

Six Images of India

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India, like China, is part of the collective imaginary of Western civilisation. It is not only a geographical, historical or cultural area: the memories of India are registered in the inner archives of Western memories. Since the ancient Greeks India occupies a place in the heart of Western culture and has served as a kind of a counter image to the self-perception of the West. India has never been to the West the Other, in the sense of the immediate neighbour, the stranger next door, the enemy crouching behind the border. India has rather been the Remote Other, the Other that is too far away and therefore always open to the falsifications of fantasy. It is interesting to note that India was for the old West a place of fabulous wealth and strange religions. Mysticism and opulence were two key concepts to define India in the ancient Western world.

In the relations between India and Europe there was an opening that started in the sixth century BC and ended with the fall of the Roman Empire.

This opening put India, Greece and Rome in direct contact. In the first century BC Greek sailors learnt from their Arab colleagues about the existence of the monsoon winds which allowed them to sail directly from Aden to the south of India. The trip from Aden to the ports of southern India usually lasted about forty days, but Pliny mentions the case of the Roman sailor Annius Plocamus who, led by strong monsoon

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