

MODERN INDIA AND THE WEST

A STUDY OF THE INTERACTION
OF THEIR CIVILIZATIONS

Edited by

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With a foreword by

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FOREWORD

HOW far the impact of one great civilization upon another has advanced or retarded the progress of mankind must usually be a matter for the historian to assess in after-centuries, when much of the evidence for his verdict has been destroyed. Rarely can it be given to him to watch the process actually at work and to weigh its value against facts abundant, patent, and uncontroverted. To-day he has that opportunity. He can study the pressure of the restless, sceptical civilization of the West upon the static, contemplative civilization of the East. To that study this volume is devoted. The particular case of India has been chosen, not only because we have special knowledge of it, but also because India has reached a point at which she may soon have to decide for herself how far the impact of western civilization is to carry her.

In a sense the metaphor of an impact is inappropriate to India. There has been nothing, or very little, of a clash between her own ancient culture and the alien culture imported from the West; no violent conflict of ideas or of methods; no forcible replacement of one social system by another. The more fitting metaphor would be that of a stream of new thought and practice flowing into the sea of India's traditions and life. We can trace, for a time at least, the distinctive colour of the river water spreading out over the surface of the sea; but, as we often have cause to reflect in India, how little can we tell of its influence in the ocean depths beneath. The movement of western civilization into India has been slow and peaceful penetration.

It must always be a matter of difficulty to distinguish between the changes imposed, with however benevolent an intention, by an alien government upon a subject people, and the free acceptance by the people of the standards which the alien government has brought with it. In the matter of law and justice, for example, there are certain tenets of British jurisprudence, certain offences in the penal code, to which Indian opinion is not yet wholly reconciled; but the great bulk of both the civil and the criminal law which the British government has enacted commands the general intellectual assent of the people, the more so as their indigenous family law has been respected and preserved. In many of the regions of art and literature India has paid western culture the compliment of imitation; the poetry of Toru Dutt and Mrs. Naidu will at once occur to mind as brilliant examples. Music, however, remains a striking exception: to the Indian ear European music has as little attraction as Indian music, with its 'melody untouched by harmony' and its subtle cross-rhythm and quarter-

tones, has for the ordinary European. But, when we come to the so-called 'nation-building' services, and especially education, India has hastened to meet them with zealous approval in theory, and increasingly also in practice. On the whole it may be said with confidence that, if European civilization has met with resistance at times and in some of its phases, its general *ethos* has been accepted with warmth, and when hostility is shown to its practices, the declared reason is usually that they fall so far short of its precepts.

Of all the channels through which western influences flow into Indian life, education is the chief. On no Indian topic has controversy raged so long and acutely as on the policy of the British government in replacing the old indigenous systems of teaching by definitely western methods, and particularly in giving the English language prominence at the secondary stage and dominance at the university stage as the medium of instruction. Upon the wisdom or unwisdom of this policy time alone can return the verdict; but the facts to-day are clear. On the one hand the policy has checked the spontaneous processes of the intellectual genius of the people. So far, it is true, as scientific development is concerned, this criticism would hardly apply, if only because no scientific vocabulary exists in any of the Indian vernaculars. But in other realms of thought—literature, history, philosophy—the teaching of English has deflected the Indian mind from the traditional lines of culture which an advanced vernacular education might have encouraged.

That is one side of the shield. The other is that the widespread knowledge of the English language and use of English text-books has drawn the Indian mind into an entirely new line of development. Along that line lie utterly novel conceptions: freedom of speech and the pen, criticism of authority, the questioning of accepted dogmas, the insistence on the rights of man as opposed to his duties. The growing familiarity with these has brought a new spirit into Indian life, the stirrings of scepticism instead of a stagnant authoritarianism, a glimmering if not the forerunner of what we in Europe call democracy.

Here emerges the crucial problem of the two civilizations. All the western doctrines of freedom and progress are eagerly embraced by the great majority of Indians who have made English their common language; but how will this new current in the end affect the unfathomed depths of Hindu and Muslim life? Will there be a blend? or will the East slowly assimilate and absorb what comes from the West? or will the western tincture spread and produce, as it were, a chemical transformation? Although the reformers to-day are a small proportion of the Indian people, they

are vigorous, they have leaders of marked ability, and they hold the monopoly of swaying the masses and creating public opinion. As the present system of education broadens out, so will their power, unless and until, as so often in history, a counter-reformation boils up and checks it. This again is a contingency on which prophecy would be vain; but the influences unfriendly to democratic reforms are far from negligible. They are rooted in philosophies and antipathies which are sketched in Chapters IX and XI of this work with a reticence that does not conceal their durable hold upon the minds of the multitude.

When, if ever, this conflict arises, it will set its seal upon the value or otherwise of what the West has brought to India. The momentous political changes which are now taking place may bring it nearer. On the other hand, if the new political powers which the Indian reformer is acquiring are used with wisdom and tolerance, the conflict may never come. This then, it would seem, is the searching test that may in the near future be applied to the work of western civilization in the East. Has it, by its teaching and its example, given India the will and the power to use unfamiliar political institutions for the creation of a civic sense, the promotion of national unity, and the greater happiness of the people? If it has done this, we may safely anticipate that the verdict of history will be favourable.

Although reflections on political issues naturally present themselves, especially at the present juncture, to the mind of the reader, he will find no polemic in these chapters. They were planned in the determination to present a thoroughly objective study of the subject; and not the least of the editor's successes is the firmness with which this attitude has been maintained amid the enthusiasms that might easily have been displayed. The design of the book was to secure for each of the most prominent phases of civilized life an author with special knowledge of its manifestations in India. There have been some disappointments, inevitable at a time like the present. There are a few omissions; the chapter on Indian literature, for example, has been confined to six of the leading vernaculars in view of the difficulty of choice if the field had been widened. Taken as a whole, however, the symposium is authoritative and comprehensive; and the co-operation of British and Indian writers has been particularly happy. For various causes a quite disproportionate share of the research and writing has fallen on the editor; and it would not be easy to estimate too highly Mr. O'Malley's work, both in guiding his contributors and in the long and valuable chapters which he has himself provided; his two opening chapters and his final chapter form a masterly *aperçu* of the whole Indian situation.

The objects of this study have been already mentioned. There is yet another; more than fifty years ago Dr. Jowett said:

'Englishmen cannot govern a people without understanding it, and the understanding of it must be gained through a knowledge of its languages, its literature, its institutions, its customs, its poetry and mythology, its land and agriculture.'

Since then change has been busy; but the necessity for our understanding India remains; to-day indeed it is probably greater than ever before; and if this book does something to further the mutual comprehension of India and England, it will serve one of the main purposes of Chatham House, under whose aegis it is published.

MESTON

While this book was in the press, Mr. O'Malley passed away, after a wearing illness. He had given his best to it through much ill health, and it will always be a regret to his many friends that he did not live to see it complete.

M.

PREFACE

THE object of this work is to give a synopsis of the nature, extent, and effects of the influence which western civilization has had upon the life and thought of India since the beginning of the sixteenth century, to show what have been the reactions of different classes at different times and how they have been expressed in word and deed, and to trace the far smaller influence which India has had upon the West. It is a co-operative survey, to which a number of writers have contributed. The work has been conducted under the direction of a special committee of the Royal Institute of International Affairs and under the immediate supervision of a sub-committee, but the opinions expressed are those of the writers themselves.

In the survey of India which he gave in *India in 1880*, Sir Richard Temple drew attention to the changes which had already been effected by the plastic touch of western civilization. The face of the country and its economic organization were undergoing modification; the religious ideas, the moral sentiments, the social habits of many classes of the people were changing fast. So too Lord Ripon observed in 1882 that no one who watched the signs of the times in India with even moderate care could doubt that it had entered upon a period of change. The spread of education, the influence of a free Press, the substitution of legal for discretionary administration, the progress of railways, telegraphs, &c., the easier communication with Europe, and the more ready influx of European ideas were beginning to produce a marked effect. New ideas were springing up; new aspirations were being called forth. A movement, he said, had begun which would advance with greater rapidity and force every year. Since then the rapid advance of western civilization has brought new forces to bear on the country, and India has been subject to the levelling ideas of a modern democratic nation. During the present century the number and significance of the changes which have taken place are perhaps greater than in any previous generation. To many it seems that India has been taken in tow by the West and is going fast ahead in its wake, and there is a tendency to overlook or minimize the constants which persist in spite of change. On the other hand there are others who are impressed by the strong reactions against western influences and are inclined to argue *plus ça change*,

plus c'est la même chose. There are still many, especially those of an older generation, with whom the idea of the unchanging East is almost an article of faith. Every endeavour has been made to keep an even balance between the two views and to give a just estimate of the evolution which has taken place and of the forces which have prevented it going further.

L. S. S. O'M.

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¹ It is with great regret that we record the death of Sir Benjamin Lindsay during the progress of the work.

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