


INDIA IS A SPIRITUAL LEADER: MYTH OR REALITY		Philosophy Keywords: India, spiritual leader, Indian philosophy, Indian scriptures, <i>Amrit Kal</i> , Indian yoga.
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Keshab Chandra Mandal	Head Master, S.M. Nagar Derozio Smriti Vidyalaya (High), India.
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Abstract

There is a buzzword in the world about India’s being a spiritual leader. The patriot classical Hindu protagonists are advocating vehemently for (re)establishing its old and golden image to the people, especially the students and youths in this vast country and the world as a whole. India just completed the celebration of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsab (Nectar Festival of Freedom) by commemorating its 75th year of Independence (from 1947 to 2022). India, henceforth, decided to celebrate the next twenty-five years as the “Amrit Kaal” i.e., golden period (from 2022-2047). During this quarter century, the vision of India is to achieve a technology-driven and knowledge-based economy, reminisce with respect to the Indian struggle for independence and the sacrifice of the freedom fighters, and promote India’s heritage, culture, literature, and language. When the government of India upholds and prioritizes the promotion of its age-old tradition, culture, language, spirituality, and philosophy, a critical group of scholars and thinkers put up multiple problems and crises facing India in the present time. Therefore, a debate is going on regarding the issue of India’s role as a global leader as well as the spiritual master. The criticism and counter-arguments by scholars and social thinkers are neither wrong nor anti-national. This is the beauty and fine characteristic of modern Indian democracy, where every citizen enjoys the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression, though with certain restrictions as enshrined in the Constitution. In the run of this debate, the Prime Minister and his team are determined to take India to such a height that every man on this earth can have a taste of its spiritual and philosophical honey juice. Now the question is - are Indian culture, heritage, philosophy, and spirituality so rich and exuberant? What are there in India’s philosophy, and spirituality, and the teachings of Indian sages and saints? Do they have created any impact ever upon the minds and activities of people anywhere in the world? Can India really show the path to the global leaders and general people to end war and conflicts, and bring forth peace and prosperity? This article seeks to examine all these questions and finally explores if the acclaim of India as a spiritual leader is appropriate or absurd.

Introduction

William H. Draper III, the premier administrator of the United Nations Development Program, wrote in the Foreword of the UNDP Report that, “We live in stirring times” (Draper, 1990). Almost three decades later in 2018, a similar view was expressed by his successor Achim Steiner. He pointed out that, “We are living in a complex world. People, nations, and economies are more connected than ever, and so are the global development issues we are facing” (Steiner, 2018). Both the statements of Draper and Steiner are very much relevant even today. If we look back in the twentieth century we would find that the world was devastated by the cruel bloodbath and inhuman attack and counter-attack on one another in Europe and America. Interestingly, both the attackers and attacked countries had faith in Christianity and many of them used to go to churches for prayers on a regular basis. Colonial India and South Africa had to join the First World War in 1914 as a part of the British Army. China joined in 2017 only. Peace Conference that began in Paris on 18 January 1919 culminated with the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles on January 10, 1920 (Library of Congress, 1914-1921). But the Treaty of Versailles could not prevent further war and bring about real and sustainable peace in the world for more than two decades.

The League of Nations failed to restore peace and give people respite from another more violent, more destructive, and bloodier World War. Unfortunately, Japan (being a moderate follower of Buddhism) became a part of the Axis Powers with Germany and Italy in the Second World War, and they were opposed by the Allied Powers led by the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the Soviet Union – all protagonists, protectors, and promoters of Christianity. Sister M. Fides Shepperson wrote in *The Advocate of Peace*, “...it appears that one fundamental Christian virtue was forgotten – the virtue of humility” (Shepperson, 1912). The article was published before World War I. However, she further wrote, “Christianity believes in peace.” We will see how far Christianity acted in restoring peace in the world.

The Second World War

The Second World War was far more fierce and devastating than the World War I. What was the extent of destruction and consequences of World War II? The International Monetary Fund indicates that “By the end of World War II, much of Europe and Asia, and parts of Africa, lay in ruins. Combat and bombing had flattened cities and towns, destroyed bridges and railroads, and scorched the countryside. The war had also taken a staggering toll in both military and civilian lives” (International Monetary Fund, 1945-1958). The killing of innocent people including children, women, the aged, and the infirm; bombarding of schools, hospitals, bridges, and libraries, and the tyranny of warlords created lasting negative impacts on the economy, education, infrastructure, industry, society, and ultimately on national governments across the globe. The demographic and economic consequences of World War II can further be understood from the writing of Tadeusz Kugler, Kyung Kook Kang, Jacek Kugler, and Marina Arbetman-Rabinowtztz, and John Thomas. The authors reveal that “The severity of war is measured by the number of military and civilian casualties. World War II, the most catastrophic global conflict thus far, produced battle casualties of roughly 22 million combatants and 28 million non-combatants. The worldwide losses exceeded 50 million people. Three-fourths of these casualties took place in Europe where almost 38 million people perished. Overall losses translate to 3% of the population in the belligerent countries” (Kugler et al., 2013, p.1). The wars in general and particularly the Second World War produced depression, mislocated factories of production, and reduced growth levels. Many prosperous as well as third world countries could not recover from the losses they incurred by the war. Some researchers show that the emergent economies recovered fast, while “developed nations recover from ravages of war in proportion to war losses. Foreign aid adds to this recovery” (Kugler et al., 2013, p.5).

In addition to the demographic and economic losses, the social impact was also exquisite. In the fall and winter of 1941-1942, Greece was struck by a severe famine with about 100,000 to 200,000 deaths. A combination of a food blockade and a harsh winter led to a severe hunger crisis in the winter of 1944-1945 in the Netherlands. About 20,000 deaths mainly among elderly men are attributed to this famine. “Thousands of people are dying on the streets of Athens, all a result of the brutal British blockade against a people who wanted to carelessly pick out of the fire of

chestnuts for the English people. That's the gratitude of London. The famines in Greece and Holland were the most lethal in occupied Europe during the Second World War. It is estimated that the Greek famine killed close to 5 percent of the population...According to the records of the German army, the mortality rate in Athens reached 300 deaths per day during December 1941" (Memories of the Occupation in Greece).

Similarly, the Royal British Legion highlights the social impact of World War II in the following lines: "New families were created as women married servicemen of other nations and moved overseas; children were born in fatherless homes as a result of demobilized troops leaving the UK to return to the US or Canada or due to death as a result of the war; and the divorce rate spike as many families struggled to re-adjust to a world at peace. Close to 3 million US troops passed through Britain during the war, along with nearly 500,000 Canadians. Many had relationships resulting in thousands of war children. It estimated Canadians have left behind 23,000 war children and Americans over 20,000" (Royal British Legion, 2022).

The world is now volatile and capricious. People's restlessness and distress are clearly observed throughout the world. There is almost no country in the world where people are living peacefully and happily. War and bombing are still a menace to mankind. The keepers of peace and protectors of human rights are themselves engaged in violating peace and destabilizing world order to fulfill their ego and satiate their wantonness. Karen Talbot, the Director of the International Peace and Justice and a member of the International Executive Committee of the World Peace Council expressed her concern over the ongoing violation of human rights, human security, and international peace. In regard to the US-led NATO blitzkrieg on Yugoslavia, where 23000 "dumb" bombs and "smart" missiles rained upon for 79 days she raised her voice. The US Senate termed Serbia a terrorist state, and therefore, the US-led NATO dropped upon civilians – from the sanctuary of high altitude and from computer-guided missiles, radioactive depleted-uranium weapons, and outlawed clustered bombs designed to rip human flesh. Was it not terrorism to deliberately target the entire infrastructure of this small nation, including electrical and water filtration systems critical to the survival of civilians? Was it not terrorism to obliterate 200 factories and destroy the jobs of millions of workers? What of the constant air assault – "fire from the sky" – against cities, villages, schools, hospitals, old residences, TV towers and studios, oil refineries, chemical plants, electrical power plants, transmission towers, gas stations, homes, farms, market places, buses, trains, railroad lines, bridges, roads, medieval monasteries, churches, historic monuments – destructions amounting to more than \$100 billion. What of incalculable destruction of the environment, including the deliberate bombardment of chemical plants? Above all, was it not terrorism to kill, maim, traumatize, impoverish, or render homeless tens of thousands of men, women, and children? Not only was NATO's war a comprehensible act of inhumanity, but it was also in contravention of all norms of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. It was an unprecedented war by the most powerful military force in history. It involved the 19 wealthiest nations, which possess 95% of the world's armaments,

against a small sovereign nation that had little chance of countering such an attack” (Talbot, 2000, p. 95).

United Nations and its Purposes

Following the devastation and destruction of the Second World War, the United Nations Organization (UNO) was set up in 1945. The purposes and principles of the Organization are mentioned in Article 1 of the UN Charter. It resolves “To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace... Secondly, to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace; and, thirdly, to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion” (United Nations Charter).

No doubt the purposes and principles are good. But the question is - have these purposes and principles been successful ever? Have international peace and security been established in the world? What appropriate measures have been taken by the UNO to ensure and “strengthen universal peace?” Has the Security Council been able to free the world from the menace of war? Have the leaders of the world learned anything from the century’s worst man-made crisis in socio-economic spheres that were incurred by the two World Wars? Have they been able to provide security and ensure peace to the people of their countries and others? Are the great powers not engaging, any further, in wars and destroying life, property, infrastructure, and heritage of different countries since the signature of the UN Charter? Let us have a look at the following part.

1. Korean War - The Korean War was fought between North Korea and South Korea from 1950 to 1953.

2. The Suez Crisis - The Suez Crisis or the Second Arab–Israeli war began with the invasion of Egypt in late 1956 by Israel, followed by the United Kingdom and France.

3. Arab-Israeli War - Again the world witnessed Arab–Israeli War from 5 to 10 June 1967 between Israel and a coalition of Arab states primarily comprising Jordan, Syria, and Egypt (then known as the United Arab Republic).

4. The Vietnam War - We all know about the infamous Vietnam War, which was a conflict in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from 1st November 1955 to the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975. It was the second of the Indochina Wars and was officially fought between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. It lasted for almost 20 years, with direct U.S. involvement ending in 1973. The conflict ended with all three countries becoming communist states by 1975.

5. Indo-Pakistan War - The Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 was a culmination of skirmishes that took place between April 1965 and September 1965 between Pakistan and India.

6. Arab-Israeli Wars – The Arab-Israeli wars, a series of military conflicts between Israeli forces and various Arab forces, most notably in 1948–49, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, and 2006.

7. Iraq War - The Iraq War was a protracted armed conflict in Iraq from 2003 to 2011 that began with the invasion of Iraq by the United States-led coalition, which overthrew the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein.

8. Iraq-Iran War - The Iran–Iraq war was another armed conflict that began on 22 September 1980 with a full-scale invasion of Iran by neighboring Iraq. The war lasted for almost eight years.

9. Another Indo-Pak War – The Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 was a military confrontation between India and Pakistan that occurred during the Bangladesh Liberation War in East Pakistan from 3 December 1971 to the fall of Dhaka on 16 December 1971.

10. Afghanistan War (2001-2014) – The Afghanistan War was an international conflict in Afghanistan beginning in 2001 that was triggered by the September 11 attacks. The U.S. and NATO combat mission formally ended in December 2014, ending the 13-year Afghanistan War, which was the longest war ever fought by the United States.

11. Russia-Ukraine War – The Russian-Ukraine battle formally started on 24 February 2022 and still it is continuing. Almost one and a half years have gone, but there is no chance of ending the war.

A close examination of the above wars reveals that the countries initiated and engaged in conflicts in the last seven decades are mostly either believer in Christianity or Islam. With full respect for all the religions of the world, it can be said that some warlords may be devout Christians, Muslim or Buddhist, or believers in other faiths, they failed to control themselves, whatever might be the reasons behind their attack and killing and destruction of infrastructure, innocent life and wealth of people. My question is very simple: Does any religion permit its people to attack and kill innocent people? Does the UNO allow NATO and other powerful countries to kill children, women, and old people, and destroy the schools, hospitals, libraries, bridges, and houses of citizens? If yes, then what are the utility, universality, and regality of these organizations and faiths? Why common people will have to displace and dislocate in other's countries and live on the grant of others? Why should the general people have to escape their country on dark nights in fear of attack or bombardment? Can we relate lust for profit, lack of spiritual knowledge, and over-ambition of some crazy political leaders and arms dealers with these heinous acts and crimes? Is there any effect of globalization, modernization, and urbanization on these wars and conflicts?

Globalization and Its Impact

Since 1960 the affluent countries in the world have started to witness a substantial increase in economic globalization. International trade and investment have clearly grown across the affluent democracies in Western European countries, North America, New Zealand, and Australia. Globalization has impacted greatly upon the economy, society, culture, and trade and commerce in

not only advanced economies, it also affected third-world countries substantially. What is economic globalization? To denote the concept David Brady, Jason Beckfield, and Wei Zhao asserted that, “We conceptualize economic globalization as international economic exchange and the flow of goods, services, people, information and capital across national boundaries” (Brady, 2007, p. 316). The effects of globalization are multi-faceted on both affluent and emerging economies. The poor and third-world countries are not out of their aggression. It is stated that “globalization may matter more within the political discourse surrounding welfare states...’ ‘globalization produces volatility and uncertainty,’ ‘globalization forces governments to retrench welfare programs in the name of competitiveness and austerity,’ and ‘globalization initially causes expansion and subsequently, at higher levels, causes retrenchments” (Brady, 2007, p. 316). Further, “...since globalization encompasses the entire world, hence, every citizen in the world is affected” by it (Pooch, 2016, p. 17). Globalization facilitated information and communication; created a demand for artificial goods and services; increased people’s greed and made people intoxicated by fashion, drugs, and modern life. The arms production has increased and so also the supply of arms and ammunition. The lobby of drug manufacturers and fashion goods and arms manufacturers upon political decisions cannot be ignored in contemporary conflicts and wars.

A more close examination of the crimes and violence against humanity reveals that people’s increasing intolerance, distrust, poverty, poor quality education, defective intelligence, unequal upbringing, deprivation, unemployment, violence in the family, separation in the family, lack of social security, war, and lack of stringent government laws and implementation programs induce criminal, illegal, and unethical activities. Broadly, the causes of crime are related to economics, education, sociology, ethics, and religion. A.M. Kidd, a Professor in the School of Jurisprudence of the University of California has nicely traced out the roots of the problem in his article *The Causes of Crime* (1932), where he pointed out that, “...individuals and private organizations fail to show their capacity for self-control through respect for the rights of others and the discharge of their duties and obligations to society, to that extent the social organization, acting through the agencies of government, must and will step in and exercise social and economic control if human society is to endure” (Kidd, 1932, p. 263).

Kidd further mentioned the report of the National Commission of Law Observance and Enforcement of the United States of America (National Commission of Law and Enforcement, on the Causes of Crime, 1931, pp. LXXI), where he mentioned that “In social causes, the family is of course of first importance in fixing behavior habits, but the simple solution of attributing criminality to broken homes or to immigrant families is not borne out by the studies made. Economic causation is not adequately shone by the proponents of that society. The close relations between politics and crime have an influence in some types of professional and organized crime, but in others, the relation is not apparent...The investigators believe they have found an increase in burglary, robbery, and vagrancy during periods of unemployment as determined from records in Massachusetts and New York... The negroes were separated for study and the volume of crime

among them in New York appears to be due to congestion in poor dwellings, inability to get a job as they are the last hired and the first fired, caste, the large proportion of males, et cetera.”

Understanding the Well-being and Happiness of People

Thus we find that the world is now volatile and complex. We need to find out ways to survive and sustain. The world must be a safe place for our children and grandchildren. There must be peace, respect, tolerance, integrity, and fellow-feeling towards one another. The materialistic world cannot give one lasting mental peace, happiness, and family bonding. People’s well-being is the prime important thing desired by a section of social scientists. What is well-being? Well-being is basically a common-sense concept closely allied with health. “The constellation of ideas coded with the term well-being come from various disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, economics, sociology, epidemiology, and public health” (Welch, 2023, p. 4). There are multiple pursuits to define the terminology of well-being and measure it, but due to disciplinary crosstalk and the relevance of public policy, no concrete conclusion could be drawn so far. Different countries have different cultures, and different cultures engage their own concepts of wellness. Some earlier anthropological texts exhibited romanticized notions of indigenous well-being as Neolithic, happy, joyful, peaceful, carefree, and simple, while some contemporary anthropological literature emphasizes hedonic dimensions such as happiness, ‘good life’, and conviviality. However, “Amazonian societies tend to talk about how to live well, happily, tranquility, lovingly, compassionately, and harmoniously” (Welch, 2023, p. 4). Well-being is primarily doing good, feeling good, and believing in the good of self and others. It might be selfless service and sacrifice for others.

From the above discussion, we find that the concept of wellness differs from person to person and from one culture to another. What we need today is to search for a better world for the people, because the pivot of all development programs is people. In the 21st century, the invisible pressure of globalization, modernization, and industrialization have made possible connectivity at an unthinkable level; people’s income has increased many folds; there has been a revolutionary change in the communication system; and infrastructure has also been developed a lot; but with all the conveniences and comforts people are not happy, they are neither satisfied nor peaceful. If people are not happy, peaceful, and satisfied, what is the utility of having money, gold jewelry, and living in luxurious palaces with all modern ease and comfort? Hence, it has become necessary to find out solutions for man’s unhappiness, frustration, sadness, misfortune, and untimely destruction causing due to greed, voracity, lust, wantonness, cruelty, capriciousness, and mercilessness. After a long study of some philosophies and religions, it seems that the keys to happiness, mental peace, well-being, and family bonding are lying in the teachings of Indian philosophers and saints.

The Perception of Indian Philosophy and Spirituality in the West

Indian philosophy and spirituality were mostly underestimated and ignored by Western pundits. Many of them either wrongly interpreted by fully knowing its universality or criticized without studying it seriously. P.S.S. Ayer (Ayer, 1935, p. xiii) refutes straightforward the charges by Christian writers against Hindu ethics and its merits. In the context of his choice of subject for Kamala lectures, Ayer told that “frequent attacks have recently been made by Christian writers on the principles of Hinduism.” Such criticism, he continues, “is generally ill-informed and unfair and often inspired by racial or religious prejudices and proceeds from a lack of historical perspective.” The taste of Indian spirituality, literature, and its rich scientific achievements in ancient times could be understood well with the knowledge of Sanskrit and well access to Indian libraries. Many American and European scholars, except German Scholars, still consider that Indian religion is based on paganism and is much inferior to Christianity. Justin A. Smith in a journal article entitled Ethical Values in Pagan Religions points out that, “The precepts of pagan philosophy, so far as they are good, are simply good advice, nothing more...when the God of the Christian says, “Be ye holy, for I am holy”, there is an awful emphasis in the words that lend available sanction to every precept of the religion which adores the great God as a holy being” (Smith, 1886, p. 19). The criticism of Vedanta philosophy was bluntly made by John McKenzie. He remarked that “Those ideas which bulk so largely in the Vedanta and which find expression in other systems of (Indian) philosophy, when logically applied, leave no room for ethics” (McKenzie, 1922, p. 206-207).

The Actuality of Indian Spirituality and Philosophy

Swami Vivekananda presented the core Vedantic proposition that all paths ultimately lead to the same pinnacle of spiritual realization and gave ample references to the Bhagwat Gita. He made the Westerners believe in the folly of religious fanaticism. It was Swami Vivekananda who ignited the East-West Transmission that shaped the American spiritual landscape. He opened the Vedanta Society in the USA in 1894, and now almost all major cities including Las Vegas of the USA have its centers. In the 19th century “India was perceived by most as a backward outpost of the British Empire, and Hinduism as a primitive, polytheistic, idol-worshipping religion in need of Christian missionaries” (Goldberg, 2020). It was Swamiji who transformed the misconception of the Western people.

Kalidas Bhattacharyya in an article (Bhattacharyya, 2018, p. 17) traces that “The very schools in India are Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Nyaya, Vaisesika, Jainism, some forms of Buddhism, and a form of philosophy of Grammar...A precise division of philosophy in these “departments” was unknown to the Indians, as even in the West in earlier days, and if with the renaissance in the West, we find this practice growing and finally being recognized under the pressure of work it is still an open question whether such division is desirable.” Bhattacharyya, further, argues that “...logic was not wanting in Indian philosophy. Every concept there was carefully analyzed,

classified, and compared with other concepts. The Indian mind was constitutionally logical in this sense. Clarity was a keynote of Indian thinking” (Bhattacharyya, 2018, p. 17).

Indian philosophy is conceived by S.K. Maitra “as a state of freedom from the bonds of empirical life” (Maitra, 1948, p. 55). Indian philosophy is essentially a philosophy of values and ethics. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan while speaking in the context of ethics of the Upanisads he remarked that “finite objects cannot give us the satisfaction for which our soul hungers” (Goodwin, 1955, p. 326). Indian philosophy tells about *moksa* i.e. liberation. Swami Nikhilananda considers that *moksa* is “liberation – liberation from imperfection, bondage, separateness, misery, and death” (Gandhi, 1987, p. 28). He further explains the essence of Hindu ethics: “the aim of Hindu ethics is to enable a man ultimately to conquer his lower self and attain freedom from passion, desire, and attachment...In the Hindu tradition the ideal society should enable its members, through proper discipline, to rid themselves from desires and attachment and ultimately world-renouncing *sanyasins* (hermits), who transcend all moral laws” (Nikhilananda, 1952, pp. 7-8).

Teachings of Indian Philosophers and Saints

India is a land of philosophers, saints, and sages. For hundreds of years, people have come to India from thousands of kilometers away to learn Indian philosophy, yoga, and meditation. Why did they come? They came, and many thousands are coming even today, to have a taste of India’s culture, philosophy, spirituality, heritage, sculpture, temples, mosques, mountains, rivers, seas, and natural beauty. The following part focuses merely on the essence of spirituality and philosophy of India. There are numerous philosophers, sages, spiritual leaders, and saints in India. Here due to time and space constraints, we will discuss briefly only a few of them. Let us begin with Saint Kapil.

Kapil Dev - Saint Kapil, a renowned sage of antiquity, is the author of the Sankhya philosophical system. Kapil Muni is considered India’s oldest Vedic sage, who lived between the 6th and the 7th century BCE. Sankhya is India’s ancient philosophical heritage consisting of both a system of metaphysics and a system of spiritual knowledge culminating in liberation. Kapil Muni considers that unless one is liberated from material contamination, one cannot engage in devotional service to the Lord. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada says “When one is self-realized he becomes happy and free from the influence of material nature, and at that time he is freed from lamentation and hankering.” To answer the question - how does happiness come to one’s life, he answers ‘A *mahatma* (spiritual man) is always happy.’ A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder of ISCON in his book – *Teachings of Kapila: The Son of Devahuti* (1977) says, “A *mahatma* cannot be manufactured. He is under the *daivi prakriti*, the divine nature.... As soon as one understands that he is uselessly serving Maya in the material world in the form of society, friends, country, and so forth, one reaches the stage called *jnana*, knowledge. As soon as one attains this knowledge, he reaches the *Brahma-bhata* stage, Brahman realization, and he becomes *prasannatma*, happy” (Bhaktivedanta, 1977). Kapil Dev teaches us about a *sat*

(honest) and an *asat* (dishonest) person. Those who are actually spiritually interested are called *sat*, or devotees. *Sat* means “that which eternally exists,” and *asat* means “that which is not eternal.” Unless one is situated on the spiritual platform, he is not *sat*, he is *asat*. The persons who are standing on the platform of spirituality will exist eternally, and the persons who are not standing on the spiritual platform will not exist forever.

Buddhist Philosophy - What did Buddha teach to the common people, for which he is remembered even after many centuries of his death? His basic teachings can be summarized using the device of the Four Noble Truths, which are as follows: 1. There is suffering in the world. 2. There is the origination of suffering. 3. There is the cessation of suffering, and 4. There is a path to the cessation of suffering. These are the hard realities of life. The world is full of suffering. There are varieties of sufferings. However, ‘suffering’ is understood to mean not mere pain but existential suffering, the sort of frustration, alienation, and despair that arise out of our experience of transitoriness. Every adult human being has faced or will go through suffering – may it be physical, mental, economic losses, health, or non-availability of their desired goods and persons. Secondly, if there is suffering, there must be causes for the same. It can be simply claimed that there are causes and conditions for the arising of suffering. Then it makes the obvious point that if the origination of suffering depends on causes, future suffering can be prevented by bringing about the cessation of those causes. And finally, the Noble Truth is that it specifies a set of techniques that are said to be effective in such cessation. Much then hangs on the correct identification of the causes of suffering. “The great idea that seems to admit of no modification or evasion is that man can under no circumstances escape the consequences of his acts; that morals are in themselves productive causes without any intervention or aid from supernatural or higher authority. It turns upside down the great Christian doctrine that man is justified by faith, and not by his works; it says that man is justified by works and not by faiths” (Tagore, 1863, p. 186).

In the modern world, if any person or student follows his teachings on *Astangik Marg* i.e. Eightfold Path or practices propounded by Buddha, he is sure to turn into good and great person in the family, society, and institution he is associated with. The Noble Eightfold Paths (ways) prescribed by Lord Buddha are (i) Right View, (ii) Right Resolve, (iii) Right Speech, (iv) Right Conduct, (v) Right Livelihood, (vi) Right Effort, (vii) Right Mindfulness, and (viii) Right Samadhi (concentration).

Sri Ramanuja – Sri Ramanuja lived a very long life of 120 years from A.D. 1017 to 1137. He was a great philosopher of India. His teachings have great value in the spiritual world. The gist of his teachings can be highlighted in the following manner. He said, “Worship holy men exactly as you would do in the care of your religious preceptor. Have sincere faith in the teaching of great *Acaryas* (masters) of yore. Never be slaves to your senses. Be not satisfied with acquisitions of worldly knowledge. Go on reading repeatedly the books dealing with the greatness of God and the wonders of His creation. If perchance you are favored with scintillating wisdom by the Guru’s (master’s) grace, then the attraction of the senses will cease for you. Learn to treat all your feelings

with indifference. Bear in mind that he who renders service to God's devotees attains God speedily." Here if God means 'good works', one should sacrifice life for good works for the development of mankind. If God is 'Truth,' stick to the truth and do work sincerely any work that comes before you. Kandadai Seshadri in an article in the Economic and Political Weekly wrote: "To him, god was the personification of kindness to both saint and sinner. This is similar to Christian virtue, but it should not be concluded that Christianity had influenced him since no Hindu philosopher looked to other countries for inspiration" (Seshadri, 1996, p. 294).

Sri Chaitanya – Sri Chaitanya was born in 1486 A.D. at Navadwip in the district of Nadia of West Bengal. Lord Chaitanya's direct teachings are recorded in Sanskrit verses called *Siksastakam* (though, in *Vaishnava Padavali* it is said: "Chaitanya himself wrote many songs on the Radha-Krishna theme"). Chaitanya's epistemological, theological, and ontological teachings are summarized as ten root principles called *Dasa Mula*. These are as follows: 1. The statements of *amnaya* (scripture) are the chief proof. By these statements, the following nine topics are taught. 2. Krishna is the Supreme Absolute Truth. 3. Krishna is endowed with all energies. 4. Krishna is the source of all rasa - flavor, quality, or spiritual rapture/emotions. 5. The *jivas* (individual souls) are all separated parts of the Lord. 6. In the bound state (non-liberated) the *jivas* are under the influence of matter, due to their *tatastha* (marginal) nature. 7. In the liberated state the *jivas* are free from the influence of matter. 8. The *jivas* and the material world are both different from and identical to the Lord. 9. Pure devotion is the only way to attain liberation, and 10. Pure love of Krishna is the ultimate goal.

Paramhansa Yogananda – After the setting up of the Vedanta Society by Swami Vivekananda in 1896 in New York, Indian *yogas* were significantly deepened and expanded in American society. It increased Western consciousness. Robert A. McDermott wrote, "The intellectual emphasis was supplemented by the more occult aspects of yoga practice as expounded by Paramhansa Yogananda, who founded the Self-Realization Fellowship in 1920" (McDemott, 1975, p. 215). McDermott further writes, "Appropriately, the influence of such personalities as Swami Vivekananda and Paramhansa Yogananda has been more conspicuous in the popular culture than has been the influence of Indian philosophy on American thinkers...Indian philosophers have indeed exercised a significant influence on American thinkers dating from Emerson, through Royce and Santayana, up to the linguistically and philosophically sophisticated work presently being done by Karl Potter, Eliot Duetsch, Troy Organ, E.A. Burt, George Burch, and Dale Riepe himself" (McDemott, 1975, p. 216).

Yoganandaji taught the modern Western world about meditation and *kriya yoga*. Meditation consists of withdrawing outwardly directed *prana* (subtle energy or life force) and focusing it on the spiritual eye, concentrating on God or on one of His qualities: light, sound, joy, peace, calmness, love, wisdom, or power. Secondly, *Pranayam* is a technique that keeps us alive and healthy, makes us magnetic, and allows us to succeed. All aspects of life are improved when we learn to control it, for to control energy is to gain control also over all things. Yogananda taught

the techniques of *Kriya Yoga* and the Energization Exercises to help us gain this control. He often said that the true altar is not in any church but in our central nervous system. Lastly, he taught about *Karma* and reincarnation. Every thought, feeling, and action creates a wave of energy that is destined to return to us: As we give, so shall we receive. The results of our own past actions create the circumstances and events of life. The way to free ourselves from this karmic cycle is to accept life, control our reactive processes, be even-minded and cheerful, and dissolve the ego” (Nayaswamii, 2015).

Philosophy of Chanakya – A wise man always thinks ahead of his time. The most amazing assertion of Chanakya is that the king (at present Prime Minister for the country) should be a good leader first. His ideal king will be like a *Rajrishi*. The concept of *Rajrishi* is very similar to that of the Philosopher King by Plato. An ideal leader is a combination of *Raja* (king) and *Rishi* (sage). Like a *Raja* i.e. king, he should be dynamic and active and should have prompt and wise decision-making capacity. At the same time, he should be able to connect with the spiritual and higher-level people of the world by being wise and should focus on philosophy. A king should be a promulgator of *dharma* (spirituality). He must practice *dharma* in his daily life too. He should be a model for the masses. There should have royal idealism in him. He should possess the quality of inviting nature, self-restraint and spirit, intellect and intuition, and enthusiasm. Not only that, he should control his lust, greed and attachment, vanity and pride.

A leader has to be a thinker and a doer. Chanakya wanted active leaders to be intelligent and dynamic. Active leaders should also be able to ideate. Many brilliant thinkers are unable to execute their ideas, and some excellent facilitators cannot be bothered with thinking and planning. Radhakrishnan Pillai in his recently published book entitled *Thus Spoke Chanakya* (2018) wrote, “The ideal combination for a leader is that of a thinker and a doer” (Pillai, 2018).

Guru Nanak – Guru Nanak was born on 15 April 1469 at Rai Bhoi Ki Talvaṇḍi village (present-day Nankana Sahib, Punjab, Pakistan) in the Lahore province of the Delhi Sultanate. He is the founder of Sikhism and is the first of the ten Sikh Gurus. The concept of man as elaborated by Guru Nanak, states Mandair (2009), refines and negates the "monotheistic concept of self/God," where "monotheism becomes almost redundant in the movement and crossings of love." The goal of man, taught by the Sikh Gurus, is to end all dualities of "self and other, I and not-I," attaining the "attendant balance of separation-fusion, self-other, action-inaction, attachment-detachment, in the course of daily life." Guru (leader/master) Nanak and other Sikh Gurus emphasized *bhakti* ('love', 'devotion', or 'worship'), and taught that the spiritual life and secular householder life are intertwined.

Ethics and Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi – Mahatma Gandhi is an apostle of *ahimsa* (non-violence). He considers that, the basic principle of life is based on Truth. “The word ‘Satya’ (Truth) is derived from ‘*Sat*’ which means being. And nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. And where there is truth, there also is knowledge, pure knowledge. And where there is true

knowledge, there is always bliss.” Gandhi called himself a classical or *sanatani* Hindu. “The chief value of Hinduism lies in holding the actual belief that all life (not only human beings, but all sentient beings) is one, i.e., all life coming from One universal source, call it Allah, God or Parameshwara” (Gandhi, 1936). He said, “To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live” (Gandhi). Further, in regard to non-violence, he said, “In my opinion, non-violence is not passivity in any shape or form. Non-violence, as I understand it, is the activist force in the world” (Gandhi).

Gandhiji’s conception of non-violence is so remarkable that any person will feel attracted to it in no time. Non-violence implies truthfulness, selflessness, harmlessness, freedom from anger, pride, and hatred, love for all men and creatures, fearlessness, courage, humility, forgiveness, and absolute self-surrender to God.” Further, he feels that “One who believes in non-violence believes in a living God.” Gandhiji was influenced by Christ who says, “Love your enemies, do good to them who hate you. Bless them that curse you and pray for them, which despitefully use you.” Gandhi believes that “Hate the sin and not the sinner.” “For we are all tarred with the same brush and are children of one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers, and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world.”

Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda – Swami Vivekananda was a Hindu monk of India. He was the most favorite disciple of his master Sri Ramakrishna, who wanted him ‘to grow like a huge banyan tree’ for sheltering thousands from the scorching misery of the world. He asserted “Never think there is anything impossible for the soul. It is the greatest hearsay to think so. If there is sin, this is the only sin – to say that you are weak, or others are weak.” The book – *Vivekananda: His Call to the Nation* asserts that “Whatever you think of yourself you are so. If you think you can win, if you can think you are the best, you are actually the best. So, never say “No”, never say, “I cannot,” for you are infinite” (Vivekananda, 2013).

Swamiji’s inspiration awakens the needy and even “Those who are meek and afraid to fight for good, and fight for survival.” He said, “Never mind the struggles, the mistakes....Never mind the backsliding, hold the ideal a thousand times, and if you fail a thousand times, make the attempt once more.” Professor Sachinandan Sau and Pinaki Das in their recent work – *Life, Philosophy, and Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* (2021) highlight that “It is fear that is the great cause of misery in the world and it is the greatest of all superstitions. It is the cause of our woes and it is fearlessness that brings heaven even in a moment.” (Sau & Das, 2021). Vivekananda linked morality with control of the mind, seeing truth, purity, and unselfishness as traits that strengthened it. He advised his followers to be holy, unselfish, and to have *shraddha* (respect) for others. Vivekananda supported *brahmacharya* (celibacy), believing it the source of his physical and mental stamina and eloquence. He wanted *shraddha* (respect) for the teachers and elders. What

makes one man great, and another weak and low is this *shraddha*. With respect for elders, parents, and teachers one can attain the goal of perfection.

India does not only have such wonderful pieces of advice; the people of India do obey and follow them in their daily life, and practice the bits of advice and instructions of these gurus religiously. Millions of people in India practice yoga and meditation every morning. Indian people work hard, do physical exercise, and daily follow yoga disciplines such as *raj yoga* (mental, psychological), *karma yoga* (action), *jnana yoga* (knowledge), and *bhakti yoga* (devotion, surrender). India's spirituality is now being enthusiastically followed by thousands of people in Western countries; India's Upanishad and Bhagwat Gita – the supreme knowledge book is read and followed by millions of people daily, and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* are performed by millions of people across the world. That is why India is so strong spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, culturally, and physically. That is why India is praised and adored by world leaders.

India is Praised by World Leaders

Is India really worthy of calling a world-spiritual master? To find out the answer we need to examine the perceptions of some most prominent leaders of the world. Let me begin with the former US President Donald Trump (2017-2021), who heaped praise on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, calling him a “True friend” and a “tremendously successful leader,” when he came to visit India in February 2020. In regard to India's potentiality, the US President uttered, “India can accomplish anything, anything at all, anything they want.” He further pointed out that, “The story of the Indian nation is a tale of astounding progress, a miracle of democracy, extraordinary diversity, and above all, you noble people. India gives hope to all humanity.” (Langa, 2020).

Another former president (from 2009 to 2017) of the United States of America Barack Obama also wrote extensively about India, its culture, and its administration in his book *A Promised Land* (2020). President Obama expressed his fascination for India may be of its “sheer size,” large population, hundreds of languages, and ethnic groups. He further said, “More than anything, though, my fascination with India had to do with Mahatma Gandhi. Along with (Abraham) Lincoln, (Martin Luther) King, and (Nelson) Mandela, Gandhi had profoundly influenced my thinking,” and added, “As a young man, I'd studied his writings and found him giving voice to some of my deepest instincts.” In his latest book, he also wrote that “His notion of ‘Satyagraha’, or devotion to truth, and the power of non-violent resistance to stirring the conscience; his insistence on our common humanity and the essential oneness of all religions; and his belief in every society's obligation, through its political, economic, and social arrangements, to recognize the equal worth and dignity of all people – each of these ideas resonated with me. Gandhi's actions had stirred me even more than his words; he'd put his beliefs to the test by risking his life, going to prison, and throwing himself fully into the struggles of his people” (Kurien, 2020). India is adjudged by the USA as a land of opportunity and ‘hard work.’

Shinzo Abe, the former Prime Minister (2006-07 and 2012-2020) of Japan, visited India in 2007 and delivered a lecture in the Rajya Sabha (upper chamber of Parliament). He began his speech with the words of Swami Vivekananda to remind the strong cultural relationship between the two great Asian countries. He praised for regime of King Ashoka, and Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha movement of non-violence. How the Japanese Prime Minister himself was personally influenced by the philosophy and teachings of Swami Vivekananda can be understood from his speech. Quoting frequently from Swamiji's Chicago lecture of 1893, he said, "help and not fight," "assimilation and not destruction," and "peace and not dissension." These exhortations are very relevant and appropriate in the present situation also when a devastating war is going on in Ukraine. Mr. Abe pointed out that, "If you insert these exhortations into the context of the modern day, it is clear that these words preaching tolerance can hardly be considered relics of the past. Instead, we can recognize that they now hold a tone that is even more compelling than before" (Abe, 2007).

Germany has great respect for Indian mythology, literature, and philosophy. For centuries German philosophers, scholars, and even political leaders have got inspired by the works and ideas of Indian philosophy and religions. They are fond of Indian culture and philosophy. The Germans have great respect for Sanskrit and the Indian language. At present Sanskrit is taught in 14 Universities in Germany. The first German poet, philosopher, and Enologist, Friedrich Von Schlegel (1772-1829) in 1808 published an epoch-making book, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (On the Language and Wisdom of India). In this book, the author argued that "a people originating from India were the founders of the first European civilizations." This author also wrote, "India is superior in everything – intellectually, religiously, even Greek heritage seems pale in comparison." Another philosopher and theologian Gottfried von Herder said, "Mankind's origins can be traced to India where the human mind got the first shapes of wisdom and virtue."

Another German philosopher Max Muller extensively studied Indian religious scriptures and philosophy. He studied the Vedas, the Upanishad, and other Hindu scriptures. He was so impressed by reading the Vedas that he said, "If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered over the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant, I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of the Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw the corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact, more truly human life... again I should point to India." Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), a Prussian philosopher and diplomat, who after reading the Bhagwat Gita said, "I read the poem for the first time today. I felt a sense of overwhelming gratitude to God for having let me be acquainted with this work. It must be the most sublime thing to be found in the world." Another great German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) uttered, "In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and as elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life and will be

the solace of my death. They are the product of the highest wisdom. Vedas are the most rewarding and the most elevating book which can be possible in the world.” (Mehta, 2020).

The president of France admitted that he discovered India through Mahabharat. In the Preface of his memoir *Revolution* (2017) he wrote, “I discovered India through the path of dharma, which makes us responsible – each one of us in our respective fields and in solidarity with everyone – for the order of the world in the principle of non-violence in the quest of dignity and independence.” He was largely influenced by Nobel Laureate Professor Amartya Sen and Mahatma Gandhi. He explicitly wrote, “I have often recalled the precepts of Mahatma Gandhi, who said ‘You must be the change you wish to see in the world.’ I share the belief that the difference between possible and impossible lies in our determination” (The Times of India, 2017).

The views of U Thant, the third Secretary General of the United Nations, can be worthwhile to mention here. He read the works of Gandhi which prompted him to utter that “Many of his principles have universal application and eternal validity, and I hope the passing years will show that his faith in the efficacy of nonviolent pressure as an agent for peaceful change is as justified today all over the world as it was in his time in India.” Will Durant, an American historian and the author of the book *The Story of Civilization* spoke eloquently some of the most significant words for Mahatma Gandhi. He said, “Not since Buddha has India so revered any man. Not since St. Francis of Assisi has any life known to history been so marked by gentleness, disinterestedness, simplicity of soul, and forgiveness of enemies. We have the astonishing phenomenon of a revolution led by a saint” (Dhiman, 2015). Mahatma Gandhi mostly inspired leaders who fought for the freedom and independence of their respective countries. Ho Chi Minh a renowned Vietnamese revolutionary was also an admirer of Gandhi. He said, “I and others may be revolutionaries but we are disciples of Mahatma Gandhi, directly or indirectly, nothing more nothing less” (Raju, 2019).

The contribution of Swami Vivekananda to India’s renaissance and resurgence is enormous. When Vivekananda delivered his historic speech in 1893 at the World Parliament of Religions, few Americans knew about India and about its culture and religions. He, confident with Gurudev Ramakshina’s blessings, eloquently described Hinduism as “a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance” and accepts “all religions as true.” He also presented the core Vedantic proposition that all paths ultimately lead to the same pinnacle of spiritual realization and gave ample references to the Bhagwat Gita. This is the enchanting power of Hinduism that gives the message of love, equality, and fellow feeling. While talking with a spiritual leader of India Sri Joydeep Maharaj (Joydeep Maharaj, dt. 14.5.2022) about the concept of India as a Biswaguru (spiritual leader), he said with confidence that “India is already a *Biswaguru*.” India does not require anything else to show the world separately to be recognized as a *Biswaguru*.

Conclusion

From the above discussions on the contributions of Indian philosophers and spiritual leaders, we come to learn that Indian philosophers and saints are so rich and momentous that any problem of an individual, societal, national, or the world can easily be solved. Indian saints spent hundreds of years in meditation and *yoga* living in secluded places and sitting in the lap of nature. They observed the greatest perseverance and sacrificed all of their ease, comfort, and all luxuries to attain the ultimate truth. They taught what they learned throughout their long years of study, meditation, and *yoga*. The light of their knowledge and wisdom is so bright that it can enlighten any suffering human soul living anywhere in the world. If Guru (master) is a person who teaches and inspires others to believe, participate and practice in his method and way of life, and ideology, India can aptly be called a real Guru.

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