

II-4. Millennium of Mahaveer and Buddha

Some words are destined to wait for years or centuries for their fulfillment.

Both Mahaveer (Mahvira, Mahaveera, 599 to 527 BCE) and Buddha (Gautam Buddha, 550 to 480 BCE) addressed issues of human condition. They stirred geopolitical upheaval in the Ganga valley. Buddha was born when Mahaveer was 49. It is unlikely that they ever met. Buddha left home at age of 26 that is 3 years after Mahaveer had died. A poignant allegory in the biography of Buddha by Ashvghosh (ca 200 CE) mentions that Buddha began to think about human condition after hearing the "song of the wind" possibly referring to the wind of socio-political change already blowing in the region. After leaving home Buddha focused on the importance of individual enlightenment (*Pragya*) while rejecting the a priori of the Ved described as *wordless edict by immutable supreme who knows no uttermost*. Both Buddha and Mahaveer are perceived *wiser than wisdom is thy simple lore, and knowing belike, as children know, more than we dream* to make people aware of their ability to make informed decisions. Both discouraged rituals, or gobble-gook of the unusual explanations and fantastic rationalizations, such as 'It is the will of God,' or 'God works in mysterious ways,' or some such magic bag that takes in anything and gives out anything.

An attempt to reveal truth is not a revealed truth. With a concern for humanity both Buddha and Mahaveer gave understandable worldly 'reasons' for ethical behavior through which humans feel empowered irrespective of their origin or station in life. They built concepts from tangible experiences

illustrated through understandable parables. For example to a mother struck by grief of her child Buddh suggested that she should find some mustard seeds from the household who has never been struck by grief. Of course no such household exists, As for the living: *All creatures have and strive to keep life. All life is linked and kind; and what we slay have given meek tribute of the milk and wool, and set. Life, which all can take but none can give.*

Simply profound (from Ashvghosh: Buddh Charit)

The self guides: *Stronger than woe is will you suffer from yourself. It knows not wrath, nor pardon. That which ye sow you reap - so is man's fate born.*

Tell us: *Wiser than wisdom is thy simple lore for forays into mind. Speak, if thou know a way more excellent. If not, peace go with thee.*

In the end: *Issues upon the universe that Sum of debit and credit for function and substance.*

The main message of Mahaveer was used to reformulate the earlier Arihant tradition of shared knowledge. He emphasized that "I can experience all tangibility through senses, I can access its meaning and significance which can be validated by direct evidence (*pratyakch*)." This is where the enlightenment of Buddh begins to diverge: *Na Syami aham, Na syati lok* (If I do not exist, the World does not exist), and also that all evidence is hidden from view (*parokch*). Such diversions augmented the Buddhist view of human perceptions so much so that they surmised that most humans cannot even begin to grasp reality. However, as a social-activist he advised that *by following right path individuals can spontaneously attain enlightenment*. He did not have the advantage of an existing tradition that emphasized criteria-based approach.

The *anugam* approach applies far more stringent external criteria for validity. Therein lies the basis for a deeper difference in the need for degrees of restraints through which states of perception qualitatively evolve incrementally towards a vision (#9-23 in Vol. I). It also includes the practitioners in the process not only through words and thoughts, but also by placing a far greater emphasis on their individual input through consistent conduct and behavior.

Mahaveer revived and echoed the pre-Vedic world-views of the Ganga Valley, i.e. perceptions validated by direct sense experience (*Pratyakch*) are the only guide for behavior. He rejected the class structure of the newly arrived Ary. He argued that rituals and beliefs in any form of supreme or omniscience is inherently contradictory as epitomized in the Vedic a priori that their scriptures are of non-human (*aporushey*) origins (Ved, Smrti, Shastr and Puran). As result Vedang began to evolve into Vedant (post-Vedic) constructs elaborated in scores of Upnishad, Samhita and Bhasya. As later interpreted by Shankar (ca 800AD) the hold of omniscience as God-incarnate solidified as certainty on the Hindu mind and society.

Search for certainty

Certainty of the past and present is key to successful behavior in the future. Virtually all ancestor and god-based traditions rely on the omniscience of the past to assure certainty of the present and also to chart the course for the future. Not unlike the legal systems such faith based omniscience is preserved and perpetuated with fear, omnipotence, and variations on the theme of structured decision-maker.

On the other hand, in the tradition of Arihants, and to some extent in the Buddhist world view, the starting point is the

reality of the present as perceived through sense inputs. It is used with some feedback to validate perceptions and address concerns. Such insights also set the course for future actions and mid-course corrections. Such an approach based on learning from trial and error is necessarily pluralistic. It discourages use of power and authority as wider discussion permits learning from the experience of other.

Mahaveer emphasized concern whereas Buddha emphasized compassion towards all beings. Both acknowledged the egalitarian view that all beings attain tangible identity (*atm* not *atma*) through their own effort and actions. Humans have ability to make decisions and choose a path to express self identity as an individual. Both dismissed a role for external will, grace, and judgment. Yet some branches of Buddhism invoke moderate versions of human enlightenment through prescribed path. Deeper appeal the original views of Mahaveer and Buddha has survived and evolved in traditions that have resorted to different degrees of rituals. Both promote an atmosphere of discourse, debate and dialog with remarkable intellectual openness and honesty. To varying degree both emphasize that the only acceptable interpretation of thought and words is through practice. Since human actions have consequences, it calls for negation of contradictions and irreversible actions. Social activism of egalitarian thinking still persists. Since all humans have potential, it calls for organization that does not classify potential of people at birth.

Without resorting to ontological mentalism and sophistry of the external grace (*religion*), for the individual search of truth through behavior (*Dharm* or *Dharma*) both Mahaveer and Buddha encouraged use of reality based (epistemological) syllogisms for

empirical search. Through such analytic and synthetic devices one arrives at increasingly valid inferences about the basic structure (*the unchanging*) underlying the appearances (*sat* or reality) coupled with its thinking and reasoning interaction with (*man* or *mind*) to validate perceptions. Unlike the Western tradition, mind does not exist outside the reality. Also the represented reality exists within the constructs of mind. In other words, heaven does not create anything beyond *man*.

The focus of the Syad-Nay of Mahaveer (III-22 to 24) is to identify contradiction and inconsistency to resolve doubt. It also facilitates separation of the unknown from the non-existent. Altogether it facilitates more viable perceptions and actions even in the absence of complete knowledge. The focus of the Buddhist tradition shifted to paradoxes, particularly that of the logical nothing (*sunyata*) against which all existence is represented. Thus the Buddhist *prajna* emptiness (consciousness behind *know thyself*) dissolves subject-object distinction in representation.

Three World-views

Dharm (behavior) mirrors the world-view of the action and consequence cycle. Behaviors evolve as we learn from experience of our own and the others. On this subject the three views from the Indian sub-continent are fundamentally different.

■ The Jain-View is that discrete parts of the world, including entities, events, and behaviors change in stages. A qualitative change is motivated by an individual self. It requires a qualitative change in the perception of the sense inputs (*Pratyakch*). Validity of perceptions increases in stages as the accumulated evidence coheres as cognition (*Pratybhigya*). Along the way it is prudent to be aware of what *one does not or may not know*, and to discard

beliefs that may rely on the non-existent. The goal for an individual is to arrive at the valid construct (*kevel*) that is useful guide for future behaviors.

- The Buddhist-view assumes that sense- experience is inherently unreliable. Therefore a useful starting point is that there is nothing real (*Shoonyta*). Valid perceptions and behavior lead to spontaneous enlightenment (*Pragya*) of the internal cognition.

- The Vedic beliefs are inspired by a creator, care-taker, omniscience. With the Vedantic reasoning it evolved into all-pervading Brahm - a non-entity that is beyond sense experience, but it can be experienced through meditation.

Pre-Mahaveer Geo-political context: Both the Indus valley and the Ganaga valley civilizations (ca. -2700) used cow for milk and bulls as the source of mechanical power. Horse did not arrive on the scene until about 2000 BCE. The horse-based technologies and practices, including war and diseases from the Middle East, brought waves of upheavals. By about 700 BCE these herders had settled in the Ganga valley, whereas in the Sindhu valley they remained invaders for a long time to come. These included Persians (400 BCE), Alexandar (327 BCE), Gaznavis (1000 CE), and Babar (1500 CE). With the advantage of horse and methods of warfare the invaders and the herders resorted to violence to establish their superiority fueled by faith in the absolute and omniscient. Their methods of dealing with other beliefs and practices were influenced by ideals of their faith. These encroaching cultures and beliefs clashed with very different views and practices that prevailed in the Ganga Valley.

Born only a few hundred miles apart and within an interval of few decades, both Mahaveer and Buddh took a stand against the practices inspired by the faith in the absolute that was

described as the "unknown and unknowable omniscience."
Although the migrants changed somewhat by the arguments of Mahaveer and Buddh, however within the next 300 years the followers of Mahaveer and Buddh had to leave the Ganga Valley.

These followers of both went, literally "begging" as monks to other parts of India. In South and West they found enduring support among the ordinary people. They rarely had royal patronage, and certainly no backing of the armies. The followers of Mahaveer found a hospitable environment in Central and South India. In the later years alliance of Buddhist Sangh with rulers in India put them in direct conflict with the alliance of Brahmins with the rulers. As a result by 1000 CE Buddhism virtually disappeared from India. The Buddhist monks carried the message to Afghanistan, Shri Lanka, East Asia and Japan. These transplanted traditions of Buddhism now have international influence.

The followers of Mahaveer did not make political alliances with the rulers nor pose threat to the rulers. The lay Jain community continued to be influential. The Jin monks stayed in touch with the grass-root for their support where they developed a deep understanding of the concerns and potentials of common people. This is a possible reason for the continuity of the reality-based egalitarian world-views including *more peace of mind comes with fewer skeletons in closet*. They survived and thrived without a centralized authority or support from the armies or the State. They did not resort to dialectic, conversions, or other forms of polarizing practices. With the grass-root support and practice-based thought both laity and monks retained their identity as Jain in virtually all parts of India. Belonging to the tradition comes from practice. Many of the Jain monks and the Arihants are said to be born as non-jains. Thus the social order is not by birth as is

the case with the Brahminical caste system. Nor the membership is to be approved by some higher authority. These egalitarian practice-based-thoughts are often wrongly portrayed as the "religions" or "church" in the style of organized Judeo-Christian-Islamic faiths for (omniscience)-thought-based-practices.

It is said that Mahaveer established the Jainism. It is correct only in the same sense as Shakaracharya (ca. 800 CE) started the Hinduism. Mahaveer revived the more ancient tradition of Arihant for a reality based action and consequence evaluation. Mahaveer had a significant reforming influence on the violence prone Aryan practices and rituals. As a result the Vedic belief system has evolved into a more pluralistic and heterodox world view. Many of their Hindu descendents have adopted vegetarian and other nonviolent practices.

Upnishad: Attempt to break from the Vedic *a priori*. Origins of the Vedic hymns is traced 1500 to 1200 BCE period when the Aryan herders came to the Ganga valley from Afghanistan and father West. These herder migrants were quite aware that their myths were not factual accounts of reality. Their Gods of epiphany and visions are not meant to explain or even express cosmic mysteries:

Who really knows? Who will proclaim it? Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation? The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe. Who then knows whence it has arisen? Whence this creation has arisen - perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not - the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows - or perhaps he does not know. [From Rigved, translation by W. Doniger]

The attitudes changed as the herders began to settle in the Ganga valley and came in contact with city cultures of the City

States of the Ganga Valley. Under the influence of the indigenous cultures the Vedic a priori evolved in to the post-vedic (*vedant or vedanta*) constructs based on discourse and dialog that facilitates personal search. For about 500 years (between 800 to 300 BCE) the aryan hermits (Brahm Rishis) began to provide their own interpretations (*upnishads, up* for near, and *nishad, sit*). Prefixes (*aranya* or woods, *kath-up*, difficult) of about 40 available discourses have themes of personal curiosity and wonderment.

The post-Vedic narratives speculate on issues ranging from life and death to ultimate reality and the universe. Water (*salilain*) is considered an all pervading Reality (*tadkain*): Since water evolved through action of the heat (*tapas*), the contradiction like water and heat is inherent in existence (*sat*) and non-existence (*a-sat*). Soon the concept of *Atma* (soul), an entity that makes a living body different than the dead, substituted the Vedic Creator with Param Atma and Brahma. Note that this concept of *Atma* has little to do with the *atm* as an individual self. With the Vedantic revival, such ambiguities evolved further to cosmic soul in the writings of Sankara and Ramanujam. They also encouraged stratification of the moral codes into the caste system (possibly based on *Jaimini Sutr* and *Manu Smriti* from 800 to 500 BCE). A cast-ridden society without strong intellectual cohesion and camaraderie is much easier to exploit. It prepared the ground for 1000 years of subjugation by Mongols, Moguls and British.

Speculative thoughts and musings of Vedantic Upnishads (Aranyak) begin to explore the relationship of the individual self with the rest (non-self). For example, *Tat tvam asi* (translated as *That thou art*) resonates with "I think, therefore I am" or "It thinks, therefore it is" as formulated 2000 years later in Europe (Descartes) with emphasis on the individual. Such constructs can be self-referential and do little to do away with other ad hoc

beliefs. Also If Shakespeare had Hamlet say, "I think, therefore I am" would that prove to us that Hamlet really exists?"

An Upnishad aphorism, *vakyovakyam*, appeals to look for the 'purpose' behind a sentence. An understanding of the intent and meaning is needed if we wish to go beyond the stage of literal post-mortem or after-the-fact analysis (*aanvikha*). This attempt to understand the meaning and intent was denounced in Ramayan (Balmiki) and Manusmriti as anti-Vedic.

After several readings of Upnishad, my impression is that these narratives are attempts of the Vedic Scholars to integrate the local beliefs and aspirations of individuals. In their search for unity in multiplicity, they wonder out aloud: *When are we born, where do we live, and whither do we go?* Then, as if in frustration one resorts to *eti eti* (this too and that too) or to *neti neti* (no it is neither this nor that. Note that *eti eti* and also *neti neti* is contradiction to reality (Chapter III-24). Referring to such circularity, in response to the question by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi why Beatles were leaving him, John Lennon said *You are the cosmic one; you ought to know.*

Upnishadic discourses leave the impression that these are attempts to integrate local thoughts into Vedic traditions to synthesize theistic unity. Such constructs are still believed to be the outcome of divine grace. Rituals were designed to influence the divine judgment. In their musings Upnishads fail to touch the complexity of real world (see III-28). Nowhere do they come around to the idea of the primary role of humans in shaping their own course without grace and omniscience or *niyati* (fate or destiny). Soon it was widely recognized that the Vedic assertions are not meaningfully interpretable (see Nay on this site), let alone help in formulating a cohesive body of knowledge. Vatsyayan (ca 400) noted: *Reasoning is not mere study of self, like the Upnishad.*

*Successful behavior results from evidence based knowledge of reality. Method of Nay (reasoning) has no relevance for objects that are unknown, nor for those that are known for certain. It has relevance only for those about which there is doubt. As it is said (by Gautam), final determination (**nirnay**) requires consideration (**vimarsh**) and resolution (**pratipaksh**) of doubt to cognize reality (**tattva-jnana**).*

Seminal thoughts

Mahaveer (India 599-527 BCE): The world is knowable to humans, and the human knowledge is for humane use;

Nonviolence, logic of doubt, Shared knowledge,

Buddh (India 563-483 BCE): Compassion and personal enlightenment through a path.

Confucius (China 551-479 BCE) Prior Knowledge from Ancestors and the State

Thales (Greece) 624-545 BCE) First prediction of Solar Eclipse; Magnetism

Also: **Pythagoras** (581-497), **Socrates** (470-399); **Plato** (427-327),

Aristotle (384-322), **Lao Tze** (601- ?), **Zoroaster** or Zorathustra of Persia or Iran (630-533).

It appears that this was the period of questioning through which humans began to take charge of human affairs by discarding wide ranging make beliefs to reconstruct a more equitable world in which an individual is the mover and doer in the social context.

To recapitulate Buddha and Mahaveer argued to break away from the pantheon of deities and self-referential beliefs. Their premise is that all *beings* aspire to realize their potential within the bounds of shared extent reality. For humans who can choose and make decisions they emphasized a secular role for actions (*karm*) and behaviors (*Dharm*) in shaping future outcomes. As for the unknown 'nothing' of significance lies beyond here and now; everything that is there to know is known or will become known with time; we may not know what lies ahead but the future is as real as the past and present.

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