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*Terrestrial Lessons: The Conquest of the World as Globe.* Sumathi Ramaswamy.  
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Sumathi Ramaswamy's *Terrestrial Lessons: The Conquest of the World as Globe* centres on the history of the terrestrial globe in the Indian subcontinent, and examines how the European preoccupation with terrestrial sphericity came to be an Indian concern. Ramaswamy raises the important question: does this object have the same history elsewhere and everywhere, and with the same affects and effects? Ramaswamy provides a much-needed alternative history of this "worldly" object, which serves to fill a significant gap in the existing literature. While the notion of the world as a globe has been extensively examined and studied in the Western context, the question arises, what occurs when this conception of our earth travels elsewhere? Moreover, what are the implications when the globe, as a symbol of the educated, enlightened, and modern, is received in a colonial context?

Significantly, Ramaswamy's work makes a meaningful contribution to the field of South Asian Religions. In her study, Ramaswamy highlights the disparity between, on the one hand, the Western enlightenment and Christian understanding of the earth as spherical, and on the other, the multiple Hindu conceptions of the earth, for example, the idea of the flat Earth as resting upon an animal variously imagined as a turtle, elephant, or a multi-headed cobra. In her analysis of the confrontations between European and native conceptions of the earth, Ramaswamy coins the term "cartographic evangelist" (61) which she uses to describe a figure who is involved in the task of "geographic catechism" (16). Many Europeans living and working in colonial India took up the mantle of guiding young Indians away from the "darkness" of their false ancestral knowledge into the European "light" in the form of the "the Gospel of Modern Earth" (61), as Ramaswamy aptly phrases it. Ramaswamy illustrates not only how the spherical world became an object to be both surveyed and mastered by the colonial British, but also came to represent the superiority of European scientific knowledge. She convincingly argues that these beliefs cannot be untangled from the Christian notion of God as not only the creator of the universe but also the spherical earth and the life which inhabits it. In this context, Ramaswamy interprets the globe as becoming an instrument of conversion which strikes down the very foundations of Hinduism and serves to wean the young Hindu child away from their native idols.

Ramaswamy traces the history of the terrestrial globe in colonial India and, through extensive archival research, is able to relate key accounts of Indian encounters with this object. Her command of the history and sources across the regions of both North and South India is impressive. Moreover, a notable feature of Ramaswamy's book is the remarkable images and photographs which have remained

unscrutinized until now. These visuals further complement her critical analysis on the terrestrial globe as a material object.

Ramaswamy structures the chapters of her book around three key encounters with the terrestrial globe, the first being the story of a teenage Maratha prince who was gifted a globe by a colonel. The prince was subsequently encouraged to study the terrestrial globe and learn geography by a reverend of the Halle Mission in 1794. Yet, in his pursuit of European science throughout the course of his life, Ramaswamy highlights the fact that the Maratha king retained his ancestral faith even while he converted to “the Gospel of Modern Earth.”

In the second encounter, Ramaswamy relays the account of a female Protestant missionary who, in 1815, presented a makeshift ball of silk fashioned out of some scrap cloth to a young Brahman who was troubled about his ancestral beliefs. The young man abandons his inherited faith as a result of this encounter and undergoes baptism, eventually becoming a teacher of so-called “terrestrial lessons” to a new generation of native pupils in mission schools. Ramaswamy coins the term “global pandit” (94) to categorize this young man as a figure who feels pressured to uphold his ancestral knowledge, yet rejects his hereditary role in order to advance the cause of Western science alongside European adherents.

The last encounter centers on the plot of the 1956 Indian film, *Aparajito*, in which a Bengali Christian headmaster presents his brightest pupil with a pocket globe. The young boy uses the globe to teach his widowed mother the terrestrial lessons he has learned in school. However, as a young man, he rejects his mother’s wish for him to follow in his ancestral profession of Hindu priesthood and embarks on a journey to pursue his higher education in the city, which comes to represent secular modernity.

Ramaswamy’s method of weaving these personal narratives with the history of the terrestrial globe in different places and times across the Indian subcontinent is both effective and engaging. These core narratives provide a springboard from which Ramaswamy is able to delve into more nuanced historical accounts and analysis over the course of her chapters. At the same time, these core narratives serve as anchors which aid the reader in making meaningful connections across the various topics and themes discussed in each of the chapters.

Ramaswamy’s *Terrestrial Lessons* is an ambitious work which takes an innovative approach by making the central “protagonist” of the academic work the artefact of the terrestrial globe. Ramaswamy has achieved her goal in demonstrating that even the most commonplace objects, such as the school globe, have consequential histories. This work promises to make a valuable contribution to the scholarship of South Asian Religions and Post-Colonial Studies.