



Wisdom Magazine



INDIA AND HINDUISM



A Picture Book
Volume Two

Somparn Promta



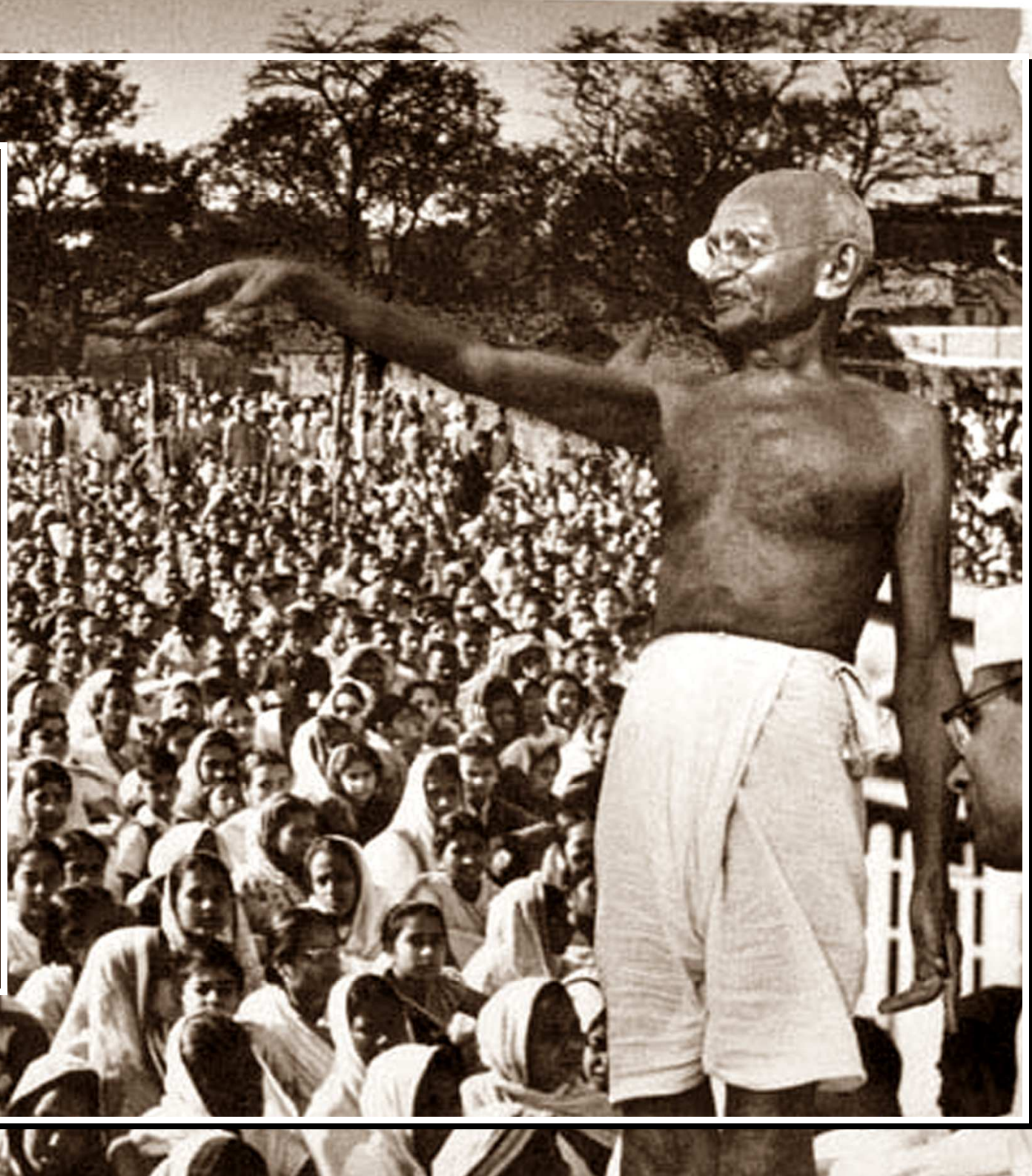
India and Hinduism

A Picture Book
Volume Two

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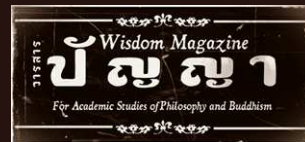


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Preface

This book was conceived from my idea that sometimes only one picture can say so many things better than thousands of words. The book was designed as a 'picture book' which means the book in which the contents are directed by pictures rather than the text. However, a short text is needed, like a silent movie, to communicate some main topics. The book was originally written to be used in my class in Chula, 'Basic Thoughts of Asia.' It contains two volumes. The first one deals with popular Hinduism, and the second one with scholarly Hinduism.

Somporn Promta

Part One
Introduction

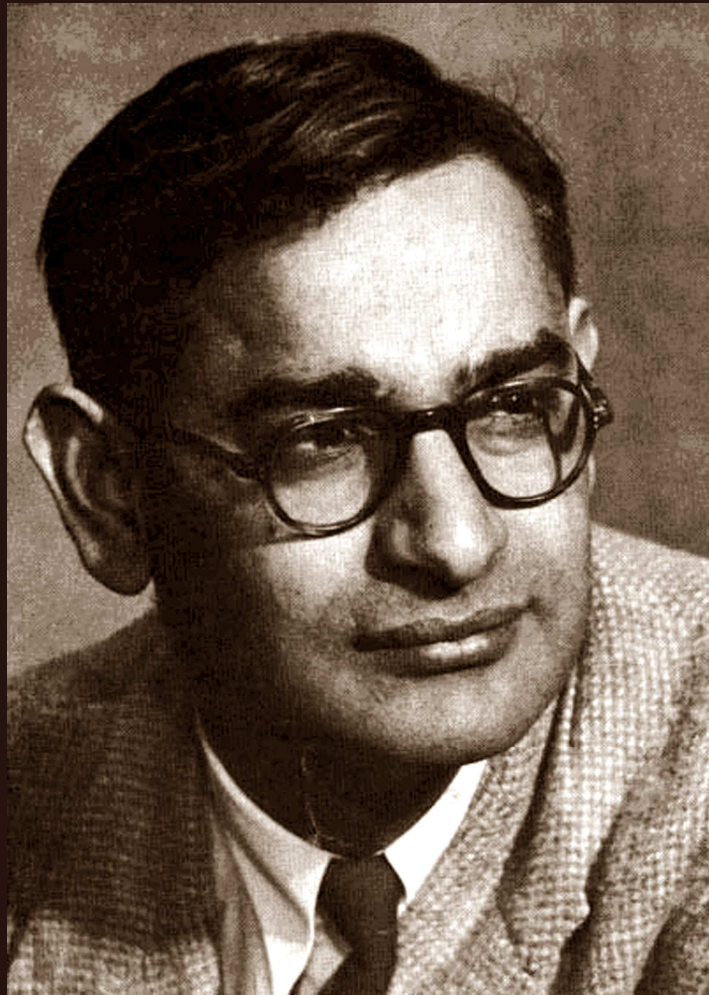
India for some people is the land of poor people. They imagine several things when they hear somebody talking about India. They may think that as the land of poor people, India might be the land of education lower than their country.

This imagination could be right or wrong. To answer the question “Is it right to say that India is the land of illiterate people?” we need to explore what happens in India in terms of knowledge and academic excellence in general. Consider the following pictures.



This Indian man is a physicist named Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman. He studied physics at B.A. and M.A. levels in India; and never studied abroad. After that he taught physics and undertook research in the field of physics in Indian universities.

In 1930, he was awarded Nobel Prize in physics.



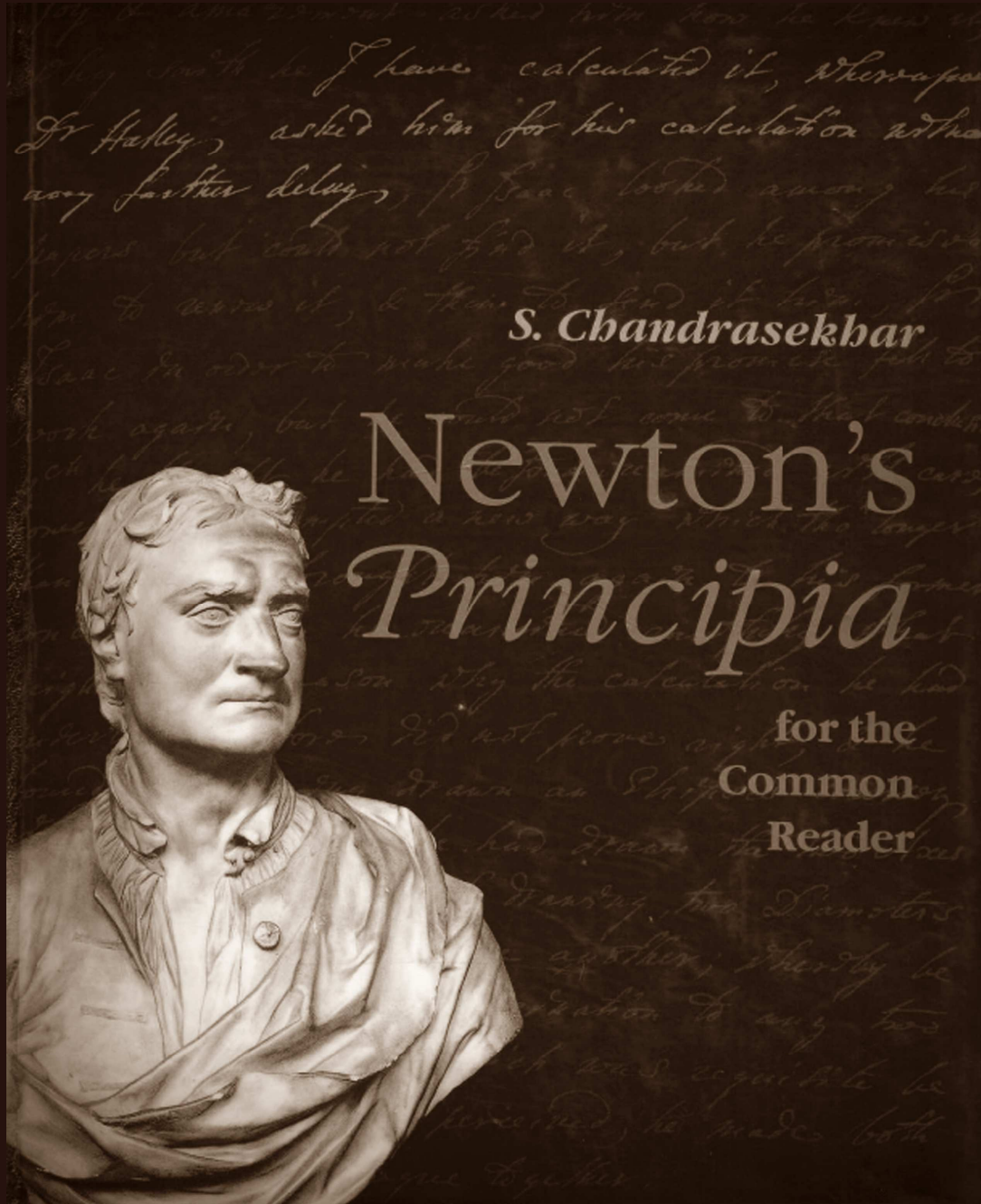
This man, Har Gobind Khorana, was born in a poor village in India. He finished his B.Sc. and M.Sc. from Punjab University; and Ph.D. from the University of Liverpool. In 1970 Khorana was invited to be the Alfred Sloan Professor of Biology and Chemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he had worked until retiring in 2007.

He was awarded Nobel Prize in 1968 for his work on the interpretation of the genetic code and its function in protein synthesis.



This is a picture of an Indian great physicist, Subramanyan Chandrasekhar. Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman, the first person above, was his paternal uncle. During his lifetime, he was accepted in India and the world as a world leading physicist.

In 1983, he was awarded Nobel Prize in physics.



S. Chandrasekhar

Newton's Principia

for the
Common
Reader

This is one of Chandrasekhar's books that I have recently read. It was published by Oxford University Press in 1995.

I enjoyed the reading so much. He did not only talk about what Newton has contributed in his 'Principia,' but also gave personal insight and interpretation on the work.



Amartya Kumar Sen had been professor of economics and philosophy at Harvard University.

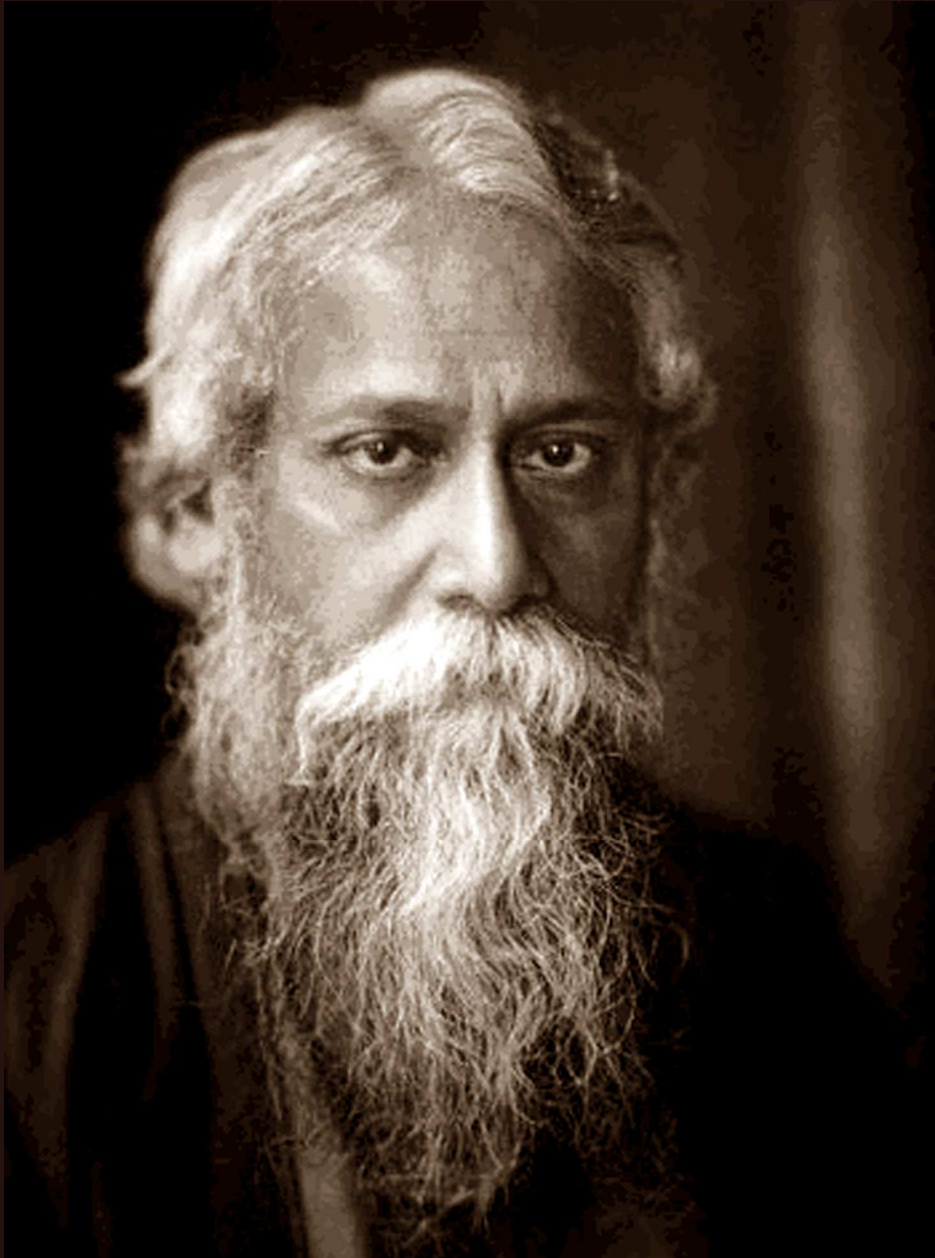
Amartya Sen's books have been translated into more than thirty languages. He has received over 80 honorary doctorates. In the year 2010, 'Time' magazine listed him among the 100 most influential persons in the world.

In 1998, Sen won the Nobel Prize in economic sciences for his contributions to work on welfare economics.



Venkatraman Ramakrishnan was born in Chidambaram in Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu. He was a graduate from Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, and did his Ph. D. in physics from Ohio University, USA. He currently works at Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge.

In 2009, he won Nobel Prize in chemistry.



Rabindranath Tagore was a popular poet, novelist, musician, painter, and playwright. In 1913, Nobel Prize in literature was awarded to him.

I personally admire this Indian poet, thinking 'the profound thinker needs some spiritual source for artistic inspiration—religion or philosophy.' And I see that India has the highest potential to provide this thing.

What do you think? From above, we see that there are some Indian people receiving the Nobel Prize, both for their deep knowledge in 'science' and 'arts.' This means that education in India is not below standard as somebody thinks.

What is interesting is that all of the persons as we have seen above claim that one of Indian religion, which they adopt as personal faith, Hinduism, plays the important role behind their work. Hinduism, for these people, is the endless source for an inspiration in doing creative work.

How does Hinduism have the real influence on the creating of arts, science, logic, mathematics, and so on?

To answer this question, we need to understand one thing.

It is a thing called 'scholarly Hinduism.'

We shall devote the following pages to explore this thing.

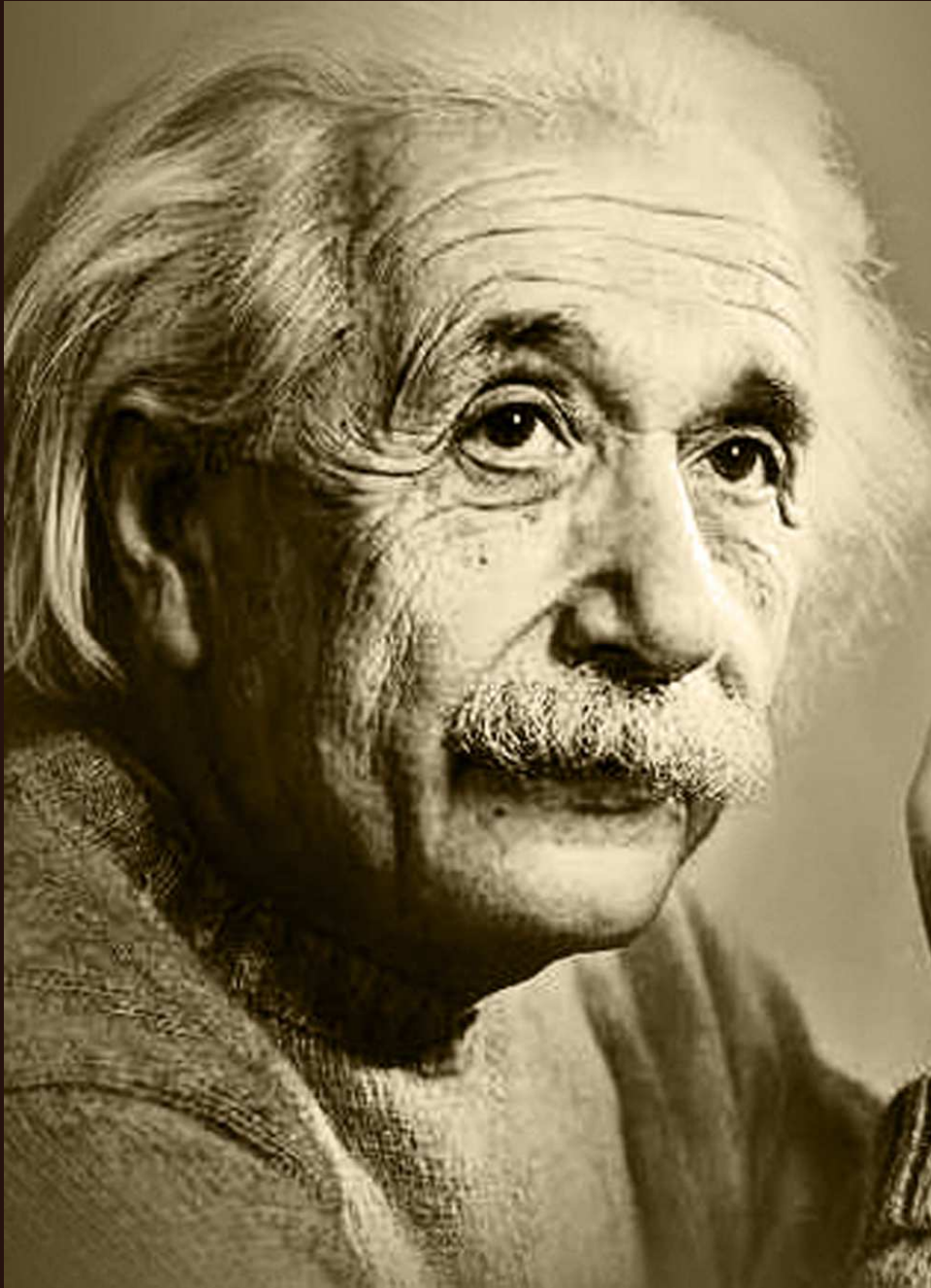
Part Two
Scholarly Hinduism

Before answering what is 'scholarly Hinduism,' we have to start with the third kind of theism, mentioned in the first volume of this book, which is 'pantheism.'

This kind of theism mainly differs from the first two kinds that we have considered previously (monotheism and polytheism) in that Gods in monotheism and polytheism are the 'person,' but God in pantheism is not.

Personal God is the one which is given in the form of person, and this person is believed to be the original form of man. To know what personal God looks like, we just have to see ourselves.

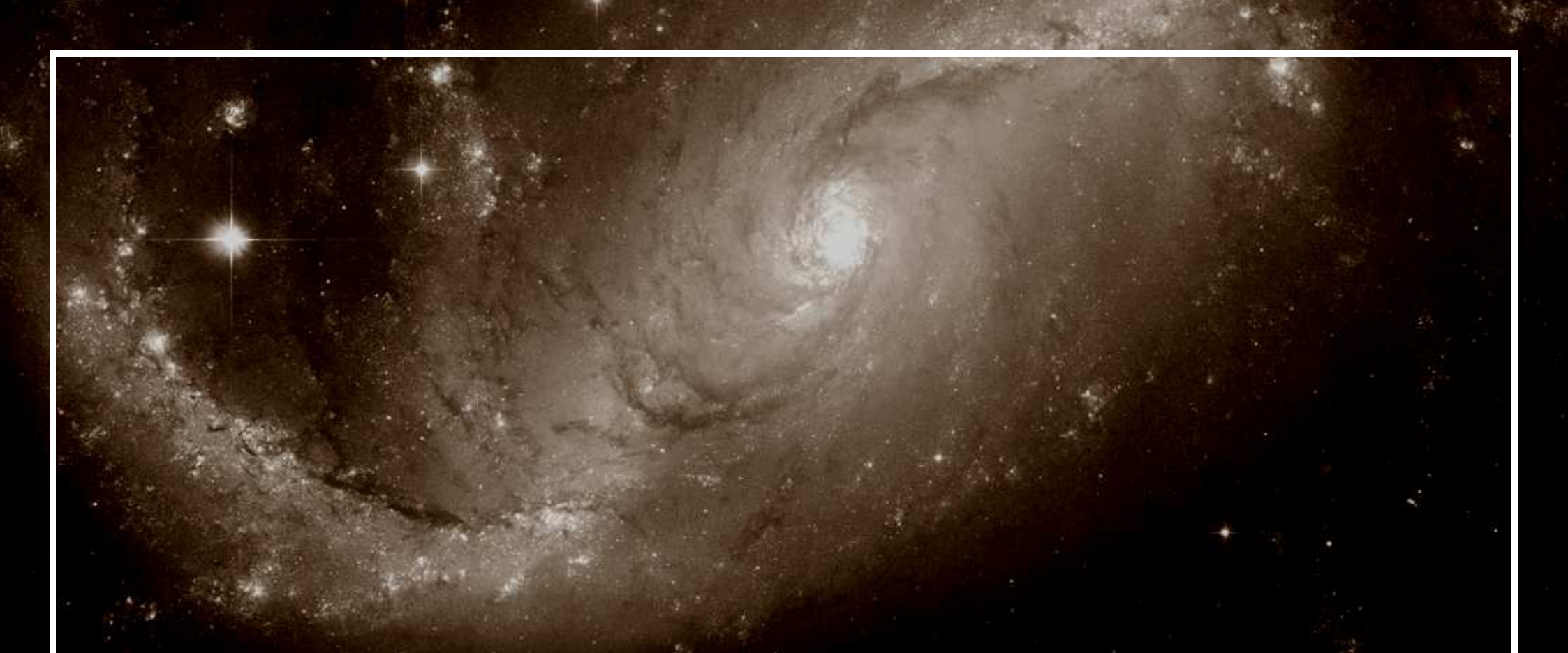
In the 'Bible' they said that when God has to create the first man (Adam), He decides to create that first man, following His own image. That is: God uses Himself as the model of man. In the Hindu texts, they said like that, as well.



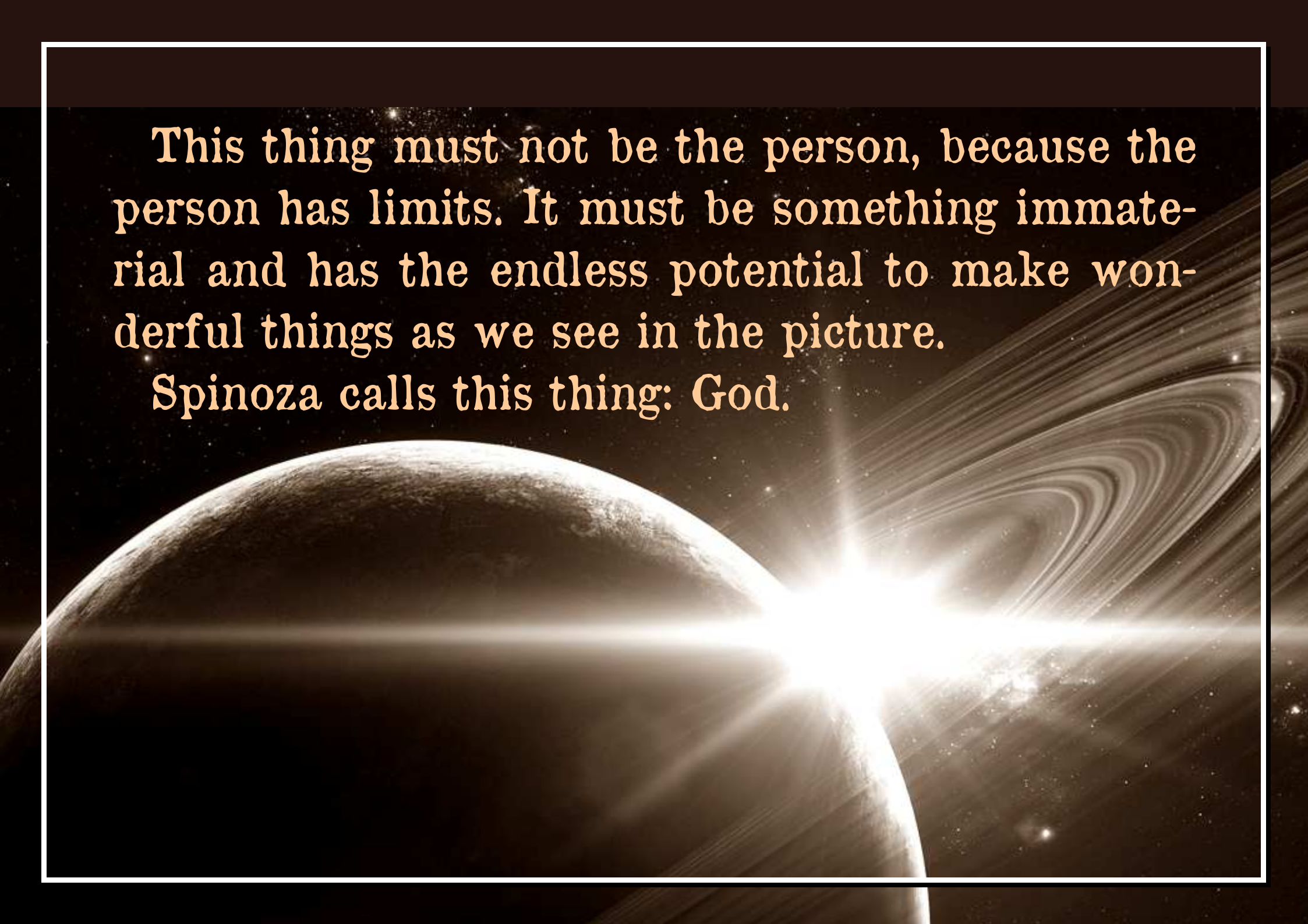
Once Einstein was questioned, “Did you believe in God?” He replied, “I do not believe in personal God as found in the ‘Old Testament.’ However, I believed in Spinoza’s God.”



This is Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), mentioned by Einstein. He was a Dutch Jewish philosopher. God in the view of this philosopher is not a person, a Holy Man who has emotions and sometimes punishes people because He feels not pleased with them.



The universe, according to Spinoza, is well arranged. And this means that there must be 'something' playing the role behind the beauty and harmony of things in the universe.

A composite image featuring a large, dark, cratered planet in the foreground on the left. In the background, the rings of Saturn are visible, illuminated by a bright light source that creates a lens flare effect. The scene is set against a dark, starry space background.

This thing must not be the person, because the person has limits. It must be something immaterial and has the endless potential to make wonderful things as we see in the picture.

Spinoza calls this thing: God.

For some people in this modern age, the happening of the universe including its beauty could be explained through a concept of nature. They say that the universe is naturally created. Nature, not God, creates the universe.

In the view of Einstein, the words 'Nature' and 'God' as something playing the role behind the happening of the universe are not different in the meaning; they are just different in the form, or language symbol, only. For Einstein, you can say 'Nature creates the universe.' But 'Nature' here must be something, not nothingness. The universe cannot happen from nothingness.

In India, God as presented by Spinoza is something well known among the Indian thinkers or philosophers. They call this God: Brahman.

Brahman is not personal God. It is something unseen, immaterial, and formless—meaning that human beings can never see or experience Brahman through sense experience.

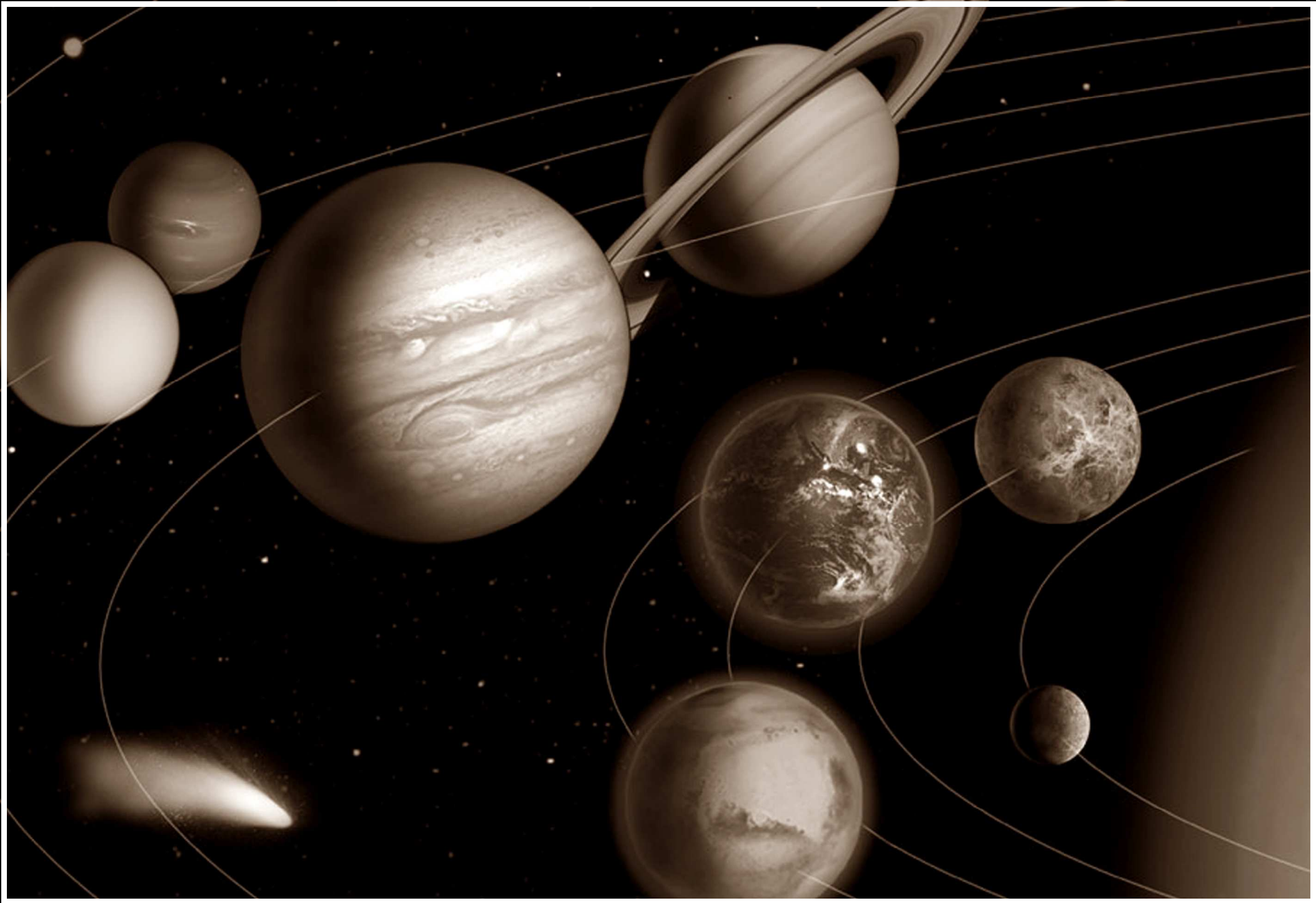
The only way allowed, to perceive this thing, is 'wisdom' which means contemplative thinking.

For Hindu philosophers, all Big Gods and small gods that we have considered in the first volume have their origin from Brahman.

We know from daily experience that anything must have its origin, and the origin of a thing must be another thing. We have a cup of tea. It was made from the factory. It was made from some kind of material. Without the doer and the material, that cup can never be born in this world.

The cup is a manmade entity. This kind of thing is not difficult to see 'where it is from and who makes it.'

But looking at the vast sky, we see so many wonderful objects such as the sun, the stars, and so on. The following picture is of our solar system. What did you see from this?



For me, this is so amazing picture. Why all of these objects are completely round—who made it! Why they orbit around the sun like that. How they can move as they are just plain objects without engines.

When I see a car moving, I understand how it can move. When I see the fire in the stove, I understand how it occurs and understand further it cannot last more than hours.

But the sun lasts for millions of years. The fire on the sun is not like the fire that we made. Who made the fire on the sun and made from what?

The earth, that we are now inhabiting, has its mass. The question is: the mass of the earth comes from what. Suppose we say that: from A. The question remains: the mass of A comes from what. It may be that A is from B, and B is from C...

Finally, there must be the point, the last point, where the mass of our earth is from.

Hindu thinkers believe that such a final point is nothing but Brahman.

The belief in Brahman plays the major role in Indian history, in the creation of Indian civilization, as to be seen ahead.

Part Three
The Making of Zero

There are two main number systems used in the world. An example of the first one is the Roman number system. And the second one is the Hindu-Arabic one.

The difference between these two systems lies in that in the former system, there is no the number called 'zero' while there is this thing in the latter system.

We know that the Roman number system has its limits as it lacks the number zero.

Some people wonder why the wise persons like the Greek and Roman people do not invent zero. The simple answer for this question is: Because the Greek and Roman mathematical thinkers do not see 'something' which the Indian mathematical thinkers see.

What is the thing that Indian mathematical thinkers see?

They see 'voidness' which is one of important philosophical concepts known widely among Indian philosophers.

The original word used to convey a concept of voidness in Sanskrit is 'shunya.' This concept is shared by Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism.

In Hinduism, it is believed that Brahman is the 'Great Voidness' as it has no form. The 'formless' in Hindu philosophy is the thing that has higher potential compared with the 'formed.'

Water is formless. The wind is formless as well. Water and wind move gently, but possess the hidden strength. Moreover, the formless is the thing that supports the formed.



Without water, we can never sail the ship across the ocean. As well, without the wind, the plane can never fly across the vast sky.



According to Hindu philosophy, the four basic elements of the universe, which are earth, water, fire, and air, are formless. As the formless, these things will last forever.



Man tries to form these formless elements into the formed things and calls them civilization. Consider the great things in human history as follows.

A Mayan Pyramid



An Egyptian Sphinx



The Roman Coliseum



These things, in the view of Hindu philosophy, are made from the four formless elements. As the formed, one day they must be destroyed by time. All the formed are temporary.

As these things are formed from the formless, finally they must come back to their original sources. From earth to earth, from water to water, from fire to fire, and from wind to wind—again!

Theoretically, Brahman is the highest formless. The four elements as said come from Brahman. The closer relation between them and Brahman makes them more formless than the world, the sun, the stars, the ocean, the clouds, and so on, which are less close.

The world could be categorized as a 'natural' formed; and the pyramid as a 'manmade' formed. Between these formed things, the former has more potential to last.



From above, we can say:

“The thing that stays closer to Brahman has more potential to last.”

The above concept was widely known among Indian mathematical thinkers, especially those who are Hindu. According to Indian mathematicians, the numbers should consist of both the formed and the formless ones. The numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 were designed to be the formed; while the number 0 was designed to play the role as the formless number.

The formed number, like other formed entity in the universe, has a positive value; and this value is fixed. For example, '1' means '1' (the first positive arithmetical value); and '2' means '1+1.' The formless number, like other formless entity in the universe as well, has no such positive value; it contains only 'negative' value, which means the value for other, and not for itself. The positive value of 1-9 is for itself, and not for other.



In the Roman number system, there are only the formed numbers, so no number plays the negative role as said; all of them play only the positive role—to express ‘my value’ or ‘my existence.’

Consider the following.

When the Roman mathematicians need to talk about 'thirty three,' they write: 'XXXIII,' which requires six spaces. For the same number, the Hindu mathematicians just write: '33,' which needs only two spaces.

Actually, '33' means '30+3.' As the formless number, zero does not need to claim any positive value. So, it gives way to '3' to occupy its space.

Zero does the same to other formed numbers. And this makes the Hindu number system highly flexible and effective, compared with the Roman number system which is fixed.

Note that in the Hindu number system, there are nine numbers that are the formed; while there is only one number that is the formless. This means that in one system, we do not need many formless things because the formless has the high potential to act or operate for other.

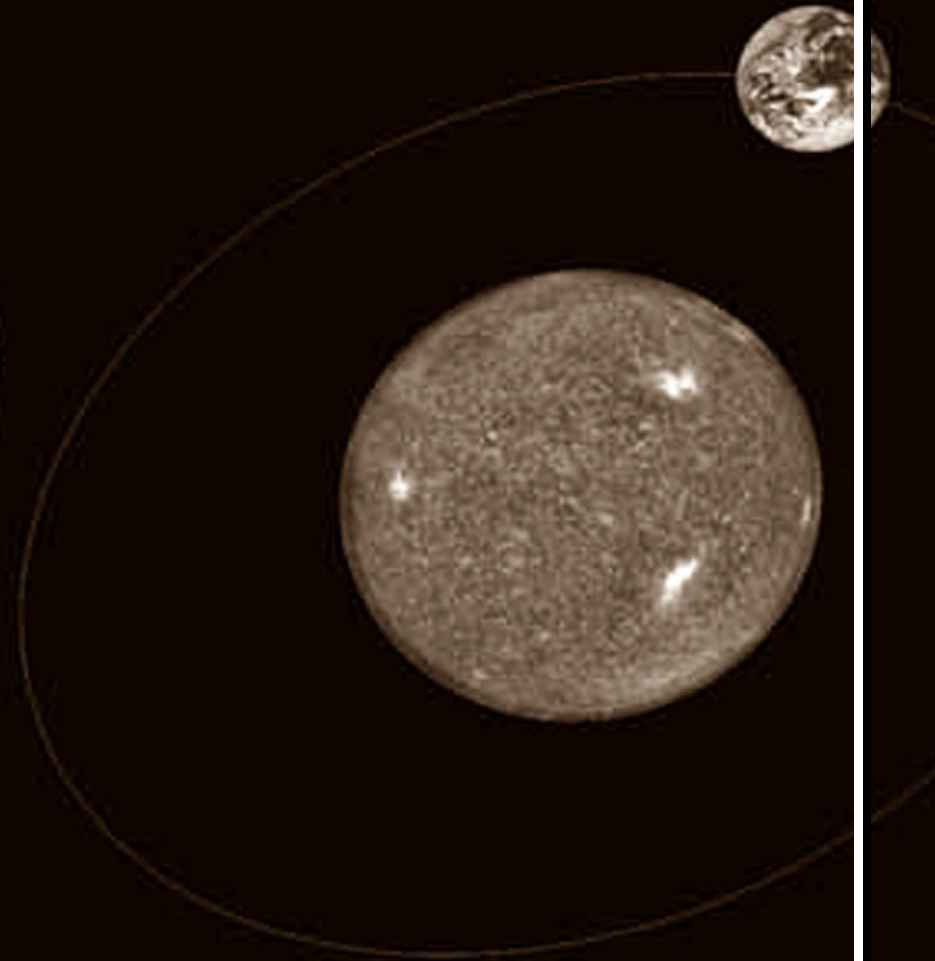
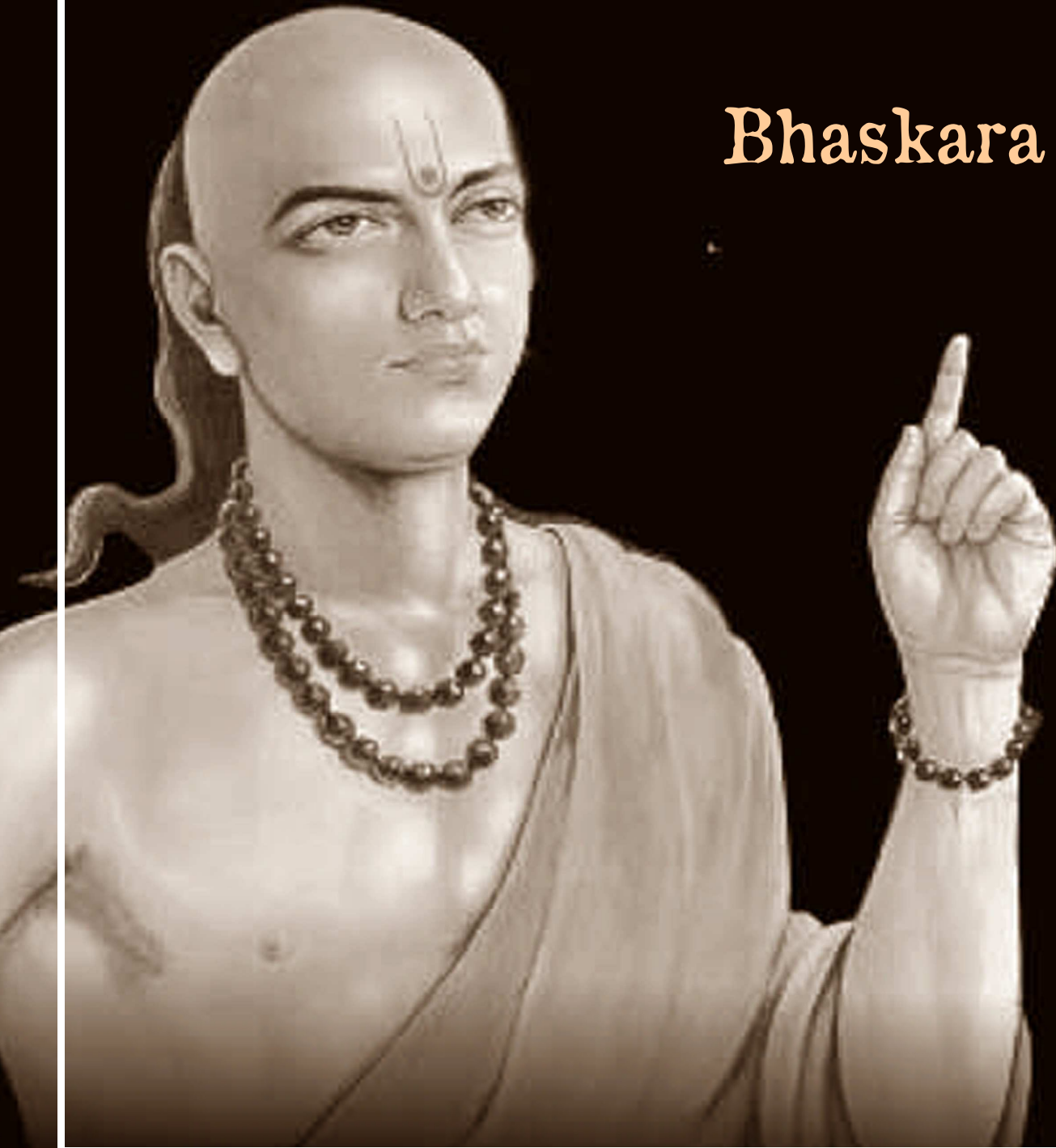
Or we can say that in one system we need only one formless entity to lead the whole system. In Hindu number system, zero plays the role as the center of the whole system. Without zero, the formed numbers can do very limited things, like the Roman numbers.

However, people do not notice its leadership, like we do not think about the wind when we are boarding the plane, or do not notice the existence of air while breathing.

To conclude, we see that the wisdom which is the source of the invention of zero is very simple. Great things in Hindu philosophy are those that 'give' to other; and the small things are those that 'take' from other.

We shall end this part with the pictures of the Hindu mathematical thinkers who are supposed to play the role behind the creation of zero.

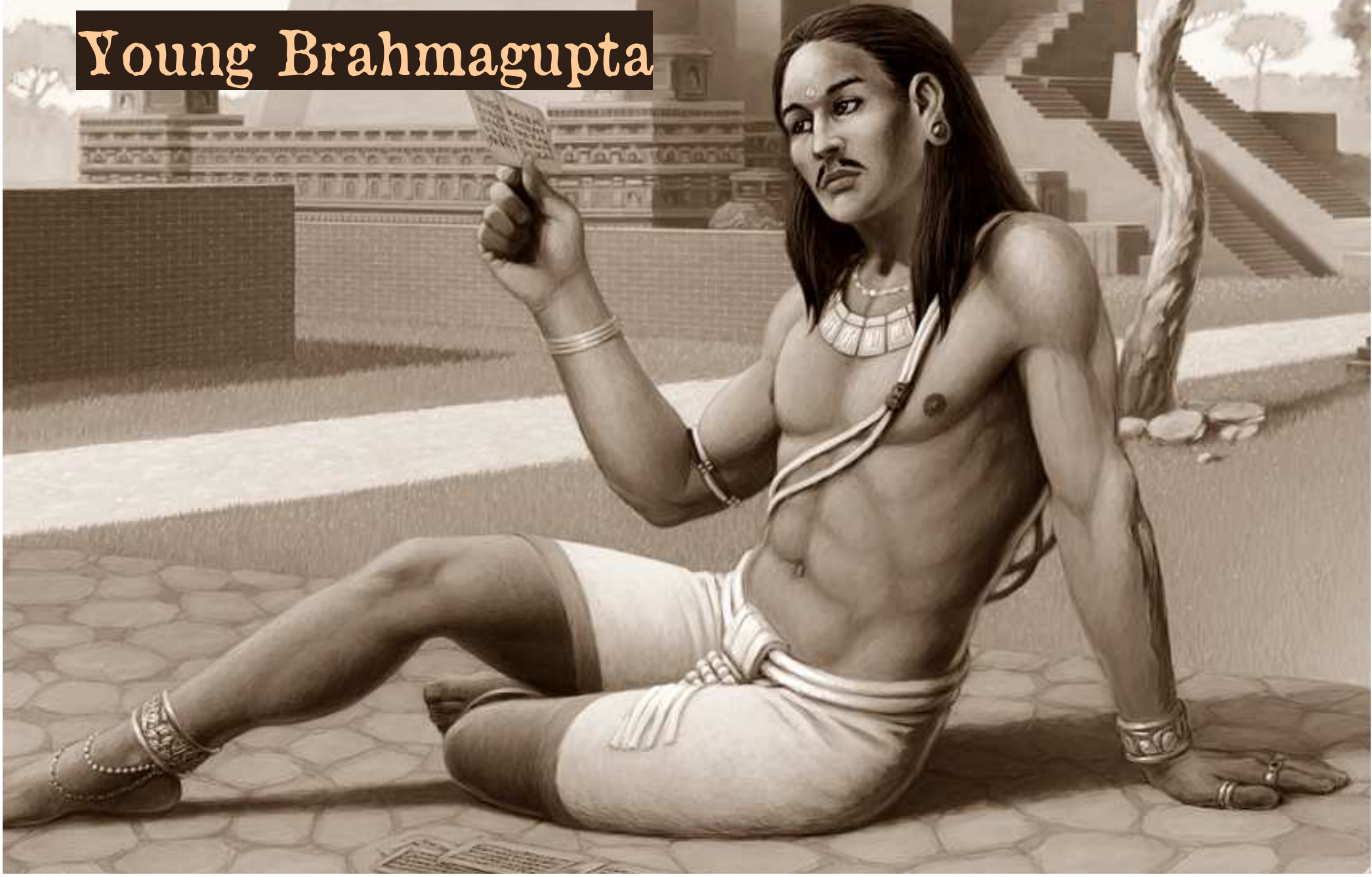
Bhaskara (1114-1185 A.D.)



**Brahmagupta
(598-668 A.D.)**



Young Brahmagupta





Aryabhata
(476-550 A.D.)

Part Four
Political Wisdom

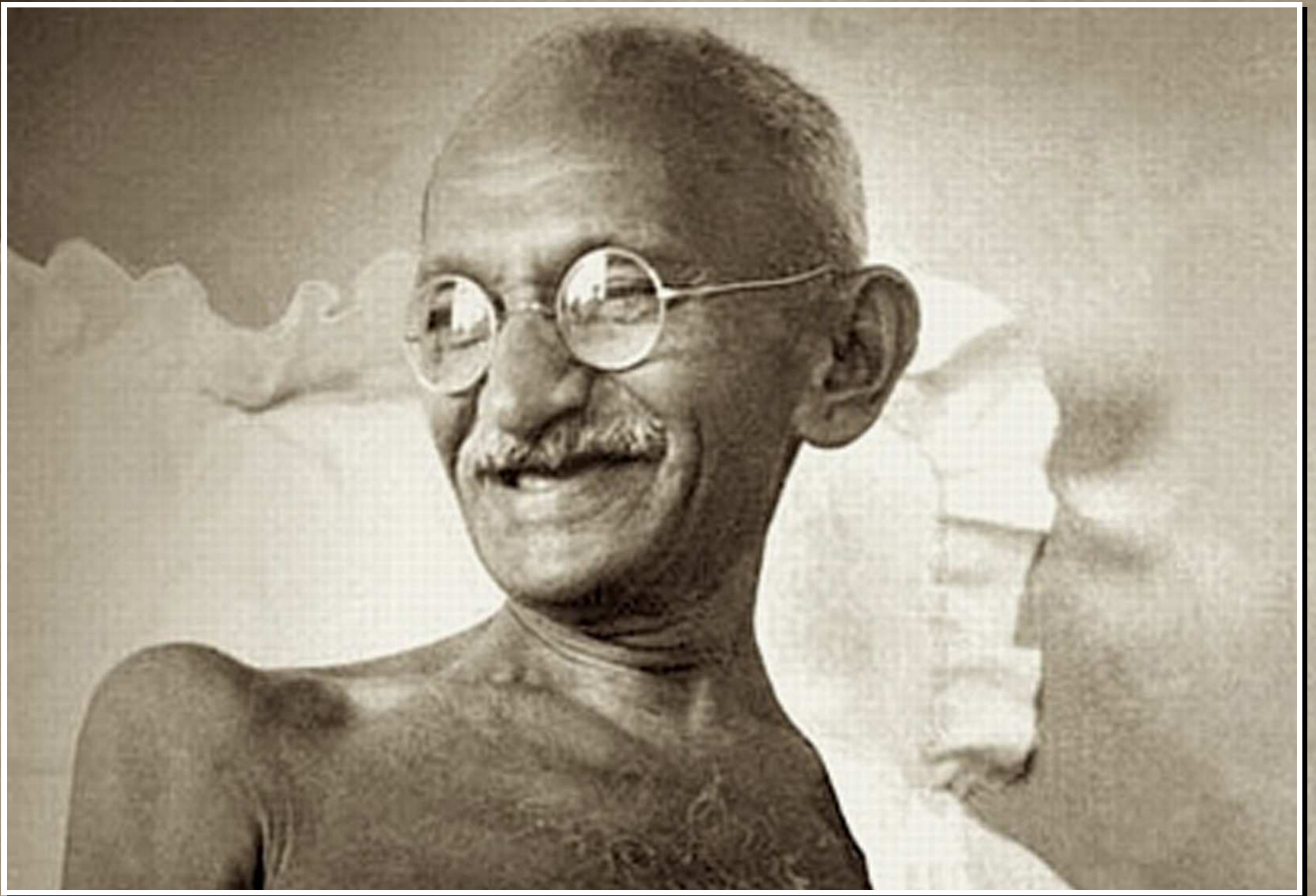
Hinduism defines goodness as social duties which are properly undertaken. In the 'Bhagavadgita' Arjuna thinks that killing enemies in the war is an evil. His thought as said is rejected by Krishna as a wrong view. In the view of Krishna, killing enemies in the war could be right or wrong, depending on 'you belong to which side between the good and the evil.' Killing is not an evil in itself.

Like war, politics can be good or evil, depending on “you use it for what objective.” Politics is not an evil in itself. Mahatma Gandhi seems to be a good example of the person who can use politics for the good objectives. Certainly, without a deep belief in Hinduism, Gandhi would not have performed such a wonderful task.

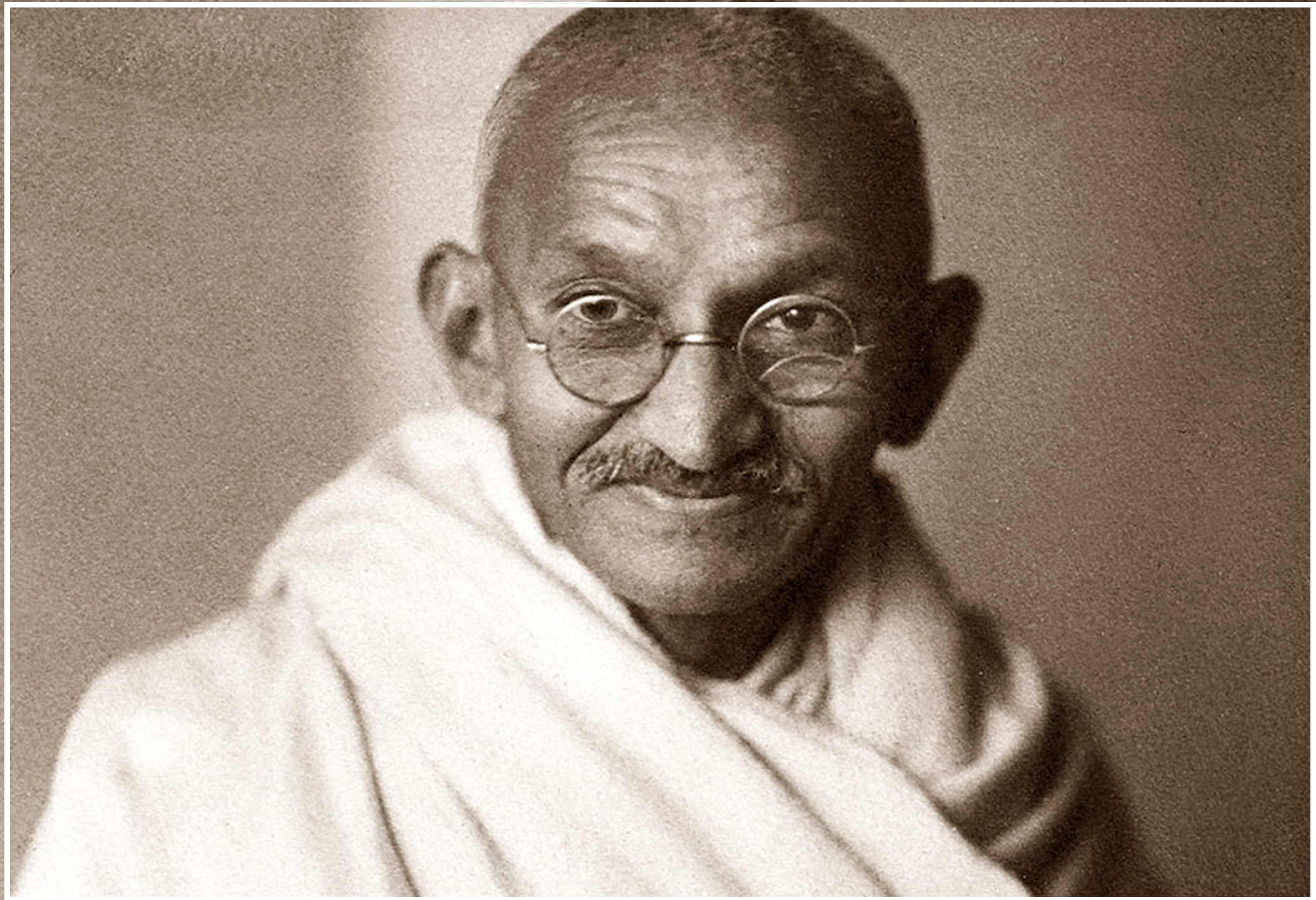
We shall dedicate the following pages to explore what done by Gandhi.

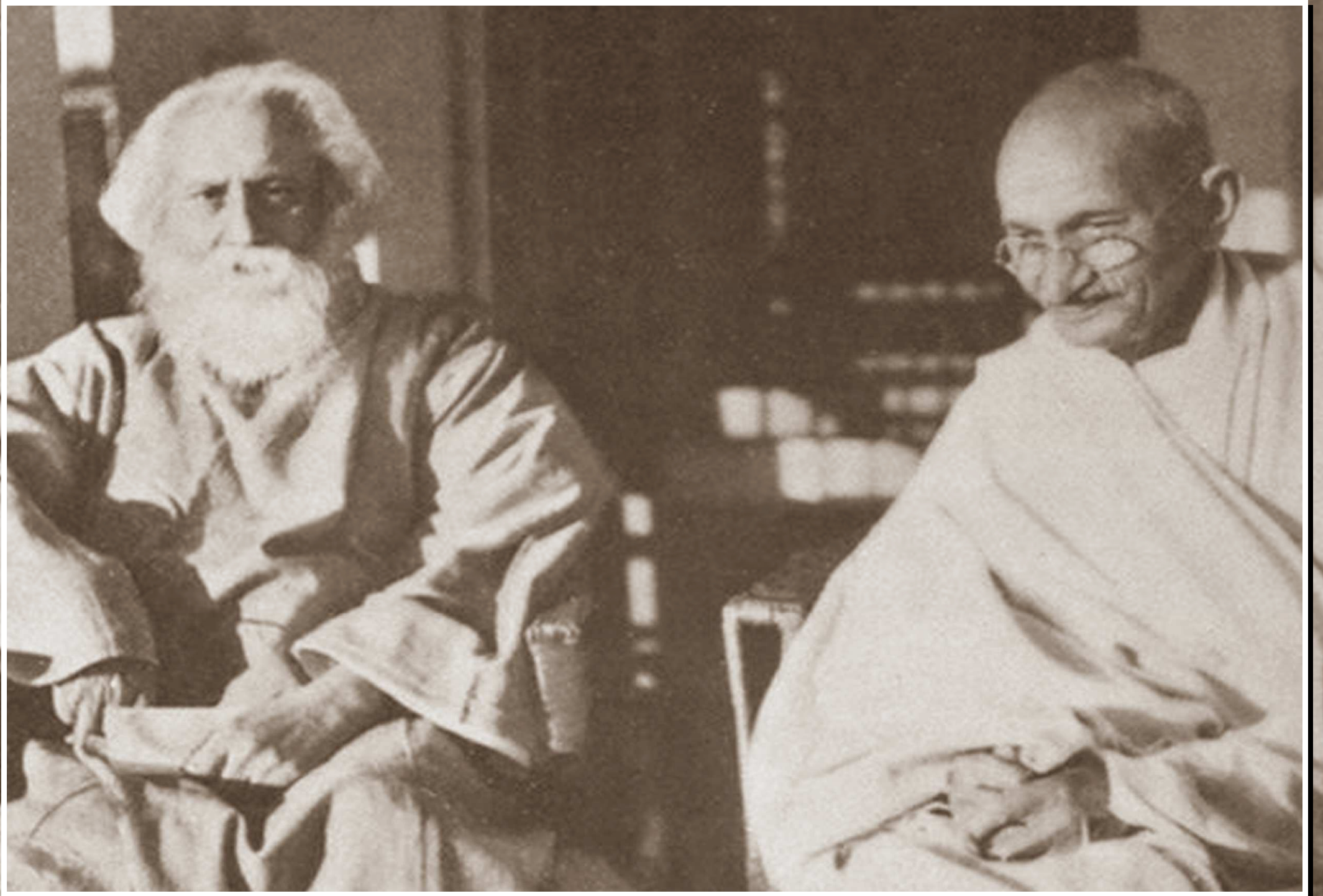




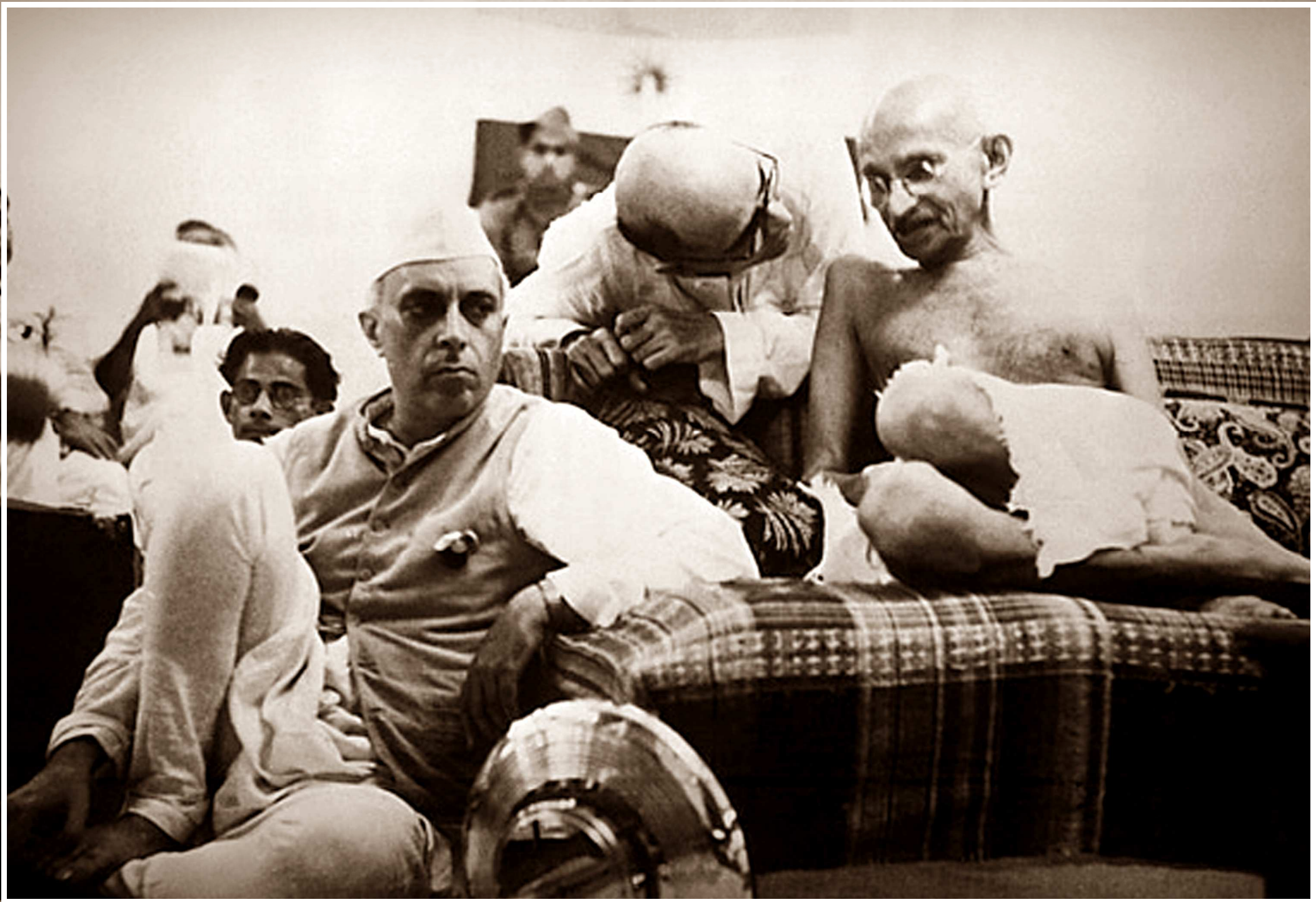












There is a famous saying of Gandhi concerning the relation between religion and politics. It says:

“Those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.”

In some religious tradition, for example Thai Buddhism, people think that politics is a dirty thing as it involved with greed and power which are evil. For them, good people should not be involved with politics.

The understanding of Thai people is partly true. In Thai politics or anywhere in the world, we see that the politicians are those who do everything to preserve their political power. In Thai politics, there is a saying widely adopted as a moral code among the politicians: "There is no real friend or enemy in politics."

Gandhi knows that most (or even all) of politicians could be selfish and greedy as said. But this does not mean that politics is an evil and good people should not be involved with it.

According to him,

Politics and the
politicians are not
the same thing.

There are two kinds of politics.

One, the politics played by the politicians.

Two, the politics played by general people who are not the politicians.

It is the politics of the second kind that Gandhi dedicated his life for. This kind of politics can be made good.

The politics of the politicians
needs violence.

But the politics of the people
needs non-violence.

The politics of the politicians
needs power and lie.

But the politics of the people
needs love and truth.

Concerning non-violence, Gandhi says:

“Literally speaking, Ahimsa means “non-killing.” But to me it has a world of meaning, and takes me into realms much higher, infinitely higher.

It really means that you may not offend anybody; you may not harbour an uncharitable thought, even in connection with one who may consider himself to be your enemy.”

“To one who follows this doctrine, there is no room for an enemy”

Hitler thinks that the Jews are his enemies.

As the result of such thinking, the tragedy as to be seen in the next pages sadly happens into this world.











Gandhi says that it is not easy to love your enemy; but we have got to try if we need to make the politics peaceful and non-violent.

For those who do not have any faith in religion, the practice of 'Ahimsa' seems to be very difficult or not possible.

And this is why we should have a faith in religion, Gandhi says.

For those who practice 'non-violence' there is no one in their view to be an enemy. However, it is possible that there are some people who consider themselves as the enemy of such persons.

Gandhi knows this best and writes it in some of his articles, to point out that 'Ahimsa' has some limits.

Jesus does not think that there is someone as his enemy, but he was killed by those who considered themselves as his enemies.

In the same way, Gandhi does not think that there is someone as his enemy, but he was killed by those who considered themselves as his enemy.

However, the killing of Gandhi does not mean that non-violence is defeated by violence. The 'dharma' can never be defeated by the 'adharma.' This is a common belief shared by all Indian religions and other religions in the world.

A day after his death, The New York Times has published the following statements.

“A light has gone. The rest remains for history’s inexorable hand to write down.

A hush will go round the world to-day as Gandhi’s frail body is borne to the banks of the sacred river Jumna, there to be turned to ashes.”

“Out of the ashes we do not know what flowers will spring. But this we do know: that saintly man, who preached non-violence, is dead by violence. Those who saw him cut down believe that with a last gesture of forgiveness he forgave his last enemy. His undying spirit speaks now to all India and all the world.”

“He has left as his heritage a spiritual force that must in God’s good time prevail over arms and armaments and dark doctrines of violence.”

(January 31, 1948)

The same day, The London Times says:

“No country but India
and no religion but Hin-
duism could have given
birth to a Gandhi.”

End of Second Volume

Acknowledgments



All pictures used in this book are gained from the Internet. Thanks to the unknown original creators of them. I believe that they must share a thing called in Indian tradition as 'punya' from the making of this book. The use of their work is done on the basis of my personal respect of them.