

The Indosphere

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ABSTRACT

This review explores William Dalrymple's "The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World," emphasizing India's pivotal role in shaping global cultural, intellectual, and economic landscapes during antiquity. The narrative highlights historical trade routes, the dissemination of religious philosophies, and advancements in mathematics and science, alongside the interconnectivity between diverse regions, including Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Central to this discourse is the concept of the "Indosphere," which illustrates India's influence on cultures beyond its borders, fostering a rich exchange of ideas and practices. This review critiques the inclusivity and depth of Dalrymple's argument, addressing regional diversities and the nuanced transmission of knowledge, while advocating for a recognition of India's historical contributions as foundational to modern global frameworks.

Keywords: Dalrymple, The Golden Road, Indosphere, Ancient India, Cultural Exchange, Intellectual History, Mathematical Innovations, Religious Philosophies, Global Trade.

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Introduction

William Dalrymple's *The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World* (Bloomsbury, 2024), with its working title **The Indosphere**, presents an ambitious and interdisciplinary narrative that weaves together India's ancient cultural, intellectual, and economic influence over a vast stretch of Eurasia. The book's chapters, ranging from the initial chapter, "A Gale of Stillness," to the concluding one, "Fruits of Numbers," follow a rich thematic progression through history, trade, religion, and ideas that traveled far beyond the subcontinent.

Dalrymple's approach is refreshingly broad, positioning ancient India not as a peripheral player but as a central node in a vast maritime and intellectual network spanning over a millennium (roughly from 250 BCE to 1200 CE). He reimagines the connections between India, Southeast Asia, China, Arabia, and Europe, offering the term "**Indosphere**" as a metaphor for the cultural and intellectual sphere shaped by Indian ideas, religions, mathematics, and trade routes. The book presents a narrative that ties together the economic, intellectual, and religious currents of the ancient world, elevating India as a **core** rather than a periphery. Dalrymple's thesis hinges on India's role as a pioneering

soft power, with its ideas spreading through peaceful trade, religious exchange, and intellectual engagement, rather than military conquest.

The central strength of Dalrymple's work is its **comprehensive scope**, drawing on diverse sources: ancient texts, archaeological discoveries, and cross-cultural accounts. The book covers a wide array of topics—from the rich mathematics of ancient India and its influence on the Islamic world (**Fruits of Numbers**), to the vast religious and philosophical expansions of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism through the **Sea of Jewels** (Nalanda), and the extraordinary maritime trade routes that India established. The descriptions of **Nalanda**, once the world's most celebrated university, serve as a vibrant example of the intellectual dynamism that was exported globally. This scholarship is often contrasted with China's tightly controlled imperial academies, Europe's monasteries, and the Islamic world's madrassas, drawing a sharp distinction in the methods by which knowledge was spread and institutionalized.

Dalrymple's emphasis on the "**soft power**" India exerted through ideas—rather than the military dominance that characterized other empires—is a powerful critique of

the traditional narrative of empire-building. The “Golden Road” he traces across the Indian Ocean is more than a trade route; it is a conduit of **philosophical, religious, and intellectual** influence. India’s **mathematical innovations**, such as the concept of **zero**, and the spread of **Buddhism, Hinduism**, and later **Jainism**, influenced vast stretches of Asia, from the Buddhist shrines of China to the mathematical developments in the Islamic world and the eventual rise of the **European Renaissance**. In this context, the “**sink of the world’s most precious metals**”, a term used to describe India’s magnetic attraction in the ancient world, is emblematic of the influence India had on global trade and culture.

At the same time, Dalrymple critiques the **limitations** of his own thesis. While he does an admirable job of highlighting India’s global influence, his analysis sometimes flattens the **diverse regional cultures** within India, treating them as a monolithic “Indian” civilization. The book focuses predominantly on **Buddhism** and **Hinduism**, and while it touches on **Jainism**, it does not delve deeply into regional variations or the complex ways in which Indian religion and philosophy were practiced and interpreted in different parts of the subcontinent. Furthermore, Dalrymple’s work largely treats the **Indosphere** as a **unified, unbroken chain** of cultural diffusion, which risks oversimplifying the **complex, localized processes** of adaptation and transformation that occurred in different parts of Asia.

Sculptures Compared

For instance, the comparison between Gandhara sculpture in India’s northwestern frontier and Khmer sculpture in Cambodia can be effectively understood through the framework of reception, adaptation, and transformation. Gandhara art, flourishing from the 1st to the 5th centuries CE under Kushan patronage, represents one of the earliest anthropomorphic renderings of the Buddha. Here, the reception of Hellenistic and Roman artistic traditions, transmitted through Alexander’s successors and later contacts, profoundly shaped the visual vocabulary. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in Gandhara exhibit Greco-Roman traits such as naturalistic anatomy, wavy hair, and heavy drapery resembling togas, while still embodying Indian religious ideals of dharma, compassion, and liberation. In this way, Gandhara established a hybrid style that localized foreign artistic idioms to express distinctly Indian spiritual concepts.

In Cambodia, examined in the chapter “Protected by the Sun” Dalrymple correctly notes the caste system didn’t spread to South East Asia, and speak laudatory terms about how this is the place to study and understand Indian ideals. Beginning with the rise of the Khmer Empire in the ninth century, Indian cultural ideals, especially those associated

with Hinduism and later Buddhism, were actively received through commercial, religious, and diplomatic exchanges. Khmer rulers embraced Indian gods and cosmological schemes to legitimize their power, transforming Indian religious symbols into political ideology. Just as Gandhara had reinterpreted Indian spirituality through Greco-Roman formal language, the Khmer absorbed Indian deities and narratives into their own political and ritual landscape.

Adaptation in the Gandharan context took the form of stylistic fusion. Local craftsmen worked in schist and stucco, combining the expressive realism of the classical Mediterranean world with Indian iconography, producing a Buddha image that was simultaneously universal and regionally distinctive. Khmer adaptation, by contrast, emphasized scale and localization. Sculptures of Vishnu, Shiva, or the Buddha were created with Khmer physiognomic traits: broad faces, fuller forms, and ornate crowns. Carved in durable sandstone, these images were conceived not as isolated cult statues but as integral components of vast temple complexes.

Transformation reveals the sharpest divergence. Gandhara’s transformation lay in its role as a bridge: it created a new image of the Buddha that spread across Asia, influencing early Chinese, Central Asian, and even Japanese art. The Gandharan Buddha became a prototype for spiritual representation beyond India, marrying foreign realism to Indian transcendental ideals. The Khmer transformation, however, was monumental and political. In Angkor Wat, Bayon, and other temple complexes, sculpture was marshaled into service as part of a cosmic architecture that asserted the king’s divine status. Reliefs of mythological episodes, such as the “Churning of the Ocean of Milk,” not only illustrated Hindu cosmology but also symbolized the Khmer king’s central role in maintaining cosmic order.

The monumental scale of Khmer art and architecture, something it shares solely with Mesoamerican and Egyptian art, was the product of a combination of ideological and material factors. The *devarāja* cult required temples to embody Mount Meru, the axis of the universe, thus demanding colossal architectural statements. Khmer rulers mobilized vast labor forces and exploited abundant sandstone resources to produce enduring structures. In India, by contrast, far less remains of Gandhara’s monumental production. Several factors explain this discrepancy: Gandhara’s use of stucco and schist was less durable than Khmer sandstone; the region’s exposure to invasions and iconoclastic destruction, particularly with the arrival of Central Asian and later Islamic powers, led to large-scale loss; and the geography of Gandhara, positioned as a cultural crossroads, meant that its monuments were more vulnerable to cycles of conquest and neglect.

In conclusion, while Gandhara sculpture crystallized a hybrid aesthetic that married Indian spirituality with Greco-Roman naturalism and radiated outward across Asia, Khmer sculpture received Indian religious ideals and transformed them into monumental state art. The Khmer synthesis of religion, politics, and cosmology in stone created a legacy of unparalleled durability and scale, whereas Gandhara's legacy survives more in its stylistic influence than in its material remains.

Intellectual Heritage

Dalrymple's narrative is also shaped by a clear agenda to **reclaim India's intellectual heritage** against the backdrop of the colonial narratives that have often marginalized or misrepresented it. He champions India's contributions to **cosmology, mathematics, ethics, and political philosophy**, but the work sometimes overlooks how these ideas were **adapted** and transformed in local contexts. For example, while the book focuses on **Ashoka's edicts** and the spread of **Buddhism**, it could benefit from a deeper examination of how these teachings were challenged or reinterpreted in various parts of the world, particularly in regions outside the Buddhist sphere.

In contrast to **China's Confucianism** and **Europe's Christianity**, both of which were more centrally controlled and institutionalized, Indian religious traditions were **pluralistic** and often **syncretic**, blending various ideas and practices into complex, localized systems. In **Southeast Asia**, for instance, the transmission of Indian ideas often involved the **adaptation** of Hindu and Buddhist concepts into indigenous cosmologies and political systems. While Dalrymple provides fascinating examples of **Indian influence** in places like **Angkor Wat** and **Java**, he does not fully engage with the **indigenous modifications** that shaped the reception and practice of these ideas.

On the other hand, the **Islamic world** presents an interesting contrast. India's ideas filtered into the Abbasid caliphate, where Indian numerals and mathematical concepts played a key role in the intellectual advances of the **Islamic Golden Age**. Yet Dalrymple's portrayal of India's influence on Islam could be more nuanced, especially in light of the complex relationship between Islamic **theological orthodoxy** and Indian mathematical or philosophical thought. The eventual **Mongol invasions** and the rise of **Islamic empires** saw the decline of much of India's intellectual hegemony, and Dalrymple's treatment of this **transition** could have been more critically explored.

Despite these limitations, Dalrymple's work is a **landmark contribution** in the field of world history. It offers a much-needed corrective to the Eurocentric view of world history, elevating India to its rightful place as a **cultural and**

intellectual superpower of the ancient world. He draws attention to India's **global cultural diaspora**, showing how ideas from the subcontinent shaped civilizations across Asia, Africa, and Europe, and how India's thinkers grappled with some of the **biggest existential questions** about the **nature of life, the universe, and morality**.

At its core, William Dalrymple's *The Golden Road* is not just an exploration of ancient trade routes or a historical recounting of India's influence on the world. It is an intellectual journey into how **Indian civilization** shaped, and continues to shape, our understanding of **fundamental human questions**. These questions—about **the nature of the world, how it operates, why we are here, and how we should live our lives**—lie at the heart of not only India's religious and philosophical traditions but also the framework that underpins much of the **modern world's thinking**.

How the World is: A Dynamic, Interconnected Universe

Indian philosophies, across its major religious and intellectual traditions—**Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism**—convey a worldview that contrasts sharply with the more mechanistic, linear, and hierarchical cosmologies of **Europe, China, and Islam** during the same period. For instance, **Buddhism** and **Jainism** emphasize the impermanence and interdependence of all things, reflecting an understanding of the world that is not static but constantly in flux. This is captured in the **concept of samsara** (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth), central to both **Hindu** and **Buddhist** thinking.

In this context, the world is not a fixed, material object that can be **conquered or controlled**. Instead, it is understood as an **interwoven** and **dynamic** system where everything—from the smallest grain of sand to the most towering of mountains—is part of an eternal, **cosmic dance**. The concept of **Brahman** in Hinduism, the underlying spiritual reality that connects everything in the universe, serves as an excellent example of this. It is the **unifying principle** that encompasses the infinite variety of life and matter, a vast interconnectedness that humans can only begin to comprehend.

This idea was not just abstract philosophy—it had **real-world consequences** for the Indian conception of **nature**. Indian thought rejected the Western idea of **nature as a resource to be conquered**, placing humans within a more **ecological understanding** of life. Hinduism, with its reverence for natural elements (earth, water, fire), and Jainism's deeply entrenched commitment to non-violence toward all living things (even microorganisms), offered a worldview that advocated **harmony** and **balance** between

humans and the environment. The **idea of the world as a dynamic, interconnected system** influenced Indian politics, art, science, and ethics, creating a civilization where respect for the natural world was woven into the very fabric of religious and cultural practice.

How the World Operates: Through Karma and the Interplay of Forces

Where many Western traditions view the operation of the world through the lens of **divine will** or **reason**, India's **concept of karma** provides a framework for understanding how life works. Karma, or the idea that every action has consequences that ripple throughout the cosmos, forms the backbone of Indian moral philosophy. In Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism alike, karma suggests that life is a **continuum of cause and effect**—everything one does, whether good or bad, leaves an imprint on the individual's **future**. This vision gives rise to an understanding of the **law of consequences**, where people are the **architects of their fate**, but also part of a grander, more complex web of cosmic forces.

In addition to karma, **Indian thought emphasized the idea of cycles**. Life, nature, and even time itself are seen as part of a continuous, repeating cycle. The **yugas** (ages) in Hinduism, for example, describe the cyclical nature of time, a concept vastly different from the Western **linear progression** of time from creation to apocalypse. This cyclical understanding implies that the universe is constantly **renewing itself**—birth, death, destruction, and regeneration are **inherently part of the world's functioning**.

Dalrymple highlights how the **Indian worldview** of interdependence and cyclical time not only shaped spiritual practices but also influenced ancient Indian scientific approaches to **astronomy, mathematics, and medicine**. The ancient Indian contributions to **zero** and **decimal systems**, for example, are rooted in this broader view of time as **cyclic** and **endless**. Rather than a finite end, the Indian mind saw **potential for infinite expansion and variation** within the natural order.

Why We are Here: The Search for Liberation (Moksha, Nirvana, Kevala)

At the heart of the Indian worldview lies the **search for liberation**—the question of why we exist and what our ultimate purpose is. This question underpins the spiritual core of the three major religious traditions of the subcontinent: **Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism**.

In **Hinduism**, the ultimate purpose of life is **moksha**, liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth, achieved by realizing one's **oneness with Brahman**, the supreme reality. This liberation is not a reward from a distant god

but an experience of self-realization, where the individual's soul (atman) merges with the infinite, realizing its true nature. This philosophy provides a path of **self-discovery**, focusing on detachment, meditation, and ascetic practices to break free from the illusory world (maya) and reach enlightenment.

In **Buddhism**, the question of why we are here is answered through the **Four Noble Truths** and the **Eightfold Path**. Life, according to the Buddha, is inherently **suffering (dukkha)**, caused by our attachment to desires. **Nirvana**, the Buddhist goal, is not a union with a divine essence, but a **state of cessation of suffering**, achieved through the eradication of desire and attachment. This form of liberation is more focused on the individual's **internal transformation**, emphasizing mindfulness, ethical conduct, and wisdom.

Jainism, with its emphasis on **non-violence (ahimsa)**, provides a unique take on liberation. For Jains, the ultimate goal is to achieve **Kevala**, or perfect knowledge, through a path of **self-discipline**, non-attachment, and strict non-violence. By purifying the soul through ethical actions and meditative practices, Jains believe one can escape the cycle of birth and death and attain **complete spiritual freedom**.

These religious paths reflect a **profound commitment to personal responsibility** and **self-discipline** in the pursuit of **spiritual liberation**. The Indian conception of life is not passive but **engaged**, where one must actively work toward personal and spiritual growth. The emphasis is on **individual agency**—each person has the ability to **transform their own fate** through **moral action** and inner discipline.

How We Should Live: Dharma and the Ethical Path

Finally, the question of how we should live is deeply intertwined with the concept of **dharma**—the moral and ethical duties that govern individual and social life. In Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, living in accordance with **dharma** means acting in harmony with the natural order, the cosmic law, and the **ethical guidelines** specific to one's life stage, caste, or profession. Dharma is not a rigid set of rules but a flexible framework that adapts to **individual circumstances** and helps one navigate the complexities of life.

The ethical teaching of **ahimsa** (non-violence), central to **Jainism** and **Buddhism**, extends not only to **human relations** but also to the natural world. **Compassion, generosity, and truthfulness** are core values in Indian religious thought that shaped social, cultural, and political practices. These values became the foundation for many of India's ancient **social structures** and influenced ideas of justice, governance, and community.

In **Buddhism**, the idea of **right conduct** is framed through the **Eightfold Path**, which encourages ethical living through right speech, right action, and right livelihood. The focus is not on external authority but on the **internal cultivation of virtue**, suggesting that an ethical life arises from inner harmony rather than external regulation.

The core message across all three traditions—**Hinduism**, **Buddhism**, and **Jainism**—is that human life is **intricately connected** to a **broader cosmic order**. One must live a life that aligns with **universal principles** of non-harm, compassion, and mindfulness. This ethical path leads to the ultimate goal: **liberation** from the cycle of suffering and the realization of one's true nature.

Scholars and reviewers praise its readability, comprehensive narrative, and vivid storytelling. Yet, some critique it as “pop history”—not offering much novelty to regional specialists, such as in South India or Nalanda. Others note oversimplification—like overstating Buddhist vihara models in Islamic madrasas or the linear introduction of Indian numerals into Europe, without full context.

Dalrymple compellingly argues that ancient Indian ideas offered **profound answers** to life's big questions:

- **Cosmology & Zero** → through Brahmagupta and Aryabhata, foundational to science and computation (**Fruits of Numbers**).
- **Religious Pluralism** → Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain coexistence; their philosophical richness shaped ethics, polity, and art (e.g., Nalanda, Borobudur, Angkor Wat).
- **Political Philosophy** → from injunctions of dharma to Ashoka's paradigm shift (**Great King**) and Xuanzang's missions.
- **Cultural Narratives & Storytelling** → Ramayana, fables, Jataka tales—seeding moral and philosophical molds in China, Arabia, Greece, even Europe (**Diaspora of the Gods**).

Main Analytical Points and Critique

1. **Maritime Networks as Infrastructure of Ideas:** The sea—not land—was the vector of an intellectual empire (**Maritime Empire of Ideas**).
2. **“Indosphere” as a heuristic:** A useful framework but risks retroactive homogenization of diverse polities.
3. **Soft Power vs. Military Power:** Long-lasting influence via ideas vs. improving comparison with martial empires.
4. **Cultural Continuity vs. Disjunction:** Indian traditions were adapted in plural ways across East & West; nuanced attention to local adaptation is sometimes glossed.

5. **Modern Implications:** Dalrymple calls for reclaiming ancient pluralism in contrast to present nationalism.

Dalrymple's *The Indosphere* stands out as a **richly woven, scholarly yet accessible narrative** that compellingly positions India as a central node in ancient global systems. Its thematic, interdisciplinary approach, integration of ideas, religion, and trade, and vivid descriptive style make it an excellent model for a robust review article or interdisciplinary synthesis.

However, it could further benefit from:

- More critical engagement with regional histories,
- Attentive nuance to religious diversities,
- Balanced treatment of earlier historiography, and
- Clearer acknowledgment of scholarly limits vs. narrative sweep.

In summary, Dalrymple's *The Golden Road* emphasizes that **Indian philosophical traditions** provided profound answers to humanity's most enduring questions. They present a **dynamic worldview**, where life is understood as a constantly evolving system of interdependence. This cosmic order is governed by the law of **karma** and rooted in an ethical system based on **non-violence, compassion, and self-realization**. These ideas are not abstract or speculative; they are meant to be lived and practiced, providing a **roadmap for ethical living** and spiritual liberation. Through these traditions, India has contributed deeply to the **modern understanding** of human existence, offering insights into how we should live our lives, understand the world, and navigate our place within it.

William Dalrymple's *The Golden Road* serves as a compelling lens through which to view the rise of India as a global power. Dalrymple's historical and cultural exploration of India's ancient interactions with the wider world — through trade routes, the exchange of ideas, and the spread of religions — offers valuable insights into how India's past continues to shape its present and future role on the world stage.

In the context of India's **rise as a great power**, Dalrymple's work is a reminder that India's **long-standing tradition** of **philosophical inquiry, scientific achievement, and cultural exchange** forms the foundation upon which modern India stands. His focus on India's **historical importance**, particularly its role in **global trade, intellectual exchange, and the dissemination of religious thought** (such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism), reveals the depth and breadth of India's influence across the world. As India now steps into a new era of **geopolitical power**, these historical patterns of interconnectedness and cultural dialogue will serve as the bedrock for future

diplomatic relations, especially with key regions like **Europe**, the **Muslim world**, and its **Asian neighbors**.

Dalrymple's exploration of how India's **ideas and religious insights** have laid the foundations for modern philosophical thought offers crucial context for understanding the nation's foreign policy approach today. India's worldview, shaped by its deep-seated traditions in **spirituality, humanism, and ethics**, remains an essential feature of its **global identity**. This perspective will undoubtedly influence how India approaches its role in the international order, balancing economic power with its moral and ethical commitments.

The Living Philosophy: How Indian Thought Shapes Perception, Culture, and Identity

For those seeking the deeper roots and meaning of Indian philosophy, the most subtle of the subcontinent's inventions comparable to classical music in Europe, and the design of the mind inherent to Indian civilization Dasgupta's volumes remain the safer bet about its embeddedness in religion. This is a point of criticism of his work. Ergo let us examine this issue in some detail and make it more explicit than Dalrymple openness to the world care for.

Indian philosophy is not confined to dusty texts or ivory towers. It pulses through the arteries of Indian life — shaping how people think, perceive the world, relate to one another, and express themselves culturally. Unlike in many traditions where philosophy remains abstract and academic, in India, it is lived. It is part of the air one breathes — embedded in language, art, values, rituals, and social structures. To understand how Indians think and how culture diffuses across time and generations, one must begin by understanding the philosophical soil from which it all springs.

At the core of Indian philosophical traditions — be it Vedanta, Buddhism, Jainism, or Samkhya — lies a distinctive way of seeing the world. The Indian mind, shaped by these frameworks, often embraces complexity and ambiguity rather than resisting them. The concept of Advaita (non-duality), for example, teaches that all reality is one — distinctions between self and other, subject and object, are ultimately illusions. This idea fosters a natural openness to paradox, a comfort with holding multiple truths simultaneously. It helps explain why, in Indian discourse, “both/and” is often preferred to “either/or.”

Time itself is perceived differently. Rather than moving in a straight line from past to future, Indian philosophy conceives of time as cyclical — a continuous rhythm of birth, death, and rebirth. This has a profound effect on how Indians perceive change, patience, and life's events. There

is often a deeper sense of acceptance — that life unfolds in rhythms beyond individual control, and that moral actions (karma) ripple across lifetimes. Responsibility, then, is not only personal but cosmic. Every act carries weight — not just for the present moment, but for the soul's journey across time.

This philosophical foundation doesn't sit still in books; it diffuses through culture in vibrant and dynamic ways. Indian art, classical music, dance, and theatre are steeped in philosophical meaning. The *Natyashastra*, for instance, is not only a guide to performance but a deeply philosophical text that discusses aesthetics (*rasa*), emotional experience, and the purpose of art as a path to transcendence. Likewise, yoga and meditation — now global practices — originate from spiritual disciplines described in the *Yoga Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, meant not just to calm the body but to unite it with the divine.

Stories have always been a major carrier of Indian philosophical thought. The epics — the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* — are more than tales of gods and warriors. They are ethical laboratories, exploring dilemmas of duty (*dharma*), justice, desire, and liberation. These stories, told and retold across centuries through oral tradition, street theatre, films, and TV serials, make philosophical questions accessible to the common person. They are not abstract, but deeply personal — part of childhood, family conversations, and public discourse.

Indian philosophy also subtly underpins social behavior and collective identity. The traditional idea of *dharma*, or moral duty, still influences familial roles and societal expectations. While modern India has moved far from rigid caste-based interpretations, the underlying belief in fulfilling one's role and living ethically remains powerful. Even in politics, philosophy has played a transformative role. Mahatma Gandhi's *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satyagraha* (truth-force) were not political strategies borrowed from the West, but rooted in Jain, Hindu, and Buddhist thought — applied with revolutionary force.

Religious pluralism in India, too, is philosophically grounded. The ancient Vedic verse “*Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*” — “Truth is one, but the wise call it by many names” — reflects an ethos of coexistence. It is not uncommon for an Indian to visit a temple, a mosque, and a church, all in the same week, seeing no contradiction in doing so. This fluidity comes from philosophical traditions that emphasize the inner experience of truth over outer forms of worship.

In daily language, remnants of philosophical thinking are everywhere. Phrases like “*Karma ka phal milega*” (You will reap the fruits of your actions) or “*Sab kuch maya hai*” (Everything is illusion) hint at deeper metaphysical ideas.

They reveal how philosophy continues to live in idiom, in humor, and in how people make sense of suffering, success, and the human journey.

Ultimately, Indian philosophy is not a static tradition—it is a living, breathing presence in the culture. It informs how people think, how they feel, how they organize society, and how they express beauty and truth. It has allowed Indian culture to evolve while staying rooted; to diffuse across continents while retaining a core. The philosophical ideas of oneness, duty, rebirth, and liberation continue to shape the Indian psyche — quietly but profoundly — from the Vedic seers to the everyday person on the street.

Take the term **Ātma-dharmānupraveśa** (आत्मधर्मानुप्रवेश), “the inward penetration into the law of the self,” expresses the Indian conviction that cosmic order is not merely external but must be interiorized as self-realization. It illustrates how Indian philosophy often collapses the boundary between personal essence and universal law, treating spirituality and responsibility as inseparable. Such inwardization reflects a characteristic subtlety of the Indian mind, where metaphysics, ethics, and psychology are fused in a single gesture.

The term **Sat-cit-ānanda-saṃvāda** (सच्चिदानन्दसंवाद), “the dialogical unfolding of being, consciousness, and bliss,” highlights the preference for discourse as a path to truth. Indian thought, from the Upaniṣads to Buddhist dialogues, consistently frames ultimate reality as something approached through layered exchange rather than fixed definition. This dialogical mode reveals the intellectual subtlety of a culture that privileges conversation, interpretation, and plurality in its pursuit of the absolute.

The term **Prapañca-apavāda-kāruṇya** (प्रपञ्चअपवादकारुण्य), “compassion arising from the negation of the phenomenal manifold,” captures the paradoxical structure of much Indian philosophy. In both Advaita Vedānta and Mahāyāna Buddhism, the denial of worldly multiplicity is not a nihilistic withdrawal but a basis for universal compassion. Here the Indian mind displays its capacity to turn metaphysical negation into ethical affirmation, converting detachment into benevolence. Taken together, these three compounds show that the subtle design of Indian philosophy lies in its ability to unite inner and outer, to favor dialogue over dogma, and to reconcile world-transcendence with world-embrace.

Scientific Discoveries

India’s Foundational Contributions to Scientific Knowledge in Antiquity

In *The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World* (2024), William Dalrymple reorients the historical narrative by foregrounding India’s formative role in the

evolution and dissemination of scientific thought. While often marginalized in Eurocentric historiographies, the Indian subcontinent emerges in Dalrymple’s account not merely as a recipient of classical wisdom but as a dynamic generator and transmitter of foundational scientific knowledge. These contributions, developed across centuries, spanned mathematics, astronomy, medicine, metallurgy, and chemistry, and circulated along extensive transregional networks linking South Asia with Central Asia, the Islamic world, and beyond.

Among the most consequential Indian contributions is the **invention of zero as a numeral**, attributed to **Brahmagupta** in the 7th century CE. Not only did he define zero as a mathematical entity with operative rules, but he also articulated early forms of arithmetic involving **negative numbers** and **infinity**—concepts that would take centuries to be assimilated into Western mathematics. Parallel to this, the **decimal place-value system**, in use from at least the 3rd century CE, revolutionized computation and enabled vast advances in scientific modelling and accounting.

In **astronomy**, India’s scientific tradition was equally precocious. **Aryabhata** (c. 500 CE) proposed a **rotating Earth**, correctly explained lunar and solar eclipses, and introduced a mathematically rigorous sine function. Later, scholars of the **Kerala School**, notably **Madhava of Sangamagrama** (14th century), developed techniques akin to modern **calculus**, including infinite series approximations for trigonometric functions—predating Newton and Leibniz by centuries. These mathematical and astronomical developments were systematized in Sanskrit treatises and later translated into Arabic and Persian, thereby entering the scientific canon of the Islamic Golden Age.

India’s empirical and theoretical sophistication also extended to **medicine**. Texts such as the **Charaka Samhita** (on internal medicine) and the **Sushruta Samhita** (on surgery), composed between 600 BCE and 200 CE, reflect a systematized body of medical knowledge. Sushruta’s descriptions of surgical techniques—including cataract extraction, rhinoplasty, and cesarean operations—are indicative of advanced anatomical understanding and clinical methodology. These Ayurvedic treatises not only formed the backbone of Indian medical practice but also traveled with Buddhist monks and traders to China, Tibet, and Southeast Asia, shaping the medical cultures of those regions.

In **metallurgy**, Indian craftsmanship achieved remarkable feats. The production of **Wootz steel**, an ultra-high-grade crucible steel, became a sought-after export, influencing metallurgical techniques in Persia and the Mediterranean. The **Iron Pillar of Delhi** (c. 400 CE), resistant to

corrosion over centuries, stands as a testimony to the subcontinent's material science ingenuity. Meanwhile, Indian alchemical traditions—compiled in the genre known as **Rasaśāstra**—combined spiritual cosmology with empirical experimentation, laying groundwork for early chemical theory and pharmacology.

Dalrymple's work underscores the crucial role of India as a **transmitter of scientific knowledge**. Indian concepts and texts traveled westward via Persian and Arab intermediaries, notably entering the **Bayt al-Hikma (House of Wisdom)** in Abbasid Baghdad, where they were translated and integrated into the Islamic intellectual tradition. From there, many of these innovations would later reach Europe, catalyzing the scientific reawakening of the late medieval and early modern periods.

In sum, India's scientific legacy—characterized by originality, systematic inquiry, and long-range transmission—constitutes a cornerstone of the global intellectual heritage. Dalrymple's synthesis calls for a revision of outdated diffusionist models and highlights the need to acknowledge India not just as a repository of ancient wisdom but as a pivotal actor in the making of modern science.

Or in the style of Dandin, from the Pallavan court of Kanchipura.

The Reckoning of the Golden Mind

In Bharat's breast, where rivers roam with scripted song and sacred foam, There rose a flame no sword could quell—of thought, exact and infinite. Where Nilgiri's cool mists descend and Vindhya's learned forests bend, The sages stirred the stars to speak and named the void with ciphered rite. From Ashvalayana's chanted fire to Aryabhata's wheeling sky, The Earth was turned upon its pole before the Latin tongue awoke. Beneath the peepal's whispering shade, where Charaka his canon made, The pulse was read, the flesh laid bare, and mercury was coaxed to smoke.

The steel of Dakshin blazed so pure, that kings from west and desert shore Would beg the smith for molten scripts whose edge would hum like Vedic hymn. While surgeons, with a sharpened leaf, would mend the face of war and grief, And rivers bore their salves and lore past Ceylon's cape and Khorasan's rim.

These truths in braids of Sanskrit spun, with numbers yoked like stars to sun, Were carried east on monkish backs, and west through ports where dhows unfurled. So Baghdad's lamps in midnight burned with algorithms India learned, And from her manuscripts there flowed the hidden grammar of the world.

Not silence, nor the forest's hush, nor time's erasing, mortal crush, Could dim the arc of zero's womb or calculus in palm-leaf born. For what was writ with stylus bright on bark or bell or blackened night, Resounds now in the circuits hum where modern sciences are sworn.

And that is all I know about anecdotal evidence about the force of love and abuse of power, and a collection of works.

India's Rise as a Great Power: Global Implications

The **revival and rise of India as a great power** carries profound implications, not only for India itself but also for the **global geopolitical landscape**. As India continues to grow in terms of economic, military, and political influence, it has significant consequences for its **foreign relations**, particularly with the **Muslim world, Europe**, and its broader role in **Asia**. These changes are reshaping not just regional dynamics but also challenging and transforming global power structures that have been in place for centuries. Below, I'll break down the implications and consequences of India's rise in these key areas.

India's rise as a global power represents a dramatic shift in the **balance of power**, particularly in the **Global South**. As the world's largest democracy and second-most populous country, India has become a **political and economic juggernaut** that cannot be ignored on the global stage. In the coming decades, India is expected to be a central player in global governance, contributing to decision-making in international institutions such as the United Nations, World Trade Organization, and International Monetary Fund.

Economic Implications

India's economy, with its expanding middle class, burgeoning tech sector, and agricultural base, is poised to be a **major engine of global growth**. As the **"world's factory"**, India is already emerging as a key alternative to China in terms of **global supply chains**, especially in the wake of growing geopolitical tensions with China. This **economic power** will allow India to exert more influence over global trade rules, investment flows, and financial markets. India's increasing dominance in **technology, digital infrastructure**, and **sustainability solutions** is also positioning it as a key player in global innovation.

Military and Strategic Implications

India's military power has grown significantly, and it now boasts one of the largest standing armies in the world, along with a rapidly modernizing **navy and air force**. India's geopolitical strategies are increasingly aligned with **countering China's influence**, especially in the

Indo-Pacific region. The strengthening of alliances like the **Quad** (with the United States, Japan, and Australia) and **bilateral partnerships** with other powers such as **France** and the **UK** reflects India's strategic shift toward **global influence**.

India and Islam

India's relationship with the **Muslim world** is multifaceted, shaped by **historical ties**, **religious diversity**, **economic diplomacy**, and **geopolitical considerations**.

Historical Context

India has a long history of engagement with the Muslim world, dating back to the **Delhi Sultanate** and the **Mughal Empire**, which left enduring cultural, architectural, and religious imprints on the subcontinent. Today, India is home to one of the world's largest Muslim populations (around 14% of its population), and this demographic reality provides India with an influential platform in Muslim-majority countries.

However, **tensions** have surfaced in the relationship, particularly due to internal **sectarian conflicts** and the **disputed status of Kashmir**, which is a sensitive issue for many in the Muslim world. The rise of **Hindutva** (Hindu nationalism) has raised concerns in some parts of the Muslim world, especially about the treatment of Muslims within India and the **question of religious freedom**. This **internal dynamic** sometimes complicates India's foreign relations with countries like **Pakistan**, **Turkey**, **Iran**, and parts of the **Gulf**.

Diplomatic and Economic Cooperation

Despite these challenges, India has managed to maintain positive relations with many countries in the Muslim world. **Saudi Arabia**, the **UAE**, and **Qatar** are key **economic partners**, particularly in terms of oil and investment. India has also become a significant trading partner for the **Gulf states**, and many of the **Gulf economies** are keen to attract India's growing technological and industrial prowess. Additionally, India's historical links with **Iran** in terms of trade, energy, and regional stability remain significant, although they are impacted by **US sanctions**.

India's increasing role in **regional security** also impacts its relationship with the Muslim world, particularly in the **Indian Ocean**. India has consistently worked to enhance security and stability in the region by fostering diplomatic ties with Muslim-majority nations while balancing its own security interests vis-à-vis **Pakistan** and the broader regional stability affected by **Islamic radicalization** and **terrorism**.

Implications for Foreign Policy

The rise of India as a global power is likely to push the Muslim world to reassess its traditional alliances and

diplomatic strategies. India's approach to **multilateralism**, its willingness to engage with both the **Gulf monarchies** and **Iran**, and its interest in fostering **economic ties** with Muslim-majority nations are critical aspects of this evolving relationship. India's **strategic autonomy** means it is unlikely to take sides in **regional Sunni-Shia rivalries** but will rather focus on promoting **stability** and **economic development** in the Muslim world.

India's Relations with Europe

India's relationship with **Europe** is grounded in **trade**, **cultural exchange**, **security cooperation**, and **shared democratic values**.

Trade and Economic Diplomacy

India's rise presents a strategic opportunity for Europe, as India offers a **rapidly growing market** for European goods, services, and technologies. The EU is one of India's largest trading partners, and bilateral trade has steadily increased over the last two decades. India's growing role in **global supply chains**, especially in technology and pharmaceuticals, complements Europe's interests in diversifying its economic dependencies.

India's **tech sector**, especially in **artificial intelligence** and **digital infrastructure**, is increasingly viewed as a key partner for Europe's own **digital transformation**. Furthermore, India's growing influence in sectors like **renewable energy**, **climate change**, and **sustainability** aligns with Europe's Green Deal ambitions. Europe views India as an important partner in the **fight against climate change** and **sustainable development**.

Geopolitical Cooperation

In terms of security, Europe sees India as an important partner in countering **China's growing influence** in the Indo-Pacific region. India's commitment to a **free and open Indo-Pacific** dovetails with Europe's strategic interests, particularly in maintaining the **rules-based international order** in the region. **France**, for example, has increasingly partnered with India on defense and maritime security, and this trend is expected to continue.

Cultural and Social Ties

On a cultural level, India's **diaspora** in Europe plays a key role in fostering **people-to-people** connections. Additionally, India's shared commitment to **democratic values**, rule of law, and **secularism** makes it an attractive partner for the **EU** in its push for a **multipolar world order**.

However, there are challenges in the relationship, especially over issues of **trade protectionism** and **human rights**, with some European countries expressing concerns over India's

domestic policies, including its treatment of minorities, the **Kashmir issue**, and the rise of **Hindu nationalism**. Despite these differences, **India's importance** in Europe's **geostrategic calculations** is only growing.

India's Role in Asia

India's **role in Asia** has been transformed by its growing influence and its rivalry with China.

Strategic Rivalry with China

India and China, despite being both ancient civilizations and having deep historical ties, are increasingly locked in a **strategic rivalry**. Both countries are vying for **dominance in the Indo-Pacific region**, and the **border disputes** in the **Himalayas** have become flashpoints for military tensions. India's growing military modernization and alliance with powers like the **US** and **Japan** is partly aimed at **counterbalancing China's influence** in the region.

Economic Competition and Cooperation

India's rise poses a challenge to **China's economic dominance** in Asia, particularly as both countries compete for **investment** and **market share** in emerging economies. However, India also offers **collaborative opportunities**, especially in **infrastructure development**, **technology**, and **climate change**. India's commitment to a **rules-based order** in Asia provides a counterpoint to China's more assertive, sometimes coercive, policies.

Regional Leadership and the Indo-Pacific

India's leadership in forums like the **ASEAN-India summit**, the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**, and the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** reflects its growing role in regional governance. India's growing importance in the **Indo-Pacific** means it is increasingly positioned as a regional leader with the ability to influence the **security architecture** of the region, in partnership with countries like the **US**, **Australia**, and **Japan**.

Implications for India's Foreign Relations

India's rise as a great power is likely to **reshape global geopolitics**, particularly its relationship with the **Muslim world**, **Europe**, and its role in **Asia**. While India will continue to navigate complex dynamics—particularly in relation to its neighbors, economic partners, and its internal **cultural diversity**—it is poised to play an increasingly pivotal role in shaping the future global order. India's foreign policy, with its focus on **strategic autonomy**, **multilateralism**, and **economic partnerships**, will not only influence its **bilateral relations** but also contribute significantly to the evolving **geopolitical landscape** of the 21st century.

India's Growing Role in the World: The Lessons From Dalrymple

The implications of India's rise as a great power, therefore, are not just geopolitical but deeply cultural and philosophical. Dalrymple reminds us that India's historical **role as a bridge between East and West** is not only economic but also **intellectual and spiritual**. India's increasing prominence is not just about material power or military strength, but about fostering a new **global dialogue** rooted in the **ideas** and **values** that have shaped the Indian subcontinent for centuries.

As India strengthens its ties with the **Muslim world**, **Europe**, and the broader **Asian region**, Dalrymple's work helps illuminate the **interconnectedness** of these relationships. For instance, India's **cultural diplomacy** with the Muslim world, with its emphasis on common values like tolerance and pluralism, is reminiscent of the **historical exchanges** that Dalrymple so eloquently describes. India's diplomatic approach with **Europe** is likely to reflect the **longstanding cultural ties** between India and the **West**, particularly in terms of shared democratic values and the promotion of **global stability**.

India's **role in Asia** also carries echoes of the past, particularly in its efforts to counterbalance **China's rise** through alliances like the **Quad** and its focus on **regional security** and **economic integration**. Dalrymple's exploration of the **trade routes**, **cultural exchanges**, and **religious movements** of ancient India highlights the significance of **regional leadership** and the responsibility that comes with it — something India will continue to navigate in the context of **modern geopolitical shifts**.

Conclusion: The Revival of an Ancient Power

In essence, Dalrymple's work helps us see that the **rise of India as a great power** is not merely a product of **modern economic and military might**, but rather the revival of an ancient force — a force grounded in **knowledge**, **wisdom**, and a **philosophical understanding of the world**. India's future, as seen through Dalrymple's lens, is intricately tied to its ancient past: a past of intellectual curiosity, cultural exchange, and deep engagement with global ideas. As India charts its course on the global stage, it does so as a country rooted in a **complex history of influence** that stretches across millennia, poised to reshape the contours of modern international relations and diplomacy.

Dalrymple's thesis provides a framework for understanding how India, now on the threshold of becoming a major global power, will continue to assert itself as a beacon of **plurality**, **sustainability**, and **ethical responsibility** in world affairs, drawing upon a rich legacy of **humanistic**

thought and spiritual wisdom that remains as relevant today as it was in the distant past.

The genuine unification of India, a first in History, could have profound implications for its role as a civilizational power and influential force in Asia and the world. A unified India would foster greater cultural cohesion among its diverse regions, leading to a more harmonious representation of its rich traditions and philosophies on the global stage. This could enhance India's soft power, allowing it to project its values of pluralism, tolerance, and democratic governance more effectively.

Unification could lead to streamlined policies and decision-making processes, boosting economic growth and stability. As India's economy strengthens, it could become a key hub in regional and global supply chains, positioning itself as a counterbalance to other economic powers like China. A unified India could wield increased political influence within international organizations, advocating for a multipolar world order. India's historical engagements in diplomacy, grounded in its ancient practices, would enable it to foster collaborative relationships across various regions.

Drawing from its historical contributions to science, philosophy, and mathematics, India could reclaim its role as a leader in intellectual discourse, advancing discussions on sustainability, ethical governance, and cultural studies, while offering an alternative to Western-centric narratives. Furthermore, a united India might contribute to regional stability in South Asia and beyond by promoting cooperation over conflict. By leveraging its historical ties and shared cultural narratives, India could mediate disputes and strengthen diplomatic relations with its neighbors and Muslim-majority countries.

Today, India is already forming alliances such as the Quad with the United States, Japan, and Australia. A unified stance could enhance these relationships, allowing for stronger collaborations in defense, technology, and environmental sustainability. India's unity amidst diversity could serve as

a model for other nations grappling with similar challenges. By integrating various regional identities into a cohesive national narrative, India may inspire other multi-ethnic societies towards peaceful coexistence and collective prosperity.

Ultimately, the unification of India represents not only an internal consolidation of its civilizational identity but also a transformative opportunity to assert itself as a vital player in global affairs. As India embraces its historical legacy and adapts its traditions to contemporary contexts, it could significantly influence the future trajectory of civilization in Asia and around the world.

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