

Toward a Global Science. Susantha Goonatilake. Vistaar Publications (A Division of Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd), 32 M-Block Market, Greater Kailash-I, New Delhi 110 048, India. 1999. 314 pp. Price: Rs 495.

The American novelist, William Faulkner used to say of the past that it is not only not dead, but is not even past. Susantha Goonatilake thinks that it has even a bright future, particularly if it comes from non-western civilizations. His latest book, *Toward a Global Science*, 'is driven by a strong conviction that the pre-Renaissance acquisition of aspects of Asian knowledge – for example, South Asian algebra and arithmetic, Chinese printing, gunpowder and compass – did not exhaust the contribution that non-European civilizations can give to science. In fact there are elements of valid knowledge, still laying . . . in civilizational stores, that can be grafted onto the contemporary scientific enterprise'.

But why does modern science need a graft? Goonatilake holds that the Enlightenment project of the West is floundering and the essentially western achievement of modern science is facing a foundational crisis. He points out that 'current epistemological problems in several fields – including the seeming fountainhead of them all, physics – have questioned the Cartesian dichotomy of subject and object' and 'the project of mathematizing the "true knowledge" of science and completing the rational project at a full foundational level has collapsed, because mathematics, after Godel, has lost its earlier assumed certainty.' There can be considerable divergence of opinion as to the importance of those problematic issues for the practice and progress of modern science, specially when, as Goonatilake does, science is characterized as 'that which works' and for which 'everyday reality is always the reference point.'

But why does not the author of the books, *Crippled Minds: An Exploration into Colonial Culture* (1982) and *Aborted Discovery Science and Creativity in the Third World* (1984), advocate the wholesale rejection of modern science in favour of one of the so-called 'alterna-

tive' science, if any such is available? Drawing, what I would consider to be a mistaken analogy between a recent cultural, selective cognitive enterprise like modern science and the biological tree of evolution, he asserts that 'Changing it completely is an impossible task, as impossible as starting a new biological system, replacing the 4000 million year old existing one. . . . One can only graft elements to the existing tree, and such grafts only take if there is some compatibility.' What sort of compatibility he is looking for is far from clear, particularly when he affirms that 'if it sounds like I am accepting the "totalizing" hegemony of modern science, I am. . . . But the modern sciences, when taken individually, are not monolithic, ontologically and epistemologically totalizing projects. There are too many differences and even contradictions in the approaches of the different disciplines as to methodology, epistemology, and at times ontology. So science as a totalizing project is totalizing only to the extent that it is an organized skeptical attempt to gather valid knowledge. . . . I want only to increase the skepticism, to make it more valid, and to enlarge the catchment area.' Evidently the author of the book under review does not see much future for the 'unity of science' programme launched by Carnap and company or for 'the theory of everything' being promoted by Stephen Hawking. Organized skeptical attempts to gather valid and more valid knowledge then make it imperative to mine civilizational knowledges from the debris of history of the 'other', purge them of 'religious and philosophical baggage', of 'references to chakra, cosmic consciousness, and the like which a more scientific person would balk at using' and issue accreditation certificates, under the seal of authority of modern science, to what compatibly remains in ayurvedic medicine, vedic mathematics, yoga, Buddhist meditation, etc. With all the erudition that he can bring to bear upon those diverse domains of knowledge, Goonatilake gives us a glimpse of the status of the health of our patient after those multiple grafts in a prognosis that spans nearly half of his book.

In another one-fourth of the book he takes us on a scholarly guided tour of the

many possible worlds that are already being or will soon be manufactured by the recent developments in information and biological technologies and explores how they will blur our Cartesian 'clear and distinct ideas' about self and the other, subject and object, real and unreal, truth and falsehood, Being and Becoming and such other dichotomous conceptual pairs. He also seeks to convince us that the concepts of the five sheaths of Upanishads, seven-valued logic of Jainism, stream of cognitions of Buddhism, etc. can shed considerable light on the ethical and philosophical problems engendered by those technologies.

If the above grafting exercises constitute what he calls the method of 'splicing in directly, existing material that has demonstrable, direct validity', there is another method which 'would be to bring in, as metaphors, elements from other traditions that could nudge the imagination and give rise to new concepts.'

After all this mining of civilizational knowledge Goonatilake is understandably concerned with the question, 'Mining for whom?'. Starting with the statement, 'there is no clear answer', after two pages of pontification on monopolistic multinationals in the West, coming creed of Asian multinationals, dispersed multinationals, niche markets, private and public sectors, and universities without commercial interests (if there are still such places), etc. he concludes 'For us all'.

If one begins to feel the need for GAST (General Agreement on Science and Technology), WSO (World Science Order), and CIPR (Civilizational Intellectual Property Rights) after this *Global Science*, I cannot blame him.

Those of us whose ideas of and concerns for the knowledge system of science and its implications for civilized living belong to a past that is not in conformity with Faulkner's intuitions can only say, 'whither science?', if not, 'what science?'.

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