No two countries are as misunderstood by each other as the United States and India. The misunderstanding goes back 50 years, to a period when India became independent and the US emerged as one of the two global superpowers. Part of the reason for this estrangement between India and the U.S. is the fact that there has been little historical contact between these two civilizations. This lack of historical contact between the United States and India is in contrast to America’s contact with two other great Asian cultures: China and Japan.

Many in the audience have heard about the Boston Tea Party, and some believe that goods imported into the colonies from India were a major cause of the American Revolution. This is not the case. All that happened was that tea that originated from India was dumped into the Boston Harbor by American freedom fighters to protest the British monarch’s policies of mercantilism.

Lord Cornwallis, Governor General of India from 1786 to 1793, provides another unimportant footnote to history. Cornwallis was defeated at Yorktown in 1781 by American revolutionary forces, sealing the fate of British power in North America. After his defeat in America, Cornwallis was sent to India as the Governor General of East India Company. It is interesting to note that as the British colonial yoke was lifted off the backs of the Americans, it was imposed on the backs of the people in India. Along with Robert Clive and Warren Hastings, Cornwallis extended the borders of British rule in India.

There is one exception to the lack of historical contact between India and America. This is the Transcendental Movement of 1830s and 1840s that captured the imagination of many educated and free-thinking Americans. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were the leading figures in this Movement. The transcendentalists were deeply influenced by their reading of the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and the Brahmanas. Emerson’s lecture on the AOversoul@ delivered in 1844 at the Divinity School at Harvard University shows how much he had been influenced by Vedantic philosophy. I will have more to say about the Transcendental Movement later on in my paper.

My remarks will take the following outline. I will first describe the beginnings of the Cold War and the downward drift that occurred in Indo-American relations as a result of the Cold War. I will then argue that relations between India and the United States are likely to improve in the 21st century. Three reasons are specified for this optimism: (1) the bettering
of economic relations between the two countries, (2) the growing people to people exchanges between the two countries, and (3) perhaps most important, the growth of Eastern spiritual practices in America.

THE BEGINNING OF THE COLD WAR

The Cold War may be said to begin on March 12, 1947 when President Harry S Truman appeared before a joint session of the US Congress to request $400 million to defend the borders of Greece and Turkey against the threat of Soviet expansionism. This policy became known as the Truman Doctrine.

The year 1947 also witnessed the launching by the United States of the Marshall Plan for European reconstruction, named after the then Secretary of State George C. Marshall. Through the Marshall Plan, the United States gave to Western Europe in excess of $12 billion. The economic rebuilding program in Western Europe has been immensely successful. Nations of Western Europe have become economic powerhouses in less than 50 years. This is remarkable because European economies were shattered during the War.

As the economic development program in Europe proceeded, so did the military rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. In February, 1948 the Soviet government engineered the overthrow of a democratic government in Czechoslovakia and imposed a communist regime. In July 1948, the infamous Berlin Blockade occurred. The Soviet Union blockaded access to the city of Berlin in an effort to drive the Western Powers out of the city.

The American response to Soviet expansionist moves has been called the Containment Policy. George F. Kennan, a young State Department employee in 1947 provided a rationale for this policy. In an article written for Foreign Affairs (July 1947, p 576), Kennan wrote:

"There must be a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies. The Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points. . . . The Soviet thesis not only implies complete lack of control by the West over its own economic destiny, it likewise assumes Russian unity, discipline and patience over an infinite period. . . . the future of Soviet power may not be by any means as secure as Russian capacity for self-delusion would make it appear to the men in the Kremlin. . . .

The possibility remains (and in the opinion of this writer it is a strong one) that Soviet power . . . bears within it the seeds of its own decay, and that the sprouting of these seeds is well under way."
When the Soviet system collapsed in the 1990s, an aging George F. Kennan was interviewed by a TV reporter. Kennan exuded satisfaction in knowing that the policy he recommended 40 years earlier had borne fruit.

THE COLD WAR AND INDO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

Prior to the ensuing of the Cold War in 1947, the United States sympathized a great deal with Indian struggle for independence. The sympathy for India's struggle for independence was natural, for America herself had been a colony of the British. Mahatma Gandhi was perceived in America as a moral force. Secretary of State George C. Marshall described Mahatma Gandhi as the spokesman of the moral conscience of mankind. In a public opinion survey, the American public selected Mahatma Gandhi and Charlie Chaplain as being the most admired persons in the world. Charlie Chaplain was a great tragic-comedy actor of silent films. Both Gandhi and Charlie Chaplain stood for the dignity of the little man.

Soon after 1947, however, relations between India and the US took a downward turn. They have never fully recovered in my opinion. The reasons lie in the failed policies of India's first Prime minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and in the narrow view of the world held by the then American leadership.

Pandit Nehru was an immensely popular world leader in the 1950s. He had many reasons to his credit for this international accolade. He was an aristocrat with an aristocrat's demeanor. He was good-looking and charming. He was a scholar of high caliber. He had written acclaimed books on the history of India and of the world: *The Discovery of India* (1946), and *Glimpses of World History* (1934). The intelligentsia and the academia respected him.

Added to all these personal attributes was the fact that Nehru was a committed democrat and a secularist. This position was admired in the West. Nehru helped fashion a democratic constitution for a large country. Nehru's stature was also helped by the fact that he was perceived to have inherited Gandhi's mantle. Mahatma Gandhi was a highly revered global personality.

Under Nehru, India emerged as leader of the Afro-Asian group of countries. Along with Nasser of Egypt, Tito of Yugoslavia and Sukarno of Indonesia, Pandit Nehru helped define the international role for the newly emerging nations of the world. Nehru was admittedly the leader of the so-called Non-alignment movement in the emerging nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Because of Nehru's stature in the world, he was sought after by the leadership of the United States as a partner in their efforts to check Soviet expansionism. I believe that the United States would have done almost anything to have Nehru on its side. Democratic India was perceived as a counterweight to Communist China. The natural alliance between the
United States and India, both democratic and culturally pluralistic nations, did not happen. Mistakes were made on both sides.

First a look at Nehru’s perceptions and prejudices. Nehru viewed America through the eyes of the British. Nehru had spent his formative years in Britain as a student. He suffered from British prejudices. The British viewed Americans as being crude, boorish, and nouveau riche. The United States was perceived as a land inhabited by gun-wielding cowboys. Nehru shared these views. It is one of the great ironies of history that in a span of 50 years, from being perceived as uncultured, American culture has spanned the globe. Look at the American icons that have world-wide appeal: Coca Cola, McDonald’s, American style pizza, jeans, talk shows, and Hollywood movies. Even the closed Communist societies have been seduced by the lure of this pop culture.

Nehru was a socialist. While a student at the London School of Economics, he had imbibed socialist ideas. To him, America epitomized the weaknesses of capitalism—concentration of wealth, economic boom and bust cycles, an underprivileged lower class, the influence of big capital on policy. His anti-capitalistic views were reinforced by V. K. Krishna Menon, his friend and India’s spokesman at the United Nations in New York City. Krishna Menon, who lived on tea and biscuits, was a staunch socialist in his convictions, perhaps even a covert or a crypto-communist. He was a passionate and a fiery speaker. In numerous of his speeches, America was the recipient of Menon’s wrath. India distanced itself from America.

Mistakes were made on the American side too. The United States perceived the world as being bipolar. The bipolarity was between good and evil, between God and Satan. In a war of righteousness, one cannot take a middle position; one cannot sit on the fence. The very powerful Secretary of State John Foster Dulles declared, “They who are not with us are against us.” This a Biblical line. India’s neutrality and its policy of non-alignment was not accepted by the United States as being morally defensible.

To contain the power of the Soviet Union, the United States undertook the creation of certain defensive military alliances. North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO was established in 1949. The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization or SEATO and the Central Treaty Organization or CENTO were born a few years later. The United States would have welcomed India’s membership in one of these military alliances. Nehru was not amenable to any such partnership. Having received a cold shoulder from Nehru, the United States turned to Pakistan for membership in these alliances. Pakistan became a member both of SEATO and CENTO. Pakistan was not sincere in its anti-Communist zeal. It did not perceive a threat from Russia or China. It joined the military alliances in order to receive American military aid which it could then use against India.

Spurned by America’s military alliance with Pakistan, India gravitated towards the Soviet Union. It consistently voted against positions held by the United States in the UN. For example, India championed China’s admission to the UN. The United States opposed it. India supported Arab position against Israel. The U.S. took the opposite stand. Parenthetically, it may be noted that India’s support of the Arab cause was rooted in its
domestic politics. Anti-Israeli policies were popular with Indian Muslim voters, who constituted an important voting bloc for India’s ruling Congress party. While these pro-China and anti-Israeli policies were popular at their time in India, history has shown them to be failed policies. These policies did not serve India well.

During Bangladesh’s struggle for freedom from Pakistani war of genocide in 1971, Indo-American relations reached a new low. America tilted to the side of Pakistan.

Indo-American relations improved somewhat during the Reagan regime (1980-88). This trend continued during both the Bush and the Clinton administrations. Then in May 1998, Pokharan I and II happened. India test-exploded its nuclear devices. This happened during a period when the two countries were engaged in a dialog to redefine their strategic relationship.

I believe America’s opposition to India’s minimum nuclear deterrence is illogical and morally indefensible. Clinton Administration policy to conclude both the NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) and the CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) is ideologically driven rather than reality based. It ignores India’s legitimate security needs.

America continues to opposed India’s rightful claim for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council. The United States supports a permanent seat for Germany (80 million people), and for Japan (125 million people) but not for India (1 billion people).

President Clinton’s travel to South Asia in March, 2000, the first visit of a U.S. President in 22 years, and Prime Minister Vajpayee’s return visit in September opened a new chapter in Indo-American relations. India intends to increase investment and hopes to reestablish itself as a key regional and international player. The United States wants to open India’s markets, limit nuclear proliferation, help resolve Kashmir and preempt Chinese and Russian influence in South Asia. Given the wide range of issues and the checkered history of the relations, progress is likely to be slow.

INDO-AMERICAN RELATIONS IN A NEW LIGHT

I believe Indo-American relations will enter a new period of comity and friendship in the 21st century. This looks implausible given the past history of missed opportunities. But the globe is changing at an unprecedented speed. Unimaginable developments are taking place. Who, only as recently as 1989, would have foreseen that the Soviet Union would cease to be a superpower and that it will split into fifteen separate republics? Who would have expected that the Berlin Wall would come down? A natural partnership between India and the United States is not out of the question.

Differences between India and the United States are a product of the Cold War. With the Cold War gone, India and America will establish their natural friendship. Three factors will help redefine Indo-American relations in the new century: (1) burgeoning economic relations between the two countries, (2) growing people to people exchanges, and (3) the growth of Hindu and Buddhist based spiritual practices in America.
ECONOMIC RELATIONS. For reasons of time, I will not dwell on this point except to say that American investments in India have increased dramatically in the recent years. This is in response to the economic liberalization policies taken by the Government of India. India is becoming economically important to the U.S. American investments in India have increased several fold. Economic interests will override political differences. This point is well understood.

PEOPLE TO PEOPLE EXCHANGES

People to people exchanges between India and the United States have grown. There is increased traffic in both directions. I will highlight the effects of the Indian migration to America. It is estimated that 1.5 million people from India are living in the United States (1999 estimate). This number is likely to double in the next ten years, owing to the continued migration of people. Indian immigrants to America are highly educated and professional. This is in contrast to the people who went to England in the 1950s as laborers and manual workers. It is safe to assert that Indian residents in America occupy the top rungs of the economic ladder. Almost every university in America has one or several Indian professors; every hospital has one or several Indian doctors; every manufacturing firm has one or several engineers of Indian origin. Indian software professionals have acquired a global reputation. India is the leading source of software professional workers for the U.S. industry. I am told that of all the H-1 working visas that are issued each year by the American Consulates around the globe, some 80 percent are issued in India, with the Madras (now Chennai) Consulate leading the pack.

The migration of people of India into the United States is of recent vintage. It began with the change in American immigration policy in 1965. Prior to this change, America had a quota system which established the number of persons that could be admitted into the U.S. from different countries. The West European countries such as England, France and Germany had large quotas, Eastern Europeans countries had smaller quotas and Asian countries had tiny quotas. For example, prior to 1965, India had a quota of 100 persons per year.

Persons of Indian origin in the United States have distinguished themselves economically and professionally. Recently, they have begun to flex their political muscle. Numerous political action groups have been started. Partly as a result of their efforts, the Congressional Caucus on India has nearly 100 members and is the largest Caucus of this type. Both Democratic and Republican elected representatives are members of the India Caucus. The members can be expected to defend India’s position in the U.S. Congress. Senator Connie Mack of Florida defended India’s position on the nuclear issue on the Senate floor. Congressmen Frank Pallone and Gary Ackerman did the same on the floor of the House of Representatives.

As persons of Indian origin become better organized, their influence on policy making will increase. It may be observed that America’s strong defense of Israel is a natural result of the Jewish presence in America (some 6 million). It also reflects the influence of the strong
lobbying efforts by American Israeli Public Affairs Committee or AIPAC. The American sympathy for the Catholic cause in Northern Ireland is similarly a function of the large Irish American community. Both John F. Kennedy and the former Speaker Tip O'Neill were Irish.

GROWING SPIRITUALITY IN AMERICA

It may come as a surprise to members in this audience that Americans are exhibiting a great spiritual hunger. In their search for spirituality, many turn to the East, to the spiritual practices of Hinduism and Buddhism. Many Americans now practice yoga and meditation. Some even chant Vedic hymns in congregational Satsangs.

The roots of American interest in Indian spirituality can be traced back of the Transcendental Movement of the middle of the 19th century, referred to earlier. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were two of the generally recognized leaders of this movement. Others include Margaret Fuller, Palmer Peabody, James Freeman Clark, and Charles and Myrtle Fillmore. Thoreau is better known in India. This is because Mahatma Gandhi was influenced by Thoreau's short book, Civil Disobedience (1849).

In a lecture delivered at the Harvard Divinity School in 1844, titled Athe Oversoul, Emerson clearly shows the influence on him of Vedic philosophy. He talked of A Divine Presence that permeates the whole creation and all living things. Behind the appearances in the universe, there is a Reality of a Being and Consciousness, which is One and Eternal. In Sanskrit this is called Asad Ekam. This One Reality is the Self of all things. God could best be found by looking inward into the core of one's being, one's Soul. By living according to the dictates of an inner Will, one could transcend the materialist world of sense perception, the world of cause and effect. The purpose of human life was to seek unity with the Oversoul (Paramatma in Sanskrit).

Like the Vedic Rishis (seers), the transcendentalists believed that intuition rather than reason was the highest human faculty. The notion of a mystical union with the Divine was emphasized. The process of seeking unity with the Divine was inherently individualistic rather than congregational. The role of religious institutions were therefore de-emphasized. Contemplative solitude was extolled. Henry David Thoreau lived in a 10 x 15 cabin on the banks of Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. He lived deliberately, in the tradition of ancient Rishis. His observations are recorded in a short book, Walden (1854).

Even though Emerson and other transcendentalists met opposition in their time, their ideas have sprung forth a number of non-traditional Christian churches in America. These are called the New Thought or New Age churches. Examples include: the Unity Church of Christianity, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Science of Mind, Divine Science Church, Temple of the Universe, Self Realization Fellowship, and the Center for Spiritual Awareness.
Occasionally, I attend meetings of the Unity Church in Pensacola, Florida. I will describe here several of the Unity articles of faith. Unity Church was founded by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore in 1889.

I. Unity members affirm the following statement of Truth at their Sunday service meetings: "There is one Power and one Presence in the universe, God the Good, Omnipotent." Compare this statement with the opening line of Isa Upanishad: "Asa Vasyam Idam Sarvam"—in the heart of everything, of whatever there is in the universe, dwells the Lord.

Traditional Christianity posits a dual power: God and Satan. An important Unity principle is that duality itself springs from God. Compare this statement of truth with another statement from the Upanishad: "Brahman is Ekam Advityam," one without a second.

II. The founder of the Unity Church, Charles Fillmore and many of his followers believe in the theory of reincarnation. This is the belief that the Soul returns to express itself in another life in the universe until it finally gains divine perfection. Traditional Christianity posits a single life span for man and woman.

III. Unity is non-sectarian. One does not have to give up one's religion in order to join Unity Church.

IV. Unity does not preach that Jesus was the only Begotten Son of God. Jesus is regarded as a way-shower. He set an example on how men ought to live.

V. Prayer and meditation are an important part of Unity service meetings. For example, every Sunday service includes a 20-minute period of meditation.

Unity is one of the fastest growing churches in America. The story is told in "The Unity Way" by Marcus Bach (1982).

Listed below are several of the spiritual centers and study groups that presently function in Pensacola, Florida. This will give you an idea of the extent of Eastern based spirituality being practiced in the United States. Please note that Pensacola is a medium sized southern city, with a metropolitan population of about 400,000. Larger cities obviously have much more activity.

I. Integral Knowledge Study Center. Members (mostly American) meet twice weekly on Wednesdays and Sundays to read and discuss works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Each meeting is concluded with a 20-minute period of meditation.

II. Self Realization Fellowship. The group meets Sundays for meditation and for recitation of the SRF prayer for world healing. Self Realization Fellowship was founded by Swami Parmahansa Yogananda in the early 1900s. It is headquartered in California.
and has chapters in many cities in the United States. Yogananda's popular Autobiography of a Yogi has sold copies in the millions since its publication.

III. The Sai Baba Group. This group meets every Saturday evening for congregational singing of Bhajans (hymns) and devotional songs.

IV Theosophical Society. This group meets occasionally to read and discuss works of Theosophical Society and those of Krishnamurthy.

V. The Siddha Yoga Meditation Center. This center was founded on the teachings of Swami Muktananda of Ganeshpuri. This group meets every Thursday and Sunday in Fort Walton Beach near Pensacola. The Guru Gita is recited every Sunday morning. Popular mantras chanted by the group include: O m Namah Shivaya, O m Namo Bhagavate Vasudevya.

VI Hatha Yoga classes are held at the Pensacola Junior College and at several other locations in the city. Pensacola supports at least half-a-dozen teachers of Hatha Yoga.

A large majority of the participants in the groups listed here are Americans, not members of the Indian community. Indians are noticed only in their absence. The list above is from personal knowledge and is necessarily incomplete. Because of lack of personal knowledge, the list does not include Buddhist inspired groups.

Last summer I spent a week at the Siddha Yoga Ashram in South Fallsburg, N. Y. in the Catskill mountains. The Ashram, spread over three large former luxury hotels, was founded by the late Swami Muktananda of Ganeshpuri, Maharashtra. The teachings are derived from Kashmir Shaivism. This Ashram draws thousands of American devotees. Members get up early in the morning to chant verses of the Guru Gita. The Siddha Yoga Ashram in South Fallsburgh is now larger than the mother Ashram at Ganeshpuri in India. (www.siddhayoga.org).

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam at Saylorsburg, PA, in the Pocono Mountains is another popular Ashram. People come to the Ashram to learn Sanskrit, study Vedanta, do Hatha Yoga and meditate. This Ashram is founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati. It may be noted that two of the leading Sanskrit teachers at the Ashram are Americans. (www.arshavidya.org).

Dipak Chopra, a teacher of Ayurvedic Medicine from India, is a popular Guru for the New Age generation. His books such as Timeless Mind and Ageless Body have sold in the millions.

It may be argued that the events described here are in the nature of a fad. America is the land of fads. Fads by definition are a temporary phenomena. I do not believe in these arguments. The growth of spirituality in America is answer to a genuinely felt need. Material abundance alone does not fulfill man.

AMERICA AS A GLOBAL NATION
The United States is a global nation. People from around the world have come to its shores. The strength of America lies in the fact that it renews its blood lines every generation. Today people of India, China, Japan and other Asian countries enrich its blood lines.

America welcomes not only people from abroad, but it also is open to new ideas. America does not feel threatened. It has matured and is self-confident. The fact that Indian Vedantic ideas have found a niche in America is a testimony to this confidence and maturity. I call America a universal nation, because it is becoming a microcosm of the universe.

The globe is shrinking at an amazing speed. We do not always appreciate the magnitude of change engulfing us. Fifty years ago, Asia was colonized. Today it is free. Fifty years ago, Japan was a defeated nation. Today it is the leading economic power in the world. Fifty years ago, it took almost a month to travel from India to the United States by sea. Today it takes less than 24 hours to cover the same journey by air. Today it takes only 10 seconds for a message to be sent on the Internet rather than a week by mail. Fifty years ago in the small Punjabi village school that I attended, I learned my alphabet by writing on sand with my forefinger. Today my 5-year old grandson learns his alphabet on the computer screen. What amazing transformation has occurred in less than half a century!

Equally important is the fact that the globe is being internationalized. I spent five months in Pondicherry in Southern India on a Fulbright lecturing award. Pondicherry is a testimony to this internalizing phenomenon. I studied beginning Sanskrit from a 20 year old girl who spoke 5 languages: English, French, Hind, Bengali and Sanskrit. She is a graduate of the Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education. While in Pondicherry, I stayed at the Golconde Guesthouse. Its three dozen residents included Russian, English, French, Iranian, Dutch and people from several parts of India. I have been told that 48 different languages are spoken around Pondicherry because of the many nationalities that have settled there.

Some 10 miles from the city of Pondicherry is the new township called Auroville, the City of Dawn. The 2,000 residents of Auroville are drawn from some 30 nationalities. Auroville draws its inspiration from the vision and work of the great Indian seer, Sri Aurobindo. It was founded in 1968. Auroville seeks to establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth, in the collective life of mankind. (Written for a UNESCO committee, 1969).

Truly, a new Dawn is about to spring forth.

I will conclude my speech with lines from Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was a philosopher, a mystic, a yogi, a poet, and a universalist. He may appropriately be called the sage of the 21st century. The lines from Savitri describe Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the dawning of a new spiritual age.
Even when we fail to look into our souls
Or lie embedded in earthly consciousness
Still have we parts that grow toward the light,
Yet are there luminous tracts and heavens serene
And Eldoradoes of splendour and ecstacy
And temples to the Godhood none can see...

Thus will the masked Transcendent mount his throne.
When darkness deepens strangling the earth’s breast
And man’s corporeal mind is the only lamp,
As a thief in the night shall be the covert tread
Of one who steps unseen into his house.

A voice ill-heard shall speak, the soul obey,
A power into mind’s inner chamber steal,
A charm and sweetness open life’s closed doors
And beauty conquer the resisting world,
The truth-light capture Nature by surprise

A stealth of God compel the heart to bliss
And earth grow unexpectedly divine.
In Matter shall be lit the spirit’s glow,
In body and body kindled the sacred birth;
Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,
The days become a happy pilgrim march,
Our will a force of the Eternal’s power,
And thought the rays of a spiritual sun.

A few shall see what none yet understands,
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;
For man shall not know the coming till its hour
And belief shall be not till the work is done.

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