

GCE A LEVEL



WJEC A-LEVEL
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

A large background image showing the silhouette of Mahatma Gandhi in profile, facing right. He is wearing his characteristic round glasses and is positioned against a sky with a purple and blue gradient, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The bottom of the image shows the dark silhouette of a rock or ground.

Theme 1 B:

A comparison of the contributions made to Hinduism by Mahatma Gandhi and Shri Paramahansa Ramakrishna: Gandhi

Contents

Glossary Key Terms	3
Conviction and belief in Advaita Vedanta	4
Bhagavad Gita: 18:52-53	5
Satyagraha and brahmacharya, their interpretation and application	6
Interaction between his political stance and religious beliefs	8
Self-rule for India	10
Opposition to untouchability	11
Opposition to partition	14
Belief in a universalist religion	16
Issues for discussion	17
Bibliography (for books not already referred to in the document):	18
Other Useful Resources	18

Glossary Key Terms

Advaita Vedanta – Non-dual Vedanta which teaches that atman and Brahman are identical. One of the 6 ‘Darshans’ (or schools) of Vedantic philosophy.

Brahmacharya – The student ashrama – marked by devotion to one’s guru and celibacy.

jnana – Experiential knowledge of Brahman.

Upanishads – The section of the Vedas that deals with the philosophical principles underlying the practices documented in the Vedas. The most famous Upanishads, for example, the Chandogya or the Brihadaranyaka, speak of the inherent unity of atman and Brahman, and delineate a monist philosophy.

Bhagavad Gita – meaning ‘The Celestial Song’; the discourse between the Avatar Krishna and the warrior Prince Arjuna in the Hindu epic ‘The Mahabharata’.

ahimsa – the virtue or principle of ‘non-harming’.

Sarvodaya – Sanskrit term meaning ‘universal upliftment’; Gandhi’s socio-political ideal.

Satyagraha – Sanskrit term meaning ‘Truth Insistence’; Gandhi’s ethical activism.

Swaraj – Swaraj is an ancient Sanskrit term, composed of ‘swa’ meaning ‘self’ and ‘raj’, which means ‘rule’. Swaraj means ‘self-rule’ or ‘self-restraint’

Conviction and belief in Advaita Vedanta

Mahatma Gandhi is arguably the most famous follower of Advaita Vedanta, one of the classical Hindu paths to self-realisation. The name, 'Advaita' means 'non-duality', signifying that this is the path for those who see the true self (atman) as the same as the infinite metaphysical reality (Brahman). It is called 'Vedanta' as it traces its roots back to the original Vedanta, the Upanishads. As a living tradition, Advaita Vedanta incorporates the teaching of the Upanishads, as consolidated in the Brahma Sutras, and expounded further in the Bhagavad Gita, in a unified interpretation.

Advaita Vedantins seek spiritual liberation through knowledge (or *nana*) of their true identity of atman, experienced as Brahman. Since Advaita Vedanta asserts that the 'spirit-self' within each living entity is the same in everyone as well as identical to the universal eternal Brahman, it is a potentially limitless experience of 'oneness' which unifies all beings; one in which the divine is in every being, and in which all existence is a single divine Reality. The deep drive to achieve this spiritual unity and liberation holds a crucial key to a deeper understanding of Mahatma Gandhi. It unlocks his relationship both with his personal Hindu faith and with the deeply held socio-political convictions that spurred him to change the course of 20th century India.

Bhagavad Gita: 18:52-53

Beginnings

Gandhi first read the Bhagavad Gita as a 20 year old law student in London, where the book was being studied by the London Theosophical society. In his autobiography, he describes this first encounter as it “stimulated in me the desire to read books on Hinduism, and disabused me of the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition.”

The Gita is an extract taken from the Hindu Scripture, ‘The Mahabharata’, occurring as a dialogue between Krishna, a fully self-realised Avatar and Prince Arjuna, a heroic, but troubled soul. Krishna sets out the multiple paths and clear hallmarks of a Yogi, one who seeks to embody union with Brahman.

As well as a different presentation of Hindu beliefs from those taught in Colonial India, this first reading of the Bhagavad Gita also showed Gandhi a different representation of a Hindu, as a spiritually and ethically evolved master of self-discipline (Yogi). This description left a deep impression on Gandhi (key quote).

One becomes fit to attain Brahman when he or she possesses a purified intellect and firmly restrains the senses, abandoning sound and other objects of the senses, casting aside attraction and aversion. Such a person relishes solitude, eats lightly, controls body, mind, and speech, is ever engaged in meditation, and practices dispassion. Free from egotism, violence, arrogance, desire, possessiveness of property, and selfishness, such a person, situated in tranquillity, is fit for union with Brahman (i.e. realization of the Absolute Truth as Brahman).

Bhagavad Gita Chapter 18: 52-53

Whilst the Upanishads focus on Jnana-yoga (the path of insight), the Gita includes Bhakti Yoga (the path of devotion) and most strongly of all, Karma yoga (the path of action/service). What resonated for Gandhi about Advaita Vedanta was firstly that it emphasised the underlying unity of all humanity, irrespective of nationality, religion and social background at a time when these factors were used by social and political elites to separate and subjugate people. Secondly the Gita opened up the vibrant possibility for any soul in any walk or circumstance of life to aspire to the highest levels of self-development as an action-yogi, and thence to whole-being liberation.

He resolved to dedicate himself to living this aspiration.

Satyagraha and brahmacharya, their interpretation and application

Brahmacharya

Shortly after qualifying as a barrister, Gandhi went to work in South Africa. He had begun striving to become a Karma Yogi which he described as taking ‘no relish for sensual pleasures and keeping oneself occupied with such activities as ennoble the soul [to] deliver the self from the bondage of the body’. This led to him taking on more and more of the Yamas or ‘specified virtues’ of a Yogi, including ahimsa, satya, aparigraha and brahmacharya in what his secretary Desai described as ‘making every moment of his life a conscious effort to live the message of the Gita’.

Brahmacharya is often translated as either the practice of ‘celibacy’ or ‘studentship’, the first of the four ideal life-stages (or ashramadharma). In fact, Gandhi explains brahmacharya as “fully and properly understood, it means search for Brahman or God. It signifies control of all senses, at all times, and at all places in thought, word and deed. It thus includes, yet transcends sexual restraint; it embraces restraint in diet, emotions and speech. It rules out hate, anger, violence and untruth”.

For Gandhi, a brahmacharya lifestyle was the closest match to the Gita’s definition of a Karma yogi, and so the ideal vehicle for testing and developing both the spiritual ‘muscles’, and physical self-discipline of a Karma yogi. He spent the rest of his life living out these self-testing practices.

Satyagraha

When Gandhi entered South African society, it was starkly segregated by “skin colour, class, religion and profession”. Gandhi recounted his own first experience of this segregation as one of “the most creative experiences of my life”. Whilst travelling on business by train, despite being smartly dressed and presenting a first class train ticket, a passenger had him forcibly evicted after he politely refused to move to third class. More than the inconvenience, or even the indignity, he was struck by the dishonesty or untruthfulness (asatya) in allowing himself to be treated in this way. He resolved to follow a key Gita teaching: Krishna’s exhortation to Arjuna to act. (BG Ch 2:31).

Seeing thine own duty thou shouldst not shrink from it: for there is no higher good.

Bhagavad Gita Chapter 2 verse 31

His experience demonstrated the systemic mistreatment of his countrymen and a clear choice, to either run away or stay and act. He checked the terms of purchase of his railway ticket, began unravelling the truth of what had occurred, and in standing against the injustice, took his first steps towards what would become ‘satyagraha’.

Gandhi coined the term 'satyagraha' from two Sanskrit words, 'satya' meaning truth (or the practice of truthfulness) and 'graha' meaning 'firm or insistent hold'. So satyagraha is truth-insistence. Its power comes from taking a stand that refuses to compromise when pressured by 'untruth'. Truth in Hindu philosophy is ultimate reality, the sacred state of Brahman itself as Gandhi explains in the key quote. It is revealing that Gandhi gave a spiritual name to a worldly movement, showing how deeply interconnected the religious and social were, both to him and to his commitment to live by Karma yogi principles in the 'real world'.

The word Satya is derived from Sat, which means 'Being'. Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why Sat or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God than to say God is Truth.

Gandhi M.K. 'The selected works Vol. 5', Independently Published, (2018), ISBN:9781983187018, p.68.

Ahimsa – application of Satyagraha

Gandhi's methods for implementing satyagraha were equally faith-based. Satyagraha seeks to confront and overcome wrong-doing as a form of 'harmfulness', by presenting its fundamental opposite, love, as the essence of divine truth, and hence a more powerful force. Thus ahimsa (another of the Yogic virtues) as an active expression of love was a crucial component of satyagraha. He explained 'Ahimsa is the means, Truth is the end'. It is the confronting that takes courage and the resisting retaliating with violence that takes strength. The two methods Gandhi used were 'civil disobedience' and 'non-co-operation' both of which allow him to act authentically based on his beliefs in a way that disrupts the systemic wrong doing. It was a highly effective way of getting himself arrested by being sufficiently disruptive but without having to hurt anyone.

Interaction between his political stance and religious beliefs

Gandhi published his ideas for peaceful political engagement powered by religious conviction whilst still in South Africa. His publication, “Ethical Religion”, introduced the term satyagraha, in describing any gulf between word and action as untruth. He felt that the majority of people, by passively tolerating injustice and discrimination were co-operating with wrong-doing. He agreed with Thoreau, on the value of civil disobedience. As a Karma yogi, Gandhi sought to establish harmony between words, beliefs and acts, in a time when institutions of state, church and politics had split-personalities. He wrote

“An ethical idea is like an architect's plan. The plan shows how the building should be constructed; but it becomes useless if the building is not raised accordingly. Similarly, an ethical idea is useless so long as it is not followed by suitable action. There are many who memorize moral precepts and preach sermons, but they neither practise them nor do they mean to do so.”

Gandhi M.K. ‘Ethical Religion’, CreateSpace, (2016), ISBN:9781530107018.

This clearly demonstrates that for Gandhi, to have religious beliefs was to be socially and politically engaged and active.

Whilst Gandhi’s religion-led activism is famous for opposing systemic social injustice and political tyranny, he was equally keen to nurture alternative systems in line with his beliefs, and experimented with many social and philosophical ideas. He found inspiration in Ruskin’s ‘Unto the Last’, which spoke of the well-being of individuals and society, equal dignity for all types of work and the life-enhancement of performing manual work. These ideas deeply resonated with Gandhi’s spiritual belief in the divinity of every atman, the interdependence of all humanity and the divine nature of action.

This inspired him to investigate how his beliefs could be directly translated and applied as social activism. In 1904, outside Durban he set up the first of his farming communes where there were no servants, every one worked whether in carpentry or bread-baking, all participated and were treated with equal dignity. He named this progressive adaptation of his beliefs as sarvodaya, ‘universal uplifting’. The Sanskrit terminology again signifies Gandhi’s signature blend of spiritually-motivated politics and politically engaged spirituality.

Gandhi’s religious beliefs not only powered his political stance, they equipped him with the necessary personal resilience. In Young India Magazine of 1925 he wrote: *“When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the Bhagavad Gita and find a verse to comfort me”*. Satyagraha is underpinned by verses such as Chapter 2 verse 38

Hold alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, and gird up thy loins for the fight: so doing thou shalt not incur sin.

Bhagavad Gita Ch 2 ver 38

It describes Yogic battle as 'sinless' due to its focus on selfless righteousness in action, rather than for personal acquisition of wealth, power or vengeful destruction of others. Krishna advises Arjuna to be unattached to the outcome, win or lose, to engage selflessly in righteous battle, because it is the right thing to do, elevating the battle to a form of Sewa.

Gandhi clarified his own stance on the role of ahimsa in conflict, in later years, as "in a choice between cowardice and violence, choose violence", emphasising that non-violent opposition is actually the more courageous option. This desire not to harm highlights another hallmark of the Vedantic philosophy fuelling Gandhi's political activism: seeing the same divine atman in all people, including those of different religions, social classes and even his opponents such as the Colonial British and South African Governments. His battle was always with wrong-doing rather than wrong-doers.

Self-rule for India

Gandhi went to South Africa convinced that ‘the British Empire existed for the welfare of the world’. His response to discriminatory laws granting European visitors privileges denied to resident Indian workers was to campaign for citizenship equality under Empire. However his evidence gathering revealed the impact of Colonial Rule on the livelihood and well-being of India and Indians and so in 1906 he finally called for Indian self-rule or Swaraj. He wrote *“British people seem to be obsessed by the demon of commercial selfishness”* (‘Essential Gandhi’, page 118). This quote reveals his Hindu approach, where the ‘enemy’ was neither British people nor even the British Government, but rather the ‘demon’ of commercial selfishness itself, and the harm it caused. In contrast to the sarvodaya ideal of mutually supportive labour, he saw the over-riding profit focus as the reason why *‘India is exploited in the interests of foreign capitalists’* and realised that India would never thrive whilst under such rule. Mirroring his South African strategy, and in line with the ethics of war from the Gita, Gandhi began his fight to free India of immoral British rule, rather than to defeat or humiliate Government officials.

As with other Sanskrit terms used by Gandhi, ‘swaraj’ holds deep religious insights. He equated India’s colonial bondage and yearning for freedom with an atman’s material entrapment whilst yearning for liberation. He believed India was enslaved as long as it believed itself to be and Britain could only suppress and rule India, whilst Indians accepted and deferred to its authority. He believed cultivating inner freedom would lead Indians to outer freedom and as people acquired individual and collective dignity, they would insist on their rights, and nobody could hold them in bondage. Thus as the satyagraha for self-rule was launched in 1919, Gandhi exhorted Indians to practice self-restraint through peaceful non-co-operation with the British authorities, with all the discipline of a Karma yogi seeking moksha.

“Power resides in the people; they can use it at any time. This philosophy rests inside an individual, who has to learn to be master of his own self, and spreads upwards to the level of his community which must be dependent only on itself, and so on.”

Gandhi, M. K. ‘Indian Home Rule’. Reprint Franklin Classics (2018), ISBN:9780353240070.

Gandhi summarised the fundamental principle as “It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves”. This is a key feature of Advaita Vedanta, in that it does not see divine authority as being ‘up there’, making rules or judgements. Instead its focus is on the birthright of a person to be free to act and take responsibility for himself and his impact on wider society. This was applying ancient dharma principles to a contemporary context.

Opposition to untouchability

Based on Advaita Vedanta and Karma yoga, Gandhi's Sarvodaya movement, advocated equal dignity for all irrespective of their trade, valued manual work as divine action, and viewed collective flourishing as key to individual flourishing. Gandhi set up Sarvodaya farms, ashrams, and reinvigorated villages to pursue their traditional crafts. He vehemently rejected Casteism and Untouchability as not only against sarvodaya but also not part of Hinduism, despite their entrenchment in Indian society. Gandhi wrote an extensive paper called 'Varna and Caste' explaining Indian meanings of Varna and Jati, contradicting the contemporary interpretations that the British-administered Government had enshrined in 'Hindu Law'.

What I want, what I am looking for and what I should delight in dying for is the eradication of untouchability, root and branch... If untouchability is rooted out it will not only purge Hinduism of a terrible blot, but its repercussions will be world-wide; my fight against untouchability is a fight against the impurity in humanity.

Tendulkar, D 'Mahatma', Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Govt of India, (2016), . ISBN:9788123021515, p. 209

Jati

According to Gandhi, ancient Indian people lived in tight-knit villages of interdependent trade groups or *jatis*. The term 'jati' referred to a local family-group rather than an individual, and often described its contribution in a co-operative arrangement where commitment and expertise were passed from one generation to the next. Jati culture was pragmatic, fluid and responsive to local needs, generating a diversity of colloquial jati-names across states, languages and landscapes.

The Rig-Veda suggests an ethics of co-operative *collective flourishing*, as envisioned by Gandhi, was in use since Vedic times and allowed the peaceful co-existence of a diversity of social groups.

"being united in the same place, they are of one mind; they strive not, nor do they break the Gods' eternal statutes, and injuring none, move with wealth."

Rig Veda vii.76.5

The stigmatising of any jati as 'unclean' contradicts ancient Hindu scriptures such as Patanjali's Yoga Sutras 2:31, which explicitly includes all jatis in the practice of the yogic virtues including cleanliness and purity. This view, that had become corrupted over centuries, is what Gandhi wanted to revive.

“The yogic virtues [which include cleanliness] are universal, irrespective of jati (social group), time-frame, location and circumstances”.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutra Number 2 Verse 31

Varna

Varna according to the Gita is an individual's spiritual motivation or outlook on life based on personality traits and behaviour.

In any group:

- some people are motivated to serve the greater good (as advisors, leaders or producers)
- whilst the majority are motivated by personal comfort.

In Vedic times, the former were trained in accordance with their disposition and then known as 'twice-born', signifying any birth or jati role was replaced with responsibility to perform specialised services for the benefit of others such as Healer (Brahmin), or leader (Kshatrya), etc.

However, over time, Gandhi felt the desire to selflessly serve, had become replaced with personal ambition under outside rulers, leading to the roles becoming hereditary privilege rather than based on personal merit.

'Physicians serve the society and rested content with what it gave them, now they have become traders and even a danger to society.'

Gandhi, M. K. 'Varna and Caste' from 'My Religion' Collected Papers, Navjivan Trust, (2011), ISBN:9788172291693.

According to colonial era scholar Susan Bayly, the 19th Century British Census team allocated a Jati to every citizen despite many not having one, as it was such a fluid term. Whatever Jati was assigned was then allocated within an all-India 'Four-Varna' hierarchy by adapting parts of an archaic (Smriti) scripture called the Manusmriti. They called this new nationwide, hereditary register 'The Caste System', and ranked every citizen accordingly. By 1901 every family had an assigned 'religion' and if it was 'Hindu', they also had a family Varna and Jati, now officially renamed as 'caste and sub-caste'. This became significant as it was used for lucrative government job applications and for acquiring status rather than to serve community. Gandhi was deeply conscious that Casteism not only went against his own Advaita Vedanta beliefs, but was also a corruption of the Hindu philosophy of Varna and was poisoning India.

“Varna has nothing to do with caste. Down with the monster of caste that masquerades in the guise of Varna! This travesty of Varna has degraded Hinduism and India.”

Gandhi, M. K. ‘Varna and Caste’ from ‘My Religion’ Collected Papers, Navjivan Trust, (2011), ISBN:9788172291693.

Dalits

Vedic scholars describe ‘outcastedness’ as a temporary state, linked to unvirtuous conduct, such as stealing, by an individual rather than branded collectively on a jati. However in 1901 when the British Jati-Varna construct had been in place for a few decades, Risley and his census clerks removed from the ‘Sudra Caste’, the poorest and those the Government called the ‘criminal classes’ by virtue of their inability to pay Government tax, and put them in a newly constructed ‘fifth Caste’ which they named ‘Untouchables’. This permanently linked their poverty-stricken plight directly to an assumption of Brahmin purity-based oppression, rather than the exploitative land tax laws of both the Mughal and British rule eras, to which post-colonial scholars such as John McLane attribute the socio-economic decimation of landless families.

Gandhi disputed the term ‘Untouchables’ as demeaning and divisive and went on hunger strike to object. He argued, based on his Advaitin principles, for an inclusive India, where all Indians valued each other, irrespective of their wealth or status, and where the poorest of every jati and region would be locally uplifted into mainstream society through sarvodaya. Ambedkar took the opposite view, renamed this constructed social class Dalits (meaning Broken People) and encouraged a new national Dalit identity. A highly gifted politician of Dalit background himself, he used the Brahminical oppression theory enshrined in the legally defined Caste System, to launch an anti-Brahmin, grievance-based political activism. This highlighted and publicised the terrible plight and atrocious prejudice that some Dalits were experiencing, but also perpetuated the view that India’s poorest were trapped in an oppressive Hindu Varna-based ‘caste system’.

In selecting the ancient Hindu village model to represent an ideal for free India, Gandhi chose an Indian governance style pre-dating the administrative land-focussed mechanisms of both Mughal and British Empires. As an Indian solution, the Sarvodaya movement was intended to restore self-esteem and economic stakeholding to every Indian citizen irrespective of their current or historical status.

Opposition to partition

When the self-rule movement began in 1901, the Muslim upper classes became concerned at the notion of being governed by a Hindu majority. Many were also concerned, as wealthy landowners, at the proposal to address India's wealth imbalance by re-distributing land rights, across all religions. In order to protect Muslim interests, the Aga Khan and others, established the Muslim League in 1906.

In the post-WWI Indian Council, the Muslim league requested separate representation, whereby Muslims would elect Muslim representatives, Hindus for Hindu representation, etc. Gandhi who enjoyed support from Hindus and Muslims objected, but the British agreed, leading to formation of a new group, the Hindu Mahasabha in response to protect Hindu interests in 1915. As Gandhi feared, this sowed the seeds for a full-blown gulf between Hindus & Muslims and despite his best efforts, became a damaging feature of Indian politics, the manipulation of which led to tension and violence exploding periodically in a previously peaceful population.

As with his other campaigns, Gandhi believed in fighting on the side of right principles, rather than securing vested interests or defending power structures. He was as empathic and supportive of the well-being of Muslims as Hindus, and believed self-ruled India's future lay in healing the rift that had developed between them. Gandhi withdrew from politics to directly address Hindu-Muslim unity, including a 21 day fast based at the home of a staunch Muslim supporter.

'it is impossible to separate us into two nations'

Fischer, L. 'Essential Gandhi', Vintage Books, (2002), ISBN:9781400030507.

After WW2 the Muslim League campaigned for a separate Muslim homeland to be created from the Muslim majority areas. Gandhi upheld the Hindu ideal of 'Unity in Diversity', and wanted Congress to reject partition rather than have the British enshrine 'an absolute evil' (he equated it to submitting to Hitler), by creating two hostile countries. He saw this as allowing 'hatred' to win and fought it like an enemy, seeking a multicultural, multi-religious, secular and tolerant, unified nation.

To prevent Partition, he had to prove that Hindus and Muslims could live together in peace and so campaigned against both Hindutva (Seeking a Hindu Nation) and Partition (seeking two nations), as well as against violence; Fischer ('The Life of Mahatma Gandhi') describes how "he felt the suffering of those who inflicted violence as much as its victims..." and so "he pressured Hindus for concessions" (based on their Hindu principles), even when provoked. Gandhi pressed Hindus to higher standard of recompense of wrong-doing, such as rebuilding Muslim homes, as key to his mission to 'heal' India towards a viable united state.

Customs and cultures of waves of newcomers had blended across religions, such that in states such as Bengal and Punjab, appearance and language of Hindus and Muslims were practically identical. Until the early 20th century, Indians lived peacefully in intertwined multi-faith neighbourhoods across the country. Muslims were divided

between Gandhians & Jinnah-supporters. Bengal & Punjab were divided to keep their non-Muslim parts in India, as Pakistan was created.

Gandhi did not celebrate the 15th August as the state of the nation mattered more than independence to him. India was still in the grip of the divisions he had wished to heal and Partition caused 100,000s of deaths & 15 million refugees, in the largest migration in history. Afterwards, unrest continued and Gandhi fasted for unity 'until death' as a direct appeal to 'the conscience of all, Hindus, Moslems of India & Pakistan'. When he had Hindu assurance that Muslims who had chosen to stay in Delhi were safe, he broke his fast. However this strategy cost him his life, as twelve days later, a Hindu activist assassinated him for favouring Muslims over Hindus.

Belief in a universalist religion

Gandhi's political stance for an inclusive multi-faith India was based on his essentially Universalist view of religion.

'After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that [1] all religions are true; [2] all religions have some error in them; [3] all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives.'

Gandhi M.K. 'The selected works Vol. 5 – Voice of Truth', Independently Published, (2018), ISBN:9781983187018.

The first two points in Gandhi's quote illustrate a Hindu form of universalism known as pluralism. His first point is found in a Rig-Veda hymn: *"Truth is One, though the sages know it variously"* and the second echoes a quote from Sri Krishna an avatar of the Deity Vishnu stating: *"As people approach me, so I receive them. All paths lead to me"*. Hinduism accepts degrees of truth across other religions, as it recognises a pluralism that is not just within Hinduism but within Humanity. Hinduism perceives everyone who prays as *"worshipping the same God, whether one knows it or not"*. The third point echoes the Vedic mantra *"Vasudev Katumbakum – the world is my family"*. Gandhi campaigned relentlessly to privilege this universalist position over any personal or Hindu concerns as a vehicle for peace. That said, he was very clear that his own religion suited him the best. *"My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith; therefore no thought of conversion is possible"*.

Gandhi's universalism allowed him to revere and respect other religions whilst being able to denounce and resist what followers of those religions might do in its name. The Bhagavad Gita takes a scenario from the epic Mahabharata to give deep guidance on how to do the right thing when faced with powerful 'wrong-doers', it emphasises the need to act, but from love and a service intention for highest outcome. This principle is applicable across all political and religious systems. It is no co-incidence that this text was referenced by such world-famous rule-challenging non-Hindu heroes as Dr Martin Luther-King, Nelson Mandela, as well as Gandhi himself.

As a Karma yogi, Gandhi lived by his spiritual truth and acted as needed to oppose himsa (harmfulness) and asatya (untruth) within himself, other Hindus, and followers of other faiths around him. His outstanding contribution has been in reminding Hindus that the power of these teachings is not just internal or philosophical, thus revitalising Hinduism as a force for disrupting and overcoming adharmic power structures and doing universal good in the world.

Issues for discussion

In what ways did Gandhi's views lead him to campaign as fiercely for the welfare of Muslims as Hindus?

Rank the following principles in order of importance to Gandhi: ahimsa, satyagraha or sarvodaya

How and why is the Bhagavad Gita so relevant to political activism?

Useful Resources

<https://resources.wjec.co.uk/Pages/ResourceSingle.aspx?rlid=2941>

WJEC Unit 3E: Scheme of Work

Bibliography (for books not already referred to in the document)

Fischer, L. 'Essential Gandhi', Vintage Books, (2002), ISBN:9781400030507.
Fischer, L. 'The Life of Mahatma Gandhi', Vintage (2015), ISBN:9781784700409.
Flood, G., 'An Introduction to Hinduism', Foundation Books, (2004), ISBN:8175960280.
Gandhi M.K. 'The selected works Vol. 5', Independently Published, (2018), ISBN:9781983187018.
Gandhi M.K. 'Ethical Religion', CreateSpace, ISBN:9781530107018.
Gandhi, M. K. 'Indian Home Rule'. Reprint Franklin Classics (2018), ISBN:9780353240070.
Jamison, I., 'Hinduism', Philip Allan Updates, (2006), ISBN:1844894207.
Rodrigues, H., 'Introducing Hinduism', Routledge, (2016), ISBN:0415549663.

Websites

http://wps.pearsoncustom.com/wps/media/objects/2426/2484749/chap_assets/documents/doc32_2.html

Gandhi speaks against the Partition of India

<http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/mahatma-gandhi-books.php>

The Gandhi Sevagram Ashram (founded by Gandhi in 1936)