



ISSN Print: 2664-7699
ISSN Online: 2664-7702
Impact Factor: RJIF 8.00
IJHA 2024; 6(2): 15-21
www.humanitiesjournals.net
Received: 13-05-2024
Accepted: 16-06-2024

Dr. Prem Lata Chandra
Associate Professor,
Department of Modern
European & Other Foreign
Languages, Himachal Pradesh
University, Shimla, Himachal
Pradesh, India

Abhay Kumar Mishra
Professor, Department of
German Studies, Banaras
Hindu University, Varanasi,
Uttar Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author:
Abhay Kumar Mishra
Professor, Department of
German Studies, Banaras
Hindu University, Varanasi,
Uttar Pradesh, India

International Journal of Humanities and Arts

Shakuntala, critique of eurocentrism, and the grotesque: Herder and Goethe on India

Dr. Prem Lata Chandra and Abhay Kumar Mishra

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26647699.2024.v6.i2a.84>

Abstract

Herder's writings on India contain his profound reverence for Indian inclination to retain a harmony with nature. The Sanskrit drama "Shakuntala" confirmed Herder not only about man's immense love to nature, flower, animals but testified simultaneously to the 'voice of heart' resonating in this work. During the age of colonization, the notion of 'noble savage' had helped towards the implicit justification of the colonization of the primitive native people. Herder's India, a culture in childhood was, however, holistic, pure, simple, and close to God. With such an image of India, Herder embarked on a polemic against the enlightened Europe resting on the ideal of progress. Herder, being aware of the contemporary misery of the indigenous people, anticipated future repentance on the part of Europe vis-à-vis the colonized world. Herder has played out the childhood of culture against European senescence. Contemporary postcolonial discourse has sought to make Herder relevant for the critique of colonial plunder, which Herder was vocal of in his writings scattered over years. Nonetheless, Herder did take a dim view of the inhuman practices prevailing in India and remained unsparing about the widow-burning and ill treatment given to the pariahs. Goethe held "Shakuntala" in a high aesthetic esteem and this drama bore distinct influence on the contemplation of shaping his drama "Faust". Goethe's ambivalence toward India is however marked by his disdain for the forms and images worshipped in India, which has recently been typified as Goethe's encounter with the 'grotesque' India.

Keywords: Shakuntala and love of nature, noble savage, culture in childhood, destruction of cultures by Europe, Herder's critique of Indian social vices, Shakuntala for Goethe, Goethe and Indian gods

Introduction

In his lifetime, Kant considered the French revolution to have confirmed the irreversibility of progress of mankind, creating the conditions for the espousal of freedom as cultural value and refuting the possibility of a return of faith in despotic rule, for people had learnt ruling themselves. While reiterating the achievements of the French revolution, Kant underlined that "progress...turns out to be no longer completely retrogressive" (Dupré, 1998, p. 822) [3]. Kant added that the "human race has always been in progress toward the better and will continue to be so henceforth" (Dupré, 1998, p. 822) [3]. Moreover, in his essay on Enlightenment "Kant claimed that the culture of the Enlightenment had definitively taken the road of irreversible progress" (Dupré, 1998, p. 822) [3]. In the intellectual realm Enlightenment served as a counterpart to the political phenomenon of the French revolution, and thus they embodied the notion of progress in terms of freedom and rationality, validating history's march from the state of nature into civilized state.

At the time, when Kant defined the contours of progress for Europe in the realization of freedom, rationality, and liberation from political despotism, a counter-model of historical destination also developed that took note of the positive traits of primitive peoples. This counter-model was propagated under the rubric of 'noble savage'. The French Enlightenment philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau was credited to have coined this term. Ter Ellingson (2001) [4] writes that according to Jean Jacques Rousseau, the eighteenth-century French philosopher, the noble-savage denotes "an individual living in a 'pure state of nature'-gentle, wise, uncorrupted by the vices of civilization" (p. 1). A reference to Rousseau and his idea of 'noble-savage', which has been examined from different perspectives, is relevant to appreciate Herder's position regarding India, for Herder found in India and its literary texts those dimensions, which drew praise from him, even as India was not be viewed solely in terms of the European Enlightenment model of historical progress.

All through the nineteenth century, the colonial enterprise harped on the theme of childlike-native and benefitted from it. According to Johannes Fabian, “talk about the childlike nature of the primitive has never been just a neutral classificatory act, but a powerful rhetorical figure and motive, informing colonial practice in every aspect” (Kang, 2017, p. 24) ^[7]. The trope of the ‘childlike native’ stood beside the notion of the ‘savage’, a notion used to designate the childlike condition of the native in the colonial discourse. Johannes Fabian maintained that “aside from the evolutionist figure of the savage there has been no conception more obviously implicated in political and cultural oppression than that of the childlike native” (Kang, 2017, p. 24) ^[7]. Imagining the ancient or non-European people as child-like people substantiated later the idea of civilizing-mission in the colonial enterprise. Taran Kang (2017) ^[7] underlines that later “thinkers deployed this narrative, in which both ancient peoples and contemporary non-Europeans were likened to children, as a justification of the civilizing mission...” (p. 24).

Herder’s analogy of the ancient Orient with the age of historical childhood, however, places him closer to Rousseau than to the European colonizers. Assessing the Orient so, Herder elicited in the least a pejorative intellectual outlook. Instead, he attributed to the Orient those qualities which accord it a uniqueness of its own. For Kant, the cultural advancement of Europe was being marked in the “transition from the state of nature to a civilized one” (Dupré, 1998, p. 819) ^[3] representing historical progress. Herder pointed out that the values like simplicity, strength, and loftiness of the Oriental people outweighed the philosophical coldness of Europe. Compared to Europe, the Orient possessed the sense of wonder that could be preferred to the philosophical ruminations of Europe lacking inspiration. Taran Kang (2017) ^[7] notes that Herder “intimated that the Oriental sense of wonder was preferable to the uninspired philosophical sentiment of the present age” (p. 28). In Orient, human heart came to its manifestation vis-à-vis the intellect that reflected in the philosophy of Europe. As against European fragmentation, the Orient was held together with a holistic state of life. Referring to Herder’s appreciative affiliation with the Orient, which foreshadowed his critical stance to Kantian paradigm of the universal history, Taran Kang (2017) ^[7] stresses that Herder “mounted a polemic against the contemporary division between heart and intellect, an unnatural condition of fragmentation foreign to peoples in the more holistic and well-integrated state of childhood...Herder celebrated childhood as a more pure and holy state of being in which the child was closer to God than was the adult” (p. 29). Herder added to it that the primordial wisdom and virtue still reigned supreme in the Orient, something nowhere to be found in contemporary Europe. Taran Kang (2017) ^[7] argues that Herder held to his belief “that in the Orient “the human spirit received the first forms of wisdom and virtue with a *simplicity, strength, and loftiness* that now-speaking frankly-in our philosophical, cold, European world surely has nothing, nothing at all, like it” (*Writings*, 278)” (p.29).

Herder’s espousal of the noble virtues of the Orient may not be treated in isolation from the contemporary researches in the area of philology in the circles of the scholars in Germany. The philologist at Göttingen, Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812) was developing his ideas on the interrelations between the myth and literary creativity of the

peoples at this point of time. He viewed the myth less as an individual poetic achievement, and more a natural mode of expression of the childhood of human race. George S. Williamson (2004) ^[14] points out that the “Göttingen philologist Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812)” argued “that myth was not the invention of individual poets or priests but rather a natural and necessary mode of expression during the “childhood of the human race”” (p. 32). This endorses a close affinity between the childhood of the human race and its natural expressive potential through literary works. Herder, in his conception of history, harped on this point arguing that primitive people-during the beginning of human civilization-stood very close to the moment of creation of speech and enjoyed a prolific ‘mythopoetic’ resourcefulness of articulation. Maintaining such a position, Herder shared a viewpoint with Rousseau that people (*Volk*) possess a relatively high level of vitality during its youth, when it remained immune to the vices of modern civilization. The echo of Rousseau’s idea of ‘noble savage’ in Herder can be traced here. George S. Williamson (2004) ^[14] emphasizes that Herder viewed the concept of *Volk* “as the basic unit of human history. Echoing Rousseau, he maintained that a *Volk* was most aesthetically creative and religiously vital during its youth, before it slipped into the evils of luxury and civilization. Far from suffering from a poverty of language, primitive people enjoyed an unusual richness of language, because they exercised speech at the moment of its creation, when it stood closest to nature and was thus most full of poetic-and mythopoetic-potential” (p. 33).

Unmistakably, it is the closeness to nature which Herder finds in abundance in the literary works of art from the Orient, in particular from India.

Herder’s early impressions about India were based on and derived from the travel-narratives available to him. However, Herder’s most enduring literary encounter with India occurred in 1791, when Georg Forster translated “Shakuntala” into German and sent it to Herder in Weimar. In the following year he published his notes on “Shakuntala”, extolling the language, style and thematic splendor of the play. Taran Kang (2017) ^[7] notes that in his work *Über ein morgenländisches Drama*, consisting of a collection of letters, “Herder provided a brief synopsis and assessment of the play. In these letters, which first appeared in the *Zerstreute Blätter* in 1792, he effusively praised the play for its poetic language, its character development, and its narrative structure. The same expression of high esteem reappears in the 1803 preface to the second edition of Forster’s translation” (p. 34). Herder sought to read into this drama the intimate bond of the protagonist Shakuntala with the all-embracing nature and her penchant for natural creations like flowers and animals. In its subtle structure and narrative this drama presented the Indian spirit as gentle, innocent and hence yet not alienated from a condition of natural pristineness. Herder did not waver to designate Shakuntala as the child of nature and doing so confirmed Indian spirit’s kindred affiliation to nature. Highlighting this, Taran Kang (2017) ^[7] underscores that Herder “described Sakuntala, the play’s eponymous protagonist, as a “child of nature” (*Kind der Natur*), and he interpreted her close communion with animals and her love for flowers as an expression of the spirit of the Indian people (*Werke*, 24: 578)” (p. 34).

At the time “Shakuntala” fell into the hands of Herder, Europe was experiencing the full sway of reason as the guiding principle of the Enlightenment. Literature retained merit to the extent it furthered rational ideals in the language of reason. Herder, however, refrained from treating reason to be the sole yardstick of the expressive faculty of peoples across the length and breadth of the globe. Already in his famous work *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772) he had expressed reservations against the universal eulogizing of reason. Conceiving of an ‘undivided human soul’, Herder (1772) wrote of thinking of those “corners of the earth where reason is still least cast into fine, societal, many-sided, scholarly form”, where “sensuality and primitive cleverness and cunning and courageous efficacy and passion and spirit of invention-the whole undivided human soul -still operates in the most lively way...” (marxists.org/archive/herder/1772/origins-language.htm). In the same treatise, distinguishing the East from the rest of the world, Herder also underlined that in a characteristic Eastern way, man created language not by the urgency of reason, but from the sounds of nature. He wrote that “in an Eastern, poetic way: the human being invented language for himself! -from the sounds of living nature!” (marxists.org/archive/herder/1772/origins-language.htm).

And the language that man invented in close propinquity with the nature gave expression more to his emotions emanating from his heart. Ronald Taylor (2003) ^[13] refers to his work *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774), in which he had declared: “Behold the East-the cradle of the human race, of human emotions, of all religion!” (p. 130).

In the philosophy of Kant, values retained their validity from the prescription of reason. Alongside, in as much as the sensibility and understanding functioned as the channels of the awareness of the external world, human feeling always remained alien to the Kantian system of values. In so far as the grounding of human feelings in the senses was ruled out, they were considered fleeting and consequently stopped short of enjoying a philosophical recognition in the Kantian paradigm. Elucidating the marginality of feeling in the Kantian system, Oliver Sensen (2011) ^[11] says that for “Kant external objects are given to human beings by sensibility. This relates to his arguments in the Critique of Pure Reason about how one can discern external entities. If the value is nothing one can sense through the five senses, then it must be a feeling, according to Kant...Feelings, however, are fleeting, relative and contingent. As such they cannot ground a necessary and universal moral law, as Kant argues moral laws must be” (p. 4). On account of its fleeting nature, feeling forfeit a place worthy of attention in the philosophical system of Kant.

Yet, Herder makes an earnest bid to build up his philosophy of language and narrative of humanity focused on the pivotal recognition of feeling. Language, for Herder, is naturally embedded in human feeling and human capacity to feels foregrounds his capacity of language. In his *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772), Herder unequivocally pleads that “human being is...a listening, noting creature, naturally formed for language...if only he is not without feeling and deaf” (marxists.org/archive/herder/1772/origins-language.htm). Human being, a feeling creature and so bestowed with language, in turn traverses securely the gap between him and nature. Mingling with nature, he names the fine creations of nature around him and thus a vivid nature

turns into his cherished haven. Herder contends in continuation that even to a man “on a lonely island; nature will reveal itself to him through his ear, a thousand creatures which he cannot see will nonetheless seem to speak with him, and even if his mouth and his eye remained forever closed, his soul does not remain entirely without language. When the leaves of the tree rustle down coolness for the poor lonely one, when the stream that murmurs past rocks him to sleep, and the west wind whistling in fans his cheeks-the bleating sheep gives him milk, the trickling spring water, the rustling tree fruit-interest enough to know these beneficent things, urgent cause enough, without eyes and tongue, to name them in his soul. The tree will be called the rustler, the west wind the whistler, the spring the trickler” (marxists.org/archive/herder/1772/origins-language.htm).

Herder’s visualization of language as the manifestation of the feeling human soul helped him judge the exquisiteness of Kalidasa’s “Shakuntala” without impugning reservations. He could unerringly trace the lively reverberations of the ‘voice of heart’ in “Shakuntala”. When he received “Shakuntala” in his mother tongue, Herder exclaimed laudatorily, “Where Shakuntala dwelt with her once lost scion, where Dushyanta welcomed her back from the realm of the Gods-O Holy Land, I salute thee, thou source of all Music, thou voice of the Heart-O raise me aloft to thy spheres!” (Taylor, 2003, p. 131) ^[13]. Hailing the ‘voice of the Heart’, Herder hardly misses to pay tributes to the realm of the Gods and acknowledging the lofty holiness of India alongside. Kalidasa’s “Shakuntala” struck Herder as much as a literary creation as a testimony to an order in nature pervaded with the resplendent activity of an all-embracing spirit. Ronald Taylor (2003) ^[13] suggests that in “Kalidasa’s drama *Shakuntala* Herder found the imminent, all-embracing spirit-the presence which Friedrich Schlegel was to call the *Allheit*...” (p. 132). Herder’s applause of “Shakuntala” hence conspicuously bore an implicit recognition of the religious semblance of the drama.

This religious substance of the drama “Shakuntala” essentially cohered with the ideal of humanity encapsulated in it. From Herder to German romantics flowed a long tradition of humanity that thrived on the quasi-religious foundations having its remote anchorages in India. According to Ronald Taylor (2003) ^[13], the “nebulous ideal of human progress which Herder called *Humanität* gained stature from the discovered relevance to it...of values from the Indian world. ‘Humanity’, which was later to be re-interpreted in the context of the philosophy of German Romanticism, was a dynamic, if unprecise, evocative concept of the latent perfectibility of man, a quasi-religious persuasion that the hope of immortality contains the seed of the supreme ethical and cultural achievements of the human race” (p. 132). For Herder, the ideal of humanity gained its eminence not on account of its distance, rather in its being adjacent to religion. Kalidasa’s “Shakuntala” appeared to Herder as the literary presentation of such a setting, in which the divine and the human affairs are intimately interwoven. Gods and supernatural emblematically intermingle with the real human course of events, conveying the quasi-religious undercurrent of the ideal of humanity. Ronald Taylor (2003) ^[13] argues, it is significant that “for Herder, in *Shakuntala* the Gods are directly involved in human events, not figures standing above and aloof from the world. Mythology is woven into the fabric of man’s affairs; the real and the supernatural unite in a single, multi-

dimensional context within which the story of the drama is played out. Divine revelation, the source of all knowledge, thus penetrates the very core of human existence, and in the society which is sustained by this faith there prevail those values of which man stands in the greatest need” (p. 132). Besides, Herder expressed his unwavering appreciation for human intimacy to nature and characteristically divine essence underpinning the drama “Shakuntala” when he got the opportunity to briefly comment on “Shakuntala”. In the preface to the second edition of Georg Forster’s translation of “Shakuntala”, he articulated his doubt “whether one could imagine any more refined, more sublime conceits in the whole of our universe than this regal dignity, this sense of nature, this love-India’s divine possessions” (Taylor, 2003, p. 132) ^[13].

Beneath Herder’s fervent admiration of “Shakuntala”, its language, and its thematic opulence lay an evaluative outlook that was critically directed against Eurocentric standards of literary assessments. Herder, while praising “Shakuntala”, had cautioned the readers against reading it in the European framework of literary and aesthetic judgments. Ronald Taylor (2003) ^[13] cites the admonitions of Herder, noting that this was not a book “to be read ‘in the European spirit, that is to say, with a fleeting curiosity, just for the sake of finding out how it ends; but in the Indian spirit-attentively, in tranquility, and in deep meditation’” (p. 132). By appealing the readers to read “Shakuntala” in the Indian spirit, Herder freed the assessment of this Sanskrit drama from the yoke of the universal applicability of the Aristotelian categories of poetic scrutiny. Herder advocated in fact the appreciation of Indian literary work according to Indian literary-aesthetic ethos. Herder’s dismissal of the universal Greek models of drama in the context of “Shakuntala” has been noted by Dorothy Matilda Figueira, when she (1991) ^[5] argues that “Herder’s discovery of the *Śākuntala* enabled him to conclude that the Greek model was not absolute. Gupta India was not ancient Greece; different historical conditions were sufficient reason for a difference in creative personality and production. Each dramatist remains true to nature and treats action in one place and at one time” (p. 15). Accentuating her argument Dorothy Matilda Figueira (1991) ^[5] adds that “Herder sought to emancipate himself from the yoke of Classicism. Toward that end, *Śākuntala* served an important technical purpose. By presenting a different dramatic model, it challenged Aristotle’s absolute authority. Through its unorthodox use of nature, sanctity, sentiment, and realism, it successfully defied the shibboleths of contemporary literary tradition and created a new horizon of expectation for drama as a whole” (p. 15). Herder was candidly making a case for historically contextualizing “Shakuntala” and placing it in the cultural matrix of Indian religion and mythology. As Taran Kang (2017) suggests, in “the *Zerstreute Blätter*, Herder also demonstrated the inapplicability of Aristotle’s categories to *Sakuntala* and thereby called into question the universal validity of the philosopher’s poetics (Werke, 16:92-104). He insisted that a proper appreciation of *Sakuntala* required a sensitivity to Indian culture and an acquaintance with the religion and mythology of the people; the appeal to alien aesthetic standards must give way to historical contextualization and empathetic understanding” (p. 34).

When Herder jettisoned universalist parameters and endorsed relativist yardsticks in appreciating “Shakuntala”,

it revealed his skepticism not only against Eurocentric models, but with the universalist notions as such. While European Enlightenment emphatically related language with intellect or reason, Herder demonstrated the ‘feeling’ to be equally crucial to human language, and identified in “Shakuntala” the reverberations of the “voice of heart”. The Enlightenment Europe with Kant celebrated the ideal of humanity as the fostering of the program of rationality and progress. Yet, Herder did not refrain from acknowledging the divine pattern of the human affairs in “Shakuntala”, which paved the way for the quasi-religious notion of Humanität stretching from Herder to German romantics. It is precisely this difference of Herder with the reigning universal claims of the Enlightenment Europe, which has allowed some critics to discern in Herder a perceptible leaning towards the idea of cultural pluralism, which is informed by his philosophy of education. Taran Kang (2017) ^[7] has argued regarding Herder that understanding “culture itself as an educational process, he reasoned that different cultures were at different stages of education. Within this schema, those at an earlier stage of education were imagined to be more like children than those at a later one. The analogy seems to suggest a hierarchy of grades, but Herder actually deployed it in favor of a cultural and historical pluralism that undermined hierarchical evaluations. Since not all people participate in the same temporal moment, the application of a timeless standard to all of them leads to misrepresentation and misunderstanding. And just as there are peoples at different stages of education, there are also different forms of education and these cannot be judged according to uniform criteria” (p. 36). Herder accepted the temporal unevenness of the cultures and yet applauded the positive values as available in India. Kant, contrarily, agreed to temporal unevenness, but remained insistent on advocating the European supremacy. Kant had stated, “Purposeless savagery held back the development of the capacities of our race...” (web.itu.edu.tr/girayg/comprehensive/docs/Kant%2020%Ide a%for%a%Universal%History%20...pdf). And to that he added that “Rousseau was not far wrong in preferring the state of savages, so long, that is, as the last stage to which the human race must climb is not attained” (web.itu.edu.tr/girayg/comprehensive/docs/Kant%2020%Ide a%for%a%Universal%History%20...pdf).

While the narratives of human progress and rationality unfolded in the wake of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution in Europe, Herder sought to acknowledge the cultural riches of India in its own terms. In the form of a Hindu, the nature revealed its gentleness and unadulterated purity, which shaped the benign way of an Indian dealing with the world. Herder believed that the “Hindus are the gentlest race on earth. They dislike causing pain; they respect all living creatures, drawing their sustenance from milk, rice, fruit and health-giving herbs-the pure, undefiled food which Nature offers” (Taylor, 2003, 131) ^[13]. Living gently in harmony with nature engendered a state of happiness for the Indians. Herder read into this happiness the uniqueness of a culture distinct from another. Taran Kang (2017) ^[7] notes that for Herder “the Hindus, whom he described as “the most gentle tribe among men” (*der sanftmüthigste Stamm der Menschen*), embodied many of the virtues of this early childlike condition (Werke, 13: 222). According to Herder, the native inhabitants of India did not seek to harm any living thing, and they derived their

sustenance from milk, rice, and the nourishing fruits and vegetables that the land provided. Establishing the parallelism between the beauty of the body and the beauty of the soul, he repeated and endorsed William Macintosh's description of them as slender, well-proportioned, and graceful in their movements (*Werke*, 13: 222). He also lauded the lofty conception of God, which the Brahmins promulgated, and the gentle comportment of the Indians, which he juxtaposed with European aggressiveness and violence" (p. 33).

Herder's assessment of India foreshadowed the positive image of India that proliferated during romanticism in Germany. In his essay "'Heile Welt" oder Rückständigkeit? Deutschland, Indien und das deutsche Indienbild. Das romantische und das utilitaristische Indienbild Europas", Jürgen Lutt (1998) ^[9] points to the German romantic thinker August Wilhelm Schlegel's polemics against the utilitarian principle of exclusive insistence on the usefulness as a normative category. Contrary to utilitarianism, German romantic thinkers and poets highlighted the non-utilitarian image of India in contrast to the interests of the British colonialists. Writing about the long persistence of this positive image of India from Herder to the romantics, Carmen Brandt (2016) ^[1] underlines that Herder "draws a romanticized picture of India where people live in harmony with nature and religion. The poet yearns for this imagined holy country whose inhabitants seem to be innocent and gentle. These topoi of a mythical and wondrous India were already known from the Medieval Ages, but through the translation of Sanskrit literature into German, for instance Kālidāsa's play *Śakuntalā*...this romantic image received new and durable impetus and could now unfold to its full extent without any opposition until its counterpart, the atrocious India image found its way to Germany" (p. 90). Herder's positive image of India gave way to the atrocious India image in the writings of Hegel and Marx during the course of the nineteenth century in Germany. Carmen Brandt (2016) ^[1] maintains that this atrocious India "image reached a larger audience only very slowly and selectively through writings of authors like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx" (p. 91).

One would not be very far from recognizing the cultural dichotomy between India and Europe, if one assents to Herder's favorable stance towards India. This dichotomy appears all the more remarkable if one sees in Herder's India nature, wonder, childhood as juxtaposed to science, progress, and enlightened maturity of Europe. Carmen Brandt and Kirsten Hackenbroch (2017) ^[2] refer to the implicit presence of this dichotomy in German perception about India, when they cite from Anil Bhatti, "Ob positiv oder negativ gewertet, war Indien eine vergangene Größe. Ursprungstraum, verlorenes Paradies, Wiege der Kultur, Kindheit der Menschheit etc. Die Gegenwart war ein matter Abglanz, ja degenerierte Stufe der einstigen Glorie. Neben dieser Verweigerung der Gleichzeitigkeiten wurden durch Dichotomisierung und Abgrenzungen "moderne" Eigenschaften wie Wissenschaft, Rationalität, Philosophie diesem Indien abgesprochen" (p. 45).

Yet contemporary discourses are upholding not only Herder's positive image of India but also his acutely critical stance against colonialism. Herder compared the European colonizers with the old men and he nursed no qualms about criticizing the diseases and profligacies that had befallen them. Herder had noted Europeans as suffering from

senescence in so far as there existed peoples in the stage of childhood and youth in other corners of the world. Taran Kang (2017) ^[7] emphasizes that Herder "presented Europeans themselves as suffering from a senescence that made them less than ideal educators. In regard to the condition of the planet, he writes that "there exist there peoples in childhood, youth, manhood, and will probably do so for a long time to come before the seafaring old men of Europe succeed in advancing them to old age through brandy, diseases, and slaves' arts" (*Writings*, 416-417)" (p. 37). Not surprisingly, Herder inveighed vehemently also against the "civilizing mission" of Europe. The idea of evolution of human beings according to their natural conditions is cardinal to Herder's philosophy of culture, which nonetheless discards the belief in the principle of subjugation of one people by another. Articulating Herder's repugnance towards Europe's agenda of civilizing the colonized peoples, Tarang Kang (2017) ^[7] observes that in "his "Gespräche über die Bekehrung der Indier durch unsre Europäische Christen," which appeared in 1802 as part of the third volume of Herder's *Adrastea*,...a condemnation of European violence perpetrated against other peoples and a skepticism towards missions to civilize them" (p. 37) are notable. For Herder, it lay into the nature of the things that the crimes committed in the name of colonization would recoil on Europe itself and before long Europe would learn to be rueful vis-à-vis the peoples it wronged. According to Taran Kang (2017) ^[7], near "the conclusion of the *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität*, Herder stated that "Europe must give compensation for the debts that it has incurred, make good the crimes it has committed-not from choice but according to the very nature of things" (*Writings*, 418)" (p. 38). Moreover, the spiritual elements which Herder traced in Indian literature carried emulative worth for him. For Herder, one day in future Europe would rise to the occasion of figuring out and appreciating the human essence of this spiritual wisdom. As Taran Kang (2017) ^[7] puts it, "Herder retained hope that Europe would learn from its past mistakes and pursue loftier spiritual goals in the interest of humanity; the chastisement it experienced might even facilitate a spiritual regeneration" (p. 38) Here, Herder's mention of the 'spiritual regeneration' of Europe appears in some respect to prefigure romantic discovery of language, literature, and philosophy of India in much broader conceivable terms.

In contemporary discourses on literary and cultural studies, Herder's relevance for post-colonial critique has been forcefully articulated. Herder has been seen one of those earliest thinkers of Europe, who unerringly sought to call attention to the indiscriminate colonial plunder of the indigenous people by the European colonizers. Herder wrote in 1764 that the "gold of royal diadems, the delicacies of our tables, all the appurtenances of splendid display and luxury, concealed beneath the mask of convenience, all these are the pillage of distant worlds" (Noyes, 2014) ^[10]. Herder was thus among the first thinkers of the modern age in Europe to take cautious note of Europe's material prosperity thriving on the misery of the colonies. It did not escape his attention that the natural growth of culture of the peoples in many parts of the world had been stunted by European colonizers under the unbridled rage of power. Viewing this colonial rage of power from the postcolonial perspective, John K. Noyes cites from Herder qualifying Europe to be presumptuous and manipulative, and more than that also not wise. According to John K. Noyes (2014) ^[10], "Herder

writes later (1797) that “our continent ought not to be called the wise, but the presumptuous, intrusive, manipulative part of the earth; it has not cultivated, but destroyed the germs of other peoples’ cultures, wherever and however it was able.” Arguing with Herder, the much-extolled ‘civilizing mission’ of Europe was nothing else than a façade. Europe, instead of cultivating peoples, wreaked havoc on them as long as possible and arrogated to itself the esteem of civilizer. This Europe was severely at odds with the Enlightenment image of it as a torch-bearer of universal progress and Herder went to the extent of wishing its ‘perishing’. According to John K. Noyes (2014) ^[10], Herder “states in 1793 that “for the benefit of Humanity, unfortunate Europe should perish.” These notes of Herder make him side with the postcolonial critique of Empire, in which Empire symbolizes a perpetual repression and regimentation of the colonized peoples at the cost of humanity.

Herder’s critical stance to colonial excesses however did not dissuade him from taking a dim view of the prevailing ills and inhuman practices of the Indian society. Sonia Sikka (2011) ^[12] writes that Herder “does not hesitate to condemn certain practices, such as the treatment of pariahs and the burning of widows on their husbands’ funeral pyres (*Ideas*, 455-6; cf. Spencer 2007, 96)” (p. 17). Herder equally deplored the puzzling biological excuse behind widow-burning in India. In this context, Sonia Sikka (2011) ^[12] says, Herder “points out the poor excuses men give for their brutal treatment of women, especially in warm climes where people are allegedly given to an excess of libidinous desire, offering the case of widow immolation in India as an example (*Ideas*, 319)” (p. 17).

In essence, Herder’s view of India resonates with diversity of frames of reference. He fully adores man’s harmonic relationship to nature and his happy state of mind like in childhood in India. Human feeling and not cold rationality suffuse the language that man utters and hence, in Kalidasa’s “*Shakuntala*”, he discerns the outpouring of the ‘voice of heart’. His India outweighs a Europe ageing with diseases, and he critiques the imperialistic vices of Europe. At the same time, he refrains from overlooking the inhuman practices existing in Indian society. The mélange of perspectives that comes out from Herder’s engagement with India substantiates in him a curious convergence of cultural pluralism, critique of colonialism, and universal humanism. Precisely because of a coherent convergence of diverse perspectives, Herder was able to praise India, partly critique it, and also could denounce Europe long before postcolonial critics endeavored to do so.

It is significant to note that glossing over Goethe’s involvement with India would be tantamount to bypass the prominence that India had acquired in Germany during the lifetime of Herder. As early as 1791, almost simultaneous with Herder, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was fascinated by the figure of Sakuntala of the ancient Sanskrit poet Kalidasa. He composed a short Sakuntala epitaph in 1791 as follows:

“Will ich die Blumen des frühen, die Früchte des
späteren Jahres,
Will ich, was reizt und entzückt, will ich, was sättigt und
nährt,
Will ich den Himmel, die Erde mit *einem* Namen
begreifen,

Nenn ich, Sakuntala, dich, und so ist alles
gesagt.”(Mertens, 2011, p. 320) ^[15]

Above lines in adoration of Sakuntala bring out the charm and appeal of Sakuntala in the drama of Kalidasa. Sakuntala appears here as the symbolic denotation of an aesthetic glory taking Goethe’s poetic consciousness in its sway, saturating and nourishing his creative impulses. All the distinctions of Sakuntala add up to such a prolific grandeur that the earth and heaven in its entire humanly conceivable realms can be designated by only one name-Sakuntala. The human dimension of Sakuntala reaches up thus to a dimension at the level of universe.

The deep impact of the drama *Sakuntala* on Goethe persisted till the end of his life. In 1830, when Goethe was engaged completing his monumental dramatic work *Faust*, he was still in search of inspiration from the drama *Sakuntala* of Kalidasa. In December 1830, Goethe took to reading *Sakuntala* again in its French translation as brought out by the French orientalist Antoine Léonard de Chézy. Volker Mertens (2011) ^[15] refers to this reading of *Sakuntala* by Goethe and alludes to Goethe’s conclusion that whereas the stuff of a work of art generally determines the receiver’s approach to it, it is the handling of the theme in *Sakuntala*, which captivates the reader so overwhelmingly (319). Volker Mertens (2011) ^[15] further points out Goethe’s belief in 1830 concerning *Sakuntala* that in this drama the dramatist appears in his highest function (‘höchste Funktion’), as the representative of the natural condition, of the finest way of life (‘feinste Lebensweise’), of the purest moral striving (‘reinste sittliche Bestreben’), of the most venerable majesty, and of the sincerest observations of the God (‘ernsteste Gottesbetrachtung’) (319). Volker Mertens (2011) ^[15] argues that Goethe was so profoundly moved by the God’s presence in this drama that the idea of transcendence entered his drama *Faust* also, in which the meeting of the loving souls occurs in a transcendental sphere (319).

Yet, a deep disdain for the superhuman and gigantic forms of the Indian Gods can be found in Goethe. In *Zahmen Xenien*, which was published in 1821 in *Ueber Kunst und Alterthum*, Goethe expressed his disdain for Indian Gods as follows:

“Und so will ich, ein für allemal,
Keine Bestien in dem Götter-Saal!
Die leidigen Elephanten-Rüssel,
Das umgeschlungene Schlangen-Genüssel,
Tief Urschildkröt’ im Welten-Sumpf,
Viel Königsköpf auf einem Rumpf,
Die müssen uns zur Verzweiflung bringen,
Wird sie nicht reiner Ost verschlingen.” (Lauer, 2012, p. 164)

Above lines depict range of Indian Gods as the labyrinth of elephants and snakes evoking the beastly images. Even the human beings do possess numerous heads, particularly the kings. Goethe finds these forms and images least appealing to a sensible human aesthetic taste, and declares that they perplex our imagination instead of ennobling it. These forms signify the grotesque, hardly anything beyond the objects of curiosity. Gerhard Lauer (2012) ^[16] quotes from Goethe, “Chinesische, Indische, Ägyptische Altertümer sind immer nur Curiositäten, es ist sehr wohl gethan, sich und die Welt

damit bekannt zu machen; zu sittlicher und ästhetischer Bildung aber werden sie uns wenig fruchten" (162). It is, hence, not surprising, that Goethe, even though he was fascinated by Sakuntala's aesthetic charm, sought the basis of education not in the East, rather in Greece and Rome. Gerhard Lauer (2012) ^[16] quotes from Goethe, "Möge das Studium der griechischen und römischen Literatur immerfort die Basis der höhern Bildung bleiben" (p. 163). Herder and Goethe represent two distinct points of departure as far as German literary reception of and intellectual response to Indian condition at the end of 18th century are concerned. The prominent dimension of Herder's concern for India, its heritage, and its contemporary conditions is bound up with the strands of cultural pluralism and critique of colonial dominance. On the other hand, Goethe's reception of Indian heritage is informed by his enlightened outlook which comes in the way of accepting the images of Indian deities by him. This has gone into the contemporary literary debates as Goethe's encounter with the 'grotesque' India. Nonetheless, while contemplating the completion of his drama *Faust*, Goethe was least reluctant to pore over Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*. Thus, Goethe's ambivalence on India kept him dispassionate about it although at the same time not making him deficient of benefitting from Indian literary resources for his literary endeavors.

References

1. Brandt C. Spirituality, Atrocities and It-German Images of India. DOI: 10.12797/Politeja.13.2016.40.07. Accessed 18 Jul 2024.
2. Brandt C, Hackenbroch K. Die deutsche Südasiensforschung im Wandel der Zeit. ASIEN. Jul 2017;36-57. Available from: asien.asienforschung.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/07/Asien_144_RA_Hackenbroch.pdf. Accessed 18 Jul 2024.
3. Dupré L. Kant's Theory of History and Progress. The Review of Metaphysics. Jun 1998;51(4):813-828. Accessed 5 Apr 2024.
4. Ellingson T. The Myth of the Noble Savage. University of California Press; c2001.
5. Figueira DM. Translating the Orient: The Reception of Śakuntalā in Nineteenth Century Europe. State University of New York Press; c1991.
6. Herder JG. Treatise on the Origin of Language. Available from: marxists.org/archive/herder/1772/origins-language.htm. Accessed 12 Jul 2024.
7. Kang T. Herder's Idea of Historical Childhood. German Studies Review. Feb 2017;40(1):23-40. DOI: 10.1353/gsr.2017.0001. Accessed 19 Jul 2024.
8. Kant I. Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View. Available from: web.itu.edu.tr/girayg/comprehensive/docs/Kant%2020%Idea%for%a%Universal%History%20...pdf. Accessed 3 Apr 2024.
9. Lutt J. Heile Welt oder Rückständigkeit? Deutschland, 1998. Indien und das deutsche Indienbild. Das romantische und das utilitaristische Indienbild Europas. Indien. 1998, 1. Available from: buergerundstaat.de/1_98/bis981k.htm. Accessed 18 Jul 2024.
10. Noyes JK. Herder, Postcolonial Theory and the Antinomy of Universal Reason. Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry. Mar 2014;1(1):107-122. Accessed 11 Jul 2024.
11. Sensen O. Kant on Human Dignity. De Gruyter; c2011.
12. Sikka S. Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference: Enlightened Relativism. Cambridge University Press; c2011.
13. Taylor R. Herder and German Romanticism. In: Macfie AL, editor. Eastern Influences on Western Philosophy: A Reader. Edinburgh University Press; c2003. p. 130-140.
14. Williamson GS. The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche. The University of Chicago Press; c2004.
15. Mertens V. Sacontala...muß man küssen''. Über den Einfluss von Kalidasas Drama Sakuntala auf Tieck und Goethe. In: Voda Eschgfäller S, Horňáček M, editors. Kulturgeschichtliche Daten zur deutschmährischen Literatur. Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci; c2011. p. 313-320.
16. Lauer G. Goethes indische Kuriositäten. In: Kunz EA, Müller D, Winkler M, editors. Figurationen des Grotesken in Goethes Werken. Aisthesis Verlag; c2012. p. 159-180.