

FOR INDIA

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I. Personal

I wish to speak, in this chapter, with unaccustomed partiality and passion. I am poorly qualified to write of India : I have merely crossed it twice between east and west, and once from north to south, and seen hardly a dozen of its cities. And though I have prepared myself with the careful study of a hundred volumes, this has all the more convinced me that my knowledge is trifling and fragmentary in the face of a civilization five thousand years old, endlessly rich in philosophy, literature, religion and art, and infinitely appealing in its ruined grandeur and its weaponless struggle for liberty. If I write at all it is not only because I feel deeply about India, but because life cannot wait till knowledge is complete. One must speak out, and take sides before the fight is over.

I have seen a great people starving to death before my eyes, and I am convinced that this exhaustion and starvation are due not, as their beneficiaries claim, to overpopulation and superstition, but to the most sordid and criminal exploitation of one nation by another in all recorded history. I propose to show that England has year by year been bleeding India to the point of death, and that self-government of India by the Hindus could not, within any reasonable probability, have worse results than the present form of alien domination. I shall limit myself in this chapter to presenting the case for India, knowing that the case against her has been stated all too well in what may be long remembered as the unfairest book ever written.¹ Nevertheless, lest I should merely repeat and reverse that crime, I shall in a later chapter outline the case for England in India as strongly as I can.

In the London Daily Herald of October 17, 1927, Ramsay MacDonald, now Prime Minister of England, declared that further so-called "tutelage" of India for self-rule was useless; she should have self-government at once. He affirmed that India was already fit for self-government, and that the only training she required was that of her own experience in liberty. Shortly before its recent coming to power, the Labor Party of Great Britain officially declared: "We believe that the time has come when our brothers in all parts of India are capable (not will be some time but are now) of controlling their own affairs equally along with South Africa and other British Dominions; and we hereby pledge ourselves to assist in every way possible to bring about this much desired reform."²

I have the honor to agree with the British Government; I argue only for Home Rule. I speak not as an American only, but as a member of the family of the English-speaking peoples; I rest

my case above all on the evidence of Englishmen; I write, I think, in harmony with the fine traditions of English liberalism from Burke and Sheridan and Fox to Bertrand Russell, Ramsay MacDonald, and Bernard Shaw. I like and honor Englishmen, but I am not fond of the British; the English are the best gentlemen on earth, the British are the worst of all imperialists. The English gave the world liberty, and the British are destroying it. I ! confess that I am prejudiced in favor of liberty.

II. A Perspective of India

Let us remember, first, that India is not a little island, nor a continent sparsely inhabited by savages, but a vast territory containing 320,000,000 souls—three times as many as in the United States, more than in North and South America combined, more than in all Europe, west of Russia, combined; all in all, one-fifth of the world's population. Let us remember, further, that in the northern and more important half of India the people are predominantly of the same race as the Greeks, the Romans, and ourselves—i.e., "Indo-Europeans" or "Aryans"; that though their skin has been browned by the tireless sun, their features resemble ours, and are in general more regular and refined than those of the average European; that India was the mother-land of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of Europe's languages; that she was the mother of our philosophy, mother, through the Arabs, of much of our mathematics, mother, through Buddha, of the ideals embodied in Christianity, mother, through the village community, of self-government and democracy. Mother India is in many ways the mother of us all.*

Let us remember, also, in order that we may see the problem in perspective, the age and variety of India's civilization. Recent excavations at Mohenjo Daru have revealed a civilization 3500 B.C. with great cities and industries, comfortable homes, and luxuries ranging from bathrooms to statuary and jewelry; "all betokening a social condition . . . superior to that prevailing in contemporary Baby-lonia and Egypt." When Alexander the Great invaded India in 326 B.C., his historian, Megasthenes, recorded his amazement at finding on the Indus a people quite as civilized and artistic as the Greeks, who were then at the height of their curve.

At no time in history has India been without civilization: from the days of Buddha, in the fifth century, who is to the East what Christ is to the West; through the time when Asoka, the most humane of emperors, preached the gentle creed of Buddha from pillars and monuments everywhere; down to the sixteenth century, when culture, wealth and art flourished at Vijayanagar in the south, and a still higher culture, and still greater wealth and art, flourished under Akbar in the north. It was to reach this India of fabulous riches that Columbus sailed the seas. The civilization that was destroyed by British guns had lasted for fifteen centuries, producing saints from Buddha to Ramakrishna and Gandhi; philosophy from the Vedas to Schopenhauer and Bergson, Thoreau and Keyserling, who take their lead and acknowledge their derivation from India (India, says Keyserling, "has produced the profoundest meta-physics that we know of"; and he speaks of "the absolute superiority of India over the West in philosophy"); poetry from the

Mahabharata, containing the Bhagavad-Gita, "perhaps the most beautiful work of the literature of the world," down to Sarojini Naidu, greatest of living women poets, and Rabindranath Tagore, who, writing a local dialect in a subject land, has made himself the most famous poet of our time. And how shall we rank a civilization that created the unique and gigantic temples of Ellora, Madura and Angkor, and the perfect artistry of Delhi, Agra and the Taj Mahal—that indescribable lyric in stone?

This, evidently, was not a minor civilization, produced by an inferior people. It ranks with the highest civilizations of history, and some, like Keyserling, would place it at the head and summit of all. When, in 1803, the invading British besieged the Fort at Agra, and their cannon struck near the beautiful Khass Mahal, or Hall of Private Audience, the Hindus surrendered at once, lest one of the most perfect creations of the human hand should be ruined like Rheims. Who then were the civilized? The British conquest of India was the invasion and destruction of a high civilization by a trading company utterly without scruple or principle, careless of art and greedy of gain, overrunning with fire and sword a country temporarily disordered and helpless, bribing and murdering, annexing and stealing, and beginning that career of illegal and "legal" plunder which has now gone on ruthlessly for one hundred and seventy-three years, and goes on at this moment while in our secure comfort we write and read.

(यह लेख विल ड्यूरांट की पुस्तक "The Case For India" से लिया गया है।)