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Through the Ages

Nationalism and Imperialism under the Guptas

The Maurya Empire faded away and gave place to the Sunga dynasty, which ruled over a much smaller area. In the south great states were rising, and in the north the Bactrians, or Indo-Greeks, were spreading out from Kabul to the Punjab. Under Menander they threatened Pataliputra itself but were defeated and repelled. Menander himself succumbed to the spirit and atmosphere of India and became a Buddhist, a famous one, known as King Milinda, popular in Buddhist legend and regarded almost as a saint. From the fusion of Indian and Greek cultures rose the Graeco-Buddhist art of Gandhara, the region covering Afghanistan and the frontier.

There is a granite pillar called the Heliodorus column, dating from the first century BC, at Besnagar, near Sanchi in Central India, bearing an inscription in Sanskrit. This gives us a glimpse of the process of Indianization of the Greeks who had come to the frontier, and their absorption of Indian culture. The inscription has been translated thus:

This Garuda column of Vasudeva (Vishnu), the God of gods, was erected by Heliodorus, a worshipper of Vishnu, the son of Dion, and an inhabitant of Taxila, who came as Greek ambassador from the great King Antialcidas to King Kashiputra Bhagabhadra, the saviour, then reigning in the fourteenth year of his kingship.

Three immortal precepts, when practised well, lead to heaven—self-restraint, self-sacrifice (charity), conscientiousness.

In Central Asia the Shakas or Scythians (Seistan=Shakasthan) had established themselves in the Oxus Valley. The Yueh Chih, coming from further east, drove them out and pushed them into North India. These Shakas became converts to Buddhism and Hinduism. Among the Yueh Chih, one of the clans, the Kushans, established their supremacy and then extended their sway over Northern India. They defeated the Shakas and pushed them still further south, the Shakas going

to Kathiawad and the Deccan. The Kushans thereupon established an extensive and durable empire over the whole of North India and a great part of Central Asia. Some of them became converts to the Hindu faith, but most of them became Buddhists, and their most famous king, Kanishka, is also one of the heroes of Buddhist legend, which records his great deeds and public works. Buddhist though he was, it appears that the state religion was a mixed affair to which even Zoroastrianism had contributed. This borderland state, called the Kushan Empire, with its seat near modern Peshawar, and the old university of Taxila near by, became the meeting place of men from many nations. There the Indians met the Scythians, the Yueh Chih, the Iranians, the Bactrian Greeks, the Turks, and the Chinese, and the various cultures reacted on each other. A vigorous school of sculpture and painting arose as a result of their interactions. It was during this period that, historically, the first contacts took place between China and India, and a Chinese embassy came to India in 64 AC. Minor but very welcome gifts of China to India at that time were the peach and the pear trees. Right on the borders of the Gobi Desert, at Turfan and Kucha, rose fascinating amalgams of Indian, Chinese, and Iranian cultures.

During the Kushan period a great schism divided Buddhism into two sections—the Mahayana and the Hinayana—and controversy raged between them and, as has been India's way, the issue was put to debate in great assemblies, to which representatives came from all over the country. Kashmir was situated near the centre of the empire and was full of this debate and of cultural activities. One name stands out in this controversy, that of Nagarjuna, who lived in the first century AC. He was a towering personality, great in Buddhist scholarship and Indian philosophy, and it was largely because of him that Mahayana triumphed in India. It was the Mahayana doctrine that spread to China, while Ceylon and Burma adhered to Hinayana.

The Kushans had Indianized themselves and had become patrons of Indian culture; yet an undercurrent of nationalist resistance to their rule continued, and when, later, fresh tribes poured into India, this nationalist and anti-foreign movement took shape at the beginning of the fourth century AC. Another great ruler, also named Chandragupta, drove out the new intruders and established a powerful and widespread empire.

Thus began the age of the imperial Guptas in 320 AC which produced a remarkable succession of great rulers, successful in war and in the arts of peace. Repeated invasions had produced a strong anti-foreign feeling and the old Brahmin-Kshatriya element in the country was forced to think in terms of defence both of their homeland and their culture. The foreign elements which had been absorbed were accepted, but all new-comers met with a vigorous resistance, and an attempt was made to build up a homogenous state based on old Brahminic ideals. But the old self-assurance was going and these ideals began to develop a rigidity which was foreign to their nature. India seemed to draw into her shell, both physically and mentally.

Yet that shell was deep enough and wide enough. Previously, in the ages since the Aryans had come down to what they called Aryavarta or Bharatvarsha, the problem that faced India was to produce a synthesis between this new race and culture and the old race and civilization of the land. To that the mind of India devoted itself and it produced an enduring solution built on the strong foundations of a joint Indo-Aryan culture. Other foreign elements came and were absorbed. They made little difference. Though India had many contacts with other countries through trade and otherwise, essentially she was absorbed in herself and paid little attention to what happened elsewhere. But now periodic invasion by strange peoples with strange customs had shaken her up and she could no longer ignore these eruptions, which not only broke up her political structure but endangered her cultural ideals and social structure also. The reaction was essentially a nationalist one, with the strength as well as the narrowness of nationalism. That mixture of religion and philosophy, history and tradition, custom and social structure, which in its wide fold included almost every aspect of the life of India, and which might be called Brahminism or (to use a later word) Hinduism, became the symbol of nationalism. It was indeed a national religion, with its appeal to all those deep instincts, racial and cultural, which form the basis every where of nationalism today. Buddhism, child of Indian thought, had its nationalist background also. India was to it the holy land where Buddha had lived and preached and died, where famous scholars and saints had spread the faith. But Buddhism was essentially international, a world religion, and as it developed and spread it became increasingly so. Thus it was

natural for the old Brahminic faith to become the symbol again and again of nationalist revivals.

That faith and philosophy were tolerant and chivalrous to the various religions and racial elements in India, and they still continued to absorb them into their wide-flung structure, but they became increasingly aggressive to the outsider and sought to protect themselves against his impact. In doing so, the spirit of nationalism they had roused often took on the semblance of imperialism as it frequently does when it grows in strength. The age of the Guptas, enlightened, vigorous, highly cultured, and full of vitality as it was, rapidly developed these imperialistic tendencies. One of its great rulers, Samudragupta, has been called the Indian Napoleon. From a literary and artistic point of view it was a brilliant period.

From early in the fourth century onwards for about a hundred and fifty years the Guptas ruled over a powerful and prosperous state in the north. For almost another century and a half their successors continued but they were on the defensive now and the empire shrank and became smaller and smaller. New invaders from Central Asia were pouring into India and attacking them. These were the White Huns, as they are called, who ravaged the land, as under Attila they were ravaging Europe. Their barbarous behaviour and fiendish cruelty at last roused the people, and a united attack by a confederacy under Yashovarman was made on them. The Hun power was broken and their chief, Mihiragula, was made a prisoner. But the descendant of the Guptas, Baladitya, in accordance with his country's customs, treated him with generosity and allowed him to leave India. Mihiragula responded to this treatment by returning later and making a treacherous attack on his benefactor.

But the Hun rule in Northern India was of brief duration—about half a century. Many of them remained, however, in the country as petty chiefs giving trouble occasionally and being absorbed into the sea of Indian humanity. Some of these chiefs became aggressive early in the seventh century AC. They were crushed by the King of Kanauj, Harshavardhana, who thereafter built up a powerful state right across Northern and Central India. He was an ardent Buddhist but his Buddhism was of the Mahayana variety which was akin in many ways to Hinduism. He encouraged both Buddhism and Hinduism. It was in his time that the famous Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang (or Yuan Chwang) came

to India (in 629 AC). Harshavardhana was a poet and dramatist and he gathered round his court many artists and poets, making his capital, Ujjayini, a famous centre of cultural activities. Harsha died in 648 AC, just about the time when Islam was emerging from the deserts of Arabia, to spread out rapidly across Africa and Asia.

South India

In South India for more than 1000 years after the Maurya Empire had shrunk and finally ceased to be, great states flourished. The Andhras had defeated the Shakas and were later the contemporaries of the Kushans; then came the Chalukyan Empire in the west to be followed by the Rashtrakutas. Further south were the Pallavas who were mainly responsible for the colonizing expeditions from India. Later came the Chola Empire which spread right across the peninsula and conquered Ceylon and Southern Burma. The last great Chola ruler, Rajendra, died in 1044 AC.

Southern India was especially noted for its fine products and its trade by sea. They were sea-powers and their ships carried merchandise to distant countries. Colonies of Greeks lived there and Roman coins have also been found. The Chalukyan kingdom exchanged ambassadors with the Sassanid rulers of Persia.

The repeated invasions of North India did not affect the South directly. Indirectly they led to many people from the north migrating to the south and these included builders and craftsmen and artisans. The south thus became a centre of the old artistic traditions while the north was more affected by new currents which the invaders brought with them. This process was accelerated in later centuries and the south became the stronghold of Hindu orthodoxy.

Peaceful Development and Methods of Warfare

A brief account of repeated invasions and of empire succeeding empire is likely to convey a very wrong idea of what was taking place in India. It must be

remembered that the period dealt with covers 1000 years or more and the country enjoyed long stretches of peaceful and orderly government.

The Mauryas, the Kushans, the Guptas, and, in the south, the Andhras, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas and others, each lasted for two or three hundred years —longer, as a rule, than the British Empire has so far lasted in India. Nearly all these were indigenous dynasties and even those, like the Kushans, who came from across the northern border, soon adapted themselves to this country and its cultural traditions and functioned as Indian rulers with their roots in India. There were frontier forays and occasional conflicts between adjoining states, but the general condition of the country was one of peaceful government, and the rulers took especial pride in encouraging artistic and cultural activities. These activities crossed state boundaries, for the cultural and literary background was the same throughout India. Every religious or philosophic controversy immediately spread and was debated all over the north and south.

Even when there was war between two states, or there was an internal political revolution, there was relatively little interference with the activities of the mass of the people. Records have been found of agreements between the warring rulers and the heads of village self-governing communities, promising not to injure the harvests in any way and to give compensation for any injury unintentionally caused to the land. This could not apply, of course, to invading armies from abroad, nor probably could it apply to any real struggle for power.

The old Indo-Aryan theory of warfare strictly laid down that no illegitimate methods were to be employed and a war for a righteous cause must be righteously conducted. How far the practice fitted in with the theory is another matter. The use of poisoned arrows was forbidden, so also concealed weapons, or the killing of those who were asleep or who came as fugitives or suppliants. It was declared that there should be no destruction of fine buildings. But this view was already undergoing a change in Chanakya's time and he approves of more destructive and deceptive methods, if these are considered essential for the defeat of the enemy.

It is interesting to note that Chanakya in his *Arthashastra*, in discussing weapons of warfare, mentions machines which can destroy a hundred persons at one time and also some kind of explosives. He also refers to trench warfare. What all this meant it is not possible to say now. Probably the reference is to

some traditional stories of magical exploits. There is no ground for thinking that gunpowder is meant.

India has had many distressful periods in the course of her long history, when she was ravaged by fire and sword or by famine, and internal order collapsed. Yet a broad survey of this history appears to indicate that she had a far more peaceful and orderly existence for long periods of time at a stretch than Europe has had. And this applies also to the centuries following the Turkish and Afghan invasions, right up to the time when the Moghul Empire was breaking up. The notion that the Pax Britannica brought peace and order for the first time to India is one of the most extraordinary of delusions. It is true that when British rule was established in India the country was at her lowest ebb and there was a break-up of the political and economic structure. That indeed was one of the reasons why that rule was established.

India's Urge to Freedom

The East bowed low before the blast
In patient, deep disdain;
She let the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again.

So says the poet and his lines are often quoted. It is true that the East, or at any rate that part of it which is called India, has been enamoured of thinking, often of thinking about matters which to those who consider themselves practical men seem absurd and pointless. She has always honoured thought and the men of thought, the highbrows, and has refused to consider the men of the sword or the possessors of money as superior to them. Even in her days of degradation, she has clung to thought and found some comfort in it.

But it is not true that India has ever bowed patiently before the blast or been indifferent to the passage of foreign legions. Always she has resisted them, often successfully, sometimes unsuccessfully, and even when she failed for the time being, she has remembered and prepared herself for the next attempt. Her method has been two-fold: to fight them and drive them out, and to absorb those who could not be driven away. She resisted, with considerable success,

Alexander's legions, and immediately after his death drove out the Greek garrisons in the north. Later she absorbed the Indo-Greeks and the Indo-Scythians and ultimately again established a national hegemony. She fought the Huns for generations and drove them out; such as remained being absorbed. When the Arabs came they stopped near the Indus. The Turks and Afghans spread further only gradually. It took them several centuries to establish themselves firmly on the throne of Delhi. It was a continuous, long drawn-out conflict and, while this struggle was going on, the other process of absorption and Indianization was also at work, ending in the invaders becoming as much Indian as anyone else. Akbar became the great representative of the old Indian ideal of a synthesis of differing elements and their fusion into a common nationality. He identified himself with India, and India took to him although he was a newcomer; because of this he built well and laid the foundations of a splendid empire. So long as his successors kept in line with this policy and with the genius of the nation, their empire endured. When they broke away and opposed the whole drift of national development, they weakened and their empire went to pieces. New movements arose, narrow in outlook but representing a resurgent nationalism, and though they were not strong enough to build permanently, they were capable of destroying the empire of the Moghuls. They were successful for a time, but they looked too much to the past and thought in terms of reviving it. They did not realize that much had happened which they could not ignore or pass by, that the past can never take the place of the present, that even that present in the India of their day was one of stagnation and decay. It had lost touch with the changing world and left India far behind. They did not appreciate that a new and vital world was arising in the West, based on a new outlook and on new techniques, and a new power, the British, represented that new world of which they were so ignorant. The British triumphed, but hardly had they established themselves in the north when the great mutiny broke out and developed with a war of independence, and nearly put an end to British rule. The urge to freedom, to independence, has always been there, and the refusal to submit to alien domination.

Progress Versus Security

We have been an exclusive people, proud of our past and of our heritage and trying to build walls and barriers to preserve it. Yet in spite of our race-consciousness and the growing rigidity of caste, we have, like others who take such pride in the purity of their racial stock, developed into a strange mixture of races—Aryan, Dravidian, Turanian, Semitic, and Mongolian. The Aryans came here in repeated waves and mixed with the Dravidians; they were followed in the course of thousands of years by successive waves of other migratory peoples and tribes: the Medians, Iranians, Greeks, Bactrians, Parthians, Shakas or Scythians, Kushans or the Yueh Chih, Turks, Turco-Mongols, and others who came in large or small groups and found a home in India. ‘Fierce and warlike tribes,’ says Dodwell in his *India*, ‘again and again, invaded its (India’s) northern plains, overthrew its princes, captured and laid waste its cities, set up new states and built new capitals of their own and then vanished into the great tide of humanity, leaving to their descendants nothing but a swiftly diluted strain of alien blood and a few shreds of alien custom that were soon transformed into something cognate with their overmastering surroundings.’

To what were these overmastering surroundings due? Partly to the influence of geography and climate, to the very air of India. But much more so, surely to some powerful impulse, some tremendous urge, or idea of the significance of life, that was impressed upon the subconscious mind of India when she was fresh and young at the very dawn of her history. That impress was strong enough to persist and to affect all those who came into contact with her, and thus to absorb them into her fold, howsoever they differed. Was this impulse, this idea, the vital spark that lighted up the civilization that grew up in this country and, in varying degrees, continued to influence its people through historical ages?

It seems absurd and presumptuous to talk of an impulse, or an idea of life, underlying the growth of Indian civilization. Even the life of an individual draws sustenance from a hundred sources; much more complicated is the life of a nation or of a civilization. There are myriad ideas that float about like flotsam and jetsam on the surface of India, and many of them are mutually antagonistic. It is easy to pick out any group of them to justify a particular thesis; equally easy to choose another group to demolish it. This is, to some extent, possible everywhere; in an old and big country like India, with so much of the dead clinging on to the living, it is peculiarly easy. There is also obvious danger in

simple classifications of very complex phenomena. There are very seldom sharp contrasts in the evolution of practice and thought; each thought runs into another, and even ideas keeping their outer form change their inner contents; or they frequently lag behind a changing world and become a drag upon it.

We have been changing continually throughout the ages and at no period were we the same as in the one preceding it. Today, racially and culturally, we are very different from what we were; and all around me, in India as elsewhere, I see change marching ahead with a giant's stride. Yet I cannot get over the fact that Indian and Chinese civilizations have shown an extraordinary staying power and adaptability and, in spite of many changes and crises, have succeeded, for an enormous span of years, in preserving their basic identity. They could not have done so unless they were in harmony with life and nature. Whatever it was that kept them to a large extent to their ancient moorings, whether it was good or bad or a mixture of the two, it was a thing of power or it could not have survived for so long. Possibly it exhausted its utility long ago and has been a drag and a hindrance ever since, or it may be that the accretions of later ages have smothered the good in it and only the empty shell of the fossil remains.

There is perhaps a certain conflict always between the idea of progress and that of security and stability. The two do not fit in, the former wants change, the latter a safe unchanging haven and a continuation of things as they are. The idea of progress is modern and relatively new even in the west; the ancient and medieval civilizations thought far more in terms of a golden past and of subsequent decay. In India also the past has always been glorified. The civilization that was built up here was essentially based on stability and security, and from this point of view it was far more successful than any that arose in the west. The social structure, based on the caste system and joint families, served this purpose and was successful in providing social security for the group and a kind of insurance for the individual who by reason of age, infirmity, or any other incapacity, was unable to provide for himself. Such an arrangement, while favouring the weak, hinders, to some extent, the strong. It encourages the average type at the cost of the abnormal, the bad or the gifted. It levels up or down and individualism has less play in it. It is interesting to note that while Indian philosophy is highly individualistic and deals almost entirely with the individual's growth to some kind of inner perfection, the Indian social structure

was communal and paid attention to groups only. The individual was allowed perfect freedom to think and believe what he liked, but he had to conform strictly to social and communal usage.

With all this conformity there was a great deal of flexibility also in the group as a whole and there was no law or social rule that could not change by custom. Also new groups could have their own customs, beliefs, and practices and yet be considered members of the larger social group. It was this flexibility and adaptability that helped in the absorption of foreign elements. Behind it all were some basic ethical doctrines and a philosophic approach to life and a tolerance of other people's ways.

So long as stability and security were the chief ends in view, this structure functioned more or less successfully, and even when economic changes undermined it, there was a process of adaptation and it continued. The real challenge to it came from the new dynamic conception of social progress which could not be fitted into the old static ideas. It is this conception that is uprooting old-established systems in the East as it has done in the West. In the West while progress is still the dominant note, there is a growing demand for security. In India the very lack of security has forced people out of their old ruts and made them think in terms of a progress that will give more security.

In ancient and medieval India, however, there was no such challenge of progress. But the necessity for change and continuous adaptation was recognized and hence grew a passion for synthesis. It was a synthesis not only of the various elements that came into India but also an attempt at a synthesis between the outer and inner life of the individual, between man and nature. There were no such wide gaps and cleavages as seem to exist today. This common cultural background created India and gave it an impress of unity in spite of its diversity. At the root of the political structure was the self-governing village system, which endured at the base while kings came and went. Fresh migrations from outside and invaders merely ruffled the surface of this structure without touching those roots. The power of the state, however despotic in appearance, was curbed in a hundred ways by customary and constitutional restraints, and no ruler could easily interfere with the rights and privileges of the village community. These customary rights and privileges ensured a measure of freedom both for the community and the individual.

Among the people of India today none are more typically Indian or prouder of Indian culture and tradition than the Rajputs. Their heroic deeds in the past have become a living part of that very tradition. Yet many of the Rajputs are said to be descended from the Indo-Scythians, and some even from the Huns who came to India. There is no sturdier or finer peasant in India than the Jat, wedded to the soil and brooking no interference with his land. He also has a Scythian origin. And so too the Kathi, the tall, handsome peasant of Kathiawad. The racial origins of some of our people can be traced back with a certain definiteness, of others it is not possible to do so. But whatever the origin might have been, all of them have become distinctively Indian, participating jointly with others in India's culture and looking back on her past traditions as their own.

It would seem that every outside element that has come to India and been absorbed by India, has given something to India and taken much from her; it has contributed to its own and to India's strength. But where it has kept apart, or been unable to become a sharer and participant in India's life, and her rich and diverse culture, it has had no lasting influence, and has ultimately faded away, sometimes injuring itself and India in the process.

India and Iran

Among the many peoples and races who have come in contact with and influenced India's life and culture, the oldest and most persistent have been the Iranians. Indeed the relationship precedes even the beginnings of Indo-Aryan civilization, for it was out of some common stock that the Indo-Aryans and the ancient Iranians diverged and took their different ways. Racially connected, their old religions and languages also had a common background. The Vedic religion had much in common with Zoroastrianism, and Vedic Sanskrit and the old Pahlavi, the language of the Avesta, closely resemble each other. Classical Sanskrit and Persian developed separately but many of their root-words were common, as some are common to all the Aryan languages. The two languages, and even more so their art and culture, were influenced by their respective environments. Persian art appears to be intimately connected with the soil and scenery of Iran, and to that probably is due the persistence of Iran's artistic

tradition. So also the Indo-Aryan artistic tradition and ideals grew out of the snow-covered mountains, rich forests, and great rivers of north India.

Iran, like India, was strong enough in her cultural foundations to influence even her invaders and often to absorb them. The Arabs, who conquered Iran in the seventh century AC, soon succumbed to this influence and, in place of their simple desert ways, adopted the sophisticated culture of Iran. The Persian language, like French in Europe, became the language of cultured people across wide stretches of Asia. Iranian art and culture spread from Constantinople in the west right up to the edge of the Gobi Desert.

In India this Iranian influence was continuous, and during the Afghan and Moghul periods in India, Persian was the court language of the country. This lasted right up to the beginning of the British period. All the modern Indian languages are full of Persian words. This was natural enough for the languages descended from the Sanskrit, and more especially for Hindustani, which itself is a mixed product, but even the Dravidian languages of the south have been influenced by Persian. India has produced in the past some brilliant poets in the Persian language, and even today there are many fine scholars of Persian, both Hindu and Muslim.

There seems to be little doubt that the Indus Valley civilization had some contacts with the contemporaneous civilizations of Iran and Mesopotamia. There is a striking similarity between some of the designs and seals. There is also some evidence to show that there were contacts between Iran and India in the pre-Achaemian period. India is mentioned in the Avesta and there is also some kind of a description of north India in it. In the Rig Veda there are references to Persia —the Persians were called ‘Parshavas’ and later ‘Parasikas’, from which the modern word ‘Parsi’ is derived. The Parthians were referred to as ‘Parthavas’. Iran and north India were thus traditionally interested in each other from the most ancient times, prior to the Achaemian dynasty. With Cyrus the Great, king of kings, we have record of further contacts. Cyrus reached the borderlands of India, probably Kabul and Baluchistan. In the sixth century BC the Persian Empire under Darius stretched right up to northwest India, including Sind and probably part of western Punjab. That period is sometimes referred to as the Zoroastrian period of Indian history and its influence must have been widespread. Sun worship was encouraged.

The Indian province of Darius was the richest in his empire and the most populous. Sind then must have been very different from the desiccated desert land of recent times. Herodotus tells us of the wealth and density of the Indian population and of the tribute paid to Darius: ‘The population of the Indians is by far the greatest of all the people that we know; and they paid tribute proportionately larger than all the rest—(the sum of) 360 talents of gold dust’ (equivalent to over a million pounds sterling). Herodotus also mentions the Indian contingent in the Persian armies consisting of infantry, cavalry, and chariots. Later, elephants are mentioned.

From a period prior to the seventh century BC, and for ages afterwards, there is some evidence of relations between Persia and India through trade, especially early commerce between India and Babylon which, it is believed, was largely via the Persian Gulf.¹ From the sixth century onwards direct contacts grew through the campaigns of Cyrus and Darius. After Alexander’s conquest Iran was for many centuries under Greek rule. Contacts with India continued and Ashoka’s buildings, it is said, were influenced by the architecture of Persepolis. The Graeco-Buddhist art that developed in north-west India and Afghanistan has also the touch of Iran. During the Gupta period in India, in the fourth and fifth centuries AC, which is noted for its artistic and cultural activities, contacts with Iran continued.

The borderland areas of Kabul, Kandahar, and Seistan, which were often politically parts of India, were the meeting place of Indians and Iranians. In later Parthian times they were called ‘White India’. Referring to these areas, the French savant, James Darmesteler, says: ‘Hindu civilization prevailed in those parts, which in fact in the two centuries before and after Christ were known as White India, and remained more Indian than Iranian till the Mussulman conquest.’

In the north, trade and travellers came overland to India. South India depended more on the sea and sea-borne trade connected it with other countries. There is record of an exchange of ambassadors between a southern kingdom and the Persia of the Sassanids.

The Turkish, Afghan, and Moghul conquests of India resulted in a rapid development of India’s contacts with Central and Western Asia. In the fifteenth century (just about the time of the European Renaissance) the Timurid

Renaissance was flowering in Samarkand and Bokhara, powerfully influenced by Iran. Babar, himself a prince of the Timurid line, came out of this *milieu* and established himself on the throne of Delhi. That was early in the sixteenth century when Iran was having, under the Safavis, a brilliant artistic revival—a period known as the golden age of Persian art. It was to the Safavi king that Babar's son, Humayun, went for refuge and it was with his help that he came back to India. The Moghul rulers of India kept up the closest of contacts with Iran and there was a stream of scholars and artists coming over the frontier to seek fame and fortune at the brilliant court of the Great Moghul.

A new architecture developed in India, a combination of Indian ideals and Persian inspiration, and Delhi and Agra were covered with noble and beautiful buildings. Of the most famous of these, the Taj Mahal, M. Grousset, the French savant, said that it is 'the soul of Iran incarnate in the body of India'.

Few people have been more closely related in origin and throughout history than the people of India and the people of Iran. Unfortunately the last memory we have of this long, intimate and honourable association is that of Nadir Shah's invasion, a brief but terrible visitation two hundred years ago.

Then came the British and they barred all the doors and stopped all the routes that connected us with our neighbours in Asia. New routes were opened across the seas which brought us nearer to Europe, and more particularly England, but there were to be no further contacts overland between India and Iran and Central Asia and China till, in the present age, the development of the airways made us renew the old companionship. This sudden isolation from the rest of Asia has been one of the most remarkable and unfortunate consequences of British rule in India.²

There has, however, been one continuing bond, not with Iran of modern times but with old Iran. Thirteen hundred years ago, when Islam came to Iran, some hundreds or thousands of the followers of the old Zoroastrian faith migrated to India. They found a welcome here and settled down on the western coast, following their faith and customs without being interfered with and without interfering with others. It is remarkable how the Parsis, as they have been called, have quietly and unostentatiously fitted into India, made it their home, and yet kept quite apart as a small community, tenaciously holding on to their old customs. Intermarriage outside the fold of the community was not allowed and

there have been very few instances of it. This in itself did not occasion any surprise in India, as it was usual here for people to marry within their own caste. Their growth in numbers has been very slow and even now their total number is about one hundred thousand. They have prospered in business and many of them are the leaders of industry in India. They have had practically no contacts with Iran and are completely Indian, and yet they hold on to their old traditions and the memories of their ancient homeland.

In Iran there has recently been a strong tendency to look back to the old civilization of pre-Islamic days. This has nothing to do with religion; it is cultural and nationalistic, seeking and taking pride in the long and persistent cultural tradition of Iran.

World developments and common interests are forcing Asiatic countries to look at each other again. The period of European domination is passed over as a bad dream and memories of long ago remind them of old friendships and common adventures.

There can be no doubt that in the near future India will draw closer to Iran, as she is doing to China.

Two months ago the leader of an Iranian Cultural Mission to India said in the city of Allahabad. "The Iranians and Indians are like two brothers, who, according to a Persian legend, had got separated from each other, one going east and the other to the west. Their families had forgotten all about each other and the only thing that remained in common between them were the snatches of a few old tunes which they still played on their flutes. It was through these tunes that, after a lapse of centuries, the two families recognized each other and were reunited. So also we come to India to play on our flutes our age-old songs, so that, hearing them, our Indian cousins may recognize us as their own and become reunited with their Iranian cousins.'

India and Greece

Ancient Greece is supposed to be the fountain-head of European civilization and much has been written about the fundamental difference between the Orient and the Occident. I do not understand this; a great deal of it seems to me to be vague

and unscientific, without much basis in fact. Till recently many European thinkers imagined that everything that was worthwhile had its origin in Greece or Rome. Sir Henry Maine has said somewhere that except the blind forces of nature, nothing moves in this world which is not originally Greek. European classical scholars, deeply learned in Greek and Latin lore, knew very little about India and China. Yet Professor E.R. Dodds emphasizes the ‘Oriental background against which Greek culture rose, and from which it was never completely isolated save in the minds of classical scholars.’

Scholarship in Europe was necessarily limited for a long time to Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, and the picture of the world that grew out of it was of the Mediterranean world. The basic idea was not essentially different from that of the old Romans, though inevitably many changes and adaptations had to be made to it. That idea not only governed the conceptions of history and geopolitics and the development of culture and civilization, but also came in the way of scientific progress. Plato and Aristotle dominated the mind. Even when some knowledge of what the peoples of Asia had done in the past soaked into the European mind, it was not willingly accepted. There was an unconscious resistance to it, an attempt to fit it somehow into the previous picture. If scholars believed so, much more so did the unread crowd believe in some essential difference between the East and the West. The industrialization of Europe and the consequent material progress impressed this difference still further on the popular mind, and by an odd process of rationalization ancient Greece became the father or mother of modern Europe and America. Additional knowledge of the past of the world shook these conclusions in the minds of a few thinkers, but so far as the mass of the people were concerned, intellectuals and non-intellectuals, the centuries-old ideas continued, phantoms floating about in the upper layer of their consciousness and fading away into the landscape they had fashioned for themselves.

I do not understand the use of the words Orient and Occident, except in the sense that Europe and America are highly industrialized and Asia is backward in this respect. This industrialization is something new in the world’s history, and it has changed and continues to change the world more than anything else has done. There is no organic connection between Hellenic civilization and modern European and American civilization. The modern notion that the really

important thing is to be comfortable is entirely foreign to the ideas underlying Greek or any other ancient literature. Greeks and Indians and Chinese and Iranians were always seeking a religion and a philosophy of life which affected all their activities and which were intended to produce an equilibrium and a sense of harmony. This ideal emerges in every aspect of life—in literature, art, and institutions—and it produces a sense of proportion and completeness. Probably these impressions are not wholly justified and the actual conditions of life may have been very different. But even so, it is important to remember how far removed are modern Europe and America from the whole approach and outlook of the Greeks, whom they praise so much in their leisure moments, and with whom they seek some distant contacts, in order to satisfy some inner yearning of their hearts, or find some oasis in the harsh and fiery deserts of modern existence.

Every country and people in the East and the West has had an individuality, a message, and has attempted to solve life's problems each in its own way. Greece is something definite, superb in its own way; so is India, so is China, so is Iran. Ancient India and ancient Greece were different from each other and yet they were akin, just as ancient India and ancient China had kinship in thought, in spite of great differences. They all had the same broad, tolerant, pagan outlook, joy in life and in the surprising beauty and infinite variety of nature, love of art, and the wisdom that comes from the accumulated experience of an old race. Each of them developed in accordance with its racial genius, influenced by its natural environment, and emphasized some one aspect of life more than others. This emphasis varied. The Greeks, as a race, may have lived more in the present and found joy and harmony in the beauty they saw around them or which they themselves created. The Indians found this joy and harmony also in the present, but, at the same time, their eyes were turned towards deeper knowledge and their minds trafficked with strange questions. The Chinese, fully aware of these questions and their mystery, in their wisdom avoided entanglement with them. In their different ways each tried to express the fullness and beauty of life. History has shown that India and China had stronger foundations and greater staying power; they have thus far survived, though they have been badly shaken and have greatly deteriorated, and the future is obscure.

Old Greece, for all its brilliance, had a short life; it did not survive except in its splendid achievements, its influence on succeeding cultures, and the memory of that short bright day of abundant life. Perhaps because it was too much engrossed in the present, it became the past.

India is far nearer in spirit and outlook to the old Greece than the nations of Europe are today, although they call themselves children of the Hellenic spirit. We are apt to forget this because we have inherited fixed concepts which prevent reasoned thought. India, it is said, is religious, philosophical, speculative, metaphysical, unconcerned with this world, and lost in dreams of the beyond and the hereafter. So we are told, and perhaps those who tell us so would like India to remain plunged in thought and entangled in speculation, so that they might possess this world and the fullness thereof, unhindered by these thinkers, and take their joy of it. Yes, India has been all this but also much more than this. She has known the innocence and insouciance of childhood, the passion and abandon of youth, and the ripe wisdom of maturity that comes from long experience of pain and pleasure; and over and over again she has renewed her childhood and youth and age. The tremendous inertia of age and size have weighed her down, degrading custom and evil practice have eaten into her, many a parasite has clung to her and sucked her blood, but behind all this lie the strength of ages and the subconscious wisdom of an ancient race. For we are very old, and trackless centuries whisper in our ears; yet we have known how to regain our youth again and again, though the memory and dreams of those past ages endure with us.

It is not some secret doctrine or esoteric knowledge that has kept India vital and going through these long ages, but a tender humanity, a varied and tolerant culture, and a deep understanding of life and its mysterious ways. Her abundant vitality flows out from age to age in her magnificent literature and art, though we have only a small part of this with us and much lies hidden still or has been destroyed by nature or man's vandalism. The *Trimurti*, in the Elephanta caves, might well be the many-faced statue of India herself, powerful, with compelling eyes, full of deep knowledge and understanding, looking down upon us. The Ajanta frescoes are full of a tenderness and love of beauty and life, and yet always with a suspicion of something deeper, something beyond.

Geographically and climatically Greece is different from India. There are no real rivers there, no forests, no big trees, which abound in India. The sea with its

immensity and changing moods affected the Greeks far more than it did the Indians, except perhaps those who lived near India's coastline. India's life was more continental, of vast plains and huge mountains, of mighty rivers and great forests. There were some mountains in Greece also, and the Greeks chose Olympus as the abode of the gods, just as the Indians placed their gods and even their sages on the Himalayan heights. Both developed a mythology which was indivisibly mixed up with history, and it was not possible to separate fact from fiction. The old Greeks are said to have been neither pleasure-seekers nor ascetics; they did not avoid pleasure as something evil and immoral, nor did they go out deliberately to amuse themselves as modern people are apt to do. Without the inhibitions which afflict so many of us, they took life in their stride, applying themselves wholly to whatever they did, and thus somehow they appear to have been more alive than we are. Some such impression one gathers of life in India also from our old literature. There was an ascetic aspect of life in India, as there was later in Greece, but it was confined to a limited number of people and did not affect life generally. That aspect was to grow more important under the influence of Jainism and Buddhism, but even so it did not change materially the background of life.

Life was accepted as it was and lived fully both in India and Greece; nevertheless, there was a belief in the supremacy of some kind of inner life. This led to curiosity and speculation, but the spirit of inquiry was not so much directed towards objective experience as to logical reasoning fixed on certain concepts which were accepted as obviously true. That indeed was the general attitude everywhere before the advent of the scientific method. Probably this speculation was confined to a small number of intellectuals, yet even the ordinary citizens were influenced by it and discussed philosophical problems, as they did everything else, in their public meeting places. Life was communal, as it is even now in India, especially in the rural areas, where people meet in the market place, in the enclosure of the temple or mosque, at the well-head, or at the *panchayat ghar* or common assembly house, where such exists, to discuss the news of the day and their common needs. Thus public opinion was formed and found expression. There was plenty of leisure for these discussions.

And yet Hellenism has among its many splendid achievements one that is even more unique than others, the early beginnings of experimental science. This

was developed far more in the Hellenic world of Alexandria than in Greece itself, and the two centuries from 330 to 130 BC stand out in the record of scientific development and mechanical invention. There is nothing to compare with this in India, or, for the matter of that, anywhere else till science again took a big stride from the seventeenth century onwards. Even Rome for all its empire and the Pax Romana over a considerable area, its close contacts with Hellenic civilization, its opportunities to draw upon the learning and experiences of many peoples, made no significant contribution to science, invention, or mechanical development. After the collapse of classical civilization in Europe it was the Arabs who kept the flame of scientific knowledge alight through the Middle Ages.

This burst of scientific activity and invention in Alexandria was no doubt the social product of the time, called forth by the needs of a growing society and of seafaring, just as the advance in arithmetic and algebraic methods, the use of the zero sign and the place-value system in India were also due to social needs, advancing trade and more complex organization. But it is doubtful how far the scientific spirit was present in the old Greeks as a whole and their life must have followed traditional patterns, based on their old philosophic approach seeking an integration and harmony in man and with nature. It is that approach which is common to old Greece and India. In Greece, as in India, the year was divided up by popular festivals which heralded the changing seasons and kept man in tune with nature's moods. We have still these festivals in India for spring and harvest-time and *deepavali*, the festival of light at the end of autumn, and the *holi* carnival in early summer, and celebrations of the heroes of epic tradition. There is still singing and dancing at some of these festivals, folk-songs and folk-dances like the *rasa-lila*, the dance of Krishna with the gopis (cowherdesses).

There is no seclusion of women in ancient India except to some extent among royalty and the nobility. Probably there was more segregation of the sexes in Greece than in India then. Women of note and learning are frequently mentioned in the old Indian books, and often they took part in public debates. Marriage, in Greece, was apparently wholly a contractual affair; but in India it has always been considered a sacramental union, though other forms are mentioned.

Greek women were apparently especially welcome in India. Often the maids-in-waiting at royal courts mentioned in the old plays are Greek. Among the

noted imports from Greece into India at the port of Barygaza (Broach in Western India) were, it is said, ‘singing boys and pretty maidens’. Megasthenes, describing the life of the Maurya king Chandragupta, tells us: ‘the king’s food was prepared by women who also served him with wine which is much used by all Indians.’ Some of the wine certainly came from Grecian lands or colonies, for an old Tamil poet refers to ‘the cool and fragrant wine brought by the Yavanas (Ionians or Greeks) in their good ships.’ A Greek account relates that the king of Pataliputra (probably Ashoka’s father, Bindusara) wrote to Antiochus asking him to buy and send him sweet wine, dried figs, and a Sophist philosopher. Antiochus replied: ‘We shall send you the figs and wine, but in Greece the laws forbid a Sophist to be sold.’

It is clear from Greek literature that homosexual relations were not looked upon with disfavour. Indeed there was a romantic approval of them. Possibly this was due to the segregation of the sexes in youth. A similar attitude is found in Iran, and Persian literature is full of such references. It appears to have become an established literary form and convention to represent the beloved as a male companion. There is no such thing in Sanskrit literature and homosexuality was evidently neither approved nor at all common in India.

Greece and India were in contact with each other from the earliest recorded times, and in a later period there were close contacts between India and Hellenized western Asia. The great astronomical observatory at Ujjayini (now Ujjain) in central India was linked with Alexandria in Egypt. During this long period of contact there must have been many exchanges in the world of thought and culture between these two ancient civilizations. There is a tradition recorded in some Greek book that learned Indians visited Socrates and put questions to him. Pythagoras was particularly influenced by Indian philosophy and Professor H.G. Rawlinson remarks that ‘almost all the theories, religious, philosophical, and mathematical, taught by the Pythagorians were known in India in the sixth century BC.’ A European classical scholar, Urwick, has based his interpretation of the ‘Republic’ of Plato upon Indian thought.³ Gnosticism is supposed to be a definite attempt to fuse together Greek Platonic and Indian elements. The philosopher Apollonius of Tyana probably visited the university of Taxila in north-west India about the beginning of the Christian era.

The famous traveller and scholar, Alberuni, a Persian born in Khorasan in Central Asia, came to India in the eleventh century AC. He had already studied Greek philosophy which was popular in the early days of Islam in Baghdad. In India he took the trouble to learn Sanskrit in order to study Indian philosophy. He was struck by many common features and he has compared the two in his book on India. He refers to Sanskrit books dealing with Greek astronomy and Roman astronomy.

Though inevitably influencing each other Greek and Indian civilizations were each strong enough to hold their own and develop on their distinctive lines. In recent years there has been a reaction from the old tendency to ascribe everything to Greece and Rome, and Asia's, and especially India's role has been emphasized. 'Considered broadly,' says Professor Tarn, 'what the Asiatic took from the Greek was usually externals only, matters of form; he rarely took the substance—civic institutions may have been an exception—and never spirit. For in matters of spirit Asia was quite confident that she could outstay the Greeks, and she did.' Again: 'Indian civilization was strong enough to hold its own against Greek civilization, but except in the religious sphere, was seemingly not strong enough to influence it as Babylonia did; nevertheless, we may find reason for thinking that in certain respects India was the dominant partner.' 'Except for the Buddha statue the history of India would in all essentials have been precisely what it has been had the Greeks never existed.'

It is an interesting thought that image worship came to India from Greece. The Vedic religion was opposed to all forms of idol and image worship. There were not even any temples for the gods. There probably were some traces of image worship in the older faiths in India, though this was certainly not widely prevalent. Early Buddhism was strongly opposed to it and there was a special prohibition against the making of images and statues of the Buddha. But Greek artistic influence in Afghanistan and round about the frontier was strong and gradually it had its way. Even so, no statues of the Buddha were made to begin with, but Apollo-like statues of the Bodhisattvas (supposed to be the previous incarnations of the Buddha) appeared. These were followed by statues and images of the Buddha himself. This encouraged image-worship in some forms of Hinduism though not in the Vedic religion which continued to be free of it. The

word for an image or statue in Persian and in Hindustani still is *But* (like put) derived from Buddha.

The human mind appears to have a passion for finding out some kind of unity in life, in nature and the universe. That desire, whether it is justified or not, must fulfil some essential need of the mind. The old philosophers were ever seeking this, and even modern scientists are impelled by this urge. All our schemes and planning, our ideas of education and social and political organization, have at their back the search for unity and harmony.

We are told now by some able thinkers and philosophers that this basic conception is false and there is no such thing as order or unity in this accidental universe. That may be so, but there can be little doubt that even this mistaken belief, if such it was, and the search for unity in India, Greece, and elsewhere, yielded positive results and produced a harmony, a balance, and a richness in life.

The Old Indian Theatre

The discovery by Europe of the old Indian drama led immediately to suggestions that it had its origin in, or had been greatly influenced by Greek drama. There was some plausibility in the theory, for till then no other ancient drama had been known to exist, and after Alexander's raid Hellenized states were established on the frontiers of India. These states continued to function for several centuries and Greek theatrical representations must have been known there. This question was closely scrutinized and debated by European scholars throughout the nineteenth century. It is now generally admitted that the Indian theatre was entirely independent in its origins, in the ideas which governed it, and in its development. Its earliest beginnings can be traced back to the hymns and dialogues of the Rig Veda which have a certain dramatic character. There are references to *Nataka* or the drama in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It began to take shape in the song and music and dances of the Krishna legends. Panini, the great grammarian of the sixth or seventh century BC, mentions some dramatic forms.

A treatise on the Art of the Theatre—the *Natya-Shastra*—is said to date from the third century AC but this was evidently based on previous books on the

subject. Such a book could only be written when the dramatic art was fully developed and public representations were common. A considerable literature must have preceded it, and behind it must lie many centuries of gradual progress. Recently an ancient playhouse, dating from the second century BC, has been unearthed in the Ramgarh Hills in Chota Nagpur. It is significant that this playhouse fits in with the general description of theatres given in the *Natya-Shastra*.

It is now believed that the regular Sanskrit drama was fully established by the third century BC, though some scholars take the date back to the fifth century. In the plays that we have, mention is often made of earlier authors and plays which have not so far been found. One such lost author was Bhasa, highly praised by many subsequent dramatists. Early in this century a bunch of thirteen of his plays was discovered. Probably the earliest Sanskrit plays so far discovered are those of Ashvaghosa, who lived just before or after the beginning of the Christian era. These are really fragments only of manuscripts on palm leaves, and they were discovered, strangely enough, at Turfan on the borders of the Gobi desert. Ashvaghosa was a pious Buddhist and wrote also the *Buddha Charita*, a life of the Buddha, which was well known and had long been popular in India and China and Tibet. The Chinese translation, made in a past age, was by an Indian scholar.

These discoveries have given a new perspective to the history of the old Indian drama and it may be that further discoveries and finds will throw more light on this fascinating development of Indian culture. For, as Sylvain Lévi has written in his *Le Théâtre Indien*:

Le théâtre est la plus haute expression de la civilisation qui l'enfante. Qu'il traduise ou qu'il interprète la vie réelle, il est tenu de la resumer sous une forme frappante, dégagée des accessoires insignifiants, généralisée dans un symbole. L'originalité de l'Inde s'est exprimée tout entière dans son art dramatique; elle y a combiné et condensé ses dogmes, ses doctrines, ses institutions ...

Europe first learned of the old Indian drama from Sir William Jones's translation of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, published in 1789. Something in the nature of a commotion was created among European intellectuals by this discovery and several editions of the book followed. Translation also appeared (made from Sir William Jones's translation) in German, French, Danish, and Italian. Goethe was powerfully impressed and he paid a magnificent tribute to *Shakuntala*. The idea

of giving a prologue to Faust is said to have originated from Kalidasa's prologue, which was in accordance with the usual tradition of the Sanskrit drama.⁴

Kalidasa is acknowledged to be the greatest poet and dramatist of Sanskrit literature. 'Le nom de Kalidasa,' says Professor Sylvain Lévi,

domine la poésie indienne et la résume brillamment. Le drame, l'épopée savante. L'élégie attestent aujourd'hui encore la puissance et la souplesse de ce magnifique génie; seul entre les disciples de Sarasvati (the goddess of learning and the arts), il a eu le bonheur de produire un chef d'œuvre vraiment classique, où l'Inde s'admire et où l'humanité se reconnaît. Les applaudissements qui saluèrent la naissance de Cakuntala à Ujjayini ont après de long siècles éclaté d'un bout du monde à l'autre, quand William Jones l'eut révélé à l'Occident. Kālidāsa a marqué sa place dans cette pléiade étincelante où chaque nom résume une période de l'esprit humain. La série de ces noms forme l'histoire, ou plutôt elle est l'histoire même.

Kalidasa wrote other plays also and some long poems. His date is uncertain but very probably he lived towards the end of the fourth century AC at Ujjayini during the reign of Chandragupta II, Vikramaditya of the Gupta dynasty. Tradition says that he was one of the nine gems of the court, and there is no doubt that his genius was appreciated and he met with full recognition during his life. He was among the fortunate whom life treated as a cherished son and who experienced its beauty and tenderness more than its harsh and rough edges. His writings betray this love of life and a passion for nature's beauty.

One of Kalidasa's long poems is the *Meghaduta*, the Cloud Messenger. A lover, made captive and separated from his beloved, asks a cloud, during the rainy season, to carry his message of desperate longing to her. To this poem and to Kalidasa, the American scholar, Ryder, has paid a splendid tribute. He refers to the two parts of the poem and says:

The former half is a description of external nature, yet interwoven with human feeling; the latter half is a picture of a human heart, yet the picture is framed in natural beauty. So exquisitely is the thing done that none can say which half is superior. Of those who read this perfect poem in the original text, some are moved by the one, some by the other. Kalidasa understood in the fifth century what Europe did not learn until the nineteenth, and even now comprehends only imperfectly, that the world was not made for man, that man reaches his full stature only as he realizes the dignity and worth of life that is not human. That Kalidasa seized this truth is a magnificent tribute to his intellectual power, a quality quite as necessary to great poetry as perfection of form. Poetical fluency is not rare; intellectual grasp is not very uncommon: but the combination of the two has not been found perhaps more than a dozen times since the world began. Because he possessed this harmonious combination, Kalidasa ranks not with Anacreon and Horace and Shelley, but with Sophocles, Virgil, and Milton.

Probably long before Kalidasa, another famous play was produced—Shudraka's *Mrichhkatika* or the Clay Cart, a tender, rather artificial play, and yet with a reality which moves us and gives us a glimpse into the mind and civilization of the day.

About 400 AC, also during the reign of Chandragupta II, yet another notable play was produced, Vishaka-datta's *Mudra-Rakshasa* or The Signet Ring. This is a purely political play with no love motive or story from mythology. It deals with the times of Chandragupta Maurya, and his chief minister, Chanakya, the author of the *Arthashastra*, is the hero. In some ways it is a remarkably topical play today.

Harsha, the king who established a new empire early in the seventh century AC, was also a playwright and we have three plays written by him. About 700 AC there lived Bhavabhuti, another shining star in Sanskrit literature. He does not yield himself easily to translation for his beauty is chiefly of language, but he is very popular in India, and only Kalidasa has precedence over him. Wilson, who used to be professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University, has said of these two: 'It is impossible to conceive language so beautifully musical, or so magnificently grand, as that of the verses of Bhavabhuti and Kalidasa.'

The stream of Sanskrit drama continued to flow for centuries, but after Murari, early in the ninth century, there is a marked decline in the quality. That decline, and a progressive decay, were becoming visible also in other forms of life's activities. It has been suggested that this decline of the drama may be partly due to the lack of royal patronage during the Indo-Afghan and Moghul periods and the Islamic disapproval of the drama as an art-form, chiefly because of its intimate association with the national religion. For this literary drama, apart from the popular aspects which continued, was highbrow and sophisticated and dependent on aristocratic patronage. But there is little substance in this argument though it is possible that political changes at the top had some indirect effect. As a matter of fact the decline of the Sanskrit drama was obvious long before those political changes took place. And even those changes were confined for some centuries to north India, and if this drama had any vitality left it could have continued its creative career in the south.

The record of the Indo-Afghan, Turkish, and Moghul rulers, apart from some brief puritanical periods, is one of definite encouragement of Indian culture,

occasionally with variations and additions to it. Indian music was adopted as a whole and with enthusiasm by the Muslim Courts and the nobility and some of its greatest masters have been Muslims. Literature and poetry were also encouraged and among the noted poets in Hindi are Muslims. Ibrahim Adil Shah, the ruler of Bijapur, wrote a treatise in Hindi on Indian music.

Both Indian poetry and music were full of references to the Hindu gods and goddesses and yet they were accepted and the old allegories and metaphors continued. It might be said that except in regard to actual image-making no attempt was made by Muslim rulers, apart from a few exceptions, to suppress any art-form.

The Sanskrit drama declined because much in India was declining in those days and the creative spirit was lessening. It declined long before the Afghans and Turks established themselves on the throne of Delhi. Subsequently Sanskrit had to compete to some extent as the learned language of the nobility with Persian. But one obvious reason appears to have been the ever-widening gap between the language of the Sanskrit drama and the languages of day-to-day life. By 1000 AC the popular spoken languages, out of which our modern languages have grown, were beginning to take literary forms.

Yet, in spite of all this, it is astonishing how the Sanskrit drama continued to be produced right through the medieval period and up to recent times. In 1892 appeared a Sanskrit adaptation of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Manuscripts of old plays are continually being discovered. A list of these prepared by Professor Sylvain Levi in 1980 contained 377 plays by 189 authors. A more recent list contains 650 plays.

The language of the old plays (of Kalidasa and others) is mixed—Sanskrit and one or more *Prakrits*, that is, popular variations of Sanskrit. In the same play educated people speak in Sanskrit and ordinary uneducated folk, usually women, though there are exceptions, in Prakrit. The poetical and lyrical passages, which abound, are in Sanskrit. This mixture probably brought the plays nearer to the average audience. It was a compromise between the literary language and the demands of a popular art.

Yet, essentially, the old drama represents an aristocratic art meant for sophisticated audiences, usually royal courts and the like. Sylvain Levi compares it, in some ways, to French tragedy, which was cut off from the crowd by the

choice of its subjects and, turning away from real life, created a conventional society.

But apart from this high-class literary theatre, there has always been a popular theatre based on stories from Indian mythology and the epics, themes well known to the audience, and concerned more with display than with any dramatic element. This was in the language of the people in each particular area and was therefore confined to that area. Sanskrit plays, on the other hand, being in the all-India language of the educated, had an all-India vogue.

These Sanskrit plays were undoubtedly meant for acting and elaborate stage-directions are given, and rules for seating the audience. Unlike the practice in ancient Greece, actresses took part in the presentation. In both Greek and Sanskrit there is a sensitive awareness of nature and a feeling of being a part of that nature. There is a strong lyric element and poetry seems to be an integral part of life, full of meaning and significance. It was frequently recited. Reading the Greek drama one comes across many customs and ways of thought and life which suddenly remind one of old Indian customs. Nevertheless Greek drama is essentially different from the Sanskrit.

The essential basis of the Greek drama is tragedy, the problem of evil. Why does man suffer? Why is there evil in the world? The enigma of religion, of God. What a pitiful thing is man, child of a day, with his blind and aimless strivings against all-powerful fate—‘The Law that abides and changes not, ages long ...’ Man must learn by suffering and, if he is fortunate, he will rise above his striving:

Happy be, on the weary sea
Who hath fled the tempest and won the haven.

Happy whoso has risen, free,
Above his striving. For strangely graven

Is the art of life that one and another
In gold and power may outpass his brother.

And men in their millions float and flow.
And seethe with a million hopes as leaven;

And they win their Will, or they miss their Will,
And the hopes are dead or are pined for still;

But whoever can know,
As the long days go,
That to Live is happy, hath found his Heaven!

Man learns by suffering, he learns how to face life, but he learns also that the ultimate mystery remains and he cannot find an answer to his questions or solve the riddle of good and evil.

There be many shapes of mystery;
And many things God brings to be,
Past hope or fear.

And the end men looked for cometh not,
And a path is there where no man thought.⁵

There is nothing comparable to the power and majesty of Greek tragedy in Sanskrit. Indeed there is no tragedy at all for a tragic ending was not permitted. No such fundamental questions are discussed for the commonly held patterns of religious faith were accepted by the dramatists. Among these were the doctrines of rebirth and cause and effect. Accident or evil without cause was ruled out, for what happens now is the necessary result of some previous happening in a former life. There is no intervention of blind forces against which man has to fight, though his struggles are of no avail. The philosophers and the thinkers were not satisfied by these simple explanations and they were continually going behind them in their search for final causes and fuller explanations. But life was generally governed by these beliefs and the dramatists did not challenge them. The plays and Sanskrit poetry in general were in full accord with the Indian spirit and there are few traces of any rebellion against it.

The rules laid down for dramatic writing were strict and it was not easy to break them. Yet there is no meek submission to fate; the hero is always a man of courage who faces all hazards. ‘The ignorant rely on Providence’, says Chanakya contemptuously in the *Mudra-Rakshasa*, they look to the stars for help instead of relying on themselves. Some artificiality creeps in: the hero is always the hero, the villain almost always acts villainously; there are few intermediate shades.

Yet there are powerful dramatic situations and moving scenes and a background of life which seems like a picture in a dream, real and yet unreal, all woven together by a poet’s fancy in magnificent language. It almost seems, though it may not have been so, that life in India was more peaceful, more stable then; as if it had discovered its roots and found answer to its questions. It flows along serenely and even strong winds and passing storms ruffle its surface only.

There is nothing like the fierce tempests of Greek tragedy. But it is very human and there is an aesthetic harmony and a logical unity about it. The Nataka, the Indian drama, says Sylvain Levi, still remains the happiest invention of the Indian genius.

Professor A. Berriedale Keith⁶ says also that ‘The Sanskrit drama may legitimately be regarded as the highest product of Indian poetry, and as summing up in itself the final conception of literary art achieved by the very self-conscious creators of Indian literature ... The Brahmin, in fact, much abused as he has been in this as in other matters, was the source of the intellectual distinction of India. As he produced Indian philosophy, so by another effort of his intellect he evolved the subtle and effective form of the drama.’

An English translation of Shudraka’s *Mrichhkatika* was staged in New York in 1924. Mr Joseph Wood Krutch, the dramatic critic of the *Nation*, wrote of it as follows:

Here, if anywhere, the spectator will be able to see a genuine example of that pure art theatre of which theorists talk, and here, too, he will be led to meditate upon that real wisdom of the East which lies not in esoteric doctrine but in a tenderness far deeper and truer than that of the traditional Christianity which has been so thoroughly corrupted by the hard righteousness of Hebraism ... A play wholly artificial yet profoundly moving because it is not realistic but real ... Whoever the author may have been, and whether he lived in the fourth century or the eighth, he was a man good and wise with the goodness and wisdom which come not from the lips or the smoothly flowing pen of the moralist but from the heart. An exquisite sympathy with the fresh beauty of youth and love tempered his serenity, and he was old enough to understand that a lighthearted story of ingenious complication could be made the vehicle of tender humanity and confident goodness ... Such a play can be produced only by a civilization which has reached stability; when a civilization has thought its way through all the problems it faces, it must come to rest upon something calm and naïve like this. Macbeth and Othello, however great and stirring they might be, are barbarous heroes because the passionate tumult of Shakespeare is the tumult produced by the conflict between a newly awakened sensibility and a series of ethical concepts inherited from the savage age. The realistic drama of our own time is a product of a like confusion; but when problems are settled, and when passions are reconciled with the decisions of an intellect, then form alone remains ... Nowhere in our European past do we find, this side the classics, a work more completely civilized.

Vitality and Persistence of Sanskrit

Sanskrit is a language amazingly rich, efflorescent, full of luxuriant growth of all kinds, and yet precise and strictly keeping within the framework of grammar which Panini laid down two thousand six hundred years ago. It spread out, added to its richness, became fuller and more ornate, but always it stuck to its original roots.

In the years of the decline of Sanskrit literature, it lost some of its power and simplicity of style and became involved in highly complex forms and elaborate similes and metaphors. The grammatical rule which enables words to be joined together, became in the hands of the epigones a mere device to show off their cleverness by combining whole strings of words running into many lines.

Sir William Jones observed as long ago as 1784: ‘The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin and more exquisitely refined than either: yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs, and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all without believing them to have sprung from *some common source* which perhaps no longer exists ...’

William Jones was followed by many other European scholars, English, French, German, and others, who studied Sanskrit and laid the foundations of a new science—comparative philology. German scholarship forged ahead in this new domain and it is to these German scholars of the nineteenth century that the greatest credit must go for research in Sanskrit. Practically every German university had a Sanskrit department, with one or two professors in charge of it.

Indian scholarship, which was considerable, was of the old style, uncritical and seldom acquainted with foreign classical languages, except Arabic and Persian. A new type of scholarship arose in India under European inspiration, and many Indians went to Europe (usually to Germany) to train themselves in the new methods of research and critical and comparative study. These Indians had an advantage over the Europeans, and yet there was a disadvantage also. The disadvantage was due to certain preconceived notions, inherited beliefs and tradition, which came in the way of dispassionate criticism. The advantage, and it was great, was the capacity to enter into the spirit of the writing, to picture the environment in which it grew and thus to be more in tune with it.

A language is something infinitely greater than grammar and philology. It is the poetic testament of the genius of a race and a culture, and the living embodiment of the thoughts and fancies that have moulded them. Words change their meanings from age to age and old ideas transform themselves into new, often keeping their old attire. It is difficult to capture the meaning, much less the spirit, of an old word or phrase. Some kind of a romantic and poetical approach is necessary if we are to have a glimpse into that old meaning and into the minds of those who used the language in former days. The richer and more abundant the language, the greater the difficulty. Sanskrit, like other classical languages, is full of words which have not only poetic beauty but a deep significance, a host of associated ideas, which cannot be translated into a language foreign in spirit and outlook. Even its grammar, its philosophy, have a strong poetic content; one of its old dictionaries is in poetic form.

It is no easy matter, even for those of us who have studied Sanskrit, to enter into the spirit of this ancient tongue and to live again in its world of long ago. Yet we may do so to a small extent, for we are the inheritors of old traditions and that old world still clings to our fancies. Our modern languages in India are children of Sanskrit, and to it owe most of their vocabulary and their forms of expression. Many rich and significant words in Sanskrit poetry and philosophy, untranslatable in foreign languages, are still living parts of our popular languages. And Sanskrit itself, though long dead as a language of the people, has still an astonishing vitality. But for foreigners, however learned, the difficulties become greater. Unfortunately, scholars and learned men are seldom poets, and it is the scholar poet who is required to interpret a language. From these scholars we usually get, as M. Barth has pointed out, ‘traductions infidèles à force d’être littérales’.

So while the study of comparative philology has progressed and much research work has been done in Sanskrit, it is rather barren and sterile from the point of view of a poetic and romantic approach to this language. There is hardly any translation in English or any other foreign language from the Sanskrit which can be called worthy of or just to the original. Both Indians and foreigners have failed in this work for different reasons. That is a great pity and the world misses something that is full of beauty and imagination and deep thinking, something

that is not merely the heritage of India but should be the heritage of the human race.

The hard discipline, reverent approach, and insight of the English translation of the Authorized Version of the Bible, not only produced a noble book, but gave to the English language strength and dignity. Generations of European scholars and poets have laboured lovingly over Greek and Latin classics and produced fine translation in various European languages. And so even common folk can share to some extent in those cultures and, in their drab lives, have glimpses of truth and loveliness. Unfortunately, this work has yet to be done with the Sanskrit classics. When it will be done, or whether it will be done at all, I do not know. Our scholars grow in numbers and grow in scholarship, and we have our poets too, but between the two there is a wide and ever-growing gap. Our creative tendencies are turned in a different direction, and the many demands that the world of today makes upon us hardly give us time for the leisured study of the classics. Especially in India we have to look another way and make up for long lost time; we have been too much immersed in the classics in the past, and because we lost our own creative instincts we ceased to be inspired even by those classics which we claimed to cherish so much. Translations, I suppose, from the Indian classics will continue to appear, and scholars will see to it that the Sanskrit words and names are properly spelt and have all the necessary diacritical marks, and that there are plenty of notes and explanations and comparisons. There will be everything, in fact, literally and conscientiously rendered, only the living spirit will be missing. What was a thing of life and joy, so lovely and musical and full of imaginative daring, will become old and flat and stale, with neither youth nor beauty, but with only the dust of the scholar's study and the smell of midnight oil.

For how long Sanskrit has been a dead language, in the sense of not being popularly spoken, I do not know. Even in the days of Kalidasa it was not the people's language, though it was the language of educated people throughout India. So it continued for centuries, and even spread to the Indian colonies in South-east Asia and Central Asia. There are records of regular Sanskrit recitations, and possibly plays also, in Cambodia in the seventh century AC. Sanskrit is still used for some ceremonial purposes in Thailand (Siam). In India the vitality of Sanskrit has been amazing. When the Afghan rulers had

established themselves on the throne of Delhi, about the beginning of the thirteenth century, Persian became the court language over the greater part of India and, gradually, many educated people took to it in preference to Sanskrit. The popular languages also grew and developed literary forms. Yet in spite of all this Sanskrit continued, though it declined in quality. Speaking at the Oriental Conference held in 1937 at Trivandrum, over which he presided, Dr. F.F. Thomas pointed out what a great unifying force Sanskrit had been in India and how widespread its use still was. He actually suggested that a simple form of Sanskrit, a kind of basic Sanskrit, should be encouraged as a common all-India language today! He quoted, agreeing with him, what Max Müller had said previously: ‘Such is the marvellous continuity between the past and the present in India, that in spite of repeated social convulsions, religious reforms, and foreign invasions, Sanskrit may be said to be still the only language spoken over the whole extent of that vast country ... Even at the present moment, after a century of English rule and English teaching, I believe that Sanskrit is more widely understood in India than Latin was in Europe at the time of Dante.’

I have no idea of the number of people who understood Latin in the Europe of Dante’s time; nor do I know how many understand Sanskrit in India today; but the number of these latter is still large, especially in the south. Simple spoken Sanskrit is not very difficult to follow for those who know well any of the present-day Indo-Aryan languages—Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, etc. Even present-day Urdu, itself wholly an Indo-Aryan language, probably contains 80 per cent words derived from Sanskrit. It is often difficult to say whether a word has come from Persian or Sanskrit, as the root words in both these languages are alike. Curiously enough, the Dravidian languages of the south, though entirely different in origin, have borrowed and adopted such masses of words from the Sanskrit that nearly half their vocabulary is very nearly allied to Sanskrit.

Books in Sanskrit on a variety of subjects, including dramatic works, continued to be written throughout the medieval period and right up to modern times. Indeed, such books still appear from time to time, and so do Sanskrit magazines. The standard is not high and they do not add anything of value to Sanskrit literature. But the surprising thing is that this hold of Sanskrit should continue in this way throughout this long period. Sometimes public gatherings

are still addressed in Sanskrit, though naturally the audiences are more or less select.

This continuing use of Sanskrit has undoubtedly prevented the normal growth of the modern Indian languages. The educated intellectuals looked upon them as vulgar tongues not suited to any creative or learned work, which was written in Sanskrit, or later not infrequently in Persian. In spite of this handicap the great provincial languages gradually took shape in the course of centuries, developed literary forms, and built up their literatures.

It is interesting to note that in modern Thailand when the need arose for new technical, scientific, and governmental terms, many of these were adapted from Sanskrit.

The ancient Indians attached a great deal of importance to sound, and hence their writing, poetry or prose, had a rhythmic and musical quality. Special efforts were made to ensure the correct enunciation of words and elaborate rules were laid down for this purpose. This became all the more necessary as, in the old days, teaching was oral, and whole books were committed to memory and thus handed down from generation to generation. The significance attached to the sound of words led to attempts to co-ordinate the sense with the sound, resulting sometimes in delightful combinations, and at other times in crude and artificial mixtures. E.H. Johnstone has written about this:

The classical poets of India have a sensitiveness to variations of sound, to which the literature of other countries afford few parallels, and their delicate combinations are a source of never-failing joy. Some of them, however, are inclined to attempt to match the sense with the sound in a way that is decidedly lacking in subtlety, and they have perpetrated real atrocities in the manufacture of verses with a limited number of consonants or even only one.⁷

Recitations from the Vedas, even in the present day, are done according to the precise rules for enunciation laid down in ancient times.

The modern Indian languages descended from the Sanskrit, and therefore called Indo-Aryan languages, are: Hindi-Urdu, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Oriya, Assamese, Rajasthani (a variation of Hindi), Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, and Kashmiri. The Dravidian languages are: Tamil, Telugu, Kanarese, and Malayalam. These fifteen languages cover the whole of India, and of these, Hindi, with its variation Urdu, is far the most widespread and is understood even where it is not spoken. Apart from these, there are only some dialects and some

undeveloped languages spoken, in very limited areas, by some backward hill and forest tribes. The oft-repeated story of India having five hundred or more languages is a fiction of the mind of the philologist and the census commissioner who notes down every variation in dialect and every petty hill-tongue on the Assam-Bengal frontier with Burma as a separate language, although sometimes it is spoken only by a few hundred or a few thousand persons. Most of these so-called hundreds of languages are confined to this eastern frontier of India and to the eastern border tracts of Burma. According to the method adopted by census commissioners, Europe has hundreds of languages and Germany was, I think, listed as having about sixty.

The real language question in India has nothing to do with this variety. It is practically confined to Hindi-Urdu, one language with two literary forms and two scripts. As spoken there is hardly any difference; as written, especially in literary style, the gap widens. Attempts have been, and are being made to lessen this gap and develop a common form, which is usually styled Hindustani. This is developing into a common language understood all over India.

Pashto, one of the Indo-Aryan languages derived from Sanskrit, is the popular language in the North West Frontier Province as well as in Afghanistan. It has been influenced, more than any of our other languages, by Persian. This frontier area has in the past produced a succession of brilliant thinkers, scholars, and grammarians in Sanskrit.

The language of Ceylon is Singhalese. This also an Indo-Aryan language derived directly from Sanskrit. The Singhalese people have not only got their religion, Buddhism, from India, but are racially and linguistically akin to Indians.

Sanskrit, it is now well recognized, is allied to the European classical and modern languages. Even the Slavonic languages have many common forms and roots with Sanskrit. The nearest approach to Sanskrit in Europe is made by the Lithuanian language.

Buddhist Philosophy

Buddha, it is said, used the popular language of the area he lived in, which was a Prakrit, a derivative of Sanskrit. He must have known Sanskrit, of course, but he preferred to speak in the popular tongue so as to reach the people. From this Prakrit developed the Pali language of the early Buddhist scriptures. Buddha's dialogues and other accounts and discussions were recorded in Pali long after his death, and these form the basis of Buddhism in Ceylon, Burma, and Siam, where the Hinayana form of Buddhism prevails.

Some hundreds of years after Buddha there was a revival of Sanskrit in India, and Buddhist scholars wrote their philosophical and other works in Sanskrit. Ashvaghosha's writings and plays (the earliest plays we have), which are meant to be propaganda for Buddhism, are in Sanskrit. These Sanskrit writings of Buddhist scholars in India went to China, Japan, Tibet, and Central Asia, where the Mahayana form of Buddhism prevailed.

The age which gave birth to the Buddha had been one of tremendous mental ferment and philosophic inquiry in India. And not in India only for that was the age of Lao-tze and Confucius, of Zoroaster and Pythagoras. In India it gave rise to materialism as well as to the Bhagavad Gita, to Buddhism and Jainism, and to many others currents of thought which were subsequently to consolidate themselves in the various systems of Indian philosophy. There were different strata of thought, one leading to another, and sometimes overlapping each other.

Different schools of philosophy developed side by side with Buddhism, and Buddhism itself had schisms leading to the formation of different schools of thought. The philosophic spirit gradually declined, giving place to scholasticism and polemical controversy.

Buddha had repeatedly warned his people against learned controversy over metaphysical problems. 'Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent,' he is reported to have said. Truth was to be found in life itself and not in argument about matters outside the scope of life and therefore beyond the ken of the human intellect. He emphasized the ethical aspects of life and evidently felt that these suffered and were neglected because of a preoccupation with

metaphysical subtleties. Early Buddhism reflected to some extent this philosophic and rational spirit of the Buddha, and its inquiries were based on experience. In the world of experience the concept of pure being could not be grasped and was therefore put aside; so also the idea of a creator God, which was a presumption not capable of logical proof. Nevertheless the experience remained and was real enough in a sense; what could this be except a mere flux of becoming, ever changing into something else? So these intermediate degrees of reality were recognized and further inquiry proceeded on these lines on a psychological basis. Buddha, rebel as he was, hardly cut himself off from the ancient faith of the land. Mrs Rhys Davids says:

Gautama was born and brought up and lived and died as a Hindu ... There was not much in the metaphysics and principles of Gautama which cannot be found in one or other of the orthodox systems, and a great deal of his morality could be matched from earlier or later Hindu books. Such originality as Gautama possessed lay in the way in which he adapted, enlarged, ennobled, and systematized that which had already been well said by others; in the way in which he carried out to their logical conclusion principles of equity and justice already acknowledged by some of the most prominent Hindu thinkers. The difference between him and other teachers lay chiefly in his deep earnestness and in his broad public spirit of philanthropy.⁸

Yet Buddha had sown the seeds of revolt against the conventional practice of the religion of his day. It was not his theory or philosophy that was objected to—for every conceivable philosophy could be advocated within the fold of orthodox belief so long as it remained a theory—but the interference with the social life and organization of the people. The old system was free and flexible in thought, allowing for every variety of opinion, but in practice it was rigid, and non-conformity with practice was not approved. So, inevitably, Buddhism tended to break away from the old faith, and, after Buddha's death, the breach widened.

With the decline of early Buddhism, the *Mahayana* form developed, the older form being known as the *Hinayana*. It was in this Mahayana that Buddha was made into a god and devotion to him as a personal god developed. The Buddha image also appeared from the Grecian northwest. About the same time there was a revival of Brahminism in India and of Sanskrit scholarship.

Between the Hinayana and the Mahayana there was bitter controversy and the debate and opposition to each other has continued throughout subsequent history. The Hinayana countries (Ceylon, Burma, Siam) even now rather look

down upon the Buddhism that prevails in China and Japan, and I suppose this feeling is reciprocated.

While the Hinayana adhered, in some measure, to the ancient purity of doctrine and circumscribed it in a Pali Canon, the Mahayana spread out in every direction, tolerating almost everything and adapting itself to each country's distinctive outlook. In India it began to approach the popular religion; in each of the other countries—China and Japan and Tibet—it had a separate development. Some of the greatest of the early Buddhist thinkers moved away from the agnostic attitude which Buddha had taken up in regard to the existence of the soul and rejected it completely.

Among a galaxy of men of remarkable intellect, Nagarjuna stands out as one of the greatest minds that India has produced. He lived during Kanishka's reign, about the beginning of the Christian era, and he was chiefly responsible for formulating the Mahayana doctrines. The power and daring of his thought are remarkable and he is not afraid of arriving at conclusions which to most people must have appeared as scandalous and shocking. With a ruthless logic he pursues his argument till it leads him to deny even what he believed in. Thought cannot know itself and cannot go outside itself or know another. There is no God apart from the universe, and no universe apart from God, and both are equally appearances.

And so he goes on till there is nothing left, no distinction between truth and error, no possibility of understanding or misunderstanding anything, for how can anyone misunderstand the unreal? Nothing is real. The world has only a phenomenal existence; it is just an ideal system of qualities and relations, in which we believe but which we cannot intelligibly explain. Yet behind all this experience he hints at something—the Absolute—which is beyond the capacity of our thinking, for in the very process of thought it becomes something relative.⁹

This absolute is often referred to in Buddhist philosophy as *Shunyata* or nothingness (Shunya is the word for the zero mark) yet it is something very different from our conception of vacancy or nothingness.¹⁰ In our world of experience we have to call it nothingness for there is no other word for it, but in terms of metaphysical reality it means something transcendent and immanent in all things.

Says a famous Buddhist scholar: ‘It is on account of *Shunyata* that everything becomes possible, without it nothing in the world is possible.’

All this shows where metaphysics leads to and how wise was Buddha’s warning against such speculations. Yet the human mind refuses to imprison itself and continues to reach out for that fruit of knowledge which it well knows is beyond reach. Metaphysics developed in Buddhist philosophy but the method was based on a psychological approach. Again, it is surprising to find the insight into the psychological states of the mind. The subconscious self of modern psychology is clearly envisaged and discussed. An extraordinary passage in one of the old books has been pointed out to me. This reminds one in a way of the Oedipus Complex theory, though the approach is wholly different.¹¹

Four definite schools of philosophy developed in Buddhism, two of these belonged to the Hinayana branch, and two to the Mahayana. All these Buddhist systems of philosophy have their origin in the Upanishads, but they do not accept the authority of the Vedas. It is this denial of the Vedas that distinguishes them from the so-called Hindu systems of philosophy which developed about the same time. These latter, while accepting the Vedas generally and, in a sense, paying formal obeisance to them, do not consider them as infallible, and indeed go their own way without much regard for them. As the Vedas and the Upanishads spoke with many voices, it was always possible for subsequent thinkers to emphasize one aspect rather than another, and to build their system on this foundation.

Professor Radhakrishnan thus describes the logical movement of Buddhist thought as it found expression in the four schools. It begins with a dualistic metaphysics looking upon knowledge as a direct awareness of objects. In the next stage ideas are made the media through which reality is apprehended, thus raising a screen between mind and things. These two stages represent the Hinayana schools. The Mahayana schools went further and abolished the things behind the images and reduced all experience to a series of ideas in their mind. The ideas of relativity and the subconscious self come in. In the last stage—this was Nagarjuna’s Madhyamika philosophy or the middle way—mind itself is dissolved into mere ideas, leaving us with loose units of ideas and perceptions about which we can say nothing definite.

Thus we arrive finally at airy nothing, or something that is so difficult to grasp for our finite minds that it cannot be described or defined. The most we can say is that it is some kind of consciousness—*vijyana* as it is called.

In spite of this conclusion arrived at by psychological and metaphysical analysis which ultimately reduces the conception of the invisible world or the absolute to pure consciousness, and thus to nothing, so far as we can use or comprehend words, it is emphasized that ethical relations have a definite value in our finite world. So in our lives and in our human relations we have to conform to ethics and live the good life. To that life and to this phenomenal world we can and should apply reason and knowledge and experience. The infinite, or whatever it may be called, lies somewhere in the beyond and to it therefore these cannot be applied.

Effect of Buddhism on Hinduism

What was the effect of Buddha's teachings on the old Aryan religion and the popular beliefs that prevailed in India? There can be no doubt that they produced powerful and permanent effects on many aspects of religious and national life. Buddha may not have thought of himself as the founder of a new religion; probably he looked upon himself as a reformer only. But his dynamic personality and his messages attacking many social and religious practices inevitably led to conflict with the entrenched priesthood. He did not claim to be an uprooter of the existing social order or economic system; he accepted their basic premises and only attacked the evils that had grown under them. Nevertheless he functioned, to some extent, as a social revolutionary and it was because of this that he angered the Brahmin class who were interested in the continuance of the existing social practices. There is nothing in Buddha's teachings that cannot be reconciled with the wide-flung range of Hindu thought. But when Brahmin supremacy was attacked it was a different matter.

It is interesting to note that Buddhism first took root in Magadha, that part of northern India where Brahminism was weak. It spread gradually west and north and many Brahmins also joined it. To begin with, it was essentially a Kshatriya movement but with a popular appeal. Probably it was due to the Brahmins, who

later joined it, that it developed more along philosophical and metaphysical lines. It may have been due also chiefly to the Brahmin Buddhists that the Mahayana form developed; for, in some ways, and notably in its catholic variety, this was more akin to the varied form of the existing Aryan faith.

Buddhism influenced Indian life in a hundred ways, as it was bound to, for it must be remembered that it was a living, dynamic, and widespread religion in India for over a thousand years. Even in the long years of its decline in India, and when later it practically ceases to count as a separate religion here, much of it remained as a part of the Hindu faith and in national ways of life and thought. Even though the religion as such was ultimately rejected by the people, the ineffaceable imprint of it remained and powerfully influenced the development of the race. This permanent effect had little to do with dogma or philosophic theory or religious belief. It was the ethical and social and practical idealism of Buddha and his religion that influenced our people and left their imperishable marks upon them, even as the ethical ideals of Christianity affected Europe though it may not pay much attention to its dogmas, and as Islam's human, social, and practical approach influenced many people who were not attracted by its religious forms and beliefs.

The Aryan faith in India was essentially a national religion restricted to the land, and the social caste structure it was developing emphasized this aspect of it. There were no missionary enterprises, no proselytization, no looking outside the frontiers of India. Within India it proceeded on its own unobtrusive and subconscious way and absorbed newcomers and old, often forming new castes out of them. This attitude to the outside world was natural for those days, for communications were difficult and the need for foreign contacts hardly arose. There were no doubt such contacts for trade and other purposes but they made no difference to India's life and ways. The ocean of Indian life was a self-contained one, big and diverse enough to allow full play for its many currents, self-conscious and absorbed in itself, caring little for what happened beyond its boundaries. In the very heart of this ocean burst forth a new spring, pouring out a fountain of fresh and limpid water, which ruffled the old surface and overflowed, not caring at all for those old boundaries and barriers that man and nature had erected. In this fountain of Buddha's teaching the appeal was to the nation but it

was also to more than the nation. It was a universal call for the good life and it recognized no barriers of class or caste or nation.

This was a novel approach for the India of his day. Ashoka was the first person to act upon it in a big way with his embassies to, and missionary activities in, foreign countries. India thus began to develop an awareness of the world, and probably it was largely this that led, in the early centuries of the Christian era, to vast colonial enterprises. These expeditions across the seas were organized by Hindu rulers and they carried the Brahminical system and Aryan culture with them. This was an extraordinary development for a self-contained faith and culture which were gradually building up a mutually exclusive caste system. Only a powerful urge and something changing their basic outlook could have brought this about. That urge may have been due to many reasons, and most of all to trade and the needs of an expanding society, but the change of outlook was partly due to Buddhism and the foreign contacts it had brought about. Hinduism was dynamic enough and full of an overflowing energy at the time but it had previously not paid much attention to foreign countries. One of the effects of the universalism of the new faith was to encourage this dynamic energy to flow out to distant countries.

Much of the ritualism and ceremonial associated with the Vedic, as well as more popular forms of religion, disappeared, particularly animal sacrifices. The idea of non-violence, already present in the Vedas and Upanishads, were emphasized by Buddhism and even more so by Jainism. There was a new respect for life and a kindness to animals. And always behind all this was the endeavour to lead the good life, the higher life.

Buddha had denied the moral value of austere asceticism. But the whole effect of his teaching was one of pessimism towards life. This was especially the Hinayana view and even more so that of Jainism. There was an emphasis on other-worldliness, a desire for liberation, of freedom from the burdens of the world. Sexual continence was encouraged and vegetarianism increased. All these ideas were present in India before the Buddha but the emphasis was different. The emphasis of the old Aryan ideal was on a full and all-rounded life. The student stage was one of continence and discipline, the householder participated fully in life's activities and took sex as part of them. Then came a gradual withdrawal and a greater concentration on public service and individual

improvement. Only the last stage of life, when old age had come, was that of *sanyasa* or full withdrawal from life's normal work and attachments.

Previously small groups of ascetically inclined people lived in forest settlements, usually attracting students. With the coming of Buddhism huge monasteries and nunneries grew up everywhere and there was a regular flow of population towards them. The very name of the province of Bihar today is derived from *Vihara*, monastery, which indicates how full that huge area must have been of monasteries. Such monasteries were educational establishments also or were connected with schools and sometimes with universities.

Not only India but the whole of Central Asia had large numbers of huge Buddhist monasteries. There was a famous one in Balkh, accommodating 1,000 monks, of which we have many records. This was called *Nava-vihara*, the new monastery, which was Persianized into *Naubahar*.

Why was it that Buddhism resulted in the growth of otherworldliness in India far more than in some other countries where it has flourished for long periods—in China, Japan and Burma? I do not know, but I imagine that the national background of each country was strong enough to mould the religion according to its shape. China, for instance, had the powerful traditions derived from Confucius and Lao-tze and other philosophers. Then again, China and Japan adopted the Mahayana form of Buddhism which was less pessimistic in its approach than the Hinayana. India was also influenced by Jainism which was the most otherworldly and life-negating of all these doctrines and philosophies.

Yet another very curious effect of Buddhism in India and on its social structure appears to have been one that was entirely opposed to its whole outlook. This was in relation to caste, which it did not approve of though it accepted its original basis. The caste system in the time of the Buddha was flexible and had not developed the rigidity of later periods. More importance was attached to capacity, character, and occupation, than to birth. Buddha himself often uses the term Brahmin as equivalent to an able, earnest, and disciplined person. There is a famous story in the Chhandogya Upanishad which shows us how caste and sex relations were viewed then.

This is the story of Satyakama whose mother was Jabala. Satyakama wanted to become a student of the sage Gautama (not the Buddha) and, as he was leaving his home, he asked his mother: 'Of what gotra (family or clan) am I?'

His mother said to him: 'I do not know, my child, of what family thou art. In my youth when I had to move about much as a servant (waiting on the guests in my father's house), I conceived thee. I do not know of what family thou art. I was Jabala by name, thou art Satyakama. Say that thou art Satyakama Jabala (that is, Satyakama, the son of Jabala).'

Satyakama then went to Gautama and the sage asked him about his family. He replied in the words of his mother. Thereupon the teacher said: 'no one but a true Brahmin would thus speak out. Go and fetch fuel, friend. I shall initiate you. You have not swerved from the truth.'

Probably at the time of the Buddha the Brahmins were the only more or less rigid caste. The Kshatriyas or the ruling class were proud of their group and family traditions but, as a class, their doors were open for the incorporation of individuals or families who became rulers. For the rest, most people were Vaishyas, the agriculturists, an honoured calling. There were other occupational castes also. The so-called caste-less people, the untouchables, appear to have been very few, probably some forest folk and some whose occupation was the disposal of dead bodies, etc.

The emphasis of Jainism and Buddhism on non-violence led to the tilling of the soil being considered a lowly occupation, for it often resulted in the destruction of animal life. This occupation, which had been the pride of the Indo-Aryans, went down in the scale of values in some parts of the country, in spite of its fundamental importance, and those who actually tilled the land descended in the social scale.

Thus Buddhism, which was a revolt against priestcraft and ritualism and against the degradation of any human being and his deprivation of the opportunities of growth and leading a higher life, unconsciously led to the degradation of vast numbers of tillers of the soil. It would be wrong to make Buddhism responsible for this, for it had no such effect elsewhere. There was something inherent in the caste system which took it in this direction. Jainism pushed it along that way because of its passionate attachment to non-violence—Buddhism also inadvertently helped in the process.

How did Hinduism Absorb Buddhism in India?

Eight or nine years ago, when I was in Paris, André Malraux put me a strange question at the very beginning of our conversation. What was it, he asked me, that enabled Hinduism to push away organized Buddhism from India, without any major conflict, over a thousand years ago? How did Hinduism succeed in absorbing, as it were, a great and widespread popular religion, without the usual wars of religion which disfigure the history of so many countries? What inner vitality or strength did Hinduism possess then which enabled it to perform this remarkable feat? And did India possess this inner vitality and strength today? If so, then her freedom and greatness were assured.

The question was perhaps typical of a French intellectual who was also a man of action. And yet few persons in Europe or America would trouble themselves over such matters; they would be much too full of the problems of today. Those present-day world problems filled and troubled Malraux also, and with his powerful and analytical mind he sought light wherever he could find it in the past or in the present—in thought, speech, writing, or, best of all, in action, in the game of life and death.

For Malraux the question was obviously not just an academic one. He was full of it and he burst out with it as soon as we met. It was a question after my own heart, or rather the kind of question that my own mind was frequently framing. But I had no satisfactory answer to it for him or for myself. There are answers and explanations enough, but they seem to miss the core of the problem.

It is clear that there was no widespread or violent extermination of Buddhism in India. Occasionally there were local troubles or conflicts between a Hindu ruler and the Buddhist *Sangha*, or organization of monks, which had grown powerful. These had usually a political origin and they did not make any essential difference. It must also be remembered that Hinduism was at no time wholly displaced by Buddhism. Even when Buddhism was at its height in India, Hinduism was widely prevalent. Buddhism died a natural death in India, or rather it was a fading out and a transformation into something else. ‘India,’ says Keith, ‘has a strange genius for converting what it borrows and assimilating it.’ If that is true of borrowings from abroad or from alien sources, still more is it applicable to something that came out of its own mind and thought. Buddhism was not only entirely a product of India; its philosophy was in line with previous Indian thought and the philosophy of the Vedanta (the Upanishads). The

Upanishads had even ridiculed priestcraft and ritualism and minimised the importance of caste.

Brahminism and Buddhism acted and reacted on each other, and in spite of their dialectical conflicts or because of them, approached nearer to each other, both in the realm of philosophy and that of popular belief. The Mahayana especially approached the Brahminical system and forms. It was prepared to compromise with almost anything, so long as its ethical background remained. Brahminism made of Buddha an *avatar*, a God. So did Buddhism. The Mahayana doctrine spread rapidly but it lost in quality and distinctiveness what it gained in extent. The monasteries became rich, centres of vested interests, and their discipline became lax. Magic and superstition crept into the popular forms of worship. There was a progressive degeneration of Buddhism in India after the first millennium of its existence. Mrs Rhys Davids points out its diseased state during that period: ‘under the overpowering influence of these sickly imaginations the moral teachings of Gautama have been almost hid from view. The theories grew and flourished, each new step, each new hypothesis demanded another; until the whole sky was filled with forgeries of the brain, and the nobler and simpler lessons of the founder of the religion were smothered beneath the glittering mass of metaphysical subtleties.’¹²

This description might well apply to many of the ‘sickly imaginings’ and ‘forgeries of the brain’ which were afflicting Brahminism and its offshoots at that time.

Buddhism had started at a time of social and spiritual revival and reform in India. It infused the breath of new life in the people, it tapped new sources of popular strength and released new talent and capacity for leadership. Under the imperial patronage of Ashoka it spread rapidly and became the dominant religion of India. It spread also to other countries and there was a constant stream of learned Buddhist scholars going abroad from India and coming to India. This stream continued for many centuries. When the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hien came to India in the fifth century AC, a thousand years after Buddha, he saw that Buddhism was flourishing in its parent country. In the seventh century AC the still more famous pilgrim Hsuan Tsang (or Yuan-Chwang) came to India and witnessed signs of decay, although even then it was strong in some areas. Quite a

large number of Buddhist scholars and monks gradually drifted from India to China.

Meanwhile there had been a revival of Brahminism and a great cultural renaissance under the Imperial Guptas in the fourth and fifth centuries AC. This was not anti-Buddhist in any way but it certainly increased the importance and power of Brahminism, and it was also a reaction against the otherworldliness of Buddhism. The later Guptas contended for long against Hun invasions and, though they drove them off ultimately, the country was weakened and a process of decay set in. There were several bright periods subsequently and many remarkable men arose. But both Brahminism and Buddhism deteriorated and degrading practices grew up in them. It became difficult to distinguish the two. If Brahminism absorbed Buddhism, this process changed Brahminism also in many ways.

In the eighth century Shankaracharya, one of the greatest of India's philosophers, started religious orders or *maths* for Hindu sanyasins or monks. This was an adoption of the old Buddhist practice of the *sangha*. Previously there had been no such organizations of sanyasins in Brahminism, although small groups of them existed.

Some degraded forms of Buddhism continued in East Bengal and in Sind in the north-west. Otherwise Buddhism gradually vanished from India as a widespread religion.

The Indian Philosophical Approach

Though one thought leads to another, each usually related to life's changing texture, and a logical movement of the human mind is sometimes discernible; yet thoughts overlap and the new and the old run side by side, irreconcilable and often contradicting each other. Even an individual's mind is a bundle of contradictions and it is difficult to reconcile his actions one with another. A people, comprising all stages of cultural development, represent in themselves and in their thoughts, beliefs, and activities, different ages of the past leading up to the present. Probably their activities may conform more to the social and cultural pattern of the present day, or else they would be stranded and isolated

from life's moving stream, but behind these activities lie primitive beliefs and unreasoned convictions. It is astonishing to find in countries industrially advanced, where every person automatically uses or takes advantage of the latest modern discovery or device, beliefs and set ideas which reason denies and intelligence cannot accept. A politician may of course succeed in his business without being a shining example of reason or intelligence. A lawyer may be a brilliant advocate and jurist and yet be singularly ignorant of other matters. Even a scientist, that typical representative of the modern age, often forgets the method and outlook of science when he goes out of his study or laboratory.

This is so even in regard to the problems that affect our daily lives in their material aspects. In philosophy and metaphysics the problems are more remote, less transient and less connected with our day's routine. For most of us they are entirely beyond our grasp unless we undergo a rigid discipline and training of the mind. And yet all of us have some kind of philosophy of life, conscious or unconscious, if not thought out then inherited or accepted from others and considered as self-evident. Or we may seek refuge from the perils of thought in faith in some religious creed or dogma, or in national destiny, or in a vague and comforting humanitarianism. Often, all these and others are present together, though with little to connect them, and we develop split personalities, each functioning in its separate compartment.

Probably there was more unity and harmony in the human personality in the old days, though this was at a lower level than today except for certain individuals who were obviously of a very high type. During this long age of transition, through which humanity has been passing, we have managed to break up that unity, but have not so far succeeded in finding another. We cling still to the ways of dogmatic religion, adhere to outworn practices and beliefs, and yet talk and presume to live in terms of the scientific method. Perhaps science has been too narrow in its approach to life and has ignored many vital aspects of it, and hence it could not provide a suitable basis for a new unity and harmony. Perhaps it is gradually broadening this basis now, and we shall achieve a new harmony for the human personality on a much higher level than the previous one. But the problem is a more difficult and complex one now, for it has grown beyond the limits of the human personality. It was perhaps easier to develop some kind of a harmonious personality in the restricted spheres of ancient and

medieval times. In that little world of town and village, with fixed concepts of social organization and behaviour, the individual and the group lived their self-contained lives, protected, as a rule, from outer storms. Today the sphere of even the individual has grown world-wide, and different concepts of social organization conflict with each other and behind them are different philosophies of life. A strong wind arising somewhere creates a cyclone in one place and an anti-cyclone in another. So if harmony is to be achieved by the individual, it has to be supported by some kind of social harmony throughout the world.

In India, far more so than elsewhere, the old concept of social organization and the philosophy of life underlying it, have persisted, to some extent, to the present day. They could not have done so unless they had some virtue which stabilized society and made it conform to life's conditions. And they would not have failed ultimately and become a drag and a hindrance, divorced from life, if the evil in them had not overcome that virtue. But, in any event, they cannot be considered today as isolated phenomena; they must be viewed in that world context and made to harmonize with it.

'In India,' says Havell, 'religion is hardly a dogma, but a working hypothesis of human conduct, adapted to different stages of spiritual development and different conditions of life. A dogma might continue to be believed in, isolated from life, but a working hypothesis of human conduct must work and conform to life, or it obstructs life. The very *raison d'etre* of such a hypothesis is its workableness, its conformity to life, and its capacity to adapt itself to changing conditions. So long as it can do so it serves its purpose and performs its allotted function. When it goes off at a tangent from the curve of life, loses contact with social needs, and the distance between it and life grows, it loses all its vitality and significance.'

Metaphysical theories and speculations deal not with the ever-changing stuff of life but with the permanent reality behind it, if such exists. Hence they have a certain permanence which is not affected by external changes. But, inevitably, they are the products of the environment in which they grow and of the state of development of the human minds that conceived them. If their influence spreads they affect the general philosophy of life of a people. In India, philosophy, though in its higher reaches confined to the elect, has been more pervasive than

elsewhere and has had a strong influence in moulding the national outlook and in developing a certain distinctive attitude of mind.

Buddhist philosophy played an important part in this process and, during the medieval period, Islam left its impress upon the national outlook, directly as well as indirectly, through the evolution of new sects which sought to bridge the gap between Hinduism and the Islamic social and religious structure. But, in the main, the dominating influence has been that of the six systems of Indian philosophy, or *darshanas*, as they are called. Some of these systems were themselves greatly affected by Buddhist thought. All of them are considered orthodox and yet they vary in their approach and their conclusions, though they have many common ideas. There is polytheism, and theism with a personal God, and pure monism, and a system which ignores God altogether and bases itself on a theory of evolution. There is both idealism and realism. The various facets of the complex and inclusive Indian mind are shown in their unity and diversity. Max Müller drew attention to both these factors: ‘the more have I become impressed with the truth ... that there is behind the variety of the six systems a common fund of what may be called national and popular philosophy ... from which each thinker was allowed to draw for his own purposes.’

There is a common presumption in all of them: that the universe is orderly and functions according to law, that there is a mighty rhythm about it. Some such presumption becomes necessary, for otherwise there could hardly be any system to explain it. Though the law of causality, of cause and effect, functions, yet there is a measure of freedom to the individual to shape his own destiny. There is belief in rebirth and an emphasis on unselfish love and disinterested activity. Logic and reason are relied upon and used effectively for argument, but it is recognised that often intuition is greater than either. The general argument proceeds on a rational basis, in so far as reason can be applied to matters often outside its scope. Professor Keith has pointed out that ‘The systems are indeed orthodox and admit the authority of the sacred scriptures, but they attack the problems of existence with human means, and scripture serves for all practical purposes but to lend sanctity to results which are achieved not only without its aid, but often in very dubious harmony with its tenets.’

The Six Systems of Philosophy

The early beginnings of the Indian systems of philosophy take us back to the pre-Buddhist era. They develop gradually, the Brahminical systems side by side with the Buddhist, often criticizing each other, often borrowing from one another. Before the beginning of the Christian era, six Brahminical systems had taken shape and crystallized themselves, out of the welter of many such systems. Each one of them represents an independent approach, a separate argument, and yet they were not isolated from each other but rather parts of a larger plan.

The six systems are known as: (1) *Nyaya*, (2) *Vaishesika*, (3) *Samkhya*, (4) *Yoga*, (5) *Mimamsa*, and (6) *Vedanta*.

The *Nyaya* method is analytic and logical. In fact *Nyaya* means logic or the science of right reasoning. It is similar in many ways to Aristotle's syllogisms, though there are also fundamental differences between the two. The principles underlying *Nyaya* logic were accepted by all the other systems, and, as a kind of mental discipline, *Nyaya* has been taught throughout the ancient and medieval periods and up to today in India's schools and universities. Modern education in India has discarded it, but wherever Sanskrit is taught in the old way, *Nyaya* is still an essential part of the curriculum. It was not only considered an indispensable preparation for the study of philosophy, but a necessary mental training for every educated person. It has had at least as important a place in the old scheme of Indian education as Aristotle's logic has had in European education.

The method was, of course, very different from the modern scientific method of objective investigation. Nevertheless, it was critical and scientific in its own way, and, instead of relying on faith, tried to examine the objects of knowledge critically and to proceed step by step by methods of logical proof. There was some faith behind it, certain presumptions which were not capable of logical treatment. Having accepted some hypotheses the system was built up on those foundations. It was presumed that there is a rhythm and unity in life and nature. There was belief in a personal God, in individual souls, and an atomic universe. The individual was neither the soul alone nor the body, but the product of their union. Reality was supposed to be a complex of souls and nature.

The *Vaishesika* system resembles the *Nyaya* in many ways. It emphasizes the separateness of individual selves and objects, and develops the atomic theory of the universe. The principle of *dharma*, the moral law, is said to govern the universe, and round this the whole system revolves. The hypothesis of a God is not clearly admitted. Between the *Nyaya* and *Vaishesika* systems and early Buddhist philosophy there are many points of contact. On the whole they adopt a realistic approach.

The *Samkhya* system, which Kapila (c. seventh century BC) is said to have shaped out of many early and pre-Buddhist currents of thought, is remarkable. According to Richard Garbe: ‘In Kapila’s doctrine, for the first time in the history of the world, the complete independence and freedom of the human mind, its full confidence in its own powers, were exhibited.’

The *Samkhya* became a well-co-ordinated system after the rise of Buddhism. The theory is a purely philosophical and metaphysical conception arising out of the mind of man and having little to do with objective observation. Indeed, such observation was not possible in matters beyond its reach. Like Buddhism, *Samkhya* proceeded along rationalistic lines of inquiry and met the challenge of Buddhism on the latter’s own ground of reasoned argument without support of authority. Because of this rationalistic approach, God had to be ruled out. In *Samkhya* thus there is neither a personal God nor an impersonal one, neither monotheism nor monism. Its approach was atheistic and it undermined the foundations of a supernatural religion. There is no creation of the universe by a god, but rather a constant evolution, the product of interaction between spirit, or rather spirits, and matter, though that matter itself is of the nature of energy. This evolution is a continuous process.

The *Samkhya* is called *dvaita*, or a dualistic philosophy, because it builds its structure on two primary causes; *prakriti*, or an ever-active and changing nature or energy, and *purusha*, the spirit which does not change. There is an infinite number of *purushas* or souls, or something in the nature of consciousness. Under the influence of *purusha*, which itself is inactive, *prakriti* evolves and leads to the world of continuous becoming. Causality is accepted, but it is said that the effect really exists hidden in the cause. Cause and effect become the undeveloped and developed states of one and the same thing. From our practical point of view, however, cause and effect are different and distinct, but basically there is an

identity between them. And so the argument goes on, showing how from the unmanifested prakriti or energy, through the influence of purusha or consciousness, and the principle of causality, nature with its immense complexity and variety of elements has developed and is ever changing and developing. Between the lowest and the highest in the universe there is a continuity and a unity. The whole conception is metaphysical, and the argument, based on certain hypotheses, is long, intricate, and reasoned.

The *Yoga* system of Patanjali is essentially a method for the discipline of the body and the mind leading up to psychic spiritual training. Patanjali not only crystallized this old system but also wrote a famous commentary on Panini's Sanskrit grammar. This commentary, called the *Mahabhashya*, is as much of a classic as Panini's work. Professor Stcherbatsky, of Leningrad has written that 'the ideal scientific work for India is the grammar of Panini with the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali.'¹³

Yoga is a word well known now in Europe and America, though little understood, and it is associated with quaint practices, more especially with sitting Buddha-like and gazing on one's navel or the tip of one's nose.¹⁴ Some people learning odd tricks of the body presume to become authorities on the subject in the West, and impress and exploit the credulous and the seekers after the sensational. The system is much more than these devices and is based on the psychological conception that by proper training of the mind certain higher levels of consciousness can be reached. It is meant to be a method for finding out things for oneself rather than a preconceived metaphysical theory of reality or of the universe. It is thus experimental and the most suitable conditions for carrying out the experiment are pointed out. As such a method, it can be adopted and used by any system of philosophy, whatever its theoretical approach may be. Thus the adherents of the atheistic Samkhya philosophy may use this method. Buddhism developed its own forms of *Yoga* training, partly similar, partly different. The theoretical parts of Patanjali's *Yoga* system are therefore of relatively small importance; it is the method that counts. Belief in God is no integral part of the system, but it is suggested that such belief in a personal God, and devotion to him, helps in concentrating the mind and thus serves a practical purpose.

The later stages of *Yoga* are supposed to lead to some kind of intuitive insight or to a condition of ecstasy, such as the mystics speak of. Whether this is some

kind of higher mental state, opening the door to further knowledge, or is merely a kind of self-hypnosis, I do not know. Even if the former is possible, the latter certainly also happens, and it is well-known that unregulated Yoga has sometimes led to unfortunate consequences so far as the mind of the person is concerned.

But before these final stages of meditation and contemplation are reached, there is the discipline of the body and mind to be practised. The body should be fit and healthy, supple and graceful, hard and strong. A number of bodily exercises are prescribed, as also ways of breathing, in order to have some control over it and normally to take deep and long breaths. ‘Exercises’ is the wrong word, for they involve no strenuous movement. They are rather postures—*asanas* as they are called—and, properly done, they relax and tone up the body and do not tire it at all. This old and typical Indian method of preserving bodily fitness is rather remarkable when one compares it with the more usual methods involving rushing about, jerks, hops, and jumps which leave one panting, out of breath, and tired out. These other methods have also been common enough in India, as have wrestling, swimming, riding, fencing, archery, Indian clubs, something in the nature of ju-jitsu, and many other pastimes and games. But the old *asana* method is perhaps more typical of India and seems to fit in with the spirit of her philosophy. There is a poise in it and an unruffled calm even while it exercises the body. Strength and fitness are gained without any waste of energy or disturbance of the mind. And because of this the *asanas* are suited to any age and some of them can be performed even by the old.

There are a large number of these *asanas*. For many years now I have practised a few simple selected ones, whenever I have had the chance, and I have no doubt that I have profited greatly by them, living as I often did in environments unfavourable to the mind and body. These and some breathing exercises are the extent of my practice of the physical exercises of the Yoga system. I have not gone beyond the elementary stages of the body, and my mind continues to be an unruly member, misbehaving far too often.

The discipline of the body, which includes eating and drinking the right things and avoiding the wrong ones, is to be accompanied by what the Yoga system describes as ethical preparation. This includes non-violence, truthfulness,

continence, etc. Non-violence or *ahimsa* is something much more than abstention from physical violence. It is an avoidance of malice and hatred.

All this is supposed to lead to a control of the senses; then comes contemplation and meditation, and finally intense concentration, which should lead to various kinds of intuition.

Vivekananda, one of the greatest of the modern exponents of Yoga and the Vedanta, has laid repeated stress on the experimental character of Yoga and on basing it on reason. ‘No one of these Yogas gives up reason, no one asks you to be hood-winked or to deliver your reason into the hands of priests of any type whatsoever ... Each one of them tells you to cling to your reason, to hold fast to it.’ Though the spirit of Yoga and the Vedanta may be akin to the spirit of science, it is true that they deal with different media, and hence vital differences creep in. According to the Yoga, the spirit is not limited to the intelligence, and also ‘thought is action, and only action can make thought of any value.’ Inspiration and intuition are recognized but may they not lead to deception? Vivekananda answers that inspiration must not contradict reason: ‘What we call inspiration is the development of reason. The way to intuition is through reason ... No genuine inspiration ever contradicts reason. Where it does it is no inspiration.’ Also ‘inspiration must be for the good of one and all; and not for name or fame or personal gain. It should always be for the good of the world, and perfectly unselfish.’

Again, ‘Experience is the only source of knowledge.’ The same methods of investigation which we apply to the sciences and to exterior knowledge should be applied to religion. ‘If a religion is destroyed by such investigation it was nothing but a useless and unworthy superstition; the sooner it disappeared the better.’ ‘Why religions should claim that they are not bound to abide by the standpoint of reason no one knows ... For it is better that mankind should become atheist by following reason than blindly believe in two hundred million gods on the authority of anybody ... Perhaps there are prophets, who have passed the limits of sense and obtained a glimpse of the beyond. We shall believe it only when we can do the same ourselves; not before.’ It is said that reason is not strong enough, that often it makes mistakes. If reason is weak why should a body of priests be considered any better guides? ‘I will abide by my reason,’ continues Vivekananda, ‘because with all its weakness there is some

chance of my getting at truth through it ...We should therefore follow reason, and also sympathise with those who do not come to any sort of belief, following reason.' 'In the study of this Raja Yoga no faith or belief is necessary. Believe nothing until you find it out for yourself.'¹⁵

Vivekananda's unceasing stress on reason and his refusal to take anything on trust derived from his passionate belief in the freedom of the mind and also because he had seen the evils of authority in his own country: 'for I was born in a country where they have gone to the extreme of authority.' He interpreted—and he had the right to interpret—the old Yoga systems and the Vedanta accordingly. But, however much experiment and reason may be at the back of them, they deal with regions which are beyond the reach or even the understanding of the average man—a realm of psychical and psychological experiences entirely different from the world we know and are used to. Those experiments and experiences have certainly not been confined to India, and there is abundant evidence of them in the records of Christian mystics, Persian Sufis, and others. It is extraordinary how these experiences resemble each other, demonstrating, as Romain Rolland says, 'the universality and perennial occurrence of the great facts of religious experience, their close resemblance under the diverse costumes of race and time, attesting to the persistent unity of the human spirit—or rather, for it goes deeper than the spirit, which is itself obliged to delve for it—to the identity of the materials constituting humanity.'

Yoga, then, is an experimental system of probing into the psychical background of the individual and thus developing certain perceptions and control of the mind. How far this can be utilised to advantage by modern psychology, I do not know; but some attempt to do so seems worthwhile. Aurobindo Ghose has defined Yoga as follows: 'All Raja-Yoga depends on this perception and experience—that our inner elements, combinations, functions, forces, can be separated or dissolved, can be newly combined and set to novel and formerly impossible uses, or can be transformed and resolved into a new general synthesis by fixed internal processes.'

The next system of philosophy is known as the *Mimamsa*. This is ritualistic and tends towards polytheism. Modern popular Hinduism as well as Hindu Law have been largely influenced by this system and its rules which lay down the *dharma* or the scheme of right living as conceived by it. It might be noted that

the polytheism of the Hindus is of a curious variety, for the *devas*, the shining ones or gods, for all their special powers are supposed to be of a lower order of creation than man. Both the Hindus and Buddhists believe that human birth is the highest stage that the Being has reached on the road to self-realization. Even the *devas* can only achieve this freedom and realization through human birth. This conception is evidently far removed from normal polytheism. Buddhists say that only man can attain the supreme consummation of Buddhahood.

Sixthly and lastly in this series comes the *Vedanta* system, which, arising out of the Upanishads, developed and took many shapes and forms, but was always based on a monistic philosophy of the universe. The *purusha* and *prakriti* of the Samkhya are not considered as independent substances but as modifications of a single reality—the absolute. On the foundation of the early Vedanta, Shankara (or Shankaracharya) built a system which is called the *Advaita Vedanta* or non-dualist Vedanta. It is this philosophy which represents the dominant philosophic outlook of Hinduism today.

It is based on pure monism, the only ultimate reality in the metaphysical sense being the *Atman*, the Absolute Soul. That is the subject, all else is objective. How that Absolute Soul pervades everything, how the one appears as the many, and yet retains its wholeness, for the Absolute is indivisible and cannot be divided, all this cannot be accounted for by the processes of logical reasoning, for our minds are limited by the finite world. The Upanishad had described this *Atman*, if this can be called a description thus: ‘Whole is that, whole (too) is this; from whole, whole cometh; take whole from whole, (yet) whole remains.’

Shankara builds a subtle and intricate theory of knowledge and proceeding from certain assumptions, step by step, by logical argument, leads up to the complete system of advaitism or non-dualism. The individual soul is not a separate entity but that Absolute Soul itself though limited in some ways. It is compared to the space enclosed in a jar, the *Atman* being universal space. For practical purposes they may be treated as distinct from one another but this distinction is apparent only, not real. Freedom consists in realizing this unity, this oneness of the individual with the Absolute Soul.

The phenomenal world we see about us thus becomes a mere reflection of that reality, or a shadow cast by it on the empirical plane. It has been called Maya, which has been mistranslated as ‘illusion.’ But it is not non-existence. It is an

intermediate form between Being and non-Being. It is a kind of relative existence, and so perhaps the conception of relativity brings us nearer to the meaning of Maya. What is good and evil then in this world? Are they also mere reflections and shadows with no substance? Whatever they may be in the ultimate analysis in this empirical world of ours there is a validity and importance in these ethical distinctions. They are relevant where individuals function as such.

These finite individuals cannot imagine the infinite without limiting it; they can only form limited and objective conceptions of it. Yet even these finite forms and concepts rest ultimately in the infinite and Absolute. Hence the form of religion becomes a relative affair and each individual has liberty to form such conceptions as he is capable of.

Shankara accepted the Brahminical organization of social life on the caste basis, as representing the collective experience and wisdom of the race. But he held that any person belonging to any caste could attain the highest knowledge.

There is about Shankara's attitude and philosophy a sense of world negation and withdrawal from the normal activities of the world in search for that freedom of the self which was to him the final goal for every person. There is also a continual insistence on self-sacrifice and detachment.

And yet Shankara was a man of amazing energy and vast activity. He was no escapist retiring into his shell or into a corner of the forest, seeking his own individual perfection and oblivious of what happened to others. Born in Malabar in the far south of India, he travelled incessantly all over India, meeting innumerable people, arguing, debating, reasoning, convincing, and filling them with a part of his own passion and tremendous vitality. He was evidently a man who was intensely conscious of his mission, a man who looked upon the whole of India from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas as his field of action and as something that held together culturally and was infused by the same spirit, though this might take many external forms. He strove hard to synthesize the diverse currents that were troubling the mind of India of his day and to build a unity of outlook out of that diversity. In a brief life of thirty-two years he did the work of many long lives and left such an impress of his powerful mind and rich personality on India that it is very evident today. He was a curious mixture of a philosopher and a scholar, an agnostic and a mystic, a poet and a saint, and in

addition to all this, a practical reformer and an able organizer. He built up, for the first time within the Brahminical fold, ten religious orders and of these four are very much alive today. He established four great *maths* or monasteries, locating them far from each other, almost at the four corners of India. One of these was in the south at Sringeri in Mysore, another at Puri on the east coast, the third at Dvaraka in Kathiawad on the west coast, and the fourth at Badrinath in the heart of the Himalayas. At the age of thirty-two this Brahmin from the tropical south died at Kedarnath in the upper snow-covered reaches of the Himalayas.

There is a significance about these long journeys of Shankara throughout this vast land at a time when travel was difficult and the means of transport very slow and primitive. The very conception of these journeys, and his meeting kindred souls everywhere and speaking to them in Sanskrit, the common language of the learned throughout India, brings out the essential unity of India even in those far-off days. Such journeys could not have been uncommon then or earlier, people went to and fro in spite of political divisions, new books travelled, and every new thought or fresh theory spread rapidly over the entire country and became the subject of interested talk and often of heated debate. There was not only a common intellectual and cultural life among the educated people, but vast numbers of common folk were continually travelling to the numerous places of pilgrimage, spread out all over the land and famous from epic times.

All this going to and fro and meeting people from different parts of the country must have intensified the conception of a common land and a common culture. This travelling was not confined to the upper castes; among the pilgrims were men and women of all castes and classes. Whatever the religious significance of these pilgrimages in the minds of the people might have been, they were looked upon also, as they are today, as holiday-time and opportunities for merry-making and seeing different parts of the country. Every place of pilgrimage contained a cross-section of the people of India in all their great variety of custom, dress, and language, and yet very conscious of their common features and the bonds that held them together and brought all of them to meet in one place. Even the difference of language between the north and the south did not prove a formidable barrier to this intercourse.

All this was so then and Shankara was doubtless fully aware of it. It would seem that Shankara wanted to add to this sense of national unity and common consciousness. He functioned on the intellectual, philosophical and religious plane and tried to bring about a greater unity of thought all over the country. He functioned also on the popular plane in many ways, destroying many a dogma and opening the door of his philosophic sanctuary to every one who was capable of entering it. By locating his four great monasteries in the north, south, east, and west, he evidently wanted to encourage the conception of a culturally united India. These four places had been previously places of pilgrimage from all parts of the country, and now became more so.

How well the ancient Indians chose their sacred places of pilgrimage! Almost always they are lovely spots with beautiful natural surroundings. There is the icy cave of Amaranath in Kashmir, and there is the temple of the Virgin Goddess right at the southern tip of India at Rameshwaram, near Cape Comorin. There is Benares, of course, and Hardwar, nestling at the foot of the Himalayas, where the Ganges flows out of its tortuous mountain valleys into the plains below, and Prayaga (or Allahabad) where the Ganges meets the Jamna, and Mathura and Brindaban by the Jumna, round which the Krishna legends cluster, and Budh Gaya where Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment, and so many places in the south. Many of the old temples, especially in the south, contain famous sculptures and other artistic remains. A visit to many of the places of pilgrimage thus gives an insight into old Indian art.

Shankara is said to have helped in putting an end to Buddhism in India as a widespread religion, and that thereafter Brahminism absorbed it in a fraternal embrace. But Buddhism had shrunk in India even before Shankara's time. Some of Shankara's Brahmin opponents called him a disguised Buddhist. It is true that Buddhism influenced him considerably.

India and China

It was through Buddhism that China and India came near to each other and developed many contacts. Whether there were any such contacts before Ashoka's reign we do not know; probably there was some seaborne trade, for

silk used to come from China. Yet there must have been overland contacts and migrations of peoples in far earlier periods, for Mongoloid features are common in the eastern border areas of India. In Nepal these are very marked. In Assam (Kamarupa of old) and Bengal they are often evident. Historically speaking, however, Ashoka's missionaries blazed the trail and, as Buddhism spread in China, there began that long succession of pilgrims and scholars who journeyed between India and China for 1000 years. They travelled overland across the Gobi Desert and the plains and mountains of Central Asia and over the Himalayas—a long, hard journey full of peril. Many Indians and Chinese perished on the way, and one account says that as many as 90 per cent of these pilgrims perished. Many having managed to reach the end of their journey did not return and settled in the land of their adoption. There was another route also, not much safer, though probably shorter: this was by sea via Indo-China, Java, and Sumatra, Malaya and the Nicobar Islands. This was also frequently used, and sometimes a pilgrim travelled overland and returned by sea. Buddhism and Indian culture had spread all over Central Asia and in parts of Indonesia, and there were large numbers of monasteries and study centres dotted all over these vast areas. Travellers from India or China thus found a welcome and shelter along these routes by land and sea. Sometimes scholars from China would break journey for a few months at some Indian colony in Indonesia in order to learn Sanskrit before they came to India.

The first record of an Indian scholar's visit to China is that of Kashyapa Matanga who reached China in 67 AD in the reign of the Emperor Ming Ti and probably at his invitation. He settled down at Lo Yang by the Lo river. Dharmaraksha accompanied him and, in later years, among the noted scholars who went were Buddhabhadra, Jinabhadra, Kumarajiva, Paramartha, Jinagupta, and Bodhidharma. Each one of these took a group of monks or disciples with him. It is said that at one time (sixth century AC) there were more than 3,000 Indian Buddhist monks and 10,000 Indian families in the Lo Yang province alone.

These Indian scholars who went to China not only carried many Sanskrit manuscripts with them, which they translated into Chinese, but some of them also wrote original books in the Chinese language. They made quite a considerable contribution to Chinese literature, including poetry. Kumarajiva

who went to China in 401 AC, was a prolific writer and as many as forty-seven different books written by him have come down to us. His Chinese style is supposed to be very good. He translated the life of the great Indian scholar Nagarjuna into Chinese. Jinagupta went to China in the second half of the sixth century AC. He translated thirty-seven original Sanskrit works into Chinese. His great knowledge was so much admired that an emperor of the T'ang dynasty became his disciple.

There was two-way traffic between India and China and many Chinese scholars came here. Among the best known who have left records of their journeys are Fa Hien (or Fa Hsien), Sung Yun, Hsuan-Tsang (or Chwen Chuang), and I-Tsing (or Yi-Tsing). Fa Hien came to India in the fifth century; he was a disciple of Kumarajiva in China. There is an interesting account of what Kumarajiva told him on the eve of his departure for India, when he went to take leave of his teacher. Kumarajiva charged him not to spend all his time in gathering religious knowledge only but to study in some detail the life and habits of the people of India, so that China might understand them and their country as a whole. Fa Hien studied at Pataliputra university.

The most famous of the Chinese travellers to India was Hsuan-Tsang who came in the seventh century when the great T'ang dynasty flourished in China and Harshavardhana ruled over an empire in North India. Hsuan-Tsang came overland across the Gobi Desert and passing Turfan and Kucha, Tashkand and Samarkand, Balkh, Khotan and Yarkand, crossed the Himalayas into India. He tells us of his many adventures, of the perils he overcame, of the Buddhist rulers and monasteries in Central Asia, and of the Turks there who were ardent Buddhists. In India he travelled all over the country, greatly honoured and respected everywhere, making accurate observations of places and peoples, and noting down some delightful and some fantastic stories that he heard. Many years he spent at the great Nalanda University, not far from Pataliputra, which was famous for its many-sided learning and attracted students from far corners of the country. It is said that as many as 10,000 students and monks were in residence there. Hsuan-Tsang took the degree of Master of the Law there and finally became vice-principal of the university.

Hsuan-Tsang's book the *Si-Yu-Ki* or the Record of the Western Kingdom (meaning India), makes fascinating reading. Coming from a highly civilized and

sophisticated country, at a time when China's capital Si-an-fu was a centre of art and learning, his comments on and description of conditions in India are valuable. He tells us of the system of education which began early and proceeded by stages to the university where the five branches of knowledge taught were: (1) Grammar, (2) Science of Arts and Crafts, (3) Medicine, (4) Logic, and (5) Philosophy. He was particularly struck by the love of learning of the Indian people. Some kind of primary education was fairly widespread as all the monks and priests were teachers, Of the people he says:

With respect to the ordinary people, although they are naturally light-minded, yet they are upright and honourable. In money matters they are without craft, and in administering justice they are considerate ... They are not deceitful or treacherous in their conduct, and are faithful in their oaths and promises. In their rules of government there is remarkable rectitude, whilst in their behaviour there is much gentleness and sweetness. With respect to criminals or rebels, these are few in number, and only occasionally troublesome.

He says further: 'As the administration of the government is founded on benign principles, the executive is simple ... People are not subject to forced labour ... In this way taxes on people are light ... The merchants who engage in commerce come and go in carrying out their transactions.'

Hsuan-Tsang returned the way he came, via Central Asia, carrying a large number of manuscripts with him. From his account one gathers a vivid impression of the wide sway of Buddhism in Khorasan, Iraq, Mosul, and right up to the frontiers of Syria. And yet this was a time when Buddhism was in decay there and Islam, already beginning in Arabia, was soon to spread out over all these lands. About the Iranian people, Hsuan-Tsang makes an interesting observation: they 'care not for learning, but give themselves entirely to works of art. All they make the neighbouring countries value very much.'

Iran then, as before and after, concentrated on adding to the beauty and grace of life, and its influence spread far in Asia. Of the strange little kingdom of Turfan, on the edge of the Gobi Desert, Hsuan-Tsang tells us, and we have learned more about it in recent years from the work of archaeologists. Here many cultures came and mixed and coalesced, producing a rich combination which drew its inspiration from China and India and Persia and even Hellenic sources. The language was Indo-European, derived from India and Iran, and resembling in some ways the Celtic languages of Europe; the religion came from India; the ways of life were Chinese; many of the artistic wares they had were

from Iran. The statues and frescoes of the Buddhas and gods and goddesses, beautifully made, have often Indian draperies and Grecian headdresses. These goddesses, says Monsieur Grousset, represent ‘the happiest combination of Hindu suppleness, Hellenic eloquence, and Chinese charm.’

Hsuan-Tsang went back to his homeland, welcomed by his Emperor and his people, and settled down to write his book and translate the many manuscripts he had brought. When he had started on his journey, many years earlier, there is a story that the Emperor T’ang mixed a handful of dust in a drink and offered this to him, saying: ‘You would do well to drink this cup, for are we not told that a handful of one’s country’s soil is worth more than ten thousand pounds of foreign gold?’

Hsuan-Tsang’s visit to India and the great respect in which he was held both in China and India led to the establishment of political contacts between the rulers of the two countries. Harshavardhana of Kanauj and the T’ang Emperor exchanged embassies. Hsuan-Tsang himself remained in touch with India, exchanging letters with friends there and receiving manuscripts. Two interesting letters, originally written in Sanskrit, have been preserved in China. One of these was written in 654 AC by an Indian Buddhist scholar, Sthavira Prajnadeva, to Hsuan-Tsang. After greeting and news about common friends and their literary work, he proceeds to say: ‘We are sending you a pair of white cloths to show that we are not forgetful. The road is long, so do not mind the smallness of the present. We wish you may accept it. As regards the Sutras and Shastras which you may require please send us a list. We will copy them and send them to you.’ Hsuan-Tsang in his reply says: ‘I learnt from an ambassador who recently came back from India that the great teacher Shilabhadra was no more. This news overwhelmed me with grief that knew no bounds ... Among the Sutras and Shastras that I, Hsuan-Tsang, had brought with me I have already translated the Yogacharyabhumi-Shastra and other works, in all thirty volumes. I should humbly let you know that while crossing the Indus I had lost a load of sacred texts. I now send you a list of the texts annexed to this letter. I request you to send them to me if you get the chance. I am sending some small articles as presents. Please accept them.’¹⁶

Hsuan-Tsang has told us much of Nalanda university, and there are other accounts of it also. Yet when I went, some years ago, and saw the excavated

ruins of Nalanda I was amazed at their extent and the huge scale on which it was planned. Only a part of it has so far been uncovered, and over the rest there are inhabited localities, but even this part consisted of huge courts surrounded by stately buildings in stone.

Soon after Hsuan-Tsang's death in China, yet another famous Chinese pilgrim made the journey to India—I-tsing (or Yi-tsing). He started in 671 AC, and it took him nearly two years to reach the Indian port of Tamralipti, at the mouth of the Hooghly. For he came by sea and stopped for many months at Shribhoga (modern Palembang in Sumatra) to study Sanskrit. This journey of his by sea has a certain significance, for it is probable that there were disturbed conditions in Central Asia then and political changes were taking place. Many of the friendly Buddhist monasteries that dotted the land route may have ceased to exist. It is also likely that the sea route was more convenient with the growth of Indian colonies in Indonesia, and constant trade and other contacts between India and these countries. It appears from his and other accounts that there was at that time regular navigation between Persia (Iran), India, Malaya, Sumatra and China. I-tsing sailed in a Persian ship from Kwangtung, and went first to Sumatra.

I-tsing also studied at Nalanda university for a long time and carried back with him several hundred Sanskrit texts. He was chiefly interested in the fine points of Buddhist ritual and ceremonial and has written in detail about them. But he tells us much also about customs, clothes, and food. Wheat was the staple diet in North India, as now, and rice in the south and the east. Meat was sometimes eaten, but this was rare. (I-tsing probably tells us more about the Buddhist monks than about others). Ghee (clarified butter), oil, milk, and cream were found everywhere, and cakes and fruits were abundant. I-tsing noted the importance that Indians have always attached to a certain ceremonial purity. 'Now the first and chief difference between India of the five regions and other nations is the peculiar distinction between purity and impurity.' Also: 'To preserve what has been left from the meal, as is done in China, is not at all in accordance with Indian rules.'

I-tsing refers to India generally as the West (Si-fang), but he tells us that it was known as Aryadesha—'the Aryadesha'; 'arya' means noble, 'desha' region—the noble region, a name for the west. It is so called because men of noble character appear there successively, and people all praise the land by that name.

It is also called Madhyadesha, *i.e.*, the middle land, for it is the centre of a hundred myriads of countries. The people are all familiar with this name. The northern tribes (Hu or Mongols or Turks) alone call the Noble Land ‘Hindu’ (Hsin-tu), but this is not at all a common name; it is only a vernacular name, and has no special significance. The people of India do not know this designation, and the most suitable name for India is the ‘Noble Land’.

I-tsing’s reference to ‘Hindu’ is interesting. He goes on to say: ‘Some say that Indu means the moon, and the Chinese name for India, *i.e.*, Indu (Yin-tu), is derived from it. Although it might mean this, it is nevertheless not the common name. As for the Indian name for the Great Chou (China), *i.e.*, Cheena, it is a name and has no special meaning.’ He also mentions the Sanskrit names for Korea and other countries.

For all his admiration for India and many things Indian, I-tsing made it clear that he gave first place to his native land, China. India might be the ‘noble region,’ but China was the ‘divine land.’ ‘The people of the five parts of India are proud of their own purity and excellence. But high refinement, literary elegance, propriety, moderation, ceremonies of welcoming and parting, the delicious taste of food, and the richness of benevolence and righteousness are found in China only, and no other country can excel her.’

In the healing arts of acupuncture and cautery and the skill of feeling the pulse, China has never been superseded by any part of India; the medicament for prolonging life is only found in China ... From the character of men and the quality of things China is called the ‘divine land’. Is there anyone in the five parts of India who does not admire China?

The word used in the old Sanskrit for the Chinese Emperor is *deva-putra*, which is an exact translation of ‘Son of Heaven’.

I-tsing, himself a fine scholar in Sanskrit, praises the language and says it is respected in far countries in the north and south. ‘How much more then should people of the divine land (China), as well as the celestial store house (India), teach the real rules of the language!’¹⁷

Sanskrit scholarship must have been fairly widespread in China. It is interesting to find that some Chinese scholars tried to introduce Sanskrit phonetics into the Chinese language. A well-known example of this is that of the monk Shon Wen, who lived at the time of the T’ang dynasty. He tried to develop an alphabetical system along these lines in Chinese.

With the decay of Buddhism in India this Indo-Chinese commerce of scholars practically ceased, though pilgrims from China occasionally came to visit the holy places of Buddhism in India. During the political revolutions from the eleventh century AC onwards, crowds of Buddhist monks, carrying bundles of manuscripts, went to Nepal or crossed the Himalayas, into Tibet. A considerable part of old Indian literature thus and previously, found its way to China and Tibet and in recent years it has been discovered afresh there in the original, or more frequently, in translations. Many Indian classics have been preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translations, relating not only to Buddhism but also to Brahminism, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, etc. There are supposed to be 8,000 such works in the Sung-pao collection in China. Tibet is full of them. There used to be frequent co-operation between Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan scholars. A notable instance of this co-operation, still extant, is a Sanskrit-Tibetan-Chinese dictionary of Buddhist technical terms. This dates from the ninth or tenth century AC and is named the 'Mahavyutpatti.'

Among the most ancient printed books discovered in China, dating from the eighth century AC, are books in Sanskrit. These were printed from wooden blocks. In the tenth century the Imperial Printing Commission was organized in China and as a result of this, and right up to the Sung era, the art of printing developed rapidly. It is surprising and difficult to account for that, in spite of the close contacts between Indian and Chinese scholars and their exchanges of books and manuscripts for hundreds of years, there is no evidence whatever of the printing of books in India during that period. Block printing went to Tibet from China at some early period and, I believe, it is still practised there. Chinese printing was introduced into Europe during the Mongol or Yuan dynasty (1260–1368). First known in Germany, it spread to other countries during the fifteenth century.

Even during the Indo-Afghan and Mughal periods in India there was occasional diplomatic intercourse between India and China. Mohammed bin Tughlak, Sultan of Delhi (1326-51) sent the famous Arab traveller, Ibn Batuta, as ambassador to the Chinese court. Bengal had at that time shaken off the suzerainty of Delhi and became an independent sultanate. In the middle of the fourteenth century the Chinese court sent two ambassadors, Hu-Shien and Fin-Shien, to the Bengal Sultan. This led to a succession of ambassadors being sent

from Bengal to China during Sultan Ghias-ud Din's reign. This was the period of the Ming Emperors in China. One of the later embassies, sent in 1414 by Saif-ud Din, carried valuable presents, among them a live giraffe. How a giraffe managed to reach India is a mystery: probably it came as a gift from Africa and was sent on to the Ming Emperor as a rarity which would be appreciated. It was indeed greatly appreciated in China where a giraffe is considered an auspicious symbol by the followers of Confucius. There is no doubt that the animal was a giraffe for, apart from a long account of it, there is also a Chinese picture of it on silk. The court artist, who made this picture, has written a long account in praise of it and of the good fortune that flows from it. 'The ministers and the people all gathered to gaze at it and their joy knows no end.'

Trade between India and China, which had flourished during the Buddhist period, was continued throughout the Indo-Afghan and Mughal periods, and there was a continuous exchange of commodities. The trade went overland across the northern Himalayan passes and along the old caravan routes of Central Asia. There was also a considerable sea-borne trade, via the islands of south-east Asia, chiefly to south Indian ports.

During these thousand years and more of intercourse between India and China, each country learned something from the other, not only in the regions of thought and philosophy, but also in the arts and sciences of life. Probably China was more influenced by India than India by China, which is a pity, for India could well have received, with profit to herself, some of the sound commonsense of the Chinese, and with its aid checked her own extravagant fancies. China took much from India but she was always strong and self-confident enough to take it in her own way and fit in somewhere in her own texture of life.¹⁸ Even Buddhism and its intricate philosophy became tinged with the doctrines of Confucius and Lao-tze. The somewhat pessimistic outlook of Buddhist philosophy could not change or suppress the love of life and gaiety of the Chinese. There is an old Chinese proverb which says: 'If the government gets hold of you, they'll flog you to death; if the Buddhists get hold of you, they'll starve you to death!'

A famous Chinese novel of the sixteenth century, *Monkey* by Wu Ch'en-en (translated into English by Arthur Waley), deals with the mythical and fantastic adventures of Hsuan-Tsang on his way to India. The book ends with a dedication

to India: 'I dedicate this work to Buddha's pure land. May it repay the kindness of patron and preceptor, may it mitigate the sufferings of the lost and damned ...'

After being cut off from each other for many centuries, India and China were brought by some strange fate under the influence of the British East India Company. India had to endure this for long; in China the contact was brief, but even so it brought opium and war.

And now the wheel of fate has turned full circle and again India and China look towards each other and past memories crowd in their minds; again pilgrims of a new kind cross or fly over the mountains that separate them, bringing their messages of cheer and goodwill and creating fresh bonds of a friendship that will endure.

Indian Colonies and Culture in South-East Asia

To know and understand India one has to travel far in time and space, to forget for a while her present condition with all its misery and narrowness and horror, and to have glimpses of what she was and what she did. 'To know my country', wrote Rabindranath Tagore, 'one has to travel to that age, when she realized her soul and thus transcended her physical boundaries, when she revealed her being in a radiant magnanimity which illumined the eastern horizon, making her recognized as their own by those in alien shores who were awakened into a surprise of life; and not now when she has withdrawn herself into a narrow barrier of obscurity, into a miserly pride of exclusiveness, into a poverty of mind that dumbly revolves around itself in an unmeaning repetition of a past that has lost its light and has no message for the pilgrims of the future.'

One has not only to go back in time but to travel, in mind if not in body, to various countries of Asia, where India spread out in many ways, leaving immortal testimony of her spirit, her power, and her love of beauty. How few of us know of these great achievements of our past, how few realize that if India was great in thought and philosophy, she was equally great in action. The history that men and women from India made far from their homeland has still to be written. Most westerners still imagine that ancient history is largely concerned

with the Mediterranean countries, and medieval and modern history is dominated by the quarrelsome little continent of Europe. And still they make plans for the future as if Europe only counted and the rest could be fitted in anywhere.

Sir Charles Eliot has written that,

Scant justice is done to India's position in the world by those European histories which recount the exploits of her invaders and leave the impression that her own people were a feeble dreamy folk, sundered from the rest of mankind by their seas and mountain frontiers. Such a picture takes no account of the intellectual conquests of the Hindus. Even their political conquests were not contemptible, and are remarkable for the distance, if not the extent, of the territories occupied ... But such military or commercial invasions are insignificant compared with the spread of Indian thought.¹⁹

Eliot was probably unaware, when he wrote, of many recent discoveries in South-East Asia, which have revolutionized the conception of India's and Asia's past. The knowledge of those discoveries would have strengthened his argument and shown that Indian activities abroad, even apart from the spread of her thought, were very far from being insignificant. I remember when I first read, about fifteen years ago, some kind of a detailed account of the history of South-East Asia, how amazed I was and how excited I became. New panoramas opened out before me, new perspectives of history, new conceptions of India's past, and I had to adjust all my thinking and previous notions to them. Champa, Cambodia and Angkor, Srivijaya and Majapahit suddenly rose out of the void, took living shape, vibrant with that instinctive feeling which makes the past touch the present.

Of Sailendra, the mighty man of war and conquest and other achievements, Dr H.G. Quaritch Wales has written: 'This great conqueror, whose achievements can only be compared with those of the greatest soldiers known to western history, and whose fame in his time sounded from Persia to China, in a decade or two built up a vast maritime empire which endured for five centuries, and made possible the marvellous flowering of Indian art and culture in Java and Cambodia. Yet in our encyclopaedias and histories ... one will search in vain for a reference to this far-flung empire or to its noble founder ... The very fact of such an empire ever having existed is scarcely known, except by a handful of Oriental scholars.'²⁰ The military exploits of these early Indian colonists are important as throwing light on certain aspects of the Indian character and genius

which have hitherto not been appreciated. But far more important is the rich civilization they built up in their colonies and settlements and which endured for over a thousand years.

During the past quarter of a century a great deal of light has been thrown on the history of this widespread area in South-East Asia, which is sometimes referred to as Greater India. There are many gaps still, many contradictions, and scholars continue to put forward their rival theories, but the general outline is clear enough, and sometimes there is an abundance of detail. There is no lack of material, for there are references in Indian books, and accounts of Arab travellers and, most important of all, Chinese historical accounts. There are also many old inscriptions, copperplates, etc., and in Java and Bali there is a rich literature based on Indian sources, and often paraphrasing Indian epics and myths. Greek and Latin sources have also supplied some information. But, above all, there are the magnificent ruins of ancient monuments, especially at Angkor and Borobudur.²¹

From the first century of the Christian era onwards wave after wave of Indian colonists spread east and south-east reaching Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Siam, Cambodia, and Indo-China. Some of them managed to reach Formosa, the Philippine Islands and Celebes. Even as far as Madagascar the current language is Indonesian with a mixture of Sanskrit words. It must have taken them several hundred years to spread out in this way, and possibly all of these places were not reached directly from India but from some intermediate settlement. There appear to have been four principal waves of colonization from the first century AC to about 900 AC, and in between there must have been a stream of people going eastwards. But the most remarkable feature of these ventures was that they were evidently organized by the state. Widely scattered colonies were started almost simultaneously and almost always the settlements were situated on strategic points and on important trade routes. The names that were given to these settlements were old Indian names. Thus Cambodia, as it is known now, was called Kamboja, which was a well-known town in ancient India, in Gandhara or the Kabul valley. This itself indicates roughly the period of this colonization, for at that time Gandhara (Afghanistan) must have been an important part of Aryan India.

What led to these extraordinary expeditions across perilous seas and what was the tremendous urge behind them? They could not have been thought of or organized unless they had been preceded for many generations or centuries by individuals or small groups intent on trade. In the most ancient Sanskrit books there are vague references to these countries of the east. It is not always easy to identify the names given in them but sometimes there is no difficulty. Java is clearly from 'Yavadvipa' or the Island of Millet. Even today java means barley or millet in India. The other names given in the old books are also usually associated with minerals, metals, or some industrial or agricultural product. This nomenclature itself makes one think of trade.

Dr R.C. Majumdar has pointed out that 'If literature can be regarded as a fair reflex of the popular mind, trade and commerce must have been a supreme passion in India in the centuries immediately preceding and following the Christian era.' All this indicates an expanding economy and a constant search for distant markets.

This trade gradually increased in the third and second centuries BC and then these adventurous traders and merchants may have been followed by missionaries, for this was just the period after Ashoka. The old stories in Sanskrit contain many accounts of perilous sea voyages and of shipwrecks. Both Greek and Arab accounts show that there was regular maritime intercourse between India and the Far East at least as early as the first century AC. The Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Islands lay on the direct trade route between China and India, Persia, Arabia, and the Mediterranean. Apart from their geographical importance these countries contained valuable minerals, metals, spices, and timber. Malaya was then, as now, famous for its tin mines. Probably the earliest voyages were along the east coast of India—Kalinga (Orissa), Bengal, Burma and then down the Malay Peninsula. Later the direct sea routes from east and south India were developed. It was along this sea route that many Chinese pilgrims came to India. Fa Hsien in the fifth century passed Java and complains that there were many heretics then, meaning people following the Brahminical faith and not Buddhism.

It is clear that shipbuilding was a well-developed and flourishing industry in ancient India. We have some details and particulars of the ships built in those days. Many Indian ports are mentioned. South Indian (Andhra) coins of the

second and third centuries AC bear the device of a two-masted ship. The Ajanta Frescoes depict the conquest of Ceylon and ships carrying elephants are shown.

The huge states and empires that developed from the original Indian settlements were essentially naval powers interested in trade and, therefore, in the control of the sea-routes. They came into conflict with each other on the seas, and at least once one of them challenged the Chola State of South India. But the Cholas were also strong on the seas and they sent a naval expedition which subdued for a while the Sailendra Empire.

There is an interesting Tamil inscription of 1088 AC which refers to a 'Corporation of the Fifteen Hundred'. This was apparently a union of traders who were described in it as 'brave men, born to wander over many countries ever since the beginning of the Krita age, penetrating the regions of the six continents by land and water routes, and dealing in various articles such as horses, elephants, precious stones, perfumes, and drugs, either wholesale or in retail.'

This was the background of the early colonizing ventures of the Indian people. Trade and adventure and the urge for expansion drew them to these eastern lands which were comprehensively described in old Sanskrit books as the Svarnabhumi, the Land of Gold or as Svarnadvipa, the Island of Gold. The very name had a lure about it. The early colonists settled down, more followed and thus a peaceful penetration went on. There was a fusion of the Indians with the races they found there, and also the evolution of a mixed culture. It was only then, probably, that the political element came from India, some Kshatriya princes, cadets of the noble families, in search of adventure and dominion. It is suggested, from a similarity of names, that many of these people who came were from the wide-spread Malva tribe in India—hence the Malay race which has played such an important part in the whole of Indonesia. A part of central India is still known as Malwa. The early colonists are supposed to have gone from Kalinga on the east coast (Orissa) but it was the Hindu Pallava Kingdom of the south that made an organized effort at colonization. The Sailendra dynasty, which became so famous in South-East Asia, is believed to have come from Orissa. At that time Orissa was a stronghold of Buddhism but the ruling dynasty was Brahminical.

All these Indian colonies were situated between two great countries and two great civilizations—India and China. Some of them, on the Asiatic mainland, actually touched the frontiers of the Chinese Empire, the others were on the direct trade route between China and India. Thus they were influenced by both these countries and a mixed Indo-Chinese civilization grew up, but such was the nature of these two cultures that there was no conflict between the two and mixed patterns of different shapes and varying contents emerged. The countries of the mainland—Burma, Siam, Indo-China—were more influenced by China, the islands and the Malay Peninsula had more of the impress of India. As a rule the methods of government and the general philosophy of life came from China, religion and art from India. The mainland countries depended for their trade largely on China and there were frequent exchanges of ambassadors. But even in Cambodia and in the mighty remains of Angkor the only artistic influence that has been so far detected came from India. But Indian art was flexible and adaptable and in each country it flowered afresh and in many new ways, always retaining that basic impress which it derived from India. Sir John Marshall has referred to ‘the amazingly vital and flexible character of Indian art’ and he points out how both Indian and Greek art had the common capacity to ‘adapt themselves to suit the needs of every country, race, and religion with which they came into contact.’

Indian art derives its basic character from certain ideals associated with the religious and philosophic outlook of India. As religion went from India to all these eastern lands, so also went this basic conception of art. Probably the early colonies were definitely Brahminical and Buddhism spread later. The two existed side by side as friends and mixed forms of popular worship grew up. This Buddhism was chiefly of the Mahayana type, easily adaptable, and both Brahminism and Buddhism, under the influence of local habits and traditions, had probably moved away from the purity of their original doctrines. In later years there were mighty conflicts between a Buddhist state and a Brahminical state but these were essentially political and economic wars for control of trade and sea routes.

The history of these Indian colonies covers a period of about thirteen hundred years or more, from the early beginnings in the first or second century AC to the end of the fifteenth century. The early centuries are vague and not much is

known except that many small states existed. Gradually they consolidate themselves and by the fifth century great cities take shape. By the eighth century seafaring empires have arisen, partly centralized but also exercising a vague suzerainty over many lands. Sometimes these dependencies became independent and even presumed to attack the central power and this has led to some confusion in our understanding of those periods.

The greatest of these states was the Sailendra Empire, or the empire of Sri Vijaya, which became the dominant power both on sea and land in the whole of Malaysia by the eighth century. This was till recently supposed to have its origin and capital in Sumatra but later researches indicate that it began in the Malay Peninsula. At the height of its power it included Malaya, Ceylon, Sumatra, part of Java, Borneo, Celebes, the Philippines, and part of Formosa, and probably exercised suzerainty over Cambodia and Champa (Annam). It was a Buddhist Empire.

But long before the Sailendra dynasty had established and consolidated this empire, powerful states had grown up in Malaya, Cambodia, and Java. In the northern part of the Malay Peninsula, near the borders of Siam, extensive ruins, says R.J. Wilkinson, 'point to the past existence of powerful states and a high standard of wealth and luxury'. In Champa (Annam) there was the city of Pandurangam in the third century and in the fifth century Kamboja became a great city. A great ruler, Jayavarman, united the smaller states in the ninth century and built up the Cambodian Empire with its capital at Angkor. Cambodia was probably under the suzerainty of the Sailendras from time to time, but this must have been nominal, and it reasserted its independence in the ninth century. This Cambodian state lasted for nearly four hundred years under a succession of great rulers and great builders, Jayavarman, Yashovarman, Indravarman, Suryavarman. The capital became famous in Asia and was known as 'Angkor the Magnificent', a city of a million inhabitants, larger and more splendid than the Rome of the Caesars. Near the city stood the vast temple of Angkor Vat. The empire of Cambodia flourished till the end of the thirteenth century, and the account of a Chinese envoy who visited it in 1297 describes the wealth and splendour of its capital. But suddenly it collapsed, so suddenly that some buildings were left unfinished. There were external attacks and internal troubles, but the major disaster seems to have been the silting up of the Mekong

river, which converted the approaches to the city into marshlands and led to its abandonment.

Java also broke away from the Sailendra Empire in the ninth century, but even so the Sailendras continued as the leading power in Indonesia till the eleventh century, when they came into conflict with the Chola power of South India. The Cholas were victorious and held sway over large parts of Indonesia for over fifty years. On the withdrawal of the Cholas the Sailendras recovered and continued as an independent state for nearly three hundred years more. But it was no longer the dominant power in the eastern seas and in the thirteenth century began the disruption of its empire. Java grew at its expense as also did the Thais (Siam). In the second half of the fourteenth century Java completely conquered the Sailendra Empire of Srivijaya.

This Javan state which now rose into prominence had a long history behind it. It was a Brahminical state which had continued its attachment to the older faith in spite of the spread of Buddhism. It had resisted the political and economic sway of the Sailendra Empire of Srivijaya even when more than half of Java itself was occupied by the latter. It consisted of a community of sea faring folk intent on trade and passionately fond of building great structures in stone. Originally it was called the Kingdom of Singhasari, but in 1292 a new city, Majapahit, was founded and from this grew the empire of Majapahit which succeeded Srivijaya as the dominant power in South-East Asia. Majapahit insulted some Chinese envoys sent by Kublai Khan and was punished for this by a Chinese expedition. Probably the Javanese learnt from the Chinese the use of gunpowder and this helped them finally to defeat the Sailendras.

Majapahit was a highly centralized, expanding empire. Its system of taxation is said to have been very well organized and special attention was paid to trade and its colonies. There was a commerce department of government, a colonial department, and departments for public health, war, the interior, etc. There was also a Supreme Court of justice consisting of a number of judges. It is astonishing how well this imperialist state was organized. Its chief business was trade from India to China. One of its well-known rulers was the Queen Suhita.

The war between Majapahit and Srivijaya was a very cruel one and though it ended in the complete victory of the former, it sowed the seeds of fresh conflict. From the ruins of the Sailendra power, allied to other elements, notably Arabs

and Muslim converts, rose the Malaya power in Sumatra and Malacca. The command of the eastern seas, which had so long been held by South India or the Indian colonies, now passed to the Arabs. Malacca rose into prominence as a great centre of trade and seat of political power, and Islam spread over the Malay Peninsula and the islands. It was this new power that finally put an end to Majapahit towards the end of the fifteenth century. But within a few years, in 1511, the Portuguese, under Albuquerque, came and took possession of Malacca. Europe had reached the Far East through her newly developing sea power.

The Influence of Indian Art Abroad

These records of ancient empires and dynasties have an interest for the antiquarian, but they have a large interest in the history of civilization and art. From the point of view of India they are particularly important, for it was India that functioned there and exhibited her vitality and genius in a variety of ways. We see her bubbling over with energy and spreading out far and wide, carrying not only her thought but her other ideals, her art, her trade, her language and literature, and her methods of government. She was not stagnant, or standing aloof, or isolated and cut off by mountain and sea. Her people crossed those high mountain barriers and perilous seas and built up, as M. Rene Grousset says, ‘a Greater India politically as little organized as Greater Greece, but morally equally harmonious.’ As a matter of fact even the political organization of these Malaysian states was of a high order, though it was not part of the Indian political structure. But M. Grousset refers to the wider areas where Indian culture spread: ‘In the high plateau of eastern Iran, in the oases of Serindia, in the arid wastes of Tibet, Mongolia, and Manchuria, in the ancient civilized lands of China and Japan, in the lands of the primitive Mons and Khmers and other tribes in Indo-China, in the countries of the Malayo-Polynesians, in Indonesia and Malay, India left the indelible impress of her high culture, not only upon religion, but also upon art and literature, in a word, all the higher things of spirit.’²²

Indian civilization took root especially in the countries of South-East Asia and the evidence for this can be found all over the place today. There were great

centres of Sanskrit learning in Champa, Angkor, Srivijaya, Majapahit, and other places. The names of the rulers of the various states and empires that arose are purely Indian and Sanskrit. This does not mean that they were pure Indian, but it does mean that they were Indianized. State ceremonies were Indian and conducted in Sanskrit. All the officers of the state bear old Sanskrit titles and some of these titles and designations have been continued up till now, not only in Thailand but in the Muslim states of Malaya. The old literatures of these places in Indonesia are full of Indian myth and legend. The famous dances of Java and Bali derive from India. The little island of Bali has indeed largely maintained its old Indian culture down to modern times and even Hinduism has persisted there. The art of writing went to the Philippines from India.

In Cambodia the alphabet is derived from South India and numerous Sanskrit words have been taken over with minor variations. The civil and criminal law is based on the Laws of Manu, the ancient law-giver of India, and this has been codified, with variations due to Buddhist influence, in modern Cambodian legislation.²³

But above all else it is in the magnificent art and architecture of these old Indian colonies that the Indian influence is most marked. The original impulse was modified, adapted, and fused with the genius of the place and out of this fusion arose the monuments and wonderful temples of Angkor and Borobudur. At Borobudur in Java the whole life story of Buddha is carved in stone. At other places bas-reliefs reproduce the legends of Vishnu and Rama and Krishna. Of Angkor, Mr. Osbert Sitwell has written: ‘Let it be said immediately that Angkor, as it stands, ranks as chief wonder of the world today, one of the summits to which human genius has aspired in stone, infinitely more impressive, lovely and, as well, romantic, than anything that can be seen in China ... The material remains of a civilization that flashed its wings, of the utmost brilliance, for six centuries, and then perished so utterly that even its name has died from the lips of man.’

Round the great temple of Angkor Vat is a vast area of mighty ruins with artificial lakes and pools, and canals and bridges over them, and a great gate dominated by ‘a vast sculptured head, a lovely, smiling but enigmatic Cambodian face, though one raised to the power and beauty of a god.’ The face with its strangely fascinating and disturbing smile—the ‘Angkor smile’—is

repeated again and again. This gate leads to the temple: ‘the neighbouring Bayon can be said to be the most imaginative and singular in the world, more lovely than Angkor Vat, because more unearthly in its conception, a temple from a city in some other distant planet ... imbued with the same elusive beauty that often lives between the lines of a great poem.’²⁴

The inspiration for Angkor came from India but it was the Khmer genius that developed it, or the two fused together and produced this wonder. The Cambodian king who is said to have built this great temple is named Jayavarman VII, a typical Indian name.

Dr Quaritch Wales says that ‘when the guiding hand of India was removed, her inspiration was not forgotten, but the Khmer genius was released to mould from it vast new conceptions of amazing vitality different from, and hence not properly to be compared with anything matured in a purely Indian environment ... It is true that Khmer culture is essentially based on the inspiration of India, without which the Khmers at best might have produced nothing greater than the barbaric splendour of the Central American Mayas; but it must be admitted that here, more than anywhere else in Greater India, this inspiration fell on fertile soil’.²⁵

This leads one to think that in India itself that original inspiration gradually faded because the mind and the soil became overworked and undernourished for lack of fresh currents and ideas. So long as India kept her mind open and gave of her riches to others, and received from them what she lacked, she remained fresh and strong and vital. But the more she withdrew into her shell, intent on preserving herself, uncontaminated by external influences, the more she lost that inspiration and her life became increasingly a dull round of meaningless activities all centered in the dead past. Losing the art of creating beauty, her children lost even the capacity to recognize it.

It is to European scholars and archaeologists that the excavations and discoveries in Java, Angkor and elsewhere in Greater India are due, more especially to French and Dutch scholars. Great cities and monuments probably still lie buried there awaiting discovery. Meanwhile it is said that important sites in Malaya containing ancient ruins have been destroyed by mining operations or for obtaining material for building roads. The war will no doubt add to this destruction.

Some years ago I had a letter from a Thai (Siamese) student who had come to Tagore's Santiniketan and was returning to Thailand. He wrote: 'I always consider myself exceptionally fortunate in being able to come to this great and ancient land of Aryavarta and to pay my humble homage at the feet of grandmother India in whose affectionate arms my mother country was so lovingly brought up and taught to appreciate and love what was sublime and beautiful in culture and religion.' This may not be typical, but it does convey some idea of the general feeling towards India which, though vague and overladen with much else, still continues in many of the countries of South-East Asia. Everywhere an intense and narrow nationalism has grown, looking to itself and distrustful of others; there is fear and hatred of European domination and yet a desire to emulate Europe and America; there is often some contempt for India because of her dependent condition; and yet behind all this there is a feeling of respect and friendship for India, for old memories endure and people have not forgotten that there was a time when India was a mother country to these and nourished them with rich fare from her own treasure-house. Just as Hellenism spread from Greece to the countries of the Mediterranean and in Western Asia, India's cultural influence spread to many countries and left its powerful impress upon them.

'From Persia to the Chinese Sea,' writes Sylvain Levi,

from the icy regions of Siberia to the islands of Java and Borneo, from Oceania to Socotra, India has propagated her beliefs, her tales and her civilization. She has left indelible imprints on one-fourth of the human race in the course of a long succession of centuries. She has the right to reclaim in universal history the rank that ignorance has refused her for a long time and to hold her place amongst the great nations summarising and symbolising the spirit of Humanity.²⁶

Old Indian Art

The amazing expansion of Indian culture and art to other countries has led to some of the finest expressions of this art being found outside India. Unfortunately many of our old monuments and sculptures, especially in northern India, have been destroyed in the course of ages. 'To know Indian art in India alone,' says Sir John Marshall, 'is to know but half its story. To apprehend it to

the full, we must follow it in the wake of Buddhism, to Central Asia, China, and Japan; we must watch it assuming new forms and breaking into new beauties as it spreads over Tibet and Burma and Siam; we must gaze in awe at the unexampled grandeur of its creations in Cambodia and Java. In each of these countries, Indian art encounters a different racial genius, a different local environment, and under their modifying influence it takes on a different garb.²⁷ Indian art is so intimately associated with Indian religion and philosophy that it is difficult to appreciate it fully unless one has some knowledge of the ideals that governed the Indian mind. In art, as in music, there is a gulf which separates Eastern from Western conceptions. Probably the great artists and builders of the middle ages in Europe would have felt more in tune with Indian art and sculpture than modern European artists who derive part of their inspiration at least from the Renaissance period and after. For in Indian art there is always a religious urge, a looking beyond, such as probably inspired the builders of the great cathedrals of Europe. Beauty is conceived as subjective, not objective; it is a thing of the spirit, though it may also take lovely shape in form or matter. The Greeks loved beauty for its own sake and found not only joy but truth in it; the ancient Indians loved beauty also but always they sought to put some deeper significance in their work, some vision of the inner truth as they saw it. In the supreme examples of their creative work they extort admiration, even though one may not understand what they were aiming at or the ideas that governed them. In lesser examples, this lack of understanding, of not being in tune with the artist's mind, becomes a bar to appreciation. There is a vague feeling of discomfort, even of irritation, at something one cannot grasp, and this leads to the conclusion that the artist did not know his job and has failed. Sometimes there is even a feeling of repulsion.

I know nothing about art, eastern or western, and am not competent to say anything about it. I react to it as any untutored layman might do. Some painting or sculpture or building fills me with delight, or moves me and makes me feel a strange emotion; or it just pleases me a little; or it does not affect me at all and I pass it by almost unnoticed; or it repels me. I cannot explain these reactions or speak learnedly about the merits or demerits of works of art. The Buddha statue at Anuradhapura in Ceylon moved me greatly and a picture of it has been my

companion for many years. On the other hand some famous temples in South India, heavy with carving and detail, disturb me and fill me with unease.

Europeans, trained in the Greek tradition, at first examined Indian art from the Grecian point of view. They recognized something they knew in the Graeco-Buddhist art of Gandhara and the Frontier and considered other forms in India as degraded types of this. Gradually a new approach was made and it was pointed out that Indian art was something original and vital and in no way derived from this Graeco-Buddhist art, which was a pale reflection of it. This new approach came more from the Continent of Europe than from England. It is curious that Indian art, and this applies to Sanskrit literature also, has been more appreciated on the Continent than in England. I have often wondered how far this has been conditioned by the unfortunate political relationship existing between India and England. Probably there is something in that, though there must be other and more basic causes of difference also. There are of course many Englishmen, artists and scholars and others, who have come near to the spirit and outlook of India and helped to discover our old treasures and interpret them to the world. There are many also to whom India is grateful for their warm friendship and service. Yet the fact remains that there is a gulf, and an ever-widening gulf, between Indians and Englishmen. On the Indian side this is easier to understand, at any rate for me, for a great deal has happened in recent years that has cut deep into our souls. On the other side perhaps some similar reactions have taken place for different reasons; among them, anger at being put in the wrong before the world when, according to them, the fault was not theirs. But the feeling is deeper than politics and it comes out unawares, and most of all it seems to affect English intellectuals. The Indian, to them, appears to be a special manifestation of original sin and all his works bear this mark. A popular English author, though hardly representative of English thought or intelligence, has recently written a book which is full of a malicious hatred and disgust for almost everything Indian. A more eminent and representative English author, Mr Osbert Sitwell says in his book *Escape With Me* (1941) that 'the idea of India, despite its manifold and diverse marvels, continued to be repellent.' He refers also to 'that repulsive, greasy quality that so often mars Hindu works of art.'

Mr Sitwell is perfectly justified in holding those opinions about Indian art or India generally. I am sure he feels that way. I am myself repelled by much in

India but I do not feel that way about India as a whole. Naturally, for I am an Indian and I cannot easily hate myself, however unworthy I may be. But it is not a question of opinions or views on art; it is much more a conscious and subconscious dislike and unfriendliness to a whole people. Is it true that those whom we have injured, we dislike and hate?

Among the Englishmen who have appreciated Indian art and applied new standards of judgment to it have been Lawrence Binyon and E.B. Havell. Havell is particularly enthusiastic about the ideals of Indian art and the spirit underlying them. He emphasizes that a great national art affords an intimate revelation of national thought and character, but it is only to be appreciated if the ideals behind it are understood. An alien governing race misapprehending and depreciating those ideals sows the seeds of intellectual antipathy. Indian art, he says, was not addressed to a narrow coterie of literati. Its intention was to make the central ideas of religion and philosophy intelligible to the masses. ‘That Hindu art was successful in its educational purpose may be inferred from the fact, known to all who have intimate acquaintance with Indian life, that the Indian peasantry, though illiterate in the western sense, are among the most cultured of their class anywhere in the world.’²⁸

In art, as in Sanskrit poetry and Indian music, the artist was supposed to identify himself with nature in all her moods, to express the essential harmony of man with nature and the universe. That has been the keynote of all Asiatic art and it is because of this that there is a certain unity about the art of Asia, in spite of its great variety and the national differences that are so evident. There is not much of old painting in India, except for the lovely frescoes of Ajanta. Perhaps much of it has perished. It was in her sculpture and architecture that India stood out, just as China and Japan excelled in painting.

Indian music, which is so different from European music, was highly developed in its own way and India stood out in this respect and influenced Asiatic music considerably, except for China and the Far East. Music thus became another link with Persia, Afghanistan, Arabia, Turkestan and, to some extent, in other areas where Arab civilization flourished, for instance, North Africa. Indian classical music will probably be appreciated in all these countries.

An important influence in the development of art in India, as elsewhere in Asia, was the religious prejudice against graven images. The Vedas were against

image worship and it was only at a comparatively late period in Buddhism that Buddha's person was represented in sculpture and painting. In the Mathura museum there is a huge stone figure of the Bodhisattva which is full of strength and power. This belongs to the Kushan period, about the beginning of the Christian era.

The early period of Indian art is full of a naturalism which may partly be due to Chinese influences. Chinese influence is visible at various stages of Indian art history, chiefly in the development of this naturalism, just as Indian idealism went to China and Japan and powerfully influenced them during some of their great periods.

During the Gupta period, fourth to sixth centuries AC, the Golden Age of India as it is called, the caves of Ajanta were dug out and the frescoes painted. Bagh and Badami are also of this period. The Ajanta frescoes, very beautiful though they are, have, ever since their discovery, exercised a powerful influence on our present-day artists, who have turned away from life and sought to model their style on that of Ajanta, with unhappy results.

Ajanta takes one back into some distant dream-like and yet very real world. These frescoes were painted by the Buddhist monks. Keep away from women, do not even look at them, for they are dangerous, has said their master long ago. And yet we have here women in plenty, beautiful women, princesses, singers, dancers, seated and standing, beautifying themselves, or in procession. The women of Ajanta had become famous. How well those painter-monks must have known the world and the moving drama of life, how lovingly they have painted it, just as they have painted the Bodhisattva in his calm and other-worldly majesty.

In the seventh and eighth centuries the mighty caves of Ellora were carved out of solid rock with the stupendous Kailasa temple in the centre; it is difficult to imagine how human beings conceived this or, having conceived it, gave body and shape to their conception. The caves of Elephanta, with the powerful and subtle Trimurti, date also from this period. Also the group of monuments at Mamallapuram in South India.

In the Elephanta caves there is a broken statue of Shiva Nataraja, Shiva dancing. Even in its mutilated condition, Havell says that it is a majestic conception and an embodiment of titanic power. 'Though the rock itself seems

to vibrate with the rhythmic movement of the dance, the noble head bears the same look of serene calm and dispassion which illuminate the face of the Buddha.'

There is another Shiva Nataraja in the British Museum and of this Epstein has written:

Shiva dances, creating the world and destroying it, his large rhythms conjure up vast aeons of time, and his movements have a relentless magical power of incantation. A small group in the British Museum is the most tragic summing up of the death in love motive ever seen, and it epitomizes, as no other work, the fatal element in human passion. Our European allegories are banal and pointless by comparison with these profound works, devoid of the trappings of symbolism, concentrating on the essential, the essentially plastic.²⁹

There is a head of a Bodhisattva from Borobudur in Java which has been taken to the Glyptotek in Copenhagen. It is beautiful, in the sense of formal beauty, but, as Havell says, there is something deeper in it revealing, as in a mirror, the pure soul of the Bodhisattva. 'It is a face which incarnates the stillness of the depths of the ocean; the serenity of an azure, cloudless sky; a beatitude beyond moral ken.'

'Indian art in Java,' adds Havell, 'has a character of its own which distinguishes it from that of the continent from whence it came. There runs through both the same strain of deep serenity, but in the divine ideal of Java we lose the austere feeling which characterizes the Hindu sculpture of Elephanta and Mamallapuram. There is more of human contentment and joy in Indo-Javanese art, an expression of that peaceful security which the Indian colonists enjoyed in their happy island home, after the centuries of storm and struggle which their forefathers had experienced on the mainland.'³⁰

India's Foreign Trade

Throughout the first millennium of the Christian era, India's trade was widespread and Indian merchants controlled many foreign markets. It was dominant in the eastern seas and it reached out also to the Mediterranean. Pepper and other spices went from India or via India to the west, often on Indian and Chinese boats and it is said that Alaric the Goth took away 3,000 pounds of

pepper from Rome. Roman writers bemoaned the fact that gold flowed from Rome to India and the east in exchange for various luxury articles.

This trade was largely, in India as elsewhere at the time, one of give and take of materials found and developed locally. India was a fertile land and rich in some of the materials that other countries lacked, and the seas being open to her she sent these materials abroad. She also obtained them from the eastern islands and profited as a merchant carrier. But she had further advantages. She had been manufacturing cloth from the earliest ages, long before other countries did so, and a textile industry had developed. Indian textiles went to far countries. Silk was also made from very early times though probably it was not nearly as good as Chinese silk, which began to be imported as early as the fourth century BC. The Indian silk industry may have developed subsequently, though it does not seem to have gone far. An important advance was made in the dyeing of cloth and special methods were discovered for the preparation of fast dyes. Among these was indigo, a word derived from India through Greece. It was probably this knowledge of dyeing that gave a great impetus to India's trade with foreign countries.

Chemistry in India in the early centuries AC was probably more advanced than in other countries. I do not know much about it but there is a *History of Hindu Chemistry* written by the doyen of Indian chemists and scientists, Sir P.C. Ray, who trained several generations of Indian scientists. Chemistry then was closely allied to alchemy and metallurgy. A famous Indian chemist and metallurgist was named Nagarjuna, and the similarity of the names has led some people to suggest that he was the same person as the great philosopher of the first century AC. But this is very doubtful.

The tempering of steel was known early in India, and Indian steel and iron were valued abroad, especially for warlike purposes. Many other metals were known and used and preparations of metallic compounds were made for medicinal purposes. Distillation and calcination were well-known. The science of medicine was fairly well developed. Though based mainly on the old text books, considerable experimental progress was made right up to the medieval period. Anatomy and physiology were studied and the circulation of the blood was suggested long before Harvey.

Astronomy, oldest of sciences, was a regular subject of the university curriculum and with it was mixed up astrology. A very accurate calendar was worked out and this calendar is still in popular use. It is a solar calendar having lunar months, which leads to periodical adjustments. As elsewhere, the priests, or Brahmins, were especially concerned with this calendar and they fixed the seasonal festivals as well as indicated the exact time of the eclipses of the sun and moon, which were also in the nature of festivals. They took advantage of this knowledge to encourage among the masses beliefs and observances, which they must have known to be superstitious, and thus added to their own prestige. A knowledge of astronomy, in its practical aspects, was of great help to the people who went on the seas. The ancient Indians were rather proud of the advances they had made in astronomical knowledge. They had contacts with Arab astronomy, which was largely based on Alexandria.

It is difficult to say how far mechanical appliances had developed then, but shipbuilding was a flourishing industry and there is frequent reference to various kinds of ‘machines’, especially for purposes of war. This has led some enthusiastic and rather credulous Indians to imagine all kinds of complicated machines. It does seem, however, that India at that time was not behind any country in the making and use of tools and in the knowledge of chemistry and metallurgy. It was this that gave her an advantage in trade and enabled her for several centuries to control a number of foreign markets.

Possibly she had one other advantage also—the absence of slave-labour, which handicapped Greek and other early civilizations and came in the way of their progress. The caste system, with all its evils, which progressively increased was infinitely better than slavery even for those lowest in the scale. Within each caste there was equality and a measure of freedom; each caste was occupational and applied itself to its own particular work. This led to a high degree of specialization and skill in handicrafts and craftsmanship.

Mathematics in Ancient India

Highly intellectual and given to abstract thinking as they were, one would expect the ancient Indians to excel in mathematics. Europe got its early arithmetic and

algebra from the Arabs—hence the ‘Arabic numerals’—but the Arabs themselves had previously taken them from India. The astonishing progress that the Indians had made in mathematics is now well known and it is recognized that the foundations of modern arithmetic and algebra were laid long ago in India. The clumsy method of using a counting frame and the use of Roman and such-like numerals had long retarded progress when the ten Indian numerals, including the zero sign, liberated the human mind from these restrictions and threw a flood of light on the behaviour of numbers. These number symbols were unique and entirely different from all other symbols that had been in use in other countries. They are common enough today and we take them for granted, yet they contained the germs of revolutionary progress in them. It took many centuries for them to travel from India, via Baghdad, to the western world.

A hundred and fifty years ago, during Napoleon’s time, La Place wrote:

It is India that gave us the ingenious method of expressing all numbers by means of ten symbols, each symbol receiving a value of position, as well as an absolute value; a profound and important idea which appears so simple to us now that we ignore its true merit, but its very simplicity, the great ease which it has lent to all computations, puts our arithmetic in the first rank of useful inventions; and we shall appreciate the grandeur of this achievement when we remember that it escaped the genius of Archimedes and Apollonius, two of the greatest men produced by antiquity.³¹

The origins of geometry, arithmetic, and algebra in India go back to remote periods. Probably to begin with there was some kind of geometrical algebra used for making figures for Vedic altars. Mention is made in the most ancient books of the geometrical method for the transformation of a square into a rectangle having a given side: $ax = c$. Geometrical figures are even now commonly used in Hindu ceremonies. Geometry made progress in India but in this respect Greece and Alexandria went ahead. It was in arithmetic and algebra that India kept the lead. The inventor or inventors of the decimal place-value system and the zero mark are not known. The earliest use of the zero symbol, so far discovered, is in one of the scriptural books dated about 200 BC. It is considered probable that the place-value system was invented about the beginning of the Christian era. The zero, called *shunya* or nothing was originally a dot and later it became a small circle. It was considered a number like any other. Professor Halsted thus emphasizes the vital significance of this invention: ‘The importance of the creation of the zero mark can never be exaggerated. This giving to airy nothing,

not merely a local habitation and a name, a picture, a symbol but helpful power is the characteristic of the Hindu race from whence it sprang. It is like coining the *Nirvana* into dynamos. No single mathematical creation has been more potent for the general on-go of intelligence and power.'³²

Yet another modern mathematician has grown eloquent over this historic event. Dantzig in his *Number* writes:

This long period of nearly five thousand years saw the rise and fall of many a civilization, each leaving behind it a heritage of literature, art, philosophy, and religion. But what was the net achievement in the field of reckoning, the earliest art practised by man? An inflexible numeration so crude as to make progress well nigh impossible, and a calculating device so limited in scope that even elementary calculations called for the services of an expert ... Man used these devices for thousands of years without making a single worthwhile improvement in the instrument, without contributing a single important idea to the system ... Even when compared with the slow growth of ideas during the dark ages, the history of reckoning presents a peculiar picture of desolate stagnation. When viewed in this light the achievements of the unknown Hindu, who sometime in the first centuries of our era discovered the principle of position, assumes the importance of a world event.³³

Dantzig is puzzled at the fact that the great mathematicians of Greece did not stumble on this discovery. 'Is it that the Greeks had such a marked contempt for applied science, leaving even the instruction of their children to slaves? But if so, how is it that the nation that gave us geometry and carried this science so far did not create even a rudimentary algebra? Is it not equally strange that algebra, that corner-stone of modern mathematics, also originated in India, and at about the same time that positional numeration did?'

The answer to this question is suggested by Professor Hogben:

The difficulty of understanding why it should have been the Hindus who took this step, why it was not taken by the mathematicians of antiquity, why it should first have been taken by practical man, is only insuperable if we seek for the explanation of intellectual progress in the genius of a few gifted individuals, instead of in the whole social framework of customary thought which circumscribes the greatest individual genius. What happened in India about AD 100 had happened before. May be it is happening now in Soviet Russia ... To accept it (this truth) is to recognise that every culture contains within itself its own doom, unless it pays as much attention to the education of the mass of mankind as to the education of the exceptionally gifted people.³⁴

We must assume then that these momentous inventions were not just due to the momentary illumination of an erratic genius, much in advance of his time, but that they were essentially the product of the social *milieu* and that they

answered some insistent demand of the times. Genius of a high order was certainly necessary to find this out and fulfil the demand, but if the demand had not been there the urge to find some way out would have been absent, and even if the invention had been made it would have been forgotten or put aside till circumstances more propitious for its use arose. It seems clear from the early Sanskrit works on mathematics that the demand was there, for these books are full of problems of trade and social relationship involving complicated calculations. There are problems dealing with taxation, debt, and interest; problems of partnership, barter and exchange, and the calculation of the fineness of gold. Society had grown complex and large numbers of people were engaged in governmental operations and in an extensive trade. It was impossible to carry on without simple methods of calculation.

The adoption of zero and the decimal place-value system in India unbarred the gates of the mind to rapid progress in arithmetic and algebra. Fractions come in, and the multiplication and divisions of fractions; the rule of three is discovered and perfected; squares and square-roots (together with the sign of the square-root, $\sqrt{}$); cubes and cube-roots; the minus sign; tables of sines; π is evaluated as 3.1416; letters of the alphabet are used in algebra to denote unknowns; simple and quadratic equations are considered; the mathematics of zero are investigated. Zero is defined as $a - a = 0$; $a + 0 = a$; $a - 0 = a$; $a \times 0 = 0$; $a - 0$ becomes infinity. The conception of negative quantities also comes in, thus; $\sqrt{4} = \pm 2$.

These and other advances in mathematics are contained in books written by a succession of eminent mathematicians from the fifth to the twelfth century AC. There are earlier books also (Baudhayana, c. eighth century BC; Apastamba and Katyayana, both c. fifth century BC) which deal with geometrical problems, especially with triangles, rectangles, and squares. But the earliest extant book on algebra is by the famous astronomer, Aryabhata, who was born in AC 476. He wrote this book on astronomy and mathematics when he was only twenty-three years old. Aryabhata, who is sometimes called the inventor of algebra, must have relied, partly at least, on the work of his predecessors. The next great name in Indian mathematics is that of Bhaskara I (AC 522), and he was followed by Brahmagupta (AC 628), who was also a famous astronomer, and who stated the laws applying to *shunya* or zero and made other notable advances. There follow a succession of mathematicians who have written on arithmetic or algebra. The

last great name is that of Bhaskara II, who was born in AC 1114. He wrote three books, on astronomy, algebra, and arithmetic. His book on arithmetic is known as ‘Lilavati’, which is an odd name for a treatise on mathematics, as it is the name of a woman. There are frequent references in the book to a young girl who is addressed as ‘O Lilavati’ and is then instructed on the problems stated. It is believed, without any definite proof, that Lilavati was Bhaskara’s daughter. The style of the book is clear and simple and suitable for young persons to understand. The book is still used, partly for its style, in Sanskrit schools.

Books on mathematics continued to appear (Narayana in 1150, Ganesha in 1545), but these are mere repetitions of what had been done. Very little original work on mathematics was done in India after the twelfth century till we reach the modern age.

In the eighth century, during the reign of the Khalif Al-Mansur (753-774), a number of Indian scholars went to Baghdad and among the books they took with them were works on mathematics and astronomy. Probably even earlier than this, Indian numerals had reached Baghdad, but this was the first systematic approach, and Aryabhata’s and other books were translated into Arabic. They influenced the development of mathematics and astronomy in the Arab world, and Indian numerals were introduced. Baghdad was then a great centre of learning and Greek and Jewish scholars had gathered there bringing with them Greek philosophy, geometry, and science. The cultural influence of Baghdad was felt throughout the Muslim world from Central Asia to Spain, and a knowledge of Indian mathematics in their Arabic translations spread all over this vast area. The numerals were called by the Arabs ‘figures of Hind’ (or India), and the Arabic word for a number is ‘Hindsah’, meaning ‘from Hind’.

From this Arab world the new mathematics travelled to European countries, probably through the Moorish universities of Spain, and became the foundation for European mathematics. There was opposition in Europe to the use of the new numbers, as they were considered infidel symbols, and it took several hundred years before they were in common use. The earliest known use is in a Sicilian coin of 1134; in Britain the first use is in 1490.

It seems clear that some knowledge of Indian mathematics, and especially of the place-value system of numbers, had penetrated into Western Asia even before the formal embassy carried books to Baghdad. There is an interesting

passage in a complaint made by a Syrian scholar-monk who was hurt at the arrogance of some Greek scholars who looked down on Syrians. Severus Sebokht was his name, and he lived in a convent situated on the Euphrates. He writes in AC 662 and tries to show that the Syrians were in no way inferior to the Greeks. By way of illustration he refers to the Indians: ‘I will omit all discussion of the science of the Hindus, a people not the same as the Syrians; their subtle discoveries in the science of astronomy, discoveries that are more ingenious than those of the Greeks and Babylonians; their computing that surpasses description. I wish only to say that this computation is done by means of nine signs. If those who believe, because they speak Greek, that they have reached the limits of science, should know of these things, they would be convinced that there are also others who know something.’³⁵

Mathematics in India inevitably makes one think of one extraordinary figure of recent times. This was Srinivasa Ramanujam. Born in a poor Brahmin family in south India, having no opportunities for a proper education, he became a clerk in the Madras Port Trust. But he was bubbling over with some irrepressible quality of instinctive genius and played about with numbers and equations in his spare time. By a lucky chance he attracted the attention of a mathematician who sent some of his amateur work to Cambridge in England. People there were impressed and a scholarship was arranged for him. So he left his clerk’s job and went to Cambridge and during a very brief period there did work of profound value and amazing originality. The Royal Society of England went rather out of their way and made him a Fellow, but he died two years later, probably of tuberculosis, at the age of thirty-three Professor Julian Huxley has, I believe, referred to him somewhere as the greatest mathematician of the century.

Ramanujam’s brief life and death are symbolic of conditions in India. Of our millions how few get any education at all, how many live on the verge of starvation; of even those who get some education how many have nothing to look forward to but a clerkship in some office on a pay that is usually far less than the unemployment dole in England. If life opened its gates to them and offered them food and healthy conditions of living and education and opportunities of growth, how many among these millions would be eminent scientists, educationists, technicians, industrialists, writers and artists, helping to build a new India and a new world?

Growth and Decay

During the first thousand years of the Christian era, there are many ups and downs in India, many conflicts with invading elements and internal troubles. Yet it is a period of a vigorous national life, bubbling over with energy and spreading out in all directions. Culture develops into a rich civilization flowering out in philosophy, literature, drama, art, science, and mathematics. India's economy expands, the Indian horizon widens and other countries come within its scope. Contacts grow with Iran, China, the Hellenic world, Central Asia, and above all, there is a powerful urge towards the eastern seas which leads to the establishment of Indian colonies and the spread of Indian culture far beyond India's boundaries. During the middle period of this millennium, from early in the fourth to the sixth century, the Gupta Empire flourishes and becomes the patron and symbol of this widespread intellectual and artistic activity. It is called the Golden or Classical Age of India and writings of that period, which are classics in Sanskrit literature, reveal a serenity, a quiet confidence of the people in themselves, and a glow of pride at being privileged to be alive in that high noon of civilization, and with it the urge to use their great intellectual and artistic powers to the utmost.

Yet even before that Golden Age had come to a close, signs of weakness and decay become visible. The White Huns come from the north-west in successive hordes and are repeatedly pushed back. But they come again and again and eat their way slowly into North India. For a half-century they even establish themselves as a ruling power all over the north. But then, with a great effort, the last of the great Guptas, joining up in a confederacy with Yashovarman, a ruler of Central India, drives out the Huns.

This long-drawn-out conflict weakened India politically and militarily; and probably the settlement of large numbers of these Huns all over northern India gradually produced an inner change in the people. They were absorbed as all foreign elements had so far been absorbed, but they left their impress and weakened the old ideals of the Indo-Aryan races. Old accounts of the Huns are full of their excessive cruelty and barbarous behaviour which were so foreign to Indian standards of warfare and government.

In the seventh century there was a revival and renascence under Harsha, both political and cultural. Ujjayini (modern Ujjain), which had been the brilliant capital of the Guptas, again became a centre of art and culture and the seat of a powerful kingdom. But in the centuries that followed, this too weakens and fades off. In the ninth century Mihira Bhoja, of Gujarat, consolidates a unified state in North and Central India with his capital at Kanauj. There is another literary revival of which the central figure is Rajashekhar. Again, at the beginning of the eleventh century, another Bhoja stands out as a powerful and attractive figure, and Ujjayini again becomes a great capital. This Bhoja was a remarkable man who distinguished himself in many fields. He was a grammarian and a lexicographer, and interested in medicine and astronomy. He was a builder and a patron of art and literature and was himself a poet and a writer to whom many works are attributed. His name has become a part of popular fable and legend as a symbol of greatness, learning, and generosity.

And yet for all these bright patches, an inner weakness seems to seize India, which affects not only her political status but her creative activities. There is no date for this, for the process was a slow and creeping one, and it affected north India earlier than the south. The south indeed becomes more important both politically and culturally. Perhaps this was due to the south having escaped the continuous strain of fighting waves of invaders; perhaps many of the writers and artists and master-builders migrated to the south to escape from the unsettled conditions in the north. The powerful kingdoms of the south, with their brilliant courts, must have attracted these people and given them opportunities for creative work they lacked elsewhere.

But though the north did not dominate India, as it had often done in the past, and was split up into small states, life was still rich there and there were many centres of cultural and philosophic activity. Benares, as ever, was the heart of religious and philosophical thought, and every person who advanced a new theory or a new interpretation of an old theory, had to come there to justify himself. Kashmir was for long a great Sanskrit centre of Buddhist and Brahminical learning. The great universities flourished; of these, Nalanda, the most famous of all, was respected for its scholarship all over India. To have been to Nalanda was a hall-mark of culture. It was not easy to enter that university, for admission was restricted to those who had already attained a certain standard.

It specialized in postgraduate study and attracted students from China, Japan, and Tibet, and even it is said, from Korea and Mongolia and Bokhara. Apart from religious and philosophical subjects (both Buddhist and Brahminical), secular and practical subjects were also taught. There was a school of art and a department for architecture; a medical school; an agricultural department; dairy farms and cattle. The intellectual life of the university is said to have been one of animated debates and discussions. The spread of Indian culture abroad was largely the work of scholars from Nalanda.

Then there was the Vikramshila university, near modern Bhagalpur in Bihar, and Vallabhi in Kathiawar. During the period of the Guptas, the Ujjayini university rose into prominence. In the south there was the Amravati university.

Yet, as the millennium approached its end, all this appears to be the afternoon of a civilization; the glow of the morning had long faded away, high noon was past. In the south there was still vitality and vigour and this lasted for some centuries more; in the Indian colonies abroad there was aggressive and full-blooded life right up to the middle of the next millennium. But the heart seems to petrify, its beats are slower, and gradually this petrification and decay spread to the limbs. There is no great figure in philosophy after Shankara in the eighth century, though there is a long succession of commentators and dialecticians. Even Shankara came from the south. The sense of curiosity and the spirit of mental adventure give place to a hard and formal logic and a sterile dialectic. Both Brahminism and Buddhism deteriorate, and degraded forms of worship grow up, especially some varieties of Tantric worship and perversions of the Yoga system.

In literature, Bhavabhuti (eighth century) is the last great figure. Many books continued to be written, but their style becomes more and more involved and intricate; there is neither freshness of thought nor of expression. In mathematics, Bhaskara II (twelfth century) is the last great name. In art, E.B. Havell takes us rather beyond this period. He says that the form of expression was not artistically perfected until about the seventh and eighth centuries, when most of the great sculpture and painting in India was produced. From the seventh or eighth to the fourteenth century, according to him, was the great period of Indian art, corresponding to the highest development of Gothic art in Europe. He adds that it was in the sixteenth century that the creative impulse of the old Indian art

began markedly to diminish. How far this judgment is correct I do not know, but I imagine that even in the field of art it was South India that carried on the old tradition for a longer period than the north.

The last of the major emigrations for colonial settlement took place from South India in the ninth century, but the Cholas in the south continued to be a great sea power till the eleventh century, when they defeated and conquered Srivijaya.

We thus see that India was drying up and losing her creative genius and vitality. The process was a slow one and lasted several centuries, beginning in the north and finally reaching the south. What were the causes of this political decline and cultural stagnation? Was this due to age alone, that seems to attack civilizations as it does individuals, or to a kind of tidal wave with its forward and backward motion? or were external causes and invasions responsible for it? Radhakrishnan says that Indian philosophy lost its vigour with the loss of political freedom. Sylvain Levi writes: ‘La culture sanscrite a fini avec la liberté de l’Inde; des langues nouvelles, des littératures nouvelles ont envahi le territoire aryenne et l’en ont chassé; elle s’est réfugiée dans les collèges et y a pris un air pédantesque.’

All this is true, for the loss of political freedom led inevitably to cultural decay. But why should political freedom be lost unless some kind of decay has preceded it? A small country might easily be overwhelmed by superior power, but a huge, well developed and highly civilized country like India cannot succumb to external attack unless there is internal decay, or the invader possesses a higher technique of warfare. That internal decay is clearly evident in India at the close of these thousand years.

There are repeatedly periods of decay and disruption in the life of every civilization, and there had been such periods in Indian history previously; but India had survived them and rejuvenated herself afresh, sometimes retiring into her shell for a while and emerging again with fresh vigour. There always remained a dynamic core which could renew itself with fresh contacts and develop again, something different from the past and yet intimately connected with it. Had that capacity for adaptation, that flexibility of mind which had saved India so often in the past left her now? Had her fixed beliefs and the growing rigidity of her social structure made her mind also rigid? For if life ceases to

grow and evolve, the evolution of thought also ceases. India had all along been a curious combination of conservatism in practice and explosive thought. Inevitably that thought affected the practice, though it did so in its own way without irreverence for the past. ‘Mais si leurs yeux suivaient les mots anciens, leur intelligence y voyait des idées nouvelles. L’Inde s’est transformée à son insu.’ But when thought lost its explosiveness and creative power and became a tame attendant on an outworn and meaningless practice, mumbling old phrases and fearful of everything new, then life became stagnant and tied and constrained in a prison of its own making.

We have many examples of the collapse of a civilization, and perhaps the most notable of these is that of the European classical civilization which ended with the fall of Rome. Long before Rome fell to the invaders from the north, it had been on the verge of collapse from its own internal weaknesses. Its economy, once expanding, had shrunk and brought all manner of difficulties in its train. Urban industries decayed, flourishing cities grew progressively smaller and impoverished, and even fertility rapidly declined. The Emperors tried many expedients to overcome their ever-increasing difficulties. There was compulsory state regulation of merchants, craftsmen, and workers, who were tied down to particular employments. Many kinds of employment were forbidden to those outside certain groups of workers. Thus some occupations were practically converted into castes. The peasantry became serfs. But all these superficial attempts to check the decline failed and even worsened conditions; and the Roman Empire collapsed.

There was and has been no such dramatic collapse of Indian civilization, and it has shown an amazing staying power despite all that has happened; but a progressive decline is visible. It is difficult to specify in any detail what the social conditions in India were at the end of the first millennium after Christ; but it may be said with some assurance that the expanding economy of India had ended and there was a strong tendency to shrink. Probably this was the inevitable result of the growing rigidity and exclusiveness of the Indian social structure as represented chiefly by the caste system. Where Indians had gone abroad, as in South-East Asia, they were not so rigid in mind or customs or in their economy, and they had opportunities for growth and expansion. For another four or five hundred years they flourished in these colonies and displayed energy and

creative vigour; but in India herself the spirit of exclusiveness sapped the creative facility and developed a narrow, small-group, and parochial outlook. Life became cut up into set frames, where each man's job was fixed and permanent and he had little concern with others. It was the Kshatriya's business to fight in defence of the country, and others were not interested or were not even allowed to do so. The Brahmin and the Kshatriya looked down on trade and commerce. Education and opportunities of growth were withheld from the lower castes, who were taught to be submissive to those higher up in the scale. In spite of a well-developed urban economy and industries, the structure of the state was in many ways feudal. Probably even in the technique of warfare India had fallen behind. No marked progress was possible under these conditions without changing that structure and releasing fresh sources of talent and energy. The caste system was a barrier to such a change. For all its virtues and the stability it had given to Indian society, it carried within it the seeds of destruction.

The Indian social structure (and I shall consider this more fully later) had given amazing stability to Indian civilization. It had given strength and cohesion to the group, but this came in the way of expansion and a larger cohesion. It developed crafts and skill and trade and commerce, but always within each group separately. Thus particular types of activity became hereditary and there was a tendency to avoid new types of work and activity and to confine oneself to the old groove, to restrict initiative and the spirit of innovation. It gave a measure of freedom within a certain limited sphere, but at the expense of the growth of a larger freedom and at the heavy price of keeping large numbers of people permanently at the bottom of the social ladder, deprived of the opportunities of growth. So long as that structure afforded avenues for growth and expansion, it was progressive; when it reached the limits of expansion open to it, it became stationary, unprogressive, and, later, inevitably regressive.

Because of this there was decline all along the line—intellectual, philosophical, political, in technique and methods of warfare, in knowledge of and contacts with the outside world, and there was a growth of local sentiments and feudal, small-group feeling at the expense of the larger conception of India as a whole, and a shrinking economy. Yet, as later ages were to show, there was yet vitality in the old structure and an amazing tenacity, as well as some flexibility and capacity for adaptation. Because of this it managed to survive and

to profit by new contacts and waves of thought, and even progress in some ways. But that progress was always tied down to and hampered by far too many relics of the past.