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Great Personalities of India, Varahamihira and Bipin Chandra Pal

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Varahamihira

- Indian philosopher and scientist also called **Varaha, or Mihira**
- Born 505, Ujjain, India died 587, Ujjain
- Indian philosopher, astronomer, and mathematician, author of the Panca-siddhantika (“Five Treatises”), a compendium of Greek, Egyptian, Roman, and Indian astronomy.
- Varahamihira’s knowledge of Western astronomy was thorough. In five sections, his monumental work progresses through native Indian astronomy and culminates in two treatises on Western astronomy, showing calculations based on Greek and Alexandrian reckoning and even giving complete Ptolemaic mathematical charts and tables.
- Although Varahamihira’s writings give a comprehensive picture of 6th -century India, his real interest lay in astronomy and astrology. He repeatedly emphasized the importance of astrology and wrote many treatises on sakuna (augury) as well as the Brhaj-Jataka (“Great Birth”) and the Laghu-Jataka (“Short Birth”), two well-known works on the casting of horoscopes.

Bipin Chandra Pal

Indian Journalist

- Born Nov. 7, 1858, Sylhet, India [now in Bangladesh] died May 20, 1932, Calcutta [now Kolkata]
- Indian journalist and an early leader of the nationalist movement. By his contributions to various newspapers and through speaking tours, he popularized the concepts of Swadeshi (exclusive use of Indian-made goods) and Swaraj (independence) .
- Though originally considered a moderate within the Indian National Congress, by 1919 Pal had moved closer to the more militant policies of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, one of the leading nationalist politicians. In later years Pal allied himself with fellow

Bengali nationalists who resented the cult of personality surrounding Mahatma Gandhi, the most popular nationalist leader. Pal's overriding concern in his writings from 1912 to 1920 was to achieve confederation of the different regions and different communities within India. After 1920 he remained aloof from national politics but continued to contribute to Bengali journals.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale

Indian Social Reformer

- Born May 9, 1866, Ratnagiri district, India died Feb. 19, 1915, Pune
- Social reformer who founded a sectarian organization to work for relief of the underprivileged of India. He led the moderate nationalists in the early years of the Indian independence movement.
- In 1902 Gokhale resigned as professor of history and political economy at Fergusson College, Pune, to enter politics. As an influential and respected member of the Indian National Congress, the leading nationalist organization, Gokhale advocated moderate and constitutional methods of agitation and gradual reform. Three years later he was elected president of the Congress.
- In addition to his political activities, Gokhale's deep concern with social reform led him to found the Servants of India Society (1905), whose members took vows of poverty and lifelong service to the underprivileged. He opposed the ill-treatment of untouchables, or low-caste Hindus, and also took up the cause of impoverished Indians living in South Africa.

Michael Madhusudan Datta

- Indian author Datta also spelled **Dutt**
- Born Jan. 25, 1824, Sagardari, Bengal, India [now in Bangladesh] died June 29, 1873, Calcutta, India Poet and dramatist, the first great poet of modern Bengali literature.
- Datta was a dynamic, erratic personality and an original genius of a high order. He was educated at the Hindu College, Calcutta, the cultural home of the Western-educated Bengali middle class. In 1843 he became a Christian.
- His early compositions were in English, but they were unsuccessful and he turned, reluctantly at first, to Bengali. His principal works, written mostly between 1858 and 1862, include prose drama, long narrative poems, and lyrics. His first play, Sarmistha (1858), based on an episode of the ancient Sanskrit epic, the Mahabharata, was well received. His poetical works are Tilottamasambhab (1860), a narrative poem on the story of Sunda and Upasunda; Meghnadbadh (1861), his most important composition, an epic on the Ramayana theme; Brajangana (1861), a cycle of lyrics on the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme; and Birangana (1862), a set of 21 epistolary poems on the model of Ovid's Heroides.

- Datta experimented ceaselessly with diction and verse forms, and it was he who introduced amitaksar (a form of blank verse with run- on lines and varied caesuras), the Bengali sonnet – both Petrarchan and Shakespearean – and many original lyric stanzas.

Vivekananda

Hindu leader original name **Narendranath Datta**, **Datta** also spelled **Dutt**

Born Jan. 12,1863, Calcutta died July 4,1902, Calcutta

- Hindu spiritual leader and reformer who attempted to combine Indian spirituality with Western material progress, maintaining that the two supplemented and complemented one another. His Absolute was man's own higher self; to labour for the benefit of mankind was the noblest endeavour.
- Born into an upper-middle-class Kāyastha family in Bengal, he was educated at a Western-style university where he was exposed to Western philosophy, Christianity, and science. Social reform was given a prominent place in Vivekananda's thought, and he joined the Brahmo Samaj (Society of Brahmā), dedicated to eliminating child marriage and illiteracy and determined to spread education among women and the lower castes. He later became the most notable disciple of Ramakrishna, who demonstrated the essential unity of all religions.
- Always stressing the universal and humanistic side of the Vedas as well as belief in service rather than dogma, Vivekananda attempted to infuse vigour into Hindu thought, placing less emphasis on the prevailing pacifism and presenting Hindu spirituality to the West. He was an activating force behind the Vedanta (interpretation of the Upanishads) movement in the United States and England.
- In 1893 he appeared in Chicago as a spokesman for Hinduism at the World's Parliament of Religions and so captivated the assembly that a newspaper account described him as "an orator by divine right and undoubtedly the greatest figure at the Parliament." Thereafter he lectured throughout the United States and England, making converts to the Vedanta movement.
- On his return to India with a small group of Western disciples in 1897, Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission at the monastery of Belur Math on the Ganges River near Calcutta. Self-perfection and service were his ideals, and the order continued to stress them. He adapted and made relevant to the 20th century the very highest ideals of the Vedāntic religion, and although he lived only two years into that century, he left the mark of his personality on East and West alike.

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