



Jesus and India

Pradeep Darooka

Foreword

If we can strip the dogma from religious thought, and bring any religious teaching down to the bare bones spiritual level, the following will make sense. It is not about comparison of religions but the essence of human spirit. Just as Hinduism has nothing to do with Rama or Krishna or any of the other godheads, Buddhism has nothing to do with Buddha's teachings, Islam has nothing to do with Prophet Mohammed's revelations, so also, Christianity has nothing to do with Jesus and his teachings. All of these religions came about as becoming 'organized' thanks to the greed and power of certain individuals who took it upon themselves to 'interpret' the teachings of the Teachers themselves!

I looked up at the icon again and again, not believing my eyes. I was in the St. Sava Church in Belgrade, Serbia. It is the largest Orthodox Church in the world. I went around and looked at some more icons, and the hand gestures stared at me again, almost wanting to tell me something. They were unmistakably similar to the mudras in Hindu / Buddhist philosophy. My curiosity was now piqued, and I started clicking some pictures.

In the last couple of years, I have travelled extensively to Eastern Europe and Russia which, along with Greece, are the centers of the Orthodox Church. I had visited numerous Orthodox Churches in these countries, each more resplendent than the other. One of the most beautiful I had visited was in Vilnius, Lithuania. But I had never noticed the hand gestures on the icons until now. It is important to understand that iconography is unique to the Orthodox Church, and does not exist

in the Catholic or Protestant Churches. The latter have an altar which does not exist in the Orthodox Church. There are no pews in the Orthodox Church and the faithful and visitors are required to stand during the services. These differences between the two parallel places of worship of Jesus are missed by most non-Christians while visiting the Churches. But a closer and patient look will reveal some surprises, as they did to me.

From Belgrade onwards, as I travelled to the other Balkan countries and Bulgaria and Russia, I started noticing these hand gestures in almost all the icons in the Churches. These countries are predominantly Orthodox, but do have a few Catholic churches. So, to be sure of what I was noticing, I visited them and of course did not find any icons and therefore no hand gestures. The two most common hand gestures I noticed were

1. The thumb and the ring finger joined together.
2. The little and ring fingers joined to the thumb.

Both were done with the right hand..

The first one is the Prithvi mudra and the second is the Prana mudra, two of the 108 mudras from Yoga and Tantra practices. The third most common hand gesture I noticed was the first finger touching the thumb in the Vitarka mudra.

How did these mudras come about in these Christian icons thousands of years after they had already become part of the spiritual and religious practice in India?

As part of this happening, three other happenings occurred within a span of a few days during the same trip to help me find the answer to this question.

First, I stumbled upon 'The Urantia Book' at the Mystic Fair in Zagreb, Croatia.

Second, I finally read the complete book 'Jesus Lived in India' by Holger Kersten.

Third, I met a defrocked priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade.

Let me start with the Third happening.

While conducting a cooking workshop at Radost, a vegetarian restaurant in Belgrade, I started chatting with Maria, one of the cooks who is a Krishna devotee. I shared my observations about the hand gestures with her, and her eyes lit up. She quickly told me about Priest X (his name cannot be disclosed for obvious reasons) who had been defrocked by the Church. Why? Because he had done extensive research on the connection between Jesus and India, and in particular what exactly happened during the 'missing years' of his early life and subsequent to his 'resurrection'. He had travelled to India and Tibet numerous times, and was about to publish his findings. Before he could do that, the Church got wind of it, and defrocked him. Instead of a messiah, he had become a pariah!

Maria knew Priest X and agreed to introduce me to him. I met him the next day over a cup of tea. He was a very unassuming person radiating a certain aura that was very comforting. As I shared my observations with him, he smiled and said what I had noticed was not coincidental. It reflected the 'Buddhist teachings and philosophy that Jesus had imbibed while visiting India and Tibet during the missing years of his life". I listened to him in disbelief as he shared anecdotes, tidbits, evidence and other information he had gathered during his trips as part of his research. I sat there transfixed as he showed me pictures and references in various Indian and Tibetan scriptures alluding to the presence of one Yuz Assaf and Issa Masih visiting India and subsequently living there. His trail culminated just outside Srinagar in a dargah that is marked as the tomb for Yuz Assaf. Yuz Assaf was Jesus! His last statement as we parted was even more thought provoking; "Jesus was the last of the seven reincarnations of Vishnu to date. Krishna and the Buddha were the fifth and the sixth."

Just then, my memory pricked me, and I realized that I had actually visited this place in 2006 while in Kashmir. I had just come across the book 'Jesus Lived in India' that pinpointed the exact location, and I had gone to find it for myself.

This brings me to the Second happening.

Whenever I am on a long trip like this one (over two months), I usually throw in a book for reading assuming I will have some free time somewhere, which of course I never do! The book lies buried deep inside my suitcase. This time, for some strange reason, I was carrying 'Jesus Lived in India' and had forgotten about it. After my meeting with Priest X, I immediately dug up the book from my bag, and devoured it anxiously. Holger Kersten is a Swiss / German theologian and religious scholar. In this book he has meticulously and painstakingly outlined in detail the missing gaps in Jesus' life, and in particular shed light on the mystery of the Resurrection and what happened thereafter. His trail from Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Palestine took him across the entire Middle and Near East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Tibet. It culminated in Anzimar, just outside Srinagar at Yuz Assaf's tomb, the same one referred to by Priest X above! While Priest X's research notes etc. were all in Serbian and therefore not readable by me directly, Kersten's book is in English. While some parts may appear to be conjecture and may not stand up in a court of law because of circumstantial evidence, the scientific and theological proof provided by him appears quite convincing to a non-Christian. Of course, to the Vatican Church it was blasphemy, and the book and the author were quickly denounced.

Irrespective of whether one accepts and believes in the theories postulated by the two individuals above, one fact remains irrefutable. Civilization as we understand it had dawned in India before anywhere else in the world. Indian philosophy and thinking in the form of Vedas and Puranas had developed and been documented in the scriptures thousands of years before Jesus was born. Krishna and Gautama Buddha had both been reincarnated and lived their lives, and left a trail of their teachings and followers well before Jesus. It is not out of the realm of possibility that these teachings and belief system made their

way to various parts of the world. However up until the last couple of centuries, Indian history was largely depicted through the oral tradition with very little in writing. This is unlike Western history that is largely written and therefore also easier to manipulate and amend to suit one's need. The Western world, right through the ages, has never given credence to the depth of Indian wisdom and its impact on almost every aspect of life in the world. Authors like Kersten in modern times, and travelers like Marco Polo have done that. It is also an indication of Eastern passivity versus Western aggressiveness.

And this brings me to the First happening.

The Urantia Book is a 2,000 pages tome that was first noticed in the 1950s. It has no stated author and was compiled based upon supposed revelations to some individuals who chose to be anonymous... It quickly became controversial for its contents and the fact that no individual(s) took responsibility for its contents. In a nutshell, the book purports to reveal wisdom about the Universe, its functioning, God, and in particular Jesus and his life and teachings. Skimming it (it is impossible to read the entire text due to the dense and science fiction character of the writing), one gets the impression, that the author(s) took off from where the New Testament ended, and took it upon themselves to 'reveal' the true nature of the Universe from the Western Christian perspective, so as to counter the widely accepted wisdom of the Vedas and Upanishads. Whether or not they succeed is not relevant. The reason this book became relevant in the context of Jesus and India is twofold. One, it does talk about Jesus seemingly appearing in person to various individuals for a long period after the Resurrection. Second, it reluctantly acknowledges the fact that India was the beehive of all spiritual wisdom during the period of Jesus' early years, specially the Buddhist teachings and impact that had spread far and wide. It also mentions that the belief in reincarnation and the ability of wise men to portend the arrival of the next Buddha were strongly accepted thinking in the East. But thereafter, instead of joining the dots and linking the birth of Jesus with this reincarnation as followed by the 'three wise men from the East' who came following the Bethlehem star, they abruptly drop it like a hot potato on the premise that Indian spirituality and wisdom 'did not fulfill its potential'! It is not

important to go into the reasons for this. Suffice to say, Indian wisdom was very much acknowledged and known in the West, even to a reluctant latter day Christian.

There are numerous areas of similarity and convergence between Christian theology and Hindu / Buddhist philosophy. This is evident more in the Orthodox Church and less so in the Vatican Church. Nikolaj Belimirovic is another Serbian Orthodox priest who has alluded to this connection. Just as Zen is the purest form of Buddhism, Sufi is the purest form of Islam, and Advaitya is the purest form of Hinduism, the Orthodox beliefs emerged as a truer version of Jesus' teachings and life, though not in its entirety. A few of the similarities are:

- The introduction to John's Gospel, 'In the beginning there was the Word.....'
That word was Om, the sound of creation itself.
- The Holy Trinity: The Father, The Son, The Holy Spirit.
Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh or Buddha, Dharma, Sangha
- Baptism using Holy Water
Cleansing through ritual bathing in the holy rivers
- Chanting
Mantras
- Rosary beads
Japa mala
- Fasting
Fasting
- Birth of Jesus, foretold and feared by King Herod
Birth of Krishna, foretold and feared by Kansa
- Jesus, a healer
Buddha, a healer

This is how the hand gestures start to make sense. If Jesus was indeed a Bodhisattva, his spending time in India and Tibet during his formative years starts to fall in place. Upon his return, his teachings earned him the wrath of the Jews since it is in total opposition to their concept of God. He was hounded, betrayed and ultimately crucified. But as foretold by him, he rose from the tomb on the third day, not just in spirit as mentioned in the Gospels, but in body since he never died on the cross. His appearances subsequent to the Resurrection are not just visions, but in flesh and blood, only no one is aware of this except the few who were with him throughout this time, and who now accompany him as he crosses Mount Olive to head to the East, to India, his home, where he had come from. No less a master of the modern times than Osho himself acknowledges this.

Amen!

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