

INDIA, ASIA AND THE WORLD, AUTUMN 2009

I - Introduction

Brij Tankha is Professor of Modern Japanese History, Department of East Asian Studies, University of Delhi. He is also the former Director and currently Honorary Fellow and Coordinator, East Asia Programme, Institute of Chinese Studies, CSDS, New Delhi. Professor Brij Thanka originally studied the idea of "Asia" in the eyes of Japanese, from the viewpoint of growing Japanese nationalism. The area of reserach quickly expanded to Japan's difficult relationships with neighbouring countries (Korea, China) and engagement with other significant Asian powers. The issue of pre-modern and modern India in the context of "Asia" became his primary interest as he realised how little the Indian angle had been systematically documented and researched before. No one had really formed a "big picture" of how India deals, and has dealt in the past, with the outside world. After all, it is a complex web of relationships and interaction over a very long period of time.

India seems to be a "storehouse of knowledge" - the source, which has influenced *other* Asian cultures, not a *cultural entity* itself (or of its relative "worth"). The question that arises is: *what is India?* From which point of view the question is approached and what exact parts of the vast country are examined both have a major impact on how the question can be answered. Professor Thanka elaborates on phenomena like escaping civilisation to the mountain regions, the cultural borderland nature of India and the effect of the sea both as a gateway (*possibilities, linking of peoples*) and a boundary (*safety, limitations*). But should India be examined either as *an Indian community*, a homogenic unity, or as a network of different social structures and plenty of cultural variation? The cultural interaction shows in, for example, the change of *lingua franca* during the ages, the sheer amount of micro-communities and how the the ancient traditions merge with fast-paced cultural changes.

Trade and emigration have allowed the Indian influence to spread outside it's core regions, founding far-away settlements, building mixed communities and absorbing outside influence and advances. The Indian empires have always played a specific role in the geopolitics of Asia, but he colonial period broke this static pattern. When it was the British who engaged in warfare, the war was fought *de facto* by the Indian colonial troops –

thus affecting India's prestige and relationship with its neighbors. The change from "a cultural fortress" of independent Indian kingdoms, to a pre-modern colonial India and eventually to a modern era nation state is a great one. The current economic strength, policy of neutrality and high-tech, academic education define the modern Indian republic.

II - The ancient networks

The second lecture focuses on two main issues: how the Indians categorised the world and what kind of networks they developed in ancient times. In the ancient times the concept of world was a complex combination of religious doctrines and philosophical theories, which were affected by outside cultural influence (mostly a byproduct of *trade networks*), the introduction of new religions etc. It is quite astonishing how many different views of the universe existed at the same time in the very same paradigm. The faith in reincarnation, that we all are reborn in some other form or in another world after death, in a way gave space for many different impressions and worldviews, since the only world we could be certain of was the one we were living in right now.

The main "form" that the ancient Indian concept of the world usually took was a ring or a sphere, where the centrum was mainland India. The interesting difference to most high cultures of that time was that the center was not necessarily the greatest of realms. The places that lied on the outer rims were not necessarily inferior, but could in fact hold a promise of a paradise in them. Maybe this dominating attitude could have been one of the factors that pushed Indian traders and explorers to face foreign cultures so extensively? With them they carried, what Prof. Tankha calls, "a cultural baggage".

The comparison between British colonisation (of India) and Indian colonisation (of South-East Asia, mainly) is also an interesting matter. Oftenmost the Indians see their influence on the "outer rim" as voluntary and unhostile, opposed to the forced and violent British influence. At the same time the colonial era under British control is considered an oppressive time in Indian history, while colonisation by the Indians is considered to be the peak of the culture's development, a golden age of sorts, and this is not considered a contradiction on any level. It is noteworthy that the same level of arrogance that can be "read between the lines" of European history writing is also visible, to some extent, in the way Indians handle their heritage.

III – India and China, the early period

Relations between India and China in the old times have been colored by the spread of Buddhism, although the earliest encounters have been trade and military related. The relationship was mutually respectful at first, but as Buddhism spread and China became the "land of Buddha", India lost its status in the eyes of the Chinese. The gap between the two cultures began to deepen. China's booming economy caused a high expansion in trade, and India was all but a trade route to the west for China.

China rose from being "an apprentice of India" to a worthy rival in the 10th and 11th century. The relations became more and more complex with elements of political intrigue, embassies, trade missions and manipulation of third-party nations in Asia. The Indian peninsula was "between fire and ice" with the growing Arab and Persian nations in the west and the "power-triangle" of China-Japan-Korea in the east. Somehow this very same subconscious feeling, of being squeezed out of living space by the surrounding powers, seems to reflect to modern Indian foreign relations. India still bickers with Pakistan and China, showing off its military capabilities (e.g. the recent launch of a nuclear submarine) and trying to prove the world its Great Power status: "We will not be pushed to the sea!" This similar kind of defensive position is shown on the religious map: Hinduism was left between the growing power of Islam and Buddhism. Slow but steady the attitude of welcoming outside influence with open arms turned into more closed behavior to protect the "true" Hindu lands and culture, and even the tolerance of different points of views within the society was tightened.

Maybe India is still craving after recognition as the "cradle of civilisation" in Asia? The whole setup seems, with a little exaggeration, like an inferiority complex on national scale, based on traumas going back centuries in time. Does the rest of the Asia owe India something? Their cultural heritage? The middleman's dirty work in spreading ideas and religion continentwide? Or, perhaps it was the respect and fear of India that kept the Persians and the Chinese away from Indian soil for so long?

IV – Early India and the West

Although India has seen many high cultures during its history, our historic

concept of India is heavily based on how India was perceived by the Greeks. Greek written sources are one of the earliest texts describing ancient Indian society, but the knowledge within them is "filtered", only second-hand knowledge. Hellenic culture did not affect India *directly*, but it often acted as a catalyst of phenomena that then spread (*domino effect*) and had an indirect influence. Eg. Alexander the Great's impact itself was minimal, but the power vacuum left behind was crucial. The birth of the Seleucid empire led to a new era of interaction between the India and the West with Persia acting as the "bottleneck". The role of India as the "halfway house" of sorts was enforced by both being a part of the "silk route" to China and having a wide variety of maritime trade opportunities. Ancient Graeco-Roman and Chinese commodities have been found, and their influence can be seen in architecture, sculpture and figurative art. The Indian urbanisation at the beginning of the Common Era was influenced, and probably accelerated, by Greek and Roman trade as well. Yet India managed to keep its distinct cultural milieu pretty much intact.

The motives for written language are many, but oftenmost the earliest needs for writing were the recordings of religious texts: Jewish have Tanakh, Muslims have Qur'an, Buddhists have *Jatakas*. The *Jatakas*, alongside with the Greek literature, are another main source of knowledge when it comes to ancient India. These texts include historical details of everyday life, relations between realms and events taking place, but their content is however mainly religious and thus biased. They are more folk-tales than an accurate record of events, focusing more on philosophy than chronology.

The tales of the Indian empire(s), its riches and exoticism told in the West are quite clear examples of what we call today *orientalism*. They are "fantasies of the east", as Prof. Tankha puts it. They tell of places that no one in the West has experienced first-hand, far away from their own cultural centrum – and the further we drift from our own surroundings, the more amazing claims we are willing to accept without doubt. Orientalism can be idealistic ("land without disease or hunger"), but it is more often linked to demonising, turning people of strange cultures into less than humans, and justifying war and cruelty against those demonised people. This is clearly visible in the way more modern scholars have tried to disdain the achievements of Indian culture by saying that these (architectural, agricultural, industrial etc.) ideas and advancements were just borrowed

from the higher Greek and Roman cultures, that the Indians could've never done it on their own. But in fact, the influence was not one-sided at all – it was cultural *exchange* and Indian influence can be found in Graeco-Roman culture as well.

V – India and the Islamic world

The birth of Islam is closely linked to India through cultural links and exchange. Islam absorbed many aspects and elements from the Indian culture and through migration the different cultures interacted and clashed with each other. The Muslim influence fluctuated around Asia – from Arabia and North-Africa to Indian peninsula. The rise of Mongols in the 13th century pushed the muslim elite (educated and wealthy) strongly towards India, who eventually became the ruling class.

The Muslim population in India today are a minority, leftovers of the detachment of "muslim Indian state" (Pakistan), yet they are the largest Muslim minority in the world. They have long lost the ruling class status, and their situation today resembles that of Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda: the ruling class that once persecuted others (Hindus in this case) became the target of persecution. The Indian Muslim stereotype also resembles the European Jew stereotype of same era: spread in strange lands after *diaspora* (caused mainly by Mongol invasion in this case), forming tight-knit communities and thriving in the art of trade. The traditional view of history divides India into three phases: Hindu India, Muslim India and British India. India is seen originally as "Hindu Land", which was then conquered by Muslims and later on by the British. Preserving "Hindu Land" against the ravaging hordes of Muslims and Christians is one of the core elements of modern Indian nationalism.

However, the Muslim rule was never achieved by force: it was through subtle assimilation, and as such the traditional view of "Islamic conquerors" is false. Muslims affected the founding of the sophisticated economic system of India under one government. Their contribution to the advance of Indian maritime trade, the connection to land caravan routes and thus the advance of the sub-continent as a whole is remarkable. The connection to strong Muslim states in the Middle-East provided India a benefit in the trade. Later this benefit turned into a dependency: as the decline of the Arab / Turk nations began, so did the decline of trade and wealth in India.

VI - India and the Portuguese empire

Often overshadowed by the British, the Portuguese impact on India's development is usually considered to be a minor one. The British sought mainly gold and glory in expansion of their empire, but for the Portuguese the main motive was spreading Christianity. I also found Prof. Tankha's idea of Catholic southern Europe being culturally closer to Asia than northern Protestants quite fascinating – the Portuguese shared many values (constancy, dislike of war and conquest) with the Asian cultures, and although they were a christianising empire, they did not hesitate to co-operate with other religions.

Whenever we face cultural difference, which dramatically differs from our own, we tend to take defensive positions and deflect this new influence. But the more subtle this new difference is, the more likely we have our "guard down" and the greater the chance of cultural exchange. Those using violence and coercion to further their goals, such as the Dutch or the British, became more successful than the Portuguese when measured in controlled territory or sovereignty over India, but in the long run the impact left in the culture ("Hindu Land", protected from ravagers) was more powerful by the Portuguese. The Portuguese way of colonising was quite decentralised, and especially in the Southeast Asia expanded mostly by the efforts of private traders and entrepreneurs.

Another interesting point that Prof. Tankha brings out is that not everyone within the Western states wished for colonisation and imperialism. It would've served the interests of certain factions that the crown would've not gained power through overseas colonies. Becoming an empire with colonies greatly shook the internal power structure – could this explain the reason why some European states of relatively great strength never flourished in colonialism?

The intense religious setting of 16th century Europe was reflected to Indian colonies: the Counter-Reformation, inquisition and intolerance for local population's beliefs. The new radical approach was greeted by a strong resistance – and perhaps the decentralised Portuguese were not prepared for a straight-forward conflict? They lost their status in favor of Muslims and other European states. But then again, the rising (Islamic) Mughal Empire in India relied on their Portuguese allies to keep away threats from the west, and in turn the Portuguese benefited from the trade privileges provided to them.

VII – Indian travellers going west

The period of British colonisation from the 18th century forward was not, according to Prof. Tankha, as one-sided as it is often cited to have been. India had extensive connections to the West and its fair share of ambassadors and diplomats in the British isles. Britons seeking a career in India needed to learn Indian languages, and thus a class of *munshi's* (Indian-born teachers) formed in Britain. Although it was clear the British had the upper hand, they were not however "omnipotent" in their rule – the acceptance and co-operation of local elite was crucial. Of course, there never was full co-operation, but a variable amount of resistance, which was kept in check by either force or providing wealth and power as Britain's subordinates.

Comparison between the period of Enlightenment and the rise of rationalism, materialism and secularity amongst intellectual Muslims was another interesting point. The significant scientific exchange between the "West" and the "Orient" has often been overlooked, or considered more like Europeans teaching inferior barbarians in Western literature. The Indian elite could objectively evaluate and analyse the reasons why the British had gained such a superior position. This information, in turn, helped the British to fix their weaknesses and concentrate on their strong points. Another example of this "intellectual exchange" is the rights of women: Mirza Abu Thalib Khan remarked on women's absence of legal status and rights to property in Britain in the late 18th century. It took nearly a century from this remark for this elemental part of women's rights to be enacted in Britain, while it had been part of everyday life in the Muslim community for ages.

What we often consider civilised, sophisticated and advanced today does not actually originate from Europe and the spread of ideas has not been one-sided. I believe this is the key point of this lecture: some things we used to consider to be only barbaric and exotic peculiarities in the past are now essential parts of our cultural heritage. But these influences had the opportunity to assimilate, because the cream of society of that era did not show discrimination or exclusion, but instead were open-minded to the exchange of ideas. I fear that the current rise of neonationalism and anti-immigration movement does us a grave disservice with long-term consequences.

VIII – The British empire – social exchanges

The basis of the empire was the European mission to civilise the world, and one scale of measuring civilisation was the eating of bread – bread represented lifestyle (farming required staying put, building cities), technology (mills, ovens), division into social classes (farmers, bakers, traders) and economic system (purchasing bread). Food and Empire were connected in other ways as well – the climate of colonies was often appropriate for plantations of highly desired products, such as coffee and tea.

Spices, ingredients and cooking methods were absorbed into culinary customs of the European elite, where they spread to the tables of common man. Despite the tight (religious) dietary restrictions in India, many Western habits and products also caught on. Food represented modernity and as such it worked as a tool for radicals trying to breach ancient traditions and taboos. Again, this is an example of how once foreign things become part of heritage – and how xenophobia and extreme conservatism serve only as means to meet short-term political agendas, possibly harming the natural progress of the culture as a whole. How can one define "Indian" or "British" in terms of architecture, culinaryism or literature, for example? What is considered Indian is actually a diverse array of influences filtered through the geopolitical framework of "India" or "Indian culture", it's a concept that is constantly changing form.

The way in which these foreign influences spread through social classes did differ quite much in Britain and India. In Europe the wealthy and powerful were the first to adopt new ideas and were later mimicked by the lower classes. In India, however, some things were first adopted by the lower *castes*. Western clothing and religion felt liberating as they shook the centuries old caste system, from which many of the lower caste people wished to escape.

IX – Trans Himalayan trade

Himalaya is a frontier where civilisations meet, yet where "civilisations haven't left their mark". The Himalayan culture (Tibetan, Bhutanese, Nepalese etc.) formed by the trade routes of empires, surviving in the hostile environment. Such a colorful culture can only be born in heavy surrounding pressure, but such pressure also has its threats: Tibet

has long lost its sovereignty and its cultural heritage and originality have been in constant peril for ages.

The Himalayan cultures are also distinct in the way they've never been self-sufficient when it comes to grain or food production in general. Their existence has always relied on trade with neighboring cultures, salt being the main export item in the past. These kinds of communities existed in the turbulent ancient times, yet some still argue that a nation state without food self-sufficiency cannot thrive, even in the modern world of globalisation. The Himalayans were not able to feed their own in the time of crisis – that is why they prepared by stockpiling and investing wisely. They also paid close attention to relations with neighboring peoples. Perhaps the more dependant countries were of each other, the less reasons they would have to wage war against each other? On the other hand, if the leaders of nations were overcome by greed (and *need* of self-sufficiency?), perhaps they would insist on taking what they want by force instead of trade? We have more examples of the latter in our recent past.

Understanding the region of Himalaya demands understanding of Himalaya's surroundings. Himalayn culture was defined by trade communities, and the act of trade itself is defined by exchange and interaction between people – the surroundings. Tibet is often considered to have been most connected with China, but the truth is far more complex. Tibet was, and still is, a vast country with great internal differences, and in fact, most of southern and western Tibet were more inclined to interact with Indian empire(s). The meaning of surroundings becomes even more meaningful with the British colonialism. Nepal and Bhutan in the Himalayas were allowed sovereignty (under heavy British influence, however) with the cost of isolation, which dramatically shaped their cultures from that point onward. British India acted as an economic dynamo as well, which caused more and more of the Himalayan region to lean towards Indian influence.

Commercialisation in the 19th century made traditional Trans Himalayan trade mostly obsolete, as means of transports became more advanced and new, more efficient trade routes were discovered. First waves of centralisation can be seen to have hit Himalayas in that time – large, concentrated trade communities flourished, and powerful trade families controlling these communities rose to power. The evolution of *dynasties*, as described by Adam Smith himself in *The Wealth of Nations*, is clearly visible in the

Himalayan region's development of meeting new demands and challenges.

X - Maps and Pundits, exploring the northern regions

As the British established their control of India, they went to explore the northern regions of India, which had been uncharted territory up to that point. These "backwater regions" had not been mapped by Indian empires either, so the Indians partaking in the survey were directly involved in forming the geographical concept of India. This could be compared to Nordic history: in the 15th and 16th century king of Sweden sent expeditions to the eastern regions of Finland to accurately map the borderlands of Sweden and Russia (Novgorod). The Finns that took part in the surveys had the chance to be part of something far more spectacular than it first seems - drawing lines on parchment would actually divide peoples centuries later.

Exploring and mapping the frontiers was the key element in the world politics from the 18th century onward. Geopolitical rivalry shows in the way nations invested in surveys, how conquering highest peaks (Everest) was a national concern and in the great increase of shared border - the amount of "No-Man's Land" or Terra Incognita in the world was declining fast. The significance of this, I believe, is difficult for a modern man to understand. We live in a world where there are no "blanks" in the maps, there are no uncharted territories - we have mapped the globe, even photographed (satellite images) most of it! It reflects in the general attitude people have on man's capabilities, the world and what secrets it holds. The age of explorers meant that the world was still full of possibilities, it only took someone brave and capable enough to look for and find them.

"The pen is mightier than the sword" - it took decades from the most powerful of rulers to redefine their borders by sword, while these simple yet skilled men redrew borders of empires in few years. "Knowledge is power" - knowing your realm in detail allows one to better control it. The view on the Indian involvement has changed from regarding them merely as labor force to noticing the subtle ways they influenced the mapping process. The more the topic is researched, the more obvious it seems that the definition of modern India comes just as much from the Indians themselves as from the outsiders.

XI - Swami Vivekananda

Vivekananda, titled "Swami" (scholar, intellectual), was one of the key figures in defining what it means to be Indian. Despite his strong nationalism and obvious agendas, he was quite open-minded to western ideas and approached them with academic neutrality. He argued against the dominating view of West's superiority, turning the setup upside down: what has India given to Britain, what would Europe be without India and so forth. In terms of orientalism, Vivekananda blames Indian intelligentsia of the very same array of prejudice that the British showed towards Indian culture. Indians that journeyed to the west were no "blank slates", they had built a clear image of the West in their heads, influenced by the governing paradigm.

In Vivekananda's time India was a nation of extremes, perhaps even more than today. Although most of the people lived in poverty, struggling to earn their living through physical labor, there were highly educated intellectuals who matched their Western equivalents in every aspect. Vivekananda was one of them - understanding high culture and speaking several languages. After reading his works, British intellectuals would not believe it was a genuine work of an Indian man (orientalism) - an attitude which can be found today when the West confronts Africa and areas formerly part of USSR. Eventually, Vivekananda became a great success among the liberal Christian intelligentsia, whose influence can be seen in the roots of the Western civil rights movement. Does history repeat itself?

One of Vivekananda's main themes and areas of research was religion. He argued that Buddhism is a modern religion, a doctrine which rejects the idea of "supernatural" in favor of "rational". His ideas on using religion to build a powerful nation (term: muscular religion) remind those of Macchiavelli: pragmatic view on things that are "unchangeable" (even taboos) and their use in the fight for independence. Vivekananda saw that the poor and the religion were cornerstones in building a strong India - education and material aid gave "tools" and religion gave "purpose".

It is interesting how Vivekananda saw the relations between India and Europe. He argued, almost 150 years ago, how both the Indians and the Westerners saw each other in caricatures: India was a land of poverty, misery and exotique, Europe a home of greedy slaves blindly following their leaders. He was able to detach himself from the

governing paradigms and prejudice. Vivekananda was no idealist. He thought that each had their place in the system and that in the long run the gap in wealth and station served as an incentive - he saw the aim towards ascetism and renunciation a fruitless goal, a seed of stagnation. He foresaw that the socialist revolution would take place in Russia and China and elaborated on The International, the poor and oppressed having no borders.

XII - Opium and the China Connection

The opium trade played a major role in the diplomatic relations between India and China, the consolidation of power of certain powerful Indian (and British) families and affected many aspects of both Indian and Chinese economy. The modern connection between India and China was formed in the context of colonialism, and thus between *British* India, a colony of the West, and the ancient Asian Empire of China. These details color the whole setup of modern Indo – China relationship.

Opium's addictive and emaciating effects fueled the anger against the colonial lords and its ubiquity made sure that the general Chinese population knew it very well and became more agitated each day. Of course, this was just a side effect – the purpose of the British was to fix the imbalance in trade. The East India Company was heavily importing goods from China, but only minor amounts were exported – until opium. EIC controlled the opium production within its territory in a centralised manner, and only marginal amounts were produced and traded by other parties. Opium, as far as narcotics go, was a perfect commodity: it was of extremely high value, it wasn't heavy nor did it take much space and it did not spoil in short time. Entire fortunes were built around this single trade item, while the patrons of the Chinese opium dens paid the price.

In post-modern times the poppy fields of Afghanistan fall under the same topic of interest – a poor nation with a radical, religious government and low level of technology manages to resist the invasion of both the Soviet Union and later the United States supported by opiate production. The "drug money" provided the basic source of income, even up to the point when the farming of wheat became almost nonexistent, while poppy fields flourished. Opiates are still highly-valued commodities – perhaps even more so now that most the world has forbidden their production.

Prof. Tankha tells interesting stories of exceptional Indian individuals who

managed to carve fortunes in the opium trade and build up power in the social network of the Indian elite. They are good examples of how the stereotype of "helpless Indians incapable of succeeding when competing with the British" is stuck deep in our minds, at least of my own. These individuals managed to take advantage the opportunities under British colonisation and actually gained such station that their words carried weight among the colonial lords. These stories also help to understand that in some ways the grudge held by the Chinese against the Indians concerning the opium trade, money lending and exploiting the system is actually justifiable – the Indians were not just mindless servants of the British, but instead they often had strong motives for their actions.

XIII – Indians in China

The image of India in China during the late 19th and early 20th century was a complex one. Many Chinese considered India to be a "dying country", since an ancient realm allowed the upstart British to govern over them, and saw India in negative light. British officers commanded Indian troops against the Chinese, even using force on the civilian populace. On the other hand, Indians craving for independence found mutual hate against the British amongst the Chinese and actually fought side-to-side with them on occasion. The children of two ancient, majestic nations sharing a friendly past and a common enemy. As the pressure grew amongst the nationalists, many prominent Indians fled first to China or Japan, and afterwards to North America where they could openly meet and found independence movements. US and Canada later restricted Asian immigration, after which more and more nationalists stayed in China and Japan.

A large number of Sikhs, a religious minority in India, immigrated to China, where their temples (*Gurdwara*) became centers of nationalist activity. The Sikh were categorised as "warrior race" by the British, and many had received basic military training. Those individuals, lead by the priests (*granthi*), were core members of the local independence movement and key figures in preparation for an all-out revolution. Perhaps because of their minority status (inferiority?) they never gained the leading role in the nation-wide independence movement. The fact that there had not been a Sikh prime minister until 2004 speaks for this as well.

In the wake of the first World War, the relations between India and China got

even warmer. The Japanese aggression against China won the sympathies of Indian minds and although the Indians were still fighting *for* the British, their colonial lords, they fought against the Japanese once the war began. Communism (or socialism), a new ideology on the rise in that time, had also gained foot-hold both in India and China, where individuals of the two nations yet again found common ground. The way China and India became closer reminds me of classic political rhetoric: "*The enemy of my enemy is my friend*" or "*You're either with us, or against us.*" The only way for two wranglers to stop quarreling is to have a bigger bully harass them both. Yet, the rivalry still holds – at no time neither wanted to give up on their endeavour of becoming the leader of Asia.

XIV - Indian trading networks in Southeast Asia

The regions around India have always been closely linked together, and artificial boundaries and limitations have never thoroughly restricted the flow of people, goods and ideas. The connection between the sub-continent of India and the communities of Southeast Asia has always been strong, based on a great variety of trade and movement of labour. Prof. Tankha gives examples of Indian and Indian-related communities that can be found all over Asia in great numbers.

Opening the Suez Canal in 1869 meant a new economic boom for Indian traders. The resources (especially rubber) found from Southeast Asia gained importance as they became more available. This meant that the relative significance of India in terms of trade grew significantly. Indian labor was needed on ships, caravans and warehouses, Indian moneylenders provided capital to the local entrepreneurs and Indian merchants' lack of cultural / language barrier gave them advantage over others. Most often the increase of wealth, and the rise of welfare indirectly deriving from it, has "side-effects". Traditions and laws were forced to change when opposed by fiscal opportunities – Indian communities that had been more or less discriminated before, were able to enjoy newly granted rights and privileges in Southeast Asia. This meant a clear change in the population's socioeconomic structure, an evolution of sorts: colonial India was no longer considered a nation of just servants and retainers, but of investors and owners as well.

The more actively the "inferior" Asian peoples interacted (trade, negotiation, factory building) with each other, the more obvious it became that there could exist a

successful Indian nation without the "superior" British in charge. Stronger India, in any way, was a threat to Britain – but this progress was allowed, because it filled the royal coffers. Is this a perfect example of man's weakness? The downfall of an empire because of greed?

XV – Revolutionaries abroad

The mainstream view has long been that the Indian independence movement was mainly based within the Indian borders. Lately it has been argued that very much like any revolutionary movement, the Indian independence movement found "operating space" outside of India, and based most of the activities abroad. The actions themselves took place and were aimed at the British within India, but the scale and magnitude of operations could've not been what it was under the British surveillance and jurisdiction inside Indian borders. The ironic aspect of this all is that several revolutionaries were educated in Britain and many branches of the movement gained funds by working with the British and their allies.

Of course, the independence movement was most closely linked to nations that rivaled Britain or were their outright enemies. Revolutionaries did not, however, cooperate only with "legitimate factions" outside of India – they also worked with the revolutionaries and radicals within those said nations. In this way Indian revolutionaries actually affected the domestic politics of several countries. The co-operation with other Asian countries, including Middle East, eventually expanded into fantasies of a pan-Asian union, something which was natural for people of close ideologies and circumstances. As can be seen, however, these fantasies never became reality in the grand scale. The revolutionaries' aims and objectives often contradicted with those of their allies – the Germans for example sought after conquering India from the British, thus dramatically conflicting with the aim for independence. But, the way of reaching the goal (driving British influence out of India) was agreed on, so there was room for co-operation.

The Indian revolution's personification of sorts was Virendranath Chattopadhyaya alias *Chatto*. He was highly educated, travelled abroad, was multi-lingual and had plenty of connections with European radicals. He made a "career" in USSR as an influential figure within the Comintern, where his life came to an end during Stalin's purges in 1937. The connection between Indian revolutionaries and communists was strong

all over the world, all the way to founding the Mexican Communist Party. This in itself is quite interesting – how those following the people's revolution (Proletarians of *all countries, unite!*) worked together with radical nationalists (India is *for Indians only!*). The connection was so deep, that many leftist Indian intellectuals affected the core Marxist-Leninist ideology, built alternative theses and provided practical support.

Revolutionaries should not be "stamped and categorised" in one simple division, all unanimous in harmony. They had their fair share of schisms, quarrels of either means or the end and direct opposition against each other as well. There was a great gap between the various supporters of the revolutionaries: for example, the Communist Party of Great Britain, Stalin and Mao, though ideologically rather close, did not agree on most of key issues, and this reflected to the minds of the revolutionaries. The supported ideologies amongst the movement (apart nationalism) ranged from classical liberalism, even fascism, all the way to social democracy and socialism. This spelled trouble for the unification of India later on – how could there exist a nation in unity, when its very foundations were so heavily fragmented?

XVI – Asian imaginings

When conversing on India's relationship with the rest of the Asia, it is a common mistake to compare it to Europe's (old world) relationship to America (new world). Asia was never discovered, or even rediscovered, *per se*. It was a gradually strengthening relationship, that was accelerated during the colonial period – metaphorically speaking it was something built on centuries old foundation with bricks of a few decades. The European imperialism and colonialism affected the Asian self image by forcing the Asians to define themselves through European set standards, which alienated them from their origins. The focus is on "the big three", India, China and Japan.

The main channels of rebuilding the *Asian image* from the *Asian viewpoint* were the nationalist connection network that spanned accross the continent and the religious connection's (mainly Buddhism) new upheaval from under the yoke of Christianity. The pan-Asian connection grew, partly because of the (unconscious) help from from the British – they shared a new *lingua franca*, the English language force-fed to the population. The semi-autonomous rulers of India and other Asian nations were highly

educated, wealthy and ambitious, and their cross-border co-operation was vital in separating the image of "Asia" from the European framework. In practical terms this meant the exchange of ideas (government policies, philosophy), technology (engineering, infrastructure) and intel (industrial espionage, military movement). Japan gained an exemplary status amongst Asian nations, others eager to copy its success: the turning of its medieval society in a short period of time into a modern industrial nation.

Another interesting issue is the intertwinement of concepts "development" and "national unity" - the way Asian world in the late 19th and early 20th century often saw nationalistic ideals and patriotism to be the requirement and cause for not being underdeveloped. The train of thought is that a nation (and therefore its people) should first be united, before it is capable of executing its "purpose" or *image* and thus becoming a developed nation, a nation above most others, superior. This was obviously influenced by the success of nationalist movements in Europe (German Empire, United Italy, Austria-Hungary), which brings up yet another contradiction: how could nationalism be used as a tool of purging Asia of Western influence, when the whole concept was of European doing? There was honest and well-argued critique on West's orientalism and at the same time the Asian intelligentsia were falling for borrowed, paradoxical ideas to build their "independent" image of Asia on. True modernisation (post-modern?) could be achieved through ideas and paradigms that were new and radical to the Western world as well; ideas without first-hand experience of their execution.

XVII – Re-dressing Asia

Asia is not entirely a geographical concept. In the colonial period the notion of "Asia" is built as the opposition of the West: underdeveloped, barbaric, inferior by the Western colonial lords and ancient, enlightened, superior by the Asian nationalists. Redefining (or *re-dressing*) of Asia spells out the political games involved in winning territory, wealth and also "hearts and minds".

One dress, or garment, for India and Asia is the European clothing: garments of steam and electricity, Western scientific tradition and claim of racial superiority. European clothing, with the suits, monocles, tophats and all, was an every-day testament of colonialism that people actually wore on them. In the same way traditional Asian clothing

spoke for the opposite and it was in India where the traditionalist view on clothing became inseparable with nationalism. The production of clothes, or *cloth* to be more exact, was the cornerstone of Indian industry. The pride on development was heavily based on the concentration of textile industry and its sidelines (cotton farms, weaving mills, dye factories). The British then tailored this cloth into clothes and sold them back to Indians. This was a prime example of *colonial exploitation*.

Oftenmost Europeans did not encourage wearing Western style clothes, but instead the initiative came from the Asians – Japanese changed their kimonos to black ties and Chinese gave up their hanfu. The reasons were "practical", hoping to become more modern and absorbing the Western "superiority" in any way possible. As Indians and other Asian peoples began wearing Western clothes, the views of orientalism amongst Europeans also weakened. Thoughts of prejudice are based on shallow and superficial concepts, fueled by ignorance and simplicity – thus the way "the inferior" looked played a great role: how can I be superior to one who looks just like me? Clothing was also part of the cultural exchange between colonies and colonial lords. The influence was subtle and developed slowly over the years, but its effects are definitely there. Later on, when wearing Western clothes was the norm, to reject wearing them was a political act of stating "We don't need you (anymore)", something of which Gandhi among others became known for.

The fear of losing the past and the "original" culture, as described by prof. Tankha in the search and revival of traditional national dresses, rings a familiar tune with the fear of cultural decline in today's Europe. Opposite to common belief, a cultural change is not tantamount to cultural decline. A never-changing culture is, in fact, a stagnated one, whereas evolving cultures are lively and prosperous. This goes for language, every-day customs, culinary tradition, clothing and so on. Nationalists put heavy weight on these details they see to be the definition of a nation and its people, and somehow believe these traditions just fell out the sky in their current form, undefiled and untouched by outside influence, even when the whole aspect of *tradition* demands evolution of some degree. Stagnation means the culture is not interacting with other cultures or even within its own domain – it means people do not feel part of it, and like a religion without followers the empty shell of this "culture" falls to oblivion. And thus, when analysed accurately enough, all of these details that are used in enforcing nationalist ideals are more or less artificial.

XVIII - The Indian National Army, allying with the enemy

The collaboration between Indian revolutionaries and Japan during World War 2 closely resembled the situation with Finland and Axis powers during the same period. "Alliance" would be a too strong word to use, as the participants had such differing goals – they agreed on the methods and saw co-operation to be profitable at that certain point in history. Japan wanted to create a pan-Asian empire to confront the West, Indians wanted independence – this meant driving out the British, of which the Indian National Army (INA) and Japanese Armed Forces agreed on. This "alliance" only lasted as long as it served the intentions of both parties. Respectively, the Indian freedom fighters were never labeled part of the Axis, just as Finns weren't, and they were both highly respected by the mixed, heterogeneous population and feared by the British rulers.

However, during this brief period of collaboration the connection between INA and Japan was deep (just as it was between Finland and Germany). Members of INA received training and equipment from the Japanese and key figures of INA were present in Tokyo and other major Japanese centers. This deep connection came to conflict with the differing goals as time went on – INA had its own objectives concerning Southeast Asia, mainly national revolution and encouraging independence movements, while Japan sought to mainly just exploit the area's resources. Ideologically INA was quite far from the fascist policies of Japan. Many criticised Japan's policy in China and other occupied territories, and the highly influential socialist / communist movement in India affected most of the revolutionaries. The issue of India itself also became more and more important as the Japanese troops advanced the Indian borders, seeking occupation in formerly British-owned territories. Threat of Japan served INA's objectives as long as the threat did not realise, and the combination of fear and brotherhood was hard to keep together. Ultimately this meant the dissolution of this collaboration, the end of "allying with the enemy", as conflicts grew bigger.

It's an interesting point that despite all the effort, time and resources spent on planning armed revolution and equipping a nationalist army, at the end of the day India gained independence through nonviolent means (*Mahatma Gandhi*). Many battles were fought and during the whole colonial period there had been several semi-serious uprisings

all around India, but their actual effect on the independence is controversial. Did it "soften up" the British reign? Or did it do the exact opposite, strengthening the British as they learned to repel these uprisings (what does not kill me, makes me stronger)? Armed resistance was defeated by lack of resources and the will to fight was subjugated by disease, matters which did not hinder the success of civil disobedience movement. On the contrary, *hunger* was used as a *weapon* on several occasions.

XIX – India and Asia

Naming a place, whether it's a continent, a town or a river, always includes political interest. According to one school of thought, politics exist where men interact – thus the names of places are fine examples of political action. The "baggage" that names carry consists of history, sometimes centuries long: warfare, scientific advance, blood feuds, rivalries, cultural changes (subjugation, assimilation), racial issues and class struggle, to name a few. When naming a place, one must decipher the meanings behind names and their possible alternatives. Even more so when *renaming*, which in itself is an act of *removing old baggage* and, quite possibly, adding new. In the era of independent Asia, (mostly) free of Western colonisation, the dilemma of naming Asia comes up.

Issue no. 1: "Where does it end, where does it begin?" The geographical definition of Asia has long been affected by European orientalism by defining "all that is unknown, exotic" to be "Asian", where cosmos *ends* and chaos *begins*. European tradition says that Asia *begins* somewhere around the Ural mountains and Middle East, while modern Asians themselves claim that Asia *ends* to the Himalayan and Pakistani regions. Geographical definition is sometimes misleadingly labeled "accurate" or "scientific", which it is not – it is just as artificial or "unnatural" as any other way of defining. Urals serve as no natural boundary to stop the movement of people and interaction of cultures, and the cultures left in the so called gray zone (between Europe and Asia) can have a strong link to either Asian or European cultures, regardless of their geographical position. The borders themselves are illusionary, but the territories and traditions within them are not.

Issue no. 2: "What is Asian culture, what is not?" Another issue arises from the effect of orientalism, the question how to define what is "original", "pure" Asian, what is cultural influence from other parts of the world and defining by negation (ie. what is *not*

Asian). Orientalism has not formed the idea of exotic mystery lands far away in negative aspect only – the mystery and secrecy holds a chance of *paradise*, or at least utopia, in itself. Asians of post-colonial period often cling on to this image of superiority, "a promised land projection" of sorts, defining themselves above Europeans through European prejudice (orientalism), filtered through European way of thinking. This makes it much more difficult to determine what is in fact *Asian* and what is just *a stereotype of Asian* in the eyes of the West. Does Asian culture, by definition, then be any different than others? Are only aspects that are considered positive and constructive ("good") included in this definition and based on which conditions are things excluded ("bad")? This leads us to the next issue...

Issue no. 3: "How comparable are Asian political movements to those of the West?" As these previously mentioned inclusions and exclusions are most obvious examples of political activity, it is crucial to understand that those ideological fervours present in Europe are not tantamount to those in the Asian cultural environment. Even the superficially similar movements (like socialism for instance) are built on a completely different foundation, which inherently makes them different than their "sister movements" (Marx – Lenin – Stalin – Mao - Ho Chi Minh). The way Asian cultures and nations have transformed and resisted change differs from Europe, and thus forcing Asia into European standards, categories and moulds only leads to distortion which stops us from understanding Asia. Of course human nature on the very basic level works the same all around the globe and all people share certain aspects or apprehension of cruelty, kindness, humanity and such.

XX - India independent, non-alignment to a new global engagement

The post-independence era from 1947 onwards is very colorful, even by the terms of Indian history, as there were many rapid changes within a few decades and the nation went through several upheavals (not *only* the armed sort). This era's international policy is mainly marked by three distinct themes: search for equitable global order (in defence of third world countries), non-alignment and neutrality (peace work in international crises) and nurturing global links (Commonwealth, revolutionary connections). Economy-wise these are sustaining growth and developing markets to equal

their Western counterparts. In domestic politics India seeks for unity (long lost?), struggles for socioeconomic justice and balances on razor's edge in keeping its multicultural, multireligious population in a state of relative peace and prosperity.

India's declaration of independence meant the birth of a new major player amongst Asian powers and it's no wonder why many sought co-operation with India early on. There were visions built of pan-Arab, pan-African (*people of color, unite*) and, of course, pan-Asian collaboration. Relations between the Indian Muslims and the rest of the population aggravated to the point where Pakistan (including Bangladesh) separated from India. The situation is still quite unstable, as both India and Pakistan have developed nuclear weapons and heated bickering over territory still exists. This reflects to the Indian stance on both its own Muslim minority and the Middle Eastern Muslim states, this being one of the reason why pan-Arab vision turned unsuccessful. Pan-African vision was overcome by the sheer amount of plurality, disagreements and controversy it was supposed to be built on. The historical "baggage" with China (opium) and Japan (WW2) proved to be too much, not to mention the border disputes and skirmishes with China soon after declaring independence, and the pan-Asian vision failed as well. In fact, China began supporting Pakistan in its efforts.

Modern India is still a nation of extremes: a population of well over one billion (40 % of which live in poverty), booming economy and world-known high education. The country is vast and full of regional differences (nations within a nation), different religions, languages and ideologies. The flow of jobs favors India at West's expense, especially on IT-sector, and to counter China on Asian geopolitics India has formed warm relations with USA. Perhaps now, more than ever, India can be seen as a land of possibilities. The role of terrorism / terror in international politics, connection to Islam, global warming (India would suffer heavily from a rising sea level) and the demands of growing industry are today's and tomorrow's issues that are still left unanswered, and India's position on the map of Asia still undefined.