

Cultural Encounters and the Orient: A Study in the Politics of Knowledge

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I

Johann Galtung in one of his lectures talks of a painting that hung in the ante-room of the late Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah. It was a giant picture of Nkrumah himself struggling loose from his chains. There is thunder and lightning in the air, and in one corner of the picture are three men, three white men. The first is a capitalist and he carries a briefcase. The second is a missionary and he clutches a Bible. The third, the meekest looking carries a book whose title can be barely read. It is *African Political Systems*, and the third man is an anthropologist.

The iconography of the picture used to haunt me. In the 1970s, as I taught my political anthropology classes, I saw it as a classic example of nationalism struggling against the depredations of western capitalism, missionary Christianity and colonial science. But today the picture seems outdated, mildewed and almost embarrassing. National movements, once thought liberating, have turned dictatorial. The new battles for freedom have created strange bedfellows as grassroots groups battle development projects and globalization produces its accompaniment in civic internationalism. There is a politics of memory here that does not allow for amnesia or innocence. The cultural presence of huge Indian, Chinese and African diasporas shuffles the politics of cultural encounters, creating hybrids out of competing dualisms.

In fact, the history of cultural encounters can never be read in single registers. They have varied from the banal and the surreal to the unimaginable. They have ranged from the sublimity of Martin Buber's 'I and Thou' dialogue to the eerie silence of genocide epitomized by King Leopold in the Belgian Congo. Given this range and complexity and given the political nature of the subject which has produced the writings of Gandhi, Tagore, Nirad C. Chaudhari, V.S. Naipaul and also Fanon and Said, any writer is forced to engage in two preliminary rituals: he has to outline a map of possibilities; and he has to state his political and academic position.

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Models of Encounters

Genocide Ecocide	Museumization (Reservation)	Ghettoization (Apartheid)
Assimilation	Substitution (Substitution of imports by Industrialization)	Imperial Hegemony (Primary Product Encounters)
Fundamentalism	Millennialism	Ethnic-Mixing
Diasporic Hybridization	Autonomy (Segmentalized Exchange) a) Tourism b) Smuggling c) Diffusion d) Transfer of Technology	Pluralism (Dialogue, Translation, Emergence)

Cultural encounters when read on the axis of power or economics produce powerful treatises on Imperialism or Colonialism (see the models offered above). They remind us that one cost of the meeting of the East and West was genocide, the physical erasure of large masses of the population including a virtual loss of their beliefs, their music and their ways of life. This necrophilic aspect of East–West encounters is caught in the paradox called the museum.

The museum to the western mind is a great humanitarian institution, which reflects western sensitivity to the cultures of the past. But the museum to the eastern eye was almost a rationalization of piracy. One does not have to refer to the recent scandal of the Elgin marbles but one can go back to Indian nationalist archives for a more systematic statement.

The Sinhalese geologist and art critic Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy citing a journalist asked: ‘If God were to return today and ask civilized Western man where the Aztecs, the Incas or the Australian aborigines were, would he take Him to a museum?’¹

The museum as an institution represented the paradox of East–West encounters caught in the grip of evolutionary metaphors, which created not only a hierarchy of cultures but sanctioned violence as a legitimate tactic against those labelled ‘primitive’, ‘simple’, ‘traditional’ or ‘backward’. The museum embodied the logic of progress that valorized one society over another. One is reminded of a story that Raimundo Pannikar recounted in one of his extraordinary conversations. It was a tale of an encounter between an American, a Texan and an American Indian tribal. The Texan informed the Indian that he had progressed far beyond the latter. The Indian smiled and said that he was happy for both, as both were where they wanted to be.

Coomaraswamy condemned the modern museum as a cultural encounter because

he saw it as an extension and embodiment of the objectivity of modern western science, which smelt of death and formaldehyde. The museum was a mere annexe to the laboratory. Coomaraswamy lamented that the museum represented an encounter that preserved the folksong at the very moment it destroyed the folksinger, and he suggested that the Indian national moment should fight a guerrilla war against the idea of the museum because it embodied a clinical curiosity about the death and dyingness of traditional cultures that encountered the western gaze.

II

The necrophilic and hegemonic aspects of the encounter between the East and West have been narrated brilliantly by anthropologists, Marxists and cultural historians. One text, which as a discourse has almost appropriated this politics of memory, is Edward Said's *Orientalism*.² In fact, it is a tribute to his work that his *Orientalism* as map almost threatens to embrace territory. Said's description of the Orient as a career, a construct, as a hegemonic discourse is textbook wisdom taught and celebrated in many universities. But the Orient cannot be a frozen text or a unilateral one even in Saidian terms. Said's gift of *Orientalism* demands a repayment, a return gift that understands the politics of memory he so deftly created. Thanks to Said there is no longer an affable innocence or legitimacy of the Orientalist oeuvre.

Said's book, along with the works of Chomsky and Zia-ud-din Sardar, helps us understand that the Orientalist virus or gene is still present in the foreign policy of many Western nations. It helps us understand the Orientalist grammar of foreign policy present in the violence of Vietnam, Palestine or even in the logic of the Indian partition. The genocidal quotient of Orientalism must be enormous. Years ago the Mexican writer and poet Octavio Paz coined the term, the syllogism dagger. Paz invented the term to refer to abstract, almost antiseptically banal concepts like 'progress', 'development', 'revolution' which, when empirically applied as policy, extracted an enormous cost in terms of cultures destroyed and lives lost. Orientalism, as Said showed, was full of syllogism daggers.³

The Orientalist discourse, however, demands multiple readings.

One reason ironically is the career of Said himself who, in fact, is not able to reconcile the two parts of his intellectual self. His writings on Conrad and western music remain parallel to his studies of Palestine.

Edward Said is not only a Palestinian but also a diasporic scholar. Along with dozens of Third World scholars like Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, Ranajit Guha, Arjun Appadorai, Homi Bhabha, Tapan Roychaudhri, he represents a formidable textuality of Third World scholarship in Cultural Studies in western universities. As intellectuals, they are heroes not only to the Third World academe, but also to the Indians, Sri Lankans and Pakistanis in the First World. This diaspora provides a new constituency and a new imagination. In fact, it is enabling a new form of Orientalism, an academic career that reinvents, mediates India for the consumption not only of the West but for this new generation of Indians among others. India is constructed and consumed in a new way by the children of the diaspora, many of whom are as wary of India as any Orientalist was, and as caught in the stereotypes of poverty, devel-

opment, secularism and Bollywood. Not only is there a West in us, there is an 'us' in the West. The diaspora and its impact on cultural studies has not been reflexively understood. Today the Orientalist archive is being created not in the British Museum or the India Office records but in the campuses of the American universities with the children of the diaspora as consumers. Said behaves as an exile. His reflections on exile are moving but his meditation as a diasporic is empty.

There is a second political reason, which also has to do with memory and the search for alternatives. Orientalist texts can be re-read out of their hegemonic context. The Indian imagination in search of alternatives can use the Oriental archive to search not only for traditional ways of making indigo but mine it for the alternative imaginations which these archives kept alive.

One has only to consider the career of one of India's outstanding historians, Dharampal, who showed how Indian agriculture was an alternative epistemology to modern western science.⁴ It is interesting to note that Dharampal's burrowing into the archives was an Orientalist exercise: he read Reuben Barrow, H.W. Prinsep, William Jones as witnesses of an alternative way of life.

More banally, one's disquiet about Said's work comes from four different sources. Firstly, Said's Orient fits the Orient of the Arabs better than the Orientalism of India. The British, especially under Robert Clive and Warren Hastings, were rapacious but the Orientalism they created with the help of James Mill, William Jones and H.W. Prinsep was a different kind.⁵ It was set within the competing frame of different hegemonies with Ram Mohan Roy and other modernists demanding the legacy of Bacon, Newton and Locke while the earlier Orientalists sought hegemony through native law.

Secondly, Indian Orientalism, through that great intellectual dinosaur, the Asiatic Society of Bengal, tried to create a different frame for western science. The Society's attempt to represent all knowledge and hold together the amateur and the expert, while quixotic, represents one of great experiments at holism. The Asiatic Society as a cultural encounter of East and West dredged the excitement of the great discoveries in linguistics, a celebration that dimmed with the parochialism of Mill and Macaulay, who saw in the Orient a defeated civilization fit to be an object in a museum rather than an academic subject at a modern university.

Thirdly, Indian Orientalism had a double that Arabic Orientalism lacked: the Indian Orientalist imagination, as a part-time hegemonic discourse, had to contend with the intellectual power of Theosophy, which Orientalism elsewhere could shrug off. The theosophist imagination emphasized the intellectual fraternity of all civilizations and people. It was a search for marginal and occult knowledges and also for the other West, the defeated West that dominant imaginations of the West had suppressed. Between Theosophy and the Orientalism of Jones and Prinsep, there was the cultural critique of western science and medicine, which still constitutes one of the great archives of that cultural encounter.

The western discovery of a pluralist model of medicine receives its intellectual power from this period. These debates provided a tremendous impetus to the feminist critique of science and medicine in the West. Theosophy became a conduit, a site, a perennial source of metaphors whereby western feminism could find the 'orientalist' sources for a critique of science. The feminists borrowed from Theo-

sophy not only a critique of the vivisectionist violence of modern science but of the pluralization of bodies beyond the dominant metaphor of the mechanical body. Theosophist ideas of 'reincarnation', the occult body, the 'hysterical' body provided a defence of feminism through metaphors that were not available to a western secularist imagination.⁶

Theosophy was, of course, a site for a two-way discourse. Theosophists worked for the revival of Buddhism in Ceylon. Theosophist texts, including the translation of the Gita, were grist to the mill of the Gandhian imagination. Gandhi in South Africa was sustained by the friendship of theosophists like Polak who helped sustain Phoenix Farm.

Theosophy also provided the more eccentric embers of the nationalist imagination in Ireland. One immediately thinks of the genius of William Butler Yeats. Yeats, AE (George Russell), Bernard Shaw were quarrelsome or committed theosophists. In fact, if T. S. Eliot borrowed from the Orientalist imagination, Yeats with ideas of the gyre and the occult was an essentially theosophist imagination, a mind which sought roots in the other West that theosophy desperately sought to keep alive. Incidentally, Yeats translated Tagore's poems.

The other of the West in the colonial period came from three separate conduits – the Tropics, the Orient and Theosophy. One could add to it the missionary encounter with Indian religions. The Hinduism that the West encountered was its own invention constructed around its own grammar of Christianity. The British demanded the equivalent of the Bible and found it in the Gita. The Hinduism they consumed was partly their own creation but it had a fascinating impact on the western imagination. The West found in the Mahabharata a text more complex than the Illiad or Odyssey, a model of war, ethics, conflict, destiny that continues to fascinate. Witness the cultural impact of Peter Brooks's *Mahabharata* or Robert Oppenheimer quoting from the Gita as the first atomic bomb exploded.⁷ The threefold theatres of Tropics, Orient and Occult theosophy provided a fertile field of thought experiments in medicine, poetry, science and fed into the suffragette movement, the creative writings of poets from Eliot to Octavio Paz. At a parallel level, the mechanistic scientific paradigms of the time benefited from the works of J. C. Bose. Western mathematicians still remained intrigued by the mathematical genius of Srinivasa Ramanujan. One also remembers the English mathematician Hardy being puzzled as Ramanujan patiently explained to him that he saw his theorems in a dream as Goddess Namakkal rolled out her tongue to him.

Finally, India itself was a site, a theatre for a whole generation of English, European and American minds. These eccentric imaginations saw in India a theatre of possibilities the West had lost or suppressed within itself. Their ideas of India and their researches here created what one might call 'the Other Colonialisms' or 'Other Orientalisms', attempts to sustain the recessive West in India. Probably the most profound attempts in this direction came from the researches of three scientists – Patrick Geddes, Albert Howard and J. S. Haldane.

III

Sustaining a recessive West – Geddes

Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) was a great biologist, ecologist and town planner and, along with his 'protégé' Lewis Mumford, remains among the most interesting dissenting imaginations of the 20th century. As educationist, biographer, gardener, peacenik, Geddes saw in India a metaphor for what the West had lost. A quixotic figure more at home with the nationalist imagination than with the colonial office, he wrote over 20 town plans, none of which was implemented, and taught a summer school in Darjeeling with J. C. Bose the scientist and Rabindranath Tagore the poet. One must confess that Geddes's encounters with Gandhi were not as exciting. He wrote a letter to Gandhi suggesting his meetings could be modelled on the Greek *agora* but it is not clear whether Gandhi was responsive to such suggestions. But Geddes on the whole was a master of the cultural encounter, a sociologist who ran his critique both ways.

Geddes saw the colony as a tropical world, magnifying the pathologies of the West. He claimed that there was something unreal about the extraordinary diffusion of English as the medium of education in India. He realized the disaster of a system which was 'trying to educate princes into public school boys, pundits into honours graduates, *babus* into cheap clerks, peasants into proletarians'.⁸ Yet, Geddes cautioned that the nationalist movement in its very moment of protest was compounding the tragedy through its interpretation of the situation. Geddes believed that the strife was not between East and West, and added that developments in science had created the conditions for the recovery of a second West – the other West of vitalist ecology beyond the reductionist, machine-driven colonialism of the first West. For Geddes, the restructuring of the Indian university had to develop through a dialogue with this other West. The Indian university of the future had to understand its genealogy as a knowledge system.

Geddes argued that the career of the university as an organism reflected an often violent dialogue with the competing notions of knowledge and pedagogy resident in its environment. Its success lay in its ability to provide a working synthesis. The medieval university itself arose out of an attempt to reconcile the doctrines of the Christian Church with the recovery of Aristotle. Paralleling this was the dialogue of the medical systems, where physicians of many faiths were comparing not only their drugs but their doctrines. This medieval university then became the Renaissance university by imbibing 'the new learning from the fugitive Greeks, the new astronomy from the persecuted heretics and the results of the new art of printing from wandering scholars and craftsmen'.⁹ The Renaissance university eventually grew into the contemporary German system. For Geddes, thus, no university was complete without its dissenting academics: the relationship between the two provided for both stability and mutation.

India, Geddes remarked, faced a similar challenge in rebuilding its universities. Rather than mechanically importing the western university, one had to innovate by counterposing the western university to the civilizational possibilities inherent in indigenous systems of medicine, agriculture, law or architecture. The tragedy lay in

the fact that India had failed to respond to the challenge and produced not a post-Germanic university expounding new notions of biology, law and medicine, but secondhand pre-Germanic universities in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. These universities were unable to respond creatively to the possibilities of their environment and were reduced to being examination machines. What was true for the university was true for the scientist.

Geddes once observed that he was not against Indians travelling abroad for science, but he warned against the insidious power of western thought.

Let the Indian student come to us by all means . . . but I think merely to be a more or less faithful or weak reproduction of ourselves, be it in sports or games, as minor functionary or convert, not even if he were to surpass our ideal. Prince Ranjitsinghi is most welcome; he has done us no end of good; he has raised the popular esteem and respect for India in the man in the street more than a new Buddha would have done. We admire the Saxon Ivanhoe for overthrowing Norman champions at their own tournaments. Yet Ivanhoe, masquerading in a culture foreign alike to his deepest traditions and his highest aspirations was . . . but the first snob, the first misleading example to his own culture.¹⁰

For Geddes, thus, there were two Wests, the paleotechnic West of the mechanical-colonial era and the neotechnic, vitalist, ecological West. *Swadesism*, he implied, was ignorant of the neotechnic sciences and in its very moment of protest, was internalizing the categories of the mechanical mind.

It is interesting to note that both Geddes and Tagore, in their schemes for a new international university, argued in a similar manner. The biologist as scientist resonated with the poet in his conception of the university, in vision, if not in all detail.

Tagore believed that the modern university as a collective representation embodied the essential worldview of western civilization.¹¹ Tagore felt that the East had no equivalent institution. He sought to build such a centre at Santiniketan, not content with a *Swadesism* that settled for a voyeuristic view of the western university. He argued that before the dialogue between East and West could begin, there had to be an intellectual centre, which embodied the spirit of knowledge in the East, reflecting each of its great civilizations. Only with the existence of such an institution could the interaction of East and West be one of equality, of dialogic reciprocity, exploring difference.

Tagore argued that each university was an embodiment of an archetypal set. The western university, as the microcosm of the *civitas*, reflected the mind of the city. In India, however, civilization was associated with the forest 'taking on its distinctive character from its origin and environment'. Its intellect sought spiritual harmony with nature, while the mind of the city sought its subjugation, extending its boundary walls around its acquisitions. The sage in the forest hermitage was not interested in acquiring and dominating, but in realizing and enlarging his consciousness by growing with and into his surroundings. Even when the primeval forest gave way to the farm and the city, 'the heart of India looked back with adoration upon the great ideal of strenuous self realization and the simple dignity of the forest hermitage'.

Tagore predicted that the dialogue between the two universities would be between a city science and a forest science, between a mode of being that sought harmony with nature and a way of doing that sought possession of it.

Denying neither the power of western science nor the dynamism of the western university, Tagore felt, however, that the dialogue of knowledges could only begin when differences were understood and recognized. It was in a similar spirit that Geddes sought a return to an agricultural view of science, to a biology that would replace the hegemony of the machine as reified metaphor. Geddes's letter to Sister Nivedita about his idea of the proposed Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore could have been written by Tagore. One arrived at vitalism through the poetics of a leaf, through understanding the implications of the forest as meaning, the other through the synoptic eye that sought communion with the life-giving tendencies of science. It is in such a context that Geddes's vision of the Indian university should be seen.

You seek wealth through poverty, through simplicity. We seek the mastery of man and beast; you know the spirit that is in them. In science, it is we who have dissected the body, we who have classified and named the plants, but it is amidst the strange symbolism of your temples that has first and most fully been shadowed forth the secret of growth and the revival of all things living – for us, the outward forms of life and death, for you, the inner mysteries. We can tell you of evolution in concrete detail, as of horse from clumsy tapiroid, flower from humble weed; but you caught the first breath of Brahma; the anti-thesis of anabolism and katabolism with its physiological details and their outcomes.

Our world is the modern specialist's skill, but yours has been the cosmic sense. With the renewal of your own poetry, your own philosophy, renew your ancient science, infuse and deepen our keener yet less profound western thought.¹²

The Geddesian plans for the post-Germanic university were never concretized. The Swadeshi nationalists defeated his hopes of designing the new University of Banaras. The Central University of Indore remained an unrealized vision. The dialogue between Geddes and Tagore did not continue for long. Soon after, he moved to Palestine to work on the plans for the University of Israel. But the ecologicistic vision of the world remains as relevant today, particularly in his vision of the city.

Howard and agriculture

If Geddes was an attempt to sustain a neo-vitalist post-Germanic world in India, Albert Howard's years in India were devoted to creating the elements of discourse on organic gardening. Along with F. H. King's *Farmers of Forty Centuries*,¹³ Howard's *Agricultural Testament*¹⁴ stands as the master text of the cultural encounters around agriculture. King's text was a classic celebration of Chinese agriculture and its attitude to waste. It was Howard's understanding of Indian agriculture that eventually led him to challenge the Crime of Justus Liebig, the western obsession with synthetic fertilizers, which Howard dubbed the NPK mentality.

Albert Howard's career in India can be divided into three distinct phases: he came to India to Pusa as the Imperial Economic Botanist in 1904, moved to Indore in 1928

to head the new agriculture institute, and returned to England in 1931 to popularize his idea of organic farming.

Howard's *Agricultural Testament* was a great anthropology of Indian farming. The Indian farmer, unlike the official western laboratory chemist, saw the soil as something alive, as an act of trusteeship, which he had to utilize and then return undamaged to the next generation. Howard's ode to humus is a celebration of a different form of agriculture. It was a great comparative study of three civilizations – China, India and the West – centring around each culture's attitude to soil and health. The closest contemporary equivalent one can think of is Hans Jeny's lectures at the University of California.¹⁵ Jeny would walk into class with a collection of slides, project them and ask the students to identify them. The students would reply that they were the paintings of Monet or the work of other impressionists. Jeny would smile and observe wryly that they were slides of different kinds of soil, and talk of the rights of soil. It was just such a perspective that Howard articulated in *Agricultural Testament*, a classic view of culture as agriculture. Howard's works found little response in England after the wars but it helped inspire J. I. Rodale's organic farming movement in the USA.

Haldane and genetics

Even more intriguing in some ways is J. B. S. Haldane and his encounters with India. The story of Haldane's pilgrimage or journey into India has been told thrice and each time brilliantly. The first consists of a few pages in Ronald Clark's biography of Haldane,¹⁶ the second is Dronamaraju's memoirs of his teacher,¹⁷ and the third is Francis Zimmerman's fascinating reading of the two narratives in 'Why Haldane went to India?'¹⁸

John Burdon Sanderson Haldane (1892–1964) was a larger-than-life scientist, a Marxist and one of the founders of population genetics. He held the Weldon Chair of Biometry at University College London before he migrated to India in 1957. Initially, he taught at the Indian Statistical Institute at Calcutta, did a short stint with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), before setting up his own laboratory at Bhubaneshwar in Orissa.

Zimmerman observes that the apparent cause of Haldane's departure from England was his objection to the Suez crisis. Haldane himself helped feed the folklore of this event through his bravura performances at the airport before his departure. Playing to the press he fumed that he was leaving his native land because of mass murders at Port Said. Zimmerman notes that the Suez crisis was pure political coincidence as Haldane had virtually negotiated his appointment in India by then.

Dronamaraju's reminiscences have an anecdotal rather than a clinical quality about them. They are unpretentiously a student's tribute to his teacher, a story of the final years at Bhubaneshwar. Yet, as Zimmerman notes, there are powerful leads here. Dronamaraju testifies that Haldane claimed that Darwin's original work was not the theory of evolution but his work on plant physiology. In a famous series of lectures, published as *The Unity and Diversity of Life*, Haldane, now firmly rooted in

India, emphasized that Darwin's key concept was not evolution but diversity. Evolution might have been more central in a Christian cosmology that emphasized a discontinuity between the human and animal, but, in a Taoist or Hindu community, where animals have rights and even duties, diversity might be more politically life-giving and central. For Dronamaraju, Haldane had become 'Hindu' challenging the dualism of body and mind, animals and men, a disease that had plagued western thought for millennia.¹⁹

Francis Zimmerman, a French Indologist known for his classic study of Ayurveda, provides a third reading of why Haldane came to India. He remarks that there was a politics here: not the politics of Suez or Marxism but a more fundamental protest against the politics of knowledge in the West. India provides both the concepts and the site for a different axiomatic of biology.

Zimmerman notes that Haldane was a maverick determined to find alternative ways of constructing biology. Two strands are already obvious. First, Haldane was completely opposed to the Social Darwinism dominant in the West of that time which propagated a crude survival of the fittest. Second, his choice of population biology as a style which emphasized the universal also went against the individualist ideology of the time. Population transcended individuals. Haldane, in his previous trips to India, had already been impressed by its diversity. India was classically the land of polymorphisms. Haldane had expressed an affinity for Gandhi, Hinduism and non-violence, but what were once just hunches combine with Haldane's biology to create a different science.

Haldane saw Darwinist theory as a two-stroke engine comprising variation and natural selection. The dominant interpretations of biology emphasized natural selection while also reducing Darwinian theory to an economic and utilitarian view of nature where fitness emphasized selection. Haldane's reading of Darwin in India created an alternative ambience for biology.

Challenging the crudity of the notion of fitness as a selective value, Haldane claimed that fitness could not be equated to adaptation to a current environmental condition. In his classic essays on the peacock's tail, Haldane argues against a utilitarian biology: 'None will contend that except insofar as it has induced Hindus to regard him as sacred, the peacock's rather cumbrous tail has been of any advantage to him'. And, in unravelling the question, Zimmerman shows how peacocks, Hinduism, population biology, diversity, India become the mythemes of a new problematic of biology. Space does not permit a full elaboration but this much is clear – India as site, as a field of concepts, helped create a dissenting approach to biology and it is this that I want to emphasize.

Historians have emphasized the exotic India, the colonial India in critical encounters, but what emerges from my examples is that India helped create a dissenting academy for the western imagination. Just as the universities of the West could not have grown without absorbing the knowledge of the Dissenting academies, the culture of the West could not have grown without these repeated encounters with India. The West as a paradigm has distinctive Indian threads in the warp and woof of its imagination. One does not need a Hobson-Jobson to testify to it.

IV

I have followed the career of three great biologists to show how India helps create a different texture for western biology. I also emphasized biology because the conventional narratives of cultural encounter read the costume ball of imperialism as a debate on Indian art, architecture and law. Biology offers both a complement and antidote to these perspectives. One also wishes to emphasize that the western cultural encounter in India was not about transfer of technology or the organized piracy of the East India Company. It was also about the manner in which India served as a linguistic shifter, continually redefining the tropes that constituted western identity.

This point can be made by looking at, first, the nature of the detective novel and, second, the creative use of Gandhi.

Let me first emphasize that the detective novel as expounded by Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle, G. K. Chesterton and P. D. James is a stunningly Christian creation. As a narrative structure it begins with the breakdown of social order through a murder or a robbery. Every individual is regarded as suspect or liminal until the last chapter, where the novel completes its passage from disorder to order. In the last chapter, the detective who has been meeting all the suspects serially now assembles them around a table. The resemblance to the Last Supper is amazing and the Detective plays God and the scientist.

What is intriguing about the detective novel as a genre is its notion of good and evil. Good and evil required metaphors and what I would like to suggest is that in at least two classic cases these were drawn from Indian reservoirs. Where would Sherlock Holmes be without the Tropics and the colony? But this is even clearer in G. K. Chesterton's creation of Father Brown. Chesterton cannot play out the rationality of religion or science without eliminating the hocus-pocus of occult theosophy or re-reading the colony and the Tropics. Sadly, India is the source of red herrings in these detective novels, but at the level of the unconscious, India creates the grammar of a wider imagination without which the detective novel would have been a narrowly Oxbridge affair.

In fact, the easiest way to understand this is to consider science fiction. As a genre its notion of evil is superficially adolescent, full of aliens and Martians who look surprisingly familiar. Evil is not a polyvalent affair in the science-fiction story, partly because the future does not avail of the Orient as an imagination. Even resorting to badly laundered medieval stories does not quite help. Unfortunately, there is a double sadness, a sadness that I must also qualify.

Indian literature lacks the genre of science fiction. It is a strange absence. Probably, the only two incidental contributions are the fact that Jules Verne's character, my childhood delight, Captain Nemo was actually an Indian prince who left India after what Verne archaically dubs 'The Sepoy Mutiny'. Second, Steven Spielberg's classic *ET* was based on a Satyajit Ray story. Unfortunately, when Ray's son did it as a film, it was a disaster.

We now come to Gandhi, especially the consumption of Gandhi after 1947.

*

Sadly, after Independence, Gandhi was a greater source of innovation outside India. Within India, Gandhi became frozen symbolic capital to be articulated around an official grammar and a politically correct mnemonics. Abroad, Gandhi inspired Steve Biko in South Africa, Lanza Vasto in France, Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King in the USA and Fritz Schumacher in England. There is improvisation in Gandhian imagination abroad and a general embalming at home. The Gandhian imagination also creates Richard Attenborough's film. What is interesting to observe is that the Gandhi of the film is read and consumed through western eyes. Gandhi is read through C. F. Andrews, Polak, Madeline Slade, the photographer Margaret Bourke-White, the journalist who covered the Dandi March, the white judge who saluted and sentenced him. Gandhi the Indian is consumed and constructed through western eyes. In fact, Attenborough's film becomes a fable for the way the Orient is consumed and constructed today.

One has to face one final question. What can India as a fragment of that construct 'the Orient' provide today? One faces the irony that Indian tourism itself is orientalizing our heritage. What was once an arduous pilgrimage is exoticized and presented as a middle-class tourist possibility. Fortunately, India cannot be reduced to IT and curry. If India has to offer anything, I think it is the heuristics of our civilization as a model of plurality, diversity and complexity. At a time when identity is becoming officially singular, agriculture desperately monocultural and culture turning homogeneous, what India can offer is the carnival of its 'confusions' as a different order of pluralism, beyond assimilation, conversion, reduction, the salad bowl or the melting pot. India, as a clearinghouse of ideas where nothing dies as an idea and everything is composted, offers a new intellectual commons of experiments and heuristics.

Wes Jackson, the American biologist, put it to me brilliantly and brutally in a conversation. He said: 'It is sad you Indians think the USA is a high information society and India a developing low information one. As you said you have 40,000 varieties of rice and we are a society that reduced 165 varieties of apple to six.'²⁰ Jackson suggested that with it disappeared the tacit knowledges that create a civilization of the apple. Where now Johnny Appleseed is homeless, India's diversity, ethnicity, its pluralism may still provide invitations to new cultural encounters, a heuristic to Re-Orient the imagination of the West.

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Notes

1. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Bugbear of Literacy*, London, Dennis Dobson, 1947, p. 22.
2. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage, 1978.
3. Octavio Paz, *The Other Mexico*, New York, Grove Press, 1972.
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