Hinduism & Islam: Tradition & Modernity
Gandhi
Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a British trained lawyer of Indian origin from South Africa. He had
won his political spurs organising the Indian community there against the vicious system of apartheid.
During this struggle, he had developed the novel technique of non-violent agitation which he called
'satyagraha', loosely translated as moral domination. He was thus heir to the ancient traditions of Gautama
Buddha, Mahavir Jain and emperor Ashoka, and was later given the title of Mahatma, or Great Soul.
Gandhi, himself a devout Hindu, also espoused a total moral philosophy of tolerance, brotherhood of all
religions, non-violence (ahimsa) and of simple living. He adopted an austere traditional Indian style of
living, which won him wide popularity and transformed him into the undisputed leader of the Congress. As
Jawaharlal Nehru said, "He was a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take a
deep breath" and revitalised the Freedom Movement.

Under his leadership, the Congress launched a series of mass movements - the Non Cooperation
Movement of 1920 -1922 and the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. The latter was triggered by the
famous Salt March, when Gandhi captured the imagination of the nation by leading a band of followers
from his ashram at Sabarmati, on a 200 mile trek to the remote village of Dandi on the west coast, there to
prepare salt in symbolic violation of British law.

These were populist movements in which people from all classes and all parts of India participated with
great fervour. Women too, played an active role in the struggle. Sarojini Naidu, Aruna Asaf Ali and Bhikaji
Cama, to name but a few, inspired millions of others to take the first step on the road to emancipation and
equality. In August 1942, the Quit India movement was launched. "I want freedom immediately, this very
night before dawn if it can be had.'.. we shall free India or die in the attempt, we shall not live to see the
perpetuation of our slavery", declared the Mahatma, as the British resorted to brutal repression against
non-violent satyagrahis. It became evident that the British could maintain the empire only at enormous
cost. At the end of the Second World War, they saw the writing on the wall, and initiated a number of
constitutional moves to effect the transfer of power to the sovereign State of India. For the first and
perhaps the only time in history, the power of a mighty global empire 'on which the sun never set', had
been challenged and overcome by the moral might of a people armed only with ideals and courage.
(http://www.ams.sunysb.edu/~saurabh/philosophy/mkg.html)
• Gandhi emphasized “personal purity and simplicity, and his insistence on a strict morality grounded in love for others, found a ready response in the hearts of tens of million of India’s poor and illiterate people.” (Koller, p.156)

• He saw dignity in manual labor. He argued that the “highest life is a life of service…. ” (p.156)

• See Attenborough's Film: (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27lMS76hGG0)

• **Ahimsa** – expanded from negative “nonhurting” to encompass more affirmative meaning of universal love

• **Satyagraha** – truthfastness – the importance of telling the truth as an expression of a fundamental recognition of all humans deserving justice – each human is the divine incarnate – each human must live free with dignity

• Together they imply => active, nonviolent resistance to injustice – “there may be principles worth dying for but there are no principles worth killing for.”

**Gandhi: Ahimsa, Satyagraha & Political Justice**
Gandhi argued that political freedom from oppression and tyranny could be linked to *Moksha* – spiritual liberation, self-realization, enlightenment. For Gandhi – political tyrants were very much akin to the tyranny of one’s not self or ego – both must be overcome through true understanding and the elimination of ignorance.
Gandhi had become convinced that India could never be truly free as long as it remained part of the British Empire. India finally won independence in 1947. But for Mahatma Gandhi, triumph was tempered with disappointment over the violent partitioning of the country into India and Pakistan. Nearly one million people died in the riots that ensued between Hindus and Muslims. Mahatma Gandhi had always been against the partition. The year before he had said, "Before partitioning India, my body will have to be cut into two pieces." But the alternative to partition was thought to be civil war between Hindus and Muslims, and so at the last minute Gandhi urged the Congress Party to accept partition. But his efforts to achieve reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims eventually brought him death. On January 30, 1948, he was assassinated by a fellow Hindu, Nathuram Godse, who felt that Gandhi had betrayed the Hindu cause.

(\url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/50664.stm})

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**Gandhi’s Death**
Gandhi’s Funeral
Sri Aurobindo
Sri Aurobindo was a political activist, Indian Yogi, and spiritual master, who first came to prominence in India's struggle for independence from the British, in an extremist nationalist movement in 1908. He was convinced that any political freedom must be imbued with spiritual elements and thus created a new vision of India, in which her independence was grounded in the necessity of preserving the great teachings of Indian religion, which he predicted would be essential to saving our global humanity at some future point in history. This revolution would occur collectively through a critical mass of enlightened individuals.

His spiritual practice was grounded in yoga and meditation. However, he did not advocate a withdrawal from the affairs of life, but a full political engagement that was based in spiritual understanding and practice. In fact his discovery of yoga as a young adult, after returning from his English education at King's college in Cambridge, was what reconnected him to his Indian roots, and convinced him of India's ultimate value. He was immediately transformed and enthralled by the practice, experiencing electric power around his head, the presence of the Divine within, and the silent Brahmin consciousness, or union with the absolute.

Aurobindo's ultimate belief was in the spiritual nature of all reality, which he described as *being, consciousness, and bliss* (sat-chit-ananda). To him, the underlying thrust of the entire phenomenal world is a spiritual evolution in consciousness toward a situation in which all material forms will reveal the indwelling spirit. He postulated several states of consciousness, such as the Overmind, Intuitive mind, Higher mind, and Illumined mind. These states he saw as interconnected and revealing different levels of reality and unity. Normal waking consciousness is steeped in individualism, while the higher states reveal an ultimate unity. Psyche or soul was the manifestation of the divine as it occurs within individuals, for the purpose of reuniting with the universal.

Sri Aurobindo was a mystic who achieved his *ascending* levels of consciousness through yoga and meditation. Yet, in 1926 he had a profound experience of the Overmind *descending* into him, and stressed that it is not merely transcendence that we are seeking, but an integration of that higher mind with our involvement in the daily world. In this way, he described his spiritual practice as *Integral* Yoga, for it integrated the many systems of India, with daily practice and political and worldly activity. "For truth and knowledge are an idle gleam, if knowledge brings not power to change the world."

"Our experience of the descending current is the experience of the transforming Force."

"Virtue is a pretentious impurity. The only sin is to be discouraged."

"There is an evolution of the consciousness behind the evolution of the species and this spiritual evolution must end in a realization, individual and collective, on the earth."  (http://www.gaiamind.org/Aurobindo.html - by Anodea Judith)

Aurobindo: A Brief Biography
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Sri Aurobindo was born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Returned to India, after attaining his education in Cambridge University</td>
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<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Became the editor of the newspaper, Bande Mataram</td>
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<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Was viewed as a new leader, during a convention of Indian nationalists</td>
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<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Arrested for the possession of weapons</td>
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<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Withdrew from politics and went to Pondicherry, in French India, in order to concentrate on his inner life and work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Established of Sri Aurobindo Ashram &amp; retreated from his Ashram life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Left for the holy abode (Died)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sri Aurobindo Timeline**
• Defined as “the life lived in full realization of Brahman, and yoga is the chief means to this life.” (Koller p.157)
• For Aurobindo, reality emerges through the “creative play” of Brahman or ultimate reality or the “power Spirit.
• The diversity of reality can be explained through the evolution of the world manifested by the higher and lower forms of this “power Spirit” (p.158)
• “Sat-Chit-Ananda” (Being – Consciousness – Joy)
• This evolution of reality is purposeful

Aurobindo & Reality
• The problem of thought therefore is to find out the right idea and the right way of harmony; to restate the ancient and eternal spiritual truth of the Self, so that it shall re-embrace, permeate, and dominate the mental and physical life; to develop the most profound and vital methods of psychological self-discipline and self-development so that the mental and physical life of man may express the spiritual life of man....” (pp.157-58)
Aurobindo argued that justice and freedom are essential to the higher elevation of humanity – that social harmony and unity are instrumental to achieving the harmony and balance of each individual’s life.
Mohammed Iqbal
Indian poet and philosopher, Iqbal was born at Siālkot, India (now in Pakistan), on Nov. 9, 1877 of a pious family of small merchants and was educated at Government College, Lahore. In Europe from 1905 to 1908, he earned his degree in philosophy from the University of Cambridge, qualified as a barrister in London, and received a doctorate from the University of Munich. His thesis, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, revealed some aspects of Islāmic mysticism formerly unknown in Europe.

On his return from Europe, he gained his livelihood by the practice of law, but his fame came from his Persian- and Urdu-language poetry, which was written in the classical style for public recitation. Through poetic symposia and in a milieu in which memorizing verse was customary, his poetry became widely known, even among the illiterate. Almost all the cultured Indian and Pakistani Muslims of his and later generations have had the habit of quoting Iqbal.

Before he visited Europe, his poetry affirmed Indian nationalism, as in *Nayā shawālā* ("The New Altar"), but time away from India caused him to shift his perspective. He came to criticize nationalism for a twofold reason: in Europe it had led to destructive racism and imperialism, and in India it was not founded on an adequate degree of common purpose. In a speech delivered at Alīgarh in 1910, under the title "Islam as a Social and Political Ideal," he indicated the new Pan-Islāmic direction of his hopes. The recurrent themes of Iqbal’s poetry are a memory of the vanished glories of Islām, a complaint about its present decadence, and a call to unity and reform. Reform can be achieved by strengthening the individual through three successive stages: obedience to the law of Islām, self-control, and acceptance of the idea that everyone is potentially a vicegerent of God (*nāʾib*, or *muʾmin*). Furthermore, the life of action is to be preferred to ascetic resignation.

Known for his influential efforts to direct his fellow Muslims toward the establishment of a separate Muslim state, an aspiration that was eventually realized in the country of Pakistan. He was knighted in 1922. After a long period of ill health, Iqbal died in April 1938 and was buried in front of the great Bādshāhī Mosque in Lahore. Two years later, the Muslim League voted for the idea of Pakistan. That the poet had influenced the making of that decision, which became a reality in 1947, is undisputed. He has been acclaimed as the father of Pakistan, and every year Iqbal Day is celebrated by Pakistanis.


Iqbal : A Brief Biography
• Recognized major problems of modern life:
  • Political oppression
  • Ideological oppression
  • Economic oppression
  • Spiritual oppression
The main function of religion is “to be nurturing and fulfilling of the ego’s potential.” (Koller p.160)

“The moral and religious ideal of man is not self-negation but self-affirmation, and he attains to this ideal by becoming more and more individual, more and more unique.”

Religion must guide both the individual and the state: without it one can not reach “the profound truth at the very core of life....” (p.159)
“The modern world, dominated by the rule of reason, fails to recognize the full reality of individual beings. Instead, it regards the individual merely as a class member, as a type that functions according to a conceptual classification.” (Koller p.160)
• “At the core of Iqbal’s understanding of religion is a vision of the self-affirmation of the individual (khudi). A person’s individuality is sacred, never to be subordinated…” Koller p.160

• Thus, the goal of a religious life is “the reconstruction of the finite ego by bringing him into contact with an eternal life-process, and thus giving him a metaphysical status of which we can have only a partial understanding in the half-choking atmosphere of our present environment.” (Iqbal)
What thing is the State? or why
Must labour and capital so bloodily
disagree?
Asia’s time-honoured cloak grows
ragged
and wears out . . .
For whom this new ordeal, or by
whose hand prepared?

• (Khizr-e rāh (“Khizr, the Guide”) Eng.
trans. by V.G. Kiernan.)

Iqbal – The Anguish of Muslim Powerlessness
• 1) Faith – “emphasis on obedience to divine laws”
• 2) Thought – “emphasis on achieving rational understanding of the demands and authority of faith”
• 3) Discovery - “religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by releasing himself from the feters of the law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness.” (p.160)
• When the individual acts creatively, God is manifested, and both the individual and the world becomes infused with the divine energy which sustains and endows life with meaning.

Lo, like a candle wrestling with the night
O’er my own self I pour my flooding tears.
I spent my self, that there might be more light,
More loveliness, more joy for other men.

• (Rumūz-e bīkhūdī 1918; The Mysteries of Selflessness, Eng. trans. by A.J. Arberry.)

Iqbal on Creative Action