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The True India

*a plea for
understanding*



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THE TRUE INDIA

A Plea for Understanding

by

C. F. ANDREWS



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To the
RABINDRANATH TAGORE
with deep affection

PREFACE

FOR more than ten years, a succession of books has come from the Press both in America and Great Britain condemning the morals of India and pointedly attacking Hinduism as a debased religion.

These have caused great offence in India itself, and have led to very serious misunderstanding. The replies that were published in India had only a small circulation, and therefore the misunderstanding has remained. India's own case has very nearly gone by default.

For this reason I have often been urged, as a friend of India, to make known the truth as I have seen it, so that those who desired in all sincerity to know the facts might be able to do so. After long hesitation, it seemed to me at last that the time had come to undertake this, and therefore this book has been written.

In these days of world bitterness and confusion, it is more than ever necessary for peace-lovers to build up, wherever possible, bulwarks of sincere good-will to withstand the inrushing tide of hatred between nations. Sensational and unfair literature does immeasurable harm by stirring up hostility among masses of people who feel that their own country and their own religion have both been unjustly attacked. Naturally their desire has been to answer back. But mere retaliation can do no good, and what I have aimed at is to build up a construc-

tive picture of Indian life which shall express the truth and at the same time expose some of the fallacies on which this sensational literature has been based.

In the final revision of this book I have had most valuable help from Indian and English friends to whom I have been able to show the manuscript for advice and correction. My friend, John Mathew, has won my gratitude for his excellent typing. Ill-health has compelled me to finish my task at a small hill station, where it has been impossible to verify references, but I hope that no inaccuracies have crept into my text. In certain chapters I have used the material of articles which I had already contributed to the public press.

In dedicating what I have written to the poet, Rabindranath Tagore, I am seeking to repay a very small portion of the debt which I owe to him for opening my eyes both to the deeper meaning of Indian culture and to the singular beauty of the lives of the simple villagers who bear such heavy burdens with a cheerfulness and nobility of spirit that often puts us all to shame. Tagore knows and loves Indian village life best of all, and his simple songs will live on the lips of many generations of the country folk long after other memorials have perished.

C. F. ANDREWS

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INTRODUCTION

WHILE I was travelling recently on a world tour undertaken in connexion with the Student Christian Movement, I was surprised and pained to discover what desolating harm had been done to the cause of international good-will by a certain type of literature which has given an entirely one-sided impression of Indian moral life to-day as being altogether decadent and corrupt. The Hindu religion itself has been the centre of the attack. Unfortunately, this wrong done to India has been increased in the West by paragraphs in certain missionary publications of a crude type, setting forward the darker side of Hinduism and Islam with very little appreciation of what is good in those religions.

This one-sided presentation, through the Press and on the platform, continuing year after year, has tended to throw the truth about India out of focus. The *real* India becomes obscured. A false perspective has been given.

While it is happily true that in the missionary sphere great improvement has taken place and the majority of missionaries seek to be fair and impartial, it is also true that there are still controversialists among them who seem unable to resist the opportunity, when they reach their home environments, of carrying on the old, bad method of decrying other religions in a way that Christ Himself would have been the very first to condemn. For His own words

are as clear as possible, that He came not to destroy, but to fulfil.

Not long ago in London a film was to be produced professing to represent a cinema picture of Indian life. This film was regarded as entirely unobjectionable by its missionary producers. But when a copy of the scenario was shown to me, I was able to point out at once certain things that were obviously out of date, and therefore bound to give needless offence to good people who were Hindu by birth. Note was taken of this, and they were immediately omitted. Such an instance as this has been quoted merely to show what precautions are needed where naturally a keen sensitiveness exists. Indian sentiment surely ought to be respected by those whose one desire is to reveal to mankind the spirit of their Master, Jesus Christ.

When I came out to India as a missionary thirty-five years ago this mode of attack on other religions was fairly common. The effort was constantly made to show up the seamy side of things. In still earlier days the habit was even more pronounced. At one time, when I had to make research into early missionary literature for the purpose of writing a book on North India, I was profoundly shocked by the things I read in print. I remember also being given at Delhi, soon after my arrival, a whole series of pamphlets published by a missionary who had been employed at a station not far distant. These contained nothing but a number of bitter attacks upon what were considered to be the vulnerable points in

the armour of Hinduism. Such a form of controversy led on to counter-attacks. Abuse was poured upon the Christian religion in turn. It was something like the modern armaments race, in which more and more destructive weapons are produced till at last open war ensues.

I wish that I could assert with full confidence that all this kind of controversy had been done away with for ever; for it is utterly unchristian. But now and then, especially in the home countries, these objectionable methods are still employed at meetings where there is no one to put forward the other side of the case. The distress and indignation which such practices cause can easily be imagined.

It needs to be added, in order to make clear the change that has taken place, that lately very notable work has been done, under direct missionary auspices, of exactly the opposite kind. Some of the finest gems of Hindu literature, such as the songs of Tukaram, have been edited and translated in such a way as to make them fully appreciated almost for the first time in the West. The works of Nicol Macnicol, Jack Winslow, and J. S. Hoyland are in this respect worthy of note, and also those of Verrier Elwin. Genuine love has been put into their translations, and the publication of these Hindu classics by those who came out to India as missionaries has done much in Europe and America to remove the false impression created by other kinds of literature.

But sadly enough the different Christian denominations, which send out men and women to India,

are scattered and divided. There is no single standard of training and discipline which is universally observed. The National Christian Council of India has sought lately with some success to co-ordinate missionary effort, but much is still being done which cannot be brought under its control. The great Roman Catholic Church, with its high standard of sacrifice and devotion, remains almost entirely apart and aloof. Therefore a deplorable rivalry has taken place, with painfully disintegrating results. The Indian Church has suffered in consequence.

These attacks on Hindu morals have been regarded by Indians themselves as a subtle form of politics whose main ulterior object was to prove that Indians, who have such bad morals, are not ready for self-government. The evil thus begun and carried on through a large number of publications reached its climax in a new book by Miss Mayo, with pictures representing Hinduism at its worst, which the British Government in India very rightly refused to allow to enter the country. Its immediate proscription was a prudent measure taken at a critical juncture; for it would have been certain to have stirred up once more the old bitter recrimination just after it had died down.

It is not that Indians themselves desire either to conceal or condone the things that are wrong in their ancient social and religious organizations. Nothing could possibly exceed the frankness with which they have unreservedly exposed abuses, dragging them forward relentlessly into the light for

scathing rebuke. Nor do they in the very least object to those who have already been proved to be their friends pointing out that which is harmful. Miss Rathbone's book, for instance, on child marriage, called *The Indian Minotaur*,¹ which gave accurate statistics concerning this evil, was welcomed by the All India Women's Conference. But they do object very strongly indeed to people coming from the outside as foreigners, and then after a short cold weather visit going back to the West to exaggerate in glaring colours these evils before the world with no sense of proportion and with no presentation of the other side of the picture. To do this is all the more unfair, as power and prestige are behind these Western writers, while they attack those who have no opportunity of making an effective reply.

To return to my own experience in different parts of the world concerning the wide spread of this abusive, anti-Hindu literature, it came to me, as I have said, with a great shock of surprise to find that this entirely distorted picture of Hinduism was still being widely regarded as authoritative in every country I visited. My surprise was extreme because I had wrongly supposed that such sensational material as this, which had been so hastily collected, would have been discredited long ago. But here was *Mother India* being sold all over the world in a cheap edition, even on railway bookstalls, and having an honoured place in the libraries of private persons. Furthermore, I found that it had been published in

¹ *Child Marriage: The Indian Minotaur* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd.)

different translations in foreign countries. Indeed, so large had been the circulation that even to-day, after all its numerous editions, it appears to be about to start on a new career of sale in the world market. For the volume has taken its place, among the list of "famous authors," in a series of books which are to be retailed at popular prices.

It may be well, therefore, to relate in further detail some of the personal experiences which I have had as to the harm done to India's reputation abroad by such sales. For this fact has to be driven home. More than anything else it has made me feel the need, in the cause of truth, of presenting the other side of the picture. For what is now being offered to the public is often a menace to good-will and friendship between East and West.

(1) In New Zealand I met the Indian Community at Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch, and also the Indian students at Auckland and Dunedin. Among the thoughtful New Zealanders there were many who were deeply interested in India and anxious to do her people full justice. All of these were indignant at the misrepresentations which were still being published. For their own use, in their daily intercourse with other people, there was required some simple and constructive book that might state in a brief compass the real truth about Hindu morals and religion. For they explained to me what difficulty they had in counteracting these scurrilous attacks.

(2) In Fiji, which is near to New Zealand and

where there is a large Indian population, this propaganda had done great harm by stirring up racial prejudice at a time when nothing was more supremely needed than racial good-will and friendship.

(3) In Australia a similar experience awaited me. Indians who were resident in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, and other places spoke of the harm that was being done by this adverse view of India which had recently been created. It has stirred up all the worst prejudices of "White Australia." When I lectured about India in the great cities references were made to the bad effect on the public mind of this kind of literature. Those who were on the side of India in her struggle for self-government asked me on many occasions to give them some reliable account of Indian morals which might undo the evil that had already been done by sensational literature.

(4) When I was in Berlin a German lady brought me an article written in one of the leading newspapers. It was full of cruelly misleading statements. She asked me to contradict it in the same paper, and I did so. Here it was a mere accident that I was present in Berlin at that particular moment. Otherwise the article would have been regarded by most people as authoritative.

(5) When I have been lecturing in Canada and the United States I have been cross-questioned after the lecture was over by those who had read attacks upon Indian morals which had their origin in this form of writing. So many books of the same type have appeared, since *Mother India* reached its

phenomenal circulation, that many erroneous views are now regarded by a vast multitude of people in the West as commonplace truths.

(6) Even in Oxford and Cambridge, Indian students have often come to me and told me about their own difficulty in answering arguments used by their fellow students concerning Indian morals, which have been based on statements made in this continuous series of writings which have no object in view except to degrade India in the eyes of the West.

We cannot simply ignore all this that is going on openly under our very eyes—often with political motives behind it. To do so would be very foolish indeed. There must be provided some simple antidote against these deliberate assaults upon the fair name and honour of India which we are bound to defend.

“We want,” the Indian students have said to me with touching earnestness, “a short and convincing answer put into our hands which we can show to our friends: for we know that the charges now being made are exaggerated and unfair, but we do not know how to contradict them. Cannot you yourself, who know India almost better than we do, write such a book, so that we may give it to our friends to read?”

Considerations such as these have made me take up the task at last, however late in the day. In doing so I have looked back at the notes which I put down long ago, and also at some articles published in Mahatma Gandhi's weekly paper, *Young India*,

which received his own valuable scrutiny. By a bad mistake at the time they were only published in India. Among these I have found some of the material which I needed for the present book. But everything has been revised and much more has been added besides, so that this volume represents in a brief and simple form a constructive reply to this kind of attack on Indian moral character which has continued for several years.

It is true, of course, that the evil already done can never be wholly undone; we can never retrieve the past. But it is often possible to remove false impressions which have just been formed, and when an occasion arises it is surely our duty to do so. There is no danger of increasing the evil, which has been already committed, merely by reviving the subject; for the worst sensation, with all its bitterness, is over. To put the matter concisely, the continual asseveration of these charges against India, which have appeared without any serious contradiction, has made even those who desire to know the truth begin to believe that no answer is possible. This false idea must at all costs be removed, and a true idea of India must be given instead.

For the truth is that the moral foundation of Indian society, which can be traced in all Indian culture and civilization, remains stable and secure through the ages. It rests upon the immemorial village tradition, which is one of the permanent things in a world of constant change. It is this basis which those who have criticized India so harshly

from the outside have never taken the trouble to understand.

One argument has been brought forward by those who have defended this kind of sensational literature which may be dismissed at once. It is asserted that, in spite of all its gross exaggeration, such writings have performed a public service by forcing the attention of the world upon some deep-seated evils in Hindu life. In this connexion an analogy has been drawn between *Mother India* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. For the latter book, it is stated, though giving a one-sided picture of the old slave days in the Southern States, dealt a mortal blow at the cruel wrong of slavery itself. It has even been suggested that the passing of the Sarda Act, raising the age of marriage in India, was indirectly due to the storm of protest aroused by *Mother India* throughout the whole civilized world.

But the two examples are not analogous. For Miss Mayo's experience of India was shallow. She was writing about a foreign country in which she had spent only a few months. Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, on the other hand, was born in the United States and had lived there all her life. She had the right to speak out. Furthermore, later history has shown that where the picture drawn in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was highly exaggerated it did mischief. The wound inflicted on the Southern States has not yet been fully healed.

While I have been writing I have taken my examples chiefly from *Mother India*, because it has had a world-wide circulation. It has thus become

the head and front of all the offending. But my wish has been to go farther, and to help those who have not even heard Miss Mayo's name to understand and love India better. Nothing can be more important at the present time than intelligent appreciation and understanding. We have had far too much contempt in the West for races that are different from our own. Conquest and domination have created a "colour prejudice" which goes far deeper down into our subconsciousness than we are wont to imagine. We may not, as educated people, hold its cruder forms of stupid arrogance and vulgar abuse, but we should be very unwise if we regarded ourselves as rising altogether above it. Yet the subtle mischief, which this one-sided condemnation of India has often done, has been to stir up within us this superiority complex and rekindle it into a flame; and this has happened just at a time when the one way forward to sanity in human affairs is to determine that as we would wish the East to appreciate us, so ought we to seek with all our hearts to appreciate the East. Surely this is the Golden Rule which alone can bring back a genuine peace to mankind.

Let me repeat once more the thought that I have expressed in the Preface. The world in our own generation appears to be sinking back into the chaos of bitter hatred and party strife. It is a time, therefore, when every single word of good-will between the nations sincerely uttered may be of priceless value. The time is short and the odds against us are great. But the truth is on our side, and in the end it will prevail.

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