

India and Mixed Culture

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Since time immemorial, the Indian civilization has prospered, spanning the extensive region of Southeast Asia. When delving into the prevailing culture of this area, it becomes evident that the Southeast Asian expanse has enjoyed exceptional prosperity throughout history. The intricately adorned sculptures of divine deities serve as a reminder that the region's rich artistic heritage seamlessly integrated into our cultural legacy over generations, owing to its unparalleled historical affluence. Before delving into the present-day amalgamated cultures across various Southeast Asian regions, it is crucial to comprehend the diverse forms these cultures have assumed. Historical evidence points to the early stages, where the Bhimbetka rock shelters, embellished with unique paintings, bear witness to the extraordinary creativity of ancient Indian art. These artistic expressions, resonating with antiquity and grandeur, captivate individuals across various backgrounds, transcending distinctions of caste, religion, and age. Essentially, ancient Indian art, particularly in the Southeast Asian subcontinent, has been profoundly ancient, dynamically creative, and universally appealing, captivating society's imagination with its rich cultural, artistic, and philosophical tapestry.

Historical records indicate that during eras when civilization had not yet spread globally, or when knowledge had not illuminated every corner of the world, ancient Indian sages, through their concealed discoveries, established ashrams with the aim of enlightening society. Their wealth of knowledge, acquired through diligent efforts, was passed down through generations, safeguarded by the guru-disciple tradition, to protect and preserve society. The concept of "Veda" or knowledge originated from the sentiments or experiences (in ancient times, the term "Vedana" meant experience) of these sages, whose constant endeavor was to illuminate society through the dissemination of knowledge. The term "Veda" or "Vid," meaning knowledge, therefore, has its roots in the practice of imparting knowledge to society.

The cultural richness, artistic expressions, and intellectual pursuits of ancient India have significantly enriched and captivated not only its own society but also those from outside, who embraced and contributed to the diverse wealth of its culture, including art, music, dance, and more. The word "Veda" finds its origin in the early inclination to explore and refine knowledge for the benefit of society. In the ancient era, the munis (sages) dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge played a pivotal role in establishing a tradition that continued to thrive, turning the Indian subcontinent into a repository of diverse cultural, artistic, and philosophical traditions. In the poem "Bharat Tirtha," Rabindranath Tagore eloquently recites that perennial, eternal, and melodious proclamation—

No one knows whose call it is,
The stream flows far from the court, lost in the sea;

(কেহ নাহি জানে কার আহ্বানে কত মানুষের ধারা
দুর্বার স্রোতে এল কোথা হতে, সমুদ্রে হল হারা ;)

Here, Aryans and non-Aryans, Dravidians,
Shakas, Huns, Pathans, Mughals—all merge into one.

(হেথায় আর্য, হেথা অনার্য, হেথায় দ্রাবিড় চীন-
শক-হুন-দল পাঠান মোগল একদেহে হল লীন)

In the West, the gates have opened today,
Bringing gifts for everyone,
Exchanging, meeting, never to return,
At the shores of India's great humanity.

(পশ্চিমে আজি খুলিয়াছে দ্বার, সেথা হতে সবে আনে উপহার
দিবে আর নিবে, মিলাবে মিলিবে, যাবেনা ফিরে,
এই ভারতের মহামানবের সাগরতীরে।)

The battlefield echoes with victorious songs,
The mad whirlwind of the desert and mountains,
They all reside within me, close and distant,
Their diverse melodies resonate in my blood.

(রণধারা বাহি জয়গান গাহি উন্মাদ কলরবে
ভেদি মরুপথ গিরিপর্বত যারা এসেছিল সবে
তারা মোর মাঝে সবাই বিরাজে, কেহ নহে নহে দূর
আমার শোণিতে রয়েছে ধ্বনিতে তার বিচিত্র সুরা)

Come, Aryans, come, non-Aryans,
Hindus, Muslims,
Come, English, come, Christians,
Brahmins, cleanse your hearts, embrace all,
Come, fallen ones, bear the weight of dishonor.

(এসো হে আর্য, এসো অনার্য, হিন্দু মুসলমান
এসো এসো আজ তুমি ইংরাজ, এসো এসো খৃস্টান
এসো ব্রাহ্মণ, শুচি করি মন ধরো হাত সবাকার
এসো হে পতিত, হোক অপনীত সব অপমানভার।)

Hasten to my consecration,
Where the holy river meets the sacred shore,
At the ocean of India's vast humanity.

(মোর অভিক্ষেপে এসো এসো ত্বরা, মঙ্গলঘট হয়নি যে ভরা
সবার-পরশে-পবিত্র-করা তীর্থনীরে
আজি ভারতের মহা মানবের সাগরতীরে।)

This poem appears to capture the fundamental essence of South Asia, specifically delving into the history and literature of Bangladesh. Within the rich tapestry of culture and history in Bangladesh, there is a blending of diverse influences. Throughout its various epochs, Bangladesh has been at the forefront of embracing innovation and progress.

Going back in time, during the prehistoric era, a significant majority, around 95% of Bangladesh's population, adhered to Brahmanical ideologies and practices. However, around the 6th century BCE, during the time of Lord Buddha, a significant shift occurred as people veered away from the Brahmanical path and embraced the teachings of Gautama Buddha. This marked the adoption of new beliefs and paths, giving rise to a new societal framework and mindset.

Over an extended period, amid various conflicts and interactions, some segments of the population in Bangladesh converted to Islam during the Islamic rule. This transformation involved assimilating new cultural and ideological perspectives while still maintaining a connection with their roots, resulting in the formation of a fresh societal paradigm.

This transformation is not unique to Bangladesh but is evident across South Asia when viewed from a global perspective. The entire Indian subcontinent has experienced similar metamorphoses, both externally and internally, seamlessly intertwining various aspects. Despite differences in religious doctrines, there exists a pervasive environment of mutual respect, camaraderie, and a loving atmosphere conducive to coexistence, evident in dietary habits, clothing styles, language, and cultural amalgamation.

When this deeply ingrained, well-nurtured humanity manifests, it acts as a catalyst for the flourishing of human consciousness, fostering trust, reverence, and a well-informed awareness towards one another. As the renowned poet expressed, "In how many colors, fragrances, and tunes, in how many rhythms, in your formless form's play, the heart awakens!" ("কত বর্ণে, কত গন্ধে, কত গানে, কত ছন্দে, অরূপ তোমার রূপের লীলায় জাগে হৃদয়পুর")।

Shifting our focus from general subjects to specific topics, is there a potential risk of causing harm by expecting that the topic will more clearly resonate with our consciousness? The direction of our independent opinions deeply influences society. Throughout history, profound thinking has been cultivated through the Vedas, sowing the seeds of consciousness. The increased use of iron during this period alleviated labor pressures, allowing for leisure. Consequently, spiritual and philosophical thoughts flourished around 700 BCE and beyond, marked by the composition of Brahman and Upanishadic texts.

The compilation of timeless and independent wisdom found in the Upanishads indicates that the foundations of Indian culture have long been nurtured by ideals of well-being and the common good. The Vedic religion was initially established with noble intentions. However, a significant portion of the priestly class, the Brahmins, distorted the benevolent teachings of the Vedas, turning Brahmanism into a weapon wielded by the priestly society to exploit and oppress the common people. This misuse of the Vedas' benevolent aspects transformed the Brahmanical society, using Brahmanism as a tool for exploitation and oppression, as depicted in Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay's story "Maheshh."

In search of liberation, people abandoned the existing path and embraced new directions, giving rise to various ideologies such as the Charvaka sect, the Jaina tradition, and the highly influential philosophy propagated by Gautama Buddha. The misuse of the Brahmanical tradition by the priestly class led to the emergence of Jainism, while Gautama Buddha's philosophy and ethical teachings gained widespread influence, leading to the birth of new sects and thoughts.

During the Upanishadic era, the words of sage Uddalaka stand out in highlighting the spread of Brahmanical ideology and the exploitation of the common people by the priestly class, turning Brahmanism into a weapon. Despite opposition to Brahmanism, various ideologies emerged, including the Charvaka sect advocating materialistic ideologies. Gautama Buddha's philosophy and ethical teachings became the most influential, guiding people towards overcoming suffering and transcending toward their goals. This era witnessed the birth of diverse philosophies as people explored new paths in pursuit of happiness, peace, and a utopian society.

The birthplace of this invaluable education is India, specifically South Asia. Gautama Buddha's teachings, continuing to guide humanity towards true humanism, possess the transformative power to elevate humanity to divinity. Following Siddhartha Gautama's footsteps, subsequent eras in the Indian subcontinent saw the emergence of great souls as torchbearers of the compassionate path. In the 3rd century BCE, Emperor Ashoka, formerly known as Ashoka the Great, underwent a profound transformation from 'Chanda Ashoka' to 'Dhamma Ashoka'. He dedicated monumental efforts beyond his empire, practicing self-discipline for the welfare of humanity and the world. To safeguard these teachings, he inscribed them on rocks and pillars, burying them underground. Despite challenges from Brahmanical orthodoxy and later Islamic invasions, Gautama Buddha's path was obscured in the homeland. However, the magnificent melody hidden in the depths of South Asia has continued to illuminate the world with the brilliance of magnanimity and humanity.

Despite the harshness of Brahmanical fanaticism and the subsequent invasion by Islamic forces, the teachings of Gautama Buddha were lost in his homeland. Nevertheless, the profound melody emanating from South Asia has continued to illuminate the world with the brilliance of magnanimity and humanity. Though we can discern the social, cultural, and religious currents that have shaped the distant past, there is no comparison to the fears of bygone eras. The present framework, extending from ancient times to the present, stands resolute above the apprehensions of the past.

Amidst the medieval darkness, a remarkable structure emerges, marked by the resounding echoes of an ancient symphony. The current social, cultural, and religious diversity, evolving from a distant past to the present, is particularly impressive and stands tall above the apprehensions of the past. In a distinctive chapter of time, Sri Chaitanya Deva manifested, bringing a new wave of enlightenment in the medieval darkness of Bengal.

In the love of Krishna, the Matuas have become a unifying force, transcending the boundaries of Hindu and Muslim, blending everyone in the mantra of love and the ocean of compassion. Rich and poor, high and low, black and white, all blend together in the air of Bengal. Gauranga, through the mantra of love, struck at the roots of discrimination in a society rooted in unity in

diversity. The symbol of intolerance, Jagai-Madhai, transformed at the touch of Krishna's name, asking, "They have sinned, so shall I not give love?" ("মেয়েছে কলসির কাণা, তাই বলে কি প্রেম দেবোনা?") In an era of medieval barbarism, the common people, oppressed by domestic Brahmanical orthodoxy and foreign Islamic forces, found a beacon of enlightenment.

Gauranga, as a historical figure, emerged from the depths of the Bengali soul, extending his direction to lead society. In the age of primordial barbarism, he became the glowing manifestation of enlightenment, guiding the Bengali nation with its deep-rooted culture. Embracing the tolerant form of the ancient Sanatan path, Gauranga's teachings spread widely, giving rise to the syncretic religion named Vaishnav Dharma. This erased dividing lines among people of all levels in society and propelled the Bengali community forward in self-discipline.

Gauranga, through his teachings, erased boundaries among people of all societal levels and propelled the Bengali community forward in self-discipline. In the words of Kabir, "The one who is more tolerant than a tree, more humble than a blade of grass, that person is a true Vaishnava; they do not boast of their achievements." ("তরু হতে যে বা হয় সহিষ্ণু, তৃণ হতে দীনতর, সেই বৈষ্ণব; জয়গৌরব ভাবে না সে কতু বড়ো") Gauranga advanced the rights of self-control in Bengali society not through material victories but through the development of internal wealth, as Kabir expressed, "Greatness is not in external victories, but in the development of inner wealth for the welfare of humanity and the world."

As Bengalis and Indians, we have the opportunity to introspect and present ourselves as torchbearers of wisdom, moving forward on the path of human welfare and the meaningfulness of life – this is the essence of Gauranga's philosophy. Time continued to march on, and with the decline of Islamic rule, the English established their colonial regime. It was during this period that Sri Ramakrishna emerged in Bengal, spreading harmony within the behavior of an ordinary village boy. His concept of harmony and actions became evident during his ascetic life when he accepted the mother in the form of begging.

Residing in Kamarpukur, Chaitanya's family radiated the world with his enchanting spells. Immersed in the stream of syncretic culture, he imparted the grand mantra to the world - "As many opinions, so many paths." ("যত মত, তত পথ") Amid European priests propagating Christianity and non-theistic Brahmos involved in a religious renaissance, the advent of Sri Ramakrishna as a symbol of harmony marked the beginning of unity in Bengali and Indian history.

In his attraction, people from various religious sects and different segments of society, regardless of wealth or poverty, found solace in the cool shade of peace. Swami Vivekananda, formerly known as Narendra Nath Dutt, profoundly assisted in the expression of Mahanubhivism as a spiritual successor. His words at the World's Parliament of Religions in America captivated the Western world, accepting him as a revered leader. Vivekananda's ability to turn the impossible into reality, and his emphasis on the development of human qualities prevalent in South Asia, especially in the context of prevailing humanitarian traits, was highlighted.

The crux of his philosophy centered on the development of human qualities and the meaningfulness of life, casting a radiant illumination over the world in the tranquil shade of peace. According to Swami Vivekananda, "What can destroy you? Your own wicked thoughts, desires, and hates. As long as you carry within your heart the ideal of the Self within, no external power can harm you." As a guiding light of enlightenment, he steered India towards self-discovery and introspection, emphasizing the principles of unity and harmonious coexistence.

In this narrative, it is crucial to mention Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual consort and disciple, Sri Sri Ma Sarada Devi. Despite lacking modern education, she was an ordinary village bride with an extraordinarily advanced inner self. Her life's pursuit, expressed through embracing her maternal role, brings forth a new dimension. Ma asserted, "My Sharat is like my son, and this Ajad is also like my son." (আমার শরৎ যেমন ছেলে, এই আমজাদও তেমন ছেলে) Sharat, Swami Saradananda, became the editor of Ramakrishna Mission, while Ajad was considered a dacoit; yet, in the eyes of the Divine Mother, both were equal. Ma proclaimed, "I am the mother of both the virtuous and the non-virtuous." ("আমি সতেরও মা, অসতেরও মা")

The ideal image of Sri Ramakrishna portrayed by Sri Ma showcased a grand vision of life for humanity. His extraordinary life was complemented by an extraordinary philosophy. Many contemplative individuals today believe that the challenges in social, ethical, and spiritual life in modern India and the world necessitate deep reflection on Sri Ma's life and adherence to her ideals.

In the subsequent era, followers of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Saradamayi, through their selfless service, have contributed to the world. Their efforts have spread the radiance of Ramakrishna's philosophy to every corner of the globe. Acknowledged as indispensable for the well-being of the world, their contributions carry the stream of syncretic culture. The life of Sri Sri Sarada Ma and her adherence to ideals have become a shining beacon, resonating in our hearts and minds.

A saying of Sri Sri Sarada Ma encapsulates the essence: "If you seek peace, do not find fault with anyone; find fault with yourself. Learn to make yourself one with the world. In your own hands lies the salvation of the world." ("যদি শান্তি চাও, কারো দোষ দেখো না; দোষ দেখবে নিজের। জগৎকে আপনার করে নিতে শেখো, কেউ পর নয়, জগৎ তোমার।")

As an analogy, we can liken society to clothing that requires washing when excessively dirty. Similarly, when society becomes polluted, a great being incarnates to purify and liberate it from impurities. Through historical experience, we observe that this phenomenon has recurred in the Indian subcontinent since ancient times, with human society repeatedly seeking progress and development by bringing about changes in its social fabric. In the modern age, what has gained significance in society is the incredible expansion and progress of science and technology. The arrival of the modern era has witnessed society placing importance on the incredible expansion and development of science and technology.

In various regions worldwide, the amalgamation of diverse ideologies, coupled with the influence of European liberal thought, has introduced a new dimension to blended cultures. This newly formed blended culture has thrived, transcending the limitations of religion-centric perspectives, fostering the growth of human thought and consciousness. The history of independence movements in Europe and America, such as the French Revolution and movements advocating human rights has further enriched the narrative of blended culture.

Throughout different eras and across nations, a universally recognized concern is the continuous effort to uplift the vulnerable and establish protective laws for their well-being and security. Ensuring equal protection for all, regardless of race or religion, necessitates the safeguarding of blended culture. The security of society and its culture hinges on giving prominence to the mixed cultural tradition. Prioritizing the mixed culture is essential for strengthening self-security and guiding human society forward. Any negligence in this regard will have far-reaching consequences for humanity. Although humans possess intellectual and humane qualities that distinguish them from other creatures, there exists an inherent animalistic aspect within us. By engaging in thoughtful exploration of organized, virtuous, and auspicious mixed cultures, we can overcome animalistic traits and progress from humanity towards divinity through spiritual exploration. The next level of Brahmatva, the highest spiritual state, is achievable through focused exploration, establishing the mixed cultural tradition as its bearer and guardian. A wise being is described as Arihant (victorious over inner enemies), Siddha (trikala jnani – knower of past, present, and future), Acharya (possessor of true knowledge and virtues), Suvrat (one with virtuous conduct), Lokavid (knower of the world), Anuttaropurisadhamma (unsurpassable teacher), Sthitadheeva-manushyanam (upholder of gods and humans), and Buddha (enlightened one – pure, liberated, omniscient). The term "Bhagava" is attributed to such a being, symbolizing one who has broken the bondage of desires, the liberator, and protector.

From the early stages of Lord Buddha's life, it is evident that he embraced various prevailing spiritual paths of his time in his pursuit of liberation or achieving Nirvana. Through contemplation, reflection, and meditation, he attained specific goals. In simpler terms, an individual, through syncretism and diverse discussions, can naturally find the correct path. Analogous to consuming various types of food for proper bodily nourishment, eliminating mixed doctrines for mental nourishment naturally leads to becoming a global-minded individual with love for all. The undercurrent of mixed culture is apparent here, as instances of such great beings are found repeatedly.

Examining Rabindranath Tagore's life, it is observable that from a young age, he cultivated his understanding of life through multifaceted discussions. By embracing various cultures, he presented a new form of wealth to the world through his writings—an exemplary manifestation of the prevailing current of mixed culture. The gifts of his inner thoughts and prayers were globally recognized through his poetic work "Gitanjali." The Nobel Prize he received serves as an indication of the triumph of our mixed culture. His earnest prayer to the Creator reflects, "O Lord, Grant me forgiveness as well. Leaving my home, I walk this path, sitting with a heavy heart. Prepare a seat in my heart, for I know I am Your unworthy child. I must find a place at Your feet. I have submerged in sin, and I weep in anguish. Listen to my heartfelt plea." ("আমারেও করো মার্জনা, আমারেও দেহ নাথ অমৃতের কণা, গৃহ ছেড়ে পথে এসে, বসে আছি ম্লান বেশে; আমরা হৃদয়ে করো আসন রচনা, জানি আমি, আমি তব মলিন সন্তান, আমারেও দিতে হবে পদতলে স্থান, আপনি ডুবেছি পাপে, কাঁদিতেছি মনস্তাপে, শুনগো আমারও এই মরমবেদনা।") Essentially, if the goal of human life is to attain immortality, discussions on mixed culture are capable of achieving that. These discussions have provided him with the realization that, "If you turn me away repeatedly, the worship will

not blossom, sorrow will not be dispelled, and the veil will not be torn. Life will be filled with sweetness; when will it awaken in auspicious moments, O Lord? O Lord, when will the body, mind, and wealth be gained?" ("মোরে বারে বারে ফিরালে, পূজা ফুল না ফুটিল, দুখ নিশা না ছুটিল, না টুটিল আবরণা জীবন ভরি মাধুরী, কি শুভ লগনে জাগিবে? নাথ ওহে নাথ, কবে লবে তনু মন ধন")

In Rabindranath's realization, after the flower of worship blooms, after the end of the night of sorrow, and after shedding the veil, the body-mind-soul-wealth all become useful for benevolent activities. The poet rises and sings, "Where does the pain of love awaken? Slowly, I realize the dense darkness. In the courtyard of my heart, my beloved arrives. All my sorrows are distant, O Lord. Awake in joy, O soul. Ignite all the lamps, burn brightly, and call out in eager voice. Come, O dearest." ("কোথা হতে জাগে প্রেম বেদনারে, ধীরে ধীরে বুঝি অন্ধকার ঘন, হৃদয় অঙ্গনে আসে সখা মম, সকল দৈন্য তব, দূর করো ওরে, জাগো সুখে ওরে প্রাণ, সকল প্রদীপ তব জ্বালো রে জ্বালো রে, ডাকো আকুল স্বরে এসো হে প্রিয়তম")

Essentially, the latent qualities within humans can blossom, and the limitless welfare of the human race can be achieved by dispelling the darkness in the middle of the heart. In this context, he can say, "After robbing the soil beneath the throne, O Lord, I will become dust at your feet; why keep me away with honor, forget me like this forever, bring me close, O Lord... I am behind the procession of your devotees, give me a place below everyone." ("ওই আসনতলের মাটির পরে লুটিয়ে রব, তোমার চরণ ধূলায় ধূলায় ধূসর হবো; কেন আমায় মান দিয়ে আর দূরে রাখো, চিরজনম এমন করে ভুলিয়ে না কো, অসম্মানে আনো টেনে পায়ে তব..... আমি তোমার যাত্রীদের রব পিছে, স্থান দিয়ে হে আমায় তুমি সবার নীচে.....")

In the expansive region of South Asia, where the current of mixed culture flows, we witness the manifestation of such richness everywhere—in art, literature, music, and history. Therefore, over the ages, across nations and people, the current of mixed culture has disseminated, dispelling the darkness of ignorance. We have become capable of guiding the restless world in the correct direction. Let the current of mixed culture, prevalent in South Asia, eliminate the darkness of ignorance and illuminate the world with the light of true knowledge. This enduring current, flowing through all ages and times, holds the potential to ultimately dispel darkness.

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