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Introduction

India in a Global Age; or, The Neoliberal Epiphany

Alfred J. López and Ashok K. Mohapatra

Here I was in Bangalore—more than 500 years since Columbus sailed over the horizon, using the rudimentary navigational technologies of his day, and returned safely to prove definitively that the world was round—and one of India's smartest engineers, trained at his country's top technical institute and backed by the most modern technologies of his day, was essentially telling me that the world was flat—as flat as that screen on which he can host a meeting of his whole global supply chain.

—THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

I climb off a three-wheeler close to the market... A kind and insisting rickshaw whalla is eager to take me to "a very beautiful and cheap" handicraft shop... A small Kashmiri vendor with henna-tainted beard approaches me on the sidewalk discreetly whispering in my ear, "Hash, hash? Smoke, smoke?" I turn toward him only to become distracted by a group of Gujarathi women displaying their hand-painted textiles on the hot and dusty ground. Their piercingly sweet voices rise above the more distant shouting of the clothes vendors, "Sir, sir, look at my paintings, 100 rupees only!" Men are standing on tables displaying cheap locally made knock-offs of Nike and Adidas shirts, trousers, and shorts... I notice the approach of a Hare Krishna devotee who I judge, by his accent, to be East European. Reading a few lines out of the Bhagavad-Gita, he asks me in English for money to buy a meal... Young men in tight T-shirts show their biceps while observing a group of blonde female tourists investigating the quality of a kurta decorated by an OM-sign, which is on display in one of the stands. The vendor in his worn white kurta invites them to consider a T-shirt displaying the text "OM-Sweet-OM" on the belly.

—PAOLO FAVERO

DISCOVERING INDIA DISCOVERING GLOBALIZATION

Clearly, Thomas Friedman and Paolo Favero have not been traveling—or trafficking—in the "same" India.¹ The world's shape (metaphoric or otherwise) aside, it is worth noting the position of the two narrators relative to their observed objects: Friedman the neoliberal conquistador returns from his 21st-

century Indies with a discovery (“The world is flat”) gleaned from the heart of India’s high-tech capital; Favero the ethnographer immerses himself in Delhi’s Janpath Market and discovers street-level globalization through his interactions with his tourist guide “informers.”

Both interventions are informed and delimited by their respective self-imposed perspectival limitations: However much Friedman insists on his surprise at what he “discovers,” for example, clearly his choice to go to Bangalore and interview “one of India’s smartest engineers, trained at his country’s top technical institute” forecloses considerably on what Indian views of globalization he will obtain. Likewise, Favero has clearly arrived at the market already armed with the theoretical apparatus, courtesy mostly of John Berger and Sergio Agamben, that will enable him to read his object of study in terms of “Phantasms in a ‘Starry’ Place” (Favero 551). In each case, India is the catalyst for a desired epiphany—albeit one undermined by its manufactured nature; in both examples, the writer/researcher deploys a particular image of India that in turn informs their staged epiphany in a calculated and predictable way. *Of course* Friedman’s brilliant Indian engineer will portray globalization “as a good thing, as a new milestone in human progress and a great opportunity for India and the world” (Friedman 7); and *of course* Favero will find all the colorful street scenery and chaotic diversity he needs at the market, which he then presents as a “sensory experience... representative of public space in contemporary urban India” (Favero 553). (It isn’t, by the way.)

Their lack of spontaneity notwithstanding, we can still read these texts as epiphanies, as Simon Gikandi applies the term in his recent work. Following Charles Taylor’s formulation of modernism as “the epiphany of modernity,” Gikandi posits “this deployment of an epiphanic moment” as less an encounter of “revelation and insight” with modernity’s others than “a continuation of older forms of social mediation” (Gikandi 31–32). For Gikandi, it is “the other—variously called the primitive or the barbarian—that comes to constitute “the aesthetic ideology of modernism” (32). Put another way, modernism’s epiphanic response to modernity consists of a simultaneous cultural appropriation and material erasure/disenfranchisement of its perceived others.

Also, the epiphanic turn of modernism that Gikandi describes reveals a self-reflexivity of its *newness* and self-indulgence, as it were. His against-the-grain reading deconstructs modernism’s commonly accepted self-narrative by positing the “primitive”—in his immediate context, African so-called primitive art—as European modernity’s supplement, and Africa’s erasure as a strategic move to repress a foundational other from modernism’s originary “scene of writing.” In Gikandi’s reading, Africa emerges not as modernism’s other, but as the irreducible ground without which modernism as it knows itself is unthinkable. Gikandi deploys a paradigm that inverts the already old Orientalist self-constructing itself in terms of its unwell other, akin to how, for example,

the crew's humanitarianism on the *Narcissus* configures itself through sympathy and charity for the tubercular West Indian black sailor, James Wait, in *The Nigger of Narcissus*.² While Wait remains under the sympathetic gaze of white crewmen for most of Conrad's novella, what we should expect instead is to find his absence from the white men's opticon as an object and his reconfiguration as a milieu of reaction to the healthy and superior Other. This may sound as a perverse plea for seeing things from the wrong end of the telescope. But it provides a way to reformulate Gikandi's take on modernity in terms of a more postmodernist view (shall we say epiphany?) analogous in many ways to Slavoj Žižek's reading of *Waiting for Godot*, where we see Godot on stage, "who not knowing himself... has found himself by chance at the place of the Thing; he would be the incarnation of the Thing whose arrival is awaited" as opposed to the modernist dramatization of the futile and senseless waiting for Godot, who is "a name for nothingness and central absence" (Žižek 43). Here the Third World's Other, i.e., Godot, the metonymy for the West, the guarantor of the meaning of Africa's or India's nationalist modernity and postcolonial/globalist postmodernity, emerges as profoundly and pathetically "materialized nothingness" (43). In this shift of gaze and perspective, what is invoked is the reactive milieu of India through the inanity of the metropolitan North.³

Our opening proposition, and the overarching premise that informs this Special Issue, is that India occupies a position in relation to neoliberal globalization—and intellectually, to postcolonialism itself—analogue to Africa's to modernism. This supplemental relation is not exactly that of subaltern and hegemon, a theoretical problem that Gayatri Spivak's arguably best-known essay trenchantly exposed decades ago, the implications of which postcolonial studies has struggled with ever since.⁴ While the question here is partly one of representation—namely, of India-based scholars being largely absent from postcolonial studies as it has unfolded in the US/UK, and from the current emerging critique of globalization—Gikandi's critique opens up representation to the larger context of the other's role as cultural capital. Why, for example, do India-based scholars remain so woefully underrepresented in postcolonial and globalization studies, even as India itself has become the field's most widely referenced postcolonial location? How has the canonization of postcolonialism functioned to marginalize a state and people so closely associated with the kind of anti-colonial struggle that is the field's very condition of possibility? In what sense can we read India as playing the role of "epiphany"—as the originary founding ground of metropolitan Northern discourses from which its scholars find themselves largely erased? This phenomenon arguably applies even to India's best-known and revered global icon of resistance to empire. As Robert Young points out, the writings of Mahatma Gandhi are rarely cited, much less seriously examined, in postcolonial theory. Young cites Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* as a notable—and important

exception; yet Young concedes that this text, and indeed Nandy's work generally, is not widely cited in the field, despite being highly regarded in India itself.⁵

In this context, the almost complete identification of postcolonial studies with diaspora, exile, etc. has yielded a discourse ill-positioned to critique globalization, one arguably better suited to strategically undergird the notion of a global neoliberal subject. As Geeta Kapur has observed, the postcolonial "discursive subjectivity" championed by theorists such as Homi Bhabha, and novelists such as Salman Rushdie, has had the perhaps unintended effect of enabling "ideological maneuvers by vested interests in the globalization project" (Kapur 199). Kapur further argues that

This is a floating intelligentsia to supplant a rooted intelligentsia; the discourse of postmodernity puts to rout the notion of the "organic intellectual." Once again, continents and nations recede into native habitations, and we have interpreters and translators decoding cultures across the globe....

In the all-around navigation of the shoreless horizon, there is a surfeit of semantics about displacement; we are always "somebody's other," always dodging the mockery of co-optation. The real choices, about community versus the communal, about ethnic vulnerability and neoreligious fundamentalisms—choices that are national vexations turning into tragedies—remain blurred in the exile's imagination. (Kapur 199-200)

It is precisely our belief in, and commitment to, the continuing tradition of the Indian "organic intellectual," rooted in the laudable history of anti-colonial thought and action whose main exponents—Tagore, Gandhi, M.N. Roy, Nehru, Ambedkar, Ray, and many others—collectively offer an alternative genealogy that counters narratives of European superiority and continues to inform and inspire the work of Indian intellectuals today. And it is precisely issues and problems such as those cited by Kapur a decade ago, and regrettably, very much relevant today, that this Special Issue of *The Global South* hopes to examine within the context of the rise of neoliberal globalization in India over the past twenty years. Kapur's critique of postcolonialism's then-unforeseen consequences for the spread of neoliberal ideology reveals how the conflict between desiring the other and strategically erasing or marginalizing them—or rather, between desire and the failure of that desire—has defined the irresolvable paradox that informs both the establishment of neoliberal globalization and its hegemonic rise. Postcolonial nationalisms can thus articulate, but not fulfill, Indian intellectuals' search for what Radhakrishnan calls "a different political ethic or teleology . . . one that is underwritten neither by the Western subject of Enlightenment nor by a reactionary and essentialist nativism" (85).

Seen in this context, neither postcolonialism nor globalization manages to

escape the contradictions and cultural logic of colonialism itself. Instead, the simultaneous embrace and differentiation of the Other continue to fuel an irresolvable tension inextricable from how these discourses define themselves. While globalization draws its conceptual energies from places and spaces outside the metropolitan North, its actual deployment—how it looks on the ground—is informed by the imperative to subsume under its postmodern cosmopolitanism the very difference that had drawn it to the other in the first place. The resulting discourse projects onto its other (in the present example, India) the conditions of diaspora, hybridity, cosmopolitanism, etc. by which it wishes to define itself, while systematically excluding that other from the privileged subject position of the transnational and the global. This Special Issue of *The Global South* emerges from our recognition of the erasure of Indian intellectuals from the discourse of globalization, and our resolve to counter their ongoing marginalization in some small way.

THE VIEW FROM (T)HERE

This Special Issue of *The Global South* has its origins in a conversation between its editors that has been ongoing for five years. Since 2003 we have been discussing a significant imbalance in postcolonial and globalization studies, between on the one hand the focus on India as a site of struggle and transformation and on the other hand the absence of India-based voices on the subject relative to the ubiquity of diasporic (U.S.- and Europe-based) commentators. The current issue represents for us a small first step toward addressing this imbalance, which we believe continues to the disservice of both Indian scholars and the larger body of work on India in a global age.

With a single exception (two, counting one of this essay's co-authors), the contributors to this Special Issue of *The Global South* are scholars located across a broad range of geographical locations, institution types, and professional rank within the Indian academy. They hail from major metropolitan areas and smaller towns, work at research universities and smaller liberal-arts colleges, work as a Lecturer or Professor or Department Head.⁶ Each of them brings a crucial, and heretofore missing, perspective and subject position to the current US/European conversation about neoliberal globalization's impact on the planet, a conversation from which African, Indian, Middle Eastern, etc. voices are markedly absent. The contributors' interventions constitute much more than an oppositional "writing back" from margin to center, a process which, whatever its ideological efficacy, does little to think through how a response to neoliberal hegemony will help the millions of lives on the sub-continent impacted daily by its spread. Some essays in this issue take a more theoretical approach than others, and not all address globalization in its present manifestation; but all offer perspectives on the rise of globalization and its ongoing

daily impact on India and Indians that is all but absent from scholarly work currently being published on the subject.

Aside from this introduction, the exception to the above description is Purnima Bose's remarkable essay "Hindutva Abroad: The California Textbook Controversy." It is included in (indeed, leads off) this issue because of its thoughtful examination of an understudied dimension of Indian diasporic studies, and certainly a topic seldom addressed in mainstream postcolonial studies on India. Bose's incisive critique of fundamentalist Hindu nationalism in the diaspora and its efforts to control the way Indian history is viewed in the US—and taught to US (among them of course, diasporic Indian) students—emphasizes the importance of religion in, as the essay puts it, "staking epistemological claims about ancient history, the status of memory, and the construction of a collective diasporic identity" for Indians living abroad.⁷ It also reveals how a small—but determined, organized, and well-funded—minority has partially succeeded in defining the larger, more secular diasporic Indian community in California and beyond—a cautionary example of how the circulation and mobilization of ideology and capital under globalization can have unforeseen consequences, not just in the global South but also in the metropolitan North. Purnima Bose's essay stands out for us as an example of the kind of work that will prove indispensable to any substantive analysis of what has happened, *is* happening, as globalization disseminates capital, knowledge, and human beings across the planet and realigns them into unforeseen configurations.

In her essay "Modernity, Sexuality and the City: A Reading of Indian Cinema," Brinda Bose explores how the city in Satyajit Ray's films *Mahanagar* and *Cabulata* constitutes a liminal space for woman's transgressive sexuality, tenuously positioned between emancipation and control, reverence and suspicion. Predicated upon complex sociocultural transactions between Western liberal ideas of progress and traditional Indian mores, the Indian city has occupied an ambivalent position in the national(ist) imaginary, between social and economic freedom on the one hand and moral and cultural degeneration on the other. As with the Indian city, Indian women in the mid-19th century acquired similarly contradictory inflections of meaning in the discourse of nationalist ideology, which sought to contain women's sexuality while offering limited, controlled emancipation from a morass of oppressive social practices. This contradiction continues unresolved into the present globalized moment, and is inscribed in the public culture of the urban postcolonial modernity that Ray's films portray so masterfully. For both Ray and Brinda Bose, the postcolonial Indian city is a harbinger of the global, embodying contradictions and anxieties that presage the rise of globalization.

Stating that her essay "does not so much offer an interpretation of texts like *The Shadow Lines* as looks at the motives and fallout, both overt and tacit

that surround the materiality of the text,” Nandana Dutta focuses on a fundamental hiatus that exists between the ontology and materiality of the other and their representation by a political hegemon that legitimates its own systems of knowledge and meaning. But the knowledge of this hiatus, which prompted revision of the postgraduate English syllabus at Guahati University in India’s North East region, has invested this academic exercise with a larger ideological meaning by interrogating the assumption that a muffassil university in India implicated in the life of the people of its region stands committed to the human resource development of that region.⁸ The institutional assumption is that university students of English studies in the socio-economically beleaguered state of Assam should be sensitized to the complex issues of nation and otherness—as represented by texts, such as Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, that are mediated through (and informed by) postcolonial theory. Instead, however, the Assamese student—already the nation’s economic and cultural other—suffers upon discovering the inanity of the postcolonial/postmodernist celebration of ideas such as the borderless nation, dissemination, porous borders, migrancy, liminality etc., which fail to empathize with the miseries of the native population, given the deplorable “actual conditions” of the region such as years of neglect by the center/nation state, infiltration of people from Bangladesh and the resultant overcrowding which the land and economy cannot sustain, sub-nationalist aspirations being perceived as secessionism and terrorism. The migrant in the northeast state “is not a Bhabha or Rushdie-like individual,” says Dutta wryly, but an interloper, sneaking upon a portion of the limited economic resources of the region. The resulting unresolved tension between text and readers in the Assamese classroom underscores the unequal development that globalization was supposed to ameliorate, but which serves only to further privilege the diasporic and transnational at the expense of domestic liminal and disenfranchised populations.

While underlining the representational need of Indian scholars as an intractable counterpoint to the self-gratifying epiphany of the metropolitan North, which depends upon the co-optation and erasure of India, we have also discovered scholars in the social sciences who share our concern, much to our reassurance. For example, in rethinking the culture and identity of the Oceanic Native in a new methodology, Teresia K. Teajwa asserts that her project is not

of assimilating or erasing difference, but of acknowledging difference—not as something given, but as something relying in complex ways on the construction of one’s own identity. What the Native has to offer... is a counter-discourse of culture and identity within modernity that like diaspora and postcoloniality also exceeds modernity. The native is a discursive figure constructed in histories of travel, discovery and colonial-

ism, appropriated in nationalism, abandoned by the postcolonial, and either erased or commodified by globalization. (31)

But the counter-discourse is not so much an anti-colonial discourse deployed in a confrontational manner as a litany of moral progress, technological advancement, and material prosperity to be embarrassingly rehashed by a Western-educated colonial native informant and comprador elite within the Orientalist discourse of travel writing. In Jayati Gupta's "Modernity and the Global 'Hindoo': The Concept of the Grand Tour in Colonial India," we find Baboo Bholanauth Chunder undertaking "to take a survey of India with the eyes of a Hindoo" certainly not as imperial modernism's other but as the irreducible ground constitutive of the West's liberal epiphany of modernity. Gupta's examination of the 18th-century "Grand Tour" thus broadens and deepens the common views of globalization as a contemporary phenomenon, and reminds us that transnational cultural, political, and economic exchanges were occurring well before Friedman's now-"flat" world of neoliberal globalization. Indeed, Gupta's opening questions place considerations of globality and creeping hegemonic modernity at the forefront of her reading of Indian 18th-century travel narratives: "In the specific context of India, when did the global epoch begin and what does it mean to be a global citizen? Is globalization a process of homogenization that seeks to obliterate cultural differences? Does being transnational mean that boundaries of nation, race, class, caste, and religion are transgressed?" (Gupta 59). Gupta's study of the 18th-century "Grand Tour" reveals globalization to also be a historical (and thus historicizable) process.

Read in this global context, Chunder's discursive intent and effect in his travel writing to produce India as an unproblematically flat, contiguous, seamless, "unidimensional monochrome frame" of a nascent nation-state seems to generate the very context in which the Empire represented and validated itself in just the manner, according to Arjun Appadurai, in which globalization represents and validates itself through the production of a context-generative ethnoscape.⁹ Both Appadurai's globalist ethnoscape and its nationalist counterpart of Chunder's, produced from gazing out of the train window—a common travel-writing motif—elide the unpalatable material truth of iniquitous economic and political conditions. It is no wonder that Chunder conveniently forgets the darker sides of the Permanent Settlement and Anglicist utilitarian ideology. But his very silence and erasure of historical truth are eloquent and revealing about the very mode in which the West stages its epiphany. So much, indeed, for our shift of gaze and perspective.

Notes

1. See Friedman 7 & Favero 551-552, respectively.

2. See Conrad.

3. His false opposition between modernism and postmodernism notwithstanding, Žižek still shows a reversal of perspective from one to the other in comparing the modernist movie *Blow Up* and Hitchcock's *Life Boat*. For a more thorough examination of spacing and displacement of perception and the act of its appearing to itself through writing, see Derrida.

4. For Spivak's revision and significant updating of her original essay, see Spivak *Critique* 269-311.

5. See Young 337-343. Young singles out Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* as among the first to successfully tackle questions about the interrelatedness of colonial motives, desires, and racial imperatives in colonial India. Although Nandy's impressive study is not a psychoanalytic work in the narrow sense, it nevertheless points to a method and an idea that would integrate psychology, narrative, and culture in the service of an oppositional analysis of colonial power and its effects on the governed. Nandy begins with the proposition that colonialism in India was "a shared culture" that went beyond the brute fact of military and political domination and sought to extend itself into every aspect of Indian life. The result, Nandy argues, is colonialism as "a state of mind," an "ideology of colonialism... still triumphant in many sectors of life" and clinically observable in Indian psychotherapeutic practice into the postcolonial present.

Rather than focus on individual case histories, however, Nandy chooses to examine the larger struggle between the colonizers' and colonized's networks of cultural meanings. Specifically, Nandy shows how in colonial India the British were able to 1) identify shared cultural "codes" between colonizers and colonized that would justify British rule, and 2) exploit these shared cultural imperatives in order to manage and attenuate dissent. As Nandy explains, British rationalizations of the "civilizing mission" of Indian colonization depended on the insinuation of two key determinants of social status in Britain itself—age and sex—into Indian society through strategic interpretations of Hindu sacred texts by colonial apologists. Nandy depicts British colonialism in India as in ideology that, in an interestingly duplicitous twist on Said's Orientalist, sought out and enabled appropriately reactionary indigenous spokespersons to explain and rationalize the colonial project. Nandy's analysis establishes a growing network of relations between mid-19th century British middle-class cultural imperatives—notably a homophobic correspondence between sexual dominance and political/military power, with its analogue of the feminized, "unmanly," and thus inevitably vanquished, homosexual—and the colonial rhetoric with which they sought to assimilate Indian society. More importantly for Nandy, the dissemination of such a sexualized rhetoric of colonial power led to the internalization by Indian men of these values, and of themselves as rightfully dominated by a stronger, because more aggressive and "macho," culture. Only with the successful appeal of Mohandas Gandhi to a higher, "androgynous" model of resistance, one which privileged the feminine (*Naritva*) over the narrow oppositional logic of manhood or its failure, did the colonial allegory of sexuality-as-ideology begin to crumble and its psychic impact on Indian masculinity begin to fade.

Implicit throughout Nandy's argument is the idea that, far from Said's thesis that colonialism unilaterally constructs the rhetoric of its own "civilizing mission" and the discursive object of the "barbaric" Other, the psychological conditions for colonization are to some extent already latent in both cultures, "rooted in earlier forms of social consciousness in both the colonizers and the colonized." This discrepancy between Nandy's psychoanalytic model and Said's more reductive but more broadly accepted framework, as articulated in *Orientalism* and elsewhere, may account in part for Nandy's study not circulating as widely within postcolonial academic circles in the U.S. and Europe. See Nandy, especially 1-17, and Said.

6. A Lecturer in India occupies a position equivalent to the rank of Assistant Professor in the US academy.

7. See Bose 12.

8. This term, a leftover from the Raj days, is preferable to “provincial” on grounds of the strong cultural resonance it carries in India, as the adjective of a place or institution or people suffering to relative degrees the deprivation of basic amenities, infrastructural facilities, and other critical inputs for development. It signifies regional inequality and imbalance in much stronger ways than the other neutral and more westernized term. For a brief but useful glossing of terms such as this one, see Kundu.

9. See Appadurai 178-99.

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