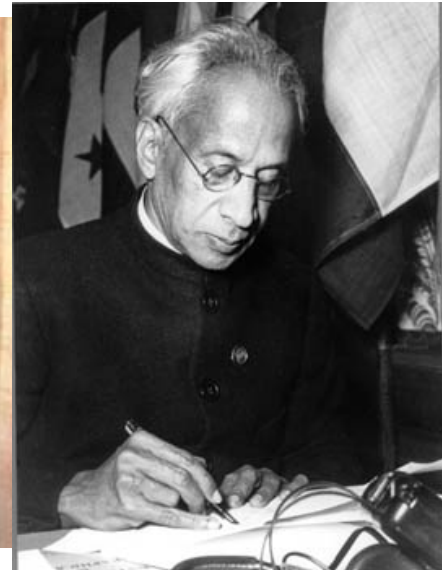
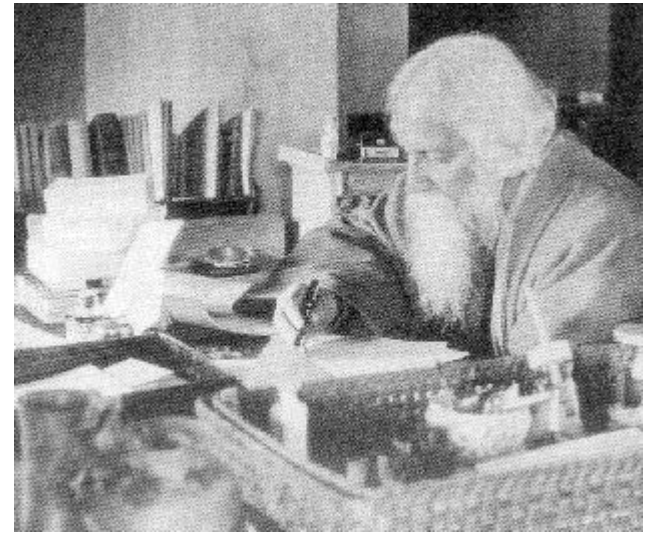
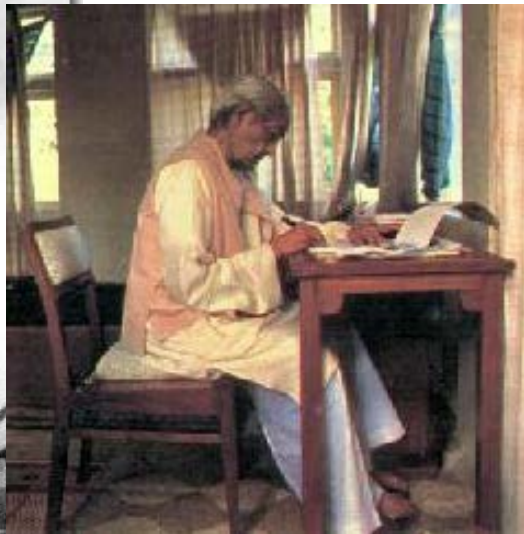
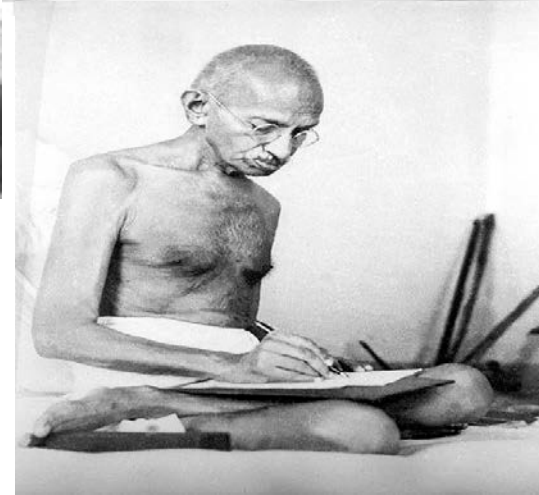


Phil 410/810

Contemporary Indian Philosophy



Texts:

- Indian Philosophy in English, edited by N. Bhushan and J.L. Garfield, Oxford University Press, 2011.
 - Indian Philosophy, An introduction, by M. Ram Murty, Broadview Press, 2012.
 - Mahatma Gandhi, The Essential Writings, edited by Judith Brown, Oxford World's Classics, May 2008
-

Syllabus

- We will cover selected chapters from the Bhusan-Garfield anthology, along with supplemental material from Indian Philosophy, an introduction and the essential writings of Mahatma Gandhi.
 - I will also post weekly lectures on the course website as well as the slides and there may be additional reading assignments.
-

Grading

- 1 Term Paper (8 pages, double spaced, 12pt font with 1 inch margins) due Oct.16, 2019 (40%).
 - Theme: Vivekananda/Aurobindo/Tagore
 - 1 Term Project (10 pages, double spaced, 12pt font with 1 inch margins) due November 13, 2019. (50%)
 - Theme: Gandhi/Krishnamurti/Radhakrishnan
 - Class Participation (10%)
-

How to write an essay

- Read Appendix 3 of my book to get an idea of how to write an essay.

*There are three rules for writing a novel.
Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.*
—Somerset Maugham

Your essay is not a murder mystery! You should state in the first paragraph precisely what your main thesis is and how you will develop your argument.

Standard rules for all references and footnotes apply. Precise page numbers should be given for any quotations from either a paper or a book.

The essay should have a concluding paragraph or paragraphs in which you briefly summarize your ideas amplified in the essay.

A panoramic view of Indian philosophy

The three thousand years of the Indian philosophical tradition can be divided roughly into five periods: the Vedic period (2500 BCE to 600 BCE), the Epic period (600 BCE to 200 CE), the Sutra period (200 CE to 600 CE), the Scholarly period (600 CE to 1700 CE) and the Modern period (1700 CE to the present). The writings of all the periods except for the last one are in Sanskrit. Nearly all of the writings of the Modern period are in English and we will momentarily see why. Thus, for anyone wanting to study Indian philosophy, knowledge of both Sanskrit and English (and perhaps a few other Indian vernacular languages) is essential. However, several notable scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries who were proficient in both these languages have left us valuable writings in the English language that simplify this onerous study. Beginning with Vivekananda in the 19th century, and followed by Aurobindo and Rabindrananath Tagore as well as other prominent scholars, we have a valuable anthology of writings that can be studied critically with profit.

The Vedas and the Upanishads

- It is essential to know something about ancient Indian philosophy before we attempt to understand contemporary Indian philosophy.
- Since time is short, it may be best to focus on the contemporary themes and refer back to the earlier tradition as the occasion arises.
- Our goal is to study six of the 19th and 20th century philosophers: Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhi, Krishnamurti and Radhakrishnan. There will be other philosophers like Ramana Maharshi, Vinoba Bhave, Nehru and Coomaraswamy along the way, but these are the principal ones.
- Some historical knowledge of the Vedas and Upanishads are essential to understand the thought of Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhi and Radhakrishnan.

From those ancient times, four Vedas have been identified and they are called the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda and the Atharva Veda. Each Veda in turn consists of four parts: the hymns (*mantras*), rituals (*brahmanas*), the forest teachings (*aranyakas*) and finally the philosophical portion (*the upanishads*).

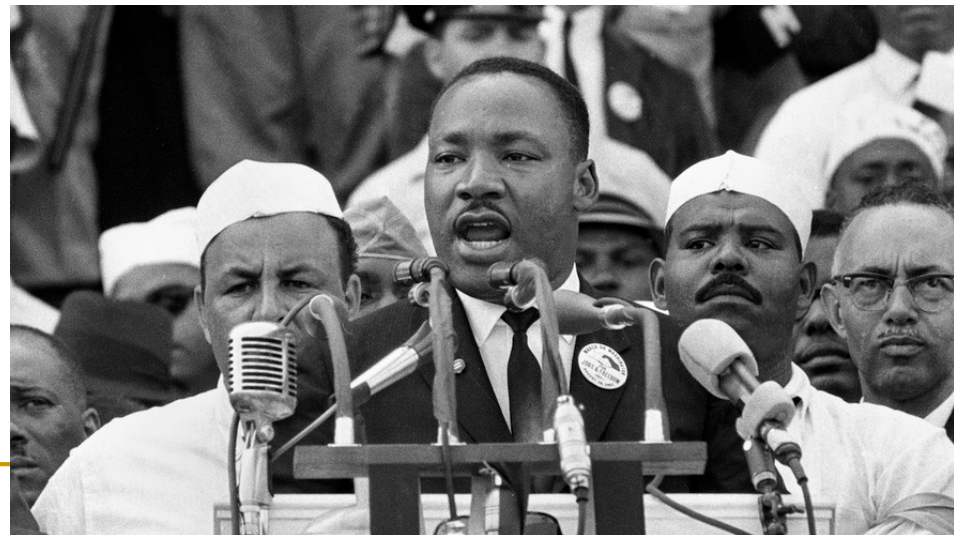
The Upanishads

The Upanishads focus largely on epistemology. What is knowledge? What is perception? What is mind? What is the intellect (*buddhi*)? Is there anything higher than body, mind and intellect? In the Mundaka Upanishad, we find the following profound question. “What is that by knowing which everything is known?” Very early on, these Upanishads highlight the importance of the discovery of underlying principles as a means for understanding. For example, in the Chandogya Upanishad we find a partial response to this question. “Just as the knowledge of one slab of clay gives us knowledge of all clay, what is that, by knowing which everything else becomes known?” Later philosophies focused on social concerns, ethics, and moral principles. A large portion of Indian philosophy is also devoted to the study of art and aesthetics, music and literature, especially in the context of the philosophy of language.

The study of Gandhi and political philosophy

Gandhi in particular, is significant. He challenged the British rule of India with his philosophy of non-violent resistance and *satyagraha*. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., “Gandhi was able to mobilize and galvanize more people in his lifetime than any other person in the history of this world. And just with a little love and understanding goodwill, and a refusal to cooperate with an evil law, he was able to break the backbone of the British Empire. This I think was one of the most significant things that ever happened in the history of the world. More than 300 million people achieved their freedom and they achieved it non-violently.” (King, 129)

We will need to look at the Bhagavad Gita carefully to see how it influenced Gandhi's thinking.



A short history of colonial India

Even an ephemeral knowledge of world history shows that in the 15th century, India had a global reputation as a source of wealth and wisdom. Children today study that Christopher Columbus was searching for another trade route to India and in 1492 he “discovered America”. We now know that he discovered the Bahamas. But why was he doing this? In the 15th century, we also see the rise of the Ottoman empire which included much of India and all of the land routes to India through the Middle East. These routes were essentially blocked that many European nations that were trading with India were exploring alternate sea routes. In 1498, the Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama discovered the route around the horn of Africa and established trade with Calicut in Kerala on the west coast of the Indian subcontinent. Other nations quickly followed his path and also established trading outposts in India. This led to militant rivalries among the European nations between the Portuguese, the French, the Dutch and the British, all of whom vied to establish political control of the region. By the middle of the 18th century, England had a stronghold in India with its East India Company, established in Calcutta. They soon realised that they could expand their control to other parts of the Indian subcontinent, even as far as Burma. Their complete control of the subcontinent was established by the middle of the 19th century. India was regarded as the “jewel in the crown of the British Empire.” and Queen Victoria had the official title “Empress of India.”

Colonial India

Constable's Hand Atlas of India

Plate 15



The Sepoy Rebellion or the War of Independence

In 1857, there was a militant response by the local population to the British rule which is often called the “Sepoy rebellion,” by British historians and “The War of Independence” by Indian patriots. In any case, it took more than six months for the British rulers to suppress the opposition with heavy loss of life on both sides of the conflict though on the Indian side the casualties were greater by a factor of a hundred since the Indians were essentially fighting with their bare hands. That year can be seen as a moment of awakening among the Indian intellectuals that physical force may not be the effective tool to evict the British from India. A series of movements such as the Brahma Samaj, founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the Arya Samaj, founded by Dayananda Saraswati, began to take root.

Indian Administration Service (IAS)

The British realised that in order to rule over India, they needed an efficient administration recruited from the local population, spread over the entire subcontinent. To this end, they established three universities, in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Bombay (now Mumbai) and Madras (now Chennai). Their only goal was to create a fleet of civil servants knowledgeable in the English language and able to carry out the instructions from the Viceroy of India, who was seen as the Queen's representative but really had the status of a monarch in his own right. Thomas Macaulay was commissioned to create the syllabus for these universities and his famous "Minute on Education" of 1835 decreed that its goal was to introduce the use of the English language in all the universities:

Macaulayism

- In 1834, Macaulay was appointed to the “Supreme Council of India” where he viewed his role as a civilizing mission. In 1835, he enforced his famous “minute” on education.
- “We must at present do our best to form a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinion, in morals and in intellect.”
- The method unfortunately worked. The system produced a race of educated elite who were ashamed of being Indian.



T. Macaulay
(1800-1859)

Sri Ramakrishna



Sri Ramakrishna
(1836-1886)

- Ramakrishna was born in 1836 in nearby Calcutta and since his childhood, heard about sages and enlightenment. Instead of going through formal education, he sought out the sages and masters of the Upanishadic tradition. In fact, they came to him!
 - He showed that every religious tradition, if faithfully followed, leads to enlightenment.
 - After mastering the Indian traditions, he took up mystic Sufism (a part of Islam) and the Christian tradition and attained high levels of consciousness.
 - Hearing about Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda decided to see for himself if these stories about his enlightenment were true.
-

Vivekananda



Vivekananda
(1863-1902)

- In 19th century India, British colonial rule had undermined the educated elite's faith regarding their own history and traditions.
 - Vivekananda, born as Narendranath Dutta, was not immune to this educational system, studying at the University of Calcutta.
-

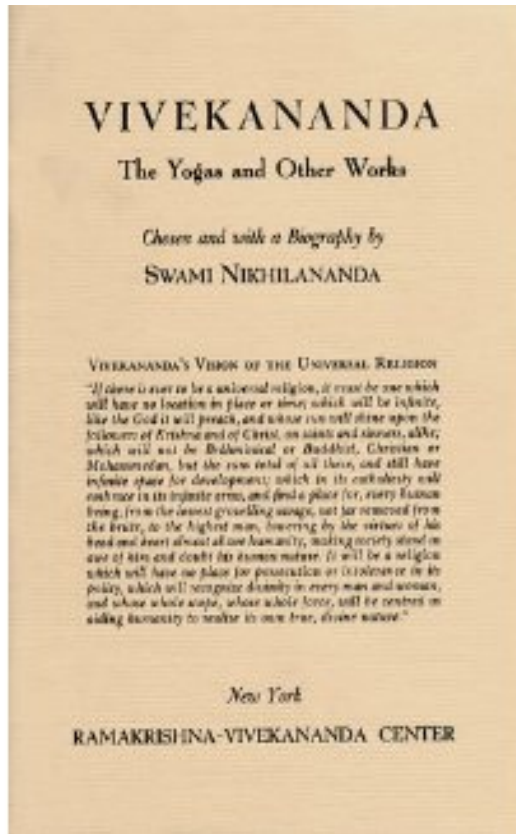
Vivekananda meets Sri Ramakrishna

- Here was the marvellous meeting of the great teacher and the great student.
- The insights of Sri Ramakrishna, obtained through his meditations, were handed over to Vivekananda, and it was this knowledge that has now reached us through the medium of the English language.



In many ways, this meeting is seen as the meeting of the ancient Upanishadic India and the modern India.

The Four Yogas



- After writing his commentaries on the four yogas, Vivekananda summarized Indian philosophy as follows:
- “Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control or philosophy – by one, or more or all of these and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas or rituals or books, temples or forms, are but secondary details.”

Vivekananda's mission in his own words

The meeting of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda represents a fusion of the ancient Indian philosophical and spiritual tradition with the modern scientific and rational world view. In a letter to Alasinga, written on 17th February 1896, Vivekananda wrote "to put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds – is a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The dry, abstract Advaita must become living – poetic – in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology – and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work." (Vivekananda, 5.104) His writings span nine volumes and marks the beginning of the theme of Indian philosophy in the English language.

Aurobindo



- Aurobindo was the youngest of three sons born to Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, who had studied medicine in England and returned to India westernized in his outlook.
- He felt that his three sons would be better off educated in England rather than in India and so he sent them off to a boarding school in Manchester with explicit instructions to their guardians that they should learn nothing of India's traditions and cultures.
- Aurobindo's experience there reads like pages out of "Oliver Twist."
- Aurobindo wrote later, "During the whole year a slice or two of sandwich, bread and butter, and a cup of tea in the morning and in the evening a penny saveloy [sausage] formed the only food."

Return to India

- At the age of 20, Aurobindo returned to India only to learn his father had died. His mother died in his youth.
 - He had a command of English and Greek literature so he accepted a post as an instructor at the University of Baroda.
 - Seeing the British occupation of India, he, along with his brother Barin, plotted to bomb the parliament buildings. They were both arrested. After a year, Aurobindo was acquitted but his brother Barin was sentenced to life in the Andaman Islands, off the east coast of India.
 - Since he was still under surveillance, he went to Pondicherry, in southern India, where the French were in control.
 - He lived there, in hiding for almost 50 years. It was at this time, he decided to take up an intense study of Indian philosophical thought and deepen his study of yoga, something his father never wanted him to do.
-

Synthesis of yoga

- This exile was put to good use. His literary output during this period fills more than 30 volumes.
 - Two of his famous works at this time were “Synthesis of Yoga” and “Essays on the Gita”.
 - He spent 12 hours each day writing, from 6pm to 6am, and then walked up and down in his living room for about 8 hours for exercise!
-

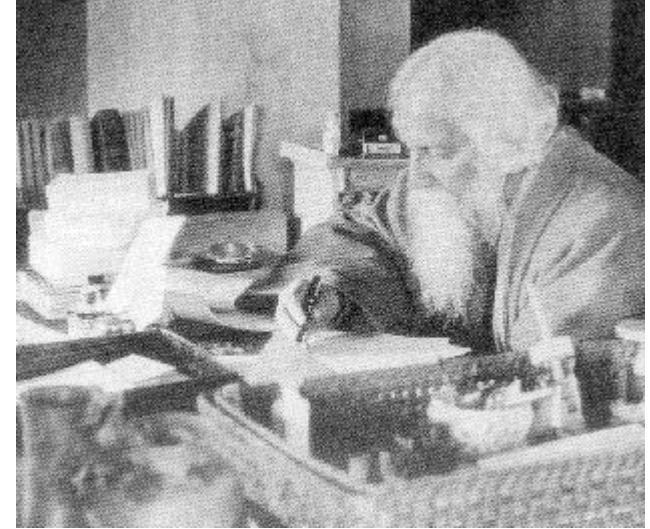
Gradations of mind and supermind

- He discovered several gradations of mind: first the ordinary mind, and then the higher mind, manifest in the writings of thinkers and philosophers. But beyond this is the illumined mind, gaining insight through silent reflection and experiencing a silent awareness.
- It is from this higher level that the ancient sages wrote the Upanishads and penned the epics. This level of awareness is accessible through yoga, he wrote.
- His epic poem Savitri, is definitely an attempt by Aurobindo, to give expression to this level of consciousness which was familiar to the sages who wrote the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.



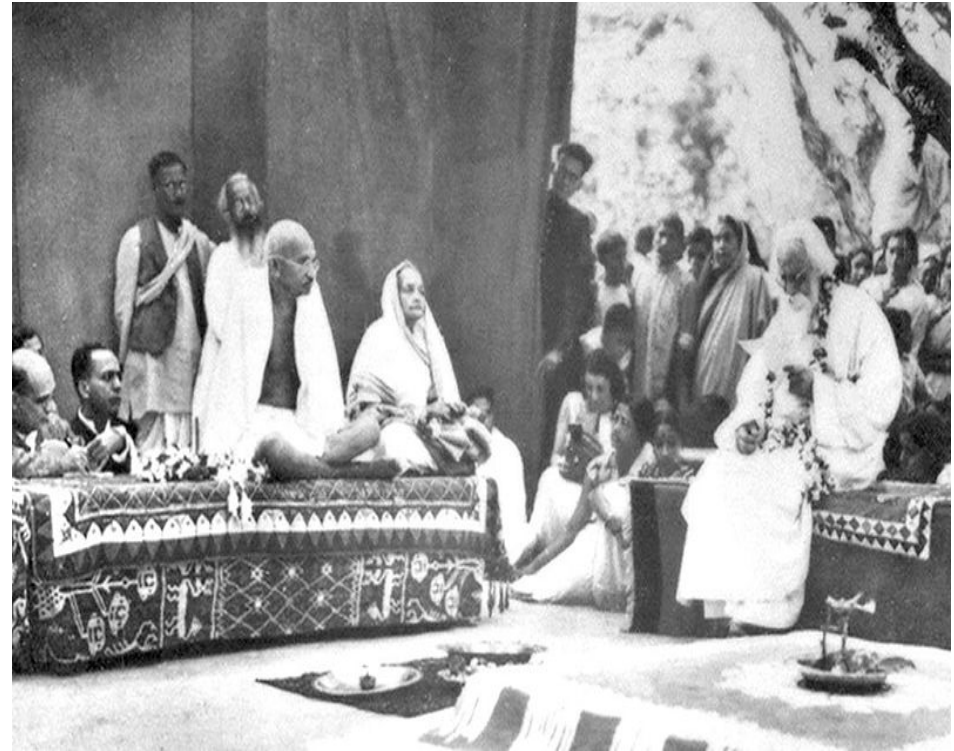
Tagore

- Rabindranath Tagore was born into an aristocratic and educated family in the year 1861. He was a contemporary of Vivekananda and in fact, they shared a passion for music.
- A little known fact is that Vivekananda wrote a book on music before he became a monk and that book includes 12 of Tagore's songs.
- At the age of 8, Tagore began to write poetry, first in Bengali and later in English. Since his father was very scholarly and also well versed in yoga, he learned much of the Indian tradition at home.
- He admired Valmiki and Kalidas, two great poets of antiquity and attempted to imitate their style.



Shantiniketan and Visvabharati University

- In 1910, he wrote Gitanjali or “Song offerings” in Bengali, which was a collection of about 150 poems.
- At the insistence of many, he himself translated them into English in 1912.
- Later that year, this book got the attention of William Butler Yeats who found the poems so sublime, he nominated it for the Nobel Prize in literature.
- In 1913, Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and became the first non-European to win the prize.
- With the prize money, he built Shantiniketan and Visvabharati University, modeled on the Upanishadic ideals fostering creativity in arts and sciences.



Gandhi and Tagore at
Shantiniketan, 1940

Some verses from Gitanjali

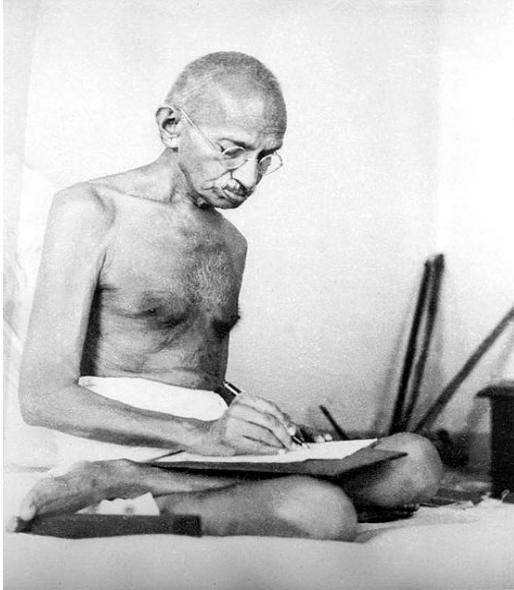
My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight.
O Master Poet. I have sat down at thy feet.
Only let me make my life simple and straight.
Like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music.



On the eve of India's independence from British rule, he wrote:

- Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up
into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason
has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and
action---
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

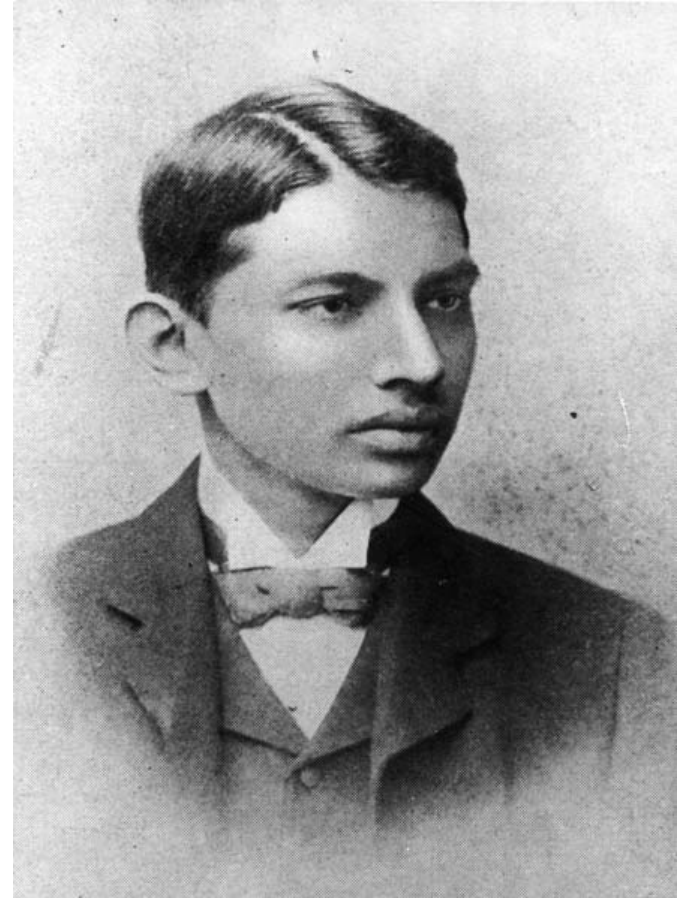
Gandhi



- Gandhi was born in Porbandar, Gujarat in 1869 and was the youngest of three sons.
- He came from a middle class family and after high school, was sent to England to study law at the age of 18.
- After four years of study, he returned to India with his law degree. He took up a year-long assignment in South Africa to defend Indian indentured labourers.
- There he faced racial discrimination in all its forms and shapes and ended up staying there 20 years to deal with problems of these labourers.
- During that time, he took up the study of Indian philosophy, especially the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita and forged out a new philosophy of non-violent resistance.

Philosophy of Satyagraha

- Many of the indentured labourers were illiterate and were being exploited. To counter their oppressors, he had to study the laws and determine a viable way to correct injustice.
- He began a weekly journal to galvanize his thoughts and chart out a new political philosophy based on satyagraha, which means holding on to truth.



Gandhi in South Africa

An excerpt from his *Autobiography*

- “Through these journals I now commenced to the best of my ability the work of educating the public in satyagraha. These journals reached a very wide circulation ... The journals helped me also to some extent to remain at peace with myself, for whilst immediate resort to civil disobedience was out of the question, they enabled me to freely ventilate my views and to put heart into the people. Thus I feel that both the journals rendered good service to the people in this hour of trial and did their humble bit towards lightening the tyranny of martial law.”
-

Return to India

- In 1915, Gandhi returned to India and took up the cause of India's independence movement from British colonial rule.
- His experience in South Africa enabled him to formulate a new approach of non-violent resistance.
- He dreamt of Hindu-Muslim unity on a national scale and this against the background of two world wars.
- In this, he was not completely successful since India was partitioned. However, the British realized that they could no longer continue to occupy India in the face of this movement and world opinion.
- India achieved independence on August 15, 1947.



Sadly, an extreme faction felt that Gandhi gave too many concessions to Pakistan to appease them and prevent partition. On 30 January, 1948, he was shot by a Hindu assassin.

Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi

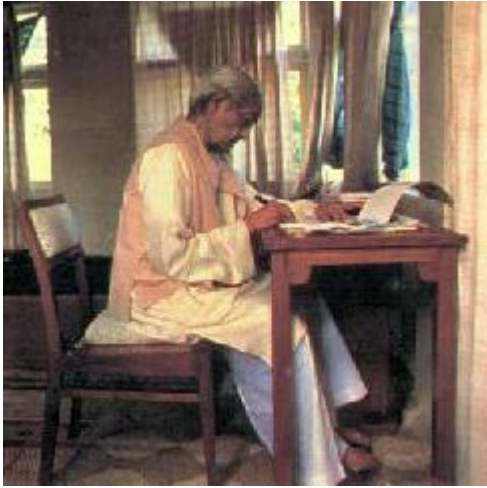


- Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence has found expression in other movements around the world.
- Martin Luther King Jr. writes that he became familiar with Gandhi's writings in 1950.

“As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my scepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform. ... Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. He was able to break the backbone of the British empire. This, I think, was one of the most significant things that ever happened in history.”



Krishnamurti



- Krishnamurti was born in 1895 in Madanepalli, Andhra Pradesh in South India.
- At that time, theosophy, a strange mystical combination of theology and philosophy, found a foothold in India.
- Essentially, it was a religious cult with Annie Besant as their leader.

Theosophy and Krishnamurti

- In 1909, Krishnamurti and his younger brother Nitya, were noticed by the theosophists for their “spiritual auras”.
- Since their parents were illiterate, it was easy to convince them to hand over the custody of the two boys, so that they can be trained to become “world teachers.”
- Annie Besant then sent both of them over to England to be educated. Nitya had trouble adjusting to the new environment and constantly had health problems. He died there at the age of 27 in 1925.

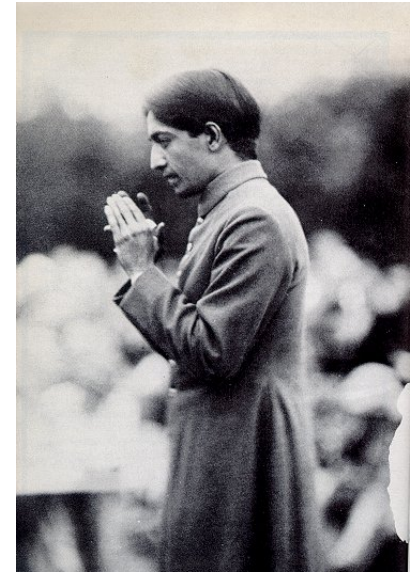


A turning point

- Nitya's death was a turning point for Krishnamurti that led to deep philosophical reflection.
- Annie Besant groomed him to be the messiah and much to her shock, in August 1929, at the meeting of the society, he announced to her and the world at large that he was no messiah and that he was leaving her society.



Annie Besant and
Krishnamurti

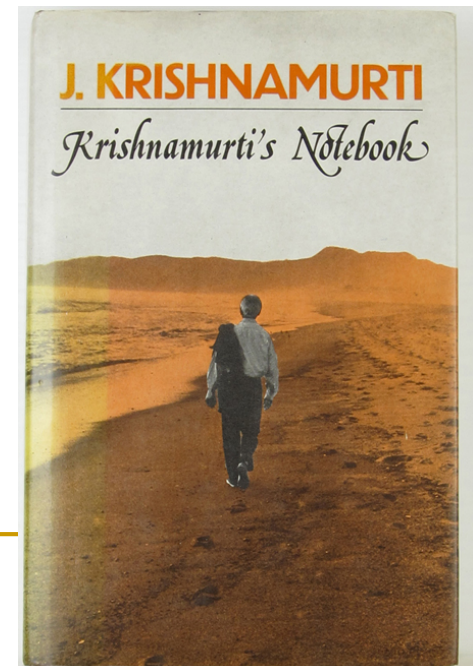


I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organised; nor should any organisation be formed to lead or coerce people along any particular path.

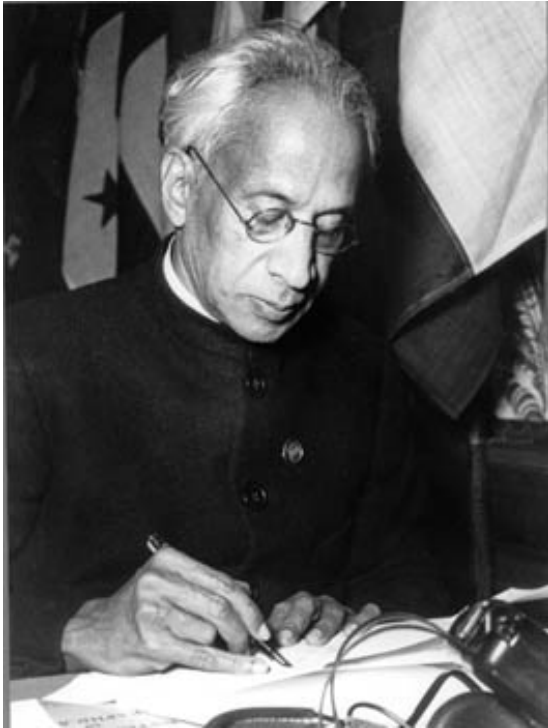
His later years as a world teacher

- “Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a portion of mankind remains under lifelong tutelage, and why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians. If I have a book which understands for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a physician who decides my diet, etc. I need not trouble myself. I need not think, if only I can pay – others will undertake the work for me.”

He died in 1986 at the age of 90 in Ojai California.



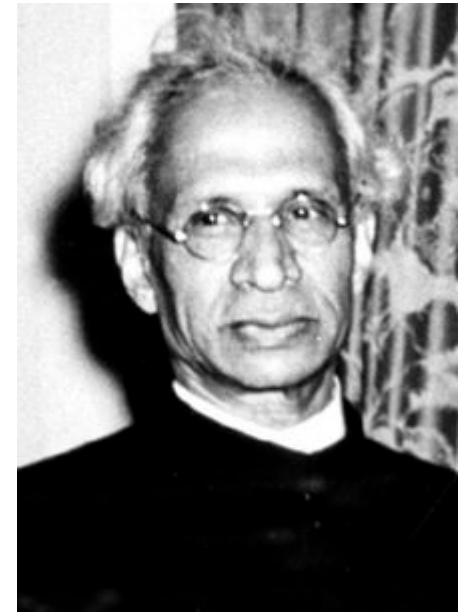
Radhakrishnan



- Radhakrishnan's childhood was not as turbulent as the others we have discussed.
- Born in 1888 in Tirutani, Andhra Pradesh, he was one of eight children born in extreme poverty.
- His parents didn't have money to buy books but did want to give him a good education and so enrolled him in the Madras Christian College in 1908.

Later reflections

- When asked how he became a philosopher, he replied: “To all appearances this is a mere accident. But when I look at the series of accidents that have shaped my life, I am persuaded that there is more to life than meets the eye. Life is not a mere chain of physical causes and effects. Chance seems to form the surface, but deep down other forces are at work. If the universe is a living one, if it is spiritually alive, nothing in it is merely accidental. ‘The moving finger writes and having writ, moves on.’ ”



Synthesis of eastern and western thought

- From 1909 onwards, he dived into an intense study of both eastern and western philosophies. He initiated a comparative study of philosophy.
 - He wrote: “The comparative method is relevant in the present context, when the stage is set, if not for the development of a world philosophy, at least for that of a world outlook.”
 - In 1923, he completed his two-volume tome on Indian philosophy, and thus began a period of prolific writing.
-

Spalding professor at Oxford University

- From 1936-1952, he held the Spalding professorship at Oxford University during which time he worked on the Sourcebook with Charles Moore.
- In 1952, he was appointed as the Vice-President of India and in 1962, the President of India. He died in 1975 in Chennai, India at the age of 87.

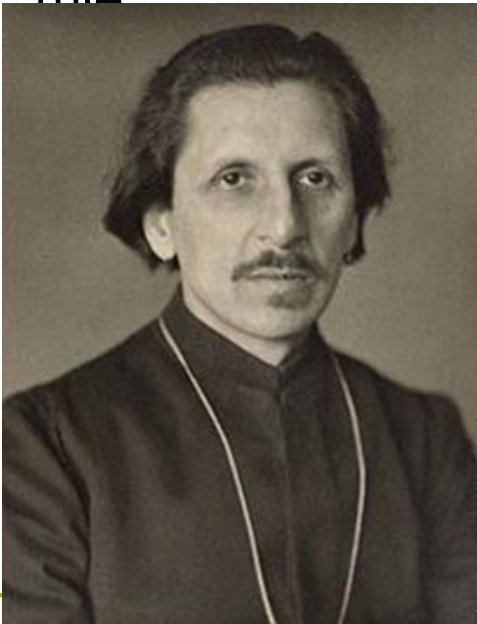


Charles Moore wrote of him: “In all phases of philosophy, he reveals a synthesizing ability which enables him, in conformity with the essence of the great Indian tradition, to avoid all extremes. In this spirit, Radhakrishnan resolves the traditional oppositions between the Absolute and the non-absolute, God and the world, appearance and reality, intuition and reason, philosophy and religion, and philosophy and life, as well as contradictions and oppositions among various religious and philosophical systems.”

Other philosophers along the way:

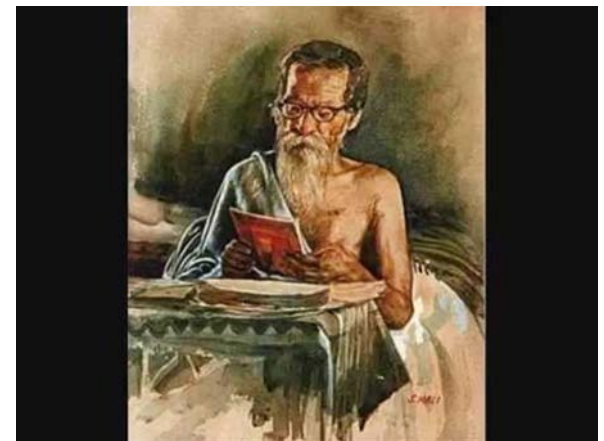
Ananda Coomaraswamy

- Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) wrote about the philosophy of aesthetics, with emphasis on Indian art. He was curator of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts for most of his life. Being the son of a Sri Lankan father and English mother, he had access to two worlds and had strong views about India's struggle for independence against colonial rule.



Vinoba Bhave

- Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982) was a staunch Gandhian. But unlike Gandhi, he was also an academic well-versed in Sanskrit and Philosophy, both western and eastern.
- His innovative idea was the Bhoodan movement, where wealthy landowners donate land, which he then gave to poor landless people to cultivate so as to reach a level of self-reliance.



Jawaharlal Nehru

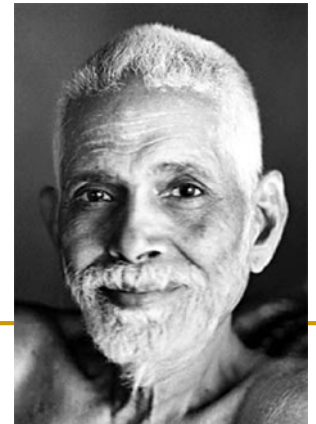
- Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) was the first Prime Minister of independent India.
- He was a prolific writer, scholar and political visionary.
- He was torn between Gandhian agrarian and non-violent political philosophy and what he saw as the emerging scientific and technological age. His essential contribution to philosophy is that of internationalism and so he founded the non-aligned movement.

“All of my books were written in prison. For anyone who wants to write a book, I recommend prison.”



Ramana Maharshi

- Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) was an enigmatic mystery in many ways. Several scholars have compared him to a modern Buddha and there is considerable validity in that.
- His philosophy is one “self-enquiry” and he is often known to have prompted anyone seeking knowledge to find the answer to the question “who am I?”
- Most of his writings are in Telugu or Tamil and that makes for some difficulty in translation. Fortunately, there are some reliable translations which we can rely on.
- There is no doubt that Ramana Maharshi is someone who can refer to as “enlightened” whatever that may mean.



Summary

- We will focus primarily on the first six personalities and have selected readings of their writings.
- The Bhushan-Garfield anthology contains writings of Vivekananda, Tagore, and Aurobindo.
- The works of Coomaraswamy will also be studied along with Aurobindo and Tagore when we study the philosophy of aesthetics and art.
- We will use “The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi” to study Gandhi’s works.
- His complete works can be found at:
 - https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/cwmg_volume_thumbview/NA%3D%3D%23page/282/mode/2up
- Or you can simply google “Gandhi heritage portal”.
- Vinoba Bhave and Nehru will be discussed briefly in relation to Gandhian thought.
- Krishnamurti and Radhakrishnan’s works are not in pdf formats or available online; I will, at a later date, circulate selected essays for detailed study. I will also augment selected writings of Ramana Maharshi at some point.