







# EUROPE LOOKS AT INDIA

*A STUDY IN CULTURAL RELATIONS*

*By*

**DR ALEX ARONSON**

M.A. (Cantab), PH. D.

*With a FOREWORD*

*By*

**D. P. MUKHERJI**



**HIND KITABS**  
**PUBLISHERS      BOMBAY**

**Rs. 5**



*FIRST PUBLISHED 1946*

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RABINDRANATH THROUGH WESTERN EYES

(Kitabistan, 1943)

ROMAIN ROLLAND—THE STORY OF A CONSCIENCE

(Padma Publications, 1944)

PRINTED BY NEVILLE N. R. MISTRY AT VAKIL & SONS,  
PRINTERS, BALLARD ESTATE, BOMBAY; AND PUBLISHED BY V.  
KULKARANI, HIND KITABS, 107, MAHATMA GANDHI ROAD, BOMBAY.

## FOREWORD

Dr Aronson, whose works on Tagore and Rolland have pleased all those who desire a cultural understanding between Europe and India, has honoured me by the invitation to write a foreword to this volume. My compliance is prompted as much by a sense of obligation to the subject as by an appreciation of the manner and quality of the author's treatment thereof. Though the theme has been reduced by him, and thereby focussed, to the approaches of a dozen modern representative European men of thought (and one American, Emerson) towards India, yet in substance and significance, it retains both width and depth. Thanks to Dr Aronson's handling, it also fairly indicates the movements and gently hints at the finale. One can almost hear the diapason in Man rising above the phrases, over the discords.

Yes, the discords are very audible today. In these years Man in the West seems to have been diminished. And his prestige too, in India and the East. For us all, the West and Imperialism are nearly identical. We have grown to believe that Europe has looked, is looking, and will try in future to look at India with only hungry eyes. Our eyes are angry in return. This is natural. If, however, reflection could supersede reflexes on our side, and a feeling for equality quash the greed and domination on theirs, one could press for a wide recognition of the fact that conflict is a relation, that misunderstandings belong to the process of adjustment, that repulsion operates within the ambit of attraction and co-operation. It is difficult for us to be generous now. But the trouble

has to be undergone. The present position as it appears to an Indian, for whom Tagore, Gandhiji and Nehru's lives have a meaning, is simply this: Apart from the fact that Man in the West is known to be a victim of the order inherited, the moral stature of the Indian, and of every freedom-loving, self-sacrificing man in the East, has definitely increased by suffering. That being so, the chances for mutual understanding are, to say the least, not overridden by the short-term facts of mastery and slavery. Equivalent events have occurred there and here, in all occupied zones, and they draw the dispossessed nearer than before. Probably, in these spheres some law of equilibrium operates by which men and women in all lands approximate to an average level of conduct and aspirations. That level has quite often been low, *vide* the previous schemes of hegemony, World Order, New Order, etc. But it has sometimes been, and may as well be, kept high by earnest efforts to halt the downward pull and help the upward rush. Man in the West is now bent upon countering the drag, while Man in India, and in the East, is equally resolved to raise his status and to function in equality on higher reaches. An Indian nurtured in the traditions of the West and revolting against its avarice, lust of power and superciliousness, but natured in the sap of Indian culture and resenting its low vigilance, cannot but feel that the complement of a chastened West is an awakened India, aye, a resurgent East. Dr Aronson's volume fortifies my faith that though the West fleeces the East and the East allows itself to be fleeced, the days of Man either in the West or in the East are not yet over. There are long stretches to cover, other levels to be reached, wider rythms to be achieved. This dynamic theme is implicit in these pages.

Dr Aronson's actual treatment is equally reassuring. The merit of this volume does not arise merely from scholarship. That the pages bear in controlled abundance. It rather consists in 'historical understanding', which in the hands of Dr Aronson is sociological in the main. That is as it should be. Voltaire, Scott, Southey, Goethe, Schlegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Emerson, Spengler, Rolland, Guenon, and a few more like Forster—the attitude of each such representative thinker towards India is placed in the perspective of the 'ideology', the 'idolum', or the 'cultural compulsive' of the age. The shifts in the ideology of Europe in the last one hundred and fifty years are also indicated. If on the eve of the French Revolution the climate of opinion was Enlightenment, in the following period of Romanticism it was the ferment and the agony of a divided culture. Still later, it would be the haunting fear of decay to be appeased by Nationalism at home and Imperialism abroad. Overriding all would be the partial realization of the fact that the emergent forces of Industrialism and Science could no longer be held in the framework of Europe's outlook on life. These changes in the vision of Europe towards India are a measure of Europe's own cultural evolution. In noting them Dr Aronson has proved a good European. On our side, his balanced account should write off the current view that India is an escape for the harassed man of the West. For certain individuals it may be true, both spiritually and economically; but it is up to us to concede, even if it were difficult to realize, that Europe's approach to India is both an expansion and an intensification of the Western spirit of Humanism.

What about India's deeper obligation? Dr Aronson waits for 'a master-mind who will tell the western reading public what India is, the reality of popular traditions

among the people, the rise of new thought and behaviour patterns among the various groups that constitute the Indian nation, the bewilderment of the Indian intelligentsia when confronted by Western progress, the struggle of a whole continent for the fundamental freedom in thought, in speech and in action'. If that master-mind is to be a historian and sociologist, I also wait for him, and probably, with more despair and less patience. But need one be a master-mind in these days? I should think that by now the West is in a fair position to know what, and how India feels, thinks, speaks and acts, in spite of the nearly complete 'absence of freedom. But, probably again, a scholarly work would be useful in the near future. It is my duty to pass on the invitation of a sincere and a good European to Indian intellectuals to formulate the new India to the new West.

D. P. MUKERJI

28th October 1945  
Lucknow University

**TO  
ARI AND MARGOT**

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## INTRODUCTION

This book attempts an analysis of the cultural relations between Europe and India within the context of modern social history during the last hundred and fifty years. Our aim was to select only those events and people that were relevant to an understanding of significant relation-patterns between East and West. Such a selection might appear arbitrary to some. We know that it is open to controversy. But only by reducing significance to its essential minimum, could we hope to master a subject the complexity of which is too evident to require any emphasis.

It is due to this desire for relevance that much had to be left out that normally should find a place in a book of this kind: popular accounts of India, travel-stories, the daily comment in the press, political speeches, academic research. The significance of the European response to India during this time very largely consists in its close relation to contemporary thought—movements and social revaluation in the West. By limiting ourselves to some of the outstanding leaders of Western thought, we separate, as it were, the significant from the unessential, the relevant from the arbitrary.

If we have at times simplified issues, it was because the continuity of our narrative demanded such simplification. For however complex the history of modern civilization, we would like to believe that there is order and coherence beneath the conflicting chaos of appearances. And where, if not in the constant endeavours of the best representatives of the human mind to create harmony out of discord, would the ultimate significance of cultural response be found?

A.A.





## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM OF RESPONSE

The study of cultural relations, far from being a merely intellectual subject-matter to be treated academically, involves the scholar in an analysis of what might be called cultural dynamics, a study of parallel developments, influences, and cross-currents, in the civilization of countries or continents, and the way they affect human beings, both as individuals and as members of a social group in a given historical and social context.

The civilization of Europe, however, is not a homogeneous whole. And yet, scholars who have dealt with the problem of response, and in particular the response of Europeans to India, always started with the assumption that the civilization of a country or a continent, is something static, easily definable, and limited to the intellectual make-up of a few writers, poets and philosophers. But civilization is always a process; not a being, but a becoming. It is reflected not only in the mind of man, but far more clearly in behaviour-patterns, moral standards and valuations. A human being who responds to an alien civilization, does so within the context of his social group, its thought and behaviour patterns that have infused into him a particular set of moral standards and values. The problem of response is very largely identical with the problem of how one form of cultural evolution adjusts itself or fails to adjust itself to different, and frequently diametrically opposed forms of cultural dynamics, and it is no good assuming that there exists a mysterious mechanism of response shaping and re-shaping

the intellectual destiny of people regardless of the time in which they live, the social structure of which they are a part, the economic system of which they are both the builders and the victims, the values they attach to certain given conditions of existence.

This book, therefore, is first of all, a challenge against complacent scholarship with its artificial, though academic, formulas, its deeply rooted intellectual bias, its prejudice in favour of abstract and generalized definitions. It is a challenge also against all the pseudo-scientific attempts to explain away the problem of response in terms of 'racial' idiosyncrasy, of intellectual superiority or inferiority, of apparently indisputable cultural abstractions, of political or economic dishonesty. This challenge is justified by the importance the problem has assumed in recent times. And just as the political and economic struggle of our age can be solved only by a revaluation of those very forces that created the conflict, so also the cultural conflict will be solved only by the application of new values and the training of new attitudes. For what would such a challenge be worth if it did not ultimately lead to the formation of a more mature collective intelligence and the creation of saner relation-patterns between one continent and another ?

Instances are not lacking in Europe where men of outstanding intellectual gifts have made statements of a most misleading kind about the pre-supposed relationship between East and West and the way the Western response to India should be 'regulated'. Sometimes such statements have had a very far-reaching influence, evoking counter-statements, public discussions and controversies, and often leading to personal abuses or dogmatic

pronouncements on a variety of subjects quite disconnected from the problem in question. Each one of the participants in such public controversies is, first of all, out to prove his own thesis, regardless of any argument to the contrary. An instance to the point is Maeterlinck's famous statement about the 'Eastern and the Western lobe' in man's mental make-up. This statement, based as it is upon a purely fictitious hypothesis, evoked many replies equally founded on hypothetical assumptions, and is probably still being discussed by well-meaning intellectuals all over Europe and America. The statement, it may be recalled, was made during the last war. It indeed is symptomatic of the abstract concepts commonly used by European intellectuals when discussing the problem of response between East and West: 'The one (lobe) here produces reason, science, consciousness; the other yonder secretes intuition, religion, the subconscious. More than once they have endeavoured to penetrate one another, to mingle, to work together; but the Western lobe, at any rate on the most active expanse of our globe, has heretofore paralysed and almost annihilated the efforts of the other. We owe to it extraordinary progress in all material sciences, but also catastrophes, such as those we are undergoing to-day. It is time to awaken the paralysed Eastern lobe.'

According to Maeterlinck, the whole problem boils down to a merely intellectual proposition, the supposed division of the human brain into two watertight compartments, called Eastern and Western, the predominance of the latter in recent times and the necessity to 'awaken' the former which had remained 'paralysed' for such a long time. Maeterlinck, significantly

enough, is hardly concerned at all with the response of one continent to another, but rather with a purely *mental* adjustment which, in his opinion, is required to 'stabilize' once again the Western mind. Whether that is at all possible without a re-valuation of the very attitudes that underlie all human behaviour, including of course, thought patterns, does not seem to concern Maeterlinck here. He has given us his formula. It is for us to apply it to living reality. No wonder that most intellectuals failed in their attempt. Nothing, indeed, is more significant in an analysis of the problem of response between East and West than the frustration that periodically overcomes the intellectuals and scholars in Europe who, genuinely in search of a deeper understanding, are confronted again and again by meaningless formulas, abstractions, and concepts. Their greatest disappointment is when their cherished formula cannot be applied and proves to be unsuitable to actually existing conditions of reality. Their desire to understand turns into bitterness and deliberate misinterpretation, the open hatred of the frustrated scholar when confronted by something he cannot grasp 'intellectually'. It is out of such an attitude that arise those amazing schemes, built up with all the pedantry of European scholarship, concerning the racial superiority of the 'Aryans', as in Gobineau, the superiority of the 'Teutons', as in H. S. Chamberlain, the 'senility' of Indian civilization, as in Hegel, or of Buddhism, as in Spengler. And with an enviable, though enervating, thoroughness they will put forth argument after argument, footnote after footnote, quotation after quotation, to prove their main thesis. Once their thesis established, all they

had to do was to apply it, point by point, to what they considered to be 'reality'. Their ignorance which at times was appalling, could always be hidden behind a veil of cynical condescension masquerading as scholarship. And there was nothing to prevent them from being frankly contemptuous whenever the 'paralysed Eastern lobe' interfered too much with their well-ordered plans and intellectual hypotheses.

What happened in Europe during the last hundred and fifty years has frequently been compared to that period in Western civilization known by the name of Renaissance. This expansion of the mind, in the opinion of traditional scholarship, was entirely due to a re-awakening of that same 'paralysed' Eastern lobe of which Maeterlinck had spoken during the last war. According to Sir S. Radhakrishnan, just as the consciousness of Europe 'was enlarged in the period of the Renaissance by the revelation of the classical culture of Greece and Rome, there is a sudden growth of the spirit today effected by the new inheritance of Asia, with which India is linked up'\*. Such a statement, however justified in a general manner of speaking, requires some qualifications. What exactly is meant by the 'growth of the spirit today'? Does this growth comprise the whole of Europe or only some privileged countries? Does it include all the population groups of a country regardless of its social or economic structure, or does it apply only to a minority group, an elite of intellectuals, scholars, and poets? Has this growth of the spirit during the last hundred and fifty years in any fundamental way affected the thought or behaviour patterns of the people

\* *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*. Oxford 1939, p. 115.

of Europe (as the Renaissance undoubtedly did) ? What precisely constituted this 'new inheritance of Asia' ? Do we find it reflected to the same extent in works of art, literature, or philosophy, as the culture of ancient Greece and Rome was reflected in the works of the Renaissance ?

Some of these questions, we hope, will be answered in this book. A few preliminary remarks, however, will be necessary. Cultural relations are not established by some vague entity called the human spirit, but by men and women living within the particular historical context of their age, and responding, due to a large variety of motives, to an alien civilization. It is indeed the problem of motivation that concerns us here most. The fact that human beings respond to something that is foreign to their outlook on life is in itself hardly of any significance at all, unless we can also determine the reason, often hidden behind intellectual arguments and ratiocination, that made them look in another continent, be it for inspiration or knowledge or a new way of life. For the motives that make men respond in one way or another to an alien civilization are often elusive, and only by a study of the historical context itself can they be properly understood.

It is no doubt true that this growth of the European mind took place at a time when spiritually Europe had become saturated with its own past and when intellectuals longed for a wider and larger view of life than the one that confined them to classical antiquity and Christianity, the two forces that had shaped European civilization during the last 2000 years. Western scholars, long before Maeterlinck, looked upon the 'paralysed Eastern lobe' as the only hope for the spiritual

rejuvenation of Europe. Michelet, for instance, speaking about the Ramayana, wrote in 1864: 'Whoever has done or will too much, let him drink from this deep cup a long draught of life and youth. Everything is narrow in the West—Greece is small and I stifle; Judaea is dry and I pant. Let me look a little towards lofty Asia, the profound East ' Nor indeed was Michelet the first to express in words that new awareness of spiritual expansion. Since the time of Voltaire, that is since shortly before the French Revolution, writers and scholars, philosophers and poets, have voiced similar opinions, and all of them seem to agree that Europe has become too 'narrow' for them, that a rejuvenation can only come from the East. Most of them stressed the need for a moral and intellectual re-awakening, only very few mentioned the political and economic interests involved.

The fact that pre-occupations of a very material kind **were** involved throughout these hundred and fifty years, however, admits of no doubt. The coincidence of spiritual and material expansion is far too striking to be merely accidental. And if, as some say, cultural progress reflects, in more than one way, material progress, then we have here an admirable instance to the point. Historically speaking, the re-awakened interest in Indian civilization coincided with the economic and colonial expansion of those countries in Europe which required new markets for the products of their factories and workshops. The English were the first to begin a systematic study of Sanskrit and Indian civilization because they had very definite material interests in the East and were quite naturally led to an investigation into the lan-



guage and philosophy of those people who had become, both politically and economically, their subjects. The first Sanskrit scholars and Indologists were either Government officials or missionaries. The reason why France lagged behind is to be found in the fact that her interests were at that time already more confined to the Near East than to India. The country, therefore, in which the Industrial Revolution first originated, accelerating thereby the rise of the middle classes, was also the first to investigate the civilization of India. For, on the one hand, the Industrial Revolution had opened up a new market in the East and, on the other, the middle classes were thirsty for a vaster and less limited kind of knowledge. They indeed revolted against the aristocratic culture of Greece and Rome, and demanded fresh spiritual food. The middle classes stood for expansion of the empire as well as for the expansion of their mind. And France which remained an agricultural country for a much longer period of time than England, was less successful in expanding either her trade or her 'spirit'.

It is no accident either that Indology received a truly amazing impetus in Germany during the Napoleonic wars. Here also it was a rejuvenated middle class that looked towards the East for a new inspiration and a new 'renaissance'. Not being able to expand economically or to establish colonies, Germany compensated her political inferiority (as it undoubtedly existed at that time) by some kind of spiritual superiority, brought about, if not by anything else, by the ever-increasing interest of middle class scholars and poets in things Indian. And while the English, at the beginning, deve-

loped Indology as a science to be systematically studied, the Germans began by idealizing India and transforming the East into a romantic fairyland of their own imagination. It was only very much later that Germans with their proverbial thoroughness took up Indology as a science for its own sake, while, on the other hand, the repressed desire of the Germans for a colonial empire made them expound their far-fetched racial theories regarding an Indo-Aryan or Indo-German or even Indo-Teutonic race.

India was to the rising middle classes of Europe, apart from being one of the main sources of their economic prosperity, an escape from their own spiritual narrowness, a protest against the limitation of a purely classical culture, the romantic dream of a timeless and conflictless existence come true. From the very beginning the response of European intellectuals to India was coloured by their middle-class origin, the wish-fulfilment of the Philistine or the inability of the nineteenth-century rationalist to grasp anything that did not fit in with his pre-arranged schemes and plans. Indeed, both the romantic and rationalist attitude towards India spring from the same source. For the nineteenth century produced both the utopian dream of the infinite and the positivism of the scientific rationalist, both of them responded to India according to their own beliefs and attitudes. For the dreamer India became an escape from the scientific ugliness and hypocrisy of his age, a restatement of spiritual and moral values, a symbol of the re-discovered human soul. For the rationalist India was a 'backward' country stimulating him for social reform or political emancipation,

racial theories or humanitarian enterprises. It might not always be possible to distinguish the two types clearly. Their response to India was at times coloured by their desire to escape from a civilization that had exhausted itself and in which they played the part of rather superfluous appendages to an industrial 'progress' which in its very essence was opposed to their most cherished longings; and at times they turned into social reformers and utopian humanitarians, protesting against the inequality prevailing among men, the injustice of the caste system, and, paradoxically enough, against the gradual 'modernization' of India. In their attitudes both were equally 'romantic': India, whether real or imaginary, always remained a wish-fulfilment. And even those who most strongly protested against the interference of the 'Eastern lobe' were guided by a similar wish-fulfilment: for they deceived themselves into believing in the 'senility' of Indian civilization only in order to compensate their own realization of failure and gradual decay in the West.

The attitude of Western thinkers and poets towards India was indeed to a very considerable extent that of escape and wish-fulfilment. Only those who were conscious of the failure of their own age to create new forms of life, took to such an attitude. That limits the response of the West towards India to the few, the intellectuals and scholars, who had achieved that level of awareness which made them want to escape from the horrors of industrialization and, more often than not, from the horrors of what they considered to be the coming social and economic revolution. It is indeed a minority group within a new mass-civilization

that was at all ready to respond to India, her civilization and philosophy. Those countries in which the spiritual crisis, partly brought about by the Industrial Revolution, was most strongly felt, developed such minority groups earlier than relatively self-contented agricultural countries. Such a minority group can hardly be called a 'movement' or a 'renaissance'. The man-in-the-street, the people at large, were hardly affected at all. Their belief in progress and the infinite possibilities of the human mind remained unshaken throughout these hundred and fifty years. Neither culture nor behaviour patterns in the West were in any significant way changed by that minority group. India remained, and still is today, for most Europeans a vague geographical or political entity, the land of the Taj Mahal, of Maharajas and Mahatmas. The mass-civilization of Europe, with its material progress and its periodical wars and cataclysms, its literature and art, its religion and moral standards, its varying forms of governments, its jazz and Hollywood pictures and newspaper trusts, remains unaffected by the dream and wish-fulfilment of the minority of intellectuals. Only from time to time a voice is heard in the wilderness, Emerson or Tolstoy or Romain Rolland, and people go and buy their books for the sake of etiquette or good breeding, and for a few days or weeks Buddha or Vivekananda become the main subject-matter of conversation in the fashionable drawing-rooms of Paris or London or New York. At best their books will be a literary success and might establish a new literary tradition. They will not lead to a new way of life or the creation of new patterns of thought, except in individual cases. The 'growth of

the spirit today' is the result of individual protest against the existing modes of life. The Renaissance brought about by the 'inheritance' of Asia is still in its childhood. Indeed, we wonder whether it will ever grow to maturity.

In this book we shall limit ourselves to the response of Europeans to India during the last hundred and fifty years only. A more complete account could be given if we would also include the response of Indians to Europe during the same period of time. Such a study would reveal similar historical and social forces at work as in the West. For in India also it was the educated higher middle class, those who were dissatisfied with the limitations of ancient learning and culture and who desired a broadening of their consciousness who most readily responded to the influence of the West. Here as in Europe it was a time of spiritual re-awakening and material progress, of a new search for truth and the application of new values. And just as in the West, the 'Renaissance' in India was also limited to an elite of poets, writers, and intellectuals of middle-class origin. The people remained, to a very considerable extent, unaffected. The main difference, however, between the response of the West to India, and India's response to Europe consists in the fact that the former were 'free' to respond and did so out of an urgent inner need, while the latter were, first of all,—and almost certainly against their will—driven to acknowledge the superiority of a culture whose only claim to superiority, so at least it seemed to them, consisted in material efficiency and the large-scale manufacture of arms. It is indeed significant that, while many a great European considered the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha to be the very cli-

max of human perfection in the realm of the spirit, only a small select group of Indians looked upon the Bible or Christianity with an equal enthusiasm. But then, we must remember that neither the Upanishads nor Buddhism entered Europe in the wake of invading armies or colonial subjection. Indeed, European scholars and poets were 'free' to admire where admiration was due. The admiration of the Indian intellectual, whenever it was ungrudgingly given, was due to an inherent generosity of heart and a willingness to understand *despite* the loss of political or economic freedom. Such an intellectual freedom is, quite naturally, limited to the very few only, a Vivekañanda, a Rabindranath, a Mahatma Gandhi. The psychology of cultural response in India was, therefore, determined by different forces than in the West. And a comparative study of the two might again lead to those misleading generalizations and abstractions which we want to avoid. By limiting ourselves to the West only we shall at least be able to point out those currents and cross-currents that made the response of Europeans to India during the last hundred and fifty years one of the most significant cultural events in the history of the human mind.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The nineteenth-century romantics were by no means the first to 'discover' India. Already during the eighteenth century we can feel the first breath of a new dawn—it frequently comes from the most unexpected sources. And we can see those urbane, highly refined and sophisticated men and women, proud of their growing empires, their discoveries in the field of science and their flourishing arts—we can see them looking towards the East, not so much for 'inspiration' but for a new contribution to human knowledge. They were a little ashamed of their ignorance with regard to India, and they felt that, however superior their civilization might be, there was still much to be learnt from the inhabitants of a continent who had written books of eternal wisdom at a time when the illiterate ancestors of Dr Johnson and Voltaire were hunting boars in the jungles of Europe. Yes, they were a little ashamed of their ignorance—though they were careful enough not to commit themselves in any way. Dr Johnson, for instance, when writing to Hastings, formulates his own ignorance in the most urbane language: 'You, Sir, have no need to be told by me, how much may be added by your attention and patronage to experimental knowledge and natural history. There are arts and manufactures practised in the countries in which you preside which are yet very imperfectly known here either to artificers or philosophers. Of the natural productions, animate and inanimate, we yet have so little intelligence

that our books are filled, I fear, with conjectures about things which an Indian peasant knows by his senses.\* That ignorance frequently is responsible for political systems, is indeed almost a commonplace. Thus, Dr Johnson, who confesses his ignorance about India in unmistakable language, also has something to say about an ideal government for that country. The crudity of his political ideas need not surprise us: he is only an example of contemporary feeling about India among intelligent men in England. At least, no one can accuse Dr Johnson of hypocrisy when he tells Boswell that 'all distant power is bad. I am clear that the very best plan for India is a despotick governour; for if he be a good man, it is evidently the best government; and supposing him to be a bad man, it is better to have one plunderer than many. A governour whose power is checked lets others plunder that he himself may be allowed to plunder: but if despotick, he sees that the more he lets others plunder, the less there will be for himself, so he restrains them.'

Dr Johnson's contemporary in France, Voltaire, never admitted his ignorance in such explicit terms nor did he have any political system ready for India. He was a man of cyclopaedic knowledge, gathering his information from every available source, accepting indiscriminately both truth and falsehood, and integrating them in his works on history, philosophy, literature, politics, in his novels and plays, and his innumerable letters. That India had a strong exotic appeal for him can be seen from the fact that a fair number of his books are, either wholly or partly devoted to India and that he

\* Boswell, Hill ed., iv, p. 69.



took the plot for many of his plays from the storehouse of Eastern mythology. There are, for instance, his *Fragments on some Revolutions in India and on the death of Count de Lalli* (1773); his *Essay on the customs and the spirit of the nations* (1765) including several long chapters on India; his *History of the Age of Louis XIV* which, indeed, is a kind of world history of the seventeenth century embracing the whole of Europe and Asia.

Voltaire was not what we could call today a profound writer. He could hide, with a cleverness which seems to us incredible today, his own ignorance as well as the utter stupidity of the sources from which he gathered his information about India. He was perfectly sure of himself. And his mind, accustomed to historical research and the co-ordination of facts and data, established a unity where his contemporaries had seen nothing but diversity. And however artificial this unity may appear to us today, it pleased his sophisticated and urbane readers who—although on the brink of a revolution which would sweep away many of the artificialities of their lives—were still entranced by the beauty of the classical form. And if this purely abstract unity was often meaningless, it was at least intellectually satisfying.

What then were Voltaire's sources on India? First of all, we hear of the 'Ezour-Vedam', an alleged translation of the Yajurveda which appeared in French in 1778 and which, according to Dr Winternitz, is a falsification, a pious fraud; the translation was supposed to have been made by the missionary Roberto de 'Nobili'. Voltaire received it from an official returning from Pon-

dicherry; later on he presented it to the Royal Library in Paris. All through his life Voltaire was under the impression that this book was an old commentary on the Veda which had been translated by a venerable centenarian Brahmin into French. This was his authority for Indian antiquities. His other source, however, is more contemporary and even more absurd. John Zephania Holwell's fame today rests on rather obscure political happenings connected with the 'Black Hole' at Calcutta, his temporary governorship of Bengal, his reform of the Zamindar's court, and his defence of Calcutta as a member of the Council, against Suraj-ud-Dowlah, in 1756. Very vaguely we are also told that he was the first European who studied 'Hindoo antiquities' and published works on 'Indian politics and mythology'. This very same Holwell whose statue in more recent times had become something of a major political issue, was one of Voltaire's main sources of information about India. And Voltaire who all through his life had a profound admiration for everything English, especially for constitutional monarchy, had nothing but praise for this same Holwell—for whose name we shall, however, vainly search in modern histories of Indian literature. In his *Historical Fragments on India*, Voltaire is as outspoken as could be desired: "This very same Holwell", he says, 'had learnt not only the language of the modern Brahmins, but also that of the ancients. It is he who has since written such admirable memoirs on India and who has translated the sublime passages from the first books in the sacred language. We gratefully take this opportunity of paying back our debt to a man who has travelled only for the sake of

learning. He has unveiled for us what had been hidden for so many centuries. He has done more than the Pythagoras and the Appoloniuses. . . .’

Holwell himself had a very high opinion of his knowledge of Indian life and thought. Voltaire—in a footnote—quotes him as saying, ‘I have studied everything that has been written about Indians since Arrian’, and Voltaire, in his *Age of Louis XIV*, adds that it was Holwell who has destroyed once and for all ‘this vain collection of errors with which all the histories of India are filled’ and that ‘the learned and untiring Englishman has copied, in 1759, their first written Law, called the *Shasta*, which precedes the Vedas by fifteen-hundred years.’ What Voltaire or, for the matter of that, Holwell, meant by the *Shasta* is not quite clear. And though it all remained rather vague, it was, to say the least, impressive, and Voltaire who probably knew as little about the *Shasta* as his own readers, must have enjoyed the little trick he played on them. For however ignorant he might have been with regard to things Eastern, he was a man endowed with a truly amazing sense of humour.

A few words on Holwell’s contribution to the study of Indian civilization may not be out of place here. His *magnum opus* on India bears the rather formidable title : ‘Interesting Historical Events Relative to the Province of Bengal, and the Empire of Industan. With a Seasonable Hint and Persuasive To the Honourable The Court of Directors of the East India Company. As also The Mythology and Cosmogony, Fasts and Festivals of the Gentoo’s, followers of the Shastah. And a Dissertation on the Metempsychosis, commonly, though

erroneously, called the Pythagorean Doctrine. By J. Z. Holwell, Esq., etc.' His concern with India was not, however, altogether disinterested. For Holwell had his own axe to grind. Even a cursory glance at books on India before his time had taught him that most of the writers were Roman-Catholic missionaries; his book, therefore, is, in more than one sense, a reply to the 'popish authors'. And Holwell, who is more convincing as a politician than as a scholar, quite rightly assumed that such a book—anti-Catholic and, therefore, also in a way anti-French—would be well received at home. We know of a number of reports written by French missionaries about India in the eighteenth century; there are the letters of Pere Calmette in 1733 and of Pere Pous in 1740, for instance. Holwell, very successfully, plays the part of the enlightened and benevolent administrator. The motive, however, for his rather unexpected defence of the Hindu religion can be found in his loyalty to the Anglican Church and his hatred of Roman-Catholicism: 'All the modern writers represent the Hindoos as a race of stupid and gross Idolaters... The modern authors who have wrote on the principles and worship of the Hindoos, are chiefly of the Romish communion, therefore we need wonder the less than they (from a superstitious zeal inseparable from that communion) should depreciate and traduce the mythology of the venerable ancients Brahmins, on so slender a foundation as a few insignificant literal translations of the Viedam ... From such weak grounds and evidence as this, and by the help of a few exhibitions of the *seemingly* monstrous idols of the Hindoos the Popish authors hesitate not to stigmatize those most venerable sages the

Brahmins, as having instituted doctrines and worship which if believed, would reduce them below the level of the brute creation ... though strictly speaking, their own tenets were more idolatrous than the system they travelled so far to stigmatize'.\*

It is interesting to find that Voltaire readily believed the uncommon and out-of-the-way; but sometimes when actually correct facts had been transmitted to him, his commonsense reasserted itself. There is, for instance the matriarchal system in Malabar. This seems to him incredible, and several times he refers to it with grave misgivings, as to the sanity of his informants. 'It is true,' he says, 'one ought to read almost all the narratives that come to us from that distant land with a sceptical mind. One is more concerned with sending us from the shores of Koromandel and Malabar commodities than truth. A particular case is often taken to be a general usage. One tells us that at Cochin it is not the king's son who inherits him, but his sister's son. Such an arrangement contradicts nature too much: there does not exist a man who wishes to exclude his son from his heritage. . . ' Voltaire's historical mind could grasp anything that went according to the 'laws of nature'; he could not imagine, however, that nature is not everywhere the same, and that differences in latitude and longitude also imply different systems of values among human beings. Even his cyclopaedic mind had its 'natural' limitations.

His main argument in all these innumerable chapters on India, however, is that India was once the cradle of civilization: 'Everything came to us from the

\* *To the Public. Preliminary Discourse*, p. 6, 1766; 2nd edition.

Ganges,' he writes to his friend M. Bailly, 'astronomy, astrology, metempsychosis, etc. '; that today (that is in the eighteenth century) this past greatness is slowly crumbling into dust is partly due to inherent germs of decay, partly also to the commercial invasion from the West. 'All the greatness and misery of the human mind are displayed in the ancient Brahmins, and in their successors. On the one hand, there is persevering virtue, supported by rigorous abstinence; a sublime philosophy, though fantastical and veiled by ingenious allegories; a horror at shedding blood, constant charity towards human beings and animals. On the other hand, there is the most despicable superstition. This fanaticism, although of a calm kind, has led them for innumerable centuries to encourage the suicide of so many young widows who have thrown themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands. This horrible excess in religion and in greatness of soul maintains itself side by side with the famous profession of faith of the Brahmins that God wants from us only charity and good deeds. The whole world is dominated by contradictions.' \*

And Voltaire has no doubt that this 'misery of the mind' is entirely due to the 'Brahmins' themselves, their deliberate attempt to misguide the people. He, by the way, makes a rather subtle distinction between what he calls the 'Brachmanes', meaning thereby the priests of ancient times, and the 'Brames' who are their successors today. All his criticism is levelled against the contemporary leaders of Indian religion. 'Most of them,' he says, 'live in a soft apathy. Their great maxim,

\* *Hist. Fragments on India.*

drawn from their ancient books, is that it is better to sit than to walk, to lie down than to sit, to sleep than to be awake, to die than to live.\* And he mentions a few pages later on the *Cormo-Weidam* which is full of prognostications for the future and rules of conduct for every hour of the day. 'There is nothing surprising in that,' he exclaims, 'not two hundred years ago the same foolishness could be found among our princes and the charlatanism was taken up by our astronomers.' The modern Brahmins, he continues, must be very wise indeed: '...they say that the people must needs be deceived and be ignorant.' It is the child of the Enlightenment who speaks—the philosopher who could see beyond the appearance of things, and whose over-critical mind perceived the sordidness below the glittering surface. Indeed some of his conclusions on the decline of true spirituality in India are surprisingly relevant. For he immediately relates this spiritual decay to the historical fact of the loss of political independence. According to him 'it seems that men have become weak and cowardly in India in proportion to the extent of their subjugation. To judge by appearances the superstitions and penance of the vanquished people have increased twice as much with every new conquest.'

No argument could be more natural to Voltaire, the atheist and philosopher. Religion, of whatever kind, is liable to dope the people, to make them quarrelsome and ignorant. There is little to choose between Christianity and what he considers to be Hinduism. And when with every new conquest, missionaries of the various Christian sects invaded India, Vol-

\* *Hist. Fragments on India.*

taire does not miss the opportunity of flinging a little insult at those whom he detested more than anything else. The modern 'Brahmins' and the missionaries from Europe were indeed birds of the same feather, the only difference being that the spiritual influx from the West demoralized the native greatness of the spirit of India. For among the missionaries 'the Catholic fights against the Anglican who fights against the Lutheran who, in his turn, fights the Calvinist. Thus, all against all, everyone of them wanting to announce truth, and accusing the others of falsehood, they surprise a simple and peaceful people who see coming to them, from the Western extremities of the earth, men eager to tear each other to pieces on the shores of the Ganges.\*' Whatever may be our attitude to such a statement, there is no doubt that Voltaire was one of the first in Europe to realize that not everything beyond the borders of Europe is 'barbarous', savage, and 'uncivilized'. Such a misconception, he thinks, is due to the fabrications of 'ignorant and foolhardy priests of the Middle-ages' (evidently a reference to Holwell's 'Popish authors') who taught the people to admire and worship nothing but what could be found within the confines of Europe. And Voltaire, just like Michelet and Renan long after him, found the intellectual Europe, stretching from the river Jordan to the river Thames, a rather small place to live in. Many a European, both before and after him, revolted against the 'provincialism' of Europe which they considered to be a rather insignificant appendage to Asia.

\* 1765 ; Coll. Works, 1819, vol. 13. p. 280.



In this connexion it will be interesting to inquire what exactly Voltaire thought of those European powers who seemed to have settled in India for good. It is quite in the nature of things that he gives free vent to his satire and wit when he speaks about them. But his satire is always delightfully inconsistent: for though he abhors the economic exploitation of the weaker nations by the stronger, he cannot help feeling that such a state of affairs could not have been brought about, but because of some inherent superiority of the latter over the former. On the one hand, he finds all the ugliness of profit-making at the cost of innocence and wisdom, on the other, he remembers the age of Louis XIV, the dynamic and expansive urge for power of a refined civilization. And in the true spirit of historical research, he first states the facts, and then lets the reader read between the lines. His sense of humour which at times breaks out in the most unexpected places, always saves him from taking sides. He says neither yes nor no: history is beyond affirmation or negation. It simply happens. Our opinions, at best, can serve only one useful purpose: they enliven the narrative and establish a link between the cold facts and datas of existence and our own intellectual make-up. And Voltaire is careful enough not to offend the English. He always says 'We', meaning thereby Europe as a whole. "These successors of the Brahmins, the inventors of so many arts, these amateurs and arbiters of peace, have become our servants, our commercial mercenaries. We have devastated their land, we have made it fat with our blood. We have shown them how much we surpass them in courage and wickedness, and how inferior we are to

them in wisdom. Out nations have mutually destroyed each other on that very same soil where we went to collect nothing but money, and where the first Greeks travelled for nothing but knowledge.’\*

But economic exploitation is not the only sin committed by Western nations on Indian soil. They also brought with them the vices of a sophisticated civilization—corrupting and demoralizing the innocent people on the shores of the Ganges. Voltaire never tells us what vices exactly he means. But he does tell us the story of Vishnapur or Bishnupor, a small townlet in Bengal, near Bankura. He had read about Bishnupor in a book by the same unfortunate Holwell who had supplied him with information about good many other things in India. ‘What is most astonishing,’ he exclaims, ‘is that this Bishnupor cannot be found on any of our maps. The reader, however, will be pleasantly surprised to know that this place is inhabited by the mildest of men, the most just, the most hospitable and the most generous ever found on the face of the earth. “Freedom and property here are inviolable. One never hears people speak of theft either private or public. . . .” All the Englishmen admit that when the Brahmins of Calcutta, Madras, Masulipatam, Pondicherry were bound by common interest to the foreigners, they have taken from them all the vices; those who have lived in seclusion have preserved all their virtues.’† Here is the original passage from Holwell’s book to which Voltaire obviously refers: ‘To the West of Burdwan, something Northerly, lie the lands belonging to the family of Rajah

\* *Hist. Fragments on India.*

† *Ibid.*

Gopaul Singh, of the Raazpoot Brahmin tribe . . but from the happiness of his situation, he is perhaps the most independent Rajah of Industan; having it always in his power to overflow his country, and drown any enemy that comes against him. But in truth it would be almost cruelty to molest these happy people; for in this district, are the only vestiges of the beauty, purity, piety, regularity, equity, and strictness of the ancient Industan Government. Here the property, as well as the liberty of the people are inviolate. Here, no robbing are heard of, either private or public. In this form, the traveller is passed through the country; and if he only passes, he is not suffered to be at any expense for food, accommodation, or carriage for his merchandize or baggage. If anything is lost in this district, for instance, a bag of money, or other valuable, the person who finds it, hangs it upon the next tree, and gives notice to the nearest Chowkey or place of guard; the officer of which orders immediate publication of the same by beat of tomtom, or drum . . . Bishnapore, the capital and chief residence of the Rajah, and which gives a name to the whole district, is also the chief seat of trade.' And Holwell concludes his panegyric of Bishnupor with a not insignificant piece of information which Voltaire, however, did not think worth while to include: ' . . it is from this district that the East India Company are chiefly supplied with the article of shell lacca.\*'

So far for Bishnupor and its virtuous inhabitants. We do not know where Holwell got his information from, but it certainly provided Voltaire with an oppor-

\* Chap. iii, p. 197.

tunity of expressing his admiration for the 'noble savages' in terms of actual reality. For however great the wisdom and virtue of the 'Brahmins', they did not build Versailles, they did not write tragedies in blank verse, they were not interested in scientific or social progress. And if the influence of the West on India was vicious and corrupting, at least Europe could be conscious of centuries of 'progress' which had been denied to the East. And the following comparison between England and Greece is most illuminating: 'But this England which dominates today the whole of Bengal, whose possessions in America extend from the fourteenth degree to the polar circle, which has produced Locke and Newton, and which, finally, has preserved the advantages of freedom with those of monarchy, is despite all her abuses as superior to the people of India as Greece at the time of Miltiades, Aristides, and Alexander, was superior to Persia.'

But Voltaire is too intelligent a man and too perspicacious a scholar to leave it at that. Did he not live in that period of intellectual evolution in the West, when for the first time the relative value of all systems—political, moral, religious, and so forth—had been realized? Was he not one of those who by destroying old values wanted to build up new ones on the basis of reason and common-sense? We know today that he was wrong. We know today that neither the French Revolution nor its child, Napoleon, established the reign of reason in Europe. But from the point of view of historical awareness, this relativity of all concepts and systems, was of the utmost significance. For it helped the intellectual elite of Europe to look at historical events in their true

perspective. In that sense Voltaire paved the way for the Eastern revival in Europe, a revival which, significantly enough, coincided with the Napoleonic wars and the yearning of the poets of Europe for the wisdom born of innocence, and the simplicity born of a mature mind.

It is strange, thinks Voltaire, that it is always the West that goes to India in search of truth. Never did Indians feel this craving either to subjugate the West or to learn from Europe how to live. Perhaps the strangest thing is, he reflects, that despite our superiority, it is we who invade, never we who are invaded: 'The occidental peoples,' he says, 'have in all discoveries shown a great superiority of mind and courage over the oriental nations. We have established ourselves among them, and very often despite their resistance. We have learned their languages, we have taught them some of our arts. But nature had given them one advantage over us which outweighs all ours: namely that they had no need whatsoever of us, while we were in need of them.'

Yes, Voltaire is ashamed. He is ashamed of his ignorance and the wickedness and cruelties of Europeans in the East. He is also a little bit ashamed of his own civilization, the decline of which he is the most qualified man to foresee. But everything, his shame and his fear and his growing sense of frustration, is hidden beneath a veil of cynicism and satire. There is nothing much to choose between the superstitious ignorance of the priests at home and the 'Brahmins' of India, the poverty of the agricultural labourer in France and the Indian peasant, the political system of one country and that of another. It all leads to the same abyss from which there is no escape. And we shall not be far from wrong if

we assume that this excursion, this intellectual adventure, on the shores of the Ganges, was to Voltaire more than a purely mental exercise. It was the first feeble attempt of a great European, in modern times, to escape from the futility of progress and action for their own sake, a momentary awareness that Europe, with all her self-consciousness and condescension, was only part of a greater continent. And while noblemen and ladies were still exchanging involved courtesies in the gardens of Versailles, Voltaire could hear from far away the rumbling of the storm.

## II

Voltaire, the philosopher, the sceptic, and the atheist, looked at India with the eyes of the disillusioned European who hardly expected to find in India anything more than an intellectual stimulus and an argument in favour of the relativity of all human concepts. Indeed, his main thesis seems to have been to prove the non-existence of all absolute standards by which one could measure the level of any given civilization, its religion, social structure, or moral values. The India of which he speaks is indeed the India of the Enlightenment, of scepticism and a cynical disbelief in all those forms of progress that contradict 'nature'. On the other hand, his various historical essays on India imply a growing political interest in the Far East and a shrewd recognition that the struggle between France and England which was being fought out on Indian soil was motivated by other than merely intellectual or cultural reasons.

Not many years after the publication of Voltaire's books another Frenchman set foot on the shores of In-

dia, driven there by causes of a more obviously political nature. Indeed the Abbe Dubois went to India because he had to leave France as a 'political refugee' and partly because he felt within him that strong urge, so representative of many Europeans both before and after him, to civilize the heathens, and bring them back to the true way of life. His attitude towards India was undoubtedly that of a well-wisher. No surprise, therefore, that after a stay of 31 years in the South of India, he should have become a declared enemy of the Hindus. For frequently the intensity of deliberate misunderstandings increases, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in proportion to the length of the stay in the country. And the Abbe who had come out to India with very strong convictions as to what is right and wrong in human conduct, was confronted by a civilization which had its own standards of good and evil, of the beautiful and the ugly, of progress and human endeavours. And having found that the two civilizations (or what he considered to be such) were unreconcilable, he escaped into wishful thinking and frustration (as so many Europeans after him); Dubois is indeed the least 'enlightened' among Western thinkers; that is why he deserves a place in this book. For we must not forget that his hatred was equally distributed between European enlightenment and scepticism, on the one hand, and Indian polytheism, on the other. He could never forget his own suffering during the French Revolution. And by that peculiar psychological process known by the name of compensation, he developed that 'superior' attitude of righteousness so common among opinionated people who have failed to convince their opponents and begin to doubt their

own infallibility. And from religious righteousness to wholesale moral condemnation the step is very short indeed.

We know very little of the Abbe's contact with French political life. One of his contemporaries, Major Mark Wilks, historian of Mysore and British resident in that Province, remarks: 'Of the history and character of the author, I only know that he escaped from one of the fusillades of the French Revolution, and has since lived among the Hindus as one of themselves.' The Abbe's own comment to this is: 'It is quite true that I fled from the horrors of the Revolution, and had I remained I should in all probability have fallen a victim, as did so many of my friends who held the same religious and political opinions as myself; but the truth is, I embarked for India some two years before the fusillades referred to took place.\*' The political background to the Abbe's studies of *Hindu manners, customs and ceremonies* provides a useful clue to the psychological motivation that drove Dubois to write his book: to compare the paganism of the Hindus with the scepticism of the European Enlightenment, and thereby to point out the utter wickedness of both. His standard of comparison was Christianity, or rather the Roman-Catholic Church. There is no doubt, therefore, that his book was meant to be a warning to the West. He, by the way, makes his point quite clear in his own Preface: "There is one motive which above all others has influenced my determination. It struck me that a faithful picture of the wickedness and incongruity of Polytheism and idolatry would by its very ugly-

\* Abbe J. A. Dubois; *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*. Translated by Henry K. Beauchamps. Prelatory Note by Max Mueller. Clarendon Press, 1897, vol. I. p. xi.



ness help greatly to set off the beauties and perfections of Christianity.’\* It is at times difficult enough to determine which of the two, polytheism or atheism, he despised most. Having left a ‘godless’ Europe he found himself now surrounded by godfearing Hindus, and the result was a peculiar conflict of loyalties which it took Dubois many hundred pages of his book to solve. Confronted by this alternative he takes sides with the Hindus. We must give Dubois credit for his consistence, although we cannot help being slightly amused by his reference to Voltaire. It almost seems as though the Abbe and the Freethinker find a common platform in their condemnation of the West. ‘It is quite true, therefore, that a religion, however bad and absurd it may be, is still preferable to the absence of any religion at all. Unquestionably, in my opinion, the worshipper of the *Trimurti* is much less contemptible than the freethinker who presumes to deny the existence of God. A Hindu who professes the doctrine of metempsychosis proves that he has infinitely more commonsense than those vain philosophers who utilize all their logic in proving that they are merely brute beasts, and that “death is merely an eternal sleep” for the reasoning man as well as for the animal which cannot reason . . . And I may fitly terminate these remarks by drawing attention to the testimony of Voltaire, a man whom nobody can accuse of too much partiality in the matter of religion.’†

Dubois’ various remarks on the Hindu religion cannot bear scrutiny at all. In all probability he understood very little of the main principles underlying Hin-

\* Dubois op. cit., p. 11.

† Ibid., p. 618; See Voltaire : *Traite de la Tolerance*, Chapter xx.

duism. His frame of reference always remained Christianity and the West; his angle of vision was, therefore, quite naturally distorted and his treatment of religion, in spite of his attempts at objectivity, always coloured by his own preconceptions and prejudices. A few of his remarks are, however, worth mentioning. He, just as Voltaire before him, also maintains that the 'primitive creed of the ancient Brahmins seems to have been utterly corrupted by their successors...'\* As regards that 'primitive creed' Dubois, like all his contemporaries, has very hazy notions about its significance. But by insisting on the superiority of the ancient religion of India, howsoever vague and indefinite his own conception of it might have been, he paved the way for the romantic glorification of India and the Indians which became, as it were, the battle-cry of the next generation of poets and writers in Europe. Voltaire already had pointed out the decadence of the modern 'Brahmins' and the simplicity and greatness of that primitive creed of ancient times. The romantic poets of the next century responded only too readily to that dreamlike conception of God and the Universe, and to what seemed to them the complete absence of dogmatic religion in the India of pre-historic times.

Dubois has also something to say on caste. And we are not surprised when we hear him praising the caste system as one of the greatest achievements of ancient Indian civilization. Violently opposed as he must have been to all democratic reforms in society (such as the one attempted by the French Revolution) he pro-

\* Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

bably saw in the gradual loosening of the caste system in India one of the causes of the spiritual decay of the people. It goes without saying that this attitude towards caste became rather unpopular after the French Revolution when new humanitarian ideals pervaded Europe and the caste system was considered to be the very incarnation of evil and injustice on earth. On the other hand, however, Europeans always spoke in favour of the caste system whenever they were exposed to reactionary influences in politics and social organization, as in the nineteenth century and in more recent times as part of the nationalistic revival in post-war Europe. Humanitarianism of any kind has never been very popular among 'practical politicians', and Dubois, although a missionary and guided by apparently the most altruistic emotions, sides with the reaction. His escape from France at a crucial moment of her history only provides the psychological background to his praise of the caste system. As most of the writers after him, Dubois also stresses the 'spiritual' advantages of caste. The social point of view is rejected as irrelevant: 'I believe caste division to be in many respects the *chef d'oeuvre*, the happiest effort, of Hindu legislation. I am persuaded that it is simply and solely due to the distribution of the people into castes that India did not lapse into a state of barbarism, and that she preserved and perfected the arts and sciences of civilization, whilst most other nations of the earth remained in a state of barbarism. After much careful thought I can discover no other reason except caste which accounts for the Hindus not having fallen into the same state of barbarism as their neighbours and

\* Dubois, op. cit., P. 28.

as almost all nations inhabiting the torrid zone.\* From the point of view of morality the caste system seemed to him to guaranty a certain minimum of decency and honesty in dealing with one's fellow beings. In his own characteristic way Dubois sums up his digression on caste: 'A caste Hindu is often a thief and a bad character, but a Hindu without caste is almost always a rogue.\*'

It is almost impossible to say whether Dubois ever came in contact with genuine devotees of Hinduism. His remarks on Yoga and Asceticism in general seem to indicate a very superficial knowledge of religious practices in India. The asceticism of an Indian Yogi is contrasted with that of a medieval Christian saint, obviously with a view to bring out the sincerity of the latter and the absurdity of the former. Such a statement is of particular interest to us today if we remember similar comparisons established in more recent times by Romain Rolland and Aldous Huxley. Both these writers indeed agree that genuine devotion and contemplation are the same everywhere, whether among the Saints of India or of Europe. To admit that, would have defeated Dubois' purpose in writing his book: 'Modern authors, confusing religious practices which originated in sincere love for and devotion to God with those emanating from vainglory, hypocrisy, and superstition, have tried to throw discredit on the life of asceticism and contemplation, which was advocated by the old and new dispensation, and have presumed to trace a similarity between it and the absurd *yogams* of the Hindu *sannyasis* ... The penances of John the Baptist, for example, have certainly nothing in common with the exaggera-

\* Dubois, op. cit., p. 39.

tions and hypocritical follies of the Hindu *sannyasis*, whose sole aim and object is to attract public attention to themselves.\*

Dubois' account of Buddhism probably constitutes the most incredible part of his book. We do not know where from he derived his information. Very few Europeans before him had written on Buddhism and whatever little was known consisted in popular stories and tales transmitted orally from generation to generation. The best known among these books was the *Book of Barlaam and Joasaph*: according to Dr. Winternitz,† there can be no doubt at all that this book was written by some Christian monk during the middle-ages who knew the Buddha legend from some Indian source, probably from the *Lalitavistara*. This Christian novel is indeed nothing else but a summary of the Buddha legend, including even some of the parables well known in Indian literature. Dr Winternitz surmises that this work was first composed in the Pehlevi language in the sixth or eighth century, afterwards translated into Arabic and Syrian, from which both the Greek and Latin versions derived. From the Latin ultimately came the numerous translations into the various European languages. Both Barlaam and Joasaph were very well-known figures among Christian people, so much so that they were finally included in the catalogue of Christian saints by the Roman Catholic Church. Dubois probably knew nothing of the Buddhist origin of this book and his account of Buddhism is indeed first-hand, and, therefore,

\* Dubois, op. cit., p. 545.

† See: *Some Problems of Indian Literature*. Cal. University Readership Lectures, 1923, Calcutta 1925, p. 65 sq.

of the greatest interest: 'There is another sect called Bouddha Mata, which has no Brahmin adherents at all, its followers being chiefly Buddhists, whose number at present is very small in Southern India. Their doctrine is pure materialism. Spinoza and his disciples endeavoured to palm it off as an invention of their own; but the atheists of India recognized this doctrine many centuries before them and drew from it pretty much the same deductions which have been propagated in modern times with such deplorable success. According to this doctrine there is no other god but Matter... They hold that there can be neither vice nor virtue during life; neither heaven nor hell after death. The truly wise man, according to them, is he who enjoys every kind of sensual pleasure, who believes in nothing that is not capable of being felt, and who looks upon everything else as chimerical. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at that human monsters who professed doctrines so detestable and so opposed to all considerations of social well-being became objects of general execration, and that they were almost exterminated in India, where, it appears, they were once so powerful.'\*

Dubois' first concern on arrival in India was to convert and then to civilize the Hindus. After thirty years' stay in the country, however, he had lost many of his illusions and, we may assume, much of his former zeal and enthusiasm. His disillusionment was undoubtedly due to two causes: one was the obstinacy of the Hindus themselves, the contempt with which they treated missionaries and their obvious hesitation to become either converted or civilized; the second reason was the unfit-

\* Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 415.

ness of most Europeans in India to inspire Indians with confidence and goodwill. We must give Dubois credit for having admitted that at least. For to judge by his book, he felt equally lost among the heathen Hindus as among his Christian contemporaries in India. Dubois has very definite convictions as to what constitutes civilization. But to achieve it the Hindus must first be converted; for civilization and Christianity are to him synonymous terms. Normal methods having failed, Dubois suggests a truly amazing scheme for the conversion of the Hindus. According to him 'one would have to begin by undermining the very foundations of their civilization, religion, and polity.' The effect of such an upheaval would be to turn them into 'atheists and barbarians'. Having plunged the whole country into primeval chaos—and Dubois seriously suggests such a course—he and his like will 'offer ourselves to them as law-givers and religious teachers'. But this is by no means the end of his 'reform'. For after dragging the Hindus—or rather, no longer Hindus—'out of the depths of barbarism, anarchy, and atheism into which we have plunged them' and after giving them laws, a new constitution, and a new religion, the real difficulty would only begin then: 'We would still have to give them new natures and different inclinations.'\* For there is no guaranty that the newly converted and civilized heathens may not one day relapse into their former state, unless their 'natures' are also changed. Dubois' method of civilizing the Hindus strikes us as rather violent; compared to it the French Revolution was child's play. Fortu-

\* Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 96 sq.

nately Dubois never attempted to put his scheme into practice. Perhaps we are not wrong in assuming that he would have been the first to pay with his life for the 'barbarism, anarchy, and atheism,' into which he wanted to plunge India.

The second reason for Dubois' loss of enthusiasm, we said, was the Europeans themselves. Dubois is as outspoken as could be desired. We do not know whether Dubois had any personal grievances against Europeans living in India; but he accuses them of almost all the crimes on earth. It is true that just as Voltaire, he also has nothing but praise for the British Government in India. The 'colossal' domination which they have succeeded in establishing in India 'has filled the people of India with admiration' and has convinced the 'powers of Asia' of the superiority of the West over the East 'and more especially in the art of subjugating and governing nations.\* Dubois is less generous towards Missionaries. In his *Letter on the State of Christianity of India* Dudois raises a very relevant point indeed: to an Indian a Missionary is a natural appendage to political subjection and, therefore, all missionary efforts are bound to fail. Here again Voltaire and Dubois meet on a common platform; for what Voltaire discovered by means of scepticism and critical thinking, it took Dubois thirty years of painful missionary experience: 'The Hindus soon found that those missionaries whom their colour, their talents, and other qualities had induced them to regard as such extraordinary beings, as men coming from another world, were in fact nothing else but disguised Feringhis (Europeans), and their country, their

\* Dubois., op. cit., p. 5.



religion, and original education were the same as those of the evil, the contemptible Feringhis who had of late invaded their country. This event proved the last blow to the interests of the Christian religion... and Christianity became more and more an object of contempt and aversion in proportion as European manners became better known to the Hindus.\* As regard those 'European manners' Dubois, in a later chapter of his book, is of opinion that 'Europeans should indeed blush and take shame to themselves when they see to what depths of degradation and abasement the religion of their fathers has sunk in this country through the misconduct and bad example of their fellows.'† Dubois knew—and perhaps also understood—the average Indian's attitude towards Europeans. Indeed, some paragraphs in his book reveal a strangely sympathetic feeling towards Indians and a frank contempt for the West. For it is natural for a Hindu to consider Europeans 'below the level of beasts' and their everyday manners and customs 'coarse and degraded.'‡ And Dubois is almost ready to take sides with the Hindus. His dilemma, we remember, was also that of Voltaire. Voltaire had the golden age of French civilization to lean upon—Louis XIV, Racine, Descartes, Pascal, Versailles and its parks, painting and music and architecture. And though he felt more than anyone else the gradual decay of his civilization, it was still 'Greece' to him, while India was subjugated and invaded 'Persia'. Dubois was less attached to these civilizing factors of human existence. There was

\* p. xxiv

† p. 304.

p. 276.

always Christianity to lean upon although here too the germs of decay were at work. But while ultimately Voltaire refused to take the Hindus seriously because they were too religious, Dubois was desperately convinced of their lack of religion; Dubois denied all civilization to the Hindus because of the absence of any true religion whatsoever. Perhaps it may not be out of place to enquire what exactly were the standards by means of which Dubois judged Indian culture.

Dubois begins with an analysis of the mental faculties of the Hindus. According to him, they 'appear to be as feeble as their physique'. Nowhere in the world, he says, are there as many 'idiots and imbeciles'; and although he admits that among the Hindus there are some 'who possess marked abilities and talents' he is constrained to add that 'during the three hundred years or so that Europeans have been established in the country, no Hindu, so far as I know, has ever been found to possess really transcendent genius'.\* Considering their feeble intellectual propensities, learning could only be of little avail. Actually, according to Dubois, the Hindus have made no progress at all in learning and while 'many barbarous races have emerged from the darkness of ignorance the Hindus have been perfectly stationary.' He does not find among them any sign of moral or mental improvement, with the result that 'they are now very far behind the peoples who inscribed their names long after them on the roll of civilized nations.'† Mental faculties and learning among the Hindus having been dismissed in this rather casual manner, Du-

\* p. 324.

† p. 380.

bois now enters into a more detailed discussion on poetry and music. There is no doubt that Dubois read the Ramayana and the Bhagavata; his approach is again that of the sophisticated European for whom Corneille and Racine are the last word in poetry. Accordingly, Dubois finds the meaning of Hindu poetry often so obscure that 'it is impossible to understand it properly unless one makes a special study of the subject'. He adds, however, that Hindu poetry might one day become the fashion in Europe. Perhaps Europeans will discover then that they 'have borrowed from it the *romantic* style of our day which some find so beautiful and others so silly'. This is an astonishingly relevant remark considering the literary dispute that took place just then between the ancients and the moderns, the classics and the romantics, and in which India and its literature played a not unimportant part. Dubois, however, is all with the Ancients. For he, rather ingeniously, refers the Ramayana and Bhagavata to Aristotle's Poetics. 'It may easily be understood,' he says, 'that the "unities" prescribed by Aristotle have not been observed in these epics.' For the Bhagavata takes up its hero 'before his birth, and does not quit him till after he is dead'.\* During Dubois' time a violation of Aristotle's three unities was tantamount to literary sacrilege. And did not Voltaire himself write his tragedies in accordance with Aristotle's precepts? Indeed, Voltaire was the first to attack those 'Moderns' who thought they could do without Aristotle; in his old age he even accused Shakespeare of having violated not only Aristotle's unities but also human decency and sanity. We wonder what Voltaire would have said, had he seen the Rama-

\* p. 403sq.

yana or Kalidasa's immortal poem. The next generation hailed Indian poetry as the final liberation from Greek and Latin classicism, from Aristotle's misunderstood laws, from the rule of the Ancients. Dubois, a child of pre-revolutionary France, still found Romanticism 'silly'. His contemporary, Goethe, found it beautiful.

Very few Europeans have ever cared to listen attentively to Indian music; even fewer have written intelligently about it. Dubois must have heard a great deal of genuine Indian music during his stay in South India. That his response is entirely negative need not surprise us. But it is worth while to reproduce the whole paragraph dealing with his impressions of music in India as it constitutes a representative example of an average European's attitude towards a musical system that is not his own. Similar statements can be found in many books during the hundred and fifty years from Dubois to our own time. It almost seems as though music is the most difficult obstacle which both Indians and Europeans have to overcome in order to understand one another better. Despite all his attempts to remain impartial and detached, his account of Indian music is very largely the result of his application of wrong standards. Indeed, it is only in very recent times and in consequence of modern research in the structure and technique of classical Indian music that Europeans have begun to appreciate what to them had been alien for such a long time. According to Dubois, however, 'the sounds produced by these instruments are far from pleasing, and may even appear hideous to European ears. 'The Hindus recognize a kind of harmony, however, in two parts: they have always a bass and a high counter-tenor or alto... The whole musi-

cal *repertoire* of the Hindus is reduced to 36 airs which are called *ragas*; but most of the musicians hardly know half of them... Hindu music, whether vocal or instrumental, may be pleasing to the natives, but I do not think it can give the slightest pleasure to any one else, however little sensitive be his ear... Their songs have always appeared to me uninspiring and monotonous, while from their instruments I have never heard anything but harsh, high and ear-splitting sounds... To appreciate it rightly, we must go back two or three thousand years and imagine ourselves in those ancient times when the Druids and other priests used in their civil and religious ceremonies no other music but dismal cries and noisy sounds, produced by striking two metal plates together, by beating tightly-stretched skins or by blowing horns of different kinds.\*

There is little left that can profitably be said about the Abbe's book. As a complement to Voltaire's studies on India, on the one hand, and to the coming revival of Eastern learning in Europe, on the other, it is of invaluable interest to any student of the cultural relations between East and West. His prolonged stay in India was undoubtedly an initial disadvantage. Voltaire who never set foot on Indian soil, wrote lucidly and intelligently on a country which he could hardly visualize at all, while Dubois imbibed in India all the prejudices and preconceptions that Europeans are liable to develop when living in a foreign country without actively participating in the life of the people. His political past and his religious pre-occupations condemned his attempts to 'civilize' the Hindus from the very beginning to failure. When he

\* p. 595. sq.

thinks he is most sincere, he is also most absurd. And while hating the European Enlightenment just as much as the polytheism of the Hindus, he placed himself beyond the main intellectual and social currents of his time. Dubois who pleads for the Roman Catholic Church is fundamentally an uprooted. His escape to India was more than symbolical. Having failed to convince the newly arisen middle classes of France he tried his hand at converting those who still lived in the primitive purity and integrity of faith. His failure was also the failure of the West to respond with kindness and understanding, instead of condescension and brutality, to a civilization so essentially human and unpretentious.

## CHAPTER III

### THE VISION

#### I

While the two Frenchmen, the sceptic and the priest, laboriously collected materials for their books on India, the one stressing the historical tendencies that manifested themselves in contemporary India, the other insisting on the social and religious forces that were visible to the untrained European eye, a small number of Englishmen living in India started their great work of translation from the classical literatures of India and of expounding whatever they understood of Indian philosophy. For some undoubtedly it was no more than a pastime; for some others, however, the result of a genuine literary interest. The foundation had been prepared by missionaries such as Abraham Roger, from Paliacatta, North of Madras, who translated Indian texts directly from the original into Dutch, published in 1630 under the title 'Open Door to the Hidden Paganism', or by Civil Servants such as Holwell whom we have already mentioned in connexion with Voltaire. At the end of the eighteenth century, however, it was no longer individual effort and haphazard initiative that opened the eyes of the West to the 'hidden' treasures of Indian literature and philosophy, but the simultaneous and systematic endeavour of a number of English administrators in India who unconsciously paved the way for that truly amazing revival of Indian learning in Europe and especially in Germany. There is Charles Wilkins, the translator of the Bhagavad-Gita, Sir Henry Thomas Colebrooke, the first systematic

expounder of Indian philosophy, and, lastly, Sir William Jones, the founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal who translated *Shakuntala* (1789), the *Gita Govinda*, and Manu's law-books into English; three years later in 1791, Georg Forster translated *Shakuntala* into German and thereby made it accessible to the new generation of writers and poets in Germany, among them Herder and Goethe. Most of Jones' treatises on India were available in German translation in the years 1795-7. His translation of Manu's Law Book had also been rendered into German already in 1797. The Vedas, however, and the entire literature of Buddhism was unknown in Europe till 1830. In passing it may also be noted that Friedrich Schlegel, whose book on 'The Language and Wisdom of the Indians' (1808) constitutes the first German contribution to Indology, learnt Sanskrit from an English officer, Alexander Hamilton, in 1803, while they were both interned together in Paris.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Indology became largely a province of German scholarship. We are not concerned here with assessing their contribution to the study and knowledge of Indian civilization. What strikes us most of all today is the fact that at the same time as the Germans 'discovered' their own language and the propensities and idiosyncrasies of their own civilization, they should also have welcomed so enthusiastically an alien literature, a foreign way of thinking and conduct. The usual explanation we are offered is that there exists some kind of mysterious affinity between the German and the Indian mind, an affinity which, as a rule, is thought to consist in a common tendency towards contemplation and abstract speculation as well as in an incli-



nation towards pantheism. Leopold von Schroeder, an eminent scholar, for instance, says: "The Indians are the nation of romanticists of antiquity: The Germans are the Romanticists of modern times."\* Schroeder considers the pre-occupation with the supernatural, the formlessness of Indian philosophy and art, the dreamlike love of nature, the caste system, asceticism and the solitude of the saint, to be both romantic and medieval. And he concludes that all the 'romantic' minds of the West turn towards India because of that deeply-rooted similarity between romanticism in Europe, which is essentially German, and what he considers to be romanticism in India. Professor Winternitz even goes a step further: 'It is not only German poets,' he says, 'who have sung of "Weltschmerz" (World-sorrow). "Weltschmerz" is also the basic idea upon which the doctrine of Buddha is built up and more than one Indian poet has lamented the suffering and woe of the world, the transitoriness and the vanity of all earthly things which reminds us forcibly of our great poet of "Weltschmerz", Nikolaus Lenau. And when Heine says:

"Sweet is sleep, but death is better,

Best of all is it never to be born."

he expresses the same idea as those Indian philosophers, who aspire to nothing more ardently than to that death after which there is no further rebirth. Again sentimentality and feeling for Nature are the common property of German and Indian poetry, whilst they are foreign, say, to Hebrew or Greek poetry. . . . Mention has already been made of the tendency of the Indians to work out

\* L. v. Schroeder *Reden und Aufsätze, vornehmlich über Indians Literatur und Kultur*.

scientific systems; and we are justified in saying that the Indians were the nation of scholars of antiquity, just as the Germans are the nation of scholars of today.'\*

To put forward generalizations such as the ones Schroeder and Professor Winternitz indulge in, is extremely misleading. Till the beginning of the nineteenth century the literatures of Greece and Rome had been the sole powerful influence in Western civilization, including Germany; as a matter of fact, Germany had been more widely exposed to foreign influences, both by her geographical position and her lack of political unity, than any other country in Europe. Till the end of the eighteenth century French was the spoken and written language of the educated classes in Germany, while German was looked down upon as common and vulgar. The Prussian king Frederick the Great wrote and spoke only in French, cultivated the friendship of Voltaire, and openly ridiculed the first play of Goethe which was written in German and in the Shakespearean manner. It was only after the wars of liberation and especially after Napoleon that the new German middle classes became aware of the existence of their own language and civilization. And while writers such as Lessing, the young Goethe, Herder, and others, vigorously opposed the French influence—the decaying classicism of pre-revolutionary days, eagerly welcomed the translations from Indian literature, thereby compensating their own loss of French culture. Instead of the art and poetry of Versailles, we find them now responding to Shakuntala and Hindu mysticism. From a literary point of view it is undoubtedly true that the tendency

\* M. Winternitz : *A History of Indian Literature*, 1927, I, p. 6.

of German romanticism towards the middle-ages helped them, in a manner of speaking, to appreciate Indian civilization and religion. But mere literary research hardly explains anything at all, unless we also remember that this literary re-orientation also coincided with the creation of a new social structure in Germany, and that instead of the former feudal aristocracy we are now confronted by a youthful and vigorous middle-class in rebellion against both cultural and political domination from outside. Any attempt to abolish the hateful French influence had necessarily to lead to a revaluation of cultural standards. And having only the middle ages to lean upon—for since the 'Thirty-years' War Germany had hardly produced any art or poetry of any outstanding merit, the new writers of Germany turned with a common enthusiasm both towards medievalism and Indology. Considering this historical context, to speak of affinities between the German and the Indian mind, seems rather far-fetched. The poem by Heine, quoted by Professor Winternitz, has nothing specifically Indian. And the fact that Heine was a Jew by race slightly complicates the matter. Similar passages, however, could easily be culled from English literature, from Shakespeare to Rossetti, without thereby inferring any spiritual similarity between the Indian and the English mind. And as regards the 'World sorrow' so largely advertised by German literary critics, it is common enough in all poetry, be it Chinese, or Hebrew, or Russian. Nor is it entirely absent from Greek poetry either. If at all we can speak of an affinity, it is because Indian literature and philosophy entered at the right psychological moment into the cultural body of Germany; for at the same time as

the German middle classes consciously began rejecting the Latin influence, as part of their cultural and social revolt against oppression of any kind, they also discovered India which throughout the 'romantic' period seemed to them the embodiment of freedom, justice, and natural simplicity.

Shakespeare on the one hand, and Indian literature on the other, were the two factors that mainly inspired the German romantic movement. Both were discovered at almost the same time. It is no accident either that the brother of Friedrich Schlegel, who wrote the first systematic Indological study in Germany, should have given the most sensitive and the most perfect translation of Shakespeare to the German people. It is from this time onwards that both Shakespeare and India became part of Germany's spiritual heritage. Shakespeare was soon transformed into a teutonic superman and the Indians into a super-race of 'pure' Aryans. Both discoveries were, at the beginning, adventures of the mind; for the liberation from the chains of a dying French classicism made the young German poets eager to know more about the world, especially that part of the world which was far removed from the Latin love of perfect form, its external polish and urbanity, its artificial code of manners and conduct. And while they found the primeval violence of human instincts and emotions in Shakespeare, they discovered simplicity and grace in Indian literature. From India Friedrich Schlegel expected the 'unfolding of the history of the primeval world which up till now is shrouded in darkness; and lovers of poetry hoped, especially since the appearance of the *Shakuntala* to glean hence many similar beautiful creations of the Asiatic spi-

rit, animated, as in this case, by grace and love.’\* Romantic poets all over Europe felt attracted by what had lain forgotten and unappreciated for centuries; and just as in England Percy’s *Reliques* and Macpherson’s *Ossian* established a new literary tradition, so also India became for Germany’s new generation of poets a source of never-ending inspiration. Here was the exotic adventure they had all been looking for. Friedrich Schlegel, in a letter to Goethe, describes how he had turned from Dante to Shakespeare, to Petrarch and Calderon, to the old German heroic songs: ‘In this manner I had to a certain extent exhausted the European literature and turned to Asia in order to seek a new adventure.’† And his brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel, the same who so successfully translated Shakespeare into German, writes in a book of essays dealing with India, that he desires to point the way towards India to those of his compatriots ‘who wish to taste the adventure, for an adventure it remains after all.’‡

Many of these German writers identified their own romantic dreams with what they considered to be India. They were hardly at all concerned with ‘reality’. Macpherson’s forgery and the translation of *Shakuntala* were accepted with an equally eager enthusiasm. The young Goethe, for instance, carried his *Ossian* about with him wherever he went, which did not prevent him from welcoming the first translation of *Shakuntala* in a memorable stanza. Anything that pointed a way out of the cultural oppression of France was called ‘romantic’.

\* Quoted in Winternitz : *Hist. of Ind. Lit.*, Vol. I., p. 14.

† *Ibid.*, p. 16.

‡ *Indische Bibliothek*, p. 8.

Shakespeare and Ossian, the folk-songs of primitive times, the Christian saints of the middle ages, the art and literature of ancient India, all these were equally 'romantic'. Thus we are not surprised to hear Friedrich Schlegel exclaim: 'In the East we must look for the highest form of Romanticism.\*' Indeed, it was in India that the Romantics found that dynamic and synthetic approach to life which they felt was lacking in the formalism and artificial polish of Latin civilization. Poetry and philosophy, they learned from India, are one and the same thing: 'To separate them is an altogether subjective and purely European conception', says Friedrich Schlegel.† Apart from philosophy and literature, the religion of India opened the eyes of the German romantics to a less dogmatic and narrow-minded form of belief than could be found in the West. Throughout the nineteenth century we shall come across religious criticism animated and inspired by the discovery of India's polytheistic creed. Here they found a simplicity of faith which the West had lost long ago. 'If one considers', says Schlegel, 'the superior conception which is at the basis of the truly universal Indian culture and which, itself divine, knows how to embrace in its universality everything that is divine without distinction, then, what we in Europe call religion or what we used to call such, no longer seems to deserve that name. And one would like to advise everyone who wants to see religion, he should, just as one goes to Italy to study art, go to India for that purpose where he may

\* Quoted in: P. Th. Hoffmann: *Indien und der Deutsche Geist von Herder bis zur Romantik*, 1915, p. 61.

† Ibid., p. 76.

be certain to find at least fragments for which he will surely look in vain in Europe.’\*

In Friedrich Schlegel, however, we find more than the purely visionary and romantic attitude towards India. He like many of his contemporaries belongs to a group of disillusioned scholars and poets, who after the first youthful enthusiasm for all things Indian realized the fundamental conflict which from now on will characterize the attitude of many a Western intellectual towards India. For as long as India remained a wish-fulfilment only, the ‘reality’ of human life was bound to destroy it sooner or later. Reason and commonsense always seemed to interfere; the result was a dualism in the mind of more than one great Romantic, the realization of the discrepancy between appearance and reality. Whenever they came to know what the ‘real’ India was like, their reason revolted, and scepticism took the place of their former enthusiasm. After having written his book on ‘The Language and Wisdom of the Indians’, Schlegel went over to the Roman Catholic Church, and twenty years after the first appearance of his book he exclaims: ‘As a whole, the occidental mind guards itself against all the abuses of mysticism by its nature of moderation and synthesis, its more varied intellectual culture, and most of all by the purer light of truth perceived in its entirety, a mysticism which in India, not only theoretically but also even in practice and application, is led to extremes that transcend all the limits of human knowledge, and even by far surpasses the limits of all possibility or what one considers to be possible.’†

\* Quoted in P. Th. Hoffmann. *op. cit.*, p. 77.

† F. Schlegel: *The Philosophy of History*, 1828. Quoted in P. Th. Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

The occidental mind revolted more than once in the nineteenth century, against the 'excesses' of Eastern religious sensibility. Such a reaction was both intellectually and politically inevitable. For just as the late romantics ceased to be inspired by the exploits of the French Revolution and quickly forgot the enthusiasm of their youth for either literary or social reform, in the same manner many of them turned away from India and took refuge in a purely medieval conception of life (the Roman Catholic Church, for instance) or in the political reaction that set in all over Europe after the downfall of Napoleon. On the one hand, we shall find them preoccupied with the patriotic themes of nationalistic revival, on the other, with what in literary history we are accustomed to call the Victorian attitude to life, the romanticism of scientific progress and the liberalism of humanitarian advancement. That is the reason why we have devoted so much space to a discussion of Friedrich Schlegel. In him indeed, we find reflected the split of sensibility better than in any other contemporary writer, except perhaps Goethe. The response of the German mind to India, from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, was coloured by that same conflict and dualism. It is a peculiar form of twentieth-century wish-fulfilment, particularly in India, which deceives itself into believing that Germany at all times, responded wholeheartedly to the 'appeal of the East'.

Before discussing Goethe himself, let us look at some other romantics in Germany. Most of them were less aware of this conflict. They indeed responded to



India spontaneously and as part of their longing to escape from the intellectual and material unrest of their own time. Novalis, one of the greatest poets Germany ever produced, a contemporary of Schlegel and Goethe, sees in India the primitive simplicity of innocence: 'In India human beings still slumber and their sacred dream is a garden surrounded by lakes made of milk and sugar...' and reacting, as all the Romantics did, against the rationalism of the preceding age, Novalis exclaims: 'Like a beautified India, poetry, purer and more colourful, stands opposed to the cold and deadening mountains of philistine reason. In order to make India, in the middle of the globe, so warm and wonderful, there must exist all around the inhospitability of a cold and sterile sea, dead rocks, mist instead of a starry sky, and a never-ending night.\*' Heinrich Heine, in one of his stories, gives vent to his longing for an Eastern environment and faithfully describes a landscape and a setting which alone would make him happy. It is supposed to be India or rather the India of his dream and imagination—'and in the glass I saw the dear motherland, the blue and sacred Ganges, the eternally shining Himalayas, the gigantic forests of Banjan trees on whose wide shadowy paths quietly walk wise elephants and white pilgrims, strangely dreamy flowers looked at me, golden wonder birds soared wild and secretly warned me, the flickering rays of the sun and the grotesque sounds of laughing monkeys lovingly teased me, from far away Pagodas resounded the pious prayer of priests, and in

\* Quoted in P. Th. Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

between one could hear the melting sorrowful voice of the Sultana of Delhi.\*

Herder who in more than one sense was the intellectual guide of Goethe's adolescence and early manhood belongs to the same class of German writers as Novalis and Heine, if we judge him by his attitude towards India. In his encyclopaedic work *Also a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Mankind* India is mentioned more than once. We find, side by side, his admiration for the 'simplicity' and the childlike innocence of the Indians, on the one hand, and his contempt for the greed and corruption of the Europeans whose main concern with India seems to be economic exploitation, on the other. Voltaire's attitude, as we have seen, was based on very similar considerations; only it was more detached and impersonal, while Herder looks upon the problem as an intensely personal issue affecting the very essence of European culture. Indeed, no writer between Voltaire and Goethe could quite detach himself from personal considerations with regard to India. For Herder, as for all the other Romantics, the emotional discovery of India mattered more than intellectual ratiocination. 'Such a fortunate people,' he exclaims, 'would have been happy, if it could have lived separated from the conquerors on a solitary island; but living as you do at the foot of the mountains on which reside human beasts of prey, the warlike Mongols, and near the shore rich in inlets where the greedily cunning Europeans land, you, poor Indians, would have lost sooner or later your peaceful way of life.'† And with a

\* Heinrich Heine : *Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand*. Chapter 11.

† Quoted in P. Th. Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

consistency peculiar to the visionary character of the romantic movement, Herder draws his conclusions as regards the nature of Western civilization; only in the far away countries of the East can still be found the primeval innocence of man. And what they all so ardently longed for was achieved, though only, in a dream: in India they had rediscovered the human soul. And their wish-fulfilment made them identify the soul of man with nature. The literature of India expressed that same identity which alone, according to them, could save civilization from decay.

## II

We have already mentioned Goethe more than once. His evolution is in many ways similar to that of Schlegel. Perhaps the main difference between his response and that of the other German Romantics consists in the fact that by the time Indian literature and philosophy had become known to him, he had already achieved a considerable degree of intellectual maturity and broadmindedness. We are not surprised, therefore, to hear him welcome the East, not as an escape from Western unrest and futility, but rather as a new source of intellectual inspiration which might enlarge, but certainly not replace, the European consciousness. Three years after the publication of Schlegel's book, Goethe writes in a letter to Count Uvarov, one of the then leaders of Indology in Russia: 'Although I could, for instance, only give a casual glance at Indian literature, my early love for the Vedas was again and again nourished on the contributions of Sonnerat, the studious efforts of Jones, the trans-

lations of Shakuntala and the Gitagovinda; and I was tempted to use some legends, just as I formerly intended to adapt the Vedas; such an adaptation might have been of little value from the point of view of literary criticism; but at least it would have served the purpose of vivifying among many people the attitude of mind inherent in this significant and amiable tradition. . . . Thus an altogether new world is bound to be born where we can live in greater plenitude, and where the peculiarities of our mind will be fortified and will be refreshed for new activity.\*

The personality of Goethe, however, is probably the most representative instance of this split of Western consciousness which we have already observed in the case of Schlegel. Due to some kind of wish-fulfilment, scholars have almost always emphasized Goethe's early enthusiasm for Shakuntala, his feeble attempts to study the Gita and to master the Devanagari script; a number of poems are also mentioned where an Indian influence is evident. But considered as part of Goethe's life work, his interest in and preoccupation with things Indian form an infinitely small part indeed. If at all we can speak of an Eastern influence in Goethe's life, then it was Persia rather than India that provide him with a pattern of life to which he responded immediately and unhesitatingly. All through his life he felt more attracted to Hafiz than to Indian philosophy and art. Hafiz's conception of and attitude to life were simpler, more 'homely', more appealing to the senses than the vast and mysterious cosmogony of ancient India.

Let us remember that Goethe also was a child of his

\* 27 February 1811. Quoted in P. Th. Hoffmann, *op. cit.* p. 38

century; and the event that had overshadowed everything else during his lifetime was the French Revolution. It provided the writers and poets at that time with a new social awareness which was not without some influence on their attitude towards India. For apart from philosophy and religion they found in India a structure of society consisting of a rigid separation of castes which could not but strike them as 'inhuman' and opposed to the principles of equality and justice. And while writers before the Revolution (for instance the Abbe Dubois, as we have seen) had nothing but praise for the caste system, Goethe and many others with him rejected it as unjust and irrational. Two plays, both entitled 'The Paria' (The Untouchable) appeared in the first half of the century, one in France by Casimir Delavigne and another in Germany by Michael Beer. The latter was staged at Weimar by Goethe himself who also wrote an introduction to it. A few years later, he himself wrote his last great ballad 'The Paria'; he had found the plot in Sonnerat's book. And out of Indian mythology Goethe creates a new conception of man and invests him with a dignity which almost borders on the divine.

It is especially in the later part of his life that Goethe turns his back on India. Indeed, there is nothing surprising in that: for he did not only reject all Indian influences at that time, but also the Romanticism of his youth, his pre-occupations with medieval forms of life, and the symbolism of the recent Germanic revival in literature. Ancient Greece and the Italy of the Renaissance fascinated him more and more, and, quite naturally, he found it impossible to reconcile the rational form of the Mediterranean civilization with the formlessness and exotic appeal

of the East: 'I have by no means an aversion to things Indian,' he writes to his friend Humboldt on October 22, 1826, 'but I am afraid of them, for they draw my imagination into the formless and the diffuse, against which I have to guard myself more than ever before.' The same argument Goethe also applies to the plastic arts. He is overcome by the same 'fear', when he compares ancient Greek sculpture, its love for the beautiful and proportionate human form, with the frightening abstractions of Indian sculpture: 'Let me confess,' he says, 'that we who read Homer as our breviary and who dedicate ourselves with heart and soul to Greek sculpture as the most perfect incarnation of God on earth, that we, I say, enter with a kind of uneasy fear those limitless spaces where monsters obtrude themselves upon us and deformed shapes soar away and disappear.'

Goethe's attitude towards India is consistent from the very beginning. He has taken from India what seemed to him profitable for his own and his country's intellectual development. He never failed to acknowledge the tremendous stimulus of Indian thought on Western civilization. But he also rejects that influence when it threatens to overcome the equilibrium and stability of his mind. One of his last statements on Indian philosophy is, perhaps, not without significance: for he discovers there an element alien to the dynamic western urge for action and progress—the indifference of old age: 'This Indian philosophy has, if the information of the Englishman [probably Colebrooke is meant] is correct, nothing foreign for us; rather periods through which we ourselves pass, are repeated there. We are sensualists as long as we are children; Idealists when we love and when we

invest the object of our love with virtues which are not really there at all. Love wavers, we doubt fidelity and are sceptics before we know it. The rest is indifference, we let it go as it will, and end with quietism just as Indian philosophy.\*

Goethe was not alone in his disillusionment. A whole generation of writers and thinkers was engulfed by that same scepticism with regard to India. They were disinclined to believe the enthusiastic accounts of the romantics and, though they never admitted their own ignorance with regard to India, they started applying their western preconceptions and ideologies to a civilization of which they knew next to nothing. And while Goethe always approached India from his own personal angle of vision, from the context of his own intellectual evolution, others applied the abstract principles of pedantic scholarship to a land the history of which was hardly known to them at all.

Before, however, dealing with the 'reaction' on the Continent let us look at the country where Indology as a science first originated. For we must not forget that the Indian revival on the Continent was made possible only by the translation from Indian languages, and especially from the Sanskrit, made by Englishmen living in India. We shall not be far wrong, if we assume that the close contact between India and England determined the response of English writers to Indian literature, philosophy, and religion, and that, in some respects at least, India mattered to the average Englishman more than to the average German or Frenchman. And the continental response which had been coloured by strong

\* Quoted in P. Th. Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

emotional and religious forces, will be replaced in England by no less strong moral and political considerations. For there is no doubt that the response of a people to an alien country is very largely determined by material, as much as by spiritual, conflicts. Germany responded 'spiritually', because she had no material interests in India. Her dream and wish-fulfilment were, to a considerable degree, a compensation for her political and economic backwardness. We shall find very little of this 'dream' in the English response to India. It was more matter-of-fact, less emotional, but also less intellectual. And the best among Englishmen saw in India during the hundred and fifty years that will form the subject-matter of our next chapter, a moral challenge, indeed a challenge to their 'spiritual' complacency and political consciousness.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE MORAL CHALLENGE

The English response to India before and during the French Revolution was the result of criticism levelled by Englishmen against the British administration of India. Even Johnson who, as we have seen, knew very little about India suggested improvements in the government. England, throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, was obsessed by the ostentation of the 'Nabobs' of whom Clive was probably the most outstanding. On the one hand, they found deeds of epic greatness, on the other, the 'orientalized', if not 'sultanized', Englishman in all his money-making vulgarity, his unscrupulousness, and his obvious lack of 'good manners' when away from home. The English conflict with regard to India could not be 'spiritual', because what England imported from India was not 'spirit', but gold. But a conflict, nevertheless, it was. The 'appeal of the East' was probably as strong among Englishmen as among Continentals; but while appearances were all that mattered in Germany, England was again and again confronted by a reality to which they found it very difficult to adjust themselves. Thus it happened that their first response was directed towards, or rather, against their own representatives in India, the political and economic upstarts in the service of the East India Company.

The end of the eighteenth century, indeed, witnessed the rise of a strong humanitarian movement in all the countries of Europe. Just as pre-revolutionary France and Goethe in Germany strongly protested against the caste

system as unjust and contrary to the 'natural' equality among men, so also Englishmen revolted against the callousness of their own compatriots who made their fortunes out of the devastation of Indian provinces. Before Burke's great indictment of the English Nabob, the protest took mostly the form of satire. Mackenzie, for instance, satirizes the class in *The Lounger* (1787) where he describes the return from India of Mr. Mushroom and his wife. They arrive with a fortune of a hundred thousand pounds, dressed in Indian muslin, and many episodes of dancing girls, maharajas, and elephants: 'The Sunday after those two newcomers' arrival they appeared in church, where their pew was all carpeted and cushioned over for their reception, so bedizened—there were flowered muslins and gold muslins, white shawls and red shawls, white feathers and red feathers and every now and then the young Mushroom girls pulled out little bottles that sent such a perfume around them—nay, my old friend, their father, like a fool he was, had such a mixture of black satin and pink satin about him, and was so stiff and awkward in his finery, that he looked for all the world like the *King of Clubs*, and seemed, poor man ! to have little to say for himself.\* In another paper Mackenzie introduces another 'hero', Jack Truman, who in twelve years' practice as a physician in India, had accumulated a fortune of £25,000. 'Various, Sir,' he says, 'are the methods of acquiring wealth in India.' And at the end of his paper, Mackenzie adds the following note: 'Had Mr. Truman returned from India 'with the enor-

\* *Lounger*, No. 17, May 28, 1785... (This as well as many of the following quotations are taken from the valuable study of R. Sencourt: *India in English Literature*, 1923.)

mous fortune of some other Asiatic adventurers, he would probably have been much less happy than he is, even without considering the means by which it is possible such a fortune may have been acquired. In the possession of such overgrown wealth, however attained, there is generally more ostentation than pleasure, more pride than enjoyment: I can but guess at the feelings which accompany it, when reaped from devastated provinces, when covered with the blood of slaughtered myriads.’\*

That this subject matter was extremely popular is shown in a large number of books published at the time and dealing with English administration in India. A contemporary of Samuel Foote whose play *The Nabob* (1772) had been a great popular success in London, gives an interesting comment on his play: ‘About this time a general outcry had been raised against several members of the East India Company who, from small beginnings and obscure origins, had raised immense fortunes in a very short period. What made this more disgusting to the public, and particularly to the higher orders of the English, was that these *new men* from the extent of their purses, and the extravagance of their tempers, not only ousted many of the old families from their seats in Parliament, but erected palaces about the country, and blazed forth in a style of magnificent living that eclipsed the steadier but less brilliant lights of the hereditary gentry.’† As regards the hero of this play, Sir Matthew Mite, he is shown to be a sinister fool and a parvenu. ‘Will he listen’, exclaims one of the characters in this play, ‘to a private complaint who has been deaf to the cries of a peo-

\* *Lounger*, No. 44, Dec. 3, 1785.

† William Cook: *Memoirs of Samuel Foote*, 1805, London, I, p. 175

ple ? or drop a tear for particular distress who owes his rise to the ruin of thousands?' Contemporary poets were no less outspoken. A number of passages in Cowper, for instance, indicate the place that India occupied in the mind of England at that time. It is evident that even the response of poets was very considerably influenced by the impression made by the pictures of the Company's servants before the time of Hastings :

'The Brahmin kindles on his own bare head  
The Sacred fire, self-torturing his trade!  
His voluntary pains, severe and long  
Would give a barbarous air to British song;  
No grand inquisitor could worse invent  
Than he contrives to suffer, well content  
The villas with which London stands begirt  
Like a swarth Indian with his belt of beads.'

A novel such as *Hartly House* (1789) could only strengthen such an impression. For this journal written by a woman for her friends in England is a narrative of the personal experiences of a young and empty-headed girl who had escaped from the constricted opportunities of middle-class life in England to the princely scale in which Calcutta magnates sought to compensate themselves for their lack of European culture, on the one side, and on the other, an exhausting climate and the danger of disease. Written in the style of Richardson, the author of the diary compares her life filled with 'all the transports of animation and magnificence' with that of her poor middle-class friend in England which seems to her, as seen from her Chowringhee palace, 'one dull track from infancy to age'.

Before even her literature and philosophy were known to Englishmen, India loomed large on their intellectual horizon. But let us remember that it was the horizon of middle-class people, puritanical, narrow-minded, and essentially respectable. As regards their attitude towards Indians they, as in the case of Johnson for instance, confessed their ignorance; but they had very definite opinions regarding the exploitation of India by their own countrymen. There is a good deal of righteous indignation in their writings on the British administration and we wonder whether indeed they realized that much of their own prosperity and culture, their 'good manners' and respectability, would disappear with the cessation of that exploitation of their colonies which they so strongly condemned. We would like to assume that they were still unconscious of the relationship between civilization and economic prosperity, and that their indignation, just as Goethe's when confronted by the caste system, was genuine. And when a few years later the first English scholars, inspired and encouraged by Warren Hastings, published their first translations from Indian literature, the people of England realized the relativity of all standards of civilization. It was indeed Hastings himself who opened the eyes of Englishmen to the fact that there is something called Indian civilization which calls for a positive response from the West. Hastings' position was peculiar inasmuch as he had to stress both the cultural and the political aspect of the problem of response. On the one hand, therefore, he takes up a similar attitude as Goethe a few years after him, namely, that a knowledge of Indian life and literature will broaden and enliven the mind of the West, on the other, however, he also points

out the fresh obligation arising from that newly acquired wisdom with regard to statesmanship and administration. For him, indeed, the question of cultural relations implies first of all a new way of looking at and of governing the subjects of the East India Company: 'It is not very long,' he writes in his Preface to Sir Charles Wilkins' translation of the Bhagvadgita, 'since the inhabitants of India were considered by many as creatures scarce elevated above the degree of savage life; nor, I fear, is that prejudice yet wholly eradicated, though surely abated. Every instance which brings their real character home to observation will impress us with a more generous sense of feeling for their writings, and these will survive when the British dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist, and when the forces which it once wielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrance.' And commenting on the *Gita* he points out the differences between the Western way of thinking and that of the East, but generously admits the religious and moral values of the book: 'Many passages will be found obscure and many will seem redundant, others will be found clothed with ornaments of fancy unsuited to our taste, and some elevated to a tract of sublimity into which our habits of judgement will find it difficult to pursue them; but few will shock either our religious faith or moral sentiments.' Neither Wilkins, however, nor Halhed, whose *Sanskrit Grammar* was published in 1778, were the first pioneers of Sanskrit learning. The first scholar or writer to have printed in Europe a real dissertation in Sanskrit learning was Alexander Dow who also wrote an essay on Hinduism, entitled 'A Dissertation concerning the Customs. Manners, Language, Religion and Philosophy of the Hindus'.

published in 1768. He was also the first to point out that 'there are many hundred volumes in prose in the Shanskrita language, which treat of the ancient Indians . . .' And he also has a great reason to believe that the Hindoos carry their authentic history further back into antiquity than any other nation now existing.' And he is frank enough to assert that 'literary enquiries are by no means a capital object to many of our adventurers in Asia.'

From now on books and translations follow each other in quick succession. The importance of Sir William Jones' contribution to Indology need hardly be stressed in this connexion. Their work only strengthened the moral challenge of those writers who saw in the British occupation of India a sacred trust and obligation. We can observe a change in the attitude of mind after Hastings, brought about undoubtedly by the new awareness that the inhabitants of India are human beings deserving respect and admiration. India, in the eyes of the average Englishman, ceased to be a merely geographical unit constituting a definite economic asset, but a country inhabited by people who had evolved their own civilization, their own standards of conduct, their own wisdom. It was this 'human' angle of vision that most appealed to Burke when he defended the case of India during Hastings' impeachment: 'I assert their morality to be equal to ours,' he exclaims, 'in whatever regards the duties of fathers, governors and superiors, and I challenge the world to show, in any modern European book, more true morality and wisdom than is to be found in the writing of Asiatic men in high trust, and who have been counsellors

to princes.'\* The feelings that inspired Burke were undoubtedly genuine; and by vindicating justice for India he also vindicated the claims of India to nationalist, or at least, human rights. Lord Morley in his book on Burke, sums up his attitude as follows: 'From beginning to end of the fourteen years in which Burke pursued his campaign against Hastings, we see in every page that the India which ever glowed before his vision was not the home of picturesque usages and melodramatic costume, but rather in his words the land of princes once of great dignity, authority and opulence; of an ancient and venerable priesthood, the guides of the people while living and their consolation in death; of a nobility and antiquity and renown; of millions of ingenious mechanics, and millions of diligent tillers of the earth and finally, the land where might be found almost all the religions professed by men, the Brahminical, the Mussulman, the Eastern and the Western Christian.' Burke's attitude towards India no longer remains satisfied with a satirical presentation of the Nabobs. He took up the moral challenge from his predecessors and made India a matter of moral and political responsibility for Englishmen and secondly, he saw in India a country of something more than wealth, barbarity, and gorgeousness; indeed it was a country of human beings endowed with intellect, religion, and imagination.

It is within this context of moral and political awareness that the revival of Indian learning in England has to be understood. Throughout and after the Romantic movement it was this consideration of moral responsibility towards India that counted most among English writers. Nowhere shall we find in England that same spi-

\* Bohn, J.: *Warren Hastings*, p. 114.



ritual fervour which inspired their German contemporaries. India was at best only a side-issue: for to many of the greatest poets of English Romanticism, India is hardly as yet a dream, and by no means a reality. Neither Coleridge nor Wordsworth, Keats or Byron, found in India any lasting source of inspiration. Attempts have been made to show the influence of Hindu mysticism on Blake's poetry, and although affinities have undoubtedly been found they do not indicate that Blake ever made any detailed study of Hinduism. We also know that Coleridge read the English translation of the Abbe Dubois' book on India from a manuscript note in Coleridge's handwriting in the copy preserved in the British Museum. But however much he was attracted to medieval supernaturalism, India is conspicuously absent from his poetry. It was left to two second-rate poets to incorporate the Indian background into English Romantic poetry: Southey and Moore. And neither of the two could integrate their very superficial knowledge of oriental life.

Southey, in his poem *The Curse of Kehama*, succeeded to a certain extent in giving us the mythological texture of Hinduism without any deeper insight, however, into the meaning and significance of the Hindu religion. The atmosphere and imagery of the poem are thoroughly western. And if we add to all this that he was by no means in sympathy with his subject-matter, we shall understand why his ambitious attempt was bound to fail. His first poem *Thalaba* dealt with Islam, written with evident relish. This may again be due to the fact that Europeans at all times responded more easily to Islam than to Hinduism. Goethe had already been a representative instance to the point. The reason why at all

Southey chose oriental subjects for his poetry can be found in an experience of his childhood, the reading of Picart's *Religious Ceremonies* : "The book impressed my imagination strongly, and before I left school I had formed the intention of exhibiting all the more prominent and poetical forms of mythology which have at any time maintained among mankind, and making each the groundwork of an heroic poem.\*" However strong the impression might have been, it did not provide Southey with that sympathetic attitude of mind which alone would justify the writing of such a poem. He has, indeed, very strong opinions as regards the moral and religious value of Hinduism. According to him it is 'of all false religions, the most monstrous in its fables and the most fatal in its effects' And apologizing for the fantastic character of his poem, he says: 'However startling the fictions may appear, they might almost be called credible when compared with the genuine tales of Hindu mythology. No figures can be imagined more anti-picturesque and less poetical than the mythological personages of the Brahmins their hundred hands are but a clumsy personification of power, their numerous heads only a gross image of divinity; whose countenance, as the Bhagavat Geeta express it "is turned on every side"' Significantly enough, Southey's teacher was Sir William Jones, and in a way, Southey's poem served the purpose of enlightening English public opinion regarding India and Hinduism. But the impression it actually made is comparable only to that made by the Abbe Dubois, or, for the matter of that, by Sir William Jones himself. It aroused little sympathy for India and much repugnance, and its

\* Quoted in Sencourt, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

only tangible result was a great new effort of the missionaries in India and the appointment of an Anglican Bishop to Calcutta. One instance, culled at random from the poem itself, will make the point quite clear. He describes the frantic votaries falling prone before the chariot of the God and laying their 'self-devoted' bodies to 'pave the chariot-way' of the Deity and

'. . . On Jaga-Naut they call,  
The ponderous Car rolls on, and crushes all.  
Through flesh and bones it ploughs its dreadful  
path.

And Death and agony  
Are trodden under foot by yon mad throng  
Who follow close, and thrust the deadly wheels  
along.'

Shelley read these lines and was deeply impressed. In his *Queen Mab* he describes a very similar scene. For having read Southey he could not forget those hosts of votaries who

'Stain His death-blushing chariot-wheels, as on  
. Triumphantly they roll, whilst Brahmins raise  
A sacred hymn to mingle with the groans .'  
(VII, 34.)

Shelley is indeed the only one among the major English poets of this period who seems to have taken a more active and intense interest in India. As early as 1809, his favourite poet was Southey. He read *Thalaba* 'till he knew it almost by heart'. The *Curse of Kehama* was his 'most favourite poem', he says in a letter to Eliz. Kitchenner, on June 11, 1811. As early as December 24, 1812, he requested Clio Rickmann, the bookseller, to send him copies of Robertson's *Historical Disquisition* on India

and Sir William Jones' works.\* Shelley undoubtedly learnt a good deal from Southey's poems. They indeed opened his eyes to the absurdity of any orthodox faith, be it Christianity, Islam, or Hinduism. Thus Southey's poem which indirectly led to the appointment of an Anglican Bishop at Calcutta, on the other hand, strengthened Shelley's atheistic convictions. From now on Shelley, although he knew indeed very little of Hinduism, could not resist the temptation of referring to the followers of 'Brahmah' along with other 'religionists'. In some of his poems he introduces an Indian background which reminds us of the visionary descriptions and dreams of contemporary German poets. The poet in *Alastor*, for instance, was stretching 'his languid limbs

In the vale of Cashmire, far within  
Its loneliest dell, where odorous plants entwine  
Beneath the hollow rocks a natural bower  
Beside a sparkling rivulet . . . ' (II, 144)

while 'Asia', the redeemer of mankind, in *Prometheus Unbound* waits

'in that far Indian vale,  
The scene of her sad exile: rugged once  
And desolate and frozen, like this ravine;  
But now invested with fair flowers and herbs,  
And haunted by sweet airs and sounds, which  
flow

Among the woods and waters, from the aether  
Of her transforming presence . . . '

*The Curse of Kehama* had undoubtedly attracted the imaginative interest of many readers in England. They

\* See : Amiya K. Sen 'Shelley and India' in : *Studies in Shelley*, 1936, p. 244, 599.

indeed were eager to hear more about the East. These descriptions of gorgeousness and mythological demons, of fabulous deeds and the ferocity of an alien nature, of tropical vegetation and of heroes of truly superhuman stature, stimulated their imagination; and it was not long before the East had become a poetic convention. Fitzgerald's *Omar Kaysam* was only the climax of an evolution which started at the beginning of the nineteenth century and which from now on no great writer could quite avoid. Tennyson's eastern sketches interspersed in many of his poems are as fair an instance as could be given of the false glamour and the unreal atmosphere of fairy tales that this convention created in English literature. Moore's *Lalla Rookh* coming soon after Southey's poem, is another instance to the point. Longman had offered him, in 1814, three thousand guineas for a metrical romance on an eastern subject, which once again, proves the immense popularity of the oriental convention in English literature at that time. Moore's long and at present unreadable poem, decided to a great extent the form in which the cultivated world of England pictured India. Moore sought his effects through fullness of details, but knowing very little of India, his poem is also full of inaccuracies and the most incredible blunders. Reality and imagination have nothing in common in this poem. However fascinating some of his descriptions of the landscape and the people of India may be, the impression it produces on us today is that of an unrealized experience, the result of a half-digested and misunderstood literary convention, paralysing rather than stimulating the imaginative faculty of any sensitive reader.

India never became in England, as it did in Germany, an intrinsic part of a poetic revival. If we leave aside Shelley's occasional references to India, the response of English poets and writers was from the very outset determined, not so much by 'spiritual' elements, but by England's moral and political 'responsibility' towards India. That also explains why throughout the Victorian age, poets and novelists in England were concerned with India as part of their moral consciousness. From the point of view of literary creation or philosophy, India's influence was indeed negligible. Some of the works, however, deserve mention here, not so much because of any literary merit, but in order to establish parallels with the Continental response to India.

Victorian England was, perhaps, more definite in condemning the unscrupulousness of English rule in India than ever before. India plays a very important part in one of Scott's latest novels *The Surgeon's Daughter*, published in 1827. The way in which a young man of that period looks upon India is very well expressed in the following exclamation of a youthful lover who envies his friend who is going to join the service of the Company : 'To India, happy dog, to India! Oh, Delhi! Golconda! have your names no power. . . India, where gold is won by steel, where a brave man cannot pitch his desire of fame and wealth too high, but that he may realize it if he have fortune for his friend!' Another young man who had left England five years previously for India, comes swaggering back to the village, paying even his debts and giving a glowing account of what India has to offer: 'Not a stream did he mention but flowed over sands of gold, and not a palace that was inferior to those of the celebrat-

ed Fata Morgana. His descriptions seemed steeped in odours, and his every phrase perfumed in attar of roses.' But the novelist also gives us a more sinister portraiture of the actual conduct of responsible Englishmen in India. With probably Sir Thomas Rumbold in his mind, he describes the 'president of the Council' at Madras as 'an able and active but unconscientious man who, neither in his own affairs, nor in those of the Company, was supposed to embarrass himself much about the means which he used to attain his object.' Apart from the obvious moral challenge, Scott in this novel displays his extraordinarily accurate knowledge of Indian scenes and Indian life. His painting is as vivid, his details as exact as when he is describing his own beloved Scotland. He was intensely interested both in local customs and the romantic scene, and as he says in his Preface, 'India is the true place for a Scot to thrive in.' What effect this novel had on English public opinion at that time, is not difficult to guess. He spread the impressions first made by Burke; he pointed out afresh the moral challenge, inherent in any sensitive response of an Englishman towards India; he pictured the blazing promises by which India had fascinated the brains of young Britishers. And lastly he is the first English novelist to have drawn on India for 'romantic' material.

There are still two more writers to be considered, Thackeray and Ruskin. Thackeray's case is probably representative of the Victorian attitude to India in general. For though, on the one hand, he is a remoulder of the sinister impression made on England by the Nabobs which has never been entirely forgotten, he also takes the opportunity in his novel *The Newcomes*, to satirize the

inhabitants in India in the person of Rummum Loll, the fraudulent Bank Director, who offers the guileless Colonel an investment which will treble his capital in a year. The condescending attitude of Thackeray towards India and the Indians is, psychologically speaking, a kind of self-defence against the unquiet moral conscience of the average Englishman at that time. He does not, by any means, justify unscrupulousness. He simply ignores it. 'The nabob of books and traditions', he even says, 'is no longer to be found among us. He is neither as wealthy nor as wicked as the jaundiced monster of romances and comedies, who purchased the estates of broken-down Englishmen with rupees tortured out of bleeding rajahs, who smokes a hookah in public, and in private carries about a guilty conscience, diamonds of untold value, and a diseased liver; who has a vulgar wife with a retinue of black servants whom he maltreats, and a gentle son and daughter with good impulses and an imperfect education, desirous to amend their own and their servants' lives, and thoroughly ashamed of the follies of the old people.' Thackeray's interest was more in persons and customs than in natural scenery. The *Arabian Night* atmosphere was there all the time, but diluted by close observation and description of familiar Indian scenes: 'Though I would like to go into an Indian Brahmin's house and see the punkahs and the purdahs and the tattys, and the pretty brown maidens with great eyes, and great nose rings, and painted foreheads, and slim waists cased in Cashmere shawls, Kincob scarves, curly slippers, gilt trousers, precious anklets and bangles; and have the mystery of Eastern existence revealed to me (as who would not who has read the *Arabian Nights* in his youth ?) yet I would not



choose the moment when the Brahmin of the house was dead, his women howling, his priests doctoring the child of a widow, now frightening her with sermons, now drugging her with bang so as to push her on his funeral pile at last, and into the arms of that carcase, stupefied, but obedient and decorous.'

It may, perhaps, not be very fair to include Ruskin in the present survey; for his mind was clouded over by the effects of the Indian mutiny, and prejudiced as he then was, he could hardly be expected to judge either Indian art or philosophy dispassionately. According to him, the Indians were 'childish, or restricted in intellect, and similarly childish or restricted in their philosophies or faiths.'\* The dark terrifying spectre of ferocity haunted all his interpretations of the Hindu genius, and he ignores the Muslim when he speaks of India. The following quotation, however painful to the modern reader, reflects public opinion in England at that time—Tennyson's *Defence of Lucknow* speaks the same language under the guise of poetic convention: 'Since the race of man began its course on this earth nothing has ever been done by it so significative of all bestial, and lower than bestial, degradation, as the acts of the Indian race in the year that has just passed by. Cruelty as fierce may indeed have been wrecked, and brutality as abominable been practised before, but never under like circumstances: rage of prolonged war, and resentment of prolonged oppression have made men as cruel before now, and gradual decline into barbarism, where no examples of decency or civilization existed around them, has sunk, before now, isolated populations to the lowest level of possible

\* *Lectures in Art*, p. 158.

humanity. But cruelty stretched to its fiercest against the gentle and unoffending, and corruption festering to its loathsome in the midst of the witnessing presence of a disciplined civilization,—these we could not have known to be within the practical compass of human guilt, but for the acts of the Indian mutineers. . . . Out of (India's) ivory palaces comes cruelty and treachery, cowardice, idolatry and bestiality; comes all that is fruitful in the work of Hell.\*

Here undoubtedly we have reached the lowest level in the history of England's response to India. Determined as this response has been throughout by historical and social forces, we are not unduly surprised at the manner in which the 'moral challenge' of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century has been transformed into open hatred, as in Ruskin, or, at best, into benevolent, though supercilious, condescension as in Thackeray. From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards we find ourselves confronted by a reaction against the preceding age of humanitarianism and romantic glamour. Scepticism and disillusionment take the place of that early genuine enthusiasm for the East. The Mutiny will for many years to come determine the response of Englishmen towards India. And at the same time as England began to deny her moral obligations, we find on the continent of Europe a number of outstanding scholars, who refused to acknowledge the spiritual message of the East and who strongly reacted against the romantic and visionary conception of India.

\* *The Two Paths*, p. 104.

## CHAPTER V

### THE REACTION

Just as the political history of a continent is very largely the result of the continuous struggle of opposing forces in conflict, cultural evolution also is determined by similar antithetical currents and movements. Although it may not be always possible to foresee such an evolution in detail we can observe similar principles at work which permit to arrive at certain general conclusions regarding the way in which, either in politics or in culture, currents and cross-currents are created. An age of prosperity, economic and political expansion, and cultural stability is usually followed by a period of intense unrest, social transition and intellectual re-valuation. These are times of intense artistic creation caused by the intellectual's search for certainty and his attempts to enlarge the frontiers of his mind. The transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century was such a time. It also witnessed the most creative kind of response of Europeans towards India. The response was coloured by the intense desire of the middle classes of Europe for emotional identification, social justice, and a rejuvenated religion.

The 'return to reason' which the nineteenth century witnessed, also brought about a reaction in the Western response towards India. India that so long had been identified in the mind of European intellectuals with nature, innocence, and simplicity, had been 'humanized' by the Indologists, by Burke, by innumerable accounts of travels in the East. Out of the dream and the vision there arose a new image of India, no longer an isolated

continent, but a land with a civilization of its own to which from now European intellectuals could apply the same test as to that of any other country. The standards by which they would judge that civilization would, of course, be western. Indeed, they did not know that every civilization develops its own standards by which alone it can be tested. By applying western standards and values to India, they defeated their own purpose. Instead of judging India, they judged themselves: for so indeed it must seem to any intelligent Indian reader. The fact that some very outstanding philosophers and scholars took part in this attempt at testing Indian civilization by applying western standards of comparison, only indicates the self-centredness of nineteenth-century scholarship. The most eminent of them, Hegel, deserves a few paragraphs to himself alone. In his *Philosophy of World History* (1822-23), published while Goethe was still alive, he devotes a whole chapter to India. His frame of reference is historical from the very beginning, his method comparative, and his conclusions exceedingly depressing.

He begins with an attack against the romantics: 'A beautiful aroma,' he says, 'has pervaded the name of India. In more recent times this aroma has evaporated, and our judgment finds something quite different from what fancy had imagined this land to be like.' We know very little about the India of ancient times, he says; we have to judge this civilization by its present appearance. And the element that is most conspicuous is its old age, its declining power, in short, its senility. It almost seems as though Hegel considers India to be the prototype of a civilization condemned to death by its own inability to create something new out of the ruins of antiquity. His

argument is of great psychological significance. For he implicitly takes for granted that India is a civilization on the decline, while the West is still struggling hard towards fulfilment: 'Death', he says, 'exhausts the body; but spiritual bliss illumines the face. Just in such a manner does the earthly element die in the Indian character and a deeply spiritual being breaks through. But such a beauty, even in its most lovely form, remains the beauty of nervous debility in which all that is uneven, rigid, and contradictory, is dissolved and which makes the soul appear as experiencing deeply; but it is a soul in which we can perceive the death of the free and firm intellect. The Indian susceptibility to flowers seems to us indeed most lovely. But quite a different thing are the work, the labour, the deed of a mind conscious of its own self, of freedom and of justice. We are bound to suspect that this beauty of infirmity is unable to show itself at its best and by the force of intellect in the great events of life and statehood; on the contrary, life experienced in such a way will fall headlong into most disgraceful slavery and degradation.'

Instead of morality and rational thinking, India is, according to Hegel, a prey to superstitious beliefs and magic practices. Indeed, he insists so much on this supposed lack of morality in contemporary India, that we shall not be far from wrong if we assume that Hegel was influenced not only by the writings of English administrators in India, but also by the Abbe Dubois' book on the customs and manners of the Indians. For many parallel passages could be quoted where Hegel seems to rely for his information entirely on the Abbe: 'Morals, reason,

individuality,' he says, 'are rejected, and a wild imagination, steeped in sensual enjoyment, on the one hand, and lost in an utter abstraction of the inner life, on the other, are the two extremes between which the Indian is thrown hither and thither. . . . Everything that exists in the present, escapes with the Indians into colourful dreams. With them perception is determined by an irritation of the nerves which prevents them from accepting things as they are and transforms them into feverish dreams. In addition to this, they are incapable of knowing that they lie; for they completely lack the awareness of falsehood. One cannot rely either on their writings or their tales. . . . One may say that in dreams the profoundest truth of the soul is expressed, although on the other hand, they are also foolish. Just in such a way we find in the Indians the consciousness of the highest idea mixed with the most arbitrary fancifulness.'

Only towards the end of his chapter on India, does Hegel give his sources away. There he mentions, first of all, 'the Governor-General of the East Indies' who reported to Parliament 'on the moral conduct of the Indians'. Hegel probably alludes here to a book by Grant who returned from India in 1790, and who published his *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain* two years later. In 1797 it was laid before the Court of Directors, and in 1813 before the House of Commons who ordered it to be printed. Furthermore, Hegel also mentions the reports of missionaries, especially the Abbe Dubois, and those of English officers. 'They all agree in one point that there can be nothing more devoid of moral sentiments than the Indian nation.' Hegel's remarks on the Brahmins do not bear

scrutiny. 'They only eat and sleep, it is reported to Englishmen. If something is not prohibited for them by their customs, they are entirely guided by their instincts; whenever they take part in public life, they show themselves avaricious, deceiving, and voluptuous; they treat those with humility of whom they have reason to be afraid, and make their inferiors pay for it. An honest man among them, reports the Englishman, is unknown to me.'

How ignorant Hegel, and for the matter of that, his contemporaries were with regard to things eastern can best be shown in that short paragraph in his book in which Hegel attempts a definition of Buddhism. 'There is a great dispute going on,' he says, 'which of the two religions (Buddhism and Hinduism) is older and simpler; for both there are reasons, but one cannot discern it clearly. The Buddhistic religion is simpler; but this may be due either to the fact that it is older or that it is the result of a Reformation. Probably, however, Buddhism is the older of the two.'

However disconcerting such statements may be to a student of cultural relationships, it must be kept in mind that Hegel, throughout this chapter on India, was out to prove his thesis, namely that a nation can come into being only if the individuals themselves have reached a high level of moral and intellectual consciousness. Indeed, according to him, India is no nation at all, but what he calls a 'tyranny'; at best it is only a 'people'; the very lowest and most primitive form of social organization. A 'state' alone incarnates the 'mind' of the people; its history is the history of that all-pervading, universal mind. A people that, for one reason or another, has lost its 'statehood', has no history of its own. For history is a continual pro-

test, an antithesis to all the static forms of society. The absence of this protest in India, the passive acceptance of the inevitable, condemns India to the status of a people without history.

At first sight, Goethe's 'fear' of the formless in Indian art and philosophy, on the one hand, and Hegel's thesis, on the other, have apparently very little in common. And yet both of them withdrew from India for very similar motives: what Goethe calls the 'formlessness' of Indian culture is transformed in Hegel into a lack of self-consciousness and moral awareness. Both of them alike applied western standards when judging India; for both Hegel's conception of history and Goethe's conception of what is beautiful and true, are the result of a cultural tradition inherently western. We might smile today at Goethe's fear and Hegel's rather gratuitous attack. But their attitude symbolizes the most fundamental obstacle put in the way of an intelligent understanding of the East by the West. Nobody would accuse either Goethe or Hegel of prejudice of racial bigotry. They were indeed singularly free of any preconceived bias. The same, however, cannot be said with regard to the next nineteenth century scholar to whom some more paragraphs will be devoted here.

It is difficult to deny the influence of Count Gobineau on the intellectual life of modern Europe. His book *The Inequality of the Human Races* (1853) had a far-reaching effect on all the subsequent racial theories which, especially in more recent times, have flooded the continent of Europe. His 'thesis' is that the 'white' race is superior to all the other races on earth and his conclusion as regards the 'history' of India bears a very close re-



semblance to that of Hegel. Indeed all through his long chapter on India, he will follow Hegel's arguments, especially those referring to the lack of 'reason' and 'morality' among the present-day Indians.

Gone are the humanitarianism and philanthropy of Goethe and the Romantics with regard to the caste system; Gobineau is the first among the great nineteenth-century scholars in Europe who sees in the caste system the superiority of the ancient social organization in India over the present one. For was not this caste system determined by the 'race' of those who first established it, and whom Gobineau calls the Aryans? 'The problem had found its ideal solution,' he writes, 'and nobody can refuse his approval to a social body ruled by reason and served by intelligence. The great difficulty is to put an abstract scheme of this kind into practice. All the theorists of the West have failed in it: the *purohiths* thought of having found the true method of success. Taking for their starting point the observation, established for them on irrefutable facts, that all superiority was on the side of the Aryans, all weakness and inability on the side of the black races, they admitted, therefore, that the intrinsic value of all human beings stood in direct proportion to the purity of blood, and they founded their categories on this principle. They called these principles *Varna*, which means colour, and which since then has taken the meaning of *caste*.'

So far for the past. But since the time that the original Aryans had established their caste system, many changes have occurred. And it is with these changes that Gobineau is concerned in his book. According to him, it is due to the mixture between the 'pure' blood of the

Aryan Brahmins and the blood of the 'black' and 'yellow' races that the Brahmins have lost their former hold over the people. His theory is indeed subtle and not without surprises to the layman uninitiated in the racial doctrines of Gobineau. He proceeds in the best scholarly tradition of the nineteenth century on a purely experimental basis. And experiments, he says, have amply proved that a slight mixture between the Aryan blood and that of black races produces artistic imagination in the Aryans; but at the same time it also 'disarms reason, diminishes the intensity of the practical faculties,' and takes away from them both 'the capacity and the right' to compete with the 'pure' Aryans in 'patience, character, and intelligence'. And he concludes that 'the Brahmins, having mixed their blood, before the formation of castes, with some melanasian races, were ready for defeat on the day when they would have to fight with races that had remained more white.' Again and again Gobineau insists upon the fact that the predominance of 'imagination' (due to racial impurity) was the true cause of the decline of the Brahmins; and just as Goethe and Hegel had done before him, he points towards reason and order—as opposed to the instinctual urges of the black races—which alone could have saved the original caste system, that is, the superiority of the white race over the black and the yellow. 'The black type and yellow principle', he says in this remarkable chapter on India, 'have penetrated this elite, and in many regards it is difficult, even impossible, to distinguish the Brahmins from individuals belonging to low castes.' It goes without saying, he continues, that 'never will the perverted nature of this degenerated race be able to maintain itself against the superior power of the white nations that had

come from the west of Europe.' India will never become civilized, at least not in the European sense of the term.

And with righteous indignation, Gobineau refers the reader to two forms of national and religious degeneration. First comes Buddhism. Where exactly Gobineau gathered his information about Buddhism from, is indeed a riddle of nineteenth-century academic scholarship. He frequently refers to Burnouf's *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*. But in vain shall we look there for corroborating statements for Gobineau's extraordinary evaluation of Buddhism. According to him, Buddhism is nothing but a degenerated kind of Hinduism, the best proof, he says, of what happens to a rational theory when it becomes popularized and undertakes moral and social responsibility for the guidance of the people. Only the lowest castes have taken to Buddhism and while 'Brahmanism represented in India the true supremacy of the white principle... the Buddhists tried, on the contrary, a reformation of the inferior castes.' When it comes to art Gobineau is not less outspoken. Brought up as all his contemporaries on the principles of reason and order which they thought they had found in Greek art, he violently repudiated the fanciful and imaginative mythological art of India. Only he was not 'afraid' of it, as Goethe had been. He ruthlessly destroyed all the illusions and dreams of the romantics. His frame of reference is the western world and Christianity; his conclusions, as usual, are based on his own racial 'discoveries': 'Hellenism and the Catholic Church', he exclaims, 'could very well dispense with ugliness when they depicted subjects which yet were not less metaphysical than the more complicated dogmas of the Hindus, the Assyrians, the Egyptians.' Not

the ideas or subject-matters are different, but the eyes, the mind, the imagination. Only the 'pure' Aryan can appreciate beauty: 'The black and the yellow could not comprehend anything else but ugliness; it is for them that ugliness was invented and will always remain necessary.'

Some impatient readers may consider such statements puerile gibberish or at best the result of unlimited conceit and fatuity. Actually Gobineau, just as Hegel before him, draws very definite political and historical theories from his investigations into the decline of Brahmanism. For Gobineau's obvious thesis all through his book on the inequality of the human races is to prove the superiority of the 'white principle', i.e. the Aryan race, over all the other races on earth. Historically speaking, such an argument would imply the complete absence of any history worth mentioning among the black and yellow people. And all his arguments go to prove that this is so. Apart from his rather curious assumption that the new Anglo-Indian race is destined to a great future in Indian political life, he concludes his chapter on India with a number of paragraphs dealing with the racial problem from the historical angle which again closely reminds us of Hegel: 'The West has always been the centre of the world,' he says. 'Even from a purely moral point of view it is correct to maintain that, apart from all patriotic pre-occupation, the centre of gravity of political life has always oscillated between occidental countries without ever leaving them, having, according to the age, two extreme poles, Babylon and London, from East to West. Stockholm and Thebes in Egypt, from North to South; beyond there is isolation, limited personality, in-

ability to evoke general sympathy, and lastly barbarism in all its forms.' We may note in passing that, although Gobineau was a Frenchman, he has included London as the westernmost point of occidental civilization, and not Paris; and though the contributions of Stockholm to western civilization may seem very slight indeed, he had to include it as it was the northernmost point on his Aryan map of Europe. And Aryan it certainly was.

It is in the West, therefore, with its dynamic political and religious movements, its constant urge for action and progress, that human history has its being. The reason why the other parts of the world had no history of their own was due to the fact that there the struggle took place between the Aryan element, on the one hand, and the 'black and yellow principle', on the other. And Gobineau continues: 'There is no need to observe that, where the black races fought among themselves only, or where the yellow races were concerned with their own circle of existence, or lastly where black or yellow mixtures are at grips with each other, no history at all is possible. . . History springs forth only from contact with the white races.' It is, perhaps, strange to find that Hegel and Gobineau, starting as they do from such different points of view, should reach such similar conclusions. But the nineteenth century, which saw the rise of democracy, also witnessed the formation of the forces of reaction; and if we speak of cultural conflicts we indeed mean by it the reflection of deeply rooted social and political conflicts in the consciousness of man. Gobineau's insistence on the caste system and the 'white principle' is symbolical of a generation of writers and scholars who had been disillusioned by the failures of the French Revolution and who

tried to substitute the principle of a master-caste or race or nation, for the humanitarian idealism of the eighteenth century.

## CHAPTER VI

# BUDDHISM AND THE SUPERMAN

### I

The preceding chapters attempted an analysis of the European response to the discovery of the East, the way in which some outstanding leaders of Western thought at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century reacted to Indian religions, philosophy, and art. What began as an intellectual adventure, political curiosity, and a desire to convert the heathens, soon became part of a mental attitude and a moral valuation, both of them so characteristic of the newly arisen middle-class intelligentsia of early nineteenth-century Europe. In Hegel's *Philosophy of History* and Gobineau's *Inequality of Human Races* we have witnessed the first attempts at rationalizing the 'magic' of the East. Both had their formulas ready. All they had to do was to apply them to what they considered to be India. And although they started from different points, they reached the same conclusion: India has no history and, therefore, no culture of her own; it is only in the Western 'lobe' of the human mind that progress has its being; and as civilization is not possible without progress, the achievements of India in the realm of religion, art and philosophy, seemed to them, at best, of purely archaeological interest.

It may be noted that we have hardly ever as yet spoken of an 'influence' of Indian thought on the West. Considering the almost complete ignorance of European writers and thinkers with regard to India, there could be

no question of any influence whatsoever. It was only after a certain amount of knowledge had been accumulated that the more difficult process of adjustment and assimilation could begin. It is this assimilation of knowledge that leads to cultural influences. The Indologists had paved the way : the intelligentsia had only to apply that new kind of knowledge to their own spiritual preoccupations. And as neither Christianity nor the classical cultures of Greece and Rome were found satisfactory any longer, they could without any great difficulties adjust themselves, their attitude to life and their system of values, to the newly acquired 'wisdom of the East'. On the other hand, they could also 'react' to it with greater conviction than ever before : for integrated knowledge produces a more mature response than wishful thinking. The German romantics deceived themselves into accepting an India of their own imagination : it was against this illusion that Hegel protested. On the other hand, Schopenhauer's enthusiasm for the Upanishads and Buddhism was based at least upon a partial study of the original texts in translations; and Nietzsche's protest was directed as much against Schopenhauer's own philosophy as against Deussen's interpretation of the Vedanta. The difference between Hegel's and Nietzsche's response indeed consisted in the fact that the former attacked a foreign civilization and ways of life of which he knew very little, while Nietzsche had Schopenhauer's philosophy and the first attempts of Indologists in the realm of philosophy and religion, such as Deussen's, to go by.

Schopenhauer became first acquainted with India in the winter of 1813-1814 during a stay at Weimar. One of Goethe's friends, the Orientalist Friedrich Majer, in-



introduced him to the 'hidden treasures' of Indian antiquity which, as Schopenhauer himself says 'was of utmost importance to me'. We also find from the register kept at the Weimar Library that Schopenhauer issued during these winter months the first three volumes of the 'Asiatische Magazine' (1806-7), edited by Beck, Haensel and Baumgaertner, which he kept for four months, Madame de Bolier's *Mythologie des Hindous* (1809) for three months, and lastly the *Oupnek'hat*. This *Oupnek'hat* was Schopenhauer's main source of knowledge regarding India and the Hindu religion. Professor Winternitz, in his *History of Indian Literature*, tells us the story of this first translation of the Upanishads into Western languages. They were first translated in the seventeenth century into Persian by the brother of Aurangzeb, Prince Muhammed-Dara Shukoh, the son of Shah Jehan. The first translation in Latin appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the French scholar Anquetil du Perron under the title *Oupnek'hat* (1801/2). Anquetil du Perron's translation from the Persian into Latin is faulty and full of misinterpretations; it is, however, of the greatest importance if we want to assess correctly the 'influence' of India on the western mind during the nineteenth century. For both Schelling and Schopenhauer came to know and understand Hinduism through the medium of this *Oupnek'hat*: 'It was not,' says Winternitz, 'the Upanishads as we know and explain them now with all the material of Indian philosophy now accessible to us and our more definite knowledge of the whole philosophy of the Indians, but the *Oupnek'hat*, that absolutely imperfect Perso-Latin translation of An-

quét il du Perron which Schopenhauer declared to be "the production of the highest human wisdom." \*

Schopenhauer's enthusiasm for the Upanishads indeed knew no bounds. His attitude is from the very beginning essentially personal; for the reading of the *Oupnek'hat* has opened the possibility of a new faith, fundamentally emotional in character. His constant references to Christianity and the 'Jewish superstitions' implied in it, indicate the beginning of a new search for religious values, coloured, however, by strong racial prejudices. For according to Schopenhauer, Christianity was essentially an upshoot of the Jewish religion, and he was neither the first nor the last in the history of German scholarship to resent the semitic imposition on the cultural and religious life of the Aryans. We shall, indeed, find Hinduism opposed to Judaism again at the end of the nineteenth century in the work of Austen Steward Chamberlain. Schopenhauer's discovery of the Upanishads, therefore, provided him with a personal philosophy, on the one hand, and a counterpart to Christianity and Judaism, on the other : 'And O ! how the mind is here washed clean of all its early ingrafted Jewish superstition ! It is the most profitable and elevating reading which (the original text excepted) is possible in the world. It has been the solace of my life, and will be the solace of my death.' †

When, after 1818, he added Buddhism to Hinduism, his opposition between Christianity and Indian religions became identical with the conflict between intellect and reason, on the one hand, emotion and intuition, on the

\* Vol. I, p. 19 ff.

† *Parerga*, ii, p. 185, quoted in Wallace : *Schopenhauer*, p. 106.

other : 'Buddhism is profounder than Christianity, because it makes the destruction of the will the entirety of religion, and preaches Nirvana as the goal of all personal development. The Hindus were deeper than the thinkers of Europe, because their interpretation of the world was internal and intuitive, not external and intellectual; the intellect divides everything, intuition unites everything; the Hindus saw that the "I" is a delusion; that the individual is merely phenomenal, and that the only reality is the infinite One—"That art thou".'\* What drew Schopenhauer to the religion of the Buddha was the pessimistic fundamental view of life, the doctrine of misery and the ethics of Buddhism. The morality of Christianity, he says at one place, is inferior to that of Buddhism and Brahmanism as it does not take into account animals. In his *Aphorisms and Fragments on Religion and Theology* he says: 'Buddha, Eckhard and myself teach essentially the same thing. Eckhard does so in the fetters of his Christian mythology. In Buddhism the same thoughts are there, without being spoilt by such mythology, and therefore simple and clear, so far as reality can be. In me there is perfect clearness.'† The fact, however, remains that the admiration of Schopenhauer for Buddhism rests upon a very defective knowledge of the religion, as in his time very little was known of the oldest Buddhist literature.

It is of particular interest to find that Schopenhauer constantly refers his discovery of Hindu and Buddhist religion to his own philosophy. It seemed to him that a complete identity of views had been established between

\* Quoted in Will Durant : *Story of Philosophy*, p. 368

† Quoted in Winternitz : 'India and the West', in *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. ii, p. iv.

him and the religions of ancient India, and that from now on 'the influence of Sanskrit literature will penetrate (into Europe) not less deeply than did the revival of Greek letters in the fifteenth century.' Had he known Buddhism more fully, he might have doubted this complete identity of views. Schopenhauer, indeed, attempted what many Europeans after him did with more or less success, namely to adapt whatever he knew of Indian religion to his own philosophy. A superficial acquaintance with Buddhism brought to light a number of similarities which could not but strike Schopenhauer as extremely significant. For, apart from flattering his vanity, it went a long way to prove the need of a revaluation of ethical and religious standards. And it was this diluted form of Buddhism, sentimentalized and made accessible to the average man, that he put before the Western reading public. His justification is, strangely enough, based upon the quantitative superiority of Buddhism over any other religion on earth : 'If I were to take the results of my philosophy as the standard of truth, I would be obliged to concede to Buddhism the pre-eminence over the rest. In any case it must be a satisfaction to me to see my teaching in such close agreement with a religion which the majority of men upon the earth hold as their own; for it numbers far more adherents than any other. This agreement, however, must be the more satisfactory to me because in my philosophising I have certainly not been under its influence. For up till 1818, when my work appeared, there were very few, exceedingly incomplete and scanty, accounts of Buddhism to be found in Europe, which were almost entirely limited to a few essays in the earlier

volumes of "Asiatic Researches" and were principally concerned with the Buddhism of the Burmese.\*

We quite believe Schopenhauer when he says that he reached his conclusions independently of any outside 'influence'. No one indeed represents better than Schopenhauer the *malaise* of the nineteenth century, that peculiar synthesis of dissatisfaction and revolt, the divided mind of the thinker who foresees the doom of his own civilization and is at the same time deeply aware of his own helplessness. Mysticism, especially of the emotional kind, will from now on be the main method of escape for the Western mind when confronted by his own inability to transform thought into purposeful action. The failure of Christianity imposed upon them the duty to re-state the fundamental issues of life. No surprise, therefore, that they reached conclusions which, superficially speaking, resembled those of Buddhism. It is for this reason that Schopenhauer resented nothing more strongly than the attempt of European nations to convert the Indians to their own decaying religions: 'We...now send the Brahmins English clergymen and evangelical linen-weavers to set them right out of sympathy, and to show them that they are created out of nothing, and ought thankfully to rejoice in the fact. But it is just the same as if we fired a bullet against a cliff. In India our religions will never take root. The ancient wisdom of the human race will not be displaced by what happened in Galilee. On the contrary, Indian philosophy streams back to Europe, and will produce a fundamental change in our knowledge and thought.'†

\* *The World as Will and Idea*, Vol. II, p. 370 (London, Trubner, 1883).

† *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 460.

Beyond religious and philosophical revaluation, Schopenhauer also visualizes a new culture arising out of the influx of Eastern ideas and conception of life. A number of remarks dealing with art, for instance, make it quite clear that he was ready to respond in the same manner to the artistic sensibility of the East as he had already responded to Eastern religions. All he had to do was to apply his 'philosophy' to artistic productions in general, and especially in India: 'The less the will is excited,' he says, 'the less we suffer. The great masterpieces of painting have always represented countenances in which we see the expression of the completest knowledge, which is not directed to particular things, but has . . . become the quieter of all will . . .'\* Again: 'Greek sculpture devotes itself to the perception, and therefore it is aesthetical. Indian sculpture devotes itself to the conception, and therefore it is merely symbolical.'† Symbolism of this kind could not but appeal to Schopenhauer, and if we remember Goethe's 'fear' of this same symbolism, his inability to grasp the formless and irrational which such a symbolism implies, we shall realize the fundamental difference between Schopenhauer's and Goethe's attitude and response towards India. For Goethe it was never more than an enlargement and broadening of Western consciousness, an attempt to enrich and rejuvenate the civilization of Europe which he considered to be of essentially mediterranean origin; while for Schopenhauer the discovery of India implied a new wisdom diametrically opposed to the rationalism of the West, a new attitude to life, based upon the denial of the will, which was going,

\* Quoted in Will Durant, *op. cit.*, p. 369

† *The World as Will and Idea*, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 309

sooner or later, to oust the intellectual rationalism of the West and the Judaeo-Christian conception of religion. And just as the early romantics had been exposed to the criticism of Hegel and the pseudo-scientific attacks of Gobineau, so also Schopenhauer found an opponent worthy of his greatness. For in Nietzsche the dualism which began with Goethe reaches its climax. His voice was indeed, one of joyful affirmation of life. An early follower and admirer of Schopenhauer, he had, however, first to free himself from this influence. His early search for certainty, indeed symbolizes the coming effort of the twentieth century to see beyond Schopenhauer and his misconstrued Buddhism, into the reality of cultural processes. For Nietzsche was out to save what still remained of the European mind. And in order to build anew, he had to destroy first, not only Christianity, but also Buddhism whose influence became increasingly stronger during Nietzsche's life-time. Schopenhauer had been the light and hope of his youth : only after having dissolved the dualism between intellect and intuition, and between good and evil, did he deny his master.

## II

If we remember the tradition established by Hegel and Gobineau, we shall not be surprised to find Nietzsche on their side. For the step from the 'white principle' and the superiority of the West to a conception of the superman as distinguished from the herd, is a very short one indeed. Metaphorically speaking, it was the Indian Brahmins who first of all enunciated the ideal of the superman : this implies, on the one hand, a withdrawal from the political life of the herd, and, on the other, an

implicit obedience of the herd to the religious and moral commands of the 'ruling' caste. Nietzsche has nothing but praise for such a social system : 'And in the case of the unique natures of noble origin, if by virtue of superior spirituality they should incline to a more retired and contemplative life, reserving to themselves only the more refined forms of Government (over chosen disciples or as members of an order), religion itself may be used as a means for obtaining peace from the noise and trouble of managing grosser affairs, and for securing immunity from the *unavoidable* filth of all political agitation. The Brahmins, for instance, understood this fact. With the help of a religious organization, they secured to themselves the power of nominating kings for the people, while their sentiments prompted them to keep apart and outside, as men with a higher and super-regal mission.'\*

It would be a fatal misunderstanding to assume that Gobineau and Nietzsche in their pronouncements on the caste system are exceptions rather than the rule. Nowhere else can we study this split in the European consciousness better than in the attitudes of Western scholars and writers towards ancient social organization in India. On the one hand we find the tradition established by the Abbe Dubois who considers the caste system the most rational solution of all social problems. On the other hand there is the humanitarian tradition of the Romantics and Goethe, strongly condemning the caste system as unjust and opposed to the principles of human equality. In more recent times Tolstoy and Romain Rolland were upholding that very same tradition when they preached the return to a simplified, undogmatic, and universal kind

\* *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886 ; Chapter : The Religious Mood.



of religion. But the forces of reaction were strong throughout the nineteenth century. And they still are at work now. Keyserling who by many is still supposed to be one of the best qualified exponents of Indian thought in Europe, writes in his *Travel Diary* : 'No wonder, then, all who know India only superficially condemn it (caste) as a monstrosity. As a matter of fact, it justified itself fully as well as any other, which the more reasonable West has invented, because in India one factor is the main consideration which hardly arises in the West : an almost unlimited power of faith.'\*

Nietzsche, therefore, was by no means the only European in recent times to proclaim the superiority of a master-caste over all other castes. And if we remember the increasing interest taken in Buddhism at that time, Nietzsche's insistence on the necessity of a 'ruling' caste will become quite consistent with his thesis of a superman who will guide the destinies of people in future. Wagner, the most intimate friend of his early manhood, and Schopenhauer, his contemporary, had both turned towards Buddhism, the former unconsciously, the latter as part of his philosophical doctrine. And the solitary Nietzsche realizes that the old aristocratic virtues and values are dying out: 'Europe is threatened with a new Buddhism,' he exclaims, 'the whole of the morality of Europe is based upon the values which are useful to the herd... Goodness is to do nothing for which we are not strong enough...'† Nietzsche looked, probably, deeper into the psychology of religious experiences than any one of his contemporaries. He knew that beyond

\* Vol. I, p. 180 (1912).

† Quoted in Will Durant : *Story of Philosophy*, p. 458.

denial, resignation, and non-attachment, there lies the most joyful approval of human existence. Indeed he wanted to go beyond Buddha and the East. We do not know what exactly he wanted to find there; in all probability, a human ideal which is beyond good and evil, and yet striving after even greater perfection and fulfilment, an ideal of action, but action which would no longer be morally determined, indeed an ideal which is beyond East and West : 'Whoever, with an Asiatic and super-Asiatic eye, has actually looked inside and into the most world-renouncing of all possible modes of thought—beyond good and evil, and no longer like Buddha and Schopenhauer under the delusion and domination of morality,—whoever has done this, has perhaps just thereby, without really desiring it, opened his eyes to behold an opposite ideal: the ideal of the most world-approving, exuberant and vivacious man, who has not only learnt to compromise and arrange with that which was and is, but wishes to have it again as it was and is, for all eternity, insatiably calling out *da capo*, not only to himself, but to the whole piece and play.'\*

In its final analysis Nietzsche, therefore, attempts to rise above both Buddhism and Christianity; for that undoubtedly is the meaning of the 'super-Asiatic eye'. In the music of Wagner, for instance, he finds both of them side by side; and they both seem to him forms of the same cultural decline, the absence of aristocratic values, and of a will to greatness: 'Wagner flatters every nihilistic Buddhistic instinct and disguises it in music; he flatters every kind of Christianity and every religious form and expression of decadence. Richard Wagner...

\* *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886.

a decrepit and desperate romantic, collapsed suddenly before the Holy Cross. Was there no German with eyes to see, with pity in his conscience to bewail, this horrible spectacle? . . .'\* That actually Wagner was profoundly affected by the new Buddhism propagated by Schopenhauer and his followers, and that he was deeply attracted by the doctrine of salvation and the ethics of compassion, can be seen from a letter written by him in 1859 to Mathilde Wesendonck: 'You know how I have unconsciously become a Buddhist. Yes, child, it is a world view, compared with which every other dogma must appear small and narrow.'†

It is of particular interest to follow Nietzsche's evolution regarding his attitude towards India. Most of the statements quoted in the preceding paragraphs were made after the publication of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and, therefore, constitute Nietzsche's final judgement of things Eastern and especially Buddhism. A few extracts from his letters, most of them written to his friend Paul Deussen, the famous Indologist, may, however, elucidate Nietzsche's gradually increasing interest in India and the way he reacted to the impact of Eastern philosophy and religions. The first letter in which India is mentioned is addressed to his childhood friend von Gresdorff and deals with Nietzsche's first encounter with a missionary. It shows a peculiar though vague admiration of the Upanishads, for which in all probability Schopenhauer was responsible, and an implicit contempt for Europeans who, devoid of all intellectual discernment, want to convert and 'civilize' the 'Brahmins': '... I have come

\* *The Case of Wagner*, 1888

† Quoted in Winternitz: *India and the West*, op. cit., p. 18

across, however, a sufficient number of instances,' he says, 'to realize how dim frequently is the intellect of men. The other day I talked to one who wanted shortly to go out as a missionary—to India. I asked him a few questions. He had read no Indian book, had never heard even the name of the Oupnek'hat and had decided not to trust the Brahmins,—because they were philosophically so corrupt. Sacred Ganges !' \* About ten years later Paul Deussen communicates to him his plan of translating ancient Hindu texts and of expounding the philosophy of the Vedas. Nietzsche is overjoyed, expresses the greatest admiration for this work and bitterly complains at the complete lack of authoritative books on Indian philosophy : 'Your plan seems to me to deserve an even higher praise, if you intend to devote your painfully earned leisure-time to such a noble life-work as to make accessible to us Indian philosophy in good translations. If only I knew means of encouraging you in such an enterprise, how much would I like to encourage you ! My praise may satisfy you, but even more so my longing to drink from that source which you one day want to open for us all. If you only knew with what uneasiness I have always thought about Indian philosophy ! What I forcibly was made to feel when Professor X (who has devoted himself much to philosophical texts and who has edited in London a catalogue of about 300 philosophical writings) told me when he showed me the manuscript of a Sankhya-text : "Strange, these Indians always philosophized, and always the wrong way round !" This "always the wrong way round" has become proverbial with me. The old Brockhaus delivered

\* 7 April 1866. Friedrich Nietzsche's *Gesammelte Briefe*. (Collected Letters) 1902, Vol. I., p. 26.

a few years ago at Leipzig his inaugural lecture consisting of a survey of the results achieved in the researches on Indian philology,—but about philosophy not a word; I thought he had accidentally forgotten it. Therefore: you should be praised for not also having accidentally forgotten it.'\*

During the following few years, both Nietzsche and Deussen worked at their respective books, the former at *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the latter at his *System of the Vedanta*. And when, in 1883, Deussen sends a copy of his book to his friend, the first part of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was already in the press. There is no doubt that Deussen's book, however defective it may appear to be in the light of modern academic research, opened up new lines of thought, not only as regards Indology, but also Western philosophy. And Nietzsche who was a generous friend, was the first to admit the importance of this book. On the other hand, however, he cannot help pointing out to Deussen the conclusions he himself arrived at during these years of intense intellectual effort. His *Zarathustra*, indeed, stands at the opposite pole of human thought, and, although he carefully avoids hurting Deussen, he makes it quite clear to him that the East has lost a good deal of its former glamour. His 'suspicions' regarding the *world-denying* tendencies in Buddhism are slowly coming true. His path lies elsewhere: 'Much had to accumulate in one man in order to make accessible to us Europeans this doctrine of the Vedanta. . . It is with the greatest pleasure that I come to know the classical expression of this to me most foreign thought-pattern: this your book has achieved. In it everything that I have suspected regarding this

\* *Ibid.*, p. 302, January 1875.

thought-pattern comes to light in the most naive manner : I read every page with utter "wickedness";—you could not wish to have a more grateful reader, dear friend ! It so happens that just now a manifesto of mine is being printed which says with the same eloquence *Yes !* where your book says *No !* That makes me laugh ; but perhaps it pains you, and I have not made up my mind as yet whether I shall send it to you. In order to write your book you could not think about everything in the same manner as I do, and yours *had* to be written . . . '\*

What Nietzsche had begun in his *Zarathustra*, he completed in his next great book *Beyond Good and Evil*, extracts of which, referring to India have already been quoted. It is in this book that Nietzsche takes the ultimate plunge beyond the conventional morality of the Philistine and the 'Buddhist' ethics of Schopenhauer, beyond Christianity and its doctrine of compassion and love. In his letter to Deussen he calls it a 'wicked' book, for to the Philistine and, so he implies, to the Vedantist, anything that is beyond good and evil must appear wicked. 'As a sign how very much I would like to be once more near you, I have permitted myself to send you my youngest and most wicked child : I hope it will learn near you some "morality" and Vedantic dignity which it so sadly lacks from the paternal side. It is called "Beyond Good and Evil" . . . Your book has again and again given me the deepest interest and instruction: I wish there existed something equally clear and dialectically elaborate for the Sankhya-Philosophy.'†

\* *Ibid.*, p. 454, 16 March 1883.

† *Ibid.*, p. 478, Sept. 1886.

One year before final darkness will fall over Nietzsche's mind, he once more writes to Deussen about his attitude towards India. This is a strangely subdued letter indicating that Nietzsche has raised himself up beyond even that 'wickedness' of his previous books. Like Goethe he sees in Indological research a potential source of widening and enlarging European consciousness. And although he disagrees as strongly as ever with the philosophy of life as expressed in Hinduism or Buddhism, although his ideal of a superman has steadily been growing beyond the confines of ordinary intellectual and moral patterns of existence, he yet accepts the philosophy of India, if not as anything else, at least as a parallel and complement to Western philosophy: 'For everything that you propose to do, I have, as you know, a deep sympathy. It also belongs to the essential needs of my unprejudiced mind, (my "super-european" eye), that your life and work always reminds me of the only great parallel to our European philosophy. Here in France there still exists complete ignorance regarding the Indian evolution: the followers of A. Comte, for instance, create laws for a necessary historical evolution and sequence of fundamental philosophical differences, in which the Indians are not considered at all,—laws which the Indian evolution contradicts. But that Msr. de Roberty does not know.'\*

The conception of a superman is part and parcel of the Western urge for action and progress; it is the logical result of the dualism in the mind of Europe which began with Schlegel at the beginning of the nineteenth century and ended with Nietzsche's rejection of Buddhism. The

\* *Ibid.*, p. 493; 3 January, 1888. (The reference is to de Roberty's book *L'ancienne et la moderne philosophie*, 1887).

ponse of Goethe, Hegel, Gobineau, and Schopenhauer towards India, was part of one and the same evolution. For each one of them the discovery of the East constituted a severe test of sensibility. None of them could offer a satisfactory solution: their knowledge of the East only served the purpose of accentuating their intellectual dualism: Schlegel's late conversion to Roman-Catholicism, Goethe's 'fear' of the formless and irrational, Hegel's definition of India as a 'people without history', Gobineau's escape into pseudo-racial prejudices, Schopenhauer's attempt to adapt Buddhism to nineteenth-century purposes of moral revaluation, and finally, Nietzsche's forceful claim for a life lived on an altogether amoral level, are all expressions of that same discrepancy, so characteristic of nineteenth-century civilization, between thought and action, ideal and practice, principle and realization. Each one of these solutions is either an escape from the very real problems of moral adjustment brought about by the Industrial Revolution and modern power politics, or the affirmation of an ideal of life which is utopian in its essence and hardly anything more than a wish-fulfilment. In Nietzsche we find represented, better than in anyone else, the protest of the man of genius against the gradual mechanization of life, against the predominance of the average and the mediocre in modern society, against the moral values imported either from Judea or from India; the last futile attempt of a great European to solve the spiritual conflict within him.



## CHAPTER VII

### INTEGRATING THE EAST

Three more countries remain to be considered. In all of them alike the impact of the East led to a revival both in the domain of literature and of religion. We have already seen how the discovery of India affected the romantic revival, especially in Germany. Although it may be an exaggeration to say that the newly acquired knowledge of Indian religion and philosophy actually led to the Romantic revival, there is no doubt that, on the continent at least, it contributed to a very considerable degree to that 'revivalist' attitude underlying all new and revolutionary movements either in religion or in literature. A similar revival took place in America and in Ireland, though at a much later date. The New England Literary Revival, on the one hand, and the Irish Literary Renaissance, on the other, were based on very similar attitudes of mind as the 'romantic' revival on the Continent: they were intimately connected with a search for new values, and by no means only literary values, a realization that Christianity had failed to fulfil its original purpose, and a consciousness of a separate cultural tradition based upon the present and past achievements in the field of cultural and religious life. The very term 'revival' implies a looking back, a becoming aware of traditional cultural forces: it is indeed one of the paradoxes of Western civilization that revivalist movements, however revolutionary they may appear on the surface, are always based on conservative, if not reactio-

nary, patterns of thought. The romantic revival in Europe ended in medievalism, the Roman-Catholic Church, and excessive nationalism. The Irish revival, for instance, also carried within it, as we shall see in this chapter, the germs of reaction and authoritarianism. There is no doubt that India whenever it became part of any particular 'movement', either literary or religious, or any particular 'revival' in the West, helped to slow down rather than to accelerate the progressive forces in Europe. This holds good for almost all the schools of thought in the West since the French Revolution. In the fight that lasted throughout the nineteenth century, the forces that wanted to preserve a *status quo* in politics or social structure took indeed wholeheartedly to India.

We can, therefore, from now on distinguish three separate forces at work in the West regarding India: first, those writers who guided by humanitarian ideals and a sense of justice and equality considered India a moral challenge to their conscience, such as Voltaire, Goethe, some of the nineteenth century English writers, and also Tolstoy and Romain Rolland in more recent times; secondly those who took to India as part of some particular literary or religious revival and also thereby utilized India—in most cases unconsciously—to foster their own conservative if not reactionary ideals of life, such as Friedrich Schlegel and the German romantics, Schopenhauer, and in modern times W. B. Yeats, Count Keyserling, and Rene Guenon; and lastly those who, conscious of the gradual decline of the West, opposed any Indian influence whatsoever, in order to save European civilization from complete extinction, such as Hegel, Gobineau, Nietzsche, and, during the last fifty

years Austen Steward Chamberlain, Spengler, Henri Massis, and a host of others. Such a classification may seem unnecessarily dogmatic; for some writers undoubtedly are difficult to classify. They unconsciously represented the vested interests of which they were a part, be it religion or social organization or political structure. India, for all the three classes alike, however, was hardly anything more than a useful peg on which to hang their prejudices and preconceptions. This applies even to a philosopher such as Schopenhauer who found in Buddhism, first and foremost, a reflection of his own glory.

Apart from the New England literary revival and the Irish Renaissance, we also include Russia in this chapter, and especially the personality of Tolstoy. It is true, he did not belong to any school nor was he part of any 'revival'; but, on the other hand, his response to India was coloured by very similar emotions, as that of Emerson or W. B. Yeats. It was part of his longing to reevaluate Christianity and the moral standards of modern civilization. And although the conclusions these three writers arrived at show very little similarity indeed, their starting-point is the same, a strong desire to integrate Eastern wisdom and to recreate with the help of Indian religion and philosophy, a new attitude to life. The influence they exercised over their contemporaries was very great indeed—Emerson as a thinker, Tolstoy as a writer and a religious reformer, W. B. Yeats as a symbol of national revival. Emerson attempted to integrate India into his philosophy of life, Tolstoy into his attempts at religious reform, Yeats into the rejuvenated civilization of Ireland.

## I

The best approach to Emerson's integration of India is through his Journals. A careful scrutiny of his entries throughout more than 20 years will enable us to follow the development of Emerson's thought with regard to India. These Journals are in many respects more revealing than his poems dealing with India, because they consist of day to day entries, essentially personal in character. The first time India is mentioned occurs in 1842 when Emerson was already 39 years old. There are two entries, one in December 1842 and the next early in 1843, both of them dealing with Buddhism. The effect Buddhism had on Emerson at the beginning was indeed of an ambivalent nature. He, in all probability, recognized the greatness of Buddhistic doctrines, but he was afraid of their application in the daily life of men. He perhaps saw in it an easy way of escape for the Philistine and, on the other hand, the very conception of nothingness, the Nirvana, filled him with terror; for he visualized the Nirvana as an abyss of infinite dimensions, a sterile darkness, into which we are all going to fall sooner or later: 'The trick of every man's conversation we soon learn. In one, this remorseless Buddhism lies all around, threatening with death and night. We make a little fire in our cabin, but we dare not go abroad one furlong into the murderous cold. Every thought, every enterprise, every sentiment, has its ruin in this horrid Infinite which circles us and awaits our dropping into it. If killing all Buddhists would do the least good, we would have a slaughter of the Innocents directly...' And,

'*Buddhism*: Winter, Night, Sleep, are all the invasion of eternal Buddh, and it gains a point every day. Let be, *laissez-faire*, so popular now in philosophy and in politics, that is bald Buddhism; and then very fine names has it got to cover up its chaos withal, namely, trance, raptures, abandonment, ecstasy,—all Buddh, naked Buddh.'\*

What seems to have attracted Emerson more than anything else during the years following these first entries, is the belief in the transmigration of souls. In the following year he notes down: 'Then I discovered the Secret of the world; that all things subsist, and do not die, but only retire a little from sight and afterwards return again.'† Closely connected with this belief is also his defence of *suti* as an eminently 'practical' doctrine: 'In the long rotation of fidelity they meet again in worthy forms. The flame of the funeral pile is cool to the widow. To this practical doctrine of Migration we have nothing corresponding. Ours is sentimental and literary.'‡ On the same page of the Journal written probably on the same day we find another entry which reminds us of the disenchantment of the romantics, when confronted by the 'reality'. Emerson, probably, did not know much of the Indian people; but what little he knew, made him doubt the efficacy of the ancient religious faith. Beneath the veil of Indian mythology and religion, he sees the real people of India—his contemporaries—and he is amazed at their suffering born with resignation, their fatalism, and reluctance to fight; 'Indian mythology a lace veil; clouds of legends,

\* Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, with Annotations edited by Edward Waldo Emerson & Waldo Emerson Forbes, London, 1913. Vol. VI, pp. 318, 382.

† *Ibid.*, p. 494, 30 Jan. 1844.

‡ *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, p. 121, 1845.

but the old forms seen through. We should infer a country of sages and devotees; but there seems no relation between the book and the actual population. One thing marks it all, the Fate in the character. As soon as they confront each other, victory is declared without a struggle. It is by posts, not battles.' Although we may disagree with the generalization implied in this statement, it almost grew into a conviction with Emerson: for a few years later we read: 'Orientalism is Fatalism, resignation. Occidentalism is Freedom and Will. We Occidentals are educated to wish to be first.'\* A comparison between Eastern and Western religious sensibility led Emerson to a number of other generalizations. First he finds nothing but contrast and difference. He thinks of the Indian kings and courtiers 'making the most romantic sacrifices' for the sake of 'knowledge and spiritual power'; in France, on the other hand, personality and intelligence count for more than anything else, while in England 'possession in every kind' is the ultimate standard by which human beings are judged. Not very much later, however, it strikes him that there exists a fundamental similarity in all human aspirations whether originating in the East or in the West. It is the same discovery that Rolland was going to make some eighty years later and which Rolland calls the 'predisposition to Vedantism': 'Trace these colossal conceptions of Buddhism and of Vedantism home, and they are always the necessary or structural action of the human mind. Buddhism, read literally, the tenet of Fate, Worship of Morals, or the tenet of Freedom, are the unalterable originals in all the wide variety of geography, language, and intelligence of the

\**Ibid.*, p. 201; 1847.

human tribes. The buyer thinks he has a new article; but if he goes to the factory, there is the self-same old loom as before, the same mordants and colours, the same blocks even; but by a little splicing and varying the parts of all patterns, what passes for new is produced.\* Many years later Emerson will come back to this idea that the fundamentals of all religions are the same everywhere. The discovery of India and her religions taught Emerson that Christianity is by no means the sole revelation. And what Voltaire had found out long ago with something amounting to frivolous satisfaction, reappears again in Emerson almost a century later; for in Indian religions he found 'the same principles, the same grandeur, the like depths, moral and intellectual,'† as in Christianity.

To Emerson the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism were undoubtedly a matter of personal faith. He found in them realized what was lacking in the growing mechanization of life around him. His response towards India was indeed part of his revolt against the Industrial Revolution: 'The Indian teaching through its cloud of legends, has yet a simple and grand religion, like a queenly countenance seen through a rich veil. It teaches to speak truth, love others as yourself, and to despise trifles. The East is grand.—and makes Europe appear the land of trifles. Identity, identity! friend and foe are of one stuff. Cheerful and noble is the genius of this cosmogony.‡ With growing age, Emerson became increasingly absorbed in Hinduism. And we are

\* Emerson, *Journals*, 1845, vol. vii., p. 122-3.

† *Ibid.*, 1859, vol. ix, p. 197.

‡ *Ibid.*, 1845, Vol. vii, p. 129

justified, in assuming that Hindu and Buddhist doctrines and ways of life were, in his old age, his main spiritual support. Thus he writes in 1866, when he was already 63 years old: 'In the history of intellect no more important fact than the Hindu theology, teaching that the beatitude or supreme good is to be attained through science: namely, by the perception of the real and unreal, setting aside matter, and qualities, and affections or emotions and persons, and actions, as Mayas or illusions, and thus arriving at the contemplation of the one eternal Life and Cause, and a perpetual approach and assimilation to Him, thus escaping new births or transmigration.'\*

There is much in Emerson's attitude and response towards India that remains vague and indefinite. However much and sincerely he tried to integrate Eastern wisdom, it only remained an appendage, though not without significance, to his philosophy and his constant attempts to give a meaning which had been lost by most of his contemporaries, back to life. His desire to attain the ultimate truth of the spirit was great, but perhaps he—like most of those who followed in his footsteps—was afraid of facing the real issue, the divorce, brought about very largely by the Industrial Revolution, between the thinker and the people, the intellectual and the labouring masses. The path of the spirit, the one that Emerson pointed out, was the path of escape. It led upwards into regions where the people could not follow him. Emerson is indeed the first of the great moderns

\* *Ibid.*, 31 Aug. 1866, vol. x, p. 162.



for whom India was but a brick in the building of his ivory-tower.

## II

Nor was Yeats the only one to discover that poetry is born out of a mystical experience, a kind of supernatural trance where all earthly conflicts are solved and the subconscious itself is transformed into artistic creation. Many before him had experienced a similar spiritual awakening; indeed almost every great poet is confronted at one time or another, by the truly overwhelming realization that the life of human being on earth is in itself hardly at all a significant subject-matter for great poetry, unless it is purified of all extraneous matter, the irrelevancies of a purely 'human' existence. Instead of the 'all-too-human' of common-place experiences, there is a new awareness of the 'super-human' level of existence, where the poet becomes one with the all-pervading spirit of the universe.

Many literary critics will not feel happy with such an interpretation of the creative process. They will accuse the poet of indefiniteness and attempt a more 'scientific' analysis of the urge for literary expression. But we have to go by what the poet himself tells us. And there is no doubt that, in the case of Yeats, the 'super-human' or 'super-natural', in short the non-rational, played an exceedingly important part in his evolution as a writer and a poet. And the fact that, from his childhood onwards, he felt attracted towards things Eastern, and particularly India, indeed proves that not only intellectually, but also temperamentally he was drawn towards the subconscious of the human mind. And more than

once he found in India what was so sadly lacking in the West: an intuitive approach to life, a religion born of an inner need, a challenge to the materialism of Europe.

Yeats was a dreamer and more than once he deceived himself into believing in an India of his own creation, the India of the Romantics; indeed, as to so many other European thinkers and poets before him, India was a wish-fulfilment rather than a reality. And first and foremost it was an escape, a looking back rather than a looking forward, an India coloured by the nostalgic emotions of a dissatisfied European poet.

Yeats discovered the East when, still an adolescent, he became alienated from science by the 'Odic Force' of which he first heard in Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*. From that time onwards Science became for him 'the tree of death' or, as he calls it later on—'the religion of the suburbs'. Theosophy, Buddhism, the Odic Force, and poetry, constituted, for the time being, the essence of Yeats' dreams. He remembers this period of his life with a certain amused irony in his *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* (1916): 'We spent a good deal of time in the Kildare Street Museum passing our hands over the glass cases, feeling or believing we felt the Odic Force flowing from the big crystals. We also found pins blindfolded and read papers on our discoveries to the Hermetic Society that met near the roof in York Street.'\* A more mature understanding of things Eastern came with the visit of a 'Bahmin philosopher from London' whom Yeats and his friends had invited to spend a few days with them at Dublin. 'It was my first meeting', he says, 'with a philosophy that confirmed my

\* P. 173.

vague speculations and seemed at once logical and boundless. Consciousness, he taught, does not merely spread out its surface but has, in vision and in contemplation, another motion, and can change in height and in depth.'\*

Yeats' discovery of India can hardly be called an intellectual and even less an academic achievement. His poetry, indeed his love for all that is primitive and simple and rooted in the soil, quite naturally led him towards India. Already in 1897, in an essay entitled 'The Celtic Element', he speaks of the imaginative passions of the 'ancient people' who were nearer 'to ancient chaos, every man's desire, and had immortal models about them.'† A few years later, in 1900, in an essay on Shelley, he compares the ministering spirits of Intellectual Beauty with 'the Devas of the East, the Elemental. spirits of mediaeval Europe, and the Sidhe of ancient Ireland', and he regrets that Shelley knew so little about their traditional forms.‡

Yeats, in his early manhood, was intensely pre-occupied with the past, that dim and primeval darkness of ancient times. Indeed he shows all the symptoms of that kind of revivalism which is more concerned with the past than with the future. Even a cursory glance at contemporary poetry made him realize that the future of European literature could hardly be expected to be found in a return to the primitive darkness of ancient times: 'There are two ways before literature,' he says, 'upward into ever-growing subtlety... or downward, taking the

\* *Ibid.*, p. 177.

† *Essays*, p. 220.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

soul with us until all is simplified and solidified again.’\* This was written six years before Yeats discovered Tagore’s English rendering of *Gitanjali*. And it was quite in the nature of things that he found in *Gitanjali* just those elements of poetry which were lacking in the West, the living tradition of the past, a continuity in the life of the people whose roots are deep down in the soil: ‘If the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which—as one divines—runs through all, is not as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other, something even of what is most subtle in these verses will have come, in a few generations, to the beggar on the roads.’†

It is from this time onwards that we find Yeats definitely turning towards the East for inspiration. For by means of a rather subtle identification of ancient Ireland, on the one hand, and India, on the other, Yeats looked for a common past and a common soil in both the countries alike. And in moments of deep depression he will cry out: ‘It may be well if we go to school in Asia, for the distance from life in European art has come from little but difficulty with material.’ Or, ‘Only our lyric poetry has kept its Asiatic habit and renewed itself at its own youth, putting off perpetually what has been called its progress in a series of violent revolutions.’‡ Sometimes, indeed, Yeats feels that Europe has outgrown her past, that every seed has borne its fruit; and in the same essay he continues: ‘It is now time to copy the East and live deliberately.’

\* *Discoveries*, 1906.

† Preface to *Gitanjali*, p. xiv.

‡ *Noble Plays of Japan*, 1916.

This incidentally reminds us of another great Irish poet, George William Russell, popularly known as AE. He also, from his earliest boyhood, had taken keen interest in everything pertaining to the East. Johnson's *Translation from the Upanishads* (1896) and the *Irish Theosophist* helped him in this direction. Just as W. B. Yeats, AE also discovers an identical spirit underlying both Gaelic and Indian civilization: 'The Earth-world, Mid-world, Heaven-world and God-world spoken of in the Indian scriptures are worlds our Gaelic ancestors had also knowledge of.\*' He also postulates a new Renaissance in the West based on the wisdom of the East: 'If Europe is to have a new Renaissance comparable with that which came from the wedding of Christianity with the Greek and Latin culture it must, I think, come from a second wedding of Christianity with the culture of the East. Our own words to each other bring us no surprise. It is only when a voice comes from India or China or Arabia that we get the thrill of strangeness from the beauty, and we feel that it might inspire another of the great cultural passions of humanity.'†

In more recent times, Yeats' attitude towards India has indeed become more 'deliberate'; instead of the imaginative identification of his early life, he will now take recourse to intellectual prognostication which at times hardly bears scrutiny at all. When he borrowed something from India, he would excuse himself by the supposition that India is essentially Irish. In his introduction to the *Mandukya Upanishad* (1935) he praises the

\* 'The Memory of the Spirit': *The Candle of Vision*, p. 149.

† *The Living Torch*, ed. by Monk Gibbon, p. 169.

belief of certain Indians who seek the divine in sexual union. Louis Macneice mentions Yeats' last prose writing *On the Boiler* which reveals the reactionary ideals which he would have liked to see embodied in his nation. 'The formation of military families should be encouraged,' he writes, 'for human violence must be embodied in our institutions.' And Ireland also must have a caste system: 'The new-formed democratic parliament of India will doubtless destroy, if they can, the caste system that has saved Indian intellect.'\*

A poet's approach to a foreign civilization must necessarily imply a valuation; for what are attitudes if not determined by a system of values that are entirely the poet's own? In the case of Yeats we may safely say that many of his values, both literary and cultural in general, were derived from that revivalist movement which he himself helped to create and which was by no means determined by purely literary considerations. In poetry and in politics, in the drama and in religion, the same forces were at work. It was a return to the primeval simplicity of the past, the unsophisticated civilization of the 'people'. In discovering their own land, they also discovered India. And although they all too frequently generalized on abstract issues and found similarities between Ireland and India which actually never existed at all, although Yeats in his old age came obviously under the influence of reactionary tendencies, there is no doubt that India was to him the fulfilment of many of his dreams, a vision of the final harmony in human life.

\* *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats*, 1941, p. 41

## III

While in America and, later on, in Ireland, the literary and spiritual revival was the work of an intellectual elite of writers, philosophers, and poets, in Russia a similar revival took place centering, however, around the personality and message of one great solitary figure, Tolstoy. The search for new ideals of life which made Emerson and Thoreau in America and W. B. Yeats and George Russell in Ireland turn towards the East, affected Russia no less, and indeed long before Tolstoy Russian intellectuals became conscious of the historical necessity of affirming a new ideal of life. Coinciding with the Romantic movement in Western Europe, these Russian intellectuals also reacted against the increasing mechanization and industrialization of life by turning towards the East and by repudiating the best and the worst in European civilization alike. It was not so much a philosophical revival as in the Germany of Schopenhauer, nor even a spiritual awakening as in the Anglo-Saxon countries with Emerson, or a religious re-orientation as in most western countries; rather it was a new awareness that Russia, both geographically and temperamentally 'belonged' to Asia, was indeed part of that continent of vast and unlimited spaces, where time does not count, and the infinite is vaguely floating above the darkness of impenetrable mysteries. This, we might say, was an unscientific view to take. But it appealed to the inherent lack of emotional stability of those intellectuals who needed 'vast and timeless spaces' to let their emotions expand and contract at will. The scientific precision, the artificial conduct, the pompous self-con-

sciousness, of western Europe was considered an insult to their elasticity of mind. And one of them, by the name of Tchadaiev, in 1840 already, exclaims: 'We are the darling children of the Orient. What need have we of the West? Is the West the home of science and of all the profound things of life? Everywhere we are in contact with the East, it is from there that we have once drawn our beliefs, our laws, our virtue. The old Orient is going. Are we not its natural inheritors? It is among us that henceforward these admirable traditions will be perpetuated, that will be realized all the great and mysterious truths which had been deposited in the East since the beginning of all things.'

We shall not be wrong in assuming that the Russian people knew nothing of these 'admirable traditions' and 'mysterious truths'. Indeed the history of cultural relations between Russia and the East is very largely the history of two intellectual movements which opposed each other all through the nineteenth century, the one known by the name *Zapadniki* (Occidentalists) and the other by the name of *Slavophiles*. The one said that Russia is subjected to the same laws of development as the rest of Europe. Russia has its own destiny to fulfil, said the others, a destiny diametrically opposed to that of the West. It is worth remembering, however, that this dispute was carried on on a purely intellectual level. The 'people' either knew nothing about it or remained indifferent to the issues involved. The higher classes—the only ones that were literate—artists, politicians and scholars, were alone conscious of the existence of this conflict.



For a conflict undoubtedly it was, though it remained till the days of Tolstoy a merely intellectual dilemma divorced from the realities of life. It is perfectly true that the Russian peasant, till the Revolution, exhibited characteristics not dissimilar from those of Chinese or Indian peasants. Maxim Gorki who knew the people better than any other contemporary Russian writer wrote, for instance, during the last war to Romain Rolland: 'I am afraid Russia is more oriental than China... A Russian is a man who knows not how to live well, but who knows how to die well... The Orient is pessimist and passive...'\* A tendency towards mysticism is discernible in almost the whole of Russian literature, together with a singularly 'oriental' willingness to resign oneself to fate. But most of the litterateurs during the nineteenth century led a life divorced from the masses. The 'people' had become a convenient abstraction, or at best, figures on their political and cultural chessboard. Where, for instance, are the labouring masses in Dostoievski's novels? Peasants merely provide stimulating subject-matter for endless—and rather futile—discussions. There is no outstanding peasant-character in the whole of Dostoievski's work as there will be in Tolstoy's. And yet Dostoievski took up a very definite attitude regarding the conflict between East and West. 'Give us Asia,' he exclaims, 'and we shall create no difficulties for Europe. If we would devote ourselves to the organization of our Asia, we shall see at home a great national revival.' Although most of his novels take place in large cities, he thinks that 'it would be useful for

\* Letter to Romain Rolland; quoted in P. J. Jouve: *Romain Rolland Vivant*, p. 229

Russia to forget Petersburg for some time and to turn her soul towards the East.' It is obvious that for Dostoievski the East was a purely mental, an intellectual, proposition.

Tolstoy, it seems to us today, experienced the East not only with his mind, but with his whole sensibility, conscious as he was of a common spiritual heritage. His acquaintance with the East was based on personal experiences rather than on ideological discussions among intellectuals. As a student at Kasan he took up Oriental Languages and Literatures as his first subject; his frequent stays in the Caucasus brought him in close contact with people of Asiatic extraction. Already in 1870 he published a collection of folk-tales, including Indian. After his 'conversion', he first read the 'Sacred Books of the East', Chinese Philosophy, and later on, Indian philosophy and religion. He was greatly fascinated by the writings of Swami Vivekananda, and shortly before his death he published a number of essays, among them one dealing with the life of Buddha, and others dealing with the sayings of Mohammed and the teaching of Confucius and Lao-Tse. The genuineness of his attempts to capture the spirit of the people of the East, first through the medium of folk-tales and later on through religion and philosophy, cannot be questioned.

There is no doubt that the East provided Tolstoy with new religious standards which helped him in his attempts at revaluating Christianity. If, however, we want to assess correctly Tolstoy's attitude towards India, we have to look at his letters written to prominent Indians during the last ten years of his life. These letters have one advantage over his philosophical writings; their

context being essentially personal, he infused into them all the intensity of his moral and religious fervour. For whatever we may think of Tolstoy's philosophy and however much we may regret his statements about art, we cannot doubt his sincerity of purpose and his disinterestedness. And even if we are amazed at the contradictions inherent in Tolstoy's literary work, on the one hand, and his 'message', on the other,\* we cannot overlook the fact that Tolstoy's attitude and response towards India was very largely determined by his religious convictions during the last years of his life. We shall, indeed, in vain look for any relevant reference to India in any of his great novels. It is only after having completely exhausted the raw material of life itself in his creative work, that he started on his weary pilgrimage in search of the inner spirit of man. It is with these questions of religion and true spirituality in relation to society that his letters to Indians are concerned.

The first letter written to Tolstoy from India comes from Madras, and is dated June 1901. In it Mr A. Rama-Seshan, the editor of the *Arya*, a paper affiliated to the Arya Samaj, proposes certain solutions regarding the social structure of India. Tolstoy's reply was published in the *Hindu* and the *Madras Mail*. It deals with the necessity of purifying religion and of non-cooperating with the British Government. The letter was also criticized later on by Rama-Seshan in the *Arya* magazine. Tolstoy's main assertion in this letter is that

\* See the illuminating article by Lenin: Leo Tolstov as a mirror of the Russian Revolution. In *Religion*. (Burman Publ. House, Calcutta).

all European countries undergo at present a process of social disintegration and that, therefore, any social structure imposed upon India by a Western nation will carry within itself the germs of decay. 'The only possible solution', he continues, 'of the social question for beings endowed with reason and with love consists in abolishing all force and in building up society on a foundation of mutual love and comprehensive principles which will be voluntarily accepted by all. In my opinion, therefore, it is the duty of each cultured Indian to destroy all the old prejudices which rob the masses of an understanding of the fundamental principles of true religion; the realization that the soul is of divine origin, and respect before the life of any living being without exception—this realization ought to be spread as widely as possible. It seems to me that these principles are implicitly stated in your ancient and profound religion and have only to be further developed and clarified.'\*

It appears from this as well as from the following letters that Tolstoy looked upon the Hindu religion with the eyes of a social reformer, of one who was out to find the basic principles of any religion and to build up a true spirituality on the foundation of a simplified and essentially undogmatic faith. He, therefore, represents religious revivalism in its pure state: a going back to the very roots of all faith, an insistence on what is essential and relevant in all religions, a rejection of all the cumbersome symbolism which prevents the average man from actively participating in a common faith. In another letter addressed to an Indian, Baba Premanand

\* This as well as the following quotations are taken from P. Birukoff: *Tolstoy und der Orient*, 1925. (Tolstoy and the Orient), p. 23.

Bharati, at Los Angeles (1903-4), he vigorously attacks the artificial cosmogony of Hinduism: 'But in the religion of Krishna as in all ancient religions can be found assertions which not only cannot be proved but indeed are the creations of an unbridled imagination which, furthermore, are altogether irrelevant for an understanding of the fundamental truth and for the strengthening of the rules of conduct which are implied in the essential doctrines. Herein belong all cosmological and historical assertions concerning the creation of the world and its duration, all the stories of magic, the theory of the four ages, and the origin of the caste system which contradicts the fundamental truth.'\*

Perhaps the most important pronouncements of Tolstoy on India are to be found in a letter addressed to C. R. Das. C. R. Das had written to Tolstoy at the end of 1907 as the editor of a Magazine called *Free Hindustan* whose motto was, 'Resistance to aggression is not simply justifiable but imperative; non-resistance hurts both, Altruism and Egoism.' As a revolutionary, says C. R. Das, he cannot accept the doctrine of non-resistance to evil. And he requests Tolstoy to encourage the fight of Indian revolutionaries and to give his support to his paper *Free Hindustan*. C. R. Das' letter unfortunately is lost; only Tolstoy's reply is available. This letter was later on published under the title 'To An Indian'; Gandhi who was then in South Africa himself edited the translation and enclosed a copy of it in his letter to Tolstoy on October 4, 1910. The importance of this letter in a study dealing with the Western response to India can-

\* *Ibid.*, p. 32.

not be overestimated and justifies more extensive quotations and a more detailed analysis.

He begins with a comparison between the Indians and the English: 'It strikes me particularly in India,' he says, 'that here a physically and mentally highly gifted nation of 200 million inhabitants is under the yoke of a small circle of complete strangers who from the point of view of morality and religion are immeasurably inferior to those they have conquered.'\* Tolstoy again, as in his previous letters, resents the Western influence, especially on Indian leaders, and the indiscriminate acceptance by the masses of India of an alien attitude to life: 'Most of the leaders of public opinion in your country no longer attach any importance to the religious doctrines which were and still are valid for the Indian people; on the contrary, they see the only possibility of liberating the people from the oppression under which they suffer, by adapting the anti-religious and profoundly immoral social structure in which live the English and other pseudo-Christian nations. Nothing indicates better the complete absence of religious consciousness among the present leaders of the Indian people than their effort to persuade the people to accept European ways of life. And yet, if not the only, the main reason for the conquest by England resides in that lack of religious consciousness and the consequent attitude to life—a lack which at the present time all the nations of the West as well as the East, from Japan to England and America, have in common.†

p. 51.

† *Ibid.*, p. 52

Tolstoy is the first among the great Europeans to grapple with contemporary problems in relation to the social, political and religious life of India. All his predecessors, throughout the nineteenth century and most of the intellectuals in recent times, found in India the simplicity and integrity of ancient times which made them aware of their own lost spirituality. Tolstoy's first pre-occupation with the East was undoubtedly based upon a similar wish-fulfilment. But it was not long before he realized that the conflict between ideals and practice which characterizes modern Christianity was as much in evidence in the East as in the West. The only solution for this conflict is what he considers to be the religion of love. It is only through love that ideal and realization, theory and practice, will be co-ordinated. It is quite in the nature of things that Tolstoy in this letter to C. R. Das anticipated the modern pre-occupation with the problem of ends and means: neither Romain Rolland nor Aldous Huxley contributed much to what Tolstoy had discovered long before them: 'Love is the only salvation for mankind from all its miseries. In love you also possess the only means of freeing your people from slavery.... You who belong to one of the most religious of nations, you, in this twentieth century, light-heartedly deny your law, convinced, as you are, of your scientific enlightenment and your inner justification; and you repeat—don't mind my saying so—that amazing stupidity which had been infused into you by the defenders of violence, the enemies of truth, first by the servants of religious hypocrisy and then by those of science, your European masters.'\*

\* *Ibid.*, p. 61

Throughout this letter to C. R. Das, Tolstoy is at great pains to point out the intrinsic similarity between East and West in modern times. Both alike are passing through the same crisis. And it seems to Tolstoy that it is very largely a crisis of the spirit. He knows only too well that neither the old religious faith of Europe nor the religions of ancient India provide mankind with ready-made solutions. He finds, on the one hand, a loss of belief resulting in cynicism, callousness, indifference, to what is best in human nature, and on the other, a strong conviction that scientific progress, compulsory education, and material comfort, will alone guarantee a higher standard of life, both spiritual and material. And Tolstoy begins his single-handed fight against the slavery of the mind, against mental and spiritual prejudices, against the priest and the scholar alike: 'Men, free yourself', he exclaims, 'of your belief in all the Ormuzds, Brahmas, Zebaoths, and their incarnation in the Krishnas and Christs, the belief in paradise and hell, in transmigrations and re-incarnations, in the interference of God in external destinies of life; free yourself above all of the belief in the infallibility of the Vedas, Bibles, Evangels, Tripitakas, Korans and all the rest, free yourself equally of the blind belief in the various scientific doctrines concerning infinitely small atoms, molecules, infinitely large and infinitely distant worlds, their movement and origin, of the belief in the permanence of scientific laws which are supposed to dominate mankind,—of historic laws, of economic laws of conflict and experience, and the others; free yourself of this terrible burden, the idle excitement of an inferior mind—and the capacity



to memorize which is called science; of all the innumerable subjects of various histories, anthropologies, homiletics, bacteriologies, legal sciences, cosmographies, strategies, whose name is legion—free yourself of all this silly and corrupting ballast, and that simple clear law of love, accessible to all and solving all questions and doubts, will of its own accord unveil itself before you and fulfil your life.’\*

Religious and scientific superstitions rule the world; Tolstoy is up in arms against both of them alike. Having replaced dogmatic religion by his religion of love, he now has to apply the same process to what he calls ‘science’ and especially the underlying belief in material progress as the only standard by which to judge human civilization. Tolstoy is hardly conscious of the slippery ground on which he is treading. The moment he hazards a solution of political and social conflicts on the basis of ‘love’, he either overestimates the innate goodness of men or deceives himself into believing in a gradual regressive evolution from cynical exploitation of the poor by the rich to some kind of vague and indefinite equality among men. We have already mentioned the fact that all revivalist movements are by their very nature regressive in spirit; Tolstoy is no exception to the rule. His dream and his prophecy go backward, not forward; he visualizes a society resembling that of the early Christians, classless and unified in a common faith, revolutionary in the same sense as were the early Christians before they achieved political power. And by rejecting the very principle of progress Tolstoy, though unconsciously and unintentionally, sides with the reaction:

\* *Ibid.*, p. 65

‘What the Indian needs as much as the Englishman, the Frenchman, and the German, are not constitutions and revolutions, not all sorts of conferences and congresses, not shrewd inventions of U-boats, aeroplanes, powerful explosives, or all kinds of pleasures for the rich and ruling classes, not new schools nor Universities with innumerable scientific subjects, not additional journals and books, gramophones and cinemas, not that childish and for the most part immoral foolishness they call art,—they only need one thing: realization of that simple, clear truth which has a place in the soul of everyone who has not been fooled by religious and scientific superstition, the truth that the law of love is the law of our life and that it leads all men to the highest salvation.’\*

At the end of his letter to C. R. Das, Tolstoy analyses the contemporary situation in the West. The conflict and tension which he discovers everywhere in ‘socialism, anarchism, the Salvation Army, the increase in crimes, unemployment, the growing and insane luxury of the rich and the misery of the poor, the terrible growth in the number of suicides’† can be solved only by non-violence and love. It is, perhaps, interesting to find that in this letter he considers socialism and communism to be signs of the spiritual decay of the West. The explanation for this attitude can be found in the fact that to Tolstoy both these political movements were characterized by the rejection of any religion whatsoever. The atheism both of the labouring class and the intellectuals is mentioned in another letter of Tolstoy in 1909-1910,

\* *Ibid.*, p. 67

† *Ibid.*, p. 76

addressed to W. A. Posse, and published under the title 'On the Study of World Religions'. At that time Tolstoy and Gandhi had already exchanged a number of letters, dealing mostly with the problem of non-resistance, his letter to C. R. Das had become widely known both in India and abroad, and he had also read with the greatest interest I. Doke's book *M. K. Gandhi: an Indian Patriot in South Africa* (London, 1909) in which his influence on Gandhi is already mentioned. It was also at that time that his collection of essays dealing with ancient oriental religions was published. Tolstoy's study of the past and Gandhi's experiment in South Africa had taught him once more the fundamental truth that the conflict inherent in modern times is the result of the inability of the labourers and the unwillingness of the intelligentsia to find a common faith: 'However pathetic appears to be the position of the labouring class,' he writes to W. A. Posse, 'because of its inability to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant in religious doctrines... the position of the so-called cultured people is even sadder. The simple man cannot distinguish the important from the unimportant because he lacks the necessary knowledge. The cultured people cannot do it, not because they are unable to, but because they do not want to. Either they have to pretend to believe in something in which nobody can any more believe, or they deny, with the firm conviction born of ignorance, and unable to apprehend it, the higher disposition of the soul of man.'\*

Tolstoy's reponse towards India provides the starting-point for our discussion of the contemporary scene. In

\* Ibid., p. 186.

him we find the first attempt of a great European in modern times to apply the same standards of moral and religious revaluation to East and West alike. In our discussion he provides the bridge between the nineteenth and the twentieth century. His dream of a return to primeval simplicity points backward to the nineteenth century and beyond, to that other great dreamer, Rousseau. His awareness of social and political conflicts in modern society indicates his intense pre-occupation with the destiny of man. And he knows, as the best minds of contemporary Europe know, that this destiny will fulfil itself in one and the same way in both East and West.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MODERN DILEMMA

#### I

A study of the contemporary western response towards India is possible only on the basis of the nineteenth-century conflict between ideal and practice, theory and realization. The conflict, instead of being solved, was greatly intensified by the economic and political struggles of the first decades of this century. The attempt to solve the problem in terms of economic re-adjustment by establishing a classless society, the gigantic rise of political reaction both in East and West, the intensification of racial prejudices and the insistence by political leaders, social reformers, and popular philosophers, on the irrational elements in human nature, only served the purpose of sharpening the consciousness of Europeans to the existing conflict without providing any solution satisfying to all. Their response towards India was increasingly coloured by racial and political pre-occupations; only in a few exceptional cases did India provide them with a new intellectual stimulus. The new 'Renaissance' of which Radhakrishnan speaks in such glowing terms is indeed only part of the attempt by a minority of profoundly frustrated intellectuals to find a way out of their spiritual dilemma.

We have followed the growth of this dilemma, this split of the European consciousness, throughout the nineteenth century. There is no doubt that during the last fifty years the number of dissatisfied intellectuals has increased in proportion to the growth of values based upon

the essentially acquisitive character of modern society. That is why Buddhism found more adherents in the West during the last few decades, and especially shortly after the first World War, than at any previous period. It seemed to them, as long as it was not a challenge to existing social and political values, a thoroughly satisfying solution. And, more than anything else, it saved Europeans the trouble of making a deliberate choice, of taking sides in the forthcoming battle. It is no accident either that this neo-Buddhistic cult was strictly limited to the higher middle-classes: the labouring masses had long ago been alienated from religion and looked in political extremism for a solution.

Hegel and Nietzsche provide the background to the contemporary attack against Buddhism; the former had, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, pointed out the senile character of Indian civilization and philosophy, the latter, at the end of the same century, considered the Neo-Buddhism of Schopenhauer and Wagner to be part of the disappearance of aristocratic values of life, of leadership, and the striving for perfection beyond all the standards of morality. Buddhism to Nietzsche was the cult of the philistine, the spiritual equivalent to political democracy. And those who followed in his footsteps were inspired by his contempt for 'equality' of any kind whatsoever, by Gobineau's pseudo-scientific thesis regarding the 'inequality' of the human races, and, lastly, Hegel's theory of the 'decay' of Indian civilization.

While both Tolstoy and Nietzsche were still alive, two books were written which were going to influence the average European's attitude towards India for many years to come: Houston Steward Chamberlain's *Founda-*

*tions of the Nineteenth Century* and Spengler's *Decline of the West*. The former was published in 1899, the latter written before the first World War, but published very shortly after the Peace Treaty. These two books have much in common: a truly monumental analysis of modern life on a historical basis, a comparative study of various civilizations, a synthetic approach to religion and philosophy, a strong anti-semitic bias, and lastly a re-valuation of Buddhism on the lines already suggested by Hegel and Nietzsche. It will hardly be possible to do full justice to these two books here: we are concerned only with their attitude towards India as part of their philosophy of history and their outlook on life. And from the very outset we are struck by one characteristic feature which both these thinkers have in common: their constant attempts at reducing Buddhism to a historical necessity which, both in ancient and in modern times, is the result of a spiritual decline. Both were equally obsessed by the idea of the interplay of historical forces, predetermined and inevitable, and against which neither the mind of man nor his will are ever able to struggle. This profound pessimism, pervading both these books alike, quite naturally also affected their attitude towards India, and in particular, towards Buddhism.

For Chamberlain, Buddhism formed the anti-thesis to Christianity. Buddha, according to him, 'represents the senile decay of a culture which has reached the limit of its possibilities;'<sup>\*</sup> on the other hand, he continues: 'Christ represents the morning of the new day; he won from the old human nature a new youth, and thus be-

<sup>\*</sup> H. S. Chamberlain: *Foundations of the 19th Century*; trsld. from the German by John Lees, 1910, Vol. I, p. 184.

came the God of the young vigorous Indo-Europeans, and under the sign of His cross there slowly arose upon the ruins of the old world a new culture...'\* As part of a historical process Buddhism, therefore, stands for 'decline'; Chamberlain calls it 'a living death' and 'a lived suicide'; for according to him, 'Buddha lives solely and only to die, to be dead definitely and beyond recall, to enter into Nirvana—extinction.'† To appreciate Chamberlain's thesis properly we must remember that throughout his book he was out to prove the superiority of the 'Indo-German' race over all the other races on earth. For although Buddhism symbolizes for him the senile decay of a culture, he has nothing but praise for the 'Aryan Indians'. It is only when comparing them to the Semitic races that the characteristic features of the Aryan race—Gobineau's 'white principle'—become evident: 'The Aryan Indian can stand as an example of the extreme contrast to the Semite—a contrast, however, which clearly reveals itself in all people that are devoid of Semite blood, even the Australian negroes, and which slumbers in the hearts of all of us. The mind of the Hindoo embraces an extraordinary amount, too much for his earthly happiness; his feelings are tender and full of sympathy, his sense pious, his thought metaphysically the deepest in the world, his imagination as luxuriant as his primeval forests, as bold as the world's loftiest mountain peak, to which his eye is ever drawn upwards.'‡ And with the usual thoroughness so characteristic of German scholarship, he will now prove that Christ really was no Semite at all, but an Indo-German': 'The

\* *Ibid.*, p. 200.

† *Ibid.*, p. 186.

‡ *Ibid.*, I, 434.



probability that Christ was no Jew, that he had not a drop of genuinely Jewish blood in his veins, is so great that it is almost equivalent to a certainty.’\*

It goes without saying that Chamberlain’s generalizations, on the basis of comparative history, are extremely misleading. According to him, for instance, Christ and Buddha, are the ‘opposite poles’—the antithesis—of one and the same experience. For whether it be the ‘denial’ of the will, as in the case of Buddha, or the ‘conversion’ of the will, as in the case of Christ, both belong to what he calls the ‘Indo-German’ attitude to life. Chamberlain, therefore, carries Gobineau one step further, and establishes what he considers to be the fundamental inequality of two races on earth, the Indo-German (including both Christ and Buddha and ‘even the Australian negroes’) and the Semitic race by which presumably he means the Jews. And instead of Gobineau’s rather crude pseudo-scientific approach, Chamberlain plunges into comparative religion with all the enthusiasm of an obsessed monomaniac: ‘Redemption by knowledge, redemption by faith: two views which are not so very different as people have taught; the Indian, and Buddha, put the emphasis on the intellect, the Graeco-Teuton, taught by Jesus Christ, upon the will: two interpretations of the same inner experience. To the Jewish religion both views are equally foreign.’†

Spengler’s approach—though based on fundamentally similar assumptions—is more subtle. His interest embraces a wider view of human history. His historical parallels of the rise and fall of civilizations include both

\* *Ibid.*, I, 211.

† *Ibid.*, II, 40-1.

primitive and civilized societies and all the expressions in art, religion, philosophy, and social structure that characterize particular periods in the past. Being less obsessed than Chamberlain by racial prejudices, he attempts a more objective, but not therefore the less sinister, analysis of the process of culture in both East and West. Spengler saw in the history of civilization a continuous process of birth, growth, and decay according to pre-established historical 'laws'. The fatalistic character of these laws, however, almost precludes all struggle. An understanding of these laws may, at best, help human beings in foreseeing and shaping the future. Human intelligence and will are abolished for the sake of predeterminism and a mechanistic view of life. Every period carries within it the 'decline' of the former and the germs of the next civilization. Nothing can ever stop an evolution, for ever turning round itself in an increasingly vicious circle. Such a fatalistic outlook on life could not but lead to an over-emphasis of the irrational over the rational, the instinctive or intuitional propensities of man over the intellectual. Spengler's followers will, therefore, be found among the strongest, i.e. the least rational, forces of reaction. He, not Nietzsche, is the spiritual father of Fascism.

Periods in which intellectual ratiocination prevails over free instinctual expression are to him periods of decline. He includes among these periods, Buddhism in India, Stoicism in ancient Greece, the Europe of Rousseau, and the rise of modern Socialism. All these four periods have one thing in common: they try to save a moribund civilization by a process of fundamental revaluation; they are the flowers of decline, the germs of which can be found in the preceding centuries of 'pro-

gress' and increasing intellectual effort; their failure is very largely due to the fact that they—having reached and being themselves the climax of a civilization—saw no future in front of them. Indeed, they were condemned to death at the very hour of their origin: for their pre-occupation was with the material and intellectual destiny of man, rather than with the metaphysical truth underlying it: the 'strength' of Buddha, Socrates, and Rousseau, is also their most significant weakness: 'Again and again there appears this type of strong-minded, completely non-metaphysical man, and in the hands of this type lies the intellectual and material destiny of each and every "late" period. Such are the men who carried through the Babylonian, the Egyptian, the Indian, the Chinese, the Roman civilization, and in such periods do Buddhism, Stoicism, Socialism ripen into definite world-conceptions which enable a moribund humanity to be attacked and reformed in its intimate structure. *Pure* civilization, as a historical process, consists in a progressive *taking-down* of forms that have become inorganic or dead.'\*

It has already been said that such 'late' periods constitute at the same time the climax of a particular civilization. Their inherent rationalism is mostly directed towards the material well-being of man; on the other hand, it is only after the historical process of urbanization has taken place that we are confronted by a 'will to decline'. When the intelligentsia shifts to the city and thereby loses all touch with the soil and the masses, the process of disintegration starts. The 'rationalism' of Buddhism and Stoicism is synonymous with an a-moral and a-historical view of life; the very foundation of all social life breaks

\* Oswald Spengler : *The Decline of the West*, N.Y., 1932, I, p. 23.

to pieces: 'We have in two examples—the Classical and the Indian world—a picture of utterly careless submission to the moment and its incidents. Different in themselves as are Stoicism and Buddhism (the old-age disposition of these two worlds), they are at one in their negation of the historical feeling of care, their contempt of zeal, of organizing power and of the duty-sense; and therefore neither in Indian courts nor in classical market-places was there a thought for the morrow, personal or collective.'\*

When Spengler, later on, speaks of the 'abdication of the soul' in these late periods, he means by soul the absence of consciousness that distinguishes the peasant from the city-dweller. The 'urbanity' of all late periods implies an insistence on consciousness unknown to the metaphysical 'soulfulness' of primitive man. 'Only the sick man feels his limbs.' And although we today can hardly accept this antithesis between 'Reason' and 'Soul', it constituted for Spengler the very foundation of his theory. No wonder, therefore, that he opposes scientific progress to the more essential 'progress of the soul'. According to him the ideas of Buddhism, of Stoicism, and Socialism, rest upon a 'superficial, practical, soulless, and purely extensive world'; life ceases to be 'self-evident', but is to be treated as a problem 'presented as the intellect sees it,' judged by 'utilitarian' or 'rational' criteria. And the distinction dear to all German scholars, between Culture and Civilization, almost automatically obtrudes itself on Spengler's vision. 'The brain rules', he exclaims, 'because the soul abdicates. Culture-men live unconsciously, Civilization-men consciously.'† The inhabitants of the cities of modern Europe as of an-

\* *Ibid.*, I, 137-8.

† *Ibid.*, I, 353.

cient India and Greece have in common 'the purely practical world-sentiment of tired megalopolitans...it was the basic feeling of the Indian civilization and as such both equivalent to and "contemporary" with Stoicism and Socialism.' Contemporary also are the roots from which this world-view draws its inspiration: the 'rationalistic atheistic Sankhya philosophy' for Buddhism, on the one hand, 'Pythagoras and the Sophists' for the Stoa, and the 'sensualism and materialism of the 18th century' for modern socialism. Modern psychology and social doctrines, in short, correspond to a very considerable degree to the 'Indian psychologists of early Buddhism . . . who reduce the inward man to a bundle of sensations and an aggregation of electro-chemical energies. . .'\* And it is in such periods, Spengler concludes, that the educated man, the Sage, goes 'back to Nature', Voltaire to Ferney, Rousseau to Ermenonville, Socrates to the Attic Gardens, Buddha to the Indian grove—'which is the most intellectual way of being a megalopolitan. . .'|†

Spengler's influence on his contemporaries was very considerable. It is undoubtedly true that he expressed in terms of academic scholarship that consciousness of decline and fatalistic resignation which characterize the first few decades of this century. To some of the writers of our own time this parallel between Buddhism and the rise of modern socialism seemed particularly fascinating. Both Nietzsche and Chamberlain, before Spengler, had pointed out the essentially 'democratic' character of all moribund civilizations. For Nietzsche's insistence on aristocratic values, Chamberlain's assumption of the superio-

\* *Ibid.*, I, 356.

† *Ibid.*, II, 307.

rity of the Indo-German race over all the other races on earth and, lastly, Spengler's parallelism between Buddhism and Stoicism, on the one hand, and modern Socialism, on the other, they all pointed the same way: a denial of the intellect in favour of intuition, a new emphasis on the soul of man as opposed to his reason. However different their hypothetical assumptions, their implications were the same. We should, therefore, not be surprised to find reflected in contemporary literature a similar revaluation of all standards. And if we choose D. H. Lawrence as the most significant instance among modern writers, it is because he unconsciously was on the side of Spengler, Chamberlain, and Nietzsche, and because he took up an attitude towards the East which fits in admirably well with that of his spiritual predecessors.

Lawrence was indeed the most significant writer at the beginning of this century: we find in him all the 'unpleasantness', the 'terrifying honesty' which is usually associated with all great works of art. For Lawrence's primary concern was with the soul, and he took the soul out of the stuffy drawing-rooms of Victorian England, that disinfected and sterilized centre of middle class respectability, and placed her again in the dark and windy paces that still surround modern civilization, and left her alone in a waste land of chaos, conflicting desires, and a self-destructive dualism. Some have read into Lawrence's pre-occupation with the human soul a return to 'spirituality', an emphasis of mind over matter. But Lawrence's concern was neither with mind nor with matter: his discovery that the instinctive and affective life of man was being crippled in modern times led him to a revaluation of the process of civilization and an over-

emphasis of impulse over reason, of instinct over intellect. He visualized a time when the individual human soul will be free again to follow her own pre-destined path regardless of the inhibitions and repressions of a mechanized and stereotyped civilization.

It goes without saying that Lawrence's primary concern was with the West. For it was there that he found the soul 'in bondage', the bondage of the rich and the poor alike. More than once he left England in search of countries where the essential unity of human nature was not yet broken into disconnected fragments. But whether it was Australia or Mexico or the South of France, his mind found rest nowhere. And the utopian society of which he dreamed all his life was gradually reduced to a small circle of friends all equally frustrated and equally longing for an escape.

Once while travelling to Australia he also stopped for a few weeks in Ceylon. This indeed was his only contact with the East, and there can be no doubt that Ceylon was the country least likely to inspire any writer in search for certainty and truth and the lost freedom of the soul. The innocence and naivety of great men are, however, at times overwhelming. For Lawrence, the son of a miner born in the very heart of England, Lawrence the schoolmaster and the writer of genius, took Ceylon at its face-value. Ceylon to him was the East, the very incarnation of that strange exotic appeal which has made more than one intelligent European look foolish. Ceylon was Buddhism, Nirvana, and the transmigration of souls.

It is not for us to decide whether Ceylon is the East, is all that Lawrence wanted it to be. We are concerned

only with the fact that he, the most honest interpreter of the western soul, responded to Ceylon as though it represented all those 'mysterious' and alien elements which Europeans as a rule associate with the East. There is, however, no doubt that Lawrence reached Ceylon with a prejudiced mind. Already during the last war, when the average Westerner passed through a phase of temporary enthusiasm for the Orient and all it stands for, Lawrence expressed his doubts with regard to the possible affinities between East and West: '... Buddha-worship is completely decadent and foul nowadays: and *was* always only half civilized...: it is ridiculous to look to the East for inspiration... One always felt irked by the East coming it over us. It is sheer fraud. The East is *marvellously* interesting for tracing our steps back. But for going forward, it is nothing. All it can hope for is to be fertilised by Europe, so that it can start on a new phase.\*' Indeed, whenever Lawrence speaks of the East in his later letters this attitude of 'tracing our steps back' reappears. This historical valuation of the East is almost an obsession with him. The Orient is a kind of fairyland on a stage (for the effect of the East on Lawrence was always that of the theatre) representing some weird prehistoric event and 'one sees a darkness, and through the darkness the days before the Flood, marshy, with elephants mud-grey and buffaloes rising from the mud, and soft-boned voluptuous sort of people, like plants under water, stirring in myriads.†' Lawrence, the man in search of a soul, could not but feel disconcerted at the

\* Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. and with an Introduction by Aldous Huxley. Heinemann, London, 1937. (To Lady Ottoline Morrell, 24-5-1916, p. 350).

† *Ibid.*, To Austin Harrison, 11-4-1922, p. 543.



'soft, moist, elephantine prehistoric' of the East, the indifference of the time-less Orient to the overstrained consciousness of the European escaping from collective boredom and neurosis. Instead of the liberated soul, he found Buddha in Ceylon. And the very name of Buddha evoked within him stock-responses of a peculiarly un-illuminating kind: 'I feel absolutely dead off Buddhism', he writes from Ceylon, 'either Nibbana or Nirvana, Kama or Karma. They can have Buddha.'\*

What exactly Lawrence understood of Buddhism is very difficult to say. He found in it mostly negative qualities, denial of life, denial of the soul, rejection of activity or creation as a life-giving principle. This lack of a dynamic appeal made him unreasonably bitter. One more reason for his bitterness is undoubtedly due to the absence of any dualism whatsoever in Buddhism; he found 'souls' that could afford not to struggle against themselves, because they had achieved a final and ultimate liberation of which Lawrence could not but be ignorant. The fact that Buddhism is something more than an external cult consisting of dogmas and rituals, seems never to have struck Lawrence. Pre-occupied, as he always had been, with the twisted complexities of the European soul, he could not possibly visualize a soul liberated from boredom and neurosis without any visible effort. The effort implied in Buddhistic teaching is all within; no westerner without a thorough knowledge of Buddhist training will be able to appreciate much of the external cult. And Lawrence also finds it 'all a bit extraneous. I feel I don't belong, and never should... It was wonderful, gorgeous and barbaric with all the elephants and

\* To Mrs. A. C. Jenkins, 28-3-1922, p. 542.

plined soul, the other extreme from which he recoiled as from something impure? It almost seems so. For a few days after his arrival in Ceylon, he exclaims: 'I doubt if we shall stop long... My mind turns towards Australia... I have a fancy for the apple-growing regions, south from Perth: have a great fancy to see apple trees in blossoms: and to be really "white"...'\*

Lawrence here is treading on dangerous ground. For he does not say what it is 'to be really white'. White is the war and the civilization from which he was just then escaping; white also is the slum in which he was born and brought up; white are the literary censors who had banned his books. Is it not a contradiction in terms that Lawrence, the writer who more strongly than anyone else indicted the 'white' civilization of Europe and America, should—when confronted by the 'darkness' of Ceylon—want to be 'really white'? A few weeks later he is, however, even more definite: 'Those natives are *back* of us—in the living sense *lower* than we are. But they're going to swarm over us and suffocate us. We are, have been for five centuries, the growing tip. Now we're going to fall. But you don't catch me going back on my whiteness and Englishness and myself. English in the teeth of all the world, even in the teeth of England. How England deliberately undermines England...†

These quotations—interesting as they undoubtedly are—may, however, be very misleading. A writer's 'opinions' are always an anti-climax; and D. H. Lawrence is no exception to the rule. But once we place these

\* To Mrs. A. C. Jenkins, 28-3-1922, p. 542.

† To Lady Cynthia Asquith, 30-4-1922, p. 546.

statements within the inevitable context of Lawrence's system of values as expressed in his novels and stories, they will acquire an altogether new meaning. For, superficially speaking, these statements show an appalling degree of ignorance and racial prejudice. White as opposed to black has today only one connotation: the superiority of the former over the latter. And we find that such an attitude is unbearable. But Lawrence was no spurious propagandist for the superiority of the white races. No one was more convinced of the decline of values and intelligence in the West. To be 'really white' implied a struggle against oneself, against one's complacency and self-satisfaction. It also implied the dualism between mind and matter, the soul and the body, which characterizes Lawrence's work. And from Ceylon he writes to a friend: 'I think that the most living clue of life is in us Englishmen in England, and the great mistake we make is in not uniting together in the strength of this real living clue—religious in the most vital sense—uniting together in England and carrying the vital spark through. Because as far as we are concerned it is in danger of being quenched. I know now it is a shirking of the issue to look to Buddha or the Hindu or to our own working men, for the impulse to carry through.'\*

Lawrence's 'soul' was too deeply involved in the complexities of life in the West to respond in any helpful manner to the East. He only saw the 'mirage', the magic of exoticism, the pre-historic moisture of a protoplasmic kind of existence. And with amused interest we watch Lawrence's liberated soul groping in the dark-

\* To Robert Pratt Barlow, 30-3-1922, p. 543.

ness—the days before the Flood—among ‘soft-boned voluptuous’ sort of people’ and almost losing himself and his cherished soul in the timeless indifference of the East. The ‘complexion’ of the soul is, after all, an irrelevant issue. For in the cities, of both East and West alike, the souls of those who are discontented and frustrated by civilization, are searching for certainty and the fulfilment that lies in complete living. And strangely enough, Lawrence knew, before travelling to Ceylon, that this fulfilment would only be achieved in solitude, in the withdrawal from a reality in which the human soul had no place at all: ‘I think one must for the moment withdraw from the world away towards the inner realities that *are* real: and return, may be, to the world later, when one is quiet and sure. I am tired of the world, and want the peace like a river... I don’t believe in Buddhistic inaction and meditation. But I believe the Buddhistic peace is the point to start from—not our strident fretting and squabbling.’\*

## II

The economic disaster after the last war, the visits of Rabindranath Tagore to Europe and America, the sense of frustration and the consciousness of failure among middle-class intellectuals, these are some of the factors that shaped the response of the West towards India during the last twenty years or so. Apart from Indological research mostly carried on by scholars in Universities and therefore inaccessible to the wider public, India became known to the man-in-the-street by Tagore’s lectures, delivered in the capitals of Europe before a mid-

\* To Catherine Carswell, 24-1-1922, p. 534.

dle-class audience consisting of a fairly large number of genuinely sincere people, and by the various societies and associations established both in Europe and America for the purpose of 'spreading the knowledge of the East' and of helping those who had lost their way in the aftermath of war to find back their lost spirituality. These organizations were frequently business enterprises catering for a very wide public: "They have adopted the high-powered salesmanship of American business to boost their course of philosophic and religious teaching to spiritually hungry and nervously sick American men and women, mostly women, using such bait phrases as "marvellous illumination", "instantaneous healing", "God-consciousness" and charging each from 25 to 100 dollars for their course of lessons."\* That spirituality and money are by no means strange bed-fellows in modern civilization, is proved by the fact that the missionaries of the New Thought Movement 'have what they call prosperity meetings by the thousand all over the country where they sit and visualize prosperity in the "cosmic", and millions of absent treatments per week for healing, are sent out through the air. They like to harness and goad the Soul to run errands for them. The Indian idea of the divinity of man fits in pretty well with the demands of American individualism.'†

The more intelligent among Europeans found such a state of affairs shocking. It insulted their sense of discrimination and outraged their intelligence. D. H. Lawrence—without understanding much of the East—had

\* From : B. K. Bagchi, Ph.D.: *Adventures of Indian Philosophy in America*. (In *Modern Review*, February 1936, p. 164).

† *Ibid.*

already given expression to the inevitable reaction against the fashion of Buddhism, spiritualism, Theosophy and what not. Indeed, a whole chapter could be added on the way in which a large number of Europeans and Americans plunged wholeheartedly and unhesitatingly into the muddy waters of this pseudo-eastern revivalism. But we here are concerned only with significant figures who gave expression to a body of opinions less indiscriminate and sensational than the mass-response of the man-in-the-street.\* It is certainly true to say that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was the author himself who established a public opinion and guided public response along the proper channel, while today the individual author—however significant his statements may be—has little influence on the average reading public. It would certainly be possible to determine the popular response towards India during the last few decades from a close study of newspaper cuttings, editorials, column writers on India, pseudo-religious publications, letters to the press: research of this kind would open our eyes to the average man's attitude towards India and, in all probability, would make it exceedingly difficult to apply Radhakrishnan's dictum of a new 'Indian Renaissance' in the West to any but the 'high-brow' elite of Bloomsbury. On the other hand, the middle classes after the last war were ready to accept any kind of exotic adventure provided it would save them for the time being from the more pressing problems of daily existence.

\* For a detailed study of the mass-response in the West to Rabindranath Tagore in the West, see the author's *Rabindranath through Western Eyes*, Kitabistan, 1943.—René Guénon's book on the Theosophical Movement will be found to be extremely illuminating in this context.

They welcomed the 'soul' because it did not make any demands on their critical intelligence and provided them with an outlet for the inhibitions brought about by an increasingly mechanical civilization. Spengler's 'megalopolitan' gave himself up to the 'soul' as one of the forms of passive relaxation (like novel-reading, the wireless, or the cinema) which constitutes the modern city-dweller's most favourite week-end occupation. A Sunday-Soul and Buddha-for-the-week-end became the cherished possessions of countless Europeans whose main activity during the remaining six days of the week consisted in acquiring wealth and to outdo their neighbours in crookedness and deception.

The significance of Count Keyserling and Rene Guenon in this context consists in the fact that both of them utilized this Eastern revival to bring about a revaluation of individual standards of conduct and morality. Both of them alike appealed to the elite in terms of eastern philosophy and traditional religion; both treated the common man with contempt and founded esoteric 'schools' and 'movements' on the basis of an aristocratic exclusiveness and intellectual superiority. The influence of Keyserling, especially on the German intelligentsia after the last war, was short-lived but intense; Guenon's influence is still a matter of conjecture: it was certainly limited to a much smaller number of 'followers' but was more definite and lasting in character. Both were intensely and sincerely concerned with the problem of civilization and the decline of the West, and both attempted to transform the wisdom of the East into individual awareness. Their insistence on the traditional values of the East and their rejection of western progress (at least in its material impli-

cations) make them side with the reaction. In an autobiographical sketch Count Keyserling writes: 'I am without a doubt exceptionally self-centred. I lack every fundamental social instinct.'<sup>\*</sup> This is a key-passage for an understanding of Keyserling's work and his pre-occupation with the East. In all his books he was more concerned with personal salvation than with solving the social or political conflicts around him. The strongest intellectual influence on him comes from Chamberlain's *Foundations of the 19th century*.<sup>†</sup> His *Travel Diary of a Philosopher* published shortly before the first World War, established his reputation as a writer, a thinker, and a propagandist for the East. Keyserling's books impress the reader by the occasional brilliance of style, their vagueness, and mystical indefiniteness; his enthusiasm is at times too explicitly obvious not to irritate the intelligent reader; his prophecies are many and give the impression of an over-conscious sensibility, tortured by vague ecstasies and longings, speaking down to the average man with the condescension of a misunderstood seer and the pompousness of a German professor lecturing to his students. In short, Keyserling can be exceedingly annoying at times and the reading of his books is very seldom a literary pleasure. Chamberlain's influence undoubtedly accounts for the vast and cyclopaedic vistas characteristic of Keyserling's work. But instead of the very substantial scholarship behind the vastness of Spengler and Chamberlain, we are confronted here by brilliant—though

<sup>\*</sup> *The World in the Making*. (My Life and My Work as I see them), 1927, p. 9.

<sup>†</sup> See, M. G. Parks: *Introduction to Keyserling*.—*An Account of the Man and his Work*. London 1934. Also, Maurice Boucher: *La Philosophie de Hermann Keyserling*, Paris, 1927.



at times unconsciously amusing—‘parallels’ and comparisons; for instance, when he says that ‘for Buddha as well as for the modern psycho-analyst, life was essentially Impulse,’ the modern reader is liable to wonder at this intellectual *tour-de-force*; but when Keyserling, warming up to his subject, calls Buddha’s doctrine ‘the highest possible expression of psycho-analysis’\* we are frankly unable to appreciate the formula, however stimulating it may appear to be. This is intellectual charlatanism of the most ambiguous kind. The secret of Keyserling’s great success can be found in this very same charlatanism, his constant confusion of issues, his escape into nebulosity and non-committal eye-wash whenever he was confronted by the reality of life, his long-rolling sentences, his self-centredness, his truly amazing ability to sentimentalize even the simplest of human phenomena. His intelligence throughout his work, is receptive and passive, not active and discriminating. That is why he accepted and even understood the East better than most of his contemporaries, and yet falsified that first experience of his into abstract generalizations and dogmatic pronouncements, the meaning of which is frequently obscure and always highly controversial. Buddhism and psycho-analysis is only one instance out of many.

That Keyserling remained under Chamberlain’s influence all through his life can be gathered from his attitude towards Buddhism. Chamberlain (as well as Spengler) saw in Buddhism the abdication of the soul; according to Keyserling, ‘in Buddhism the philosophical nation *par excellence* has renounced the tendency to philosophize, the people who delighted most on earth in

\* *The Recovery of Truth*, 1929, p. 150 ff.

created forms here *capitulated* before the ideal of uniformity, the most speculative race who ever existed has sought salvation in empiricism. This could not lead to a good end.\* Keyserling also finds in Buddha's 'rationalism' a destructive element, a lowering of the human level of existence; his own School of Wisdom, established at Darmstadt shortly after the last war, although inspired by Buddhism and its search for truth, aims at creation, instead of annihilation. 'Buddha', says Keyserling elsewhere, 'used his understanding for the purpose of destroying the world. But it can be used as well for the purpose of raising the world to a higher level. This is what we are undertaking. The School of Wisdom is the antipode to Buddhism.'†

Keyserling's significance in this study lies, however, not so much in his attitude towards Buddhism as in his frequent and repeated attempts at reconciling what he considered to be eastern and western philosophies and ways of life. He has been called both an eastern propagandist and a defender of the West, a representative of Pan-Germanism and the founder of a new international religion. And in a manner of speaking he was all that combined; elasticity of mind is a virtue in some writers: in his case it was a deeply rooted intellectual vice. His knowledge of both East and West was profound; the use he made of this knowledge always led him into ambiguities and loose thinking. In his attempts to be thorough and precise, he more than once mistook dogmatic generalizations for scientific truth. His defini-

\* *Travel Diary*, London, 1925. I, p. 173. (*Italics mine*).

† *The Recovery of Truth*, p. 179.

tions of the Eastern and the Western mind are a case to the point.

Many of these definitions will be found in the *Travel Diary*. Here East and West are still irreconcilable opposites, the former laying greater stress on 'psychic phenomena', the latter on 'physical' ones.\* He also makes a rather subtle distinction between 'significance' and 'fact'; facts, he says, 'as such are totally irrelevant. Thus India with its tendency to produce myths, has judged from the angle of life, chosen the better part as opposed to precise Europe.'† The division of humanity into those who follow 'tradition' and those who believe in 'progress' is one of Keyserling's favourite devices in dealing with the East. (It will also be the main argument in all of Guenon's writings.) But Keyserling is too clever to leave it at that. Progress, according to him, represents the masculine principle, while tradition is essentially feminine. In the modern West, he says, 'the masculine principle in all its purity has attained sole control'; that is why the West will become more and more 'masters of the world', because whenever tradition and progress compete with each other 'the latter must gain the victory, because its principle is superior to empirical accident.'‡ And Keyserling very strongly feels that only this masculine spirit of progress 'will in future achieve greatness and goodness'. Having again warmed up to the subject, he now applies western 'masculinity' to the attraction of the East, the feminine principle. Despite 'increasing masculinity', he exclaims, the feminine

\* *Travel Diary*, I, p. 93.

† *Ibid.*, I, p. 108.

‡ *Ibid.*, I, p. 165.

element is by no means dying out: 'This is proved sufficiently clearly by the immense attraction exercised by the religions of the East among us. Many are drawn towards them as men are to women; and yet I think that most of them are only attracted as one woman is to another who is possessed of understanding... the feminine element... is the more profound one in the real sense of the word. The work of understanding will be done best by feminine humanity until the Last Judgment.'\* Carried away by his own play with words and his rather overstrained symbolism, Keyserling leaves us with a sense of having failed to grasp 'the real sense of the word'. Allied to the 'feminine principle', is also what Keyserling calls 'profundity'. The Indian personality, he tells us, 'is notably lacking in width and breadth and 'seems poor compared with its western equivalent'; but on the other hand, 'it knows modulations of intensity, a manifoldness in the dimension of depth, as no other does.'† In its final analysis, the division of eastern and western minds boils down to the rather commonplace statement that in the East the metaphysical reality predominates over material reality, while the West has invented 'idealism as a substitute for metaphysics'.‡

Keyserling, just like Spengler and Chamberlain before him, is concerned with 'saving' western civilization, and his experience and understanding of the East only serve the purpose of an anti-thesis, as it were; his books are studies in contrasts; the so much desired synthesis, the compromise between East and West, comes like an

\* *Ibid.*, I, p. 168.

† *Ibid.*, I, p. 335.

‡ *Creative Understanding*, 1929, p. 13.

after-thought, as though to justify and to give a finishing touch to his involved symbolism. If indeed the world can be divided into a feminine principle (perfection) and a masculine principle (progress), it naturally follows that the union of the two would produce a 'new' principle. On a metaphysical level such a union is profoundly desirable and it hardly should require many thousands of pages to arrive at this conclusion. And while there is something intrinsically convincing in Nietzsche's desire to go 'beyond East and West', beyond Schopenhauer and Buddha, Keyserling's 'union' of East and West strikes us as hardly anything more than the symbolism of a scholar who has lost his roots in the West and is unable to take roots in the East. It goes without saying that the compromise found many followers in Europe; it saved them the trouble of thinking: Keyserling did that for them.

When discussing the features that characterize Western civilization, Keyserling has much to say on Progress and Heroism and Personality. 'From the angle of progress', he says, 'it is we who are the chosen people among all the others.' Indeed, western influence on the East in recent times is so strong that even there progress becomes invested with a new 'eastern' significance. It is, in the opinion of the Sage of Darmstadt, due to the western urge for progress (the masculine principle) that 'the eastern civilizations are acquiring significance for mankind at large'. For does it not seem as though the 'progress' imported into the East during the last 100 years is now 'flowing back' again to Europe in the shape of 'Missionaries from the Ganges and the Yellow

Here Keyserling raises a question which is no longer metaphysical, but related to the life of his own time. Heroism for its own sake, regardless of ends and means, is hardly worth fighting for. On the other hand, the rise of vast political organizations is detrimental to individual heroic expression either in thought or in action. The 'masculine principle' is being undermined by the herd-instinct which—we may assume—represents neither the masculine nor the feminine principle, but is essentially 'neutral' and, therefore unattractive. Salvation, according to Keyserling, lies in individual heroism as opposed to mass-acceptance of patterns of thought or conduct. The first requisite of the School of Wisdom, therefore, is training for leadership. Keyserling's use of political terminology shows where his thoughts are leading him: he is only one of the many German intellectuals (Spengler belongs to that same group) who consciously or unconsciously drift towards Fascism which according to them, constitutes the union of heroism and spirituality. The goal of the School of Wisdom, therefore, must be 'the raising of the human level by proclaiming the standard of quality and not of quantity in human values, now that the democratic ideal at its lowest has destroyed itself, and must be replaced by that of an aristocracy founded not on class, which is also played out, but on individual worth.'\* These are very beautiful words, if taken at their face-value. It is indeed unfortunate for Keyserling that exactly the same terminology is used by Alfred Rosenberg, the official 'philosopher' of the National-Socialist Party, on every page of his *Myth of the Twentieth Century*.

\* Written in 1924 ; quoted in Parks, op. cit., p. 93.

Keyserling again and again affirms the necessity of bringing about that synthesis between East and West, which alone will guarantee the training of the right kind of leadership for Europe. His method of approach, however, lacks consistence; at times he wishes his followers to go 'beyond East and West' ('If mankind wishes to attain to a higher stage of insight, it must get beyond the East and the West.\*') and a few pages later he opines that 'our occidental spiritual body, properly adjusted and perfectly developed, would be the very body required for the best possible expression of that very spiritual reality which in itself and as such has been recognized only by the East.'† That, he says, would be an entirely 'new' philosophy which would 'bring the antagonism of the East and the West to a peaceful end'. Keyserling's confusion increases, the more he thinks of this union of the masculine and the feminine principles. For, towards the end of that same book he very definitely states that 'the School of Wisdom does not mean to transplant eastern being to the Occident its goal is absolutely western—particularly in so far as the emphasis will have to be laid on the personal and because this must be done to an extent the East has never known. this leads to a fundamental difference between the schools of the East and ours, not only as to the goal, but also as to the way.'‡ We do not doubt the sincerity and good intentions of Keyserling's attempts at unifying eastern sensibility and western progress. What he was lacking was the necessary awareness to see beyond the veil of metaphysical

\* *Creative Understanding*, 1920, p. 23

† *Ibid.*, p. 26.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 220

speculations; that explains his use of an unrealized symbolism and his lack of consistency. We wonder what happened to him during the last ten years. He has been strangely silent all this time. Perhaps he has found the personal salvation he had been looking for all his life.

If anything distinguishes Keyserling from Guenon, it is the latter's consistency. It amazes and terrifies the reader; the impression it creates in his mind is that of a mania, a fixed idea, an obsession. No other western scholar has exposed with the same vehemence that very same principle of progress underlying all European civilization during the last few centuries. 'Tradition' is the key-word for everything that Guenon has ever written, and whatever is outside tradition is rejected with all the spiritual violence at his command. Guenon is as intensely pre-occupied with western civilization as Keyserling; he is as much concerned with the revaluation of the standards of conduct as Tolstoy or Romain Rolland. But he has made up his mind as regards the trend of western 'progress' and he has nothing but contempt for it: 'The civilization of the modern West appears in history as a veritable anomaly: among all those which are known to us more or less completely this civilization is the only one which has developed along purely material lines, and this monstrous development, whose beginning coincides with the so-called Renaissance, has been accompanied, as indeed it was fated to be, by a corresponding intellectual regress. This regress has reached such a point that the Westerner of today no longer suspects that anything of the kind can exist; hence their disdain, not only for eastern civi-



lization, but also for the Middle Ages of Europe, whose spirit escapes them scarcely less completely.\*

Rene Guenon is a Frenchman and endowed with all the intelligence and perspicacity of his race. That may be the reason why his condemnation of western civilization carries greater conviction than the occasional teutonic outbursts of Keyserling. His generalizations, however, are just as dangerous as those of his German counterpart. Just as Keyserling distinguishes between eastern perfection and western progress, so also Guenon classifies humanity into 'western science' and 'eastern knowledge'. The former 'means analysis and dispersion,' the latter 'means synthesis and concentration'. What the West needs, he exclaims, is 'a principle of a higher order'.† He calls this principle sometimes 'tradition', sometimes 'pure intellect,' and there is no doubt that he refers to the essential spirit underlying all human thought and action, the metaphysical reality of human existence. That is why, he says, all true Easterners reject the principles of change and progress on which all western civilization is built. Contrary to Keyserling and Bergson, he does not believe that Europe has made the faintest impression on the East. Mysticism still exists in India not because of, but in spite of western influence: "The only impression that, for example, mechanical inventions make on most orientals is one of deep repulsion; certainly it seems to them far more harmful than beneficial, and if they find themselves obliged to accept certain things which the present epoch has made necessary, they do so in the hope of fu-

\* Rene Guenon: *East and West*. Trsltd. by William Massey, London, 1941, p. 23.

† *Ibid.*, p. 43.

ture riddance; these things do not interest them and will never really interest them. What westerners call progress is for orientals nothing but change and instability; and the need for change is in their eyes a mark of manifest inferiority; he that has reached a state of equilibrium no longer feels this need, just as he that has found no longer seeks.\*

Who are exactly those 'easterners' and 'orientals' in whose name Guenon seems to speak? He never quite clearly commits himself, but we can assume that he means that very small number of people in the East for whom religious tradition and spiritual integrity matter more than the eternal flux of life around them. That is where he found the 'pure intellect' of the East. Although Guenon is evidently concerned with the very few only, he generalizes all the time and speaks of 'Easterners' while meaning only a handful of 'traditionalists'. He conveniently ignores all those millions of orientals who have taken to western progress—either for the better or for the worse. Western civilization, he says, cannot have a real 'influence on those who possess just those things which it lacks itself',† but he does not tell us who 'those' are. Religion, according to him, is the foundation of all knowledge. Its absence leads to mechanical progress and an over-emphasis on science as the aim and end of all civilization. Religion in the West, he continues, is anti-intellectual and its place is taken by 'religiosity' or in other words, by a mere sentimental aspiration'; and following the tradition established by Schlegel and other expounders of Eastern religion and philosophy in Europe, the

\* Guenon, op., cit., p. 44.

† *Ibid.*, p. 109.

only refuge for traditional knowledge 'appears to be Catholicism'. \*

Guenon has also much to say about orientalists in Europe, those in particular whose academic specialization has prevented them from grasping the inner significance of the doctrines they chose to interpret to the West. 'Germans above all,' he says, 'who refuse to take into the smallest consideration the opinion of the authorized representatives of these doctrines'; and he specifically mentions Deussen 'thinking to explain *Shankaracharya* to the Hindus, and interpreting him through the ideas of Schopenhauer' † The results of western research into oriental philosophy and religion are lamentable, 'because they have brought into their studies all the prejudices that their minds were encumbered with, the more so because they were "specialists", having inevitably acquired beforehand certain mental habits which they could not get rid of.' ‡ And he particularly attacks Schopenhauer and his followers who have made 'philosophy' out of Eastern traditional knowledge and have spread the idea of 'Buddhist pessimism' all over Europe.

Guenon's books have undoubtedly all the seriousness of a great scholar and of one whose concern with the future of civilization was intense. His opinions—however extravagant they may appear to the uninitiated—are based on a thorough study of the materials, and Keyserling's charlatanism is absent. But Guenon also likes to be 'prophetic' and his constant pretence of being misunderstood and of having a grievance against each and

\* Guenon, op. cit. p. 99.

† *Ibid.*, p. 78.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

everybody (including all the leaders of art and thought in Europe from the Renaissance onwards) at times turns into an obsession. His conclusion, however, is as lame as that of Keyserling: only a return to the Middle Ages can save Europe, an insistence on the traditional elements still existing in the West, the creation of a minority of the elect, a spiritual elite. He distinguishes between the 'religious form' of a tradition which is meant for the majority of the people, and an 'intellectual form' which 'concerns directly none but the elect' and adds in a footnote; 'An analogy might well be drawn here with the caste system and its way of ensuring that everyone participates in the tradition'.\* Guenon is also very well aware of the fact that this 'minority of the elect' does not exist at present in Europe, that the 'legacy of purely intellectual tradition of the Middle Ages' has been lost and that, therefore, only an indirect assimilation of the eastern doctrines 'could bring to birth the first elements of the future elect'. Individuals who have succeeded in assimilating these doctrines will still have to keep in touch with whatever remains intact of the western traditional outlook 'chiefly under the form of religion.' †

The modern dilemma is very largely the dilemma of the uprooted intellectual who has lost his way in a civilization which has broken with the past and offers no promise of a future. Surrounded as he is at present by the dynamic forces of progress and deeply aware of the spiritual destruction this progress entails, unable to take sides in the battle for social justice, he cultivates a form of intellectual nostalgia (the basis of all attempts

\* Guenon, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

† *Ibid.*, p. 201

at revivalism), longing for a past which is irrevocably gone and eager to save the last vestiges of a tradition which has lost its meaning for the man-in-the-street. Opposed as he is bound to be to any attempt at popularizing this tradition, he devises ways and means of creating an elite which alone would understand and know what is best for the people and would alone be responsible for the destiny of a future civilization. His hope lies in the individual, intelligently aware of the implications of the spiritual decline in the West and willing to assume leadership in a disintegrating world. In India alone tradition is still alive: the future leaders of Europe will have to go to school in the East, and having absorbed eastern doctrines, will prepare the ground for a spiritual revival of Europe. Both Keyserling and Guenon seem to agree on that point: their one-sided emphasis on the individual as *opposed* to the masses, their rejection of the democratic attitude, their lack of sympathy with the toiling people, create cynicisms and contempt. They carry within them the germs of political reaction. Their revival, however attractive the metaphysical foundation, does not lead towards purposeful social action.

### III

It may be of some interest to know that quite a large number of representatives of 'tradition' in Europe considered the East to be the greatest obstacle in a revival of western traditional forms of life. A few years after the first World War a list of questions was circulated among an impressive number of eminent men of letters in the West. These questions were drawn up by a group of French intellectuals who considered the

oriental influence on European thought and culture to be responsible for the gradual decline of western civilization, and whose main concern it seems to have been to oppose the ancient classical values of Greece and Rome and especially those of the Roman-Catholic Church to the newly discovered Eastern conception of life as propagated and preached by such men as Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi in India and Romain Rolland in France. The bias inherent in the questions themselves is obvious. Their approach is aggressive and confused. Most of the questions lack in precision and take for granted the existence of an altogether separate eastern and western sensibility. They never offer a definition of the former, and the latter, according to them, consists mainly of the 'Mediterranean' values which have guided the spiritual destiny of Europe for the last several thousand years. Here is a literal translation of this list. Its significance—apart from its great historical interest—lies in the fact that the consciousness of decay and disintegration among French intellectuals at that time was compensated by an aggressive 'cultural' nationalism directed against those who attempted a fusion of eastern and western thought, in particular against Romain Rolland :

1. Do you think that the East and the West are altogether impervious to each other, or at least that, in the words of Maeterlinck, there exist in the human brain an oriental and an occidental division which mutually paralyse their efforts ?

2. If we are open to oriental influence, which are the lines of approach,—Teutonic, Slavonic, Asiatic,—that seem to you to have the deepest effect on France ?

3. Do you agree with Henri Massis that this influence from the Orient is liable to constitute for French thought and art a grave menace and that it would be urgently necessary to oppose it, or do you think that the liquidation of the Mediterranean influences has begun and that we could—following in the footsteps of Germany—demand from the “knowledge of the East” an enrichment of our general culture and a spiritual revival ?
4. Which is the domain—art, literature, philosophy—in which this influence seems to you necessarily to lead to particularly creative results ?
5. Which are, in your opinion, the occidental values that constitute the superiority of the West over the East, or which are the false values that, according to you, lower occidental civilization ?

This list of questions was reprinted in a French periodical “Les Cahiers du Mois” (9/10) in 1925, together with the replies from scholars, philosophers, writers, and artists; we also find there extracts from a number of books dealing with the problem of cultural relations between East and West. This publication remains one of the most significant documents in the history of contemporary western resistance to any oriental influence whatsoever. Psychologically speaking, it was an antidote to the overwhelming success of Rabindranath Tagore and other eastern thinkers in the West. From a political point of view it provides the modern reader with historical documents of the greatest significance with regard to the wide-spread opinion in France that oriental thought will penetrate western civilization *via* Russia and Germany, the two countries which, according to these French intellectuals, had turned their back to the ‘Mediterranean’ values and,

not least of all, to Christianity. Even a scholar of the standing of Professor Sylvain Levy who had spent many months in India, could not help feeling that something was wrong somewhere, though he does not, in the following quotation from the same book, specify his misgivings in a very helpful manner: ' . . . From East to West, from West to East, let us try to know each other just as we are, loyally, without being either favourably biased or blindly prejudiced. Romain Rolland who depicts the India of Gandhi as Philostrates depicted the India of the Gymnosophists, does an ill turn to India which he pretends to glorify; Tagore who denounces to his compatriots, in China, in Japan, the faults and crimes of the West, and contrasts them with an Orient of pure fantasy, does harm to Asia, to Europe, and to his own ideal.'

Henri Massis who has already been mentioned in the list of questions, was probably the most outspoken opponent of eastern influence in Russia. Apart from innumerable essays in which he attacks sometimes Russia, sometimes Germany, sometimes eastern thinkers and writers and very often Romain Rolland, he also published a book, *The Defence of the West*, dealing—as the title implies—with the very same problems as are mentioned in the list of questions. This book was also translated into English and found in G. K. Chesterton, who wrote the Preface to it, a worthy propagandist. Massis's attitude towards the East is a mixture of conspicuous ignorance of the problems involved, prejudice as regards the political implications which he found in all the attempts at propagating eastern thought in Europe, and a disconcerting inability to see beyond the confines of French civilization.



Nevertheless, Massis's book is more than a compensation of suppressed fear or persecution complexes. He gave voice to a fairly large number of discontented people, whose conservative bent of mind saw in every attempt to spread knowledge about the East in Europe an attempt at weakening the stability of western civilization. Here is how Massis puts it: 'It is in the West that one must first look for and denounce the ideologists who—while pretending to open our eyes to oriental ideas—betray occidental civilization and their own proper vocation. On the other hand, when we consider who are their allies in Asia, among the orientals themselves, we observe that they all have been formed by western culture. Tagore, Okakura, Coomoraswamy, even Gandhi himself, all of them have been educated in European universities; they quote unceasingly our poets, our philosophers, and it is our own ideas—meaning thereby our worst follies—which they give back to us. How does it happen that under the pretext of coming to an understanding, a union between East and West, their thought—by a kind of pre-established harmony—is in agreement with what is most destructive in European ideology? It is obvious that they utilize the breaches and search for the line of least spiritual resistance in order to penetrate into the body of the disintegrating West.'

One of the 'lines of least spiritual resistance' was, according to these French intellectuals, Germany. It is undoubtedly true that, shortly after the last war, Germany was passing through a spiritual crisis. France which had provided Germany for several centuries past with civilizing influences in art and culture, had ceased to be the predominant factor, and Germany saw, how-

ever vaguely and obscurely it might have been, a light in the East. According to a well-known German scholar, 'Germany prefers looking towards the East, towards Russia, India, China, towards Asiatic civilization. The pillars of German culture erected on a Roman foundation are shaken. Germany moves towards an Asiatic realization of universal synthesis.' It is undoubtedly true that Germany between 1920 and 1930 was looking to the East for a new inspiration. Innumerable novels and poems with a preponderantly eastern background testify to this growing interest in Indian thought and, particularly, religion. Whatever one may think about the sincerity and earnestness of this search for oriental wisdom in post-war Germany, (Hitler's racial theories should shake even the most dogmatic enthusiast)' French intellectuals looked upon this tendency in German civilization with grave misgivings. And those who, in France itself, became the defenders of the East were subjected to unceasing attacks.

It is necessary to know this background and to understand the significance of this cultural struggle in order to appreciate rightly Romain Rolland's contribution to a new synthesis between East and West. All through his life Romain Rolland fought a battle on two fronts. For apart from the necessity he found himself in, of resisting these attacks from outside, he had himself to struggle towards the truth which he ultimately attained despite all the spiritual obstacles; for he himself was brought up and fed on the classical 'Mediterranean' values, on the art of the Renaissance, on the classical music of Germany, on the philosophy of ancient Greece. Solitary all his life, his path led from Tolstoy

to Mahatma Gandhi, from Beethoven to Ramakrishna, from Michel Angelo to Vivekananda. And oblivious of the racial and nationalistic hatred around him, he found his way. And into everyone of his biographies from Tolstoy to Vivekananda, he infused his own newly-found convictions, and an ever-growing belief in the fundamental similarity of all human creation.

Romain Rolland's preoccupation with things eastern, and in particular with India, is not the result of some abstract and purely intellectual conflict between the principles of contemplation and action, between the oriental tendency towards introspection and the occidental conception of a permanent dualism in the life of man: India for Romain Rolland was, first and foremost, an intensely personal experience, indeed almost a revelation which from his early youth served the purpose of creating an equilibrium, a stability, so sadly lacking in the life of most westerners. The intensity of Rolland's Indian experience explains both his strength and his weakness as a champion of Indian thought and culture. Frequently purely mental phenomena were invested with an emotional glamour foreign to them and on the other hand, the westerner's attempt to rationalize, sometimes brought about to Indians an almost intolerable anticlimax and bathos. Whenever exaggerated emotions or rationalization were introduced, Rolland the Frenchman seems to lose himself in an indefinite vagueness which at times is both painful and disconcerting.

Personal experiences, however, are undoubtedly of this kind; they begin as a voyage of discovery, exploring ever new vistas in as yet unconquered territory, until some unsurmountable obstacle is reached, a mountain

which it requires superhuman strength to cross. Here the explorer hesitates, casting lingering glances at the snow-covered peaks, and looking for the valleys which would lead across the mountain to the plains beyond. And when, after overcoming all the difficulties, the tired traveller sets foot on the promised land, the sudden light blurs his vision, and blind and weary he stumbles across the plains. But he knows that it was worth it: for there is fulfilment in discovery and a never-ending joy in having reached one's destination.

Romain Rolland's Indian experience was such a voyage of discovery. Not the painstaking labours of a philologist, nor the far-fetched comparisons of a philosopher, nor the pre-conceived ideas of a social reformer or the sentimentalizing glorifications of a poet: it was an inherent, almost inborn tendency, inevitable like life itself. And Rolland knew it, when he wrote in a letter: 'Now I am a Frenchman of France born in the heart of France, in a family which has been nurtured on the soil for centuries. And when I was barely twenty I had no knowledge of the religions and philosophy of India. —I believe therefore that there is some direct family affinity between an Aryan of the Occident and an Aryan of the Orient.—And I am convinced . . . that it was I who must have descended down the slopes of the Himalayas along with those victorious Aryans. I have their blue blood flowing in my veins.'\* Let us follow Rolland on this voyage of discovery. The journey will lead us across many gigantic rivers, each one of them a landmark in the explorer's progress. And only after having crossed all of them, will Rolland realize that they

\* In a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, Oct. 1924, published in *Anami*.

all flow into the same ocean and that the same clouds rain water on all of them alike.

Rolland's fascination for human greatness is of an intensely complex kind. The genius of three great artists attracted him before the last war: three men in whom a continual and self-destructive dualism was striving for a solution beyond the boundaries of common human experience—Tolstoy, Beethoven, and Michel Angelo. The struggle of the artist with his own art, with the limitations imposed upon him by his medium of self-expression, the word, the sound, stone and colour, the ever-repeated attempts to express the inexpressible, his ultimate failure to give the only one and perfect shape to the intensity of his experiences—it was always the same struggle, 'always the same Man, the son of Man, the Eternal, our Son, our God reborn. With each return he reveals himself a little more fully, and more enriched by the universe.'\* Each one of them a creator of myths, unsurpassable and inimitable. And yet the mountain was still towering above the plains beyond, seen from far away in *The Death of Ivan Ilytch*, in the *Appassionata*, in the frescoes in the Sistine chapel. And Rolland turns towards a different medium of integrating reality; no longer the word, the sound, or the colour, but the mind of man itself. In one of his early plays (1917), he creates a character, Saint Louis, half fictitious, half historical, who for the first time approaches the 'ideal', the great and unique synthesis, which neither of the three artists could achieve. Saint Louis is certainly no artist, no dreamer of dreams. His medium is faith, and his defeat on earth is his victory in the realm of the spirit: 'His leading qua-

\*Romain Rolland : *The Life of Ramakrishna*, 1931, p. 12, 13.

lity is gentleness, but he has so much of it that the strong grow weak before him; he has nothing but his faith, but this faith builds mountains of action. He neither can nor will lead his people to victory; but he makes his subjects transcend themselves, transcend their inertia and the apparently futile venture of the crusade, to attain faith. Thereby he gives the whole nation the greatness which springs from self-sacrifice. In Saint Louis, Rolland for the first time presents his favourite type, that of the vanquished victor. The king never reaches his goal,—the more he seems to be crushed by things, the more does he dominate them.’\* Indeed, we wonder whether Rolland remembers his Saint Louis when, five years later, he began his book on Mahatma Gandhi.

The clue to a proper understanding of Rolland’s Indian experience lies in his early attempts at finding a new frame of reference in the lives of great men. The step from Tolstoy to Mahatma Gandhi, from Beethoven to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, is indeed much shorter than many people seem to believe. Already in his early book on Tolstoy, published in 1911, references to India can be found, and once even a comparison between Tolstoy’s inherent dualism and the Hindu synthesis of thought and action: ‘But as he (Tolstoy) was no Indian mystic, for whom *extasis* is sufficient, as in him intermingled the dreams of the Asiatic with the westerner’s mania for reason and his need for action, he had to translate his revelation into practical faith and to deduce from this divine life rules for his day-to-day existence.’† This seemed to Rolland the ultimate problem all through his life. And

\* Quoted in Stefan Zweig : *Romain Rolland*, p.81.

† Romain Rolland : *Life of Tolstoy*.

nothing pained him more than Tolstoy's inability to live up to his faith. Rolland's early and unbounded admiration for Tolstoy was responsible for his first great disillusionment with the West; but it was also the first stepping-stone leading across the mountains to the plains beyond: 'But I must say nevertheless that Tolstoy is a bad guide. His tormented genius has always been incapable of finding a practical way out' \* And when one year later his book on Mahatma Gandhi appeared, he found that 'everything in Gandhi is natural, simple, modest and pure: whereas in Tolstoy pride fights against pride, anger against anger, everything is violent not excepting even non-violence.' †

It was during the last war—the period of greatest disillusionment in Rolland's life—that his Indian experience took a more definite shape. In neutral Switzerland many men of intellect, free thinkers, revolutionaries, social reformers, used to meet. We do not know whether Rolland met any Indians there, either before or during the war. But in the course of conversations with friends, India and the East were mentioned more than once. Tagore had delivered his lectures on Nationalism in Japan. Rolland read them, translated extracts from them, and printed them at the end of one of his own books.‡ Neither the war nor the peace brought a final solution to the tortured European soul. The alternative between East and West became in the eyes of Rolland the choice between two diametrically opposed attitudes to life. And already in 1918 he writes: 'Out of this battle of the nations two

\* Letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, March 1922, published in *Anami*.

† Romain Rolland: *Mahatma Gandhi*, Madras, 1923.

‡ *Aux Peuples Assassines*, first published in *Domain*, 11, 12, 1916.

colossal powers will emerge, one facing the other: America and Asia. Europe will be engulfed by either of them. I am no prophet and nobody can say which of the two currents will engulf Europe. But I believe that the salvation of humanity, the hope of its future unity resides in the latter.\* Rolland is even more definite in his Preface to the French edition of Mahatma Gandhi's *Young India*. Speaking of 'the spiritual tide rising from the East', he continues: 'This tide will not recede until it has covered the shores of Europe.' Again and again, after the last war, Rolland makes the same kind of statement. His disillusionment with the West is boundless, and so is his hope for some light from the East: 'We are a certain number of people in Europe,' he says, 'who are no longer satisfied with European civilization. There are among us some who look towards Asia. I do not suggest to Europeans to adopt an Asiatic faith. I only want them to taste of the blessing of this magic rhythm, this large and slow breath. They will learn there what the soul of Europe (and America) is most in need of: quietness, patience, virile hope, serene joy.†

The evolution of Rolland's Indian experience is also his own personal evolution from the artistic impulse considered as the most vital factor in human life to Faith in its most spiritual expression; it is his own personal development starting from Tolstoy, Beethoven, and Michel Angelo, and ending in Mahatma Gandhi, Ramakrishna, and Vivekananda. And each one of the biographies he wrote, was indeed part of his own autobiography. Does he not admit it himself at the beginning of his book on

\* Quoted in P. J. Jouve : *Romain Rolland Vivant*, 1921.

† Preface to the translation of Coomaraswamy's *Dance of Shiva*.



Ramakrishna: 'Neither Shakespeare nor Beethoven nor Tolstoy nor Rome, the masters that nurtured me, ever revealed anything to me except the "Open Sesame" of my subterranean city...'\* But the standards by which human greatness is measured are the same everywhere. Again and again Rolland comes across similarities in the struggle for self-realization, and his comparisons between occidental artists and oriental religious leaders are intensely illuminating. For the dualism of the European 'tragic hero' is resolved in the Indian saint. What neither language, nor music, nor painting could do, was fulfilled by Faith. A new frame of reference had been discovered. Once again reality could be integrated: 'But he (Ramakrishna) had realized cosmic joy more fully than our tragic heroes. Joy appeared to Beethoven only as a gleam of blue through the chaos of conflicting clouds, whilst the Paramahansa—the Indian swan—rested his great white wings on the sapphire lake of eternity beyond the veil of tumultuous days. It was not given to his proudest disciples to emulate him. The greatest of them, the spirit with the widest wings—Vivekananda—could only attain his heights by sudden flights amid tempests which remind me over and over again of Beethoven.'†

Rolland's preoccupation with master-minds, on the one hand, and his insistence, in his later writings, on the problems of social justice and revolution, may seem to some the result of loose thinking and of an inherent intellectual inconsistency. Actually, all through his life, Rolland had been insisting on the fundamental difference between the life of the masses and the life of the elite.

\* Romain Rolland : *Life of Ramakrishna*, p. 11.

† Romain Rolland : *Life of Vivekananda*, p. 4.

He was intensely conscious of the solitary struggle of all great masters in a world of ignorance and hatred. From Tolstoy to Vivekananda, it was the individual achievements that fascinated him, not the inertia and docility of the masses. And in a letter he wrote: 'A minority of choice spirits shall always be several centuries ahead of the masses whom they can understand and even love—as they should. But the masses will never understand them for what they are.'\* This quotation explains why in all his books on India hardly ever mention is made of the Indian masses, except in terms of abstraction or generalizations. This undoubtedly is the greatest drawback in his three great biographies. They indeed attempt a spiritualization of India. The indebted peasant on his neglected land, the underpaid labourers in suburban factories and workshops, the uprooted middle-classes in the fast growing cities—they are all absent from his books. Never having been to India, he was indeed singularly handicapped. We do not feel the 'land' with its own continuity of tradition, which—for the better or the worse—is shaping a future, different from the one that Rolland put before his western readers. There is individual greatness in his books, but it is divorced from the breath and being of the people. They are solitary figures all of them and far too frequently oppressed by the consciousness of their own solitude. The people are simpler, and their greatness is deeply immersed in the soil on which they live. It is not to be found on the mountain-tops, but deep down in the fertile and for-ever reborn earth. And we would like to believe, that Rolland's 'inconsistence' is the result of a new awareness, that the greatest creations of

\* To Dilip Kumar Roy, Nov. 1922, Published in *Amani*.

the human mind are collective and anonymous, originating in the silence of the labouring millions, and finding their richest expressions in the achievements of master-minds.

Perhaps mention should be made of another writer who, shortly after Romain Rolland, attempted a similar synthesis of social action and individual integration. There are two opinions about Aldous Huxley in the West: some say that he is too intelligent and too sophisticated by upbringing and temperament to be genuinely absorbed in anything he undertakes; according to them he is a writer who knows a good deal about everything from biology to music, and from chemistry to mysticism, but who never as yet succeeded in integrating his knowledge. His personality, they say, is divided. The experiences he depicts in his novels are the result of an innate cynicism, the modern intellectual's inability to 'live'. Huxley, according to them, becomes the prototype of a modern Hamlet who can see beyond the surface of things and who realizes the need for action, but who is constantly afraid to do what alone he considers to be right. His recent enthusiasm for things eastern is, they say, another intellectual *tour de force* which need not be taken any more seriously than any of the preceding ones.

There are, however, some few who think that Huxley's evolution as a writer and thinker could not but lead him in a straight line to India, and that this increasing pre-occupation with eastern religion and philosophy—far from being a purely intellectual attitude—is Huxley's first serious attempt at integrating a new system of values. They attach a particular significance to the fact that a writer of such distinction and eminence should have lost his

bearings and should turn his back on a civilization which, according to him, has ceased to represent a system of ethical values worth living for. The split which undoubtedly exists in Huxley's personality is no longer the result of a dissociation of sensibility (the *malaise* of most modern poets, for instance), but is the result of an intense intellectual effort at revaluating contemporary life. But revaluation, it goes without saying, always implies an integrating process; in that sense Huxley's eastern pre-occupation is more than a new intellectual device of solving the pressing problems of life. It is an attitude, brought about by mental discipline and training. Huxley provides us with the best instance of a man who turns his back on a civilization which he had probably integrated deeper than any one else among his contemporaries; for only one who *has* a civilization to lose, knows the implications of such a loss, and ultimately can afford losing it.

Huxley's evolution from cynicism to integration is identical with his evolution from western cultural tradition to Indian religious experiences. The inner logic of this development is expressed in his books, both novels and essays. His first contact with India was established when he journeyed across the world shortly after the last war. The intelligent and open-eyed European will find much to criticize in India, and Huxley took full advantage of his scientific training and his capacity for under-statement in criticizing Indian institutions, be it the Taj Mahal, Hindu mysticism, or the English spoken by educated Indians. His *Jesting Pilate* (as well as the short chapter dealing with India in *Point Counter Point*) are the best instances known to us of a highly sophisticated European taking up a defensive attitude

towards all things eastern: defensive, because the psychological mechanism of frustration always leads to a wholesale denial of spiritual or ethical values. If frustration is combined with an ever-alert intelligence, the result cannot but be a self-protective kind of cynicism indulging in paradoxical sayings in order to hide one's own lack of faith and convictions. *Jesting Pilate* abounds in such sayings. Nothing indeed is easier than to ridicule the Indian tendency towards the spiritual in terms of modern scientific research: 'And what meaning for us have those airy assertions about God? God, we psychologists know, is a sensation in the pit of the stomach, hypostasized: God, the personal God of Browning and the modern theologian, is the gratuitous intellectualist interpretation of immediate psycho-physiological experiences.'\* The same argument can be applied to the moral aspects of religion. For does not the history of religious movements teach us that it encourages those elements in human nature which make us complacent, indolent, and frequently evil? 'And religions have been unanimous in encouraging within limits that have tended to grow wider and ever wider, the social, altruistic, humanitarian proclivities of man, and in condemning his anti-social, self-assertive tendencies. Those who like to speak anthropomorphically would be justified in saying that religion is a device employed by the Life Force for the promotion of its evolutionary design. But they would be justified in adding that religion is also a device employed by the Devil for the dissemination of idiocy, intolerance, and servile abjection.'†

\* *Jesting Pilate*, p. 33.

† *Ibid.*, p. 45.

It took Huxley ten years to overcome cynicism and frustration. And gradually the conviction dawned upon him that society cannot be changed unless and until the individual sensibility has been purified of all prejudices and is ready to take that final step towards self-realization which lies in self-less and non-attached action. *Ends and Means* and *After Many a Summer* provide us with many hints as to where this method of self-realization is to come from: it is always the East, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucius, or the mediaeval European mystics. But Huxley is also the first to warn his readers of the dangers involved in an interest in the East which is 'undisciplined' and not yet ready to live up to the demands of one's own conscience: 'There is a danger that the present wide-spread interest in oriental psychology and philosophy may lead, through misunderstanding, to a recrudescence of the grossest form of superstition.'\*

This therefore, must be emphasized: Huxley's interest in the East is essentially 'practical'. He is concerned with it in the same way as a doctor is with the medicines which are needed to cure his patient. And since Huxley's 'patient' is contemporary Western civilization with its false values and its insistence on 'action' as a dynamic principle of life, he must needs ask himself whether actions—if morally evil—can serve a morally good purpose. A reply to this question can hardly be expected from the West with its worship of brute animal power, its dictatorships, its wars. Action becomes meaningful only if the individual himself has been 'regene-

\* *Ends and Means*, p. 228.

rated', i.e. if it is essentially non-attached: 'To us, "life of action" means the sort of life led by movie heroes, business executives, war correspondents, cabinet ministers and the like. It is a matter of experience and observation that actions undertaken by ordinary unregenerated people, sunk in their selfhood and without spiritual insight seldom do much good.'\* Huxley's concern, therefore, is with activity of a purposeful nature and on the basis of social and political progress. He realizes that in 'unstable, unisolated, technologically progressive societies, such as ours, large-scale political action is unavoidable.' But even if we take for granted that the end of such action is always well-intentioned, 'the human instruments with which and the human materials upon which political action must be carried out, is a positive guarantee against the possibility that such action shall yield the results that were expected from it.'†

And if everything in Huxley's latest books centres around the problem of action, and especially political action, he has to devise a 'means' by which action will be come—not only purposeful and leading towards progress—but also self-less and non-attached. And this 'means', this method of achieving an active annihilation of self (as distinguished from passive annihilation which consists in pure contemplation), Huxley finds in the life of all great mystics, be they Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Taoists, or Sufis: 'For the radical and permanent transformation of personality only one effective method has been discovered: that of the mystics. It is a difficult method, demanding from those who undertake it a

\* *Grey Eminence*. p. 238.

† *Ibid.*, p. 242

great deal more patience, resolution, self-abnegation and awareness than most people are prepared to give, except perhaps in times of crisis, when they are ready for a short while to make the most enormous sacrifices.\*

Huxley had a long way to go before reaching these conclusions. But armed as he was with the instruments of modern scientific research he had the courage—not only to burn the boats behind him (only the least sensitive among European intellectuals refused to do that), but also to apply the methods employed by mystics and saints and founders of religions to a new conception of society where the result of political action will be determined by the degree of non-attachment and selflessness of the individual who acts. For if once again ends and means are identical, the split in the consciousness of modern man will be abolished and instead of frustration and cynicism, there will be a deeper awareness of the moral implications of action. According to Huxley, this awareness is the first step towards non-attachment.

\* \* \*

Our analysis of the cultural relations between India and the West has come to an end. It was a story of moral bewilderment within the context of political and social confusion and unrest. The response of European intellectuals towards India during the last hundred and fifty years was very largely determined by their desire to solve the problems of civilization and their inability to do so within a purely western frame of reference. Let us, however, keep in mind that this response was essentially limited to a small group of people in the West, those indeed who alone were conscious of the necessity

\* *Grey Eminence*, p. 243.



of affirming new ideals of life, new standards of conduct, and a new system of values. The uprootedness of the modern intelligentsia in Europe, since the Industrial Revolution, explains their utter disregard for the people, either in the East or in the West. India, in the writings of most of them, is still a fairyland of immense spiritual possibilities: it is the India of the Upanishads, the Vedas, of Ramkrishna and Vivekananda, of Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. Hardly any of the writers discussed in this volume, except Tolstoy and Romain Rolland, were aware of the implications of the loss of political freedom for India. None of them were concerned with the living reality of the people, their search for happiness and for certainty and for freedom. Even the most sympathetic novels dealing with India by modern western authors exhibit a peculiar lack of awareness regarding the reality of contemporary life in India. Even the best among them, such as Forster's *Passage to India*, however sympathetic their appeal and however powerful their moral challenge, lack that complete integration of a country and a people which requires something more than moral sympathy. We still wait for a master-mind who will tell the western reading public what India is, the reality of popular traditions among the people, the rise of new thought and behaviour patterns among the various groups that constitute the Indian nation, the bewilderment of the Indian intelligentsia when confronted by western progress, the struggle of a whole continent for the fundamental freedom in thought in speech, and in action.

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