IN GRATITUDE

THIS book is an essay in the primary meaning of the word, a trial in exposition which cannot but be sketchy and tentative. Some might consider it only as a trifle. Nevertheless, the acknowledgements I have to make for it are not fewer than those for my ponderous autobiography.

My thanks are due first and foremost to my friend, Khushwant Singh, the well-known Sikh writer, good companion, and man-about-town, for the loan of his portable typewriter. Though it may be said that my mind is ‘feudal’, my hands at least are of the machine age. I can write only on a typewriter, and mine was worn out. As soon as Khushwant Singh heard that my project of writing this series of works was held up because I could not immediately replace my broken machine, he lent me his own; afterwards he presented me with a brand new portable. He is also the only fellow-Indian (significantly a Sikh, and not a Hindu) who has put in good words for me in print in India. This needed courage.

But living where I live, even in feeling gratitude I cannot get away from rerum indicarum natura, one aspect of which is a bizarre duality. I wish I could say that it was a duality in the grand Zoroastrian manner, a secular conflict between Ahriman and Ahura Mazda in which light was bound to triumph over darkness. But the duality of the Hindu existence is like the cat-and-dog life of a maladjusted married couple who can neither separate nor live together. So just when, with the near completion of one of the essays, my gratitude to Khushwant Singh was at its highest I read an account of the loan of the typewriter in a public print. It was contained in an article entitled An Interview with Khushwant Singh by an American woman in a magazine which described itself as ‘the official publication of the American Women’s Club of Delhi’—and in it I read:
Interviewer: 'Who is the best Indian writer today?'

Khushwant Singh (as reported): 'In non-fiction? Without a doubt Nirad Chaudhuri . . . A bitter man, a poor man. He doesn't even own a typewriter. He borrows mine a week at a time.'

I was struck all of a heap. My poverty is, of course, well known in New Delhi and much further afield, and therefore I was not prepared to see it bruited about by so august a body as the American Women's Club of Delhi. Why did the impressive board of twelve American women who were jointly looking after the magazine think it necessary to publish such small talk about a man who was even smaller by their standards, who had neither of the two things they understood and respected: namely, money and official position? Was it because I was a writer? Then I would only lament—

Why did I write? What sin to me unknown
Dipt me in ink, my parents' or my own?

Khushwant Singh told me that he had never made the statement in the form and spirit in which it was reproduced, and that he was not even aware of the real intention of the woman he was entertaining at tea. Of course, I took his word for it. But even if in the course of a private conversation he had said all that was reported that would not have made any difference to my affection for him. I tried to show that I bore no grudge by again borrowing the machine after the publication of the article and by most gratefully accepting the present of the new typewriter. *

The conduct of the American women, however, I cannot now understand unless I attribute it to the sad but inexorable law of the American impingement on Asia that the United States will never export any of its products to the East except those of which every decent American

* Having read Pascal early in life I have always tried to profit by his wisdom: 'Si tous les hommes savaient ce qu'ils disent les uns des autres, il n'y aurait pas quatre amis dans le monde.'
is ashamed, taken with its complement that in retaliation the East will set its lowest adventures on the distributers of American money. The arrogance of the almsgiver is fitly matched by the impudence of the beggar.

I give one example of the arrogance. When in November, 1962, there were military reverses on the north-east frontier and the Government of India appealed to all and sundry for help, the same American Women’s Club thought that it would also make a contribution of money. It did so, but not from its own funds. It held a charity show. What was it do you suppose?—a play, a concert, an art exhibition? No, five days after the day of the worst defeat, a day of national humiliation for us, the Club held a fashion parade, in which some of the women appeared in what to our Hindu eyes looked like underwear. The only consideration shown to Hindu sensibilities in this performance lay in putting the clothes or their absence, not on the scraggy, high cheek-boned, and tousled scare-crows who mannequinize in the West, but on pina-payodhara and prithunitamvini foreign women. For the rest all Hindu values were ignored. Even the wife of the American Ambassador attended this egregious display of charity. But how can I blame the foreigners when our leaders who not only swear by Gandhian chastity but also practise it even in conjugal life, accepted the money with extended palms?*

But American national projection on the rest of the world is too deep, large, and important a subject to be commented on incidentally. In its irresistible amoral power accompanied by both goodness and vileness on the moral plane, it is bound to continue and grow. Therefore I can take my time to discuss it, and discuss I will. A little will be implied even in this book, but a formal and extended

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* If you do not know the meaning of the two Sanskrit phrases, which are important terms in Hindu sexual aesthetics, refer to p. 170, l. 22 infra. As regards chastity I should add that abstention from sexual intercourse in married life is a religious and moral offence in Hindu sacred law. See p. 193 infra. So these Gandhian Hindus are not as Hindu as they think they are.
treatment is reserved for a future work. For the mo-
ment let me set down my obligations.

To Cyrus and Ruth Jhabvala I am grateful for pro-
viding me with the means of pursuing a creative recrea-
tion which refreshes me for work. Theirs is the case of a
modern Persian liberating a modern Jewish maiden from
her Babylonian exile in London. As a result, they are
so happy with their three little rose-of-Sharon-like daugh-
ters that they want to make all their friends happy. So,
hearing that some of my plants were suffering from the
hot winds of Delhi in summer for want of shelter, they
presented me with a greenhouse. The happy look of the
plants behind the glass since then is like glimpses of his
lost home to a man who was born in a land of waters.
I have also imbibed a superstitious notion that by trying
to acquire green fingers with plants I might develop them
for writing. In any case, there is no doubt that contact
with living things keeps man’s creative spirit alive. The
Jhabvalas have also provided me with another such con-
tact by giving me an Alsatian pup.

I have to thank my foreign friends (including good
Americans: I have met few finer men and women than
they) for giving me opportunities to tidy up my ideas
by talking incessantly to them. It is something to be
able to talk about India in plain language instead of in
jargon, better still to be able to talk to men who will
listen instead of continually interjecting ‘Great is the Diana
of the Ephesians!’ and yet finer to be able to talk in loud
rustic tones while enjoying a pot-au-feu and other good
food against a background of tapestries old and new,
petit-point hangings, fine china and glass, Louis Quinze
and other old furniture, Bartolozzi prints, Dutch flower
pieces, and many other lovely things which add gracious-
ness to living. All this enthusiasm in a man who cannot
buy a typewriter for want of money will raise many Hindu
brows, and provoke smiles in others who are more gene-
rous.
It grieves me to think that the friend who indulged me most will not read the pages that follow. He lies buried in the vaults of a chapel in the Isle of France. On one Sunday he had seen the chapel on the estate of a relative and observed, 'On est bien ici;' the next Tuesday he was struck dead at his desk in Paris. He killed himself by overworking in Delhi. I used to tell him, as I do all my Western friends who take their work over-seriously, 'Count, you Europeans take too much on yourselves in our tropical country.' He would still not spare himself. In India that is not doing one's duty, but committing suicide. This friend did more for me than only offering hospitality. That story will have to be told, and I am sure it will keep our faith in human nature unwavering.

I thank my publishers for helping me with my English. I must repeat that I never learned the language in any English-speaking country or from Englishmen in India. It was learnt in Bengali from Bengali teachers, and till my fifty-third year I did not have, with the exception of relatively long conversations for a period of about one year off and on, enough exchanges of speech with the natural speakers of English which would have added up to five hours in their total duration. But I also wish my publishers to realize the implication of the acknowledgement. All writers, even the best, need the help of the publisher's editor, and we the writers of Babu English need it most. Yet I had been surprised by the absence of any expression of gratitude on this score in the books in English written by Indians. So, in my first two books, I tried to set a different example and make amends for all Indian writers by putting on record what I owed to the publishers. But this has been interpreted in my country, and especially by fellow-Bengalis, to mean that my books were written in the offices of the publishers by their ghosts. The risk even now exists, but I cannot allow it to frighten me from acknowledging my debts.

I can at last record my obligation to Thomas Mark, a former Director of Macmillan, but, alas! I have gained
the freedom to do so only through his death. When he lived he would not allow me to mention his name. Until I saw how he saw a book through the press on behalf of the authors published by Macmillan I had no conception that an editor could bring so much acumen, comprehension, and affection to bear on another man’s writings. I shall give only two examples of his meticulousness. In my autobiography I had written about a hussar lashing at Indians with his whip, as represented in a picture in the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta. He commented, ‘Very strange, for hussars do not carry whips.’ I had the picture checked, and it was found that the horseman was an Indian cavalryman. Again, in my book on England I had written that Gibbon had conceived the idea of writing his great history while sitting on the Capitol and musing on the ruins of the Forum. When the proofs came I was at first very much surprised to find the passage altered to ‘mused amidst the ruins of the Capitol’, for in Gibbon’s time there were no ruins on the Capitol. I was going to restore my wording, when it occurred to me that Thomas Mark being Thomas Mark, there must be some good reason behind the change. I took down Gibbon’s autobiography, and found the passage to be as Mark had made it. Yet his modesty was amazing, and he was over-generous to my English, never treating it with contempt or condescension as the English ‘expert’ on India does. I had written of swans (cobs) busking. He queried, ‘What is this word?’ I sent him with the proofs a photograph of an illustration of a swan in that state from an English ornithological book, which bore the caption—‘Male Swan Busking’. He wrote back: though he lived at Twickenham close to the Thames, and had been seeing swans all his life, it was curious that he had neither heard nor come upon the word.

I express my gratitude in advance to those who will not treat this book as a work of scholarship, and call me learned. Having tried to acquire learning and failing to
do so, I know who is learned and who is not. I am not. In order to convince the reader that this is not insincerity I shall mention the names of four men whom I regard as truly learned. They are Mommsen, Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Harnack, and Eduard Meyer. When young and immature I cherished the ambition of being the fifth in that series. So I could not have been very modest. But a standard is a standard.

I shall ask my readers to believe me that, so far from undertaking any special reading for this essay, I have not even consulted books, though naturally with one or two exceptions all the references and citations have been checked. So far as it rests on books this essay is written entirely from remembered reading—the reading of a man who has read to live and not lived to read. So I hope that scholars will not attribute to me the unbecoming presumption to rival them. Their supremacy in their own field I wholeheartedly admit and admire. For myself, I claim nothing more than that I have read some books to supplement an individual’s personal experiences which must necessarily be very limited, with the recorded experiences and opinions of others who have gone before me. It is impossible to shake off the slavery to the present otherwise, and slavery to the present is the worst enemy of understanding the present itself.


I am particularly grateful for these permissions because the extracts are relevant to my argument, and they lend imaginative support to my conclusions which, though
independently arrived at, were set down in a prosaic manner.

I would also set down, as a matter of moral obligation, that I consider Kipling to be the only English writer who will have a permanent place in English literature with books on Indian themes, and who will also be read by everyone who wants to know not only British India but also timeless India. This is from a Bengali Babu, and honi soit qui (my ‘patriotic’ countrymen and their British friends) mal y pense.

NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI
NOTE ON THE TEXT

I have had great difficulty, for various reasons, in securing publication for this book, and due to the consequent delay the public will see the book more than two years after its completion. I have, however, kept the text unaltered except in two respects: (1) a number of references (which will date themselves) have been introduced in footnotes and elsewhere; (2) most of the critical remarks about Nehru have been removed, because I thought that after his death any criticism of him should be given the form of historical judgement, not polemics. However, some criticisms essential to particular arguments have been retained.

Chronologically, the terminus ad quem for the whole book is March, 1963; but the point of view of each chapter is of the time when it was written. I hope this will give a feeling of actuality to the book, showing that it was written under the impact of unfolding events. I am not ashamed to admit that all my books are livres de circonstance, but I should be if they remained nothing but that.

Another motive for not trying to synchronize the ‘dramatic time’ of the chapters is that I wish, if possible—a large if—to induce a little respect for my anticipations in my countrymen. Whenever I have made any, they have dismissed these outright, sometimes even using such adjectives as ‘foolish’ and ‘otiose’, and, of course, they have never recalled them when they were found correct. So I have kept even those auguries which have been partly fulfilled, and I hope the reader, seeing how obvious they have become ex post facto, will not forget that they were made when no countryman of mine would have believed them.
But for them I do not claim any extraordinary foresight. I have only used the normal method of presaging the future by means of inference from existing facts, instead of imitating my countrymen who generally put something before their eyes to prevent their seeing the precipice over which they are going to fall.

N. C. C.
THE WORLD'S KNOWLEDGE OF INDIA
SINCE 1947

In theory the knowledge should be full as well as accurate. There are in India today a larger number of foreign observers of all kinds than were ever present in the country. Of these, the first group is comprised of the correspondents of Western newspapers and broadcasting organizations. After them come an immense number of experts concerned with most kinds of human activity. Some of them feel that though they are doing their duty by their country they are not doing much good to India. But there is nothing which frightens the present Indian ruling class more than the idea of doing anything without the advice and help of White experts. So we have them, and they range from the specialists who advise us about taxation and contraception, to those who build our dams and steel plants.* Even a Japanese gardener was brought over to convert a public park, which was being grossly neglected by the Delhi Municipality, into a Japanese garden; why, the Japanese himself could not understand. All these men come by a good deal of information, and they sometimes publish it or at all events spread it by word of mouth.

Among all these foreign experts, one species has a very special status in contemporary India. It is that of the economists. As I wrote about them in my book on England: ‘There is no other country in the world in which the tribe of pundits called economists are held in greater honour. Perhaps they are the only pundits who are at all honoured by us now. So India has become an El Dorado for every kind of economist from every part of the world.’

* Since the above was written, military experts have been added, because the rulers of the country cannot and dare not defend its frontiers without making the business the White Man's Burden.
In the next row stand another set of knowledge-seekers, the diplomats. The conscientious among them, and those from North America and Europe are very much so, put in much solid work, a very heavy part of which is collection of information. They draw up reports and send them regularly to their foreign offices, which seem to have extensive cellars to mature them. They show a marvellous industry in this research, and the labour they undergo simply to make newspaper clippings appals a man like me who has never kept a note of anything in his life.

Even the novelists on India have become purveyors of sociological data. Many foreigners who are interested in our life but will devote neither the time nor the effort needed to gain any worthwhile knowledge of it read these novels. The novelists, too, conscious of the demand, and keen to meet it, go about the country notebook in hand, collect local colour and turns of speech, record snatches of conversation with special reference to such slips in English as lend themselves to caricature, and then three-quarters in ponderous solemnity, and a quarter in cold-blooded self-seeking malice, they turn out works which are no more fiction than blue-books are fables. In fact, at times they are documented with such apparent solidity that they may even be laid as evidence before the committees for foreign aid.

All these men taken together supply a very impressive amount of information about today’s India, and if the value of any kind of knowledge was to be determined solely by its volume the outside world should be well informed about us. Yet the unexpected truth is that it knows even less about what really exists and is happening in India than it does about the countries behind the so-called Iron Curtain.

In saying this I mean no reflexion whatever on the foreign observers, especially the newspaper correspondents. They are as a rule intelligent men, trained to observe rapidly and accurately. Though most often in India they have no other means of getting acquainted with the life
of the people than visual observation, and that, too, limited to small sections, yet I have been surprised to find how frequently they arrive at notions which are remarkably close to the truth. Certainly, they see and understand more than the Anglicized ruling class. Perhaps that is behind the clamour that is raised from time to time against them, and also behind the extraordinary demand which has been put forward that foreign newspapers should be compelled to employ Indian journalists, and not correspondents of their own nationality, to report on India. But they have to work under great difficulties, deployed in depth, which impede observation, obscure interpretation, and also prevent the publication of such accurate and impartial information as can be obtained. All this necessarily vitiates what is published about India and reduces its value.

Even so I would make concessions for the correspondents, but none at all for the novelists and the writers of what nowadays is called ‘reportage’ and ‘travelogue’—what words! There is nothing which can be said in extermination of their works. As a rule, they contribute neither to knowledge nor to literature. To take the novels, it would surprise the Western readers who go to them that they are hardly ever read by Indians. The main reason is that they ring false. The foreign novelists know virtually nothing about India and perhaps care still less. They come to India in search of out-of-the-way material which might help them to appear original. The result is counterfeit Indian literary curios.

Unfortunately, even those Indians who write novels about themselves in English try to do no better. They take their cue from the foreign dabbler with India. They themselves are not very well posted about their own country, and most of their information is raw material gathered ad hoc. They belong to the Anglicized upper middle-class, which is out of touch with the life of the people and even of the poor middle-class. Moreover, just to acquire the desire to write novels in English they have to de-Indianize themselves substantially.
Over and above, in order to be novelists in English, these Indian writers are faced by a problem of writing for tackling which they have neither the knowledge nor the strength of mind. The life, the mind, and the behaviour of Indians are so strange for the people of the West that if these are described in ordinary English the books would be unintelligible to English-speaking readers, and unacceptable to British or American publishers. Most Indian writers solve this problem, not by choosing a genuine Indian subject and creating an adequate Western idiom to express it, but by selecting wholly artificial themes which the Western world takes to be Indian, and by dealing with them in the manner of contemporary Western writers. To put it briefly, they try to see their country and society in the way Englishmen or Americans do and write about India in the jargon of the same masters. The result is an inefficient imitation of the novels about India written by Western novelists. India is far too big a subject for such frippery.

Even those who write ‘travelogues’ or ‘reportage’ have adopted this curious manner. They write as if they were Western journalists. The more advanced of them even go so far as to imitate the worst American and British journalistic antics, in imitating which these Indians show themselves, not simply as the harlequins the Western writers of this type are, but as dancing monkeys. Their antics and grimaces, which they regard as their airs and graces, prompt me to quote Ben Jonson and Edith Sitwell to say that they ‘out-dance the Babioun’.

*     *     *

I shall now pass on to consider the special difficulties facing the Western journalists or writers. The very first of these is the compulsion or rather coercion of Indo-British and Indo-American friendship, which is not only seriously curtailing the freedom to discuss Indian subjects, but actually coming in the way of such a basic inquiry as how much of this friendship exists or for that matter is even possible. The official representatives of the British
and American Governments are the watchdogs of this friendship, and extremely nervous and yappy dogs they are, more like Pekinese in a boudoir than mastiffs in the farmer’s yard. They try to brief and influence correspondents and get very angry if the latter show more independence than is considered safe in the light of policy.

Any foreign journalist who shows unwelcome curiosity, or any writer, Indian or foreign, who is capable of detachment soon runs into trouble. This has been the case with some correspondents I know, and in regard to the difficulty, in reality the impossibility, of securing publication for views not in agreement with the policies of the Great Powers, I shall give an instance which concerns me.

In 1957 I wrote an article in which I tried to describe the real state of the political relations between the United States and Britain on the one hand, and, on the other, the countries of Asia which had become independent after the war, and in it I also implied that the entire policy of economic aid to these countries was wrong. One important English journal and one well-known American magazine to which I offered it rejected it outright. But one American journal, noted for the openness of its editorial policy and for its seriousness and influence, read it with enthusiasm. The article was accepted provisionally, and I rewrote it twice at the request of the editorial staff. In the end, however, just before the expected date of publication, the journal found itself unable to publish it, though very handsomely I was paid the full honorarium. The reason for the final rejection was, however, extremely unconvincing to me. It could have been given as soon as the article was first received. So I could attribute it only to an afterthought or some adventitious difficulty, perhaps connected with the timidity shown towards India.

This timidity is reckoned on so confidently in India and has become so normal that the sudden outburst of anger in the Western Press over the Indian action over Goa at first shocked everybody here.
Compared with the Press, the British and American publishers are still relatively free from fear. Even so I have heard of an instance in which a very well-known firm of English publishers backed out of an agreement with a novelist on getting a report from its Indian branch that the book was likely to be regarded as anti-Indian in India. I also know of attempts at political censorship by British publishers of books on India.

I think that this timidity will harm everybody concerned, and India even more than Great Britain or the United States. Still, if one were to consider only the immediate interests of policy and not its long-term results, it has to be admitted that the abject fear that the West displays in respect of everything said or published about contemporary India and the other newly emancipated countries, is fully justified. Public opinion in all these countries is absurdly sensitive on this score, and even the highest in these countries—and the highest more than anyone else—are hurt and annoyed by the publication of anything short of fulsome praise. Any candid statement, or even a tactful assertion of one’s national interests is misinterpreted, and leads to unpleasant consequences which no Western statesman is quite willing to face. This was shown quite plainly when the question of Great Britain’s entry into the European Common Market was being discussed.

I shall recall one or two recent incidents to illustrate this. One of these arose out of a B.B.C. commentary on Ceylonese politics after the assassination of Mr Bandaranaike. Though it was both realistic and sensible, Mr Macmillan himself had to express his regrets to the Ceylonese Government and the B.B.C. had to apologize. At the same time, the correspondent was informed that all this constituted no reflexion on his professional competence, which could only mean that the regret was expedient.

Mr Herter, the former American Secretary of State, became involved in another incident which was equally characteristic. When he said that his Department had no direct knowledge of the Indo-Chinese border and his
country no direct interest in the dispute over it, I felt pleased. I thought that for once the modern practice of everybody meddling in everybody else's affairs, and thereby manufacturing a Chinese puzzle-box of quarrels, had been rejected, and there was going to be a reversion to the saner traditions and tone of diplomacy before the new open diplomacy, and the later U.N. diplomacy of showing teeth without biting, came into vogue. In any case, Mr Herter had said nothing to which any sensible person could take objection.

But no. Even before India herself had had time to feel aggrieved the American friends of India raised the cry that a grave faux pas had been committed, and that, however 'neutralist' India might be, the United States had no right to be neutral. The implied rebuke was that the director of American foreign policy should have remembered what was neutralist India's fundamental condition for managing international relations: it was the simple principle—those who are not for me, are against me.

Such a cue was not lost on India. Immediately handkerchiefs went to unofficial Indian eyes. The Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs could not follow that example and admit that it was hurt. That would have been infra dig. But it professed to be 'puzzled'. That was enough, and Mr Herter furnished explanations. Even so the Press in India commented that the damage done by the original statement to Indo-American relations was not wholly repaired.

Incidents such as these keep the fear of India fresh in the minds of Western statesmen. Though the latest trend in the West seems to be a reaction from the excessive timidity, there is at least one place where it can never be anything but live. That is the Commonwealth Office in London. An Australian professor lecturing in Delhi once said that the Ministry of Commonwealth Relations in Britain was the most timid of the British Ministries, and its main job was negative—that of cautioning the British Government about the likely effect of its various policies.
upon Commonwealth relations. Only a few days before him, Mr Malcolm MacDonald, then the British High Commissioner in India, had furnished confirmation in advance of the professor's opinion. Speaking on the so-called Commonwealth at a meeting in Delhi, he explained that on that occasion he was going to speak like a *model* U.K. High Commissioner, which meant that he would say nothing that could be in the slightest degree objectionable in any quarter, utter nothing but safe platitudes, and in short reveal nothing of the slightest interest to anybody. This sense of humour showed that Mr MacDonald had not surrendered wholly to the spirit of the new Commonwealth, and he kept his promise in the discourse which followed.

I shall not, however, go into the details of the powerful psychological compulsions which make both Great Britain and the United States so anxious about Indian reactions and induce them to take a far more optimistic view of what is happening in India than would have been the case if these compulsions were not present, for I intend to deal with the tangled relations between my country and the West in another book. So I pass on to consider the other obstacles in the way of gaining accurate knowledge about contemporary India.

The very first of these is the general and fairly serious ignorance about India among the foreign observers. There are very few who come even with the minimum book-knowledge, and their stay in the country is short, and their duties too pressing for them to be anything but perfunctory in regard to knowledge. In such circumstances, correct interpretation and appraisement of what is observed is not possible, though the observation itself might be extensive.

There is, next, ignorance of the languages of India. The apparent ease with which foreigners can carry on their work in English comes in the way of the discovery that no true insight into the Indian mind can be gained without a thorough knowledge, both for reading and conversation, of at least one Indian language, and if Sanskrit can be
added so much the better. A very large number of us are indeed glib in English, but glibness and expressiveness are not synonymous. The number of Indians who have a personal expression in English is not large, and it is soon found that the majority of the speakers of English employ a conventional diction for putting across conventional ideas. Besides, there is the Hindu secretiveness. No Hindu will speak frankly in English for fear of divulging what he does not want a foreigner to know. It has happened to me when I have been discussing India objectively, there have been winks at me and expressive glances at the foreigners present. It becomes worse if the foreigner speaks to our politicians. Then it seems all a tale of slithy toves, the mome raths, and the mimsy borogoves, and though the listener is compelled to remark audibly, ‘It is grand’, he cannot avoid saying to himself, ‘But rather hard to understand.’

Even so I would say that all these difficulties are comparatively speaking secondary ones. There are fundamental obstacles which call for a full-fledged epistemology, so to speak. A theory of knowledge seems to be an essential prerequisite to any understanding of India by Westerners. A very sketchy one is being offered.

The most important thing to note is the revolutionary transformation that has come over the character of the knowledge about India since the country became independent. So long as British rule lasted, its strongest point was District or local administration. In the same way, the strongest point of the intellectual equipment was its empiric value, derived from a mass of information collected through direct field exploration. The endless series of large and solid official or semi-official publications in which it was embodied constituted a true and gigantic Encyclopaedia Indica, which has not been superseded even now and perhaps, though partly out of date, will never be replaced by anything produced by us.
The essential quality of this old knowledge was, as I have hinted, its practical usefulness. It was brought together by practical men who needed information to carry on administration, to deal with social and economic problems, and to manage people. It was not strong in generalization, and what theories it aired were more or less amateurish. But being absolutely first-hand the knowledge rang true, and to it might be applied the words of Bergson that a mind born to speculate or dream might remain outside reality, might deform or transform the real, perhaps even create it, but an intellect bent upon the act to be performed and the reaction to follow, feeling its object so as to get its mobile impression at every instant, is an intellect that touches something of the absolute. There is a tendency in certain quarters, even British—of course, degenerate British—to describe this knowledge as the propaganda of Koi Hais, Anglo-Indian Blimps. But the stupidity of this attitude is really more unsavoury than its opportunism.

Another important feature of the old knowledge was that it was concerned almost exclusively with rural India and the common people. The men who collected this knowledge knew little about the Westernizing middle-class, and certainly cared still less. They were repelled by this class of Indians, and always denied their representative character and discounted their influence and power. The result was an insistent emphasis on the static and conservative aspects of Indian life and thought. In this they were one-sided, but the one-sidedness was in favour of what was and will always remain nine-tenths of India.

All this has been not only changed but replaced by the opposites. The seekers of knowledge about India are no longer workers seeking it for practical ends, but nearly all des cérébreux, engaged in observation and interpretation, sometimes out of intellectual curiosity, sometimes in the service of preconceived ideas and policies. If their short stay in the country can be regarded as an advantage for freshness of perception and freedom from set notions,
it is also a handicap in the way of gaining insight into the modes of Indian thinking and behaviour whose patterns are wholly different from anything in the West.

Moreover, these men stay in the Westernized quarters of the big cities and know nothing of the truly Indian parts of even the same cities. Of course, they go out at times and watch the wider milieu of Indian life, and not infrequently bring back perceptive impressions. Nevertheless, these remain external and inferential.

Thus the world's knowledge about India today is obtained overwhelmingly at one remove from people belonging to the Westernized and urban upper middle-class, who have become the heirs of British rule. For nimbleness of wit, plausibility, argumentative skill, and gift of the gab they are not surpassed by many people on the face of the earth. But in the very nature of things they are unqualified to give a full or fair view of what is taking place in the country. For one thing, they have their trust in the people of India, which I look upon their exploitation, to justify. This makes them prone to misrepresent and even to lie. But it would be a mistake to think that as a class they deceive intentionally. They are so completely imitative of the West, so dependent on current literature written in English, mostly by foreigners, for their knowledge of their own country, so ignorant about the original sources of knowledge, and so formed by their urban upbringing that the whole of traditional and rural India remains outside their ken. Perhaps their outlook can be best indicated by saying that the two things in India they ignore most and even dismiss as unimportant are Hinduism and agriculture.

Can anything be done about it? To this question, under the existing conditions the answer is virtually an unqualified 'No'. Any attempt to know India by direct observation is resented. Already the Western Press is under a cloud in India, and is suspected of bias and hostility, and a correspondent who sets store by objectivity soon finds the taps of information shut off. If, in addition, a
large number of qualified foreigners were to appear with the avowed object of carrying out field observation, the existing silken curtain is likely to be replaced by one of iron.

I come last of all to an obstacle in the way of knowledge which is interwoven with the very stuff of India in the material sense. Anyone seeking insight into our life cannot afford the luxury of avoiding or forgetting unpleasant experiences. A man out only for agreeable sensations will be beaten at the very outset by the common riddles of our existence: an indefinite sickness of heart which seems to damp off everything living; arid, dour, and laughterless personalities which yet are lackadaisical in action as well as thought. The great plain with its drawn, parched, and ascetical look at least wrinkles to a skyward smile during the rains, human beings never. It is a country which exacts robustness or inflicts neurosis.

Occidentals come from a clean and tidy material world, in which dirt, squalor, and disorder are sins. But I declare every day that a man who cannot endure dirt, dust, stench, noise, ugliness, disorder, heat, and cold has no right to live in India. I would say that no man can be regarded as a fit citizen of India until he has conquered squeamishness to the point of being indifferent to the presence of fifty lepers in various stages of decomposition within a hundred yards, or not minding the sight of ubiquitous human excreta everywhere, even in a big city.

I at least can claim that I have not run away from any of these. For the last twenty years I have lived in a part of old Delhi where none of the makers of new India ever visit me, not only because that would be physically unpleasant to them but also for the reason that it would be socially derogatory. Yet I have not moved out, nor will.

I live just inside the old wall built originally by the Mogul Emperor Shah Jahan, overlooking a fine park and
commanding a magnificent view of the famous Ridge, the Jumna, and the Jami Masjid. It is probably the finest aspect to be seen anywhere in Delhi. My Western friends say that it reminds them of the view of the Borghese Gardens from the Pincio. But after independence, for four years, I saw people easing themselves in this park in the morning, sitting in rows. During this time the stench was so foul that after inhaling it for a year I fell ill and came very near death. Within the city I have seen streets running with sewage water and faeces floating on it, while, undisturbed by this, vendors of vegetables and other foodstuffs were selling their produce on the adjacent pavements. I have never objected to or minded all this, and I will say that if I have any living knowledge of my country it is a reward for this unflinching realism. So, when Anglicized Indians come to argue with me I expect them to possess at least a fragment of my knowledge and toleration of these conditions.

But at the same time I must warn all Western observers against misinterpreting this all-pervasive squalor and untidiness. A good deal of such misinterpretation already exists, some of it innocent, some malicious. There are two appearances in India which are utterly deceptive. The first of these is the glib talk of the Anglicized upper middle-class, and the second the external squalor. Neither mean what they would have meant in the West. To take only squalor, in our society it does not have the same correlation with character as it has among European peoples. For instance, in the West a man who has not shaved or has not changed a dirty shirt will be judged as a man with an inefficient mind and slovenly character. In our society this association does not exist, and an unkempt person might be an exemplary person, besides being an efficient hand. More is said on this subject in Chapter 9 of this book.

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Squeamishness is out of place in India. I put up with almost everything, as I have already said. In fact, the
necessity to be psychologically proof against filth is the first condition of understanding our life. Therefore, I am tempted to read an allegory for those who seek enlightenment about India in a story of the Arabian Nights. It is the tale of Prince Diamond, who wanted to go to the fabulous city of Wakak. A holy man warned him against so rash a venture. ‘Do not’, he said, ‘take an endless road filled with terrors, give up your desperate quest. You might spend your whole life, and that in vain, in trying to reach Wakak, and if by fortunate chance you arrive there you would lose your soul.’ How many Occidentals have paid this price by trying to write about India!

Princess after princess, every one of whom fell in love with him, entreated him to desist. But at last one of them, herself the daughter of a king of the Jinn, finding him inflexibly resolved and set on his purpose, thought it better to help him than allow him to go to his doom. She gave him some magic weapons, which she said would protect him, and told him to seek out her uncle, the Jinni Flying Simurg, who alone could take him to Wakak. Then she bade farewell to him in bitter tears, after taking a promise that if he came back safely he would remember and return her love.

After many wanderings the Prince at last came upon Simurg, but only to find him sleeping and snoring under a tree. He waited, but when the giant did not wake up even after a long time he lost his patience and began to tickle the soles of the huge feet, which awakened Simurg. But the crafty thing pretended to see nothing, and eyeing the Prince maliciously let out a terrible fart. This went on for over an hour until the atmosphere all around was so charged that any living creature would have been poisoned. But, of course, the Prince was protected against the foulness by the magic weapons. The Jinni was astonished to find the trick he had played foiled, and asked, ‘What has enabled you to survive the blasts from my bum?’ The Prince held up the weapons, upon which the giant stood up, made a deep bow, and offered to be his slave.
When he learned that Prince Diamond wanted to go to Wakak, Simurg took him on his back, inflated his great body to an even greater size, and flew up. After seven days of flying they arrived over the shining city of Wakak.

I think the genii who guard the secrets of our country, life, and civilization put us to the same test before they will allow us to see real India. But when they do carry us up what a vision it is! Has anyone pondered over the difference which even a height of two hundred feet makes to our conception of the earth we live on? All its squalor and confusion vanish, and we see things spread out below in order, goodness, beauty. So, when I visit the hills, I like to go up to an eminence and sit on it. Even in the big cities in which I have spent most of my life by favourite perch is a high roof.

But the strongest conviction that I had of the power of height to liberate the vision and spirit of man was when, on an air journey from London to Paris, I flew over Dieppe. The coast of the Channel was drawn as if with a brush, the little town with the country around it looked like a beautifully drawn and coloured map, and every small detail was clear. Was this the place, I asked myself, where the expedition had gone wrong and come to grief after running up against unknown obstacles? How stupid! However, it was I who was being stupid. My position high up in the air had so elated me that I completely forgot what blind and helpless creatures we were on the ground. A favourite poem had passed clean out of my mind. It was that in which Baudelaire takes the albatross as the symbol of the poet and compares the bird’s grand flights with its waddling on the dock of a ship:

_Ce voyageur aîlé, comme il est gauche et veule!_
_Lui, naguère si beau, qu’il est comique et laid!_
_L’un agace son bec avec un brûle-gueule,_
_L’autre mime, en boitant, l’infirmé qui volait!_
None of us can escape this torture of the body on the ground, but there is no power on earth which can deprive us of the freedom to escape in a different way—to rise in spirit to the infinity of silent spaces, which do not frighten but only strengthen.
Chapter 1

FROM THE WORD TO THE EYE

When I hear my foreign friends speak of ‘an Indian’ or ‘Indians’ I sometimes interrupt them breezily: ‘Please, please do not use that word. Say “Hindu” if you have in mind a human type common to the whole continent; otherwise, according as you want to refer to this or that group, say “Bengali, Punjabi, Hindustani, Marathi, Tamil, Sikh, Muslim”, and so on. As to the word “Indian”, it is only a geographical definition, and a very loose one at that.’

I know what would happen if I were to say anything like that to a person belonging to the present ruling class in India. ‘Rubbish,’ he would burst out, ‘Hinduism is dying, if it is not already dead. Our industrial revolution will kill it, and that would be right. We have proclaimed a secular state, and to try to bring back into it an out-of-date religious notion is rank obscurantism. That might do for Pakistan, a backward, theocratic country, but India is progressive, and is admired by the whole world for her progressive outlook and activities.’

Yet I also know that I can persuade the very same men to withdraw their loud objection very easily, even without starting a Socratic argument about the extinction or survival of Hinduism. They can be outflanked by a simple verbal march. There is no set of men more sensitive to definitions and even quibbles. It needs very little Greek to discover that the words ‘Hindu’ and ‘Indian’ are etymologically the same, being derivatives of the Persian and Greek forms of an identical definition. The Persian word was aspirated, whereas the Greek was softly breathed, and that probably began the parting of ways. The definition originally meant ‘an inhabitant of the region of the river Indus’ (in Sanskrit—Sindhu), but was
extended to the people of the whole continent. Thus, in its primary meaning, the word ‘Hindu’ stands for the same thing as ‘Indian’, and until recently it was used only in this sense in the United States.

With my countrymen, I have no need to carry the argument further. But those Europeans who have read about us may remind me that it is not all so simple.

Perfectly true, for very early in its history the word came to embody much more than a mere geographical notion. The peoples of the Near and Middle East found out very soon that the dominant human group beyond the Indus belonged to a closed society which was not only highly organized in itself, but was also possessed of an intense and acute self-consciousness. The most important ideas within this self-consciousness were the following: that the members of this vast society were bloodkins, and no one who was not born into it could be of it, at least without the legal fiction of birth and assimilation through the slow operation of the ever-elastic caste system; that they were not only a Chosen People, but The People; that their way of life was divinely ordained and eternal; that it was superior to all others; that there was an unbridgeable gulf between them and the older inhabitants of the country, as well as foreigners.

There was nothing strange or novel in such a conviction of the individuality and even superiority of a people: similar feelings have existed elsewhere. What distinguished the Hindus from all others was, however, the fanatical rigour with which they applied and worked out the genetic principle. The concept of such an exclusive society was naturally associated with the word ‘Hindu’, and therefore it did not long remain the simple geographical definition which at first it was.

I am ready to modify so far my contention that the word ‘Hindu’ is primarily a geographical expression. Indeed, whenever I use it I feel its cultural connotation very strongly, and I wish to evoke a cultural type. But I am unable to admit any exclusively or even dominantly
religious association into it. This was read into it quite recently. I am surprised to find how many people, even among those who are well educated, think that we are Hindus because we have a religion called Hinduism, and that the word is comparable to 'Christian' or 'Muslim'. It had no such association for the Hindus or for their neighbours in former times. This crept in when modern European Orientalists began to study the religions of India. They found that the Hindus had no other name for the whole complex of their religious beliefs and practices except the phrase *Sanatana Dharma* or the Eternal Way; they did not even have a word of their own for religion in the European sense; and so the Orientalists coined the word 'Hinduism' to describe that complex of religion. Actually, we Hindus are not Hindus because we have a religion called or understood as Hinduism; our religion has been given the very imprecise label of 'Hinduism' because it is the jumble of the creeds and rituals of a people known as Hindus after their country. On this analogy, the Greek religion might be called Hellenism, and even Graecism.

In precise use, the religious suggestion of the word 'Hindu' should be kept at its minimum, if not kept out altogether. All Hindus of today, if they have anything Hindu left in them, and have not, through an inefficient Westernization, acquired an unpleasantly shallow anti-religious bias like the anti-clericalism of the French politician, think of themselves as a human community almost wholly in a cultural sense, and the religious association felt by the denatured Hindu is hardly present in their mind. Strictly speaking, the term Hindu is like 'American' or 'European', with only a far stronger genetic suggestion than is to be found in the two latter words.

Nevertheless, I neither expect nor desire to be taken too literally or seriously in my objection to the word 'Indian'. I myself employ it quite frequently, and I cannot claim that I always do so with discrimination. I am sure even in this book, which begins with a purist's plea, there will be
found many instances of improper use of the word. But at least I can say that I am fully aware of the *mot injuste*, and I know what I mean when I use it with any degree of care. For me then, the word ‘Indian’ bears only one or other of the two following senses:

1. An inhabitant of the geographical continent of India, which for practical purposes is India as it was constituted politically in the last decade of British rule.

2. A legally recognized citizen of the new sovereign State called the Republic and Union of India, it being clearly understood that I do not consider that all the citizens of this State belong to one nation. In their case, *de jure* nationality is not the same as *de facto* nationality.

Over and above, so far as I can, I try to exclude all cultural suggestion from my employment of the word ‘Indian’, which is always implied in my use of the word ‘Hindu’. But if in spite of this, in some contexts, such a suggestion seems to creep in, it will be seen that I am then using the word as a loose equivalent of ‘Hindu’.

My real object in interrupting my friends is to make a gesture of protest against the addiction to words of the educated modern Hindu. I must warn all foreigners interested in India against the enlightenment they get at the hands of our politicians, officials, and professors. With these men, they have necessarily to maintain close contacts, but that, unless the disciples are put on guard against it, may become dangerously infective.

Hindu *Gurus*, that is, spiritual guides, always initiate their *chelas* or disciples into the use of drugs, especially *ganja* or *bhang* (*Canabis indica*), which are supposed to give beatific visions. The secular Hindu *Gurus* have not given up the tradition, but the drug they offer is different. It is the most harmful drug made in India today, which if taken in large quantities—and the quantities administered are large—completely destroys the faculties of thinking and observing. I shall call it Logosane, a meaningless, tasteless, colourless, but intellectually asphyxiating substance, turned out from the only really efficient mass-production
factory established in India since independence, namely, the Nationalized Factory of Words.

What should we do then?—the foreign student of contemporary India will surely ask me. Certainly, I do not expect or want him to be so incivil as to plug his ears with cotton-wool when he is listening to the torrent of words. If he likes he can even say: 'The sounding cataract haunts me like a passion.' I only caution him against the anexestastos logos, the unexamined word. He can listen to everything so long as he is exercising criticism. By doing so he will discover that most often the English words used by our political and intellectual leaders stand for very little else than the letters they are written with. Even this will be a gain, though a negative one.

By way of positive advice I would request them to use their eyes. I shall try to illustrate what can be done by using them even superficially in connexion with the subject of this book—the peoples of India. Indian ethnography is burdened with a formidable load of words derived from the successive stages of its study, and in general conversation the obsolete terms are just as much current coin as the newest and the most fashionable ones. This indiscriminate vocabulary gives the earnest beginner a sense of being totally out of his depth. But his eyes can drastically simplify the picture for him.

They will show that there really are only three physical types in India, and not even a fourth worth speaking about. Classified by the popular and easily applied criterion of distinguishing human beings—complexion, these are the Blacks, the Browns, and the Yellows. The Darks (I shall call the Blacks so) are fairly uniform, being of a very deep shade of brown; the Yellows have two shades, the coppery (light or dark) and the true pale Mongoloid; the Browns on the other hand are very varied, ranging from the European blond to a dark, almost walnut, brown. Another point which has to be noted is that the Darks and the Yellows are more or less stable genetically, whereas the Browns are not at all so. In India proper the offspring
of very dark parents may be quite fair. There are, of course, intermediates, but on the whole the three complexes stand out in large and clearly distinguishable masses.

Now for the features. Three types are clearly marked in these too. The Darks are not Negroid, but have as a rule sharp and modelled faces, with a high though at times a rather broad nose, and large, black, and liquid eyes. They all have good figures, the men being muscular and often wiry, the women full but not fat. Anthropologists call this type Australoid, illogically as it seems to me. Of course, the reason they give is that these people resemble the Australian aborigines in their appearance, but they seem to forget that, if anything, it is the Australian primitives who should be called Indoid, because in some distant time man must have gone to Australia from South Asia.

The Yellows, copper or pale, have the familiar Mongolian features, the high cheek bone, flat nose, and eyes with the characteristic slant due to the epicanthic fold.

The Browns have what are usually described as Caucasian features, and to all appearance they constitute the Indian variety of the human type which is found all over Europe and western Asia. Though in India the type is often dark, for which I have called it Brown instead of White, it can be easily distinguished from the true Darks of India, and should be.

The last point that has to be made about these types is a very important one. It is that they are clearly separated from one another by their geographical distribution. Though faces which seem to be a blend of the Browns and the Darks occur in large numbers almost everywhere, and a blend of the Browns and the Yellows is also met with here and there, the three major types are concentrated in their distribution. Each is found in regions which seem to have been made into its fixed and normal habitat. One might even say that each type has as stable an ecology as plants.
The Mongoloids are confined to the Himalayan regions and the hills of Assam, though they have also spilled out in small numbers on the edges of the adjacent plains. The Darks in their free state are massed in the hilly and wooded areas of Central India and the Deccan. In a servile state they are found in small or large numbers in all parts of India, but are most numerous in the South. The Browns, on their part, live in the plains, large or small, and if they are also found in certain hilly regions it will be seen that these are river valleys, along which they have penetrated into the territory of the Darks or Yellows, and created trouble for everybody concerned. Overwhelmingly, however, they are plainsmen and at home only on the plains of India.

These simple facts, which any man could discover by only using his eyes, at once sweeps away the mass of cobwebs which covers up Indian ethnology and ethnic history. But the gain need not be confined to the field of intellectual investigation alone. The same set of visual facts are a practical help, for they contribute to an understanding and even solution of one of the most acute and baffling problems of Indian politics, namely, the unending human conflicts which raged in the country in the past and are continuing today. If the familiar words about the tolerance and capacity for synthesis of the Hindus were true, one would be hard put to it to explain why there are such deep suspicions and enmities among the human groups of India, why there are endemic outbursts of murderous ferocity, two of the worst of which swept two large provinces of the country recently.

To take the worst conflict, all my life I have been scandalized by the discrepancy between the actual state of Hindu-Muslim relations, and their presentation in words. I have seen and read about murder, arson, loot, and rape on a colossal scale arising out of Hindu-Muslim clashes, and I have read simultaneously that there was no reason whatever for these because the Hindus and the Muslims were ethnically and culturally one.
After independence the words have even improved their performance. In announcing these conflicts the authorities do not refer to Hindus or Muslims, they speak of attacks by one community on another. At their frankest they go only so far as to use the phrases 'Majority community' and 'Minority community'. Mankind has indeed sought mental protection against unpleasant realities by denying them or employing euphemisms. But the Hindus have carried this device to its absurdest extreme, and thereby created an unseemly opposition between what exists and what is spoken about. Therefore I say, 'Beware of words in India; above all, beware of verba magistri.'

Now let us see what can be done by using the eyes. This at once shows that the conflicts can be related to visual facts. For instance, the three ethnic groups which I have described and the classification of which is based wholly on the observation of external differences, furnish the key to one of the oldest human conflicts in India, that which has existed between the civilized Browns on the one side, and the Yellow and Dark primitives on the other.

There is fear and hatred of their Hindu rulers among all the Dark aboriginals. They feel that the Hindus are going to make, and indeed have already made, deeper inroads into their territories, economy, and life than was even thought of by any set of former rulers, including the British, under whom the country was most united politically. So, after independence, many of them are claiming autonomy, or at least separate provinces for themselves.

Outside the tribal areas the conflict between the Darks and the Browns has taken the form of a revolt of the lower, and especially the untouchable castes against the higher. In some areas it is responsible for a repudiation in principle of the authority of the central government. This inter-caste conflict is, of course, most virulent in the South, where the servile Darks are most numerous.

The Mongoloids on their part are not less alarmed and resentful. Actually, they are more actively so. They were left alone even by the British, who for reasons of
imperial strategy felt compelled to bring within their juridical border territories which neither the Hindus nor the Muslims ever ruled. One small and very primitive Mongoloid tribe, among whom British administrators went only under Gurkha escort, has even risen in revolt and defied the armed might of India. After many years of military operations the area remains a festering political sore, and if the tribe has not been able to withstand the Indian army, it has not been intimidated either. On the contrary, its resistance has impressed the Hindu rulers so much that they have given it a certain amount of autonomy. But the tribe has not been appeased.

I hope I have been able to make out a case that there does exist a connexion between the physical traits that the eye can see and some political conflicts in India today. The method can be extended by observing the differences of appearance which are made by cultures (including religion) and trying to find out if they too can be related to certain other conflicts. Of course, they can be. The Muslims of India, in spite of all that is said loosely about their being the same people as the Hindus, can be distinguished from the latter not only by their dress, speech, and manners, but even by their features and expression. In the same way, a Sikh will never be mistaken anywhere in the world for anybody else. And it is a commonplace that these two groupings, in which two cultures have characteristic external expressions, are behind two other political tensions in contemporary India.

Once you have declared your independence against the reign of words, you will recognize the truth (which everybody should see, but in actual fact does not) that the ethnic conflicts of India, both past and present, have arisen basically from the course of the history of India. Indeed, they are a part of the historical process, accompanying it as heat does chemical processes. There is, however, an important difference between the two. The ethnic process has not, except for a single exceptional phase, turned out an amal-
gamb; what it has precipitated has always been a physical mixture, which has remained more or less inflammable.

Thus one is led on to the most outstanding feature of the ethnic history of India—that whenever there has been an active stage in the formation of the population of India there have also been conflicts. It is not necessary to go back to past times to illustrate this. Everybody knows that India did not become independent in 1947 without an ethnic regrouping, which in two provinces, the Punjab and Bengal, brought about large-scale displacements amounting virtually to an exchange of populations. But this was not accomplished peacefully or in an orderly way, nor were the attendant disturbances foreseen, though they could and should have been. There were violent upheavals as if the country had exploded; in addition, there were massacres and plunder on a scale hardly seen before even in this land of recurrent anarchy. In Delhi we saw killings compared with which even those by Nadir Shah were minor horrors. In Calcutta the slaughter was worse.

I can give a more recent example of a human conflict brought about by economic and cultural rivalry. In India movements of population from province to province create problems akin to those brought into existence by immigration in other countries. Terrible ill-feelings are generated by the competition that follows. One interprovincial (really international) clash of this sort was seen in eastern India as recently as 1960. In Assam there existed and still exists a good deal of enmity between the Bengalis settled there and the descendants of the Mongoloid Ahom conquerors, kinred of the Shans of Burma, who invaded the country in the thirteenth century. In 1960 it burst out in open rioting in the Brahmaputra valley. The behaviour of the contemporary Ahoms was in striking contrast with that of the older Mongoloids in the hills, who wanted only to live and let live. They never attacked the settled population of the adjacent plains unless attacked in their own territory, and at the worst they launched a razzia once in a while.
But the Mongoloid Ahoms, though Hinduized, rampaged on the war path. To the cry of ‘Bangel kheda’ (‘Drive out the Bengalis’) they murdered the Bengali settlers, violated their women, burnt their houses. To all appearance, feeling safe that the provincial government which was predominantly Ahom would connive or at least turn the blind eye to their doings, they ran amuck. For the first few days nobody suppressed the outbreak, and when at last the army was called out, the fire had almost burnt itself out. The episode left both the sides more embittered and alienated than before.

These two examples, fresh as they are, typically illustrate the special nature of the human conflicts in India. The antagonisms increase in direct proportion to the intensity of the cultural consciousness. The Hindus and the Muslims of India were and are acutely self-conscious in this way, and the enmity between the two has also been the greatest. The Mongoloid Ahoms only demonstrated the general law afresh. They had accepted Hindu culture from Bengal, and none but a madman will say that their language is not a dialectal offshoot of Bengali. Even their war cry is corrupt Bengali. But in recent years they have developed a very strong sense of an Assamese collective personality. With that they have also acquired a violent hatred for the Bengalis, who brought them into the fold of Hindu civilization, if not civilization itself. Had they remained the primitives that they were when they came, like the Garos, Nagas, Khasis, or Kukis, there certainly would not have been massacres. Among us Indians, cannibalism, in a manner of speaking, is the product, not of the savage state, but of the civilized. The Muslims used to divide the world into two contrasted halves of a Dar-al-Islam, a land of peace, and a Dar-al-Harb, a land of strife, and if they included India in the land of strife for their own reason, India has provided her seasons to be regarded as such.

No one dealing with the peoples of India historically or descriptively can avoid a discussion of these conflicts. I
too cannot do so. But what I have to say about them will be said and suggested incidentally. The main purpose of this book is to describe the peoples of India in their natural groupings, both ethnic and cultural, and analyse their collective personality in the light of the historical evolution which has formed it. Therefore it will be only when I have to discuss the inter-relations of the groups that I shall try to explain the nature of each conflict.

Chapter 2

THE DEPOSITS OF TIME

The main ethnic groups I have to pass in review in this book are the following: the aboriginals, the Hindus, the Muslims, and the products, both genetic and cultural, of the European conquest. Among these, the Hindus are undoubtedly the most important. However, before beginning the separate accounts, I think it is necessary to give a short sketch of the entire ethnic history of India which has deposited the groups. This brief account, too, I have to preface with a methodological explanation.

It is my practice in my writings to state my positive views without discussing or even mentioning the usually held theories to which mine are opposed. This prompts my Indian critics to cast the same old views in my teeth, and charge me with the ignorance of the elementary facts of Indian history. This may happen again, for in this chapter also the reader will miss many of the conventional descriptions and theories found in the current histories of India.

In defence I would say that not only am I familiar with the views in question, but I was actually brought up on them. They constituted the first stock of information and ideas about our country and its civilization with which I began my mental life, and which I used as a fulcrum to
arrive at my later ideas. I had to absorb them because they made up the myths, to use the fashionable word, of our national existence in modern times. I was told about them, I was made to study them, I believed in them, and I examined and re-examined them until I came to lose faith in them.

It is somewhat irritating to have the opinions with which I started but have now left behind, rammed down my throat again, not even as a rechauffé, but as very stale meat. I am old, and I cannot spend the few years that are left to me in tilting at theories which I have taken a lifetime to outgrow. So in this book, too, I shall take the more sensible course of setting down my own ideas for what they are worth, and leave it at that. There is another, and perhaps a better, reason for doing so. The shibboleths I have in mind are already obsolescent not only as historical theories but also as myths of nationalism, and soon they are likely to be wholly obsolete. So I can spare myself the quixotism of tilting at them.

I cannot, however, open the story logically with the very first emergence or arrival of man in India. The first phase lies below the horizon even of prehistory. It is not that we are absolutely without all archaeological evidence on that age, but what little we have cannot be pieced together into anything positive, nor can the history of those far-off times be brought into relation with what follows.

For instance, stone implements supply a few points of flickering light in a great darkness. We know from them that palaeolithic man lived in India, both in the north and the south. Yet it is not possible to venture any guess as to his age or origins. To speculate on these questions in terms of absolute chronology is utterly futile. Even a relative chronology is difficult to establish, and no one can say on the strength of such typological analogies as exist that the various forms of palaeolithic culture in India were contemporaneous with the corresponding ones in Europe. We do not also know what ethnic types accompanied the
implements, a relationship which is fairly clear in Europe from the Mousterian epoch onwards.

Next, in India as in Europe, palaeolithic culture was followed by the neolithic, chalcolithic, and so on. But nothing is known about the transitions, especially their causes—whether they were due to the arrival of new folks or to the adoption or borrowing of new technologies from more advanced neighbours by peoples on a lower level of culture who were already settled in India, or by a combination of both.

Lastly, it is proved by the survivals that the primitive population of India, existing before the coming of civilized man, was not homogeneous either in culture or in physical characters. Some must have been much more primitive than the others in both ways, and the gulf dividing the least developed from the most developed may have been very wide. Yet the origins, sequences, and inter-relations of these primitives remain totally obscure.

Fortunately, for my purpose, these gaps in knowledge do not matter. What I am concerned with is a living and continuing process, and what I wish to understand in the light of the past is the interaction of the groups now existing, in their co-operation as well as conflicts. For this nothing more is needed than a roughly correct picture of the ethnic situation in India when the process began. The starting point, together with the given position from which the continuous development began, is all that I want, and this to my thinking can be inferred to within a fair degree of probability.

Let me deal with the starting point first. It coincides with the appearance of the cleavage which is absolutely basic to the ethnography of India—a cleavage which, once it had made its appearance, was never obliterated afterwards. It is the chasm which separates all the primitives of India en bloc, without regard for the differences of cultural development existing among them, from all the civilized peoples en bloc, whatever the species of civilization to which they in their secondary groupings, belong. An-
thropologists, archaeologists, and historians will have no difficulty in understanding which distinction I have in mind, for it is one which is absolutely basic to their disciplines.

It was no less basic to the Hindus of ancient India, though as a problem of living and not of study. It vitally concerned their existence in the country, and therefore they never forgot it, nor allowed it to be forgotten by the other side. But they defined it in terms of race, that is, genetically. They called themselves ‘Arya’ (Aryan), which signified ‘nobly born’, and the pre-existing people ‘Anarya’ (not Aryan), and they made the boundary line between the two absolutely impassable in theory, and very difficult to cross in practice. The notion of racial superiority, which was present in this distinction from the outset, was later widened to include that of moral superiority. The Hindu said to a fellow-Hindu, ‘You are Arya,’ in the same tone as that which an English colonial assumed when he said to a fellow-colonial, ‘You are White.’ Any dishonourable act or conduct was described as being unworthy of an Aryan, or befitting only a non-Aryan. The Sanskrit phrase Anarya-jushta (Na + Aryajustha or Anarya + jushta) might have meant either.

But this opposition could have emerged only with the coming of the so-called Aryans, i.e. the event or series of events which forms the watershed between prehistory and history in India. The date usually assigned to the arrival is between 1500 B.C. and 1200 B.C. It seems to me that a vague mental association with the Achaeans and Dorians has had something to do with this chronology. I would, however, place the coming of the true Aryans to India (please note the adjective, although they might have been the only Aryans) later. Without giving any reasons for doing so I would say that they moved into the Punjab around 1000 B.C., if not even a century or two later. But whatever the date, it was the confrontation of the Aryans, the first civilized people to settle in India proper, with the dark primitives that set in motion the continuous ethnic history of India.
Let me now consider the situation which the Aryans found and had to face. By the time they arrived, all the Darks of the country had virtually become fused into one mass, within which some peoples with very rudimentary cultures survived in pockets but were swamped in the whole of the primitive society by communities whose culture, though primitive, was fairly advanced within those limits. The latter made up the main body of the aborigi-
nals. To the incoming civilized people the cultural differ-
ences among the primitives were immaterial, perhaps even imperceptible. They took notice of that difference alone which struck them most, the contrast between themselves—a fair-complexioned civilized people, and the dark-skinned and, to them, savage peoples. For all purposes of history, as distinct from those of anthropology, the Darks taken as a whole may be looked upon as the autochthons of India.

What matters for subsequent history is the fact that the primitives of India had made a good deal of progress in technology before the coming of the Aryans, whatever might have been the force behind the progress. They also continued to make technological progress while remaining in contact with the Aryans. Classical Sanskrit literature represents the primitives as hunters par excellence, and not as agriculturists, but nothing that it says bars the possibility that rudimentary agriculture may have been practised by some of them. The first Aryan settlers, too, must have known them mostly as hunters.

This brief indication of the early progress of the aborigi-
nals is largely conjectural, but it is not implausible. Greater confidence is, however, permissible in speaking about their geographical distribution when the Aryans arrived. There can be no doubt that, as organized communities, in their free state, and in pursuing their natural economy—hunting, the primitives were always living where now we find the modern aboriginals, namely, in the hilly and wooded re-
gions of Central India and the Deccan. The Gangetic plain was too wet and marshy for a hunting folk, who could not
live in a region where game was difficult to find and run
down. At the most, they could have descended only to
those plains and river valleys of the south which were dry.
But it is possible that a few extremely savage and back-
ward primitives may have lived in the swampy northern
plains, and as these became drier, a few more moved
down.

The hills, however, provided enough room for the
hunters, and suited them better. Sanskrit literature puts
them there, and there can be no doubt that their normal
habitat was Central India and the Deccan plateau. In these
regions the primitives must have lived for centuries, per-
haps millennia, slowly absorbing cultural influences from
outside.

But at the eastern and north-western ends of the country
the ethnic situation was wholly different. To take the
north-west first; the land of the five rivers, or of the seven
rivers as it was called in ancient times, did not form part
of India, nor does it do so now. Geographically, it be-
longs to the Middle Eastern Zone. Culturally, it must have
passed to that region very early, even if it did not form
an outlier of western Asia from the very beginning of
human life. Such archaeological people from the Middle
East began to settle in the Punjab, forming the outer ring
of the diffusion of agricultural techniques from their centre
in Mesopotamia. This expansion towards India could not
have been later than the early Bronze Age in western Asia.
The culture of the early agriculturists is uniform all over
the Middle East, from Palestine to Baluchistan and even
the Indus basin. But while in Mesopotamia these people
evolved into city-dwellers and created an urban civiliza-
tion, farther east they remained agricultural and pastoral.

This was natural. The agricultural society of the Pun-
jab remained relatively static, standing as it did on the
eastern-most edge of the circle within which waves of cul-
ture moved outwards in concentric circles from the centre.
By the time the waves reached the Indus they lost most of
their momentum. Therefore, while the cradle of the new
agricultural civilization progressed from a state of non-literacy to proto-literacy, and then to full literacy, the eastern periphery remained relatively primitive, though within the framework of agriculture and pastoralism.

But the influence of the literate and urban civilization of Mesopotamia played on the agriculturists of the Punjab up to a point. There were trading settlements from certain communities within the orbit of that civilization among them. These settlements naturally stood on the highway of commerce, which ran from the west coast of India into the interior of the country along the great rivers, Indus and Sutlej. Through these posts the peasant society of the Punjab remained in contact with the Mesopotamian civilization. But even apart from the connexion through these intrusive trading posts, the natural orientation of the people of the Punjab was towards the west, which had sent them out. All their cultural and technological associations and affiliations were on that side, and as to their ethnic character all that can be said of the first agricultural population of Iran can also be said of them.

Let me turn next to the far eastern extremity of India. Like the western end, the eastern too was isolated from the main block of the country and from the hunting Darks. Perhaps the separation was even more complete on that side than on the western. Here the barrier was formed by the swamps and marshes of Bengal. But the uplands of Assam were habitable, and they began to receive their human fauna from eastern and south-eastern Asia. These migrations must have begun very early, and they continued down to quite recent times. It would seem that the ethnic movement, wherever it might have originated, which gave Borneo its Dyaks, to mention only one primitive people, also brought the Garos and the Nagas, the most ancient Mongoloids of India, into Assam. These and the later Mongoloids who settled in Assam remained aloof from the Hindus and the Hinduized Mongoloids on the plains, keeping intact their primitive social organization and culture.
Thus at the dawn of history India, it may be assumed with a certain amount of confidence, was divided into three ethnic and cultural zones: that of the fair pastoral and agricultural people in the Punjab; that of the Dark hunters in the mainland; and that of the Mongoloid primitives in Assam. All the three groups led isolated and self-contained lives, each within its zone.

Now begins the continuous course of the ethnic history of India. The relative staticity of the agricultural society of the Punjab and of the hunting society of the main block of the country, together with the self-sufficiency of the Darks, was broken by a new and potent movement from the west which came through the Middle East, though it did not originate in that region. It brought into India a warrior folk, whom following the analogy in European archaeology I shall call the Bow and Chariot people. Of course, they were the so-called Aryans.

They had begun the long trek which brought them to the banks of the Indus at least seven or eight hundred years earlier. It is generally agreed, and there is more in this consensus than a scholarly convention based on insufficient data, that these people came originally from somewhere between the Danube and the Volga. But the route they followed remains inferential beyond the point at which it is lighted up by written history. The first recorded allusions to a people who seem to be Aryans or at all events speakers of languages of the Indo-European family, are found in Mesopotamian, Hittite, and Egyptian inscriptions, which show these people as settled in Mesopotamia, probably in the whole of the Fertile Crescent. It is not possible to say whether they had arrived there through Asia Minor, or through the Caucasus, or by way of both.

To speak of only one Aryan group, the one which seems to be nearest to the people of the Rigveda, the Mitannians or Hurrians were in upper Mesopotamia in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C., and then they suddenly disappeared, probably by submergence in the Semitic population, or perhaps owing to an eastward migration of the
bulk of this group of Aryans. One thing about which there can be no doubt is that the Mitanni were very closely related to the Aryans who finally went to Persia and thence to India, if the two were not the same people. Their princes had names which sound Sanskritic as well as Persic, and their language contained words which are almost identical with those with corresponding meanings in Sanskrit. They had the same gods, and were both fond of horses and chariots. So it would seem that even if the Vedic Aryans were not the same people as the Mitanni, they were one of the nearest branches of a common stock. This Mitannian-Mesopotamian connexion is the only thing which is certain in the history of the Indo-Aryans before they came to India.

In any case, some Aryans moved east from Mesopotamia taking the route to Iran, leaving the less adventurous stranded between the Twin Rivers of Sloth to pay the price. It would seem that the migrants took about four hundred years to settle down in Iran and Aryanize the country. Then another eastward push began. This appears to have been due to a family quarrel, which is recorded in Hindu mythology as the war between the Devas and the Asuras, the Gods and the Titans. All Hindu texts are agreed in making the enemies closely related in blood and culture. Some texts regard them as brothers, sons of the same father Prajapati, who himself could not distinguish between the two, while others make them cousins through their mothers, sons of two sisters, who bore the names of Aditi and Diti. The names are certainly back-formations from the words *Aditya*—a certain group of Hindu gods, and *Daitya*, which in Sanskrit means Titan or Demon.

The clash appears to have taken place in the first instance over territory. At least one Sanskrit text attributes the war between the Devas and the Asuras to a dispute over land. The Devas, who lost the war, left Iran to the Asuras, and moved east. Hindu mythology represents the victory of the Asuras as an usurpation of
the heaven of their own gods, and in the fully developed legend the war is a long-drawn-out affair. The theme of paradise lost and regained is one of the major stories of Hindu mythology, and it must date from the Iranian sojourn of the Indian Aryans. In the stories the gods recover their heaven, through the wisdom, wiles, and magic of their supreme god, and also through the self-sacrifice of an Aryan priest. But in history paradise is lost for ever; and the curse begins to work: In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.

There survives in our texts a vague memory that the quarrel may also have been over a question of religion and beliefs. One Sanskrit text speaks of a difference of opinion about the nature of truth, which probably involved the whole range of moral and religious notions. There is also a hint in one of the older Upanishads that the Persians looked on the self or soul (Atman) in a very worldly sense, and did not perceive the eternal over-soul in themselves. The Aryans who left Iran may have felt that the majority of their people were taking a disquieting orientation, especially in religious matters, to the Semitic world which was so alien to them.

The thing which the true Aryan resented most in such a change of outlook was the approach to the jealous and intolerant Semitic single God. Even today a Hindu, however ignorant or uneducated he may be, rejects the idea that there can be an exclusive single God, or that truth can be exclusive to one dogma. Our modern sages, traditional or Westernized, hardly realize when they proclaim that all religions are equally true and equally good, that they are only voicing the old Aryan latitudinarianism.

The Rigvedic Aryans had their one God, who had two aspects or, it might even be said, two Persons or Hypostases as to individuality, but he was no slayer of other gods. The Aryan gods could co-exist at different levels, and the supreme god, even if he was not a mere *primus inter pares*, was no more exclusive than the venerable head of a harmonious patriarchal family who gave wise advice,
leaving the fighting to be done by the sons and nephews. This hierarchy of gods was very dear to the Aryans, and knowing what resistance to Christianity the aristocratic Greeks and Romans put up even after its official adoption, one can easily understand the scandalization of the early Aryan.

Therefore, when the bulk of the Aryans in Iran showed signs of creating an intolerant single God, those who did not approve moved out, and migrated to India with their gods and the hymns in which they praised these gods, to be free to keep the religion of their fathers, and have unlimited land to till and graze their cattle on.

The colonization of the Punjab and imposition of their domination and culture on the pre-existing peasantry did not set these pioneers a difficult problem. They had already carried out such an operation in Iran. There they had established themselves, their language, and their culture so thoroughly that no trace of the supplanted way of life survived, and no racial antagonisms were created. The older inhabitants were absorbed and raised to a higher cultural level by the invading warrior folk. The process had only to be repeated in the Punjab, and it was.

It is difficult to say whether the imposition and the assimilation in both the regions were made easy by ethnic or linguistic affinities. The introduction and adoption of a language of the Indo-European family could hardly have been as slow and gradual here as it was in Greece, for neither old Persian nor old Sanskrit presents dialectal layers as does the Greek language in the earliest epochs. Both were very homogeneous, and in no distant past even these two might have been one. This would suggest a relatively quick imposition of Indo-European speech and the connected culture. Certainly, no process which was spread over centuries or millennia could have failed to exhibit a stratification in language. On the other hand, the imposition was so thorough, and to all appearance so easy and natural, that it could hardly have been brought
about without some affinity between the newcomers and the older inhabitants. One is tempted by this to postulate a slow proto-Aryan expansion all over the Middle East, including the Punjab, before the coming of the true, fighting Aryans. But, of course, it is impossible to be sure about such an assumption.

The Vedic Aryans settled down in the Punjab, but they could not remain satisfied with it, nor confined to it. For one thing, they were a restless warrior folk with a wanderlust. Next, they had come into India, not simply as an aristocracy, but as a complete society. They did indeed have two superior and what might be called ‘leader’ classes—the priests and the fighters, but the body of the community was composed of what they themselves called Vish, the people, who carried on all the normal economic activities. For such a community the Punjab, being already populated by agriculturists, could not offer enough room. Lastly, they must have wanted to make a final break with the Mesopotamian and western association. They had left the region between the Euphrates and Tigris, where their way of life lay under the shadow of an alien and superior civilization which was unacceptable to them in everything but its technology. They had also left Iran, and the reason was, partly at least, the resurgence of the Mesopotamian affiliation. Even the Punjab, unless anchored to something heavier towards the east, looked westward. So, they had to find a new country to create a world of their very own and to be mentally free, and they moved beyond the Sutlej into the territory between that river and the Ganges. This, they made the centre of their existence and base for further expansion in India. With the shifting of the Aryans towards the east, began that curious historical and cultural ambivalence for the Punjab which has continued down to our times. Henceforth the region was to remain divided between the Indian world and the Middle Eastern, facing both ways.

c. c.—3
The main body of the Aryans in India broke so completely with the West that, reading their history, legends, and traditions a student might be led to think that the Aryan invasion of India was a fiction invented by the scholars of the West to insult the ancient civilization of the Hindus. Orthodox and traditional Hindus even today repudiate and get angry at the idea that the Aryans came from outside and were not always in India since the beginning of creation. Those among the Hindu ‘Fundamentalists’ who are not absolutely uneducated and have heard of the diffusio of the Indo-European languages, would rather believe that Europe got its languages and cultures from India than admit that anything Hindu could come from any source outside India.

The lapse of race memory is illustrated in a very interesting manner by the two great epics of the Hindus, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It may be assumed, and with some confidence, that the first is the earlier story, and it is the story of the siege of a Middle Eastern fortified city by an Aryan hero or host. But its extra-Indian historical basis was forgotten so quickly and completely after the coming of the Aryans to India, that it got mixed up with the tradition of the colonization of the south in an incongruous and anachronistic hotchpotch. The story lost its historical significance and became a mere didactic poem. On the other hand, the Mahabharata, with its theme of the tribal warfare of the early Aryans after their settlement in India, became the primary book of the national myth, the true corpus of Indo-Aryan traditions.

With the advance to the Ganges began the second phase of the Aryan expansion in India. From their base in the Karnal plain they spread rapidly eastward across virtually uninhabited territory, settling down in tribal blocks, until they were held up by the marshes of Bengal. The quick Aryanization of northern India, which came to be called Aryavarta, ‘the land of the Aryans’, was brought about by a combination of the restless pioneer-
ing spirit of the Aryans as well as their thirst for virgin land. The process is comparable to the expansion of the European settlers from the east coast of the United States to the farthest west.

As soon as the settlement of northern India was completed, the Aryans launched the third phase of their expansion, which took them to the south. But it was not from the centre of Aryan India that the Deccan was colonized. The movement was led by the pioneers and marchers from the eastern part of the Gangetic plain, the region which is now known as Oude. The priests set the example of going south, and as in other ages and other countries, the missionaries were followed by the warriors and settlers. The colonizers avoided the direct route to the Deccan because it was difficult, and taking a south-westerly route crossed Central India through the region which was known later as Malwa, and reached the headwaters of the Godavari river. From there they marched along the rivers and spread over those parts of the Deccan which suited their economy and temperament. The Aryan colonization of Ceylon was a later and independent venture.

But in the south the character of the Aryan settlement was substantially different from what it was in the north. In northern India the Aryans were the largest and the dominant community, and the Gangetic plain was, above all, their country. In the Deccan, on the contrary, even on the plains there were aboriginal populations which were large by the standards of the age. So there could be no question of totally suppressing them, still less of supplanting them. Thus, if the Aryanization of the north was like the colonization of North America or Australia by Europeans, the position of the Aryans in the south resembled that of the Europeans in South Africa. They were a civilized minority among a large and barbarous native majority. The Darks were reduced to servitude as untouchable labourers in large numbers, though in the hills many survived as free men.
From this circumstance of their colonization the Aryans of the south developed a sense of being somewhat different from their kinsmen in the north, and though they never developed any sense of emotional detachment from these relatives as modern Americans have done in regard to Europe, they were not ashamed to be colonials standing on their own. Naturally, in later times, this culminated in the creation of a vigorous southern and colonial form of the Hindu civilization of the Aryavarta. There the Aryans even came to be called Dravidah, Dravidians, after the name of the original inhabitants of the south or the south itself. This was analogous to the Dutch colonists calling themselves Afrikaner (or Afrikander) and English colonists Australians. When in subsequent times the Aryans of the north spoke of Dravidians they meant their own people in the south, not the Darks. Nowadays the older Dravidians, when the word is used at all, are distinguished from the Aryan Dravidians by being called Adi-Dra vida, which means ‘original Dravidians’.

The sense of being different from their northern cousins developed further from a serious incompleteness in the Aryan colonization of the south. Though the Aryans settled in the Deccan, they did not succeed in imposing their speech as thoroughly there as they had done in the north. This in the end led even to the abandonment by them of the pure Aryan speech in everyday life, also in popular culture, though never in the higher spheres of religion and civilization. It must not be forgotten that the Hindus of South India, taken as a whole, are more familiar with Sanskrit even now than those of Hindustan, the old Aryavarta.

At some stage, it is difficult to determine exactly when, the southern Aryans began to use the local language or languages, interspersed with a large number of Sanskrit and Sanskritic words, and this mixture evolved into the so-called Dravidian languages. There is an exact parallel to this linguistic evolution in the growth of Urdu in northern India among the Muslims. The Muslim conquerors at
first spoke only Persian or Turkish in India, and when in
the early part of the eighteenth century a Muslim noble-
man belonging to a family settled in India for a long time,
spoke in Hindustani or Urdu at the court of Muhammad
Shah, it was resented by the other noblemen. The offen-
der, who was somewhat of a buffoon, justified his lapse
by saying that it was better to speak good Hindustani than
bad Persian. Urdu is thus a sort of linguistic mulatto,
and the original sin has never gone out of it, for in its
purer and more cultured form it never ceased to be an
affectation of Arabic and Persian by Muslims who could
not speak those languages. Tamil and the other South
Indian languages were never so feeble, but they are still
linguistic hybrids created by the Aryan colonizers of the
south. When speaking to the whole of India as Hindus,
the South Indians never spoke in anything but Sanskrit,
and I have heard South Indian professors of Sanskrit in
Calcutta speaking to their colleagues in a Sanskrit which
the northerners could never rival.

The Aryan settlement in India in both its aspects, that
is to say, in the Aryanization of the Indo-Gangetic plain
and the establishment of colonists in the south, was com-
pleted in all its essential features most probably by the end
of the seventh century B.C. With it the basic ethnic pattern
of India, whose most outstanding feature is the opposition
between the civilized community of Aryan descent and the
primitive Darks, was firmly established.

By that time, it would seem, the Aryans had added a
new class to their original social organization in three
classes, and become the four-class society which the Hindu
community has remained ever since, at least in theory.
To this class, Hindu sacred law gave the legal status of
Sudra, the fourth caste. It is, however, extremely difficult
to discover the real ethnic affiliations of the Sudras. On
the one hand, they are not to be confused with the Darks,
free or unfree. The servile Darks were untouchable; the
Sudras, though theoretically servile in function, were not
so: they were part of Hindu society, not outside it. On
the other hand, within that society, they were to be distinguished from the main mass of the true Aryans, the Vaisyas, who were peasants, traders, cattle-raisers, and artisans at the same time. Few of the people to whom our sacred law gave the status of Sudra have described themselves as such. Most often they give a vocational name to their caste. For instance, I am a Sudra in the light of sacred law, but my family has for centuries called themselves Kayastha, Scribes. Recently many fancy names have been adopted by those who used to be regarded as Sudras. They may have been poor relations of the Aryans, or distantly related to them by blood. The only point which is certain is, however, this: they were given a place within the Aryan society, though as clientes and not as full citizens.

India now enters written history, and with that I feel I am treading on land. Nobody could be more conscious than I am that, so far, I have been walking on very thin ice, if not gone under through a hole in it. Students of Indian history must have been wondering at my statements, and even more at my silences. I would, however, assure them that I have not written without a sense of responsibility. So few definite data are available on the earliest periods of Indian history that a number of equally plausible reconstructions of it can be offered with perfect honesty. But the actual historical evolution could have followed only one course. Therefore a writer, unless he is resigned to a feckless neutrality or wants to air a barren agnosticism, has to make a choice, and I have made mine.

I shall, however, indicate one of the principles which I have followed. It is this: that nothing could have happened in the earliest ages of Indian history which was not consistent, in the first instance, with what was happening in Western Asia, about which we are more or less well-informed, and then with the known and patent facts of ethnic and cultural distribution in present-day India. If this principle is applied with some amount of rigour, most of the very fine-spun theories about the early history of India are bound to melt in the thin air.
THE DEPOSITS OF TIME

But not all the reconstructions of early Indian history, and even of later periods, can be described as being honestly mistaken. Prepossessions and mental reservations of all kinds have had a free run, and a fair number of spectres like the Piltdown Man skulk in the haunted house of Indian history. I should have liked to rid the whole house of them, but having taken a lifetime only to exorcise myself, I have neither time nor strength left. I must therefore be resigned to being called a fool by those who believe in ghosts, and also by those who trade in them. Historical conferences in India always remind me of seances.

But to resume the story. For about four hundred years after the completion of their settlement the Aryans in India had a respite from ethnic incursions, and from problems created by racial impacts. Of course, during this period, too, there were foreign invasions, mostly by Persians and Greeks, but this impact was military and political, not ethnic. The problems of racial and cultural assimilation it raised were contained within the four corners of civilized life. The ethnic results of these incursions were of a minor order, concerning individuals rather than groups. A few Persians and Greeks may have Hinduized, just as a number of Hindus may also have Medized or Hellenized. On the other hand, to my thinking, the cultural results were very important. These invasions, and the political relations that they brought into existence, put the Hindus in touch with the high civilization of the Persians and the higher one of the Greeks.

This phase of the external relations of the Hindus was, however, followed by another with a wholly different aspect. From the first century B.C. a new series of foreign invasions began. It not only brought into existence an ethnic ferment of a very active sort, but also brought Hindu society face to face with an external proletariat of barbarous or semi-barbarous nomads, in addition to the internal proletariat of the Darks. The Hindus were henceforth compelled to fight for the survival of their society on two fronts, and the only mitigating circumstances was
that on the whole a *modus vivendi* with the internal proletariat of the Darks had been arrived at and the war on that front was almost 'all quiet'.

The irruption of the barbarous nomads and semi-nomads from Central Asia left a permanent impress on the Hindu mind and outlook, confirming the self-consciousness which even before these invasions was aggressive. Previously, face to face with the aboriginals, the Hindus had already formed themselves into a closed society based on birth, but they had done so as conquerors, who were superior to the natives in race and civilization. On the contrary, the barbarians from Central Asia came as conquerors, and when not beaten back by an Aryan hero behaved as conquerors. Their domination intolerably humiliated the proud Hindu order, and it was in dealing with them that it added to its intense pride of race and culture, that violent xenophobia which henceforward became a fixed trait of the Hindu outlook. The compound of fear, hatred, contempt, and humiliation was embodied in the notion of Mlechchha, the unclean and uncivilized foreigner. The Hindus turned to their great preserving god, Vishnu, for succour, and the idea of a tenth incarnation of the god was born. He was Kalki, about whom the poet Jayadeva wrote:

*Mlechchha-nivaha-nidhane*

*Kalayasi karavalam,*

*Dhumaketum'iva kim'api karalam:*

*Kesava-dhritah Kalki-sarirah :*

*Jaya Jagadisa Hare!*

which translated means:

For slaughtering the Mlechchha horde
Wieldest Thou Thy waving sword,
Like a comet, Oh! how awesome:
In Kalki’s body Vishnu come:
Victory to Vishnu, the World’s Lord!

It is quite possible that an actual Hindu king, Skanda-gupta or Yasodharman, both destroyers of the abomin-
able Huns, was deified as the Kalki incarnation. The Sanskrit poet whom I have quoted puts him in the past by using the familiar participial past tense of Sanskrit, and the use of the future tense in the Puranas means nothing, because in them the future is used for recording past events in order to give the statements an eschatological character. However, Kalki was to pass into the future later in order to meet another emotional requirement.

It was also on account of the barbarian invasions that the Hindus lost their readiness and faculty of learning from foreign nations. They had never hesitated to borrow from the Persians and Greeks, and also perhaps from the Romans, but after passing through the epoch of barbarian invasions they ceased to believe that any foreign nation had any civilization, and became insufferably conceited. The extreme of this development was noted in the eleventh century by the great Muslim scholar Alberuni, who wrote: ‘Their haughtiness is such that, if you tell them of any science or scholar in Khurasan and Persis, they will think you to be both an ignoramus and a liar.’ But he is also careful to add that ‘their ancestors were not as narrow-minded as the present generation is’.

But there is another side to the matter. Strange as it might seem, the epoch of the barbarian invasions was the only period in their historical existence in which the Hindus showed any inclination or capacity to absorb non-Hindus in their society, and it is this exceptional phenomenon which has lent some plausibility to the idea that they possessed an extraordinary capacity to assimilate foreigners and bring about a racial synthesis. Actually, the historical situation left them with no choice, and the barbarian must also have been very, very willing—he wanted a rise in the cultural scale, and was granted it. Kanishka, the first emperor of the Kushana dynasty, might be compared to Theodoric the Ostrogoth, while his grandson Vasudeva became completely Hinduized.

The Hinduization of all the barbarians, including the repulsive Huns, tranquillized the collective Hindu mind
for the time being, and laid the spectre of barbarian domination. As a result the xenophobia which had been created by the invasions ceased to poison the internal existence of the Hindus and passed to the outer line of defence against foreigners outside India. But its basic character had been fixed, and in the new historical situation which was to arise within a few centuries, it was to be revived in a much more violent and virulent form.

But before I come to that I should like to say a few words about the method by which the Hindus absorbed the barbarians. That was accomplished through an extension of the caste system, and it was in absorbing them that the system acquired its third degree of complexity to become wholly amorphous. It has been said that feudalism in Europe was an organization of the anarchy which followed the break-up of the Carolingian Empire. In India the caste system organized, not one kind of anarchy, but many. Hindu society did not attempt to suppress the immense range of racial, social, cultural, and economic diversities which history, was creating for it in unending succession. On the contrary, it accepted them, gave to each its place and niche, and brought into existence a living association of human groups of all sorts, which was a federation of its parts, without ever trying to be any one thing.

Caste system is the name given to this federation. It is, however, less a system than a method. It is, in principle, an extension of the zoological pattern consisting of species in their articulated hierarchy to differentiations which are not zoological or genetic. As such, it certainly imposed the limitation of heredity on the individual’s free choice of a human function. But how many do, in actual fact, want to decide this question freely, or for that matter are even aware that there is freedom to choose? One might also say that the attempt to stabilize differences which are social or cultural by putting them into the zoological mould is not confined to the Hindus. In a more or less rigid fashion all human communities have attempted this. This is a natural compensation for man’s convergent zoological
evolution and divergent psychological evolution. He wants to make up for his inability to create new zoological species among the Hominidae or the genus Homo by creating psychological species and giving to these the status and fixity of genetic groups.

In such an attempt the Aryan in India only went to the extreme point of making the genetic principle absolutely binding, and to this they were driven by a historical necessity. There was no other way in which they could preserve their ethnic, social, and cultural personality from being submerged in a conglomeration with the native Darks. They could no more countenance such a possibility than today Europeans in Africa can contemplate any submergence in the dark population. All human groups behave in this way when seriously faced with such a menace, and all develop a conviction of the sanctity of birth and blood. The Aryans in India carried the attitude to its logical extreme, the extreme demanded by the dangerous situation in which they were placed. So, they made heredity a principle of ordering, not only race relations, but all kinds of relation and functions, even the economic.

It follows from this that so long as Hindu society continued to grow, the caste system also went on evolving pari passu. Let me state one thing emphatically and once and for all: nowhere and at no time did the caste system have a norm, or any finality. It remained elastic, and its expansibility was seen in more than one direction. To give only one instance here, the assimilation of the foreign barbarian through the caste system had as its counterpart a partial promotion of the Darks to the Hindu status. Such aboriginals as showed any capacity or desire for a superior kind of life were not denied admission into Hindu society. But there was no fixed rule for the extension of the caste system to non-Hindus. Sometimes the foreigner or aboriginal was admitted to one of the superior castes on the strength of his vocation or worldly power—foreign priests naturally became Brahmins and foreign princes Kshatriya—and sometimes a whole community of foreigners became
a separate caste. The application of the caste system was wholly empiric.

No social system has had a greater volume of feeble didactic nonsense thrown at itself. First of all, there is the charge that the caste system has been creating diversity and disunity. But the institution, as it has been worked through the ages, has never done so: it has only organized the disparities created by historical forces and movements. By so doing it has done great good by reducing the competition of the diversities, by freezing them within certain limits, and by making each not only legitimate but even moral. After assigning to each element of society its proper function or status, or rather recognizing the function and status it had arrived at through evolution, the Hindu social system made adherence to these a sacred duty. Hinduism declared that death was preferable in one's own dharma (vocation, aptitude, natura, assigned function, etc.), and that the dharma of others was to be greatly feared.

For this reason the caste system may be described as a symbiosis in human life on the lines of the zoological. It canalized competitions and helped the co-existence of elements which otherwise would have been at war. It was a social system specially suited to a country like India, which history has made into a warehouse of civilizations, and a couloir and cul-de-sac of diverse peoples and cultures.

Let me take up next the charge that it interferes with economic freedom. No one who has even a superficial knowledge of the caste system will ever say that it has come in the way of a choice of livelihood. Brahmins in India have been kings, priests, statesmen, warriors, traders, and peasants, and all these they still can be and are. Sudras have been kings. One of the wealthiest families in Bengal, the members of which I used to know intimately in Calcutta, were technically untouchable in Hindu society.

Coming to the last charge, that it bars the way to talent, I shall only quote an Englishman, who knew India at first
hand, and was one of the greatest administrators the East India Company had. Writing about the caste system in his history of India he thought it necessary to set down the following:

The caste system has by no means so great an effect in obstructing the enterprise of individuals as European writers are apt to suppose. There is, indeed, scarcely any part of the world where changes of condition are so sudden and so striking as in India. The last Peshwa had, at different times, two prime ministers; one of them had been either an officiating priest or a singer in a temple (both degrading employments), and the other was a Sudra, and originally a running footman. The Raja of Jeypur’s prime minister was a barber. The founder of the reigning family of Holcar was a goatherd; and that of Sindia a menial servant; both were Sudras. The great family of Rastia in Maratta country first followed the natural occupation of Bramins, then became great bankers, and at length, military commanders. Many similar instances of elevation might be quoted. The changes of professions in private life are no less observable.

So Mountstuart Elphinstone, and I could add to the list. It was always so in the whole history of the caste system. That it suppresses talent is a figment of the shallow egalitarian imagination.

The social immobility for which the caste system was made a scapegoat was really the product of the stagnation which was created in the social life of the Hindus by the Pax Britannica, and the suppression of talent laid at its door was almost wholly due to British rule. As the English military historian Kaye said in connexion with the military profession: ‘It was the inevitable tendency of our increasing power in India to oust the native functionary from his seat, or lift him out of his saddle so that the White man might fix himself there.’ This happened in
most fields, and, above all, in public life, and the caste system was ready to hand to bear the blame.

If the system suppressed anything it was only ambition unrelated to ability, and watching the mischief from this kind of ambition in India today I would say that we could do with a little more of the caste system in order to put worthless adventurers in their place. Taking the system as a whole I would describe it as a social organization which contributes to order, stability, and regulation of competition, and I would close the digression with a piece of advice to the foreign reformers of Hindu society, and their Hindu imitators: Please keep your tongues and pens off the caste system. If I could believe that the caste system was going to be destroyed in India by the palaver I would have added: ‘Please do not pulverize a society which has no other force of cohesion, into amorphous dust.’ But since there is no danger whatever to the caste system, I would only say: ‘Don’t make fools of yourselves.’

But successful as the caste system was in assimilating the barbarian invaders, it failed totally to cope with the next series of ethnic incursions from outside, which were set in train by the expansion of Islam. This historical movement threatened to bring the Hindus under subjection to the newly risen empire of the Caliphate, and annex India to the Islamic world. But in the first or Arab phase of the expansion, only Sind and possibly some other parts of the Trans-Indus were lost to the Hindus. It was only when the Turks took over the political and military leadership of the Islamic world that India passed finally under Muslim rule. As a result the Muslims were established in India as a society parallel to that of the Hindus.

No adjustment between these two societies took place except in minor matters, and therefore with the Muslim conquest the country also saw the emergence of the second basic ethnic cleavage in its population. In its emotional aspect the new division was infinitely more embittered than the old opposition between the primitives and the civilized Hindus. Though the previous antithesis was more
fundamental from the anthropologist’s point of view it did not generate a fraction of the venom which the Hindu-Muslim enmity engendered. Its immediate effect was a revivification in an intense form of the Hindu xenophobia created by the barbarian invasions, and one of the very interesting features of this revivification was the shuffling of the Kalki incarnation from the past to the future. He became a part of the Hindu apocalypse and eschatology, as a sort of Hindu Imam Mahdi. This animosity has inflicted irreparable harm on the country, and it is as active today as it ever was in the past, and as toxic.

Yet the sad truth is that it could never have been otherwise. Like the curse of the Atridae or the curse of the Kurus, this was inherent in the destiny of the Hindus. It is so frightening even to contemplate the cleavage that modern Hindus have always denied it, and do so even now. They invariably declare that the two communities are one, and as one of the proofs of this assertion they advance the fact that the Muslims took Hindu women as wives or concubines. I do not apologize for referring again and again to the infatuated Hindu belief in the oneness of the Hindus and Muslims, because until this idea has been squashed once and for all there can be no progress in Hindu-Muslim relations, which include, of course, India’s political relationship with Pakistan—the notorious millstone round the neck of Indian foreign policy.

Now for the reasons behind the Hindu-Muslim conflict. The Muslim conquest of India could not be made innocuous for the Hindus through the caste system. The conquest was an extension into a new country of a well-established and mature society, with a fully developed way of life and a living culture. The final conquest of India was the adventure of a Muslim king whose main territories lay outside India, but even when the subordination of the new Muslim empire to an external Muslim kingdom was ended, as it very soon was, Muslim rule in the country remained the rule of a colonizing people who never forgot their affiliation with the wider Islamic world.
What was even more important was the fact that the Muslims were not barbarians at a low level of culture who would consider admission to the Hindu fold as a promotion. On the contrary, not only were they themselves the creators and defenders of a new and aggressive culture, they had a fanatical conviction of its superiority to all others, and thought it was their duty to propagate it even by force. Their religion did, in fact, make this one of the essential, though optional, duties of a Muslim. They were the first people in history to put forward the idea of an irreconcilable conflict between a particular way of life and all others, and to formulate a theory of permanent revolution. There could be no peace on earth, they declared, until the whole world was converted to their faith.

As if that was not enough, the Hindus on their side had an almost equal contribution to make. By the time the new invasions began, they had, as I have noted, completely lost whatever assimilating power and adaptability they had, and hardened into a closed society with a conviction of its own superiority which amounted to megalomania. There could thus be no question of absorbing even a neutral foreigner, let alone a Muslim.

It follows from this that the cleavage which the Muslim conquest created in the ethnic composition of India was more cultural than racial. Of course, there were new racial elements, such as Arabs, Persians, Turks, Afghans, and Tatar-Mongols, among whom the Turks were probably the most numerous. But these foreigners formed only the hard core of the Muslim society of India, and its bulk was formed by Hindu converts, especially in Bengal and the Punjab. This fact has been fantastically exploited to prove the oneness of the Hindus and Muslims. But speciousness is hardly ever able to do away with facts, though it does come in the way of dealing with them sensibly. The fact that they were converted Hindus did not make any difference to the sense of solidarity of the Muslims of India among themselves and with the Islamic world at large. The descendants of the Hindu converts never thought that
they were nearer to the native Hindus than their foreign co-religionists.* The Hindus, too, wrote off the converts and refused to look upon them as members of a common society. The parting of ways was the work of both the sides. Here is a case of a true ethnic relationship being completely broken by a new cultural and social association.

Compared with the result of the Islamic conquest, the effect of the European expansion in India can only be described as unimportant, and therefore I can sum up its ethnic consequences very briefly. These may be divided into two categories, the genetic and the cultural. In the genetic field, European rule in India has created two types of mixed communities: a truly Mestizo population in those parts of India which were once ruled by the Portuguese, and in British India a cross-breed known as Eurasians in the old days but now called Anglo-Indians. In the cultural sphere, the British conquest has brought into existence a community of Indian Christians who till now are standing apart from the Hindus. But the most important result of British rule in the way of creating human diversity has been the creation of a Westernized Hindu upper middle-class. Most foreigners like to think that this class will reshape India and the Hindu community in the image of the countries and peoples who are contributing foreign economic aid. I shall have something to say about that in a later chapter. Here I shall restrict myself to the observation that all the new elements in the population of India created by the expansion of Europe have brought into existence problems for themselves, and not for Hindu society.

* In actual fact, the converts or Muslims with a pre-existing Hindu affiliation were even more hostile to the way of life which was once theirs. The Mogul Emperor Shah Jahan was the son of a Hindu princess, but he was very intolerant of the Hindus. Murshid Quli Khan, one of the most successful Muslim rulers of Bengal, was converted to Islam in childhood, and he was notoriously anti-Hindu. A Muslim friend of mine was the son of a woman who before her conversion was a Brahmin. She was bitterly opposed to Hinduism.
Chapter 3

THE CHILDREN OF CIRCE

The Romans had a god or demigod whom they called Sylvanus. He was a sort of faun and sometimes identified with the satyrs and sileni of the Greeks or even with Pan. He lived on uncultivated land beyond the limits of tillage. He was elusive, uncanny, full of wiles, and dangerous in some ways. Now, if these were the adjectives applied to Sylvanus, whose name itself—He of the Forest—was an adjective and epithet, there were none which could suit the dark aboriginals of India better from the point of view of the Aryans. They had a streak of superstitious dread mingled with their dislike of the Darks, whom they described as ‘men of the forests’. One Sanskrit verse refers to them as ‘wanderers in the woods and friends to their womenfolk’. The second description too was apt.

The Darks of India in their existence through the ages remind me strongly of Papageno. To no set of men could life set a harder problem of survival. The country was wild and inhospitable, the climate and weather inclement, the beasts strong, swift, and ferocious. Existence on earth presented itself to them in the shape of an ugly old woman with a croaking voice who asked for a kiss: the aboriginal gave it out of courage and compassion, and was rewarded with beauty. Without seeing them and their life nobody would have found it easy to believe that man could combine, of all things, hunting, love, and wisdom so harmoniously. They made themselves at home in the hills and jungles, adjusted themselves meticulously to the climate, and literally dug up happiness as they do water in the sands of their streams. There are many peoples on earth who are consumed by an insatiable craving for unhappi-
ness and cannot have enough of it. But the aboriginals of India had happiness in the blood, and in their free state neither would nor could be cured of it.

Nevertheless they might well have been unhappy, for human reasons in addition to the climatic and zoological. Throughout known history that terrible blight of all primitive peoples—nearness to a high civilization—has hung over them, and they might have died of the wilt, damping off, and dry rot which this contagion always brings on. Besides, they had to face the implacable enmity of the Aryans, who hated them as agricultural folk hate hunters, as dwellers among fields and pastures hate foresters, as plainsmen hate hillmen, as fair people hate the dark, as civilized men hate savages.

This holds as true of the Hindu of today as it did of the Aryan, say, of 1000 B.C. The generalization would seem to be invalidated by the publicized attitude of the present Hindu ruling class, but remains true in spite of it. Whenever the Westernized Hindu is found airing a liking for the aboriginals, it may be assumed that he is affecting a British attitude as the legatee of British imperialism, in whose arcana they had a very special place. When this class of Hindus show any solicitude for the welfare of the primitive tribes, or even any intellectual interest in them, they are even more affected. The pose is transparent.

As proof of this I shall give precisely that instance which is likely to come to the mind of those who would contradict me: that is, the annual folk dance festival in Delhi. The whole of the Diplomatic Corps and all resident foreigners go into ecstasies over it, and the least than an Anglicized Indian can do is to imitate them. But the festival was begun by the British military authorities after the last war, and I saw one of the earliest of them, if not the very first, in the spring of 1947. The bright idea was simply continued by a set of people whose strongest point as a ruling class is their loyalty to all the British imperial traditions. The true parentage of the festival is even now dis-
closed by the fact that it remains in military hands, though there is a Ministry of Culture which considers dancing of all kinds to be under its exclusive jurisdiction.*

The Indians who rush to these folk dances are actuated, when sincere, by the lingering Anglicism within them, and, when not, by their anxiety to win the good opinion of the foreigners on which their own self-respect very largely depends; and, above all, they are driven by their awe of Jawaharlal Nehru, who as the supreme Anglicized Indian feels strongly about the aboriginals in his own way.

But how exiguous even that way is can be judged from the contradictions of his own statements about them. He has, of course, to sanction military operations against some of them, but he does that *qua Imperator*, *qua* man he sometimes says that the aboriginals are not to be assimilated to Hindu society, at others that they are not to be treated as museum pieces. If neither course is right, one might well ask: *Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?* In the India of Nehru’s dreams about the future and illusions about the present, the India of reels of Five-Year Plans, the aboriginals, one should have thought, could

* The artificiality of the interest in folk dance was demonstrated in a clear but at the same time amusing manner when in 1963 the Government of India wanted to collect money for its Defence Fund, and made use of this ‘cultural’ festival for this purpose. The authorities feared that the tribal dancers would not be an attraction for the larger public they were after, and therefore they replaced the dancers with the film-stars of India. Thus it happened that these popular idols, together with the playback singers and music directors, presented a ‘cultural’ programme consisting of film songs and also songs composed for the occasion urging people to make sacrifices, put up a solid front, and not to yield ground to China. This time the Ministry of Scientific and Cultural Affairs, which would no longer be kept out of the sun, managed the show in co-operation with the Defence Department. The *tamasha* brought in two and a half lakhs of rupees for the Government. I wonder if the Diplomatic Corps attended and enjoyed this cultural display too.
have only one of two alternative destinies: *Gleichschaltung* or *Gottterdammerung*.

No, says Nehru, they are to be treated as human beings. Now, this is dangerously like Mr E. M. Forster’s plea for putting Indo-British relations on a *human* footing in that novel of his—*A Passage to India*—which made Liberal and Leftist Englishmen lachrymose to no purpose. It is not as easy to stack human relations away from politics as it is to stow wine-cases away from the boilers. If men could forget their cultural loyalties, political ambitions, pride of race and of power, as well as economic urges, they would, of course, become as easy to pack together as layers of surgical cotton-wool. But human beings will not sterilize themselves or convert themselves into cellulose. They would make distinctions. Only, if they are honest and courageous they would avow these; if not, hypocritically hide their real feelings.

Whatever other vices the ancient Hindus might have possessed, hypocrisy was the one which they never had. It had to come to the modern Hindus, along with the prudery which is only slightly less offensive, from the West, as also did tobacco, cocaine, and syphilis. So, the Hindus of olden times never disguised their hatred of the aboriginals, and made no bones about proclaiming it. They were very Kiplingian, and they declared: ‘Oh, Dark is Dark, and Fair is Fair, and never the twain shall meet.’ Like Kipling, again, they had an afterthought and made an exception. I shall describe what that was, but at this point I am concerned only with the antipathy, with the awareness of an uncrossable line.

From the beginning the Aryans were both frightened and fascinated by the aboriginals. Naturally, until they were established in the country in unchallenged power, they felt the hatred more than the attraction. At that stage, when the aboriginal was still to be feared, they must have been inclined to think, like the early settlers in
Anglo-Saxon North America who were not ashamed to be the full-blooded colonists which they were, that the only good Dark was the dead Dark. But after they had made their position secure they arrived at a compromise with the aboriginals on the basis of leaving to each party its life and its world. Then began a phase of alternating fascination and repulsion for the Aryans.

In a Sanskrit story, written probably in the seventh century of the Christian era, the daughter of a king of hunters comes to seek audience of an Aryan king. When the woman door-keeper brings in the message the king looks at the faces of his vassals and remarks: 'What harm is there in seeing her?' But when the princess of the hunting tribe enters he orders the door-keeper: 'Show her to us from a distance.' Of course, he does so for fear of being polluted by the nearness of a person who to him, an Aryan, was an untouchable Chandala maiden. However, the princess of low birth overwhelms the king and his court by her beauty. All the imagery of admiration which occurs to them is drawn from the highest levels of the Hindu aesthetic and religious feelings.

She is like a moving statue of sapphire; like the night lit up by the moon; like the river Yamuna, dark and still; like the spouse of Siva in the robe of a huntress; like Lakshmi with a blue sheen reflected from the body of Vishnu; and with her hands and feet dyed red with lac, she is like the great goddess Durga after she had slain the demon Mahisha. The similes roll out in florid Sanskrit to describe the dangerous attractions of a hunter maiden for the Aryan, who could not even touch her without insulting and sullying his Aryan birth and honour.

A thought, natural in a race-conscious Aryan, occurs to the wondering king: 'Oh, how could the Creator place so much beauty in so unworthy a vessel?' He is also unable to make out how the girl can be so fresh, for, if Sanskrit literature is to be believed, the women of the royal households were not only kneaded into dough, but actually squeezed into batter in every limb, by the men-
folk. But the explanation also occurs to the king. He bethinks himself that, fearing lest he should be polluted by her contact, the Creator must have made her without touching her with his hands. Until I read that passage I believed that it was the Nestlé Company which had invented the slogan—'Untouched by hand'—but we Hindus had said that long ago, and how much more befittingly and winningly!

Not less enthusiastic was the Aryan’s first feelings about the bodily strength and symmetry of the aboriginal man, and not less strong his subsequent revulsion, when he had had time to reflect. In the same story a Brahmin is born as a parrot for his sins, but even in that lowly form he has not lost his Aryan sensibility. So, one day, when from his hole in a tree he sees a whole host of aboriginal hunters, Sabaras as they are called in Sanskrit, he at first gives expression to his admiration, and then to his horror.

It is the young chief of the hunters, a youth with downy lips and cheeks, who strikes him most. He seems to be made of iron; his long curly hair falls on his shoulders, to make him look like a lion; his waist is girt with a piece of cloth dyed red; his chest is like a slab of rock from the Vindhyas mountains; his arms are long; and so on. One bodily feature noticed by the Aryan parrot is specially interesting: the young hunter’s belly is wrinkled in tight folds on account of hard physical exercise. What a contrast to the Brahmin Aryan’s ghee-fed ample middle!

But the parrot remembers soon enough that it is not for an Aryan to give way to such feelings, forgetting his station in life, and his duty to his race. So he utters a monologue of horror which is so revealing as a summary of the Aryan view of the aboriginal that I give a verbatim translation:

Oh, [cries the parrot] their life is a hallucination of ignorance and errors, their conduct censured by honourable men: for instance, their religion is the offering of human flesh; their food meat, and drink spirits, which is condemned by righteous men; their exercise is hunting;
their hymns are the howls of jackals; their wisdom is
knowledge of the ways of birds; their friends are the
dogs; their kingdoms are the wild woods; drinking bouts
are their festivity; their helpers are merciless bows; their
tools are snake-like arrows with poisoned heads; their
songs are a lure for the deer; their wives are women cap-
tured from other tribes; tigers are their company; the
blood of animals is their offering to gods; their sacrifice
is flesh; their livelihood is robbery; their ornaments are
snakes; their cosmetic is the ichor of wild elephants; in
every way they devastate the forests in which they dwell.

I do not think that any modern anthropologist could
describe the aboriginals of India better and in more pre-
cise detail. One thing in the Aryan’s admiration of the
aboriginal’s physical beauty is to be specially noted. All
modern Hindus are obsessed with a fair complexion, and
they cannot see any beauty in a person who is not fair.
The ancient Hindus were free from this inhibition. This
is significant.

The admiration for the aboriginal gradually died out
among the Hindus, keeping pace with the decay of their
sensibilities, and only the abhorrence remained. But the
quality of the antipathy also became extremely poor. The
world of the aboriginal was an ensemble of human and
non-human features which excited a respectful horror
and hatred in the Aryan Hindu. It was a whole form-
ed by hills, forests of large trees with chequered shade,
the burning tiger and the impassive elephant, strong and
brave though dangerous and cruel men, and women who
were even more dangerous because of the seductiveness
coming from their joy of the flesh without its shame.
If all this evoked fear it was accompanied by fascination,
and the fascination of horror and disapproval can only
be felt by live and noble minds. But it was precisely
vitality and nobility which the Hindus went on losing
quickly, and with that their concept of the aboriginal
also became vulgar, and equally vulgar their hatred of
him. For the decadent Hindus the great world of the
aboriginal took on the appearance of a mere weedy waste by the side of cultivated fields.

British rule brought back the respect for the aboriginal among those Hindus who had received the new education. But the feeling was very artificial, and, besides, it was confined to a small minority. Hindu society as a whole held on to the vulgar dislike, and I shall try to illustrate it by setting down a few of the remarks I heard myself in my young days.

We in Bengal had the aboriginals abutting on us both to the east and to the west. The Darks were our western neighbours, and the Mongoloids the eastern. All over West Bengal the Sonthals, Oraons, and other primitives of Chota Nagpur were called Buno (pronounced Boono), wild people, in Bengali. In East Bengal, especially in Mymensingh district from which I come, any wild and unkempt person was called a Garo or a Hajong. Bhutia, Lepcha, Kuki, and other tribal names were equally terms of contempt or abuse.

The Khasis of Assam were certainly not a savage people. Their women were decidedly pretty, and it was believed that the British officials and officers stationed at Shillong had a very great weakness for them. That affiliation, instead of redeeming the Khasis in the eyes of the Bengali clerks and their wives, damned them still further. They were regarded as a dirty and uncivilized people. The Hindu contempt for the aboriginals in modern times was not softened even by their notorious lust for their women.

Yet the aboriginals have survived, which seems an incredible achievement. I do not think there is any other country in the world in which primitive communities of so many kinds and with fairly large populations have been able to resist the proximity of civilization so successfully. This, the aboriginals of India have to their credit and not only have they survived, they have even been able to continue their way of life, keep it
largely intact and unimpaired, and maintain themselves in social and cultural health. *Vivat homo silvanus!*

What could have contributed to this? The first reason is obvious and elemental: the Aryan agricultural and pastoral order was not interested in the aboriginal’s hills and jungles. At their most adventurous the Aryans sent out a warrior king like Samudragupta through the wildernesses of Central India to impose a tenuous hegemony on hunter chiefs like Vyaghra Raja, Tiger King. From the beginning the primitives entrenched themselves in their terrain, and lived there without being displaced. Human geography was on their side.

Secondly, they showed an amazing adaptability within the framework of their hunting economy. They borrowed techniques from their civilized neighbours just to the point needed to ensure survival, for holding their own, without abandoning their primitive way of life, its spirit, and its social organization in any essential respect. They certainly adopted metals, also animal husbandry, and, partially, agriculture. They even borrowed myths and legends from the civilized Hindus and transformed them into their own in a recast form. But they remained *they*.

This may be described as adaptive evolution by men to whom the door of creative evolution had been closed. They could not become anything new, but they could be more efficient hunters. For me this holds a very important moral. I am often compelled in these days to hear the argument, mostly from Occidentals, but sometimes also from their Oriental echoes, that as a result of industrialization which will rescue the peoples of India from a state which these kind Westerners politely and their Hindu disciples boastfully describe as ‘under-development’, the Hindus will cease to be Hindus—which means that they will lose their traditional outlook and behaviour and become passable Americans. All Occidentals are reckoning on the Americanization of the Hindu, and they cannot even conceive of a Hinduization of industrialism.
But the aboriginals of India seem to lend support to my view that there is no necessary connexion between a certain way of life and economic techniques. I should have thought that this was proved decisively by a fact which no one would dream of disputing—by the plain fact that the United States and the Soviet Union have identical techniques but opposed ways of life. I would say that when the culture of a people has set in a particular mould, whatever that might be, and when it has created its psychological correlatives, their traditional life may survive indefinitely and can even be strengthened by progress in technology. In other words, even if techniques change the collective mind and institutions can continue, actually helped by the economic adaptations which are expected to destroy them.

However that may be, at least there is no doubt that the aboriginals of India have remained primitive even after adopting advanced techniques from the civilized Hindus. But I must also say that the survival of the aboriginals has been helped by another factor, a psychological one. If the two reasons just mentioned, namely, the indifference of an agricultural people to forests and the hunter’s adaptability, have saved them there was also something within the heart of the Aryan leader-class which worked towards the same end.

I often wonder why one significant aspect of the victory of agriculturists over hunters has escaped the notice of anthropologists and historians. This is all the more puzzling because one of the worst plagues of agricultural societies has been created by this turn in their evolution. Of course, I mean war. War in civilized societies may be attributed to an ‘original sin’ of the agriculturists. In order to deal with the hunters they put a new kind of hunters above themselves and allowed them to constitute their ruling class, supporting that order on their land. These hunters were the warriors, who hunted men as a profession and animals for pleasure. Whether they were Samudraguptas, Thutmosises, Ashur-Nasir-pals, Alexand-
ers, Scipios, Condés, or Turennes, does not matter: they were all alike. The Assyrians, the Hindu Kshatriyas, and above all, the Homo European, the most advanced and most ruthless of them, have all been destructive in a way which no primitive hunting folk, even in a cannibalic state, have ever rivalled. It was a sad day for everybody concerned—the animals, the old hunters, the agriculturists themselves, when these new hunters appeared in history.

But there was at least one saving grace in the situation. The plight of the old hunters would have been much worse if the new hunters had not felt that in some ways the primitives were nearer to them than their peasant protégés. Deep calleth unto deep, and chivalry is born. That was at the root of Kipling’s famous afterthought:

But there is neither East, nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they came from the ends of earth.

The Aryan warrior had exactly the same feeling and, strange as it might seem, this can be illustrated best from the conduct of Rama himself, the supreme Aryan hero in India and the leader of the Aryan colonization of the south. As he was going to the Deccan after being exiled from his father’s kingdom, he came on the banks of the Ganges with his wife and brother, and was received by the hunter king Guha. Rama felt no hesitation in accepting his hospitality, and called the hunter his friend. In the Hindu tradition this incident became the stock example of the unfailing courtesy and magnanimity of a true Aryan.

Equally famous is Rama’s chivalry towards the huntress Sabari. She had been living in expectation of his coming and had waited nearly a lifetime for it, turning herself into a devout religieuse. Upon seeing Rama the huntress said her nunc dimittis in the Hindu way, threw herself into fire, and was rewarded by being taken up to heaven.
The Aryan’s relations with the hunters were seen at their best when based on a godly compassion on one side, and the most self-sacrificing loyalty on the other, just as in a later age Indo-British relations were at their best when founded on the Hindu soldier’s readiness to perish in battles for the British, and the British officer’s willingness to call him ‘Bhai’—Brother! But like Kipling’s exception the Hindu edificatory tales only proved the rule.

There is another famous story, and this from the Mahabharata, which illustrates the cruel dilemma facing the Aryan in India when he had to deal with the hunter’s claim to be as good and efficient as an Aryan, even if that claim was accompanied by the most devoted loyalty to the Aryan’s ideals and to the Aryan as a man. One day, it is related, the Kuru and Pandava princes, who had the Brahmin Drona as their teacher in archery, went to hunt in a forest. One of their dogs which was scouring the woods came back with its mouth muzzled with a number of arrows shot with an amazing quickness and precision. The princes were astonished by this feat of archery and searched for the man who had performed it. They came on a hunter boy, who said that it was he who had silenced the dog. Asked how he had learnt such marksmanship and shooting, the boy replied that Drona was his master. The Aryan princes felt very mortified that their own teacher had taught a hunter boy better than themselves, and went up to him with their reproaches.

Drona was very much surprised, for he could not remember ever having taught any hunter boy, and indeed he had not. What had happened was this. The hunter boy, hearing of Drona’s reputation and wishing to learn from him, had gone to him to be taken as a pupil, but could not, of course, be accepted as he was a non-Aryan and untouchable. So the boy had come back to the forest, set up an image of Drona, worshipped and practised before it, and through sheer devotion acquired his skill. That was why he regarded Drona as his teacher.
Now, it was and still is a custom among the Hindus that a teacher should be recompensed with gifts, which ordinarily were money, land, or cattle. This gift was called *dakshina*. When Drona, who had come to the forest to inquire, found how matters stood, he demanded his dakshina. The boy asked him what he would have. Drona had already made up his mind, for he could not compromise with his duty to his Aryan pupils and to the Aryan community. He unhesitatingly demanded the right thumb of the boy, who cut it off immediately, sacrificing the very skill for which this price was demanded.

The Hindu conscience has never been easy over this incident, and so this non-Aryan boy has always been held up in the traditions of the Hindus as the ideal pupil, and by implication the cruel Aryan duty has been regretted.

But, however heartless Hindu apartheid was, at least it saved the aboriginal, which Hindu egalitarianism, had such a thing existed, would never have done. Also, Kshatriya chivalry softened its harshness. The Muslim continued the policy of leaving the aboriginals to themselves, and the British were bound to follow the same course on account of the very basic principle they had laid down for their government in India. It was the principle, not only of allowing, but encouraging every community in India to live in the light of its own traditions, maintaining its institutions. They did not want even the civilized Hindus and Muslims to be Westernized, and they relished the idea of changing the aboriginals even less. In this they were influenced in the first instance by their conservatism, and next by the sense of imperial interest. They felt instinctively that the varied elements of the populations of India should not lose their diversity and sense of diversity. This helped the aboriginals.

Now, however, a new and much more serious threat has made its appearance for them. They face the prospect of seeing their distinctive way of life wiped off the ethnic map of India, even in their home territory, which makes the wish I set down a little while ago a futile, if not frivol-
ous, gesture of rhetoric. The danger is coming, not from any resurrection of Aryan or Kshatra imperialism—which perhaps would have done India a lot of good—but from the nature of the technological revolution through which all mankind is passing, and through which the Greatest Powers in the world wish that we should also pass exactly in their manner.

It is a long argument. But I shall try to state it as briefly as possible without sacrificing intelligibility. If the primary economy of man was hunting, secondary pastoralism, and tertiary agriculture, a quaternary economy is now emerging in industrialism, which depends basically, not on what grows on the surface of the earth, but on what lies hidden under it. For ages man dreamed of buried treasures. Did he do so with a premonition of his future destiny, as he did in regard to flying? In any case, he has realized both dreams. To put it in terms of mythology, Pluto is no longer satisfied only with robbing Ceres of her daughter, he has invaded her own domain.

This revolution has now reached India, and here the minerals which it stands in need of are found for the most part in the territories of the aboriginals. Very powerful forces stand behind the movement: the policies, interests, money, and technical skill of nearly all Western nations; the convictions and emotions of the present rulers of the country; and, above all, the all-consuming Hindu avarice. All this in combination is breaking down the isolation of the aboriginal, threatening not only his security but existence. There is a Hindu push towards the wilds, which never existed before, and very large vested interests are being created for the Hindus in the homeland of the primitives. The white ants are on the march. If you have seen them, you will understand.

In my own life I have seen the march of industrialism into the aboriginal’s territory. I am quite familiar with the spot where it established its first base, and began the conquest with its most typical feature—co-operation between Indian capital and American technical guidance.
This happened at a place in the Singhbhum district of Chota Nagpur, which came to be named Jamshedpur after the great Parsi business man and financier, who conceived the idea of building the first iron and steel factory of India, and carried it out. The whole area is now generally known as the country of the Adivasis, or ‘Original Inhabitants’.

This factory began its operation soon after 1910. Even before that the industrial revolution had made its inroads into the aboriginal’s life in the same region. These parts were formerly looked upon as the hinterland of Bengal, but coal seams were discovered here in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and a large number of collieries founded. I still remember the weird impression which the advance of industrialism made on me when, as a small boy in 1904, I went to Deoghar in the Sonthal Parganas. From the train I saw hills, the Sonthals and their villages, the smoking chimneys, and the pit-head gear. The mélange remains deeply imprinted on my mind.

All the large industrial undertakings of India after independence are growing up, not in Chota Nagpur alone, but elsewhere as well, in areas which are in the occupation of the aboriginals. For me, therefore, the pioneer iron and steel factory at Jamshedpur has become a symbol, which it might also be for others. As one travels by train at night, from quite a long distance, its blast furnaces can be seen shooting up flames. An immense glow lights up the sky, and that red glare seems to rise from the gigantic and unquenchable funeral pyre of the primitives.

Nobody knows better than I how pointless it is to regret this. I would say it is almost foolish to denounce it. The motives, ideas, and forces which are ranged behind the modern onslaught on the aboriginals belong to an amoral world, where neither ethnics nor aesthetics has any say. In an industrialized India the destruction of the aboriginal’s life is as inevitable as the submergence of the Egyptian temples caused by the dams of the Nile.