

REPRESENTATION OF INDIA IN CIGARS OF THE PHARAOH

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Abstract: *This paper will examine Georges Prosper Remi's (pen name Herge) representation of India in Cigars of the Pharaoh (French: Les Cigares du Pharaon), the fourth volume of The Adventures of Tintin, by this Belgian cartoonist. It was published in Le Petit Viengtieme, the children's supplement of the conservative Belgian newspaper Le Viengtieme Siècle which was serialized weekly from December 1932 to February 1934. I shall argue how India has been (mis)represented by Herge in this volume. For instance I shall try to see how Herge looks at India in a postcolonial exotic manner. I shall try to examine was India really like this in the 1930s when Herge writes and publishes this volume and I shall also investigate the impact of Tintin comics on Indian minds.*

Keywords: *post-colonial,exoticism, mis-representation,colonization,colonial discourse,orientalism*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cigars of the Pharaoh (1934) was adapted as a television series by both French studio Ellipse and Canadian animation company Nelvana in 1991. *Sur les traces de Tintin (On the Traces of Tintin)*, a documentary series showing Tintin in Egypt and settings of *Cigars of the Pharaoh* was aired on the television channel Arte, in 2010. *Tintin in Tibet* (1960) won the International Campaign for Tibet's Light of Truth Award in 2006. This volume also shows Tintin's coming to India once again and here too the depiction of India is postcolonial. Other series which reflect postcolonial views of Herge are *Tintin in the Congo* (1931), *King's Ottokar's Scepter* (1939), *Land of Black Gold* (1950), *Tintin and the Picaros* (1976) . In fact Herge himself has justified that he was fed by the prejudices of the bourgeois society that surrounded him. Root asserts that "Exoticism describes a political as much as an aesthetic practice. But this politics is often concealed, hidden beneath layers of mystification ..." (*The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* 14).

Instead of admitting that the main aim of colonization was exploitation of East by the West, colonial discourse said that the colonized were primitive, infantile people in desperate need of the enlightenment that the colonizers could only provide. This assumption was supported widely with limited and flawed knowledge that the colonizers read about the colonized territories collected from the travel diaries, letters written by explorers and adventurers and also from fictional accounts like adventure novels and stories, all of which are highly fanciful.

Edward Said in defining the European colonialism says:

To that extent that western scholars were aware of contemporary orientals or oriental movements of thought and culture, these were perceived either as silent shadows to be animated by the orientalist, brought into reality by them, or as a kind of international and useful for the orientalist's grander interpretive activity. (*Orientalism* 208)

2. POST –COLONIALISM AND ITS WIDER APPLICATIONS

The term "Postcolonialism" refers mainly to the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture, and human identity itself are presented in the modern era, after many colonized countries achieved their independence. However, some critics use the term to refer to all culture and cultural products influenced by imperialism from the moment of colonization until today.

Postcolonial literature seeks to describe the interactions between European nations and the countries they colonized. By the mid of the twentieth century, the vast majority of the earth was under the dominance of European countries. At one time, Great Britain, for instance ruled almost half of the world. During the twentieth century, countries such as India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Canada, and Australia gained independence from the European colonizers.

The works and art produced in these countries after Independence have become the object of "Postcolonial Studies," a term coined in and for studies in British universities. This field gained prominence in the 1970s and has been developing ever since. Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said's critique of Western imperialism of the Eastern culture in his 1978 book, *Orientalism*, is a major text for postcolonial studies and has introduced a lot of theories on the subject. However, as the importance of the term "postcolonial" has gained wider use, its meaning has also widened. Some consider the United States itself a postcolonial country because of its former status as a territory of Great Britain, but it is generally studied for its colonizing rather than its colonized characteristics. In another lens, Canada and Australia, though former colonies of Britain, are often placed in a separate category because of their status as "settler" countries and because of their continuing loyalty to their colonizer. Some of the important works of postcolonial literature include Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1981), Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Michael Ondaatje's novel

The English Patient (1992), Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988), Isabelle Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982), J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians and Disgrace* (1990), Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), and Eavan Boland's *Outside History: Selected Poems, 1980-1990*.

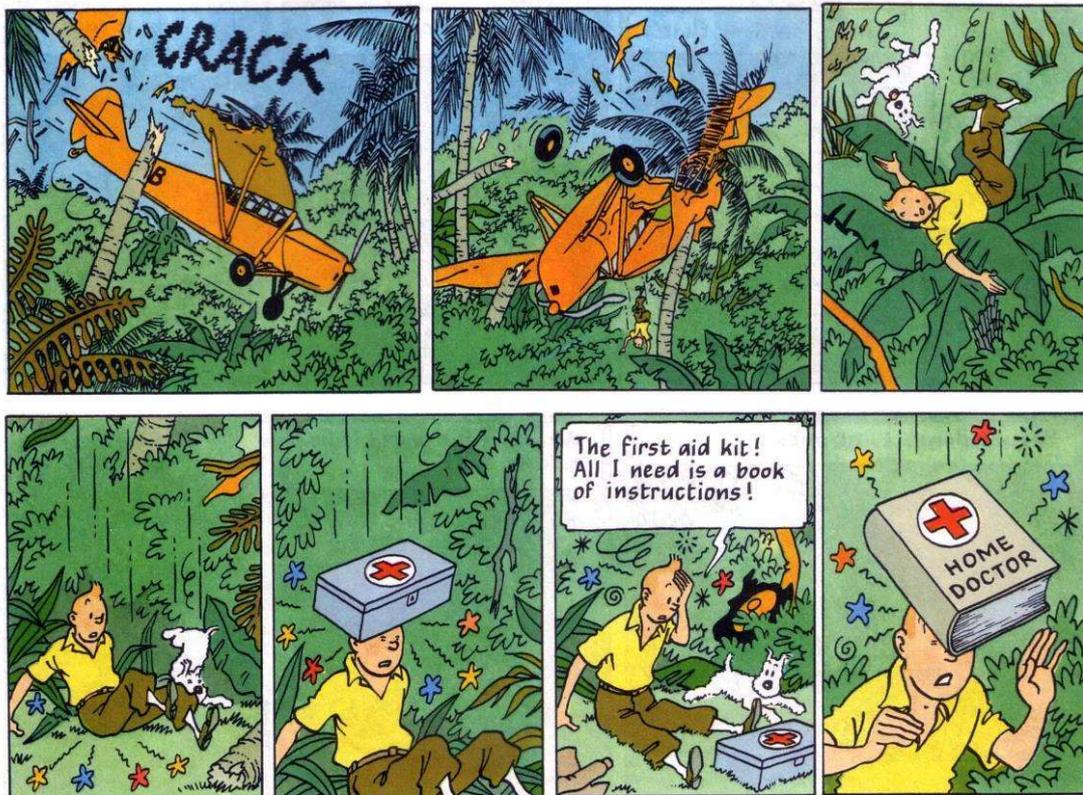
3. EXOTICISM IN TINTIN'S CIGARS OF THE PHARAOH

Vacationing on a Mediterranean cruise ship, Tintin and his dog Snowy meet wealthy film director Rastapopoulos and idiosyncratic Egyptologist Sarcophagus. When two police officers (Thomson and Thompson) accuse Tintin of heroin trafficking, he escapes the ship and joins Sarcophagus on his quest for the unexplored tomb of the Pharaoh Kih-Oskh. Tintin discovers that the tomb is full of boxes of cigars labelled with an unknown symbol, but he and Sarcophagus fall unconscious after an unseen foe gasses them. They are then taken aboard a ship inside woody sarcophagi, captained by smuggler Allan, but to avert the coastguard Allan orders Tintin and Snowy thrown overboard. They are recovered by a gunrunner who sails them to Arabia. Touring by land, Tintin meets Sheikh Patrash Pasha, a big fan of his, and confronts Rastapopoulos filming movie. The local army drafts Tintin then captures him as a spy, before Thomson and Thompson rescue him. Boarding a plane, he sidesteps Arabia but runs out of fuel over India, falling into the jungle. He discovers Sarcophagus, who has become crazy as the aftereffect of being injected with Rajaijah juice: "the poison of madness". Tintin is hypnotised by a fakir and institutionalised in an asylum, which he soon escapes. Meeting the Maharaja of Gaipajama, the two become friends, with the Maharaja revealing that his family has long been fighting a criminal opium-smuggling troupe. The fakir comes and Tintin follows him, discovers the drug cartel's hideaway and is able to capture the cartel. Tintin identifies their Kih-Oskh symbol and understands it is the same organisation that was operating in Egypt and Arabia. The fakir escapes, and with the disguised leader of the conspiracy kidnaps the Maharaja's son. Tintin follows them in a sports car, recovering the boy, while the leader falls into a chasm.

Tintin returns to Gaipajama, where his arrival is celebrated. Unwrapping one of the cigars with the strange Kih-Oskh symbol, Tintin discloses to the Maharaja how opium was smuggled across the world in the cigars.

The very first vision of India in this comic series is shown as a land of jungles and mountains where Tintin accidentally lands because of his dearth of fuel in the plane which crashes. Tintin says “not a hope landing in that jungle...” (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 33). Here Herge exoticises India with his very first sketch of India as a land of jungles and mountains showing pristine nature, devoid of industrialization, enlightenment, civilization. He deglorifies India through Tintin’s comment that he was not even ready to land in India even accidentally in one of his worst nightmares. India as a land can never be explored by western scouts like Tintin deliberately. Tintin again says “now, I wonder in where we are. Somewhere India. I’m sure but impossible to tell exactly.” (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 34). This is a typical vision of a colonizer. Describing India, Marco Polo says:

The country produces a diversity of beasts different from those of the rest of the world. There are black lions with no other visible colour or marks. There are parrots of many kinds. Some are entirely white - as white as snow-with feet and beaks of scarlet. Others are scarlet and blue – there is no lovelier sight than these in the world (...) everything there is different from what is with us and excels both in size and beauty. They have no fruits the same as ours, no beasts, no birds (*Postcolonial Theories* 5).



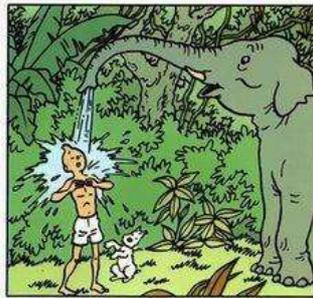
(*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 33).

Herge’s Tintin series also falls in the genre of “graphic novel”, the term which got popularized after the publication of Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God* (1978). Herge, in fact pioneered the *ligne Claire* style for drawing the Tintin series. Scwhartz says in *The Misadventures of Tintin: (Post)Colonial Representations and Imaginative Geographies*:

The new medium [of photography] was employed in various ways to establish imperial control, extend imperial connections, and articulate imperial identity...Photographs were spaces where facts, in visual form, were stored and communicated, ordered and conceptualized, reconstituted and transformed by an imperial gaze into the myths and metaphors of place and identity (15).

Next, they (both Tintin and Snowy) see an elephant and they are scared. Tintin cures the elephant of its fever and it takes Tintin by its trunk which once again scares Tintin and he says “where in the world is he taking me?” (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 34). Tintin sweats in the hot arid weather in India which shows how the weather is unfit for a colonizer to come and live in a colonized country. The elephant bathes Tintin by pouring water through his trunk which again shows how uncivilized the Indians are as they don’t even bathe properly like the westerners.

Malcolm crick observes “...They need to travel in an environment which gives them a vicarious encounter with the ‘other’, yet at a safe distance, with all the security of the familiar around them...” (*The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* 195).



(*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 35).

Then Tintin and his companions went to a bungalow in a nearby village where Tintin asks the owner of the house about a weapon hung in a wall. Tintin asks “that’s a strange weapon you have there. Isn’t it a hindu dagger?” The onwner replies “yes, a kukri...” (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 38). He again says: “it’s made of steel... a deadly little toy!... I was given it by a fakir. He told me it had magic powers... it is supposed to point to anyone whose life is in danger.”

(*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 38).

By making both Tintin and the owner of the bungalow utter such speeches Herge depicts Indian (Hindu) religion only to show the sacrificial (killing) rites leaving all the positivity of the religion. When the owner says it has magic powers Herge shows how the Indians still believe in powers like magic which is far way from being rational. He depicts the mysteriousness of India, a typical postcolonial trait. Tintin then says “... anyway, I ‘m not scared of omens!” (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 38) which once again shows the rationalizing attitude of the west. Then we see how Mrs. Snowball has fainted after seeing a ghost. She says “oh! ... oh!... it was horrible ... a ghost... I saw a ghost!” (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 39) and how the dagger with magical powers has suddenly disappeared which is an ill omen suggesting further dangers.

Writers have depicted India as a place of horrors and fascination, as a land of magic, mysteries, and wonders, as a place of colonial nostalgia, a romantic tourist goal and so on. So India is always available for consumption.

Next, we see the fakir stepping out of the jungle like barbaric nomad wearing only a small loin cloth, having animal like eyes and a long black beard. Herge almost dehumanizes the fakir and brings him down to a level of a wild animal in jungle coming out from the bushes stealthily. The fakir says to Tintin “aha! You are in my power!” (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 41). Herge shows that weapons are even less powerful than the hypnotic powers of this fakir. Todorov says “the best candidates for the exotic ideal are the peoples and cultures that are most remote from us...” (*The Postcolonial exotic: Marketing the Margins* 186). Both Sarcophagus and Mr. Zloty are poisoned with the arrows of “rajaijah juice, the poison of madness” by the fakir which results in making them insane. Mr. Zloty says “too late... I’m done for... it’s their revenge... this arrow is poisoned with rajaijah juice, the Herge shows how the hypnotizing fakir is related with illegal drug trafficking which he may bound to do because of his utter poverty and even maddens the people who comes to know about this or wants to know about it. poison of madness” (*Cigars of Pharaoh* 43).

Herge depicts the utter poverty of India through the appearance of the fakir and his occupation. India, a land of poverty is bound to carry on illegal activities for some remuneration, keeping her honour at stake. The east is seen as a container of cruelty, sensuality, decadence, laziness and so on which remains unrecognized by the west. Cromer says ". . . I content myself with noting the fact that somehow or other the Oriental generally acts, speaks and thinks in a manner exactly opposite to the European" (*Orientalism* 50).



(*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 41).

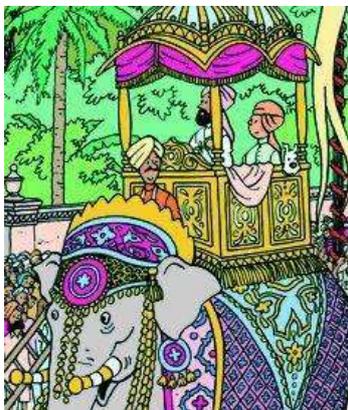
When Tintin appears to the asylum the patients are represented as barbaric animals. Tintin and Snowy both get afraid of seeing them. The doctor of the asylum infact says “there is nothing to be afraid of. They are quite harmless” (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 44). The postcolonial discourse defines the people of east as homogenous masses rather than individuals. Instinctive emotions define their actions (lust, terror, fury and others) but not the conscious choices or decisions.



(*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 44).

Snowy encounters a cow which is known as “a holy cow”. Herge depicts how the Indians worship the animals giving them a position equal to God whereas for the westerners they are merely animals. Snowy says “you?! A sacred cow? A likely story!” (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 48). It becomes unbelievable for the westernized Snowy how a cow can be sacred? Herge depicts here the superstitions of the Indian people. The blind belief in superstitions of the Indian people is further aggravated when the people from the nearby village comes running saying “sacrilege! ... a dog is attacking our sacred cow!” (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 48). They further say “we will slay it on the altar of Shiva!”. Herge questions the rationality of Hindu religion which contains rites like killing and slaying thereby degrading the Hindu religion. Thompson and Thompson behind the Shiva idol talk on behalf of Shiva. They say “stay your hand, servant of Shiva! the god will not accept so mean a sacrifice!” (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 50). Herge here shows how the foolish villager believes that Shiva says this. The Indians can be fooled to any extent in the name of religion. He also mocks here the sacrificial rite which is something grand and expensive and surely the petty dog cannot be one of the fit objects for the sacrifice.

Next Tintin is accidentally caught in the tiger trap which has been set by the maharaja of Gaipajama as he goes for hunting on his royal elephant. The name Gaipajama (cow's pajama) deglorifies Indian kings and heritage once again. The exoticist works glorify the golden past which has vanished. These works idealise the nostalgia of the past heritage and appeal to the timeless essences of indigenous cultures. Herge does the same here but partially. The maharaja is seen here hunting on a royal, decorated elephant cart which was very much a custom prevalent in those times.



(*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 61).

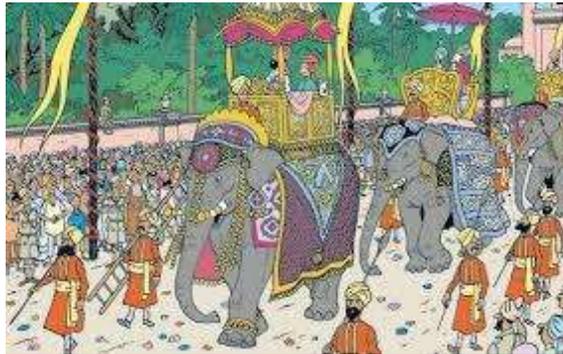
Next Tintin is taken to the maharaja's house and fed a ceremonial meal. After some time the maharaja hears an "unearthly music". He tells Tintin each time this music was heard from his palace someone became ill. The maharaja says "its horrible ... I must tell you my father and my brother both went mad , one after the other. Each time, just before they became ill, the same unearthly music was heard outside the palace..." (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 52). Herge maintains the same homogenous stereotypes by showing the poor villager, the rich maharaja or the owner of the bungalow, all of them equally superstitious. The maharaja tells Tintin how his family members have been killed for protesting against the drug traffickers. He once again says "... the poppy from which opium is made flourishes in this region. The drug traffickers terrorise my people. They force the peasants to grow poppies instead of food, and purchase..." (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 52).

Through the maharaja's speech Herge again reminds us how the Britishers forced the Indians to grow Indigo and other materials for their own profit depriving the peasants from cultivating crops of their own choices, making them bankrupt, collecting huge taxes from them, taking their lands and ultimately made them die. Huge uprisings were there in many parts of India including Bengal regarding such plantations. *The Hindu Patriot* discussed about this event. Dinabandhu Mitra's play *Nil Darpan* (1859) was based on Indigo revolution.

Next we see how the fakir plans to kill the maharaja with his arrow of "rajaijah juice" at night. He carries with him a magic rope to reach the window of the maharaja. The rope is faithful to his master. The fakir says "magic rope, obey your master!" (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 52). We again view the powerful black magic of the fakir. But the maharaja is saved from the fakir's attack as Tintin posts a dummy of the maharaja instead of the real king. Again, Herge shows how the maharaja (the East) is incapable of saving himself without the help of Tintin (the West).

Then we see Tintin attending the secret meeting of the traffickers wearing their costume. There one of the traffickers say "...our brothers from the west will speak first" (*Cigars of the Pharaoh* 54). Herge depicts how the Indian traffickers lose self confidence and depend upon the West for their orders. So they wanted the western brother to speak first and they will only follow. Their speech reflects their subaltern position. They do not have a voice of their own. The maharaja's son was kidnapped by the drug trafficking gang to take revenge against Tintin and the maharaja who caught them red handed.

But, ultimately it is Tintin who fights with them, kills them and brings the prince back and it is he who ultimately solves the mystery of drug trafficking and explains to the maharaja how the opium is imported in the form of cigars. Hergé finally asserts the dominance of West once again because it ultimately is Tintin (the West), the western boy scout without whom the maharaja (the East) is unable to stop the oppression which was going on for so long and it is none other than Tintin who rescues the prince back. So the East is even dependent on the West to get rid of its oppression. It could easily have been someone else (any Indian character from the comic) other than Tintin to ultimately lead the expedition and give the comic its final victorious touch. But, Hergé consciously makes Tintin victorious in the end which finally asserts the dominance of West more strongly once again. In the end Tintin receives a ceremonious reception by the maharaja and the villagers cheer for Tintin.



(Cigars of the Pharaoh 61).

4. MIS-REPRESENTATION OF INDIA IN *CIGARS OF THE PHARAOH*

Hergé has explained that he was only writing for the cultural stereotypes present during his time and he also confirmed that he hardly visited any of the places he wrote about in the adventures of Tintin. Nadim Damluji, a budding Tintinologist, visited the places in person and realized how these places differed in reality and the false impressions which these comic series imposed upon the reader.

Hergé did wide research on photographs of locations, buildings and vehicles to create an accuracy in his comics. Due to extensive focus on these elements he paid less attention to the intricacies of their culture which often resulted in creating stereotypes or even racist depictions of people. He mainly drew in *ligne claire* style which helped to reduce the irregularities between realism and caricature.

Tintin's moral, physical and religious powers allow Hergé to depict the West as inherently dominating. The subjugation of other characters as lazy, barbaric, evil or mystical completes the dichotomy needed in postcolonial discourse. Tzvetan Todorov says:

The exotic novels glorify foreigners while the colonial novel denigrates them. But the contradiction is only apparent. Once the author has declared that he himself is only subject ... and that the others have been reduced to objects; it is ... of secondary concern whether those objects are loved or despised. The essential point is that they are not fully fledged human beings (*The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* 184).

Hergé here depicts India from 1932 to 1934. Now let us have a look at the major events in India in these years. Some important events in these years were third civil disobedience movement, terrorism in Bengal, India wins gold medal in hockey at Los Angeles Olympics, Indian air force was established, J.R.D. Tata paved way for civil aviation in India, arrest of Gandhi, transfer of

But, we don't see any influences or shadows of these events in his representation of India in this particular series. The name "fakir" actually meant a Muslim Sufi ascetic, a wandering devotee who begged for food. Some fakirs laid down on bed of nails, piercing their skin with knives and walking on hot coals to earn some food or money and not intentionally. *Cigars of the Pharaoh* is written in a time when India was governed by the British empire. But few states were ruled by the Indian kings known as Maharajas. Herge creates the character of the maharaja from this fact.

Book store managers justify the popularity of Tintin comics by showing that those never lessens. Every Bengali child grows up reading Tintin comics. It has been adapted for radio, televisions, films, documentaries and so on and the comics have been translated nearly into hundred languages. Some publishers share their views suggesting Tintin books are common in every stores in Bengal. Even few readers share their views saying how they were absolutely surprised by the exotic locales and extraordinary acts of this superhero Tintin. Kolkata's S.P. Mukherjee road even has a food centre named Tintin Economic Chinese Restaurant where Tintin special Chowmien and Fried Rice is served. Fanon argues comics for boys are "put together by white men for little white men" (*Postcolonial Theories* 37). When these comics are read by the colonized black school boys as well as the white children, everyone identifies, as the text suggests with the explorer or adventurer who is white. When the colonized child reads that enemy of the hero is colonized and savage, he distances himself from those figures. Fanon asserts:

"The Antillean does not think of himself as a Blackman (...) the Negro lives in Africa. Subjectively, intellectually the Antillean conducts himself like a white man. But he is a Negro. That he will learn once he goes to Europe" (*Postcolonial Theories* 37).

Therefore we are still in awe of the colonizers and we don't know where to situate ourselves. Our position remains confused till today. The absence of Indian women in this volume might suggest that Herge absolutely abhorred Indian women, he didn't think of these women even getting a place in his volume.

5. CONCLUSION

Aijaz Ahmed says for postcolonial writing:

Refers simply to literary compositions ... of non-white minorities located in Britain and North America – while efforts are now under way also to designate the contemporary literatures of Asia and Africa 'postcolonial' and thus to make them available for being read according to the protocols that metropolitan criticism has developed for reading what it calls 'minority literatures' (*The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* 242). Presently, some theorists claim that the postcolonial texts in a way act as mini narratives which cuts through the meta narratives of the west, 'Minor Literature', Lloyd asserts:

is so termed in relation to the major canon, and its characteristics are defined in opposition to those which define canonical writing. To enumerate them briefly... (these) characteristics would involve the questioning or destruction of the concepts of identity and identification, the rejection of representations of developing autonomy and authenticity, if not the very concept of development itself, and accordingly a profound suspicion of narratives of reconciliation and unification (*The Postcolonial Exotic : Marketing the Margins* 84).

Jonathan Culler asserts:

The nature of theory is to undo through a contesting of premises and postulates, what you thought you knew, so the effects of theory are not predictable. You have not become master, but neither are you where you were before. You reflect on your reading in new ways. You have different questions to ask and a better sense of the implications of the questions you have put to works you read (*The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* 260).

The application of theory is gradually helping the colonized nations to come out of this hangover, and analyse how the West has always shown the East in a deglorified, dehumanizing light. Theory helps us to come out of the “white man’s burden”, the phrase popularized by Rudyard Kipling.

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