

## BOUND TOGETHER

M R Rajagopalan

THE \*TITLE READ TOGETHER with the sub-title makes it clear that human beings are bound together and Globalization has been shaped by Traders, Preachers, Adventurers and Warriors. The author is a polyglot and his mastery over several subjects has enabled him to use snippets of history, anthropology, molecular genetics, geology, hydrography, treatise on technology and dozens of other disciplines with consummate skill to bring up the central theme of the book—well before anyone spoke of it, globalization has been there, in fact, since the first human beings stepped out of Africa for lands they had never seen.

To quote the author “We find written in every individual’s DNA sequences of a record of our ancestors’ respective journeys.”

By analyzing the DNA of living humans from different parts of the world, geneticists can reconstruct the movement of their ancestors and track the prehistoric human colonization of the world. Around sixty thousand years ago, a small group of people—as few as perhaps one hundred fifty to two thousand people from present-day East Africa—walked out. Over the next fifty thousand or so years they moved, slowly occupying the Fertile Crescent, Asia, Australia, and Europe and finally moving across the Beringia land bridge to the American continent. The rising waters at the end of the Ice Age separated the Americas from the Asian continent. It was not until Christopher Columbus’s encounter with the Arawak on the shores of San Salvador in 1492 that the long-separated human cousins from Africa would meet each other.

Adventurers of the past have been replaced by a new class of tourists. Caravan traders of the past have been succeeded by multinational companies transporting their goods on container ships.

In 1800s US was the leading producer of cotton using slave labour. One senator observed that the abolition of slavery would mean making a war on cotton which he called the King. But the American Civil War did end slavery. And yet the shortages caused by the war propelled King Cotton’s march across the globe. Mill owners’ search for alternative sources led directly to a renewed demand for cotton from India and to the introduction of American upland cotton in Egypt and Brazil. The American Civil War became a landmark in Egyptian history as during the war years 40 percent of Lower Egypt’s fertile land was converted to cotton. But when the Civil War ended, the windfall of the new growers soon turned into misery as cotton prices fell. In places like Brazil, natural calamity combined with the cotton crisis resulted, by some accounts, in the death of half a million people through starvation and disease. Although historians disagree as to how much the fall in world market prices affected cultivators, historian of cotton Sven Beckett notes that “at the very least, world market integration increased the economic

uncertainty faced by people in remote corners of the world. Their incomes, and quite literally their survival, were newly linked to global price fluctuations over which they had little control. The protesters in Seattle in the year 2003 showed how the globalization of cotton was having a very different impact on America a century and half later: while American cotton farmers, fattened by government subsidies, stayed home, American textile mill workers were on the streets protesting the threat to their jobs from imports. There were to protesters from Mali to raise their voice against the export of heavily subsidized US cotton”.

Author also traces the story of coffee –how its stimulating powers discovered accidentally by a shepherd in the Hills of Ethiopia in the thirteenth century and how coffee drinking became a habit and spread through the monasteries in Italy–coffee houses in Turkey and then to Oxford. The seeds were smuggled out from Yemen to Brazil which is presently the largest producer of coffee in the world and to India, Vietnam etc.

There is an interesting account of the development of concept of zero and how it travelled from India to Europe through the medium of Arab scholars.

The material greed lurking behind Christian attempts to recover the Holy Land during the Crusades was hardly a secret. Perhaps the most striking example of this greed was the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 by soldiers of the Fourth Crusade. “Never since the creation of the world had so much booty been taken from a city,” wrote a contemporary chronicler. “No one could possibly count the piles of gold, silver, jewels or the bales of precious materials”.

Preachers enriched languages of their converts, introduced printing technology, and transformed cultures for better or for worse. If the world today, looks more homogenous than at any time in the past it is because a vast number of people have come to embrace the great religions that streamed out of the foothills of the Himalayas and deserts of the Middle East. In the remotest corner of the planet one will find a mosque, a church, or a temple.

The Mauryan emperor Asoka, whose army brought vast parts of India under his rule by the force of arms in the third century BCE, embraced Buddhism and used his imperial authority to spread the religion. He sent his own son Mahinda, who had become a monk, as ambassador preacher to the court of Sri Lanka. Mahinda undertook what he termed dhammavijaya, a religious conquest, dispatching large numbers of Buddhist missionaries abroad to the kings of Egypt, Macedonia, and several Hellenistic kingdoms in the Mediterranean.

#### **ABOUT THE TRAVELER XUANZANG**

For twelve years Xuanzang traveled through India, visiting holy Buddhist sites, studying at the famous Buddhist University in Nalanda, and debating and discussing with scholars. When in 643 AD, he took leave of his patron and friend King Harsha, he was presented with elephants and a retinue of men and horses to carry nearly seven hundred Buddhist texts and a large number of images he had collected. In the course of the biggest information transfer of the epoch, one elephant drowned while crossing the Indus River but another, amazingly, carried on over the Hindu Kush until, chased by robbers it fell into a ravine on the way to Kashgar.

## OPENING "GOD'S HIGHWAY" IN AFRICA

Livingstone concluded that God's purpose for his life was to use his talents to explore and map the unknown continent and open up "God's Highway", the Zambesi River, which flowed from west to east coast of Africa could be the continent's highway to Christianity, commerce and civilization.

The tendency and spirit of the age are more and more toward the undertaking of industrial enterprises of such magnitude and skill as to require the capital of the world for their support and execution—as the Pacific Railroad, Suez Canal, Mont Cenis Tunnel, and railway in India, and Western Asia, Euphrates Railroad, etc The extension and use of railroads, steamships, telegraphs, break down nationalities and bring peoples geographically remote into close connection commercially and politically. They make the world one, and capital, like water, tends to a common level.

Christianity and Islam shared the same universalizing impulse founded on the idea that their faith should become the sole religion of humankind. But unlike Christianity, Islam is marked by the absence of any kind of priesthood or ecclesiastic organization charged with spreading the faith.

## WORLD IN MOTION

Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and Ferdinand Magellan were official explorers seeking new pathways to fortune. Within three centuries their discoveries led to the biggest migration in human history. Even after every corner of the planet was "discovered," humans continued to travel. Yesterday's curious travelers who set out to find out what lay beyond the next mountain or ocean are today's tourists. Yesterday's fortune seekers and bonded immigrant laborers in a foreign land are today's migrants, legal and illegal.

On a hot June day in 1325, twenty-two-year-old Ibn Battuta set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca that turned into the world's longest tourist trip of the epoch. When he left for hajj riding a donkey, he did not know that the journey would last thirty years and that he would return home only after traveling seventy-five thousand miles. It was the longest distance that one person could have traversed in a lifetime in the fourteenth century using every means available to him—foot, mule, horse, camel, ox-wagon, and boat. Battuta's travels were motivated by what in Arabic is called *Baraka*—the desire to accumulate merit by visiting holy places and obtaining the blessings of saintly men. But his accounts make it clear that he was interested in many other things, including food and the opposite sex. Battuta was no explorer, but curiosity about the world made him one of the world's first tourists, certainly the most famous. As he later explained, "[I] was swayed by an overmastering impulse within me and a desire long-cherished in my bosom to visit these illustrious sanctuaries. So I braced my resolution to quit all my dear ones, female and male, and forsook my home as birds forsake their nests." In his thirty years of travel he visited every Islamic country in the world, as well as the Mongol Empire from Central Asia to China. India's Islamic ruler, in whose court he served as legal scholar,

appointed him to go to China as his ambassador. The Chinese junks that were to take him to China sank in a storm in the Indian harbor, but he managed to reach China on another vessel.

#### REVERSE MIGRATION

History seems to have turned full circle. China and India, which once were driving forces behind pre-colonial globalization have returned to the fore with surging economies and a fast-expanding diaspora. In 2005, an estimated 35 million Chinese were dispersed around the world and some 25 million people of Indian origin lived outside their country.

In many countries immigrants have become an integral part of life. Indian Gujaratis dominate the low-budget hotel business, Koreans specialize in grocery shops, and Chinese run restaurants. Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians dominate mom-and-pop groceries in their former metropolitan country France; migrants from South Asia run confectioners and newsagents in Britain; migrants of Turkish origin run bakeries and grocery stores in the Netherlands. Most labor market becomes global. A foreman from a company in Indiana moves to China to train workers in new production methods; a professor from Johannesburg, South Africa, chooses to live in Sydney, Australia, from where he commutes to a teaching post in Hong Kong, China; a nurse trained in Manila works in Dubai.

In 1961, 'globalization' entered the dictionary, the post-war world's first nongovernmental organization to care about the planet was set up: World Wild Life Fund. It was also the year that a catholic lawyer and Quaker founded the world's first human rights organization, *Amnesty International*.

The growing liberalization of capital markets promoted by the IMF, the successful completion of the GATT round, and the signing of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) combined to intensify global integration to an unprecedented level.

Nearly a third of China's 1.3 billion people have been lifted out of poverty, and in India a smaller but still significant proportion have moved up to the ranks of middle class. China has become the world's fourth largest economy and third-largest trading nation. India's growing global connections have enabled it to leverage its comparative advantage in software and English to corner half the world's out-sourced service jobs. China and India which in 1700 accounted for 22.3 percent and 24.4 percent, respectively, of the world's gross domestic product—have begun climbing back to their pre-eminent position after two and a half centuries of decline. This remarkable turnaround brought about is no small measure by economic reform and global trade, technology and investment transfer.

More than a billion people still live on less than a dollar a day, and most are likely never to have made a phone call or to have traveled beyond their place of birth. Lacking such basic infrastructure as drinking water, primary education, health services, roads, electricity, and ports, nearly two billion people are the forgotten and invisible denizens of a world. Yet it is this population that presents both a moral and a practical challenge to the developed world. Malnourished and disease-ridden children in Africa and Asia-whose numbers have grown with

failing agriculture, stunted in part by the pressure of rich countries' farm subsidies-stare at the glittering West in silent rebuke. To the policymakers of rich countries, they are simply sources of insecurity—from illegal immigration to drug smuggling and crime—and vectors of disease.

It is a great historical irony, the adventurers and migrants who have since the dawn of history been the principal actors of globalization are now seen as major threats to the stability of a globalized world.

---

\*Bound Together  
by Nayan Chanda  
Publishers: Penguin Group