Paul Joseph Goebbels was a German politician and Reich Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945. He spoke the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth when he said: “If you tell people a lie hundreds of times, they will accept it as a truth!” Well! He should know!

The validity of his statement can be seen so clearly in these times. For example and close to home is the popular global conception of India as a poor, undeveloped country. This is a blatant distortion of reality! This lie has been told tens of thousands of times by all the European exploiters who have tried to conquer this poor, barbaric (read non-Christian country) since Vasco da Gama sailed round the Cape of Good Hope and landed in Kerala in 1498! That adventurer then planted the flag of Portugal and claimed possession of this vast and ancient land, “In the name of the Queen” As though there were no culture, no people, no ownership prior to his arrival! The hospitable innocent Hindus, of course, could never imagine what he was up to and what would happen to them as the result of their hospitality.

The British, French, Spanish and Dutch (to name a few) were close on his heels. Perhaps they were motivated by his statement on arrival. “Why have you come here?” the noble rulers asked Da Gama politely,” to which the sea-adventurer replied, “I have come seeking spices and souls for Christ.” Five centuries of exploitation followed after him as the explorers and colonizers armed with sea power, gun power and money power brought the native people under their rule and in the process, looted the rich and prosperous land. They then pointed their fingers at India and said: “Shame! Shame! Such poverty and dirt!” They were like the man who killed his parents and then threw himself on the mercy of the judge since he was an orphan! Or like the thief who stole all of a man’s money and then criticized him because he was poor.

In accordance with Goebbels observation that since the foreign rulers never tired of demeaning the local customs, way of life and religion, that the people of India came to believe themselves that they were poor, uncultured and barbaric. This made it much easier for the foreign invaders to consolidate their power.

The question should be asked: **If India was so poor, so undeveloped, so crude and barbaric, why did everyone wanted to come here?**
The well-known “pop historian” Will Durant has put all of this in a very neat perspective. But it took him several years to realize the real truth behind the lie. Durant wrote his widely popular book The Story of Philosophy in the early twentieth century. It was published in 1926. It is a clever, entertaining, most informative book from which a very excellent perspective can be gained in regard to the great thinkers of the world throughout the history of mankind. It has gone through about many editions and printings. Strangely enough in his work, he did not include any of the spiritual – philosophical greats of the East: Buddha, Adi Shankara, Veda Vyas, Confucius or Lao Tzu. It seems he suffered a “blind eye” at that moment in his evolution and highlighted only English, American, European, Greek and Roman thinkers.

In 1926 he was still under the influence of the great lie. The East was not much more than barbaric and poor and had nothing to offer the civilized world. He did see his colossal mistake, however, some time later. Durant realized his horrendous oversight and wrote about it in the preface to the second, revised edition of The Story of Philosophy. He noted: “The worst sin of all-though the critics do not seem to have noticed it- was the omission of Chinese and Hindu philosophy. Even a “story” of philosophy that begins with Socrates, and has nothing to say about Lao-tze and Confucius, Mencius and Chwang-tze, Buddha and Shankara, is provincially incomplete.” He later more than corrected his stance. A little known book by Will Durant may be referred to here which was written in 1930. The Case for India by Will Durant(part of an 11-volume series The Story of Civilization). His admiration and understanding of India’s significance in the development of world’s thought process came to be expressed in that book.

“Nearly every kind of manufacture or product known to the civilized world-nearly every kind of creation of man’s brain and hand, existing anywhere, and prized either for its utility or beauty – had long, long been produced in India. India was a far greater industrial and manufacturing nation than any in Europe or than any other in Asia. Her textile goods – the fine products of her looms, in cotton, wool, linen and silk – were famous over the civilized world; so were her exquisite jewelry and her precious stones cut in every lovely form; so were her pottery, porcelains, ceramics of every kind, quality, colour and beautiful shape; so were her fine works in metal – iron, steel, silver and gold. She had great architecture, equal in beauty to any in the world. She had great engineering works. She had great merchants, great businessmen, great bankers and financiers. Not only was she the greatest ship-building nation, but she had great commerce and trade by land and sea which extended to all known civilized countries. Such was the India which the British found when they came.”
That quotation from his little known (but ought-to-be-widely-known) book written 84 years ago: The Case for India is worth noting.

Durant had a talent for digging out nuggets of surprising information. In this case it throws a light on the darkness of Western ignorance and arrogance in relationship to the East. For example he wrote that there were 7,000 opium shops in India operated by the British government. If that is not shocking enough he said that two to four hundred thousand acres of India’s soil were given away to the growing of opium.

His account of the levels of poverty that prevailed in India is perhaps the most disturbing. While Britain took away enough wealth from India to make the Industrial Revolution possible, the percentage of taxes as related to the gross produce was more in India than in any other country. Famine became a feature of Indian life. As many as 15 million people died in the famines of 1877, 1889, 1897, and 1900. This was all under the so called efficient, benign rule of England. Durant wrote:

“The British ownership of India has been a calamity and a crime. This is quite unlike the Mohammedan domination: those invaders came to stay; what they took in taxes and tribute they spent in India, developing its industries and resources, adorning its literature and art…(Under British rule) I saw a people-one-fifth of the human race-suffering poverty and oppression more bitter than any to be found elsewhere on the earth. I was horrified. I had not thought it possible that any government could allow its subjects to sink to such misery.”

Durant had visited India during that time and saw the situation for himself. These are the same nations that called India undeveloped.

Why is it so important to realize the richness and the social, economic, cultural and spiritual competence of India’s past? There are several reasons. (The views now put forth are entirely my own). I believe there has been a fear and distrust in the Western psyche towards the East, particularly India. This “fear’ it seems to me, originated to a large extent as the Christian movement’s aim shifted from the spirituality of Jesus Christ to the materiality of common men. The Church developed organizational ambitions and worked hard on consolidating its material power and strength. This shift occurred in the third and fourth centuries CE. Before that time when the so-called “pagan cultures” such as Greece and Rome dominated the “civilized European world,” many philosophers travelled to Alexandria where the cultures of East and West met in a vibrant inter change. There is some proof that Pythagoras and Plato may have travelled to India and brought back ideas which influenced Greek, Roman and European philosophy for centuries. The early Christian mystics
like Augustine still retained some mystic quality similar to Indian philosophers and Yogis.

The ancient Indian world view was eclectic and open minded accepting unity in diversity. The Christian world view, in an effort to dominate mind and hearts and pocket books too, became more and more dogmatic. There was only one God, Jesus Christ, and only one path to salvation, submission to Jesus Christ and his ambassadors on earth, the Christian priests.

Durant’s research is an eye-opener. Spiritual seekers, especially on the Yoga path, must wake up and realize that a great lie was imprinted on Western history by the colonizers of the 15th – 16th century. Vital historical records, significant art works, manuscripts, artifacts, literature, architecture – all concrete testimonies to a culture’s greatness were consciously or unconsciously destroyed by the conquerors. It is said: if you wish to demoralize a people, destroy first the symbols of their greatness, like temples, literature and works of art. When people lose their cultural, religious and spiritual identity, the conqueror’s work becomes easy.

The Indian scriptures were translated into English and other European languages in the late 18th and the 19th centuries. Most of the scholars were financially dependent on funding from Christian missionary organizations and the British rulers. The rulers wanted to understand the mindset of the colonized people and the Christians wanted to “save souls”. There was a natural Christian and colonial bias in the translations and some serious errors were also incorporated.

For the most part the scholars had no first-hand experience of India. For example, the most widely respected Indologist the German Max Muller never came to India. Though much of his correspondence in the form of letters show his Christian bias and his firm conviction that the Christian way of life and belief structure was superior to every other, still in public pronouncement especially towards the end of his long life in the late 19th century he praised India as producing the most sophisticated and valued philosophy in the world. It was Max Muller who more or less propagated the idea that the Vedas were written in about 1500 BCE, a date that is widely accepted even today. Being grounded in Christian ideology, one can understand how he came to develop this date.

The fundamentalist Christians clergy of his time had set 5000 BCE as the date in which God created the world. They came to this date by counting the generations given in the Bible backward from the present. How then could India have produced an exquisite civilization and culture tens of thousands of years ago (as widely held by most Indian pundits) if God had created the world only about seven thousand years earlier? The Indian religious historians put the date of Krishna’s death at about
3106 BCE. Rama would have to be placed about 5000 BCE. The Vedas are much more ancient than these two Avatars of Vishnu.

If the Vedas are dated at 1500BCE then the dating of all other relevant scriptures must be pushed forward. So, many believe the Yoga Sutras to be have been compiled about 100 CE, against the traditional date of 800 BCE. By this view of history, the Western philosophies and Jesus Christ become much more ancient than the Indian. It can then be claimed Indian spirituality owed much to the influence of Western thinkers. This is just a small distortion of the myriad facts available to mankind in relationship to Indian scriptures.

All this falsehood undermines the authority of Yoga and Indian spirituality. It constitutes The Great Lie which has been told so often that it is believed by the world to be true!

Nowadays, when Yoga is a household word from the igloos of the Artic to the tree houses of Africa, there is confusion about the Yoga tradition. The question rises! How can anything valuable come from a “failed nation” and a poor, barbaric society? The “Idea of Yoga” has been literally “grabbed off” by many a modern adherent. Yoga has been manipulated to mean “whatever the exponent wishes it to mean!” This creates further confusion about the history of Yoga’s cultural roots and the place of tradition (Parampara) in its world view.

Recently in an informal interview, a well-known American New York Yoga teacher manifested that arrogant attitude in a shocking manner. The interviewer asked him about the relation between Yoga today and the ancient Indian tradition. The proud, commercially successful American Asana Guru replied, “There is no India. We are Yoga!”

Need more be said?