



Contributions of Moral Thinkers and Philosophers from India

For Prelims: Chanakya, Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, Buddha, Adi Shankaracharya, Shri Krishna

For Mains: Relevance and significance of the teaching of moral thinkers and philosophers from India like Chanakya, Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, Buddha, Adi Shankaracharya, Shri Krishna

Chanakya:

- Chanakya's other names are **Kautilya** and **Vishnugupta** and He is the author of the **Arthashastra**. The **Arthashastra** was essentially a political text written in ancient India.
- Chanakya assisted **Chandragupta**, the first **Mauryan emperor**, in gaining control and played a crucial role in the establishment of the **Mauryan Empire**. Chanakya served as the principal advisor to both Emperor **Chandragupta** and his son **Bindusara**.
- Chanakya was a royal advisor, teacher, writer, strategist, philosopher and economist in ancient India.
- According to Chanakya a **king is the public face of an empire** because he is responsible for all that happens in society. The king is essentially a mirror that reflects the culture of his territory.
- Chanakya wished to establish a society that did not place an excessive emphasis on **material possessions**. Spirituality was equally important to him.
- A king's ultimate purpose should be the wellbeing of the people, and he should try to achieve it.
- It is a king's responsibility to spread Dharma. To guarantee social fairness, a king can punish the wicked. It is the king's obligation to ensure that innocent people are not penalized in any way.
- Chanakya also remarked that cases should be heard as quickly as possible and that justice should not be delayed.
- Religious austerities should be performed by one person, studies by two, and singing by three. A voyage should be conducted by four people, agriculture by five people, and war by numerous people.

Mahatma Gandhi:

- As a strong believer of almighty **Gandhiji** always felt **supremacy of God**. He realizes God within himself. His deep faith in God gives him power for doing anything and everything in life.
- According to Gandhiji truth is nothing but the **Reflection of God**. Therefore, in his autobiography **"My Experiment with Truth"** he had mentioned that truth can be achieved in a wider sense, where truth does not only mean being truthful in speech but truth should be applied in all fields of life.
- According to him, we can feel the **existence of God** when we follow the three principles that are **Truth, Ahimsa and Goodness** and apply **truth in our speech, deeds and actions**. Thus, for Gandhiji truth and God is one.
- God is the **ultimate immortal superpower** who created the universe and we can realize God within ourselves only by following the **path of truth**.
- Gandhiji also stated that **Truth** and **Ahimsa** are inseparable. They are like two sides of the same

coin. **Ahimsa is the means and Truth is the end.**

- A well-known person who was recognized for his ambitious ideals was **Mahatma Gandhi**. He was a man with a strong sense of right and wrong. By empowering its citizens, he hoped to build the country.
- He was always persuaded in **God's Absolute existence**, which we all possess as our souls.
- He is constantly concerned with the moral and spiritual growth of human beings.
- He primarily emphasizes stronger social integration and unending love for others, both of which have a favorable influence on mental health.
- In his influential book **Hind Swaraj**, he questioned Western culture, which he perceived as unspiritual. He criticized the democracy of Britain. The British parliament was described by him as a "**chattering shop**."
- He desired for India to have a **Swaraj** in which everyone might enjoy the grandeur of freedom. He did not want India to adopt democratic and administrative practices from the West. His idea of Swaraj called for the decentralization of power, and he envisioned an India made up of thousands of autonomous villages.
- According to the **Gandhian concept of Swaraj**, the **kingdom of God**, or **Ramrajya**, must first be created in our own hearts before it can be formed in our societies. Gandhi Ji was mostly interested in how a person's actions might show their thinking.
- He emphasized that each man should strive for **social life**, which is defined as residing with people and residing there for both parties' mutual benefit. Gandhi Ji's two guiding principles throughout his life were **truth** and **nonviolence**. They were regarded as the **height of morality** by some saints.
- Another important feature of **Gandhi's philosophy is nonviolence (Ahimsa)**. **Ahimsa** is a strong weapon to **conquer the world**. He had a strong faith in ahimsa and said that this love and nonviolence are essential to triumph over **hate** and **violence**.
- According to him violence can bring imbalance to society and threaten the inner peace of society. **Thus, Nonviolence is the weapon for strong minded people** which can develop different qualities like **tolerance, self-suffering, patience, self-sacrifice, love and sympathy**.
- **Ahimsa** is the complete absence of ill will against all that live. In its dynamic condition it means **Conscious Suffering**. **Non-Violence** in its active form is goodwill towards all life. It is pure love.' Therefore, nonviolence is complete self-restraint against all evils.

Swami Vivekananda:

- Swami Vivekanand worked on a wide range of subjects. **Vedanta Philosophy, Karma Yoga (1896), Raja Yoga (1896) etc.**
- He was one of the **earliest Indian philosophers** to identify as a **socialist**. The people will certainly want the satisfaction of their material needs, less work, no oppression, no war, more food."
- According to **Swami Vivekanand "If you want to speak of politics in India, you must speak through the language of religion."** For him, one could rouse the lower classes in a country like India only through **religion, education** and instruction.
- Swami Vivekanand stated that disadvantaged children must be educated if they are unable to attend schools. A large number of **Sanyasi monks** propagated their religious teachings to many areas.
- Vivekananda emphasized the need of instilling in Indians a **sense of patriotism, human dignity, and national pride**.
- He promoted **international fraternity** via his **secularism** and espoused the **principle of equality** for all people.
- Swami Vivekananda's thoughts as a progressive Indian thinker aided the development of the peoples of India's patriotic and **national self-consciousness**.
- **Vivekanand's educational philosophy** is founded on the eternal principles of the **Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and Advaita Vedanta**.
- Vivekananda's main idea of education was **man-making, character building and assimilation of ideas**.
- They have always regarded **purity, simplicity, faithfulness, and chastity** more than any **material possession**.
- Swami Vivekananda wished to **guide women** toward their **own cultural aspirations**. Their major aim should be **religious education** and **character development**. Their education should

have **religion as its focal point.**

- The vedantic notion of manifestation or unfoldment leading to total human completion profoundly inspired Vivekananda's vision of education.
- Vivekananda defined **education as “the manifestation of the perfection already in man”** and **religion as “the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.”**

According to him, the only and true answer to all of India's issues is a fully awakened India. What follows is a brief account of what Vivekananda considers to be the basic or foundational theme of Indian life, its life-center and backbone and his peculiar approach towards its understanding and interpretation.

Buddha:

▪ **Tenets of Buddhism:**

- Buddha asked his followers to avoid the two extremes of indulgence in worldly pleasure and the practice of strict **abstinence** and **asceticism**.
- He ascribed instead the '**Madhyam Marg**' or the **middle path** which was to be followed.
- According to him everyone was responsible for their own happiness in life, stressing upon the individualistic component of Buddhism.
- The main teachings of Buddhism are encapsulated in the basic concept of four **noble truths** or **ariya-sachchani** and **eightfold path** or **ashtangika marg**.

▪ **Four noble truths as preached by Buddha are that:**

- Suffering (**Duhkha**)
- Cause of this suffering (**Dukkha-Samudaya**)
- Stop suffering (**Dukkha-Nirodha**)
- Extinguish suffering (**Duhkha-Nirodha-Marga**) **Atthanga Magga (Eightfold Path)**

▪ **Eightfold Path (Astangika-marga):** The path consists of various interconnected activities related to knowledge, conduct, and meditative practices.

- Right View
- Right Intention
- Right Speech
- Right Action
- Right Livelihood
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Effort
- Right Concentration

▪ **Buddha also set a code of conduct for both monastics and laymen to follow which are also known as the Five Precepts or Panchashill and refrain from them:**

- Violence
- Stealing
- Sexual Misconduct
- Lying or Gossip
- Taking Intoxicating Substances e.g., Drugs or Drink

Adi Shankaracharya:

- Adi Guru Shankaracharya was an Indian spiritual guru and philosopher who lived in the eighth century. He is claimed to have been born in the hamlet of Kaladi on the banks of the Periyar, Kerala's largest river.
- Adi Shankaracharya's philosophy was clear and simple. He supported the idea that the Supreme Soul and the soul both exist.
- According to him, only the Supreme Soul has absolute existence and is real, whereas the soul is a changing phenomenon.
- He is also credited with **Enlightening Hindus** to the idea of a single **Supreme Being**.
- **Philosophy:**
 - **Advaita Vedanta:** Advaita Vedanta is a philosophy propounded by Adi Shankaracharya that articulates a philosophical position of extreme nondualism, a revisionary worldview rooted from ancient Upanishadic writings.
 - The entire world, according to philosophy, is a manifestation of the one and only God (brahman), and any diversity we observe is delusion (maya) caused by ignorance

(advidya).

- **Established Mathas:** Shankaracharya established Mathas in Sringeri, Dwaraka, Puri, and Joshi math for the spread of Advaita Vedanta.

▪ **Major Works of Adi Shankaracharya:**

- An important contributor to the revival of **faith in the Vedas and Upanishads was Adi Shankaracharya.**
- Adi Shankaracharya wrote around **116 works**, for example **The Brahma Sutra**, and **The Gita**. Adi Shankaracharya's most famous **poetic works** are **Maneesha Panchakam** and **Saundaryalahiri**.
- The **Vivekachudamani** was written by **Adi Shankaracharya**. It specifies the criteria necessary for vedanta students.
- He was also the author of the **Kanakadhara Stotram**. He also created literature such as **Shankara Smriti**, which tries to demonstrate **Nambuthiri Brahmins'** social supremacy.

Shri Krishna:

- Sri Krishna emphasized the idea of upholding **righteousness** and **destroying evil**. His Gita is a vast **repository of wisdom**.
- The purpose and significance of Gita have consistently been elaborated and explained by several intellectuals.
- Gita reveals that there are **two ways to live a human life: Pravritti**, the way of action and advancement, and **Nivritti**, the way of **introspection** and **spiritual growth**. The **Vedic ideas** are embodied in the **Bhagavad Gita**.
- In the **Bhagavad Gita**, **Shri Krishna** imparts a priceless message that contrasts **ego-centered living**, which is characterized by constant **striving, self-centered thinking**, egoism, and **suffering** brought on by **unfulfilled desires, union with undesirable objects, separation from desired objects**, with **divine-centered living**, which is based upon **correct knowledge, faith, devotion, self-surrender, detachment**, and dispassionate performance of tasks.
- The episode of Arjuna, who was overcome with **sorrow** and **confusion**, being taught and helped by **God himself**, in the middle of the **battlefield of Kurukshetra** where good and evil forces stood in confrontation with one another, symbolically or even truly reflects the discourse of the book as having **immense spiritual value** for people who are engaged in the daily battles of life.
- The **Bhagavad-Gita** shows how everyone may live their daily lives in the world without having to deal with the repercussions of their actions.
- According to eminent scholars, the **Bhagavad-Gita** focuses on three key ideas of gita which are known as the **"three secrets of Gita"**:
 - The **first truth is related** to duty. One must fulfill their duties in accordance with their nature (swadharma). 1
 - The **second truth** is about the **hidden Self**. Everyone has two kinds of reality for themselves, **one is real** and the **other one is the hidden Self**. The **hidden self** is different from the **external false self**.
 - The third secret is about **God's omnipresence**, which surrounds and embraces everyone.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year's Question (PYQ)

Q. "Corruption causes misuse of the government treasury, administrative inefficiency and obstruction in the path of national development." Discuss Kautilya's views. **(2016)**