

Module 1

Characteristics Of Contemporary Indian Philosophy

Just as a work of art embodies the thoughts and feelings of the artist, the philosopher attempts to project the rational nature of our thoughts behind the myths and miracles recounted by a tradition. To know such a philosophy in the Indian context is not so easy. We have to understand the different time periods to understand different epochs of Indian history. But we have to keep in mind that it becomes highly impossible to divide the ideas of philosophers. In history we will have different dynasties. They will be discrete, perfectly demonstrated by period, name and geophysical boundaries. But in philosophy, what we study or try to understand is not the physical or geopolitical records, but the human minds which lived within those boundaries. Thus it becomes not so simple to understand any philosophy or any individual philosopher without understanding their contexts. The contemporary Indian philosophers reinterpreted the ancient Indian thoughts in to the need of the present day society.

When we come to study Contemporary Indian Philosophy the period starts with Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The period continued from Ram Mohan Roy to the present day. That is this period begins from the second half of 18th century and continues up to the first half of 20th century. This period is marked by its devastating and dynamic changes caused to its contemporary societies. It did not affect only the Europeans but it affected the Indian society even. The medieval period of Indian history is totally filled with social reformations with a modified reaffirmation of the old and ancient Vedic texts. Ancient Indian philosophies over flooded with the polytheistic theology and finally gave out their way to monism and the formless monotheism. With a little modification of the stratifications of society the medieval reformations gave way to the cults of Devotion. Now that has gone away. Not only the European societies but the Indian social religions also found it to be very difficult to digest these real facts of science allowed to creep in. This marks the features of the contemporary social philosophers. The orthodoxical ideas have to be put to the backgrounds and the ideas of reformation had to be crept in. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was such a philosopher who fought against these orthodoxical practices. They were the practices of Sati, the narrow mindedness of Bhakti cult in the form of Hindu Ascetic Idealism. He tried to put in some sort of Universalism through his **BrahmoSamaj** which tried to affirm the essential unity of all religions. He tried to incorporate certain modern western ideas of liberty, secularism and humanism. This marks the important characteristics of contemporary Indian philosophy.

Ram Mohan Roy tried to assimilate the elements of Islam, Christianity and modern rationalism through his humanist philosophy. He tried to show the support from Upanishads also. He marks the first glimpses of enlightenment. He initiated new enlightenment and urge towards the future free from the chains of outworn customs and superstition. The Christian ideas of rejection of idol worship found through his writings. He preached the Fatherhood of god. We can observe from the following enumerated points the actual ideas which had been preached by all most all the Contemporary Indian Philosophers through their reformation movements.

1. All of them succeeded in arousing a new awareness and self-confidence and self-respect in the Indian mind. They showed how the essential values of the great Indian heritage were to be preserved and how the nonessentials were to be discarded.
2. They tried to purge many dark blots like sati, polygamy, child marriage, infanticide, enforced widowhood, caste distinctions, *untouchability*, animal sacrifice, *devadasi* system etc. from the then society.
3. They maintained that social reforms were not something different from other national activities.
4. In order to broaden the mental outlook of man, the thinkers of this period endeavored to popularize education, Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda, Annie Besant, Vivekananda were some of such men.
5. They respected people's religious sentiments. They did not wish to reject the cultural and sacred religious texts.
6. Without a reference to the religion of the people they tried to uplift all mankind¹.

¹Nilima Sharma, **Twentieth Century Indian Philosophy,(Nature and Destiny of Man)**, BharatiyaVidyaPrakasana,Varanasi, 1972. Page 7.

In this line of reformers comes the next contemporary philosopher. He is Swami Dayananda Saraswati. He founded Arya Samaj. He tried to reinterpret the old texts of Hindu Tradition within the focus of Western theology and Naturalism. It helped to revive a new hope in the Indians who felt the necessity to prove their native Hindu religion not to be a narrow-minded and sectarian one. He opened the gates for Non-Brahmins to perform the traditional rituals. He condemned Idolatry. But he tried to reaffirm the faith in the Indian Karma Siddhanta. **He believed in the significance of Karma and Rebirth.** He sought salvation and freedom from the bondages of ignorance through the worship of god, acquisition of true knowledge, and the performance of righteous deeds.

We can see as a marked feature of the contemporary Indian philosophy the participation even by foreigners. Not only in the form of social work, through their writings and translations of Indian texts into English, there was a renewed interest in the Indian philosophical theories as well as a heightened self-respect as a follower of Hinduism and feeling proud of being a Hindu. We can name here Dr. Annie Besant. Annie Besant becomes the philosopher who comes under this category. Even though she was not Indian but her ground work of founding the Indian future on the stern ideals of European Wisdom, the wisdom of the West is unparalleled.

Dr. Besant came forward to see that Indian religion revives itself in an enriched universal education and political participation. Indian texts both Buddhist and Hindu teach that this apparent *vyavaharika* world is of a lower order. And there will be a higher life. To participate in power and political games means to lower ourselves to the demands of an unreal and temporal life. This she countered with her European Experience and tried to prove that political participation makes one nearer to establish the Ideal through an ideal Republic. The modern concept of Democracy and the universal and non-discriminative educational system can enlighten each and every one of the truths and facts of life. Her humanistic interpretation of religion, her concept of man as an identical being to god and her indomitable faith in theosophy all make her as the mother, who changed the very fate of Indians from their servitude to the foreign invaders to a self-home rule movement. She believed in social and political actions of the individuals. She strongly believed in the evolution of human personality.

We now try to consider the second phase of the developments of Contemporary Indian philosophy. This period is marked by an awakened reaction against a foreigner and the invader, the British Emperor with an awakened self-respect. This becomes the very spirit which tried to initiate a reaction in the form of an increased respect towards Hinduism. The men here were Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. Both of them became the foundation stones for the renewed self-respect of Indians. Indians started to respect their own religion and also found universal values in their own religion. Now here we will come to a different kind of philosophers of our contemporary India. Both have influenced much the very populace of the Indian society. Both have undergone the experience of the mystic realms. Ramakrishna Paramahansa experienced the very being of *Kali* who is in black color and who appeared to him with a blue sky as her background. Ramakrishna called that experience as an Advaitic one because he had that experience as an experience of the union of oneself with the Absolute. On the other hand, Ramakrishna made Vivekananda to experience the very being and the presence of a divine essence. That comes through the initiation of Swami Vivekananda. This had made Vivekananda an unconquerable and infallible supporter and activist of Hindu religion. His Chicago lecture affected the whole populace of the world as well as the Hindus to feel proud of their own religion.

We can observe the renewed respect in the mystic experiences with these philosophers. They tried to reinforce people's faith in the mysterious religious practices. They actually developed that strength in Indian society to thrive with vehemence in the realization of Ascetic Ideals like Celibacy, Fasting, Ascetic, practice of Yoga, selfless renunciation etc. Vivekananda established Ramakrishna Mission in this regard and the only thing he wanted to show is that there is a scope of good in Hinduism also and it can be brought out with a fight against the evils present in it. He tried to show that Hinduism is having a universal vision. This puts him in his mission in the service of the poor and the suffering humanity of India. He preached *Sannyasa*, renunciation of one's own interest and he asked the youth to participate in the social and national service. He did not tolerate any kind of evil that is present within Hinduism. It is his total renunciation and self-sacrifice that makes him as a social worker, social reformer in the upliftment of the weaker and helpless sections of society. It is a missionary movement that he actually started. His impressions remained through the ages where from we find the later Indian generations take that person solely as their inspirer when they confront the British Raj in philosophy or in politics.

Mohan Das Karmchand Gandhi is universally known as Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma literally connotes a great soul. He has become a universal human. He has outgrown all the boundaries of nationality and religion. Internationally he is acclaimed as one of the greatest figures of history and also a great teacher of humanity. Louis Fischer, Gandhi's eminent biographer, has concluded his biography with the following words- "his legacy is courage, his lesson truth, his weapon love. His life is his monument. He now belongs to mankind".² On his death Gandhi was paid respectful homage almost all over that world. Einstein while paying his tribute said, 'Geerions to come, it may be will scarcely believe that such a one as – as ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth'.³ In India he is revered as the father of the nation.

²Fischer, Louis, " Gandhi", The New American Library, 1954, p. 189

³Gandhi Memorial Peace Number, 261.

We cannot have another philosopher in Indian history that was celebrated to such an extent like that of Mahatma Gandhi. His is a revolt against slavery. Consequent upon various political factors and socio-religious upsurge India was divided, much against his will, into two nations and granted independence. The partition of India and the outbreak of communal violence shattered his dream and with a heavy heart he tried his best to remove communal frenzy and violence. He tried out toured extensively the affected areas. While thousands of soldiers and policemen could not bring normalcy, his presence, personal appeal and moral courage could ring a sea change in the situation, particular in Nuakholi, he worst affected region. Finally being moved by his inner voice he decided to go on a fast to death to arouse the conscience of all. He considered his death would be amore glorious deliverance than witnessing the destruction of India due to communal violence. His fast had a tremendous effect on Hindu-Muslim amity. Riots stopped both India and Pakistan. Truly Gandhi has become universal human. He is recognized as a moral genius comparable with Jesus and Buddha despite all his shortcomings and human commissions. His non-violent struggle, the first of its kind in human history, has been a great ray of hope to settle all human conflicts in a turbulent world for peaceful coexistence. For Gandhi's greatest message to mankind is: conquer hate by love.

We can observe from all most all the contemporary philosophers as having been effectively carved by certain experiences of their life. It is the assertion and strong adherence to the metaphysical ideas of the Ancient Hindu Idealism. **Ancient Hindus believed in the phenomenon of bondage, rebirth, and the liberation or the Moksha.** They once again saw the seers of *Upanishads* speaking to them with their expositions in the form of *Upanishadic* contents. Not only had this had the modern Indians, the followers of Hindu religion started to firmly believe Ascetic Ideals, existence of the self or the soul and its rebirth in the redemption of its moral retributive affects in the form of a rebirth. Sri Aurobindo started to interpret the Upanishads and the Vedic literature in a modern context claiming the very presence of a universal outlook within these texts. People started to believe Yoga in its extensive context and Gandhi simply was recognized as a karma yogi and having performed his duties towards the state and who had gone up to the state of Mahatma in this context. The overall effect of all these evolutions simply incorporated within Hinduism the ideas of Humanism, **the belief in the service of man as a service to god, the Ascetic ideals of Brahmacharya, the ethical precepts of Astanga Yoga and the transformation of soul.** They tried to strengthen the Hindu religion with humanistic and rationalistic ideas with a committed reformative attitude. The discriminatory practices were given up. The Marxian idea of community wealth became the foundation of trusteeship and the guardian ship of those trustees. Owners of wealth were advised to consider themselves as the Trustees of that wealth. There were so many parallel developments to the developments of world historic phenomenon. Sarvodaya, and social reformation and service to the downtrodden all have been wedded within the context of their earlier and ancient cultural wisdom. This marks the very beginning of a new history of contemporary India to claim its political freedom from the foreign rule and subjection.

Sri Aurobindo is one of the most profound thinkers of contemporary thoughts. And was the most enlightened and reactionary at the same time of all the contemporary Indian philosophers. He had given more important on the inner development of human mind than the external forms of our life and living. For him in the process of our development, human being moves towards a definite goal, towards a perfect end, and towards the spiritual perfection of mankind. He feels that Yoga perfects individual and leads him to the national emancipation. He tried to achieve a synthesis between East and West. He defines the whole process of evolution through involution and evolution of the Mind or psychic life.

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born at Tiruttani on September 5th in the year 1888. He was influenced by Tagore and Swami Vivekananda. While Vivekananda introduced the Hindu mind to the west Radhakrishnan introduced the Hindu philosophy to the west. He marks the unique character of an academic philosopher in the history of contemporary Indian philosophy. His knowledge of Indian religion and philosophy in one hand and the study of philosophy of western tradition helps him to bridge the gap the east and west. His philosophical ideas are taken from Vedanta. His belief in religion marks him as the one without a second who did stick to the recovery of faith in man regarding religion, which in turn will help the whole universe, the world to reach its destiny of realizing the ultimate reality. His philosophy seems to be the synthesis of Advaita Vedanta and the philosophy of Absolute Idealism. His salvation becomes the realization of the absolute, the integral union with the absolute.

Jiddu Krishnamurti was born on 11 May 1895 in south India in a small town called Madanapalle. Unlike the above personalities we are having another great philosopher J. Krishnamurti who is concerned of our life and its problems which we face in our everyday life. He used to think how one can bring peace and awaken the spiritual quality in our everyday life living. His association with Annie Besant and her theosophical society in fact constructed him to that universal level. His acute sense of observation, his sense of renunciation, and his philosophy of an identity less life, claiming solidarity of the whole human race had no parallel in the known history of the world. Every experience of JK teaches its own lesson in bringing the consciousness of JK from being an Indian to become the World Teacher. Seers and saints cannot possess anything. They renounce everything. That becomes the very base of any sage or saint. His saintly nature created a world history when he denounced that there will not be a world messiah. And later he denounced the very funds that came through the charity of his disciples. He taught to die for every yesterday and to open a new white page for every today overcoming the prejudices of all kinds of narrow divisions of humanity into tight compartments of gender, caste, region, race, nation and religion.

All his life became a continuous experiment with truth. The theosophical society proclamation of no religion is higher than truth marks his life as a fresh experiment with reality and truth. His teachings made him a world intellectual for his views on education and other philosophical thoughts. He practiced celibacy, denied any validity to the past, and experienced the heights of these realms in their varied existences. He attained the highest insight of revealing that it is impossible to know the Truth, and there cannot be any way to know it, yet the only thing a man can do is to maintain silence and to give up all prejudicial practices of yesterday and to open our mental gates for today without any reservation. His **Nameless Experience** tells his whole philosophy. He asked everybody to give up everything which we think as my and mine. JK preached liberation not for a much selected few. He taught that it shall liberate every person. He writes,

Liberation is not for the few, the chosen, the select. It is for all when they cease to create karma.⁴

You must not make me an authority, if I become a necessity to you what will you do when I go away?

Some of you think I can give you a drink that will set you free, that I can give you a formula that will liberate you, that is not so.⁵

No one can give you liberation, you have to find it within, but because I have found I would show you the way.⁶

His life pictures the ideas of liberation in its glorious spectrum. He says that we can only understand liberation but certainly we may fail to speak, for liberation is beyond the spell of very few semantic models. It becomes an original experience which makes you as the one without any other thing other than itself.

⁴Mary Lutyens, **Krishna Murti, The Years of Awakening**, John Murray, London, 1975. Page 245.

⁵*Ibid*.p244.

⁶*Ibid*.p244.

The discovery of Buddhist and Indus Valley civilizations through the archeological surveys took place only in the first half of 20th century to the most extent. This could not affect immediately the whole socio political or socio religious thinking of contemporary India. The impact of these findings is still to be heard or experienced in the 21st century philosophical discourses of our contemporary India. As long as our contemporary philosophy is concerned it carries with it the influences, effects of early 16th to 19 century episodes. The following points as the core values that shaped the identity of contemporary Indian Philosophy

1. It did not loose its basic Indian Philosophical characteristic of a belief in the bondage and rebirth concept due to the dominant Karma Siddhanta of Vedic Civilization which polarized society into tight compartments of social and racial organization.
2. Only the Reformatory Ideas of Liberty, Democracy and Humanistic Ideals did affect it to change to some extent of its basic divisions of its social and racial organization.
3. Negativism towards nature and excessive dependence on ritualism with a bent of mind towards renunciation and seclusion from daily commitments of social life becomes the predominant characteristic of Indian Social Thought. This was to some extent disturbed.
4. Orthodoxy and pan religion-metaphysical thinking marks the very beginnings of contemporary Indian Social Thinking. With the active work of Raja Ram Mohan Roy this gets changed.
5. Contemporary Indian philosophers tried to re interpret the Indian Texts with a more realistic world attitude. This helped contemporary Indian philosophy to open its new trends of Philosophical thinking.
6. The mystic experiences of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda form the basic core of Contemporary Indian Thinking.
7. Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi make Contemporary Indian Philosophy to actualize social change. Rabindranath Tagore's artistic expressions mark a new beginning in the Indian Artistic mind and its thinking.
8. The much observed drive for a heightened self-respect with an invigorated religious activity within the Hindu frame of thinking marks the very Contemporary Indian Philosophy.
9. Humanism becomes the unique thread around which all the contemporary Indian Philosophical cob web of metaphysical thinking had netted its creative constructions.
10. Science was challenged as inadequate and inexperienced in social matters. This lays the foundation for its post-modernist Epoche.
11. Marxism and socialism did not affect much of contemporary Indian thinking. As a compensation the Ideas of commonwealth and trusteeship of all the owning of the rich class show its aversion towards communism.
12. The sole purpose of Contemporary Indian philosophy becomes to strengthen its historic identity and to respect its religious thinking to counter the foreign rulers and their agencies.
13. The highest goal becomes the liberation of Indian Nation from its slavery. This shapes all of its philosophers ideas regarding Liberation.
14. Jiddu Krishnamurti carries a new wave of thinking with him as a challenger to the Orthodoxal religious thinkers of India as well as the whole world. But his final refuge in a modified religious text draws a null vector in its attitude towards scientific facts.
15. Post-independence philosophers ventured maximum to upkeep the glory of their ancient wisdom.

Even though there were so many philosophers they have opted any one or some of the mechanisms those were enumerated just in the beginning lines of this understanding. It becomes the very characteristic of Contemporary Indian Philosophy that it adopted itself selectively to the flooding counter ideas of science and Christian Philosophy.

It is a simple struggle for the Identity of Age Old Indian Wisdom either it be Vedic, Buddhist or Jaina in essence.

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Question

1. What are the common characteristics of Contemporary Indian Philosophy?
2. Is contemporary Indian Philosophy being sufficient enough to solve the present day problems of our life and living?

