

Colonialism, Modernization and the Asian Identity

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Introductory Note by Osam Kondo

[Introductory Note]

Professor Irfan Habib was invited by the Japan Scientists Association to give the memorial lecture for the fortieth year of its foundation as a guest speaker. This paper “Colonialism, Modernization and the Asian Identity” was delivered at the International Symposium on Exchange and Cooperation of Science and Technology in Asia held on December 11, 2005 in Tokyo. On the following day he visited Kyoto University and delivered the same paper at the South Asian Study Society. Professor Habib is well-known all over the world as a historian of the medieval Indian history, especially Mughal Indian history. He has, however, been prolifically writing not only on the medieval history but also on the whole range of Indian history from the ancient to modern periods. A British historian says that Professor Habib is a national treasure of India. He is widely acknowledged as the most distinguished historian of contemporary South Asia. I, as one of the coordinating members of his invitation, am very happy to introduce here his impressive and comprehensive paper read in Japan.

Key words Asian civilizations, colonialism, modern Asia, imperialism, solidarity

Mr Chairman, Members of the Japan Scientists Association, ladies and gentlemen,

I deem it a very great privilege to have been invited to address the present symposium being held to mark the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Japan Scientists Association. Your Association has been in the forefront of promoting not only scientific research and improving the conditions under which it is conducted, but has also shown its concern, from the very beginning, about how science can serve the people. Your opposition to militarization and defence of the cause of peace stems from the vision you have of the larger cause of science. Let me begin by expressing my sincere admiration

of the work of your Association and offer my greetings to all its members.

Scientists are generally seen by their colleagues in humanities as being rather impatient of the past and dedicated entirely to the future. I am gratified that I am being asked to discuss before this gathering of scientists something which is so laden with the burdens of the past as the theme of colonialism, modernization and Asian identity. I promise, however, that though I open with Herodotus, the concerns that I close with would be those of the Asia of the present and the future. The invocation of the past will, I hope, only elucidate better the case I argue for the possible place of Asian identity in our practice today.

I

Herodotus, the Greek 'Father of History', writing in the fifth century BC begins his *Histories* by saying that he wished to "put on record the astonishing achievements both of our own and of the Asiatic peoples; and, secondly, and more particularly, to show how the two races came into conflict." One may see in the latter statement a premonition of what two thousand years later would come to be regarded as the normal state of relations between the two continents. But we must remember that Herodotus's notions of Europe and Asia were both very constricted. For him the Greeks represented 'Europe', and the Persian and other peoples across the Aegean and the Mediterranean Sea, belonged to Asia: the geographical notions of both Asia and Europe were still understandably vague. The limitation of knowledge can be seen from the way, the physician Hippocrates (c.400 B.C.) held that the temperaments of the Asiatics and Europeans were different owing essentially to Asia being possessed of a moderate climate and Europe of an extremely varying one.

This contrasting picture of Europe and Asia, however factually erroneous, was transmitted, with classical learning, to Renaissance Europe. When after the discovery of the New World, global maps began to be made, Asia at least began in European maps to assume the outlines that are given to it at the present-day. Hondius's map of the world (1607), for example, marks the entire tract from Japan, across China and India, to Arabia as part of the continent of Asia. The French traveller François Bernier (travels in Asia, 1656-68) was, perhaps, the first to lift the contrast between Europe and Asia, from a mere climatic or religious (Christian/non-Christian) level to that of a fundamental difference in political institutions: the difference lay to him in the absence of abso-

lute despotism in Europe, and its total predominance in Asia. In his *De l'esprit de lois* (The Spirit of Laws) (1748), Montesquieu further underlined this contrast, and henceforth 'Oriental Despotism' became a part of the commonly accepted assumptions about Asia in modern European thought (including to some extent that of Marx).

In whatever form, Asia yet lived only in European thought. No concept of Asia as a continent with or without any common features or values developed within any Asian civilization. Indeed, while it seems natural for a concept of Europe to have evolved, Europe forming a distinct geographical unit, a peninsula jutting out of the Eurasian land mass into the Atlantic, Asia possesses no such geographical validity. For the people of Europe it, in turn, became natural further to consider the whole of the East, a single continent. Had geographical conventions been shaped out of Chinese, Indian or Perso-Arab cultures, it is doubtful if a continent of such an immense size as of Asia could have been conceived. Indeed, it is probable that East Asia, South Asia, and West Asia, that are large regions in themselves with as geographically valid limits as Europe, might each have been thought of as distinct a continent at par with Europe.

What would grow, instead of a spontaneous Asian consciousness, was the knowledge of the existence of neighbouring civilizations in each of these distinct sub-continent. The great unification of China under the Qin (Chin) dynasty (221-207 BC) led to the whole of China coming to be known in India as 'China' or 'China-bhumi', China-land. The northern-Chinese dynasty, Qidan (Chhi-tan) (907-1119 AD) produce the name 'Khita' (Cathay) for China in Persian and Arabic. The Mongol conquests of the 13th century had the result of bringing to the Islamic world a large body of knowledge about China, some of which entered the great history of the world by Rashiduddin Fazlullah, in Persian and Arabic (early 14th century).

On its part China (and Japan) obtained, through the spread of Buddhism, a knowledge of India, whose Chinese name 'In-tu' or 'In-du' was borrowed from the Old Persian name for India, 'Hindu'. Xuan Zhuang (602-64) wrote a detailed account of India in Chinese, such as is not extant in any language including Indian languages, prior to that date. Xuan Zhuang also carried to China an interesting account of Iran.

Between India and the Perso-Arab world, geography made contacts easier. The Indians in the eleventh and twelfth centuries used the term 'Tajik' indifferently for Persian and Arabs. Abu Raihan Alberuni (c.1035) wrote an account of India in Arabic, the first occasion, perhaps, when one of the finest representatives of one civilization studied the sciences and learning of another, at the highest levels of rationality.

There thus existed by the Middle Ages a fairly large store-house of knowledge in different parts of Asia about its other parts, which these examples of inter-civilizational contacts illustrate. There was a sense, in other words, of a common world, though not a specifically Asian world. It was colonialism which, by putting Asian countries under a common system of oppression, laid the groundwork for the emergence of an Asian consciousness.

II

When the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and crossed the Arabian Sea to appear in South India in 1498, he inaugurated the long period of European dominance over Asia. An Indian historian and statesman K.M. Panikkar has chronicled the history of this process in a pioneering work *Asia and Western Dominance* (London, 1953). There is hardly any country in Asia which does not have its own major incidents of defeat or humiliation to recall from the history of colonialism: for example, for Indonesia there is the Dutch seizure of Batavia (1619); for India, the battle of Plassey (1757); for China, the Opium Wars (1840-42, 1856-60); and for Japan, the expeditions of Commodore Perry (1853-54). In a conventional political narrative, such as Panikkar's, colonialism appears as a continuous emanation of European aggression and dominance. One should, however, recognize that the configuration of colonialism itself was deeply affected throughout by the pressures exerted by the genesis and growth of capitalism in Europe.

In the first long phase from 1492 when Columbus reached America to about the end of the 18th century, colonialism basically followed the short-term aims of obtaining from the subjugated countries as much plunder as possible, the process being strikingly summed up by Karl Marx in a passage in *Capital*:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal [Amerindian] population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation [of capital].

Colonialism in its first three centuries resulted in an enormous transfer of wealth from Asia, Africa and Latin America taken in the form of precious metals, enslaved human

power and products of human industry. The last was drawn especially from Asia, where European powers, notably, the Netherlands and, then, Britain, could employ the revenues of subjugated territories to acquire craft and agricultural products — which, therefore, came to them free of cost in larger quantities, year after year. Marx had a much clearer notion than, apparently, many later economic historians like Maurice Dobb, that a part of this wealth (in both money and commodity form) became available for capital (hence the term ‘primitive accumulation’ used for it) in Western Europe, especially Britain. Other circumstances like the Scientific Revolution and a reserve labour army created by the Enclosures being also present, this infusion of capital helped to put the English Industrial Revolution on its course and so usher in the age of full-blown capitalism.

Once Britain, as the first capitalist nation, had been industrialized, the colonies had to fulfil an additional function, that of serving as markets for Britain’s industrial products, and sources of raw materials and primary wage-goods. This new function of colonialism, so clear to both Marx and Engels, unfortunately escaped attention in Lenin’s analysis of Imperialism (1917), which seems to have been far too greatly influenced by J.A. Hobson’s well-meaning pioneering work *Imperialism* (1902), written from a Free-Trade point of view. Though the germs of this perception are already to be found in the writings of Marx and Engels, one need not deny full credit to John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson for their seminal delineation of the ‘Imperialism of Free Trade’ in an essay of this title (1953). The impact of this phase which lasted throughout the nineteenth century was felt mainly by the ‘coloured’, that is, the Asian and non-White African colonies. To these colonies, unlike the white colonies, there were made no great exports of capital — the feature that Lenin especially ascribed to ‘Imperialism’ of his time. In these colonies it became of interest to Britain, the leading colonial power, rather to provide capital only for transport infrastructure, and thereafter to prevent, by means of tariff as well as administrative measures, the genesis of any indigenous industry able to compete with the metropolitan industry. In their ‘counter-factual’ work, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire ... 1860-1912*, Cambridge, 1986, Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback completely ignore this fundamental feature of Free-Trade colonialism. They, therefore, profess surprise that in India Britain took no steps to encourage and patronise “business”, as did the governments of Britain’s white colonies. If the two authors had cared to look further at the British official policy in India, by far the largest colony in the world (in terms of population), they would have found that

the British in fact sought to kill the only modern industry the Indians tried to develop, viz. the cotton textiles manufactures, first, by removing all import tariffs on textiles (1878-80), and, then, by rupee re-valuation (1891) and, finally, by enhanced excise (1894, 1896). In every sector the official policy remained solidly one of “Buy British”. To embellish a well-known statement of Marx, colonialism fundamentally played a destructive role not only because its shattering of the pre-colonial social order, but also because it strove to destroy the industrial future of the colonies as well.

There was no alteration in this feature when ‘New Imperialism’, the phenomenon studied by Hobson and Lenin intertwined with colonialism from the days of the Great Depression (1873-96) onwards. By hindsight one can attribute the intensification in the struggle for colonies during the period preceding the First World War (1914-18) essentially to the fact that Britain was no longer the sole Workshop of the World. Germany, US and France had begun to compete with it for markets; and neither for Britain nor for its rivals was Free Trade a safe ‘Open Door’ formula to be extended from China to one’s own colonies. A ‘protectionist’ colonialism took over, but we must remember that no colony was protected against its own ruling country. Other phenomena that emerged in the capitalist world at this time, namely, finance capital, monopolies and export of capital, gave enormous strength to capitalist oligarchies within the major industrialized countries; but the ‘Third World’ colonies remained only on the periphery of these momentous processes. If any ‘colonies’ were involved, these were the nominal white ‘colonies’ of Britain, such as Canada, Australia, and the White-dominated South Africa, which were parts not of the colonial, but of the capitalist world. It was only there, that capitalism was now installed by capital exported to them. These ‘colonies’ could, and did set up protective tariffs against imports of consumer goods, and so made foreign capital investments in them especially profitable. Such distinction between the two sets of colonies, did not enter the cores of the analysis of contemporary capitalism, whether by Rosa Luxemburg (*Capital Accumulation*, 1913) and Lenin (*Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1917), despite their numerous other brilliant insights. However, the issue of protection was of vital importance to the future development of the colonies.

If the colonial regimes would not allow protection, then for even capitalistic development of colonies, liberation from the tutelage of western powers became an essential requirement. Friedrich Engels made this point when in 1892 in a letter to N.F. Danielson he contrasted the conditions of Czarist Russia, which being independent, could develop its industry under protection, to those of India, a totally subject country, which had no

such privilege. A few years later he might well have cited the example of Japan, for its great success in industrialization because of its independence. Obviously, then, resistance and national liberation offered the only course by which economic modernization would be possible. Modernization, however, necessarily requires a change in the set of prevailing ideas, and we must examine briefly how this change came about in Asia.

III

Edward W. Said in his *Orientalism* (1978), propounded a thesis which, allowing for some marginal reconsiderations by him in his 'Afterword' (1995), can be summarized as follows: Europe in tandem with colonialism, evolved a hostile and censorious picture of Asia, which it not only propagated among Europeans, but also imposed on Asiatic minds, so as to combine its political subjugation with an intellectual hegemony over the latter. Those who speak in the increasingly popular idiom of post-modernism designate the communication of modern values from the West essentially as a part of such 'colonial discourse'.

There is no doubt that much writing in the West about Asia accepted the assumptions about Asia's intrinsic inferiority. This can be seen even in such widely read late text as H.A.L. Fisher's *History of Europe* (1935). Here we are told, for example, that "to the conquest of nature through knowledge the contributions made by Asiatics have been negligible". But there has also been another component of European 'orientalism', which springs from the application of scientific methods of enquiry and modern social values, notably, the rejection of racial inequality. Thus alongside the colonial constructs about Asia, there have arisen within 'Orientalism' objective reconstructions of Asia's past, which stand in contrast to the kind of 'Orientalist' depictions that Edward Said deals with. This other side of 'Orientalism' that Said all but closes his eyes to can be seen in a large array of works from Edward Gibbon's chapters on Asia in his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88) to the splendid series of Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilization in China* (beginning, 1954).

Said's one-sided exposition of 'Orientalism', in fact, mirrors a long-established confounding of the colonial with the modern. The modern values that received their final imprint in Europe, namely, the supremacy of rationality and science, the ideas of equality in social, political and gender spheres, and of national independence, democracy and socialism, were created in Europe in the midst of struggles and battles on the streets,

obtaining their sharpest expressions in and around events like the French Revolution (1789-94) and the Soviet Revolution of 1917. These values have become the common possessions of mankind through a similar mode of internal conflict and struggle, and not just by a simple mode of ideological diffusion.

There is no doubt that in so far as colonialism had to create a local administrative structure, it needed to accommodate or even create a local elite familiar with the language and ways of the rulers, in other words, a partly, westernized class. In India this necessitated the establishment of schools for instruction in English, the official policy in this respect being proclaimed by Macaulay's resolution on English education (1835), though the Hindu College at Calcutta (Kolkata) for a similar purpose had been established some twenty years earlier. Such education, was designed to provide the services of low-level native officials for the British administration. With this limited end in view, the British government was extremely parsimonious in spending money on English education, leaving it largely to private effort by Indians. The palm was taken by the Dutch in Indonesia, where in 1940 out of a population of 70 millions there were only 637 'natives' in colleges and only 37 graduates with B.A. degrees. However limited the extent of modern education thus imparted, it could not escape opening the gates to the store-house of ideas and knowledge generated in Europe. This, in turn, resulted in a dual process: the rejection of those elements of the past culture of the colonial country which did not accord with modern values; and the use of European economic and political ideas by colonial intellectuals to develop a critique of colonialism itself. In India, the first can be said to begin with Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1770-1832), the proponent of scientific education and opponent of oppression of women in Indian society; and the second, with Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), the 'Grand Old Man' of Indian Nationalism. The two aspects were interlinked: India, as Keshav Chandra Sen pointed out in 1870, could become a 'nation' only to the extent that its social inequities and divisions were removed. The two streams came to find a common representative in one man, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), social reformer, national liberator and martyr. Gandhi professed that most of his ideas had sanction from India's past, but it is obvious from his own autobiography that to him they came initially and almost entirely from the West (from the modern interpretations of the New Testament, and from Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Irish nationalists, among others); and he was, therefore, as much a product of modern thought as any other figure in the Indian national movement.

Analogous trends could be observed in other Asian countries. In China, laid low by

the collective aggression of colonial powers, there arose the “Modernization movement” of Kang You-wei (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao (1873-1929), which pursued the objective of internal reform for strengthening China to meet imperialist aggression. It reached its high water mark in the Hundred-Day Reform (1898), ending in tragedy and producing its own martyrs. Despite its failure, it lit the path for the great Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the Revolution of 1911 and China’s subsequent titanic struggles. The Communist triumph of 1949 can be characterised as both a triumph of modernization and national unification, however much Mao Zedong’s socialist vision might appear different from the concerns of today’s seemingly westernized China.

Like any great event, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 would always invite diverse interpretations. Its leaders’ declared aims of internal modernization and saving Japan from colonial subjugation were undoubtedly products of remarkable insight. The success of a policy based on these objectives enabled Japan to enter the club of the colonial powers by World War I, on the basis of its own industrial development and militarization. This proved that capitalism as a system need not be an exclusively European phenomenon, and also, unfortunately, that colonialism too was not tied to any particular set of races.

IV

What thus happened in India, China, Japan and other Asian countries, in response to the dominance of European colonialism, was precisely what Karl Marx had divined in 1853 as a future “regeneration”, which colonialism, despite its own designs, was bound to bring about in Asia. (Marx in his two *New York Daily Tribune* articles was specifically discussing India). Crucial to this process of regeneration has been the emergence of the ‘nation’ as the central entity commanding, over all other claims, the loyalty of those belonging to it. Conventional history teaches that ‘nation-states’ began to form in Western Europe in the sixteenth century (Spain, Portugal, England, France, and the Netherlands), as developing commerce transformed the economies of these countries. But it was the French Revolution that, faced with the hostility of the monarchical powers ranged against it, proclaimed the right of all nations to independence, a principle which, ultimately, did not only redraw the map of Europe, but also redrew the map of the whole world.

By giving to his study of the history of the idea of ‘nation’, the title of *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983), Benedict Anderson has underlined the fact that a nation is

not created by geography or spoken language, but is a product of popular 'imagination'. There is of course no doubt that a nation has to be perceived as such by the bulk, or at any rate, a very large number of those who inhabit it. This is why quite variant definitions of 'nation' yet bring in the factor of the 'feeling' of oneness among the inhabitants (J.S. Mill) or the 'psychological make-up' of its people (J.V. Stalin), neither of which are material factors but belong to the realm of consciousness. Where one cannot go along with Anderson is his supposition that this imagined nation is essentially implanted by the phenomenon of 'print capitalism'. From the very case of Latin America which Anderson examines in some detail, it is clear that the Hispanic nations of South America were born out of the struggle (led by Bolivar and San Martin) against Spanish colonialism. It is true that their revolt, despite its banner of national 'patriotism', was basically that of the 'creoles' (old white settlers), and not of the Amerindian populations, but one must remember that the concept of 'nation' does not necessarily involve either equality or democracy, although as political consciousness spreads, these values may be invoked more and more strongly to reinforce a national cause.

As one traces the genealogy of the idea of 'nation', one goes back inevitably to Revolutionary France and the preceding political and ideological developments in Europe. This presents, perhaps, the clearest case where a western idea, once grasped by tens of millions in Asia, could make it impossible for western rule or dominance to continue in the old way.

It was not, however, only the idea of the nation, but what the nation should be like, that made Asian peoples draw heavily on ideas that had their origins in the West. The Indian National Congress, when it met in December 1885 for its first session at Bombay, was and remained for some decades an organisation of middle-class men. One is reminded of the Creoles fighting under Bolivar in the name of the whole population of Spanish South America. The middle class Indian nationalists too wished to speak on behalf of the entire people of India. They, therefore, analysed the grievances of the Indian poor, and for this purpose, used all the instruments of modern economic science that came to them from Adam Smith, Ricardo and John Stuart Mill. Dadabhai Naoroji's *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, with materials published over the period 1876-1901, was the most notable effort of this genre. From here, the second stage arrived with Gandhi's mobilisation of the poor (especially, peasants) as participants in the National Movement (from his Champaran campaign, 1917, onwards). In his footsteps came the Communist movement and socialist groups, with ideas derived from European

socialist thought, notably Marxism. The influence of these ideas, especially as articulated by Jawaharlal Nehru, predominates in the Karachi (“Fundamental Rights”) Resolution of the Congress (1931), outlining the programme of action after India would win its freedom. From now on it was this programme carrying a vision of India as a semi-socialist secular democracy, that would serve for the main platform of the nationalist cause.

The same process could be seen in the Arab world. Confronted by the occupation of the bulk of the Arab countries by Britain and France after World War I, the growth of nationalism took first a liberal form, notably with the formation of the Wafd of Egypt under the leadership of Zaghlul Pasha in 1919. But socialist ideas too percolated, and in 1941 the second major secular stream in Arab nationalism, represented by the Ba’ath movement came into being at Damascus. Its major theoretician, Michel Aflaq created the vision of a single Arab nation along with a strong commitment to socialism. The western mainsprings of the ideologies of both the Wafd and the Ba’ath are manifest.

The concept of a ‘nation’ was not at all prominent in early Marxist thought, the proletariat being held to belong to no nation. In practice, however, the nation asserted itself. Lenin sanctioned the theory of national self-determination; and, later, Communists in Asia tended to combine the aim of national liberation with that of an ultimate socialist transformation. This took place most successfully in China and Vietnam, where the long armed struggles took the appearance of successful peasant wars.

V

If the present independent nations have been the result of the twin impact of colonialism and modernization — the one provoking resistance, the other shaping the aims of that resistance — then, where does it leave Asia, within which these nations have been created?

Perhaps, this question ought not to be so worded. As I argued at the beginning there was in fact no perception of ‘Asia’ as a continent among Asian peoples, so that one cannot expect there to have been the sense of an Asian identity before the ideas of European geography reached us, along with colonialism. That geographical designation took a living form only when, confronted by European colonialism, there arose a perception of Asian solidarity. Its beginnings lay initially in widely scattered expressions of fellow feeling.

I offer here a few illustrations of such expressions of feeling drawn from India.

The British exploitation of India in the form of the annual 'Drain' or 'Tribute' was made possible by India having a huge annual export surplus, whose proceeds were transferred to England. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century the Indian export surplus was made possible by her exporting enormous quantities of opium to China, which was compelled to admit the drug after the two Opium Wars Britain fought with her. This made Indian nationalists see the Chinese as fellow-victims of the same colonial regime. Dadabhai Naoroji expressed their sentiment in 1880 in the following words:

Because India cannot fill up the remorseless Drain; so China must be dragged in to make it up, even though it be by being 'poisoned'... This opium trade is a sin on England's head and a curse on India for her share in being the instrument.

Great sympathy was similarly aroused for Turkey when Britain and France began to put pressure upon the Ottoman Empire from the late 1890s. The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 was followed by the Italian invasion of Libya (1911-12), and the Balkan Wars (1912-13). Indian sympathies took the practical form of an Indian Medical Mission to Turkey (1912-13), funded by voluntary effort. When after World War I and the Treaty of Sevres (1920) Turkish independence was in jeopardy, the Indian National Congress initiated the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), of which the major demands were self-rule for India and restoration of Turkish independence under the Caliph. The agitation prevented any despatch of Indian troops to Turkey by Britain, and so partly facilitated the decisive Turkish military success of 1922.

Another issue was created by the Balfour Declaration (1917), by which Britain invited European Jews to settle in Palestine, recently seized by her. While opposing Hitler and his persecution and massacre of the Jews, Indian nationalist leaders, notably Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, consistently took the side of the Arabs, especially in the 1930s, considering it a matter of victimization of a fellow Asian people by Britain.

Like Turkey, Japan, at the other end of Asia, was an object of great nationalist interest. Japan became a model for Indian nationalists once it attained the status of an important industrial power around 1900, and its success in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) created great excitement, since it showed that an Asian country could indeed defeat a great European power. The Indian leader Lala Lajpat Rai declared that "Japan had vindicated the honour of Asia". There was expectation that Japan would assist Indian nationalism, and one of the early revolutionary Indian leaders Barkatullah Khan

spent some years in Japan (1910-14); so too did Rash Behari Bose, Mahendra Pratap, and A.M. Sahai. During 1942-45, one of India's major nationalist leaders Subhash Chandra Bose organised Indian National Army with the objective of liberating India from the British, with Japanese assistance.

After World War I, China once again occupied India's attention. It was an unfortunate source of perplexity for those who believed in Asian solidarity that China's troubles now should emanate chiefly from the actions of Japanese imperialism. India's great poet Rabindranath Tagore travelled to Shanghai and met Lu Hsum in 1924 (he also visited Japan). The Indian National Congress sent the Indian Medical Mission under Dr Atal to China (1938-43), for which Mao Zedong wrote a letter of thanks to Nehru (May 1939).

These facts from the history of the Indian National Movement show that the sense of Asian identity began to form as result of the recognition of the fact that India as well as other nations of Asia were the victims of colonialism, and it was important that they should aid each other. The strength of this feeling is reflected in so moderate an Indian scholar-politician as K.M. Panikkar sitting down in the early 1950's to write the history of Western dominance over Asia. It was also, perhaps, inevitable that there was also an attempt to glorify Asia's past. Thus Gandhi himself used to say with some pride that all the major religions of the world had originated in Asia.

Undoubtedly, such sentiments grew in other countries as well. I do not have access to material from the writings of China, Iran or the Arab countries about Asia to present the evidence here; but I expect that references to the common plight of Asian countries were frequently made and even a pan-Asian consciousness projected.

This sentiment needs, however, to be distinguished from an appeal to the Asian identity made from the motive of justifying parity with colonial powers. Since Japan developed as the first capitalist nation in Asia, it is not surprising that such a stance should have been taken so vigorously by some circles in Japan. Benedict Anderson quotes Kita Ikki, an influential ideologue, as demanding in his *Nihon Kaizo Hoan Taiko* (1924) that Japan should have equal rights to possess other territories, at par with Britain and Russia; he laid claims to Australia and Eastern Siberia on behalf of Japan. In fact, Imperial Japan's colonial acquisitions were perforce confined to Asian countries, and such slogans as 'Asia for Asiatics' or 'East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' could hardly conceal the inter-Asian conflicts her policy of expansion generated.

VI

The end of World War II created a new groundwork for Asian solidarity.

Imperial Japan being defeated, its colonial framework was destroyed. The destruction was huge in human costs because of the atomic attacks by the US on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945 — an attack all the more reprehensible since the USSR's joining the war was imminent by previous agreement. There was a feeling engendered immediately (as I remember the reaction of my parents and my own at the time)— and, nothing has come to light since to show it was wrong — that Japan was chosen as a testing ground because those who would suffer were, after all, Asians. It may be recalled that for this very reason the Indian judge on the War Crimes tribunal could not join in the condemnation of the Japanese accused when those who perpetrated Hiroshima and Nagasaki were going scots-free.

Another factor was the attempt of the European colonial powers to re-establish the position they had lost in South-east Asia and to retain it elsewhere, the flash points being Indonesia and Vietnam. The Inter-Asian Relations Conference at Delhi, in April 1947, organized under the auspices of the Provisional Government at Delhi, was certainly in part a reaction to this attempt (the Central Asian republics of the USSR also participated in this conference). An effort was made at Delhi to build up a feeling of Asian brotherhood by publishing portraits of Indians leaders, like Gandhi and Tagore, and of Sun Yet-Sen, Kemal Ataturk and Count Okakura, who were all deemed to have been advocates of Asian unity. This Conference, though not, perhaps, a landmark in itself, was nevertheless an attempt to express the need for Asian solidarity at a moment of crisis of old-style colonialism. Such efforts certainly added to pressures on the Dutch, who finally recognized the independence of Indonesia in 1949.

Opposition to colonialism naturally brought in Africa, where after its 1952 Revolution, Egypt had begun to play a prominent role. The defining moment came with the Conference of heads of governments of 29 Asian and African states at Bandung (Indonesia) in 1955. Here, defying Cold War alignments, both China and India played a prominent part in calling for the removal of all vestiges of colonialism in Asia and Africa and for safeguarding the independence of the post-colonial nations. Sukarno, the Indonesian leader, was to later describe the latter task aptly as a struggle against 'Neo-colonialism'.

Subsequent events, however, disrupted these developments. The pressures of the 'Cold

War' led to the emergence of the 'Non-aligned' camp, which cut across Asia, in that China, the largest Asian country, was excluded from it, along with countries, on the opposite side, like Japan and the SEATO countries, aligned with the USA. Territorial disputes between Asian nations, like India's with Pakistan and China, or Iraq's with Iran and Kuwait, blown out of proportion by local nationalisms, thwarted the growth of an Asian spirit. It seems a small mercy that institutions like the Asian Games or the Asian History Congress nonetheless survived.

It is, therefore, ironical that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the West's victory in the Cold War, there should now be again raised the spectre of a 'clash of Civilizations', *a la* Huntington, or of a challenge to the West seen in the economic growth of Asian nations, first, Japan, and, now, China and India. It would seem as if once again 'Asia' is more the mental construct of the West (as the 'Other') than of the Asian peoples themselves.

There are, however, two sets of facts that ought once again to lay the foundations for some form of Asian solidarity. The first set of facts are essentially of an economic character. These derive from the fact that once the Asian countries' internal stagnation let western colonialism dominate Asia, the continent's economic status declined precipitously. I here draw upon the data which Angus Maddison collects together in *The World Economy — a Millennial Perspective*, Paris, 2001, a publication of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development. Maddison estimates that Asia (excluding Japan) accounted for 62.1 per cent. of the World GDP around 1500, but for only 15.5 per cent. in 1950. Despite 'decolonization', the percentage remained at 16.4 in 1973. Thereafter Asia's share increased to 29.5 per cent. in 1998, which, though a considerable improvement, is still far behind its share in world population, viz., 57.4 per cent. Even if Japan is added, Asia's share in World GDP in 1998 would have been 37.2 per cent. as against its share in world population at 59.5 per cent. (It must be remembered that the figures for the GDP of Asia, excluding Japan, have been raised considerably by use of the Purchasing Power Parity converters replacing market currency exchange rates, for stating the GDP in 'International Dollars'). It is, therefore, obvious that for a very large part of Asia the sheer removal of poverty remains a shared problem. (In contrast to Asia, Western Europe with 6.6 per cent of the world population contributed 20.6 per cent of World GDP.)

There is an acute dissatisfaction among many with the notion that a mere introduction of 'globalization' or unqualified openness to foreign investment and commercial

penetration is an adequate solution to the economic difficulties of independent Asian countries. It is time to remind ourselves of Arghiri Emmanuel's thesis of 'unequal exchange' (*Unequal Exchange: a Study of Imperialism of Trade*, 1969; transl., 1972), though we may, perhaps, replace his argument about the cause of it, viz. high wages in 'developed' countries, by the higher capital-intensity in the industries of those countries. The GDP per person employed in the US rose from 23,615 in 1950 to 55,618 in 1998 in terms of 1990 international dollars, while the corresponding figures for China were 1,297 and 6,181 and for India 1,377 and 4,510. The current hue and cry in western countries about the 'out-sourcing' of certain services and production to relatively labour-intensive service and industrial sectors in Asia underline the kind of relationships that are now developing with the advanced countries practically enjoying a monopoly of capital-intensive technology.

This monopoly gets broken only where Asian countries use their independence to take special measures to develop and protect their capital-goods industries, as, indeed, China and India did through building up huge sectors of public-owned industries by the late 1970's. Owing to rapid technological changes, such 'public sectors' need continuous renewal and expansion, often by measures that cannot be deemed 'profitable' under ordinary market considerations. There is much anxiety among Western countries, especially the United States, to prevent such measures by developing countries through invoking instruments like the WTO and by applying open political pressures. The US opposition to the Iran-India gas pipeline, to which India seems currently to be succumbing, is one illustration of how the economic freedom of Asian countries is being daily endangered.

It must be realized that the USA's ability to exercise this kind of power does not come solely from its economic strength. Since 1988 it no longer remained a nation with net assets abroad. By 1998 its foreign assets deficit had reached \$1.5 trillion or 20 per cent. of its national income. As its economic strength has faltered, USA's military power has become correspondingly important for it.

This brings me to the political set of factors I was speaking about. Ever since the beginning of this century it has been recognized, with almost no protest from any Asian powers, that the US and its allies have a right to intervene at will in Asia. The 2003 invasion of Iraq by the so-called Coalition forces, led by the US, was a brazen illegal invasion of an Asian country by western armies. Earlier Afghanistan was brought under not only the US but also the NATO's sphere of operations. Syria is being threatened

with similar military action, and Iran by sanctions. President Bush's repeated announcement that the USA is entitled to bring about "regime change" has not met with any challenge from any Asian government, apart from the governments immediately threatened ('the axis of evil' countries) — and by Malaysia.

Unfortunately, popular resentment against these neo-imperialist actions, is increasingly taking a religious colour in West Asia and partly in South-east Asia, as if what the Asia countries are faced with today is exclusively a Western crusade against the religion and culture of Islam. There is no doubt that nationalisms have often invoked religion to fortify patriots, who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the cause, with still greater conviction. Catholicism was used to mobilise the Irish people for freedom by Irish nationalists, and similarly, Hindu sentiments in India were appealed to by the nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak. It is understandable that there should be widespread admiration for the bravery shown by certain militant organisations in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and other countries in standing up to the US and its allies like Britain and Israel. Yet it needs to be recognised that by constantly appealing to Islamic peoples only, the leaders of these resistance movements show a total undifference to the cause of the solidarity of Asian and other peoples, which is crucial for restraining and resisting the growing dominance of Western powers over the world. It is worth recalling the advice that Jamaluddin Afghani, the founder of Pan-Islamism, gave to young Muslims of Calcutta in 1882: he asked them to be loyal to India in order not to divide the ranks of people opposing British imperialism. That kind of vision is needed, if we hope to convert the hurt that we felt yesterday over Vietnam and must feel today over Iraq into a sense of Asian identity, which can then help all of us to unite and give 'Asia for Asians' a new democratic substance — a craving for the continent's complete liberation.

If Asia has to achieve the necessary transformation of its consciousness for this end, as rapidly as circumstances demand, then, the role of Japan, as the most advanced nation of Asia in terms of material circumstances and scientific attainments is surely crucial. Japan has already done so much to teach us. Let me salute the memory of those in Japan who before 1945 laid their lives or faced imprisonment and persecution, for their opposition to expansionist wars. The suffering of people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is a constant reminder to us of the sheer ruthlessness of imperialism. The fortitude and determination with which the Japanese people rebuilt their country and made Japan the second biggest economy in the world have been a source of inspiration to all other Asian peoples. And, finally, the defiant spirit with which the Japanese peo-

ple, with Japan's intellectuals and scientists in their front ranks, have opposed the revival of militarism and upheld the cause of freedom and peace has a message for the conscience of people throughout the world. In constructing Asian solidarity, so as to serve the cause of safeguarding national independence, preserving peace, and furthering development, the contribution of the Japanese people could be of decisive importance today. Thank you.

(Irfan Habib)

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