THE STORY OF ORIENTAL PHILOSOPHY

THE STORY OF
Oriental Philosophy

BY L. ADAMS BECK
(*E. Barrington*)

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Preface

In writing this book upon the thought and thinkers of Asia my aim has been to convey what I have to tell in as clear and simple a manner as possible to readers unaccustomed to oriental modes of expression. This has meant more than translation from original languages, for beyond that lies the necessity for familiar English terms, which sometimes do not express the full implication of the original. I can hope only that I have not been wholly unsuccessful and that as little as possible has been lost on the way.

The value of the thought of Asia is daily more realized by western thinkers. The demand for knowledge of its riches grows more and more insistent. The caravans still journey from the heart of Asia, carrying merchandise more to be desired than gold or jewels.

The attainment of the West has been mainly on the intellectual-practical side. In the Orient it has been in the development of human consciousness, with the interesting exception of Japan, which appears to aim at the combination of both and to partake alike of eastern and western mentality. Iranian thought is necessarily included in any survey of Asiatic attainment.

The values of East and West do not clash. They are supplementary and interchangeable; and it will be well for the world when this is fully realized, and there is free circulation of thought. The faith of a nation is her soul. Her literature is her intellect. Nations who do not meet on these grounds cannot understand one another, and understanding is the most vital need of the present day. In this book, readers will at least find the Asiatic thought-

systems set forth with the deep sympathy I feel for what I regard as the highest reach of human thought in such matters as they deal with.

In addition to my personal knowledge of the countries, peoples, faiths, and philosophies of which I write, I must acknowledge my sincere gratitude to the writers of the many books that I have consulted and to the many oriental friends with whom I have discussed these subjects.

A detailed list of authorities would form a volume in itself and would be impossible. I can say only that in one sense such a book as this can never be original. The bibliography does not attempt to cover my debt in quotation, paraphrase and spirit, or to name a tenth part of the books to which I owe so much. It gives a few books (under the headings of different countries), intended to be useful to students, advanced or otherwise, who wish to know more of the subjects treated. If any scholars should look into this book I ask them to remember the enormous difficulty of clarifying Asiatic thought for the general reader. They will realize obstacles which none can know who have not faced them.

L. ADAMS BECK,
(*E. Barrington.*)

Ceylon,

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Chapter I

THE ARYAN PEOPLE OF INDIA

IF the average man were approached on the subject of Asia and asked to state his impressions they would probably be to the effect: that Asia is a continent with high possibilities for romance, and film stories, and for commercial intercourse to be conducted strictly under the tutelage of the West; that it is inhabited by races of semi-civilized or wholly uncivilized peoples much in need of Christianization and civilization before they can be dealt with at all on equal terms; that Japan, with the imitative talent of a highly specialized monkey, has unexpectedly and dangerously broken loose into western allotments and has thereby inspired the rest of Asia with the unfortunate notion that she is capable of managing her own affairs instead of having them managed for her by western nations.

Such a man would add a few emphatic sentences on the menace of Asiatic cheap labor and of any Asiatic foothold among western peoples; and if he had intellectual aspirations might ask with some warmth what Asia's contribution to social philosophy, urban architecture, thought, and the religions of the world had been. He might concede that the Chinese make good servants and balance that concession with the remark that Japanese methods in trade are what you might expect—wholly untrustworthy. And he would go off without waiting for a rejoinder, secure in his conviction of the vast superiorities of the West.

Such a man will soon be extinct as the dodo, but be-

cause under every one of these so common assertions and implications lies the question of what philosophies have guided Asiatic nations on their way, and because Asia becomes every day a more vital and urgent problem for America and Europe as the narrowing of the world's confines draws them closer together, it is well worth while to study their philosophic thought with its national outcome, and the men who have been its creators, and thus to arrive at some definite conclusion of its and their worth. And my hope is to achieve this in words so simple that anyone who cares for the information may have it for use when he is obliged to consider Asia and his own relation and reaction to its life. There is no question but that these considerations will be thrust upon us even violently by the force of events, and it will then be vital that we shall understand. The interest also seems to me and to many others profound, but that is naturally a matter of opinion.

Lately there have been put before us in a striking way certain ignorances and social failures of India: the bloody sacrifices, infant marriages, shames and weaknesses of her dark places. It cannot be denied that these exist; but the other side was not dealt with, nor the causes given which would have invited understanding. I wish sincerely that equal courage and candor with a little more knowledge could be brought to bear on our own dark places by a qualified Asiatic and an equal shock administered. But in either case persons of philosophic mind would know that the whole story had not been told and that after such fashion no true appraisal of a nation's value to the world can be reached. And they would desire in either case to examine sources, before any final judgment could be passed. Examination of sources is what I attempt now.

In a book which professes to set forth the philosophies of Asia one is not concerned, however, with their practical results. Philosophy does not ask what use is made of the truths it sets forth, nor shall I. The quest of truth

Mao Ce-tun

O PRAXI

O spojitosti poznání a praxe
— o spojitosti poznatků
a jednání

(Červenec 1937)

★

NAKLADATELSTVÍ SVOBODA
PRAHA 1951

now agreed by scholars that this still undivided people were to be found *circa* sixty thousand years ago as nomads or wandering shepherds on or about the lands now known as the plateau of the Pamirs and the northern grasslands. There or thereabouts came upon this people the two great urges: pressure of population and that adventurous spirit which today sends the descendants of one branch flying across the Atlantic or climbing Himalayan peaks and long ago committed the other to spiritual adventures higher and more daring still. And so, probably never in one great exodus, but in errant bands here and there like the princes of a fairy-tale setting out to seek their fortune, this ancient people parted and went out east and west. Many and strange events were to happen before they met again—with the clash of arms.

A part, let us call it the western division, went down into Europe, probably through Southern Russia into the (now-named) Polish and Austrian countries. Another, deflecting eastward, pressed through the mountain passes to India along many tracks which invaders were to follow later, and coming down upon the glorious river Indus, which gives its name to Hindustan, realized that here was a fair home for a haughty and courageous people.

Thus, they left their friends and kinsmen, little guessing what vast seas of custom, language, philosophy, and even of color, were to divide them; though indeed both sections carried indelible marks of identity, which would in coming ages reveal the history of their parting.

There were deep grooves of thought traced by the original language, in which the thought of both Indian and European philosophers must move henceforth, however far apart their lives. A family likeness can still be traced between the thoughts of Indo-European philosophers, such as the Greeks, and those of the great Aryans of India. Their mythology is unmistakably alike in earlier stages. There are identities of language. They had the verbal copula that existed before the separation—

in Sanskrit *asti,* in Greek *esti,* in Latin *est,* in English *is.* They kept (like ourselves) the relative pronoun and the article, definite and indefinite. Those who have studied such alien languages as Hebrew, Chinese, and Japanese know all this implies, but there is much more. Both branches kept the indicative and subjunctive in the verb, the comparative and superlative in the adjective; both use the genitive case. It would be tedious to elaborate these points; but they are extremely interesting, and expose the rudimentary structure of thought, as the identical bones and teeth of animals may prove them to be of the same species.

Philologists assert that this ancestral language common to ourselves and the Aryans of India dates from at least ten thousand years B.C. and must then have been in a high state of development. We find it a strong and beautiful variant when we catch our first glimpse of it in Indian sacred and philosophic literature. It was for a long time unwritten, but was handed down in the marvelously cultivated memories of the East, and afterwards written and codified by their learned men. It was the opinion of Max Müller, the famous oriental scholar, that writing for literary purposes does not appear in any nation much before the seventh century B.C. in alphabetic writing.

It is a curious fact that many root-words employed in philosophic terms still connect us. In Sanskrit there is *manas,* the mind, which is *mens* in Latin and which we use as *mentality,* and so many more that it is impossible to recapitulate them. In short, there is between the separated Indo-European and Aryan peoples a now deeply submerged stratum of thought—like a reef covered with sea-water which forms a submarine bridge between islands, and accounts for identities of animals and plants otherwise inexplicable.

Yet we must not overrate the degree of philosophic thought at which our common ancestors had arrived. We

know from what we see in India that it must have been rudimentary, though marvelous, in that it held the materials for the mighty palaces of thought which Greece and India were to rear on the racial foundations.

It is a very much debated question whether after the long separation Greece was indebted for some of her highest flights of thought to India; and here there will aways be differences of opinion as there were among the Greeks themselves. The Persians, also Aryans or Noble People, and closely allied in faith with their Indian cousins, entered Greece freely, and brought with them Indian teachings. The name of their prophet Zoroaster or Zarathustra was familiar to both Plato and Aristotle. In the third century B.C. there existed in Greece an analysis of his teaching.

I cannot enter into the proofs of Indian influence, but a story of the visit of an Indian philosopher to Socrates cannot be passed over. Aristoxenus asserts that Socrates told the stranger that his work consisted in inquiries about the life of men, and that the Indian smiled, replying that none could understand things human who did not understand things divine—a note of thought so deeply and peculiarly Indian that Max Müller says this alone impresses him with the probability of the truth of the story.

There is no reason why it should not be true. The caravans came and went down the passes to India, as I have seen them myself in the Khaibar Pass, and others traveled down the ancient Asiatic trade-route through Kashmir from Ladakh and Turkestan, or from China down the mighty Burmese river, the Irawadi. Standing in these places I have realized that it was not only the merchandise of food, garments, and jewels which went to and fro. Men's thoughts have journeyed along these ways from time immemorial, far more abundantly, I believe, than has been allowed.

Wise men took their wisdom with them, lovers their ardors of verse and story; and that India should have

communicated to Plato her teaching of reincarnation, which he held so strongly, is as possible as that it sprang up in his own mind, or in the minds of both from some dim forgotten heritage of their once united peoples. Who can say? It matters little. For choice I prefer to think that the ancestral intelligence working in both countries independently produced the greatest philosophers the world has known.

Certain other points of resemblance are at first notable also: a deep and reverent devotion to the unseen, destined to fade in Europe later under the glare of unrivaled war-like and commercial genius; a high respect for their women as mothers and wives, to fade later in India under the torment of foreign invaders and alien races whose practice was very different from that of the Arya. Destiny had decreed that the two branches were to draw farther and farther apart, receding from the common home and kinship until a modern poet of their blood could write:

> Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.

Yet in a fine outburst he ends:

> But there is neither East nor West, Border or Breed or Birth,
> When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth.

The strong men were to meet often in the clash of thought and sword. In the former they are now meeting more fruitfully every day.

So the eastern-traveling Aryans settled in India, and still in their traditions and most ancient writings are embedded hints of the fact that they came to their home originally as strangers and pilgrims. This is not a common racial trait. The Hebrews recorded the entry into the Promised Land, but the Briton, the Teuton, and the Greek, as nations hold apparently no racial memory of a

time when they were not settled in their countries, though there were aborigines about them who might have served as reminders. In Indian folk-lore are many hints and reminiscences of a dark-skinned people, often beautiful and dangerous, who opposed the advance of the Arya and tempted them with the beauty of their women from the Aryan tradition of race, insinuating their own lower formulas of life into the code of the new rulers.

Still, the Indo-Aryans carried with them the sense of an aristocracy qualified and resolute to dominate all opposing races, and while ruling them justly to teach them that submission was their rôle and obedience their only concern with law and custom. This racial trait is repeated in the history of America and Canada and all the far-flung dominions of the Indo-European races.

When we first come upon India it is a comparatively civilized country, aiming at and attaining a deep and true sense of its relation to the Unseen and to social order as it conceived it. These people might have quoted Schleiermacher's definition of religion and philosophy as one which they frankly accepted: "Religion is the knowledge of our absolute dependence, something which determines us and which we cannot determine in return." And this presupposes great teachers, mighty minds, who gathered together the hopes and aspirations of a race and summed them up into the eternal question of humanity.

But in India the figures of these ancient teachers are legendary at first. Before the days of the Buddha they move, almost mythical and semidivine, caring profoundly for the thoughts they loosed among the people, but nothing for their own personalities and renown. How could it be otherwise in a land where personality tends always to merge in the Universal? All this is so alien to the Indo-European mind that—if one might dream—it might be said that possibly the great eastern and western branches fell apart because the westerners concerned themselves little with metaphysics and the things of the

spirit, whereas every instinct of the easterners drew them with passion to the solution of the eternal problem of man's relation to the Unseen.

This is pure imagination; but it is true that the westerners have never evolved a faith of their own and have been compelled to import religions from the East as they did tea and spices. They got no further than a ritual of human or bestial sacrifice to fearful or lustful gods. They could rise later into the great philosophies of Greece, relegating the old stories into the inane. But for the spiritual inspiration which rules the daily life of a nation they have been compelled to look to the East. The gods of Greece, Rome, early Gallia and Britannia exist no longer. "Great Pan is dead" was the cry which rang down the Ægean Sea as a conquering eastern faith prepared to rule the West with scepter and sword. The East in the form of the Galilean had conquered.

To many it seems that eastern thought as developed in Asia is to come again to rescue the western world from materialism, and that so the Indo-European and Aryan races may meet once more. This innermost difference has been a hitherto unbridgable gulf between them. The East, haughty, aristocratic, spiritual and other-worldly, leisured, tolerant of all faiths and philosophies, moving on vast spiritual orbits about the central sun; the West eager, hurried, worldly, absorbed in practical and temporary affairs, opinionated, contemptuous of other peoples and faiths, money-loving less for money's sake than its pursuit, younger, infinitely younger in tastes and psychic development than the East—what point of fusion can there be between the philosophies of these two divergent branches of the same great root? That, the thoughts recorded in this book may shadow forth.

For the growth of true philosophy such as walks hand in hand with religion, peace is needed and the absence of extremes of wealth and poverty. And when the Aryans had settled themselves they found a land that philosophy