Introduction: Looking for India in Asia

> Amidst the wealth of beauty in the vast abode of art that is Borobudur, embraced by this immortal creation birthed by the vibrant pulse of ancient India, stood India's finest aesthete: Rabindranath. . . . Modern India's finest man standing at the playground of ancient India's talent . . . the sight was sublime. – Suniti Kumar Chatterjee (Java, 1927).[1]

On a fine afternoon in September 1927, a Bengali poet sporting a flowing grey beard and donning impeccably white robes solemnly ascended the stupa-complex of Borobudur in Central Java. Rabindranath Tagore was accompanied by a small group of Indian travelers, including the linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, and his Dutch hosts. Tagore and his compatriots were not mere tourists. Whereas stopovers in British Southeast Asia had involved a tight schedule of talks and fundraising events for the poet's international university of Visva-Bharati, they had come to the Dutch East Indies to look for ancient India's cultural legacies.[2]

Tagore's Southeast Asia tour, which received widespread coverage in dailies and monthlies from Bengal to Bombay, was not a singular event.[3] Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Indian intellectuals affiliated with the Calcutta-based Greater India Society (GIS) crisscrossed Southeast Asia to search for the legacies of "Greater India." The monumental Hindu-Buddhist temples, shrines and stupas they encountered en route were interpreted as tangible reminders of an ancient cultural geography molded by Indian civilization. Founded in 1926, the GIS was made up of predominantly Bengali intellectuals born in the 1880s

[1] Chatterjee, *Indonesia*, 322–23.
[2] See also Ghosh (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore in South-East Asia*; Das Gupta, "Rabindranath Tagore in Indonesia"; Bloembergen and Eickhoff, "Save Borobudur!"; Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, Chapter 7.
[3] Chatterjee's travelogue *Dvipamay Bharat* [*India of Many Islands*] was serialized in the *Modern Review* and *Prabasi*, and Tagore's *Java Yatrir Patra* [*Letters from Java*] appeared in the *Modern Review* and *VBQ*. The tour was also covered in newspapers such as the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, *Forward*, *The Statesman*, *The Bombay Chronicle* and *The Times of India*. See "The Truth about Tagore's Visit to Java" (1927); "Rabindranath Tagore's Return" (1927); "Rabindranath's Return. Successful Greater India Tour" (1927); "Clear Cut Issues. India's Cultural Conquests" (1927); "India's Work in S. East Asia" (1927); "India and the Further East" (1927); "Indian Influence in Java" (1927).

and 1890s, and included among its most active and prominent members Kalidas Nag, Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Benoy Kumar Sarkar, Ordhendra Coomar Gangoly and the South Indian historian K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, as well as a number of loosely affiliated figures such as the itinerant *sannyasin* (religious ascetic) Swami Sadananda. The interest in India's cultural legacies abroad found expression in a substantial body of publications – including travelogues, historical monographs and newspaper articles – and the *Journal of the Greater India Society* (*JGIS*) which was published from 1934 until 1959.

GIS members and Tagore, who acted as *Purodha* (honorary chief advisor) of the GIS, were particularly drawn to the edifices of Borobudur, Prambanan (Java) and Angkor Vat (French Indochina), where they claimed to experience "the presence of ancient India in its glorious silence."[4] In 1923, P. C. Bagchi had been the first Indian scholar to study the monumental templescapes of Cambodia and Champa in situ. He was accompanied by his French mentor, the renowned Indologist Sylvain Lévi, who reported that they had visited Angkor and "the noblest and grandest remains of Indian civilisation in the Far East."[5] A decade later, Swami Sadananda sailed from Singapore to the Dutch East Indies "in order to witness the relics of Hindu Civilisation and Culture in Javadwipa."[6] During another journey to Siam, which Tagore and Chatterjee had earlier claimed as "a member of the Greater Indian cultural confederacy," Sadananda discovered to his joy that "the whole country-side was dotted with ruins of ancient Indian architecture."[7] Besides these major Hindu and Buddhist architectural landmarks, GIS members also expressed a keen interest in the Hindu island of Bali. Already in 1915, Tagore had written in a letter to his close associate C. F. Andrews about his longing to visit that "remnant of Old India" and "prisoner of time" whose voice was beckoning him from across the sea.[8]

Although the highlights of the "Greater Indian pilgrimage trail" were to be found in the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina, the GIS did not restrict its quest to Southeast Asia. Kalidas Nag, one of the founders of the GIS and its main driving force, had accompanied Tagore on his journey to China in 1924 in order "to study the problem of the migration of Indian art and ideas in the Far East" and visit as many historical sites and museums as their tight schedule

[4] Chatterjee, *Indonesia*, 323. In 1924, Tagore received an invitation from the EFEO to visit Angkor, but decided against a tour. Letter Nag to Finot, Shanghai, May 28, 1924, Dossier 35 Kalidas Nag, Carton XXIV, Relations extérieures, EFEO.
[5] "Letter S. Lévi to Sir Asutosh" (1923), 550–52.
[6] Sadananda traveled to the Dutch East Indies in 1935. See Sadananda, *The Ramayana in Stone* (1943).
[7] Chatterjee, "Siam and India" (1928), 64; Sadananda, *Hindu Culture in Greater India* (1949), 151.
[8] Cited in Tagore, *Letters from Java*, 11.

allowed for.[9] A similar quest inspired Bagchi to travel to the edge of the Gobi Desert where he surveyed the dazzling frescos in the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas (Dunhuang) and confirmed their archaeological importance for the ancient history of India.[10] And even if GIS members were primarily interested in tracing ancient India's cultural legacies in Southeast, Central and East Asia, they extended the scope of their studies to include Europe, as well as the wider Pacific world and Indian Ocean realm, thus bringing such diverse cultural and historical contexts as ancient Greece, Tang China, Madagascar, the Philippines and Polynesia within the orbit of Greater India. Nag, for example, published a monograph on the cultural legacies of ancient India in the Pacific world and wrote about Vedic influences in Cappadocia, the Asokan missions to Epirus and Macedonia, and the "audacious Indian mariners" who reached Madagascar.[11] The Greater India projection, although primarily oriented towards "the East," came thus to refer to a cultural geography which transcended notions of a bounded space delimited by clear borderlines.

The prospect of traveling in areas imagined to be part of this vast cultural geography of Greater India, elicited a sense of wonder and marvel but also a potent sense of anticipation. As Tagore observed on the eve of his Southeast Asia tour, knowing "what the true wealth of India consisted of" required visiting "the vast and far-off field of her self-dedication" and "search for the Greater India outside India."[12] Tagore and GIS members thought of these travels as a pilgrimage (*tirthayatra*) and drew an analogy between their journeys and "the cultural missions undertaken by the Ancient Indian Missionaries of Buddhism & Brahmanism in the lands of Indo-China, Indonesia and the Far East."[13] Following in the footsteps of ancient Buddhist monks and itinerant Hindu sages, they evoked a Golden Age of Indian cultural flowering during which Indian religious ideas, morals, literary epics and art had been scattered in all directions of the wind. For example, at a shrine near Hangzhou, Kshitimohan Sen and Nag paid homage to an Indian saint and contemplated

[9] Letter Nag to Finot, Shanghai, May 28, 1924, Dossier 35 Kalidas Nag, EFEO. For an account of the China tour (1924) and the ambivalent, at times even hostile, reception of Tagore's speeches, see Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West*; Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire*, Chapter 5.

[10] Nair, *Short Stories on China and India* (1949), 50–52.

[11] Nag, "A Study in Indian Internationalism" (1922/1960), 119, 128, 144. On Greater India and the Pacific world, see Nag, *India and the Pacific World* (1941); Chatterjee, "The Philippines and India" (1931); "Gleanings. Hinduism in the Philippines" (1934); Roy, "The Philippines and its Past" (1931). See also Spoelder, "An 'Indian Hermes'."

[12] Tagore, "Greater India" (1943), 5; Tagore, "Greater India" (1927), 216. Excerpts of the talk, delivered at the GIS in July 1927, first appeared in the Bengali monthly *Prabasi.* See Tagore, "Brihattara Bharat" (1927). Citations are taken from English translations of the speech by Kalidas Nag and Jadunath Sarkar. See also Das Gupta, "Rabindranath Tagore in Indonesia," 456; Bhattacharya, "Rabindranath Tagore in South-East Asia."

[13] Chatterjee, "Description of Java Tour in 1927," File CF 178, RBA, 91.

the "holy place sacred with the memory of the martyrs who gave their lives to build a bridge of fellowship between India and China."[14]

In his poem "Farewell to Siam," Tagore had mused about how his "traveller's hasty hours" had been "constantly filled with the golden memory of an ancient love."[15] But what did Tagore exactly mean by this and what had triggered this new historical awareness? What impelled Indian intellectuals affiliated with the GIS to trace the religious, cultural and artistic legacies of ancient India beyond the subcontinent and how did they come to think of Angkor, Borobudur and Silk Road art as "Indian" cultural heritage? Why did the notion of Greater India matter at this juncture in history, and what was, from the GIS's point of view, at stake?

By exploring these questions, *Visions of Greater India* offers a wide-ranging study of the quest "to find India in Asia" (and beyond) and the Greater India imagination. The book brings together three stories usually told apart: the recovery of Buddhist connectivities along the Silk Roads, the (linked) projects of colonial archaeology in Dutch and French Southeast Asia, and the intellectual history of anti-colonial nationalism and internationalism in British India. Archaeological discoveries in Chinese Turkestan and Southeast Asia opened new historical vistas on the Pan-Asian legacies of Buddhism, and Indian art and culture more broadly. These vistas, in turn, energized the research paradigm of Greater India which became, in the 1920s, tied to nationalist, Asianist and anti-imperialist agendas in the Indian context. Charting a period from roughly the late eighteenth century, when the first Indocentric approaches to Asia's past were formulated by William Jones of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, this study extends its analysis to the 1950s when the last issue of the *JGIS* was published.[16]

Visions of Greater India shows that Greater India was both a scholarly project that reconfigured the writing of Indian (art) history, and a highly versatile political concept central to emerging notions of India as a national and civilizational entity in the interwar period. As a political and culturalist discourse it was multilayered and full of contradictions; it was a colonial fantasy and (Hindu) chauvinist projection but also at the heart of anti-imperialist and internationalist schemes. Below I will use the travelogues and reflections on Greater India by Tagore and GIS members to introduce the book's main themes and argumentative strands.[17]

[14] Sen, "Reminiscences by Kshitimohan Sen" (1942).
[15] Tagore, "Farewell to Siam" (1927), 263.
[16] The final issue of the *JGIS* appeared in 1959.
[17] Although I draw here primarily on travelogues by Tagore, Nag, S. K. Chatterjee and Swami Sadananda, they were certainly not the only Indians who traveled across Asia to trace the cultural legacies of ancient India. Examples include Majumdar's study tour in the Dutch East Indies, Siam and Indochina, and B. R. Chatterjee's visit to Siam (1924). See "R. C. Majumdar in Europe and Indonesia" (1929); B. R. Chatterjee, "Impressions of Siam" (1924).

Transimperial Knowledge Networks and Indocentric Approaches

Whereas the "discovery of ancient India" has so far been primarily told as a subcontinental history, this book demonstrates that archaeological discoveries in the wider Asian sphere had a significant and lasting impact on the study of ancient Indian history and art history, as well as the nationalist and historical imagination, *within* British India.[18] On one level, *Visions of Greater India* opens a new perspective on the connected histories of Orientalist knowledge production in Asia. It charts how the recovery of Buddhist connectivities along the Silk Roads, and the systematic study of Southeast Asia's templescapes by colonial research bodies in the Dutch and French imperial spheres, triggered a lasting interest in the Pan-Asian legacies of Buddhism, and Indian art and culture more broadly, among Indologists and archaeologists in Leiden, Batavia, Paris and Hanoi.

Although often assessed against the broader backdrop of European Orientalism and scholarly exchange, different European Indological traditions remain primarily studied as if they were "cocooned" within their national institutional frameworks.[19] By adopting a comparative and transimperial perspective, the book shows that European Indology was, by the early twentieth century, a highly differentiated field of Orientalist scholarship. Research priorities were contingent on colonial trajectories which not only structured the field of knowledge production but also had a strong bearing on a nation's cultural politics vis-à-vis India. Whereas German Indology remained a sub-branch of philology primarily preoccupied with Sanskrit studies and British Indology languished, following the waning of early Indomania, as an institutional sideshow throughout the heydays of the Raj, Dutch and French Indology transformed into a state-sponsored, interdisciplinary research endeavor whose primary object of study was the imprint of ancient Indian culture beyond the subcontinent. In contrast to their British and German colleagues, Dutch and French Indologists drew predominantly on source materials from Southeast and Central Asia. By approaching ancient Indian history from the "outside,"

[18] On the legacies of colonial archaeology, see Keay, *India Discovered*; Chakrabarti, *Colonial Indology*; Ray, *Colonial Archaeology in South Asia*; Lahiri, *Marshalling the Past*; Lahiri and Singh (eds.), *Buddhism in Asia*; Singh, *The Discovery of Ancient India*; Singh, *The Idea of Ancient India.* For an exception to the subcontinental focus (with a focus on prehistory), see Guha, *Artefacts of History.*

[19] For the German case, see Sengupta, *From Salon to Discipline*; Marchand, *German Orientalism*; McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism*; Adluri, "Pride and Prejudice"; Adluri and Bagchee, *The Nay Science*. For the French context, see Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*; Lardinois, *Scholars and Prophets*. In the Dutch case, the literature has focused on the nexus between Indology and the education of colonial administrators. See, for example, Hart, "Imagine Leiden Without Kern"; Fasseur, *De Indologen*; Gonda, *Indology in The Netherlands.* For a broader panorama of "Europe's India," see Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India*; Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*; Rietbergen, *Europa's India*.

they opened up new perspectives on the connected histories that tied India to Asia and the wider world. *Visions of Greater India* highlights the role of trends beyond the "ivory tower" and shows how research trips and travels, transimperial institutional entanglements, and the dynamics of imperial competition energized the research paradigm of Greater India in the Dutch and French sphere.[20]

On another level, this study reconstructs and scrutinizes the implications of the Indian "discovery" of a vast civilizational sphere allegedly molded by the transregional circulation of ancient Indic culture and religions. Through an analysis of journal and newspaper articles, monographs, lectures and university curricula, as well as memoirs and private paper collections, this book underlines the crucial role of the GIS and its affiliated scholars in disseminating and popularizing a nationalist historical narrative, not just in Bengal but across the subcontinent, in which ancient India was staged as a shaper of world history and a great civilizing force in the wider Asian sphere.

Building on the important work of Susan Bayly, who pointed out the links between French Indologists and scholars of the GIS, and Marieke Bloembergen, who recently offered first insights into the Leiden–Calcutta nexus, I show how the longstanding scholarly tendency to approach the history of vast tracts of Asia via India was institutionalized at the Sorbonne (Paris), the Kern Institute (Leiden) and the Calcutta-based GIS in the 1920s.[21] Calcutta became the South Asian node in this transimperial knowledge network and Greater India came to refer to an ancient cultural geography molded by India, the alleged fountainhead of Asiatic civilization. While traveling across Southeast Asia, Nag was introduced to the efforts of Dutch and French scholars to recover this "Indic past" and, turning the gaze back to India, he asked himself whether "the marvelous history of ancient Indian colonization" and "the epic of the Indian Vikings" would remain "unsung and unwritten for ever."[22] Turning wonder into action, a new generation of Indian scholars with Nag in the vanguard found inspiration in the work of research clusters in Leiden and Paris and the ongoing archaeological excavations in Indochina, the Dutch East Indies and the wider Asian sphere.[23] Thus, as Chatterjee remarked with respect to the Dutch efforts, they "aided us Indians in our quest for self-knowledge" and revealed that the achievements of

[20] On transimperial history as an approach, see Hedinger and Heé, "Transimperial History."
[21] Bayly, "Imagining 'Greater India'"; "India's 'Empire of Culture'"; Bloembergen, "The Open Ends of the Dutch Empire"; "The Politics of 'Greater India'." See also Chong-Guan (ed.), *Early Southeast Asia Viewed from India*, xv–xlvii; Stolte and Fischer-Tiné, "Imagining Asia in India," 82–87; Stolte, "Orienting India," Chapter 3.
[22] Nag, "Greater India Revisited. Eastwards Ho!" (1927), 68.
[23] Kris Manjapra has asserted that the concept of Aryanism and the comparative method "tied Bengali thinkers in the Greater India movement to modes of German orientalist scholarship." Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, 198. This study suggests that French and Dutch Orientalist clusters played a crucial mediating role.

ancient Indian civilization could only be grasped by "look[ing] outside India."[24] Tagore was likewise impressed by the Dutch efforts and stressed that Indians "must accept them as our gurus if we would understand India in its completeness."[25] While taking in "evidence of the architectural grandeur to which the Hindus rose in Java," Swami Sadananda praised the Dutch authorities for their "Curzonian spirit in protecting the monumental achievement of the past" which, he added, "will be appreciated by every Hindu."[26]

Likewise, the GIS welcomed the efforts of French scholars affiliated with the Sorbonne or L'École française d'Extrême-Orient in Hanoi for throwing light on the vanished "Hindu Empires" of Funan, Champa and the Khmers. Nag, in an article solely devoted to the achievements of the French School, praised the "silent and sound workers" and "noble scholars of the French School of Archaeology" who had "helped in the rearing of the superb edifice of Far Eastern Archaeology, with India as the golden thread running through and connecting all."[27] Pioneers of Central Asian archaeology, such as Aurel Stein, were similarly eulogized for recovering the "forgotten history" of ancient Indian civilizational diffusion along the Silk Roads. Such kudos to European scholars deeply implicated in imperial projects in Southeast Asia (and in the case of Stein, the Raj) should be understood in light of their role as harbingers of a new historical identity and cultural politics that assigned India historical agency as a superior civilizational force in the larger Asian sphere and a shaper of world history. The GIS paid its tributes and acknowledged that without these efforts, Indians would have remained unaware of the historical legacies of Greater India.

This transimperial constellation of actors appears, at first, to go somewhat against the grain of the Saidian paradigm of Orientalism that tends to draw a sharp line between colonizer and colonized in the production of Orientalist knowledge.[28] Yet although, from an Indian point of view, the research paradigm of Greater India evidently represented a palatable and even welcome strand of Orientalist scholarship, it involved similar mechanisms of imposition, epistemic violence and exclusion that Said identified as part and parcel of Orientalist projections. Greater India was, on at least one level, a remarkably consistent Indocentric research paradigm that structured the quest for the ancient past in Dutch/French Southeast Asia and parts of Central Asia, and which culminated in the foundation of the GIS in the 1920s. This research paradigm typically ascribed cultural heritage to Indic artistic impulses at the expense of local agency. When "native" initiative was granted in some measure, the artistic output was often dismissed as a departure from imported Indic

[24] Chatterjee, *Indonesia*, 224. [25] Tagore, *Letters from Java*, 131–32.
[26] Sadananda, *Pilgrimage to Greater India* (1936), 20. [27] Nag, "Art and Archaeology," 66.
[28] Said, *Orientalism*.

classical standards, thus marking a process of cultural decline. A remarkably similar diffusionist logic guided European art historians on the Indian subcontinent where the artistic highpoint of "classical" post-Mauryan Hindu-Buddhist art was attributed to Greco-Roman impulses. Yet further East, "Indic" replaced "Greek" as the superior classicism and civilizing force that had temporarily "uplifted" local culture and left its ennobling aesthetic imprint.

Staging the Nation Beyond the Raj: Greater India and the Colonial Predicament

Inspired by the Indocentric research paradigm developed in the French and Dutch sphere, figures such as Nag, Bagchi, Chatterjee and Majumdar traveled to Paris, Hanoi, Leiden and Batavia to study with Indologists, and embarked on pilgrimages across Asia to search for the immaterial and material legacies of Greater India. In British India, the GIS tied the template of Greater India to anti-imperialist agendas. Greater India became an empowering political discourse which allowed Nag and his colleagues to take a few well-aimed potshots at the "myths" that had acquired paradigmatic status in the British historiography on India since James Mill's influential *The History of British India* (1817). The GIS played a crucial role in destabilizing self-serving "colonial" assumptions about India and Indian history and challenged the Raj's monopoly on knowledge production within the university settings of British India. Under the impetus of the Greater India imagination, the nation and its ancient past thus became increasingly staged beyond the territorial and epistemic limits of the Raj. In the process, the Greater India movement reconfigured the "idea of India."

But the appeal of Greater India as a reservoir of anti-imperialist discourse was not limited to its utility as an historical argument that could expose and correct the biased and often racist accounts of British historians. Below I zoom in on the travel experiences of Tagore and GIS scholars and flag the multiple ways in which the colonial predicament informed the Greater India imagination. These vignettes also allude to a broader argument foregrounded in this book: "Staging the nation beyond the Raj" enabled Indian intellectuals to reevaluate India's positionality and agency in Asia as well as the world at large, both in historical terms and with regard to the present. Although inspired by Rebecca E. Karl's work on the role of "staging the world" in shaping the intellectual trajectory of Chinese nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century, in this book "staging" has an altogether different analytical purchase.[29] "Greater India," as this book argues, was a culturalist discourse fueled by transimperial knowledge networks that allowed Indian intellectuals

[29] Karl, *Staging the World*.

espousing different political agendas to project their idea of India on a geographical canvas that transcended notions of colonial space as defined by the Raj. But the new spatial and historical imaginations energized by the interwar Greater India movement also challenged the epistemic foundations of knowledge production in British India and undermined the colonialist rendering of Indian history undergirding the imperial civilizing mission. The material and immaterial legacies of Greater India represented a "forgotten past" that became the locus of an alternative historical identity and the key to understanding India's civilizational self. Greater India, as we will see, offered new horizons of historical possibility by disrupting the colonial projection of Indian history as an anti-climactic saga of splendid isolation, civilizational degeneration, political fragmentation and excessive mysticism.

Traveling in Greater India during the Age of Empire

In the 1920s, a dense network of steamship companies and ocean liners greatly facilitated travel across Asian waters. Yet Tagore and his compatriots still faced the humiliating hurdle of travel restrictions. Nag, for example, reflected on his ordeal of obtaining the required papers that would permit him to visit the Dutch East Indies. With characteristic flair he evoked for his Indian readers how "claiming descent from my great ancestors Sakya Nagasena, Gunavarman etc." had not spared him from "the purgatory of the Passport Office."[30] Called to present himself before the Dutch Consul, he entered "the dingy office, in the stuffy steaming atmosphere" and felt all his pride "as a descendant of the great Hindu pioneers, dissipated into vapour." Due to his contacts with Dutch Orientalists he was eventually issued a passport but the experience had left him "a bit crestfallen."[31]

The flexible contours of the cultural geography of Greater India offered an evocative point of contrast with the concrete political boundaries that, in the 1920s, divided South and parts of Southeast Asia into imperial spheres lorded over by the British, the French and the Dutch. Although often couched in colonialist rhetoric, Tagore and Nag postulated Greater India as the historical antithesis of the European, and in particular the British, template of empire. In this vision, Greater India signified a cultural ecumene and *true* commonwealth organically molded by the "Indic factor" and united by the shared spiritual inheritance of Hinduism and Buddhism. Tagore and Nag contrasted this ancient "empire of culture" with the political imposition and territorial occupation that characterized the formation of modern European empires and

[30] Nag, "Greater India Revisited. Eastwards Ho!" 69. Nagasena and Gunavarman were Buddhist monks. Gunavarman allegedly played an important role in the diffusion of Buddhist doctrine to China and Java.
[31] Ibid.

informed the predicament of colonial subjecthood. They harked back to a Golden Age when "Indian teachers" mingled freely with Javanese, Burmese and Chinese Buddhists on the pilgrimage circuit that connected India, and its cosmopolitan hubs such as the Buddhist university of Nalanda, to the wider Asian sphere. In this sense, Greater India was a "cultural counter-geography"; it was a ploy that could be used to criticize a world order shaped by empire and predicated on unequal movement. As Nag had discovered in that dingy passport office, current conditions hindered Asian rapprochement and were a far cry from the free and spontaneous flow of intercourse that, he believed, characterized the epoch when Indian civilization reigned supreme under the Eastern skies.

Tagore juxtaposed this "connected past" with the fragmented present and sought to revitalize the ancient bonds of the Greater Indian ecumene. In the poem "To Java. By a Pilgrim from India," Tagore evoked the outward flow of Indian civilization and meditated on the severance of "ancient bonds":

> The time wore on, the dark night came upon us,
> and we knew not each other.
> The seat we shared was buried under the Dust
> raised by Time's chariot wheels.
> By the receding flood of oblivion I was borne back
> to my own lonely shore –
> my hands bare, my mind languorous with sleep.
> The sea before my house remained dumb
> of the mystery of a meeting it had witnessed,
> and the garrulous Ganges spoke not to me
> of a hidden long track to her other sacred haunt.[32]

The sad, elegiac tone and the longing for a time "when we tied golden threads of kinship round each other's wrist" was, however, followed by a more optimistic note. India had risen from her slumber and once again sent her best sons to Java's shores so that "the old that has been lost" could "be regained and made new."[33] In a speech addressed to an audience in Saigon in 1929, Tagore proclaimed himself to be a "messenger from the past":

> The heart of India once throbbed under the sunny skies of these shores and dreamed its dreams in beauty and scattered its thoughts for a rich harvest of culture in an alien land. I feel that the India of these days has come in my person to visit once more her forsaken home which has such association of years of achievements and growth of civilization. I am a messenger from her past, I stand by your door, seek a sear in your heart and ask

[32] Tagore, "Some Poems" (1927), 256–58. A Dutch translation of Tagore's *Letters from Java* appeared in the literary journal *Oedaya* [*Sunrise*]. Tagore, "Brieven" (1929).

[33] Tagore, "Some Poems" (1927). The Javanese poet Doetadilaga struck a similar chord in the poem "To Hindusthan." Doetadilaga evoked India as "an older brother" and alluded to the cultural and religious lessons India had imparted. Doetadilaga, "Aan Hindoestan" (1927), 288.