INNER ASIA AND INDIA
THROUGH THE AGES

—Nirmal C. Sinha

PROLOGUE

Inner Asia and this sub-continent known as India have been inseparably connected through impact on each other for over four thousand years down to our times. The impact of India on Inner Asia in ancient times is common knowledge thanks to discoveries and explorations of Western scholars like Aurel Stein if only one name is to be mentioned. Inner Asia’s impact on India is however not as well known. Among reasons of our ignorance is our preferential reading of history, that India radiated enlightenment all over Asia. Positive evidence of religion and philosophy, arts and culture from India migrating and thriving for centuries in Inner Asia pampers our amour-propre. Reproduction of Ajanta in the Huang Hei temple of Kailasa Mandir on the Khulam or the work of Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow monopolizes our academic pursuits. The vastes of Mani and Ghey in Tibet and Mongolia, and the transformation of the wind Vihara into Bodh Gaya or of Sarthak into Sari in Western Turkestan are so doubtful survivals of Indus culture there. I need not amplify this point.

I would devote myself here into the other side of the medal, that is, what Inner Asia has meant for India’s history and civilization. I humbly draw inspiration from the greatest sage of this century, Rabindranath Tagore, who not only in his famous poem but in many of his writings and utterances highlighted the role of Inner Asian peoples in our past. I own with pride the lessons I had at the feet of Prabodh Chand Bagchi who in my knowledge was the first scholar to highlight as a historian the role of Inner Asia in the life and culture of the entire country.

A few scholars had earlier written on the races from Inner Asia finding their permanent habitat in India. James Tod in the last century wrote his monumental work on the tribes and dynasties later known as Rajput.

Text of Prabodh Bagchi Memorial Lecture at Visva-Bharati on 19 January 1981. The four rules, printed at the end were read as introductory to the Lecture.
Devadatta Ramakrishna Bhanmukar, in the first quarter of this century, wrote on foreign elements in Indian population, particularly of Western India. Sunati Kumar Chatterjee wrote on foreign-diction in Indian languages particularly in Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi from around 1925 made a survey of "Central Asian nomads" setting in, or passing through, India from pre-historic times. He did not confine himself to ethnico-linguistic or regional aspects, but presented his findings as a historian of the entire sub-continent, in a few writings, which are not less important than his great contributions as Sinologist or Sanskritist.

Professor Bagchi's untimely death (1936) took place when the Soviet archaeologists had unearthed an enormous haul of Kushana antiquities. If he had lived for five years more, I am certain, Professor Bagchi would have ably supplemented the findings of Western scholars like Harold Bailey, Bernard Levin or Livinsky. India's loss in the field of Inner Asian studies remains irreparable.

I am neither an antiquarian nor a linguist and I am not fit to follow the trail blazed by Prabodh Chandra Bagchi. My homage to the great polymath is an exercise to condense four thousand years' contacts between Inner Asia and India in an hour long essay. As a student of history I am well aware of the pitfalls in such summing up whether in twenty pages or in as many volumes. I feel diffident when I remember the lapses of the foremost historical scholar of our times Arnold Toynbee, whether in his mammoth work A Study of History or in his interesting monograph Between the Oxus and the Jumna. I thank the Visva Bharati Vice-Chancellor for this gracious invitation to deliver the Bagchi Memorial Lecture. I thank my fellow students and my fellow teachers that you bear with me for an hour.

**WHAT IS INNER ASIA? WHAT IS INDIA?**

The expressions Inner Asia and India may be explained at the outset. Why not Central Asia and why not Bharat?

The expression 'Central Asia' has been variously understood. For most, Central Asia includes Pamirs and all Turkish-speaking regions within Russia and China. Some would include only Uzbek, Kirghiz, Kazak and Tadzhik areas of Russia and Sinkiang of China. Some recently have included Afghanistan. Many on the otherhand exclude Afghanistan, and with good reason it is connected from pre-historic times through folk movements and in historical times through commerce and trade that the expression 'Inner Asia' provides a commodious form. Inner Asia comprehends, in my submission, all the Asian highlands and steppes which are landlocked that is, far away from
the warm waters of the high seas or oceans. 'High seas' is more relevant because to peoples of this landlocked landmass all lakes - big or small -- have all through been 'seas'. In my study I thus include the mass of land spreading clockwise from the Baikal in the northeast to the Caspian in the southwest. The southern limits marked by the mountains like the Himalaya are clear while the northern limits are lost in the snow and steppes. To use modern geographical term People's Republic of Mongolia Inner Mongolia, Sinkiang, Ado, Kham and Tibet regions of People's Republic of China and Kazakh, Kirghiz, Tadzhik, Usbek and Turkmen besides Buriat, Kalmyk and Tuva republics of USSR constitute Inner Asia. The Baikal in the north and the Pamir in the south are within Inner Asia as much as Kokonor in the east and Aral Sea in the west.

India in my study here denotes the sub-continent known in our old popular writings as 'land of the vipers' and in ancient Greek writings vaguely as 'India'. In the Mughal period the expression Hindustan was used without any religious or sectarian tone. I use 'India' not as a synonym for 'Bharat' as in our Constitution. I use the term for the Indo sub-continent which includes in modern terms India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal besides eastern regions of Afghanistan. I do so as a student of history and need emphasize that all parts of this sub-continent came under Inner Asian impact.

PRE-HISTORIC GEOGRAPHY

Some observations on the pre-historic geography of both Inner Asia and India are needed as the memories of these pre-historic times continued in the legends and myths, idiom and imagery, of the peoples and races inhabiting the lands down to the opening centuries of the Christian era.

Inner Asia for ages prior to the Paleolithic was mostly in ice age and several areas had glaciers or glacial rivers. In warmer Paleolithic age the rivers and lakes became prized landmarks for the races around. Even in historical times the rivers and lakes would often wander and sometimes disappear. The ancient Greek belief that in most ancient times the rivers Oxus and Jaxartes flowed direct into the Caspian Sea is not turned down by modern geologists. Appearance of Aral Sea in its present dimensions cannot be dated today. Lake Ixnon has shifted from place to place in the age of Chinese travellers even during the days of Siva Nārāya and Aurel Stein once. Rivers have changed courses as Oxus, Jaxartes and Tymprün in the first millennium after Christ. The Jaxartes now pouring into the Aral Sea used to be tributary of the Oxus in the first millennium A.D. Some rivers in Gobi and its north are now altogether lost in sands and steppes. The Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) in Tibet changed its direction from west to east.
Even with all these changes, a firm concept of 'Seven Rivers', whatever be their location, was in the mind of Inner Asian man from the Paleolithic times. Iranian ‘Hapta Hindi’ Sanskrit, ‘Sepa Sreenu’, Slav ‘Semirecye’ or Turkish ‘Bt -bu’ are echoes from the pre-historic past. Only geologists and antiquarians cannot be precise about the Seven Rivers. I may add another peculiarity of Inner Asian soil. Upriver up to 1000 ft. or more are well-known. What is not so well-known is that swamps or sandbags have turned into rocky soil in even less than three centuries. I have on-the-spot knowledge of what was a Dam (swamp) even in early eighteenth century and in 1950s a ready landing ground for supersonic aircraft in Tibet Region of China.

In India particularly in the north physical geography underwent great changes in pre-Paleolithic times. The most notable change is that of the North Indian Rivers. I cannot do better than speak in the words of Geologist Wadia, whom I had the privilege to know. "Ample evidence is found on the common ancestry of the Brahmaputra, Ganges and Indus rivers, their reversal and capture before attaining their present state which has influenced the course of Indian history at many a turn and corner. It was the notable pre-historic river, named the Siwalik, that flowed from the head of the Sindh gulf to the Punjab and thence at the feet of embryonic Himalaya chains through Simla and Nainital to Assam. Post-Siwalik earth movements in the Punjab brought about a dismemberment of this river system into three subsidiary systems: (1) the present Indus from North-West Hazara, (2) five tributary rivers of the Indus and (3) the rivers belonging to the Ganges system which finally took a south-eastern course."

This short summary is not an adequate substitute for an extensive study of the subject. I am sure the expert would find interest in this subject and would give much greater elaboration and reference.

The first thing to be noted is that the common ancestry of these rivers continues to be in the catchment area of Kailas-Manas. I add that the estuaries of the Indus and the Ganges have changed their outlets considerably through the last fifteen centuries. I also add how the thirsty Thar swallows the Saraswati in post-Vedic centuries.

**GIFTS FROM INNER ASIA**

In Post-Vedic literature, in Buddhist as well as Hindu legends, Mount Meru (Sumeru or Hemadrum) and the neighbouring regions featured as Devakshetra. Mount Meru or the mountain system Meru was to be spotted somewhere from the Kos Loon in the east to the Pamir in the west. The location of Meru as that of Binda Sarovar is long forgotten in India while the Vermont for these regions were adored as treasure lands. In grateful imagination of our remote forefathers Jambudvipa, south of Himalayas, had the choicest gifts from the Devakshetra, north of Himalayas. Tribhulab or Tibet, was in these Deva regions.
History bears testimony to these gifts counted in our legends as innumerable and immeasurable. I may reduce the count to "thirteen", an auspicious number both in Inner Asia and India in ancient times. The three are: RIVER, MAN and HORSE. The river fed by eternal snow, the man with brains and brahmins and the mount with majesty and mobility shaped the history of India since ancient times.

While the rivers and the race attract much notice through this essay, for obvious reasons, the horses cannot command the notice they deserve. I may quote here how the Vedic Rishi portrayed the noble animal.

ḥrō bruṭvā devān avahād vaijī gandharvān
vaiśāspān asīva manusyasā

(This animal carried the Devas, Haya, the Gandharvas as Vajín, the Asura as Arva and the Manushyas as Aswá.)

As is well known even today with "mechanized cavalry", say around the Pamirs, the old fashioned "hoofed carrier" is handy and indispensable for reconnoitring, scouting and supply services. Internal combustion engine has not completely replaced the "Ass from Asia" as the ancient Egyptians described the strange animal used by some Hyksos warriors. Till the Indus script is deciphered we have to be in the dark to know how the Indus people described the mount of the Aryan invader. Even an animal less noble, that is, Asvalata or mule, was of use to the Aryan and succeeding immigrants from Inner Asia.

THE RIVERS

A country is rightly described as the gift of a river, if the history or life of the people there is determined by the river. Thus we have the saying "Egypt is the gift of Nile". It will not be wrong to say that the entire continent of Asia is the gift of its great rivers.

All the great rivers of Asia except the four in Decan (South India) and the two in Mesopotamia (Iraq), rise in Inner Asia and flow into the warm waters of high seas. These great rivers may be mentioned clockwise. These are Amur, Hwang Ho, Yansze Kiang, Mekong, Salween, Irrawaddy, Brahmaputra, Ganges and Indus. The two great beneficiaries from the Inner Asian fons et origo are China and India. China from ancient times considered the great streams as indispensable material wealth that was systematically drawn upon. India from ancient times esteemed the great streams as divine waters. Spā devāh or Spā divyāh. In later times even the Muslims or Christians of Indian
stock would prize the rivers as gifts of God rather than bounties from Nature. It is only from the beginning of the current century that a materialist attitude to our great rivers may be noticed. From the middle of the century all countries of the Indo sub-continent are fully awake to the material or mundane merits of the divine water.

The river as a deity was possibly there among the Pre-Aryan peoples, Dravidian or Keralians. But the divinity, sanctity or sublimity attached to the rivers of Jambudvipa may be traced to the Rig Veda, that is, the Aryan invaders who settled down in the Punjab. The rivers are referred to with respect in Rig Veda and the object of highest veneration in Saraswati, the Naditama. The honorific for a river was Sindhu, though this term was principally for the Indus in the beginning and exclusively for the Indus later. This honorific, Sindhu, was in respect of seven rivers only, as is evidenced from a number of occurrences in Rig Veda and later Samhitas. It is however not clear what are the seven rivers, though Indus itself and the river pyre excellence Saraswati would certainly be in the list. Sindhu could be the seven rivers were in the land where Rig Veda was composed.

Hindus and Buddhists in Jambudvipa preserved the tradition of Seven Rivers down the centuries. In Puranas and like literature rivers flowing out of Bindu Sarasvata were named also. The elite as well as the common folk in India however never bothered much about the exact rivers collectively called Sapta Sindhu. Max Muller, at the end of the last century, identified the seven as the Indus with its five tributaries plus Naditama Saraswati. Other scholars preferred Kapisa (Kubh/Kapil) or Oxus is place of Saraswati. Mediconelli and others held that the seven streams of Rig Veda should not be identified with any actual physical streams. (Vide Vedic Index). This theory is no more running away from any historical reality. Sri Aurobindo, the sage of Pondicherry, has the last word when he says that the seven streams of Rig Veda are symbolic of the virtues like Energy, Light or Truth. In my submission the Sapta Sindhu of Rig Veda had no reality in physical world. The expression no doubt was a firm reality, comm with the Aryans from their earlier habitat in the Oxus-Jaxartes plains. It may have some legendary origins or it may be that some seven rivers were conspu- neous in pre-historic Inner Asia. The Aryans carried the imagery of seven rivers down to Punjab and much beyond. It should however be noted that at least 27 rivers find mention in Rig Veda. In my submission Sapta Sindhou, occurring only once in Rig Veda, did not refer to Punjab, I may add here that even in the evolution of the word "Sindhu" Hans, Takhar and Histitile elements are noticed. Not univocally both Sindhu and Sapta Sindhu were in the dialect of the Aryans before they crossed the Hindukush.
Sri Aurobindo is right in his warning that comparative philology or physical geography cannot guide us to the inner metaphysical meaning of the Veda. The Vedic words and expressions have an external as well as an internal connotation. It is beyond the scope of my present task, as also beyond my abilities, to speak on the inner metaphysical meanings of Sindhu, Saptaka, Sindhu and other terms in Rig Veda; Sri Aurobindo's writings (1914-16) later collected in the book *Dhyan Veda* (Pondicherry 1916) may be consulted.

SAPTA SINDHU

The point I contend is that the imagery or nomenclature of Seven Rivers was so firm in the mind of the Aryan immigrants that they christened the rivers around their new settlement as Saptaka Sindhu. No amount of research can establish beyond caveat the names and locations of the Seven Rivers of Rig Veda.

Post Vedic literature - Buddhism, Jain and Puranic - records traditions of seven streams radiating from lakes or lakes across the Himalayas. Lake Bindusara being most commonly cited. The seven rivers streaming out of Bindusara are Ganga, Nalini, Pavani, Hidimba, Sita, Chakravati and Sindhu. Ganga or Ganges, Sindhu or Indus, Sita or Svarati and Chakravati or Oxus are clear and legible. D.C. Stace identified, tentatively, Hidimba with upper Brahmaputra (Tsiang-po in Tibet), Pavani with Brahmaputra, and Nalini with Salween or Meikong. (Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India Varanasi 1960). S.M. Ali, a geographer drawing upon modern geological data, holds that the waters from the legendary lake "not only flowed through visible outlets but also through subterranean channels, which according to the Puranas were legitimate outlets for enclosed watersheets." (The Geography of the Puranas New Delhi 1966).

The orthodox belief that Gangotri has subterranean feeds from Marwar-Kailas area is not accepted by geologists today. S.M. Ali's conjecture that Yangtze Kiang is the principal eastern river from the legendary times seems correct; the source of Salween or Tawlandi would be far away from the legendary spot.

If Saptaka Sindhu of Rig Veda referred to any definite land, it was in their homeland dominated by seven streams.

SEVEN RIVERS IN INNER ASIA AND INDIA

Geology confirms that pre-historic as well as historic times there have been many rivers spread over Inner Asia. Of these many, the several inland rivers, that is those which did not reach any high seas or oceans were of vital importance in the life and welfare of the races, nomadic or sedentary. Geology can be sure about the seven particular rivers,
The memory of races and tribes of Inner Asia however has preserved the imagery of seven rivers down to the days of Axel Stein and Sven Hedin. Thus Sanskrit Saptâ Sinhū made room for some Takhṛ expression whose Tukrit equivalent in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was și-hu, rendered in Russian as Semirečje, Semireč'e, in Russian administrative geography, comprised only the eastern side of the Oxus-Jaxartes plains and mainly the basins of the lakes Issik-Kul and Balkhash. In the period of Mongol Empire and till the seventeenth century Semirečje included portions of Eastern Turkestan (Sinkiang). Scholars, like Vasily Vladimirovich Barthold, hint about the changing boundaries of the land of seven rivers in the middle ages. (Vide for example Barthold’s “History of the Semirečje” in Four Studies in the History of Central Asia-ioden, 1962). The concept of Saptâ Sinhū as a geographical fact or a historical reality was subject to changes in frontiers or dimensions in Inner Asia, and likewise in India.

Rig Veda refers to Saptâ Sinhū conspicuously but never names the seven Sindhūs. The Tenth Mandala refers to 21 rivers and names them Verse 75 gives the most comprehensive list. More significant than curious is the first name in the list, that is, Ganga; and strangely enough Sindhū with its western tributaries are named at the end. The last Mandala of Rig Veda was composed when the Aryans had on-the-ground knowledge of Ganga and Yamuna. The Verse 75, in my submission, not only upholds the sanctity of Ganga but also hints a sanctity far higher than that of Sindhū.

When Aryansattva of the entire country was complete and when the sacred rivers had to be located, only seven were found worthy. Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhū and Kaveri. Jambudvipa Bharatavarsha was now become Saptâ Sinhūvah and each Sindhū in the list was declared as holy as Ganga.

The signs of Mahābhārata recognise in the form of ablation prayer that the Seven Rivers were the springs of our material as well as moral wealth.

PRE-ARYANS FROM INNER ASIA

It is generally thought that the Aryans or Indo-Aryans were the first invaders from Inner Asia. Some scholars suggest that a Mongoloid race may be called Tibeto-Burman, were first such invaders or immigrants in fact numbers. A Tibeto-Burman race movement beginning from the Pamir matched southeast along both sides of the Himalayas. Those on the southern tracks completed their wanderings in Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. Some however sought home in the Himalayas.

In the Harappa sites, besides large numbers of Dravidian and Aryan skeletal remains, not insignificant quantity of Mongoloid skulls and bones have been
found. Mongoloid traders and travellers to Indus Valley cannot be ruled out in those days because of esoteric mystic cult flourishing in Indus Valley with Pamirs-Kashas as focal point in such religions. (cf. Mirow, J.J.: Shambadam London, 1964). Some scholars hold that the Aryan had with them Mongoloid soldiers who were already familiar with northern parts of the Indus Valley. A British archaeologist, serving as a brigadier during the War, used very modern terms to describe these Mongoloids, of 2000 B.C. He put the question "Did the Aryan invaders have with them Gurkha scouts and pioneers?" (Mortimer Wheeler: Indus Civilization Cambridge, 1953).

The Tibeo-Burman migration through the plains below the southern slopes of the Himalayas began c. 2000 B.C. and continued for nearly a thousand years. Around 1000 B.C. all over the Himalaya from Ladakh to Lhasa there were colonies of Tibetan speaking populations. It is such pre-Aryans from Inner Asia who gave the country words or names like Gangga, Anga, Vaivata, and Kalinga. Even the word Linga first occurring in later Vedic literature was a Tibetan word (Gling), later Aryanized and Indianized. Ganga for example is Sanskrit form of Gang-ri-mo (daughter of snow mountain) or Gang-mo (daughter of snow). Along with such dictions, Mongoloid esoteric mysticism got duly Indianised. It is not necessary to digress here into the subject of Tibetan Tantra in Indian system. (Vide Prabodh Bagchi: Studies in the Tantras Calcutta 1979) (Vide Izade:Yogo New York 1966 and works of Arthur Avalon/John Woodroffe.) It is necessary to emphasise that such foreign elements go back to the Pre-Aryan period. (Vide Bagchi: Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian in India Calcutta 1929).

THE INDO-ARYANS

The branch of Aryans who invaded and settled in India are designated Indo-Aryans. The invasion may be dated between 2000 B.C. and 1500 B.C. Their first military encounters were with the people who had built a rich civilisation in the Indus Valley and were progressing eastward inside the sub-continent. Destruction of facts, cities and even waterworks, as evidenced from the ruins of the so-called Harappa sites, speaks of total victory of the Indo-Aryans.

Horse, the new engine of war, was no doubt superior to elephant and bull. A superior weapon of war was also used by the invaders. The Indo-Aryan weapon was of the hardest metal known to man ever since. It was iron against which copper or bronze was of no avail. From the legendary period of sage Dadhichi to the historical period of poet Rudyard Kipling, it is iron—cold iron — which has decided the course of battles in Punjab, India and all over the world.
May be the Deva worshippers had perfected the iron tool earlier. The Aryan
varna would be a Dravidian if he was slain when Rig Veda was composed. I
accept the brilliant suggestion of Kalyan Kumar Goel that Vajra marks the
transition from stone or bronze to iron. Indra's weapon was perhaps blessed
by the sage who donated his bow to breathe mystic spirit into it.

It was, however, neither horse nor sword which primarily accounted for
Aryan expansion over the entire sub-continent in the north while the estuary
of the Ganges within a few centuries in the south unto Kurnakar within a
thousand years. At Jambudvīpa, south of Himavāta, war by and large Arya-
ized, when Gautama Buddha preached a religion different from the Vedic
system. The Indo-Aryan victors were so keen in amassing material power.
Victors were masters and could not readily treat the conquered natives as
their equals. The Indo-Aryans, however, wanted to be at home in their
homeland, there was thus no question of segregation or apartheid. There are
no slaves in India was the pithy remark of Greek observers of Chandragupta
Maurya's time. Co-operation of the conqueror was warmly sought, gods and
rituals of the vanquished were tolerated and even adopted or adapting the
learning or knowledge of the victor was duly shared with eligible. As a
result Jambudvīpa was the Golden Hind when Cyrus the Great (c. 550 B.C.)
invaded Gandhara.

I cannot deny, nor do I admire, the evil features like "caste". I praise the
merits of the Indo-Aryan to affirm that the later lower Asian invaders like
Scythians, Kshatryas and Hunas merely followed the wise tradition of being at
home in their new homeland.

In fact I do not intend to speak on the grand achievements in arts and
sciences or philosophies and religions traceable to the Aryans. I would refer
you to the testimony of foreigners. Well-known are the names of William
Jones, Max Müller, Woodroffe, Zetland, and my late lamented friend Basham.
I better mention only three and none of them Indologist: Arthur Schopen-
hauer, Henri Bergson and Humian Rolland.

QUINTESSENCE OF INDO-ARYAN LEGACY

I must however present the quintessence of the legacy of these great
nomads from inner Asia. This is usually little noticed because the long lists of
achievements in arts and sciences or philosophies and religions diverge or
from the highest truth of Indo-Aryan way of life.

Vedic religion has been described with so many different words, pantheism
polytheism, henotheism, monotheism, monism, mysticism and what not. The
Vedic seers summed up:

Ekāh Sati Vipā bahudhā vaddantī
That which is One, wise men speak of it in many ways. (Eng. Tr. Sunil Kumar Chetterji). Whether we date this wise saying to 1500 B.C. or 1000 B.C., here we have the first recorded statement that the Absolute or Transcendental may be described or realized in diverse ways. In no other religion, earlier or later, we come across such sentiments. Inspiration of this wise saying could have been in the wonderful environment of Inner Asia. “My religion right or wrong or “My God is true God” was never practised in Inner Asia till the middle of the last century, I shall refer to this later again. I, however, anticipate a little known fact: Islam did not use sword much in Turkestan.

“God has many names” or that “Different beliefs are different roads to the summit” is the Indo-Aryan legacy for the world. The legacy was given to world in modern times by Ramakrishna Paramahamsa through Swami Vivekananda. Definition of the Absolute was considered a dogma and as is well-known Buddha was altogether silent on God.

No reference to Buddha can be worthwhile if it is not emphasised that Buddha was the first propit to preach a religion for all. Confucius, Moses, Zoroaster and even the Vedas were preached for their own people and all these religions were ethnocentric. Buddha’s religion was for all mankind and it is an undisputed fact that Dharma was not propagated with sword. In all countries Schechini or Thers was welcome and in many countries Buddhist missionaries went on invitation. In Inner Asia even when Dharma had full state patronage, believers in other religions did not suffer any disability; I may anticipate here that the Mongol Khans had high seats for the Lamas in open court where all else had to stand all the time. Yet in Mongol administration, both civil and military, there were Confucians, Hebrews, Christians and Moslems in high offices.

LEGACY FOR INDIA

Ya esa'varam bahuvah śaktiyogī
evarān māmāni nihiśeṣo dādātī
ciśānti cīnte viśvam sātu sa devaṁ
sa no buddhāś Gaṇēśa Śākyamukha

He who is one, who is above all colour distinctions, who dispenses the inherent needs of men of all colours, who comprehends all things from their beginning; to the end, let Him unite us to one another with wisdom which is the wisdom of goodness. (Eng. Tr. Rabindranath Tagore).

To be at home in their new homeland, the Aryans had to recognise the original or earlier inhabitants as indispensable both for material and moral development. Thus exchange of religious speculations, rituals or deities at
different levels, in different regions, was a continuous process spread over centuries. There was no compulsion on either side.

Sanskrit, the language of the scriptures, was for the elite, Aryan or not. Vernaculars of the pre-Aryan were supported while popular dialects (Prakrit) were permitted to grow. Sanskrit alphabet, after the invention of Brahm, naturally became the alphabet of even Dravidian languages with modifications. Even if the script of every language was not all conforming to the Brahmi, a common Varnamala effectively united the different languages and those who spoke these languages. Loan words in Sanskrit from native languages strengthened the link between the Aryans and the non-Aryans. Sanskrit accommodating non-Aryan deities and rituals became sacred for the non-Aryans. The use of Verminion for rituals or any auspicious occasion was learnt from the Mundari people (Source: Sarat Chandra Roy & Nirmal Kumar Bose). In due course Verminion became the mark of sanctity as well as prosperity all over the Aryanoid sub-continent. The master colour, Sin- Dura, united all castes and all colours.

The daily remembrance of the Seven Rivers - Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu, Kavi - was more than an act of piety. It was a reminder of the unity of the vast country which drew subsistence from the seven rivers. Fundamental unity of India was the workmanship of Indo-Aryan sages.

POST-ARYAN NOMADS

Sanskrit literature, Hindu as well as Buddhist provide long lists of invaders and immigrants from Inner Asia besides the Yavanas and Parakasas from West. The most important from Inner Asia were Saka, Kushana and Huna.

In Sanskrit accounts the Sakas precede the Yavanas, that is, the Greeks. Western scholars found the wrong on the basis of Chinese evidence that the Sakas entered India in first century B.C. Prabodh Bagchi made a thorough examination of the movements of different groups of Saka race from Sanskrit, Chinese as well as Greek accounts and concluded that a group or tribe of Saka varn had invaded and settled in Indus before the establishment of Yavana rule in India. (Vide Bagchi’s Presidential Address to Indian History Congress, Aligath in the Journal of Greater India Society, Calcutta 1943). This conclusion has cleared up several obscure points in our ancient history. We have also to thank Prabodh Bagchi for his finding that the famous Kambhoja people, associated with Gandharas, were post-Aryan immigrants from Inner Asia. Both Saka and Kambhoja peoples are known to have left their legacy in Sanskrit dialects. Much has been revealed by inseparables of P.C. Bagchi, H.W. Bailey and F.W. Thomas to mention only three such scholars. The epithet ‘Tathagata’ for Buddha and the ‘spotless white horse’ associated with Gautama siddhattha are, according to many scholars of Inner Asia background.
SAKA KUSHANA HUNA

The Sakas came in much larger numbers in the first century B.C. and settled down mostly in Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujrat and Maharashtra. There were Saka colonies in Ganges plain and perhaps in Karnatak in South. They became completely Indianized in a century or so and became patrons or protectors of Indian religion(s). The Kshatrapas or Mahakshatrapas are well known figures of our history and I need not detail their achievements. The growth of Vaishnavism or Bhagavata Cult and the spread of sun worship through Sakrdevi Brahmanas are attributed to Saka patronage. I would draw your notice to Saka Era (beginning with 78 A.D.) Whoever might have invented this era had studied the long term atmospheric and consequent seasonal changes so scientifically that Meghnad Saha advised the government of Independent India to fix the reckoning of months Vasakha onward as in Saka Era for our national calendar. It may be noted that Meghnad Saha, besides being the leading astro-physicist, probed deep into all ancient calendars including those of Babylon, Chaldea and Egypt.

Parsis, an Iranian tribe with much Inner Asian associations, came almost the same time with the Sakas, and ruled in the Indus Valley till the rise of Kushanas. The Parsis seemed to have introduced Surya Puja which had much patronage of the Sakas.

The Sakas, Parnas and Kushanas brought in a number of icon of which Amithaba and Avalokiteshvara are final finalized forms. Mahayana, a deity associated with Prajna Paramita; the basic scripture of Mahayana, was no doubt come from far in the northeast, the border region of Mongolian-Manchuria, the earliest habitat of Yüeh-chi race. The recent finds of Kushana amulets in western Turkestan support the hypothesis that iconic forms of Dhammakaya, Samabhogakaya and Nirmanakaya Buddhies were in the making there independent of Hellanistic inspiration.(Vide Gafurov, Borisj Levinets; Kushan Studies in USSR Calcutta 1970).

Ignoring the fresh controversies in the chronology of the Sakas and Kushanas, I may highlight an important outcome of Saka Kushana rule in political thought. In Vedic and Post-Vedic periods monarchy and republican tribes were the normal institutions while divinity for kings was unknown. Buddha even spoke of contrast in tracing the origins of state and kingship. Concept of Son of Heaven (Devaputra) came with the Yüeh-chis and the concept of Rex Imperator as semi-sive came with the Saka. Yüeh-chis were under Han influence and Sakas were under influence of Cesarism.

This concept of Divine Monarchy was prized by Puzara compilers and the great Gupta kings were nothing short of Parama Daivata, Parame Bhatta-
raka or Parama Bhagavata. Divine Right became an integral part of Hindu philosophy. The Hunas, who invaded Gupta Empire, also brought the Han doctrine of Son of Heaven but it was no novelty for India then.

The Hunas were notorious for their violent acts and cruel treatment of the conquered. Even then, when they found permanent homes in the conquered lands they sought admission to the religion of the way of life of the natives. Their descendants mostly settled in Punjab, Rajastan and Gujarat became good Hindus and as is well-known under names like Gurjara, Pratihara, Paramara, Chauhana or Rathora their descendants fought and successfully resisted the Arabs, Afghans and Turks who came with a mission to preach their religion and settle in India with their religion as the state religion. I return to this later.

Meanwhile I speak on several racial groups collectively called Tukhara in Sanskrit accounts. Tukhara as distinguished from Kushana and Huna was in India during the Kushana rule and later during Harsha's reign. What exactly happened to them and when some of them got Indianized will remain a problem till the chronology of Kushana rule and the affinities of numerous foreign invaders till Harsha's time (606-647) are satisfactorily fixed.

I may note the important Tukhara contribution in Indian vocabulary. The word 'Thakura', unknown to Vedic and Classical Sanskrit, does not occur in Sanskrit literature before 500 A.D. The word was possibly current in many North Indian dialects before the Imperial Guptas. Sylvain Levi, Frederick Thomas and Harold Bailey among foreign scholars and Prabodh Bagchi, Sunil Chatterji and Buddha Prakash among Indian scholars agree on 'Thakura' being a loan word from Inner Asia, Tukhara regions. (Vide Buddha Prakash in Central Asiatic Journal Vol III, No 3). It may be noted that in South India among orthodox Brahmin, Thakura or Thakur is not a popular term obviously because of its Tukhara or Tutsuka background.

Expressions like Saka-Huna or Saka-Kushana-Huna generally stand for all Post-Aryan nomads from Inner Asia till the advent of Islam. Puranes and Buddhist texts give long lists which cannot be incorporated in this summary view. Besides all the races and/or tribes listed cannot be satisfactorily identified. Kamboja and Tukhara, mentioned earlier, still defy both ethnologists and linguists. Khassa, featuring in Sanskrit accounts, settled in Central Himalayas and the principal language of Nepal, Khasiana, is a reminder of the Khassa immigrants. Did the Khassas come from Kashmir? Some hold the Khassas to be a branch of the Kushtian migrating to the Pamar. An additional problem is that when the different successive nomads settled down they would sometimes be mixed up through marriages or common occupations. Gujar in many places of Punjab and Rajasthan have both Saka and Huna blood in their veins.
I notice two peoples, Murundas and Chulikas, about whom Prabodh Bagchi made pioneer comments. Murundas were often bracketed with Sakas in some inscriptions and books. Bagchi highlighted the Puranic knowledge of the Murundas as quite distinct from Sakas, and traced their advent much before the foundation of the Guada empire and spread of Pataliputra in third century A.D. From Chinese records, Bagchi noticed an interesting event, that in the middle of third century, a Murunda king of Pataliputra exchanged gifts with a king of Funan. The Murunda king's presents included "four verses of Yueh-chi country", Murunda expansion to Benga, Pundra and Rangapur regions a now accepted.

Bagchi made a very important contribution about the ancient ancestors of the Cholukyas and presented cogent facts to trace the first Chalukyas to the Sogdians came into northwest India along with Sakas-Yavana-Pahlava invaders about the Christian Era. These Sogdians, mostly mercantile and agricultural were known in Prakrit as Sulika or Chulika. The Sulika who settled down in the northwest mainly around Multan long after Indianization, came to be known as the Sad Khattis. But many of the Sogdians are known to have gone south along with the Sakas. The tribal name Sulika or Chulika had many variants in South Sulika, Sulaki or Solanki and Chalika, Chulika, or Cholukya. (Vide P.C. Bagchi: India and Central Asia, Calcutta 1955).

I refer to the Murundas and Chulikas to draw your notice to my submission made at the beginning that all the three Asian invasions made their impact all over this sub-continent. The horses with Murundas were either from Mongols or from Kirghiz-Kazakhs regions as later also till the mid-nineteenth century. The Multani Khattis, I may emphasize, used to have their own mercantile agencies in Samarkand, Tashkent, Bukhara and around till the middle of the last century. Their decline followed the rising encounter between British and Russians from about the seventies of nineteenth century.

INVADES AND RULERS FROM WEST

The first Muslim invasion was that of Sind by Abbas in 711. The Arabs could not penetrate further because of the Rajput descendants of Saka-Huna settlers. A century later Arab merchants visited regularly the Saurashtra coast. The Rashtrakuta rulers who had given asylum to the Iranian (Persi) refugees on condition that the refugees would respect the religious beliefs of the country, gave facilities to Arab merchants for trade but no rights to proselyte. In mid-twelfth century, from the Kingdom of Qutb with both seculiar and religious aspirations, Sultan Mahmud (998-1030) invaded India seventeen times, and looted the rich towns and temples including Multan in
Punjab, Kangra in Himalayas, Kanyakumari and Mathura in Gangetic plain and Somnath in Gujarat. Mahmud could not build an empire in India but drained the material resources of the country and damaged the morale of the people. India posed no difficulty to, the Pathans and Turks in Afghanistan, India was now open for conquest and conversion.

From 1192 when Prithviraja Chauhau was lost to Muhammad Ghori till 1526 when Ibrahim Lodhi lost to Babar Mughal, Muslim Sultans ruled over North India and Deccan. They were zealous believers, directly concerned with the conversion of Rajputs to their faith and professed allegiance to the Caliph of Islam.

INVADERS FROM INNER ASIA

Zahiruddin Babur (1534-1530) called himself Padshah and did not recognise the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph. His ancestors on mother's side, Chingiz Khan and immediate successors, had conquered Turkistan from the Caliphate (1208-205-1255). His paternal ancestor Timur (Tamerlane) had proclaimed himself Great Amir of Transoxania (c. 1370) and even invaded Syria-Mesopotamia (c. 1400). The Ottoman Caliph was a mere phantom for Turkistan when Babar was born (1483), ironically in Europe since 1453 the Ottoman Sultan on his Divan of Constantiople was a demented barbarian.

Arabs brought Islam into Western Turkistan from about 750 and Semirechye was converted about 960. Islam spread over Eastern Turkistan in eleventh and twelfth centuries. Buddhism was in decline and Shamanism was reviving. Therefore Islam had not to use sword much. On the other hand Muslim scholars and priests would grope into Buddhist learning and according to Barthold and others, the first Madrasas were inspired by the Buddhist Viharas. This spirit of respect for merits of non-believers very much flourished when the Mongol Khan conquered Turkistan in the thirteenth century. I may refer to the well-known Mongol passage to scholars and administrators of all religions though the Mongol State religion was Manichaean Buddhism. After the fall of Mongol Khans, the Mongols in Turkistan intermarried with the Turks and underwent conversion into Islam. The spirit of co-existence continued in Turkistan. Even the great Timur was more interested in conquest than in conversion. Turks and in the fourteenth century produced a scholar-scientist in Muzzulugh-beg (1394-1449), Ulugh-beg's astronomical tables and astronomical observatory at Samarkand were pioneer efforts which inspired similar projects in other countries including India. Ulugh-beg was not very orthodox and was murdered by men professing to be orthodox.
Inner Asia in the second half of fifteenth century was not the special preserve of one particular religion. The great saint of medieval Asia, Guru Nanak (1469-1538), made pilgrimage to holy places of all religions. Among the regions the great saint visited was Doos Valley and Kaales-Manas. I repeat that the environment or ethos of Inner Asia proclaims the varied and vast grandeur of the Transcendental. Concord and peace follow realization of this truth. The first Great Moghul, Babur, though loyal to his own faith, came from the land which fostered concord and peace.

The Mughal Empire in India was the first Islamic state to be outside the authority of the Caliphates and from its inception till the accession of Aurangzeb (1657) this Empire had no special mission to proselytize or to treat the Hindus or other non-Muslims as second class citizens.

To be fair to the pre-Mughal rulers, I have to point out two names. Shah Zainul Abadin (1420-1470) of Kashmir and Riber Shah the last Pathan Emperor (1537-1545) ruled as the protector of all communities and could recognize merits in their subjects irrespective of their religious beliefs. These two names stand out as exceptions to the norm of the pre-Mughal Muslim regime in India.

The Inner Asian tradition of “five faiths as five fingers on one’s hand”, proclaimed by the Mongol Khans, found its finest efflorescence in the reign of the Greatest Moghul, Jalaluddin Abub (b. 1542, acc. 1556-1605). It is not necessary to detail here Akbar’s administrative measures and reforms, his matrimonial alliances with the descendants of the Sakas/Hunus and his wise or unwise formulation of a religion for all. A British bureaucrat-cum-historian, Vincent Smith aptly describes Akbar’s new city Fatehpur Sikri with a phrase for all faiths as “the reflex of Akbar’s mind”. Akbar’s two immediate successors, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan were no doubt smaller than Akbar and committed a few indirect acts against the Hindus. Even then the spirit of mutual understanding and respect for others’ beliefs continued till Aurangzeb won the War of Succession and killed his eldest Dara Shukoh (1657). Dara Shukoh was extremely well-read in the Vedanta, the Talmud, the New Testament and the Sufi writings. A leading administrator of the Company Raj, William Sleeman, while watching the grave of Dara Shukoh thought aloud that had Dara lived to occupy the throne the nature of education and therewith the destiny of India would have been different.

Before I proceed with Aurangzeb and the later Moghuls, I must emphasise the greatness of the Great Moghuls till 1657. In contemporary Europe the state policy was “sola regio sola religio” (religion of the king is the religion of the region) as most bigotedly inscribed in the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). Hindus had protection while on pilgrimage to Kaales-Manas or Sita Chakshu and the Hindu merchants from Multan and Shikarpur freely operated in
Kashgar, Bokhara or Semarkand. Tibetan merchants and pilgrims came to Gaya and Varanasi and some would go up to Swat associated with Guru Padmasambhava. (Vide Tucci: Tibetan Pilgrims in Swat Valley Calcutta 1939).

THE AGE OF VASCO DA GAMA

Though Aczengzeb (1638-1707) was the last great Mughal and he ruled over the largest extent of this sub-continent, the fall of this great empire began with him. Discord and discord between different communities and rise of independent states both Hindu and Muslim began during Aczengzeb’s reign, and invited the distant Western powers to prospects of conquering the Golden Hind. The Age of Vasco da Gama had already begun (1498). Reference to the advent of European powers has to be made for the simple reason that these powers would utilize all means for conquest or control: trade, sword and religion. Some powers like Britain and France would assign low priority to conversion and introduce the diplomacy of ‘divide and rule’ not only between different countries but also between different creeds in the Asiatic continent. Relevant to my subject is how such diplomacy was operated in Inner Asia and with India in background.

Indian pilgrims and Indian merchants, both Hindu and Moslem, continued in Inner Asia beyond the fall of the Mughal Empire. Khettri of Multan, Amils of Shikarpur, and Moslems of Kashmir valley traded all over Turkistan and the Newars of Nepal and Muslims of Ladakh traded in Tibet, Faisal and Sudder moved all over what was called High Asia in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The British while exploring trade prospects in Inner Asia found the different communities living in absolute harmony - a phenomenon unknown in Europe. The British, however, found a field for divide and rule in the fact that the vast plains of the two rivers Oxus and Javatze had Muslim population while the rulers were Christians called Russian. The British sympathy for the subject Turk was thus provable, while in India after the Mutiny (1857) and with Wahabi Movement the British had antipathy for the Muslim. So most amazing events took place all over Asia and eastern Mediterranean which exposed the inner contradictions of Pax Britannica.

EPILOGUE : ARMA GEDDON

To a student of history, Inner Asia, the ancient home of sublime harmony is today the theatre of supreme conflict. A few events in the preceding hundred years will tell the tale.

From about 1870 Britain had to woo Ottoman Turkey for controlling the Near East and was all out to shed tears for the Muslims of Inner Asia. Only
British Liberals and Romanov Tsars would cry against Armenian massacres, and Bulgarian atrocities committed by the Ottoman Sultan venerated as Caliph by orthodox Muslims. When Kaiser Wilhelm II, German Emperor, swore external friendship with the Caliph, British moved towards reconciliation with Russia. In 1907 Sultan and Russia became best friends on the stipulation that Britain would not be friends of Muslims in Turkey and Russia would give Britain and China free hand in Tibet. During the First World War (1914–18) Britain managed to sabotage and break up the Ottoman Empire by sponsoring Arab nationalism, and at the same time -- without Arab knowledge -- promoting restoration of the homeland for Jews. The War ended also in the victory of the Caliph's internal enemy, Musafir Kamal Pasha, who changed his name to Kamal El Tursi, not only terminated Caliph's office and inundated some democratic reforms but also maneuvered Turkey so much so that Islamic orthodoxy was put an end to. The Grey Wolf standard of Kamal Pasha symbolized as it were the ancient Meroë tradition of peace for all beliefs.

Britain again encountered Russia now Communist in I yet Asia. Tsars for the Muslims of Turkey again rolled down the Whitehall corridors while in New Delhi same British bureaucrats would don fez caps. Second World War again brought Britain and Russia on the same side but in the aftermath the encounter was on a world wide scale. America with Britain as good second would try to engage Soviet Russia around Persia. Much curious is that USA and People's Republic of China would be meeting on Kanskowum heights to contain Soviet Russia. The end of the Heartland Story is not yet in sight. In sight is the spectrum on the horizon of India as well as Tibet.

NOTES

1. Use of first person singular is calculated. This is to emphasize my own individual responsibility for facts, opinions and conclusions in my presentation here. I have been associated with several official and academic bodies engaged in study of subjects like Inner Asia or India, past or present, but these official or academic bodies are in no way responsible for the facts or views I state here. The words 'my', 'I', or 'myself' is not to claim scholarship but to disown responsibility of the academic and official bodies I have served for years.

2. The spellings of proper names in Roman transcription are generally as current in the middle of this century. The recent Chinese reform like Beijing for Peking is not followed because such new nomenclature for Sinkiang, Tibet or Inner Mongolia would be confusing for reading the past history. For same reason place names in the Indian sub-continent are spelt as till the middle of this century.

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3. Technical terms of geology and anthropology are avoided.

4. A basic premise in my study is that the so-called Aryans or that the race who spoke Vedic Sanskrit and composed the Rig Veda were not autochthonous in the sub-continent. I subscribe to Bal Gangadhar Tilak's finding that these Aryans, the Indo-Iranians, were settled in the vast valleys of the rivers: Dus and Javales, before they migrated South to Iran, Afghanistan and India. This conviction need not bind one to Tilak's other finding that the original home of the Aryans was in the Arctic. I also hold a basic premise that the authors of the Indus Civilization were pre-Aryan settlers who were Dravidian. Even before the Vedic Age was over the Aryans had to adopt and adapt a number of items from Dravidian religion and speech. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, a Bengali Brahmin, proudly called himself a Dravida (1925-30) and was not popular with all Brahmins who clung to their belief of Aryan ancestry. Two Western scholars, Burrows and Evanson, have later listed the Dravidian loan words in Sanskrit; these words are for three thousand years now as sacred as those of Vedic vocabulary. Later only two words, Pinda and Pandita.