत्र मोहिताः ।।(Bhagavadgītā IV.15)
5. श्रेयान्द्रव्यमयाद्यज्ञाज्ज्ञानयज्ञः परन्तपः।
सर्वं कर्माखिलं पार्थ ज्ञाने परिसमाप्यते।।(Bhagavadgītā IV.33)
6. यज्ज्ञात्वानपुनर्मोहमेवं यास्यसि पाण्डब ।
येनभूतान्यशेषाणि द्रक्षस्यात्मन्यथोमयि।।(Bhagavadgītā IV.35)
7. सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज।
अहंत्वां सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः।।(Bhagavadgītā XVIII.66)
8. न हि कश्चित् क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत्।
कार्यतेह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः।। (Bhagavadgītā III.5)
9. कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते माफलेषु कदाचन ।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मातेसङ्गो/स्त्वकर्मणि।।(Bhagavadgītā I.47)
10. भगवद्गीता (VI.5)

11. The Social Role of the Gītā' How&Why,Satya.P.Agarwal,P.221
12. यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत।
    अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम्।।
    परित्राणायसाधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम्।
    धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे।।(IV.7,8.)
13. सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज।
    अहं त्वां सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः।।
14. Quotations from M.K. Gandhi, Young India,1925,pp.1075-1079.
15. The Foundations of New India, K.M.Panikkar, p.44
    The social role of the Gita- How & Why, Satya, P.Agarwal, pp.192-93

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