

# Bodhi Tree and Human Revolution

Lokesh Chandra

## What the Bodhi Tree Symbolizes

**D**ISTINGUISHED colleagues on the dais and in the audience.

In 1979, President Daisaku Ikeda came to Delhi at the invitation of the Government of India. He wanted a bodhi tree. The Minister of State for External Affairs was puzzled as to what a bodhi tree is. When I explained to him the bodhi tree, he asked how he would take a big, peepul tree in the plane.

I gave him my own miniature bodhi tree, about a foot high, including the pot in which it grew. It was a small lovely bodhi tree, fully branched. President Ikeda carried it to Japan, but the customs were adamant and the bodhi tree could not enter Japan. Now we have this colossal bodhi garden in Delhi.

The bodhi tree is an important valorization of existence. Materiality and spirituality in congruence. Both have to be harmonized. Harmonisation and inter-netting of the two is crucial.

Sanskrit has the tree called *ashwattha*—which means “the place where horses stand.” In ancient times the Kshatriyas (warrior class) used to tie their horses to a peepul tree. When the horse is not broken, it is wild. We have to see the wild horses in Mongolia, galloping in their natural instinct; a delight to see a horse running around wild. The Buddha pondered under this *ashwattha* tree as to how our mind, our roving mind, can find a value system. He sat down under this tree to control the uncontrollable horse which is the mind. The UNESCO Charter begins “war is born in the minds of men.” I would have worded it “peace is born in the minds of men.” Enlightenment or Bodhi has to begin in the Bodhi-citta or Bodai-shin.

Lord Buddha sat under the bodhi tree for 49 days, hungry, trying to control the horse, the mind. A passage in the Nikayas, the oldest section of the Tripitaka, defines the meditation of Siddhartha in the words: “He looked up at a *pippala* leaf imprinted against the blue sky, its tail blow-

ing back and forth as if calling him. Looking deeply at the leaf he saw clearly the presence of the sun and stars. Without the sun, without light and warmth, the leaf could not exist. He also saw in the leaf the presence of clouds. Without clouds there could be no rain. And without rain the leaf could not be. He saw the earth, time, space and mind.” I would underline the word mind. “All were present in the leaf. In fact at that very moment the entire universe existed in that leaf. The reality of the leaf was a wondrous miracle.”

The idea of peace is ecological peace. Without ecology there would be no human mind, no humanity, no life. Speaking of peace, we think of social peace in the first instance. Transcending all is spiritual peace which conditions social, political or global peace. In India, we say *Shantih* (peace) three times: *Shantih, shantih, shantih!* The first *shantih* represents ecological peace, our harmonization with nature. The second is social peace, peace within society, within nations. The third is spiritual peace that conditions all elements of peace.

Lord Buddha sat under the bodhi tree and the horse or mind was fully trained. The horse of Alexander the Great has a stupa in Taxila, the Dharmarajika Stupa. It had carried him on his long campaigns. When it reached India, the heat and fatigue of thousands of miles, the horse passed away and a stupa was erected at Taxila in his honor. It still stands there, in ruins. What does this horse represent? It is not just the horse of Alexander. It is the horse, the mind that has been tamed and conditioned for a transcension into a higher spiritual existence.

### What the Lotus Symbolizes

Why is it called the Lotus Sutra? In its Sanskrit text, there are four kinds of lotuses. The principle of physics is—VIBGYOR—violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. Four colors of lotuses are mentioned in the Lotus Sutra. When Kumarajiva was translating the Sutra, he could not find the color of the *kumuda* though he was a great transcreator. The Lotus Sutra symbolizes the harmonization of colors, like the seven colors of the rising sun in the morn. The seven colors are not seen as individual colors. They coexist in a harmony in the light of the sun. The light of the sun gives us the entire agricultural world. Agriculture has been vital to human life. Red, blue, yellow and white represent different phases of human activity. The culminating color is white; the color of purity where the conscience becomes supremely pure. Why is the lotus used as a symbol and not a horse? The lotus grows in the slush of the village. The dirtiest pond in the village has the most beautiful

lotus. The coexistence of the slush and the wonderful flower of the lotus has to be reflected in human consciousness. We can't wish away the negations of life, howsoever negative they be. We have to accept negations of life and make them positives. The positives have to be lived with the negatives. The slush and the beauty of the lotus flower coexist. Not only coexist, they have a symbiotic relationship. The symbiotic relationship is reflected in the four different colors. Symbiosis of different elements of life, different languages, different ethnicities, is the symbolic white lotus where materiality will coexist with spirituality.

President Ikeda is deeply imbued with Buddhist thought and he is an *arhat* incarnate. The way he writes about life, feels life and adores life, he symbolizes the expansion of human consciousness.

Once Dr Karan Singh asked me, "Why does Buddhism speak of *duhkha* only, while Vedanta culminates in Ananda." I requested him to read the conclusion of President Ikeda's book on Buddhism. President Ikeda says Buddha had his last dinner at the house of Amrapali, left Vaishali, looked back and said "How beautiful is Vaishali!" The more evocative sentence was "How beautiful is life!" In Sanskrit: "*Manoramam Jivitam*". The beauty of life is enshrined in every poem that President Ikeda writes. When I read his poems, I am reminded of the last words of the Buddha. President Ikeda's spirit, his conscience represents this culmination of Buddha's valorization of life. To read a short sentence of his: "Never belittle yourself, for you harbour the great universe within you." It represents the thought of the Agamas (Agon in Japanese.) If we sublimate our mind, which embraces the universe, our life will shine brilliantly. This is what we call human revolution. But the shine of life and the slush of life both have to coexist in harmony. Harmonization, the internetting of variations, of differences, of contradictions is the core of life. Nothing can be wished away. It has to be accepted and sublimated.

I once again pay deep regards to President Ikeda who has given to India this beautiful Bodhi Tree Garden. Someone has to write a book on what the bodhi tree represents in Buddhism. How is it depicted in the Agamas, in the Chinese Sutras, in the Tibetan Canon, the Pali Canon and Sanskrit texts. In the early stages of Indian Buddhist art, the bodhi tree represents Lord Buddha's Bodhi. The erstwhile wild horses of the mind became the illumination of Lord Buddha, and will be our renaissance.