**Zakir Hussain on Pathfinders**

It is with deep reverence that I write these words about the great beings whose determination, focus, commitment, sacrifice and passion showed us the way forward.

This series refers to them as ‘pathfind­ers’. The word struggles to aptly bring into focus the enormity of their contribution and the influence of these visionaries upon our lives. Throughout the annals of history, we are reminded of those land­mark moments when these unique think­ers shaped our vision of the future, be it in the arts, academia, science, commerce or sports.

Time and again, enlightened beings have appeared, and India has been blessed with a fair share of them. It is very difficult to say if the constantly changing geograph­ical make-up of India, the recent pre-In­dependence era of princely subsidies, the post-Independence emergence of business houses, or government support or lack of it had any influence on the creative vision of these pathfinders. I am not qualified to speak of the thinkers who shaped the eco­nomic development of India, but I may be able to speak of the changing world of arts and its effect on our culture throughout the aforementioned time span.

I would like to suggest that pathfinders are, in reality, innovators. To give clarity to their views, they have to be multidimensional in their thought processes, a quality which exposes them to criticism. They are accused of de­stroying tradition and tampering with the tried-and-true ‘old way’. We all fear change and therefore condemn those who have the courage to point the way forward, but it is important to understand that innovators do preserve the ‘old way’. Innovation and preservation are two sides of the same coin, a sub-process in the big scheme of evolution. In any creative thought there exists a connection to the source that is almost always traditional, and, using this source as a basis of creativity, a new thought is put for­ward while preserving the old way.

It is essential that we keep pace with evolution. Oth­erwise, we expose ourselves to becoming dinosaurs in danger of extinction. In India, we see that through many oppressive regimes, wars and hardship, our cultural evo­lution has been positive and its fast-paced development has been carefully nurtured by these innovators. In our country, or anywhere else in the world, a true innova­tor has never waited for subsidies or court recognition to find a way to enhance and advance knowledge. In the world of music, for instance, new ragas were emerging regularly without a clue as to where the next meal for the artiste and his family would come from.

Before Independence, the arts in India were supported to some extent by the maharajas and nawabs of princi­palities scattered over all parts of the country. Literature, sculpture, painting, theatre, dance and music all thrived under their patronage but this support was limited to a chosen few. It was therefore fortunate that the old system of guru–shishya parampara practised by these masters al­lowed the gurus to support and teach their shishyas, thus passing on knowledge to future generations. The gurus of this era, with no economic worries, concentrated entire­ly on consolidating, analyzing and overseeing the docu­mentation of all information from the ancient masters. As is usually the case, this detailed look provided new insights into the ancient ways, in turn pointing to a new way forward: preservation leading to innovation.

Creative arts and the laws that govern these art forms were re-examined; modern inventions led to the advent of contemporary thinking. The creative minds of that era seemed to be a step ahead of the fast-changing times, turning yet another corner, reaching yet another horizon, taking India onwards towards another wondrous journey of discovery, a golden era, a renaissance in full flow. It was too good to be true.

Then came a great cataclysmic upheaval. India was thrown into chaos by the after-effects of Independence. The country was split into two. ‘Mine and not yours’ be­came the chant of the time, while progress in all facets of life became almost non-existent. Nawabs and maharajas became myths of yesterday and, with their demise, went the protectively cushioned, carefree world in which the creative arts were cocooned.

These were difficult times. The Raj was gone, but the West was even more a part of India. Emulating the cul­ture of a faraway land became the norm. In a world where everyone was trying to become a doctor, an engineer or a successful businessman, there was no time for the arts or culture, and so, having emerged from the protective shadows of the royal courts, the artists suddenly found themselves looked upon as third-class citizens with no social status, adrift with little or no economic backing from the elite. It became necessary to reinvent culture but, this time, for the masses.

One does not tell a visionary to stop seeing beyond the horizon, or order a thinker to stop thinking out of the proverbial ‘box’, or bind any innovator with the pres­sures of social protocol. The pathfinders were up to the task; they realised that Indian arts and culture needed to be accepted by the world with deep reverence. Only then would they earn the respect they deserved at home.

A new breed of innovators emerged, skilled in market­ing and networking in an increasingly global landscape. They set about finding a way to seamlessly bring a thou­sands-of-years-old system of creative arts and culture into modern times, with the idea of developing aware­ness and elevating the social status of the arts. There was a conscious effort made to project arts and culture as a product. Education, appearance, social skills and stage­craft emerged as required essentials for the representa­tives of this product.

We look back with amazement at this process of evolu­tion and the marvellous visionaries who confidently car­ried the fragile fabric of Indian art and culture on their broad shoulders and brought it into the present. At the time of this writing, I am not aware of the greats who will be covered in this book, but I am sure that there will have to be series two, three and more if there is to be proper credit given to all those who have led us to where we are now.

In conclusion, mankind’s evolution has its foundation in creative innovation. Looking at our past and the great minds of the present, it is clear that the future promises to be a great journey of exciting discoveries. 1 would also like to give a nod to the very first innovator, the Being who created our world and planted that software called ‘Thought’ in us, which became the window to the path of infinite possibilities found and yet to be found.

Have a good read.

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