

1 / *Passage to More than India: A Sketch of  
Changing European and American Images*

Milton Singer "A Passage  
to More than India"  
in When a Great Tradition  
Modernizes 1972.

INTRODUCTION

Harold Isaacs's study<sup>1</sup> of the underlying attitudes, feelings, and impressions that 181 American leaders of opinion have regarding China and India reveals sharp "scratches" on their minds about the two countries and their inhabitants. These leaders come from many different fields and professions: universities and colleges, newspapers and magazines, government, business, church and mission groups, and voluntary organizations concerned with education and public opinion. Since we shall be dealing only with images of India, let us see what kind of mental "scratches" Isaacs found among his interviewees relating to India. The images are familiar enough—of a fabulous land of glittering wealth and wild animals, a land of religion and philosophers, a land of benighted heathen and lesser breeds, of Gandhi the saintly statesman and Nehru the intellectual world leader. Some of these are predominantly positive and favorable images: the fabulous, the religious and philosophical, and Gandhi; others are predominantly unfavorable: the benighted heathen and the lesser breeds. In the case of Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister, a favorable image was held (in 1958) by more than twice as many as held the unfavorable image.

Isaacs expresses some surprise that leaders of American opinion, many of them "experts," should have such "scratches" on their minds. He probes the sources for these in personal contact, travel, what people read in books and newspapers, see in movies, and learn in school. He also attempts to assess the influence of such images on politics and international relations.

The Isaacs study is a cross-sectional one, probing the images held by a sample of contemporary American leaders. It would also be useful to have a longitudinal study that traces the history of these images as they appear and fade in the encounters of Europeans and Americans with India and Indians. This longitudinal study would be an essential complement to the cross-sectional study, for—as Isaacs indicates—the sources of his interviewees' images are rooted in the past, in the history of their own lives, as well as in the social and cultural history of their country. They are not as

individuals entirely free to take or leave the prevailing images and stereotypes, although each may add something personal and eccentric to them.

In this chapter, I propose to sketch the "natural" history of European and American images of India. The history is rather complex, for there are several different dialogues going on simultaneously. There is the dialogue between image and reality. An image always contains some element of truth and is responsive to changes in reality. Events in Goa, for example, not long after Isaac's book appeared, forced a revision in the image of Indian nonviolence. A second dialogue takes place between the Western image of India and the Indians' self-image. Self-conscious nations, like self-conscious individuals, quickly become aware not only of how they look to themselves but of how others look at them, and then the two sets of images may begin to influence each other. "It was very gratifying to see now what a fine image of India there was before Goa and what an unusually great man Mr. Nehru was and how he has fallen," Nehru said on December 28, 1961, in New Delhi. A third conversation takes place between the images one country holds of another and the psychological needs, fears, and hopes projected onto these images. An image may sometimes reflect more about the psychology of its holder than about any reality to which it purportedly refers. Finally, there is the dialogue between what society and culture contribute to an image and what an individual brings to it. The variety and eccentricity of personal backgrounds need not block intercultural understanding, for this individuality may motivate us to a voyage of discovery we might not otherwise take. The American chicken-farmer in Burma who is described in *The Ugly American* went out to Asia lured by the sound of such words as "cinnamon" and "Rangoon." Herman Hesse expresses in his strange little parable of a "Journey to the East" a good deal of wisdom about this individual and social dialogue:

One of the characteristics of the Journey to the East was that although the League aimed at quite definite, very lofty goals during this journey . . . yet every single participant could have his own private goals. Indeed, he had to have them; for no one was included who did not have such private goals, and every single one of us, while appearing to share common ideals and goals, carried his own fond childhood dream within his heart as a source of inner strength and comfort.<sup>2</sup>

These various conversations of images have made up an important part of the communication that has gone on between India and the West. They have also influenced international policy and behavior. Perhaps the relations between different nations will never be completely free of the dialogue of image and self-image. Yet, as each nation becomes aware of how it looks to others and to itself, and of how it looks upon others, and comes to recognize the distortion, bias, and incompleteness in these different views, the chances for misunderstanding are lessened, and the opportunities for mutual understanding increased. At least that is my assumption and my reason for sketching the character, sources, and changes of some of the images Europe and the United States have held about India.

#### OPULENT AND FABULOUS INDIA

The image of India as a land of great wealth, natural marvels, and strange customs prevailed in the ancient world, in the Far East as well as around the Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> Strabo refers to India as "a nation greater and more flourishing than any other" and Horace called it "opulent India." Dionysius of Periegetes wrote a poem in which he said, "India enriches her sons with wealth in every form," and listed as the country's major occupations the mining of gold, the sawing and polishing of elephant tusks, the weaving of linen, and searching for precious stones in mountain torrents.

Herodotus says that all Indian animals are bigger than those in Europe, except horses. He and other early writers describe eels in the Ganges 300 feet long, ferocious dogs that fight lions, monkeys that roll rocks on their pursuers, one-horned horses with heads like deer, and serpents 80 and 140 cubits long. Among the fabulous races described in these early accounts are a wild tribe with heels in front and toes turned backward, who have no mouths and live on the smell of roast beef and the odors of flowers and fruits; a tribe with ears that hang down to their feet and are used as covers at night; and another whose women conceive at the age of five and are old at eight. Many Indian customs and traits are recorded: a love of finery and ornament paired with a love of simplicity, the marrying of many wives, the burning of wives upon the death of the husband, and exercising by passing smooth ebony rollers over the surface of the body. At that time, Indians had a reputation for seldom going to law to settle disputes.

So strong is the sense of the marvelous in the classical reports of India that one is tempted to conclude that the early Europeans found India interesting because of the wonders it purportedly contained. Its land, animals, plants, and people were in some respects strange and astonishing. Its wealth of gold, silver, precious stones, and spices also took on these qualities of the wonderful and must have owed much of their importance in the "luxury trade" to these qualities. Even its philosophers were distinguished, in the eyes of Greek and Roman writers, for the unusual character of their doctrines and the still more astonishing rigors of their conduct.

I shall give two examples of how this image of a land of wonders merges with the images of opulence and wisdom. The first is Herodotus's description of how the Indians obtained the large amounts of gold they paid as tribute to Darius; it is the first account of the gold-digging ants:

In this desert . . . and in the sand, there are ants in size somewhat less indeed than dogs, but larger than foxes. . . . These ants, forming their habitations underground, heap up the sand, as the ants in Greece do, and in the same manner; and they are very like them in shape. The sand that is heaped up is mixed with gold. The Indians therefore go to the desert to get this sand, each man having three camels, on either side a male one harnessed to draw by the side, and a female in the middle. . . . The Indians then adopting such a plan and such a method of harnessing, set out for the gold, having before

calculated the time, so as to be engaged in their plunder during the hottest part of the day, for during the heat the ants hide themselves under the ground. When the Indians arrive at the spot, having sacks with them, they fill them with the sand, and return with all possible expedition. For the ants, as the Persians say, immediately discovering them by the smell pursue them, and they are equalled in swiftness by no other animal, so that the Indians, if they do not get the start of them while the ants were assembling, not a man of them could be saved. Now the male camels . . . slacken their pace, dragging on. . . but the females, mindful of the young they have left, do not slacken their pace. Thus the Indians, as the Persians say, obtain the greatest part of their gold; and they have some small quantity more that is dug in the country.<sup>4</sup>

This story is repeated with embellishments by other ancient and medieval writers. One reports that he saw the skins of the gold-digging ants in India. These reports seem to be based on an Indian tradition. There is a passage in the *Mahabharata* that mentions "gold dug up by ants (Pippilikas) and therefore called ant-gold (Pippilikas)."<sup>5</sup> Because Megasthenes states that the gold was carried away from the Dardai, modern scholars have concluded that the "ants" were Tibetan miners.<sup>6</sup>

My second example is the story of the Indian embassy to Augustus Caesar. This embassy included eight naked servants who presented gifts consisting of a man born without arms, large snakes, a serpent ten cubits long, a river tortoise three cubits long, and a partridge larger than a vul-ture. These were accompanied by an ascetic who burned himself at Athens.

Strabo explains the ascetic's self-immolation: "As everything had gone well with him up to this time, he thought it necessary to depart, lest if he tarried longer in the world some unexpected calamity should befall him. . . . On his tomb was the inscription 'Zarnanochegus, an Indian from Bangosa, having immortalized himself according to the custom of his country, lies here.'"<sup>7</sup> Of this custom, one early writer remarked that no Sophist has yet appeared among the Indians, as among the Greeks, to perplex them by asking, "If everybody did this, what would become of the world?" The early sources do not indicate, however, whether this custom and the other marvels that astonished the Greeks were equally astonishing to the Indians themselves.

The chief sources of the early European image of India were the luxury trade through the Middle East and the accounts of travelers. The objects in the luxury trade—pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, gold, diamonds, pearls, precious stones, ivory, silks, and cottons—spoke for themselves. Many of the European words for these objects are loan words from Indian languages. The English word "India" itself carries the traces of the old trade routes, for it comes from the Latin *India* which can be traced from the Greek *Indikē* through the Persian *Hindū* back to the Sanskrit *Shindhu*, the name the ancient Indians gave to the Indus River. Pliny complained that the trade with India was draining Rome's treasury. In some cases, India was not the original source of the luxuries but only an entrepôt, for some of the spices, precious stones, and gold came from Ceylon, Indonesia, and the Malay Peninsula.

The travelers who wrote accounts based on personal observation were

merchants, soldiers, and ambassadors. The most detailed were written by some of Alexander's scholarly officers and by Megasthenes, who was sent as an ambassador to the Maurya Court in Pataliputra. Strabo, the Roman geographer, is highly critical of Megasthenes and the early Greek writers, although he draws heavily on their accounts. Everything about Megasthenes' account, he says, is "exaggerated and represented as marvelous." In another place, he concludes that "the men who have hitherto written on the affairs of India are a set of liars" who have coined fables. He prefers Roman sources: "The entrance of a Roman army into Arabia Felix under the command of my friend and companion Aelius Gallus and the traffic of the Alexandrian merchants, whose vessels pass up the Nile and Arabian Gulf to India, have rendered us much better acquainted with these countries than our predecessors were."<sup>8</sup>

A story that seems to have impressed both the Greeks and the Romans concerns two Indian ascetics, called in Greek accounts "philosophers" and named Kalanos and Mandanis. The story is derived from Onesikritos, one of Alexander's officers, who was sent to find the sages. Alexander had heard that they went about naked, were inured to hardships and held in highest honor, but would not go to others when invited. Onesikritos found some outside of the city (Taksasilā) sitting or lying naked in the hot sun and talked with two of them. Kalanos, the younger, told Onesikritos that if he wished to hear him he should strip off his clothes and lie down naked on the stones to listen. Mandanis, the older and wiser, rebuked Kalanos for his insolence and said he would talk with Onesikritos. He praised Alexander for desiring wisdom and for being the only philosopher in arms he had ever seen.

"I am entitled," he added, "to indulgence, if while conversing by means of three interpreters, who, except for the language, understand nothing we say any more than the vulgar, I am unable to demonstrate the utility of philosophy. One might as well expect water to flow pure through mud."

Mandanis said that the best doctrine was that which removed pleasure and grief from the mind, and that grief differed from labor, which was a friend to man. He said they would unite in advising Taxilés (the King) to receive Alexander as a friend, for if he received a person better than himself, he would be benefited, and if one worse, he would dispose him to be good.

Mandanis asked whether such doctrines were current among the Greeks and was told that Pythagoras, Socrates, and Diogenes held similar views. Mandanis replied that in other respects he thought they entertained sound notions, but erred on one point by preferring custom to nature, for otherwise they would not be ashamed to go naked like himself and to subsist on frugal fare—"for that was the best house which required least repairs."

Both ascetics were invited to accompany Alexander. Kalanos went, changed his mode of life, became an adviser, and went to Persis, where he died on a funeral pyre. Mandanis refused to go, saying he wanted none of the gifts of a man whose desires nothing could satisfy; while he lived he had food enough, and when he died he would be delivered from the flesh

and would be translated to a better and a purer state of existence. Alexander praised him and excused him from coming.<sup>9</sup>

FROM THE LAND OF DESIRE TO A WHITE MAN'S BURDEN

There were during the Middle Ages a number of events that may have increased Europe's knowledge of Asia and of India in particular—the Muslim invasions, the Crusades, and the Mongol invasions. While European merchants, soldiers, slaves, diplomatic embassies, and missionaries traveled to the East, the amount of new knowledge brought back was meager. Marco Polo's travel records and those of a few Franciscan friars gave Europeans their most detailed knowledge of Asia until the end of the fifteenth century, when the Portuguese discoveries began. It is not surprising, therefore, that when religious and political conflict during the fourteenth century cut off the Middle Eastern trade routes to India, the efforts to find a direct sea route should have been guided by the ancient geographies and travel accounts. Nor is it surprising that European explorers, being dependent on these accounts, should continue to be lured by the image of India as a land of fabulous wealth and wonders. In one of the medieval digests of world geography probably used by Columbus, *Imago Mundi*, there is a chapter on "the marvels of India," which repeats the stories of the Greek and Roman authors.

For medieval Europe, as for ancient Greece and Rome, the image of India continued to be that of marvels and great wealth, an image which must have acted as a strong lure for the explorers. As one historian of the explorations writes:

The information gathered by travellers pictured farthest Asia, with all the enchantment that distance lends, as a land of vast wealth, rich in the commodities which formed the luxuries of Europe, a land of gold and silver, of silks and spices, a land of cities that dwarfed the proudest towns of Europe. And thus the lure of the East became a potent incentive to the explorations of da Gama and Columbus, and later to those of English adventurers who attempted to find the route around the North American continent.<sup>10</sup>

The same idea is stated more abstractly by the German philosopher Hegel:

India as a land of desire formed an essential element in general history. From the most ancient times downwards, all nations have directed their wishes and longings to gaining access to the treasures of this land of marvels, the most costly which the earth presents, treasures of nature—pearls, diamonds, perfumes, rose essences, lions, elephants, etc.—as also treasures of wisdom.<sup>11</sup>

As the explorations succeeded, however, and the Portuguese, Dutch, English, French, and other European nations establish colonial settlements in India (and elsewhere in Asia), a significant transformation takes place in the European image of India. The change does not take place suddenly or all in one place. Rather, new images gradually supersede the old. As more Europeans travel and work in India, the sense of the fabulous fades. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the British scholar and colonial administrator Sir Henry Maine chides his countrymen because they find

Indian topics dull, while the continental Europeans still look upon India as "the most exciting, as the freshest, as the fullest of new problems and the promise of discoveries." For the British, Maine thinks, India is in some respects too near:

It has none of the interest of a country barely unveiled to geographers, like the valley of the Oxus or the basin of Lake Tanganyika. It is mixed up with the ordinary transactions of life, with the business of government, with debates in Parliament, not too well attended, with the stock exchange, the cotton market, and the annual relief of regiments. Nor do I doubt that the curse of the evil reputation of India which extends most widely is the constant and frequent complaints which almost everybody receives from relatives settled there, of the monotony of life which it entails upon Europeans.<sup>12</sup>

In other respects, he thinks, India's political and moral institutions were too far from the experience of the Englishman, who had not yet seen in them the challenge to his own premises about the universality of his political maxims and moral principles.

This is one side of the transformation—the "land of desire" becomes the white man's burdensome colony. Maine might have added, as further explanation of the change, colonial policy and the relative spurt in manufactures that took place in England in the nineteenth century. Well into the eighteenth century, the products and processes of Indian craftsmen were sought after and imitated by European craftsmen. But as the industrial revolution made headway in Europe, and was simultaneously inhibited in Europe's colonies as a matter of deliberate policy, India began to fall behind in technical and economic development.

The "white man's burden" image does not crystallize on a particular day to displace the older medieval and ancient images. In the popular poem *Lalla Rookh* (1817) by Moore, and in the poetry and prose of the nineteenth-century romantics, the magic of the older images is renewed to entertain and to lure even a "nation of shopkeepers" to India. Some of the magic was also enshrined in the "Indian Gothic" architecture of the Brighton Pavilion.

The foundation for the image of India as a land of dark-skinned, benighted heathen who need the blessings of Christianity and European civilization was laid several hundred years before England's industrial revolution and the establishment of the British Rāj in India. It goes back to the conflict of Christian Europe with Islam. The Portuguese and other early explorers looked upon the Muslims as their hated enemies and rivals. They expected to find in India the Nestorian Christians and the fabled Christian monarch Prester John, about whom Marco Polo and other medieval travelers wrote. When Vasco da Gama was asked at Calicut what he had come for, he replied, "Christians and spices." He found the spices, but many more Hindus and Muslims than Christians.

When the Portuguese (and other Europeans) learned that the Hindus were not Christians, their hatred of Muslims was expanded to include these new "heathen." The Portuguese epic of empire in Asia, *The Liristads*, as translated by Sir Richard Fanshawe, tells the story of this transformation, of how da Gama's search for Christian allies and spices also

discovers the "barbarous sect" worshipping "man-beasts" and "monsters defiled," whose ruler is without "shame or worth."

In another stanza (7.31) the new arrivals are told:

God, God hath brought you: He hath (sure) some grand  
And special business *here* for you to do.

The "special business" is to extend the Christian faith (7.3). Portugal calls upon Germany, England, France, and Italy to unite "to scourge the arrogant Mahumetan."

Against the Turke let Booteie league you all,  
If not to see the Holy City Thrall [7.11].

But, seeing that these other Christian nations are diverted by fighting with one another, Portugal assumes the burden alone. The history and customs of the people of Malabar are described to da Gama by a Spanish-speaking Moor (7:30-41) in a relatively objective manner, except for the lines

The natives' manners (poor, as well as rich)  
Are made up of all Lyes and Vanitie [7.37].

Da Gama was impressed by what he saw in the city, especially in the royal palace. But when he passes a Hindu temple, the words of the poem convey revulsion. The worshippers are described as "barbrous people of that sect" and their worship as "superstition" (7.49).

Da Gama is represented as offering the local ruler a treaty of peace and friendship with the King of Portugal, if he will

Allow commerce of superfluities  
Which bounteous Nature gave *His Realm* and *Thine*,  
(For *Trade* brings *Opulence* and *Rarities*,  
For which the *Poor* doe *sweat*, and *Rich* doe *Pine*)  
Of two *great* fruits, which will from thence redound,  
*His* shall the *glory*, *thine*, the *Gain* be found [7.66].

His mind poisoned by local Muslim advisers, the Zamorin rejects this offer and seeks to imprison da Gama. By bribing his captors with European merchandise, the captain gets back to his ship to sail home with some "Malabars," "burning pepper," nutmegs, black clove, and cinnamon (9.14). Sailing away he reflects on the unworthy moral character of the ruler and his advisers.

At leisure *then* he walks upon his *Decks*  
To see what *Time* and *Patience* will bring forth,  
No *Ruler* hath he *there* to make him vex,  
Imperious, brib'd, without *Or Shame* or *worth*,  
Now let the judging *Reader* mark what *Rex*  
The *Idol* *Gold* (which all the World adoreth)

Plays both in *Poor* and *Rich*: by *Money's* *Thrust*  
All *Laws* and *Tyes* (Divine, and Humane) burst.<sup>13</sup>

Against this high-minded judgment should be set that of Saint Francis Xavier on the Portuguese officials he observed in India and the East not very many years after da Gama's first trip, in a private letter to Simon Rodrigues: "All go the same road of 'I plunder, thou plunderest,' and it terrifies me to witness how many moods and tenses and participles of that miserable verb 'to rob,' those who come to India discover."<sup>14</sup>

For the Portuguese, the image of India as a Christian's burden persisted right down to the occupation of Goa. On November 30, 1954, Dr. Salazar said: "The preservation of Portuguese Goa is an indispensable base for the conservation and spread of Christianity in India." This claim was rejected by representatives of Indian Christians meeting in New Delhi on August 21, 1955. They pointed out that there were more Christians in India than in Portugal.

There were many missionaries from Europe and the United States who observed, disapproved, and even tried to rectify the unjust conduct of their countrymen in India and who contributed the first scholarly works on the languages and religions of the Orient. Through their schools they introduced science, medicine, agriculture, and much else. Yet it probably remains true that more of them assumed the "white man's burden" toward the Indians, and it was their letters home and the books they wrote to raise funds which made this a sharp and vivid image in the popular imagination. "The Heathen Mother," a verse in a nineteenth-century children's book, expresses the dominant attitude of some missionaries:

See that heathen mother stand  
Where the sacred current flows;  
With her own maternal hand  
Mid the waves her babe she throws.  
Hark! I hear the piteous scream;  
Frightful monsters seize their prey,  
Or the dark and bloody stream  
Bears the struggling child away.  
Fainter now, and fainter still,  
Breaks the cry upon the ear;  
But the mother's heart is steel  
She unmoved that cry can hear.  
Send, oh send the Bible there,  
Let its precepts reach the heart;  
She may then her children spare—  
Act the tender mother's part.<sup>15</sup>

The verse is illustrated with two pictures, one showing the heathen mother standing on the banks of a river as a crocodile approaches the shore where an infant lies. The other is called "Saugor Island," which is described as "inhabited only by wild beasts," and is said to be a place

where "thousands of Hindu mothers have thrown their children into the Ganges to be devoured by alligators."

The "white man's burden" image was, of course, not limited to missionaries. Rudyard Kipling gave us the phrase, as also its sister epithet, "the lesser breeds without the law." Whatever Kipling himself may have meant by them, these two phrases quickly came to symbolize the European's stance of arrogant superiority toward the colonial peoples he considered inferior to him socially, morally, and culturally. There is a statement attributed to Kipling by a missionary official indicating that he shared this stance. The Reverend R. A. Hume quotes Kipling as having said: "What's the matter with this country (India) is not in the least political, but an all-round entanglement of physical, social, and moral evils and corruptions, all more or less due to the unnatural treatment of women. . . . The foundations of their life are rotten—utterly rotten."<sup>16</sup>

It remained for an American writer, a woman named Katherine Mayo, to write the classic epitome of the "white man's burden" in a book called *Molter India*, published in 1927 in the United States. It ran through twenty-seven editions and sold about a quarter of a million copies. Compared to the righteous moral indignation of this work, Kipling and the missionaries appear morally lax. In her book, based on a six-month trip, Miss Mayo collected a gallery of horrors to haunt the most tolerant reader: child-marriage, subordination of wives to husbands, low status of widows, unsanitary and unskilled midwives, purdah, *devadasi*, worship of idols at Kāthghat, and sickness (cholera and malaria, plague, hookworm); Indian medicine, discussed in a chapter called "Quacks Whom We Know"; dirty water and unsanitary conditions in Benares the Holy City, in village tanks and wells, and in Madras City; untouchables; Brahmans as seen by Southern non-Brahmans; high marriage costs; rapacious moneylenders, unproductive hoarding, and shameless begging; the sacred cow, sick dogs, cruelty to animals; lies without shame; trappings of parliamentary government without the reality; Hindu-Muslim quarrels; the educated unemployed, with their calling cards engraved "B.A. failed" and "B.A. plucked," their unwillingness to work with their hands in agriculture, their remoteness from villages and villagers; and opposition to education of women and untouchables. "The Home of Stark Want," in short, was produced not by the "drain" of British rule but by Indian bad habits.

She says her motives are friendly and humanitarian: "Some few Indians will take plain speech as it is meant—as the faithful words of a friend; far more will be hurt at heart. Would that this task of truth-telling might prove so radically performed that all shock of resentment were finally absorbed in it, and that there need be no further waste of life and time for lack of a challenge and a declaration!"<sup>17</sup>

It is quite possible that Miss Mayo's profession of humanitarian motivation for harsh criticism was sincere, as sincere as was the motivation of missionaries, soldiers, merchants, politicians, and liberal reformers who shared the image of India as "the white man's burden," although they may have differed on the best means for lifting that burden. A judgment

of total inferiority passed on another civilization can justify a wide range of attitudes and policies toward that civilization.<sup>18</sup>

When Miss Mayo is compared with Megasthenes and other classical writers on India, one is struck by a singular contrast. For Miss Mayo, India and Indians are objects for moral judgment and censure, while for the ancient Greeks and Romans they are objects of curiosity and wonder. Judgments occur in the early accounts—as when Megasthenes remarks that it would be better for social life if Indians ate together at fixed times—but these judgments are infrequent, unimpassioned, and incidental to the descriptive account. Although many of the same institutions and practices are dealt with—such as caste and suttee—there is not the same quick disposition to indignation on religious or humanitarian grounds, or the same complacent confidence that one's own religion and moral standards are the only possible and correct ones. Even the Brahmans, who as a class are not noted for their humility, were struck by the arrogance of the early Europeans.<sup>19</sup>

#### AMERICA, THE ROAD TO INDIA

Although the United States developed no colonial interest in India, Americans tended to take over and exaggerate, as in the case of some missionaries and Katherine Mayo, the prevailing European images of India. India was one of the great fields for American Protestant missionaries throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There were other contacts also. Before this, a modest trade was carried in United States ships, which took ice, coal, flax, candles, medicines, and Madeira wine to Madras and Calcutta and brought back pepper, ginger, sugar, blue cloth, camboy, pulicate handkerchiefs, and a great variety of Indian cottons. Samuel Elliot Morrison relates that on the brig *Caravan* of Salem, early in 1812, Captain Augustine Heard took several thousand dollars to invest in East Indian goods for his relatives. Friends also commissioned him to buy for them shawls, necklaces, thin muslins, straw rugs, bedspreads, and pots of ginger. Henry Pickering asked Captain Heard to bring him a "Sanskrit bible," and three children gave him a dollar each to invest in Calcutta.<sup>20</sup>

In 1845, three-fourths of the ships that docked in the port of Calcutta were U.S. vessels. From about 1859, British restrictions, the United States tariff on cloth, and new ice machines caused American trade with India to dwindle. After this the missionaries and a small number of consular officials, travelers, and scholars kept the contact alive.

That these prosaic contacts did not extinguish the image of India as a fabulous land of marvels and ancient wisdom may be gathered from visiting the East India Marine Hall in Salem, Massachusetts, and recalling the Indian influences on Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, and Hawthorne. The Salem Hall, now called the Peabody Maritime Museum, was built in 1824 by the Salem East India Marine Society. The Society was founded in 1799 by an association of sea captains, factors, and supercargoes engaged in the East India trade. Every member kept journals of each

voyage and collected articles of curiosity. The Society held meetings and issued publications.

The Catalogue of the Museum listed a "pregnant queen ant," "a tail of an African elephant," "a flying dragon," "Java from Java," "a ball of hair from the stomach of a cow from Madagascar," "vocabulary of the Cochin-Chinese language, with a Latin translation," "a very elegant hub-bubble," "a medal of the Pope and the Devil," "a cigar from Manila, used by females," and so on. Hawthorne's essay "The Virtuoso's Collection" is probably based on the museum and these lists.<sup>21</sup>

At Walden, Thoreau mused on a highly poetic exchange—the exchange of ice, taken from his pond and shipped to India, for Hindu philosophy:

Thus it appears that the sweltering inhabitants of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well. In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonal philosophy of the Bhagavat-Geeta . . . I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! I meet the servant of the Brahmin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges. With the favoring winds, it is wafted past the site of the fabulous islands of Atlantis . . . melts in the tropic gales of the Indian seas, and is landed in ports of which Alexander only heard the names.<sup>22</sup>

Thoreau, writing of the value of history, also said: "I do not wonder that men read history, for I am as nearly related to the men of history as to my contemporary. Farthest India is nearer to me than Concord and Lexington."

A distinctive note entered the United States image with the belief that America was the "passage to India." This belief undoubtedly goes back to Columbus's mistake, and the belief held by many explorers of his day, that North America was just a group of islands through which a passage to the "Indies" existed. Much of the early exploration of North and South America was spurred by the search for a "northwest passage." One sixteenth-century globe (1531) showed a land connection between Mexico and the peninsula of Hindustan and placed the province of "Cathay" in the western part of Mexico.<sup>23</sup>

Long after it was recognized that America was a wide continent separated from Asia by a vast ocean, the idea of America as the "passage to India" continued to fascinate the imagination of Americans. Senator Thomas Hart Benton, who tried in the 1840's to arouse interest in a railroad from St. Louis to the Pacific, called the railroad "the American Road to India." Of the American West, Benton said, "There lies the East, there lies the road to India." His perspective was historical:

The impassable mountain has become passable—the uninhabited desert has become inhabitable—the Siberia of America has become a promised land! and the exalting fact stands revealed that, from the Father of Floods, to the Mother

of Oceans, the rolling tide of American population may go on spreading its wide and lofty wave; and, from San Francisco to St. Louis, in a straight line with Canton and London, the rich stream of oriental commerce, after wandering for forty centuries upon unstable and devious routes, is to find its last, its greatest and its everlasting channel. These great facts are now revealed—established—fixed and all that we have to do is to act upon them. . . . The knowledge is acquired—the means are at hand—the spirits of the people are up. All that is lacking is the action of the government; and that, as always, needs stimulating.<sup>24</sup>

This was more than high-flown senatorial rhetoric, for when the Union Pacific, starting from Omaha, joined the Central Pacific, starting from San Francisco, the event was hailed as symbolizing the westward march of civilization and as the meeting of East and West. *Harper's Weekly* published a picture of the two roads joining, each flanked by a panorama of Western and Oriental peoples climbing to the light. To sing this and two other "achievements of the present"—the laying of the Atlantic cable in 1866 and the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869—Walt Whitman wrote *Passage to India*, perhaps the closest thing to an American epic. In one verse he salutes Columbus:

Ah Genoese thy dream! thy dream!  
Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave,  
The shore thou foundest verifies thy dream!

He speaks of America as:

Bridging the three or four thousand miles of land travel  
Tying the Eastern to the Western sun,  
The road between Europe and Asia.

In the three "modern wonders" he sees "God's purpose from the first":

The earth to be span'd, connected by network,  
The people to become brothers and sisters,  
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,  
The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,  
The lands to be welded together.

The American's passage to India Whitman sees as a return to the "soothing cradle of man," "the past lit up again." In "a retrospect brought forward" he reviews the history of

The old, most populous, wealthiest of Earth's lands,  
The streams of the Indus and the Ganges, and their many affluents;

by a stirring recital of the "passages" to India from Alexander on. It is "a passage indeed," not to lands and seas alone but to "primal thought," "to reason's early paradise," "to wisdom's birth," "to innocent intuitions," "to the flowing literatures, tremendous epics, religions, castes." It is "a pas-

sage to more than India," "a circumnavigation of the world" which takes the soul through "the regions infinite."

Bathe me, O God, in thee—mounting to thee,  
I and my soul to range in range of thee.<sup>25</sup>

This, too, is a characteristically Indian devotional sentiment. America, the road between Europe and Asia, the passage to India, is seen as the road to the brotherhood of man and also to man's self-discovery in the universe.

#### THE TREASURES OF ANCIENT WISDOM

The belief of Thoreau, Whitman, and the New England transcendentalists that India is a land of ancient wisdom was not a peculiarly American notion. Fortunately for Europe and for its relation to India, this image developed there too from the end of the eighteenth through the nineteenth century, at the very time when the "benighted heathen" image was displacing the older image of the "fabulous land of wealth." The source of the favorable view of India's religion, philosophy, and culture can be traced to the work of a handful of students, among missionaries, administrators, and scholars, who discovered and appreciated the great intellectual and aesthetic achievements of Indian civilization and made them available to the West. This work began with the translation into European languages of many classics from Sanskrit literature—*Sakuntalā*, the *Bhāgavadgītā*, the *Upaniśads*, the *R̥gveda*—and extended to translations from Pali Buddhist scriptures and tales and Hindu codes of law, as well as research in the fields of archeology, art, history, linguistics, dance, music, medicine, mathematics, the game of chess, and many other aspects of Indian civilization.

The movement of discovery set in motion by these scholars has still not lost its momentum. When the first results were published in Europe and the United States, they started something like a second renaissance, an "Oriental renaissance." Raymond Schwab has called it.<sup>26</sup> Writers, poets, and philosophers found inspiration in the Oriental classics and modeled some of their work on the new forms. Goethe's poetic tribute to *Sakuntalā*, written after he read the German translation, gives the flavor of the romantic enthusiasm aroused:

Willst du die Blüthe des frühen, die Früchte des späteren Jahres,  
Willst du was reizt und entzückt, willst du was sirtigt und nährt,  
Willst du den Himmel, die Erde, mit Einem Namen begreifen:  
Nenn' ich, Sakontala, Dich, und so ist Alles gesagt.

Wouldst thou the young year's blossoms and the fruits of its decline,  
And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted, fed,  
Wouldst thou the earth and Heaven itself in one sole name combine?  
I name thee, O Sakontala, and all at once is said.<sup>27</sup>

Goethe also modeled the prologue to *Kaust* on a feature of Sanskrit drama.

The romantic movement in Germany (the Schlegels, Schiller, Schopenhauer, Fichte, Nietzsche), as well as in England (Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Tennyson), was influenced by these Indian sources. And this influence has continued to be effective in our own day on writers and poets who are not all "romantics" (for example, Yeats, Eliot, A. E., Thomas Mann, Aldous Huxley, Hermann Hesse).

The strong interest in Oriental literature led to the establishment of European and American chairs in Sanskrit and Oriental languages during the nineteenth century. How the knowledge of Sanskrit was first brought to France, Germany, and England is an interesting story: An English East India Company servant, Alexander Hamilton, who was in Paris in 1802, where he was detained for three years, taught his fellow prisoners Sanskrit; he met A. L. de Chézy, self-taught first professor of Sanskrit at the Collège de France. They taught the brothers Schlegel, who took it to Germany. Chézy's successor was Eugène Burnouf, who studied Avesta hymns, Buddhist scriptures, and translated the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. F. Max Müller, a German student of Burnouf, went to Oxford, revived Sanskrit studies, translated the *R̥gveda*, and edited *The Sacred Books of the East*. Indeed the effects of the "Oriental renaissance" in Europe went far beyond romantic poetry and philosophy and the study of Sanskrit, Pali, Persian, and Arabic. They helped to generate, besides, a cluster of new branches of scholarship—comparative philology, comparative mythology, comparative religion and folklore, comparative law and anthropology.

This unexpected series of developments grew from the discovery that Sanskrit was closely related to Greek, Latin, and other European languages. One of the first scholars to notice this relationship was Sir William Jones, a pioneer of the "Oriental renaissance." In 1786, Jones, who was then sitting as a Supreme Court Judge on the Calcutta bench and studying Sanskrit in his spare time, announced to the Asiatic Society a most unusual observation:

The Sanskrit Language, whatever be its antiquity, is a wonderful structure: more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either. Yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of the verbs and the forms of the grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong, indeed, that no philosopher could examine them all without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which perhaps no longer exists. There is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanskrit; and *Old Persian* might be added to the same family.<sup>28</sup>

This observation was the basis for the beginning of comparative Indo-European studies developed by Bopp, Müller, Grimm, and others.

"If I were asked," Müller once said, "what I considered the most important discovery of the nineteenth century with respect to the ancient history of mankind, I should answer by the following short line: Sanskrit Dyaus Pitar—Greek Zeus pater—Latin Juppiter—Old Norse Tyr."<sup>29</sup>

Overarching the literary and scholarly ramifications of the "Oriental renaissance" in nineteenth-century Europe and America was the firm con-

fiction that the "sacred books of the East" contained an ancient and profound wisdom of great value to the modern Western mind. Friedrich Schlegel, who introduced the new learning into Germany, called his first book on the subject *On the Language and Wisdom [Weisheit] of the Indians: An Essay on the Foundations of Antiquity* (1808).

Consider also Schopenhauer on the Upanishads: "That incomparable book," he declares in *The World Considered as Will and as Idea*,

stirs the spirit to the very depths of the soul. From every sentence deep, original, and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit. Indian air surrounds us, and original thoughts of kindred spirits. And oh, how thoroughly is the mind here washed clean of all early engrafted Jewish superstitions, and of all philology that cringes before these superstitions! In the whole world there is no study, except that of the originals, so beneficial and so elevating as that of the *Upanishad*. It has been the solace of my life; it will be the solace of my death.<sup>30</sup>

This conviction created an avid market for translations from the Oriental classics. Sir Edwin Arnold's translations of the *Bhagavadgītā* (*The Song Celestial*) and of the *Dharmapada* (*The Light of Asia*) (1879) went through sixty editions in England and eighty in the United States, and were translated into many European languages.<sup>31</sup>

The poet A. E. sums up the feeling about the ancient Indian wisdom:

Goethe, Wordsworth, Emerson, and Thoreau among moderns have something of this vitality and wisdom, but we can find all they have said and much more in the grand sacred books of the East. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* and the Upanishads contain such godlike fulness of wisdom on all things that I feel the authors must have looked with calm remembrance back through a thousand passionate lives, full of feverish strife for and with shadows, ere they could have written with such certainty of things which the soul feels to be sure.<sup>32</sup>

"The desire for the "treasures of wisdom" may seem out of place among the more mundane pleasures. Arthur Christy follows the neo-Humanists Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More in trying to separate the two kinds of treasures, material and spiritual, sought in the East:

Clearly, at the end of the nineteenth century and continuing into our own day, the Occidental imagination created for itself two worlds which are romantically "oriental." One was a world of untrammelled nature, exotic mystery, and unchecked passions. The other consisted of the mysticism of the Sūtas, Buddha, the Upanishadic seers, and Lao-tzi. It remained for the Neo-Humanists of the twentieth century, particularly Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, to point out that the popular imagination of the West could not consistently live in both worlds. "If the temple bells are calling the British private to 'raise a thirst,'" wrote Babbitt in an essay on "Buddha and the Occident," published together with his translation of the *Dharmapada*, "to what, one may enquire, are they calling the native Burman?" Babbitt answers: "Certainly not to be 'lazy' and irresponsible . . . a central admonition of Buddha may be summed up in the phrase: 'Do not raise a thirst.'"<sup>33</sup>

#### THE SPIRITUAL EAST AND THE MATERIALISTIC WEST

We are now at the threshold of the modern image of India as a land of surpassing spirituality, an image that also implies the contrast with Western "materialism." Before we cross this threshold let us briefly review how the dialogue of images has brought us to this contrast.

Ancient and medieval Europe, whose knowledge of India depended on the Eastern luxury trade and the accounts of a few travelers, formed the image of India as a civilized country, endowed with glittering wealth, fabulous marvels of nature, and wise philosophers. This image lured the European explorers to India in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As the European nations turned India into a colony, however, the older image was transformed in two opposed directions. On the one hand, Indians became "benighted heathen," a "burden" of conscience for white Christians prepared to serve their captives' need for peace, food, medicine, education, roads, and ports and to bring them Western morality and ethics. It was conveniently overlooked that colonial policy was deliberately inhibiting the spread to the European colonies of the commercial and industrial revolutions, which were the source of the material benefits of European civilization.

On the other hand, there were some colonial administrators, missionaries, and scholars who rediscovered the ancient glories of Indian civilization in its Sanskrit scriptures and architectural monuments. As these glories became known in Europe from the end of the eighteenth century on, they were hailed as treasures of an ancient wisdom by orientalist scholars and other humanists, including poets and philosophers. By the end of the nineteenth century, some circles of popular interest had been so stimulated by the "Oriental renaissance" that they were ready to look upon modern India as a civilization animated by a spirituality far superior to the materialistic civilization of the European powers.

Leading Indian reformers, exposed to the harsh criticisms of Christian missionaries, the superior technical and economic development of nineteenth-century Europe, and the liberal philosophy of late-nineteenth-century British liberalism, were also encouraged by the European appreciation of Indian culture to launch an Indian renaissance in many different fields. Whatever the fields, however, they too made the spiritual-material contrast between India and the West a dogmatic principle of their thinking.

While the United States did not join the European powers in establishing colonies in India, it did share the dominant European images of India as a never-never land, a white man's burden, and a land of surpassing spirituality. These were derived in part from European sources and in part from direct American contacts with India through trade, missionary activity, and travel. A special ingredient of the American image of India has been the belief in America as the "passage to India" and as a bridge between East and West. This belief, given a transcendental interpretation in Whitman's *Passage to India*, complemented the belief in India's spiritual mission to the West.

There is a striking contrast between the orientalist's approach to ancient Indian wisdom and that of the early Greek and Roman writers, which calls for a word of explanation. The orientalist finds the wisdom in ancient texts and inscriptions; the Greek and Roman writers find it in philosophers with whom they converse. Perhaps there were fewer texts and more sages in the ancient period, but the predominance of the personal approach in the classical accounts and of the textual one in the modern orientalist suggests an active principle of selection. The basic difference, I believe, is that the Greek and Roman writers looked upon India as a living civilization with philosophers in it who reminded them of Socrates and Diogenes, whose opinions and way of life they found interesting enough to report. The orientalist, on the other hand, looked upon India as a dead civilization whose achievements are to be discovered in ancient texts and monuments. Paradoxically, they came to this view because of their own classical education in Greek and Latin.<sup>34</sup> India was for them another ancient civilization, such as that of Greece and Rome, and Sanskrit and Persian were new-found "classics" to be placed on a par with the old. The living civilization surrounding them, as they lived and worked in India, was considered no more related to their "classical" studies than, say, the life of modern Greece would be for a scholar of ancient Greece. Some of the orientalists, such as Sir William Jones, learned their Sanskrit with the help of Indian pandits, whom they looked upon as walking libraries, as living fossils, not as individual thinkers or scholars with a life of their own.

The attitude of these orientalists, especially those who were colonial administrators, toward *contemporary* Indians was dominated by the image of the white man's burden, as was that of the scholarly missionaries. This ambivalence between respect and admiration for the past and mistrust and disdain for the present is most dramatically expressed in Sir William Jones's request to Cornwallis for support of his grand project to translate Hindu and Muslim law books:

If we had a complete digest of Hindu and Mohammedan laws, after the model of Justinian's inestimable Pandects, compiled by the most learned of the native lawyers, with an accurate verbal translation of it into English . . . we should rarely be at a loss for principles, at least, and rules of law applicable to the cases before us, and should never perhaps be led astray by the Pandits or Maulavis, who would hardly venture to impose on us, when their imposition might so easily be detected.<sup>35</sup>

This well-intentioned effort to entomb a living civilization did not, fortunately, succeed. Nor could it, for as the "treasures of ancient wisdom" became available to a wider audience without a classical education, they aroused a great curiosity about the people and the land that had produced them. From the latter half of the nineteenth century to the present, the pilgrimage to the wise men of the East became a popular reason for a trip to India or Ceylon. Europeans and Americans sat at the feet of sages and holy men and recorded their conversations, modes of life, and unusual powers. In some cases the Westerner was converted. Among the latest

of these conversions is that of the Austrian Leopold Fischer, who became a Hindu monk, Svāmi Aghananda Bharati, and who has published a most interesting account of his experience in *The Ochre Robe*.

One of the earliest and best-organized movements in the West to popularize "Eastern Wisdom" was the Theosophical Society, founded about 1875 by Madame Blavatsky, a Russian lady, and Colonel Olcott, an American, and later directed in India by Annie Besant, a British reformer. The objects of the Society were various:

It influences its fellows to acquire an intimate knowledge of the natural law, especially its occult manifestations. . . . The Society teaches and expects its fellows to personally exemplify the highest morality and religious aspiration; to oppose the materialism of science and every form of dogmatic theology . . . to make known among Western Nations the long suppressed facts about Oriental religious philosophies, their ethics, chronology, esotericism, symbolism; to counteract as far as possible the efforts of missionaries to delude the so-called "Heathen" and "Pagans" as to the real origin and dogmas of Christianity . . . to disseminate a knowledge of the sublime teachings of that pure esoteric system of the archaic period which are mirrored in the oldest Vedas, and in the philosophy of Gautama Buddha, Zoroaster and Confucius; finally and chiefly, to aid in the institution of a brotherhood of Humanity, wherein all good and pure men, of every race, shall recognize each other as the equal effects (upon this planet) of one Uncreated, Universal, Infinite and Everlasting Cause.<sup>36</sup>

The Theosophical doctrines were drawn chiefly from Hinduism and Buddhism combined with admixtures of nineteenth-century spiritualism, occultism, and humanitarianism. The movement attracted wide attention and followers in India, where it set up headquarters at Adyar near Madras, as well as in Europe and the United States. Its popularity in India was, no doubt, a result of its defense of Hinduism against the attacks of Christian missionaries and the threats of skepticism that Western education brought. The new pride and interest in Hinduism that the movement stimulated among Indians became part of a revival (or renaissance) of Hinduism, as it has been called. This revival expressed itself in organized form through the activities of several Indian Societies, the most important of which were the Brāhmo Samāj, Ārya Samāj, and the Rāmakrishna Movement.<sup>37</sup> In specific objectives and programs these movements differed, but they all tended to agree on one general conclusion: that while the civilization of the West was superior in material techniques and comforts of life, the civilization of the East was superior in spiritual techniques and standards. This materialism-spiritualism contrast became the standard message, not only of Western Theosophists and seekers after Eastern wisdom, but of the speeches of distinguished Indian visitors to Europe and America, among them Svāmi Vivekānanda and Rabindranath Tagore. The following excerpt from the Svāmi's letters is characteristic: "As our country is poor in social virtues, so this country [the United States] is lacking in spirituality. I give them spirituality, and they give me money."<sup>38</sup>

Tagore's conception of the meeting of the spiritual East and the materialistic West was expressed as early as 1878 in an essay he wrote when he

was only sixteen. Stephen Hay thinks this was written just after his arrival in England for a study tour of eighteen months:

That the remnants of Indian civilization should be the foundation on which European civilization is to be built, what a beautiful sight that will be! The European idea in which freedom predominates, and the Indian idea in which welfare predominates; the profound thought of the Eastern countries and the active thought of the Western countries; European acquisitiveness and Indian conservatism, the imagination of the Eastern countries and the practical intelligence of the West—what a full character will be formed from a synthesis between these two.<sup>38</sup>

These claims to a superior spirituality did not go unchallenged. They were attacked by missionaries, rationalists, and skeptics, and by all those who were reluctant to give up their image of the "benighted heathen." An editorial in a Detroit newspaper on the occasion of Svāmī Vivekānanda's visit there in the 1890's expresses the hard-headed American attitude at the time. The editorial was called "Give Us Some Miracles."

It may sound vulgar, but it is not improper for Detroit to insist, now that it has gotten one of these wonderful East Indian mahatmas or priests, or whatever they are called, that he either "put up or shut up." During the past 10 or 15 years the people of Christian lands have been asked to believe that there exists among some of the upper castes of India a profundity of esoteric wisdom and a knowledge of the laws of nature which, in comparison with our accidental ignorance, borders on the infinite. The mystifying tricks of the eastern fakirs have been long recognized as the best specimens of sleight-of-hand work that exists anywhere in the world, and these tricks have been used as the foundation for stories of wonder-working that places the doings of the adepts of India on a par with the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth.

Svāmī Vivekānanda will talk at the Unitarian church, but will he do nothing but talk? There are thousands of Americans who can talk better and longer than he can. They can say sweeter things and say them in more elegant form, but they cannot grow a pine tree before the eyes of 10,000 people. They cannot pick up Belle Isle and sink it in Lake St. Clair and then put it back again. If Svāmī Vivekānanda declines to do some of these things in addition to saying sweet things, he will injure his boasted religion of superiority more than he will help it. If his religion is better than ours, it surely does not show among the millions of people of India. It does not show in any wonders seen by Western eyes. Where, then, does it show? Answer: As yet only in sensational stories of travelers which thousands of Americans have swallowed. Will Kananda do something handsome while in Detroit?<sup>39</sup>

The same paper then ran an interview with the Svāmī headed: "Only Wonders Worked. No Miracles in the Pure Hindoo Religion," in which Vivekānanda disclaimed miracles:

"I cannot comply with the request of The News to work a miracle in proof of my religion," said Vivekānanda to a representative of this paper, after being shown The News editorial on the subject. "In the first place, I am no miracle worker, and in the second place the pure Hindoo religion I profess is not based on miracles. We do not recognize such a thing as miracles. There are

wonders wrought beyond our five senses, but they are operated by some law. Our religion has nothing to do with them. Most of the strange things which are done in India and reported in the foreign papers are sleight-of-hand tricks or hypnotic illusions. They are not the performances of the wise men. These do not go about the country performing their wonders in the market place for pay. They can be seen and known only by those who seek to know the truth, and are not moved by childish curiosity."<sup>41</sup>

The Detroit newspaper's challenge to Svāmī Vivekānanda to perform some miracles in demonstration of the superiority of his religion<sup>42</sup> recalls Marco Polo's plea to the Pope to send several priests to the Court of Kubla Khan who could compete with two Indian ascetics at the Court. These ascetics, according to Marco Polo, by their ability to make goblets of wine pass through the air from a buffet to the Emperor's dining table and to bring or avert rain, were winning his allegiance to their religion. Marco Polo was sure Kubla Khan could be won to Christianity if the Pope sent the clever priests quickly. There is no record of the Pope's response.

#### AFTER NONVIOLENCE, WHAT?

Higher ground for criticizing the claims for India's superior spirituality has been taken by some Western thinkers. These generally appreciate the development of Indian thought and religion at its highest level, but tend to characterize it as predominantly otherworldly and nonsocial, if not antisocial. In *Indian Thought and Its Development*, Albert Schweitzer for example, argues that the distinctive Indian world view is based on a world- and life-negating world view, which makes individual salvation consist in withdrawal from the world. From such a world view it is not logically possible, Schweitzer said, to derive an active social ethic inspired by world- and life-affirmation. He recognizes in modern Indian thought the striving for such an ethic and finds some expressions of it in Vivekānanda, Gandhi, and Tagore, among others. But this is, he contends, a very late direction of development in Indian thought and one in which Western thought is farther advanced. It cannot logically be reconciled with the otherworldly trend of Indian thought, even if it coexists with it.

By a magnificent paradox Gandhi brings the idea of activity and the idea of world and life negation into relationship in such a way that he can regard activity in the world as the highest form of renunciation of the world. In a letter to the Brahmin ascetic he says, "My service to my people is part of the discipline to which I subject myself in order to free my soul from the bonds of the flesh. . . . For me the path to salvation leads through unceasing tribulation in the service of my fellow-countrymen and humanity."<sup>43</sup>

A sociological counterpart to Schweitzer's analysis had been given a little earlier by the German sociologist Max Weber. In his studies of Hinduism and Buddhism, recently translated into English as *The Religion of India*, Weber argues that Hinduism and Buddhism are otherworldly and

irrational in their "inner spirit" and are incapable of producing the positive social ethic required for the development of industrial capitalism and social progress. He contrasts Indian religion with the positive role that he believes "the Protestant ethic" played in the rise of capitalism in Europe. Not many Indians seem to take either the Schweitzer or the Weber position very seriously. The distinction these European scholars draw between an other-worldly spirituality and a this-worldly spirituality seems to Indians overly sharp, overlooking as it does a long-standing coexistence of both kinds of spirituality. And is not Gandhi's "magnificent paradox" also the same paradox involved in the transformation of Protestantism's other-worldly asceticism into a this-worldly asceticism? Upon popular thought in Europe and the United States the Weber-Schweitzer analysis has not been very effective. Western popular thought sees India as "spiritual" and does not bother about distinguishing an other-worldly from a this-worldly variety of spirituality. The educational and social services of the Ramakrishna missions; Gandhi's nonviolent campaigns on behalf of spinning, untouchables, and independence; and Tagore's cosmopolitan aestheticism are all caught up in the popular image as modern expressions of India's ancient spirituality. Since the modern reformers are ascetic in their personal habits, self-sacrificing and high-minded in their work, and conversant with the ancient scriptural texts, there is some justification for looking upon them as following in the tradition of Indian saints and sages, as Romain Rolland does in his tribute to Gandhi published in 1924:

His principle of *Ahimsa* [nonviolence] has been inscribed in the spirit of India for more than two thousand years. Mahavira, Buddha, and the cult of Vishnu have made it the substance of millions of souls. Gandhi has merely transmuted heroic blood into it. He called upon the great shadows, the forces of the past, plunged in mortal lethargy, and at the sound of his voice they came to life. In him they found themselves. Gandhi is more than a word; he is an example. He incarnates the spirit of his people. Blessed the man who is a people, his people, entombed, and then resurrected in him! But such resurrections are never haphazard. If the spirit of India now surges forth from temples and forests, it is because it holds the message for which the world is sighing.

This message carries far beyond the boundaries of India. India alone could formulate it, but it consecrates the nation's greatness as much as its sacrifice. It may become its cross.<sup>45</sup>

Over the last thirty to forty years, the image of India as a "spiritual" land, dedicated to peace and democracy, has become worldwide and has gradually gained ascendancy over the competing image of a land of benighted heathens. For this change and its worldwide dissemination, Gandhi's nonviolent campaigns are chiefly responsible. Not everyone, to be sure, accepted the image at its face value. There have been many realists, skeptics, and rivals for righteousness who have resented the notion that India was assuming a moral burden for them and was becoming the conscience of the world. And they have been quick to point out discrepancies

between the image and realities. Even they, however, were temporarily silenced when Great Britain granted India independence and commonwealth status. This was a most spectacular demonstration of the effectiveness of nonviolence. If Gandhi and his disciples were performing rope tricks, the tricks worked, and no one knew how or why. So impressed was the world with this triumph of the weak and virtuous that not even the partition riots, the "police action" in Hyderabad, or the fighting with Pakistan over Kashmir could dim the luster of India's spiritual effulgence. Idealists, pacifists, and liberals looked to India as a model of successful morality and began to apply the methods of nonviolence and "spiritual" techniques in other parts of the world to other problems. Nehru's consistent championing of the cause of peace and nonviolence in international affairs brightened the image still further, in spite of the irritations that India's nonalignment policy aroused in the West.

The continuous growth of India's reputation for spirituality was suddenly interrupted on December 18, 1961, with India's military action in Goa. The universal condemnation of this action in Europe and the United States was no doubt motivated by a complex constellation of circumstances. But the one circumstance which best seems to explain the intensity of the indignation is the shattering of the image of India's spirituality. In the realists' response there was a note of gloating: "The Indian rope trick had at last been exposed. Goa had liberated them from the nagging superego that, speaking with an Indian accent, had condemned every Western effort in *realpolitik*." On December 19, a Laborite MP, the only Member of the House of Commons to support India's action on Goa, asked Prime Minister Macmillan to "restrain his delight because he thinks he has caught out somebody much more virtuous than himself in doing something naughty, and ask himself and the Government to consider the facts."<sup>46</sup>

The idealists were dismayed and saddened by the Goa action. India could no longer be looked to as the world's leader in the practice of nonviolence. Adlai Stevenson put the idealists' predicament most starkly in his speech at the Security Council: "Prime Minister Nehru himself has often said that no right end can be served by a wrong means. The Indian tradition of non-violence has inspired the whole world, but this act of force mocks India's own professions of faith."<sup>47</sup>

The effect of the Goa incident on India's self-image was not completely unequivocal. During the first few days there was almost universal enthusiasm. All major Indian political parties and newspapers supported the action. One newspaper called it "Nehru's finest hour." Getting rid of the last, and first, colonial foothold in India overshadowed in the minds of Indians any concern about India's reputation for nonviolence. As the strong Western criticism of the action became known in India, there were, however, some second thoughts. The leader of the opposition Swatantra Party, C. Rajagopalachari, stated that by the Goa action India "has totally lost the moral power to raise her voice against the use of military power." He invoked Gandhi's doctrine of not using "bad means to end bad things" and added, "our nationalism has, I fear, led us into impa-

tience at the wrong moment, when in the international world there is trouble brewing everywhere, and we have a mission for promoting peace and a special qualification for fulfilling that mission."<sup>48</sup>

Prime Minister Nehru was amazed and disturbed by the criticism and defended himself against it by declaring that India "remained firmly and fully committed to her traditional policy of nonalignment and of trying to encourage the forces of peace, to settle problems peacefully." He added: "In spite of the fact that I have been called a hypocrite, I might say I work for peace."

He said it was gratifying to be told "what a fine image of India there was before the Goa action" and what an unusually fine man Nehru was. "It is good to know that a man was great even if he is not now." The Goa action, he said, was "entirely in keeping" with Gandhi's principles and Gandhi's closest followers supported it. Gandhi himself, Nehru said, "definitely and clearly approved" of India's 1947 action against Pakistani tribesmen in Kashmir.<sup>49</sup>

Whether Gandhi would have approved the action in Goa, or a military response against China, or even the Five-Year Plans, I do not know. These questions will continue to be debated. In these debates, it will be increasingly difficult to assume that Gandhi's distinctive contribution consisted in his personal asceticism and loyalty to Hinduism. That contribution appears more and more to spring from the way he brought elements of Indian religious traditions into the service of political, social, and economic reform. Precisely because Gandhi did harness his "spirituality" to a philosophy and program of social reform was he forced to break with the more orthodox interpretations of Hinduism. As I have written elsewhere:

His philosophy of non-violence (*ahimsā*), of the simple life in self-sufficient villages, of the necessity of work and the dignity of manual labor, of service to neighbors, of social justice in the distribution of power and wealth, has breathed a vitality into traditional Indian asceticism which animated India's successful struggle for independence and which shapes much of the present government's domestic program.<sup>50</sup>

While Gandhi was opposed to unbridled industrialism and the "craze for machines" that put men out of work and led to irresponsible concentrations of power and wealth, he was not opposed to programs of moderate industrialization and modernization. In 1944, he endorsed S. N. Agarwal's *The Gandhian Plan of Economic Development for India*, which proposed a national economic plan essentially similar to the Second Five-Year Plan. Many heavy industries, including defense industries, were in the Agarwal plan. And about the defense industries he added the following footnote: "Although Gandhiji is an uncompromising pacifist and a staunch believer in nonviolence he is practical enough to concede that a free India may require an armed defence."<sup>51</sup>

The impression that India is so "spiritual" that it is opposed to the use of force in the defense of its national interests has been rapidly corrected by other events, and perhaps the correction is even more rapid in India than elsewhere.

A few days after the Chinese attacks, Nehru called upon the people and the government to awake from their undogmatic slumbers. Speaking of Congress Party members, he said, "We were getting out of touch with reality in the modern world and we were living in an artificial atmosphere of our own creation. We have been shocked out of it, all of us whether it is the Government or the people."<sup>52</sup>

On the same day Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the former President of India, in a stirring call to Indians asking them to drive out the Chinese invaders from Indian soil, said that "there was no conflict between India's traditional faith in non-violence and resisting Chinese aggression with force. It was open for everybody to act according to his belief in meeting force with force and meeting force with non-violent means."<sup>53</sup>

Even Gandhi, who practically identified nonviolence with the golden rule, conceded the necessity of a military establishment to defend Indian territory. In a famous article written in 1920 on "The Doctrine of the Sword," Gandhi argued for nonviolence but stated conditions under which violence would be justifiable:

I do believe that when there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. . . . I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless victim to her own dishonour. But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment.<sup>54</sup>

Gandhi interpreted nonviolence as a religious principle applied to politics; for most of his followers in the freedom struggle it was simply a practical political weapon, to be judged by its effectiveness. Nehru's autobiographical statement on this point expresses the general Indian position:

For us and for the National Congress as a whole the nonviolent method was not, and could not be a religion or an unchallengeable creed or dogma. It could only be a policy and a method promising certain results, and by those results it would have to be finally judged. Individuals might make of it a religion or incontrovertible creed. But no political organization, so long as it remained political, could do so.<sup>55</sup>

In retrospect, the exaggerated modern contrast of Eastern spirituality with Western materialism recalls the fanciful ideas of the ancient and medieval images, but with one important difference. The splendor of the ancient and medieval images was as much material as spiritual—deriving from the gems, spices, and silks of the luxury trade. No attempt was made to segregate in moral or intellectual principle these "material treasures" from the "spiritual treasures" of Indian civilization. Such segregation is a legacy of European colonial rule and attitudes. As an object of the "white man's burden," India was stripped, at least in image, of both material and spiritual treasures, and was left as the abode of naked and bearded heathens. As if to compensate for such an uncharitable view and for the activities with which they were associated, the orientalist rediscovered

the ancient spiritual wisdom. This inspired a romantic enthusiasm for Indian philosophy and religion in the West and a new-found pride among Indians in their spirituality. Unfortunately, this compensatory movement did little to restore respect for the material arts and achievements of Indian civilization. At best, "material India" came to be considered a field for Western improvements and for humanitarian endeavor. This cleavage between a "spiritual" and "material" India has been of the greatest consequence, not only for Western understanding but India's self-understanding as well. For Indians, too, were lulled by this half-flattering Western attitude to develop a one-sided image of their civilization.

Now that India is completely free of colonial rule, with an army, navy, and air force of its own, and in its Fifth Five-Year Plan for social and economic reform, its attitude toward the relative merits of "soul force" and "material force" may change. Perhaps it will now want to be a nation like other nations, rather than a topic of marvelous fables, or an object for self-righteous pity and charity, or the last home of occult mysteries. As India takes the path of modern nationalism, it will undoubtedly become less fascinating to the rest of the world, but it will also become less of an "image" and more of a reality in that world.

When he looked on the first atomic explosion at Los Alamos, J. Robert Oppenheimer memorialized the event by reciting a Sanskrit verse from the *Bhagavadgita*:

If there should rise suddenly within the skies  
Sunburst of a thousand suns  
Flooding earth with rays undreamed of,  
Then might be that holy one's  
Majesty and glory dreamed of.

(Alternate translation by J. A. B. van Buitenen:

If the light of a thousand suns suddenly  
arose in the sky, that splendor might be  
compared to the radiance of the  
Supreme Spirit.)<sup>56</sup>

Near Bombay, Indian scientists have successfully established a nuclear reactor. If this work has reminded them of Sanskrit *stokas*, they have not, as far as I know, expressed themselves to that effect in public. Their attitude more likely is that expressed by Nehru at the end of his *Discovery of India*, when he observed that while the Westerner's "passage" to India is a search for humanity's past, the Indian travels abroad in search of the present and future:

We in India do not have to go abroad in search of the Past and Distant. We have them here in abundance. If we go to foreign countries it is in search of the Present. That search is necessary, for isolation from it means backwardness and decay. . . .

[For] we march to the One World of tomorrow where national cultures will be intermingled with the international culture of the human race. We

shall therefore seek wisdom and knowledge and friendship and comradeship wherever we can find them, and co-operate with others in common tasks, but we are no supplicants for others' favors and patronage. Thus we shall remain true Indians and Asians, and become at the same time good internationalists and world citizens.<sup>57</sup>

#### NOTES

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## 2 / Text and Context in the Study of Contemporary Hinduism

### INTRODUCTION

There is no royal road to the "meaning" and function of a complex religion such as Hinduism. One reason for the development of anthropological studies of world religions has been the incompleteness of purely textual studies. These tell much about what is transmitted but very little about how, and to or for whom. The result tends to be a collection of disembodied "ideas" logically manipulable into a systematic "philosophy." By adding the information supplied from anthropological interviews with representatives of the religion, and from the observation of the incidence of religious beliefs and practices in the context of daily life, we are able to find for these ideas a local habitation and learn how they operate in the lives of ordinary people. The contextual studies of the anthropologist thus help in essential ways to locate and specify the meaningful content of a religious system depicted by the textual studies of the historian of religion, the philosopher, and the philologist.

The articulation of textual and contextual studies has been most successful in cases of "primitive" religions, where the small scale of the society and the oral nature of the texts make it relatively easy for the anthropologist to trace the web of functional connections.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the world religions, however, with their complex traditions of literary development, frequently cultivated by specialized literati who are interested in logical consistency and standards of universal truth, the articulation is more difficult to bring off. The "cosmology" constructed by the intellectual frequently seems quite remote from the "world view" implicit in the conduct and beliefs of every man.<sup>2</sup> Robert Redfield's conception of civilization as a compound structure of Little and Great Traditions and M. N. Srinivas's concept of "Sanskritization" are both designed to deal with this problem. The application of these conceptions by anthropologists to the study of Hinduism has so far not incorporated in any direct fashion a coordinate textual analysis. Because they are not usually Sanskritists and cannot often obtain the collaboration of Sanskritists, anthropologists must perforce bypass the textual corpus and content themselves with noting the references to it that turn up in their interviews and observations.