



MY INDIA, MY WEST

## WORKS BY KRISHNALAL SHRIDHARANI

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THE BANYAN TREE (*Vadalo*), A Nature Fantasy, Dakshinamurti, 1931

I SHALL KILL THE HUMAN IN YOU ! (*Insan Mita Dunga*), A Novel of Life in Jail, Dakshinamurti, 1932

SPRING FLOWERS (*Pila Palash*), Three Plays for Children, Dakshinamurti, 1933

THE SUTTEE (*Padmini*), A Historical Play, Navayuga, 1934

THE EGGS OF PEACOCK (*Morna Inda*), A Social Play, Saurashtra, 1934

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# MY INDIA, MY WEST

By

KRISHNALAL SHRIDHARANI

With an Introduction by

LOUIS BROMFIELD



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*Again to Winifred Patterson,  
daughter of the West*

*It was inevitable in writing about Gandhi and his technique of non-violent direct action (satyagraha) that I should use some parts of the extensive and detailed treatment given to these subjects in my earlier book, WAR WITHOUT VIOLENCE; I am grateful to its publishers, Harcourt, Brace and Company, for permission to include here a reworking of portions of two chapters from that book.*

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## INTRODUCTION

I SUSPECT THAT MORE rubbish has been thought, spoken, and written about India than about any country in the world. There are a good many reasons for this. India has been exploited for nearly two hundred years by all sorts of individuals and organizations, from the East India Company to Madame Blavatsky and Katherine Mayo.

All kinds of people from fortune-tellers to politicians and missionaries have made sizable fortunes of one kind or another out of presenting India to the world in the fashion which suited their ends. But the fundamental reason for the abysmal ignorance and the fantastic ideas about this great nation lies in the defects of Western education. To the vast majority of educated people, even those within the higher intellectual brackets, India is a nation governed by English Pukka Sahibs in pink coats and infested with cobras, snake charmers, and Brahmin priests. We were taught that Christendom was the beginning and end of civilization and that somewhere beyond Tartary there were a couple of vague over-populated and half-civilized nations called India and China. Somehow the fact is overlooked that India was a civilized nation before the Christ legend appeared, and that the legend of Christ and the fundamental elements of Christianity had their roots in the Aryan religious philosophy of India.

Few books and few professors ever mention the fact that the Indian King Asoka was one of the great men of all time and that India under Akbar was a united nation living in peace and great prosperity at the time Europe was emerging through the Renaissance out of the chaos of putrescent feudalism. Small mention is made of the fact that the Great Akbar, a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth, spent his whole life in trying to create a universal religion which would end for ever all religious strife, and invented a kind of Esperanto which has become the language of modern India. To prove the sincerity of his feelings he married four wives of different faiths—Moslem, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist. Their palaces, each one a jewel of architecture, still exist in the great dead city of Fatehpur Sikri.

The ignorance and misrepresentation of the past are scarcely greater than those of the present. In its grossest manifestation, this misrepresentation exhibits itself in such books as *Mother India* and in the mouthings of the more violent and narrow of the evangelical missionaries. The average tourist, driven vast distances in considerable discomfort from one "sight" to another, emerges from his trip to India having really seen

nothing and understanding even less. Then there are the impressions of the narrow, limited type of English or American business man who can spend his whole life in India and live the whole time in Upper Tooting or Camden, New Jersey. Worst of all are the rantings of the Tory whose whole intellectual outlook is founded on the old school tie and "the white man's burden," and his opposite, the passionate radical who has not the faintest grasp of the immense complications of the Indian political question and boils it all down to the oppression of a down-trodden people by an exploiting imperialist nation.

One grows a little annoyed at the ignorance which lumps all inhabitants of India together simply as Indians, never understanding that there are a dozen racial divisions and some twenty-seven languages. India, it must be remembered, is a vast country, very nearly as big as Europe outside of Russia, and that it has racial, political, and religious differences much greater than any which exist in modern Europe and that the difference in every sense between a Pathan and a Bengali is far greater than the difference between an Italian and a Swede. There is too the fact that half of India is under a direct but gradually moderating British rule and that the other half is divided up into some three hundred states with absolute rulers and varying degrees of independence determined by the individual arrangements of each state with the British Empire. The clef between Moslems and Hindus is one of the generally known and fairly accurate facts although this too has been exaggerated and exploited for far more than it is worth by partisans on both sides of the Indian question. What is seldom mentioned is the extraordinary range of civilization existing within the borders of India—that there exists side by side all the degrees of human development from enlightened democracy, through black tyrannical feudalism, to a state of utter savagery. Few people, I believe, realize that there exist in the area of Western Ghats, only two or three hours from the civilization of such an enlightened State as Mysore, primitive tribes whose members have never been seen either by Europeans or by Indians themselves, small inbred savages who are so sly that they even conduct unseen their exchange of wild spices for salt and bits of cloth.

Countless books have been written about India, yet remarkably few of them have revealed anything of what India and Indians are like. Kipling's India is a romantic one, bearing very little resemblance to reality. Kipling disliked Indians and had an intimate degree of contact only with those Indians to whom he could condescend. Considering his own intellectual and philosophic limitations this condescension, like that of almost all English of his class, was remarkable. E. M. Forster in *A Passage to India* revealed more truth and understanding regarding India in one page than Kipling in all his writings. A great many of the books were accurate but so dull as to be unreadable and so never reached the public outside of India. And nearly every book written about India was

confused and rendered slightly fantastic by the assumption, sometimes conscious, sometimes wholly unconscious, that Indians (to use a vague geographical label) were different from westerners. The old claptrap about "East is East" is one of the falsest of snap clichés, and has done great harm through its wholesale acceptance by commonplace minds. Without any question I have found the Chinese the most charming and sympathetic of peoples and the Indians the most quick and intelligent. With neither people have I ever felt that I was among strangers or that they were excessively different from the people I grew up with in Richland County, Ohio.

And now what was long needed has come about. Here is a book written by an Indian who knows both the West and the East, who knows the United States very nearly as well as he knows India. The autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru is a remarkable book and one of the most distinguished books of our time, but it does not fulfil the same need as this one by Krishnalal Shridharani. For me Shridharani has presented India through the eyes of an Indian, but in the idiom of an American, and so the people in the book, their backgrounds, their customs, their traditions, become human and real. Dr. Shridharani knows, as does any American or European, that the barriers which separate (if they do separate) the Modern India from the Modern America, are wholly artificial and superficial. Americans are people, Indians are people. And the two are much nearer to each other than either suspects.

The portions of the book devoted to political India are especially enlightening from the human point of view, and that is all-important in a world in which the human element, the brotherly feeling of man for man regardless of race, creed, or colour, has been largely submerged by all sorts of dry or nonsensical political or economic doctrines. The basis of peace in the world and of man's future happiness and capacity for civilization, rests far less upon political and economic doctrine than upon human understanding.

Probably the most extraordinary single accomplishment in the remarkable career of Gandhi himself is his achievement in India of a united national feeling and the destruction of the racial, religious, and political barriers which separated Indians and paralysed their struggle toward a rebirth of India. What happened in India can and must happen in the world outside, if that world is to survive. A people trained in the Hitlerian philosophy (if it can be dignified by such a title) can only be perpetually destructive to the peace and progress of all humanity. India has set an example. She is being reborn at a speed which is breathtaking. What has happened in India *can* happen in the world. Much of the story of how it is happening to be found in the pages of Dr. Shridharani. He does India a great service and he has written a book which anyone seeking knowledge and enlightenment will read with pleasure and excitement.



I have been honoured by being asked to write this introduction and I accepted with pleasure because I love India and Indians profoundly and feel that they have a great place in the future of the world and a great contribution to make to the progress of the human race in the future as they have already done in the past.

LOUIS BROMFIELD.

#### PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The reader should bear in mind that the whole of this book, with the exception of the Epilogue and the "Post-Cripps," was completed on August 1st, 1941. The Epilogue was completed on September 10th, 1941, and the "Post-Cripps" on June 9th, 1942.

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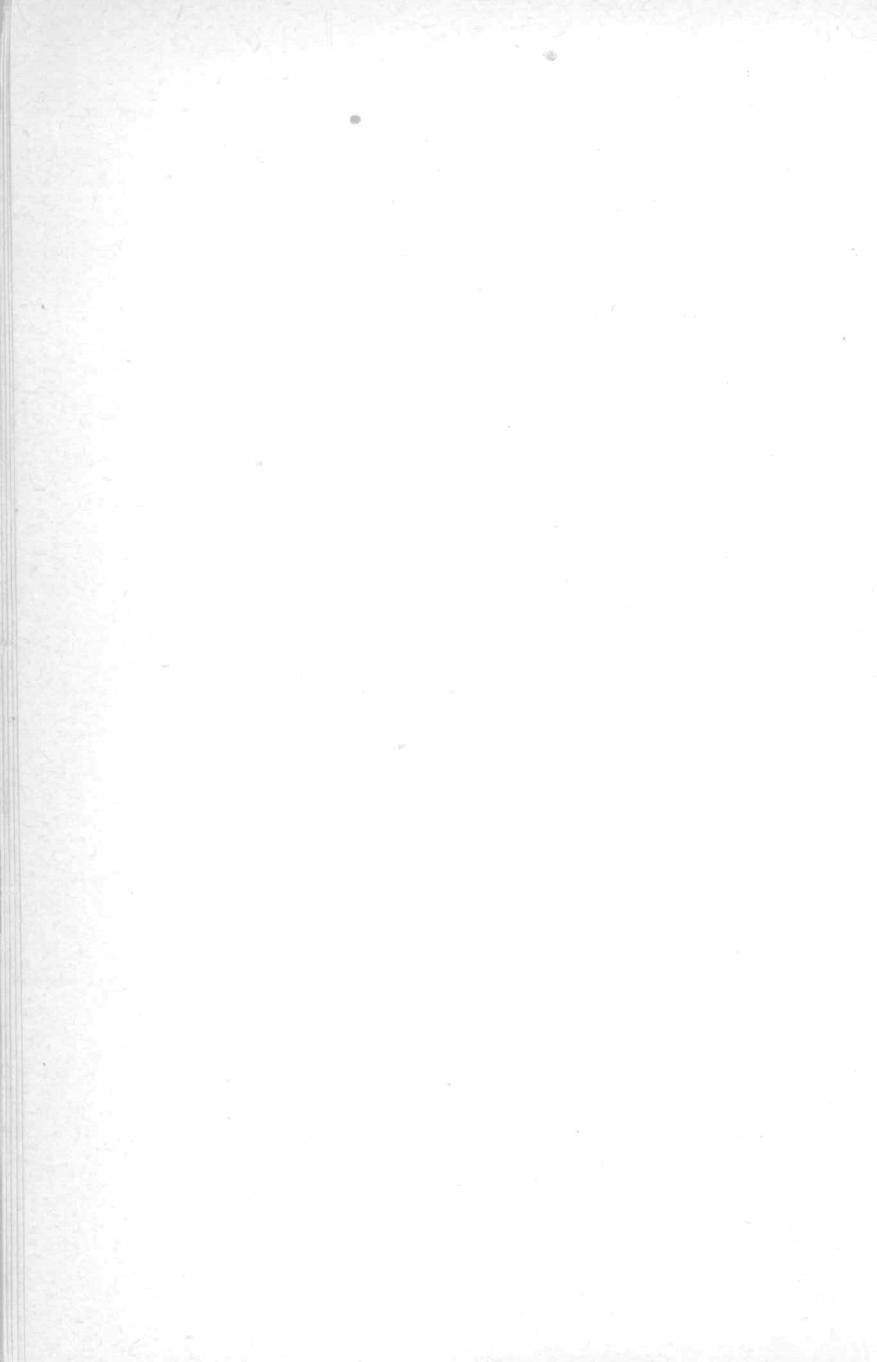
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IT IS RELATED THAT soon after becoming the Enlightened One, Buddha went to Benares. There, in the palash groves of Saranatha, on the outskirts of the sacred city, he came upon a throng who had learned of his approach and who awaited his message. After he had greeted these people he said: "Please do not listen to me because you regard me as an authority, or because you think I have something to teach you, or because you respect my judgment on matters unknown to you."

He looked then at the highway where other people, ignoring him and the throng about him, passed by. And he added: "By the same token, please do not ignore me because I am nobody, or because I have no authority, or because you think you know as much as I do and perhaps more."

Finally, after he had looked again at the passers-by and at the people standing before him, he said: "But listen to me because the theme I have chosen is of great moment, something we should all think about, something we should act upon."



