

Banerjee, Suparno. *Indian Science Fiction: Patterns, History and Hybridity*. U of Wales P, 2020.

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In *Indian Science Fiction: Patterns, History and Hybridity (ISF)*, Suparno Banerjee highlights the hybridity of Indian sf by evaluating its creation at the intersection of Indian and Western cultures and proceeds to develop this theme along with other patterns more elaborately. Banerjee is an associate professor of English and an established scholar on Indian sf with many scholarly publications to his credit, including his dissertation, *Other Tomorrows: Postcoloniality, Science Fiction and India* (2010), which studies Indian sf from a postcolonial perspective, arguing that it “intervenes in the history-oriented discourse of postcolonial Anglophone Indian literature and refocuses attention on the nation’s future” by negotiating “the stigma of colonialism to a nation emerging as a new world power” (1).

Banerjee proposes to “provide a coherent and sustained analysis, and a wider picture of Indian sf, tasks which are not possible within the confines of an article, the multiple voices of an anthology or a journal issue” (1). *ISF*, using a combination of “a community of practice and cultural history approach” (8), also shows that Indian sf with its “imagination of alterity” has always resisted “fantasies of imperialism resulting from progress and modernity” (7). Taking inspiration from Sami Ahmad Khan’s *Star Warriors of the Modern Raj: A Critical Study of Science Fiction in Indian English* (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, 2016) on Indian English sf, Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay’s *Bangla Kalpavigyan: Science Fiction in a Transcultural Context* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 2013) on Bangla sf, and Ajay Singh’s (*Hindi Sahitya me Vigyan Katha* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 2002) on Hindi sf, which take a comprehensive view of single language traditions,

ISF examines “larger patterns and cultural cross-pollination at the national level” including science fiction produced in several Indian languages (19).

ISF, the much-awaited history of Indian sf “from a national tradition” (1), has been overdue considering that the *Indian Journal of Science Fiction Studies* started its journey in 1998 with the establishment of the *Indian Association for Science Fiction Studies*. Banerjee takes this opportunity to offer an insider perspective on the definition and genealogy of Indian sf along with “major thematic patterns across multiple languages” (2). He opens the book with a chronology of Indian sf starting from Kylas Chunder Dutt’s “A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945” (1835) to *The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction* (2019) edited by Tarun Saint. Banerjee also enlists the Indian sf works that won the prestigious international sf awards like Hugo, Nebula, and Philip K. Dick as well as the national awards to highlight the quality of Indian sf and its potential to attract the global market.

Banerjee redefines sf using an Indian cultural lens, and draws on the insights of both Western scholars like Darko Suvin and Carl Freedman and Indian scholars like Adrish Bardhan and Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay to establish a definition of it as literature with “a cognition effect” (8), reflecting a combination of taxonomic and historical approaches. *ISF* also tries to loosely define “Indian,” including both the works produced during British colonialism and after partition in 1947. Banerjee, taking India as a “state-nation” (10) (because of its openness to diversity and heterogeneity) and “culture as multilocal” (12), adopts a more inclusive approach by including not only the works produced within India (in many languages, especially English, Hindi, Bangla, Marathi, and Tamil) but also its diasporic community in his story of Indian sf.

Banerjee distinguishes Indian sf as “a genre of alterity” with chapter names such as “Other Times,” “Other Spaces,” “Other Tomorrows,” and “The Others,” focusing on four elements: “time

of action, space of action, characters that perform such action, and the epistemic base determining the nature of these narrative elements” (13). The first chapter, “Genealogies,” narrates the story of Indian sf chronologically by dividing its evolution into four distinct stages from colonial through postcolonial to the present times. It depicts the indebtedness of Indian sf to the British educational system, the gradual “consolidation of sf as a genre in Popular culture” by attracting writers of various local languages still under Western influence, the emergence of a nationalistic element in the 1940s, the experience of the golden age of indigenous sf from 1947-95, the sharing of boundaries with other popular fiction genres and myths, the development of Indian sf film in 1960s, and the rise of Indian sf in English in the 1990s with nationalistic concerns and “global ambitions” (14-15).

The second chapter, “Cognition and Estrangements,” focuses on the diversity of epistemologies working together in world-building in Indian sf. Competing epistemologies like Vedic science, myth, and Western techno-science contribute to the hybridity of Indian sf. This chapter offers a detailed analysis of the works by J. C. Bose, Narlikar, Satyajit Ray, and several short stories. The third chapter, “Other Times: Imagining the Future” offers an examination of how Indian sf imagines the past in three different ways: 1) stories written from a nationalistic perspective imagine a glorious precolonial past valuing subaltern knowledge, 2) stories that subvert colonial authority without privileging nationalistic perspective, and 3) stories that challenge “the monolithic narrative of a Hindu past” (17). The chapter also examines alternative histories like Premendra Mitra’s *Ghanada* stories (1945-88) and Vandana Singh’s *Tetrahedron* (2008). Both chapters offer a detailed overview of Indian sf comparing and contrasting them with Western sf to illustrate similarities as well as points of disjunction.

The fourth chapter, “Other Spaces: Utopian Discourses and Non-expansionist Journeys,” draws on the insights of Fredric Jameson, Tom Moylan, and Scott Bukatman and examines both utopian and dystopian elements in Indian sf to argue that they reimagine India “as a space on which forces of patriarchy, corruption, identity politics and imperialism have wreaked and are still wreaking havoc” (17). The chapter also analyzes the non-expansionist nature of Indian interplanetary sf in contrast to Western sf, which can be read as a colonial fantasy. The fifth chapter, “The Others: Aliens, Robots, Cyborgs and Other Others,” using works by Stuart Hall, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Donna Haraway as the theoretical framework, argues that “Indian SF often presents a view from this ‘other side’, i.e., through the eyes of the ‘aliens’, or other ‘Others’, such as clones, cyborgs, AIs, mutants and creatures” (18). This chapter critically examines the works by Satyajit Ray, Vandana Singh, and Samit Basu to posit that these marginalized “others” represent an experience of alienation both within Indian society as well as the Indian diaspora, “who are aliens both at home and abroad” (18). However, some “others,” in the selected works by Laxman Londhe and Chitramani Deshmukh for example, are presented as intruders, invaders, or benefactors. Both chapters present an in-depth analysis of the subversion of sf by Indian writers to address local issues.

The conclusion, “Close Encounters,” reiterates the hybrid nature of Indian sf as a product of intersectionality with various local and Western cultures. Banerjee observes that, at both national and international levels, English Indian sf draws greater critical attention than “bhasha literature” or sf produced in local languages (191). This undermining or underappreciation of the works in local languages is a common practice in postcolonial countries. Though recently critical works on local Indian sf have been produced by Sami Khan, Ajay Singh, and Hans Harder—thus

making Indian sf an important part of global sf studies—these works do not offer a detailed history and genealogy of Indian sf.

Thus, *ISF* breaks new ground by presenting “the larger tradition of Indian sf and its overarching patterns and evolution” (19). As a detailed literary history of Indian sf, *ISF* makes a seminal contribution to sf studies and has been rightly welcomed by sf scholars like John Rieder, Joan Gordon, and Vandana Singh. It will serve as a milestone for students and academic scholars on Indian and South Asian sf.

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