

India in the Making of Romain Rolland: Humanism, Spiritual Universalism, and the Reconfiguration of East-West Dialogue

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Abstract

Romain Rolland's thought continues to resonate as one of the loudest voices of peace and humanism in the twentieth century. Through his vast literary and intellectual œuvre, the Nobel laureate relentlessly championed anti-war and anti-colonial ideals while cultivating a profound engagement with India, its intellect, and its philosophy. This article examines Romain Rolland's multifaceted relationship with India, which he encountered primarily through his own extensive reading, correspondence, and dialogue with a range of interlocutors. His engagement with India can be situated within a framework of humanism, his belief in moral heroism, and his orientalist leanings. What set Rolland apart from other writers was the pull of spirituality and mysticism that drew him toward India. This gave Rolland room to bridge reason and intuition, East and West, and opened a path to self-discovery — the “inner journey” that India made possible for him. The methodological lens of alterity that Rolland adopts opens him to perspectives beyond his European frame of reference. Thus India, far from being merely an object of fascination, becomes an active participant in his quest for universal ethics, his critique of European modernity, and his commitment to dialogue. In this sense, Romain Rolland emerges as a true forerunner of intercultural studies.

***Keywords:* humanism, orientalism, mysticism, India, Romain Rolland**

1. Introduction

Romain Rolland stands as one of the most singular intellectual figures of twentieth-century Europe. Writer, musicologist, biographer, essayist, and uncompromising pacifist, the Nobel laureate built a body of work that persistently resisted the fragmentation of humanity into nations, races, religions, and competing civilizational blocs. During a period marked by imperial and colonial expansion, military prowess, nationalism, and two world wars, Rolland staunchly defended an ideal of fraternity rooted in spiritual depth and advocated pan-humanist values.

Among the many dimensions of his thought, his relationship with India occupies a particularly distinctive place.

The question of India in Rolland's work has often been approached in scholarship through different interpretative perspectives such as spirituality (Harris, 2013), pacifism (Duchâtelet, 2010), attachment to Indian philosophy (Caamano Piñeiro, 2015), hatred and alternatives to violence (Crepon, 2016), the corpus of correspondence (with Tagore, Nag through Guha, 2018, 2010; Roy (1956), or intermediaries (such as J.C. Bose, Roos, 1966), a broader view of Rolland's sociopolitical relevance and global footprint (Bridet, 2023) or Rolland's multi-pronged intellectual commitments (Fisher, 1998). This article proposes a different reading. Rather than examining what Rolland thought and wrote about India, (and thereby risk presenting India as an object of European interpretation), it seeks to understand how India participated in the making of Rolland himself — that is, how India played not a passive but an active role in his writing. This formulation demands a conceptual shift. Rather than treating India as an external element appended to the existing repertoire of European intellectual projects, it may be understood as one of the constitutive forces through which Rolland reformulated his vision of humanity, redefined the place of spirituality in modern European life, and developed a renewed sense of the need for intercultural dialogue. In this sense, India was not merely portrayed anew by Rolland; it became one of the conditions through which he reimagined Europe and, ultimately, himself.

The paradox of this relationship is striking. One might expect that a person so inspired by India would have spent time in the country; yet Rolland never travelled to India. His connect with the subcontinent was shaped entirely through reading, correspondence, meetings with Indian thinkers, writers, and political figures and his personal journals. Geographical absence did not diminish his intellectual curiosity; if anything, the distance transformed India into the exploration of an interior landscape that took shape through philosophical, humanistic, and intuitive dimensions. This interior geography becomes particularly salient in the aftermath of the First World War. Rolland's journal entries and political essays repeatedly return to Europe's moral failure and to the collapse of a civilization that had produced violence on an unprecedented scale. This was a crisis that kindled his intellectual questioning with renewed force. His pacifism was therefore not just political opposition to war, or a call for external peace, but a deeper interrogation of European modernity itself. India emerged as a mirror holding up a reality check to a war-mongering Europe.

To frame the article's central problem, we argue that India can be understood through three interconnected functions in Rolland's thought. First, India serves as a political and humanist alternative for imagining humanity and fraternity beyond nationalism, and simultaneously as an ethical mirror to Europe during its crisis. Second, India functions as a spiritual language through which Rolland conceptualised the inner experience, later finding fuller expression in his notion of the "oceanic feeling." Third, India serves as a literary and epistemological space that informed and transformed his relationship with humanity and world cultures. To explore these dimensions, the article examines Rolland's position as an uncompromising humanist, his predilection for spirituality and mysticism, and his preoccupation with moral heroism. It draws on a broad corpus of primary sources, ie. Rolland's correspondence, journals, essays, and published works, with particular attention to the relationships he cultivated with Indian interlocutors and the roles played by figures such as Gandhi, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and Tagore in shaping his reflections. India occupied so significant a place in Rolland's thought and writing that André Malraux was prompted to write: "The work of Romain Rolland forms two large parts. On one side, *Jean-Christophe, Au-dessus de la mêlée*, down to his final works, with, in the margin, music. On the other, the Indian archipelago" (*Cahiers Romain Rolland*, 1975, pp. 5–13).

Several questions are in order here: How did India come to Rolland? What was India's role in shaping Rolland's thought? What elements triggered the author's interest, and how did they come to reconfigure or strengthen Rolland's thinking? How did Rolland reconcile oriental mysticism with his western rational heritage?

2. War, crisis, and the search for answers: Reinforcing the humanist consciousness

Romain Rolland's humanism was not born of the First World War alone; the war propelled an already-present humanism into greater prominence. Yet the decisive place India eventually occupied in his intellectual trajectory cannot be fully understood apart from the moral crisis the war represented. The First World War was not simply a political event in the background of Rolland's life; it became for him a civilizational downfall that profoundly challenged Europe's claims to reason, progress, and moral universality (Rolland, 1915). His *Above the Battle* (1915), composed of essays written during the first years of the war, established his reputation as one of Europe's strongest pacifist voices. Rolland's biographer Zweig (1921), in his dedication, calls him " the most impressive moral phenomenon of our age." The opening pages of *Above the Battle* (1915) already announce this position: a nation at war, Rolland writes, "has not just its territory to defend : it also has its reason to defend" (p.1). The role of intellectual integrity and responsibility

of thinkers is not to intensify collective passions but to preserve the autonomy of the spirit. He makes a case for the “great human family”, “the unity of reason”, “the profound sources of the genius of people” (p.1). He pleads against war and asks of his countrymen to act so that history may look at France in a kindly way. In his journal, he writes about the horror of the war : “I am overwhelmed. I wish I was dead. It is horrible to live in the middle of this insane humanity and to witness, helpless, the failure of civilisation (...) “the greatest catastrophe in history since centuries, ruin of our hopes in fraternity” (1914, p.32). Rolland’s early plays, *Aërt* (1898), *Les Loups* (1898), and *Danton* (1900), the latter two being part of the collection titled *Théâtre de la Révolution* (Theatre of the Revolution), are true to their name and reveal Rolland’s predilection for social cause, ethical responsibility, and moral heroism.

In *Above the Battle*, he deplores not being rightly heard or justly understood by his countrymen and famously concludes his preface : “They can hate me, but they will not succeed in teaching me hate” (p 3). Rolland’s response to the war distinguished him from many intellectuals of his generation. While numerous writers and scholars aligned themselves with nationalist sentiment, Rolland instead adopted a stance of ethical resistance grounded in transnational humanism and intellectual responsibility, even at the risk of being branded a traitor for refusing to fall in line with his country’s wartime politics. His famously terse response to Henri Massis’s irritated rhetoric — “Where Henri Massis is, Romain Rolland cannot be” (*Les Appels de l’Orient*,” *Cahiers du mois*, no. 9-10 (February-March 1925): 322).— sealed his position on the politics of war and confirmed his stance as a humanist and pacifist. Rolland’s deep concern for war and destruction gradually expanded into a broader interrogation of European civilisation. He grew increasingly sceptical of forms of modernity based exclusively on national exclusivism and militarism, though his criticism was directed not against Europe itself but against what he perceived as Europe’s abandonment of its own humanist promise. In several of his wartime writings, Rolland insisted that Europe’s survival could come only through renewed forms of fraternity and intercultural openness.

Rolland’s humanism was at the heart of his thought. A principle, which by Todorov’s definition (1998), is being conscious of one’s humanity, one’s rights & duties towards oneself as towards others. Between 1904 and 1912 Rolland published his multivolume chef-d’œuvre, *Jean-Christophe*, tracing the life of a German musician which as a brilliant exposition of brotherhood and of rapprochement between European cultures. The novel celebrates a sense of Europeaness above nationalism. Jean-Christophe, a German musician, lives in France, in a life full of trials and tribulation. His friendship with the Frenchman Olivier stands as a vivid example

of cross border harmony. It is within this context that India acquired renewed significance for Rolland. India should not be understood here as an object of escapism or romantic exoticism. Rolland's intellectual movement toward India emerged from a search for categories capable of renewing exhausted European frameworks.

3. Orientalism, mysticism, and receiving India

To read Rolland's turn toward Indian thought as a sudden, romanticised move would be mistaken. To grasp the role and place of India in his intellectual trajectory, it is worth understanding how organically and seamlessly Rolland received it into his thinking and his spirituality. India did not interrupt his earlier concerns; rather, it gave Rolland a new vocabulary and a wider perspective with which to address them. His attraction lay less in geographical India than in the philosophical and spiritual possibilities it appeared to preserve. Three elements seem particularly important in this regard. First, Rolland discovered in India a profound inwardness that offered an alternative to the externalisation of modern life around him; spiritual experience was, for him, not opposed to social engagement but its very foundation. Second, Indian thought offered a different articulation of unity and plurality: at a moment when exclusion was becoming the European norm, Rolland was drawn to traditions capable of integrating multiplicity without fragmentation. Third, Indian philosophical and mystical traditions revealed a space in which reason and intuition could coexist — a question that would later become central to his reflections on spirituality, crystallised in the concept he elsewhere describes as the “oceanic feeling”.

Romain Rolland's formative years reveal the emergence of a moral and intellectual sensibility oriented toward universality and spirituality. Long before he met Indian personalities in person, Rolland was drawn to a deeper understanding of the philosophy of man. His training at the École Normale Supérieure exposed him to the religions of Asia and to comparative approaches to art and civilisation, laying the foundation for an early attraction towards cultural circulation and transnational understanding. He had read Burnouf's translation of the Bhagavad Gita and other Indian fundamental texts were not unknown to him. Dilip Kumar Roy recalls visiting Rolland at his house on Lake Léman in Switzerland and seeing “on his shelf French translations of many books on Buddhism and of Hindu philosophical works such as the Gita, the Upanishads, etc.” (Roy, 1945, p. 12). The Upanishadic search for unity, its reflections on consciousness, and its conceptions of interior liberation resonated deeply with concerns already present in Rolland's thought. This two-way movement distinguishes his engagement from mere admiration, marking it instead as a serious intellectual and cultural undertaking.

Reading was thus Rolland's first, and most enduring, mode of encounter with India. This reading was neither philological nor strictly academic; Indian texts were never, for him, merely historical documents to be explained, but living forms of thought breathing the soul of India. His reading, far from superficial, was comparative and dialogical. He analysed as he read, set Indian thought against Western thought, and interrogated himself against his own Western framework amid the crisis then gripping the world. As Europe advanced toward the First World War, a distressed and disillusioned Rolland, haunted by the breakdown of civilisation, turned eastward, first to Tolstoy, then decisively to India, seeking (in his journal during war years), an alternative, in his own words to "human insanity". (1914, p.32).

Mysticism, which later became an important element he sought to reveal through his biographies, was not new to Rolland. He writes in his autobiographical memoirs: "I had, between the ages of fifteen and twenty [...] several brief and staggering contacts with the Unity. These obscure illuminations were the key to the spiritual world in which I lived for the next forty years [...] visited by new revelations" (*Journey Within*, 1942, pp. 14–15). In his celebrated multi-volume novel Jean-Christophe, which won him the Nobel Prize, Rolland traces the vicissitudes of Christophe, a young musician and composer whose journey shows a remarkable closeness to Indian philosophy that Kalidas Nag appreciated and which Rolland notes: the "thought and expression of ancient Vedic hymns to Vishnu and Shiva (which, of course, I did not know)" (*Inde*, pp. 29–30). In *Soul Enchanted* (*Âme Enchantée*, 1929–1933), the connections are more visible. Annette Rivière's journey is a spiritual one: "When she recognizes herself in this river, with its tangled shimmering reflections, where her Saint-Bruno of the Himalayas shows her the image of the self with its myriads of individualities [...] the entire round making its way, swirling, toward the Ocean like the procession of the Indian Bacchus" (p. 1359).

Annette's journey crystallises what Rolland had already conceived, in 1921, as the "oceanic sensibility" or "oceanic feeling" — a concept that runs through his work like a golden thread. He coined the expression in a letter to Freud, describing it as "the direct and simple fact of the sensation of the 'eternal' without perceptible limits" (Vermorel & Vermorel, 1993, p. 252). The oceanic feeling connects the self to the infinite, vast as the ocean, a sense of being part of the universe as one encompassing whole. In *Life of Vivekananda* (1930), Rolland makes a case for intuitive faculties: "After Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose went one step further and restored intuition among the normal processes of the scientific mind" (p. 338). By this point, Rolland was already drawing meaningful associations between India and the West, marshalling references from both to make Indian thought intelligible to his European readers. These early moorings made

him receptive to the bigger India landscape that pervaded his writings, adding angles and perspectives he had not previously considered.

There was little foreignness in Rolland's thought. He mentions this himself in the Note to the Western reader that precedes the *Life of Ramakrishna* — "when I travelled the path of thoughts, in no country did I find anything foreign" (p.19). Rolland felt a profound connection with Indian philosophy, with the unity that relates all thought.

4. Moral Heroism

Alongside his humanistic preoccupations, Rolland felt an urgent need to give humanity, examples of moral heroism and to present figures capable of representing it. Unlike conventional heroism centered on conquest or military glory, Rolland's heroes embodied greatness of soul, their worth measured by courage in adversity and service to humanity.

As Castillo explains, "the essence of the hero is not being spectacular. Being heroic is an action which creates hope for a new moral life, an action which does not inspire one to follow the example but to make oneself the example itself" (Castillo, 2011, p. 36). This quest also shows how these heroes confronted suffering and rose above it: the path to inner happiness is not easily won, and trials and tribulations must be lived through and overcome. In the preface to the *Life of Beethoven* (1914), Rolland defines the hero as one whose journey proves that "life has never been greater or more fruitful than in suffering" (p. 10). He clarifies further that the lives of great men are not written for the proud or the ambitious but dedicated to the unhappy. This explains Rolland's fascination with exemplary lives. In the words of Bonnerot (1921), one of Rolland's earliest biographers, his heroic biographies were written "as an example and as a lesson" (p. 43).

It is only natural, then, that once acquainted with Gandhi, Ramakrishna, and Vivekananda, Rolland's next undertaking was their respective biographies. These are not mere factual or chronological reconstructions; they function as laboratories of philosophical and ethical thinking. Through them, Rolland sought to answer a persistent question: how may human beings rise above crisis and yet remain faithful to the highest dimensions of life during such periods? It may be useful here to frame Rolland's sense of moral heroism against Bergson's (1935) notions of "closed" and "open" morality. Exceptional individuals embodying universal values subscribe to what Bergson calls an open morality, that is a morality which goes beyond social boundaries and embraces universal values, rather than being bound to static norms of a given society. Rolland's exceptional heroes maybe better understood in the light of Bergson's categories.

Before turning to the biographies, however, we must first understand what led to Rolland's more 'direct' connection with India.

5. Encounters with India

In 1914, Ananda Coomaraswamy wrote "A World Policy for India," an essay he dedicated to Romain Rolland, whom he admired. This triggered an eager correspondence between the two writers. Coomaraswamy sent Rolland a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, along with a book on the art of India and Ceylon, and Rolland responded with what is now a well-known reply: "This universe is too rich, too full. My chest bursts. It is too small to contain this" (1915, Ind, 11-12). It was, however, Tagore's striking talk in Tokyo in 1916 with its stress on spiritualism, cultural heritage, anti-imperialism and materialism truly resonated with Rolland and threw open the floodgates toward India, that further unfolded through a sustained correspondence with Indian acquaintances and face-to-face meetings.

In his preface to Coomaraswamy's *Dance of Shiva* (1922), Rolland gives voice precisely to this connection: "I invite Europeans to taste the delight of this rhythmic philosophy, this deep slow breath thought. From it they would learn those virtues which, above all others, the soul of Europe needs today: tranquillity, patience, hope, and unruffled joy — like a lamp in a windless place that does not flicker" (1922, p. 9). From this point onward, the figures through whom Rolland encountered India, be it through letters or direct meetings, all serve as living expressions of philosophical possibility, cultural awakening, and the rekindling of a universal humanism.

5.1. The Epistolary Network

Correspondence occupies a privileged place in Rolland's trajectory. Over his lifetime, between 1886 and 1944, his copious correspondence with a huge list of interlocutors offers direct insight into his thoughts and experiences. Wide-ranging and varied, these letters did more than close geographical distance: they replaced physical absence with emotional depth and gave his thinking a sense of contemporary immediacy, spanning personal reflections, philosophical debates, and political positions. Among the many correspondents who helped fortify Rolland's bridge to India were Tagore, Gandhi, the historian Kalidas Nag and the musician Dilip Kumar Roy. Ideas circulated through correspondence, and India came alive through the individuals with whom Rolland built genuine intellectual and human relationships. In Rolland's case, epistolary dialogue became a veritable site of intercultural reflection.

One of his primary correspondents was Rabindranath Tagore, with whom Rolland exchanged fifty-six letters and telegrams (Guha, 2018), in what can be described as a relationship of mutual respect and introspection. “Of all the men I met in the West, it is Rolland who struck me as being closest to my heart, the one most aligned with my spirit”, he expressed to Nag (Cahiers, p. 12) — a sentiment Tagore amply reciprocated. Rolland’s reading of Tagore was never confined to literary appreciation; in his eyes, Tagore was an embodiment of a civilisation capable of articulating universality without uniformity. Across moments of mutual understanding and divergence over ideology and politics, the letters reflect the intellectual depth of both thinkers, united by “their idealism, their artistic sensibility, their long vision on human and international problems, their desire for the emancipation of India and East–West cooperation, their distrust of nationalism, [and] their universal approach” (Bies, 1971, p. 48). Surprisingly, however, Rolland never dedicated a biography to Tagore, which by his own account, was too daunting an undertaking. In a letter to Andrée Karpelès, Rolland explains: “To write it, I would have to go to India, live there a few months — or some weeks — near the poet. One does not write a ‘Tagore’ as one would a ‘Gandhi’. It is infinitely more complex [...] One would have to be able to penetrate into the intimate atmosphere of the soul and of the milieu” (Cahiers, pp. 122–123, 29 November 1924).

Rolland’s correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi introduced the dimension of ethical action. For Rolland, Gandhi represented one of the most significant moral figures of the age, and Rolland took it upon himself to introduce Gandhian thought to European audiences. The Rolland–Gandhi exchange ranged in depth across non-violence, spiritual discipline, collective action, and social transformation, among other themes. Despite ideological differences between the two men, Gandhi remained central to Rolland’s thought.

Equally significant were Rolland’s exchanges with the musician Dilip Kumar Roy, all the more so as Rolland’s own intellectual formation had been deeply shaped by music. Their correspondence reveals Rolland’s zeal to introduce Indian classical music to the West: he repeatedly urged Roy to publish Indian music more widely, pushing back against Roy’s own reservations. For Rolland, music was another means of bridging the gap between East and West, even of revealing how close the two already were. Another important conduit between Rolland and India was the historian Kalidas Nag, who introduced him to authors, texts, and personalities alike. If Tagore and Gandhi belonged primarily to the realm of philosophical and political thought, Kalidas Nag played a different role in Rolland’s life — that of conduit, mediator, and intellectual passerelle. Historian, scholar, and close interlocutor of European intellectual circles, Nag became one of Rolland’s

prime channels of access to India. Their correspondence reflects both their personal warmth and a shared engagement with historical and cultural understanding. Nag provided information, translations, and interpretations of Indian thought, as well as the intellectual companionship that helped Rolland refine his understanding of India as a universal culture beyond a generalised image of spirituality. Nag, in a mood of eulogy writes on 15th February 1923 (1956, p.23) : “Your study will be a step in the direction of the understanding of the East and the West in a most critical moment in our history. There are enough books — of politics, economics, statistics and religion — on the Orient, but where is the living sense of justice and positive love for humanity that shines in your heart?”

Through these epistolary dialogues, India shifted from an object of contemplation to an active participant in the honing of Rolland’s universalism and humanism.

5.2. Biographies

Rolland’s remarkable biographies of Gandhi, Ramakrishna, and Vivekananda answer to his model of heroism. Gandhi impressed him deeply, as his words make clear: “No one better merits a place in this gallery of heroes. You [India] can be proud of possessing this great soul. Europe does not have even one who can come anywhere close!”(Nag,1956, p.22) The biography presents Gandhi as the great-souled one, “the man who raised three hundred million men, shook the British Empire” (p. 11), “the moulder of a new humanity,” the leader of “a sacred legion of apostles who, like those of Christ, are the salt of the earth.” (p.93). Yet Rolland’s admiration never amounted to uncritical acceptance. His astute, analytical mind weighed virtues against weaknesses alike. He was unrestrained in his eulogy of Gandhi yet critical of aspects of his ideology. Their exchanges reveal moments of reflection and distance, particularly regarding the practical application of Gandhian principles beyond India. Nevertheless, Gandhi remained central to Rolland’s rethinking of politics as an ethical vocation.

The biographies *Life of Ramakrishna* (1929) and *Life of Vivekananda* (1930), significant as they are, form part of the *Essai sur la mystique et l’action de l’Inde vivante* (Essay on the Mysticism and Action of Living India). Apart from the biographies themselves though hagiographical in places, it is worth noting the two prefatory essays to the Ramakrishna biography, *To the Western Reader* and *To the Eastern Reader*, in which Rolland sets out his position as a Western rationalist deeply drawn to the unity he perceived in these philosophies, while asking to be excused for any misreadings he may have made of them. “I am French and Catholic [...] I found all the imprints of the universe” (p. 19), he affirms. And again, in the *Note to the Eastern Reader*, he reaffirms his

rational heritage, lest one forgets: “At the same time, I must confess that I have not abdicated one iota of my free judgment as a man of the West” (p. 25), making amply clear that his connection with India was neither romanticised nor idealised, but filtered through a mind at once rational and intuitive.

5.3 Meetings

If Rolland never travelled to India, India travelled to him, visiting frequently in France and at his home on Lake Léman in Switzerland and also in France. Tagore, Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and Jagadish Chandra Bose, not to mention Kalidas Nag and Dilip Kumar Roy, were just among the many that met Rolland in person and broadened his perspective on India.

6. Epistemological Choices

Rolland’s approach transcended the customary binaries of East and West, domination and resistance, in favour of a spiritual, ‘oceanic’ depth and a shared sense of humanity’s common goals. He perceived these values in both Western and Eastern cultures, and worked ceaselessly to establish this connection, while taking care never to relinquish his rational heritage, that let him appreciate while questioning, reason while debating, and respect while critiquing, even as he placed earnest faith in India as a soft power holding up a mirror to a crumbling Europe. Fisher succinctly sums up this position: “Romain Rolland was not the first French writer to look to the East for inspiration or consolation, or the first to compare the Orient with a materialistic, declining Occident. He was, however, one of the first French intellectuals to conceive of modern India as a challenge to European political reality and global hegemony” (Fisher, 1988 pp. 115–116). It is tempting to read Rolland’s interest in India as a disillusioned withdrawal from Europe. Such a reading, however, would oversimplify his project: Rolland did not reject Europe in favour of the East; rather, he sought in India conceptual and spiritual resources capable of renewing Europe from within. India becomes, for Rolland, a site of spiritual renewal. Whatever interest he already held in spirituality was widened and rendered more meaningful by his encounters with India. In doing so, Rolland also opened the possibility of re-examining the self, redefining and better understanding his own identity through the prism of the Other.

India became less an object of interpretation than a space in which to further his thought. India, for Rolland, becomes a decisive journey — one, however, that he never physically undertook. Roudil explains: “This journey, from India to Nivernais, is not organised along three simultaneous dimensions; it takes the form of a spiritual quest, at once an opening toward the Other and a

return toward the self — a circular path that brings one back to the *point de départ* while transforming the one who completes it” (Roudil, 2026, p. 1). A veritable intercultural approach, where alterity frames your own perspectives by going towards the Other and returning back in a spiral mode.

7. Conclusion

To Romain Rolland, India was not an exotic elsewhere, nor was it a civilisational substitute for Europe. Rather, it represented an ocean of possibilities capable of renewing and rekindling categories of thought. Indian philosophy, mystical traditions, and ethical models opened up ways of thinking beyond the traditional binaries of East and West. Debates on reason and intuition, action and contemplation, individuality and universality thus run through Rolland’s writing, revealing a perspective on India that was not cultural escapism but serious introspection. Words like *advaita*, *vedanta*, *brahman*, entered into the European discourse due to Rolland. Far from abandoning Europe, he sought to reconstruct it, to refurbish it, and to show paths to its renewal that lay beyond military prowess and subjugation. Universality ceases to represent the extension of European values and Occidental superiority to the rest of the world. Instead, it becomes dialogical: a pan-humanist approach lived through encounter between civilisations rather than hierarchy. In this way, Rolland sought to enlarge both thought and human acceptance.

The objective here is not to determine whether Rolland understood India perfectly, but to examine what his encounter with India made possible. What emerges is not a simple story of passive reception, but the journey of a European intellectual attempting to rethink the conditions of humanity through a prism of dialogue, spirituality, and humanism.

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