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 misunderstanding is the relative lack of historical contact between these two democracies. This lack of historical contact between the United States and India is in contrast to America's contact with two other Asian cultures: China and Japan.

Many in the present 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 so. 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 the East India Company. It is interesting to note that the British colonial yoke was imposed on the backs of the people in India just as it was lifted off the backs of the Americans. Along with Robert Clive and Warren Hastings, Cornwallis is the architect of British Empire in India.

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

My remarks will follow this outline. I will first describe the downward drift that occurred in Indo-American relations during the Cold War period and the reasons for it. I will then show 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) the growth of interest in 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 power houses 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 1991, an aging George F. Kennan had
the satisfaction of knowing that the policy he recommended 44 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; 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 never fully recovered in my opinion. The reasons lie in the failed policies of India's first Prime minister, Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, and in the narrow view of the world held by the then American leadership.

Pundit 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, such as: *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 also inherited Gandhi’s mantle. Mahatma Gandhi was a revered global figure of immense moral force.

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, Pundit 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 during the early Cold War years.

Because of Nehru's stature in the world, the American leadership sought him out as a partner in its 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 did not happen. Mistakes were made on both sides.

First let us examine Nehru's perceptions and prejudices that prevented an Indo-American alliance. Nehru had spent his formative years in Britain as a
student. Nehru viewed America through the eyes of the British and suffered from British prejudices. The British viewed Americans as being crude, boorish, and *nouveau riche*. Nehru shared in these views. It is one of the great ironies of history that the United States has emerged in the last 50 years as the leading cultural force in the world. Coca Cola, McDonald’s, American style pizza, jeans, TV talk shows, and Hollywood movies now have a global reach.

Nehru was a socialist. While a student at the London School of Economics, he had imbibed socialist ideas. America epitomized to him the drawbacks of capitalism—concentration of wealth, consumerism, 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. America was frequently the recipient of Menon’s wrath in his speeches at the United Nations. Because of Menon, 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 versus evil, 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.” India’s neutrality and its policy of non-alignment were not accepted by the United States as being morally defensible.

To contain the power of the Soviet Union, the U. S. undertook the creation of certain defensive military alliances. North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO was established in 1949. The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) both were created 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 military 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 opposed 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.

Indo-American relations reached a new low during the 1971 Bangladesh war. India supported Bangladesh's struggle for freedom from Pakistani war of genocide. 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 presidency (1988-92) and the early years of the Clinton administration. The two countries were engaged in a dialog to redefine their "strategic relationship" in the middle 1990s. Then in May 1998, Pokharan I and II happened. India test- exploded its nuclear devices. This derailed the burgeoning Indo-American relations.

A comment on America's stand with regards to nuclear weapons: I believe America's opposition to India's minimum nuclear deterrence is illogical and morally indefensible. America's opposition to India acquiring nuclear strength ignores India's legitimate security needs.

Another issue is India's demand for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council. It is unfortunate that America continues to oppose India's rightful claim for a permanent seat. 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. Mutuality of interests is recognized on both sides of the partnership. India hopes to increase American investment in its economy and hopes to reestablish itself as a key regional and international player. The United States wants to open India's markets, limit nuclear proliferation, and checkmate Chinese influence in South and Southeast Asia.

The two countries moved further closer together after the events of 9/11/2001. India is an important ally in fighting terrorism. However, India opposed America's war on Iraq in 2003. Given the different perception on issues and the checkered history of the Indo-American 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 have taken place. Who would have foreseen that the Soviet Union would collapse as a superpower and would split into fifteen separate entities? Who would have expected that the Berlin Wall would come down? The United States and Russia are no longer mortal enemies. A natural partnership between India and the United States is not out of the question.

The Cold War mind set poisoned the relations between India and the U.S. With the Cold War gone, India and America can 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 growing interest in Eastern (Hindu and Buddhist) spirituality in America.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

For reasons of time, I will not dwell on this topic except to say that American financial investments in India have increased dramatically in the
recent years. This is in response to the economic liberalization policies adopted by the Government of India and need on the part of the American industry to find cheaper manufacturing and data processing sites. India is becoming economically important to the U. S. Over time, economic interests will surely override political differences.

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 dwell on the Indian presence in America and its effects. In 2000, 1.7 million people from India were living in the United States (the 2003 estimate is about 2 million). This number is likely to double in the next ten years. Indian immigrants to America are for the most part either in the professions or in business. They have significant above average education. This is in contrast to migration pattern to Britain. Majority of the Indians migrating to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s were manual and factory workers. Indian Americans are said to occupy the top rungs of the economic ladder in the United States. My personal observation is that almost every large university in America has several Indian professors on its teaching faculty; every hospital has several Indian doctors; every manufacturing unit has one or several Indian engineers. Indian software professionals have acquired a global reputation. 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.

Be it noted that the migration of people from 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.

As noted above, Indian Americans have distinguished themselves in the professions and in business. They now occupy the higher reaches of the economic ladder. They have begun to flex their political muscle. Numerous
political study and action groups have come into being. These groups serve the religious, social and political needs of the community. Some groups are explicitly political in nature and aspiration. They raise money to finance election campaigns and to lobby congressmen. Partly as a result of these efforts, the Congressional Caucus on India has nearly 100 members and is the largest country Caucus of its type. Both the Democratic and Republican members serve on the India Caucus. The members oftentimes defend India's position. 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 Indian Americans become better organized, their influence on American policy making is likely to increase. There is precedence for this. The Jewish lobby in America is well organized. It is no accident that America is a strong supporter of the interests of Israel. The American sympathy for the Catholic cause in Northern Ireland is similarly a function of the large and well organized Irish American community. It may be noted that both President John F. Kennedy and the former House Speaker Tip O'Neill were of Irish descent.

GROWING INTEREST IN EASTERN SPIRITUALITY IN AMERICA

Members of the audience may be surprised to learn that an increasing number of Americans are interested in Eastern spiritual practices derived from Hinduism and Buddhism. Many Americans practice yoga and meditation. Some chant Vedic mantras in congregational Satsangs. College courses on Eastern religions are generally well subscribed.

American interest in Indian spirituality can be traced back of the Transcendental Movement of the middle of the 19th century. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were two of the leading transcendentalists. Other thinkers include Margaret Fuller, Palmer Peabody, James Freeman Clark, and Charles and Myrtle Fillmore. The name of Henry David Thoreau is better known in India. This is because Mahatma Gandhi acknowledged having read and to have been influenced by Thoreau's short book on Civil Disobedience (1849).
Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote a great deal on spiritual subject matter. His ideas about the soul and God parallel those found in Hindu scriptures. He talked about “the 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. This One Reality is the Self of all things. God could best be found by looking inward into the core of one’s being, into 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. These ideas are best expressed in his lecture on the “Oversoul,” delivered at the Harvard Divinity School in 1844.

The transcendentalists believed that intuition rather than reason was the higher 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. 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 Vedic Rishis. His observations are recorded in a short book, *Walden* (1854).

Emerson and other transcendentalists were criticized for their unconventional views. Yet, their ideas have sprung forth a number of non-traditional churches in America, known as New Thought and 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.

On occasion, I attend meetings of the Unity Church in Pensacola, Florida. Described here are the principles enunciated by the Unity Church. The Unity Church was founded by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore in 1889.

I. The following statement of Truth is affirmed at each service meeting: “There is One Power and One Presence in my life and in the universe, God the Good, Omnipotent.” *Isa Upanishad* states: “Isa Vasyam Idam Sarvam” --- In the heart of everything, of whatever there is in the universe, dwells the Lord. The similarity in the two statements is obvious.
Traditional Christianity posits a dual power: God and Satan. An Important Unity principle is that duality itself springs from God. Compare this view of truth with another statement from the Upanishad: Brahman (God) is “Ekam Advityam,” One without a Second.

II. Following the teachings of the founder of the Unity Church, Charles Fillmore, many of his followers believe in the theory of reincarnation. This is the belief that the Soul is permanent and that it is reborn in another life upon death till it exhausts its karma and is united with the Divine. 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. This is in agreement with Hindu teachings. Hinduism is not a proselytizing religion.

IV. Unity does not preach that Jesus was “the only Begotten Son of God.” Jesus is regarded as a way-shower, a teacher and an evolved soul.

V. Prayer and meditation are an important part of Unity service. 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 inspired by Eastern thought that presently function in Pensacola, Florida. This list is based purely on the basis of personal information and is by no means exhaustive. The list given here does not include Buddhist groups, of which there are several in Penscola. Please note that Pensacola is a medium sized southern city, with a metropolitan population of about 400,000. Larger cities obviously have much more of this type of activity.

I. Integral Knowledge Study Center. Members (mostly American) meet twice weekly on Wednesdays and Sundays to read and discuss the works
of Sri Aurobindo. 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 in 1946.

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

IV. Theosophical Society. This active group meets weekly to read and discuss works of the 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 during its Sunday services. Ancient Hindu mantras, such as *Om Namah Shivaya*, are chanted at the service meetings.

VI. Hatha Yoga classes are held at the Pensacola Junior College, the University of West Florida, the Unity Church and at several health clubs in the city.

A large majority of the participants in the groups listed above are Americans, not members of the Indian community. Indians are noticed only in their absence.

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. The American Ashram draws thousands of American devotees from all over the United States and now is larger than the mother Ashram at Ganeshpuri. Members get up early in the morning to chant verses of the Guru Gita. For information, visit [www.siddhayoga.org](http://www.siddhayoga.org)
Arsha Vidya Gurukulum at Saylorsbug, PA, in the Pocono Mountains is another popular Ashram. People come to the Ashram to learn Sanskrit, study Vedanta, do Hatha Yoga and to meditate. This Ashram is founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati. It may be noted that two of the Sanskrit teachers at the Ashram are Americans. For information, visit www.arshavidya.org

Dipak Chopra, a teacher of Ayurvedic Medicine and of spiritual practices 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.

America is known to be the land of fads and the events described here may well be a fad. Fads by definition are a temporary phenomenon. I do not share these views. An increasing number of Americans realize that material abundance alone does not bring happiness or provide fulfillment. This realization leads them to be open to Eastern spiritual practices.

AMERICA AS A GLOBAL NATION

The United States is a “global” nation in the sense that 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 but also ideas and philosophies from abroad. It has matured and is self-confident. The fact that Indian Vedantic ideas have found a niche in America is a testimony to the openness of the American culture.

THE PACE OF CHANGE

The globe is shrinking at an amazing speed. We do not always appreciate the magnitude of change engulfing us as we are in the midst of it. 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. Fifty years ago in the small village school in Punjab, I learned my alphabet by writing on sand with my forefinger. Today my 5-year old grandson learns his alphabet on the computer. The last half century has witnessed an amazing record of transformation.

The globe is being internationalized at a rapid speed. I spent five months in 1999 in Pondicherry in Southern India as a Fulbright scholar. Pondicherry is a testimony to the growing internationalization of the globe. I studied beginning Sanskrit there from a 20 year old girl (a graduate of the Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education) who speaks 5 languages: English, French, Hindi, Bengali and Sanskrit. While in Pondicherry, I stayed at the Golconde Guesthouse. Its three dozen residents included Russians, English, French, Iranian, Dutch and Indian. Because of the many nationalities that have settled around Pondicherry, 48 different languages are spoken there.

Some 10 miles from the city of Pondicherry is the new township called Auroville, the City of Dawn. Its 2,000 plus residents are drawn from some 30 nationalities. Auroville was founded by the Mother (a French lady) in 1969 and draws its inspiration from the vision and the work of Sri Aurobindo. The Auroville Charter states:

1) Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be the willing servitor of the Divine.
2) Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and youth that never ages.
3) Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realizations.
4) Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

Truly, a new Dawn is about to spring upon us. The spread of Vedantic ideas in the West is part of the new awakening.
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