Indo-Japan Dialogue in the 20th Century and Cultural Heritage in the New World Order

by

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The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author and not of the India International Centre.

The Occasional Publication series is published for the India International Centre by Kanwal Wali.

Designed and produced by Naveen Printers, F-11 B, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi - 110020 Ph.: 011-40523313, Website: www.naveenprinters.com
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The paper presentations on the second day of the conference on ‘Rethinking Cultural Heritage’ continued the trend of research-based studies, as evident on the first day of the meeting.¹ Professor Amiya P. Sen began with a note of apology, stating that after reflection, he had changed the title of his presentation to ‘Japan and India as Ontology: Negotiating Modernity, Culture and Cosmopolitanism in Colonial Bengal’. The paper was divided into two parts. The first part of the paper focused on the broad introduction of the structure and arguments which he developed about 19th century Bengal, as the site where the first crop of a Western-educated Hindu intelligentsia, creatively and actively engaged in a two-way, quite contrary, intellectual enterprise. While it produced some of the greatest supporters of Western modernity, it also created its sharpest critics. The second part of the paper examined changing Indian perceptions of Japan over a period of time, through the writings of two prominent intellectual figures of Bengal, that is Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), and the poet, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941).

The history of modern India and Japan may be placed within a common framework, while seeking to analyse their cogent response to an increasingly hostile world, dominated by Western imperialism. Both nations shared certain common problems, such as (a) self-understanding (b) following a suitable strategy of survival. In a sense, the problem was to negotiate modernity in a manner that was effective, progressive, and yet not culturally alienated. This led both India and Japan to critically re-examine the question of how tradition was

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*Rekha Yadav and Anisha Deswal’s Reports on Sessions IV, V & VI of IIC and ICS Conference ‘Rethinking Cultural Heritage: Indo-Japanese Dialogue in a Globalizing World Order’ held on 17 August 2018 at the India International Centre. The conference was coordinated by Himanshu Prabha Ray.

¹ Punita Kapoor and Vineeta Kumari, The Beginnings of East Asian Art History and India in Japanese Traditions, Occasional Paper, 91, India International Centre
to be placed in relation to modernity. Could tradition be sequential in relation to modernity, or could it be allowed to coexist? A re-examination of the question of modernity was an integral part of the strategy of both Japanese and Indian thinkers, where they were able to critique to various degrees of success, the trope of universal chronology of development, scripted by the imperial West. Tradition became a metaphor for cultural self-defence against the two standards of measurement—reason and utility adopted by the West. Japanese and Indian thinkers disagreed with these two standards, which held a derogatory view of non-Western cultures. It is also not accurate to apply these two measures everywhere, as they are not necessarily sufficient to judge the diversity of non-Western cultures and traditions.

Beyond a point, the historical experiences of India and Japan, and their response to colonialism are incomparable, given the obvious difference in their political status. Unlike Japan, India was exposed to a full-blown colonialist’s capital extraction. Therefore, there are meaningful differences in the experience that both countries had. Comparatively speaking, the difference between westernisation and modernisation are less apparent in the case of Japan, as compared to India. The diversity of colonial dominance further highlights the status of Japan in the world of imperial expansion, while India was a colony under rigorous British control. Therefore, the model adopted by Japan could not have been replicated in India.

In 1893, when Vivekananda attended the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, he contested the idea of the ‘West being the teacher.’ Vivekananda stated that ‘we shall not be students always but teachers also, there cannot be any friendship without equality and there cannot be equality with one party being always the teacher.’ Vivekananda essentially was of the opinion that the West has as much need for India as India has for the West, though may be the terms of exchange are not the same,
since the West was spiritually poor, and India was materially underdeveloped. They have reasons to exchange their skills and expertise, but this must be done on terms of equality.

However, contrary to received wisdom and general perception regarding this kind of universalism that Vivekananda was trying to follow and argue was actually a trope. It is strongly nationalistic in its undertone, which is not very apparent. The Chicago Parliament was an important event in Vivekananda’s life which exposed him to the unwanted aggression of the West, and helped him in establishing the idea that spiritual development is at least as valuable as material being. Vivekananda did not take universalism very seriously, and after 1894, he became more and more pro-Vedanta and Hinduism. He was quite hostile towards the Theosophists, and Buddhism, from 1893 onwards. He blamed Buddha for sectarianism. All this climaxed around the beginning of the early 20th century, just before his death when he paid a visit to Bodhgaya with Sister Nivedita. Both Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita came to the conclusion that Bodhgaya was a Shaivite shrine and not Buddhist, as had been proposed by Alexander Cunningham, the first Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India. Vivekananda strongly supported the Shaivite Mahant in the restoration of Bodhgaya, by claiming it as a Shaivite seat.

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A comparison of the life and career of the Japanese Buddhist scholar Hirai Kinza (1859-1920), and Vivekananda shows several overlaps. Kinza, like Vivekananda, went to USA to attend the Parliament of Religions where he contested two things: first, the Buddhist Missionary work in Japan and India; and second, misrepresentation of Japanese culture in Japan. He garnered a lot of attention from the local press in Los Angeles, though there is not much evidence of the dialogue between the two thinkers. Post 1893, the trajectory of the views of both the thinkers took very different paths. While Kinza became unitarian in his ideas, Vivekananda emerged as a staunch Hindu nationalist. Something astonishing happened after their return from the West. Kinza, after his return to Japan, was accused of betraying Buddhism, while the very opposite happened in the case of Vivekananda. He was widely appropriated by the Hindu intelligentsia of Bengal; his work and ideas were published, and used in a certain manner. From the letters and writings of Vivekananda, an important fact emerges which has often been overlooked. Vivekananda’s journey to the West was not to seek support for Hinduism, but rather to get material support from the West for the development of India.

The second part of the paper highlighted the perception of Japan among Indian intellectuals. The contours of Japan became more prominent for modern India in the 1870s after the Meiji restoration, with the expansion of media and contact exchanges becoming more frequent. The idea of Pan-Asianism started circulating among Bengali thinkers even before that. For example, in 1830, Ram Mohan Roy, founder of the Brahmo Samaj objected to the fact of Christ being represented as European. Another intellectual figure was Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884), Brahmo reformist, who claimed that all religions were of Asian origin in his two celebrated addresses in 1866 and 1883, which were well-known among Europeans and Asians. In ‘Jesus Christ in Europe and Asia’, Keshab Chandra Sen argued
that every religion in the world was Asiatic in its origin. Thus, the life and work of these Bengali intellectual thinkers suggests that the concept of Pan-Asianism preceded the famous Japanese thinker Okakura Kakuzo.

Vivekananda’s association with Japan, and his contribution in the development of Pan-Asianism is evident from his life experiences. Vivekananda praised Japan when he visited it, en route to the west coast of America in 1893. He visited four major cities of Japan—Nagasaki, Kobe, Kyoto, and Tokyo. His first impression of Japan was very positive. In his appreciation for Japan, he said, ‘The Japanese are one of the cleanest people on earth. They are short stature, fair skin, quaintly dressed …. Their movements, attitudes gestures all are picturesque. Everything about Japanese is picturesque. Japan is the land of pictures.’ Apart from its picturesque beauty, Vivekananda appreciated the Japanese invention of the gun; the spirit of Japanese entrepreneurial industries; and their self-defence mechanism of militarisation. In fact, Vivekananda criticised the Indian youth harshly for their orthodox views, and limited goals of achievement in comparison to Japan, though Vivekananda’s criticism did not take into account that this viewpoint was not chosen, but rather thrust upon the youth due their colonial milieu, unlike sovereign Japan which was free to arm itself.

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Unlike Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore was of the opinion that militarism was something to be curbed, and not conducive for harmonious relations between nations, based on the readings of his writings and speeches, his travelogue, *Japan Jatri* (diary/travelogue to Japan), published in 1961 in English. Tagore was travelling in 1916, a crucial time of significant shifts in the world, and also in India. One such significant phase was Bengal’s enthusiasm about the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905. This stirred the Bengali imagination, especially when Bengal was struggling with the news of the Bengal Partition, which resulted in the explosion of Hindu resistance along with the Swadeshi movement. The Japanese victory was such an inspiration that Bengali mothers gave Japanese names to their children. This changed by the time of the First World War, which lead to colossal loss of life and property. It unnerved India, Japan and Tagore. This is also reflected in his fictional work of *Gora* (1910). This work points to Tagore’s inclination towards universalism. Through *Gora*, Tagore tries to counter the chauvinistic aggressive nationalism which was manifesting itself in 20th century India.

Like Vivekananda, Tagore was also impressed by the civic sense of the Japanese. Tagore stated that ‘Unlike India, in Japanese streets if two vehicles collided and owners were somehow injured no one took it out on each other. They simply went their way dusting off dust from their jackets.’ He bemoaned the fact that this did not happen in India. Tagore was surprised to hear that Buddhism did this to Japan, while it did not have such an impact on India. Tagore grew increasingly alarmed by the military aggression of Japan in China and Korea. His first experience of this modern nation was the brazen armament. Tagore also criticised the strong tendencies of Westernisation of Japan, and stated that Japan was more European than modern, because ‘modernity represents the freedom of the mind’ and ‘not the slavery of faith’, and Japan was practising the latter, not the former. The exchange of letters between Tagore and Yonejirō Noguchi (1875-1947) in 1938 indicates the complex
dynamics of both the thinkers on modernity. Tagore seems to have claimed that Japan lacked religion and spirituality, and seemed to have problems with the idea of Asianism or Asiatic culture. Thus, Bengali intellectual thinkers of the 19th century jostled between the different paradigms of Western Modernity, Nationalism, Pan-Asianism, and Universalism. In this milieu, religions became the preferred medium of self-understanding and self-expression among the colonised, in contrast to Japan’s militarisation and modernisation. Keeping in mind the frail secular nature of 19th century India, it is significant that modern Hindu thinkers showed interest in religions other than Hinduism, particularly in Buddhism.

The second paper of session IV was presented by Victor A. van Bijlert on Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Swami Vivekananda’s (1863-1902) views on the Buddha as a moral figure beyond the Upanishadic and Vedanta-inspired Hindu modernity discourse. The paper started with the resurgent attraction for Buddhism as a result of the discovery of the Pali Tipitaka in Sri Lanka, and of Buddhist Sanskrit texts in Nepal, Japan and China. The re-emergence of Buddhist texts on a large scale at the end of the 19th century attracted great minds like Tagore and Swami Vivekananda. Both these figures in their own way were major exponents of Hindu reform. Both tried to create a national Indian ideology of modernity, based on ancient Indian philosophical and religious texts. Their approach towards the Buddha was as a teacher of spirituality, and as a great moral figure, and as a result they turned the Buddha into a paradigm of Indian ethics.
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Tagore paid tribute to Buddha as a prophet of universal humanistic spirituality and as a symbol of social emancipation. Tagore’s earliest interest in Buddhist themes is evident in the little verse play *Malini* (1896) and in the narrative poetry of *Katha* (1990). Also, some of his mature dance dramas are based on Buddhist stories, and exemplify Buddhist ethics in the behaviour of the main protagonist: *Natir Puja* (1926), *Candalika* (1933 and 1938) and *Syama* (1939). Tagore showed a keen interest to present the message of the Buddha to a global audience. He achieved that by (a) selecting what he regarded as the essence of the Buddhist message, (b) above-mentioned poetry and dance dramas in Bengali (c), his speculation on how and why the essence of Buddhism could have spread over the rest of Asia. Tagore saw himself as a kind of modernising Buddhist missionary, who visualised how Buddhism could and should be made relevant for the modern world. Yet, in his definition of the message of the Buddha, and his strong urge to promote this message in India and abroad, Tagore saw Buddhism as the full blossoming of the liberation and social emancipation, that the 19th century Brahmo Samaj had extracted from the Upanishads.

Religion for Tagore constituted a social and cosmic principle of unity or coherence, and he saw no fundamental difference between the Hindu and the Buddhist use of the term Dharma. According to Tagore, unselfishness and love were the essential normative aspects of Dharma, and he regarded them as the foundation of Buddha’s
message. In Tagore’s view, love as a moral principal was not an explicit rule or commandment, but rather an implicit unselfish emotion. Tagore even identified Buddha’s awakening with this unselfish love:

…What Buddha described as extinction –the extinction of selfishness...is the function of love and it does not lead to darkness, but to illumination. This is the attainment of Bodhi, or the true awakening… (The English Writing, vol.2:312).

Tagore got this idea of love from the Metta Sutta, the discourse on friendliness (Sutta Nipatta Book I:8). Metta Sutta was the main source of Buddhist ethics for Tagore. This became evident from his 1904 lecture in Bengali, Utsaver Din (A Festive Day), and Tagore’s extensive discussion of the content of the Metta Sutta:

Like a mother protects her son even with her life, thus one should develop an unlimited feeling of mercy (daya) for all living beings. In the upward direction, in the downward direction, in (all) four directions one should develop with an unhindered mind, a mind free of violence, a mind free of enmity, an unlimited feeling of mercy for the whole world (Jagat). Whether standing or moving or sitting or lying down as long as one is not asleep, one should be firmly fixed in this feeling of friendliness—this is called dwelling in Brahman (Brahmavihara).

Tagore was keen to stress the Indian origins of Buddhism since in Tagore’s opinion, Buddhism was the culmination of the spirituality of the Upanishads.

It is important to remember that the acquaintance of Vivekananda with Buddhism was much shorter in comparison to that of Tagore. Vivekananda worked with Buddhism for a much shorter time: roughly between 1890 until his death in 1902. Like Tagore, for Vivekananda also, Hindu or Indian spirituality was mainly found
in Vedanta, in the Upanishads and in the interpretations of the Upanishads by Shankara. Though Vedanta was the culmination of Indian spirituality and Hinduism, yet Vivekananda did not ignore the figure of the Buddha, and the latter’s indelible stamp on Indian religion and spirituality. However, like Tagore, Vivekananda did not have the very extensive Buddhological literature of later years at his disposal, so for his assessment of Buddhism and Buddha, he had to rely on what was available at the time.

In Chicago, in 1893, Vivekananda attributed the institution of equality in the sphere of world-renunciation to the Buddha. He also suggested that the Buddha preached the hidden truths of the Vedas, presumably the doctrine of the Upanishads:

_The religion of the Hindu is divided into two parts: the ceremonial and the spiritual. The spiritual portion is specially studied by the monks. In that there is no caste. A man from the highest caste and a man from the lowest may become a monk in India, and two castes become equal. In religion there is no caste; caste is simply a social institution. Shakya Muni himself was a monk, and it was his glory that he had the large-heartedness to bring out the truth from the hidden Vedas and through them broadcast all over the world. He was the first being in the world who brought missionary activity into practice—nay, he was the first to conceive the idea of proselytising. The great glory of the Master lay in his wonderful sympathy for everybody, especially for the ignorant and the poor (Vol I: 21-22)._

Two of Vivekananda’s lectures: one in Lahore on Vedanta in 1897, and the other in 1900 in USA, ‘Buddha’s message to the world’ provides indications of Vivekananda’s assessment of the Buddha and Buddhism. One can easily detect a great admiration for the moral figure of the Buddha, but little respect for the
teachings themselves. There is a polarity in his views which can be understood in Vivekananda’s claims ‘all my life I have been fond of the Buddha, but not of his doctrine. I have more veneration for that character than any other’.

Thus compared, these two thinkers who both greatly admired the Buddha as a moral person were not different. It is in the realm of the doctrine that the differences lay. For Tagore, the Buddha represented or symbolised spiritual and moral emancipation from religious repression, and from caste. For Vivekananda, the Buddha and Buddhism represented at best an imperfect version of Vedanta, and at worst an aberration from true Vedantic Hinduism. In the context of caste, Vivekananda and Tagore seemed to differ significantly. While Vivekananda suggested that caste was not bad per se and Buddhism made a mess of society by trying to abolish it, for Tagore this was precisely the moral point of Buddhism: respect for all humans and an attempt to overcome the discrimination of caste. However, Buddhism remained somewhat alien to their deepest religious needs. But Tagore is much more positive about Buddhism, whereas Vivekananda does not seem to care much for

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**Indo-Japan dialogue in the 20th century**

The paper by Judith Snodgrass focused on the foundation of an English language journal published in Tokyo ‘The Young East’, during the time when Japan was one of the five permanent members of the League of Nations between 1925-1935. Buddhism as defined in the journal was ‘engaged’ Buddhism, which aimed at finding solutions to problems of the modern world after the War.

The paper centred around three factors: (a) the dialogue between a Sanskrit Professor in Tokyo University, Takakusu Junjiro (1866-1945), and Indian social reformer, Lala Hardayal (1884-1939). Both these intellectual thinkers shared the common idea of Buddhism being an answer to modern world problems. (b) The Lumbini Festival which was transformed in the 1920s from hanamatsuri (the celebration of the Buddha’s birthday), a local observance to a mass public spectacle, and became the performance of Buddhist modernity orchestrated to promote links between Japan and Asia. This festival was very central to Indian traditional ties with Japan post-1920. (c) The Young East, an English journal which reported the festival through Asia and the West, promoting ideas of their shared Buddhist heritage, and of a Buddhist basis for social reform and Asian modernity.

The founders of the journal included Sakurai Gitcho (1866-1926), who was the publisher and founder of Indo-Japan Association; Takakusu Junjiro (1866-1945); and Watanabe Kaigyoku (1872-1933), both were professors of Sanskrit at Tokyo Imperial University and social reformers. These thinkers were dedicated to solving world problems, and the only hope for enduring peace, as they saw it, was in spreading the culture, philosophy and faith of Mahayana Buddhism. This led to the
emergence of Eastern Buddhism as the product of Meiji reform, and as the religion designed to deal with modern world problems.

Tagore visited Japan for the second time in 1924. It was the time when Japanese were denied entry into the USA. He evoked the sentiments for Asian unity by stating that ‘the need for spiritual unification of Asian people has never been more acute than at this time of racial persecution at the hands of American lawmakers.’ This attitude of western superiority was criticised in The Young East, and the counter to this attitude of the West was found in the form of engaged Buddhism.

The Young East was an English journal published from 1925 to 1943, with the purpose of creating a strong Asian regional power, that could in turn exert a positive influence on the West, and mediate between Europe and America. Young East achieved this by promoting a kind of universalistic progressive Buddhism. Nakanishi Ushiro (1859-1930) in his article, ‘The Meaning of Young East’ (November 1925), explained the liberal cosmopolitan positions of World citizenship by stating that the world is in crises.... western civilization is no longer the exclusive possession of the white race.... Orientals, as participants in it have a right and a responsibility to help find solution to the current crises.

Lala Hardayal was at that time living in London, while writing a thesis on Buddhism in Sanskrit texts at the School of Oriental and Asian Studies. He had proposed a solution to the Bodhgaya controversy by suggesting that Hindus should keep control over the temple, while Buddhists could build a grander monument to the future, nearby. He proposed a Neo-Buddhism which had no superstition, no god, no creation, no soul, but which was scientific and rational, which provided Nirvana (deliverance) from sin and sorrow in this life. Takakusu in response to Hardayal’s Neo-Buddhism argued that these attributes which Hardayal attached
with Neo-liberalism already existed in practice among Japanese believers of the Shinshu sect. Japanese Buddhist modernist thought traces the roots of engaged Buddhism to Mahayana. This has been done by associating the development of Buddha’s teaching with the oak tree that has grown from the acorn. In conclusion, the founding mission of *The Young East* was a Buddhist expression of the dominant internationalism of Japan in the 1920s, characterised by commitment to world citizenship, accommodation with the west, harmony and cooperation. The basic function of Buddhism in *The Young East* was to create a third Asian power in the world based on shared Buddhist heritage.

The second speaker of the session was Dr. Jyoti Atwal who examined the journey of the Theosophical Society through the lens of a modern feminist perspective in relation to India and Japan. The 19th century was marked by cultural complexities; religious universalism; humanism and rationality. India saw the rise of the Bengal Renaissance; the Brahmo Samaj; the Arya Samaj etc. Among these complex religious and cultural dynamics, spirituality provided a collective consciousness outside the family and community.

While the East saw the rise of Buddhism in Japan and Hinduism in India, other socio-religious movements were also in full swing, during the same time in the West, the Theosophical Society originated in America in 1875. It claimed to be a worldwide body whose principle aim was ‘Universal Brotherhood based on the realisation that life, in all its diverse forms, human or non-human, was indivisibly one’. The members were to be united by a common search for ‘truth and the desire to learn the meanings and purpose of existence by engaging themselves in study, reflection, and purity of life and loving service’. The aim was to encourage the study of comparative religious philosophy and science, and to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and powers latent in man. Under such a dynamic time
frame, Theosophy travelled to India in the late 19th century, primarily through Annie Besant and General S. Olcott.

The first encounter between Japan and the Theosophical Society occurred in 1893 when Doho Mizutani proposed to publish *Buddhist Catechism* by Henry S. Olcott, which was subsequently published in Kyoto in 1895. Olcott toured Japan and made his base at the Chion-in Buddhist Temple in Kyoto. His lectures and talks with Anagarika Dharamapala had a great effect on the revival of Buddhism in Japan.

An important member of the Theosophical Society was Margaret Cousins, who moved to India from Ireland in 1915, along with her husband James H. Cousins. James Cousins’ experience of the spiritual idealism of Buddhism in Japan became a source of knowledge for Margaret Cousins to understand Asian society through the lens of Buddhism, which further helped in the development of her views of Asian womanhood.

An analysis of the book, *The Awakening of Asian Womanhood* (1922) highlights Margaret Cousins’ opinion of women’s struggle from Palestine to Japan. Margaret Cousins challenged the Purdha as unhealthy, and a tool of women’s social imprisonment. She also drew an analogy between Sanyasini (women who renounce the world for religion) as truly freed women. Margaret Cousins’ presidential address in 1936 shows her spiritual connection with her Indian and Asian counterparts. ‘Despite strength from full participation in the valuable experience of the struggle for votes for women in Britain and Ireland, I soon realized that I had much to learn from my Indian sisters’. Thus, Cousins propagated the struggle and achievements of Japanese women through her experience as an outsider.
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**Cultural Heritage in the New World Order**

The previous paper presentations set the tone for the last and final session where speakers focused on the legacy of internationalism as propounded by 19th and early 20th century intellectuals and thinkers. The first speaker of this session was Professor Himanshu Prabha Ray, whose paper ‘Cultural Heritage: from Nationalism to Trans-nationalism’, discussed the trajectory of cultural heritage in India and Japan from the perspective of the World Heritage Convention, established by UNESCO in 1972. The main contention of this paper was that in the field of culture, both countries, India and Japan, have turned their gaze from the international to the national arena in the last seven decades.

An important issue in relation to this is Buddhism, which could provide a common ground in understanding trans-national or global cultural heritage. Transnational as a category for inscription of world heritage sites is accepted by UNESCO, where two or more nation states can come together through cross-cultural dialogue, forming an important avenue for national histories to move towards global histories, and beyond current political boundaries. India and Japan have partnered, along with five other countries, in the inscription of the trans-national
world heritage sites associated with ‘The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier (1887-1965), an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement.’ These include one each in India (Capitol Complex in Chandigarh) and Japan (National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo). Nobel laureate and author V.S. Naipaul in India: A Million Mutinies, 2010 sums up a counter position: ‘Le Corbusier’s unrendered concrete towers…megalomaniac architecture: people reduced to units, individuality reserved only to architect…India has encouraged yet another outsider to build a monument to himself”’. Similarly, in Japan’s case, the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo, exhibited art collections of western artists and not of Japanese artists. All this can be narrowed down to three different trend-setting situations: firstly, the West setting the agenda for countries in Asia to follow; secondly, re-examining what constitutes universal values, and lastly, accepting the important role of cultural heritage in collaborations within a larger global world platform.

Cultural heritage also implies selection of certain features of our heritage to be preserved at the cost of others. For example, there seems to be little interest in preserving Asian networks, particularly those related to travels by thinkers in the 19th and 20th century, especially in the modern history of both India and Japan. In India, the list of centrally protected monuments includes those which were celebrated and revered in the colonial period, and India has just inherited the same list, and continued with it. Monuments or nationally protected sites, associated with the 19th and 20th century history of the country seem to have been forgotten and marginalised. Therefore, in such a scenario, there is a potential to draw in structures or monuments which do relate to the modern history of the country.
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From the 1860s to the 1930s, there were large movements of people all across Asia. Many new cities came up like Tokyo, Jakarta, Shanghai, Calcutta etc. Tokyo in particular was a major attraction to a new generation of students, and also became a hub for political mobilisation, which attracted large groups of intellectuals, artists etc. Two of the most important Indians who travelled to Japan during this time were Rash Behari Bose (1886-945), who married a Japanese lady and formed the Indian National Army (INA) with Capt. Mohan Singh and Sardar Pritam Singh in 1942; and Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945) who took forward INA’s working from 1943 onwards. In relation to these movements and mobilisations, we do have many structures which bring forth the Indo-Japanese connections, such as the site of the Imphal Offensive at Manipur (1944), India Peace Memorial, Maibam Lokpaching, Manipur, INA Martyr’s Memorial Complex, Moirang (1969) which is a replica of the Singapore memorial and the most famous being the Red Fort at Delhi, which was declared as a World Heritage Site in 2007, but is inscribed as a ‘Mughal Monument’. The monument has a continuous history, as many of the INA soldiers were put on trials inside its complex, but this recognition and its history needs to be highlighted.

A related theme is the beginnings of archaeology in the subcontinent in the 19th century, largely due to the system of espionage and antiquarian activities. The
British were trying to spy on the Afghans, and the military officials who travelled to these regions picked up relics, sculptures, coins, etc. which could be sold either to private collectors or museums. However, in this process, many Buddhist sites were completely destroyed. The antiquities were also used by the colonial government at the turn of the 19th century to consolidate diplomatic and cultural relations, such as with Sri Lanka and Burma also under colonial rule. By the early 20th century, the Mahabodhi Society had become an important institution that insisted on antiquities from Buddhist sites being preserved in the country itself. For example, an archaeological excavation was conducted at a 4th century CE stupa at Mirpur Khas in Sind by H. Cousens in 1910. Its relics were re-enshrined in the newly constructed Mulagandhakuti temple at Sarnath with the help of the Mahabodhi Society. The Mulagandhakuti temple at Sarnath also became an important site for paintings of scenes from the Buddha’s life done in the Japanese art techniques and style. Kosetsu Nosu and Kisho Kawai, two Japanese artists at the request of the Mahabodhi Society, and through the sanction of the imperial Japanese government, worked on the fresco paintings for the Mulagandhakuti Vihara for five years from 1932.

This reviving and reconnecting process, and the analysis of this heritage of archaeology of Buddhism took the paper to its last section, where journeys across the ocean were brought into the discussion. New research indicates connections through maritime routes not only in the ancient period, but also between the 10th to 15th centuries, much before the anticipated European travels of the 16th century. This needs to be highlighted in the study of expansion of Buddhism, and the route that was taken. Thus, maritime interconnectedness and Buddhist cultural heritage could become a fulcrum for collaborations between India and Japan in the field of cultural heritage and diplomacy.
The second presenter of this session was Prof. Lynn Meskell on the topic of ‘World Heritage and Cultural Diplomacy in Asia.’ The paper argued that unresolved tensions surrounding UNESCO’s foundation in 1945 remain the same as those confronting global governance of the world’s natural and cultural heritage in 2018. On November 16, 1945, thirty-four Nations gathered in London to forge an international body for educational and cultural cooperation, under the aegis of the United Nations. Their project was no less than the intellectual and moral reconstruction of a world in ruins. At a San Francisco conference which gave rise to the UN, President Harry Truman stressed on the importance of new international commitment to cultural and educational cooperation. This was inspired by his predecessor, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s convention, ‘that civilisation is not national, it is international’.

When British Prime Minister Clement Atlee uttered those famous words that, ‘War begins in the minds of men’, he captured what many had said already in the 1930s. In his speech at the conference for the establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, he declared that ‘the peoples of the world are islands, shouting at each other over seas of misunderstandings’. Attlee recognised that in the future, ‘we are all to live in a world of democracies, where the mind of the common man will be all important’. However, it was the New Zealand delegate, Arnold Campbell, who made the linkage between peace, democracy and education. This became the chief objective of the organisation. It was to contribute to peace and security throughout the world by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science, culture and communication in order to further the universal respect for justice, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms as set out in the charter by the United Nations. On similar lines, the president of the conference, Alan Wilkinson stated, ‘we need the organisation of something positive, the positive creation of peace and ways of peace’.
Forged in the twilight of empire and led by the major colonising powers, UNESCO founders tried to expand their influence, so that the large gaps of the civilising mission could be filled. Beginning as an organisation for reconstruction of war-ravaged Europe, UNESCO soon set its sights on the developing world. Its aim was to formulate and disseminate global standards for education, science and cultural activities. However, it would remain a one-way flow, later to be problematic, and termed as ‘from the West to the Rest’. Within a matter of years, the philosophy and appeal for cultural understanding and uplift would be side-lined by the functionalist objectives of short-term technical assistance. Therefore, UNESCO was shaped by the European experience of the war and its aftermath. In the arena of world heritage, it has continued to be directed by European priorities, and served fundamentally European goals in the decades that followed. Both the ‘narratives’ and ‘materiality’ of global conflicts have been guided by European experts, and any diversion from this pattern was likely to cause great rupture in the world heritage system.

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African-Asian delegations have often expressed their concern over such inequities,
especially when their own sites of conflict and memorialisation are summarily dismissed. For example, Thailand has expressed dissatisfaction at being deterred from nominating the conflict sites such as the Burma-Siam railway built by Japan. Thailand has developed its portion of the railways as a major tourist attraction and thus, inscribed status from UNESCO branding would boost these initiatives. Irrespective of UNESCO’s position, the Thai Fine Arts Department wants this dossier to move forward. This accentuated ‘European exceptionalism’, where only European World War II sites were considered worthy of protection, and not the Asian sites.

Regulation of the past itself was required in post-war times, and how it might be recovered, that was deemed part of the New World Order. In the process of archaeological excavations conducted around the world, restructuring became important. In the 1940s, archaeological spoils were to be divided up for western advantage. The past would be managed for the future. UNESCO capitalised on the already existing momentum of world making projects devoted to humanity’s heritage. In the 1960s and 1970s, the UNESCO took part in many safeguarding campaigns of conservation on sites like Abu Simbel (Egypt), Mohenjodaro (Pakistan), Borobudur (Indonesia), which required attention. It warranted rescue and research, under the framework of internationalism and multilateralism. However, even in the 1970s, European nations dominated the world heritage sites listing. The process of conservation of Asian and African sites resulted in slow progress due to many short-comings, such as cost of expenses, scientific-technical difficulties etc., as western ideologies and methods dominated. The campaigns were poorly managed without sufficient national capacity building and mistaken strategies at all levels. Archaeological sites therefore, faced major conservation problems.
The focus of the paper then shifted to the UNESCO’s 1972 Convention, and political implications of recognition, as well as inscription on the world heritage list. The Convention is celebrated by UNESCO as development par excellence, as a body of general principles and customary norms of international law in the field of cultural heritage and protection. However, its basic structure had certain limitations. Many countries were highly dominant, and certain countries could not even send their representatives. Role of power/hegemony played an important role in all capacities. Socialist Victoria Rees, points out that in world heritage, symbolic wealth is heavily dominated by two countries—Italy and Spain. Most nations desperately want world heritage status.

As a result, entire programmes like global strategies and others have recently been launched by UNESCO Headquarters directly to address this regional imbalance. Dissatisfaction is being mirrored through scholars pointing out to the Eurocentric biases. The gap between Asia and Europe is slowly closing down as both areas exhibit similar number of inscribed sites. The most striking change is the rise of Asia and the Pacific, first coming to prominence in the early 2000s and then dominance by the late 2000s. Therefore, UNESCO, as stated in its definition, was born of war to end global conflict, and help the world rebuild materially and morally, yet its history is intertwined with that of international politics and violence. As the Swedish feminist, Alva Myrdal, Head of Social Sciences at UNESCO recognised back in the 1940s, ‘the challenge for peace and security did not pivot in the lack of cultural understanding between nations, instead it was premised upon the inequalities between the European and colonised nations’. What we would today describe as a fundamental divide between those that ‘have’ and those that ‘want’.

The last speaker of this session and of the conference was Professor Madhu Bhalla, who gave a presentation on “Culture as Power: History and Asia’s New
Culture War”, where she specifically and extensively discussed why and how claims of Buddhism have begun to create a new cultural ecology in East Asia, and its connection to the material aspects of power and influence. Her specialisation includes international politics. ‘Culture’ is not a politically neutral category; it is actually implemented through power; its objectives and strategies are of ‘location of power’ and ‘dislocation of privilege, status and ability to represent’. Therefore, it is extremely political, it plays with politics, it is politics, which is why it is important to discuss ‘culture as power’ and not ‘culture and power’.

The functioning of Buddhism as culture is something to ponder upon as it has created a new cultural ecology. This claim is valid in a way, as India and China are both currently embroiled in the Buddhist past, and Buddhism as culture. The on-going contest entrenches the power of both states, India and China, and supports each state’s claim to loyalty of extended constituencies and subjects. In this process, it also creates deliberately and manipulatively very persuasive discourses which then create affinities to superior values, privileging both domestic and external connections.

The starting point of looking at ‘culture as power’ in the current Buddhist context is to examine the history which is constructed everyday both by Beijing (China) and New Delhi (India). One of the elements of this is, to actually revive the older pathways. There is a consciousness today, that colonialism actually severed our connections. Many of the older economic, cultural and communication pathways that we had in Asia were actually sundered by colonial structures and we need to revive them in some way, if we are to create a sense of new identities outside of the colonial experience. Samuel P. Huntington has written on clash of civilisations, and international relations presentations, as well as that researches often begin with the line that there is a rise of three different civilisations—Islamic, Chinese
and Indian. It is a civilisational turn in the narrative of global politics today that each of us seek some kind of a civilisational status in a global society.

Since the turn of the century, there have been contemporary discoveries in terms of Buddhism, both in India and China. In China, we see in the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Liang Qichao, prominent intellectual in China, talk about an undercurrent of Buddhism. Between 1911 and World War II, there were around twenty Buddhist journals being published in China alone. One of the most significant texts which got published at that time was a 6th century edition published in 1898 by Jinling Scriptural Press, which was widely disseminated in China in the first years of the 20th century. By the time we come to the contemporary period, we see this narrative being drawn out in a UNESCO meeting in 2014, where Xi Jinping said, ‘that Buddhism originated in India but it became Buddhism with Chinese characteristics’. Here the appropriation is very clear, in terms of Buddhism being spread from China to Japan, Korea and South-East Asia and beyond. There is this whole Chinese influence which is being

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articulated and indicated profoundly. Thus, by the 21st century, there is a sense of competing patronage between India and China’s initiatives which was quite visible at the International Peace Conference in Lumbini (2012).

Linked to this is also the concerted development of the notion of ‘sacred spaces’ which needs to be revived. In order to establish superiority and authenticate claims on origin, control over ‘sacred spaces’ was viewed as essential. In China, this anxiety was huge because during the Cultural Revolution, many of these spaces were destroyed. To counter that, many sacred spaces are being ‘created’ and ‘invented’, and new festivals are being introduced. Here, the advantage India has over China is that the Buddha was born here and attained Nirvana here. Archaeological evidences authenticate the claims which validate the point that many sacred spaces of Buddhist concerns are largely present in India. However, India too has been into the circuit of ‘invention and creation’ of sacred spaces with ‘Tawang’ being part of this invention, as it is the birth place of the Dalai Lama and has nothing to do with the Buddha directly. There is also concurrently, prioritising of sacred spaces, as evident in the battle over Lumbini, globalisation of Bodhgaya etc. Even the recent announcements like that of Panchamrit ideology by the government including Samman (dignity), Samvaad (dialogue), Samriddhi (shared prosperity), Suraksha (regional and global security) and Sanskrit evam Sabhayata (cultural and civilisational links) is connected to many ideas of Buddhism, diplomacy and economic goals.

The consequence of this was that Buddhism has been secularised. Two non-Buddhist states, India having a population of 1 per cent that is Buddhist, and China having 18 per cent of the total population that are Buddhist, have dominated for long. This has resulted in religious practices becoming a cultural commodity, that is, in terms of tourism, festivals etc., and there is always a contestation between...
the state and the *sangha* organisations. In effect, we have leeched the faith out of Buddhism, and secularised Buddhism to a point that it can be viewed as a tool, and as an instrument in the interest of the state, which became its pitfall. There is a critical flaw in secularising Buddhism. One thinks of it as unified Buddhism, but in actuality it has many sects all across the world.

In conclusion, we need to see ‘culture as power’; not as an absolute construct, but as a plural construct, where notions of plurality, multi-civilisational connections come into play. We return to the thought-provoking quote by Samuel P. Huntington: ‘Clashes of civilisation are the greatest threat to world peace, and an international order based on civilizations is the surest safeguard against world war’. Thus, the presentation addressed some of the pertinent questions such as where the challenges in Asia lie to this project of cultural homogenisation and hegemony, and how the retrieval of history could meet the objectives.

The conference came to an end with the Valedictory Address given by Mr. Dyaneshwar M. Mulay, Secretary MEA (Ministry of External Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs). Secretary Mulay highlighted the most intriguing and fascinating triangle in the world’s geography and history, that is the India, China and Japan connection. He shared his close association with Japan from 1980s onwards, and explained how he found natural affinity with Japan during his tenure. He also very efficiently reviewed some of our own understanding of Japan, and its relation with India.

One of the most interesting episode of Secretary Mulay’s tenure in Japan was acquiring Rabindranath Tagore’s signed poems and letters from an old Japanese couple, who had read about the Festival of India and wanted to give these artefacts to ‘the place of its origin’, that is, India. Subsequently, the Tagore collection from
Japan was given to the Indian Museum in Kolkata.

Overall, there has been rich connection in terms of civilisational and cultural imports between both countries. It would seem that there is a sequential cord which is present in terms of culture, spiritualism, philosophy, etc., which is deeply reflected in the interactions. There is also a need for new beginnings based on a holistic approach, where there is an exchange and engagement at all levels of political, social, economic and cultural spheres.

The globalised order requires that cultural strength needs to be utilised in a more useful manner. The main crisis of the current era is environmental—climate degradation; increasing level of social-cultural disparities; unchecked extremism resulting in violence and terrorism. In order to limit and reform these conditions, it is important to highlight the basic tenets of Indian and Japanese cultures and civilisational wisdom, which are based on the philosophies of non-violence, peace and connectivity as propagated in Buddhism. Thus, the address ended with a positive overview of the time-tested and valid connection between India and Japan, where constant dialogue becomes pertinent for sustainable partnership between the two countries in future.
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The India International Centre was founded with a vision for India, and its place in the world: to initiate dialogue in a new climate of amity, understanding and the sharing of human values. It is a non-government institution, designed, in the words of its founder president, Dr. C.D. Deshmukh, to be a place where various currents of intellectual, political and economic thought could meet freely. 'In its objectives, the Centre declares its purpose as being that of society to 'promote understanding and amity between the different communities of the world by undertaking or supporting the study of their past and present cultures, by disseminating or exchanging knowledge thereof, and by providing such other facilities as would lead to their universal appreciation.'