

Five Hundred Years of Fear and Love

Partha Chatterjee

Vasco da Gama's arrival in Calicut in 1498 and all those processes of great consequence in the subsequent centuries which this event is supposed to have inaugurated constitute a veritable ideological minefield. Of course, there are certain safe routes through the field that have, been charted and well traversed, at least since the era of decolonisation in the middle of the 20th century. Those who wish to play it safe speak of universal humanity and brotherhood, of the falsity of the distinctions between east and west, of history as indubitable progress from backwardness to modernity, of universal access to the benefits of modern science and technology and, in more recent years, of unfettered entry into the dreamland of universal consumption in the millennium of globalisation. Not wishing to tread this safe path, the author in this paper turns to some of the political and moral issues posed by the history of relations between Europe and south Asia in the last five hundred years.

I

WHEN Vasco da Gama arrived at the Malabar coast in 1498 with four relatively small vessels, he was, it is traditionally said, looking for Christians and spices¹. The latter motive seems obvious to us now, from all that we know of the importance of trade in the European search for sea routes and new continents in the so-called age of discovery. Indeed, soon after the Cape route to Asia was opened up, the composition of the return cargo to Lisbon in the early years of the 16th century shows the overwhelming dominance of items such as pepper, ginger, cinnamon and cloves, although this composition was to change fairly soon.¹ Regarding the other objective of the visit, however, we may well wonder why anyone should accept the hazards of sailing across uncharted and dangerous seas to seek out Christians in India. Here, we have to remind ourselves of the ideological world inhabited by men like Gama. Our current ideas that associate European expansion with rational economic activity and modern statecraft gloss over the fact that the connection only emerged gradually during the course of the 500 years we are talking about and that it does not hold for the early part of this period in the same way that it might for the later. As a matter of fact, an important motive for the Portuguese expeditions to India was shaped by the legends and rumours concerning a certain Prester John, a Christian ruler supposedly living somewhere in the orient, who was said to be keen to join forces with the kings of Europe in their crusade against Islam. In an atmosphere charged with memories of the recent 'reconquest' of the Iberian peninsula from the hands of the so-called Moors and a strategic situation in which Muslim rulers and traders along the African, Arabian and Persian coasts were seen as the principal hurdles to European expansion into the Indian Ocean region, it should be understandable why the prospect of finding a Christian ally in the east seemed so compelling to the ruling groups in Lisbon. Of course, recent historians have warned us that the motives of trade and

religion did not operate in the same manner or with the same force in all influential sections of the Portuguese court and that there is a much more complex political story of how Gama was finally chosen to lead the expedition to India.- Nevertheless, the two motives do explain many curious aspects of what happened in the course of the argonaut's journey.

Vasco da Gama's ships anchored off the coast of Calicut on Sunday, May 20, 1498. The first Portuguese went ashore the next day and reported thus:

This city of Calcut is of Christians, who are dark men, and some of them go about with large beards, and long hair on the head, and others have shaven heads, and still others cropped. And they have certain topknots on their crowns, as a sign that they are Christians, and moustaches with their beards* And they have their ears pierced, and in the holes they wear much gold, and they walk about naked from the waist up, and below they wear certain very delicate cotton-cloths.

Over the next few days, the Portuguese obviously became a great curiosity in town since they were followed by large crowds of people including women and children. They saw a large building which they thought was a church, It had a large tank beside it and a pillar at its entrance with the figure of a bird on it. Small bells hung from the doorway which led into an inner chamber inside which, the visitors reported, "was a small image which they [the locals] said was Our Lady". The Portuguese were not allowed entry into the inner chamber and had to say their prayers from the outside after which some men wearing cords of thread from their shoulders sprinkled them with holy water and a white ash which, the visitors noticed, "the Christians of this land have the habit of putting on their foreheads, and bodies, and around the neck and along their upper arms", The report mentions that Vasco da Gama took the ash offered to him but managed to avoid putting it on,³

I relate this story in order to bring up a question that is inextricably connected with relations between Europe and India in the

last five centuries - that of cultural miscognition. In this case the error is blatant, indeed ridiculously so. The explanation, too, is not far to seek. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Gama's most recent biographer, tells us, the Portuguese were expecting to meet oriental Christians whose practices were different from their own, "Since they were convinced that they were in the land of some sort of deviant Christians, anything that was not explicitly Islamic appeared, residually, to be Christian".⁴ As contacts became more regular and intimate over the succeeding centuries, there would, of course, be a huge accumulation of European knowledge about India. Indeed, from the age of enlightenment onwards, European scholars and administrators would claim a distinctly privileged position as the authoritative scientific interpreters of information on the natural resources and social life of India. Needless to say, the new experts would not make the same sort of errors as the first Portuguese visitors.

And yet, the question is still asked; how have the preconceived and unexamined cultural assumptions of Europeans shaped and perhaps distorted even the supposedly scientific understanding of India in the modern disciplines of social knowledge? To pursue the example provided by the report on the first Portuguese visit to Calicut, although no informed person today will make the mistake of identifying as Christian priests wearing white ash on their foreheads and sacred threads around their torsos, yet what is the validity of supposing that what those men represented was a religion? Could it be merely a cultural prejudice of enlightened Europe to suppose that religion is a cultural universal? Why do we assume that all human societies, or at any rate societies with a certain degree of civilisational complexity, must have something that answers to the concept 'religion'?⁵ The matter is more serious than a mere error in identification. It is possible for us to laugh at the mistake made by Vasco da Gama's men. What would we say if it turns out that after being educated for a few generations in the modern scientific

disciplines/the descendants of the men with sacred threads now go about their business imbued by the sincere conviction that what they have, or indeed must have, is a religion? The problem is central to the complexities of the relations between Europe and India, and we will have occasion to return to it later.

How did Indians react to their encounter with the first European visitors across the seas? I am not a historian of that period and it is possible that there exist sources that answer that question. The secondary literature I have seen, however, appears to be based entirely on the Portuguese accounts. What can be inferred from them is that the visitors were greeted at first with warmth mixed curiosity, followed by growing caution as the Portuguese, racked by the fear of walking into some heinous oriental trap, began to act with great suspicion and obstinacy, and culminating in a sense of outrage when they began to take captives and bombard the shores and other vessels. It must have taken some time for the truth to sink in that a new ear had dawned over the Indian seas - one that a recent historian has rather delicately named the era of 'hostile trade'.⁶ K N Chaudhuri sums up the change as follows: "...the arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean abruptly ended the system of peaceful oceanic navigation that was such a marked feature of the region.,The importation by the Portuguese of the Mediterranean style of trade and warfare, by land and sea, was a violation of the agreed conventions and certainly a new experience."¹⁷

Within a decade of Vasco da Gama's first visit, the Portuguese were seeking to exercise by force some sort of monopoly over the Indian Ocean trade and compelling others to navigate only with their permission/ By the 1580s, Zain al-Din Ma' bari was writing at length about the "infamous deeds" of the Portuguese which had brought ruin upon Malabari society - the burning of cities and mosques, the interruption of the 'hajj' and the killing of nobles and learned men. His response was to inspire the Muslims of Malabar to launch a 'jihad' against these "vile and disgusting infidels", " Moving to the eastern end of India's coastline along the Bay of Bengal, were the Portuguese presence was more prominent in the form of private traders and adventurers, two words entered the Bengali language as popular synonyms for sea pirate - 'harmad' (from 'armada') and 'bombete' (from 'bombardier'). Summing up the reactions in that part of India to the Portuguese arrival, a nationalist historian from Bengal writes; "With a strange and perverse consistency, the Portuguese continued to offend the susceptibilities of a civilised society and a cultured court by their failure to conform to the higher standard of international conduct prevailing in India."¹⁰

The question might be asked; How did Europeans justify the continued violent disruption, well into the 17th century, of a region of relatively peaceful maritime trade when in Europe itself the effort was already on to secure some sort of agreed law of the seas? The answer is supplied by Joao de Barros, a Portuguese scholar. Writing in 1552, he states quite clearly:

For even though there does exist a common law which allows all navigators to sail the seas freely...this law applies only to the whole of Europe and its Christian inhabitants, who have been placed within the fold of the Church of Rome by baptism and by faith, and who are also governed by Roman law in their polity,.. But as regards Muslims and Heathens, who are outside the law of Jesus Christ, ...if these are condemned in their souls, being the principal part of them, their bodies which are animated by those souls cannot plead the privileges of our laws, since the adherents of those creeds are not members of the evangelical congregation, even though they may be our neighbours as rational beings and though they may live to be converted to the true faith."

Today, it might seem that these words were penned by some fanatical medieval warmonger, but the historian Charles Boxer assures us that Barros was a humanist and a distinguished member of the somewhat aborted Portuguese renaissance of the 16th century.¹ - I do not find this either strange or contradictory. Rather, I see in this justification of aggressive overseas expansion an early example of a structure of argument produced by what I have elsewhere called "the rule of colonial difference".¹³ This occurs when a normative proposition of supposedly universal validity (and many such propositions would be asserted in the centuries separating us from the early Portuguese expeditions) is held not to apply to the colony on account of some inherent moral deficiency in the latter. Thus, even as the rights of man would be declared in the revolutionary assemblies of Paris in 1789, the revolt in Saint Domingue (now Haiti) would be put down on the ground that those rights could not apply to black slaves. John Stuart Mill would set forth with great eloquence and precision his arguments establishing representative government as the best possible government, but would immediately add that this did not hold for India. The exception would not detract from the universality of the proposition; on the contrary, by specifying the norm by which universal humanness was to be recognised, it would strengthen its moral force. In the case of the Portuguese expedition, the norm was given by religion, Later, it would be supplied by biological theories of racial character or historical theories of civilisational achievement or socio-economic theories of institutional development. In each case, the

colony would be made the frontier of the moral universe of normal humanity; beyond it, universal norms could be held in abeyance,

I have referred earlier to the ideological world of the men of early Portuguese expeditions. There is a common understanding which treats this world as marked more by Europe's medieval tradition of religious bigotry than its modern ethic of rational innovation and profitmaking. Accordingly, a distinction is made between the early phase of European overseas expansion, characterised by the banditry, intolerance and cruelty of the Portuguese who were unable, because of their backwardness, to establish a large and durable empire in the east, and a later phase of Dutch, English and French colonialism whose lasting effects, distributed over 200 years, were supposedly the spread of capitalism, technological progress and modern governance Sanjay Subrahmanyam has recently argued against this proposition.¹⁴ If cultural backwardness was responsible for the Portuguese failure to establish extensive colonies in Asia, then how were the same Portuguese in the same period able to do so in the Americas? If they came up against superior resistance from the local powers in India, then surely, what they lacked was not some mysterious ethic of rational organisation and technical innovation but rather the ability to mobilise a sufficient force of arms.

The point needs stressing because it constitutes one more element of continuity in the history of the European presence in south Asia in the last five centuries. Whether in its early phase or later, armed force has always been a constitutive element of that presence. It was not the only element, but it was a foundational and necessary part of European colonialism in India. There had been many earlier states in India founded on conquest, but none had been held as a colony. When those empires collapsed, there was no 'decolonisation' as happened in the middle of the 20th century. There is thus some historical significance to the fact that when the last European colony on Indian soil was brought down in Goa in 1961, it needed a mobilisation of armed force, albeit a rather small one by the standards of our war-besotted century. I do not see the terror and violence of the early Portuguese expeditions as a medieval hangover soon to be obliterated by civilised trade and modern education. I see it as spelling out in somewhat coarse and brutal terms a condition of Europe's dominance in the modern world.

II

Despite attempts from time to time to press for larger territorial acquisitions, allegedly on the model of the Spanish in America, the Portuguese presence in India remained confined mainly to its power over the sea

routes, exercised from a few fortified centres on the coasts of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Already by the 1540s, historians tell us, there was a 'crisis' in the Portuguese enterprise in India. The second half of the 16th century saw the rise and consolidation of a great territorial empire - that of the Mughals - which, though based primarily on an agrarian economy, was by no means uninterested in maritime trade. Following the incorporation of Gujarat and Bengal into the empire, the Mughals became an impassable barrier to Portuguese ambitions which were now reduced to the fanciful hope that the Jesuit priests invited to the Agra court might succeed in converting emperor Akbar to Christianity. Soon, even the Portuguese dominance over the seas was threatened by the entry of the Dutch and the English chartered companies. In the 1660s, the Dutch managed to oust the Portuguese from their base in Sri Lanka and from Cochin and Cannanore and to establish themselves as the dominant power on the Indian seas. From this time onwards, the story of Europe in India is one of maritime rivalry between the European powers, their involvement in local politics and the founding in the mid-18th century of the British Indian empire.

We all know this story, because it has been told many times, although recent historians have raised some new questions about it. The imperialist version of the familiar story is one in which the English, initially interested in nothing more than a fair chance to profit from trade, almost accidentally get embroiled in the intrigues of the Indian rulers and their decadent courts and end up having to take up the responsibility of establishing justice and the rule of law. What they build is a new order characterised by a modern economy and the institutions of modern governance. In the nationalist version of the same story, the English capture power from the Indian rulers by force and trickery, destroy the old institutions of economic production and social order and, by deepening the processes of colonial exploitation, perpetuate poverty and close off the possibilities of industrial development. Recent historians such as Burton Stein, Muzaffar Alam, Sanjay Suhrahmanyam and Chris Bayly among others have, first of all questioned the assumption of a general decline in the Indian economy and polity in the 18th century. They argue that, on the contrary, this was a period of considerable economic dynamism with new rights, new sources of capital, new methods of revenue extraction, increased use of money and intensification of control over labour. Second, there arose at this time several regional regimes that were militarist, pursuing mercantilist policies that depended greatly on foreign trade and advanced banking methods. Thirdly already by the 17th century, the European trading companies were

important players in the politics surrounding these regional economies because of their control over the flow of bullion from abroad. Fourth, the East India Company was able to overpower these regional kingdoms in the 18th century because of its dominance over the sea routes and its superior ability to finance warfare. Fifth, following its assumption of power, the English company also inherited the institutions and practices on which the earlier regimes were based and thus in effect became one more indigenous regime; in the words of Chris Bayly, "the Company became an Asian merchant, an Asian ruler and an Asian revenue-farmer".¹⁵ In short, or so these historians have argued, the radical break that is supposed to characterise the advent of British rule is overstated; there was more continuity than discontinuity in the 18th-century transition.¹⁶

I do not wish to enter the empirical details of this debate here. But I do want to argue that there is reason to disagree with this revisionist suggestion in one very important sense. However, before I can make that argument, I need to bring into my story one more figure from 16th century Europe, a person who was exactly the same age as Vasco da Gama but who, as far as we know, had nothing at all to do with India.¹⁷

III

Niccolo Machiavelli, like Vasco da Gama, was born in 1469. In 1513, when Afonso de Albuquerque was consolidating the empire in India and Gama was whiling away his so-called 'wilderness years'¹ somewhere near the Spanish-Portuguese border, the Florentine was writing a manual of statecraft for his prince. In it, among many other topics that would bring him both acclaim and notoriety for several centuries, Machiavelli considered the question; is it better for the prince to be loved more than feared or feared more than loved? His answer was:

...one ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two has to be wanting. For it may be said of men in general that... as long as you benefit them, they are entirely yours... [But] men have less scruple in offending one who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared; for love is held by a chain of obligation which, men being selfish, is broken whenever it serves their purpose; but fear is maintained by a dread of punishment which never fails.

Still, a prince should make himself feared in such a way that if he does not gain love, he at any rate avoids hatred; for fear and the absence of hatred may well go together... I conclude, therefore, with regard to being feared and loved, that men love at their own free will, but fear at the will of the prince* and that a wise prince must rely on what is in his power and not on what is in the power of others...¹⁸

The above advice is, of course, part of an analysis by Machiavelli of the strategy and techniques of power whose relevance to the development of the state in post-renaissance Europe has been the subject of much controversy. One of the most perceptive readings of these manuals of statecraft, some Machiavellian and others avowedly anti-Machiavellian, appearing in Europe between the 16th and 18th centuries has been proposed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault.¹⁹ He argues that whereas the ostensible purpose of these texts was to give advice to the sovereign on how to retain possession over his territory, there is a completely different concern that also animates these discussions - which is to develop an art of government. The latter is not about sovereignty over territory, but rather about the proper disposition of people and things to produce a range of desired effects. Foucault shows how the notion of 'economy', originating in the idea of the proper management of the household, begins to permeate the discussions on government, and how it remains hamstrung by the limited model of the family until there occurs, in the political economy of the early 19th century, the rise of the concept of population. Population emerges "as a descriptive and empirical category, as distinct from the moral idea of rights-bearing citizens who share in the popular sovereignty that is supposed to be the basis of the new notion of the legitimate state. The growing knowledge about populations revealed their characteristic features and regularities - the aggregate patterns of births and deaths, of cycles of growth and scarcity, of the movements of labour and wealth, and above all of the ways in which by intervening at one or more of these points, 'policy' or the art of government could produce a specific constellation of economic effects, Population gradually became 'the ultimate end of government' - its welfare, its improvement » and these were to be brought about by acting upon that population, by inducing it through suitable policies to behave according to its own needs and proclivities and yet to produce in the aggregate the desired effects.

Foucault has traced the genealogy of the modern art of government to the practices of the Christian pastor in Europe, looking after the spiritual and material wellbeing of his flock by attending to the minute details of its everyday and even intimate lives. This 'pastoral power', if one judges it by Machiavelli's terms, is more about love than about fear. It is possible, I am sure, to find similar ideas about a ruler being loved by his subjects in many of the traditions, whether Hindu or Buddhist or Islamic, of paternalist kingship circulating in south Asia over centuries. But these genealogical antecedents must be distinguished from the forms that would be elaborated in Europe from the early

19th century into the modern governmental regimes that Foucault describes. And it is in this context that I wish to advance the hypothesis that in the elaboration of the modern art of government - of the management of populations by policy rather than of the representation of the sovereignty of citizens - Europe's colonial theatres in Asia and later Africa were at least as important as the metropolitan territories themselves as sites of experimentation and theorising. The reconstituted idea of pastoral power was, I strongly believe, a persistent theme in modern Europe's colonial project, and most exemplarily so in the case of British rule in India. Which is why I will make the argument that what is new about the English rulers of India, as distinct from earlier indigenous regimes, is their need, already apparent from the late 18th century, to be loved by their alien Indian subjects.

This then is the second part of my story about Europe and south Asia in the last 500 years. The first part was about fear-domination by the exercise of superior force, I have insisted that this is an element that does not disappear from the relationship between Europe and south Asia during the entire period, even after the supposedly more rational and modern forms of power are introduced by the British. The new element - love - comes in with British rule. It is not born in India, which is why it will not be found if one looks for it in the archives of 18th century Indian history. Its genealogy lies in certain radically new ways of thinking about society and power in late 18th century Europe. It affects India because the new imperial project is henceforth to be thought out in European terms, and very often in Europe itself. Of course, what is projected is not always what comes about, which is why it seems to the historian of colonial rule that the grand designs of European statesmen and philosophers were ultimately irrelevant because what actually happened in India carried the unmistakable stamp of native artifice - the final products were makeshift, ramshackle and imperfect. I read this to mean that whereas the desire to be loved by the colonised always remained the coveted moral goal of the colonial project, other less exalted norms were accepted in the interim - "if [the prince]", to recall Machiavelli, "does not gain love, he at any rate avoids hatred". Using Gramscian language, we can say with Ranajit Guha that what was built by the colonial power was a "spurious hegemony".²⁰ Both the desire for hegemony and its spurious substitute are important for understanding colonial history. Without them, we would not know why British rule in India, unlike any of its indigenous precursors, was a "dominance without hegemony": no earlier regime had had the need to think of the moral foundation of its

rule as hegemonic in this sense. Without them, once again, we would not discover another secret - why we, the once colonised, continue to this day to have an apparently insatiable need to love Europe.

IV

The story of love can be told from the late 18th century - from William Jones and the Asiatic Society and the European discovery of the greatness of Indian civilisation. To love India and to be loved by Indians, one had first to know India. But I would say the story actually begins at a much more mundane level with the surveys of land revenue and economic products and of the characteristics of the population. 'Statistics', we know, literally means 'the science of the state', and already by the turn of the century, the word is being used in colonial India to describe the systematic collection of data on diverse subjects that might be of interest to the state. Strange as it may sound, we could say that statistics was a new language of love between ruler and ruled, and I know of few more remarkable tomes of love than the gigantic series of ethnographic-statistical surveys of the districts of eastern India carried out in the early 19th century by Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, child of the Scottish enlightenment, physician, botanist and intrepid traveller. He was one of the first of a series of British scholar-administrators who built up the massive edifice of official knowledge about India which still remains one of the most valuable archives for historical scholarship.

If to love was to know, then to be loved one had to do good to one's subjects: "if you benefit them", said Machiavelli, "they are entirely yours". Even William Jones, who was in love with the imaginative world of the Orient, thought of his professional work in the Indian law courts as "doing very great and extensive good to many millions of native Indians who look up to me not as their judge only, but as their legislator".²¹ The most common term used in British India to describe this work of benefiting the population was 'Improvement'. It occurs, as Ranajit Guha described in his first book, from as early as the debates over the permanent settlement' of the land in Bengal:²² indeed, by Guha's count, the word, 'improve' occurs as many as 19 times in the two brief minutes written by Cornwallis on this subject in 1789 and 1790.²³ Again, William Jones, had no doubts about the significance of his work of compiling the laws of India; he declared; 'The natives are charmed with the work, and the idea of making their slavery lighter, by giving them their own laws, is more flattering to me than the thanks of the king [of England], which have been transmitted to me.'²⁴ From the time of Jones and Cornwallis, for the next 150 years, cutting across many policy changes

from zamindari to ryotwari to utilitarianism to liberal reform to welfarism, it would become a commonplace of colonial rhetoric to assert that the British were in India to improve it, to civilise it, to make it fit for the modern world, to give it the rule of law and the railways, Shakespeare and modern science, hospitals and parliaments, until in the end, with an almost ridiculous twist of historical irony, it would be declared that the British had been here to make Indians fit for self-government, which is to say that the latter had first to be robbed of their autonomy in order to qualify to receive it back from the robbers,

What about Indians? Did they return the love their new masters so generously showered on them? For the sake of simplicity, I will divide Indians into two sections, although, as I will also indicate, the matter was more complicated than that. One section consisted of those who collaborated. It is obvious, even though some historians still find it necessary to stress this obvious fact with monotonous regularity, that a handful of British officials and soldiers could not have ruled India for almost 200 years if Indians, indeed many Indians, had not collaborated. Who were they? In the early period of the East India Company's rise to power, we know of Indian princes and nobles and merchants who sided with the English against other Indian princes and nobles and merchants. We must regard these alliances as situated within a military-diplomatic context - they were strategic relations whose logic Machiavelli would have recognised instantly, for they were imbued with no other sentiment than calculations of self-interest. By the 1830s, when British power was virtually paramount in the subcontinent, these classes were left with little choice except to collaborate or perish. This was demonstrated with savage ruthlessness in the putting down of the revolt of 1857. The landed and merchant collaborators of the late colonial empire, despite their often exaggerated fondness for the European accoutrements of status, were abject in their political subservience, and would make themselves even more ridiculous by becoming increasingly irrelevant to the new forms of political power emerging within the anti-colonial movement. For this group of collaborators, certainly, it would be absurd to say that they loved the British 'out of their own free will.'

There was another group, however, of those who collaborated. This is a group about which a great deal has been written, not the least by its members themselves. I am referring of course, to the new Indian middle classes, the new literati or intelligentsia, or whatever else one wishes to call it. A long line of historical scholarship has identified the introduction of English education in India as the crucial process that created this class,

instilled in it the values of European modernity, secured the translation of those values into the vernaculars and thus produced the movements of modern nationalism that would in the end claim self-government for Indians. Needless to say, this argument ties up neatly with the colonial view that it was British rule itself that prepared the ground for Indian independence. But strangely enough, or if we think carefully, perhaps not so strangely, this is also the running theme of a long tradition of liberal nationalist historiography in India. It is only in the last two decades that a serious attempt has been made in the academic historiography in India. It is only in the last two decades that a serious attempt has been made in the academic historiography of south Asia to question the assumed connection between English education, the rise of the middle classes and the anti-colonial movements. But this is a debate that is still on, and I myself have been a participant in it. To avoid repeating myself, therefore, I will approach this subject of the Indian middle classes and their collaborative role by looking at a relatively less noticed body of literature - the writings of Indian visitors to Europe. This may also set up a useful contrast with the account of the first Portuguese visitors to India with which I began this talk.

Starting with the celebrated visit of Rammohan Roy to England in 1831. many members of the new Indian intelligentsia, some illustrious and others relatively inconspicuous, visited Europe in the 19th century. Many of them wrote travelogues meant to inform and educate their compatriots about Europe as they had seen it. I will make a few observations here about travellers from Bengal with whose writings I have some familiarity. -" But before that, let me refer to a couple of travelogues by Indian visitors to England in the 18th century - members of an older literati entirely unschooled in the ways of the European intellectual world.

Mirza Shaikh Ihtisamuddin went to England with a group of emissaries sent by the Mughal emperor Shah Alam to the English king in 1765 by which time the East India Company had firmly established its political hold over Bengal. Ihtisamuddin stayed in England for three years and, several years after his return to Bengal, wrote an account of his travels. -" At the turn of the century, Mirza Abu Talib of Lucknow visited Europe between 1799 and 1803 and also wrote about his visit.²⁷ Neither knew English nor any European language when he left for England; neither had a prior mental map imprinted in his mind telling him how England ought to be seen. I say this because the travellers of the 19th century would have a completely different orientation both to their visits and to the way they described them.

What is striking about the descriptions by Ihtisamuddin and Abu Talib of the 'wonders and curiosities.' they encountered during their travels is their passion to find out how things were made and how they worked, Ihtisamuddin starts with a series of detailed descriptions of how the direction and speed of a ship is regulated, how the compass is made and functions, how a logbook is maintained, how the sails are put up and down, how different kinds of winds are negotiated, all the time making comparisons with how things were done on Indian boats, "The people of England are extremely skilled in the art of sailing and work very hard to improve their skills even further."²⁸ In London, he was greatly interested in how the wooden ceilings of houses were constructed, how piped water was supplied, what sort of plants he saw in the botanical gardens, the stuffed animals and fish displayed in the museum and the collection of Arabic, Persian and Turkish books in an Oxford college where, incidentally, he met a certain Mr Jones who was aiming to go to India as a judge and who sought his help in reading some difficult Persian manuscripts, (Indeed, Ihtisamuddin even suggests that his translations were later used by the Oxford scholar, who was, needless to say, our familiar William Jones, to write a book from which he made a lot of money.) Both Ihtisamuddin and Abu Talib were appreciative of many wonderful things that the English were capable of making or doing, but nowhere do they give the impression that these wonderful things might be examples of a culture or civilisation that had attained a superior level of perfection. Indeed, neither of our travellers were much persuaded by theoretical explanations, When Abu Talib's ship was approaching the Car Nicobar islands in the Bay of Bengal, he was mystified by the fact that he could see vegetation in the horizon but no land. The captain of the ship tried to explain to him the spherical surface of the sea and the properties of refraction of light through water and even demonstrated this by dropping a ring in a bowl of water, all of which Abu Talib faithfully recorded. But he was convinced that the ship's telescope was faulty or that the men on the ship had played a trick on him.²⁹

Compare this with a typical travelogue from the second half of the 19th century. The gentleman from Bengal stepping on to the ship now has a concept of Europe firmly planted in his mind. Indeed, the ship is for him the first place he encounters the real Europe and the exercise of comparing it to his conceptual Europe begins in earnest. The voyage acquires for him the moral significance of a rite of passage;

On 12th March 1886, the steamer 'Nepaul' left Bombay for England, No mailboat ever felt the throbbing of so many Hindu hearts...

Prouder was she now at the result of the moral influence of England in her vast empire in India, which enabled so many of her sons to break through the trammels of caste, to rise above old prejudices and superstitions and to seek education and enlightenment at the fountain head of modern civilisation.³⁰

Setting foot on English soil, the gentlemen would declare: "I am now in that Great England of which I had been reading from my childhood and among the English people with whom providence has so closely united us".³¹ Not everything he would see in England would necessarily meet with his approval; indeed, often he would be disappointed because the real England would sometimes fail to measure up to the conceptual image. But overall, he would have no doubt that what he was experiencing, and what he would need to convey to his countrymen back home, was a moral and civilisational essence, expressed in such virtues of the modern English people as the spirit of independence, self-respect and discipline, their love for art, literature and sport, and above all, their cultivation of knowledge. Observing the success of the Colonial Exhibition of 1886, our traveller from Bengal would remark;

"The myriads of visitors that daily flocked to the exhibition revealed to us the great mysterious cause of European progress. It is the constant search after knowledge and a constant readiness to accept a better state of things, whenever that is discovered and understood.

It was this that lay at the heart of modern European civilisation and what set it apart from and above colonised countries such as India. Indeed, it was the knowledge that the Europeans had acquired of the natural and social resources of India that had given them the power to rule over the 'natives'.

The real inequality between Europeans and Natives' rests not on the fact of the former filling a few high posts in the country., The European knows more of our mountains and rivers than we do; he knows more of the plants that grow around us, their names, their properties, even the size and shapes of their leaves; he knows more of what is interred in the bosom of our earth; he knows more about the capabilities of our land; in everything he knows more than we do of our own country. Then he knows better how to use that knowledge, for the benefit of men. We do not know these things; hence we are 'natives'.³²

I present this text to you as one of the most sincere declarations of love by a modern Indian for modern Europe. Its author- the Bengali gentleman we have followed from the time he embarked on his voyage to England - was Trailokyanath Mukherjee, curator of a museum in Calcutta, a recognised expert on the agricultural products and craft manufactures of different parts of India and an outstanding humorist in the world of

Bengali fiction. If he did not, like Ihtisamuddin a hundred years before him, write about the compass and the sails and wonderful machines that the Europeans had invented, it was not because he did not know how they were made or how they worked. Rather, he knew too much; He was already an insider in the world of European knowledge, converted, disciplined and full of admiration. For men and women like Trailokyanath, we could say without fear of contradiction that they loved Europe 'of their own free will' because indeed their wills had been adequately produced to make that choice. We would be right, of course, to add that although Trailokyanath was an insider, he was nevertheless standing only at the margins, acutely conscious of the fact that he and his countrymen would now have to learn this new knowledge from the European, indeed learn even about their own country.

To avoid any confusion, let me add that politically Trailokyanath was a loyalist. He did not question the fact that the British had acquired the right to rule India because they knew how to use their knowledge for the benefit of Indians. Not everyone from the middle classes would remain a loyalist though, at least not from the turn of the century. What would change? I refer you back to Foucault's discussion on the anti-Machiavellian tracts and his distinction between the sovereign power of the ruler over his territory and the art of governing populations. Unlike Trailokyanath, many educated Indians would now question, on the strength of modern western political theory itself, the legitimacy of an alien power that was unrepresentative of the people and unwilling to recognise them as citizen with rights. Not only that, some would also argue that the people were not in fact being benefited as much as they ought to be, and that was so because the government was unrepresentative: if sovereignty were to pass on to the Indian people, the art of modern governance could be utilised to yield them far greater benefits.³³

As it happened, political opposition to British rule grew stronger within the Indian middle classes in the first half of the 20th century. In that period, the middle classes built connections with the anti-colonial demands of other sections of the people, especially peasants and workers, and spearheaded the process that finally led to the transfer of power, and also the partition of the country, in 1947. Their opposition to British rule did not in any way diminish their love for the concept of Europe that was planted in their minds - the Europe of Shakespeare and the steam engine, of the French revolution and quantum mechanics. They rejected the sovereignty that the British claimed over India, but did not question the

superiority of Europe in cultivating the arts of modernity. The subtlety of this attitude was beyond the comprehension of many late colonial officials, who took the climate of political opposition of the last days of British rule as a signal of impending danger to their lives. Thus, Field Marshall Auchinleck was still insisting in June 1947 that the British army must stay on in India until the following year to protect British lives,³⁴ little realising that once the question of sovereignty was settled, there would be no reason left for the Indians to hate Europeans.

I have not yet talked about the other section of Indians - those who did not collaborate. On them, I will be brief I believe that the mass of the Indian people, those who were subjects under British rule, whether in British India or in the princely states, never collaborated. This is not to say that they did not respect the authority of the British, or obey them, or look up to them for justice and protection. Despite many large and small revolts by tribals and peasants in British India, it is correct to say that for the most part, rebellion was more the exception than the rule. But the mass of the people did not give the British the love that they so much wanted - love that would flow from their own free wills - because within the structure of colonial rule, the British could never recognise these lowly subjects as possessing wills with that quality of free rationality that could invest their apparent docility with the aura of love. They were, in short, incapable of loving the concept of Europe.

Of the many Indians who collaborated with British rule or acknowledged its dominance, therefore, only some became familiar with the full range of knowledges and practices that constituted its intellectual wherewithal and accepted its rationality. But they too ultimately rejected the colonial claim to political dominance while making their own the project of building a modern state and society. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, with his characteristic acuteness, saw through the strategy as its moment of birth. As early as in 1909, in *Hind Swaraj*, he described this as wanting to have "English rule without the Englishman". Those who follow Gandhi believe that that is exactly what the rulers of independent India have tried to do in the last 50 years.

I have now come to my final consideration, which is about Europe and south Asia today. One major transformation that took place in the middle of the 20th century, alongside the collapse of Europe's colonial empires, was the decisive shift in world dominance from Europe to the US. For the most part and for most people in south Asia, the concept of Europe today seems to be encompassed within the concept of the west, of which the US is the dominant focus. There is little about that force remains a foundation of that

dominance, and although a contemporary Machiavelli will argue that the threat of the use of devastating force is a more efficient guarantee of dominance than its actual use, we have only to remember the televised spectacle of the Gulf war to perceive the concentrated terror that can be unleashed by those who regard themselves as policemen of the world.

In the meantime, the rulers of the newly independent countries of south Asia have continued with their project of building modern nation-states. Winning sovereignty from the colonial powers has unplugged among the expanding middle classes the springs of love for the concept of the west. I am not referring here to the alleged infatuation of young Indians with designer clothes and pop music which many feel is threatening our national tradition. My understanding of the history of the colonial encounter in the last two centuries leads me to believe that if there is the importation of a Coca-Cola culture into this country, it will soon acquire a distinctly Indian character and blend imperceptibly into that everchanging entity called Indian tradition. I am more concerned with the invocation of western modernity that tells us that in practising the latest arts of managing populations, we are losing the race because we are bogged down in politics. There is growing impatience among the middle classes who feel we are not catching up with the west fast enough because we have too much democracy. Alongside, there is a renewed attempt to impose a particular brand of the modernised upper caste brahminical culture as the true national culture on the ground that all great nations of the west were built through a process of cultural homogenisation. The same logic leads the political establishment of each south Asian country to regard its neighbours as rivals and potential enemies. And needless to say, it is the same logic that is now driving those establishments into a nuclear arms race, bolstered by the belief that that is the only way to gain the respect of the great powers of the west. With due deference to the representatives of our political establishment present here, may I say that this does not reflect the wisdom of Machiavelli's prince. Rather, it reflects the mentality of the small-time street-corner thug who believes that the world is ruled by big thugs and lives on the fantasy that by imitating the swagger and brahminess of the big guys he would one day be invited to join their club. This is a parody - a pathetic parody - of the chauvinism of the great powers designed to make our elites feel good about themselves, but one whose price, as always will be borne by the poor and the powerless in our society.

I have said before that our love for the west flows out of a concept of the west. This

concept has congealed in our minds over the last 500 years. It has survived the brutalities of the Portuguese armada, the intrigues of Robert Clive, the viciousness of the counter-insurgency in 1857-58 and the callousness that caused the Bengal famine of 1943. The fact that the most devastating wars in human history and the atrocities of nazism, fascism and apartheid took place in the 20th century and were integral to the historical dynamics of modern Europe has not, for us, pushed that concept to a crisis. Large sections of our elites still repose enough faith in that concept to insist that we should strive harder than we have so far to copy those old models of modernity in our own country.

I am convinced that the concept of the west that we have so lovingly nourished is in deep crisis in the west itself. The idea of participatory democracy and active popular sovereignty which was the moral foundation of modern politics since the time of the French revolution has been largely eroded by the instrumentalist doctrine that political choice is only about how much benefit can be reached to how many people at what cost. The social consensus around which the idea of national identity had been built in the countries of Europe and North America has been put under severe stress with the entry of new immigrants from other cultures who were not part of that earlier consensus. And now that the neo-liberal storm of the 1980s has blown over, it has left behind a capitalist social order with few ideological resources to cope with the moral embarrassment of unequal opportunity, unemployment, sickness and destitution. I do not believe that the collapse of the socialist regimes in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has meant the vindication of the liberal capitalist order as we have known it so far. On the contrary, I see that collapse as one more sign of the crisis of the old project of modernity inaugurated in Europe in the last 18th century.

It is incumbent upon us, those who are still marginals in the world of modernity, to use the opportunities we still have to invent new forms of the modern social, economic and political order. There are many experiments we have carried out in the last 100 years or so. Many, of the forms we have fashioned are regarded, by others as well as by us, as imperfect adaptations of the original - unfinished, distorted, perhaps even fake. It is worth considering whether many of these supposedly distorted forms - of economic institutions, laws, cultural practices - might not in fact contain the possibility of entirely new forms of economic organisation or democratic governance never thought of by the old forms of western modernity. For this, however, we need to have the courage to turn our backs on the history of the last 500 years and face the future with a new maturity and self-assurance born of the conviction that

Vasco da Gama must never appear on our shores again.

Notes

[Delivered as the key note address to the conference on 'Europe and South Asia: 500 Years' organised by the Institute of Social Sciences at Kozhikode and Kochi on May 16-20, 1998.]

- 1 Sanjay Subrahmanyam. *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700: A Political and Economic History*, Longman, London, 1992, p 63.
- 2 See especially, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, pp 24-75.
- 3 My knowledge of the details of Gama's visit is derived entirely from his latest biography, Subrahmanyam. *Vasco da Gama*, pp 76-163.
- 4 Subrahmanyam, *Vasco da Gama*, p 133.
- 5 The question has been forcefully raised by S N Balagangadhara, *The Heathen in His Blindness*, E J Brill, Leiden, 1995.
- 6 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500-1650*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990.
- 7 K N Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp 63-64.
- 8 Indian vessels could sail only with the cartaz, or pass issued by the Portuguese and this was enforced, often quite brutally, by the power of the Portuguese boats fitted with guns. It seems Indian merchants and rulers in the end found it cheaper to accept the Portuguese dominance rather than embark on a project to build their own fleet to take on the Portuguese. M N Pearson, *The Portuguese in India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, pp 57-59.
- 9 Tuhfatah-Mujahidin, cited in Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Mappilas of Malabar 1498-1922: Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980, pp 50-53.
- 10 Surendra Nath Sen, 'The Portuguese in Bengal' in Jadunath Sarkar, (ed). *The History of Bengal*, vol 2, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, 1948, p 354.
- 11 Cited in C R Boxer, *Joao de Barros: Portuguese Humanist and Historian of Asia*, Concept, New Delhi, 1981, p 100.
- 12 Boxer, *Joao de Barros*, pp 100-101.
- 13 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-colonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, pp 16-18.
- 14 Subrahmanyam, *Portuguese Empire in Asia*, pp 270-77.
- 15 Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, p 74.
- 16 For a short statement of these arguments, see Burton Stein, 'Eighteenth Century India: Another View', *Studies in History*, 5,1 (January-June 1989), pp 1-26. Other Statements are: C A Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988; Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830*, Longman, London, 1989; D A Washbrook, *Trogress and Problems: South Asian Economic and Social History, c 1720-1860*, *Modern Asian Studies* 22(1988), 1, pp 57-96.
- 17 After I had begun writing this lecture under its present title, I received a copy of Ranajit Guha's recently published collection of essays entitled *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1997. It carries an epigram - Machiavelli's famous advice on whether a ruler should be loved or feared - which provided me with a way of introducing my argument that I had not thought of before. I take this opportunity to acknowledge once more my debt to Ranajit Guha for the inspiration and insights he continues to provide to a generation of scholar who are no longer young.
- 18 Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Luigi Ricci, (trs), Mentor, 1952, New York, pp 98-100.
- 19 See especially Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality' in-Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, pp 87-104; and 'Politics and Reason' in Foucault, (ed), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, Routledge, New York, 1988, pp 57-85.
- 20 Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, p 72.
- 21 Cited in S N Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: A Study in 19th Century British Attitudes to India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968, p 122.
- 22 Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement*, Mouton, Paris, 1963.
- 23 Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, p 32.
- 24 Cited in Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones* pp 122-23.
- 25 I have been led to this subject by the doctoral thesis of Simonti Sen, 'Views of Europe of Turn of the Century Bengali Travellers 1870-1910', PhD dissertation. University of Calcutta. 1995.
- 26 Mirza Shaikh Ihtisamuddin, *Bilayetnama*, Abu Mohamed Habibullah, (trs), Muktahdhara, Dhaka, 1981. The original Persian manuscript is entitled *Shigarf-nama-e-vilayet*.
- 27 *Travels of Mina Abu Talib Khan*, Charles Stewart(trs), 1814, Sonali, New Delhi, 1972.
- 28 Ihtisamuddin, *Bilayetnattut*, p 37.
- 29 Cited in Simonti Sen. *Views on Europe*, p21.
- 30 Trailokyanath Mukherjee, *A Visit to Europe* Arunodaya Roy, Calcutta, 1902, cited in Simonti Sen, 'Views on Europe', p 66.
- 31 *Ibid*, p 98.
- 32 *Ibid*, p 168.
- 33 The economic critique of colonial rule in India was launched by Dadabhai Naoroji and R C Dutt at the turn of the 19th century, whereas the foundations of a nationalist strategy of industrialisation for ending poverty and creating general prosperity were laid at around the same time by G V Joshi, M G Ranade and G K Gokhale. These set up an intellectual framework of nationalist economic thinking in India that would stay relevant for almost a hundred years.
- 34 Leonard Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj 1961*, reprint Jaico, Bombay, 1971, pp 155-66.
- 35 M K Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol 10, Publications Division, New Delhi, 1958.