APPENDIX
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Sir,  


Ref: Your letter dt. 14.05.2012, for publication of Article - Reg.

With reference to your request to publish Research article on "The impact of the Bhagavadgita on Mahatma Gandhi", I am pleased to inform that your article is accepted to publish in the monthly magazine "Sapthagiri", to be issued in July, 2012 and onwards.

In the service of Lord Venkateswara,

K. Radha Ramana  
(Dr. K RADHA RAMANA)
THE IMPACT OF THE BHAGavadGITA ON MAHATMA GANDHI

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Bhavadgita is the crux or the essence of India's Vedic Wisdom and one of the greatest, spiritual philosophical classics of the world. The Gita is acclaimed by ancient acharyas and modern savants alike as a world scripture, which summarizes the perennial philosophy; it is topical and relevant to the problems an individual comes up against in life. It is meant to lift the aspirant as Dr Annie Besant observes: 'from the lower levels of renunciation, where objects are renounced, to the loftier heights, where desires are dead, and where the Yogi dwells in calm and ceaseless contemplation while his body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that fall to his lot on life. That the spiritual man need not be a recluse, that union with the divine life may be achieved and maintained in the midst of worldly affairs, that the obstacles to that union lie, not outside us, but within us, such is the central lesson of the Bhagavadgita.'

This marvellous book of eighteen small chapters with 700 verses contains the essence of the Vedas and the Upanishads. It preaches the threefold way of knowledge, action and devotion, leading to the highest good of mankind. It brings to men the highest knowledge, the purest love and the most luminous action. It teaches self-control, the threefold austerity, nonviolence, truth, compassion, obedience to the call of duty for the sake of duty, and putting up a fight against unrighteousness (adhram).

Lord Krishna is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Lord establishes Himself as the Supreme Personality of Godhead in Gita, and He is accepted as such in the Brahma-samhita and all the Puranas, especially Spimad-Bhagavatam, known as the Bhagavata Purana. Its central idea is that God descended into a mortal frame as Sri Krisna and in the inspired words of the Gita, taught Arjuna to know Him, come to Him, live in Him, and be in Him. This idea has been the priceless possession of India; and it has been accessible to all men, irrespective of the bonds of race or religion.

Not only does this work contain the quintessence of all the Upanishads, but the full name of this work is "Srimad Bhagavadgita Upanishad". The enunciative words, conveying that the chapter is closed, which are used at the end of each chapter of the Gita contain the words, iii svimad Bhagavadgita sv Upanisatsu, Brahmanidhyayam, Yogasastre Sri-Krishnarjuna-samvade", etc., i.e., "thus the conversation between Sri Krishna and Arjuna on the Karmayoga science, (that is to say, on the science of the Yoga based on the knowledge of the Brahman) in the Upanishad sung by the Blessed Lord."
The Gita forms the epitome of the teachings of Vyasa, the quintessence of his thought. That is why Sri Krishna says: 'I am Vyasa among the sages'. This manifestation of Krishna in Vyasa becomes fullest in the Gita. From the ancient times, the Gita has been given the status of an Upanishad. The Gita is the Upanishad of Upanishads, because Lord Krishna has drawn the milk of all the Upanishads and given it in the form of the Gita to the whole world. Almost every idea essential for the flowering of a full life occurs in the pages of the Gita. That is why men of experience have said, truly, that the Gita is a treasure house of the knowledge of Dharma.²

Mahatma Gandhi calls Gita his 'spiritual reference book'. He observes: 'when doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to the Bhagavadgita, and find a verse to comfort me, and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow'. With these preliminary observations, let us now examine how the Mahatma interpreted the central teaching of the Gita. According to Gandhi, the Gita teaches Anasakti or non-attachment to worldly things. He, therefore, calls his interpretation of the Gita, "Anasaktiyoga". Although like Tilak, Gandhi emphasizes on disinterested performance of one's duty, he is more inclined towards non-attachment.

Gandhi does not consider Gita as a historical work, but as a philosophical and ethical work. He says: 'Krishna of the Gita is perfection and right knowledge personified, but the picture is imaginary. That does not mean that Krishna, the adored of the people, never lived. But perfection is imagined³. The Nineteen verses describing the sthitaprajna—'one with steadfast wisdom', Gandhi said has been inscribed on the tablet of his heart; 'they contained for me all knowledge that truths they teach are the external varieties.' Gandhi referred to the anasakti-yoga or gospel of disinterested action as having given him a key as it were to the secret of public work and its success. He wrote: 'A public servant has no personal feelings to be considered. He must be tulya-nidatta samstuthih. He wrote: '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 Gita'. According to Gandhi, self-realization which forms the central teaching of the Gita is against any line of demarcation being drawn between salvation and worldly pursuits and 'that what cannot be followed out in day-to-day practice, cannot be called religion. Further, renunciation is possible only through the observance of nonviolence. Religion is not opposed to material goods. Gandhi desired that one should translate religion in one's day-to-day life's activities. In short, religion has to be lived and practised in home as well as in larger political activities of the State.'⁴

Truth, sat, is positive; non-violence is negative. Truth stands for the fact, nonviolence negatives the fact. And yet nonviolence is the highest religion. Truth is self-evident: nonviolence is its maturest fruit. It is contained in Truth, but as it is non-self-evident, a man may seek to interpret the shastras without accepting it. But
his acceptances of truth is sure to lead him to the acceptance of non-violence. Gandhi further holds that renunciation of the flesh is essential for realizing Truth. The sage who realized Truth found nonviolence out of the violence raging all about him and said: 'Violence is unreal, non-violence is real'. Realization of Truth is impossible without non-violence. Brahmancharya (celibacy), asteya (non-stealing), aparigraha (non-possession) are means to achieve ahimsa. Ahimsa is the soul of Truth. Man is a mere animal without it. A seeker after Truth will realize all this in his search for Truth and he will then have no difficulty in the interpretation of the shastras.

Gandhi finds the deeper meaning of all life’s activities in the teachings of the Gita. Gandhi says that in whatever position of life we may be, to whatever creed or religion we may belong to, the Gita teaching is unlimited in its scope. All that one has to do is to shift one's centre of individuality to the saksin, then alone one will go beyond all the dualities and struggles of life, and attain universality of outlook and breadth of heart. Gandhi foresaw that no state can ignore the ethical and spiritual welfare of the individual and of the nation; for man is rooted in divinity and his spiritual hunger cannot be satisfied by a soulless humanistic ethics, however lofty. 'True religion and true morality', said Gandhi, 'are inseparably bound up with each other'. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil'. If a change of heart has to take place in everyone of us, it can come only through a broad conception of Vedanta which Gandhi adopted in life, inspired by the teachings of Gita.  

Gandhi maintains that the central teaching of the Gita is detachment or abandonment of the fruit of action. This is taught through the illustration of war. But the real battlefield is the human mind, 'where the eternal dual between right and wrong goes on...''Hence, even when Lord Krishna urges Arjuna to fight, it should be interpreted as a moral fight; not a physical warfare. One who has attained a state of selflessness would have no desire to indulge in violence, because all violence cannot arise out of selflessness.

Towards the end of his life, Gandhi was more and more influenced by the opening verse of the Isopanisad which inculcated that things of the world should be enjoyed by renunciation. Gandhi wanted the rich men to hold their wealth in trust for the poor or give it up for them. This is the crux of the doctrine of trusteeship put forward by Gandhi. The idea contained in the Isavasya verse: 'Isavasyam idam sarvam kayasvaidhanam' is the cornerstone of Sarvodaya philosophy taught by Gandhi. In Gandhi's interpretation of the Gita, there is a marked emphasis on renunciation.  

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References

2 Gita, ii, 50
4 Gandhi, M.K., *Young India*, 6 August 1925, p. 274.