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It is indeed our pleasure to inform you that your article titled "INFLUENCE OF SANSKRIT ON GANDHI'S LIFE"

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Sincerely Yours

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INFLUENCE OF SANSKRIT LITERATURE ON GANDHI'S LIFE

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॥भारतस्य प्रतिष्ठे द्वे संस्कृतं संस्कृतिस्तथा॥

India is a land of knowledge where we can sense the greatness of advanced educational perfection through ages. India is a place where its language and culture is its soul and body.

Gandhi's Childhood:

The Indian classics, especially the stories of Shravana and king Harishchandra, had a great impact on Gandhi in his childhood. In his autobiography, he admits that they left an indelible impression on his mind. He writes: "It haunted me and I must have acted Harishchandra to myself times without number." Gandhi's early self-identification with truth and love as supreme values is traceable to this epic characters.¹

Introduction:

Man basically wants peace, security, liberty and properly which are at stake during the time of war. In Indian philosophy metaphysical and epistemological opinions differ widely, but there is at least an apparent resemblance in the epics. Non – violence in Ancient Indian thought is a brief account of Ahimsa. The verb hims, means 'to injure' or 'to kill'. The negative form of that verb is used in several places in the Rig-Veda and in the Atharvaveda.² Peace is achieved and maintained by a mutual interest in the benefits of on-going transactions.³

The epic Mahabharata has so many other aspects which common people do not know. The Mahabharata is an epic of India in 18 parvas. Firstly, the epic as we see it today containing 100,000 verses was not the creation of Vedavyasa. He composed what was then known as the Jai, containing only 8,800 verses. Later on Rishi Vaishampayana enlarged it to contain 24,000 verses which was then known as the Bharata. Finally Sauti, the son of the suta (the chariot driver) Lomaharshana, gave it present form as we see now, containing 100,000 verses.⁴

Though the Mahabharata is regarded as the "Fifth Veda". In the Anusasana Parva, ahimsa is mentioned together with truthfulness, absence of anger, mercy, self-control and sincerity.

The most famous statement of ahimsa, which probably every Indian has heard, is found only here.



**“Ahimsa paramo dharmah |
Ahimsa paramam tapah |
Ahimsa paramum satyam |
Tato daharmah pravartate” ||**

Here, ahimsa is considered to be the supreme virtue and the spring of all morality. Ahimsa in the Mahabharata is no doubt a cardinal virtue of great importance, but not extended equally towards all creatures.⁵

Antiquity of Ahimsa:

While people immediately associate Ahimsa, non-violence with Mahatma Gandhi, Gandhi ji in his autobiography, “The Story of My Experiments with Truth”, says “There is nothing new about ahimsa. It is as old as the hills.” The concept of Ahimsa finds a mention in the Vedas, Sastras, Smritis, Bhagvad Gita, Srimad Bhagavatam and many ancient texts in indigenous Indian languages. Atharva Veda defines Ahimsa as” Ahimsa is not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one’s mind, speech or body.” Ahimsa is mentioned as the foremost Dharma, knowledge and penance in the great epic Mahabharata.

In people’s minds, Mahabharata immediately conjures up thoughts of the mighty Kurukshetra War. We find that even in a scenario of imminent battle, the value of Ahimsa is extolled in Shanthi Parva, the chapter on peace in Mahabharata.

While the idea of Ahimsa is noble, by no stretch of imagination is it an easy path to tread. Mahatma Gandhi in his own words says, The power of Ahimsa has had recurrent and positive impact right through the ages not only in India but across the globe and shall continue to be so in whenever the hand of oppression rises.⁶

The Udyoga Parva of Mahabharata narrates that, just before the War, Lord Krishna, in His final peace mission, went to Hastinapur in the month of Kartika. He set out on the day when moon was at the asterism Revati. On His way to Hastinapur, Krishna took rest for a day at a place called Brikasthala, and on that day the moon was at the asterism Bharani. The day, on which Duryodhana turned down each and every effort of Lord Krishna to make peace and made the war inevitable, the moon was resting at the asterism Pushya. And the Lord left Hastinapura with Karna, on the day when the moon was yet to reach the asterism Uttara Phalguni. As mentioned above, Karna accompanied Him to some distance to see Him off and he then described to the Lord the positions of planets in the sky and expressed his apprehension that such a planetary configuration stood for very bad omen: such as large scale loss of life and



drenching of blood. Vyasadeva narrated all these planetary positions in as many as sixteen verses as if someone was describing it after visualizing them in the sky. It is also well known that during the War, Lord Balarama went on a pilgrimage to holy places along the banks of the River Saraswati and Mahabharata describes the position of the moon during the entire course of pilgrimage. For example, He set out on the day when the moon was at the asterism Pushya and returned on the day when the moon was at the asterism Shravana.

Gandhi on Bhagavad-Gita:

The Bhagavad-Gita or the sacred song is a Hindu poem with deep philosophy, spirituality and divinity embodied in it. It primarily is a wartime counsel between Krishna and his disciple/relative warrior Arjuna. Gandhi has often acknowledged its profound effect on his life. It is strange but interesting that Gandhiji's first introduction to Gita was in England and through two English brothers. Gandhi at that time was studying law. The brothers read Gita regularly and asked Gandhi to join in. Perhaps they thought that they may get to know the text in Sanskrit better. But Gandhi felt sad, because of his lack of Sanskrit knowledge. He read English version by Sir Edwin Arnold as recommended by his English friends, and was captivated for life by Gita's message. He especially liked the last nineteen verses of the Chapter II. He felt, his concept of dharma was summarized in those verses. He took to reading Gita every day, later, in the original Sanskrit language. During his imprisonment years, he studied the book in detail. Due to insistence from his friends, he translated it into Gujarati, his mother-tongue. Later English translation appeared. Many language versions and interpretations of Gita are in vogue. The three great acharyas, Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa, interpreted it to advocate their stand of monism, qualified dualism and dualism, respectively. Besides, upholding spiritual knowledge, devotion and renunciation seem to be the favorite stand of great many teachers. In modern times, Lokamanya Tilak advocated that action (karmayoga) was the real message. Gandhi however interpreted that action without expectation of fruit (anasaktiyoga) was the essence or quintessence of the entire work.

The Mahabharata war in this great book was only a pretext, he felt. It was an allegory. In fact, it represented a battle going on, within every individual. Mahabharata war might not be historical as it exists today. Poet Vyasa, used it as background to preach real dharma. This dharma according to Bapu was self-less action. Even winning the war did not bring happiness. Along with tremendous losses, it brought only regret and remorse to all. It proved that mere material gains never brought peace within. Krishna of Bhagavad-Gita is wisdom personified, to Gandhi. He might or might not be an incarnation of God. That



point was immaterial. A person who thinks or acts ahead of his times and who is a deeply religious person is considered 'avatarapurusha'. Bapu, saw complete emancipation in Lord Krishna. Self-realization or liberation may be the goal of Hindu philosophy. But for Gandhi, Gita's stress is on attaining liberation through selfless action. Renunciation of all desire of action was ultimate message, he writes.

The Gita is the universal mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks. A true votary of Gita does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. But that peace and joy come not to skeptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the humble in spirit who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind. There never was a man who worshipped her in that spirit and went disappointed. I find a solace in the Bhagavad-Gita 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 Bhagavad-Gita. 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 or indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teaching of Bhagavad-Gita. This is the opinion of Jyotsna Kamat.⁷

Conclusion:

The world is entrapped in gross materialism. Man has become so selfish as to have utter disregard for others whether an individual or a society or a nation. Scientists are vying with each other to play the role of the Creator. It is high time to create a balance between materialism and spiritualism. In the chaotic circumstances prevailing all over the world today, we are looking for peace as elusive as the mirage in a desert. I think, Mahatma Gandhi's life and his teachings can serve as beacon to guide us and lead us to steady peace.⁸

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