Virchand Raghavji Gandhi was one of the extraordinary Indians of his time. He represented Jainism at the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893, and delivered lectures before the American and the English, not only on Jainism, but also on the other systems of Indian philosophy. He made them realize the sublimity of Indian culture through his objective stance.

His lectures on Jaina philosophy have been published in a book-form under the title 'The Jaina Philosophy' in 1910 and 1924. In these lectures he made the Jaina positions comprehensible to a non-Jain and non-Indian audience. For his approach was the most non-sectarian and rational.

V. Glasenapp, a well-known German scholar on Jainism, wrote his doctoral dissertation on the Jaina doctrine of Karma; and acknowledged Gandhi's lectures as his sole influence. Even today, these lectures remain unsurpassed and serve as an independent source of enlightenment on the subject. Gandhi's exposition is so lucid and brilliant that no serious student of Indian philosophy in general, and Jaina philosophy in particular, can afford to ignore it.

His lectures on the systems of Indian philosophy have been published under the title 'The Systems of Indian Philosophy' by Shri Mahavira Jaina Vidyalaya, Bombay in 1970. The systems dealt with are the Sankhya philosophy, the Yoga philosophy, the Nyaya (Vaisesika) philosophy, the Mimamsa, the Vedanta philosophy, Buddhism and Jainism. In his lecture on the Vedanta philosophy Gandhi expounds the two main schools of Vedanta - the Kevaladvaita of Shankara and the Vishistadvaita of Ramanuja. In these lectures, we have an exposition of the non-Jaina systems of Indian philosophy by a liberal but convinced Jaina. But Gandhi's own ideological affiliation does not prevent him from making maximum honest efforts to get at the heart of the various non-Jaina systems of Indian philosophy. He regards four questions as basic to all philosophical investigation:

In his treatment of Jainism, he seeks to give the answer to these questions from the Jaina viewpoint. In the case of the other systems there is no ordered exposition of these questions, but here too, Gandhi has taken up one or another from among these very questions. His presentation of the positions of various systems of Indian philosophy is faithful and his clarity is praiseworthy. Gandhi explains as to what a particular system has to say on a problem. These lectures reveal his deep and extensive study of the subject. As a scholar of Sanskrit, he could properly understand all the systems of Indian philosophy. He draws parallels from Western philosophers, compares and contrasts the position of one system with that of another, quotes Western scholars to support his arguments, removes misconceptions, and makes intelligent and impartial observations. These lectures bear testimony of his powers of comprehension, his philosophical acumen and his profound learning.

To understand Indian philosophical thought, one should first acquaint oneself with the spirit of Indian culture. His love for this culture is represented in his speeches for he speaks with the zeal of a missionary and the reason of an honest scholar. In 'The Jaina Philosophy' he gives an account of Indian culture, yet draws no distinction between Brahmanic, Jaina or Buddhist texts, for him basic Indian culture is neither Brahmanic, nor Jaina nor Buddhist. By giving an impressive account of Indian life, he draws a true picture of the social and moral status of ancient Indians. He is particularly conscious of the fact that the true strength of India lies in what is moral and spiritual in Indians. He says, "The wonder is that not
withstanding these foreign attacks, India and her people have survived; that not withstanding the demoralizing influences of foreigners, India still leads in spirituality and morality.

Sir T. Munro says. ............ and if civilization is to become an article of trade between England and India, I am convinced that England will gain by the import cargo. Again, he quotes Max Muller in his support. Max Muller in his work entitled 'India - What can it teach us?' declares: "And if I were to ask myself from what literature we here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans and of the Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw corrective, which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact, more truly human, a life not for this life alone, but a transfigured and eternal life, again I should point to India". We hear the ring of that moral and spiritual spirit in Gandhi's following prophetic words: "You know, my brothers and sisters, that we are not an independent nation; we are subjects of Her Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, the defender of the faith', but if we were a nation in all that name implies, with our own government and our own rulers, with our laws and institutions controlled by us free and independent, I affirm that we should seek to establish and for ever maintain peaceful relations with all the nations of the world."

Gandhi interprets Sankhya dualism of Prakriti and Purusa and explains how the universe evolves from the former. Regarding Prakriti he observes: 'It (Prakriti) is an intensely subtle original essence, wholly distinct from soul (Purusa) yet capable of evolving out of itself consciousness and mind as well as the whole visible world. In my opinion it is not even the name for anything which ever existed by itself'. For Kapila himself in his work says: In the manifestation of objects there must be a succession of causes without any end; and in Hindu logic the ruling idea is that you must suppose a point to exist where you should halt and Prakriti is only a halting point; therefore, it is in Kapila's words only a i.e., merely a name given to the point in question, a mere sign to denote the cause which is the root which must be assumed rootless, merely to conform to the rule of Hindu logic.'

Regarding the Sankhya position that intellect (Buddhi) and self-consciousness (ahamkara) are the evolutes of the insentient Prakriti, he writes... "both of them imply knowledge and are but the characters of the soul but can never be the products of primordial material essence."

Sankhyas maintain that the soul is absolutely changeless: "it is not bound, nor is it liberated. It is always free. It has a delusive semblance of being bound. The nature of soul is constant freedom and indifferent to pleasure and pain alike."

"In the first place let us ask Kapila what the motive is for the creation of the universe. He mentions two motives: they might have appeared satisfactory to him but to me his reply is not rational. He says that Prakriti created the universe for the emancipation of the soul which is really though not apparently emancipated or, secondly, for the removal of itself, i.e. for the sake of removing the actually real pain which consists of itself, as his commentator explains it. If the soul is essentially free and essentially light, there was no necessity for Prakriti to interfere with the soul's infinite bliss."

He removes misunderstanding about the Sankhya view of liberation, on the part of some Western scholars. He writes: "There is however, one point to which I should draw your attention. I mean the nature of the Sankhya & - the liberation. His theory is not, as misunderstood by Western Orientalists, the theory of absorption. The soul on liberation does not merge into the Universal Spirit or the Absolute, for in his system there is no such thing as the Supreme Spirit or the Absolute. Not only does he not propound such a theory as the final object but on the contrary he refutes it. He thinks that by merging into the primordial original essence, the Prakriti, the souls will have to rise again and pass through different mundane existences. It is only when the right discrimination of soul and non-soul takes place that there will be the final emancipation of the soul."

His exposition of Yoga philosophy and its technique of eight-fold yoga to achieve the suppression of the manifestations of mind entailing the unagitated pure state of mind, is brilliant. He aptly discusses the interesting topic of miraculous powers which a yogi acquires by reason of performing highest torn of concentration on the required event, aspect or thing. At this juncture his answer to those Western scholars who denigrate them as mere superstitions or hallucinations is note-worthy, He says, "without
caring much what the foreigners have to say in reference to the religions and philosophies of India we will come to our own subject. We have said before that yoga is the suppression of the manifestations of mind.

The source of the positive power, therefore, lies in the soul. In the very wording of the definition of yoga is involved the supposition of the existence of a power which can control and suppress the manifestations of the mind. The power is the power of the soul - otherwise familiar to us as freedom if the will. So long as the soul is subject to the mind it is tossed this way or that in obedience to the mental changes. Instead of the soul being tossed by the mental changes, the mind should vibrate in obedience to the soul-vibrations. When once the soul becomes the master of the mind, it can produce any manifestations it likes. The ancient Chaldeons and the modern monks of India, Japan and China teach the same doctrine. It was by the aid of this yoga science that the ancients made many discoveries in Chemistry and Medicine. "The true yogi does not attach himself to these occult powers."

He begins his lecture on the Nyaya-Vaisesika philosophy with the following words: "The author or rather the recognized promulgator of the Nyaya philosophy is Gautama. This philosophy starts with the proposition that in order to obtain the summum bonum one must acquire the knowledge of the truth; knowledge of the truth drives away miseries, births, mundane existence, faults and false knowledge and the result is, the freedom of the soul. How can the knowledge of the truth be obtained? Gautama says: 'Knowledge of sixteen topics leads to'. What are these sixteen topics? They are all connected with the process of reasoning and the laws of thought. We do not find in Nyaya, any prominence given to the rational demonstration of the universe. This we shall find in its complement, the Vaisesika. The Nyaya, therefore, teaches us the method of Investigation, the Vaisesika following that method actually tries to investigate into the nature of the universe." He then briefly explains the sixteen topics. After which he deals with the seven categories recognized by the Vaisesika system.

Gandhi's account of the Vedanta philosophy is most interesting. He expounds Shankara's teaching and Ramanuja's teaching on the fundamental questions of philosophy, devoting relatively greater attention to the former. He writes: "The chief points in which the two systems agree on the one hand and diverge on the other are these: Both systems teach advaita i.e. non-duality or monism. There exist not several fundamentally distinct principles, such as Prakriti and Purusha of the Sankhyas, but there exists only one all-embracing being. While, however, the advaita taught by Shankara is a rigorous, absolute one, Ramanuja's doctrine has to be characterized as Vishishtadvaita i.e. qualified non-duality, non-duality with a difference. According to Shankara, whatever is, is Brahma, and Brahma itself is fundamentally homogeneous, so that all difference and plurality must be illusory. According to Ramanuja also, whatever is, is Brahma, but Brahma is not of a homogeneous nature, but contains within itself elements of plurality, owing to which it truly manifests itself in a diversified world. The world with its variety of material forms of existence and individual souls, is not unreal maya but a real part of Brahma's nature, the body investing the universal self. The Brahma of Shankara is in itself impersonal, a homogeneous mass of objectless thought, transcending all attributes; a personal God it becomes only through its association with the unreal principle of maya, so that strictly speaking, Shankara's personal God, his Ishvara, is himself something unreal. Ramanuja's Brahma, on the other hand, is essentially a personal God, the all-powerful and all-wise ruler of a real world permeated and animated by his spirit.

There is thus no room for the comparison between a param nirgunam and a param sagunam Brahma between Brahma and Ishvara. Shankara's individual soul is Brahma in so far as it is limited by the unreal upadhis due to maya. The individual soul of Ramanuja, on the other hand, is really individual; it has indeed sprung from Brahma and is never outside Brahma, but nevertheless it enjoys a separate personal existence and will remain a personality for ever. The release from samsara means according to Shankara the absolute merging of the individual soul in Brahma, due to the dismissal of the erroneous notion that the soul is distinct from Brahma; according to Ramanuja it only means the soul's passing from the troubles of earthly life into a kind of paradise where it will remain forever in undisturbed personal bliss. As Ramanuja does not distinguish a higher and lower Brahma the distinction of a higher and lower knowledge is likewise not valid for him; the teaching of the Upanisads is not twofold but essentially one, and leads the enlightened devotee to one result only."
Gandhi's exposition of Buddhist philosophy is confined to early Buddhism. By this, he gives an account of the fourfold 'noble truths', the seven jewels of the Buddhist law, the Buddhist conception of nirvana, and the Buddhist understanding of the 'law of karma'. All these topics are ethics-religion. The only metaphysical doctrine he incidentally dealt with is that of 'five skandhas' along with its corollary, the doctrine of 'no-soul'. Gandhi says that Buddhist's acceptance of the 'law of karma' is incompatible with the denial of 'soul'.

It can be said that Gandhi was a formidable champion of Jaina philosophy, a brilliant exponent of the systems of Indian philosophy and a fervent lover of Indian culture. He was a most astounding scholar with a versatile personality combining with a catholicity of outlook.

- Dr. Nagin J. Shah