Kalpavigyan and Imperial Technoscience: Three Nodes of an Argument

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The critical study of *kalpavigyan* (a word commonly identified as the Bangla term for science fiction but in its original context much larger in scope) typically involves two kinds of analysis. The first of these sees kalpavigyan as a diminutive subset of a global phenomenon called science fiction or sf, of which the representative works are Anglo-American or European-French in origin. The second, lacking a systematic framework for analyzing the specific phenomenon in Bengal, posits that kalpavigyan cannot be understood without reference to the larger body of Bangla popular science writing that has been the primary vehicle for the emergence of kalpavigyan. A consequence of these analyses is a fixation on the emergence of kalpavigyan, which necessarily begins the story with nineteenth-century colonial origins, and traces some form of linear history of kalpavigyan: a history that seems to run parallel to its counterparts in other languages. Yet even such historical studies of emergence have not been plentiful: there exist only a handful of works of any significance (Ghosh 1988 and Bal 1997 in Bangla; in English, Sengupta 2003 and 2010; Chattopadhyay 2013a and 2013b; Bhattacharya and Hiradhar 2014). Following the arguments of John Rieder (2008), one may frame emergence in sf within the colonial matrix generally instead of seeking to identify a single local point of origin, and Rieder's own later paper (2010) further complicates the question of origins. Others (eg. Csicsery-Ronay 2002, Csicsery-Ronay 2003, Kerslake 2007) have also framed questions of emergence and dominance of sf genres in countries with robust technoscientific development, by linking those developments to imperial (colonial, postcolonial, neo-colonial and neo-imperial) interests. It has thus become abundantly clear that the framing of kalpavigyan within these two kinds of analysis has a certain necessity, and indeed, urgency, if possible alternative trajectories of kalpavigyan are to be located. However, the urgency lies less in providing a mere historical account than in discovering the possible theoretical framework for describing these

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trajectories. Thus in this paper I do not attempt history, but rather, following Rieder and Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., posit a methodological framework for the analysis of kalpavigyan which follows the lead of Chattopadhyay (2013c) in describing a possible pathway of looking at non-anglophone sf. I agree with Rieder's analysis of the emergence phase of the genre as a mixed entity inseparable from early adventure fiction, but I resituate it within the specific contextual tone of the kalpavigyan phenomenon. This re-siting is crucial to the argument proposed in my earlier work (2013c) and intersects with other similar analysis carried out on early sf by others (cf. Haywood Ferreira 2011; Banerjee 2013). I argue that kalpavigyan's characteristics are the result of a resistance to the general homogenizing tendency of imperial technoscientific modernity in colonial Bengal, which tempered the genre to an ironic use of science. That is, sf in Bengal, during its emergence phase, was not understood as an entity that represented the triumph of modern sciences and technology or post-Enlightenment technoscientific rationalism, but as a pre-existing but liminal space within adventure fiction and fantasy where the synchronistic impulse of European colonial knowledge could be entangled with multiple, conflicting histories of empire as a method for historical revisionism and a rationale for political anti-colonial nationalism.

This paper is in two parts. In the initial part, I provide an overview of the current state of sf criticism in relation to the theme of empire, as well as an overview of sf criticism in Bangla that relates emergence to the question of empire in terms of theory. In the latter part of the essay, which is further divided into three subsections, I explore three thematic nodes in the kalpavigyan phenomenon: one, a tendency towards self-reflexive parody that consistently mocks the appropriation of science from a nationalist perspective while being open to it as a tool for progress of the underdeveloped colonized 'native'; two, imagining utopian alternative histories of universalism within delocalized locales while being fully saturated with nationalist images for the purpose of bolstering cultural pride; and three, the tendency to continuously appropriate the pre-colonial and the mythic for supposed scientific content in order to create a narrative history of national science.

The empire in sf and kalpavigyan

The link between sf and colonialism has by now been established quite definitively in terms of genre history, even though it must be admitted that the link itself was never in doubt from the early days of the genre, as represented in the works of Bulwer-Lytton, Wells, Verne, Robida, or their numerous successors in the early twentieth century. It could even be argued that part of sf's fascination for readers came from the speculative imaginary of a homogenous imperial future for the world, highlighted through the glitz of numerous colonial exhibitions and worlds expos, for instance, while the conflict in these

stories came from threats to the imperial project. Thus Bulwer-Lytton's Aryan vrils would emerge from their hollow earth paradise to take their rightful place on the earth above by destroying its degenerate species, and Wells' Martians would destroy the imperial heartland of Britain (Bulwer-Lytton 2008; Wells 1983). As I. F. Clarke discussed in an early study, future war fiction abounds in such imperial conflicts, for instance in terms of ideas such as the "yellow peril" (Clarke 1979). Arguably, the first significant theoretical presentation of this link is by Csicsery-Ronay. (2003). He argues:

> The conditions for the emergence of sf as a genre are made possible by three factors: the technological expansion that drove real imperialism, the need felt by national audiences for literary-cultural mediation as their societies were transformed from historical nations into hegemons, and the fantastic model of achieved technoscientific Empire. (231)

For Csicsery-Ronay, the emergence of sf was driven by imperial projects, not only by the technology that propelled real imperialism, but also by the imperial imaginary which perceived the future as a governable, controllable future by the means of continuously developing technology. What I have elsewhere called "technological futurism" (2013a) was conditioned by the imperial project. Csicsery-Ronay argues that the dominant sf traditions belong to typically imperial nations with significant technocultural power: "Britain, France, Germany, Soviet Russia, Japan and the US." (2003, 231) Also, nations like Japan came to have proper sf traditions only at the end of WWII. Csicsery-Ronay identifies this as the sf world-model. Hypothesizing from the lens of globalization, he also argues that sf from the beginning has been resistant to the notion of boundaries, which made the empire model all the more visible and uniform even with other contradictions. He argues for five kinds of "dis-imagination," (2002) or displacement from the local to the global in sf: a) transgalacticism, where the empires are galactic systems and cultural/national differences are seen as irrelevant or only seen in relative and abstract terms, as in much space opera; b) corporate globalization, which is the globalization of the market where all places replicate the same patterns of consumption; c) apocalyptic winnowing, which through an apocalypse automatically reduces the human population to unitary postcultural beings; d) biological displacement, which puts an imaginary alien as the marker of racial difference while simultaneously being the "other" of humanity; e) archaicization, which toys with the quaintness of settled communities as monolithic cultures, where the internal differences and issues are flattened. He also points out, as Marxist critics have shown (for instance, Freedman 2000), that sf writers do not necessarily seek to serve the Empire, but often write with the opposite impulse, challenging the totalitarianism of the imperial imagination. For instance, the nature of

the genre itself, where transformation and change in technoscience seem key, seems to be inherently critical of the imperial megaproject.

Patricia Kerslake's *Science Fiction and Empire* (2007) does not take quite as expansive a view as Csicsery-Ronay of the presence of imperial themes in sf, limiting her study to more select, representative texts of the sf canon and arguing for the relevance of empire as a horizon for sf extrapolation. As Kerslake identifies the empire as a horizon or a theme rather than a specifically Western project, due to continuous shifts in the imperial imagination, her argument extends Csicsery-Ronay's in showing how any sf tradition, irrespective of geocultural specificity, is implicated in the question of empire, and may be read as such:

> We have not left empire behind us for the simple reason that it still has a role to play in our cultural productions and, until we achieve a global existence where power is no longer sought after or lauded, we still need our fictional imperialisms with which to seek out and identify its most problematic issues…Empire's intellectual presence is neither good nor bad, but neutral. Its fictional peculiarities are dependent upon those actions by which the narrative defines its boundaries and policies. And it is this constant work of definition and redefinition that marks SF as a place of intellectual activity and hope. (191)

There is thus a utopian bent to Kerslake's representation of the empire in its posited neutrality. For empire is here subjected to a critique for its totalitarianism on the one hand, while being enlisted as a means to criticize insular, and potentially fascist, nationalism. This duality of purpose not only serves to explain its continued existence in sf, but is also part of the contradictory nature of sf from the locations that Csicsery-Ronay does not consider in his study, where sf needs to engage with the utopian possibilities offered by science and technology while remaining alert to the imperial context of its transmission. It also avoids the possible problem of Csicsery-Ronay's approach, where the notion of dominance in sf tradition itself looks like an imperial notion that negates other rich traditions of sf. It could be argued for instance, if somewhat reductively, that Csicsery-Ronay's approach derives from a specific kind of understanding of science and technology, one that takes the science propounded by imperial nations as a default marker for the beginning of an sf tradition, and also sees its growth and development as a linear process from colonizer (producer) to colonized (consumer), instead of looking upon the diverse ways in which these imperial sciences competed with, and were transformed by, sciences in other colonial locations, which also thus produced literature that may be classed as science fiction while being open to a number of sciences which were not acknowledged or were suppressed by the imperial project (cf. Dillon 2012).

In terms of the history of this linkage, however, John Rieder's work is arguably the most significant. This is because Rieder explores the link at the moment of inception, the colonial period, and restricts his study to that period alone, unlike Csicsery-Ronay and Kerslake. Working with a Saidian framework, Rieder (2008) classifies the various types of early sf into several categories, each of which has to do with specific ways of dealing with colonialism in the Anglo-American imaginary. The lost race motif, animal-human hybrids, differently evolved humans or posthumans, catastrophes, machine-like beings, all have their place in Rieder's categories, just as they do in colonial kalpavigyan, which amply demonstrates the generic cluster that Rieder identifies as indicative of the emergence moment. This minor but theoretically significant understanding of genre is more clearly elaborated in Rieder (2010). Rieder makes a five point argument:

> "1) sf is historical and mutable; 2) sf has no essence, no single unifying characteristic, and no point of origin; 3) sf is not a set of texts, but rather a way of using texts and of drawing relationships among them; 4) sf's identity is a differentially articulated position in an historical and mutable field of genres; 5) attribution of the identity of sf to a text constitutes an active intervention in its distribution and reception." (193)

Thus for Rieder, genres come into being when a group of texts is defined as a genre; origins here are less significant than what he calls the "web of resemblances." The point at which genres are identified and labelled as such comes with the coalescing of certain themes by a community that is actively invested in identifying a phenomenon as such. As a historical understanding of the process of genre emergence, this is undoubtedly one of the most nuanced in the field of sf studies and also genre studies. The advantages of this approach are numerous: first of all, by setting aside the notion of origin we are able to move beyond the simple influence model, which is hierarchical and vertical, to a horizontal distributed model, where individual examples of texts that demonstrate the interconnectedness of particular tropes can belong to any literature or context. Just as genre is not a static entity, but can be considered a "mutable mobile" (with apologies to Bruno Latour), literature/art too is not a static entity but something that constantly absorbs and transforms other artefacts around it, not necessarily with a refined historical sensibility, but as an active source of energy that drives the pursuit of novelty and uniqueness. To re-structure the argument proposed by Sherryl Vint and Mark Bould (2009), there does exist a thing such as "sf" as a genre phenomenon, because it is identified as such, and individual texts can thus be recognized as such, but the properties of sf that identify a text as belonging to the genre called sf do not belong to any one text but can only be identified as such by similarities between texts. For sf, moreover, in addition to the historical genre argument proposed by Rieder, we also need to refine our understanding of what constitutes science, both historically—the notion of science as a discipline—and methodologically —science as a method of organizing knowledge (cf. Chattopadhyay, 2013b). Second, pushing the same argument further, one can argue that if imperial technoscience drives sf, then authors in colonized/neo-colonized locations affected by the same technoscience are just as likely to produce subversive variants of imperial sf, directly engaging with it and challenging or repossessing the genre and its tropes. This perspective invites an approach to sf as a shared tradition between imperial and colonized cultures and the globalized world in terms of its geopolitical imbalances. This is why newer studies of sf in the twenty-first century increasingly focus on the larger global sf context.

For Bangla kalpavigyan, too, exploring the question of emergence has been particularly relevant. The earliest attempt to trace the phenomenon is that of Siddhartha Ghosh (1988), who uses a comparatist approach to sf, looking at sf in Bangla as part of a general international cultural trend. Thus his article is not merely an approach to Bangla kalpavigyan, but to sf in general, as his overview shows. For Ghosh, moreover, it is not kalpavigyan that is the operative term if one is to look specifically at Bangla sf, but "baigyanik rahasya," a phrase used by one of the founding figures of Bangla language sf, Jagadish Chandra Bose.[1] After a consideration of the history of translations of sf into Bangla in early magazines, Ghosh turns to the early history of kalpavigyan in the colonial period before moving on to the post-independence history of sf, particularly Satyajit Ray's sf, in Bangla, and the Science Fiction Cine Club. Understandably, Ghosh also laments the fact that there is no proper study of Bangla sf. By 1988, not only was there no critical industry in place, but sf itself had declined in Bangla, at least in the Indian part of Bengal. The magazine boom of the 60s-80s, which had been on the wane for a while, trickled down to nothing, Premendra Mitra, the giant of pre and post-independence Bangla sf had passed away earlier that year, and Ray was critically ill (he was to pass away four years later). Others who had made significant contributions, such as Adrish Bardhan, Leela Majumdar, and Syed Mustafa Siraj, did not hold the stature of these masters, even though they continued producing sf. After the magazine boom was over by the 90s, kalpavigyan increasingly became a subset of children's and young adult literature in Bengal.

It was in this context that Rabin Bal wrote his short history of the kalpavigyan phenomenon, *Banglay Vigyan Charcha*. Bal's book is unique in that Bal supplements his understanding of scientific literature in Bangla with a theoretical overview of how Bangla language sf has evolved. Moving past Ghosh's lament, Bal tries to show how debates over genre also animated the Bangla sf landscape. While the work is not of great quality, and nor does Bal analyse any work of kalpavigyan at length, Bal does signal the varied ways in

which Bangla language literature with scientific elements may be classified and understood, kalpavigyan being just one of the types. In classifying his varied material, Bal tries to articulate a distinction between "vigyannirbhar" and "vigyanbhittik," where the latter refers to sf in the Anglo-American sense, while the former refers to those narratives where science is a part of the framework of the narrative. The former thus subsumes the categories of vigyanbhittik and kalpavigyan for Bal. He thus uses a threefold classification of what he calles the "vigyanbhittik": 1) science and kalpavigyan stories (science fiction and fantasy); 2) *vigyanbhittik* popular essays, and; 3) science and kalpavigyan poetry.

Of particular interest is the section where Bal turns to Bangla kalpavigyan. He discusses Satyajit Ray's preference for stories that do not deviate from science as they extrapolate into far futures, recalling debates about the differences between the fiction of Wells and Verne. He also points out that Bardhan, arguably the most significant sf writer after Mitra and Ray, as well as the creator of the term kalpavigyan, disagrees:

> As a matter of fact, those who write this kind of literature are very much in love with the world of the imagination. They wish to escape from the limitations of reality to a world where there is no need to be trapped and ossified within four walls ruled by the iron finger of physical laws. These writers write agitated by the stormy winds of imagination (*kalpana*). They do not concern themselves with laws and traditions. (Bardhan, qtd. in Bal, 37; my translation).

To this, Bal adds the rejoinder by Kshitindranarayan Bhattacharya, who believes the opposite:

> I do not believe that merely to create kalpavigyan one needs the take the reader to unknown planets or strange imaginary worlds, or amongst impossible imaginary characters. In fact, I think just the opposite; because what is not based on science (vigyan) can at best be called fantasy, never *vigyannirbhar* (science dependent. (Bhattacharya, qtd. in Bal, 38; my translation)

In Bhattacharya's case, there is a form of kalpavigyan that is specifically science dependent, and only this may be considered the true genre, while the other is merely fantasy. For Bhattacharya, the two genres are separate, and to use kalpavigyan to refer to either is a critical mistake. It is unclear whether Bardhan and Bhattacharya are indeed referring to the same kind of literature, and whether the choice of literature is preconditioned by the pedagogic imperative employed by Bhattacharya stemming from the genre's roots in the colonial period, or the post-independence need for escape from a rapidly degenerating Bengal landscape, as pointed out by Bardhan.

The history that Bal presents thereafter directly links the pre-independence culture of scientific literature and kalpavigyan with its post-independence continuity. Within Bal's framework lies the generally implicit (because Bal is less interested in colonial history and more in the history of scientific literature in Bangla) but at times explicit understanding that this technoscientific culture was created by the process of empire, and that the scientific literature produced in Bengal by Bengalis deserves special consideration because it represents the rise of an indigenous innovative class of scientists and writers, many of whom traversed both the pre- and post-independence period. As Satadru Sen has discussed in a related context, literature was implicated in the questions of national development, and sf's pedagogic potential was not lost on the genre's early creators (Sen 2004). It is also important to note here that unlike the "realism vs romance" debate over the "masculine" nature of adventure fiction, kalpavigyan in Bengal appeared in spaces meant for both boys and girls, and in spite of the general lack of women characters, did have women readers. In this case too, the nationalism of the first decades of the twentieth century undoubtedly played a part.

While work on Indian sf has focused on issues of empire and nationalism, especially recently, most of the examples have been drawn from contemporary English language sf (for instance by Mehan 1998; Mehan 2017; Banerjee 2011; Smith 2012; Banerjee 2017; Chattopadhyay 2017) contemporary sf film from India (Banerjee 2014) and in a few cases sf in other languages (Harder 2001; Chattopadhyay 2013; Chattopadhyay 2014; Chattopadhyay 2016). With the exception of the previously cited Bhattacharya and Hiradhar (2014) and Chattopadhyay (2016), and to a lesser extent Chattopadhyay (2014) and Banerjee (2017), these studies do not study the colonial context in any detail, focusing instead on more contemporary literature. There is little attempt to attempt a systematic theorization of a tradition in Indian sf that predates anything produced during the colonial period. Even Bhattacharya and Hiradhar's essay, while highlighting the colonial context, does not attempt a heuristic analysis geared towards the identification of thematic patterns established through genre emergence, and thus remains mostly of historical interest. This essay attempts to identify these patterns, or nodal points in Bangla sf specifically. A more detailed study of these other strands of criticism in Indian sf has been attempted elsewhere (2016, for a comparative study of English language, Bangla language and Marathi language sf within Indian sf; and 2017, for study of contemporary English language sf by Indian writers or writers of Indian origin), for which reason I do not engage with them here.

There are three primary nodal points to consider in linking Bangla kalpavigyan with its counterparts in other languages, points which simultaneously reveal similarities and differences, and although nationalism, colonialism, and questions of empire all undoubtedly played a part, I have argued that these are

not merely questions of origin but affect the entire character of the genre, just as the theme of empire relates to the genre even now. The difference lies in the fact that the genre continues to serve a certain kind of pedagogic function. The three nodal points—the relation between myth and science, the delocalized locale, and the dominance of irony, parody and satire—will be discussed in the next part of this paper. I have also engaged in a detailed study of the term kalpavigyan elsewhere (2016), which sheds light on the possible uses of the term and its wider applicability to sf production from India, including in other languages. To summarize briefly, kalpavigyan also activates a specific understanding of science, the "vigyan" part of kalpavigyan (drawing upon its root in Sanskrit which links it to most other Indian languages as well) that differentiates it from a purely instrumental understanding of science in and as technology. This distinction is particularly important in section III below. It is possible that such features exhibited by Bangla kalpavigyan will also be found in sf produced by other colonized countries.

The delocalized locale

The delocalized locale is a form of the displacement described by Csicsery-Ronay, a staple feature of much sf and fantasy where identifiable national and cultural characteristics of a specific location are replaced by a location ostensibly completely alien to the culture of the author and/or the characters in the tale. Delocalization does not mean glocalization, where the local is a subset of the global order, or globalitarianism where the local is a microcosm of the global. By placing it in this altered context, the national/cultural characteristics of the author and/or protagonist are more clearly revealed. This is also a feature undoubtedly linked to the imperial imagination of sf, where the altered landscape (representing a colonized culture) brings forth the opportunity to display positive aspects of the colonizer culture. In the case of a colonized culture, the delocalized locale, owing to the nature of anti-colonial nationalism, typically gets exhibited not as sympathy for the colonized, but through a situational role reversal where the colonized become the colonizer. If in sf produced by the colonizer such a delocalization also offers the possibility of self-reflexive criticism, then the delocalization of the colonized is caught in the irony of mimicry and influence. The repetition of the same motif is read differently in the two, however: in one it represents nationalism or its criticism (colonizer), but in the other, mimicry (colonized) – not in the Homi Bhabha sense where mimicry could be a positive, productive value, but in its negative sense, where mimicry consigns one kind of literature to a reflection of the more well-known or dominant tradition (Bhabha 1994). The delocalized locale is usually revealed in one of the three ways which have similar characteristics but different fictional implication: a) the analogue, where a fictional place is used to display the characteristics of the real (for instance, an underwater continent, a different inhabited planet); b) the imagined real, where the place presents a real location, but whose construction is imaginary (for instance, Mars or the Moon, but also the Amazon rainforests or other "unexplored places on the map"); c) recreation, where a "real" place is presented in fiction (for instance, London, or Kolkata or Giridih), though it goes without saying that these are not the same London or Kolkata, but have been altered by the presence of the sf elements or novums.

It is also equally important to register the ways in which these different spaces are linked to specific ideas of time. Where the narrative is set in an imagined past, this past becomes a means to capture the historicity of the present: it is more likely that in the fiction produced by a colonizing country, the past becomes something to move away from as their specific success is in the present or is received as an indication of present glory. In fiction produced by the colonized, however, it is more likely that the past, if it is a pre-colonial past, will be seen more positively, as something to be understood and even reclaimed.

When the narrative creates a future or an altered present, then it is far more likely for a colonizer culture to imagine these as sites of conflict, in which case either the conclusion represents greater consolidation of the empire or its total destruction. Such narratives are more likely to be less inclusive towards other communities, at least during the colonial period, and would be slower to register diversity as a general principle or as part of the march of the Empire. For the culture of the colonized, the model of the empire might come into play as well, but in that case it is more likely to register diversity as a pre-requisite for the logic of the empire. The key differences would lie in the representation of the protagonists or authorial mouthpieces in the fiction produced by the two: the spokesperson in the fiction of a colonizing culture will speak for all humans, for instance in the case of an alien invasion, but from the vantage point of his historical right and omnipotence. The spokesperson in the fiction of the colonized too is likely to speak for all humans, for such is the horizon of empire in sf, but the narrative is more likely to create situations where national distinctions play a greater part. It is thus far more likely that an adventure produced by the colonized, at least in the colonial period, and set in the future or an altered present, will take place either in the world as analogue or as the imagined real, because these are spaces where freedom may be imagined and also spaces which the colonized will be free to occupy in the hypothetical future, while all three types may be found in the fiction produced by the colonized, because politically the territory from London to Calcutta belongs to the colonizer and serves as his domain.

The delocalized locale in early kalpavigyan serves to mark out the difference in the approaches to empire and technoscience in the colonial period. If we take for example one of the earliest kalpavigyan works, Jagadananda Ray's

"Shukra Bhraman," written in 1892 and published in a volume of essays called *Prakritiki*, we see that the delocalized locale Venus serves to co-opt the notion of empire while retaining the nationalist fervor. The two halves of Venus, with their corresponding civilizational characteristics, the light side representing scientific advancement and the darker side representing a lack of those features, mirror any number of early works, including those of H. G. Wells. While outwardly the narrative contains all the elements one would expect in a narrative of this type, with all its anthropological biases and racist implications, the narrator who lays claim to scientific knowledge, retains here his own unique identity as a Hindu commentator in this alien landscape. Cultural references drawn from "Hindu" mythology mark his associative metaphors for describing both the races he meets. He thus occupies the dual position of speaking for his species as well as his culture, while the lens of science gives him the universality that he seeks for his comparative perspective. Similar examples can be culled from the early phase, for instance Premendra Mitra's outer-space adventure *Prithibi Chariye* (1937) or his several takes on the lost world stories such as "Sekaler katha"(1927)/ *Pipre puran* (1931) or "Bhayankar" (1928). As examples of the analogue or the imagined real, the Bengali culture—and language – are always highlighted to the extent that they become integral to the story. In *Prithibi Chariye*, an adventure which takes the two German scientists and their two Bengali assistants to Mercury, and the Bangla language serves as a code between the two characters and serves an important part in the unravelling of the plot. In *Patale Paanch Bachar*, another adventure in the analogue mode, one can again see the two races with characteristics similar to the previous adventure, but the story is recast as a colonial battle over empire between the reds (technologically inferior) and the whites (technologically superior), with the former struggling for sovereignty. The Bengali characters land in the middle of this conflict, and one of them comes to be the king of the whites, while the other comes to ally with the disadvantaged reds. The story ends with a message of peace and harmony and hints at the possibility of a rapprochement between the two races (who are merely the same species with different colors and slightly different abilities—the common understanding of race in the colonial period). Equally important is the fact that the Bengali narrator is deeply interested in understanding the culture of the reds. His mentality is not one of the conqueror but of the observer: he learns the language, identifies with their cause, and eventually comes to fight for them. This is different from the whites, whose technoscientific abilities are all geared towards war. In "Sekaler Katha" and *Pipre Puran*, (the novel is based on the short story, Mitra crucially rewrites the story of Wells' "Empire of the Ants." (1905) The first discoverers of these ants are a Bengali explorer and a black scientist, who are not taken very seriously by the scientific community, and the attack of the ants takes place long after they have died. Both stories are

set in Brazil, but in the Wellsian narrative the threat is to colonial interests in South America and Europe, while in the Mitra narrative, the threat is to the whole world. In reworking this theme for the novel, Mitra adds an entire section on the culture of the ants, now described by a different Bengali scientist, who once again learns the language of the ants to understand the nature of the threat. There is even a measure of respect towards the ants, who are technologically superior to humanity and much more intelligent. This is thus not a simple reversal as in Wells's *War of the Worlds*—the classic colonial inversion narrative, as Rieder has shown—but in elevating a species (ants) above the humans and representing their culture from the perspective of a scientist of a colonized country, Mitra shows this as a threat to humanity as a whole and not merely to a colonizing country.

Myth and Science

The myth, magic, science, and religion debate, which has its roots in anthropological debates on social evolution (James Frazer and Bronislaw Malinowski could be mentioned for their particular impact on modern literature), is an important context for the rise of sf. For what establishes one form of literature as sf and another form of literature as fantasy is premised on the way in which the notion of science is constructed by any culture. This distinction makes a deep value claim, which is that science, due to its link to Empire and the phenomenon of colonization, is the key to success in the geopolitical realm. This simple fact alone demonstrates why sf as a genre, or literature resembling sf, must also arise in the literature of the colonized at the same time as it does in the literature of the colonizer, at least in the secular domain. At the same time, the social context within which this science operates also makes it a target of criticism by the colonized. This results in a pressure to generate at once something out of the general mass of local knowledge something resembling western science, which could be called "native science," which reimagines the category of science in terms of the values of the colonizer culture, and representing its own cultural strength. For example, in the context of Bengal, P. C. Ray, a leading Bengali chemist of the colonial period who prepared stable mercurous nitrite, may write a paper known as "Chemical Knowledge of the Hindus of Old" and get it published in the leading history of science journals, *Isis*, and a restatement of the entire tradition of "ancient" Indian knowledge in his *History of Hindu Chemistry*. Thus a predominantly oral-technical knowledge, or a knowledge encoded in one language, gets *translated* into the symbols and system of another language that represents science, transforming the cultural value of science for the colonized culture, and enriching the body of general scientific knowledge for the colonizer. Practical know-how, including ritual and communal trade secrets, is now absorbed into the general body of knowledge as transferable knowledge. However, this tendency has its peculiar

pitfalls, for, driven by nationalist imperatives, it often becomes politically expedient to claim a greater scope for native knowledge than can be factually justified. This is often the case with myth, a site where minimal history is transformed through imagination. In an extreme form, elements of myths are now read in terms of the new vocabulary: for instance, spaceships for travel between the stars, immortal beings, classes of otherworldly beings and so on. This transformation is not unique to the colonized; but it serves an important purpose for the colonial imagination to present the scientific possibilities within such imaginings.

These tendencies are best reflected in what I call the "mythologerm," a problem that haunts the creation and presentation of kalpavigyan to this day, and indeed much of Indian science fiction. While I do not explore the concept in detail here to avoid repetition (see Chattopadhyay 2016), to summarise, it represents the tendency to draw upon myth as a special form of history within which national science and its origins may be located. This is a peculiar form of colonial and postcolonial nationalist anxiety which transforms the artefacts of the pre-colonial past into repositories of ideas that also reflect general cultural values and future possibilities. This is something that all nations with ancient civilizations tend to draw upon, as do histories of sf though for different political reasons (cf, Aldiss 2001, Clute 2011). While non-European colonized nations are more likely to draw upon pre-colonial histories, European colonial nations are more likely to draw upon colonization as the emerging point for science fictionality, because that is the moment at which European economic and cultural ascendance can be mapped with reference to the others of Europe. Thus in European and other fiction produced by colonizing countries, mythology is more likely to be reactivated in terms of the language of fantasy, while for colonized countries, mythology is more likely to be activated in terms of the vocabulary of science. This is not to say there are no exceptions to this rule. For instance the idea of alien technology being the source of ancient societies has long found its way often into Anglophone sf, but this describes a rarer mode that is also usually described in terms of empire (usually, expanding alien empires). This is why kalpavigyan, even where it resembles sf, differs in its fundamental way of seeing the role of myth.

The framing of mythology as history, mythic elements as science, and myth as a cultural prism occurs in many significant works of Bangla kalpavigyan. For this reason, a lot of Bangla kalpavigyan works operate with a notion of science that is fluid. This does not make these works fantasy, because the unexplained is not necessarily the inexplicable, but may instead represent a certain kind of native knowledge system, as yet untranslated into the new system of science. Even the native scientist seems to exist on a continuum with the sage and the magician, someone whose quest to translate exists in constant conflict with the yet-to-be-understood or translated. The conflict between

vigyan and gyan remains, with the former (science) comprising only a part of the latter (knowledge). It happens, for instance, in most of the works described in the previous section, but in general across the range of kalpavigyan. I have written about this tendency in Hemendrakumar Ray's fiction before (2014b), especially in Ray's parodic use of the Aryan mythos in Amanushik Maanush (Inhuman Man, 1935), one can also consider any number of works, from important early works such as the one by Jagadish Chandra Bose, to minor works such as Nanigopal Majumdar's "Danab Rahassya," ("Monster Mysery," 1932), or post-independence works such as Satyajit Ray's "Professor Shonku o Egyptio Atonko," ("Professor Shonku and the Egyptian Terror," 1963), and Adrish Bardhan's "Tribhuj Rahassya" ("Triangle Mystery," 1985).

The dominance of parody and satire

Parody and satire in kalpavigyan must be seen in the context of self-reflexivity. Parody attacks both the object of ridicule and its producer. The dominance of parody and satire stems from the rejection of nationalism as a suitable form of self-expression by many critics of Indian modernity, including the most feted and influential writer of the age in Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore, whose essays and writings on Nationalism criticized the Western-style nationalism that seemed to have taken hold of the public imagination in India and Japan and was often reflected in a blind servitude to science:

> Life based upon mere science is attractive to some men, because it has all the characteristics of sport; it feigns seriousness, but is not profound. When you go a-hunting, the less pity you have the better; for your one object is to chase the game and kill it, to feel that you are the greater animal, that your method of destruction is thorough and scientific. And the life of science is that superficial life. It pursues success with skill and thoroughness, and takes no account of the higher nature of man. But those whose minds are crude enough to plan their lives upon the supposition, that man is merely a hunter and his paradise the paradise of sportsmen, will be rudely awakened in the midst of their trophies of skeletons and skulls. I do not for a moment suggest, that Japan should be unmindful of acquiring modern weapons of self-protection. But this should never be allowed to go beyond her instinct of self-preservation. She must know that the real power is not in the weapons themselves, but in the man who wields those weapons; and when he, in his eagerness for power, multiplies his weapons at the cost of his own soul, then it is he who is in even greater danger than his enemies. (Nationalism in Japan)

Tagore saw science and technology as something that had fostered a kind of soulless materialism and believed that it had thus not only produced destructive colonialism but was also eating away at the souls of the countries that

had been thus modernized, such as Japan, China, and India. Thus science and the growth of science had to be tempered by the human spirit, which was the unique gift of these Eastern civilizations and also the basis of their culture. Such criticism of science and technology was not against science so much as the way science had come to represent a kind of social mark of civilizational progress, and this criticism may be found quite commonly among writers in India as well as Europe, especially after the First World War. While some such as Oswald Spengler lamented the loss of the "Faustian spirit" of technology to non-European civilizations, fully aware that the process was to lead to the ultimate decline of European supremacy, others drew upon religious ethics to criticize the materialism of the West (Spengler 1976). In the context of India, science had become a double-edged sword: it represented progress and freedom, but it also simultaneously represented the possibility of of India turning into a mirror of European colonizer, its self-assertion transformed into naked technocratic exploitation. The notion of a native science too had the same implication: while on the one hand it could bolster national pride and encourage a spirit of discovery, it could also quickly devolve into jingoistic nationalism. Parody could bring together the contradiction of both nationalism (presenting itself as self-parody) and its opposing forces (presenting itself as criticism of the other and the alternative history of science). Parody was also a readily available tool in the general repertoire of Bangla literature, sharpened by the nineteenth-century master Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, who as a supporter of Comtean positivism at once saw the potential of science and its danger if seen as simply a western phenomenon in the context of India. He noticed how Indians and Bengalis were mired in superstition, casteism, and fraudulent ritualism but was also sharply critical of British exploitation.

There have been no studies of parody in the context of colonial kalpavigyan (with the exception of Baidik Bhattacharya's 2006 article on Parashuram' "Ulat-puran," which does not however utilize the framework of sf criticism for studying the counterfactual narrative). While Mitra's Ghanada is easily the most recognisable example of this tendency (cf. Chattopadhyay 2014; Maity 2015; Maity 2016), the use of parody and satire dates back to early kalpavigyan stories, including Hemlal Datta's "Rahassya" (Mystery, 1882), Begum Rokeya's "Sultana's Dream" (1905; written in English) or Sukumar Ray's short stories, as well as other science-fantasy tall tales such as Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay's Damarudhar stories, Hemendrakumar Ray's *Meghduter Marte Agaman* ("The Arrival of the Messengers from Space," 1925) and *Amanushik Maanush* (1935), as well as post-independence works such as the Professor Shonku stories by Ray and the Natboltu Chakra stories by Adrish Bardhan, in the numerous satirical kalpavigyan by Parashuram, and a variety of juvenile and young adult fiction.

If we take the example of "Mangal Puran," ("The Martian Purana," 1931) a satirical short story by Manoranjan Bhattacharya, we can see how the three dominant themes discussed so far come together in one space. Publishing in the same year as Mitra's *Pipre Puran,* Bhattacharya has no interest in establishing the scientificity of the story as a logical extrapolation from science as Mitra does. Instead, he satirically blends a story that seems to be a continuation of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the two Indian epics, with modern technology and set in a modern location. Bhattacharya's story is chaotic: it exists in both the imagined real of Mars and a recreated India, while existing simultaneously in all the three different orders of time: a mythic past signaled by the use of the term "purana" that follows from the epics, the altered present which is received historically, and the possible future time of the technologically-advanced Martians. The protagonists are the central characters from the epics, but even though they continue to have their powers, their placement in a normal everyday context and their humanization naturalizes their supernatural abilities as mundane realities. These characters exist in a world of telephones and rocketships, ride in Rolls Royces, treat their illnesses with "Western medicine," and are undoubtedly inferior to the alien Martians, who keep them locked up as pets on Mars. In many stories, the realm of the mysterious is only hinted at, for instance in Parashuram's "Parash Pathar" (1948).)Others use parody and satire to target nationalism, and while there are early stories that exhibit this tendency, such as Charuchandra Chakrabarti's "Baigyanik" (1929) , featuring a madcap trying to conduct "nationalist" scientific experiments, or Sushilchandra Mitra's "Baigyanik Barjatri Sambardhana" (1929) where the technoscientific ways of managing a chaotic Bengali wedding are shown to be doomed to fail, the tendency is particularly marked in the best post-independence kalpavigyan, including Satyajit Ray's fiction, Mitra's Ghanada, and the Brajada stories (1967) by Rupdarshi (Gourkishore Ghosh). Most of these stories were first published in general literary magazines of the day, including *Ramdhanu, Mouchak, Rangmashal, Sandesh,* and *Shuktara*. Many of these were aimed specifically at children to inculcate a sense of scientific curiosity. From the 60s, some of these became the core of specialized but mostly short-lived sf magazines, such as *Ascharjya*, *Vismay* and *Fantastic*, while sf continued to find space in general magazines such as *Sandesh, Shuktara* and *Ananadamela*.

As mentioned earlier, the genre of kalpavigyan, after its heyday in the magazine era, gradually became more attuned to juvenile and young adult literature. With the exception of the work of those who had started writing kalpavigyan from a background in the hard sciences, such as Anish Deb, or who were critically invested in engaging with current scientific knowledge, much of the more simple hand-wavy variety of kalpavigyan had always appealed to a more juvenile crowd. This is because kalpavigyan, even in its hand-wavy vari-

eties, was never completely distinguished from the pedagogic or critical edge of its origins. This is particularly true of the fiction of Leela Majumdar, Sunil Gangopadhyay, and Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, the work of whom, in addition to the fiction of Bardhan and Anish Deb, dominated the 80s to the 2000s. Written for a younger audience, their comic/adventure fiction tends towards the parodic, even if not in every case satiric. Parody requires less subtlety than satire, and thus these authors have also effectively used kalpavigyan to raise awareness of social issues among younger readers, complementing their treatment of these issues in realist/historical works for adults. A shining example of such fiction is Mukhopadhyay's novella *Bhuture Ghori* (The Ghost Watch, 1984), featuring a mysterious "talking" watch that turns out to be sentient alien technology, caught in the battle between two aliens. In the narrative, neither the mystic Jatai Tantrik nor the scientist Gordon, representing the two sides of the kalpavigyan project of religious nationalism and scientific materialism, is able to understand the technology that belongs fundamentally to the realm of the unknown: when they try to open the device to understand it in spiritual or technical terms, it punishes them by driving them temporarily crazy.

Conclusion

In this paper, my primary target has been the politics of sf historiography, which has begun to transform with the increasing awareness of other literary traditions with sf characteristics. However, the theoretical underpinning of this transformation has not been adequately registered. I agree with the theories of empire and imperial technoscience advanced by Rieder, Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., and others as a common horizon for the emergence and perpetual relevance of sf, but I also argue that it is the constant transformation of this horizon that marks the locus of differences in sf produced by the colonized. Bangla kalpavigyan is a representative phenomenon of this type, but the three characteristics I have identified in it may be more general trends found in other language sf, including a suspicion of science and the transformation of "native" knowledge into science, a dominance of parody towards imperial culture as well as colonized culture itself, and the creation of alternate locales that bring the past into the present/future and establish an alternate history of the community. In more utopian visions, the future establishes a more holistic and less fractured version of the present for the community, where idealized values of an imaginary cultural past are synchronized with the progressive values of technoscience, whereas in dystopian visions, abandoning the cultural past in the way of empire leads to the destruction of the community itself, recreating the colonial encounter into the undefined future.

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Abstract
In this paper, I propose a thematic overview of kalpavigyan or science fiction (sf) in the Bangla language in terms of its link to the imperial imaginary. I look at current theories on global sf that are alert to the role of imperialism, especially John Rieder, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., and Patricia Kerslake, which deal primarily with sf produced by former colonial powers, may be extended in crucial ways in the context of sf produced by writers from the Empire's others, both before and after independence. Using the lens of genre criticism and select Bangla texts from 1890-1990 as material, I explore thematic nodes in Bangla kalpavigyan that may have wider applicability for global sf. I identify three such nodes: one, a tendency towards self-reflexive parody that consistently mocks the appropriation of 'Western' science from a nationalist perspective while being open to it as a tool for progress of the underdeveloped 'native'; two, imagining utopian alternative histories of universalism (or humanism) while being fully saturated with nationalist/ethnic images for purposes of cultural pride, and; three, the tendency to continually appropriate pre-colonial myths for their supposed scientific content in order to create a sense of self-worth and identity.

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Devil's Advocates

Simon Bacon

Billson, Anne. *Let the Right One In*. Auteur, 2011. 112 pp. Paper. ISBN. 978-1-906733-50-6. $15.00/£10.50
Connolly, Jez and David Owen Bates. *Dead of Night*. Auteur, 2015, pp. 119. Paper. ISBN. 978-0-9932384-3-7. $15.00/£10.50
Heller-Nicholas, Alexandra. *Suspiria*. Auteur, 2015, pp. 95. Paper. ISBN. 978-0-9932384-7-5. $15.00/£10.50
Simmons, Amy. *Antichrist*. Auteur, 2015, pp. 89. Paper. ISBN. 978-1-906733-41-4. $15.00/£10.50
Turner, Peter. *The Blair Witch Project*. Auteur, 2015, pp. 95. Paper. ISBN. 978-1-906733-84-1. $15.00/£10.50

Devil's Advocates is a growing collection of books that focus on individual films within the horror genre. Each volume concentrates on a classic horror movie and locates it within its historical and cultural contexts, provides a detailed reading of the film itself with possible interpretations, and notes films and texts that directly influenced its making, as well as those that were inspired by it. As such, they serve as an introduction for further studies rather than the last word on the subject and are meant more for students of either film or popular culture and maybe interested enthusiasts than they are for experts. Their primary competition are similar series of books that focus on individual movies such as the *Cultographies* series by Wallflower Press and the *BFI Film Classics* series, printed in association with Palgrave Macmillan. The five books reviewed here provide examples of the kind of films covered in the wider *Devil's Advocate* series, which ranges from established classics of the genre as seen in *Dead of Night* and *Suspiria* to more recent seminal works like *The Blair Witch*, as well as important new additions to the canon such as *Let the Right One In* or stand-alone pieces like *Antichrist* that deny easy classification. The volumes discussed here are also illustrative of the strengths and some of the weaknesses of the series as a whole.

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