

Selfless Action and Social Change: Gandhi's Some Observations

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Received: 20 March 2026 / Accepted: 23 March 2026 / Published: 31 March 2026
Journal homepage: <https://anubodhan.org>

Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of karma offers a profound integration of spiritual ethics and social engagement. Rooted in the *Bhagavad Gītā's* doctrine of selfless action, Gandhi emphasized performing one's duties without attachment to personal gain, focusing instead on the moral and transformative value of the act itself. For Gandhi, karma was not merely an individual's spiritual discipline but a collective force capable of shaping social realities. He interpreted selfless action as a tool for non-violent resistance, seeing it as a moral obligation to confront injustice while remaining free from hatred or revenge. This understanding linked personal moral growth with broader societal transformation, where service to others became both a spiritual path and strategy for political change. By harmonizing inner discipline with active engagement, Gandhi transformed karma into a dynamic principle for building a just, equitable, and compassionate society. his approach continues to inspire movements for social justice, environmental stewardship, and peace, demonstrating that selfless action, grounded in truth and non-violence, can be a powerful catalyst for sustainable social change. This paper examines Gandhi's interpretation of karma, its philosophical roots, and its enduring relevance in contemporary struggles for moral and social reform.

Keywords: Karma, selfless action, social change, non-violence, spiritual ethics, *Bhagavad Gītā*.

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I

While we are aware of Gandhiji as a potent political figure, a peace messenger, and the patriarch of our country, there is much more to him than meets the eye, especially as we read through his works. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948), also referred to as "the Mahatma" or the Great Soul, once said that life without principles is like a ship without a rudder. A man without religion is synonymous with life without principles. Gandhi placed great emphasis on the role religion plays in a person's life. Gandhi felt that education is incomplete without the study of religion. In all its manifestations, religion is not only a valid field of study but also an essential component of human civilization and culture. Gandhi believed that studying religion was not only theoretical or academic but also practical and existential. Gandhi was interested in living faiths, and that is a sensible approach given how much we need it in these modern times. Gandhi's quest for Truth is a major theme of his autobiography, *The Stories of "My Experiments with Truth."* This "truth" is nothing more than "God" in his eyes; his profound acceptance of "*Ahimsā*," or "non-violence," is ultimately what makes this understanding so special. Hence, his well-known philosophy is, I oppose evil, not evildoers. Socrates once said, Virtue is Knowledge, on the other hand, Gandhi believed that Virtue is *Ahimsā* (Non-violence). Gandhiji's possession of some particular and technical characteristics that are characteristic of a Seeker pursuing *Yoga* is one such revelation. Simply expressed, yoga is a way towards surrendering our individual notions of "I" and "Me" and being one with everything and everyone in existence (in which we achieve a condition where there is neither "I" and "Me" nor "You," "It," and "They"). The word 'yoga,' has Sanskrit origins and means 'Union', union of Self and the Absolute. We have to realize that the familiar *Āsanas* (physical postures) and *Prānāyāma* (breathing exercises) are only a small component of *Yoga*. According to the Patanjali *Yoga Sutra*, there are eight sequential stages that one must go through in order to reach the state of 'Union'. These stages are as follows: of *Yama* (intra-personal ethics), *Niyama* (inter-personal ethics), *Āsana* (control over body), *Prānāyāma* (control over breath), *Pratyāhāra* (control over senses), *Dhāraṇā* (concentration act), *Dhyāna* (such as meditation), and *Samādhi* (a state of consciousness is all considered elements of the execution. The fundamental application of *Karma's* teachings from the *Gītā* cannot be found in a division between the components of good and the forces of evil. The *Gītā's* central declaration, however, around which all its other wisdom center, is that of a world constrained by action unless that activity is meant to be a sacrifice. The *Gītā* is a reform manifesto that is deeply ingrained in Indian tradition and influenced by the *itihāsic* (epochal) patterns of Indian history. The main conflict there is not about ritual, food, or a dramatic contrast between sin and sainthood; rather, it is about the more fundamental

conflict between engaging in worldly activities and activity and completely renunciation its relentless solicitations. The *Gītā* says:

“*nehābhikrama-nāśho ’sti pratyavāyo na vidyate
svalpam apyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*”

In this verse, Lord Krishna, explains the *Karma Yoga*. (i), no effort is wasted and (ii), He asserts that there is no risk of negative consequences. The *Gītā* places greater emphasis on having the proper mind-set than on escaping *Karma* in order to take the proper action. When someone cares about the outcome, they behave selfishly and in their own best interests, and they lose their sense of moral obligation. Therefore, Mahatma Gandhi believed that the most important thing we can do to live a virtuous life is to give up fruit. The *Karma-Yogi* by giving up the fruit of his actions does not lose it, but paradoxically gains it, declares Lord Krishna. We get what we plant; the fruit follows the desire. Gandhiji says that a *Karma-yogī* learns about perfection in terms of abilities and spiritual enlightenment through his own deeds and efforts. Self-rewarding is the satisfaction that comes from acting with good intentions and motivation. While pursuing his studies in England, Mahatma Gandhi initially became familiar with The *Gītā*. Two English brothers he befriended invited him to read it with them as they were avid readers. Gandhiji read the English version of the text first, then the Sanskrit translation, since he was not familiar with Sanskrit at the time. His evolution in terms of beliefs and precepts then started. He was struck by the lesson of *Karma-Yoga*, or the *Yoga* of action, which is discussed in the second chapter of The *Gītā* and relates to self-discipline both in thought and deed. He began daily readings of the *Gītā*. He studied it thoroughly even while he was imprisoned, and he eventually translated it into Gujarati. Mahatma Gandhi believed that without observing the concept of *Ahimsā*, the road of *Niskāma Karma* is unattainable, since we are tempted to refrain from using force or committing acts of violence when we have no desire to reap the consequences of our deeds. Their efforts are motivated by *Niskāma Karma*, which is typically the betterment of the underprivileged. Mahatma Gandhi is a well-known example of a *Karma-yogī* of the contemporary period, having dedicated his life to the pursuit of peace and harmony both nationally and internationally. Prejudices, temptations, and personal preferences didn't have much of an impact on him. He cleared his head of all worldly distractions in order to see India's issues and committed his altruistic devotion to helping his fellow citizens.

In a world where strong friendships and enmities influence most decisions, Gandhiji overcame his attachment to sin and desire to follow the road of *Niskāma Karma* or the fate of a *Karma-Yogi*. For the benefit of his fellow creatures, he behaved in accordance with the demands of space and time. He was therefore a sincere politician by profession and a true *Karma-yogī* by aim.

Karma-Yoga asks for a detached mind-set in which one fulfills one's responsibilities bravely, without questioning or, instead, desiring the outcome, and without letting outside influences influence one. Gandhiji also realized that everything he did was a part of the universe's divine process, which is guided by the cosmic consciousness's will. He was merely a tool of the divine plan, acting on his conscious awareness. The idea of *Niskāma Karma* may not seem important in today's environment since we are accustomed to looking for the benefit of our actions. However, Mahatma Gandhi was also a part of this universe, and Gandhiji offered humanity a fresh perspective and hope by practicing *Niskāma Karma*. The only person who can truly work for the well-being of humanity and accept the entire planet as his family is a true *Niskāma Karma-Yogi*. According to Gandhian ethics, moral action is defined as voluntary behavior carried out with self-control and discipline. Whether an activity results in happiness or pain, it is ethically right if it is carried out of a sense of divine obligation. An action has no moral value if the intent is not pure.

Ahimsā, an ethical virtue, must be upheld in thought, according to ancient Hindu scriptures. Mahatma Gandhi expanded on the idea of ahimsa, revitalizing the ancient meaning and successfully implementing it, especially in the political sphere. He bases his entire understanding of ahimsa on love. The Christian concept of love, the Buddhist twin concepts of *Karūnā* (kindness) and *Maitri* (hospitality), and the Jaina philosophy of the equality of all souls have all had a significant influence on the positive aspect of *Ahimsā*. All major religions, including Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, promote *Ahimsā*. He thus referred to it as the center of all religions. Religion teaches us to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do to those who wrong us, and pray for those who wrongfully exploit and persecute us. is etched firmly in Gandhi's memory.

II

The *Bhagavad Gītā* taught him the need for selfless action and renunciation for the results of action (*niskāma karma*). He thought that Islam was a religion of love, peace, compassion, and the brotherhood of all people after reading the Quran in translation. He discovered that moral principles are shared by all religions and serve as a symbol of their unification. He wrote in his memoirs that his father instilled in him a tolerance for all religions. He grew up in a deeply religious Vaisnavite family. According to him, God is one and only one, much as Advaita *Vedānta* describes Brahman as “*ekam eva advitam*”. He was a monist. Furthermore, according to Hindu philosophy, there is one absolute object from which all existence originates. According to him, the central idea of Hinduism is the conviction that all life is one, deriving from a single, all-encompassing source known variously as Allah, God, or ParamĪśvara. Every human has a concept of God in their own mind. His numerous incarnations

have led to varying interpretations. The concept of God varies between nations, faiths, and other contexts. It's possible that every one of us defines God differently. Apart from the various ways that people define God, there is one thing that is universally acknowledged: God is the highest reality and the ultimate power. He is a dynamic religious thinker who came to the conclusion that truth is the only thing that exists in reality. This deep conviction is the foundation of all his religious beliefs. His theological views are not dogmatic. He viewed religion as an embodiment of truth. Various religious perspectives represent distinct aspects of the same reality.

Gandhiji sees the various religions as either branches of one great tree or as lovely flowers from the same garden. As a result, despite being perceived and understood through equally flawed human instruments, they are equally true. The spiritual life of humans is elevated by religion. According to him, the major world faiths would work to bring about a life of restraint, selflessness, harmony, and peace among people in order to establish a kind of heaven on earth. There is no religion that is better or worse than another for any individual or group. Depending on a person's beliefs, ritual culture, and sect, religion can signify different things to different people. Gandhi's religion is based on *Ahimsā* and is a spiritual humanism and service to humanity. He realized truth via the practice of *Ahimsā*. The end and means paradox is one of Gandhi's most significant philosophical ideas. The two key ideas in his philosophy end and means have a significant impact on his theology of truth and *Ahimsā*. He took these two phrases very seriously, to the point where they became crucial to his ideology.

He saw *Ahimsā* as the means and Truth as the ultimate aim. It is nearly hard to separate and untangle *Ahimsā* and truth because of their extreme interdependence. Similar to a coin's two sides, they are a smooth, unstained metallic disc that is able to identify which side is the obverse and which is the reverse. Truth is the goal, and *Ahimsā* is the way to get there. *Ahimsā* is our highest responsibility since the means to be means must always be within our grasp. Eventually, if we maintain the means, we will definitely arrive at the destination. According to his philosophy, some significant goals are experiencing absolute truth, perceiving God directly, achieving *mokṣa*, or knowing oneself, and *Sarvodaya*, the highest good of all. Spirituality has a close relationship with all of these goals. Since these aims are moral and spiritual, the means must be pure. People attempt to simply accomplish their goals without considering the methods. An energetic or spiritual man considers the methods as well as the end. Gandhi believes that there are only true means.

Gandhi thought that only by using both ends and means in the proper way could man bring heaven or paradise to this planet. It is impossible to achieve a spiritual goal by non-spiritual means. It suggests that no means can justify a worthy end. Unlike Marxism and Machiavelli, he does not believe that the

means always justify the ends. Since ancient times, people have long debated the issue of means and ends. Every Indian philosophical school aims to determine the best way to reach the goal, which is pure happiness—or, to put it another way, liberation from all forms of suffering. In Indian ethics and philosophy, *mokṣa*—the ultimate end—is known as *paramapuruṣārtha*. To achieve this ultimate goal, ethical values must be followed and obeyed. They prioritize the means more highly. Gandhi shares the conventional viewpoint in emphasizing the method over the goal. He believed that the *Gītā's karma yoga* and the law of *karma* are the sources of both the concepts of end and means. One of the fundamental tenets of Hinduism is the law of *karma*. According to this theory, every action replicates its outcome. *Karma* ought to be carried out in a selfless manner. The means and the goal of an action are its results. Gandhi was undoubtedly a *karmayogi*—a man of action. *Gītā* has a big impact on his actions and thinking. He uses the *Gītā* as a daily reference book. Gandhi views the *Gītā* as the guidelines that it provides. ‘Renunciation for the fruits of action’ is the method.

Gandhi refers to the *Yoga* of the *Gītā* as *Anāsakti yoga* because of this. It is explicitly stated in *Anāsakti yoga* that a person who adheres to the *Gītā's* core teachings should walk the path of truth and non-violence. Such a votary, who experiences a state of happiness above all three *gunas*—*Rajas*, *Tamas*, and *Sttva* is referred to in the *Gītā* as *Sthitaprajñā* or *Triguṇatita*. Gandhi took up the *Anāsakti* practice and elevated it to the status of a *satyāgrahi*. In terms of ethics, metaphysics, and religion, *Ahimsā* is an unchangeable idea. Practically speaking, the idea of *Ahimsā* is far from perfect. During a battle, no one can observe ahimsa in its literal sense this is agreed in the *Gītā*. It is essential to live in order to preserve societal harmony and peace. Hindu texts had even approved the use of force in self-defense against an armed aggressor. It is impossible for a human to practice total or absolute nonviolence. There are some pursuits that demand violence. We ought to make an effort to reduce the use of force. Extreme violence needs to be completely disregarded. Even if the violent deed seems to be beneficial, it is only momentary and not long-lasting. Gandhi acknowledges that violence is acceptable in some situations. When given the option between violence and cowardice, he responded, I would recommend violence. Rather than continue to be the repugnant witness of disability, I would rather use force to defend nobility. According to him, absolute *Ahimsā* is the complete absence of *Himsā*, or animosity, hatred, and wrath stemming from ignorance, as well as an all-encompassing, understanding love for everyone. From the perspective of total *Ahimsā*, all forms of violence ought to be avoided. However, this kind of nonviolence is the ideal state, attained when speech, body, and mind are perfectly coordinated. For as long as we are physically alive, perfect non-violence is unattainable. In order for humans to survive, something must be killed, and harmful insects and animals must be kept at bay.

Violence should only be used in certain situations; otherwise, we should make an effort to refrain from using violence. That is Gandhi's point of view.

We know very well Gandhiji was effective in putting the non-violence norm into practice, this is called *Ahimsā*. *Ahimsā*, originating from the Sanskrit verb root *san*, signifies the act of killing. The term *Himsā* denotes a strong desire to cause harm, while the prefix *a-* negates this intention. Therefore, *A-himsā* literally translates to the absence of any desire to kill. In its truest sense, *Ahimsā* means to exist without causing harm; to be completely harmless, not only towards oneself and others, but towards all living beings. However, its implications go beyond this; it surpasses mere avoidance of violence and becomes a comprehensive way of life. *Ahimsā* stands in direct opposition to *Himsā*, which refers to the act of inflicting harm upon the vitalities (*prānas*) through the vibrations caused by passionate emotions that agitate the mind, body, or speech. The concept of *Ahimsā* extends to encompass all living beings, thus advocating for the protection of the environment, preservation of natural habitats, and adherence to vegetarianism. Buddhism and Jainism enforce absolute non-violence among their adherents.

III

In Hinduism, it represents the principle of refraining from causing injury to living beings. Many Hindus, particularly those residing in the southern regions of India, choose to abstain from consuming meat as a reflection of their commitment to not harm animals. For those who truly comprehend the essence of the *Gītā*, it imparts the wisdom of non-violence and the means to realize oneself through the physical body. Gandhi acquired the principle of non-violence through his wife when he attempted to impose his will upon her. Her unwavering resistance to his desires, coupled with her serene acceptance of the suffering caused by his foolishness, ultimately brought him shame and cured him of his belief that he was meant to dominate her. In the end, she became his teacher in non-violence. While *Ahimsā* generally refers to non-violence, Gandhi believed it held a much deeper, infinitely profound meaning. It signified refraining from offending anyone and harboring uncharitable thoughts, even towards those who may be considered enemies. To one who adheres to this doctrine, there are no enemies. A person who believes in the power of this doctrine finds that, as they near their ultimate goal, the entire world is at their feet. If you express your love – *Ahimsā* – in a way that deeply impacts your so-called enemy, they must reciprocate that love. This doctrine teaches us that we can protect the honor of those under our care by willingly sacrificing our own lives to those who would commit sacrilege. And that requires far greater courage than resorting to violence. My non-violence is unwavering and resolute.

It is stronger than any known metal, according to scientists. Non-violence, in its active state, entails conscious suffering. If non-violence is to spread and influence others, I must have greater control over my thoughts. A non-violent action, accompanied by non-violence in thought and speech, should never provoke a lasting violent reaction from the opponent. A non-violent warrior never leaves the battle. They fearlessly confront violence, never once harboring ill intentions. Their non-violence demands universal love and we are not excluded from it. It compels them to dedicate themselves to serving minorities. Their non-violence extends beyond mere kindness towards all living creatures. His devotion to non-violence surpasses all other things, whether they are ordinary or extraordinary. His belief in non-violence does not support the punishment of thieves, robbers, or even murderers. His commitment to truth and non-violence continues to grow, as he strives to embody these principles in his own life.

He has dedicated his life to serving India through the practice of non-violence, which he considers to be the foundation of Hinduism. His mission is to convert every Indian, including the English, and ultimately the entire world, to non-violence in order to regulate all aspects of mutual relations to be the political, economic, social, or religious. His non-violence does not allow for fleeing from danger and abandoning loved ones. He firmly states that non-violence is a creed that he must adhere to, whether he is alone or accompanied by others. His creed of non-violence is an incredibly powerful force. Since there is no room for ego and pride in *Ahimsā*, non-violence, it is essential for anyone claiming to be non-violent to practice humility in their daily routines. In this regard, Mahatma Gandhi himself declares, that if one possesses pride and egoism, they cannot be truly non-violent. Humility is indispensable for the practice of non-violence.

Gandhi's sole virtue that he wishes to embrace is truth and non-violence, which have been ingrained in society for centuries. The concepts of *Ahimsā* and truth are so intertwined that it is nearly impossible to separate them. They are like two sides of a coin or an unstamped metallic disc. However, *Ahimsā* serves as the means to achieve truth, which is the ultimate goal. Truth represents positivity, while non-violence negates negativity. Truth is self-evident, whereas non-violence is its most mature outcome. Non-violence is contained within truth but is not inherently self-evident. The pursuit of truth is based on the foundation of *Ahimsā*. I realize every day that this search is futile unless it is rooted in *Ahimsā*. The spirit of patriotism demands unwavering adherence to non-violence and truth. Truth and non-violence are perhaps the most influential forces in the world.

According to Gandhi, ahimsa was the noblest expression of truth. By combining truth with ahimsa, one can gain power and influence over the world.

Gandhi also proclaimed that truth is his religion, and *Ahimsā* is the only path to realizing it. The realization of truth, which involves recognizing the interconnectedness of all creation, embodies *Ahimsā*. When ahimsa is adopted as a means to attain absolute truth, it becomes a potent spiritual practice. Truth and nonviolence are not confined to secluded virtues but are applicable in all aspects of life, including forums, legislatures, and marketplaces. To Gandhi, truth is synonymous with God, and the only way to discover truth is through non-violence. He assured us that the practice of truth and nonviolence can bridge religious differences and enable us to appreciate the beauty in every religion. Complete independence can only be achieved to the extent that we embody truth and non-violence in our actions. Use truth as your foundation, non-violence as your tool, and reject anything that fails the test of truth and *Ahimsā* as incompatible with Hinduism.

Mahatma Gandhi's concept of *Satyāgraha* is rooted in the principle of Truth and emphasizes the importance of seeking and upholding Truth. According to Gandhi, nothing exists except for the Truth, and a person's existence is justified only through their devotion to what is true. While the general understanding of Truth suggests that one must speak the truth, for Gandhi, the concept of *Satya*/Truth encompasses more than just words. It extends to encompass one's thoughts and actions as well.

Satyāgraha, as envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi, combines the words '*Satya*' (Truth) and '*Agraha*' (insistence), and it entails following the path of Truth. It is a demonstration of Truth that does not seek revenge but appeals to the conscience of the oppressor, urging them to recognize what is true. *Satyāgraha* is a form of resistance, but it should not be mistaken for passivity. It is not a weapon of the weak; rather, it is a power that only the strong possess, as it requires intense and active engagement. *Satyāgraha* does not promote hatred or destruction; instead, it acknowledges the distinction between evil and those who commit evil acts. This recognition is a crucial aspect of *Satyāgraha*, as it understands that the oppressor is not the enemy but rather someone who is disconnected from the Truth and can be convinced, rather than coerced, to embrace the Truth.

Gandhi possessed a scientific mind-set, characterized by detachment, in his pursuit of truth. He titled his autobiography "*My Experiments with Truth*," which chronicled his endeavors to comprehend the absolute truth, which he equated with God. His laboratory consisted of his own conscience and the study of human psychology. According to Gandhi, self-realization involved a profound sense of unity with the universe and existence as a whole. The *Bhagavad Gītā* served as his primary guide in establishing this connection. The *Gītā* outlined a three-fold path, known as *Sādhana*, for attaining self-realization: *Jñāna Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, and *karma Yoga*.

Gandhi firmly believed that all three *yogas* were necessary for self-realization. However, *Karma Yoga* served as the foundation for the other two, as *Jñāna* and *Bhakti* could only be considered genuine and authentic if they withstood the test of *Karma*. Consequently, Gandhi adopted love in action as his means of self-realization. Gandhi emphasized the importance of selflessness and compassion in one's actions. He believed that true self-realization could only be achieved by actively engaging in the world and working towards the betterment of society. This concept of *Karma Yoga* requires individuals to detach themselves from personal desires and ego-driven motivations, and instead focus on the greater good.

In Gandhi's view, attachment to the limited ego and its biases hindered one's ability to see the truth and act in accordance with it. By cultivating detachment, individuals could free themselves from the constraints of their own self-interest and biases, allowing them to act as vessels for eternal truth. Just as water does not cling to lotus petals, *Karma Yogi* remain unaffected by their actions, performing them with a sense of duty and without seeking personal gain or recognition, for Gandhi, spirituality and religion were not separate from the practical aspects of life. He believed that true religious spirit could only be attained through serving humanity. By recognizing the divine in all of creation and treating every individual with love and respect, one could connect with God. Gandhi saw serving humanity as a means of serving God, as he believed that God could not be found separate from humanity.

Gandhi's love for God was not an abstract concept, but rather a love expressed through love for God's creation. He believed that to truly experience the universal and all-encompassing spirit of truth, one must love even the lowest beings as oneself. This love extended to all aspects of life, from the smallest acts of kindness to the larger movements for social justice.

IV

Gandhi's philosophy of *Karma Yoga* emphasized the importance of action, detachment, and love in achieving self-realization and connecting with the divine. By actively engaging in the world, cultivating detachment from personal desires, and treating all beings with love and respect, individuals could become vessels for eternal truth and serve humanity as a means of serving God. Gandhi believed that self-realization is not a solitary journey, but rather a collective endeavor. He emphasized the importance of community and the interconnectedness of all individuals. According to him, the realization of God and the understanding of one's true self can only be achieved through service to others. Gandhi advocated for the concept of "*Sarvodaya*," which means the upliftment of all. He believed that by serving others and working towards the betterment of society, individuals can transcend their own limitations and come closer to realizing their true selves.

Gandhi also stressed the significance of simplicity and renunciation in the pursuit of self-realization. He believed that material possessions and worldly desires only serve as distractions on the path to truth. By embracing simplicity and renouncing materialistic pursuits, individuals can detach themselves from the superficial aspects of life and focus on their inner journey towards self-realization. Furthermore, Gandhi believed that self-realization is not a destination, but a continuous process. He emphasized the importance of self-reflection and introspection in order to constantly evolve and grow spiritually.

Gandhi encouraged individuals to constantly question their beliefs and actions and to strive for self-improvement. Gandhi firmly believed that the ultimate goal of mankind is to attain a realization of God and an understanding of one's true self. This can only be achieved through the pursuit of truth, non-violence, service to others, simplicity, renunciation, and self-reflection. By aligning one's thoughts, words, and actions with these principles, individuals can embark on a transformative journey towards self-realization and liberation. Lord Krishna introduced the principles of *Karmayoga* in the *Gītā*, emphasizing the importance of performing actions with the right thought and intention. Our destiny is determined solely by our actions, or *Karmas*. Just as an arrow released from a bow will hit its target if aimed correctly, our actions will undoubtedly affect us based on the intention and thought behind them. It is crucial to understand the distinction between *Karma* (action) and *Akarma* (inaction). While the consequences of our actions are inevitable, it does not mean we should refrain from performing them altogether. Instead, we should carry out our actions with righteousness. Karma can be categorized into two types: *Sakāma Karma* (action with the desire for results) and *Niskāma Karma* (action without the desire for results). The philosophy of the *Gītā* advocates for the practice of *Niskāma Karma* to break free from the cycle of birth and death and achieve the ultimate goal.

Now, the question arises: how can one perform actions without desiring their fruits? According to Gandhiji, the *Gītā* provides an answer to this question. He regarded the *Gītā* as a Divine Message and believed that desire-less action entails renouncing the outcomes of our actions and dedicating all our activities to God, surrendering ourselves to Him both physically and spiritually. Gandhiji's entire life was built upon this philosophy of *Niskāma Karma*. He believed that we should not only act for the well-being of our loved ones but also for the entire world – including animals, the planet, and the Universe. He recognized that they were all creations of the same God, and it was humanity's duty to respect and honor His creation.

Gandhi's introduction to the *Gītā* in England was a transformative experience for him. It opened his eyes to the profound wisdom and guidance that the text offered. As he delved deeper into the teachings, he found himself

drawn to the second chapter, which emphasized the importance of *Karma yoga*, the *Yoga* of action, resonated deeply with Gandhi's own beliefs and values. It taught him the significance of disciplined action and the need to cultivate a focused and controlled mind. This concept became the cornerstone of his philosophy and activism. Inspired by the teachings of the *Gītā*, Gandhi made it a daily practice to read and reflect upon its verses. Even during his time in prison, he dedicated himself to studying the text in great detail. His commitment to understanding and embodying the principles of the *Gītā* was unwavering. Eventually, Gandhi took on the monumental task of translating the *Gītā* into Gujarati, his native language. In the introduction to his translation, he expressed his humility and acknowledged that it took him forty years of dedicated effort to truly grasp the essence of the *Gītā's* teachings. One of the most significant realizations Gandhi had during his journey with the *Gītā* was the inseparable connection between *Niskāma Karma* and *Ahimsā*. *Niskāma Karma*, or performing actions without attachment to the outcomes, was a crucial aspect of the *Gītā's* teachings.

Gandhi believed that this principle was intimately linked to non-violence. For Gandhi, true renunciation and the practice of *Ahimsā* were intertwined. He understood that when one is free from desires and expectations, the temptation to resort to forceful or violent means diminishes. By embracing the path of *Niskāma Karma*, Gandhi believed that individuals could cultivate a mindset of non-violence in every aspect of their lives. Gandhi's deep study and understanding of the *Gītā* played a pivotal role in shaping his philosophy of non-violence and his approach to activism. The teachings of the *Gītā* became the guiding principles that he lived by and that he used to inspire others in their own pursuit of truth and justice. He believed that by surrendering his ego and personal desires, he could align himself with the greater purpose of the universe. This mind-set allowed him to approach his work with a sense of humility and selflessness, always putting the needs of others before his own. Gandhi's dedication to *Karma-yoga* was evident in his daily life. He lived a simple and frugal lifestyle, rejecting material possessions and worldly pleasures. He believed that true happiness and fulfillment could only be found in serving others and working toward the development of society. His commitment to non-violence and peaceful resistance was also a reflection of his *Karma-yogī* mind-set. He understood that violence and aggression only perpetuated more violence, and instead advocated for peaceful means of protest and change. He believed that by embodying the principles of truth, love, and compassion, he could inspire others to follow a similar path and bring about lasting transformation. Gandhi's *Karma-yogī* spirit was not limited to his public life but also extended to his personal relationships. He treated everyone with respect and equality, regardless of their social status or background. He

believed in the inherent worth and dignity of every individual and worked tirelessly to eradicate discrimination and injustice.

V

In conclusion, the observations of Gandhi's *Karma-yogis* performing righteous actions without egoism cannot be overstated. Mahatma Gandhi's life and work serve as a shining example of the power of selfless service and the transformative potential of *Karma-yoga*. By dedicating ourselves to the betterment of others and aligning our actions with a higher purpose, we can create a more just, peaceful, and harmonious world. In today's modern society, where personal gain and self-interest often take precedence, the significance of the *Niskāma Karma* principle may seem diminished. The focus on individual success and material wealth can overshadow the importance of selfless action and service to others. However, Mahatma Gandhi, a prominent figure who lived in the same world as us, demonstrated the power and relevance of *Niskāma Karma* through his actions. Gandhi's life and teachings serve as a beacon of hope, reminding us that true fulfillment and happiness lie in selfless service and the betterment of humanity. He believed that only those who embody the true spirit of *Niskāma Karmayogi*, individuals who work towards the betterment of humanity without any attachment to personal gain, can bring about real change and make a lasting impact. According to Gandhian ethics, moral action is characterized by voluntary performance with a disciplined mind and intention. It is not driven by the desire for personal gain or the pursuit of happiness. Instead, it is carried out as a divine duty, regardless of the resulting happiness or suffering. The true value of an action lies in the purity of intent and the selflessness with which it is performed.

Gandhi's philosophy emphasizes the importance of considering the entire world as one's own family. This broad perspective encourages individuals to extend their compassion and service beyond their immediate circle, embracing all of humanity. By embodying the principles of *Niskāma Karma*, individuals can transcend their own self-interest and work towards the betterment of society as a whole. In a society that often prioritizes personal gain and individual success, Gandhi's example serves as a reminder of the power and significance of selfless action. His life demonstrated that true fulfillment and happiness can be found in serving others and working towards the greater good. By embracing the principles of *Niskāma Karma*, individuals can contribute to a more compassionate and harmonious world, where the well-being of all is valued above personal gain, no one can attain the ideals of *Karma-Yoga* without relinquishing their ego, a task that can only be accomplished through dedicating oneself to selfless service towards humanity. This service can begin within the confines of one's own home, extend to social circles, and ultimately encompass the entire world. It is not necessary to possess wealth and riches in order to

offer selfless service; one can serve humanity solely with their body and mind - through their actions and intentions. If one encounters a destitute and sick individual lying on the roadside, one should possess enough compassion to tend to their needs with a pure heart. This act of kindness comes at no cost. God is more pleased with such service towards the deprived and helpless than with thousands of acts of worship.

Mahatma Gandhi embodied this spirit of selfless service throughout his life. There is an incident where he brought a leper named *Parchure Shāstri* to his *Sevāgram Āshram* and selflessly tended to his wounds, even washing them, until he recovered. Gandhi had no fear of contracting the infection himself. His actions brought him inner joy, which served as his reward. His sole philosophy was to provide the same selfless service that he would be grateful to receive from others. It is said that the more one gives, the more one aligns themselves with the cosmic energy that only knows how to give. "To give" is the divine law. Selfless service can only be carried out by an individual who sees God in all those around them.

India's fight for independence was bestowed upon him by a higher power, and he was unwilling to embrace anything he deemed unethical. He had no hatred towards anyone and advocated against hating individuals, but rather the evil within them. He stood alone among politicians in his interpretation of the *Gītā*, viewing it as a metaphorical battle between right and wrong within the human psyche. The sacred battlefield of *Kurūkṣetra* exists not in the physical realm, but on the moral plane of the human mind. Gandhiji tirelessly struggled to overcome his negative qualities, fears, and aggressions, while simultaneously nurturing his positive qualities. He candidly acknowledged all of this in his autobiography, "My Experiments with Truth". He never preached anything that he himself could not practice. As a true practitioner of *Karma Yoga*, he dedicated his life to the pursuit of truth and righteousness, aiming for spiritual enlightenment through selfless service, known as *Niskāma Karma*. He understood that only a pure mind can guide pure actions.

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