

13 Contemporary Thought

In this chapter, we will give a brief survey of some of the 19th and 20th century Indian philosophers and their contributions to contemporary thought. We will examine six personalities: Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhi, Krishnamurti and Radhakrishnan. This study will give us a wide spectrum of philosophical thought, ranging from the metaphysical and mystical philosophy of Sri Aurobindo to the social and political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. All of these people were born when India was still under British colonial rule. Consequently, some of their writings are tinged with nationalism or nationalistic fervour. Still, we can extract from their writings, a universal philosophy that applies to all people in all times. In our list of six, three personalities can be described as coming from the scholastic tradition and with the express goal of interpreting and re-interpreting the ancient philosophies of India in the modern context. These three are Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan. By explaining the Sanskrit texts in the English language, they fulfilled the academic role and enabled these ideas to have a wider circulation. At the same time, they re-interpreted them in the modern context. With Gandhi, we see the development of a political philosophy based on the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita. In Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, we find the same philosophy find new expressions in art, poetry, literature and even music. In Krishnamurti, we find a total break from the past and an exhortation to think for oneself, relying only on oneself for the great journey. With Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan, we find a combination of all these viewpoints. We will examine each of these personalities and their contributions to contemporary Indian philosophy. Clearly, a short chapter such as this cannot do justice to the grandeur of the task. Yet, it is hoped that this introduction will allow the student to undertake an expanded study.

13.1 Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda's lectures and writings were certainly influenced by the traditional Vedanta philosophy. At the same time, he reinterpreted this message in the modern context. Perhaps it is in this sense the term "neo-vedanta" is often used to describe his contribution to Indian philosophy. However, upon a closer examination of his writings, we see that he had a larger view of things. First and foremost, he saw the success of the scientific revolution and its insistence of

reason as the prime tool in its investigations. He saw its universal appeal and universal acceptance and its power to unite the human race. His view of Vedanta was similar. Just as science studies external nature and has given rise to the manifold sub-disciplines like mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and so on, Vedanta, which studies the internal nature of man, has given rise to the multitude of religious and philosophical traditions on this planet. In his view, there was nothing “Indian” about Vedanta, if the latter word is understood in the sense that it is a method of understanding the internal world, just as “science” is understood as a method to understand the external world, and we don’t ascribe the scientific tradition to any particular race or culture. Indeed, modern historical researches have revealed that the scientific tradition can be traced back to all ancient civilizations in one form or another. Similarly, the Vedanta tradition can be traced back to all of the ancient civilizations.

Swami Vivekananda was born as Narendranath Dutta on January 12, 1863 in Kolkata, India. He had a traditional upbringing obtaining a degree in Law from Calcutta University. He was well-versed in Western philosophical thought and had studied the major works in their original. However, he had shown signs of a spiritual quest from the time of his youth. He was dubious of orthodox religions and advocated reason as the foundation for any lifestyle. In 19th century India, British colonial rule had undermined any faith, particularly religious, that the educated elite may have had regarding their own history and tradition. Young Narendranath was not immune to this and so he joined the Brahmo Samaj, an organization aimed at reforming Indian traditions both in religion and customs. It was in this context that he came to meet Sri Ramakrishna, then living in the nearby town of Dakshineswar. Narendranath was eighteen years old at the time.

Sri Ramakrishna came from a rustic background, but since childhood had a mystical temperament. Imbued with a fiery zeal for spiritual enlightenment, he practiced yoga and meditation. During this period of religious thirst, many teachers of various spiritual traditions came to teach him, not academically, but practically, so that he may experience personally the claims and realizations of each of the traditions. For instance, following the tradition of Patanjali’s yoga, he came to realize the state of Samadhi. After practicing various Indian religious traditions, he came to the realization that each tradition is valid in that if it is faithfully practiced, leads one to the highest realization. He then explored the traditions of Islam and Christianity and again, reached the same realization, not as an intellectual understanding, but as a matter of experience. Thus, Sri Ramakrishna was in many ways the antithesis of Vivekananda in that he had no

formal academic training, but rather the practical method of learning through one's own experience as insisted by the ancient tradition.

At first, the meeting of Sri Ramakrishna was very puzzling to Vivekananda. Yet, he was convinced that whatever Sri Ramakrishna would say to him as a matter of teaching, it was not an academic opinion, but a matter of experience. Here was a master that matched the Upanishadic ideal of a spiritual teacher.

From Sri Ramakrishna, he learned the important fact that all spiritual traditions, if faithfully followed, lead one to higher realizations. This resonated with the teachings of the Vedanta philosophy. In this way, he imbibed the wisdom and subtle understanding from the great master. After the passing away of his spiritual teacher in 1886, Vivekananda took up the monk's garb and wandered through India, teaching what he had learned and intensifying his meditation to increase his own understanding about spirituality. As he wandered through the dusty, rustic paths of rural India, he saw the plight of the multitude steeped in poverty. The problem at the forefront of his mind was how to regenerate the nation, how to revive its people. At the same time, he met wealthy landlords, and the maharajahs and exhorted them that they were only custodians of power and wealth, and that their power and wealth were to be used for the welfare of the masses.

One such maharaja that became his disciple was the Maharaja of Khetri. Vivekananda heard from the Maharaja about a conference of world's religions being organized for the World's Fair in Chicago, scheduled for September 1893. The Maharaja suggested that Vivekananda, with his vast erudition and spiritual knowledge, would be an excellent representative of the Indian spiritual traditions. Thus encouraged and supported by the Maharaja, Swami Vivekananda sailed to America. There, he presented the universal view of Vedanta, not as a particular system of Indian philosophy, but rather as an all-encompassing outlook on all of the religious and spiritual traditions of the world. He stayed on in America for four more years to teach the numerous students who were interested in Indian thought. At that time, he wrote his celebrated books on the four yogas. In this way, Vivekananda gave wider circulation to Indian philosophical thought, mainly in the Vedanta tradition. But at the same time, he was giving a new expression and new formulations for its practice.

He returned to India in 1897, and by this time, had enough support for his idea to establish the Ramakrishna Mission of social service. His idea was that all of the

four yogas can be combined for the betterment of oneself and the betterment of society. His message was to combine meditation with action, knowledge with devotion. Today, this mission has become international in its scope with an exemplary reputation for social work and education. Swami Vivekananda passed away in 1902, at the young age of 39. However, he left a great legacy in his voluminous writings encompassing nine printed volumes. His masterly synthesis of the four yogas must be considered his masterpiece of philosophical work.

If one surveys the history of India upto the 19th century, it is clear that there was a schism between secular pursuits and spiritual pursuits. Through his extensive travels, Vivekananda was keenly aware of this division. Even though the ancient epics and philosophical treatises spoke of *purusārtha*, the four goals of life, the nation had forgotten it. In fact, Vivekananda traced India's degeneration and consequent vulnerability to foreign rule to the loss of this ideal of *purusārtha*.

A concise translation of the word is “that which is the purpose of human life” and this purpose has four pillars: *dharma* (social justice), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (pleasure) and *moksha* (liberation). These four are not mutually exclusive but rather interdependent and must be taken together. Social justice in the form of a peaceable society is the foundation. The pursuit of wealth must be in the context of *dharma*, and the same with *kāma* and *moksha*. Wealth does not mean only monetary wealth, but also the wealth of knowledge and wisdom. Pleasure does not mean only sensual pleasure but also artistic, intellectual and spiritual pleasure. This four-fold purpose of life is shared by all individuals and all nations. Many times in his lectures, he said that “it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics.”¹⁴⁴ By creating the Ramakrishna Mission of service, he was able to attract strong individuals to dedicate their life for the welfare of the many and thereby fulfil their four-fold aim of life. Through this mission, he wanted to create a new type of human being, one who combines the heart of the Buddha with the intellect of Shankara. Thus, he revived the four-fold yoga in this context.

Since his writings are in the English language, his ideas are now accessible to all nations. In his own words, he said that his mission was to bring out the abstruse teachings of the Vedas and the Vedanta and explain them so that a child could understand them. Indeed, he had an incisive way of explaining abstract ideas that they seemed obvious. For instance, in his Karma Yoga, he wrote, “In every religion there are three parts: philosophy, mythology and ritual. Philosophy of

¹⁴⁴ Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 1, p. 20.

course is the essence of every religion; mythology explains and illustrates it by means of the more or less legendary lives of great people, stories and fables of wonderful things ... ritual gives to that philosophy a still more concrete form.”¹⁴⁵ Thus to understand any religion, one must understand the underlying philosophy. Often we confuse and conflate rituals and mythology as being the essence of religion. Having simplified the understanding of religion into these three categories, he summarised the whole of Indian philosophy thus. “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, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.”¹⁴⁶

13.2 Aurobindo

At the heart of Aurobindo’s philosophy is the idea that the human being is still in a process of evolution. We are on the cusp of a transition, very much like the transition from the fish to the amphibian. “Man is a transitional being” he would write in his *Life Divine*.¹⁴⁷ The human race must rise from its present level of consciousness to a higher level if it is to survive, and hence the need of philosophy and religion. “Philosophy,” Sri Aurobindo explains, “is the intellectual search for the fundamental truth of things; religion is the attempt to make the truth dynamic in the soul of man. They are essential to each other; a religion that is not the expression of philosophic truth degenerates into superstition and obscurantism, and a philosophy which does not dynamise itself with the religious spirit is a barren light, for it cannot get itself practiced.”¹⁴⁸ To this end, he wrote “*The Synthesis of Yoga*” and formulated the basic principles of an integral yoga. In essence, this is the four-fold yoga expanded and amplified. At the same time, the new yoga found a place for artistic creativity as a means for sadhana and self-knowledge.

The synthesis of art and yoga finds full expression in the life and teachings of Sri Aurobindo. In his book, *Future Poetry*, he writes, “The voice of poetry comes

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124

¹⁴⁷ See also Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Works*, Volume 17, p. 7-12.

¹⁴⁸ *Sourcebook of Indian Philosophy*, p. 578.

from a region above us, a plane of our being above and beyond our personal intelligence, a supermind which sees things in their innermost and largest truth by a spiritual identity. It is the possession of the mind by the supramental touch and the communicated impulse to seize this sight and word that creates the psychological phenomenon of poetic inspiration.” In his conversations with Dilip Kumar Roy, he said, “It is and must be the purpose of all true creation to lift man from his lower planes of vision to the higher. It must mean some sort of release of consciousness, the same as in Yoga.”¹⁴⁹

The prolific literary output of Sri Aurobindo consisting of thirty printed tomes is largely due to the fact that he saw writing as a sadhana and advocated it as a means of self-realization for his disciples as well. Poetry and literary writing was a means for meditation, for reflection, for grasping ideas from the supermind. In his essay, “Poetic vision and the mantra,” Sri Aurobindo writes “Vision is the characteristic power of the poet, as is discriminative thought the essential gift of the philosopher and analytic observation the natural genius of the scientist.”¹⁵⁰

How did Sri Aurobindo get to this realization? His life story is bizarre to say the least. Born in Calcutta on August 15, 1872, he was one of three sons born to one Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, who had studied medicine in England and had returned to India completely westernized in his views and outlook. Aurobindo was the youngest of his sons and Krishnadhan wanted all three of them to be educated in England free of what he thought was the foggy mysticism that was infecting India at the time.¹⁵¹ One of Aurobindo’s biographers, Satprem, writes, “He did not even want them to know anything of India’s traditions and languages. Sri Aurobindo was therefore provided not only with an English first name, Akroyd, but also with an English governess, Miss Pagett, and then sent off at the age of five to an Irish convent school in Darjeeling among the sons of British administrators. Two years later, the three Ghose boys left for England. Sri Aurobindo was seven.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Dilip Kumar Roy, *Among the Great*, p. 233, Jaico Publishing House, 1950.

¹⁵⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, Vol. 9, *Collected Works*, p. 29.

¹⁵¹ Such was the influence of British colonialism in India on the educated elite.

¹⁵² Satprem, *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*, Techprints, Mysore, India, 1970, p.20. Satprem (1923-2007) was born Bernard Enginger in Paris. He travelled widely and witnessed first hand the horrors of the second world war, having survived a concentration camp. He travelled to India and learned yoga in the Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry.

It seems that Aurobindo would not learn his mother tongue Bengali until the age of twenty. He was never to see his father again who died shortly before Aurobindo returned to India. His mother was plagued with illnesses and that she was unable to recognize him later in life. The three boys were put in the care of an Anglican clergyman in Manchester “with strict instructions that they should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence.”¹⁵³ Apparently, these instructions were carried out and Aurobindo was entirely ignorant of India and her culture. His life in England must have been very much like the abused orphans that one reads about described vividly in the numerous novels by Charles Dickens. “During a 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 formed the only food.”¹⁵⁴ Why a father would do such a thing to his own sons is a mystery but can only indicate the hypnotism of the educated class of India that India and her culture were something to be rejected totally. Satprem writes, “Dr. Ghose was indeed a peculiar man. He also ordered Rev. Drewett [the guardian of his sons] not to give his sons any religious instruction, so they could choose a religion themselves, if they so wished, when they came of age. He then left them to their fate for thirteen years. Dr. Ghose may appear to be a hardhearted man, but he was nothing of the kind; he gave not only his services as a doctor but also his money to poor Bengali villagers (while his sons had hardly anything to eat or wear in London), and died of shock when he was – mistakenly – informed that his favorite son, Aurobindo, had been lost in a shipwreck. But he believed his children should have character.”¹⁵⁵ There was at least one positive outcome of Aurobindo’s English education and that was his mastery of many European languages including Latin, Greek and French as well as its literary and philosophical culture.

Sri Aurobindo did well in school, often winning scholarships and prizes for his literary achievements. In his later years in England, he had some acquaintances with Indian students and some knowledge as to what was going on in India under British rule. At the age of twenty, he sailed back to India. When he reached her shores, he learned his father had died. This must have been quite a bereavement for Sri Aurobindo.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 21. See also Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Works*, Volume 26, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Works*, Volume 26, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ Satprem, *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Satprem writes, “When he landed at the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, he was seized with a spontaneous spiritual experience, a vast calm descended upon him.”¹⁵⁶ He quickly found a job as a lecturer in French and English at the State College in Baroda. He began to write articles exhorting his countrymen to get rid of British rule. He had a revolutionary bent of mind, which is not unusual for a twenty year old, something his father and guardians tried to prevent from happening for most of his life up to that point. In the context of the partition of Bengal, Aurobindo along with his younger brother Barin were arrested as part of the Alipore bomb conspiracy. The trial found Barin guilty and he was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Andaman Islands. Aurobindo spent a year in the Alipore jail and was then acquitted. After his release, he decided to go to Pondicherry in southern India, which was under French rule. There he decided to give up his revolutionary activities and turned to a study of yoga.

So it was time to catch up on the missed education concerning India. Thus began an intense period of study ranging from the Ramayana to the Upanishads. He also learned Sanskrit and tried to fathom the mystery of the Veda and dived deep into the system of yoga. He learned to silence the mind, the first step in yoga. He writes, “But for the knowledge of the Self it is necessary to have the power of a complete intellectual passivity, the power of dismissing all thought, the power of the mind to think not at all which the Gita in one passage enjoins. This is a hard saying for the occidental mind to which thought is the highest thing and which will be apt to mistake the power of the mind not to think, its complete silence for the incapacity of thought. But this power of silence is a capacity and not an incapacity, a power and not a weakness. It is a profound and pregnant stillness.”¹⁵⁷ One can say that through his voluminous writings, Sri Aurobindo was also learning. Thus began his study and practice of yoga.

Regarding his beginnings of yoga, Sri Aurobindo writes, “All developed mental men, those who get beyond the average, have in one way or other at least at certain times and for certain purposes to separate the two parts of the mind, the active part which is a factory of thoughts and the quiet masterful part which is at once a Witness and a Will, observing them, judging, rejecting, eliminating, accepting, ordering corrections and changes, the Master in the House of Mind, capable of self-empire, *sāmrājya*. The Yogi goes still farther ... It was my great

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁵⁷ Sri Aurobindo, Collected Works, Vol. 20, The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 302.

debt to Lele¹⁵⁸ that he showed me this. ‘Sit in meditation,’ he said, ‘but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts coming into it; before they can enter throw these away from your mind till your mind is capable of entire silence.’ I had never heard before of thoughts coming visibly into the mind from outside, but I did not think either of questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw one thought and then another coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free.”¹⁵⁹

What we see here is the experience of the “supermind” of which Sri Aurobindo wrote about extensively later in life. From this higher vantage point, one can witness the thoughts and feelings and not be affected by them or identify with them.

Sri Aurobindo was a yogi of the highest order and since he stands prominently in the recent past, we can gain much from the nature of his sadhana. Just as we exercise the muscles to strengthen them, we can exercise our creative faculty by deliberate effort. By personal example and the sheer volume of his output, we can determine to what heights this faculty can be taken. In his biography of Sri Aurobindo, Satprem writes, “Sri Aurobindo spent twelve hours a day writing, from six in the evening till six in the morning, then eight hours walking up and down ‘for the yoga’.”¹⁶⁰

At the heart of Aurobindo’s philosophy is that the human race is still in evolution. In this sense, it is an evolutionary philosophy. The sequence of matter, life forms, and mind is something familiar in the study of evolutionary biology. But beyond this, Aurobindo envisions a further development of mind, first into reason and intellectual development, but later into intuitive and supra-mental levels of development.

In the philosophy of Aurobindo, there are several gradations of mind. First is the ordinary mind, then there is the higher mind, followed by the illumined mind, and then the intuitive mind and finally the overmind. All of these represent increasing levels of awareness and understanding. The ordinary mind is the common

¹⁵⁸ Lele was Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual teacher.

¹⁵⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, *On Himself*, p. 84.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

experience of all humanity. The higher mind is manifest in the writings of thinkers and philosophers. But beyond this lies the illumined mind. It is found that the higher mind gains its insights through silent reflection. As the higher mind learns to accept silence, and expands into a silent awareness, it gains access to this domain of the illumined mind. Usually access to this level of awareness is often accompanied by an outburst of creative activity, particularly of a poetic nature. Indeed, if we practice even several hours of silent reflection, it is easily seen that this poetic realm is awakened. It is from this level that the sages of the Rig Veda and the Upanishads wrote of their revelations.

Aurobindo, in his essay on Rhythm and Movement writes, “The mantra, poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality is only possible when three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one, a highest intensity of rhythmic movement, a highest intensity of verbal form and thought-substance, of style, and a highest intensity of the soul’s vision of truth.”¹⁶¹

The practice of stillness or silence is absolutely essential if we want the higher mind to evolve into the illumined mind, according to Sri Aurobindo. That is the primary reason that meditation is practiced so that the mind develops the habit of silence and silent reflection. This importance of silence has been emphasized by all great philosophers and sages since the dawn of civilization. In the Psalms, we find, “Be still and know that I am God.” Lao-Tzu taught that “To the mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders.” The 16th century mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal is often quoted as saying that “all human evil comes from this, man’s being unable to sit still in a room.” Thus, silence is a prerequisite to attain the level of the illumined mind.

But beyond the illumined mind is the intuitive mind, which cognizes superconscious truths, not by cogitation but by perception of a higher kind. Finally, the overmind is the abode of cosmic consciousness or universal awareness. This has been the experience of the great sages and saints of the past and can also be our experience if we discipline the mind first into the habit of silence, and then train it to expand that silent awareness into intuition and then even beyond to cosmic consciousness, according to Sri Aurobindo.

¹⁶¹ Sri Aurobindo, Collected Works, Vol. 9, p. 17.

Explaining the idea of overmind, Satprem writes, “The Mantra, or higher poetry, higher music, the sacred Word, all issue from the overmind. It is the source of all creative and spiritual activities.”¹⁶² In Sri Aurobindo’s integral yoga, he advocates the fostering of the creative spirit especially in poetry and music. With regard to poetic fluency, he writes, “It is precisely the people who are careful, self-critical, anxious for perfection who have interrupted visits from the Muse. Those who don’t mind what they write, trusting to their genius, vigor, or fluency to carry it off are usually abundant writers.”¹⁶³ Commenting on the idea of inspiration versus effort in the field of creative poetry, he writes, “Inspiration is always a very uncertain thing; it comes when it choose, stops suddenly before it has finished its work, refuses to descend when it is called. This is a well-known affliction, perhaps of all artists, but certainly of poets. There are some who can command it at will; those who, I think, are more full of an abundant poetic energy than careful for perfection; others who oblige it to come whenever they put pen to paper ... Again there are some who try to give it a habit of coming by always writing at the same time; Virgil with his nine lines first written, then perfected every morning, Milton with his fifty epic lines a day, are said to have succeeded in regularizing their inspiration. It is, I suppose, the same principle which makes Gurus in India prescribe for their disciples a meditation at the same fixed hour every day.”¹⁶⁴

This passage underscores the importance of regular effort in daily practice (*sadhana*). To habituate the mind to stillness and silence, to regulate the flow of creative inspiration and insight is the reason for the practice of meditation and study. It will be observed that the mind does not dwell always at the same level of vibration. It has its high moments and low moments. However, one can regulate the visitations from the Muse to some extent by maintaining regularity in *sadhana*.

If we examine the people around us, we see two kinds. The first kind is the ordinary kind, not very exceptional in talent or speech, and leading the life of a piece of driftwood that moves aimlessly and randomly on the river of life. They are buffeted by events and their security lies in inertia. The other kind is the creative individual. But of this kind, there are two types, those that know the secret of creativity and those that don’t. Those that know the secret of creative

¹⁶² Satprem, *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*, p. 215.

¹⁶³ Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, p. 295.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

exertion can be called yogis, and this is one of the central ideas in Aurobindo's philosophy. Just as the Olympic athlete trains daily, the great musician practices daily, the great writer writes daily, similarly, the yogi must put in several hours of deliberate yogic discipline every day at a fixed time. According to Aurobindo, the creative fire should emerge spontaneously when the instrument has been properly prepared. The secret of life therefore is self-discipline, not so much as to create, but rather to prepare the ground.

From Sri Aurobindo's explanation, we must not infer that the creative artist does nothing but just waits for the inspiration. On the contrary, according to Aurobindo, the artist must silence the mind and this requires effort and practice. In that silent milieu, the necessary inspiration descends. In explaining the nature of thought to a disciple, Sri Aurobindo wrote, "These thought waves, thought-seeds, or thought forms or whatever they are, are of different values and come from different planes of consciousness. And the same thought-substance can take higher or lower vibrations according to the plane of consciousness through which the thoughts come in (e.g. the thinking mind, vital mind, physical mind, subconscious mind) or the power of consciousness which catches them and pushes them into one man or another. Moreover, there is a stuff of mind in each man and the incoming thought uses that for shaping itself or translating itself (transcribing we usually call it), but the stuff is finer or coarser, stronger or weaker, etc. etc. in one mind or another. Also there is mind energy actual or potential in each which differs and this mind energy in its recipience of the thought can be luminous or obscure, sattwic (serene), rajasic (impassioned) or tamasic (inert) with consequences that vary in each case."¹⁶⁵

It is fair to say that the average individual operates from the habit mind. He is after all a bundle of habits. These habits he acquired in childhood, youth, and adult life through schooling, hobbies and interests. But behind that is the animal man, coming from his evolutionary past, and so at best, the average man is some combination of animal and human with some talents and abilities. If he can eke out an existence on these acquirements, he will. He will make no effort to reflect, or to improve or acquire new talents. For he has not given any thought to what we may call the creative mind. One often inhabits the habit mind and life is just a trolley ride along the rails of past habits, some good and some bad. It is no wonder that the modern man is plagued with depression, since the immense power lodged in the mind has not been suitably expressed.

¹⁶⁵ Satprem, Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness, p. 281.

The habit mind and its imprisonment of man has been recognized by many thinkers and writers. Gurdjieff, for instance, speaks of man as a robot or a machine. Colin Wilson writes about Gurdjieff's philosophy as follows. "At the core of his work lies this notion that we possess greater powers than we realize, and that our apparent limitations are due to a peculiar form of laziness – a laziness that has become so habitual that it has developed into a mechanism."¹⁶⁶

This is nothing new and has been recognized since ancient times most notably in the Rig Veda. In fact, the opening verse of the Rig Veda, studied in Chapter 2, begins by saying "*Agnimile purohitam yajnasya devamrtvijam hotāram ratnadhātānam.*" As Sri Aurobindo pointed out, this is a prayer to awaken the creative fire within.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the obvious translation is "Agni I adore, who stands before the Lord, the god who seeth Truth, the warrior, strong disposer of delight."¹⁶⁸ Sri Aurobindo asks several questions regarding this opening verse. First, why an invocation to Agni before all other gods? "Because it is he that stands before Yajna, the Divine Master of things; because he is the god whose burning eyes can gaze straight at Truth, at the *satyam*, the *vijnānam*, which is the Seer's own aim and desire and on which all Veda is based; because he is the warrior who wars down and removes all the crooked attractions of ignorance and limitation that stand persistently in the way of the Yogin; because as the vehicle of Tapas, the pure divine superconscious energy which flows from the concealed higher hemisphere of existence, (*avyakta parārdha*), he more than any develops and arranges Ananda, the divine delight."¹⁶⁹ The image of fire is the image of tapasya and this is the recurrent theme of the Upanishads: how to awaken the inner fire, the fire of enthusiasm.

Agni is not fire, but exists in the fire. How does Agni exist in the fire? Sri Aurobindo answers, "As the man lives in his body and as thought lives in the look or the gesture. The body is not the man in himself and the gesture is not the thought in itself; it is only the man in manifestation or the thought in manifestation. So too the fire is not Agni in himself but Agni in manifestation and the world is not God in Himself but God in manifestation. The man is not

¹⁶⁶ Colin Wilson, *The War Against Sleep, The Philosophy of Gurdjieff*, The Aquarian Press Limited, 1980, p. 14.

¹⁶⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Works, Volume 11, Hymns to the Mystic Fire, The First Rik of the Rig Veda*, p. 439.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

manifested only by his body, but also and much more perfectly by his work and action. Thought is not manifested only by look and gesture, but also and much more perfectly by action and speech. So too, Agni is not manifested only by fire, but also and much more perfectly by all workings in the world, - subtle as well as gross material, - of the principle of heat and brilliance and force; God is not manifested only by this material world, but also and much more perfectly by all movements and harmonies of the action of consciousness supporting and informing material appearances.”¹⁷⁰

The fundamental problem of the human being of how to awaken the creative mind and ignite oneself to a higher purpose is what is being invoked here. The whole of yoga is to awaken this fire. Many artists and writers of all countries and climes have recognized this problem and have resorted to various contrivances, some of them ridiculous and bordering on the bizarre, to combat this lazy tendency of the mind. For instance, the American writer, Ernest Hemmingway took up big game hunting, bullfighting and working as a war correspondent. These people deliberately sought out dangers in order to avoid boredom or a life of laziness. Sadly, some people even turn to crime. The central premise of yoga is that our energies can be given a creative and purposeful direction.

The ancient sages realized that the human being becomes an automaton, or a lazy individual through inertia, through habitual thinking and action. We perform our daily tasks with our mind elsewhere and this is the source of automatic action. If we can perform our work with full attention and awareness, we can mitigate the habit forming mechanism. This is one idea. The other idea is to deliberately challenge the mind through creative exertion and this is the essence of the idea of *tapas*.

In Aurobindo’s view, writing can be used as a basis of a spiritual practice. One can rise from the morass of the habit mind to the level of the creative or inspired mind. This can be done through reflection and reading. This does not mean reading anything, but rather the reading of some inspired material. In fact, ideas have power and when great ideas are meditated upon, they have power to rejuvenate and energize the mind and fill one with enthusiasm. For instance, the entire Bhagavadgita is precisely that. Arjuna was in a state of despondency and Sri Krishna’s message on the battlefield was the message of the Atman and this lifted up his spirit that by the end of the discourse he was inspired for action. This

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 440.

is what we want. When we feel that our mind is depressed, we have to recognize methods and techniques to lift the mind from its depths of despair. The technique may differ from individual to individual and this is the essential theme of Vedanta and its insistence on an appropriate combination of the four yogas. We must find the right stimulus, the right challenge to the mind that will awaken new energies. If we take up too many tasks or too many projects, we find ourselves in the danger of spreading ourselves too thinly. This again is a dissipation of energies. No activity, or inertia, is *tamoguna*, and too much activity, with too many thoughts is *rajoguna*, and both of these extremes must be avoided. The study of great ideas is often an antidote for such an impasse of the mind. The habit of stillness is again another. Music is a third. One must determine for oneself which one works and when. It may even be possible that physical activity can help in this context. Many have found that a brisk walk around the block invigorates their spirit. It is also good physical exercise.

Commenting on this tendency of the human mind to spread itself thinly by trying to take up many things, Swami Vivekananda writes, “There is the danger of frittering away your energies by taking up an idea only for its novelty, and then giving it up for another that is newer. Take one thing up and do it, and see the end of it, and before you have seen the end, do not give it up. He who can become mad with an idea, he alone sees light. Those that only take a nibble here and a nibble there will never attain anything. They may titillate their nerves for a moment, but there it will end. They will be slaves in the hands of nature and will never get beyond the senses.”¹⁷¹

The zeal to complete a creative work is strengthened when we have a purpose and meaning in the task. One needs meaning in what one does. Creativity, for its own sake, is meaningless. There has to be a purpose and if that purpose is driven by an ideal of collective welfare, then there is more power in the work we do. This is the worship of the *Daridra Narayana*, as Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi have described it.

At the age of 78, Sri Aurobindo passed away in 1950 at his ashram in Pondicherry. His legacy of writing signals the way for future humanity. The present stage of the human race is transitional. There are higher spiritual levels to attain. Once

¹⁷¹ Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 177.

attained, life on this planet will be taken to a higher standard. The means to achieve this end is integral yoga.

Though we chose Sri Aurobindo as an example of a mystic philosopher of modern India, we find that there is much that is practical in his integral yoga. Especially in connection with mental vagaries and laziness, the sadhana of artistic expression in the form of creative writing will help much in confronting our defects and raising us into the higher levels of the mind. In this sense, the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo is part of the “Neo-Vedanta” of the 20th century.

13.3 Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore was born in Calcutta, in 1861 into a wealthy, artistic family. He started to write poetry at the age of eight. His early education was through private tutors at home, but later, he went to England to study law. He returned to India within one year without earning a degree. Though his early writings were in Bengali, he also wrote in English and translated some of his Bengali poems into English. Most of his work is imbued with a mystical quality and often borders on the devotional. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913, when he was fifty-two years old, most notably for his work *Gitanjali*, or Song Offerings. In writing the introduction to the English edition, the celebrated poet William Butler Yeats said, “I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me. These lyrics – which are in the original, my Indian friends tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of color, or metrical invention – display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble.”

From his early childhood, Tagore lived and breathed poetry. He learned the essence of poetic style from the great poets themselves. In his *Reminiscences*, he writes of one Bihari Lal Chakravarti and how his sister-in-law admired his poetry and memorized the lyrics of many of them. “He was a great admirer of Valmiki and Kalidas. I remember how once after reciting a description of the Himalayas

from Kalidas with all the strength of his voice, he said: ‘The succession of long ‘a’ sound here is not an accident. The poet has deliberately repeated this sound all the way from *Devatatma* down to *Nagādhirāja* as an aid to realizing the glorious expanse of the Himalayas.’¹⁷²

Tagore would say that one writes poetry, not to explain something or to convey a moral, but rather to convey a feeling. This feeling tries to find expression in the shape of a poem. “That words have meanings is the just the difficulty,” he wrote. “That is why poets have to turn and twist them in meter and rhyme so that meaning may be held somewhat in check and feeling allowed to express itself. The utterance of feeling does not involve the statement of some fundamental truth or a scientific fact or a useful moral precept. Like a tear or a smile, a poem is only a picture of what is taking place within.”¹⁷³

When we survey the life of Tagore, we see the life of a contemplative. Unlike Gandhi, he was a solitary man, a recluse, who spent countless hours in reflection and meditation. Something of the recluse is needed for any creative endeavor. In his essay on Tagore, Radhakrishnan writes, “The poetry of human experience, the realities of life as distinct from its mere frills, are achieved in solitude. ... Only the man of serene mind can realize the spiritual meaning of life. Honesty with oneself is the condition of spiritual integrity. We must let in the light to illumine the secret places of the soul. Our pretensions and professions are the barriers that shut us away from truth. We are more familiar with the things we have than with what we are. We are afraid to be alone with ourselves, face to face with our naked loneliness.”¹⁷⁴

We never discover who we are unless we retire into solitude and confront our thoughts and feelings. Even the creative artist or scientist must retreat into silence to sort out ideas or to make a discovery, to find the underlying patterns. When we are alone with ourselves, we can feel the canker of our thoughts and desires, their tumultuous rumble that creates a certain fear, a certain anxiety. We can feel it all too well. When the sadhaka is thus confronted by his own mind, the immediate reaction is to seek noise, to seek company, to seek for work, to seek amusement,

¹⁷² R. Tagore, *Omnibus II*, *My Reminiscences*, p. 506. The reference here is to the famous Hymn to the Himalayas written by Kalidas and the opening lines of the poem. The poem was set to tune and made famous by Pankaj Mallik.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 568.

¹⁷⁴ S. Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion*, George Allen and Unwin, 1958, pp. 135-136.

or distraction, or to slip into sleep. Few people can accept the challenge of solitude. Yet, we know for true understanding of ourselves, we must confront ourselves. It is not an easy task. But it must be done. And if it is done, we emerge stronger, and more illumined. This is the sadhana of the poet, the scholar, the scientist. To quote Radhakrishnan again, “It is with an effort that we have to pull ourselves together, cultivate the inner life, and abstract from the outer sheaths of body, mind and intellect. We then see the soul within and attain to a stillness of spirit. The discovery of inwardness is the essential basis of spiritual life.”¹⁷⁵

Tagore had the temperament of the Upanishadic sage and felt that education should be imparted in that spirit. To this end, he founded in 1901, a hermitage (*ashram*) in Shantiniketan (which literally means ‘the abode of peace’), about 200 kilometers from Kolkata. There he began an experimental school and created a veritable forest retreat. He also penned many of his literary classics including the Nobel-Prize winning *Gitanjali*. Here is a sample verse 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.*

His creativity expanded into music and art. In his life, he wrote more than 2000 songs and created a new style of music now called Rabindra Sangeet. Today, every villager hums a tune of Rabindranath Tagore. Two of these songs became the national anthems of India and (present-day) Bangladesh. Tagore is perhaps the only person on the planet to have penned the national anthems of two countries. Though he opposed British imperialism, he did not embrace any form of nationalism. He advocated internationalism and he saw that education is the only way to achieve this. So, in 1917, he conceived of a new type of university that would become a world center for the study of all great ideas from all corners of the world. Using the money from his Nobel Prize, he created the Visva Bharati University in December 1921. Today, it is one of the central universities in India.

Many scholars from all parts of the world came to Visva Bharati and exchanged ideas. Even Mahatma Gandhi came to visit him. Though they did not agree on many things, still they had mutual respect for each other. Today, Visva Bharati University has an illustrious list of distinguished alumni, the most notable being

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 136.

Indira Gandhi (former Prime Minister of India), Satyajit Ray (noted film director) and Amartya Sen (a Nobel laureate in economics).

Tagore died in 1941 at the age of 80. But he left a legacy of inspiring writings. In *Creative Unity*, a collection of essays published in 1922, Tagore wrote, “I do not put my faith in any new institutions, but in individuals all over the world who think clearly, feel nobly and act rightly, thus becoming channels of moral truth.” He further believed that global peace could only be achieved through intellectual and artistic co-operation between nations and often referred to the cult of nationalism which is tearing the globe apart.

13.4 Gandhi

In an earlier section, we outlined the ancient ideal of *purusārtha*. The ideal of *purusārtha* finds a powerful expression in the life of Mahatma Gandhi. In his life and writings, we find a marvellous synthesis of the spiritual and the secular life. In his magazine, *Young India*, he wrote as early as 1922 that the “human mind or human society is not divided into watertight compartments called social, political and religious. All act and react upon one another.”¹⁷⁶ Later, he amplified this statement in the following way. “Human life being an undivided whole, no line can ever be drawn between its different compartments, nor between ethics and politics. A trader who earns his wealth by deception only succeeds in deceiving himself when he thinks that his sins can be washed away by spending some amount of his ill-gotten gains on the so-called religious purposes. One’s everyday life is never capable of being separated from one’s spiritual being. Both act and react upon one another.”¹⁷⁷ Thus, in this way, the ideal of *moksa* was intimately wedded to the other three components of *purusārtha*. One can even say that for Gandhi, the other three components were subordinate to the ideal of *moksa*. Indeed, he wrote in his autobiography, “To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who

¹⁷⁶ Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*, 2-3-1922, p. 131.

¹⁷⁷ Mahatma Gandhi, *Harijan*, 30-3-1947, p. 85.

say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.”¹⁷⁸

These statements reveal a deep and personal understanding of religion and politics that transcends the common understanding. To probe the mind of Gandhi and uncover how he came to formulate his philosophy is a mammoth task. For in one sense, Gandhi was not an academic philosopher and was not the creator of any “ism” or system of political thought. In a famous letter to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, dated September 16, 1934, Gandhi wrote, “The fact that I have affected the thought and practice of our times does not make me fit to give expression to the philosophy that may lie behind it. To give a philosophical interpretation of the phenomenon must be reserved for men like you.”¹⁷⁹

But this is not a simple task. Gandhi is one of the most voluminous writers in human history. His Collected Works comprise more than 150 volumes. Most of the volumes are collections of his letters written to various people, but even if we remove these letters, we find that Gandhi had a vast array of essays that span more than fifty volumes. In this connection, he shares with Sri Aurobindo, the editorship of a weekly journal or journals, since Gandhi started several during his lifetime. In the case of Gandhi, the only major book formally written seems to be his autobiography, modestly titled, “A Story of My Experiments in Truth” and this was written in prison. If we want to understand his writings, we must first understand his motivation for writing. In his own words, he says, “What I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end. But as I have all along believed that what is possible for one is possible for all, my experiments have not been conducted in the closet, but in the open; and I do not think that this fact detracts from their spiritual value.”¹⁸⁰

What we see again here, by Gandhi’s own admission, is that his writing was part of his sadhana. However, unlike Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi did not aim for any literary excellence or poetic style. Rather, he wanted to get his message out as

¹⁷⁸ Mahatma Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, p. 370-371.

¹⁷⁹ S. Gopal, *Radhakrishnan: A Biography*, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 138.

¹⁸⁰ M.K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments in Truth*, Navajivan Publishing House, 1927, p. x.

clearly and as quickly as possible. There is perhaps something to be learned from this attitude, especially for some of us who tend to procrastinate and try to aim for the perfect creative work.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869 in Porbandar, India situated in the province of Gujarat. Gandhi was the youngest of three sons. He lived there until he was seven years old at which time his family moved to Rajkot. While still in high school, at the age of thirteen, he was married to Kasturbai who was also thirteen. His wife did not have schooling and was illiterate. After his matriculation, Gandhi went off to England to study law in September 1887, when he was only eighteen years old. He left behind a son who was barely a few months old. After four years of study in England, he returned to India and set up a legal practice in Rajkot with limited success. Then came a case from a Gujarati firm of merchants who had a branch in South Africa about a legal case. So, in April 1893, Gandhi sailed to South Africa with the intention of staying there one year and returning to India. It turned out that he stayed there for twenty years.

For Gandhi, his store of bitter personal experiences was fuel enough to keep the flame of his exertion and effort for the cause to be never extinguished. In South Africa, he came face to face with the ugly and grotesque face of racial discrimination in all its forms and shapes. As he relates in his Autobiography, now made famous by the opening scene of the movie Gandhi, we see one of the turning points of his life. "The train reached Maritzburg, the capital of Natal, at about 9pm. Beddings used to be provided at this station. A railway servant came and asked me if I wanted one. 'No,' said I, 'I have one with me.' He went away. But a passenger came next and looked me up and down. He saw that I was a 'colored' man. This disturbed him. Out he went and came in again with one or two officials. They all kept quiet, when another official came to me and said, 'Come along, you must go to the van compartment.' 'But I have a first class ticket,' said I. 'That doesn't matter,' rejoined the other. 'I tell you, you must go to the van compartment.' 'I tell you, I was permitted to travel in this compartment at Durban and I insist on going on in it.' 'No you won't,' said the official. 'You must leave this compartment, or else I shall have to call a police constable to push you out.' 'Yes you may. I refuse to go out voluntarily.' The constable came. He took me by the hand and pushed me out. My luggage was also taken out. I refused to go to the other compartment and the train steamed away. I went and sat in the waiting room, keeping my hand baggage with me, leaving the other luggage where it was. The railway authorities had taken charge of it. It was winter and winter in the higher regions of South Africa is severely

cold. Maritzburg being at a high altitude, the cold was extremely bitter. My overcoat was in my luggage, but I did not dare to ask for it lest I should be insulted again, so I sat and shivered. There was no light in the room.”¹⁸¹

One can say that this incident ignited the *satyagraha* movement. It is indeed a cosmic moment, a decisive moment in Gandhi’s life and the history of the world. If Gandhi had succumbed to the discriminatory laws and moved to the third class compartment as he was told to do, then the movement would have had a late beginning. But because of this incident, it was essentially born that night and was developed in South Africa before it was tried in India when Gandhi moved there in the 1920’s. For Gandhi, it was a critical moment and a time for reflection.

Gandhi continues, “I began to think of my duty. Should I fight for my rights or go back to India, or should I go on to Pretoria without minding the insults, and return to India after finishing the case? It would be cowardice to run back to India without fulfilling my obligation. The hardship to which I was subjected to was superficial – only a symptom of the deep disease of color prejudice. I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process. Redress for wrongs I should seek only to the extent that would be necessary for the removal of the color prejudice. So I decided to take the next available train to Pretoria.”¹⁸²

This episode was the source of Gandhi’s spiritual strength since he made the right decision. Often it is the case that we accept injustice since we feel we are not sufficiently strong to take on the Goliath of race prejudice or any other form of social injustice. We can assume that Gandhi spent the night in the station at Maritzburg without sleep pondering over this issue. For he writes, “The following morning I sent a long telegram to the General Manager of the Railway and also informed Abdulla Sheth, who immediately met the General Manager. The Manager justified the conduct of the railway authorities, but informed him that he had already instructed the Station Master to see that I reached my destination safely. Abdulla Sheth wired to the Indian merchants in Maritzburg and to friends in other places to meet me and look after me. The merchants came to see me at the station and tried to comfort me by narrating their own hardships and explaining that what had happened to me was nothing unusual. They also said that Indians traveling first or second class had to expect trouble from railway officials and white passengers. The day was thus spent in listening

¹⁸¹ M.K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments in Truth*, pp. 93-94.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

to these tales of woe.”¹⁸³ That day, Gandhi took the evening train to his destination. He reached Charlestown by morning but now had to take a stage coach to go from Charlestown to Johannesburg since there was no train service between these two cities. Again, even though Gandhi had a valid ticket, the coachman refused him a seat since he would be sitting next to white passengers. After some argument, Gandhi had to sit outside next to the driver. Sadly, he writes, “I knew it was sheer injustice and an insult, but I thought it better to pocket it. I could not have forced myself inside, and if I had raised a protest, the coach would have gone off without me. This would have meant the loss of another day, and heaven only knows what would have happened the next day. So, much as I fretted within myself, I prudently sat next to the coachman.”¹⁸⁴

If we think this was the end of it, we find it was not. The story gets more gruesome. That day, around three o’clock in the afternoon, one of the white passengers wanted to smoke and have some fresh air. “So he took a piece of dirty sack cloth from the driver, spread it on the footboard and addressing me said, ‘Sami, you sit on this, I want to sit near the driver.’ The insult was more than I could bear. In fear and trembling I said to him, ‘It was you who seated me here, though I should have been accommodated inside. I put up with the insult. Now that you want to sit outside and smoke, you would have me sit at your feet. I will not do so, but I am prepared to sit inside.’ As I was struggling through these sentences, the man came down upon me and began heavily to box my ears. He seized me by the arm and tried to drag me down. I clung to the brass rails of the coachbox and was determined to keep my hold even at the risk of breaking my wrist bones. The passengers were witnessing the scene – the man swearing at me, dragging and belaboring me, and I remaining still. He was strong and I was weak. Some of the passengers were moved to pity and exclaimed: ‘Man, let him alone. Don’t beat him. He is not to blame. He is right. If he can’t stay there, let him come and sit with us.’ ‘No fear,’ cried the man, but he seemed somewhat crestfallen and stopped beating me. He let go my arm, swore at me a little more, and asking the Hottentot servant who was sitting on the other side of the coachbox to sit on the footboard, took the seat so vacated.”¹⁸⁵

It seems that Gandhi still did not sit inside with the white passengers but kept his seat outside next to the coachman. This episode of racial prejudice was typical

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 95.

and must have driven home to Gandhi that something had to be done to change this. But at that moment, one can only pray for one's life, as Gandhi did. In fact, he writes, "The coach rattled away. My heart was beating fast within my breast, and I was wondering whether I should ever reach my destination alive. The man cast an angry look at me now and then, and pointing his finger at me, growled: 'Take care, let me once get to Standerton and I shall show you what I do.' I sat speechless and prayed to God to help me. After dark, we reached Standerton and I heaved a sigh of relief on seeing some Indian faces. ... I told them all that I had gone through. They were very sorry to hear it and comforted me by relating to me their own bitter experiences."¹⁸⁶

For Gandhi, there is no further motivation to seek than the desire to correct injustice. In many ways, Gandhi was motivated to correct a social injustice, a cancer on the social organism. Being a lawyer, he was very clear about how to proceed. He wrote to the various officials involved narrating all the details of the incidents. In most cases, he got back some replies trying to accommodate his travel, but of course all the time, justifying the behavior of the malicious individuals. Such were the times then and in some parts of the world, such are the times even now. What is horrifying is that if we read the next sections of Gandhi's narrative, they are more horrific and shocking than one can imagine. We will not go into it here but refer the reader to a study of his autobiography.

These painful episodes led Gandhi to evolve a viable political philosophy and gave birth to the idea of *satyagraha*. In order to clearly formulate his principles and to communicate his ideas to his followers and supporters, Gandhi initiated several journals to reach out to the community. These were *Young India*, *Navajivan*, and *Indian Opinion*. These journals were weekly journals and this meant that Gandhi had to write articles for them. Often, investing his own money into the venture, he began to write week after week on issues that mattered to Indians and their struggle for freedom. In his own words, he says, "I feel that the journal has served the community well. It was never intended to be a commercial concern. ... Week after week, I poured out my soul in its columns and expounded the principles and practice of *satyagraha* as I understood it. During ten years, that is, until 1914, excepting the intervals of my enforced rest in prison, there was hardly an issue of *Indian Opinion* without an article from me. I cannot recall a word in those articles set down without thought or deliberation, or a word of conscious exaggeration, or anything merely to please. Indeed, the journal became

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 96.

for me a training in self-restraint, and for friends a medium through which to keep in touch with my thoughts. ... Satyagraha would probably have been impossible without *Indian Opinion*.”¹⁸⁷

Though Gandhi’s writings do not qualify for high class literature, they do delineate a powerful political philosophy that had been adopted by many other leaders since. With these writings, leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel, Lech Walesa, and more recently Aung San Suu Kyi, were able to fashion and modify the principles of *satyagraha* to suit their own freedom struggles in their own respective countries. Gandhi became a voice of the conscience of all people.

In his autobiography, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote that in the spring of 1950, “one Sunday afternoon, I traveled to Philadelphia to hear a sermon by Dr. Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University. ... Dr. Johnson had just returned from a trip to India, and to my great interest, spoke of the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. His message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought half a dozen books on Gandhi’s life and works. Like most people, I had heard of Gandhi, but I had never studied him seriously. As I read, I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance. I was particularly moved by his Salt March to the Sea and his numerous fasts. The whole concept of *satyagraha* was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism 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. Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method of social reform that I had been seeking.”¹⁸⁸

Dr. King was so inspired by Gandhi’s life and message that he made a visit to India in 1959. In his autobiography, in the chapter entitled, ‘Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,’ Dr. King writes, “Gandhi was able to mobilize and galvanize more people in his lifetime than any other person in the history of this world. And just

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 239.

¹⁸⁸ The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr., edited by Clayborne Carson, Warner Books, 1998, p. 23-24.

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 390 million people achieved their freedom and they achieved it nonviolently.”¹⁸⁹

The philosophy of *satyagraha*, or holding on to truth, was evolved over decades and became refined in thought and practice through Gandhi’s writings, mainly in his journals, *Young India* and *Harijan*. When Gandhi undertook the fight of unjust laws, first in South Africa and then later, in India, he had a cause to fight for, a matter of life and death. The writings, the meditations and the experiments all had a singular purpose and the *Daridra Narayana* (the God in the Poor) was the sole object of his worship. If we read his autobiography and see that there was nothing extraordinary about his childhood, we are only amazed how a single idea such as nonviolent resistance can catch fire and ignite a nation to achieve freedom from British imperialism. But it did. This is the power of spirit, the power of an idea and this power spread through the writings of Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi did not view writing, per se, as a *sadhana*. I don’t think he ever thought, ‘Let me sit down and meditate. Let me sit down and write.’ His writings and meditations were inspired by the immediate need to solve a problem of life and death. From the scriptural lore, from the philosophical writings of learned scholars of all countries and all climes, he forged out a plan, a philosophy to suit his particular needs and the particular people he was serving. This was his originality. We are often too timid to get our feet wet. But he managed to plunge in and find a way out. That was his genius.

If Gandhi had not written his words through his journals and magazines, the mobilization of the masses to work for a cause would have never taken place. Gandhi writes, “Through these journals I now commenced to the best of my ability the work of educating the reading public in *Satyagraha*. [These journals] reached a very wide circulation, which at one time rose to the neighborhood of forty thousand ... These 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

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

in this hour of trial and did their humble bit towards lightening the tyranny of martial law.”¹⁹⁰

Everything is energy and the word is a form of energy. Just as we tame energies for creative purposes, we must tame the energy expressed through the word in the form of writing. We inhabit two worlds: a physical world and a mental world. The objects that we see around us in the physical world are clearly visible as trees, houses, lakes, clouds and so forth. The objects of the mental world are ideas, thoughts, feelings and symbols. They are quite real and exert a tremendous influence upon us. The energy that is expressed through the word is to a large extent tamed and channeled through writing. This the ancient sages knew. If Gandhi typifies the sadhana of karma yoga through his writings, then all the more so with the symbols and words that he discovered, such as *satyagraha* and so forth. He evoked symbols that meant something to the masses he was trying to lead.¹⁹¹

In speaking about this energy of the word, Swami Vivekananda writes, “In one sense we cannot think but in symbols; words themselves are symbols of thought. In another sense everything in the universe may be looked upon as a symbol. The whole universe is a symbol and God is the essence behind. This kind of symbology is not simply the creation of man; it is not that certain people belonging to a religion sit down together and think out certain symbols, and bring them into existence out of their own minds. The symbols of religion have a natural growth. ... Language is not the result of convention; it is not that people ever agreed to represent certain ideas by certain words; there never was an idea without a corresponding word or a word without a corresponding idea; ideas and words are in their nature inseparable. The symbols to represent ideas may be sound symbols or color symbols. ... The study and practice of these things form naturally a part of karma yoga.”¹⁹²

Many people are of the view that karma yoga is the yoga of action, but they fail to see that something like writing is action. Through the written word, we can reach out to many not only in the present but in the future as well. There is power in the

¹⁹⁰ M.K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, p. 395.

¹⁹¹ Apparently, Gandhi ran a competition in his magazine, *Indian Opinion*, for the right word to denote non-violent resistance. His close relative Maganlal Gandhi came up with “*sadagraha*” and Gandhi changed it to “*satyagraha*” to make the meaning clearer. See, *Mahatma Gandhi, The Essential Writings*, p. 317.

¹⁹² Swami Vivekananda, *Collected Works, Volume 1*, p. 72-74.

word. It is pregnant with the power of transformation. *Satyagraha* was such a word and in the hands of Mahatma Gandhi had the power of emancipation and transformation of India. On August 15, 1947, India became free from colonial rule.

Unfortunately, Gandhi had to sacrifice his life for the sake of the ideal he believed in. On January 30, 1948, he was killed by an assassin's bullet. Yet Gandhi lives through his legacy, his message and his writings. He has inspired and continues to inspire many who dare to dream of a better world free of conflict and strife.

The essence of *satyagraha* is to hold on to truth at all costs. But this must be done through the principle of *ahimsa*, non-violence. In 1917, he wrote, "Satyagraha is not a physical force. A satyagrahi does not inflict pain on the adversary; he does not seek his destruction. A satyagrahi never resorts to firearms. In the use of *satyagraha*, there is no ill-will whatever. *Satyagraha* is pure soul-force. Truth is the very substance of soul. That is why this force is called *satyagraha*. The soul is informed with knowledge. In it burns the flame of love. If someone gives us pain through ignorance, we shall win him through love ... Non-violence is a dormant state. In the waking state, it is love. Ruled by love, the world goes on. ... We forget the principle of non-violence, which is the essence of all religions. The doctrine of arms stands for irreligion."¹⁹³

This principle, as a principle of political philosophy for social change, has taken root in many nations around the world. As mentioned earlier, the non-violent civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. was inspired by this philosophy. If we are indeed at a cusp of evolution as Aurobindo has suggested, then our survival depends on us being able to resolve our conflicts not through violence but through dialogue and compromise. In this atomic age, where we are fighting our battles through computers and drone aircraft, through armaments and atomic weapons, the possibility of total annihilation looms large like a mushroom cloud. All it takes is one mistake.

The noted historian, Arnold Toynbee wrote, "Today we are still living in this transitional chapter of the world's history, but it is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race. In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by Western technology. But this Western

¹⁹³ Mahatma Gandhi, *The Essential Writings*, Oxford University Press, p. 316.

skill has not only ‘annihilated distance’; it has armed the peoples of the world with weapons of devastating power at a time when they have been brought to point-blank range of each other without yet having learnt to know and love each other. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way. The Emperor Ashoka’s and the Mahatma Gandhi’s principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna’s testimony to the harmony of religions ; here we have the attitude and the spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family—and, in the Atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.”¹⁹⁴

13.5 Krishnamurti

The fundamental message of Krishnamurti is that “Truth is a pathless land and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. ... Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or coerce people along a particular path.”¹⁹⁵ In this message, he is one with the Buddha, who also advocated his students to think for themselves and not to accept an idea because it was tradition, or that it was written in a book, or someone taught it to them. But rather, reason it out and if it is beneficial to one and all, accept it. How did Krishnamurti come to this realization? That is a phenomenal story.

Jiddu Krishnamurti was born in 1895 in Madanepalli, Andhra Pradesh. He was the eighth of eleven children, and being the eighth, was named Krishna (since according to Indian mythology, Sri Krishna was also the eight child of Devaki and Vasudeva). Krishnamurti’s mother passed away when he was only ten, and so the father moved to Chennai (Madras) for employment. He found work at the Theosophical Society started by Annie Besant. One of the members of the society spotted young Krishnamurti playing on the seashore along with his younger brother Nitya and noticed that they both had a “spiritual aura.” He singled out Krishnamurti as the next “World Teacher” of theosophy. Theosophy is a mystical religion and combines theology with philosophy. Its central tenet is that there is a mystical spiritual hierarchy and that humanity must evolve to a greater perfection through this hierarchy. It was founded in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky and

¹⁹⁴ Great Thinkers on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, Belur Math., p. 6.

¹⁹⁵ Mary Luytens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*, London: John Murray, 1975, Shambhala reprint edition 1997, p. 293.

theosophy, with its occult overtones, found a fertile home in Chennai, India. Soon, this turned into a religious cult and Annie Besant, was head of the society, called the Order of the Star.

In 1909, Annie Besant took custody of both Krishnamurti and Nitya and began the training of the new “world teacher.” It must have been a financial relief for the father to let go of the two sons, though there were some legal battles in this connection in later years. Krishnamurti was fourteen and Nitya was eleven when Annie Besant took over as their guardian. She sent both of them off to England for studies in 1911. His younger brother Nitya had difficulty adjusting to his new environments and had numerous health problems. They were moved around to various places to see if his health would improve. Finally, in 1922, they were moved to Ojai, California where they felt the weather would be more suitable for Nitya’s recovery. It was around this time that Krishnamurti would have his life changing experience which lasted three days. First it began as an intense pain at the back of his neck, and then it swelled. He would then lapse into unconsciousness. He would relate later, “I was supremely happy, for I had seen. Nothing could ever be the same. I have drunk at the clear and pure waters and my thirst was appeased... I have seen the Light. I have touched compassion which heals all sorrow and suffering; it is not for myself, but for the world... Love in all its glory has intoxicated my heart; my heart can never be closed. I have drunk at the fountain of Joy and eternal Beauty. I am God-intoxicated.”¹⁹⁶

In November 1925, his younger brother Nitya passed away at the age of 27. Undoubtedly, this must have had an impact on Krishnamurti. Ever since he had his spiritual experience and after his younger brother died, Krishnamurti started formulating his own ideas and thoughts without being coached by the theosophist guardians. This development reached its climax in 1929, when he was supposed to announce to the world that he was the new messiah of the Order of the Star. On the 3rd of August, 1929, in front of Annie Besant, in front of thousands of people and a world-wide radio audience, he spoke thus. “You may remember the story of how the devil and a friend of his were walking down the street, when they saw ahead of them a man stoop down and pick up something from the ground, look at it, and put it away in his pocket. The friend said to the devil, “What did that man pick up?” “He picked up a piece of the truth,” said the devil. “That is a very bad business for you, then,” said his friend. “Oh, not at all,” the devil replied, “I am going to help him organize it.” I maintain that truth is a pathless land, and

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 171-172.

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 organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or coerce people along a particular path.”¹⁹⁷

This was indeed a turning point and a defiant act of courage, Gandhian in proportion. It must have been a very difficult thing for him to do since he viewed Annie Besant as his surrogate mother. He continued: “This is no magnificent deed, because I do not want followers, and I mean this. The moment you follow someone you cease to follow Truth. I am not concerned whether you pay attention to what I say or not. I want to do a certain thing in the world and I am going to do it with unwavering concentration. I am concerning myself with only one essential thing: to set man free. I desire to free him from all cages, from all fears, and not to found religions, new sects, nor to establish new theories and new philosophies.”¹⁹⁸

Krishnamurti saw that the problem of the human being lies in his sense of complacency, his inability to act, his inability to think for himself. In all of his lectures we see an exhortation to think through things clearly. According to him, it is pure laziness that one does not do so. We allow others to think for us. Undoubtedly, he saw his guardianship of the Theosophical Society as symbolic of the problem of man. His words seem to echo the famous words of Kant who wrote, “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 I can only pay - others will undertake the work for me. That the step to competence is held to be very dangerous by the greater portion of mankind is seen to by those guardians who have so kindly assumed superintendence over them. After the guardians have made their domestic cattle dumb and have ensured that these placid creatures will not dare take a single step without the harness of the cart to which they are tethered, the guardians then show them the danger which threatens if they try to go alone.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 293.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 294.

¹⁹⁹ I. Kant, An answer to the question: what is enlightenment.

If one had to summarize in one sentence the message of Krishnamurti, it is that one must think for oneself, not accepting any authority. From this perspective, it is the same essential message of the Buddha. In his numerous discourses, we find that Krishnamurti analyses suffering, the cause of suffering and goes into it with great skill. He wrote, "If the Buddha talked to me I would say, 'Sir, I listen to you because I love you. I don't want to get anywhere because I see what you say is true and I love you.' That is all. That has transformed everything. ... Nobody listened [to the Buddha]. That is why there is Buddhism."²⁰⁰

So from then on, he spent his years travelling around the world and teaching that one must think for oneself, one must not live according to a formula, that meditation is really a form of awareness and not an attainment of a higher consciousness. He established numerous schools in many countries where knowledge would not be taught in a traditional way, but rather in a more holistic way so that the student discovers for himself or herself the truth of things. In this endeavour, he shared with Tagore the same philosophy of education.

He died in Ojai, California in February 1986, at the age of 90. His message that we are conditioned by evolution, by society, by culture and even by personal experience should sound familiar to anyone on the path of knowledge. For indeed, to be a true philosopher, one must examine one's thinking in a dispassionate and detached attitude.

13.6 Radhakrishnan

When we come to the life of Radhakrishnan, we see a different approach to philosophy and spirituality. His story is the inspiring journey of how he rose from poverty to the Presidency of India, simply by the power of his philosophy and intellect. We see a scholar, an academic, a philosopher and a great thinker. When he became the President of India in 1962, Bertrand Russell seems to have remarked that "It is an honor to philosophy that Dr. Radhakrishnan should be the president of India and I, as a philosopher, take special pleasure in this. Plato aspired for philosophers to become kings and it is a tribute to India that she should make a philosopher, her president."²⁰¹ On this accolade bestowed upon

²⁰⁰ J. Krishnamurti, *Way of Intelligence*, Chapter 2, Part 3, 1981.

²⁰¹ K. Satchidananda Murty, Ashok Vohra, *Radhakrishnan: his life and ideas*, SUNY Press, 1990, p. 154.

him, Radhakrishnan said later that “Generally, wherever addresses are presented to me, Plato is brought out as one who said that philosophers should rule the state. This is not a Platonic axiom. It is something common to all great cultures. In our own country, we said that thinkers must also act...Even Sri Krishna and Janaka were men not only of philosophical wisdom but also of practical efficiency. We should also behave in the same way. So the Platonic axiom is something which is common to all great cultures. ... We must have vision, we must have practical work. ... Once you have the vision, you must try to transform the vision into reality, by efforts, dedicated work. This is what all great people are expected to do. All students of philosophy are called upon not merely to interpret but to change the world, not only to exert their vision but also to exert honest service, honest dedication.”²⁰²

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born in 1888 in the South Indian town of Tirutani and schooled in Tirupati. He was one of eight children and the family lived in extreme poverty. Despite their poverty, the parents made every effort to educate their children. So Radhakrishnan had his early education in Andhra Pradesh and then in 1908, at the age of twenty, enrolled in the Madras Christian College for his higher education. Apparently, one of his cousins had studied in the same college and after completion of the program, donated his books to Radhakrishnan. The books were in philosophy and after reading them, decided to take up philosophy as his main subject. This would also save him the considerable expense of buying new books. Thus his decision to study philosophy seems to have been a chance event. Commenting on this later in life, he wrote, “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 in this 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.’”²⁰³

Of his early years, he wrote, “From the time I knew myself I have had firm faith in the reality of an unseen world behind the flux of phenomenon, a world which we apprehend not with the senses but with the mind, and even when I was faced

²⁰² Ibid., p. 155.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 3. The last sentence of the quote is a famous line from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. “The Moving Finger writes; and having writ, moves on: nor all the piety nor wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line, nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.”

with grave difficulties, this faith has remained unshaken.”²⁰⁴ However, this faith was challenged, first when he entered college and later, in academic circles. Speaking about his teachers in college, he writes, “They were teachers of philosophy, commentators, interpreters, apologists for the Christian way of thought and life, but were not, in the strict sense of the term, seekers of truth. By their criticism of Indian thought, they disturbed my faith and shook the traditional props on which I leaned.”²⁰⁵

What is interesting about Radhakrishnan is that all of his education was done in India. He started his professional life as a philosopher in April 1909, when he was appointed as a lecturer at the Madras Presidency College. At that time, he dived into a detailed and intense study of both Eastern and Western philosophies. Even though he studied many of the great thinkers of the world, he never became a follower of any. He was an independent spirit. However, these comparative studies enabled him to synthesize and explain many of the systems of philosophy both eastern and western. He writes, “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.”²⁰⁶

Thus began a period of prolific writing. His magnum opus was undertaken in 1923 when he wrote a two-volume treatise on Indian philosophy. In 1932, he wrote “An idealist’s view of life” which summarised his philosophical outlook. In 1939, he wrote “Eastern Religions and Western Thought.” In 1953, he completed his scholarly survey of the principal Upanishads and in 1957, the Sourcebook of Indian Philosophy. In 1960, he completed his commentary on the Brahma Sutras. How he could find time to write these scholarly volumes in the middle of his exceedingly busy schedule, first as an ambassador of India, then as the Vice-President and finally as the President of India, is definitely a source of inspiration.

For Radhakrishnan, philosophy was not a mere profession but rather the very reason for living. In his autobiography, he admits, “Though I have not had a sense of vocation, a sense that I was born to do what I am now carrying out, my travels and engagements in different parts of the world for over a generation gave

²⁰⁴ R. Venkataraman, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishna, p. 3, in Radhakrishnan, Centenary Volume, edited by G. Parthasarathi and D.P. Chattopadhyaya, Oxford University Press, 1989.

²⁰⁵ S. Radhakrishnan, Fragments of a Confession, in The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, edited by P. A. Schilpp, Open Court Press, 1991, p. 9.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

me a purpose in life. My one supreme interest has been to try to restore a sense of spiritual values to the millions of religiously displaced persons, who have been struggling to find precarious refuges in the emergency camps of Art and Science, of Fascism and Nazism, of Humanism and Communism. The first step to recovery is to understand the nature of the confusion of thought which absorbs the allegiance of millions of men. Among the major influences which foster a spirit of skepticism in regard to religious truth are the growth of the scientific spirit, the development of a technological civilization, a formal or artificial religion which finds itself in conflict with an awakened social conscience and a comparative study of religions.”²⁰⁷

Radhakrishnan’s philosophy is absolute idealism, but not of an abstract kind. It recognizes the value of everyday experiences, their richness and variety to educate and fortify the human being. At the same time, he emphasized that one must experience life through the prism of a transcendental absolute. Highlighting this point, Charles Moore wrote, “In all phases of his 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 the various religious and philosophical systems.”²⁰⁸

Radhakrishnan had phenomenal powers of concentration. The ancient sages referred to the faculty of focusing the mind on one idea as the essence of *tapas*. In his Hibbert lectures, delivered at Oxford University, Radhakrishnan writes, “Tapas, the energizing of conscious force, austere thinking, the inward travail of the spirit is the ‘brooding which is responsible for creative work. Tapas is the force by which some mighty force possibility is actualized.”²⁰⁹ In the Taittiriya Upanishad, we find this idea in bold relief:

*Sa tapa tapyata sa tapas taptva
Idam sarvam asrjata*

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁰⁸ S. Radhakrishna and C. Moore, A sourcebook in Indian Philosophy, p. 610.

²⁰⁹ S. Radhakrishnan, East and West in Religion, p. 75.

He performed tapas; having performed tapas, he produced all this whatsoever. (Verse 2.6).

So what exactly is tapas? For Radhakrishnan, it is thinking with one's whole being, one's whole mind, one's whole body. It is integral yoga. And writing is the method by which we grasp an idea and make it part of our being. Every word and every sentence is a step in the ascent towards heaven.

He elaborated, "We must concentrate or hold on to an idea .. we can write it down, visualize it, paint or draw it, until it sinks into the unconscious and recreates us. ... Brooding is creative energy."²¹⁰

Radhakrishnan had a long and exemplary academic career. He was the Spalding Professor of Philosophy at Oxford University from 1936 to 1952. He was India's ambassador to the Soviet Union in the 1950's. Then from 1952 to 1962, he was India's Vice-President and from 1962 to 1967, he was her President. During all of his appointments, he promoted world unity and intellectual dialogue, building a bridge of understanding between the east and the west, between the north and the south. In 1967, he retired from public life and spent his last years in his home in Mylapore, a suburb of Chennai (Madras). He passed away on April 17, 1975.

In many ways, Radhakrishnan was a cultural, intellectual and spiritual ambassador of India. Through his life, he demonstrated the power of ideas to transform society. Through his writings, he explained the ancient philosophy and explained it in a modern context. He wrote extensively on how these ideas can be applied in today's world. His legacy is an east-west synthesis of philosophical thought.

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 97-98.