

## **Rethinking Cultural Heritage: Indo-Japanese Dialogue in a Globalising World Order 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> August 2018**

### **Objectives:**

- To focus on the relatively under-researched theme of locating Indo-Japanese dialogue through the prism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century when India was under colonial rule and Japan was trying to end its isolation in the Meiji period (1868 – 1912). The starting point of this dialogue is the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, where Buddhism was represented by both India and Japan. How did the global vision of the Congress impact the restructuring of Buddhism in the two countries?
- Two important pan-Asianists that may be relevant to the discussion are Okakura Kakuzō (1863-1913), the founder of the Japan Art Institute and Swami Vivekananda (1863 – 1902) who took Indian religions to the world.
- This conference would limit its enquiry to the ‘discovery’ of Buddhism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century and its restructuring through new disciplines such as archaeology and the impact that this had on the making of ‘monolithic’ sacred spaces in India and Japan. Did this consolidation in the cause of modernity lead to fragmentation of religious identities within the plural and multi-religious fabric of societies of Asia?
- Two other themes of interest are: the revival of interest in the traditional arts and crafts to engage with a mass audience, especially evident in the artist Nandalal Bose’s posters exhibited at annual sessions of the Congress; or in Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya’s revival of the crafts.
- The discussion has contemporary relevance as it could provide a blue print for the promotion of a plural cultural heritage in India and Japan that transcends monolithic religious identities created and consolidated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. This could initiate a bilateral cultural dialogue, rather than continuing with a 19<sup>th</sup> century paradigm.

### **Background Note:**

In September 1893 the World Parliament of Religions was held for seventeen days at Chicago and coincided with the great World Fair built to celebrate the quarter centenary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. One of the objectives of the Parliament was “to forge a public religion for a globalizing society,” which at the end of the nineteenth century was

perceived as the Christian century.<sup>1</sup> It involved representatives of ten world religions such as Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Swami Vivekananda was one of the charismatic speakers who “combined elements of East and West in order to forge a strategy to further an Asian agenda.”<sup>2</sup>

Though 152 of the 194 papers were on Christianity, there was some representation from other religions, such as 12 speakers represented Buddhism, 11 Judaism, 8 Hinduism, 2 Islam, 2 Parsi religion, 2 Shintoism, 2 Confucianism, 1 Taoism, and 1 Jainism. The largest non-Christian Asian delegation was thus of the Buddhists. Anagarika Dharmapala, a Theosophist from Sri Lanka, represented Buddhism at the World Parliament, while His Royal Highness Prince Chadradat Chuddadharma, brother of the king of Siam was the other prominent representative of Buddhism. The impact that these visits had in terms of the revival of interest in Buddhism in the subcontinent has been discussed elsewhere, especially in terms of identifying and claiming control over archaeological sites associated with the life of the Buddha in India.<sup>3</sup>

In the context of Japan, “the narrative of Zen in the West” begins with the introduction of Japanese Buddhism, by a delegation of Buddhist priests from the Meiji Buddhist revival movement to the World Parliament of Religions. The Buddhism that they presented was shaped by the desire to produce an interpretation appropriate for the modern state.<sup>4</sup> At the time of the World Parliament, Okakura Kakuzo or Okakura Tenshin (1862 – 1913), as he was popularly known, was the Director of Tokyo Fine Arts Academy and presented the Hooden exhibit representing several periods of traditional Japanese architecture. Each of the structures showed contemporary Japanese art to highlight its vitality as it constituted an integration of traditional and modern forms. To what extent did this pan-Asian agenda in understanding religion and the arts provide the foundations for an Indo Japanese dialogue in the context of early Buddhist art and architecture?

The Japanese art critic and intellectual Okakura Kakuzo is known for his statement ‘Asia is One’ in his book *The Ideals of the East*.<sup>5</sup> The underlying objective of the book was to elaborate on Japan’s aesthetic cultural heritage and also to make a plea for preserving traditional art styles. He travelled to India in 1902 and met Rabindranath Tagore in Calcutta, as also the frail Swami

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hughes Seager, *The World’s Parliament of Religions: The East/ West Encounter*, Chicago, 1893, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Seager, *The World’s Parliament of Religions*: 111.

<sup>3</sup> Himanshu Prabha Ray, *The Return of the Buddha: Ancient Symbols for a New Nation*, Routledge, 2014: 26-30.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West*, University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Yoshiaki Miura, Okakura Tenshin and India, *China Report*, July 1, 1986, Volume: 22 issue: 3: 277-285.

Vivekananda.<sup>6</sup> This visit helped consolidate his views on art history and more importantly on early Buddhist art in India.<sup>7</sup> To what extent did Kakuzo's views on early Buddhist art impact its development in Japan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? Particularly relevant for this conference is Kakuzo's stress that Gandharan art was influenced by Chinese and Persian art rather than that of the Greeks – the latter view being propagated by European scholars, which found and continues to find greater resonance in India.

The institutionalization of the discipline of archaeology under colonial rule in India and the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1861 had far-reaching implications for the making of distinctive sacred spaces categorized based on religion. The first Director-General of ASI, Alexander Cunningham (1814-1893) initiated a search for the historical Buddha and sites associated with his life, on the assumption that the Buddha as a social reformer led a crusade against Hinduism, which figured in Victorian writings. Through Alexander Cunningham and his pursuit of field-work, these ideas found their archaeological manifestation and continue to be repeated to the present.

As discussed in my 2014 book, the *Return of the Buddha: Ancient Symbols for a New Nation*, these archaeological discoveries were widely reported in the print media not only in India, but across the world and helped build a global image of Buddhism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The adoption of Buddhist symbols, such as the Ashokan cakra and the Sarnath lion capital by India as national symbols at the time of independence on August 15, 1947 and the inclusion of paintings from history in the Constitution of India was the outcome of heightened public interest and enthusiasm for the Buddhist past, coupled with an appreciation of the deep cultural roots of the country by the political elite.

A theme that is just garnering attention in India is the extent to which archaeologists served as collaborators in the project of colonial knowledge production, especially with reference to creating iconic 'Hindu' 'Buddhist' 'Jain' and 'Muslim' spaces thereby further exacerbating

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6 Rustom Bharucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin*, Oxford Scholarship Online, October 2012.

<sup>7</sup> In *The Ideals of the East*, Okakura states: "In India the art of this early Buddhism was a natural growth out of that of the Epic age that went before. For it is idle to deny the existence of pre-Buddhistic Indian art, ascribing its sudden birth to the influence of the Greeks, as European archeologists are wont to do (74)." As for Gandharan arts, Okakura comments, ". . . a deeper and better-informed study of the works of Gandhara itself will reveal a greater prominence of Chinese than of the so-called Greek characteristics. . . The Alexandrian invasion means rather the extension of Persian influence than Hellenic cultures (78)." Masako N. Racel, Okakura Kakuzō's Art History: Cross-Cultural Encounters, Hegelian Dialectics and Darwinian Evolution, *Asian Review of World Histories* 2:1, January 2014: 17-45; footnote 10.

religious identities of monuments and structures. This led to marginalization of the multi-religious and plural cultural fabric of the subcontinent and the creation of a monolithic religious identity of monuments. An appropriate example of the multi-religious locations is the site of Ellora, in the Aurangabad district of the present state of Maharashtra in India which has continued to be revered by devotees of different faiths and religious affinities. How did these 19<sup>th</sup> century developments in archaeology and especially archaeology of Buddhism in India impact Japanese cross-cultural dialogue?

Another vital link in Indo-Japan relations is represented by Nichidatsu Fujii (or Gyokatsu, 1885 - 1985) who was a founder and teacher of the Nichiren Sect Nipponzan Myohoji, and known as one of the few Japanese to meet Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) during the Sino-Japanese War. He is best known world-wide for his decision in 1947 to begin constructing Peace Pagodas in many locations around the world as shrines to world peace. The first peace pagodas were built in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, while in India the first one was built in 1965 at Rajgir, an archaeological site associated with early Buddhism and the present location of the Nalanda International University. After the war, Nichidatsu and his followers launched a movement in which they strove for peace, advocating “non-violence,” so that Nipponzan Myohoji remains famous for its pacifism. Nichidatsu is still admired for his achievements in the peace movement and for his role in cultural exchange in Asia. Nichidatsu returned to Manchuria with a bone relic of the Buddha that was given to him by priests in India and Sri Lanka.<sup>8</sup> How does the presence of Shanti Stupas at major Buddhist archaeological sites in India provide a modernist or Japanese Buddhist dimension to the propagation of peace in the contemporary world?

It is hoped that this dialogue will present not only fresh insights into an understanding of cultural interactions between the two countries, but will also help provide a blueprint for highlighting outstanding values of the heritage for future generations. As stated by Irina Bokova, the current Director-General of UNESCO at the 35<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee on 20 June, 2011:

“Heritage is a building block for sustainable development, a vector for social cohesion and reconciliation, and a catalyst for regional cooperation. In a world of

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<sup>8</sup> TSUJIMURA Shinobu, FUJII Nichidatsu's Buddhist Pan-Asianism in Manchuria and India, IAHR, 2005, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120211104653/http://homepage1.nifty.com/tkawase/osigoto/mjbpa.pdf#page=12> accessed on 24 September 2017.

change, world heritage is a reminder of all that unites humanity. It is a reminder also of the ties between culture, nature and societies.”