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**THE BEGINNINGS OF EAST ASIAN ART  
HISTORY AND INDIA IN JAPANESE  
TRADITIONS**

by

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## **THE BEGINNINGS OF EAST ASIAN ART HISTORY AND INDIA IN JAPANESE TRADITIONS\***

India and Japan traditionally have strong relations, and have been guided by shared cultural traditions, including the heritage of Buddhism, and a strong commitment towards the ideals of democracy, tolerance and pluralism. The theme of the conference, and the papers presented, featured this shared cultural tradition, especially the ways in which this heritage developed in the 19th and early 20th century, through interactions between thinkers and intellectuals.

The conference commenced with the introductory speech by Ambassador Shyam Saran, Life Trustee, IIC. He spoke about how the end of the 19th century and early 20th century marked an important period as a period of emergence for Japan in its own right. Japan, despite having a rich cultural heritage, became a strong modernising force, embracing modern technology, and emerged as a powerful symbol for other countries in Asia under colonial and semi-colonial rule, confronting the challenge of advanced technology of the West. In that sense, Japan is an important country, especially for India. For Japan, in discovering its own cultural heritage, began to look at India. The example of this can be seen in terms of Buddhism. Buddhism in Japan is mainly associated with inputs from China, and partly from Korea. India exists in the distant past, since Japan's interactions with India were not so direct. It is the 19th and early 20th century period that brought India into the consciousness of Japan as the fountainhead of Buddhism, and in terms of looking beyond China. In discovering the source, Japan discovered the rich intellectual heritage in India. The conference thus looked at the many parallels between the cultural traditions of Japan and India, from which arose the sense of a shared Asian culture, led by India and Japan, which needed to be explored further.

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The conference was officially inaugurated by His Excellency, Kenji Hiramatsu, Ambassador of Japan. The Ambassador spoke about how the two countries evolved, and nurtured their cultural and intellectual ties. Historical reference in the *Nihon Shoki*, the first Chronicle of Japan, shows that Buddhism was introduced in Japan in the 6th century CE, through China and Korea. However, there have been divergent views on when Indians set foot in Japan. Indian travel through maritime routes across the Bay of Bengal dates from the 3rd century BCE to the 7th century CE, as several Indians migrated to Southeast Asia, while a few Indians went further to Japan through maritime connections. However, the first Indian to come to Japan was Bodhisena, who came to consecrate the Buddha statue at Nara in 752 CE. He arrived in Japan in 736, upon the invitation of Emperor Shomu. Bodhisena and his Vietnamese disciples propagated Indian culture, tradition, music, dance and Sanskrit as well. An ancient Japanese dance form like *Bugaku*, performed on the occasion of the consecration ceremony of the Great Buddha, reflects the influence of Indian culture on the ancient Japanese dance form.

Sanskrit, too, was introduced in two ways. First, in the form of Sanskrit studies, and second, by means of constituting a basis of creation of the principal Japanese scripts, Hiragana and Katakana. Japanese monks were required to study Sanskrit to master original Indian textbooks. Indian gods and goddesses entered Japan through this transmission. Japanese people were exposed to many cults, many of which find roots in India, such as the *Gion* festival, which is one of the three major festivals held in Japan. *Gion* is the Chinese name of an Indian Buddhist monastery. The guardian deity of this monastery is *Gorsirsa*, who is said to have sacred powers to expel epidemics. In 869, when epidemics hit Kyoto, people prayed to *Gorsirsa* (Gozu Tenno) and the guardian deity of *Gion* to counter [the] epidemics. This marked the origin of the Gion festival, which has been celebrated by people of Kyoto for over ten centuries. As a part of the festival, 31 giant chariots are displayed in a procession through Kyoto. These chariots show Mughal carpets, and other Indian textiles brought in the 17th century by the Dutch. Successful Japanese purchased these traditional treasures of India to decorate their community chariots.

Further reference is made to Indian cotton textiles being renowned as the finest dyeing technology, and how it had great influence over Japanese dyeing. Through this brief historical background, it is evident how India and Japan cultivated their ties from the 6th century CE through Buddhism, arts and crafts.

Direct exchange of people was limited until the late 19th century, when these early contacts expanded. In 1857, the first freedom struggle of India stirred national sentiments. In Japan, the Shogunate had followed a strong internationalised policy since the 17th century, as a result of which, in 1868, Japan expanded contact with the world after the Meiji restoration. In the 1880s, Japan entered the industrial revolution, and its economy developed with a focus on light manufacturing, especially in spinning technology. By the end of the 19th century, the shipping route between India and Japan was established by foreign companies such as the British East India Company. This was important for raw cotton, which Japan imported from India.

The industrial ties established between the two countries further expanded when J.N. Tata visited Japan, and met renowned Japanese industrialist Shibusawa Eiichi (1840–1931), considered the father of Japanese capitalism. Together they decided to mend the existing monopoly situation. In order to open a new Indian shipping route, it was necessary to show its viability. In 1893, it was agreed that three cotton spinning companies and three import companies from the Japanese side would insure intake of cargo. On the Indian side, Tata committed to ship raw cotton to Japan. With this, Japan advanced the process of modernisation and industrialisation. This launched the Bombay sea route, and the distance between India and Japan shrank. The people to people exchange increased. An increasing number of Japanese started visiting India for business purposes, and in 1894, Bombay was established as a constant channel of trade for Japan. Kolkata was another important point for Japanese trade, and the trade channel was established in 1907. The people to people exchange was not limited to business only. In the 20th century, Japanese artists visited Indian Buddhist sites for inspiration. Rabindranath Tagore visited Japan five times, and met Okakura Kakuzo (1863–1913).

Okakura, with his disciples, visited India and interacted with Indian artists and intellectuals. Both individuals had a deep understanding of their own and each other's culture, and initiated exchange between Indian and Japanese artists. The fruits of their friendship are alive today, and can be seen at Shantiniketan in Bengal.

Political ties between the two countries date back to the early 20th century, when Indian leaders, such as Subhas Chandra Bose, took refuge in Japan. With the coming of the 20th century, Indo-Japanese relations entered a new era as both countries took to modernisation, and the dialogue of intellectuals and artists from both countries nurtured mutual understanding. This resulted in flourishing ties in the 21st century. The Indian PM's historic visit last year marked a significant achievement in this relation. Many new projects between the countries were launched, such as the new highspeed rail project. However, there is still scope to unlock the potential between the two countries.

The Ambassador concluded by stating how cultural ties between the two countries were important at this juncture, and the history of these was not known to many. Thus, there is a need to have joint research between scholars of the two democracies which will deepen cultural and heritage values. Just after the Meiji restoration, the old idea of deciding on issues through debate and discussion was restored in Japan and that would make Japan the oldest democracy. At the same time, India contributed its own values and ideals to the idea of democracy. Therefore, there is a need to establish similar values of democracy. Since we know more about the 20th and 21st century history of the two countries, there is a need to appreciate the historic past of the two.

The first session of the conference on the 'Beginnings of East Asian Art History' addressed issues of cosmopolitanism, pan-Asianism, nationalism and globalisation. The first speaker for the session was Professor Shigemi Inaga, who spoke on: 'Reevaluating Asian Arts and Crafts under the Colonial Rules in 1910s and 1920s: A.K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) and Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889–1961) between Indian and Korea'.

Ananda Coomaraswamy was a distinguished Indian art historian, and close friend of Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore visited Japan five times and met Okakura in 1892. Sister Nivedita was a close colleague of Okakura, and helped in editing a manuscript that he was working on. Okakura in his *Book of Tea* mentions that during his visit to India, he found tea drinking a common practice. The underlying idea of Okakura's book, *Ideals of the East*, was to elaborate on Japan's aesthetic cultural heritage, and also to make a plea for preserving traditional art styles. Okakura wrote: 'Thus Japan is a museum of Asiatic civilisation; and yet more than a museum, because the singular genius of the race leads it to dwell on all phases of the ideals of the past, in that spirit of living Advaitism which welcomes the new without losing the old.' Okakura made a connection between Indian ideas coming to Japan through China and Korea, and showed Asia as a unified living organism, each dependent on the other, in a symbiotic relationship. This sentiment was also reflected by Coomaraswamy who affirmed the unity and interdependence of all life in Asia, and whose books were transmitted to Japan. In 1913, his book, *Arts and Crafts of India*, was translated into Japanese. The Bengal renaissance was well known in Japan, and painters like Rabindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose were recognised, and reproductions of their paintings were made by Japanese artists.

Much like Okakura, it is Yanagi Muneyoshi who discovered beauty in the ordinary objects of Korean art at a time when Korea had been annexed by Japan in 1910. Muneyoshi castigated Japanese imperialism, which he stated was European in origin, in much the same vein as Coomaraswamy denounced British rule in India. There were several similarities and commonalities between the two thinkers which have not yet been explored. Thus, there is a need to make textual comparisons between the two. Both thinkers Coomaraswamy and Muneyoshi wanted to overcome European industrial force. Both Coomaraswamy and Muneyoshi promoted interest in traditional crafts as a means of safeguarding the cultural identity of a community and in this they followed the lead of Okakura Kakuzo. This they did by constructing an aesthetic of cultural heritage which also served as a means of resistance under colonialism. Thus one can

see the revival of traditional crafts with reference to the art historian A. K. Coomaraswamy, and the Japanese philosopher Yanagi Muneyoshi, considered the founder of the Japanese folk craft movement in the 1910s and 1920s. This fascination with the crafts and especially porcelain was taken forward by Gurcharan Singh (1896–1995), who arrived in Korea in 1919. He established ties with Korean potters and ceramicists. The lotus motif was transmitted to Korea by Gurcharan Singh, and brought back to India establishing further ties.

Next, Dr. Mitsuteru Narayama spoke on ‘Globalisation and Formation of East Asian Art Collection’. The paper considered how Asian art work was collected from the late 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, and the historical events behind the movement. His focus was on the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC. It opened in 1923, showcasing the wonderful collection of artwork from Asia. This gallery was based on the personal collection of Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919). However, the Freer Gallery was different from other artwork collections in other museums as the collection was never allowed to be moved or lent to other museums. This rule comes from certain philosophy born out of Freer’s personal experience.

The Freer Gallery was launched by the Smithsonian institute, and it houses 15,000 Asian artworks, including excellent pieces from India. Japanese artworks date from the 8th century, and comprise of those in paper and wood, and are hence preserved in glass cases. Some of the outstanding specimens include an image of the Bodhisattva by Kaikei, a Buddhist sculptor from the 13th century in Japan. The presentation then traced the interest of Freer in collecting Japanese artworks. Before collecting Asian artworks, Freer was interested in artworks by Whistler, an American Impressionist painter who was based in the UK. Freer was impressed that Whistler was very much into Japanese art, and from 1890 he started purchasing Japanese artworks.

In 19th century Europe, no clear distinction was made between Japonism and Chinosene. Both were accepted in a mixed fashion as things that satisfied the exotic taste for Asia. Freer was interested in Japanese art,



and Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853–1908) changed the direction of Freer’s collections. Fenollosa pointed out to Freer that many Japanese artworks were influenced by China, while Japanese Buddhist tradition was influenced by India. Freer was strongly attracted to the roots of Japanese art and travelled to Asia four times, and saw that in China, national collections were being taken outside the country.

To understand the flow of national treasures from China, it is important to understand the background to the political situation in China in 1900. The period from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century was a time when Asian countries were swallowed by the wave of great powers of Europe such as the UK and France. The complex political and economic situation led to the sale and collection of artworks from Asian countries. The treasures in China were often auctioned off to cover the living costs of the Emperor and officials, or confiscated by the British banks as security for loans. As the Qing dynasty collapsed in 1911, officials and revolutionaries thought it to be a good idea to sell off national treasures, some of which found their way to the Beijing antique market. This is when Freer visited China and collected Asian masterpieces. But as he learned about their value, he felt more joy, and at the same time felt ashamed. For him, artwork represented the traditions and identities of the local people, which he did not have since he was born in the young nation of America.

Since the 19th century, the West has looked down upon the East as backward. But this was not the case with Freer. Freer thought Asian artworks are forms of long histories and intense identities. He visited many Asian countries, respecting their values as different from the West, in the hope of systematically understanding the cultures. Freer felt ashamed to be linked and associated with the process of collecting, because it was an act of destroying the identity of Asia, which should be respected. Fortunately, Freer made a fortune through business, which gave him a mission. This mission was to systematically understand Asian art in terms of quality and quantity, and not let the artworks be scattered or lost, so that they could be passed to future generations. He used his own money to collect artworks passionately. The philosophy behind

opening the Freer Gallery was to ‘never let the artworks be scattered and lost unintentionally by giving in to political or economic pressure even in the face of difficulties in the future.’ The donation of Freer’s collection to the Smithsonian institution was completed in 1906 before he passed away.

The final paper of the first session was by Suijun Ra on the ‘Impact that the Surveys Conducted by Japanese Scholars in early 20th Century China had on the Development of Buddhist Art History in Japan’. It was clear from her presentation that Okakura is considered to be one of the founding fathers of the discipline of art history in Japan. She has looked at Okakura’s expedition to China in the 26th year of Meiji (1902), which marked the beginning of Japanese art historical expeditions. The Shakyamuni Buddha triad in Horyuji, which caught Okakura’s attention, set the foundation for Japanese scholars to consider North China as providing roots of early Japanese Buddhist art. However, studies have since revealed that the influences seen in this important piece of work are far more complicated than was formerly assumed.

The focus of her paper was on studies concerning the Shaka Triad, Horyuji Temple, Nara built in 623. It is one of the oldest temples built by the Japanese Imperial family. Towards the end of the 19th century, the remaining artwork in this temple began to gather historical significance as Japanese policy on cultural property was developed. This stimulated an academic interest in the artwork, and scholars began to make explorations in China and India to trace the roots of Japanese Buddhist art. Meiji era studies on the Shaka Triad evolved: first through its recognition as cultural property, and then as physical evidence provided by Buddhist artwork in China through numerous expeditions to China. This can be seen as one of the results of Japan’s attempt to gain a new cultural identity as a modern nation in Asia. The Shaka Triad is located in the western complex of the temple. The architecture of the western complex is one of the oldest remaining wooden architecture in the world, and was listed as UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997. The Shaka Triad is placed in the centre on the dais, and the surrounding walls are covered with replicas of 8th century murals that were destroyed in a fire in 1949.

Horyuji was founded at the beginning of the 7th century by members of the Imperial family, i.e., by Empress Suiko and her nephew, Prince Shotoku, who dedicated the temple to previous emperors. According to the Chronicles of Japan, *Nihon Shoki*, dated 720 CE, the temple was burned to the ground in 670 CE ‘without the exception of a single building’. During archaeological investigation in 1939, the original complex, known as Wakakusa complex, the size of the western complex, was excavated in a location to the south-east. Though the original complex was buried again after the excavations were over, the founding stone for the central pillar of the pagoda has been preserved on the surface. The building of the current complex is believed to have been completed after the fire in 670. This means that the murals and individual images should also date to around the same time. However, inscriptions carved behind some of the images in the main hall indicate that they date far back than the actual complex, which means that the images were moved in from somewhere else, after the temple building was completed. This includes the Shaka Triad as well. The inscription behind the halo of the Shaka Triad indicates fundamental information, such as how it was built to wish for the recovery of Prince Shotoku and his wife. The couple passed away before the image was completed in 623 CE. The inscription mentions the name of the artisan who made it—Shiba no Kuratsukuri no Obito Tori. This information is important, as will be discussed later.

Interest in the Shaka Triad gained momentum towards the end of the 19th century, with regard to new Japanese policy on cultural property. After the Meiji restoration in 1868, the new policy promoted the separation of Buddhism and Shintoism. Shinto is the indigenous Japanese religion. Traditionally, Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines were intimately connected complexes, as were the practice, beliefs and vocations of the two traditions. However, the Meiji restoration movement to dissociate all aspects of Shinto from Buddhism led to a separation between the two. This resulted in the closure of many temples, and there were also movements to destroy Buddhist images or ritual objects. The priests quit Buddhism to become Shinto priests. It led to the destruction of cultural property. At the same time, the government attempted to distinguish between relics that had to be preserved.

In 1871, it announced an edict for the preservation of antique items and ordered surveys of cultural items owned by temples and shrines. By 1884, these surveys were in full swing and issued by the Imperial household agency, Ministry of Education. Okakura was a participant in these surveys. Artworks in these surveys were graded on a scale of ten, and this marked the beginning of the cultural property designation system. In 1896, the committee for the preservation of old temples and shrines was established, and the law for the preservation of temples and shrines decreed in 1897. As a result of this, the Shaka Triad and statue of Bhaisajyaguru in Horyuji's Main Hall were designated as national treasures under the same law, and the main hall, the five-tiered Pagoda, Middle Gate and the corridors, designated as specially protected architecture. This resulted in a proliferation of academic interest in the architecture and artworks of Horyuji.

At this point, we need to go back to the inscription stating the name of the artisan—Shiba no Kuratsukuri no Obita Tori, as mentioned earlier. Breaking down the name, it is significant to point out that Shiba is a Chinese family name, Obito means chief/head, Kuratsukuri means saddle maker, while Tori is a given name. Regarding the designation 'Kuratsukuri', Ra introduced a theory suggesting that the artisan had the ability to cast metal, and to make different parts of a saddle, as also a wide variety of metal objects. The name 'Tori' occurs in Chronicles of Japanese History as the maker of the statue of the Buddha in Gangoji temple, the first full-fledged temple made by the court. This established a Tori style for Buddhist images, and led scholars to trace the roots of the Tori style, with the development of art history in early 20th century Japan.

Kurokawa Mayori (1829–1906) was the first scholar to talk about the Tori style and its roots in South China. He proposed in 1901, based on written evidence that Tori's grandfather brought with him a Buddha image of Liang Dynasty (South China) which established the Tori style of Buddhist images in Japan. Okakura, however, was the first Japanese scholar to undertake academic exploration to China, and find the roots of Japanese Buddhist art. He realised the need to look at artworks in

Asia to get a deeper understanding of Japanese–Buddhist artworks. In 1893, he set out to Longmen Grottoes, and was the first one to point out stylistic resemblances between Tori style images and artworks in China. Ito Chuta was the first to discuss specific transmission routes after his visits to Yugang and Longmen, and suggested that the earlier Northern Wei style came to Japan from Koguryo, Korea. He divided the Northern Wei style in two styles—earlier style influenced by Gandhara as represented in Yugang caves, and a later Sinicised style as represented in the Longmen caves. Hirako Takurei too supported the theory of the Northern Wei Style—although in his case, he suggested that it was the later, and not the earlier Northern Wei style that was transmitted—coming in from Korea and for half a century, the Northern Wei style remained mainstream theory.

Perhaps because the discipline of art history was relatively young in Japan, the physical evidence provided by the expeditions had a direct and significant impact on academic interest in the issue. Although many rigorous surveys were conducted, and important studies were published after Hirako, the mainstream view remained that the origin of the Tori style was Northern Wei. It was Yoshimura Rei who finally pointed out in the 1960s that the artworks in the Longmen Grottoes exhibited influence from the south. Based on this observation, he suggested that since the Buddhist images of the southern dynasties would have been considered stylistically the most advanced in China at the time, and so the artworks in Longmen were also based on the Liang Southern Dynasties style. And because Japan absorbed Buddhist culture from the Korean kingdom of Baekje that was under the rule of Liang, he concluded that the common stylistic elements seen in the Longmen style and the Tori style was that of Liang, one of the southern dynasties.

Although Yoshimura’s proposition was met with opposition by those who continued to claim that the origin of the Tori style was northern, Yoshimura’s point was proved by newly excavated artworks from the territories of the southern dynasty. These images were discovered from Sichuan province, which, during the southern and the northern dynasties period, was ruled by the south. The oldest of the images

precedes the Sinicised images in Longmen, and yet already shares the same characteristics with Tori style images. These discoveries provided irrefutable evidence supporting Yoshimura's theory, which was an important new turn in the theories regarding the origin of the Tori style Buddhist images that started at the very beginning of the 20th century.

### **INDIA IN JAPANESE TRADITIONS**

Session II of the conference commenced with Dr. Yasuko Fukuyama's paper, 'Japanese Encounters with Ajanta', which traced travels by Japanese scholars to the Buddhist caves at Ajanta, which were discovered in 1819. Various attempts were made by scholars from different countries to copy or replicate the Ajanta paintings, starting with Major Robert Gill, who painted 30 canvases which were commissioned by the Royal Asiatic Society from 1844 to 1863. However, due to a fire at the Crystal Palace in December, 1866, most of the paintings were destroyed. In yet another case, in the period from 1872–1885, John Griffiths and his students of the Bombay School of Arts made a new set of copies. However, these canvases, estimated to be around 100, were also destroyed by fire in June 1885. Further attempts were made by C. J. Herringham and her party during 1909–1911, when Nandalal Bose was also engaged in this project. Similarly, S. Ahmed and other artists made copies and line drawings sponsored by the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1915. Reproduction of most of the remaining fragments in water colour, and monochrome photographs, was made by G. Yazdani, during 1930–1955.

Another scholar who studied the paintings at Ajanta, and suggested links between them and those at Horyuji, was Okakura Kakuzo, as discussed by him in a talk on Indian art at the meeting of the Society of History on 12 December, 1902, held at Nara. A major expedition was the Otani Expedition, widely known for its exploration of and research on the Buddhist sites in Central Asia. Kozui Otani (1876–1948) was the head of the mission sent from London to India, other members being Shensho Fuji, Daito Shimaji and Yuei Akiyama. The period of the Otani Expedition was from 10 to 13 December 1902, and it resulted in publications such as the *Diary for the Exploration of the Cave Temples in India*, which

states: ‘Ajanta cave temples are well known for the exquisite paintings. As I have seen copies of those paintings in London they are much more splendid than murals as the Kon-do of Horyuji in scale and beauty...’

Japanese scholars also critiqued the copies made by the British as being far below satisfaction, because they did not precisely convey the paintings’ original elegance. This led many Japanese painters to produce copies of the paintings, and included Testsu Sugimoto, who made copies of the Ajanta paintings from December 1937 to February 1938, and had copied Sigirya painting in Sri Lanka as well. The next painter was Hiroshi Yoshida who was popular for depicting Ajanta using *ukiyo-e* technique, as he had trained in water colour and oils in the Western art tradition, and later developed the skill to transfer subtle gradations of colour and form to a traditional Japanese medium which had emphasised sharply defined contrast. From 1931–1932, based on his sketches and oil paintings, he produced 32 prints. Yonejiro Noguchi was sent to India as a part of the cultural exchange programme under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Inspired by the Ajanta paintings, he wrote a poem, *Ajanta hekiga daisan*, which means ‘Tribute for the Ajanta Mural Paintings’. In the early 20th century, most Japanese who visited Ajanta pointed out the importance of preservation against their rapid deterioration. It could be said that travels to Ajanta, and the recognition of India as the birthplace of Buddhism throughout the Meiji and the Taisho period, helped Japanese artists establish their own identity in the rapid modernisation of the early 20th century.

Professor Fabio Rambelli in his paper on ‘India in the History of the Shinto Tradition’, questioned the typical characterisation of Shinto as ‘autochthonous religion of Japan’, and as such its nationalist and exclusive character. ‘Autochthonous’ essentially meant anything which had no outside influence, truly exclusive in its characterisation; but this was not true about Shinto tradition, especially in pre-modern times, because some of the deities of Shinto tradition were similar to Hindu deities like Saraswati, Mahakala, Tenzin or the Japanese version of Shiva or Maheshvara. Shinto today is not one tradition, but rather a collection of four different realms. The first were ceremonies that took place in the

imperial court, the second being the different occasions for worshipping of different shrines, because there are around 60,000 Shinto shrines all over Japan. The third were folk traditions, which were very difficult to define because they contained Buddhist elements, vernacular elements and Shinto elements as well. The last were the new religions, which began to appear in the mid-19th century and continue until today. In sum, all the above four different traditions jointly contribute to Shinto tradition as understood today. Thus, it is very difficult to provide a simplified definition of Shinto because of its diversity.

A crucial development in the history of Japan which affected Shinto tradition was that in the mid-6th century, Buddhist ideas began to make their way into Japan, through China and Korea. From the early 8th century onwards, Buddhist monks toured all over the Japanese archipelago, and in this process began to identify local deities and give them a name and a description. Sometimes, it is suspected that they were making up legends around them, but it is quite possible that these already existed, but lacked written evidence; therefore, it was part of documenting and recording the already existing gods and giving them a name within the Buddhist pantheon. In the Buddhist pantheon of Japan, there are Indian gods like Rama, Brahma, Indra, and the Japanese local deities placed below the Indian ones. Yet another important event was the arrival of tantric Buddhism, also called esoteric Buddhism in the 6th and 7th century. Many deities began to take the shape of tantric deities in India, not only in bodily representations like several hands, fierce face, bearing weapons, but also in the general understanding that gods were normally violent.

This basic understanding of not only Indian, but local gods as well, continued till 1700, when things began to change significantly. The most common way by which Indian gods could have been introduced into Japan was through the concept of avatars. The logic of avatars went beyond the gods, as many cultural developments of Japan were envisioned as manifestations from India, and the best example of this is the legend which suggests that the mountain *Shugendu* began to appear



in the 12th and 13th century. It is believed that like gods, these mountains also reincarnated in Japan. Apart from religion, many other things such as tools, professions, even wrestlers like Sumo apparently originated in India. Legends go on to claim that even Japan was a portion of Magadha which split away due to an earthquake and reached its current location. Yet another aspect was that the Japanese language was claimed to be a version of the Sanskrit. Some compared the syllables of the Japanese alphabet with Sanskrit ones, and claimed that the former was based on the latter. However, the most common and recent connections with India were created within Buddhism.

All the Shinto shrines that we see today, with very few exceptions, were earlier part of larger Buddhist temple complexes under the supervision of Buddhist priests. It was in the Meiji restoration period that significant change came about when Shinto was separated from Buddhism in 1868. Although it was an accepted phenomenon in Japan that India was the birthplace of Buddhism, they were not aware that Buddhism had disappeared from India. Therefore, when the Dutch and other Europeans visited Japan, they were shocked to learn that India was the birthplace of Buddhism, because Buddhism was not present then in India.

Many of the local gods who were understood as being from India were found in narratives of origin of Shinto shrines, belonging to the 14th and 17th century period. Thus, the present definition of Shinto as a form of polytheistic, animist nature worship is largely a modern construct, which was aimed at providing a new identity to Shinto shrines after their separation from the Buddhist shrines by the Japanese government from 1868 to 1871. By examining the documents and artefacts about Japanese local gods and their cults, it is evident that Shinto used to be the local representation of translocal Buddhism. The Indian tantric form of Buddhism remained the dominant form of Buddhism in Japan. Thus, this paper examined ways in which Indian concepts, images and representations shaped the 'Shinto tradition' of Japan between the 11th and 19th century.

## THINKERS OF RELIGIOUS REFORM

Professor Emiko Shimizu's paper 'Okakura Kakuzo in Cultural Exchange between India and Japan: Dialogue with Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore' focused on Okakura Kakuzo's stay in India in 1902, and his interaction with two revered personalities. Okakura promoted the Tokyo Fine Art School, and a famous Museum and Art Academy, as well as many cultural heritage preservation projects. Okakura provided new direction for the creation of new Japanese art in the art school he established at Idzura, in Ibaraki prefecture. He also demonstrated his skill while running the Chinese and Japanese divisions of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and engaged in many international activities.

On his visit to India, Okakura also went to Buddhist heritage sites including Ellora and Ajanta, and authored the *Ideals of the East* (mentioned earlier), with special reference to the art of Japan, in order to shed light on the origins of Japanese art. What was the reason behind Okakura's wish to meet Swami Vivekananda? It was Josephine McLeod (1858–949) who had introduced Okakura to Vivekananda, because she was highly impressed by Vivekananda's lecture at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Josephine had become a devotee of Vivekananda, and made her way to India to support him. It was in 1901, when during her visit to Japan she attended Okakura's lecture on Japanese art and probably told Okakura about Vivekananda. Okakura, who was a Buddhist devotee, was studying under Kancho Mariyama, the founder of Fujishinko, which aspired to bring together different Buddhist denominations. Thus, Okakura, who was trying to propagate Fujishinko, might have been impressed by the religious harmony taught by Vivekananda, and was eager to invite Vivekananda to Japan. Okakura sent an invitation and a cheque to Vivekananda. Vivekananda replied but cancelled his visit to Japan, due to ill health. Therefore, Okakura accompanied Josephine who was returning from Japan to visit Vivekananda.

The commonalities between the philosophy of Okakura and Vivekananda are evident in the latter's inner anguish of the people living in the Western world, which is caused by the loss of spirituality, a result of the mechanistic

and materialistic concept of the life promoted by rapid scientific and technological development. Okakura also felt a sense of stagnation in Western thought during a study tour in Europe. Vivekananda's philosophy of religious harmony deeply inspired Okakura. Vivekananda acknowledged the universal element shared between Eastern and Western thought, and hoped for cultural exchange between the two. This very idea captured Okakura's heart who continued with his struggle to combine Western art and Eastern art in order to create a new Japanese art. In *The Tea*, Okakura did not discuss about the tea ceremony; rather, the word tea had deeper implications, and was symbolic of the harmony between Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. Okakura's discovery of the source of Buddhist art helped him in constructing a history of art which essentially believed in the unity of religion and art throughout Asia.

Okakura and Rabindranath Tagore's friendship was not only famous in India, but also in Japan. Tagore opened a small school in Shantiniketan in 1901, and on similar lines after returning to Japan, Okakura also moved to a small village, Idzura in Ibaraki, where he developed a liking for the place and purchased a piece of land. In 1904, he moved to the US, and started working at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. In 1905, he built *Rokkakudo*, which means a hexagonal hall in Idzura. In 1906, he moved the painting production department of Japan Art Academy to Idzura for a comeback. When we look at Idzura as the new starting place for Okakura and the relationship with cultural exchange between Okakura and his new Indian friends comes to light. The idea of education that Tagore was providing touched a chord in Okakura as he valued the concept of education, involving a small number of people in a place richly endowed with nature, and away from the big city of Tokyo. It was similar also to the Advaita Ashram, because education amidst nature was also at the core of its foundation. Thus, encounters with Tagore and Vivekananda gave Okakura the idea of creating a space where one could focus on art. The *Rokkakudo* designed by Okakura linked together three architectural styles and bodies of thought.

Tagore's influence on Okakura can also be gauged from the fact that both wrote plays. Okakura's *The White Fox* and Tagore's *The Sacrifice* explore similar themes of self-sacrifice, humanism, religion, love and sorrow. Thus Vivekananda, Tagore and Okakura represented intellectuals of Asia who taught to share the art, religion, histories and culture of their countries with Western societies in the hopes that they might be better appreciated. The exchange of ideas with Vivekananda and Tagore ultimately proved to be a major turning point in Okakura's life.

The third session was concluded by Dr. Gitanjali Surendran, who spoke on 'Anagarika Dharmapala, Swami Vivekananda and Religious Reform in Calcutta, 1893-1902'. The paper explored the relationship between Swami Vivekananda and Anagarika Dharmapala, i.e., their similarities and their differences over the period of nine years, and their combined influence on ways in which South Asians thought about Hinduism and Buddhism today. Vivekananda is one of the most recognisable icons of India today: 'Vivekananda is considered as the veritable founder of modern Hinduism and his life in public memory has been prolifically a long one, witnessing a major resurgence today as patron Swami of Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the youth wing of the RSS.' Anagarika Dharmapala enjoyed a similar status in Sri Lanka on account of his efforts to rally and reinvigorate Sinhala Buddhism, and for merging it with national identity. Like Vivekananda, Anagarika Dharmapala had a long afterlife when he emerged as a youth icon in the 1950s, almost 20 years after his death, at a time when Sinhala exclusivism was beginning its long ascent in political credence. As far as Dharmapala's own view of nationalist Sinhala Buddhism was concerned, it was often aggressive and discouraging for the Sinhala minority. Dharmapala was throughout engaged with Japan at various levels. He began his career by travelling with Colonel Olcott to Japan in 1889. It could have been part of his focus to get the support of Japanese Buddhists for many of his causes.

While counting the similarities between Vivekananda and Dharmapala, the most fascinating aspect of their life was their tremendous mobility. After Indian and Sri Lankan independence in 1947 and 1948, respectively, both tended to be thought as most important national figures emerging

in nationalist historiographies. Both Vivekananda's and Dharmapala's elevation to the national pantheon obscured the other aspect of their rise to national prominence, i.e., that both became famous as a result of their activities in the World's Parliament of Religion in Chicago, and then their travels. While looking at their journeys, while Vivekananda made his name in Chicago, he continued to live, lecture and further build his reputation for another four years in America. In Dharmapala's case, he had already moved from his home base in Colombo to Calcutta in 1892 to develop and popularise his cause of Buddhist revival in the land of its birth, and to gain control over the Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya.

Interestingly, Vivekananda and Dharmapala both belonged to affluent families, and both were reformers and thinkers—the former of Hinduism and the latter of Buddhism. In Vivekananda's case, it was Ramakrishna Paramhansa's (1836–1886) role that was significant, and similarly, the Theosophists played an important role in shaping Dharmapala's views. While Dharmapala was inspired by the Buddhist monks in the tradition of monkhood, Vivekananda was led down the path of renunciation by Ramakrishna's example. Interestingly, both analysed the problems facing society, not as problems of religion, but as problems of corrupt religious practices. Like Dharmapala, Vivekananda also advocated a return to purer practices of Hinduism, and elimination of the priestly class, so that the devotees had access to important texts themselves. Both aimed at revitalising religion, and thus reforming society.

Coming to the phase of World's Parliament of Religion, it is beyond doubt that both Dharmapala and Vivekananda were success stories from the subcontinent, and in both cases, their appealing aesthetics and public speaking contributed to their success. The conference had lent them a fair bit of press coverage, and together they grabbed the spotlight from other South Asian representatives. Every minute detail of the conference, be it their pre-speech nervousness or post-speech fame and confidence, everything was covered in the media.

As regards their personal relationship, at times it appeared to be cordial and at other times it was apparently bitter. Initially, when they met during

the conference, they were respectful towards each other and appreciated each other. But gradually, they began complaining about each other, which we come to know from letters that they exchanged with their close associates. In these letters, at times they were critical about each others' knowledge, and at times criticisms were on a personal level. But there was an interesting difference in their attitude. Dharmapala never publicly criticised Vivekananda, although they continued to meet each other at frequent intervals. On the other hand, there was a pattern in Vivekananda's attitude towards Buddhism. After the Chicago conference, Vivekananda was invited for delivering lectures on Buddhism during his four years of stay in America. During this period, Vivekananda never criticised Buddhism; in fact if it ever was, it was mild. Before returning to India, he visited Sri Lanka where he saw a different kind of Buddhism, and it was after his return to India that he aggressively attacked Buddhism, and considered it to be the root cause behind the degradation of Hinduism. While this appears to be a very controversial side of Vivekananda's life, Dharmapala continued to be criticised primarily for his engagement and involvement in the rallying for regaining of control of the Mahabodhi temple from Shaivite priests. He was construed as being anti-Hindu; however, his desire for gaining international support out of this issue cannot be completely ruled out. This happened to be one of the most controversial sides of Dharmapala. When it comes to the most interesting phase, one cannot forget the way in which Dharmapala defended Vivekananda while he was being attacked, by calling a protest in his defence. This always remained the issue of contention between them, because Dharmapala believed that Vivekananda owed him for this. Whereas in Vivekananda's case, it is apparent that Dharmapala's involvement in the Mahabodhi temple issue made him angry.

The paper also examined their role in shaping modern Calcutta as a hub of intellectual exchange and religious discourse. Their major contribution was that both encouraged international exchange, and tried to position their faith as a universal one. Apart from their relations with each other, their interaction with Okakura Kakuzo, the Japanese scholar of the arts, also helped shaped their worldview.

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