

RETURN OF THE INFIDEL

Old Kids on the Block Return

In 1954, A L Basham began to 'decolonise' the Indian mind, indirectly, with his famous book, *The Wonder That Was India*, in what was a survey of the culture of the Indian subcontinent before the arrival of Muslims. In fact, soon after the Second World War, similar books about other ancient civilisations—Greece, Rome, Egypt and Babylon—were published.

It was an era of global decolonisation as the Western and West Asia's eastern empires slowly dissolved back into the vast ocean of Time, while ancient nations re-emerged. The three great Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), that had played a catalytic role in revivification of ancient civilisations, had, apparently, run their course in these settings: the contemporary rise of the BRICS nations is part of this evolutionary inevitability.

Incidentally, while Greece and Rome were almost fully converted by and underwent societal mutation due to Christianity, and Egypt and Babylon due to Islam, India not only steadfastly remained largely Hindu but also managed to reverse the tide of both the Abrahamic streams by 1947. China and Japan, too, did similarly since the 19th century.

In the 1960s, the then American Ambassador to India, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, famously observed that India was a 'functional anarchy'. Indira Gandhi, unlearning from her father Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, forgot this apt observation in 1975, and erred into

making it a 'dysfunctional monarchy'; the Indians punished her for trying to put India to Order and then also rewarded her in 1980 for restoring her inherent chaos! Her son, Rajiv, immensely contributed to the modernisation of India until he was assassinated. His successor, P V NarasimhaRao led the drive for economic liberalisation and globalisation before slipping into political oblivion.

The fate of NarendraModi, who is trying to emerge as an all-season leader, remains to be seen. Mother India ruthlessly exterminates its leaders after they deliver the next dose of semen, the way many non-chordate females swallow their male partners after sex.

Revisiting the country his forefathers emerged from, V S Naipaul slowly corrected himself, between 1964 and 1990, from *An Area of Darkness*, through *India: A Wounded Civilization* to *India: A Million Mutinies Now*; after thus trying to rediscover his own roots, he attempted to understand the life of others who had migrated from their faiths, as in *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*, and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples*.

Historian RomilaThapar, in her 1966 book *A History of India*, observed on the very first page that 'The fundamental sanity of Indian civilisation has been due to an absence of Satan'. Despite centuries of rule, Christianity and Islam could not make most Indians believe in a Satan; this Great Barrier Reef equivalent of coral colonies could not be fully converted to these alien faiths, unlike the other ancient civilisations to her west, —Iran, the Mesopotamia, Syria or Egypt— or in Europe like Greece or Rome.

Like India, other Asian civilisations also reacted similarly. That is why we find 'hybrid' nations like Indonesia and Singapore slowly rediscovering their pre-Islamic or pre-Christian past. In particular, the revivification of China and Japan in the 20th and 21st centuries has

been astonishingly fast, as compared to the slow revival of India. Of all these Asian civilisations, India, due to her geographical proximity to the Source of Christian and Islamic powers-of-the-day, had been most affected by the arrival of alien rule after the Crusades, which left both these great religions weaker. However, India reacted to regain her evolutionary energy like no other nation had done in history.

How did this chaotic, polytheist, multicultural and diverse people manage to retain their inherent unity and sanity? Understanding India's history is like the proverbial seven blind men trying to explain how an elephant 'looked' like—all explanations seem partial. There must be something unique that has made this strange—even anarchic—country retain its character uninterruptedly for some 5,000 years. It emerges that India is a polytheist and pluralist culture that set out to rediscover order out of Nature's inherent chaos, and even, at times, gloated as a civilisation. And that when a culture metamorphoses into a civilisation, it gets afflicted with lifestyle diseases; it must, then, go through a thorough health regime, shed the flab through war, and become 'normal' again.

On a wider canvas, India's is the macro-history of a warm-weathered people who got exhausted whenever gargantuan social evolutionary Waves began to shift, globally, from the First (Agriculture) to the Second (Industry) to the Third (Knowledge), and needed energy drinks to remain in the marathon. Like a strongly-knit alien community that has replaced a tired desi leadership temporarily.

All the countries in the world have seen migrations from other places; no country can claim otherwise. Immigrants often become strong enough to gain political power for some time; then the 'natives' return to power. The same was the case with India, too. In succession, the 'Aryans' replaced the Harappans around 1,500 BC, the Muslims replaced the Aryans in the 11th century, and the British replaced the

Muslims in the 18th century: they all came as great game-changers, contributed and catalysed the native Hindu culture by ending its self-imposed isolation and reconnecting it with the world. Ironically, the urban Harappans were more 'connected' with the outside world than the re-ruralising Aryans, who put India on a back-foot but laid a solid foundation for its self-defense from alien influence. On the other hand, most of the Muslims and Christians, unlike other preceding immigrants, remained largely unassimilated due mainly to their holy places being outside India, and checked out of this guesthouse in 1947; they left behind the 'converted' people whose descendants may eventually return to the Hindu fold via their caste-tunnel—for instance, over 80 per cent of Indian Christians and Muslims, whose forefathers converted, now demand parity with the Hindus' 'lower' castes to derive social benefits.

It was difficult for the colonisers to remain in India for long unless they assimilated with the host country. Essentially a chaotic culture, in which caste emerged as the only long-term constant; India, while receiving the Abrahamic catalysts of Christianity and Islam, also began to slowly elbow these alien faiths out once they had served their limited purpose of revivifying the Hindu society. India has accumulated more than 6,000 major castes over the last 30-odd centuries—they are now its fulcrums and the country works somewhat like the shape-changing creature in the Hollywood film *The Transformer*. Only a minority of the sub-continental people—of all faiths—are beyond the pale of casteism.

If we humans are social organisms, well, our society, too, is like a living organism, evolving, multiplying and decaying. Far from being static or isolationist, our dynamic society also follows the Darwinian organic evolution through a food-web, with mutations thrown in, cocooned in its own ecosystem but also interacting with those outside; while doing so, it interacts with the world beyond, and reacts to the newer situations, the basic instincts, for food, mating or self-defense.

In this competitive social world, only the fittest survive by adaptation, the ones who successfully react to external stimulus.

Like any other country's, therefore, India's history cannot be fully comprehended in isolation from other neighbouring countries' history, not even with static references only to the Muslims or Christians or their belief systems vis-à-vis India's own. Familiarity with the basics of Christianity and Islam helps us understand how and why India reacted to these two external stimuli. Each country's history carries the elements of give-and-take in relation to other active neighbours of the time and the extent of interplay with them.

For instance, Israel's history and evolution of Judaism, or even of Christianity, cannot be understood without taking into account the imperial interplay between contemporary Egypt and Mesopotamia which uprooted the Jews time and again centuries before Jesus was born. If India were a melting pot, then it must have been heated from outside.

Like other dynamic societies, India, too, followed these principles of organic evolution. During this incremental, Darwinian evolution, she reacted to the world around the way an organism reacts to an external stimulus or situation. Thus, with the theocratic evolution of West Asia, which fast-tracked the Fertile Crescent from polytheism to monotheism from the seventh century BC onwards, India had begun to adapt herself through the Vedic era for this change-of-gods that impacted her own people. This was how her long struggle involving both receiving the catalyst for adaptation and then rejecting its leftovers began. The evolution of the ShrimadBhagwad Gita, possibly in the eighth century as a reaction to growing monotheism, followed by the 'cleansing' process culminating in the emergence of the Gandhi-Jinnah duo, and the arrival of 1947 was part of this big-picture evolving scenario.

The rest of the contemporary world, too, followed this pattern. China and Japan, two major 'infidel' Asian cultures, behaved similarly using their native ecosystem, although, unlike India, they were relatively less affected by the Abrahamic catalysts. For instance, while the Christians and Muslims, together, account for just four per cent of the total population in China and two per cent in Japan, they constitute over 15 per cent in India at present. Clearly, India's struggle against being absorbed by Abrahamist catalysts, through religious conversion, has been fiercer than that of China or Japan.

How did the three Semitic sister religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam which all regarded Abraham as their Patriarch—behave vis-à-vis the host cultures they sought to convert? Judaism was not as focused on religious conversion, evangelisation and proselytisation and, as a result, the Jews, like the Parsis (Zoroastrians), found a safe haven in India for centuries after being forced out of their homelands; but Islam and Christianity, which regarded evangelisation and proselytisation as cornerstones of their Book-based Faiths, tried to process India into changing her gods. They did succeed for some time and to some extent, but were eventually rolled back by 1947.

Unlike India or China, other civilisations and cultures counted their days in terms of decades or, at best, centuries. These two peoples have always fancied themselves as mega-marathoners—India the Jagadguru (World Teacher), China the Middle Kingdom or Celestial Empire—who, turtle-like, thought in terms of geological times and spatial distances, unlike rabbits of the Occident.

The various yugas, or eras of the Vedic and Puranic antiquity, for instance, are measured in hundreds of thousands of years. Contrast this with the Biblical eras—God could dispatch Satan to Hell only for a thousand years before Armageddon because much of the Fertile Crescent (except Egypt and the Mesopotamia) had not learnt to think

beyond three zeros until the seventh century! That is why devout Christians, at every turn of the millennium, believe an Armageddon is round-the-corner: at the turn of their first millennium, they launched the bloody Crusades against the Muslims and at the turn of the second, in 2001, they tried to convert the 'infidels', including the Muslims, for an all-out emancipation of humanity. That is why, India and China have seen many a civilisation bubble up and burst while they went on with their normal business; for them Christianity and Islam were merely catalysts, even a passing phase.

Why did India, China or Japan evolve the peculiar way they did? Unlike the Fertile Crescent, these ancient Asian cultures, created largely around agriculture, mostly remained either polytheist or atheist, and the pace of their evolution as loosely connected societies was slow—culture, not faith, bound them. On the other hand, the Crescent evolved faster after monotheism converted and hyperconnected its populations. Christianity integrated Europe beyond the domains of Greece and Rome, the way Islam did beyond Egypt or Iran.

Organic evolution of humans must take into account the masses beyond the classes because actual survival rate is low and leaves behind a lot of waste; as Alvin Toffler observed in *The Third Wave*, our social decay is the compost bed of a new civilisation. The proselytising Abrahamic religions played a great role in converting loose epicurean classes into hard-wired ecclesiastical masses. We, the *Homo sapiens*, can survive any possible mass extinction only by tightly wiring ourselves into a Wave-like architectural mass, which monotheism offered.

At the same time, monotheism also intensified a struggle for existence within human societies, including the monotheists themselves, as we have seen during the Crusades, the two World Wars and now in the 'War on Terror'. This is akin to apoptosis within monotheism wherein it slowly disintegrates itself to make way for the next Set of Change. In other words, the way the post-Crusades Christianity decayed, our

contemporary Islam has also entered into a theology-triggered, self-destruct mode wherein Muslims are killing even more Muslims—mostly males! A prolonged terror environment, or a major war, may eliminate large number of Muslim males and make their womenfolk break free or even lead the Islamic world!

If monotheism were such a catalytic and transformational agent, why could not it convert the entire world? Herein lay the second most important requirement for organic evolution: diversity and variation. Monotheism did 'massify' the people into tightly-knit societies but more-of-the-same could also lead to extinction, the way asexuality or incest does. Only through variation and mutation could the humans survive and evolve. This variation came from India, China, Japan and other countries not fully converted by Christianity and Islam. Apparently, Nature parceled out our survival to the converted West Asia and Europe and variation to the unconverted areas; in the 21st century, we are witnessing integration of this survival-cum-variation process through globalisation.

To India, China and Japan, among others, monotheism largely came as a catalyst to spur evolution, as an accelerator to upload these slowly-evolving societies onto a fast-forward train and make them change-ready for the next stage. The way a referee cannot be a player himself, a catalyst cannot participate in bio-chemical reaction, or get absorbed in the process. But monotheism got absorbed in West Asia and Europe; its theologies made the devout rather 'permanently' war-enabled; the Christian belief in Armageddon, ironically, has been a major catalyst for the growth of science and technology in the West. Interestingly, even Abrahamic monotheism had evolved from solar monotheism (Sumer, Egypt, Babylon and Iran) to lunar monotheism (Israel, Arabia) until the latter variety edged out the former. But cultures worshipping the Sun continued to react against those worshipping the Moon.

In Sun-worshipping India, China or Japan, lunar monotheism, which promoted evangelisation and proselytisation, was found incompatible with local Sun-centric cultures, and, therefore, incongruent beyond its referee/catalyst role. When Christianity and Islam decided to stay on in these host cultures, they faced resistance and were forced to exit—as in Spain of 1497 or India of 1947, when they checked Islam out, or as in the Sun worshipping Europe which is now slowly phasing out Christianity. The two great faiths had almost completely replaced their earlier civilisations but native cultures resprouted slowly, as the contemporary rebirth of paganism in Europe shows now.

Since China and Japan were not as afflicted due to Christianity or Islam, these two societies did not evolve matching holy books. India did, as she had to create a psychological barrier and shelter and theological hedging against this perceived alien invasion. Both the Bible and the Qur'an are the Books of Insistence, seeking to change the world according to their weltanschauung or world-view; to counter these monotheisms, India evolved the ShrimadBhagwad Gita as the Book of Resistance.

The two Abrahamic Books are also foreign policy instruments—the Declarations from Jerusalem/Bethlehem-Rome, and al Medina-Mecca—of the respective West Asian expansionist faiths. Both Christianity and Islam, while trying to wire and unite diverse communities, sought to make the believer adopt the Christian/Muslim cultures instead of his native one; it was medieval consumerism, spiritual monopoly, the way modern colas try to replace native beverages.

Since the three faiths shared theologies and had much in common, one could convert from Christianity to Islam and vice-versa, and still survive, but his conversion to the 'infidel' religions often invited death. The market forces slowly protested against this restrictive trade practice; so, monotheism, after its raison d'être of uniting and

connecting the people from diverse cultures, began to weaken further with the arrival of modern communication. With the evolution of science and democracy, its decay became faster: in particular, the medieval empires built by Christianity and Islam began to totter in the late 18th century with the discovery of telegraphy (literally, 'writing at a distance').

After this, telephony (talking at a distance) and television (watching at a distance) also came to dominate human senses, the things they once thought only God or a prophet could do. If we can write, talk or watch from a distance, we don't really need a medium/prophet to transfer message from God! Haven't computers and mobile phones replaced stenographers and photographers? Many believers thought their inherited beliefs were an extra-baggage they could do better without. Travel light and enjoy reduced fare!

This technology-enabled self-empowerment of Homo sapiens in the last two centuries interconnected them like never before, with technology increasingly replacing theology, or at least shortening the latter's shelf-life for an individual. Because of this shift in the mode of connectivity, science and democracy gradually softened and weakened all faiths to the core, particularly Christianity, as state-patronage which had made it so strong, waned; it was due to this weakening that many among monotheists would no longer be ready to accept their inherited faith as a gospel which sought to kill their private belief, made imperial demands, and tried to convert their world-view.

How did Islam or Christianity contribute to Indian evolution, before they waned and largely exited in 1947? Why and how did India subconsciously 'plot' their exit?

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