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Macdonald, Murdo

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## Education, Visual Art and Cultural Revival:

### Tagore, Geddes, Nivedita, and Coomaraswamy

Murdo MACDONALD,  
*University of Dundee*

#### Abstract:

Rabindranath Tagore and Patrick Geddes were part of the same milieu long before they met. They were both internationally minded cultural thinkers. The links between them are illuminated by consideration of their links with two other internationally minded cultural activists: the Irishwoman Margaret Noble, better known as Sister Nivedita, and the historian of art and ideas Ananda Coomaraswamy. The lives of all four exemplify educational and political expression driven by spiritual commitment and underpinned by literature and the visual arts.

**Keywords:** Tagore, Nivedita, Geddes, Okakura, Coomaraswamy, Revival.

Rabindranath Tagore did not meet Patrick Geddes until 1917, but they were part of the same milieu long before that. Later Tagore was to write of Geddes:

He has the precision of the scientist and the vision of a prophet, at the same time, the power of an artist to make his ideas visible through the language of symbols'.<sup>1</sup>

He wrote that in the preface to a book published in 1927, entitled *The Interpreter – Geddes: The Man and His Gospel*. It was written by Amelia Defries, the American writer and art critic who took on the role of Geddes' assistant at University College Dundee. Defries' book is an important introduction to Geddes' ideas, not least because it contains a transcript of Geddes' final lecture to his students in Dundee, which he gave in 1918 before he departed to take up his post as professor of Civics and Sociology at the newly established University of Bombay. That lecture contains a powerful distillation of Geddes' thought. It includes this statement of the significance of the ecology of the planet:

How many people think twice about a leaf? Yet the leaf is the chief product and phenomenon of Life: this is a green world, with animals comparatively few and small, and all dependent upon the leaves. By leaves we live. Some people have strange ideas that they live by money. They think energy is generated by the circulation of coins. But the world is mainly a vast leaf-colony, growing on and forming a leafy soil, not a mere mineral mass: and we live not by the jingling of our coins, but by the fullness of our harvests. (p. 175)

That quotation is pure Geddes and unlikely to be mistaken for Tagore, yet later in the same lecture Geddes says this:

A garden takes years and years to grow—ideas also take time to grow, and while a sower knows when his corn will ripen, the sowing of ideas is, as yet, a far less certain affair. (p 184)

That could have been written by Tagore, and perhaps Geddes was thinking of Tagore as he wrote it. In those words one can feel the meeting of minds between these two educational and environmental thinkers. To understand the context of Geddes' link to Tagore one must consider the Irishwoman Margaret Noble, known as Sister Nivedita. In early 1900 Patrick Geddes was in New York, where he met both Nivedita and her teacher Vivekananda for the first time. Later in the same year, the three of them were in close contact in Paris at the International Exhibition, where Geddes was running an interdisciplinary summer school based on his experiments over the previous decade at the Outlook Tower in Edinburgh. Both Nivedita and Geddes complemented their dedication to cultural revival with a passionate

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<sup>1</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, quoted by Bashabi Fraser, in *Geddes Tagore Letters* (Edinburgh: Word Power, 2005), p. 61.

interest in new educational methods; prior to her involvement with Vivekananda, Margaret Noble had been a respected advocate of the methods of Pestalozzi and Froebel.<sup>2</sup> She had committed herself to following Vivekananda in London 1895, two years after the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where Vivekananda had ‘presented Hinduism to the world at large as a major religion, emphasising its antiquity’.<sup>3</sup> Taking his lead from the ideas of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda articulated the case for Hindu revival. He continued to do this in Paris at the International Exhibition of 1900. There, in his lectures on Indian art, he rejected theories of Hellenic influence and underlined the independent value of the early Buddhist art of India.<sup>4</sup> In due course Nivedita was to develop this position, as was, in a more systematic way, the other key figure to be discussed here, Ananda Coomaraswamy. Another important Indian intellectual presence in Paris in 1900 was the eminent Indian scientist Jagadis Chandra Bose, who would also be the friend of both Tagore and Geddes. He was already a friend of Nivedita, who numbered Bose’s wife amongst her closest friends. Twenty years after this meeting in Paris, Patrick Geddes was to be Bose’s biographer. That same year of 1900 saw the publication of Nivedita’s first important contribution to the Hindu revival, *Kali the Mother*.

The link between Geddes and Nivedita in the Paris of 1900 thus places in close touch with one another a central figure of the Celtic Revival in Scotland and a central figure of the Hindu Revival in India. Like Geddes, Nivedita saw cultural revival as intimately connected to an awareness of the history and the geography of a place, and Geddes had formulated these ideas into what he called ‘regional survey’, which became a key tool of the emerging town planning movement. The crucial point about Geddes’ regional survey is that it begins from the local perspective of every person and works to the global, reversing the received wisdom of what is culturally significant, then as now. In a memoir, Geddes wrote of Nivedita that her career could not be fully appreciated ‘without some corresponding grasp of the geographical outlooks and evolutionary methods which she so clearly held’.<sup>5</sup> For Geddes, she considered these methods as ‘only second in their significance and value to the philosophic and religious synthesis of her adopted order, and as an essential instrument of its social and educational purposes’. Geddes describes these perspectives as of ‘Le Play and Ramakrishna’ – he is invoking here the ideas of the pioneering French sociologist

<sup>2</sup> M. Srinivasa Iyer, ‘Sister Nivedita’ in *Eminent Orientalists: Indian, European, American* (Madras: G. A. Nateson & Co., 1922), 257-282, p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> J. L. Brockington, *The Sacred Thread: A Short History of Hinduism*, 2e (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 182.

<sup>4</sup> Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New ‘Indian’ Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 173.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Geddes, ‘Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita)’, *The Sociological Review* 6 (1913), 242-256, p. 12.

Frederick Le Play to complement the teachings of the Indian philosopher. For Nivedita they became ‘closely and vitally related, as fundamental and supreme, alike indispensable to the understanding of the social body and the social mind, their nature and their spirit Geddes regarded this complementarity as ‘one of the main clues to [Nivedita’s] rare range of sympathy and understanding, at home as she could be either in Paris or in Calcutta, and to her essential life-pilgrimage, from West to East’.<sup>6</sup>

Geddes goes on to quote from Nivedita’s *The Web of Indian Life*, which was published in 1904. There she writes: ‘The foundation stone of our knowledge of a people must be an understanding of their region. For social structure depends primarily upon labour, and labour is necessarily determined by place. Thus we reach the secret of thought and ideals’.<sup>7</sup> She makes her personal debt to Geddes clear in an epigraph in which she thanks Geddes, who, she writes ‘by teaching me to understand a little of Europe, indirectly gave me a method by which to read my Indian experiences’.<sup>8</sup> One could have no clearer statement of Geddes’ relevance in India, a decade before he went there himself.

Involvement in the Paris exhibition of 1900 was thus a critical moment in the lives of both Geddes and Nivedita. Geddes’ awareness of the European dimension of his work had always been strong but, through Nivedita in particular, he was now much more conscious of the fact that his own pan-Celticism was complemented by an Indian-originated pan-Asianism. His cultural vision was always global but his contact with Nivedita that year was crucial to deepening that already broad perspective.<sup>9</sup>

For some years after 1900 Geddes’s activities were focused on Europe, but always in the context of that global vision, and as the decade progressed Geddes became aware of another significant guide to Indian culture, Ananda Coomaraswamy. Indeed it is possible that Geddes first met Coomaraswamy through Nivedita, but the more likely contact is C. R. Ashbee whom Geddes had known since the early years of the Arts and Crafts Movement.<sup>10</sup> Coomaraswamy worked in close proximity to Ashbee at Broad Campden in Gloucester in England from 1907 and in 1908 Geddes was at

<sup>6</sup> Geddes, *Nivedita*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Geddes, *Nivedita*, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Sister Nivedita, epigraph to *The Web of Indian Life* (London: Heinemann, 1904).

<sup>9</sup> For more on Geddes’ milieu in 1900 see Frances Fowle and Belinda Thomson eds., *Patrick Geddes: The French Connection* (Oxford: White Cockade, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> My thanks to Elizabeth Cumming and Alan Crawford for discussion of this point. See also: C. R. Ashbee, ‘The “Norman Chapel” Buildings at Broad Campden, in Gloucestershire’, *Studio*, 41 (1907), 289-296; C. R. Ashbee, Foreword to A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman* (London: Probsthian, 1909).

Broad Campden as a visitor.<sup>11</sup> That same year Nivedita was also present at Broad Campden, as we learn from Coomaraswamy's biographer, who draws attention to an invitation card from 1908. This card asks friends to meet Nivedita at the Coomaraswamy house where she would give a talk on 'The Life of Indian Women in Relation to Religion, Education, and Nationalism'.<sup>12</sup>

This period, from Geddes' first meeting with Nivedita in 1900 to her untimely death in 1911, is also the period during which Coomaraswamy emerges as notable thinker. When Geddes was working with Nivedita in Paris in 1900, Coomaraswamy was still studying for a geology degree in London. But within ten years he was established as a cultural nationalist figure and was set to become the most influential historian of Indian art of the first half of the twentieth century. Building on the insights of Vivekananda and Nivedita, Coomaraswamy was to provide the art-historical scholarship needed to establish the independence of early Indian sculpture from European models. As early as 1911 one finds another key commentator on Indian visual culture, E. B. Havell, drawing on Coomaraswamy's work in his *Ideals of Indian Art*. At the same time, Coomaraswamy's strongly international historical perspective provided an intellectual grounding for analogy between the arts and crafts of medieval Europe and the surviving traditions of arts and crafts in India.

At the time of her death in 1911, Nivedita was writing a book that was eventually published in 1913 as *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*. The task of finishing the book was undertaken by Coomaraswamy and the book was published under both names. A quotation from Coomaraswamy's preface gives an idea of the high regard in which Nivedita was held, not just in India but in the West. Coomaraswamy writes:

Sister Nivedita, to whom the publishers first entrusted this work, needs no introduction to Western or to Indian readers. A most sincere disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who was himself a follower of the great Ramakrishna, she brought to the study of Indian life and literature a sound knowledge of Western educational and social science, and an unsurpassed enthusiasm of the devotion to the peoples and the ideals of her adopted country. Her chief works are *The Web of Indian Life*, almost the only fair account of Hindu society written in English, and *Kali the Mother*, where also for the first time the profound tenderness and terror of the Indian mother-cult are presented to Western readers in such a manner as to reveal its true religious and social significance. Through these books Nivedita became not merely an in-

<sup>11</sup> Fiona MacCarthy, *The Simple Life: C. R. Ashbee in the Cotswolds* (London: Lund Humphries, 1981), pp. 174-176.

<sup>12</sup> Roger Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy, His Life and Work* (Princeton: Bollingen, 1977) pp. 45-46. It has been suggested that Nivedita had left India for a period, under threat of prison or deportation for her nationalist activities. However, for qualification of this, see Guha-Thakurta, *Making of a New 'Indian' Art*, pp. 171-2.



terpreter of India to Europe, but even more, the inspiration of a new race of Indian students, no longer anxious to be Anglicised, but convinced that all real progress, as distinct from mere political controversy, must be based on national ideals, upon intentions already expressed in religion and art.<sup>13</sup>

After detailing Nivedita's contributions to the book alongside his own, Coomaraswamy concludes his preface by noting:

'The Indian myths here retold include almost all those which are commonly illustrated in Indian sculpture and painting. Finally, they include much that must very soon be recognized as belonging not only to India, but to the whole world; I feel that this is above all true of the Ramayana, which is surely the best tale of chivalry and truth and the love of creatures that was ever written'.<sup>14</sup>

That final statement underlines Nivedita's importance as a teacher of Hindu culture to the West. *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists* also marks an international appreciation of the art of the Bengal school of painters for, as it stresses on the title page, it contains thirty-two colour illustrations by 'Indian artists under the supervision of Abanindro Nath Tagore'. Abanindranath Tagore was Rabindranath's Tagore's nephew and painted – among other works in the book – the frontispiece, *The Victory of the Buddha*.

Western awareness of the Bengal school of painters was given further impetus by the publication in 1918 of the illustrated edition of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali and Fruit-Gathering*. W. B. Yeats' introduction of 1912, which makes specific mention of the Bengal School painters, is reprinted there also. And that brings me back to Rabindranath Tagore himself, serving to remind us that he contributed an introduction to a new edition of Nivedita's *Web of Indian Life*, which was also published in 1918. Tagore's introduction can be read as an assertion of Nivedita's significance in the struggle against what Frantz Fanon, in a later colonial context, was to explore as the colonisers' effort 'to bring the colonised person to admit the inferiority of his culture'.<sup>15</sup> That is to say, to internalise the assumption that the culture of the coloniser is somehow superior to the indigenous culture. Tagore also notes the more immediate political problem, namely that 'our critics not only have the power to give us a bad name, but also to hang us'.<sup>16</sup> Patrick Geddes's Scottish background equipped him well to understand such cultural paradox. His father was a Highland Gaelic speaker, and Highland Gaelic culture had been the subject of inferiorism since the beginning of the seventeenth century. For most of the eighteenth

<sup>13</sup> Introduction to Sister Nivedita and Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists* (London: Harrap, 1913), p. v.

<sup>14</sup> Nivedita and Coomaraswamy, *Myths* p. vii.

<sup>15</sup> Frantz Fanon, quoted by Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, introduction to Sister Nivedita, *The Web of Indian Life* (London: Heinmann, 1918), p. vi.

century, it had been under active military and legal suppression. Geddes's common cause with thinkers such as Tagore, Coomaraswamy and Nivedita was underpinned by his understanding of such oppressive cultural dynamics.

For Tagore, writing in 1918, Nivedita 'uttered the vital truths about Indian life'.<sup>17</sup> In an earlier appreciation of Nivedita that was printed along with one by Geddes, in *The Sociological Review* in 1913, Tagore recalled her as a versatile, all-round genius.<sup>18</sup> In a significant comment he characterised her as 'mother of the people'. That phrase brings to mind one of the seminal images of the revival in Bengali painting that Nivedita had helped to drive forward, namely, *Bharat Mata* or *Mother India* painted in 1905 by Abanindranath Tagore who, as already noted, was later to contribute to and direct the illustration of *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*.<sup>19</sup> That image was crucial in the regeneration of Indian art. In political significance it relates to the unrest that followed the politically motivated Partition of Bengal the same year. In 1908, E. B. Havell's definitional article on the Bengal school was published in the influential London-based art journal *The Studio*.<sup>20</sup> Havell included a reproduction of that crucial image, thus giving it international prominence. The same year saw the publication of Havell's book, *Indian Sculpture and Painting*.<sup>21</sup> Tapati Guha-Thakurta has noted that Nivedita's review of this book in 1909 was 'certainly as important for Indian readers as the book itself'.<sup>22</sup>

Iconographically, *Bharat Mata* finds something of an analogue in John Duncan's *Anima Celtica*, a Celtic Revival work created at the behest of Patrick Geddes for his magazine *The Evergreen*, published in 1895.<sup>23</sup> Both images draw on traditional imagery to make a point about cultural sustainability and revival. The comparison is interesting, not least because at

<sup>17</sup> Tagore, introduction to Nivedita, *Web of Indian Life*, p. viii.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Geddes, in S.K. Ratcliffe, ed., *Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita)* (London: Sherratt and Hughes, 1913). There is a copy in the Strathclyde University Archive at SUA T GED 3/3/35. It was originally part of a two-paper feature on Nivedita in *The Sociological Review* 6 (1913), pp. 242-256.

<sup>19</sup> For a brief account of nationalist painting in India see Partha Mitter, 'The Raj, Indian Artists, and Western Art', in Joachim K. Bautze, ed., *The Interaction of Cultures: Indian and Western Painting 1780-1910* (Alexandria, Virginia: Art Services International, 1998). For more detail see Guha-Thakurta, *Making of a New 'Indian' Art* and Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*.

<sup>20</sup> E. B. Havell, 'The New Indian School of Painting', *The Studio*, 44 (1908), pp. 107-117.

<sup>21</sup> That year also saw the publication of James Caw's cognate *Scottish Painting: Past and Present* (Edinburgh: Jack, 1908).

<sup>22</sup> Guha-Thakurta, *New Indian Art*, p. 174.

<sup>23</sup> The significance of John Duncan's *Anima Celtica* was emphasized by its inclusion in the major exhibition shown at the British Museum and the National Museum of Scotland in 2015 and 2016, *Celts: Art and Identity*.



the heart of John Duncan's composition is another 'mother of the people', the distinguished Celtic scholar Ella Carmichael. Much later, John Duncan was to draw on the Bengal school style when he made images of the life of the Buddha for the use of teachers at the Ananda College in Colombo.<sup>24</sup> The college had been founded by the prominent Theosophist H. S. Olcott in 1886. By the time Duncan made his images, in 1930, it was a key site of Buddhist educational resistance to colonial rule. It is interesting to note in passing that both Sister Nivedita and Ella Carmichael were Gaelic speakers; Nivedita of the Irish variety, Ella Carmichael of the Scottish variety. This is underpinning the link noted earlier between those who understood the historical British imperial suppression of the Gàidhealtachd and those who understood the British imperial suppression of Indian culture.

In her activities as an art critic, Nivedita helped to clear and maintain the path that the Bengal school of painters were to follow. A crucial aid to her efforts in this regard was Kakuzo Okakura, the Japanese art critic and teacher. Okakura is best known for his classic exposition of Zen thinking, *The Book of Tea*, which is still in print today, a century after its first publication. Just as Geddes' work in Scotland must be seen in a pan-Celtic context, so the activities of Nivedita must be seen in a pan-Asian context.<sup>25</sup> If pan-Asianism has a defining moment, it is the visit of Okakura to Bengal in 1902. He had come with the intention of visiting Vivekananda but was prevented in this aim by Vivekananda's death. Instead, Nivedita became his key point of contact. She introduced him to the Tagore family and he completed his seminal book *Ideals of the East – with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* while staying as a guest of Abanindranath's cousin, Surendranath Tagore.

Nivedita acted 'as the main mediator and promoter of Okakura's Pan-Asian aesthetic, trying to harness it to the cause of nationalism and an artistic revival in India'.<sup>26</sup> Indicative of this promotion was her introduction to Okakura's *Ideals of the East*, where she emphasises 'the absurdity of the Hellenic theory' of Indian artistic development noting that Okakura argues that the actual affinities are largely Chinese. Reiterating Vivekananda and clearing the way for Coomaraswamy she notes that Okakura argues that 'Greece falls into her proper place as but a province of that ancient Asia'.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, this pan-Asian culture was held to have had ancient Indian Buddhist and pre-Buddhist thought as its point of origin. Thus Indian culture, undermined by British rule, began to rediscover itself at the centre

<sup>24</sup> See *The Scotsman*, 10 June 1930, p. 12, for both images and text. My thanks to Nicola Ireland of the Royal Scottish Academy for this information.

<sup>25</sup> For an account of the links between these pan-Asian activists see Guha-Thakurta, *New Indian Art*, pp. 167–171.

<sup>26</sup> Guha-Thakurta, *New Indian Art*, p. 167.

<sup>27</sup> Nivedita in Kakuzo Okakura, *Ideals of the East*, (London: John Murray, 1903), p. xiv.

of a pan-Asian stage. By this time, Okakura had taken on the major role of attempting to balance the Westernisation of Japanese culture in the Meiji period with traditional cultural values. Okakura wrote in *The Studio* in 1902 of the Meiji restoration in Japan as a renaissance that had the double task of 'returning to the classic ideals and at the same time of assimilating the new revolutionising ideas'.<sup>28</sup> The problem for Okakura was to complement the 'overwhelming power of Western science and culture' with a return to classic ideas of art.<sup>29</sup> To serve this end he founded an independent Japanese art school that, through its students, directly influenced developments in Calcutta. It was from this art school that Abanindranath and his school took their cue, in particular from the work of Yokouama Taikan and Hishida Shunso, who travelled to Calcutta at Okakura's instigation.<sup>30</sup>

The promotion of this pan-Asian aesthetic by both Nivedita and Okakura was balanced by their keen desire to communicate Asian culture to the West. For example, Okakura's *Book of Tea* has been described as 'a pioneering effort in the cultural bridge-building between East and West' that 'continues to surprise [...] with the freshness of its insights'.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, Nivedita and Coomaraswamy's *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists* and Okakura's *Book of Tea* can be seen as cognate works of similar purpose and effect. As Coomaraswamy advocated, we now take the Ramayana for granted as a classic of world literature; we also take for granted the Zen Buddhism that Okakura began to give us access to. Both are keys to the understanding of the possibilities of the human spirit.

For Geddes, for Coomaraswamy, for Okakura, for Nivedita and for Tagore, such cross-cultural understanding had to be advocated through education. For example, in his essay 'Education in Ceylon', Coomaraswamy writes that he would like to see Ceylonese students gaining experience in a variety of European countries and studying Indian history and culture but 'above all I should like them to come under the personal influence of men

<sup>28</sup> Kakuzo Okakura, 'Notes on Contemporary Japanese Art', *The Studio*, 25 (1902), pp. 126-128.

<sup>29</sup> For further consideration of analogies between Geddes and Okakura in the context of the Meiji restoration, see Kiyoshi Okutsu 2005. 'Aesthetics of the Meiji Era and Geddesian Thought' in K. Okutsu, A. Johnston, M. Macdonald and N. Sadakata, eds., *Patrick Geddes: By Leaves We Live* (Yamaguchi and Edinburgh: Yamaguchi Institute for Contemporary Art, 2005), pp. 11-28. This volume contains several other Japanese perspectives on Geddes, including 'Quest for an Alternative Outlook: Geddes and Japan 1900-2004' by Toshihiko Ando, 'Reconstructing the Regional Narratives' by Fumiaki Sato, and 'Visual Thinking Course at Yamaguchi University' by Noboru Sadakata and Tadashi Kyuno.

<sup>30</sup> Guha-Thakurta, *New Indian Art*, p. 169.

<sup>31</sup> Shoshitsu Sen, introducing a new edition of Okakura's *Book of Tea* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1989).p. 11. It was first published in Boston in 1906 and in an extended and illustrated edition in Edinburgh in 1919.

like Professor Geddes and women like Sister Nivedita'.<sup>32</sup> That paper was given in 1911 and collected in *Art and Swadeshi*, published in Madras in 1912. These cultural-nationalist essays are more or less continuous with those found in *Essays in National Idealism* of 1909, and while one might expect the mention of Nivedita, it is interesting to find Geddes figuring in both collections, reinforcing the view that he was firmly part of an Indian intellectual milieu long before he set foot in India in 1914. Also mentioned in 'Education in Ceylon' is the distinguished educational thinker Michael Sadler (senior) who was a contributor to *The Sociological Review* along with Geddes, Coomaraswamy and Nivedita.<sup>33</sup>

After Nivedita's death in 1911, Coomaraswamy became Geddes's key mentor on the subject of Indian culture. In mid-March 1912 Geddes sent Coomaraswamy a text of a new project of education in the history of ideas through community drama, which he called *The Masque of Learning*. By the end of the same month, in a letter of 30 March, Coomaraswamy had written an enthusiastic reply.<sup>34</sup> He requested extra copies of the book and also suggested a few changes to the Indian section. It is clear from this letter that Geddes' adoption of the term 'guru' in the more extensive text published as *The Masque of Ancient Learning* later in 1912 is due to Coomaraswamy's advice. An interesting use of this, bringing into conjunction the experience of East and West, is Geddes' description of Plato:

We return then to our Masque, with its retrospect, its confrontation of the essentials of Indian and of Occidental thought. For now, when we come to our Western origins, we shall find them more Oriental than we knew. Aristotle, although our foremost system-maker, was never a curriculum-enforcer. His master, Plato, was no mere professor, tutor or don; but a Guru. Above all, Socrates, though, beyond all men, remembered in history as the questioner, was never an examiner: he lived and laboured as a birth-helper of the spirit, not a chooser of spirits slain'.<sup>35</sup>

The work was expanded and revised as *Dramatisations of History*, which has a particular interest here, because it was published not only in Edinburgh and London, but in Bombay and Karachi. Geddes not only draws on Coomaraswamy's advice, but he also makes explicit reference to both Coomaraswamy and Nivedita, writing of Indian art as a subject 'which we have

<sup>32</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadeshi* (Madras: Ganesh Press, 1912), p. 135.

<sup>33</sup> Sadler was later to describe Geddes' ideas about university organisation as 'pure gold'. See Paddy Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person: An Introduction to the Ideas and Life of Patrick Geddes* (London: Gollancz, 1975), p. 268. Sadler was also an early advocate of the painting of Gauguin, indeed the highpoint of that artist's Breton period, *Vision after the Sermon*, now in the National Gallery of Scotland, was previously in Sadler's collection.

<sup>34</sup> NLS MS 10543 f 52.

<sup>35</sup> Geddes, *Masque of Ancient Learning*; (Edinburgh: Geddes and Colleagues, 1913), p. 77.

long failed even to recognise, much less to penetrate or comprehend'. He continues: 'the artist with Abanindranath Tagore and Mrs. Herringham, the teacher with Mr. Havell, and the critic with Sister Nivedita and Dr. Coomaraswamy, are at length revealing to us its beauty and its significance'.<sup>36</sup>

This list is typical of Geddes, for he begins with the practice of art, proceeds through education in art and concludes with commentary about art. Christiana Herringham is a significant inclusion. She was both an expert in the materials of painting and the leader of a group of artists, mostly Abanindranath Tagore's students, who had copied the Ajanta frescoes in 1910. Herringham's first account of the project, 'The Frescoes of Ajanta', is to be found in *The Burlington Magazine* for June 1910. The May issue of that magazine had contained Coomaraswamy's first contribution to that magazine, his paper 'Indian Bronzes'. The making of the Ajanta copies was a crucial aspect of the reappraisal of the non-Hellenic origins of Indian art, and it attracted the support and interest of both Coomaraswamy and Nivedita, both of whom were involved in persuading Herringham to employ Abanindranath Tagore's students as copyists.<sup>37</sup>

Further resonance between Nivedita and Geddes can be seen in the fact that when he went to India. Geddes not only helped Rabindranath Tagore to develop both Santiniketan and Sriniketan, he also developed ideas for the Hindu University at Benares. Coomaraswamy comments on this in his classic work *The Dance of Shiva*. In that passage Coomaraswamy attacks the inferiorism of some nationalist thinking in India, noting that genuine educators like Geddes 'seeking to restore the Indian classics or vernaculars to their real place in Indian curricula' are met by the determined opposition of nationalists, adopting an uncritical western political model to achieve their aims. He goes on: 'it is not without reason that Professor Patrick Geddes, who, I am glad to say, has been entrusted with the organisation of the Hindu University at Benares, has remarked that it would be a mistake to allow the Europeanised Indian graduates to have their way with Indian education: "that would be continuing our mistake," as he says, "not correcting it."<sup>38</sup> Coomaraswamy adds a footnote saying that, after writing the passage, he learned with regret that Geddes was no longer to be entrusted with the organisation of the Hindu University at Benares. In a letter to Geddes himself he put it rather differently 'as to Benares – I am amused: it is so characteristic'.<sup>39</sup> Here Coomaraswamy is referring to his own experience for he had found his own efforts rejected in a similar context. He had offered his collection of art to the city of Benares 'to boost proposals for setting up a national museum of Indian art there, trying at the same time

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, p. 312.

<sup>38</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva* (New York: Sunwise Turn, 1918), p. 174.

<sup>39</sup> NLS MS 10545. Letter from Coomaraswamy to Geddes dated October 22 1917.

to get a post as professor at the Benares Hindu university'.<sup>40</sup> Lack of response led Coomaraswamy to offer his collection to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1916, an offer that was accepted and that led to his own subsequent career in America. By that time, Coomaraswamy had become *persona non grata* in the UK due to his Indian nationalist views. He was allowed to depart for America in 1917, on condition that he did not return to the UK. In the New England context it is worth noting again Coomaraswamy's influence on the mythologist Joseph Campbell, indeed Campbell chose Coomaraswamy (along with James Frazer, Max Muller, Durkheim, Jung, and the Church) as one of his six definers of the function of mythology.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, by the time Geddes went to India for the first time in October 1914, he was well known to Indian cultural activists and well briefed on Indian cultural matters. Not only that, but through Nivedita's book, *The Web of Indian Life*, he had already influenced thinking in India. So when he travelled to India he would have done so with a sense of continuity. That continuity was underlined when one notes that one of the early letters he received from Scotland was from none other than Ananda Coomaraswamy, who – unbeknown to Geddes – was staying at the Geddes family home in Edinburgh.<sup>42</sup> In the *Geddes Tagore Letters* Bashabi Fraser illuminates Geddes' Indian connections at this time by including a letter of introduction dated December 1914 from one of Geddes' oldest friends, the distinguished dramatist and translator William Archer.<sup>43</sup> It is addressed to Rabindranath Tagore's close associate C. F. Andrews.<sup>44</sup> It was to be some years before Geddes and Tagore made direct contact and considering their shared interests and friendships that may seem surprising. It is less so when one realises that Geddes' initial destination in India was Madras not Bengal.

Geddes' invitation to India had come from his Scottish supporter John Sinclair, Lord Pentland, who had taken up the appointment as governor of Madras in late 1912. When Geddes arrived in Madras, in addition to writing reports on the present state of the towns of the region and their potential, he organised exhibitions throughout the area to raise awareness of planning issues. Although Geddes later made a substantial contribution to the planning of British-controlled Lucknow in his reports on that city in

<sup>40</sup> Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *New Indian Art*, p. 166.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Bollingen, 1949), p. 382. Campbell's influence on George Lucas' narrative structures in *Star Wars* can also be noted. See, e.g., Joseph Campbell, ed. P. Cousineau, *The Hero's Journey* (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1990), p. 181.

<sup>42</sup> NLS MS 10544.

<sup>43</sup> Perth-born Archer was two years younger than Geddes. He was a distinguished translator of Ibsen. He should not be confused with the historian of Indian art of the same name.

<sup>44</sup> Fraser, *Geddes Tagore Letters*, p. 53.



1916 and 1917, his views were markedly different from those of most of the British Imperial establishment, including those of Sir Edwin Lutyens.<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note that Geddes had tried to involve a more radical architect – his friend Charles Rennie Mackintosh – in an Indian project in 1916. That was probably for Lucknow, and it resulted in a fascinating ‘almost’ of world architecture. Mackintosh’s designs got no further than the drawing board, but some of these drawings have been identified.<sup>46</sup>

Although their memoirs of Nivedita had been published together four years previously, it was not until 1917, in Darjeeling, that Geddes first met and began to cooperate fully with Rabindranath Tagore.<sup>47</sup> The Darjeeling meeting is probably when Geddes’ second son, Arthur, met Tagore also. Geddes was very fortunate in his children. Although nothing could remove the pain of the wartime loss of his first son Alasdair, Norah and Arthur Geddes had two remaining children who understood the importance of their father’s work and, crucially, were interested in it. Furthermore, they were both talented thinkers in their own right. It is to Norah that we owe key biographical insights into her father.<sup>48</sup> It is to Arthur that we owe the preservation of much of Geddes’s archive and the development of a series of connections that take further and illustrate his father’s thinking. Arthur’s relationship with Tagore is a notable aspect of this. Arthur was twenty-two years of age in 1917, and as the links between his father and Tagore developed, he was to act as conduit of information between the professor and the poet. Arthur went on to make a significant contribution to the understanding of the regional geography of India and later, at the University of Edinburgh, applied his skills to Scotland, in particular to the Highlands and the Western Isles.<sup>49</sup> Like his father, Arthur was a committed cultural revivalist. To this end he translated some of Tagore’s songs into English for performance at the Edinburgh Festival in 1961.<sup>50</sup> From a Scottish cultural

<sup>45</sup> Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 236.

<sup>46</sup> See Volker Welter, *Arcades for Lucknow: Patrick Geddes, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Reconstruction of the City*. *Architectural History* 42 (1999), pp. 316-332.

<sup>47</sup> Philip Boardman, *The Worlds of Patrick Geddes* (London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 331-332. Quoted in Fraser, *Geddes-Tagore Letters*, p. 29.

<sup>48</sup> Not least as outlined in her ‘memoir’ (NLS MS 10508) and her clarification of the relationship with D’Arcy Thomson in her book of poems, *Intimations and Avowals* (Edinburgh: The Moray Press, 1944).

<sup>49</sup> See, e.g. Arthur Geddes, ‘The “Outer” Hebrides’, *The New Naturalist*, Summer, 1948, 72-76; Arthur Geddes & F. D. N. Spaven, *The Highlands and Isles: Their Regional Planning* (Edinburgh: Outlook Tower, 1949). For an assessment of Arthur Geddes as a geographer see Andrew T. A. Learmonth, ‘Arthur Geddes’ in *Geographers: Biobibliographical Studies*, 2 (1978), pp. 45-51.

<sup>50</sup> Arthur Geddes, *Presenting Tagore in Sound and Sight* (Edinburgh: Adam House, 1961).



perspective, Arthur can be thought of as a key link between the Celtic Revival of the 1890s and the Folk Revival of the 1960s. And from an international perspective, not least with respect to his links to Tagore, Arthur Geddes deserves far more attention than he has so far been given.

In 1922, via C. F. Andrews, Patrick Geddes gave advice to Tagore about the development of his educational projects in Bengal. This resulted in Arthur taking up residence in early 1923 in Santiniketan, as an advisor on, and teacher of, his father's ideas.<sup>51</sup> In a letter of 12 March, Arthur laments the fact that Patrick cannot be based at Santiniketan: 'Your ideas would be lapped up here ... I realise how welcome you'd be from the keen way they took my talks on P.W.F. [Place Work Folk] [...] it seemed relevant to them, with their rural and "international ideal" aims'.<sup>52</sup> Andrews makes clear in a letter to Tagore that Geddes was also concerned to draw together Tagore's efforts with those of his old Bengali friend the scientist Jagadis Chandra Bose.<sup>53</sup> Geddes had stayed with Bose in Calcutta during the winter of 1915-16 and the two men shared an expertise in natural science allied to a profound awareness of cultural matters. In his biography of Bose, Geddes goes out of his way to emphasise that Bose's eminence as a scientist was complemented by his cultural knowledge. Lewis Mumford wrote of that biography that it 'was not merely a tribute to a great experimental physicist but a tribute to the Hindu intuition of the unity of all being that made Bose's researches possible'.<sup>54</sup> Geddes is at pains to emphasize the importance of Bose's friendships with both Nivedita and with Tagore, and Geddes writes of Tagore and Bose 'each complementing and thereby widening and deepening the other's characteristic outlook on nature and life'. That sentiment is at the heart of my argument here, for each of these educational and spiritual thinkers, whether it is Rabindranath Tagore himself, Patrick Geddes and his son Arthur, Sister Nivedita, Coomaraswamy, Bose, or Okakura, is characterized by a deep cultural knowledge of the local, informing a truly international perspective. A late expression of that ethos on Geddes' part was when he invited Tagore to be the patron of the Indian College in Montpellier that he had constructed beside his own Scots College. In honour of the opening of that Indian College Tagore wrote a typically thoughtful poem, which became in due course the epigraph to his book, *The Religion of Man* (1931).

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<sup>51</sup> Fraser, *Geddes Tagore Letters*, pp. 75-97.

<sup>52</sup> Fraser, *Geddes-Tagore Letters*, pp. 96-7.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 75.

<sup>54</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The Condition of Man* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944), p. 384.

The eternal Dream  
 is borne on the wings of ageless Light,  
 that rends the veil of the vague  
 and goes across Time  
 weaving ceaseless patterns of Being.

The mystery remains dumb,  
 the meaning of this pilgrimage,  
 the endless adventure of existence -  
 whose rush along the sky  
 flames up into innumerable rings of paths,  
 till at last knowledge gleams out from the dusk  
 in the infinity of human spirit,  
 and in that dim-lighted dawn  
 she speechlessly gazes through the break in the mist  
 at the vision of Life and Love  
 emerging from the tumult of profound pain and joy.

Santiniketan, September 16, 1929

(Composed for the Opening Day Celebrations of the Indian College, Montpellier, France.)

I conclude with those words written by Tagore for the opening of one of Geddes' projects. Typical of both these instinctive internationalists, the project in question was in the native land of neither of them. In that sense, it draws attention to their global vision and commitment, a vision that would have rejected out of hand our present misuse of the word 'globalization' as a cover for the idiocy of greed.

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## About the author

Murdo Macdonald is Professor of History of Scottish Art at the University of Dundee. His doctoral research at the University of Edinburgh explored the relationships between art and science. He is a former editor of *Edinburgh Review*. His research interests include the art of the Scottish Gàidhealtachd, the cultural milieu of Patrick Geddes (not least with respect to India), visual interpretations of the life and work of Robert Burns, and the cloud chamber photography of the Scottish physicist and Nobel laureate C. T. R. Wilson. He has a longstanding interest in Ossian and art in an international context, which he explored as part of the Cesarotti project at the University of Padua in 2013. He is a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. He was appointed an honorary member of the Royal Scottish Academy of Art and Architecture in 2009, and an honorary fellow of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies in 2016.