

Antiquity Comes Full Circle - Part VI

MODERNITY ARRIVES



As we've discovered, the East, just like the West, has been riddled with war, invasion and conflict of every kind. It is also steeped in much hypocrisy and contradiction and yet it has somehow retained a stronger sense of self than is the case in the West. It is a region where the understanding of the human spirit continues to be the greatest pursuit. It has been less preoccupied with 'looking out' into the world and has maintained its focus on 'looking in'. Whether we look at India, China, Japan, Korea or South East Asia we see this inclination and habit of 'looking in' for the answers. For nearly all the eastern religions and traditions it is inside, not outside, that ultimately leads to salvation. These traditions would all largely agree that what you see 'outside', is best understood when one is wearing the spectacles of 'insight'. What is insight?...

Informed vision! It is when a person, turns their vision (sight) inwards and through quiet reflection they come away with the 'information' that that introspection brings. Insight encourages one to interpret what one sees by going beyond logic and the senses. Have we acquired or more precisely developed such insight? Or do we continue to trust our eyes alone for our interpretation of the world. In India, especially within the yogic traditions, there is much talk of the third eye.... What is this third eye? Does it exist? We are sure that it does exist. The third eye is simply a highly refined insight, the ability (which comes from practice) to look within, which, in turn enhances what one sees when looking out into the world. This is the road, we believe, to enlightenment, peace and joy.

By the mid-19th century about half the world's population lived in Asia. They were mostly peasants and Asia's industrial activity was confined to hand-made quality goods. By the end of the 19th century, half of Asia's population was under European and American rule. It was during this time that Asia was being exposed to nationalistic and democratic ideas which, would eventually bear fruit in the 20th century and lead to calls for independence. There was little native industrialisation during this time as the European rulers had no interest in developing competition from their colonies. Colonial territories were seen as profitable markets and a great source of materials for their own factories and industries.

The industrial revolution brought with it more than technological advancement and change. It brought about complete change for the East. The British, French, Russians and later the Americans and Germans all expanded their empires whilst the older imperialists—the Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese were less active, as they were not at the forefront of industrialisation. This left few independent Asian states such as: Persia, Afghanistan and Siam, who all maintained precarious existences amidst the huge shifts in power, and empire building. It was China and Japan whose position most changed under the influence of the foreign invaders. The Chinese empire had towered over the majority of Asia for centuries. It was a huge and powerful centralised state, which was undoubtedly one of the world's greatest civilisations. We've not attempted to document here the eastern contribution to the evolution of science as there is far too much to say. This we believe is another tale for another time. Suffice it to say that medieval Europe had borrowed extensively from

Chinese science and technology, which at the time was the most advanced in the world. India contributed significantly too – particularly in astronomy and mathematics. It wasn't until the 16th and 17th centuries (see Science...The New God?) that Europe began to compete and then surpass Indio-Chinese achievements. However, the results of these advancements by Europe were not felt in China until the 19th century. Until then, the Chinese emperors had seen China as the principal actor on the world stage. They treated the squabbling European states, who were building their various colonies and empires, as bit-part players striving for central roles in Asia, however they believed they would never attain a lasting foothold. They tolerated Europe's advances as they saw themselves as culturally superior and having invulnerable strength. The Chinese during this period refused to negotiate with the European governments on equal terms. The most they would concede was limited trading privileges on the coast or at the borders.

Japan had been heavily influenced in its evolution by Chinese civilisation but, politically speaking, was a very different state. Its emperor was merely a figurehead and real power lay with a warrior aristocracy headed by a Shogun or Generalissimo. While China had disdain for what it saw as the 'barbarian' world of Europe, Japan was afraid of it. The earlier activity of European traders and missionaries during the 16th century had proved unsettling to Japanese society. This is why from the 17th century Japan's ruling class forbade contact with the outside world, except for China and Holland (as the Dutch had been more discreet than other Europeans in their trading connection with Japan).

Between 1833 and 1860 Great Britain forced China to abandon her traditional attitude to the outside world and to accept a code of international behaviour convenient to European and American trading interests. As previously stated China was self-sufficient and needed nothing from the Europeans and so British demands were not met until opium became part of the negotiations. It was discovered that China had an almost inexhaustible appetite for opium. By the 1830s over half of the British exports to China consisted of opium, a lot of it smuggled in, as in parts of China it was



banned. Early missionaries recorded the devastating effects of opium on the Chinese people especially in terms of their health, which was very poor. In 1839 the emperor Tao Kuang decided to deal with the situation by destroying the opium to stop its ever increasing use, but, in the summer of 1840, this merely brought about war as the British retaliated. The British at that time had the greatest sea power in the world and the emperor could mount little resistance and by 1842 the opium war ended with the Treaty of Nanking. This was the first of several 'unequal' treaties between China and the West, and it gave British merchants all the concessions they wanted. Hong Kong was relinquished to the British during this period and Britain had access and trading rights to five ports, most importantly Shanghai and Canton. Similar treaties were also granted to the French and Americans. The opium war made it clear that the Chinese could no longer hope to stave off the West. This was arguably the most important turning point in 2,000 years of Chinese history, as, in quite a humiliating way, China's premise of invulnerability and cultural superiority was now having to bow down to the French and the British in particular. By 1858 both had gained further trading advantages and their grip on China was strong. Much of coastal China had effectively become a European colony and the Chinese themselves were treated with contempt in their own country, such

was the power of the Europeans. For the Chinese, especially the scholarly classes and the now impotent gentry, there was distrust for a civilisation that did not seem superior in any way but only in its weapons! To them, Europeans seemed crude, vulgar and incomprehensible.

India was facing a similar fate as France and Britain both sought to expand their empires on the sub-continent. Whilst the Moguls still ruled in the north of India, the south of India became a theatre of war in which the British and the French battled for control of South India (at this time in the late 18th- early 19th century this was considered the richest place on earth). The Tamil people were the major casualties of these wars, especially as their people tried to resist these invasions but were systematically massacred. They were simply no match for the British who won control in 1799.

This was the first of many conflicts that paved the way for the British Raj. The East India Company that had pursued India merely for profit continued to do so and the 'uneasy peace' simply disguised the fact that the British ambition was to add India to its colonies. By 1857 it did just that. The war in 1857 was seen as the first big battle for independence which India lost. Up to this point Britain had used some force but had also seduced its way to power through treaties and negotiations. However, by the mid 19th century, Hindus and Muslims stood side by side and battled against the British. It was known as the greatest war against an imperial colony, Mangal Pandey. This battle was some 25 years in the making and was the result of Indians feeling denigrated by the British. The uprising took the British totally by surprise. The British response to this uprising was staggering. Their brutality was beyond belief. Karl Marx (who was working for the New York Tribune at the time) angrily condemned the British press for not reporting the atrocities committed against the Indians. Marx went on to describe the Europeans as having become "fiends in their pursuit of power". They left Delhi in total ruins and having crushed the uprising they gripped India around the throat it would be another 90 years before independence on this scale was sought and ultimately achieved (in 1947). This latter and successful independence movement was led by three great lawyers, all rather ironically British educated: they were Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah. It was they who finally led the victorious charge against the British Raj.

So until then, Europe (the West) had China, India and the rest of Asia exactly where it wanted them, servicing its interests and under its control. During that period, in the background many great philosophers and thinkers continued to emerge trying to apply reason where it was lacking. Right across Asia we can see the evidence of Antiquity coming full circle, as these often lone voices emerged, trying to help us find a kinder, more noble way.....

MODERN TIMES – ANCIENT VALUES?



Let us listen to those voices in the 19th and 20th centuries, still shouting, striving in their own ways to prevent us from being consumed by our egos and our greed. By the 19th and 20th centuries, America and Europe, aided by science and technology, were now the dominant global force and remain so today -although there is evidence that that is changing with both India and China rising again like the phoenix out of the ashes of their past oppression. Whilst in the grip of colonialism and cultural indoctrination by the West, the East

continued, philosophically at least, to fight for its autonomy and beliefs. There were many who played their part in trying to achieve this. India gave us Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) who has been acclaimed as perhaps the greatest literary figure in history. In sheer quantity of work, few writers can equal him. His writings include more than 1,000 poems and over 2,000 songs; in

addition, he wrote 38 plays, 12 novels, 200 short stories and innumerable essays covering every important social, political and cultural issue of his time. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, the first such award to an Asian writer. His life-long interest in education led to his founding a school and a university. Not content with being a philosopher, poet, educator, literary giant, songwriter and producer of plays, he took up painting in his old age and became prolific and successful at that too, producing some 2,500 pictures. Tagore was a genius and like Gandhi, who was a contemporary of his, the message he exuded in all that he did was love! This principle underpinned his whole ethos and style. He was a truly international figure at the time and in 1915 he was knighted by the British Crown for artistic, social and cultural contribution through his work. However, he later returned the Knighthood, in 1919, as a protest against the British massacre of unarmed civilians in Amritsar. This massacre has subsequently been described as 'the worst atrocity in the history of the British Empire'. 329 people were killed in cold blood and 1,000 wounded and General Dyer, the unrepentant officer responsible for the attack, followed it up with public floggings. Though Dyer was eventually dismissed by the British government, there were still many British who vigorously defended his actions, including the House of Lords. The Amritsar massacre helped to give Gandhi control of Congress, which endorsed his view that "co-operation in any shape or form with this satanic government was sinful". And in the summer of 1920, Gandhi began a campaign of non-cooperation.

This act (returning his Knighthood) gives some measure of Tagore's overriding view that love and harmony are the very meaning of life and that hatred, injustice and conflict in any form are their enemies. His philosophy and religious views were heavily influenced by the Upanishads. He believed 'true realisation' comes from the love of self, love of family and friends, all humans, animals, trees and God. He believed in 'unity in diversity' and spoke passionately about this in the face of the increasing self destruction he saw taking place in his life-time, particularly in the West which culminated in two world wars. He loved God and nature, believing both to be things of great beauty.

During this same period in India, the Great Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) was also active. He was lovingly called Mahatma (great soul). Albert Einstein said of Gandhi "generations to come will scarcely believe that such a one as this walked the earth in flesh and blood". His ambition, Gandhi said, was "to wipe every tear from every eye". Although not a great original thinker, what he did has rarely been rivaled. He collected ideas from all religious traditions, especially Hinduism and fashioned a unique and forceful philosophy. He then made his own life the embodiment of his philosophy ; he practiced what he preached! His greatest achievement was the creation of a new instrument of social action, namely, Satyagraha, also known as civil disobedience. Gandhi learnt the value of tapasya (self suffering or intense efforts) from his mother who was an especially devout Hindu and he learnt religious tolerance from his father who had friends who were Hindu, Jain, Muslim and Zoroastrian (Persian religion founded in the 6th century BC). We won't attempt to tell Gandhi's story here, as much has already been written. What is relevant to this commentary is that he was a fairly recent example of someone prepared to live and die by his principles. He built his own philosophy on truth and learnt very early of its power. When Gandhi was fifteen he stole some gold to help his older brother. Conscience stricken he made a full, written confession. He had the courage to accept the suffering his actions would incur. His father, after reading the confession, cried and forgave him. It was Gandhi's first lesson in the power of truth and he witnessed its power to arouse love and the power of that love to also reform the heart. This became his template for life and all that he went on to do was governed by truth, non-violence, simplicity and tolerance. Gandhi said and practised the principle "change begins with me; be the change you want to see in the world". He believed to be egoless was the highest personal virtue and it was this along with his loving nature that made him so popular and attractive to so many. This is probably why he was able to bring his own brand of spirituality into politics. By 1947 India had achieved its independence, through the tenacity and brilliance of Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru

(1889-1964) and Mohammed Jinnah (1876-1948). These three British educated lawyers were to become the heartbeat of the 'Home Rule Movement' and in spite of their differences orchestrated and engineered the demise of the British Raj in India.

There were other great contributors who played a part in India reclaiming its destiny, such as Aurobindo (1892-1950), K.C. Bhattacharyya (1875-1949) and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1885-1975). Aurobindo was a unique politician for he saw Indian nationalism as a return to divinity, India reclaiming its spiritual heritage and then sharing that heritage with the world. Although he had been educated in England and went to Cambridge he became a radical revolutionary who wanted nothing more than to help end British colonial rule in his homeland. Aurobindo had developed a real and lasting love for much of western culture, especially its literary heritage. He was nevertheless faced with the blatant racism and cultural chauvinism of the British attitude at the time. This ultimately is why he vehemently rejected the British notion that they were indeed superior and that colonialism was therefore somehow a 'favour' to its colonies. He went on to help encourage and revive India's belief in itself by pointing to its antiquity, especially its spiritual tradition, which had never really waned despite all that India had been through. Unusually, it was his experiences in yoga that became the vehicle for his political expression and contribution to change in India. He was passionate about integration and as a result created 'Integral Yoga', a system based on the classical forms of yoga of the Hindu tradition (devotion, karma and knowledge) which he combined with meditative and other spiritual practices. He felt this integration embraced the idiosyncrasies of the individual. Integral yoga implied the integration of spiritual practice within the regular activity of life, and so he spent the last 40 years of his life spreading this message of integration.

K.C. Bhattacharyya was born into a Brahmin family of Sanskrit scholars and as a result from a very early age he was introduced to the ancient Indian scriptures, such as the Vedas and Upanishads. He was very bright and went on to Presidency College in Calcutta. However, due to his unwillingness to appease British administrators, he never secured positions commensurate with his abilities. He held a variety of teaching and administrative positions and retired at the age of 55 as Principal of a small college. After retirement he became a professor of philosophy at Calcutta University, then the Director of the Indian Institute of Philosophy



at Amalner. Finally, he became the George V Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at Calcutta University. He was another integrationist but with a different twist to Aurobindo. Bhattacharyya constructed a comprehensive philosophical worldview of his own which was made up of elements from Eastern and Western philosophy. He was well versed in a number of Indian philosophical schools and various Western philosophies, especially Kant and Hegel (German philosophers). What was refreshing about his position is he didn't feel he owed allegiance to any particular school and so he never became concerned with the maintenance or the defense of any particular Eastern or Western school of philosophy: a true integrationist. His philosophy was/is a kind of living organism in which new material is assimilated and digested and then adapts and grows into a new form. His contribution goes a long way toward removing the popular western misconception that Indian philosophy is exclusively mystical, non-rational and unscientific. Bhattacharyya produced a substantial body of work on freedom, the concept of value and of philosophy itself but his primary focus and contemplation was on the subject of the Absolute, which he addressed in three different

phases of his life from 1914 to 1918, 1925 to 1934 and then from 1939 for a period lasting little more than a year. For those who wish to explore his work on the Absolute further, there is much written from each of these periods. For him philosophy is a rational analysis of experience in the sense of conceptual clarification, also the sorting and ordering of epistemological, metaphysical, ethical and aesthetic symbols, all in the name of progress towards the Absolute (God, the universe, perfection). He thought this was best done by marrying Eastern and Western principles, not using them as a basis for division, each striving for a superior position. So often intellectual debates on the 'truth' seem preoccupied with the 'rightness' of one's position, rather than posing the key question: 'does your perspective in fact inform mine'? Bhattacharya didn't get caught in this trap of the ego and the intellect. He revered truth as the prize.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was India's most eminent 20th century philosopher. He, like Bhattacharyya was well versed in European and Asian philosophical traditions but his knowledge and understanding went further. He was a world leader in comparative religion and philosophy but he went beyond this as he aspired to be a midwife to the world's 'unborn soul'. His own passage through adulthood reflects some of that aspiration as he rose from professor of philosophy at Calcutta and Oxford to become president of India. He was seen as a master of the English language, a spellbinding orator, dynamic leader and very generous human being.

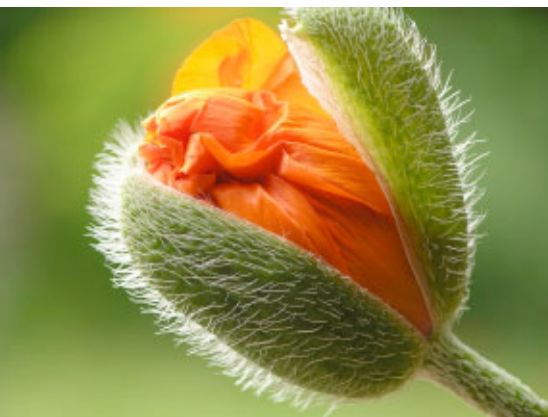
Radhakrishnan was brought up and educated in colonial India where Christian missionaries proclaimed Christianity to be the only true religion, portraying Hinduism as being seriously flawed and blasphemous. In his first published works (1923, 1927) he went on to defend the Hindu theory of karma and the ethics of the Vedanta. For Radhakrishnan, karma solved the riddle of evil because it made the individual responsible for his/her own destiny. "The 'agent's' sufferings are the consequences of his own past misdeeds, whether in this life or previous lives". So it's the agent, one's own actions, and not God, who causes evil. Karma however, does not entail fatalism nor a negation of freedom. Radhakrishnan, using an analogy from a game of cards, contended that the hand one is dealt is determined by past karma, but the individual is free to play the game as he wishes. This is where free will meets destiny. He also argued that critics of Hinduism were mistaken in claiming that the Vedanta is life-negating. "This world is the field where one enacts the drama of the soul's salvation. This is not done by renouncing the world but by acting in it!" However, he did stress: "One must act to fulfill one's duty without becoming attached to the fruit of one's actions". He saw man's highest path as selfless service and non-violence (ahimsa) and therefore it falls to us all to work for universal salvation.

It is important to note that Radhakrishnan's first major work, the *Monumental Indian Philosophy*, was a two-volume history published in Muirhead's distinguished Library of Philosophy series. This was quite a remarkable achievement. It was the first book to present a panoramic view of Indian thought to the English speaking world, especially England where it was widely believed that there was no such thing as Indian Philosophy! He smashed that myth and brought respectability to Indian Philosophy throughout the world. His influence and achievements are too many to list but at this time of loosening the British grip on India, it would be wrong not to comment on what many see as his greatest work: *An Idealist View of Life* (1932). This is based on a number of lectures he gave in London and Manchester in 1929, known as the Hibbert Lectures. In this work he remarks upon the spectacular success of science in modern times and notes that most current philosophies, using scientific knowledge as a paradigm, recognise only two sources of knowledge, namely sense perception and logic. But Radhakrishnan insisted humans have another form of knowing which he called intuition (Pramana). In fact, he claimed intuition is the fundamental source of cognition (knowing) and provides evidence that the mind is functioning as a whole. Sense perception and logic were therefore only partial functions of the mind. Whereas intuitive knowledge arises from an intimate fusion of mind with reality; it is 'knowing' by 'being' and not by senses or symbols. Intuitive knowledge, for him, was seeing things as they are, from the viewpoint of a unique

individual and not as a member of a class or as a unit in a crowd. Radhakrishnan believed that the 'knowing' that came from the intuitive aspect offers a mystical vision of the 'absolute spirit', in which the subject-object duality is transcended and where the subject knows that the foundation of the universe is Absolute Spirit and is of the same nature as his/her own deepest self. Such an experience transforms the person's life and he/she becomes a saint, a seer, one who has achieved spiritual freedom.

This is a vision that we (at Reach) share as a result of our own personal and clinical experience. All things cannot be known or understood by standing on the shores of sensory perception and logic and admiring the view of reality with the arrogance and limitation of the 'certainty' that they claim to offer. We have to go beyond the limitation of what our senses tell us and intuition offers us that opportunity. Here again we see integration being argued for, but here it's about the marriage between the viewer of reality and his/her reality. Be it art, science or morality, our understanding and expression is enhanced by an intuitive platform: this is what Radhakrishnan encouraged us to explore. He believed the answers to the 'unknown' lay in spiritual and mystical experiences, because it is through them we become one with the Absolute Spirit; and it is in that 'oneness' (moksha – liberation) that the incommunicable can be understood. He did not dismiss other perspectives and philosophical views; on the contrary, he was passionate in his advocacy of religious tolerance. Creeds were unimportant, conduct was everything: through love and righteousness all men will advance to the same spiritual goal. "There are many paths to the same goal and each one should take the one best suited to their individual nature". In 1936 he was appointed Spalding Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics at Oxford University. He was the first Indian and the first Asian to hold a chair at Oxford. See his work 'Eastern Religions and Western Thought' (1939) if you're interested in his best work during that period. From then until 1959, his commentary, writings and other work contended there was one perennial and universal philosophy to be found in all lands and cultures, from the seers of the Upanishads, the Buddha, Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, Hillel and Philo-Judaeus of Alexandria, Jesus, Paul and the medieval mystics of Islam (Sufis). It is the 'spirit' that runs through the veins of these philosophers and their teachings that can unite the continents and link the ages and save us from the meaninglessness of materialism and the illusions of modernity. He was adamant that human beings need not change the religion they were born into, they simply needed to allow their 'conduct' to truly conform to the 'values' of their religion and not get caught up in dogma. Dogmatic religion relies on authority (force), free religion is based on spiritual experience (power). All religion is a mixture of both but only those operating from a place of spiritual experience exhibit love and tolerance for all...

SUMMARY



This chapter has brought with it great pain and suffering as the East loses its grip on its own dominion and as its power is ripped away, its resources are pillaged too. An interesting historical fact which can be evidenced across the cultures is where there is wealth, knowledge and science prosper and where knowledge and science bring such prosperity, further wealth and control can be seen. The East has made a massive contribution to science. At that point it was best described as the medieval science (see Science.. The New God? also in this section of our research page). This medieval science lay the foundation for

mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, physics and helped the human spirit to begin to peer deeper into the relationship between matter and mind. The islamic scientists of the medieval period were pioneers at a time when they were saturated with wealth and the islamic empire was vast, stretching

from parts of China right across to Spain. As conflict and war led to the erosion of that empire and its wealth, and with that control, we see Europe's rise in power and influence. It's at this point that the West takes the fundamental scientific discoveries generated in the East and develops them to the next level, because now it has the power and the wealth to do so.

The East with its introspective tendency continues down that path with reasonable success but now it's pioneering work in the sciences fall away. It now becomes a backseat passenger as Europe takes the lead. Through the scientific advancements that then emerge as modernity arrives the West claims not only the prize but all the accolades for the attainments. It is as if the East has been written out of the scientific history books and even its spiritual and philosophical relevance is diminished too. This thesis is our attempt to give the East the credit it deserves for its enormous contribution to human evolution. We believe that it's still making an enormous contribution but we're simply not listening. As you read about individuals you've probably not even heard of such as: Radhakrishnan, Tagore, Aurobindo and Bhattacharyya, it's hard not to feel a great sense of awe and respect for their contributions, which for the most part have been lost or forgotten by much of the world... or simply not reported with the credibility they deserve. Their wisdom added to the great eastern river of consciousness, we think is needed now probably more than ever as we become more individualistic and have less of a social conscience and as a result are killing our planet and therefore killing ourselves. How can we hope to sustain wellbeing when the very environment needed for that is being poisoned by our actions? It's time for change... and change begins with you!