

Influence of Vaisnavism on Gandhi's Philosophical thoughts and its relevance in contemporary age

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ABSTRACT

In this materialistic age, where economics has become all important and nuclear power a must, the post independence generation has begun to consider Gandhi and Vaisnavism totally irrelevant in the present context. They think that Mahatma belongs to a bi-gone era and his ideas have become absolute. But it is really so is Gandhi irrelevant today to his all his ideals? No not at all. He is more relevant today and his ideas his thoughts on Vaisnavism is urgently needed to us. Today's world, when we look at it in a social point of view is full of greed, commotion, distress and distrust. Besides more civilized and learning about the intricacies of human race and development, we human beings are mired by the new wave of modernization and outcomes of transformation. As a result we are pre-occupied with our television, mobile phone, computer etc. spending less time with the fellow of humans. Our direct inter-action with our children neighbours and friends are taken away by this massive modern hi-tech living style. We do realize many times a day the importance of humanity, love and kindness to other living beings but could not divulge them directly upon any one. We keep humanity in high regard in principal but have no time to give it a meaning in our own life. We do not expend even a little time, a few second in the service of humanity, in the forms of prayers or meditation or by any deeds. Throughout his life Gandhiji was a humble servant of India and humanity. In this paper an attempt is made to study "Influence of Vaisnavism on Gandhi's Philosophical thoughts and its relevance in contemporary age" which shall be analyzed.

1.1.0 Introduction

Numerous speculations have been put forth by various thinkers on the life and thought of M.K. Gandhi. Gandhiji's contribution for his spiritual world is most significant. He was very much enlightened by *ahimsā* (non-violence) which is the foremost among eight-fold parts of yoga system. It is also observed that the life style and thought of Gandhi was based on Vaisnavism and he was very much enlightened by Vaisnava Philosophy. The most popular *bhajan* with which Gandhi is identified is "*Vaisnavajanato tenekahiye je pirparāi jāne re, para duhkhe upakāra kare je, man abhimān nā āne re.*" (A Vaisnava is the one who knows the suffering of the other, who helps the other in his or her suffering and without any sense of ego

for the help in her mind- my translation).The concept of suffering and its removal is also the starting point for Buddha. As a student of philosophy, I would try to find out the foundation of the Gandhian form of Vaisnavism which is apparently different from the traditional Vaisnavism which is based on Bhakti and love.

Vaisnava theism went on spreading among the masses throughout the country and from time to time acquired repeated impetus through the successive later generations of saints, devotees. Vaisnava theology has been a subject of study and debate among devotees, philosophers and scholars within India and abroad for centuries. It was the Vaisnava theism which resembles Christianity and Islam, with which India came into contact, and which further influenced and strengthened the Indian theistic outlook. This made it very easy for Gandhi to accept the basic principles of theism in Christianity and other sects of the World.

If we look into the history of philosophy in India and the West, we find that there have been many philosophers who may be called dualistic or pluralistic who have tried to understand and explain the world by assuming two or more ultimate and independent realities. But they have encountered the great problem as to how two or more absolutely different and independent entities could at all be interrelated if they are so different. Yet interrelation between mind and body is too difficult to deny. To avoid these difficulties the monist tries in many different ways to understand the universe by assuming one all pervasive reality. There are different types of monists in India and also in the West. Broadly speaking they are of two types-Sankara and his followers are the most uncompromising monists in India. They hold that all change and multiplicity are mere appearances. Therefore, according to them the body and mind are the finite appearances of the one ultimate real, Brahman. So the self of man, correctly understood is nothing but Brahman. The finitude of man is due to his ignorance of his real nature, which being known man realizes is complete identity. This doctrine is known as Advaita literally meaning non-dualism. The other kind of monist is Ramanuja, who contends that Brahman is characterized by *chit* and *achit* both and both are real.

2.0.0 Vedanta and Vaisnava Tradition and their Philosophy

Though Gandhi's inquisitive mind tried to learn and assimilate the ideas of God from different sources, it only enriched the basic belief in divinity he imbibed from the Ballabhists

Vaisnava family in which he was born. The Vaisnavas are the most important section of the theists who form a large majority of the Hindus in modern India. They draw a part of their inspirations from the Vedas, the Upanisads, the Gita and the Vedanta Sutra; but they do not accept the interpretation of these scriptures as given by the great Vedantist, Sankara who upheld the doctrine of the indeterminate absolute (*Nirguna Brahman*). The four great Vaisnava teachers; Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhava and Ballabha who succeeded Sankara and tried to refute his interpretation of God and all of them tried to establish the conception of God and a concrete person possessed of all auspicious qualities and perfections like omnipotence, omniscience, benevolence and mercifulness. All the Vaisnava teachers accepted the world and therefore God's creatorship as real. Whereas Sankara regarded knowledge of God as the ultimate attribute-less reality as the path to liberation, on the contrary all the Vaisnava teachers agreed that liberation could be obtained only by the mercy of God propitiated by devotion and self surrender.

"Vaisnavism" is the concept of Krishna (also known as Vishnu) as God. More than that, it is the eternal relationship between the *jivatmas* (individual living entities) and the Eternally Self-Existing, Self-Luminous and All-Pervading Supreme Lord, Sri Krishna. "Gaudiya" (pronounced Gaudiya) Vaisnavas trace the origin of their tradition back through time to Krishna Himself who declares boldly in *Srimad Bhagavad-gita*(10.8):

*ahamsarvasyaprabhavo-mattahsarvampravartate
itimatvabhajante mam budhabhava-samanvitah*

"I am the source of all spiritual and material worlds. Everything emanates from Me. The wise who perfectly know this engage in My devotional service and worship Me with all their hearts."

Lotus-eyed Sri Krishna revealed His Divine Nature to His disciple, Brahma, the first embodied being and co-creator of the material universe. Brahma, in turn, instructed his disciple Nārada who then taught it to Vedavyāsa, the compiler of the Vedas, the sacred scriptures of ancient India. This divine knowledge was eventually explained by the great Vaisnava saint, Madhavacharya (approximately 1238-1317).

Gaudiya Vaisnavism takes its title from the word "*Gauda*" (pronounced "Gaura"), the former name of the state of Bengal, India. GaudiyaVaisnavas are those who follow the teachings

of Sri Krishna-Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Who chose the state of Gauda to be the place of His appearance on *Bharata-varsa*(the earth planet). The advent of Sri Krishna in the form of Lord Gauranga (Lord Chaitanya) is established by the *Bhagavata Purana* (11.5.32), wherein it is said:

krsnavarnamvisakrsnam-sangopangastra-parsadam
yajnaihsankirtana-prayair yajanti hi su-medhasah

"In the age of Kali, intelligent persons perform congregational chanting to worship the incarnation of Godhead who constantly sings the names of Krishna. Although His complexion is not blackish, He is Krishna Himself. He is accompanied by His associates, servants, weapons and confidential companions."

One of the greatest Vaishnava scholars, Srila Jiva Goswami, has elucidated the meaning of this Sanskrit *sloka* (verse) in his work, *Krama-Sandharbha*. In this literature, he states that Lord Krishna also appears with a golden complexion. In the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (*BhagavataPurana*), Garga Muni says that although the child Krishna was blackish, He also appears in three other colors, red, white, and yellow. The colors of these different avatars (the assuming of different forms by Lord Krishna when He descends into the innumerable material universes) correspond to the different divisions of material time known as the four *yugas*: *Satya-yuga* (white), *Treta-yuga* (red), *Dvapara-yuga* (black), and lastly, the present era, or *Kali-yuga*(yellow), which began approximately five thousand years ago, and is scheduled to last a total of 432,000 years. These divisions are similar to the golden, silver, bronze and iron ages of Western culture. Lord Chaitanya is known as "*Gauranga*" which means "possessing a golden (or yellow) colored body." "*Krsna-varnam*" means repeating or uttering the syllables "*Krs-na*". This implies that GaudiyaVaishnavas can immediately be recognized by group or congregational chanting of the Lord's Holy Names. Lord ChaitanyaMahaprabhu, who is Lord Sri Krishna Himself, personally divulged this sublime process of *sankirtana*, or chanting the Divine Names of God by means of the "*Mahamantra*" ("the greatest of all *mantras*"):

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare,
Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare

Sri Krishna's appearance as Lord Chaitanya is also confirmed in the *Visnu-sahasra-nama* ("the thousand names of Vishnu") from chapter 189 of *Dana-dharma-parva* of the *Mahabharata: suvarna-varnohemango varangascandanangadi*

"In His early pastimes He appears as a householder with a golden complexion. His limbs are beautiful, and His body, smeared with the pulp of sandalwood, seems like molten gold."

2.1.0 Vaishnava Devotional Practices:

Different forms of Vaishnavism have different emphasis on the concept of "form" as being *a priori*. This, as would be expected, also plays a major role in the methods of worship (*bhajana*) performed daily by a Vaishnava. Inside a Vaisnava temple or home we find *Srimurtis* (deity forms) of Lord Krishna. Sometimes it is interpreted as idolatry. However, one should consider that there have been, throughout history, enlightened, saintly persons whose descriptions of the Beautiful Form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead conform to those given in *sastra* as a means of verification of legitimacy. It is assumed that a person with true transcendental vision can clearly see the Supremely Spiritual Entity residing within what appears to be, to the materialist, mere stone or metal, etc. Vishnu (Krishna) means "all-pervading." Vishnu (as *Paramatma* or "Supersoul") is inconceivably occupying all spatial locations simultaneously. He is everywhere. He resides in all things without restriction (*vasudevahsarvamiti*). Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur says: "The world attracts you through your senses, and as long as you do not see God in the objects of your senses, you live in an awkward position which scarcely helps you in procuring your spiritual elevation." He further states, "If words can create an impression upon our thoughts, and a watch can indicate time, then why should not a picture or a figure inspire associations of higher thoughts and feelings with regard to the transcendental beauty of the Divine Personage?" Ultimately, what is the difference in the usage of a pencil to describe God and the usage of a chisel to the same end? If God is incarnate in words (scripture), then why can He not be incarnate three-dimensionally according to descriptions contained within those same scriptural words?

2.2.0 Ahimsa in Dualistic Philosophy

The concept of ahimsa, meaning roughly non-injury, nonviolence, and harmlessness, can be found in the Vedas themselves, but a developed philosophical account of the subject is not found until the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, which some scholars date about two-hundred years B.C. There are at least four factors which are key for understanding the meaning of *ahimsa* in the *Yoga Sutra*, and the fact that as an *anga*, i.e., limb or practice, ahimsa is logically and temporally prior to the other *angas* in the text. The four factors are as follows:

1. The general Hindu belief that according to Karmic Law, the process of karmic development, which can lead to self-realization and thereby *moksa*, i.e., release from *samsara*, i.e., rebirth, requires overcoming ego.
2. The fact that the Yoga school was focused on and engaged in *angas* or disciplinary practices necessary for the yogins who were at a very advanced state of spiritual development to achieve self-realization
3. The underlying metaphysics of the Yoga school that differs in a significant way from the Sāṅkhya metaphysics.

Most scholars agree that when the Yoga school joined the earlier *Sankhya* school, it adopted the dualistic-metaphysics of *Sankhya*. According to *Sankhya* metaphysics, there are two ultimate aspects of reality which are distinct. One aspect is called *Purusa*, which is pure consciousness, which is described as unbound and inactive. The other aspect of reality is the physical or material world called *Prakriti*- the world is described as unconscious and the things and beings in it are said to be bound. The physical world is made up of three *gunas*, i.e., constituents-*sattvas*, that which is light or illumines; *rajas*, i.e., force, energy, or power (*Sakti*); and *tamas*, i.e., that which is dark, and heavy, and resists energy. The physical aspect of reality is referred to as *Prakrti*, which is actually the state of the *gunas* when they are in equipoise or balance. This is the state of the *gunas* before evolution, and after *moksa* or release from *samsara*. Both *Purusa* and *Prakrti* are real and distinct. Also, all things and beings are comprised of both. This means that the physical world is real, not an appearance

of reality that is devalued as it is in the Vedanta systems which emphasize the unity of reality.

Given what has been said about the ***Sankhya dualistic Metaphysics***, it is important to know that in the Yoga school there was a shift away from dualism to the idea that Purusa is to be found within oneself, "unveiled," as it were, and furthermore, Purusa is more real, and hence, more valued. This shift is important for the understanding of the significance of ahimsa, because the material, sensual self is identified with the ego which is to be overcome, while Purusa is identified as the True-Self which is to be unveiled.

4. Patanjali's great insight concerning the forces of bondage, especially raga and *dvesa* and their interactions. *Raga* can be described as an attraction to things and persons that feed the ego which expresses itself in grasping and attachment. *Dvesa* is the aversion to and dislike of those things and persons which are perceived to be threatening to the ego. In the state of *dvesa*, one has a feeling of opposition, mental disinclination, the propensity to hurt, and anger towards misery or objects producing misery.

Based on the four factors mentioned above, it should be clear that the objective of the Yoga school was to unveil and thus realize Purusa, as the inner and True Self, via the disciplinary practices necessary to achieve self-realization.

Very briefly, yoga practice, for Patanjali, is broken into five preliminary *angas* or limbs which need to be developed before "yoga proper" is undertaken. Yoga proper may refer to "meditative practices." These practices are necessary to control the fluctuations of the mind. These fluctuations are caused by the *gunas* of the physical world.

The preliminary practices start with the *yamas*, i.e., moral abstentions, which begin with and are based on ahimsa. They are followed by *niyamas* or spiritual observances; physical practices, including *asanas* or posture as well as *pranayama* or breath control, and *pratyahara* or the effort to shut off sensory input from the *gunas*.

Yoga proper also includes: *dharana* or concentration which involves the binding of *citta* or mind stuff on a place of fixed attention; *dhyana*, i.e., meditation which is the state of fixed

attention wherein there is a flow of unbroken current toward a particular object; and *samadhi*, i.e., contemplation wherein only the object of meditation "shines forth in the mind."⁸ When *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi* are combined, the state of *samyama* or constraint evolves. Via *samyama*, any incoming fluctuations of the mind are constrained. From this state, supra-normal insight or intuition arises. Finally, the yogin, who is truly separated from the physical world, gains knowledge, via intuition, of every aspect of reality. However, this too must be sacrificed if the yogin is to gain *moksa*, for knowledge is tied to the *guna* world of Prakrti. Ahimsa, in the *Yoga Sutra*, means: non-injury, nonviolence, harmlessness, and renunciation of the will to kill and the intention to hurt. These meanings are reflected in Book II, Verse 33 of the *Yoga Sutra*, where it is said:

[*Unwholesome*] notions [such as] harming and son on, whether done, caused to be done, or approved, whether arising from greed, anger, or infatuation, whether modest, middling or excessive [these have their] unending fruition in ignorance (*avidya*) and suffering (*dukka*); thus [the yogin should devote himself to] the cultivation of their opposites.

The significance of *ahimsa* is that, as part of the moral abstentions, it is considered before the spiritual, physical, or mental *angas*. Also, it underlies the other moral abstentions, namely; *satya*, i.e., truth or not lying; *asteya*, i.e., not stealing, *aparigraha*, non-grasping or non-possession, and *brahmacarya*, i.e., celibacy. But *ahimsa* is the "bedrock" of the other *angas* as *ahimsa* in the *Yoga Sutra* is to overcome the ego, the ego is identified with the material/sensual world, the ego is driven by the interaction of *raga*, i.e., attraction and *dvesa*, i.e., aversion, which can lead to harm; and one needs to detach oneself from the fetters of *raga* and *dvesa*. **One needs to develop ahimsa in order to separate himself from the effects of ego.** Furthermore, until one has done so, he cannot undertake the spiritual-*angas*, because he is too focused on the ego. As to the physical *angas* which are preparatory to "yoga proper," one could not undertake the rigorous discipline required if he were absorbed with ego needs. Finally as to "yoga proper," or meditation in its several stages, it would be impossible to still the mind if one were tethered by ego.

3.0.0 Influence of Vedanta on Gandhi

Gandhi accepted the Vedantic metaphysical view that although the ultimate state of reality, i.e., Brahman, is beyond the categories of human understanding (*netineti*, i.e., neither this nor that), it can be experienced as what in Sanskrit is called *saccidananda*. In the advaitin tradition, this translates: truth, existence, and being (from the stem *sat* for *satya*, i.e., truth); consciousness (from the stem 'ci't of 'citta', i.e., mind-stuff); and *ananda* which means bliss. Also, for advaitins, Atman, or the True-Self is the same as Brahman, so when one achieves self-realization, he experiences *saccidananda*. Gandhi's notion of *saccidananda* differed somewhat from the traditional advaitin sense, in that he took it to mean: truth, knowledge, and bliss.

What is important for the purpose at hand is that Gandhi took Truth to be the goal of life, while ahimsa was the means to that goal. However, Gandhi equated Truth with God, and God was experienced as love. Hence, Truth involved love. For Gandhi, Love was an essential part of Atman, i.e., the True Self, which is veiled by the material/sensual ego self. In addition to the advaitin influence on Gandhi's thoughts concerning Truth as God, there was the influence of Visistādvaita Vedanta, which was written by Rāmānuja. According to this metaphysics, Brahman could be thought of as a personal, creative deity. Gandhi also had great impact of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Of course in this book which Gandhi read daily, there is an emphasis on a personal deity. **These two influences upon Gandhi's thought were such that, for him, "Truth as God" had a personal aspect as well as the impersonal aspect of Advaita Vedanta.**

For Gandhi, true-Self which is within every human being is experienced as love, and God as a more personal deity has love for humans. So, for Gandhi, Truth and ahimsa form a relation. "Truth as God" is the goal of life, and as Atman, it can be experienced as love. However, the means to the goal is ahimsa which is non-harm and love as compassion. What this means is that by acting with non-harm and love, one can unveil the True Self which is God as love. In other words, by deliberately acting with non-harm and love, one can uncover the True-Self. The use of ahimsa in our everyday lives he believed can curb conflict and violence. In Gandhi's writings we find that one can develop the virtues of non-harm and compassion. The non-harm is such that one not only refrains from injuring others by word or deed, but one is not to harbor an ill thought

of another. When writing of satyagrahis, Gandhi clearly holds that they are not to harbor anger let alone hatred.

Gandhi's practice of ahimsa surpassed what most humans could ever hope to achieve, there were no "boundaries of the self." Like a true Advaitins, atman is experienced as all pervasive state of existence, consciousness, and bliss. However, atman is actually an impersonal state of self-realization that is the result of a withdrawal from the physical, sensual world. The withdrawal if accomplished, over many lifetimes, by one following his dharma or duty, and other undertakings, as well as by yoga practices.

Thus, Gandhi makes a break with the belief that self-realization was accomplished when one had withdrawn from the world. He seemed to believe that his self-realization was connected with that of others. This was probably the Buddhist influence on Gandhi's thought.

3.1.0 Gandhi an Idealist and Practitioner

Gandhi, it is true, was not concerned with constructing a system of philosophy, but mainly with applying the ideals and principles that had become a part of his life. Therefore, we do not find the distinction between the ideal and the actual explicitly stated. One discovers this only when studying his ideas in the context of his background, which was essentially that of Hindu philosophy. Cut off from this source, his ideas sometimes produce the impression of inconsistency; read in the context, they form a coherent whole. He may, therefore, not appear to be consistent with his previous statements, but he is, in his own words, consistent with truth as it may present itself at a given moment. He explains it further: "Whenever I have been obliged to compare my writing even fifty years ago with the latest, I have discovered no inconsistency between the two. But friends who observe inconsistency....should try to see if there is not an underlying and abiding consistency between the two seeming inconsistencies."(Saxena, K.S., 1972, Gandhi Centenary Papers, Council of Oriental Research, Bhopal). Although for understanding Gandhi's philosophy it is necessary that the concepts be understood in the context of Hindu philosophy, it is equally important to bear in mind that Gandhi's connotations of terms are different from the prevalent ones. Quite often they sound national or geographical, when in fact they are universal. He never seems to have realized that this could sometimes have the effect

of damaging his own purpose. The ultimate ideal for Gandhi, as he repeated several times, is unrealized and unrealizable; its value consists in pointing out the direction. According to him, there must always be an unbridgeable gulf between the ideal and its practice. The ideal will cease to be one if it becomes possible to realize it. He argues: “Where would there be room for that constant striving, that ceaseless quest after the ideal that is the basis of all spiritual progress, if mortals could reach the perfect state while still in the body?” (Richards Glyn, 1982, *The Philosophy of Gandhi*, Curzon Pree, Barnes & Noble Books: Totowa, NJ, USA.) Striving after the ideal is the very essence of practicing Gandhi’s philosophy. To the extent we make this effort, to that extent we realize the ideal.

Two basic principles, Truth and Nonviolence, are the foundations of Gandhi’s philosophy. At the highest level of experience they merge and become one with God. The ideal of reality is also the ideal of value - a distinctive mark of Hindu philosophy. God, therefore, has been referred to by Gandhi as Truth or Love (nonviolence in its perfection). His ideal of life, self-realization, therefore, is couched in ideal terms, when the Unity of Man and God has also been achieved. Gandhi, however, is fully aware that in actual fact, at the present level of human experience, there is a gulf between man and God; indeed, this gulf will never be completely bridged as long as we are in this body. “Being necessarily limited by the bonds of flesh we can achieve perfection only after the dissolution of the body.” But while in this body, the gulf can certainly be narrowed. Thus recognizing the imperfect nature of man, Gandhi’s prescription would be to follow the relative truth persistently which he called “*satyāgraha*”. This shows the dynamic character of his ideas. In order to achieve this ideal, he prescribed an ethical discipline - the observance of vows which he defined as “doing at any cost something that one ought to do”. But taking of a vow does not mean that we are able to observe it completely from the very beginning, but it does mean “constant and honest effort in thought, word and deed, with a view to its fulfillment”. It is no doubt true that in this way the practice of the ideal becomes very slippery indeed - anything could be justified as following the ideal. But this is unavoidable as is the fate of all ethical ideals whose observance can hardly be a matter of strict objective scrutiny; it would ultimately depend on the spirit of the person who observes it and which no outsider can determine fully. At the same time, it does not condone the moral lapses of the individual; rather, this consciousness should make one strive to overcome the imperfections. Gandhi’s adoption of

nonviolence as a method of pursuing truth is due to the fact that man, imperfect as he is, can only strive, he cannot command the result. Perfect nonviolence, being the attribute of God alone, cannot be practiced by human beings. Being a part of society, man cannot but participate in “*himsā*” that the very existence of society involves. Gandhi, therefore, would consider a person true to his faith if “there is an effort to avoid the violence that is inevitable in life”. That is how Gandhi’s ideal of nonviolence is translated into actual practice. In essence, it consists “in allowing others the maximum of convenience at the maximum inconvenience to us, even at the risk of life. Everyone has to determine for himself the amount of inconvenience he is capable of putting up with. No third party can determine it for him.” Gandhi believed that one should rather be conscious of one’s imperfections than that one should lower one’s ideal; this would spur the individual to perfect himself. The application of nonviolence and *satyāgraha* to social and political fields has been a subject of great controversy. Gandhi’s faith was so deep that he considered it a remedy against all social evils. What makes it a unique method of bringing about change is the transformation of the whole atmosphere, *satyāgrahi* and the opponent included. Its success or failure is not to be judged in terms of victory or defeat of one party but in terms of a change of heart of both. “A man or woman who is saturated with ahimsa has only to will a thing and it happens.” (Singh Savita, 2007, *Satyagraha*, The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India) Having decided upon the rightness of a situation, Gandhi would not like one to be a passive spectator to evil. That would be participation in the evil itself. If one does not have sufficient nonviolence to die without killing one should not shamefully flee from the danger in the name of nonviolence. Rather, Gandhi would advise killing and being killed. While for himself he did not believe in the use of arms at all, he would not hesitate to advise their use by those who had no faith in non-violence.

We do not find uniform pattern of application of nonviolence for all individuals and societies. Gandhi is sometimes talking in terms of the ideal, sometimes from his personal level; and sometimes from the point of view of what he considered the Indian masses were capable of doing. It is this distinction, which is not always made explicit, that gives the impression of inconsistency.

Gandhi was conscious all the time of the necessity of moral upliftment of the individuals who were to work the institutions after independence. In directing his energies towards political

reform his method was equally directed “to educating the individuals to rise to a moral stature”. He says: “Responsible government, which is a gift without the will and power of the people behind it, will be a mere paper responsibility hardly worth the paper on which it may be printed. If it is a fact that the atmosphere for immediate self-government among the states is not propitious, and the people are not ready to pay the price, it follows that they should have the proper training.” (Datta Dharendra Mohan, 1968, *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta). When, therefore, Gandhi is criticized as a politician, such criticism is mainly based on his having one end in view, viz. the national independence of India; it ignores the other important principle of Gandhi, namely the moral training of the individual.

4.0.0 Gandhi on Religion, Morality and Society

Gandhi was a lover of god. To him “God to be god must rule the heart and transform it”. (Young India, October 11, 1928). So to him religion means to accept god for life. Acceptance of god means to allow love, truth and reason, to rule the heart and remove selfishness, ill will, ignorance and unreason and all the passions like anger, greed and lust that follow there from. Therefore, for him the essence of religion is morality. True religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other. Morality helps religion by purifying the heart of passions and prejudice that stand in the way of realizing god in one’s own-self and in others. So morality is greatly helped by religion. Gandhi says “the purer I try to become the nearer I feel to be to god” (Young India, October 11, 1928). According to Gandhiji, man’s ultimate aim is the realization of god and all his activities, social, political, religious have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of god. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour, simply because the only way to find god is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all.

This is an expression of the positive spirit of seeking god through the service of man, the realization of the truth through action.

4.1.0 Gandhi’s thought on Vaisnavism

Gandhi believed that man’s perfection and liberation can come only by self surrender and grace. So he says in his autobiography –“For perfection or freedom from error comes only from

grace... with an unreserved surrender to this grace, complete mastery over thought is impossible”. This is typical of a theist, a Vaisnava. Gandhi was rather a theist than an Advaitin, even he is a believer in an indeterminate, attributeless, impersonal absolute (*nirguna brahma*). Gandhi echoes his theistic sentiment when he says in young India (March 5, 1925). “Let us dance to the tune of his *vamsi*-flute and all would be well”. In this connection he calls the world and illusion, *māyā*. But this word is also used by him like the Vaisnava in this the sense of *līlā* or sports. So he says- therefore it is that Hinduism calls it all His sports – *līlā* or calls it an illusion – *māyā* (Young India, January 21, 1926).

Hence, Gandhi may be said to believe in the personality of god whom he regards as the omniscience, omnipotent creator and just governor of the world. On the whole therefore it will be reasonable to think that Gandhi was a theist-Vaisnava, rather than an Advaitist – a follower of Sankara.

Conclusion

Gandhi’s philosophy lays down moral ideals for individuals and groups to strive for - their value consists in pointing out the direction, not in their realization. They cannot be enforced from above but depend upon their voluntary acceptance. Unavoidable use of force he considers to be a necessary evil - but an evil. The extent to which these ideals can be practiced depends on the ethical capacity of individuals or groups. Accordingly, the actual practice of these ideals cannot be uniform. As a social and political reformer, Gandhi spoke from different levels at different times. But three levels mainly dominate his writings: first, that of the perfect ideal (unrealizable); second, that of his own personal point of view (admitting himself to be far from perfect, yet sufficiently advanced to practice his ideals); third, that of the point of view of the Indian masses. Yet what is implied throughout is this: that even though the ideal may be impossible of attainment, the very act of pursuing it generates the goodwill essential for the well-being of the social life.

In brief the foundations of Gandhian thoughts are:

1. Non-violence or love-Ahimsa
2. Truth- Satyagraha

3. Fearlessness- *Sarvatrabhayavarjana*
4. Self-organization or self-rule – SwarajSelf-regulation means self-knowledge and taking responsibility.
5. Non-stealing – *Asteya*. Part of this is Non-consumerism- *Asangraha*. This requires ecological humility; realizing that waste is a sin against nature and that nature's cycle should be followed. It is about having enough.
6. Sacred Sex- *Brahmacharya*.
7. Physical work- *Sharirasrama*.
8. Avoidance of bad taste- *Aswāda, Sattva* –Simplicity, Rajas – glamorous, *tamas* – depressing.
9. Respect for all religion –*Sarva dharma samanatva*.
10. Self economy or Local economy – Swadeshi decentralization.
11. Respect for all beings –Sparsha.

Gandhi's relevance is eternal, timeless and universal. His cardinal principles of truth and non-violence are extremely significant in our life. According to him violence of any kind has to be rejected at all costs and at all places. He showed us the Indian way to resolve conflict to struggle over values and to replace hatred with love and affection and develop harmonious relationship between different communities, castes, religious and other groups.

The basic moral principles of Gandhian philosophy are *satya* and *ahimsa*. Jaina and Buddhist also emphasize on the two basic principles through Panchasila and Astangika-marga. Gandhi was no doubt influenced by the two schools of thought but he also developed a very interesting system of thought originating from Sāṅkhya -Yoga tradition and much influenced by Vedāntin-Vaisnava tradition.

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