

# Influence of Different Texts and Religions on M.K. Gandhi's Philosophy of Peace

**Dr. Dipanwita Chakraborty**

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Government Degree College, Dharmanagar, Tripura (North).

## Abstract

Peace refers to both internal peace as well as external peace. M.K. Gandhi believed that the path of truth is the path of peace and he added a new facet of non-violence to the world of philosophy to find the path of truth. He wanted to build a world of peace based on non-violence where there would be no war, no revolution and no bloodshed. He said that peace would not come until the great powers boldly take decision to disarm them. So there needs to be a limit on the production of swords in the world just like the production of opium because swords are probably the cause of more human misery than opium. Violence can never be beneficial to mankind. So violence has to be completely given up in the world affairs and it is possible when love and non-violence are the rules of human existence. In fact he believed that peace can be established through non-violence. It has to be said that in adopting the principle of non-violence and truth. Gandhi was influenced by various religions such as Vaishnavism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam apart from texts.

**Keywords:** Truth, Peace, Non-violence

## Introduction

The discussion of peace in the world of philosophical history has been going on since time immemorial. Plato in his text "Republic", which was based on Socrates' dialogue focused on what to do for justice. He presented a peace plan based on his city-state. His interpretation of forms and ideals also includes the notion of peace. In the philosophical text *Symposium* (dated c. 385-370 BC) Plato says that love is the means of establishing peace among people. Moreover In his last dialogue "Laws" he considered peace and friendship as the highest duty. Like Plato Aristotle also gave importance to justice and considered it as virtue. In this context it can be said that Aristotle's virtue ethics is related to peace since many pacifists associate peace with justice.

If we look at the mediaeval period we see that St. Augustine wrote in his *Enchiridion* that what we call evil is nothing but the absence of good, which is harmoniously related with the notion that negative peace is nothing but the absence of positive peace. Similarly, in his *City of God* he mentioned that losing the good has been called 'evil' and made a difference between temporal human city characterized by violent conflict and the eternal divine city characterized by peace. Another medieval philosopher named Saint Thomas Aquinas in his work *Summa Theologica* made a discussion on the nature of peace and considered that peace is a work of justice as well as a work of charity or love.

In the Renaissance period which is also known as the era for the growth of humanism, the humanist writer Desiderius Erasmus, who is also known as the philosopher of peace, in his various works

recognized compromise and arbitration as alternative to war. In 1524 in his polemical work *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collation*, commonly called in English *The Freedom of the Will*, he pointed out that peace is a method or means, not just a goal. Another Renaissance humanist writer Sir Thomas More in his *Utopia*'s second text, written in 1516, reflects a broader theory of peace by describing an agrarian egalitarian society where there is no private property, no genocide or city destruction; where young people are educated in pacifism and where the purpose of war is only to defend and liberate the oppressed from oppression.

Among the various modern western philosophers who emphasized the importance of peace, Thomas Hobbes, Benedictus de Spinoza, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel are notable. According English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), violence prevails in the state due to lack of humanitarian and civilizational influence. He mentioned in his two notable works *De Civi* (*The Citizen*) and *Leviathan* that human nature is basically selfish. He described the war as a "fighting habit" and said it was only due to lack of law enforcement. So for lasting peace he emphasized comprehensive external authority. The Dutch philosopher Benedictus de Spinoza's philosophy of peace can be cited in the context of his support for tolerance in religious doctrine. In his text *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* or *Theologico- Political treatise* (written in 1675-76) published after his death in 1677, we find that Spinoza emphasizes that peace is not just an absence of war, but a virtue that arises from the power of character. Like Spinoza modern English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) also advocated religious tolerance to avoid destructive religious wars. In his work *Two Treaties of Government*, which was published in the year 1689, we notice that Locke argued that every person has the right not to be harmed by another person, that is, there is the right to life, and that political authorities have a role to play in protecting this right. This argument is inextricably linked with the right to peace. According to Geneva philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), culture, social and economic development, especially private property has corrupted human morality and humanity. He consciously rejected corrupt violent society and emphasized respect for nature and friendship to return to peaceful existence. In *Les Confessions* Rousseau praised the peace that comes from being one with nature. Among modern philosophers, Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) philosophy is considered to be the most comprehensive foundation of peace. Kant's "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" (1795) clearly states that we have a moral obligation for peace. In the Second Definitive Article of the work he argued that we have an immediate duty to peace, and accordingly nation-states have a duty to cooperate for peace. The philosophy of the German philosopher George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) is also considered as a source of peace. Since it can be said the philosophical notion of his nation-state as the highest evolution of human society is consistent with the evolution of a super-nation state with the aim of world peace.

In the contemporary era, M.K. Gandhi was a prominent figure among the many notable contemporary philosophers and advocates of peace, such as the American pragmatist philosopher William James and the Austrian-Israeli philosopher Martin Buber. According to William James the moral equivalent of war is challenge. His approach here is consistent with the concept of positive peace that embodies the cultural challenge. In the same way Martin Buber's prominent book, *Ich und Du* ( *I and Thou*), published in 1923, which dates back to the genocide of World War 1, is a philosophical reflection of the true nature of peace, that peace involves this kind of dialogues with others, which is absent in war. Indian philosopher M.K Gandhi put peace into practice in addition to theoretical discussion. According to him, the goal of peace can only be achieved through peaceful means. So he chose non-violence as the

best medium and accordingly pursued the policy of Satyagraha, considering it as a technique of non-violence, against apartheid in South Africa and against the colonial rule in India's independence. Moreover, Gandhi asserted that non-violence is the greatest expression of truth. According to him, the basis of peace is the truth of the innate non-violence of individuals. The path to peace is peace itself. Except it there is no other way to peace. The objective of the present research work is to provide a clear and critical account of M. K. Gandhi's philosophy of peace. Moreover, the influence of various texts and religions on Gandhi's peace policy has also been discussed.

### **Gandhi's view on peace**

The term "peace" or "Shanti" in Indian context means not only outer peace but inner peace as well. Gandhi preferred to assimilate peace with spirituality. According to him, both peace and spirituality presuppose each other. One cannot be in peace without being spiritual. In the similar way, one cannot claim to be spiritual unless being in the state of peace. Now the questions may arise –"What is spirituality?", "Is religiosity same as spirituality?"--- Against the expression that religiosity and spirituality are synonymous, Gandhi stated that spirituality is not limited to any religious practice. Although every religion promotes spirituality, the former is denominational and the later is doctrinaire. Spirituality is something universal and ubiquitous which is beyond cultural, geographical and religious limitation. Gandhi said without being spiritual one cannot adhere to truth which is also called the law of the universe. He equated truth with God, the unseen supreme power residing within us and said it is possible to find the supreme power through the way of Ahimsa or non-violence which is a minimum expression of love. Gandhi clearly stated that as Ahimsa without love is only a body without life, likewise love without Ahimsa is only a disembodied spirit. According to Gandhi, the love force is same as the soul force or truth force. Without this force, the universe would cease to exist. As atoms have cohesive force, the living being also have cohesive force called love force. It is because of the exercise of love force not only families and communities, but also hundred of nations live in peace. Just as out of darkness we can find light, so out of hate we can find love. Since life exists even in destruction, the existence of something higher than destruction has to be acknowledged. Love is the name of this existence which differentiates between humans and animals. An orderly society and right living can only become possible through the law of love. It is possible to bring the God of heaven to earth through the universal practice of the law. Moreover, Gandhi said that as value system is backbone of a civilized society, every society should abide by moral values. There are two kinds of values—positive and negative. As Gandhi believed in innate goodness in man, he said that people can achieve positive values and this is possible only through self-restraint. In his words:

"Love never claims, it ever gives. Love ever suffers, never resents, never revenges itself." [1].

According to Gandhi, forgiveness is the quality of soul. Moreover, mutual tolerance is the rule of conduct in any civilized society. In fact, these two can be exercised only by the person who has love. Thus, love with its two aspects of non-violence and compassion can establish harmony as well as peace in the society. We generally notice bond of love among family members and friends and for uplifting it Gandhi wanted to extend the bond among all creature of universe. As he said:

"Mutual love enables nature to persist. Man does not live by destruction. Self-love compels regard for others. Nations cohere because there is mutual regards among individuals composing them. Some day we must extend the national law to the universe, even as we have extended the family law to form nations --- a larger family." [2].

According to Gandhi, the sovereign law of love makes no difference. Although forms are many, the spirit of formation is one and the ultimate goal of religion is to realize the unity. Moreover, it is possible to find God in His creation. Since God is within each of us, we must identify ourselves with each and every person. In the words of Gandhi:

“I am part and parcel of the whole and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity.” [3].

Gandhi wanted peace among all mankind, but did not want it by placing the aggression or at the cost of honour. As in his words:

“Having flung aside the sword, there is nothing except the cup of love which I can offer to those who oppose me.” [4].

Gandhi wanted to build a world of tomorrow based on non-violence where there would be no war, no revolution and no bloodshed. He said that peace would not come until the great powers boldly take decision to disarm them. So there needs to be a limit on the production of swords in the world just like the production of opium because swords are probably the cause of more human misery than opium. Violence can never be beneficial to mankind. So violence has to be completely given up in the world affairs and it is possible when love and non-violence are the rules of human existence. Above all, a peaceful world can be formed through non-violence. In addition to India, in various parts of the world, we observe the enhancement of the value of the principle of non-violence through various successful non-violent campaigns such as Civil Rights Movement in the United States, Greenpeace Movement in Europe, Anti-apartheid Movement in South Africa and Solidarity Movement in Poland. Thus it can be said that Ahimsa or non-violence is the only way to establish peace in the world. Indeed, to establish real peace in the world, Gandhi advised people to move incessantly from love to love and peace to peace until all ends of earth are filled with that love and peace.

Gandhi's philosophy of truth and non-violence in establishing peace was influenced by various texts such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gita and others in addition to Vaishnavism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

### **Impact of various texts on Gandhi's philosophy**

M.K. Gandhi acknowledged in his autobiography Ramanama as an indomitable remedy for him and his nurse Rambha was credited with sowing the seeds of Ramanama in his heart. In his words:

...., but the good seed sown in childhood was not sown in vain. I think it is due to the seed sown by that good woman Rambha that today Ramayana is an infallible remedy for me.”[5].

While Gandhi's father regularly listened to the *Ramayana* recited by the devotee Ladha Maharaj in a melodious voice while he was ill at Porbandar, the young Mohandas at the age of 12 was fascinated by the recitation and his deep devotion to the *Ramayana* was awakened. He was later influenced by Tulsidas's *Ramayana* and recognized it as the greatest book of all devotional literature. Tulsidas's *Ramayana* tried to prove that Rama's heart was full of omnipresent love. Although Ram fought and killed Bali, Ravan and other monsters, he had no hatred for them and he allowed them to enter the kingdom of God. A reflection of the Ramarajya described by Tulsidas is Gandhi's proposal to build a peaceful non-violent society.

Moreover, Gandhi likened the *Mahabharata* to a diamond mine whose deeper excavations yield more diamonds. Various stories and legends in the *Mahabharata*, such as Bhishma's comforting advice to Yudhisthira that non-violence is the highest religion; Maharshi Kapil's description of the moral principles of forgiveness, non-violence, truth etc. as the road to Brahman; the saying mentioned in

Vanaparva that nothing is impossible for the soft and the soft ones are stronger than hard ones; not to give up the path of truth of king Harishchandra and to keep his promise etc. indicates the importance given to non-violence and truth in the Mahabharata. According to Gandhi, the *Mahabharata* only tells the story of the victory of good over evil and does not mention the need for physical warfare since the tragic outcome of the war is tears and sorrow. In the words of Gandhi:

“The author of the Mahabharata has not established the necessity of physical warfare on the contrary he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.” [6].

Gandhi was first introduced to *Gita* in England in 1988-89 when two Theosophist brothers invited him to read the original version with them while they were reading Sir Edwin Arnold’s translation ‘*The Song Celestial*’. It had a special effect on his mind and later life as in his autobiography Gandhi wrote:

“The verses in the second chapter ..... made a deep impression on my mind, and they still ring in my ears.” [7].

The *Gita*, which is the middle part of the epic *Mahabharata* and which is considered to be the quintessence of philosophical and religious thought of Upanishads, suggests to do the assigned works, but in the absence of inclination towards fruit. Indeed, it seeks to present a balanced personality through detached man who has been referred to as ‘Sthitaprajna.’ Arjuna’s reluctance to kill his relatives and consequently his withdrawal from the war was his weakness and failure to perform Kshatriya duties. Eventually he was influenced by Lord Krishna’s admonition of non-attachment action devoid of desire for karma and realized his duty by giving up cowardice. Thus, *Gita*, according to Gandhi, in the guise of physical warfare described the everlasting inner turmoil in the hearts of mankind. . In his words:

In this great work the *Gita* is the crown. Its second chapter, instead of teaching the rules of physical warfare, tells us how a perfected man is to be known. In the characteristics of the perfected man of the *Gita*, I do not see any to correspond to physical warfare, its whole design is inconsistent with the rules of conduct governing the relations between warring parties.” [8].

In March, 1930 Gandhi published a Gujarati translation of the *Gita* and named it *Anasakti Yoga*. He was influenced by selfless action in addition to the stability of mind even in times of happiness or sorrow, victory or defeat mentioned in the *Gita*. It can be said that Gandhi improved on the teachings of the *Gita* through a systematic process of resisting against evil in a non-violent way. B. Pattavi Sitaramayya’s essay “*Gandhi in His Many Aspects*” describes M.K. Gandhi:

“He is the Sthitaprajna of the Bhagavadgita, who, by his self-control and renunciation, has conquered himself and conquered the world.” [9].

Moreover, Gandhi was influenced by various Upanishadas. The prayers recited everyday in his Ashram was taken from the Isa Upanishad. His concept of the supremacy of Dharma, which is the basis of truth or Satya that enables the weak to overcome the strong, came from the Brihadaranyak Upanishad. Moreover, Taittiriya Upanishad, Aranyak Upanishad and Kenapanishad had also a great influence on him.

### **Vaishnavism and Gandhi**

Gandhi was born in a Vashnava family. Vaishnavism, one of the major religions of the Hindus, considers Bhakti cult or devotion as the only means of realization of supreme God. In fact devotional prayers such as Ramanama and fasting for self purification, two fundamental elements of Vaishnavism can be considered key to Gandhi’s principles of truth and non-violence. While in Rajkot, the basic

foundation of tolerance towards various branches of Hinduism as well as other sister religions was laid in M.K. Gandhi's mind. Being a believer in Vashnavism Gandhi's parent and other family members used to visit Haveli (the Vaishnava temple), but they also visit the temples of Shiva and Rama. At that time when Jain monks used to come to his father frequently for food, they would talk about religious and worldly matters. Moreover, various Muslim and Persian friends used to come to his father to talk about their faiths and he would listen to them with respect and interest. Gandhi's presence during these religious conversations evoked in his mind a tolerant attitude towards various religions other than Christianity. But later on, a deep respect for Christianity also awoke in his mind. Gandhi believed that Jainism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity are all carriers of peace.

### **Jainism and Gandhi**

Since Jainism was particularly prevalent in Gujarat, Gandhi acknowledged the influence of Jainism in his childhood. As in his autobiography Gandhi wrote:

“Jainism was strong in Gujarat, and its influence was felt everywhere and on all occasions.”[10].

The concept of non-violence is so wide spread in Jainism that it is considered inappropriate to use violence against the enemy even. Gandhi's various thoughts on non-violence such as the soul force, the law of suffering, not a weapon of the weak, not to be violent even towards any poisonous creatures like snake, good will towards other, and an impossibility to practice perfectly with physical existence can be considered reflections of Jaina philosophical thought. However, among the eleven vows that Gandhi prescribed for the inhabitants of the Sabarmati Ashram, the first five vows, namely truth, non-violence, non-stealing, Brahmacharya and non-possession were of Jainism. Gandhi's adoption of fasting as a means of self purification is also a Jain method Like Jaina Ankantavada Gandhi also believed in the doctrine of manyness of reality which taught him to realize a Mussalman from his point of view and a Christian from his. On his way back from London Gandhi met a Jain man named Raychand Bhai and he recognized him as his friend, philosopher and guide. According to Gandhi Raichand was a man of great character and learning. So while in South Africa, when his faith in Hinduism began to falter he wrote to Raychand Bhai, whose response pacified Gandhi a bit.

### **Buddhism and Gandhi**

M.K. Gandhi was first introduced to Buddhism in South Africa. Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, had a message of compassion for all living beings, not just for mankind. Gandhi was greatly influenced by it and we find this all-encompassing compassion in his philosophy of non-violence. Gandhi was particularly impressed by Sir Edwin Arnold's book '*The Light of Asia*' which discusses Gautama's life and time, who became the Buddha after gaining knowledge. The teachings of Buddha's Four Noble Truths and Eight Fold Paths to Nirvana influenced Gandhi a lot. According to Gandhi, Gautama Buddha never denied Hinduism, but expanded the foundations of Hinduism with new interpretations. Indeed the essential part of the teachings of the Buddha is now an integral part of Hinduism. Gandhi said:

“So far as I have been able to understand the central fact of Buddha's life , Nirvana is utter extinction of all that is base in us, all that is vicious us, all that is corrupt and corruptible in us. Nirvana is not like the black, dead peace of the grave, but the living peace, the living happiness of a soul which is conscious of itself, and conscious of having found its own abode in the heart of the eternal.” [11] .

### Christianity and Gandhi

Christianity had a special effect on Gandhi's mind later on, although he disliked Christianity while in Rajkot. At a vegetarian boarding house in England Gandhi met a good Christian from Manchester who talked to him about Christianity. Gandhi then told him of his bitter experience with Christianity while in Rajkot. The man was very pained to hear this. He requested Gandhi to read the Bible and sold a copy of it to him after Gandhi agreed. Gandhi started reading Old Testament and probably failed. He read the book of Genesis without any interest. But the New Testament left a different impression on him. Especially the Sermon on the Mount directly entered his heart and he compared it to the Gita. He considered Christianity as a religion of peace and Jesus as one of the greatest teachers of humanity who belongs not solely to Christianity, but to all races and people of the entire world.

### Islam and Gandhi

Like Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Christianity, Gandhi described Islam also as a religion of peace. Gandhi became aware of the message of universal brotherhood by reading the Qur'an and realized that the foundation of Islam is non-violence. He included the "Kalimah" in the prayers of the Ashram. The well-known verse from Qur'an known as "Al Fateha" was included into the Ashram worship.

### Conclusion

In summing up it can be said that M. K. Gandhi ignited the light of peace in the human mind through his philosophical doctrine of truth and non-violence. In this respect he was influenced by various religions apart from different texts. Gandhi's philosophy placed emphasis on spiritual over the temporal and considered that inner spiritual growth in man is very much important for social progress. According to him, peace based on truth and non-violence is stable and encourages the inner spiritual growth in man.

### REFERENCES

1. MIND OF MAHATMA GANDHI, Encyclopedia of Gandhi's Thoughts, Compiled & Edited by: Prabhu. R. K. & Rao U. R. Ahmedabad, Navajivan Mudranalaya, May 1966, P.519.
2. Gandhi. M. K : TRUTH IS GOD, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, May 1955, P.16.
3. MIND OF MAHATMA GANDHI, Encyclopedia of Gandhi's Thoughts, Compiled & Edited by: Prabhu. R. K. & Rao U. R. Ahmedabad, Navajivan Mudranalaya, May 1966, P. 288
4. Ibid, P. 523
5. Gandhi. M. K :AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OR THE STORY OF MY EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH, , Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1927, P.30
6. Gandhi. M. K : TRUTH IS GOD, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, May 1955. P. 91
7. Gandhi. M. K :AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OR THE STORY OF MY EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1927, P. 64
8. Gandhi. M. K : TRUTH IS GOD, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, May 1955. P. 91
9. Radhakrishnan Sarvepalli: MAHATMA GANDHI, Essays & Reflections, Mumbai, Jaico Publishing House, 1957. P.161
10. Gandhi. M. K :AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OR THE STORY OF MY EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH, , Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1927, P. 20
11. Gandhi. M. K : TRUTH IS GOD, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, May 1955. P. 73