Dreaming India/India Dreaming - Proceedings of the SARI 2019 Conference

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Dreaming India

India Dreaming

Proceedings of the

SARI

2019 Conference

compiled and edited by
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INTRODUCTION

Little did the members of the learned society SARI imagine that barely a year after they chose to work on the topic "India Dreaming/Dreaming India" for their annual conference that the onset of the pandemics will perturb their lives and dreams and give them a glimpse of the dystopian world depicted in the novels of writers such as Laura Kasischke (*In a Perfect World*, Harper Perennial, 2009) and Karen Thompson Walker (*The Dreamers*, Scribner UK, 2019).

However, dreams are essential to heal and to imagine a better future. "Without dreams life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly," wrote Langston Hughes. Despite the fact that some dreams have been for ever shattered, some voluntarily abandoned or transformed, and some simply postponed, dreams should not, and cannot end because in dreams lies the possibility to overcome the limits of the human condition and envision a new life and a new world thanks to the doors to new knowledge that they open.

Dreams have always fascinated human beings because their unsubstantial nature acts as a bridge between phenomena and noumena. They give us intimations about another and alternative reality, be it bright as heaven or dark as hell. They liberate us from our ordinary existence and give us escape routes to the extraordinary. Creative flights of fancy accompany us at all times of the day and all stages of our life. Great inventions and works of art and fiction were churned out of dreams.

In the current volume, two poems by writer Cécile Oumhani - one in English on the dreamy India remembered by her mother that pulls her towards it and another in French on the Indian reality that the poet herself has observed and sublimated – help us smoothly enter the dream world. The featured article by the guest speaker, Psychoanalyst Pascale Hassoun underscores the process through which the psychoanalytic cure endows dreams with regenerative potential. During transference, she observes, the endo-psychic perception that is the dream finds an outward shift and becomes a fresh area for psychic inscription. The articles that follow have been organized into five sections for the sake of thematic coherence. They recall the definition of dreams and their significance in different cultures. They deal with different types of dreams – day dreams, night dreams, pipe dreams, fantasies, hallucinations,

nightmares, shattered dreams, unfulfilled dreams, onirical journeys, divinations, aspirations, dreams of displacement and displaced dreams. They discuss a variety of concepts - dreamwork, dreamcape, dream experience, dream journals, dream sequence, dreamocracy. They dwell on the notion of Indian night and the status accorded to the sleeping self in Indian philosophy. While the body is rested and psychic energy regenerated, the soul reaches out to the cosmos away from the sound and fury of materialistic existence.

If what distinguishes man is his capacity to laugh, what distinguishes his psyche is his ability to dream and make meaning of it. The Indian theory of Maya goes a step further and sees the phenomenal world itself as a dream of Lord Vishnu. In the West, apart from the ancient Greeks' idea of dreams as supernatural signs to be read, the modern theories of Freud, Jung and Lacan have become incontrovertible references in the study of literature and cinema. Freud's conceptualization of dreamwork and Lacan's definition of fantasm as a staging of desire have been put to good use in Jitka de Préval's analysis of the poetics of dreams and fantasies in Hindi popular cinema which tries to preserve the beauty and magic of dreams by inventing a new pictorial language. Ludmila Volná deconstructs Rushdie's attempt to write a Kiplingesque but postmodern jungle book by analyzing the Sundarbans chapter of *Midnight's Children* with the help of Hindu mythology and the dream theories of Freud, Jung, Spitta and Bauer among others.

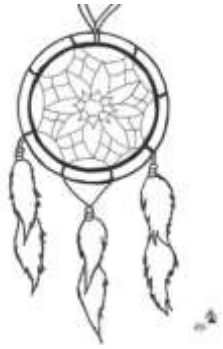
A counter point to the psychoanalytical geometry of human conscience is the romantic poet Sri Aurobindo's higher dimensional geometry of the psyche. Geetha Ganapathy-Doré's article revisits his dreams of the ideal Indian nation which was but a step in the direction of an evolution to postnational dwelling and multilateral citizenship. Lucid dreaming is what makes this synthesis between the East and West possible.

Ahmed Mulla's discussion of the Kenyan writer and activitist Shailja Patel is premised on the idea that "migritude" is the condition of the citizen in the globalized world. As older generations are caught in the web of deluded immigrant dreams, the third generation has to rebel and fight for their own dreams.

Words and narratives are indispensable for recounting and interpreting dreams. In India, there exists a curious situation wherein the imaginary of cinematic fiction contaminates reality and determines the choice of marriage partners and the modalities of wedding in real life. Madhura Joshi and Himabindu Timiri's use of cultural anthropology to interpret India's

multicultural cinema provides us insight into the weaving of personal lives with cinematic strands, whether at home or while living abroad. Similarly, Hannah Freundlich's explication of the dream sequences in which the memories of a dead man, ironically named Vishnu, coalesce in Manil Suri's novel highlights the mise en abyme of dreams as a narrative strategy to evoke afterlife.

Dream is power, the ability to imagine change and embody it. This is what Martin Luther King did when he made his unforgettable "I have a dream" speech. His speech served as a connecting link between the Biblical tradition and the secular belief in the American dream. The vice-presidential ticket that Kamala Harris has won shows the possibility for the African and Indian dreams to merge in the American destiny. In Maria Sabina Draga Alexandru's reflections on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* (East) Indian and American dreams clash, grow apart and conjoin in the concern for the planet.



However, dreams can get dangerously expansionist sometimes. Ingrid Sankey's article approaches dreams from a geostrategic point of view and reviews the stakes behind and the debates on the Indian government's attempt to claim ownership of the Indian Ocean, in the face of Chinese competition. It is a reminder to the fact that the fulfillment of dreams does not discount the responsibility of individuals and groups.

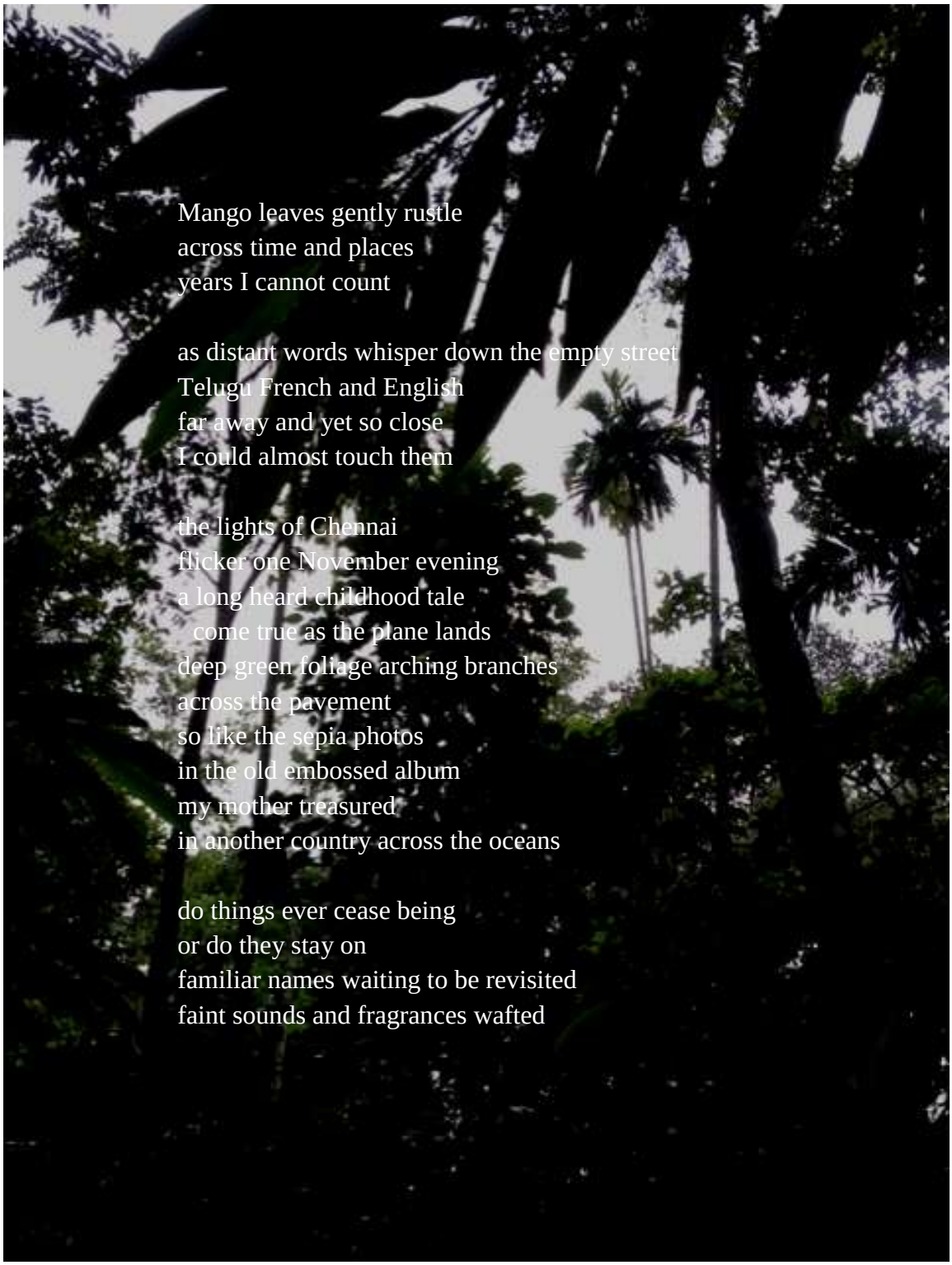
The central piece in this collection, however, is Maëlle Jeanniard du Dot's original reading of Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* in the light of anthropologists Marc Augé and Virilio's theories. Through Kunzru's protagonist who is an IT professional in the US, she is able to engage with speed, mobility, especially the aborted Dream Act, information overload and globalization. What happens when dreams are displaced? Maëlle Jeanniard du Dot suggests that a "dreamocracy" comes into force. The virus is very much there in the form of a computer bug which takes the name of an Indian actress. Transmission is the order of the day and uncontrollable mutation. We have come full circle.

This volume aspires to be nothing more than a trace left of the study day which took place in Spring 2019 at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris Nord in the Condorcet Campus.

Geetha Ganapathy-Doré,
Villetaneuse, September 2020.

Cécile Oumhani is a poet and a novelist. Among her books of poems: *Passeurs de rives* (2015), *Marcher loin sous les nuages* (2018) and *Mémoires inconnues* (2019). Among her novels: *L'atelier des Strésor* (2012), Special Mention of the Franco-Indian Gitanjali Prize (2012), and *Tunisian Yankee* (2016), winner of the Afrique méditerranéenne Maghreb ADELF Prize, nominated for the Joseph Kessel Prize. She was awarded the 2014 Virgil Prize for her work as a whole. Her books have been translated in several languages. A German translation of *Tunisian Yankee* was published in 2018. She is on the editorial board of *Siècle 21* and has been guest editor for *Words Without Borders* and *Caesurae.* She collaborates with *Apulée* and is a member of the advisory board of *Inspirare India.* Some of her poems have been published in *The Literary Sentinel, Prosopisia, The Statesman* and *Caesurae.* She participates in readings and literary festivals in France and abroad, like the 2017 International Poetry Festival in Trois-Rivières in Quebec. She is a member of the Francophone Women Writers' Parliament.

TOUCHING LAND



Cécile Oumhani, *Passeurs de rives*, Paris: La Tête à l'envers, 2015, p. 48. Reproduced with the kind permission of Dominique Sierra. Photo by Cécile Oumhani.

Rêves de draps

Étendus face au ciel
les draps de dhobis
rêvant à un autre monde
aux abords de la rivière
d'étranges nuages
s'alignent
tissés de clarté
à même les pierres
chaque jour sans se lasser
ils adressent au soleil
leur message d'espoir

côte à côte
dans un souffle il échange
murmures et
chuchotements
entendus la nuit dans les
maisons
de toute une ville

étourdis d'air et de
blancheur
ils confient au vent
secrets et paroles volées
au petit matin

les coucous koël
s'égosillent en vain
depuis les banyans
épris d'envol et de sagesse
où ils ont prudemment
élu domicile

Cécile Oumhani, *Mémoires inconnues*, Paris, La Tête à l'envers, 2010, pp. 35-36.
Poème reproduit avec l'aimable autorisation de Dominique Sierra. Photo de Cécile Oumhani.

DREAMING AS A TRANSFERENTIAL FIGURE[1]

Pascale HASSOUN
Psychoanlayst, Paris

Pascale Hassoun cofounded the Cercle freudien. She has worked in several institutions for children and adults where she has grappled with the intercultural dimension. This is how she encountered China. She regularly writes for the psychoanalytical journals, *Patio* and *Che Vuoi.*

Abstract
Dreams are above all psychic acts that shape figures, especially transferential figures. Based on a clinical fragment, I will show how the emergence of the transferential figure that is dreaming is correlative to the establishment of a metaphorical place where the places of the analyst and the analysand are transposed and transformed.

Key words: dreaming, transferential figure, individuation, reversal process, psyche

'The origin of the world was the oniric image…'[2]

The setting in which I mean to carry out this investigation about the dream is that of the psychoanalytic cure in which patients come to talk to the psychoanalyst once or several times a week over a fairly long span of time, sometimes several years. I would like to show that the psychic involvement of the transferential link can be the tool itself that makes it possible for some patients to work their way out of the numbness arising from anguish or loss of identity. The pattern of a lively psychic area is that of the dream. The analyst is then awaited so that the dream be part of the expression of the patient's psychic life, just as the parent is awaited in order to give utterance to what the child lives through, which becomes lived-in with language. The psyche cannot work unless someone names the experience by translating it into words. Moreover, the psyche also requires a projection area from which the experience can be read as something coming back from outside. Lastly, inscribing painful events runs opposite to

[1] For the original and more elaborate French version, see Pascale Hassoun, "Le rêve comme figure transitionnelle," in *Che vuoi ?,* no. 35 (2011): 95-102.
2 Pascal Quignard, *Abîmes / (Abysses), (Paris: Grasset, Paris), 24.*

repression or any other secondary process. Painful events need to be addressed to somebody. The psyche cannot work unless it has internalised this 'other one right next to me.' The pain vanishes from where it has been experienced and 'migrates.' This is the starting point of transference and of dreaming. In addition to coming up in the cure to spin the tie with the analyst and with one's own psychic life, the dream comes forward as a fresh area for psychic inscription. The dream process entails a shift outward; in and by means of the dream, the elements come back in from an outer scene which states something about inner occurrences. Even if the dream is an endo-psychic perception, in fact it comes forward as an external area, from which we can recover what could not be inscribed before. That is what Freud had rightly spotted in his analysis of dreams after a trauma. Suffering is thus re-inserted into a network of destinations, so that it can be seen not only in the other person but in oneself – oneself as other.

I would like to mention a woman teacher in her forties. I had the impression that between her then and her in early childhood, a series of barriers and enclosures stood to prevent any feeling of continuity with herself. She used to feel inconsistent, which both meant made of incongruous, ill-assorted parts of herself, and of loose substance and shape. It was as though, for lack of psychic weaving, she would stick to action. The way things went on showed that any true psychic framework *related to the other person* must have been nipped in the bud too early, and consequently she would turn the relationship *into action* in the fashion of a grip, which revealed that she was deprived of building an identity through childhood experiences. She was living a primary relationship of virtual fusion. She needed to be in her psychoanalyst's affective sphere, or else the wish to disappear would immediately surge up within her.

That was a case in which she had great difficulty being conscious of what made up her 'me.' The me may seem to exist, but in fact it does not, for it is altogether impossible to let out anything of oneself, so that it should come back onto the own person and make up some kind of self.

… Except dreams. Dreaming is possible. Dreams will recur as a fuel for the cure. They nurture the cure process and the protagonists – both the patient and the psychoanalyst. They tell about the psychic life, they tell about the relationship that is operating. They develop the intrapsychic and the inter-psychic relationships into a lively relationship, whereas the desire for fusion might make it all motionless. They open up to potentiality. They open out the various inner experiences of the dreamer.

Oddly enough, I let myself be taken in. I indulged in believing that real life is possible that way. I had some weary spells at times, especially when I thought that we were about to knit a different relationship, more individuated. I had plenty to learn about. I took in the quality of that patient's sensitivity in her particular yearning for relationship, in her virtually instinctive search for it, and in the way she was devising it and building it up. I grasped the niceties and shades in the longing for shared emotions. I fathomed the agony of distress endured by a woman who feels alien from any bond.

I made out that her attachment was not as stifling as I might have thought in the first place. I apprehended that speaking was taking over to ease the strain. I then learnt the words that greet the utterance of the desire, while letting it proceed. I learnt the words that accompany and propose. The words that prop up. Those that listen to inner echoes. Those that question and inquire. Those that name.

Up to that point, she had been able to effect a move through which she momentarily stood at a distance, inasmuch as she was doing that "for you," so she was saying – namely, for me. The start of a mutation took place when she accepted to make a second move that was driving her out of her familiar landmarks and therefore involved the movement of life, and that was when she was able to do it not "*for* you" but "*because* you are here." In that spell, she was in the position of somebody who is making a piece of work and knows that, for the piece of work to be put together, the function of another person in the building process occasionally requires an embodied relationship.

Now, what came unfolded in the midst of such a close relationship? A whole string of female figures, as each fold came out. A non-restricted series which arose from the relationship itself. The more we disclosed them, the more we revolved around the knot at the core that was her inability to break loose from her point of origin.

That was when she had the following dream. "My sister is introducing a little girl to me, the daughter of Barbara, the singer who has just died. The girl is lying. I am in front of her with my arms held out. She is distraught and very fretful. Helplessness can be heard in her babbling. She says a whole lot of things, she has questions to ask, she is trying to understand. She is at a loss, for she ends up being alone. Her mother has died and she has nobody around to take care of her. Her eyes are black. By holding both her hands in mine, by tuning my own voice to her twitter, I manage to calm her down and even to make her laugh. I am able to make her eyes brighten. The surrounding greenery is seen from the room, with trees and the

sky. Thanks to the contact with me, the girl is able to get into touch with what is around her including that nature. I wonder who will now be taking care of her."

While listening to that dream, I was saying to myself that she made me into a psychoanalyst just the way the child had made her into a mother, so I was wondering how I would get her to take in that 'reversal.' I said to her, "Isn't she extraordinary, the little girl in the dream, for she can manage to cause you, the dreamer, to develop something that gives her a taste for life again, and to find some ways out. The girl really is extraordinary, for she even makes the request to be listened taken into account."

The very fact that she was able to have that dream evinces that *I* am not the one who gives, but *she* is the giver; because *she* gives *me* a present by setting *me* as the one who can enable her to express her grief in loving. Not only does the dream tell what happens between us but it *generates* the aid situation. When I put in words, all I do is read what *she* gives me to read.

The change from undergoing to acting, the shift from a passive to an active position, and the possibility to alternate them, being either the one who is led or the one who leads, is to my mind the very mainspring of psychic life.

That she could reverse the roles of the giver and the receiver, that she could take it in turns, is an indication of a vivid psychic life. By setting me down as recipient, she herself makes up the psychic location and linkage.

In the next session, she went back over my suggestion, about which she had been thinking at length. She interpreted it not only by assuming that I was not bored when I was with her, but also that I might find it attractive to listen to her and still more, that she might even have a healing effect on me.

She said, "I wanted to thank you for something you gave me in approving of my relationship to the little girl. It more or less represents what is going on in our relationship. You told me that the little girl was extraordinary because she prompted the other person to restore a taste for life in her, to arouse her to activity, to figure out how to help her… Although I am familiar with your way of being present, of being involved… now it is *as if you had answered the question I've been asking myself – what about you, how do you feel in this analysis that we are doing together?"*

Let me borrow Harold Searles's point in his book *Countertransference and related subjects*. He says that the concern to have a healing effect on others is not a feature special to the rather few people who choose psychoanalysis or psychotherapy as a professional occupation. It is a basic concern existing in any human being.

Some of my women patients and I were experiencing the fact that the original or secondary pathway towards individuation is a symbiotic process which cannot have a healing effect upon one unless it has a healing effect upon the other as well. That is what in my own words I called the 'reversal process.'

That reversal process had appeared to me as a hinge. So far we had been going along according to standard practice; she cast me as the one who supplies, and herself as the one who requests. However, she was so eager to get closer to me, to peer at me and into me, to be on the lookout for the faintest hint at a dawning irritation or disapproval, that I was wondering what was at stake in that urge for closeness, in which I sensed something different from a mere clinging reaction.

In discovering – uncovering that reversal operation, I was discovering – finding out what it consisted of; she was seeking what kind of part she too, though she was a patient, could have in my own psychic functioning.

In order to solve the fixation she was in as regards her psychic development, she was bound – and I was bound to experience that leverage on one another.

With that clinical episode as a background, my purport was to show how the transferential figure looming and shaping into dreams correlates with the foundation of a metaphoric spot where the places of either, the analyst and the analysand, are set in motion and are at play, which allows them to be processed.

Taking after dreams which work as a psychic act of figure-shaping, especially transferential figures, likewise, what seems to be at work here is the capability to hear the body in the speech.

Somehow, the analyst sustains both him- or herself and the transference by slipping into the motion of the dreaming. He or she allows being aroused and lays down an expanse for some speech which may amount to a gesture, in order to outdo the forces of death.

Part I
Dreams of the City, Dreams of the Jungle

DREAMS, FANTASIES AND MEMORIES IN MANIL SURI'S *THE DEATH OF VISHNU*

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Hannah Freundlich is a doctoral student at the TTN Research Centre at the University of Sorbonne Paris Nord. She is writing a thesis on "Women and games" under the guidance of Dr. Xavier-Laurent Salvador. Within that framework, she is particularly working on games in *The Mahabharata*.

Abstract
Manil Suri's novel, *The Death of Vishnu* by Manil Suri deals with the last moments of a man about to die. This article purports to show that, through his memories and dreams, this man called Vishnu reaches the self-recognition that allows him to get ready for afterlife.

Key words: memories, dreams, transcendence, rebirth, recognition.

The Indo-American mathematician and writer Manil Suri's first novel, *The Death of Vishnu* was published in 2001.[1] It is the first part of a trilogy in which each part is named after a deity from the Hindu pantheon. The trilogy addresses questions of society, politics, and religion. The title of the first volume gives a good idea of its content. However, against all odds, Vishnu is just a poor man, dying on the landing of the building where he has lived and worked. While Vishnu, very ill, is lying unconscious or barely conscious on the landing floor, the novel is built around the life of the building, which is somewhat disturbed by the presence of the dying man, and around memories of Vishnu popping up through external signals. The two entities, Vishnu on one side, and the other inhabitants on the other, are experiencing two completely different realities. They belong to two different worlds, which seem to be opposed but nevertheless appear more and more entangled as the novel unfolds. This article aims to try to clarify the dichotomy on which the novel is constructed in order to study the relations between dream and death in the narrative whose roots lie in myths.[2]

[1] Manil Suri, *The Death of Vishnu* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008 reprint). All the quotations come from this edition.
[2] According to Hindu mythology, Lord Vishnu lies in a dream-like state on Adisesha Ananta, the serpent representing Time, without beginning or end, on the waters of the ocean of Cosmic Consciousness and watches Brahma create the universe.

The first question that arises is a question of definition. In the above paragraph I mention "memories" of Vishnu; then I refer to this very same matter as "dreams." What is the true nature of these parts? Vishnu is barely conscious, but external events trigger streams of images and thoughts which can be understood as the resurgence of memories of important moments in his life. The popular idea that our whole life "flashes before our eyes"[3] on the verge of death prompts us to adhere to this interpretation. But, as I look more closely at the text, many elements belonging specifically to the dream world appear, and raise doubts.

According to the definition of "dream" given by the *Collins Dictionary*, a dream is "an imaginary series of events that you experience in your mind while you are asleep", and it can also refer "to a situation or event that does not seem real […], especially if it is very strange or unpleasant."[4] Vishnu is in an intermediate state. The images that arise in his mind may or may not come from external signals, but seem to meet the proposed definition. We could, therefore, consider them as dreams, which can be reprocessed memories, but not raw and reliable ones.

The parts concerning Vishnu are constructed in the novel through the complex relationship between three elements: sensory elements, dream and memory. The sensory element sometimes functions as the connecting link between dream and memory; sometimes it initiates the dream or memory. Memories, meanwhile, can turn into a dream or come to consolidate the latter. Sensory afferences have a very important place in the novel and have to be studied in detail.

The link between the life of the building and Vishnu's dreams

I was able to identify thirty distinct memories of Vishnu in the novel. These do not have a specific place in the chapters, and one memory can call out another. Therefore, it was necessary at times to draw the borderline between memories and dreams in an arbitrary manner.[5]

[3] The idea was made popular through movies and novels, but appears as early as the late nineteenth century in studies on Near-Death Experience, and specifically with Albert Heim's *Notizen über den Tod durch Absturz*, translated into English in 1972 as *The experience of dying from falls*.

[4] Collins Online Dictionary, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/dream, accessed August 24, 2020.

[5] If we take up for consideration the twenty-third dream of Vishnu, we can separate it into a 23A and a 23B. This is the moment when Vishnu identifies with Kalki, the last incarnation of the deity whose name he bears. The change of pronoun between the two moments of this dream (we go from the third person to the first, with the horse Kalki, mount of the divinity as narrator) justifies the choice to separate the two moments, without considering them as completely independent passages. On the contrary, Dream 5 and Dream 6 are considered to

At the beginning of the novel, the link between the two worlds (that of reality and that of dreams) is quite significant. The elements that trigger dreams and invoke memories are found explicitly in the narration of events that take place around Vishnu's body. The smell of tea, the sound of footsteps on the stairs or even the light that occasionally floods Vishnu's face and caresses his eyelids conjure up waves of images and memories. The first two dreams offer telling examples:

> *The steam rises lazily from the surface of the tea. It is thick with the aroma of boiled milk, streaked with the perfume of cardamom and clove. It wisps and curls and rises and falls, tracing letters from some fleeting alphabet.*
>
> *A sudden gust leads it spiraling down to the motionless man. It reaches his face, almost invisible now, and wafts playfully under his nose. Surely, the smell it carries awakens memories in the man. Memories of his mother in the tin-and-cardboard hut, brewing tea in the old iron kettle. She would squeeze and press at the leaves, and use them several times over, throwing them away only when no more flavor could be coaxed out. Memories of Padmini, the vapor still devoid of cardamom or clove, but smelling now of chameli flowers fastened like strings of pearls around her wrists.* Dream 1, p. 3.

> *The light shines through the landing window. It plays on Vishnu's face. It passes through his closed eyelids and whispers to him in red.*
>
> *The red is everywhere, blanketing the ground, coloring the breeze. It must be the red of Holi. He is nine, hiding behind a tree, fistfuls of red powder in each hands.* Dream 2, p. 7.

In both these excerpts, a connection is clearly made between the external event - the smell of tea in the first dream, the glowing light streaming through his eyelids in the second - and the emergence of the memory. The link between the two worlds is built thanks to the continuity of the text, the modal verb "must" here expresses deduction and this already involves the psychic activity of the half-conscious subject. These first dreams most clearly establish the structure of the narrative, which then disappears slowly and progressively. These first dreams still belong to reality, to which Vishnu remains present. Dreams 2 to 5 have the same trigger, which is colour. But each dream draws us deeper into the interiority of Vishnu, and the starting point of the accounts of Vishnu's dreams is less and less linked to external reality:

> Dream 3: "*It is a different red.*" Chapter 1, p.12.
>
> Dream 4: "*The red is darker.*" Chapter 1, p. 21.
>
> Dream 5: "*The red has receded into darkness*." Chapter 2, p. 30.

Between these dreams, we can read the stories of Ladies Pathak and Asrani, two residents of the building; we witness their daily rituals, and we learn what they think of Vishnu and the fact that he is dying on the landing. As for Vishnu, he is sensitive to changes in light and

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be different, because the characters are completely different (one evokes Kavita, the other Padmini), even if the follow each other directly in the story.

therefore perhaps to different times of the day, but he is no longer connected to the daily life of the building. Dreams are related to each other through the red colour. The end of the fourth dream is a move from colour (which involves light) to darkness (absence of light):

> *'I am Vishnu,' he says, 'keeper of the universe, keeper of the sun. There is only darkness without me.'* (p.24)

Darkness is found at the beginning of the fifth dream, and can then already be interpreted as the announcement of Vishnu's departure, his death. From one end of the story to the other, a more or less important connection is established between the dreams and the daily life of the building. These fluctuations can be understood as those of the state of health of the character whose degree of consciousness is also fluctuating.

The link between reality (memorial or not) and desire: the question of the eternal feminine

The distinction between reality and desire appears quickly enough in Vishnu's dreams, but it becomes more and more blurred as the pages turn. Vishnu's dreams revolve around three female figures: Kavita, the daughter of the Asranis, a family from the building; Padmini, a prostitute who appears to be Vishnu's great love, and finally, his mother. To these three figures is added the goddess Lakshmi, who is omnipresent and who acts as a complement to them. She is embodied by the two young women or summoned in the stories of Vishnu's mother. These three female figures represent three different periods in Vishnu's life. The mother is linked to childhood memories; Padmini to the youth, which seems long gone, and Kavita - who Vishnu has seen grow and blossom into a young woman - is part of the present and the reality of the building.

The five senses are ubiquitous in Vishnu's memories, and passages that describe his interactions with these female characters further exacerbate this sensuality. This can be manifested via innocent games with his mother (*gudgudi*, i.e. tickling; playing the horse, etc.), via fantasies when it comes to Kavita (the desire to tear off her blouse; touch, etc.), as when jealousy makes him imagine the murder of her boyfriend Salim and her rape.

> *A wave of jealousy seizes him. He imagines pulling Salim off, and hurling him over the parapet. The boy grabs for an antenna to save himself, but it breaks, and plunges over the edge with him. Kavita runs screaming to the wall, and tries to jump over as well. Vishnu catches her skirt, and pulls her down to the ground with it. She is shrieking with grief as he lowers his body over hers. He feels the roundness of her breasts press against him with every scream, feels the firmness of her thighs as he pulls down her dress. He buries his face deep into her neck, and lets the smell of her body overwhelm his senses; he traces his fingers greedily over her skin, and covers her mouth with his long-waiting lips.* p. 49.

Yet Kavita is also linked to reality and when she is summoned in Vishnu's memories, one can only marvel at the care with which he observes her. In the fifth dream, for example, he notices her vulnerability, and his reaction to events takes this vulnerability into account with real sensitivity as this is probably what leads him to accept the inferior position she asks him to take:

> *He says it one day, "Kavita," and doesn't realize he has uttered it aloud. She stops, as surely as if he has physically intercepted her. She stares at him uncertainly. A smile plays at her lips, and Vishnu sees the mischief seep into her eyes.*
> *"Kavita memsahib!" she says, and looks at him daringly, to see if he will contradict her. Her hands are on her hips, and Vishnu can see the skin of her midriff exposed between her blouse and petticoat.*
> *Vishnu looks into her face, past the defiance, and is struck by her vulnerability. His need to touch her has never been stronger. "Kavita memsahib," he whispers, and folds his straying hands together.*
> *Delight springs to her eyes. She turns from him to hide her smile.*
> *"Salaam, memsahib!" Vishnu salutes, as Kavita raises her head, tosses her hair, and begins to ascend the stairs triumphantly.* pp. 32-33.

Owing to her lucrative activity of selling her body, Padmini is the source of several erotic passages in the text. We can notice that these passages are often the occasion to mix different senses. Almost all of them are summoned in Dream 21, the act of love being linked to the consumption of a mango. This passage concludes: "So many earthly ways to enjoy mangoes. Vishnu is loath to give them up." p. 192

These three female figures appear to be essential in Vishnu's ascension to afterlife. They can be seen as guides, allowing Vishnu to reach a higher dimension. In this line, they can be associated with the Eternal feminine, as we find it in Goethe and in the essentialist's logic: Kavita, Padmini, and the mother, sublimated by the figure of Lakshmi, of whom they are perhaps but the avatars, represent the femininity which guides the masculine desire, that of Vishnu, towards transcendence.

The memory of Padmini allows us to establish a link between the mango and earthly life. The abandonment of earthly life is directly linked to it.

The link between dream and death: dream as preparation for death or as a path to transcendence

In this section, I will mainly refer to the works of two scholars, that of Marie-Louise von Franz, psychologist and philologist, disciple of Carl Gustave Jung, who studied her patients' dreams announcing death and the articles from conference proceedings published by Claudine Picron under the title *Indian nights: Sleep and Dream in Indian culture*.

At a key point in Manil Suri's tale, one of the residents of the building has a vision, in which Vishnu appears in the guise of the deity of the same name. He then makes him an offering of a mango. This mango will be the trigger for the twentieth dream, which is very interesting for many reasons.[6] This dream seems to constitute the heart of the novel. It is a dream of fertility, and the mango comes across as a symbol of both joy and fertility. Happy fertility, also associated with sensuality, appears in the word for mango in Hindi and in several Indian languages *aam* (आम), which can be associated with *kaam* (काम), desire, and in particular sexual desire (found in *Kama-Sutra* for example). At first glance, it is a dream with a strong erotic content, since Vishnu meets the mango goddess there. However, beyond the eroticism of the mango, which is found in the twenty-first dream, the roundness of the mango can be associated with a cyclical idea of life as well as with the circularity of history in Indian culture. We can then, in the light of Marie-Louise von Franz's reflections on dreams, reread this passage and treat it as a dream of consolation, showing the possibility of a rebirth for Vishnu. This dream then also becomes a dream announcing death. When Vishnu plucks the mangoes, and after having impregnated the goddess with his seed, his task is accomplished. And when he watches the goddess "tread to her orchards," he watches her leave him. If we consider her as an embodiment of life, he is indeed seeing life departing from him and is therefore witnessing the announcement of his own death.

The goddess related to mangoes is Lakshmi. She is the consort of God Vishnu, and as such, she has special significance in the dreams of the man Vishnu. She is the one he has been waiting for and looking for. Marie-Louise von Franz, in *Dreams and Death*, analyzes several dreams in which the person on the verge of death is married to death or to someone who can represent death. This marriage might symbolize that the person on the verge of death is about to unite with the cosmic universe. The same idea is found in Dream 28, when Vishnu ends up meeting Lakshmi in her own guise:

> *One by one the divine bodies separate, and he sees her feature emerge. Like the moon from behind parting clouds, like the stars after a rain. She walks towards him, her body wet from the Ganges, flowers garlanding her bosom, perfumes rising from her skin. She reaches all four of her hands out — he finds, magically, that he can take each one of hers in one of his own.*
> *He feels her fingers rub against his. Not the human sense of feeling, that he no longer possesses, but a deeper, more profound contact — what souls would experience when they caressed, were they composed of skin and flesh. Her arms draw his body close to hers, and the feeling spreads down his chest, his stomach, his groin, to wherever they make contact. Buds open and turn into fruit between them, rivulets of milk slide over their skin. He sees fields of mustard sprouting from the ground around, their yellow heads rising towards the sun. She touches her lips to his: he tastes the lushness of forests, the sweetness of springs. He looks into the face with which he has journeyed through so many lives — he is part of her and she is part of him.*

[6] See the appendix for a full text of this dream.

> *His body enters hers. It is like the earth opening to admit him.* pp. 300-301.

Beyond what one can notice in common between this meeting with Lakshmi in her own guise, and the previous meeting with the mango goddess, and beyond the marriage with death, we can see here an image of the Inner Self, in which case, Lakshmi could represent the soul of Vishnu (the man), and, as he abandons his earthly envelope on the landing, this reunion with Lakshmi can be interpreted as the promise of the immortality of the soul.

But here again, there is some subtlety. The one who undergoes this meta-human experience is Vishnu, but it is not the Vishnu lying on the landing, nor the one who stopped near the door to the terrace (which I will soon discuss), but a third Vishnu, dreamt and thought of by the second. We have here a dream within a dream. A sort of *mise en abyme* that could represent the universe itself. The man Vishnu thinks he is the god of the same name, and this dream is what he thinks he must find on the terrace, after entering the door. This is a great gathering of gods, and a key to understanding other dreams. Because, is present at this meeting, a divinity that Vishnu does not recognize.

> *Only one god does not take part in the festivity — Vishnu sees him all dressed in red and green, standing apart from the rest. The god nods gravely, and raises his mace in greeting, but Vishnu does not recognize him.* p. 300.

Vishnu does not recognize him, but the reader does. We know it is Yama, the god of death. The accuracy of colours (red and green) has its significance. The colour red, as we have already observed, is omnipresent in the dreams of Vishnu. Red is the colour of marriage, and we know what interpretation we can make of marriage in that context, but it is also the colour of death. Dreams announce to Vishnu that he is approaching his end. But Vishnu seems to need time to understand and accept his fate. Another symbol of this path to death and acceptance is the image of the stairs.

Throughout the novel, and through his dreams, Vishnu climbs stairs. He starts from his landing and heads for the roof terrace. Along the way, he passes the doors of the inhabitants of the building, which leads to new dreams, on the sidelines of Vishnu's ascension. Stairs, like bridges, are particularly important elements of dreams, and more broadly, imagination. They represent the junction, the link between two worlds. The stairs, by their upward movement, can all the more easily signify this ascent to the heavens. The stairs are what binds the earth to the cosmic sky, abode of gods.

This ascending path is also a path of renunciation. As he ascends, Vishnu loses his weight, becomes light, loses his ability to feel and to touch, and he loses his grip on reality.

Accepting the comfort brought to him by the thought of Mr. Jalal, who believes that he is Lord Vishnu, helps him continue on his difficult path. But doubts arise quickly enough and Vishnu's thoughts contradict each other. It is finally when he arrives on the roof terrace that Vishnu understands and gets his questions answered.

> *Suddenly, an answer comes to him, an answer that stops him in misstep. What if he is dying? What if these new abilities are not powers, but symptoms — symptoms of death? What if he is climbing, not to immortality, but to nothingness? The steps spiraling out in front of him — so few that he can almost count them — what if this is all that remains between him and the end ? He imagines reaching the top and opening the door, stepping out to the terrace, and finding all the gods have vanished. All except the solitary red-and-green-decked figure, standing by the parapet. The figure turns around and beckons to him with its mace. Recognition comes with a shock — it is Yama, the god of death.* p. 302.

But while the reader is as impatient as Vishnu to know what is behind the terrace door, the author still has a few surprises in store for us. The first belongs to the flash of Bollywood. And redolent of Jaques' remark in Shakespeare's *As you like it* "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players," the penultimate chapter is a *mise en abyme* of the novel and the story, which contributes to further multiplying the avatars of Vishnu.

As Vishnu climbs the stairs, he remembers the stories his mother used to tell him. These are essentially made up of the accounts of the various avatars of Vishnu and the stories of Jeev, stories of a "yogi spirit born nine hundred and ninety thousand times." (p.53). It seems far from trivial that Vishnu, on the verge of death, recalls those stories which multiply identity, and which by the very name of Jeev refer to *jiva*,[7] those imperfect living beings who fear death. We have seen how the sensations, although fainter and fainter, aroused dreams haunted by memories of a "trinity" of women; how, despite their differences, all these female figures have the function of opening the way, of leading to other spaces. In this sense, they can be identified with the eternal feminine, who guides towards transcendence. With the memory of Jeev's stories and Vishnu's avatars, and through dreams, Vishnu (the man) finally comes to the recognition of his own self. It is by the multiplication of identifying figures that he is able to recognize his self. And this self-recognition enables him to prepare for death and afterlife, allows him to reach the terrace door and its mysteries and help him leave. The final *mise en abyme*, which Jeev's story has carried from Vishnu's eighth dream and his first appearance, reinforces the idea of the cyclical nature of life and the possibility of rebirth. The dreams or the choice of a number of memories prepare the Inner Self, the soul, for death while carrying within them the hope of a renewal, a new birth, and a new story.

[7] R. Swarnalatha, "Ambiguous Divinity in Manil Suri's *The Death of Vishnu*," in *Indian Writings in English*, ed. Binod Mishra and Sanjay Kumar (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2006), 177-189.

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Appendix: **Dream no. 20**

(before leaving Mr. Jalal had left a mango near Vishnu as an offering).

Mangoes. So full, so sweet, so scented, the oranges and yellows of sunlight. So this is the food gods get offered, Vishnu thinks. Ah, mangoes.

From the orchard mist she emerges. The mango goddess. Her figure lush with mango leaves as she makes her way across the shadows of trees. She stands in front of Vishnu and lets her cloak of leaves drop. Her body is bountiful with fruit underneath. Mangoes, ripe and perfumed, grow from her bosom, they swing from her arms, hang heavily from her thighs.

Vishnu brings his face to her neck and breathes her fragrance in. He touches a mango attached to her breast, and traces the curve of its smooth skin. His fingers linger at the node at the base, swollen, and yielding to his touch. He closes his hand over the mango, she quivers as he plucks it off her skin. Sap oozes out of the rupture, he puts his lips on her breast to stem the flow. She presses her arms around his head and lets him taste her essence.

She directs him to another mango, growing between her thighs. He touches it and pulls on it, anticipation plays on her lips. He detaches it with a snap, and sees pain twinge across her face. Sap flows out again, more abundant, more fertile this time, filling his mouth with her feminine nectar.

One by one, he plucks all the mangoes from her body. When he is done, she stands before him, naked, clothed only in the scars of her harvest. He spreads her cloak of mango leaves on the ground and she lays herself down upon it. He kneels between her legs, and kisses a scar still wet with sap.

She guides his body into hers. Tears moisten her eyes. As he fills her with seed, she arches back her neck to face the dying sun.

Afterwards, he drapes the cloak around her. He watches her tread to her orchard through the twilight. Underneath the leaves, he knows, her scars are already beginning to sprout. With buds of fruits barely visible, fruits that will grow and ripen in the next day's sun.

He looks at the mangoes she has left behind, scattered on the ground. They will sustain the universe until she returns. » p. 189-190 (Chapter 9)

THE SUNDARBANS AS A DREAM EXPERIENCE IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie's magic realism owes a lot to Hindu cosmology and it is especially the concept of reality vs illusion, maya, that is reflected in his story-telling. As a counterpart to reality, imagination as related to dream is part and parcel of Rushdie's act of creation, the different uses and representations of dream being found in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, *The Satanic Verses* and *Midnight's Children*, as well as in *Imaginary Homelands*. Though grounded in cosmology, the concept of maya serves as a suitable tool for interpretations of the psyche's processes and conditions and of the unconscious. "In the Sundarbans" chapter of *Midnight's Children* is an example of such a treatment. The water world of the Sundarbans jungle is portrayed as a dreamlike environment into which the four protagonists are drawn and where they embark on a kind of spiritual voyage towards recognition and finally towards responsibility and adulthood. My article analyzes the ways in which Rushdie constructs this environment and the characters' progress in terms of dream as a representation of the unconscious.

Keywords: dream, Hindu cosmology, magic realism, reality, the unconscious

Salman Rushdie's highly imaginative narrative technique that consists in using a framework of a realistic and/or mundane setting into which elements of the fantastic, magic and mysticism, myths and legends, as well as fairy tales or other metaphysical narratives are brought falls within the literary practice of magic realism.

In Rushdie's writing, notions of *real*, on the one hand, and *apparent*, on the other, are often negotiated, relativized, and/or compromised through *dream*, and it is frequently the *reality* of the *self* that is scrutinized, while the dream is viewed as the psyche's tool to deal with the unresolved issues of the conscious through the unconscious. Harcharan Singh Arora

notes that "Magic Realism is a style of writing which sometimes describes dreams as though they were real, and real events as though they were dreams."[1]

Rushdie frequently resorts to the use of dreams in his writing. In *The Satanic Verses*, for instance, the narrator negotiates the novel's arrangement of reality through a character's dream while informing the reader that this is the case. In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, the writer takes the boy Haroun on a healing dreamlike fairy-tale trip which starts in the valley of K. identified as either "Kache-Mer" or "Kosh-Mar," homophones, respectively, of the French "cache-mer," "the place that hides a Sea," and "cauchemar," "a nightmare."[2] Dreams have been used by other writers too in order to move their narration forward and/or drive home their point. The classical example is that of Franz Kafka whose protagonist in his short story "The Metamorphosis" ("Die Verwandlung", 1915), wakes up to find himself transformed into a monstrous insect, after being disturbed by a nightmare.

These as well as many other works show that

> [t]he dream is specifically the utterance of the unconscious. Just as the psyche has a diurnal side which we call consciousness, so also it has a nocturnal side: the unconscious psychic activity which we apprehend as dreamlike fantasy

to borrow Carl Jung's words.[3] Dreams

> show us the unvarnished, *natural truth*, and are therefore fitted, as nothing else is, to give us back an attitude that accords with our *basic human nature* when our consciousness has strayed too far from its foundations and run into an impasse.[4]

While describing his act of creation, Rushdie states that "[t]he creatures of our imagination crawl out from our heads, cross the Frontier between dream and reality, between shadow and act, and become actual."[5] In his fiction, he treats dream and reality both as counterparts and as interrelated aspects. My article argues that the view of dream and the unconscious suggested above serves as a suitable basis for the interpretation of the Sundarbans chapter of *Midnight's Children*. The study will discuss the ways in which the Sundarbans narrative is constructed as a dreamlike environment and demonstrate how this depiction is related to Indian culture and its imagery. This analysis will subsequently clarify the significance of the Sundarbans

[1] Harcharan Singh Arora, "Hallucination and Fantastic Elements in Salman Rushdie's Fiction: A Critical Overview," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2018): 59. http://www.ijhssi.org:papers/vol7(3)/Version-2/J0703025962.pdf.
[2] Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 34, 40.
[3] Carl Gustav Jung, "The Practical Use of Dream Analysis," in *CW 16: The Practice of Psychotherapy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1974/2002), 95.
[4] Carl Gustav Jung, "The Meaning of Psychology for Modern Man," in *CW 10: Civilization in Transition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964/1978), 149. Emphases added.
[5] Rushdie, "Lecture at Yale University," 2002.

experience from the point of view of its protagonists. Indeed according to Jung, dream "is a natural phenomenon in which consciousness attempts to find meaning."[6]

First of all, the way Rushdie portrays the Sundarbans points directly to a noteworthy characteristic attributed to dreams: the chapter contains a great number of descriptive and palpably vivid visual images in quick succession**.**

> What characterizes the waking state is the fact that thought-activity takes place in *concepts* and not in *images*. Now dreams think essentially in images [...] Dreams [...] think predominantly in visual images,[7]

Freud had observed with respect to Schleiermacher. The Sundarbans chapter provides detailed and often magnified representations of animal and plant life ("million insects," "giant flies"), frequent references to colour or colourlessness/translucence, contrast enhancing at times the vividity of the image ("the translucent flies reddened"), depictions of the body condition of the characters (soaking, shivering, blood trickled down the legs) as well as their mental shape (Ayooba crying; "Farooq said, 'We're going to die'"), or else animalization, indeed even anthropomorphization of plants ("roots of the mangrove trees could be seen snaking about thirstily in the dusk;" "[t]he leaves in the heights of the great nipa palms began to spread like immense green cupped hands, swelling in the nocturnal downpour").[8]

While discussing the Sundarbans chapter, researchers often touch on the dreamlike, nightmarish and/or devoid-of-reality world conjured up and/or its relation to the unconscious. Expressions like "dreamlike experience"[9] echo what Rushdie explicitly reiterates throughout the chapter: "dream-forest," "safety of dreams," "dreams," "dream-life," "jungle of dreams."[10] Terms like *hell* are frequently used and at times associated with the unconscious in order to refer to the painfully disturbing aspect of the protagonists' encounter with the Sundarbans forest. Thus Pradip Kumar Dey believes that "[o]n an imaginary plane, Saleem's withdrawal into the forests of the Sundarbans was like a descent into hell. In other words, it was like entering the subconscious which the rainforest externalized."[11] Neil Ten Kortenaar sees the Sundarbans not only as "a figurative descent into Hell" but also as a distinct environment:

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[6] Richard Walsh, "Dreaming and Narration," in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, ed. Peter Hühn et al. (Hamburg: Hamburg University, 2012). http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/dreaming-and-narration. See also Maria Ilena Marozza, "When Does a Dream Begin to 'Have Meaning'? Linguistic Constraints and Significant Moments in the Construction of the Meaning of a Dream," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 50 (2005), 697–98, and Carl Gustav Jung, *Dream Analysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1928-30).

[7] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. and transl. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1899/1998), 82. See also Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Psychologie,* in *Collected Works*, ed. L. George (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1862), 351.

[8] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Picador, 1981/1982), 359-362.

[9] Arora, "Hallucination," 61.

[10] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children,* 360, 363, 366, 367, 368.

[11] Pradip Kumar Dey, *Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors (P) LTD., 2008), 63, 64.

"The Sundarbans, a jungle area in the Ganges delta, belong to a time before earth and sea are divided, to the 'primeval world' from which selves and nations emerge, before mirrors, 'before clock towers' and time, before words."[12]

As a rather specific environment, the area of the Ganges delta conveniently represents a counterpart to the world hitherto known to the protagonists, a space into which Saleem, who has become identified as *buddha*, and his companions, the three child-soldiers "Ayooba Shaheed Farooq," escape from the raging war, "south south south to the sea," heading on their boat towards "an impossible endless huge green wall, stretching right and left to the ends of the earth!"[13] Already while depicting the entryway to the Sundarbans,

Photo of the Sunderbans by Mamun Srizon, Courtesy: Unsplash.com

Rushdie alerts his readers that the characters are approaching the jungle which is identified in terms of "impossible," "ends of the earth," with "strange alien birds," and the picture is full when a peasant figure called Father Time is shot by Ayooba and "Time lies dead."[14] Temporality, in addition to space, is thus redefined. The four are "swallowed up" by an environment "so thick that history has hardly ever found the way in."[15] The natural setting

[12] Neil Ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2004), 220-221.
[13] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children,* 359.
[14] Rushdie, Ibid., 359.
[15] Rushdie, Ibid., 358, 359.

represents a different *reality* because, as Önder Çetin believes, "the rules and borders of the Sundarbans are not set by the governments but by nature."[16] Other descriptions such as "historyless anonymity" or "the unreality of the trees"[17] only emphasize the difference.

If dreams "are pure nature" as Jung claims,[18] and if the framework of a natural environment such as the Sundarbans appears appropriate to express a metaphorical space which forms a counterpart to the space in which the protagonists have lived and which they have just left, then it can be seen as the most profoundly natural, instinctual sphere of their psyche – devoid of the reality perceived by consciousness – that is represented here by the unconscious and revealed through dream, i.e. that which has been suppressed by the conscious part of the mind, that which the mind does not want to or cannot admit, or that which the mind has not satisfactorily coped with. Through dream *id* expresses itself.

As already indicated, when creating this nature environment Rushdie takes great pains to see to it that it is fully secluded and separated from the preceding setting while installing an "impossible endless huge green wall"[19] as a symbol of such seclusion and separatedness. All these specifications point to an entirely isolated and distinct scene, other than real, a setting apart, whose disconnection from both time and history can be perceived as straightforwardly suggesting dream. Hildebrandt speaks of

> the completeness with which dreams are secluded and separated from real and actual life. [...] A dream is something completely severed from the reality experienced in waking life, something, as one might say, with a hermetically sealed existence of its own, and separated from real life by an impassable gulf. It sets us free from reality, extinguishes our normal memory of it and places us in another world and in a quite other life-story which in essentials has nothing to do with our real one.[20]

Severed from the former reality, Rushdie's four protagonists are engulfed by the jungle and surrounded thoroughly with water – they are swallowed up. The jungle as an environment is fully and hermetically sealed, "closed like a tomb,"[21] during their trip through water. When speeding on a boat on a large network of river channels, one of them, Ayooba, is so overwhelmed by this new set of circumstances that he starts crying "for three hours or days or weeks,"[22] the number three being "a dynamic number leading up to the condition of

[16] Önder Çetin, "Finding the Self in the Otherness of Nature: the Sundarbans and Postcolonial Identity in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*," *Ankara Universitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 10(2), (2019): 57. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c641/5d8d091c05888facf4126231a7712414568f.pdf?_ga=2.27847356.1885283764.1586271889-1410253040.1585927012, accessed August 12, 2020.
[17] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children,* 360, 361.
[18] Jung, "The Meaning of Psychology," 149.
[19] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children,* 359.
[20] Friedrich Wilhelm Hildebrandt, *Der Traum und seine Verwerthung für's Leben* (Leipzig: Schloemp, 1875), 8 ff. Qtd by Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* 43.
[21] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children,* 360.
[22] Rushdie, Ibid., 360.

completeness,"[23] so that the rainfall which follows makes "his tears unnecessary."[24] The rain becomes so heavy that the jungle itself begins to grow. Far away from the former *reality,* here where even the fruits are different, the water is continuously rising and the boat starts to be filled with rain water: such is the representation of the water envelope in which the four are wrapped, enclosed, as it were, in the "sepulchral greenness"[25] of the dream forest, this being all but a normal, usual condition.

Rushdie's straightforward relativization of reality in order to differentiate the jungle setting from the preceding one is compelling in that it directs one's attention to the Hindu concept of ***maya***, reality vs. illusion, which, further on, helps us understand the significance of water. According to the concept of *maya*, the everyday reality as we know and live it is ephemeral, temporary and apparent, and in fact, just an illusion vis-à-vis a higher, *real*, reality that is permanent but not immediately accessible. The higher reality can be achieved by an individual usually only after a great number of rebirths when they reach a state of *moksha*, a unification with the Absolute. Nevertheless, parallels have been formulated by various philosophers and scholars who have it that the Hindu concept of *maya* allows, as, for example, Heinrich Zimmer argues, "for a cautious, intuitive reading in terms of psychology – the psychology of the conscious and unconscious. [...] Māyā is as much a psychological as a cosmic term."[26] Sudhir and Katharina Kakar mention the general belief of Indian people that relativizes reality: ultimate reality is "related to everyday reality in the same way that waking consciousness is related to a dream."[27] The contrast between reality and illusion (*maya*) is represented as a mind oscillating between a waking state and the hidden unconscious state that is mostly revealed through dreams.

A marked phenomenon of the protagonists' entrance to the *other-than-real* world of the Sundarbans is, as I have mentioned earlier, the presence of water. It is the "extraordinary environmental factors such as tidal waves and monsoon rains which project the rainforest other than what it really is."[28] As a concept closely related to water, *maya* is to be comprehended as *maya-shakti*, the personification of "the world-protecting, feminine,

[23] Frances M. Parks, "Malenka," in *Příběhy duše: moderní jungiánský výklad pohádek* II, ed. Murray Stein and Lionel Corbett, trans. Karel Kessner (Brno: Emitos a Nakladatelství Tomáše Janečka, 1992/2006), 17.
[24] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children,* 361.
[25] Rushdie, Ibid., 360.
[26] Zimmer, *The Myths and Symbols*, 45.
[27] Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar, *The Indians: Portrait of a* People (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2007), 182.
[28] Çetin, "Finding the Self," 63.

maternal side of the Ultimate Being,"[29] through the creative power of which the whole universe and all existence originate in the cosmic ocean, and "waters are understood as a primary materialization of Vishnu's Māyā-energy."[30] Out of the *maya* power of the god Vishnu "came into being [...] the whole vast *dream* of the universe."[31] A different reality is experienced, the Hindu cosmology tells us, by a sage wandering inside the dreaming Vishnu's body, who, after slipping inadvertently out of the god's mouth and falling into the dark and endless cosmic ocean, ponders this essentially other situation asking himself which of the two, this or his previous existence, is a reality and which a dream, an illusion, or a product of his imagination. Zimmer explains that "'[r]eality' is a function of the individual. It is the result of the specific virtues and limitations of individual consciousness."[32] Another sage, eager to get to know the secret of Vishnu's maya, is compelled by the great god to get immersed in the waters of a pond only to come out as a girl, who subsequently marries, has children, lives her life, and finally loses her dear ones in a fire; only then the sage is restored to his former identity - he has thus experienced an entirely different identity, that of the other. Thus water represents a medium that makes passage from reality to its counterpart possible, a catalyst of creation, a birth, a new existence. Transformation of existence and/or identity with reference to the other becomes a re-birth, which is echoed in the significance of the Sundarbans experience for Saleem and his companions.

As Rushdie attempts to make the reader comprehend the characteristics of *dream* in its deep-rooted, literal as well as metaphorical sense, to grasp its *meaning* – meaning being of crucial importance for Saleem – he lets Saleem/buddha explain that the reality of the war has become too burdensome and impossible to bear: an "overdose of reality gave birth to a miasmic longing for flight into the safety of dreams."[33] As viewed by K. F. Burdach, dream is "to free us from the daily life, with its labours and pleasures, its joys and pains."[34] The horrors and pains of the war reality are thus left behind, even though the process of liberation is not devoid of suffering.

There is thus an urgent wish to escape from a difficult condition into dream. As concerns the visual images that are typical of the Sundarbans representation,

[29] Zimmer, *The Myths and Symbols*, 25.
[30] Zimmer, Ibid., 34.
[31] Zimmer, Ibid., 52. Emphasis added.
[32] Zimmer, Ibid., 39.
[33] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children,* 360.
[34] Karl Friedrich Burdach, *Die Physiologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft*, Vol. 3 (Leipzig: Voss, 1826-32/1838), 499. Qtd by Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* 41.

> [d]reams construct a *situation* out of these images; they represent an event which is actually happening; as Spitta[35] puts it, they 'dramatize' an idea. But this feature of dream-life can only be fully understood if we further recognize that in dreams [...] we appear not to think but to experience.[36]

The situation experienced by Saleem/buddha and his three companions in the Sundarbans is not a smooth and relaxing escape from the horrors of the war. The dream turns out to be, in the end, different from what was expected, "both less and more,"[37] in Rushdie's words. What is *less* becomes soon apparent as the four are tortured by the unwelcoming environment: they have hardly anything to eat or drink and suffer from a severe diarrhea to the point that they almost die. The atmosphere built up by the nightmarish dream is at first that of a near-death condition.

Dream represents both *less* and *more* in terms of "a primary manifestation of a person's psychological world," as Rudolph Bauer observes. Dreams are related to "the archaic meanings belonging to the developmental history of the person."[38] Their dream furnishes visions for the characters while they are being tortured by what Rushdie calls "punishments." These are memories of murders and other evil acts committed and kept under wraps that are now brought to light, which lead to realizations on their part and reproaches of their conscience: "the peasant leaked a colourless fluid which flowed out of the hole in his heart and on to Ayooba's gun arm" and the next morning Ayooba cannot move his arm; more torment comes as well from "the accusing eyes of the wives of men they had tracked down and seized, the screaming and monkey-gibbering of children left fatherless by their work."[39]

Moreover, as the torturing visions bring Saleem-buddha's soldier companions back to their early childhoods, the readers discover their family traumas and the circumstances surrounding them. Here the journey acquires the characteristics of personal progress and acquisition of responsibility, the responsibility potential having been neutralized before by the war in which a blind follow-up of orders was impossible to avoid. "So it seemed that the magical jungle, having tormented them with their misdeeds, was leading them by the hand towards a new adulthood."[40] The appearance of the boys' family members, a brother, a mother, and a father

[35] Heinrich Theodor Johannes Spitta, *Die Schlaf - und Traumzustände der menschlichen* Seele (Tübingen: Fues, 1878/1882), 145.
[36] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* 83.
[37] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children,* 360.
[38] Rudolph Bauer, "Dream Symbolization in Light of Analytic and Experiential Thinking," *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, Vol. 15 (1), (1985): 20. Emphasis added.
[39] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children,* 363.
[40] Rushdie, Ibid., 364.

demanding their son to earn his name,[41] is "the metaphorical emergence of figures [in the dream] that lead to a new sense of the self."[42]

"In dreams begin responsibilities," says Rushdie elsewhere, alluding to Delmore Schwartz's short story.[43] Even though the four are physically (young) adults, "a new adulthood" requires more. The realization and acknowledgement of responsibility of the wrongdoings they have committed together with the understanding of the family traumas is part and parcel of a new, adult and self-asserted identity, the *more*, towards which the dream situation of the Sundarbans jungle leads them. Thus the one who is buddha and whose Saleem identity of the past together with the related traumatic events is blurred to the point he does not remember even his name finds his memory restored. The symbolic nickname Buddha connotes a change as important as enlightenment. "Successful dream work […] educates in the sense that a person is led out of childhood perceptions and lifted out of the preoccupation with past hurt and fixations on past deprivation."[44]

Photo of the Sunderbans by Ludmila Volná

Saleem's enlightening awareness occurs when one of all the blind Sundarbans snakes, a blind and translucent venomous serpent, bites his heel. In the Hindu mythology, serpents are

[41] Rushdie, Ibid., 364.
[42] Bauer, "Dream Symbolization," 20. Emphasis added.
[43] Rushdie, "Lecture." Qtd by Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text,* 53.
[44] Bauer, "Dream Symbolization," 21.

"personifying and directing the terrestrial waters of the lakes and ponds, rivers and oceans"[45] and as such, they are perceived as "the symbol for water,"[46] whereas in Buddhism serpents "personify […] the life energy – beneficent but blind."[47] In contrast to the perception of the reptile as healer, the Judeo-Christian tradition, as represented in the biblical books of Genesis and Revelation, sees the Serpent, at times referred to as Dragon, as a symbol of Satan, Devil, and thus of a personified evil. Saleem's memory is restored and thus through "a recreation of his primary Self" he achieves "wholeness as a character,"[48] in other words, "the descent into hell is also a recovery of [the] repressed, elemental selves," which corresponds to "rebirth motifs,"[49] to quote Damien Grant.

As Rushdie's "[m]agic realism is closely connected with a nation's mythology and religion,"[50] the four protagonists are brought to a "lovely" space at the centre of which stands a Hindu temple. There the accomplishment is completed while the four experience an intense sexual relationship with four houris through which they realize "that this was what they had needed, what they had longed for without knowing it, that [...] they were leaving infancy behind for ever."[51]

Clearly, what has been hidden in the unconscious is revealed in the dream situation: the suppressed needs and desires relate to the very core of existence. The goddess Kali to whom the temple is dedicated stands here for "a state of pure Being, which is above all material manifestations" and constitutes so the preconditions for a new life,[52] "a new consciousness,"[53] that has been forged through the dream experience. Such an analysis resonates with Sudhir Kakar's explanation that, according to the Hindu belief, reality can be apprehended "only through those archaic, unconscious, preverbal processes of sensing and feeling [...] which are thought to be in touch with the fundamental rhythms and harmonies of the universe."[54]

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[45] Heinrich Zimmer, *The Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1946/1992), 59.
[46] Zimmer, Ibid., 37.
[47] Zimmer, Ibid., 69.
[48] J. Aungston and R. Kartikh, "Fragments of Human Life and Psycho Analysis of Indianans – A Reading of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*," *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IELS),* 4(2), (2019): 219. http://journal-repository.com/index.php/ijels/article/view/523.
[49] Damian Grant, *Salman Rushdie* (Horndon, Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd., 1999/2012), 55.
[50] Arora, "Hallucination," 61.
[51] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children,* 367.
[52] Jan Filipský, *Encyklopedie indické mytologie: Postavy indických bájí a letopisů* (Praha: Nakladatelství LIBRI, 1998), 80. See also Dušan Zbavitel, Eliška Merhautová and Jan Filipský, *Bohové s lotosovýma očima: hinduistické mýty v indické literatuře tří tisíciletí* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 1997), 328.
[53] Bauer, "Dream Symbolization," 20, 21.
[54] Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World*, in Sudhir Kakar, *The Indian Psyche* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981/1998), 20.

While "nature itself, specifically a bioregion, is utilized to construct identity,"[55] the water imagery together with serpent as its symbol is used here as a vehicle of transformation, of radical change, an agent of *maya*. Similar representations of water symbolism are to be found in other Rushdie's works too, like *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* or *The Satanic Verses*, as well as in a number of works authored by Indian writers such as R. K. Narayan or Anita Desai. For Rushdie's characters in *Midnight's Children* water mediates re-birth; it is a womb, as "the river is still Her, the mother-water, goddess Ganga."[56] In the end, buddha, who is restored to his Saleem identity, and the three soldiers (children no longer), Ayooba, Shaheed and Farookh, have all woken up from the Sundarbans dreams which "even if they did not themselves come from another world, had at all events carried [the characters] off into another world,"[57] to use Freud's words. The interaction with otherness can be viewed as "a mode of access to possibilities of change and development within the self."[58] Finding "one's self"[59] is the outcome and essence of Saleem and his companions' dreamlike experience in the Sundarbans.

Rushdie's treatment of otherness is well worth noting: as the imaginative systems of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity – a Hindu Kali temple, B/buddha sitting under a tree and acquiring (a kind of) enlightenment, Pakistani boys having intimate relations with houris, a snake biting the protagonist's heel – are in Saleem's experience brought together, he can be perceived as a character that "embodies all the cultural traditions of Indian society."[60] This, of course, reflects both Rushdie's multicultural views and his positioning of Saleem as an alter ego of India throughout the novel.

Clearly, it can be at this point argued that the accomplishment related to the quest for identity and adulthood emerges as "[t]he information is […] gleaned from the dream product and used and assimilated by the ego consciousness," which permits to "expand consciousness of the self."[61] As the enormous tidal wave throws the four characters out of the Sundarbans they will wake up and face anew the highs and lows of the everyday reality. The sea change brought by the experience of the rainforest "ruled by the tidal waves shaping the land

[55] Çetin, "Finding the Self," 57.
[56] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children,* 358.
[57] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* 41.
[58] Giles Gunn, *The Interpretation of Otherness: Literature, Religion and the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 188. Qtd by Scott Slovic, "Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology: The Interiority of Outdoor Experience," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* ed. C. Glotfelty and H. Fromm (Athens: U of Georgia, 1996), 352. See also Çetin, "Finding the Self," 61.
[59] Çetin, "Finding the Self," 61.
[60] Aungston and Kartikh, "Fragments," 219.
[61] Bauer, "Dream Symbolization," 20, 21.

according to the planetary movements of the moon and the earth"[62] can be understood as a life opportunity reserved for the characters' future. While the rainforest may be perceived as pointing to "a magic completely different from the magical realist elements of the novel,"[63] Rushdie's Sundarbans forest represents "without any doubt a fantasy where the narrative slides completely into dreams."[64]

[62] Çetin, "Finding the Self," 62.
[63] Neil Ten Kortenaar, "Midnight's Children and the Allegory of History," *Ariel* (2), (1995), 62.
[64] Arora, "Hallucination," 61.

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Part II
Dream India, Diasporic Homelands

SRI AUROBINDO'S DREAMS: A REASSESSMENT

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi's "The India of my Dreams' is a seminal text in any discussion of dreaming India. Similarly, Aurobindo Ghose's experiments with dreams are incontrovertible. While Nehru's tryst with destiny speech has been much quoted, Sri Aurobindo's speech on his five dreams on the day of India's independence deserves to be revisited in the contemporary context.

As early as 1942, Sri Aurobindo wrote an intriguing poem called "The Dream Boat" in which he regretted the absence of the gold god who visited him in his dream boat. Sri Aurobindo's yoga of sleep and dreams makes a distinction between dreams and subliminal dream experiences. His dream theory is a synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophies and re-interprets the nature and function of sleep and dream and connects the human to the divine.

The materialization of Sri Aurobindo's dream world in the form of Auroville, a universal town "designed to bring together the values of different cultures and civilizations in a harmonious environment" is intended to achieve human unity. Sri Aurobindo foresaw the necessity to phase out nationalism and envision a multilateral citizenship.

Keywords: nation-goddess, dream experience, Auroville, Savitri, Sri Aurobindo

In his 1985 essay entitled "'In God We Trust,'" Salman Rushdie had insisted on the importance of dreams: "The dream is part of our very essence (…) waking as well as sleeping, our response to the world is essentially *imaginative*: that is, picture-making (…)."[1] Rushdie, whose admiration for Shakespeare was well known was merely building on what Shakespeare had so memorably observed in *The Tempest*: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on."[2] Rushdie had earlier argued in *Midnight's Children* that the idea of India itself was a "dream ...

[1] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta Books, 1992), 377.

[2] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act IV, Scene I, words uttered by Prospero. http://shakespeare.mit.edu/tempest/full.html, accessed July 30, 2020.

mass fantasy... collective fiction ... new myth ... fable."[3] The birth of the nation at midnight had quite naturally facilitated the dream metaphor. By the side of the dream India of the outsiders, exist what Rushdie calls imaginary homelands, i.e., Indias of the mind of the diaspora.[4]

Much like Greece, India as a civilization was interested in the causes, types, content and significance of dreams. The Greeks believed that significant dreams represented prophecies or signs that required symbolic interpretation or visitations by Gods and ghosts.[5] Greek mythology and semiotics of dreams were to weigh on Freud's 20th century theorization of the interpretation of dreams.[6] Hindus believe that the world itself is a dream conjured up by Vishnu and our phenomenal existence *maya* or mere illusion. Indeed the *Rig Veda* mentions not only dreams, but also nightmares and day dreams. "Swapna", the dreaming state, is one of the four states of the *atman* along with waking, dreamless sleep and the transcendental state. Dreams have been classified into seven categories by Acharya Charaka, i.e., "seen (*dṛṣṭ a*), heard (*śruta*), experienced (*anubhūta*), influenced by inner wants or desires (*prārthita*), created by the imagination (*kalpita*), manifested (*bhāvita*) and generated by an imbalance of the temperaments (*doṣaja*)".[7] In Indian literature and culture, dreams, as can we see, are situated in the uneasy cusp between myth and science.

The category of dreams that Rushdie refers to falls within the *kalpita* variety. The struggled for independence went hand in hand with the Utopian dream of a nation where political equality as well as socio-economic equity were to prevail. A postcolonial nation-state was thus to emerge from the embers of the British Empire which itself had taken over the territory of India from the Mughal Empire. While partition was the paradigm that shaped the destiny of India and Pakistan, the challenge that leaders of independent India had to take up was the necessity to consolidate a united India from the diverse princely states. This meant that the leaders construct a narrative that would cover the space of the nation with a cultural memory "forged by history [and] interwoven into geography."[8] Only Indian cinema dares to perform this daunting task. However, at the very birth of the nation, the idea of India was a

[3] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Picador, 1982), 112.
[4] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 10.
[5] Miriam Kamil, "Dreams and Prophecies in Ancient Greece," ancient-sources.net, 24 September 2014. https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends-europe/dreams-and-prophecy-ancient-greece-002107, accessed July 30, 2020.
[6] Daniel Pick and Lindal Roper, "Introduction," in *Dreams and History: The Interpretation of Dreams from Ancient Greece to Modern Psychoanalysis*, ed. Daniel Pick (London: Routledge, 2003), 3.
[7] Boban Eranimos and Art Funkhouser, "The Concept of Dreams and Dreaming, A Hindu Perspective," *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* 4, no. 4 (2017): 110. https://ijip.in/articles/the-concept-of-dreams-and-dreaming-a-hindu-perspective/, accessed July 30, 2020.
[8] Julia Kristeva, "Le temps des femmes", in Les nouvelles maladies de l'âme" (Paris: Fayard, 1993), 298.

contested concept. Apart from the two nation theory that Muhammad Ali Jinnah endorsed,[9] the choice was between a secular nation that accommodates difference or a Hindu nation. The tension is reflected in the very naming of the country in the constitution: "India also known as Bharat."[10] Aijaz Ahmed calls the idea of the Hindu nation for what it is: majoritarian nationalism based on the Hindu Maha Sabha leader Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's *hindutva* ideology which "designates a blood-and-soil cultural essence unique to India."[11]

Mahatma Gandhi's essay written in 1947, "The India of my Dreams" is a seminal text in any discussion of the imagined nation. Gandhi wanted a democratic India whose constitution would empower the poor, do away with class and communal differences, eradicate caste, intoxicating drugs and drinks, establish equality between men and women and peace with the rest of the world. Neither exploiting not being exploited, India was to have the smallest army. "All interest not in conflict with the interests of the dumb millions will be scrupulously respected, whether foreign or indigenous," Gandhi concluded.[12] He saw India as a *karma bhumi* (land of duty) in contradiction to the *bogha bhumi* (the land of enjoyment). By investing the national territory with moral superiority, Gandhi wanted to raise India's status above some Western nations that hinged on a rather materialistic conception of the nation.

Gandhi did not live to see the independent India of his dreams take shape. Nehru outlined his vision of India in his *Discovery of India*. Rejecting the allegory of India as Bharat Mata, Nehru put forward the idea that India was a palimpsest[13] of the different sediments of its history, a notion that Rushdie would later play with to coin the term "palimpstine".[14] Aurobindo Ghose proposed another way of defining the new nation:

> For what is a nation? What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation. […] The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred million people.[15]

Indeed after the partition of Bengal in 1905, Aurobindo and his brother Barindra were planning to build a temple in the honour of Bhowani Bharati (the Nation Goddess) before being imprisoned by the British for seditious activities. Patriotism in the West refers to the

[9] Ashutosh Varshney, "India, Pakistan, Kashmir. Antinomies of nationalism," *Asian Survey* 31, no. 11 (Nov., 1991): 997-1019.
[10] The Constitution of India. January 26, 1950, https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india, accessed July 30, 2020.
[11] Aijaz Ahmed, "Strictly Technical," *London Review of Books* 42, no. 6 (2020), https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v42/n06/aijaz-ahmad/strictly-technical, accessed July 30, 2020.
[12] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *India of My Dreams* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1960). https://www.mkgandhi.org/indiadreams/chap01.htm, accessed July 30, 2020.
[13] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 1995 reprint), 59.
[14] Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Random House, 1995), 226.
[15] Aurobindo Ghose, *Bhawani Mandir, a pamphlet for the revolutionary preparation of the country, 1905.* https://www.aurobindo.ru/workings/sa/01/0015_e.htm, accessed July 30, 2020.

feelings of love for, loyalty towards and pride in one's country, while its Indian equivalent "Desh Bakthi" (devotion to the notion) borrows the sentiment from religious discourse. In Bakthi poetry, the devotee can imagine the God in several forms and take different postures to offer their love. Aurobindo Ghose chose to worship the nation as a goddess. The influence of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee whose portrayal of the sanyasi rebellion in *Anand Math*[16] depicts the three faces of Bharat Mata (Mother India) as Goddesses Jagaddhatri, Kali and Durga is quite evident here.

While the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty tried to build a modern, secular and socialist India, the idea of India[17] has taken a politically nationalistic, religiously fundamental and economically liberal turn with the arrival of BJP to power. Indeed the BJP justifies the scrapping of Article 370 of the Constitution that gave a special status to Kashmir and the carving of Jammu and Kashmir into three different union territories as a way of fulfilling Sardhar Vallab Bhai Patel's dream of "one India."[18] Opposition leaders criticize the BJP for appropriating the legacy of the iron man of India. As Rama Chandra Guha explains in his seminal book *Makers of Modern India*, Patel was more of a "doer" than a "writer."[19] His action as home minister and deputy prime minister declaring the Hindu fundamentalist group Rashtriya Sevak Sangh unlawful showed that Patel abhorred hatred and violence. "It was not necessary to spread poison in order to enthuse the Hindus and organize for their protection," he wrote to RSS Chief M.S. Golwalkar in September 1948.[20]

Nehru's "Tryst with Destiny" speech[21] has been oft-quoted and become the matrix of many a narrative about the nation. Much less known is the message of the *Five Dreams* given by Sri Aurobindo at the request of the All India Radio Trichinopalli and broadcast on 14th August 1947.[22] The title of the speech harks back to the Five Dreams of the Buddha[23] which gave him

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[16] Bankim Chandra Chatterjje, *Anand Math*, 1882, trans. Aurobindo Ghose and Barindra Kumar Ghosh. Pondicherry: Auro e-Books, reprinted March 6, 2016.
[17] Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).
[18] "Sardar Patel's incomplete dream fulfilled with Article 370 scrapping: PM Modi", *The New Indian Express*, October 31, 2019. https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2019/oct/31/sardar-patels-incomplete-dream-fulfilled-with-article-370-scrapping-pm-modi-2055191.html, accessed July 30, 2020.
[19] Ramachandra Guha, *Makers of Modern India*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2011), 12.
[20] The Wire Staff, "When Sardar Patel Took on the 'Forces of Hate' and Banned the RSS", *The Wire*, October 31, 2019. https://thewire.in/history/sardar-patel-rss-ban-1948, accessed July 30, 2020.
[21] Nehru's full speech had been republished on line by *Hindustan Times* on August 12, 2018. https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/a-new-star-rises-jawaharlal-nehru-s-speech-on-the-birth-of-independent-india/story-fT9JIPYpMnz2OkRUgGNIZP.html, accessed July 30, 2020.
[22] The audio script is not available in the All India Radio archives. The transcript is available at https://aurosociety.org/society/index/1947%2C-August-15th-Message, accessed July 30, 2020. All the quotations in the article are from this transcript. Rabindranath Tagore told Aurobindo Ghose that he would be the voice through which India spoke to the world. Ironically, no trace of Sri Aurobindo's physical voice could be found even in the Ashram archives but rare memories of his disciples having heard his "melodious and soft voice with

a foreknowledge of his awakening to come. Ramachandra Guha credits Aurobindo Ghose with spiritualizing literature and politics, but does not take up his prodigious writing for consideration saying that it is of interest to only English speaking Indians of the middle class and did not last beyond his death,[24] which is a rather harsh evaluation of a major figure with an enduring legacy. Ghose's stature as a national leader had been somewhat marginalized because he was a revolutionary[25] who matured into a dreamer. Besides, he had renounced politics and taken refuge in French India. He was a nationalist who turned into a cosmopolitan and offered glimpses of transnational consciousness while the nation was not yet fully up and running. He rejected the religious, but retained the spiritual from Hinduism. If Gandhi was the Mahatma, Sri Aurobindo was honoured by the epithet Mahayogi. Indeed Srinivasan Aravamudan discusses Sri Aurobindo's writings in the framework of Guru English.[26]

My article takes stock of what happened to Sri Aurobindo's dreams for India in comparison to the dreams of other leaders, analyzes his yoga of sleep and dreams through the prism of his epic poem *Savitri* and discusses the materialization of his dream world in the form of Auroville, a universal town "designed to bring together the values of different cultures and civilizations in a harmonious environment"[27] to achieve human unity. The conclusion proposes a reading of Auroville as a symptom of the discontents of postcolonial civilization.

Five Dreams for India and the World

Sri Aurobindo starts his speech by remarking the coincidence between his date of birth and the date of birth of the nation. Though this reminds us of Rushdie's strategy in *Midnight's Children* making its protagonist Saleem Sinai to be born on the precise instant of the birth of the nation, in Ghose's case, it is strictly a fact. Sri Aurobindo gives history a spiritual twist by interpreting this fact "not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine

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a cultivated British accent." Peter Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* (New York: Columbia University, 2008), 330. The radio speech was all the more significant because Sri Aurobindo had withdrawn from talk and public meetings except for the four times yearly darshan since 1926. It was also in 1926 that he started signing his name as Sri Aurobindo, dropping the patronym.

[23] In the first dream, the Buddha saw his body lie on the ground and grow in size to cover India and Nepal. In the second dream, a plant germinated from his navel and grew vertically into the sky. In the third dream, he saw countless black- haired and white-robed beings worship him. In the forth dream, blue, golden, red and grey birds sat on his lap and turned white. In the final and fifth dream, he saw himself walking on excreta but they did not touch him. See "Gotama, the Buddha" in Vipassana Research Institute's vridamma.org. https://www.vridhamma.org/Gotama-the-Buddha, accessed July 30, 2020.

[24] Guha, *Makers of Modern India*, 12.

[25] Young Aurobindo's favourite poem was Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam*.

[26] Srinivasan Aravamudan, "From Indian Romanticism to Guru Literature", in *Guru English* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006), 63-104.

[27] "Auroville et la pensée de Sri Aurobindo, *Courrier de l'Unesco*, October 1972, 12. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000078384_fre, Accessed July 30, 2020.

Force that guided his steps on the work with which he began life, the beginning of its full fruition." Aurobindo looks upon the temporal coincidence as a sign from above acknowledging his mission on earth. To understand this extraordinary claim, we have to look back at Sri Aurobindo's life journey (1872-1950).

Image copyright: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Aurobindo Ghose was educated in England and won a classical scholarship at King's College, Cambridge, in 1890. Besides learning English and French, Latin and Greek, he studied Italian in order to appreciate Dante, and German to understand Goethe. To avoid taking up the ICS career which his parents wanted him to pursue, he skipped the riding test and came back to India to teach and write. He was involved in the revolutionary movements in Maharashtra and Bengal and wrote fiery anti-colonial articles in *Bande Mataram*, a journal he edited. In 1908, he was arrested for his revolutionary agitation by the British. While in prison, he had a mystic crisis. Acquitted in 1909, he took asylum in the French trading post of Pondicherry and ceased all his political activities. India's independence on his birthday was thus for him a sign from unseen and loftier realms vindicating his struggle.

The first of his dreams starts with an observation: India today is free but she has not achieved unity. Foreseeing the separation between states on the basis of language and the politization of the Hindu Muslim communal division, Sri Aurobindo dreams about a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. This anticipation has remained an unfilled dream in spite of Ambedkar's hopes[28] for a revolt by the depressed castes and women in the years following independence and the million mutinies that Naipaul

[28] Valerian Rodrigues ed., *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar* (New Delhi: OUP, 2002), 24.

evokes in his 1990 book of travels in India. Indeed the Indian government views Maoist insurgency in India as "the single biggest internal security challenge," as Arundhati Roy points out in her book, *Broken Republic*.[29] She identifies the Maoist revolt that took place in Naxalbari village in West Bengal in 1967 as a tribal uprising against the Indian state.

> The Maoists and the paramilitary are old adversaries and have fought old avatars of each other several times before: Telengana in the '50s, West Bengal, Bihar, Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh in the late 60s and 70s and then again in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra from the '80s all the way through to the present".[30]

The second dream is for the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilization. The imprint of the Bengali school of thought could be discerned here as the Tagores, Rabindranath the poet and Abanindranath the artist, looked to the East for inspiration. The influence of the Japanese writer and artist Okakura Kakuzō is felt in both Tagore's and Abanindranath's renewal of national traditions. As for Subhash Chandra Bose, the nationalist and contender against Nehru for the leadership of the Congress, he looked upon imperial Japan as model and reorganized the Indian National Army with Japanese support. Sri Aurobindo's second dream may be said to have come true with the emergence of China and India as economic powerhouses of the future. Indeed by taking into consideration the economic data provided by Angus Maddison according to which India and China accounted respectively for 24.4% and 22.3% shares of the world's GDP in 1700,[31] some political scientists prefer to use the term "resurgence"[32] rather than emergence to refer to the increased GDP of India and China. If China has recourse to the rhetoric of "peaceful rise", India is engaged in promoting yoga worldwide.[33] In other words, these Asian giants are keen on presenting the soft side of their power.

The third dream was a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind. Ahead of time, Sri Aurobindo prognosticates both globalization and the new multipolar world order arising out of the end of empires. After asserting that the unification of the human world is under way, Sri Aurobindo stresses the necessity for "an international spirit and outlook". For him, "the nation state mechanism cannot be full-fledged in providing peace and harmony to mankind, unless it is transformed into some kind of world

[29] Arundhati Roy, "Walking with the Comrades," in *Broken Republic* (Gurgaon, Haryana: Penguin Books, 2013), 27.
[30] Ibid., 28.
[31] Angus Maddison, *The World Economy* (Paris: OECD, 2006), 263.
[32] Alan Nankervis and Samir Chatterjee, "The resurgence of China and India: collaboration or competition?," Human *Systems Management* 30, no. 1-2 (2011): 97-113.
[33] The United Nations proclaimed 21 June as the International Day of Yoga on December 11, 2014.

union" as Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra argues.[34] Sri Aurobindo's call for the emergence of international forms and institutions were to be fulfilled later by the birth of institutions such as the World Conservation Union (1948) and World Peace Council (1950). His forecasting of such developments "as dual or multilateral citizenship, willed interchange or voluntary fusion of cultures" strikes us with the power of his intelligence and clairvoyance.

While in Europe thousands of desperate migrants and refugees are pushed back as a threat to national security and identity, India is sorting out its citizens in Assam on the basis of religion by implementing the provisions of the National Register of Citizens. Amit Chaudhuri has deconstructed this logic in his essay published in *The Guardian*: "the fraught rhetoric surrounding the NRC, where "illegal migrant" is time and again conflated with "Muslim", and "Muslim" with "foreigner", shows a disconnect between what Indians have historically known, felt and achieved as migrants, despite hostility and opposition, and how, at home, they perceive those they suddenly decide are the "other"." His conclusion is rather pessimistic. Indians have refashioned their identity, "wanting to be what we're not, wanting our nation to be what it can't be."[35] The Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 aims at increasing the number of Hindu citizens. Dual citizenships are quite common in Europe but not allowed in India. The government introduced the Person of Indian Origin card (2002) and the Overseas Citizenship of India cards (2005), the latter being the only entitlement available since 2015 for people who have an ancestral connection with India. In the light of the limitations to the nation state as a paradigm, what the world actually needs is a multilateral citizenship that recognizes the transnationalism at work in our interconnected world, but it remains a pipe dream for the time being.

The fourth dream was about the spiritual gift of India to the world. Sri Aurobindo sees Europe and America getting drawn by India's psychic and spiritual practice. This was particularly the case in the 1960s with the hippie counterculture movement. The attraction for Deepak Chopra's spiritual lessons in contemporary America is another concrete example. This state of affairs seems to be a result of what Sudhir Kakar calls "a rift between the romantic and rationalist visions of life. The romantic vision emphasizes an intimate connection between humankind and universe, between self and not-self, while the rationalist insists on an enduring

[34] Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra, "From Nation-State to Ideal Human Unity: An Analytical Discourse in Sri Aurobindo's Political Philosophy," *Indian Journal of Political Science* LXV, no. 2 (April June 2004): 145.
[35] Amit Chaudhuri, "A new India is emerging, and it is a country ruled by fear," *The Guardian*, 8 October 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/08/narendra-modi-bjp-india, accessed July 30, 2020.

separation between the two." Indeed Kakar sustains that "in most non-Western ones … the romantic vision never lost its ascendancy over the rational."[36]

If the first dream had to do with revolution within India, the fifth and last dream mentions "a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed him since he first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society." Sri Aurobindo's intuition might be connected by contemporary readers to the ecological consciousness which is emerging and where humanity is finally facing the truth of the anthropocene. In a way, Sri Aurobindo may be said to have recast Gaia[37] as Savitri.

Both Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo were deeply spiritual. Though we cannot discern a conflict of dreams in their visions of India, we can see that Gandhi has a down-to-earth attitude placing a non-violent India in a pacified world map; Sri Aurobindo's transcendental dreams are intended to elevate India, Asia, and other nations through spirituality to the uplifting of humanity as such. These dreams have to be distinguished from the Greater India (Akhand Bharat) dream of Hindu nationalists who want to encompass Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Cambodia within an enlarged India. If Gandhi was the father of the nation and Tagore its sage, Sri Aurobindo was undoubtedly its prophet because he posited the divinization of humanity as the "inevitable outcome and consummation of nature's evolutionary endeavour."[38] These five dreams from part and parcel of Aurobindho Ghose's integralist approach to life.

Savitri or Dream Crossing

August 15, 1947 was not the first time that Sri Aurobindo evoked his dreams. His epic poem, the second ever written in English after Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* or *The Life Divine*,[39] started in 1916, and revised ultimately and published in 1950, is, according to his companion Mirra Alfassa alias the Mother, "a prophetic vision of the

[36] Sudhir Kakar, The Resurgence of Imagination", *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 37, no.1, 2009. https://bulletin-archive.hds.harvard.edu/articles/winter2009/resurgence-imagination, accessed July 30, 2020.
[37] Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia. Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, tr. Cathy Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).
[38] Aurobindo Ghose, "Supermind, Mind and the Overmind Maya" in *The Life Divine*, Book 1, 1929, 289. Reprinted by the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library. http://www.collectedworksofsriaurobindo.com/index.php/readbook/29-Supermind,-Mind-and-the-Overmind-Maya-Vol-18-the-life-divine-volume-18
[39] Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri: A Legend and A Symbol*. The full text (763p.) republished by Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1997 can be downloaded here. https://www.auro-ebooks.com/savitri/, accessed July 30, 2020.

world's history, including the announcement of the earth's future."[40] It is in this long poem consisting of 12 books and 24,000 lines that Sri Aurobindo finetunes concepts which will form the basis of his theory of the spirituality of sleep and dreams.

"The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in *The Mahabharata* as a story of conjugal love conquering death," as Sri Aurobindo observes in his author's note to the book. In the poet's view, Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down to save Satyavan. Sri Aurobindo does not see them as allegories but as incarnations of conscious forces that teach Man how to achieve divine consciousness. Savitri achieves divine consciousness on the night that Sayavan was to die. The hallucinatory scene described in the Book entitled "Debate between Love and Death"[41] depicts her transfiguration which is a testimony to the transformative potential of dreams. The felicitous welding of sound and meaning in the manner of a Sanskrit mantra in the English text is what helps Aurobindo transport the reader to the dreamworld of Savitri. Dreams allow Savitri to build a bridge between the worlds of sleep and death. Her onirical experience represents the spiritual evolution of not only a woman, but the human soul, the humanity and the earth as such. Night is thus seen as a school of the *sadhana*. Murali Sivaramakrishnan opines that the long epic focuses "on how nature and human nature undergo a transforming divinization that does not forego difference and identity."[42]

Reading *Savitri* is an initiation into Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga. Sri Aurobindo postulates an invisible Supreme Being. The world is "an error of our sight", in other words, an illusion. Human beings are unevolved gods. Above them is the Superconscient God or Overmind. Below them sleeps the dark Inconscient. Nature is fumbling and matter inert. Life is a channel for God's invisible power. The body is but the brittle earthly base of the eternal soul. Dreams are products of the subconscient, the part that lies between consciousness and inconscience. "In the sleep, the consciousness goes to other planes and has experiences there and when these

[40] Mirra Alfassa, The Mother. "Facsimiles and a Talk." http://savitri.in/library/mother/the-mother-on-savitri/facsimiles, accessed July 30, 2020.

[41] In Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London: Granta, 1991), the battle between the lands of Gup (noise) and Chup (silence) is pictured as a war between and love and death, 125.

[42] Murali Sivaramakrishnan, "Toward a Spiritual Aesthetics of the Environment: Quality, Space, and Being in Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri"," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 18, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 302-322. In pages 314-15, the original tale is summed up." King Aswapathy has daughter Savitri, who falls in love with Satyavan, the son of a dispos- sessed and blind king Dyumatsena. It is foretold that Satyavan is die within a year of their marriage. Savitri is undaunted and they married. When Satyavan dies at the destined time, Savitri awaits Lord of Death to come and possess his soul. She follows the soul the nether realms. Despite her repeated requests Yama, the Lord death, is unrelenting in granting her the life of Satyavan. Nevertheless she persists and is finally able to overcome death with her perseverance and single-minded commitment. Satyavan is finally reunited with Savitri in an eternal life of happiness."

are translated perfectly or imperfectly by the physical mind, they are called dreams,"[43] held Sri Aurobindo.

While ordinary dreams are impressions left in the subconscient by what we do, feel or experience that come up in a jumbled manner as recollections or pure phantasies, "dream experiences are records or transcripts of experiences in the inner worlds."[44] Ordinary sleep (*nidra*) constitutes a discontinuity in conscious existence. "The sleep of the yogi retains full and unbroken consciousness while his outer being – physical, vital and mental – is in a state that imitates death in its repose."[45] "Sleep like trance (*swapna samadhi*) opens the gate of the subliminal,"[46] i.e., supraphysical existence. The subliminal is what is behind consciousness and supports it. This presupposes the fact that every human being has a subtle body.

The body is an instrument for connecting the individual consciousness to the cosmos. Making the body enter a dreamlike trance is what makes this happen. Subliminal dreams convey truths that are not easy to get in the waking state. While Sri Aurobindo's thoughts echo neuro-scientist Antonio Damasio's conception of multi-layered consciousness[47] as well as Gaston Bachelard's faith in the power of dreams,[48] his idea of consciousness in sleep resembles what Western researchers such as Celia Green, Stephen Laberge and Fariba Bogzaran call lucid dreaming,[49] a dream in which the sleeper is aware that he or she is dreaming and where the lucid dreamer can actively participate in and manipulate the dream environment.

As early as 1949, Jean-Herbert constructed a model of what he calls the psychological anatomy of Man according to Sri Aurobindo.[50] *Shushupti* or sleep-trance is what opens the door to Sachchidhananda (sat- existence, chit – conscience, ananda- joy) or the highest superconscient state.

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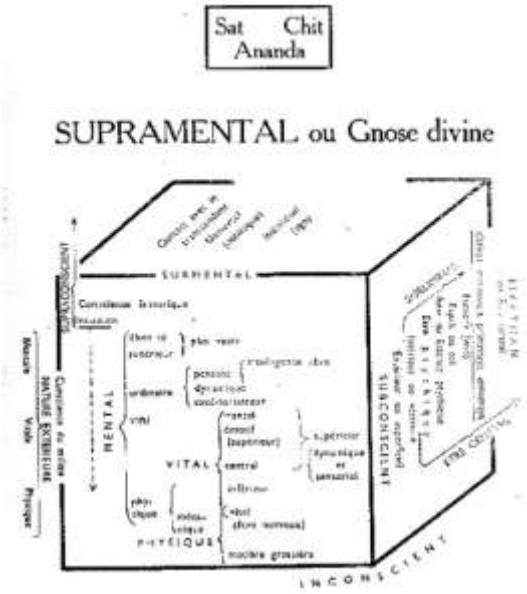
[43] Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, *The Yoga of Sleep and Dreams*, *The Night School of Sadhana*, compiled with an introduction by A.S. Dalal, (Twinlakes, WI: Lotus Press, 2004),6.
[44] Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Ibid., xviii.
[45] Mother's words, Ibid., xiii.
[46] Dalal's opinion, Ibid., 4.
[47] Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (: Boston: Mariner Books, 2000).
[48] Gaton Bachelard, *La Poétique de la rêverie*, 1960. (Paris: PUF, 2010 reprint).
[49] Celia Green, *Lucid Dreaming, The Paradox of Consciousness during Sleep* (New York, Routledge, 1994). Stephane Laberge, *Lucid Dreaming: A Concise Guide to Awakening in Your Dreams and in Your Life* (Louisville: CO, Sounds True Incorporated, 2006). Fariba Bogzaran, "Contemplating Lucid Dreaming: East-West Views", in *Dreams and Dreaming*, ed. Sudhir Kakar (Gurgaon, Haryana: Penguin, 2011), 127-145.
[50] Jean-Herbert, " L'anatomie psychologique de l'Homme selon Shrî Aurobindo," *Revue Spiritualité*, nos. 58-59, (Septembre-Octobre 1949), reproduced in revue3emillinenaire.com on 14 July 2008. https://www.revue3emillenaire.com/blog/lanatomie-psychologique-de-lhomme-selon-shr-aurobindo-par-jean-herbert/, accessed July 30, 2020.



Jean Herbert's modelling of Sri Aurobindo's map of the mind

The expression "primitive geometry" is used while referring to the term imaginary as defined by Jacques Lacan and Cornelius Castoriadis.[51] In Sri Aurobindo's model, we could discern a higher dimensional geometry.

In another short poem entitled "The Dream Boat" written in 1942, Sri Aurobindo regrets the absence of the gold god who visited him in his dream boat. The object seen in the dream is not made of matter but glowing fire and the god's brow is a flame and his body's complexion sun-gold. The waiting poet's silent expectation is met with a sweet and secret murmur, asking him if he is ready to leave. To leave what? To go where? The boat in dream fire is but a subliminal image of the poet's heart. But the subconscient interferes and disrupts the passage of his being to other planes. The poet thus fails to achieve mystic bliss or felicity. Fariba Bogzaran writes that lucid dreaming can allow one to enter spaces of the mind hitherto inaccessible and witness phenomena of light and void.[52]

One should refrain from the temptation to interpret the gold god as an internalized figure of Aurobindo's brother Barindra who was close to him and equally involved in revolutionary activities. Similarly, we cannot read Savitri as the feminine and poetic version of Sri Aurobindo's unhappy wife Mrinalini Bose who died in 1918 away from him at the young age

[51] Derek Gregory, *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 282.
[52] Bogzaran, "Contemplating Lucid Dreaming," 138.

of 32.[53] In the light of psychoanalysis, Savitri could be read as a representation of the Mother (Mirra Alfassa) who seems to have somehow helped Sri Aurobindo come out of depression as he uses the rhetoric of darkness and light quite frequently in his writings. But Sri Aurobindo had read Freud and not approved of his theories.

> The psycho-analysis of Freud is the last thing that one should associate with yoga. It takes up a certain part, the darkest, the most perilous, the unhealthiest part of the nature, the lower vital subconscious layer, isolates some of its most morbid phenomena and attributes to it and them an action out of all proportion to its true role in the nature. Moreover, the exaggeration of the importance of suppressed sexual complexes is a dangerous falsehood and it can have a nasty influence and tend to make the mind and vital more and not less fundamentally impure than before. […] I find it difficult to take these psycho-analysts at all seriously when they try to scrutinise spiritual experience by the flicker of their torch-lights."[54]

The only time Sri Aurobindo uses the word ego is when he criticizes the consumerist self of the humankind and the burden put upon the Earth in his epic poem *Savitri*.

> The Ego of this great world of desire
> Claimed earth and the wide heavens for the use
> Of man (Book 7, Canto 4, Stanza 29)

He adamantly held that that the fate of humanity is an ascending one, in spite of Savitri's descent[55] into the realm of death.

Auroville – Dream City

> There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of good will, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth. … The earth is certainly not ready to realize such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess the necessary knowledge to understand and accept it nor the indispensable conscious force to execute it. That is why I call it a dream.[56]

This is how the mother described the Auroville project. It was named Auroville, after dawn, "the hour before the Gods awake" (*Savitri,* Book 1, Canto I, Stanza 1) to quote Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*. Religion, nationality and politics are supposed to have no place in this ideal city.

The concept of the Auroville draws from the French perception of their nation as a transnational space, a universal nation. Jean d'Ormesson clearly referred to this cognition when he wrote:

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[53] Kavita Sharma, *Mrinalini: Sri Aurobindo's Forgotten Wife,* www.boloji.com, 24 December 2012. https://www.boloji.com/articles/13683/mrinalini-sri-aurobindos-forgotten-wife *, Accessed July 30, 2020.*

[54] Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, Volume 24, pp. 1605-17. http://www.collectedworksofsriaurobindo.com/index.php/01-works-of-sri-aurobindo/01-sabcl/24-letters-on-yoga-volume-24/07-Transformation-of-the-Subconscient-Vol-24-letters-on-yoga-volume-24, accessed July 30, 2020.

[55] As a woman redeeming her husband from death, the figure of Savitri is symmetrically opposed to that of Orpheus.

[56] Mirra alfassa, the Mother, "A Dream," 1954. http://library.sriaurobindoashram.org/mother/cwm12/chapter/13/, accessed July 30, 2020.

> It is because at the heart of France, there is something that surpasses her. France is not only a matter of contradiction and diversity. She also constantly looks over her shoulder, towards others, and towards the world which surrounds her. More than any other nation France is haunted by a yearning towards universality.[57]

French architect Roger Anger who was married to the grand-daughter of Mirra Alfassa designed the city. From a cursory drawing of four petals by the Mother he designed the galaxy pattern of the city containing the industrial, residential, cultural and international zones. The foundations were laid on 28th February 1968. The death of the Mother in 1973 complicated the completion of the project which had already been stalled due to conflict between the local and Auroville governments. Roger Anger withdrew in 1978 and came back in 1984 to complete the project and oversee the construction of Matrimandir which houses a crystal globe made in Germany.

A model of the galaxy concept. Image copyright: Auroville

Auroville celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2018. Some 2500 people of 50 nationalities live in a city area of 500 hectares. Today what distinguishes this experiment in alternative life style is its unending education which is "given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones,"[58] (last school, after school, superschool and no school),[59] its 28 hectare Sadhana Tropical Forest (founded by

[57] Jean D'Ormesson, "Etre français," in *Le Point*, 25 March 2011. https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/etre-francais-selon-jean-d-ormesson-13-01-2011-129480_23.php#, accessed July 30, 2020.
[58] Mirra Alfassa, the Mother, "A Dream," 1954.
[59] Tagore experimented alternative ways of education in Shanti Niketan.

Aviram Rozen et Yorit from Isarel[60] who came to Pondicherry in 2003) which houses 160 tropical species, AuroOrchard which practises agroecology thanks to Christian Tarpin[61] who learned it from Pierre Rabhi in France and Auroville's economy based on cooperation and sustainable development. The Auroville Earth Institute promotes and disseminates knowledge in the construction of sustainable habitats relying on earth-based technologies. Auroville has received support from UNESCO, governmental and non-governmental agencies, foundations, corporate donors and private well-wishers in India and abroad. The city is managed by a Trust.

Nevertheless, the community is rigid, its ways mysterious and its rules so strict that it is perceived as a closed one. Also the difficult procedure to become an Aurovillian, the one year waiting period, the necessity to find a housing and an appropriate activity to fit in and the close monitoring of the members resemble those of a sect. In reality, only rich architects and doctors are able to become permanent residents. Social and economic tensions affect every aspect of Auroville's existence.

Depending on the point of view, Auroville is seen as broken dream of posthuman bliss or a paradise for hippies. In her article entitled "European Dreams, Tamil Land: Auroville and the Paradox of a Postcolonial Utopia," Jessica Namakkal argues that Auroville forms part of anti-colonial colonialism, i.e., an ideology that rejects Western superiority but nevertheless exploits the Tamil villagers while employing a rhetoric of postcolonial equality and colour blindness. The reinforcement and reinsertion of colonial hierarchies of race, class and gender have turned an experiment grounded in the liberatory ideals of anti-capitalism, anti-nationalism and anti-colonialism into a microcosm of capitalist neocolonialism, according to her.[62]

Perhaps it is in the very essence of Utopia that it should remain nothing more than a non-place as its original meaning implies. When a dream is translated into reality, it could no longer exist as a dream. At the same time, one does not need to find a different space to construct a Utopia set apart from the rest. Any space could be transfigured into an ideal one if one strives for it. Auroville remains a flawed utopia in so far as power struggles between the

[60] Alain Sousa, "À Auroville, qui fête ses cinquante ans, l'utopie est toujours vivante", Reporterre, March 1, 2018. https://reporterre.net/A-Auroville-qui-fete-ses-cinquante-ans-l-utopie-est-toujours-vivante, accessed July 30, 2020.
[61] Alexandre Sattler, "La voix du Kaizen: Les nouveaux paysans," Broadcast on May 9, 2019. https://radio.gaia-images.com/christian-tarpin/, Accessed July 30, 2020.
[62] Jessica Namakkal, "European Dreams, Tamil Land: Auroville and the Paradox of a Postcolonial Utopia," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, no.6 (2012): 59-88.

Auroville trustees and the Sri Aurobindo Society have marred its reputation after the death of the Mother, but not a failed one.

The fact there was a necessity to set up an idea city is symptomatic of postcolonial discontents. The world has not solved the equation of how to replace "the domineering externality of the Western subject that had structured it and driven it."[63] But the responsibility does not lie with the West alone.

> There has been a tendency in some minds to dwell on the spirituality or mysticism of the East and the materialism of the West; but the West has had no less than the East its spiritual seekings and, … the East has had its materialistic tendencies, its material splendours, its similar or identical dealings with life and Matter and the world in which we live[64]

as Sri Aurobindo pointed out in his *Message to America* in 1949. This externality had been established at the detriment of women and Earth. The cult of the mother symbolized by the Matrimandir shows that the postcolonial society is in search of a mother principle and has not yet figured out the right balance between desire and spirituality. The ironic translation of Sri Aurobindo's dream of a temple for the nation goddess into the reality of a temple for a woman worshipped as Mother reveals the limits of the nation-state as an ideal habitat and makes us see one of the unconscious springs that lead to the invention of the nation, i.e, the realization that "the womb has been lost for ever."[65]

If the ideal city had truly taken shape, perhaps its model would have been easily emulated and progressively enlarged. But the fact that it is resisting and has not fully crumbled shows that it is a laboratory for a common future. The postponed dream of Auroville is but a correlative to what Sandro Mezzadra calls the never-accomplished transition of postcoloniality.

[63] Denis Grison, *Vers une philosophie de la précaution* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), 28.
[64] Sri Aurobindo, "Message to America," August 15, 1949, https://auromaa.org/message-america-sri-aurobindo/, accessed July 30, 2020.
[65] Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 99.

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DREAMS OF LOST AND FOUND COUNTRIES IN SHAILJA PATEL'S *MIGRITUDE*

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Abstract

One of the new voices in postcolonial literatures, Shailja Patel is a cosmopolitan at heart. While she presently divides her time between her birthplace in Kenya and her country of adoption, South Africa, where she composes poems and plays, Shailja Patel also lived in other countries. She actually spent her formative years in England and, later, in the United States. This may explain why as a political activist she espouses causes that transcend national borders. Her commitment makes her focus on reality, and the "dream" she may believe in is of the same nature as the one pursued by Martin Luther King, in the sense that she hopes to see a world based on "a vision of peace, justice and equality" (Patel, 2010). This adherence to universal preoccupations transpires in her works.

However, two geographical and cultural areas take pride of place in her writings: the African continent and the Indian subcontinent. While the former has constituted her physical and direct environment, the latter has embodied her "imaginary homeland" (Rushdie, 1992). The granddaughter of Indian immigrants, Shailja Patel is heir to a collective imagination imbued with foreign traditions and values. The persistence of that dreamt, fantasized, culture in the artist's poetry indicates how reverie, which characterizes creative activities, can be an act of appropriation and hybridization.

My essay studies how the conscious and the unconscious, the transmitted legacy and its (un)mastered imaginary translation, work hand in hand in Shailja Patel's poetry to make the foreign familiar.

Keywords: dreams, dreamscape, India, migration, diaspora, cultural identity

Despite attempts at rationalizing dreams by enclosing them within supposedly universal interpretative grids, dreams escape classifications. They are reflections of individual psyche and they bear the marks of the dreamer's cultural background. The situation may get complicated when one finds oneself at the crossroads of many cultures and diverse traditions. This is the fate of migrants who belong to their native culture as well as their adopted land's set of traditions. For this very reason, it is interesting to study the splintering of the migrant's dreamscape, and who better than an artist can provide us with the representation of a fragmented subjectivity, not to say the subconscious. In this regard, Shailja Patel, as a new voice in diaspora literature, sheds an instructive light on the matter.

Shailja Patel Portrait. Photo: Kris Krug[1]

This contemporary poet and playwright was born in Kenya in an Indian family that migrated to East Africa in the 1920s. According to Sana Aiyer, despite their relative prosperity, Indian migrants many of whom arrived in Kenya as indentured labourers or merchants during the colonial era "were precariously positioned in Kenya. Africans usually viewed them as outsiders, and Europeans largely considered them subservient."[2]

Indians building the Uganda Railways, Image copyright: Kenya Railway Museum.

Concerned with questions of migration and Empire, Shailja Patel invented the concept of "migritude," which was the title of a theater performance before becoming a poetry collection

[1] https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/75db5bfd-33c9-4e90-9d1e-deba76c73c48, accessed July 30, 2020.
[2] Sana Aiyer, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Harvard, Harvard University Press, 2015), Cover blurb.

of the same name in 2010. In this work which is deemed as "an autobiography, a prose-poem, a memoir and an account of the artistic process,"[3] she portrays the many migrations that have marked her family history and that have shaped her personality over the years. Those displacements were the results of different hopes and dreams. They were also the consequences of shattered dreams.[4] My article proposes to study the correlation Shailja Patel establishes between the phenomenon of migration and the notion of dreams, particularly in the context of the Indian diaspora.

Dreams of the exiled

Exile implies physical and mental separation from the motherland. While the physical gap cannot be filled at will, the lost country can still be summoned through reminiscences. In that respect, dreams form the realm where images of the former land are the more vivid since these visions are linked to memories, to nostalgia. They represent an intangible way to connect and to remain somehow connected to the home country. Shailja Patel mentions the iconic role played by the ambi-mango in the diasporic imagination. "Ambi. Form of a mango. Fruit that ripens and rots in the dreams of all South-to-North immigrants."[5] Diaspora theories give importance to the notion of locality as the site where subjectivity is created. [6] Arjun Appadurai explains that in a deterritorialized world, "the task of producing locality (as a structure of feeling,[…]) is increasingly a struggle."[7] However, Appadurai also argues that at some points and on some issues "a community of sentiment" can exist, where "a group […] begins to imagine and feel things together."[8] Shailja Patel inscribes the mango as a transnational object of "shared imagination" within the Indian diaspora. Exiles identify this fruit with the country they had to leave. As such, it is both the sign of loss as well as the way through which the sentimental bond with the motherland can be preserved. Mangoes symbolize both absence and presence, and Patel equates this absence, not as a suspended time where things remain still, but as a parallel dimension that sees the changing of seasons.

[3] Emmanuel Iduma, "A conversation with Shailja Patel", *Wasafiri online*, January 1, 2017, https://www.wasafiri.org/article/emmanuel-iduma-interviews-shailja-patel/,accessed July 29, 2020).
[4] Another Indian woman writer from Kenya, Iman Vergee, dealt with child abuse in her first novel *In between Dreams* (London: OneworldPublications, 2014). Her second novel *Who Will Catch Us As We Fall* ((London: OneorldPublications, 2016) focuses on the tensions between Africans and Indians living in Kenya after the departure of the British. Jameela Siddiqi's novel *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture,2001) recounts the many lives of Indian migrants in East Africa.
[5] Shailja Patel, *Migritude* (Los Angeles: Kaya Press, 2010), 4.
[6] Bakirathi Mani, *Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 3.
[7] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 2005 reprint), 189.
[8] Ibid., 8.

Distance and time alter the link with the homeland, while the latter continues to occupy a specific place in the exile's imagination.

Even though identification with some national symbols can be termed as universal insofar as they are shared by subjects from various backgrounds, generational divides occur when life choices are concerned. Because they belong to different localities and cultures, parents and children often have opposite goals.[9] Within diasporic communities, parental expectations refer to age-old dreams of cultural preservation. Shailja Patel recounts how her mother kept collecting saris as a trousseau for her wedding.[10] Over the years, she could gather eighteen of them before losing her patience and giving them to her daughter with the feeling, the prescience that her wedding would never happen. The mother is desperate because she realizes that her dreams have no chances of becoming true. She blames her daughter's political consciousness and concern.

> You have been brainwashed by the mass media, who concentrate on the tragedies of life […]. But in the midst of all this is youth, with its dreams of happiness. Why not concentrate on the beauty and miracle of life, instead of on suffering and pain?[11]

While Shailja Patel is unsatisfied by the state of the world as she perceives it,[12] her mother has dreams of repetition, of reproduction of traditions. She believes that her daughter's life will follow the same path as the one other women had taken before her for ages. To her, it may appear as a humble, normal, expectation, whereas the same bears an excessive price to her poet daughter. In this case, the latter's refusal to get married is a rejection of her mother's attempt at inserting her within the narrative of community history. There is an undeniable conflict between mother's and daughter's respective dreams and aspirations. Shailja Patel's acknowledgement of her subversive dream of independence is a proof of her assertiveness, of her ability to ignore her community's rules and laws.

Rebellion is actually one of the main traits of Shailja Patel's character, and she often disagrees with those who represent authority, that is to say her own relatives. She often refers to her family history in her writings, thanks to the multiple viewpoints she resorts to. In one of her poems, she expresses her mother's disappointment and fear after giving birth to three daughters:

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[9] Mani, loc.cit.
[10] "KQED Spark – Shailja Patel," KQED YouTube channel, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdNMxKzOSpw,accessed July 30, 2020.
[11] Patel, 59.
[12] As a founding member of "Kenyans For Peace, Truth and Justice" and as a participant in many societal debates, Shailja Patel is an activist and a committed artist.

> I never wanted daughters. Women are never safe. My daughters make me so angry! They keep seeking out danger. After everything we've done for their security, they reject us. They choose the hardest, worst, most dangerous things.[13]

The mother's wish, or fear, makes sense in her culture, but also on the African continent. Having daughters is a dreadful perspective, a nightmare that has come true for her, and she suffers from the lack of cooperation from her offspring, whom she perceives as fragile. Her wish to protect them is natural. The same can be said of the girls' need to experiment and test their limits. For teenagers, security and wisdom do not represent the most desired dream they wish to pursue.

In the same way, Shailja Patel expresses her childhood frustration at the lack of parental signs of affection. "They never said they loved us. These words were not in any language spoken by my parents […] they hug us at airports/tearless/stoic […] they never say they love us."[14] Although they were born in the same country, inherited almost the same culture, parents and children do not share the same expectations as far as feelings are concerned. Shailja Patel and her sisters belong to the third generation of Indian immigrants to Kenya,[15] whereas their parents were those who had to bridge the gap between their own parental culture and the country they were born in. They were those who had the responsibility, even the duty, to create the hybrid culture between the lost country and the new one. For that matter, they embodied the anguish of a community that sought a certain degree of assimilation. In one of her interviews, Patel explains that her parents suffered from a form of segregation within the Kenyan society.[16] On the contrary, though they were witness to their parents' anxiety, Shailja Patel and her sisters experienced a more hassle-free childhood and youth. What also made the difference was the fact that they were exposed to American popular culture through Hollywood movies and global television phenomena such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. Those fictions that showcased versions of the American Dream were, according to Patel, creations that also presented "emotions without consequences/words that/cost nothing/meant nothing/would never have to be redeemed" (Patel 2010, 25). The poet is aware of the flip side of the coin. She knows that what is shown by the American entertainment industry is only make-believe. Demonstrations of love are on display only to keep the dream alive. They

[13] Patel,23-24.
[14] Ibid., 25; 28-29.
[15] Sonya Renee Taylor, "Art and Activism at the Global Intersections: A Dialogue with Shailja Patel," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, March 28, 2014, https://fpif.org/art-activism-global-intersections-dialogue-shailja-patel/, accessed July 30, 2020).
[16] Josephine Reed, "Shailja Patel. Poet, theater artist, and activist," NEA podcasts, National Endowment for the Arts, 2014, https://www.arts.gov/audio/shailja-patel,accessed July 30, 2020).

nevertheless have an influence on spectators around the world as they project a model of romantic relationships people tend to idealize and reproduce. For America sets the standards, even in terms of privacy. In that sense, such depictions of successful relationships are considered as parts of the American Dream, and spectators unquestionably adopt those new modalities and lifestyles, ignoring cultural nuances. Shailja Patel is not seduced by these illusory relationships. She is, however, upset to note that none of her parents showers his or her love on the children. There is an acute sense of exclusion from the fancy world they nevertheless live in.

However, reality can also be brutal. "I learn like a stone in my gut that third-generation Asian-Kenyan will never be Kenyan enough that all my patriotic fervor will not turn my skin black."[17] Political upheavals and unrest in some African States make any dream of assimilation fragile and almost impossible. Time and allegiance are no valuable currencies in unstable countries. And dreams of belonging remain a fantasy. Shailja Patel quotes a Gujarati saying:

> *Raat thodi ne vesh jaja*, the proverb I grew up on. *The night is short and our garments change*. Meaning: Don't put down roots. Don't get too comfortable. By dawn, we may be on the move, forced to reinvent ourselves in order to survive. Invest only in what we can carry. Passports. Education. Jewellery.[18]

Patel explains that after the expulsion of Indians and other Asians from Uganda, following Dictator Amin Dada's order, it became impossible for immigrants living in such parts of the world to dream of lifelong, infinite stays in their new homelands. Those dreams could be arbitrarily interrupted . . . any time. Migration and assimilation could no longer constitute long-term life projects. Political instability, particularly in the African continent, made Asian immigrants live in the fear of a brutal awakening and they had to be prepared to such a possibility.

Out of fear and due to uncertainty, parents send their children away to "icy alien England" and they "cram instructions into [their] pockets like talismans": "Learn and study/succeed/learn and study/succeed/remember remember remember/the cost of your life."[19] Once again, parents make their children bear the weight of their expectations. This appears as a right they have on their offspring after all the sacrifices they made to raise them. But dreams need method in order to be fulfilled, and Patel's parents' *mantra* relies on the belief in the power of education. Parents show the path towards success and a secure future while insisting on the importance of memory for they consider their offspring as part of a

[17] Patel, 28.
[18] Ibid., 10.
[19] Ibid., 28-29.

continuum. In truth, this new exile dislocates the third-generation Asian-Kenyans. The young Shailja Patel and her siblings are confronted with the problematics of locality once they have to leave their birthplace and settle in England. They can no longer be defined by a unique place. They become transnational citizens and carriers of many traditions. Only in their parents' view they do remain within the same continuum and belong to the history of their community.

In Patel's words, this mentality comes both from traditional ways and from the state of unrest inherited from their exile on the African continent. Immigrants cannot build their lives, their futures, on dreams and they have to be practical. There is no place for sentimentality, and once again, Western cultural patterns cannot be automatically applied to immigrant communities from the South. Shailja Patel argues that members of the Indian diaspora can difficultly lead individual, truly independent lives. They are conditioned by the community's expectations.

> We migrants lie to those we love about our success. About our happiness. We tell them how wonderful things are, even when we're failing. We cannot bear to fall short of their hopes for us. To stab them with the realization that their dreams will not come true. We carry the visions of whole peoples right against our skin. We push ourselves to the breaking point to manifest them.[20]

Each member of the diaspora has to carry the weight of a collective dream of success; and, within this context, failure is inconceivable. Indeed an individual's fate is closely related to his community. His success, or his failure, will necessarily have an impact on the whole group. In that sense, an individual's free will is necessarily limited and there is no room for missteps. Shailja Patel unveils the cruel law that governs migrants' destinies: they have to present a happy and victorious face in all circumstances because the community's pride considerably depends on individual successes. As a consequence, the right to fail or the right to be unhappy, which should be at the core of a human being's freedom, are completely denied to individuals.

Even in times of turmoil, exiled people hope to implement their deepest wishes, but they are carried away by the maelstrom of History. In one of her letters to her daughter, Shailja Patel's mother expresses her state of mind at a time when every other member of the Indian community tries to leave the African continent to find refuge in more secure countries.

> We are fine and surviving as well as one can in the present, politically insecure climate here. […] If I can help it, I would never want to migrate, but who has seen the future?! At least, we are very happy that we've sent all of you out of Kenya and settled you in the UK and America.[21]

[20] Patel, 40-41.
[21] Ibid., 43.

In spite of the risky situation in Kenya, this woman who was born there is not ready to go away. She simply does not wish to leave a country she feels so much connected to. In fact, she feels rooted in Kenya, and moving away does not make any sense to her. At the same time, one can feel that this sense of belonging is on the verge of being torn apart insofar as the political situation does not allow dreams of any kind. Patel explains that the migrant condition consists in "embracing and inhabiting precarity."[22] People are worried about their future and their main preoccupation consists in finding a way to transfer their vital assets to another corner of the world. In that respect, Shailja Patel's parents are relieved because they could secure their offspring's future by sending them away. The corollary of this decision does not only lie in the fact that these youngsters are now safe from theaters of civil war but also that it has virtually broadened the horizon of their dreams.

However, dreams always express a form of uneasiness in Patel's works. In her early years, Shailja Patel had dreams or, shall we say nightmares, where she felt excluded in a way or the other. "The children in my dreams speak in Gujarati […] in my dreams I shudder and I run. I am six in a playground of white children. *Darkie, sing us an Indian song*!"[23] The young girl is never a part of the group; she is a lonely character, always reduced to an identity she does not necessarily identify with. In fact, the imaginary world created by human beings from different cultures does not provide enough complexity and subtlety to define her universe and her Self in a detailed and exact way. "Words that don't exist in Gujarati: Self-expression/Individual/Lesbian."[24] In the same way, the poet points out "Words that don't exist in English: Najjar/Garba/Arati."[25] Languages are means of communication but their range of actions is limited to their own cultural spaces. Meanings are not always transferable and some permanent borders remain between languages with the result that people who belong to different cultures have the advantage of possessing multiple tools to describe their world and to define themselves. According to Shailja Patel, it is mainly through a combination of multiple linguistic codes that one can approach an accurate picture of reality, even though such an endeavor remains an illusion. Nevertheless, dreams are transformed versions of existing items. Sigmund Freud defines dreams as "a particular form of thinking."[26] They are re-articulations of the subject's impressions. And the poet's lines make the reader infer that as

[22] Reed, ibid., loc.cit.
[23] Patel, 50.
[24] Ibid., 51.
[25] Ibid., loc.cit.
[26] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 649-50.

a child Patel had difficulties situating herself within the multiethnic population of Kenya. She identified with neither the Gujarati children nor the white ones.

Dreams, gateways to a new life

In Shailja Patel's world, dreams do not concern trivial matters or small material preoccupations. They actually have to do with survival and they bear an existential dimension. Each poem is connected to the notion of migration and even when members of the younger generation move to secure and wealthy nations, it is rarely the result of a dream of conquest and achievement. In general, successful departures are linked to the destination. In Patel's volume, migrations are often considered under the perspective of escape from a place that once constituted the dreamed land. Departure is then motivated by the realization that the dream has come to an end, that the country one had lived in no longer represents security and bounty. In that sense, dreams bear a metaphysical dimension in Patel's universe. They are the vehicles that open a gateway to a new lease of life.

Moreover, Shailja Patel conveys the idea that dreams are not only external entities that occasionally trouble the human being's soul and sometimes lead some of his actions. They can also be resources from which individuals in distressful contexts can find the will, the energy and the way to escape. Dreams can finally compose the stuff people are made of. In other words, human beings may be the sum of all their tiny dreams and nations may be the results of their citizens' combined dreams…

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Part III
Indian American Dreams and Dreamocracy

DREAMS AND REALITIES OF US RELOCATION IN CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S *QUEEN OF DREAMS*

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Abstract

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* (2004) revisits the author's favourite topic, that of relocation to the United States and its difficulties from the angle of intergenerational (here, mother-daughter) relationships, with their intricacies. Relocation is, as in *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), a sickness, a sad, traumatic act of dislocation which can only be cured by complex medicines for the spirit which come from India and thus reconnect the dislocated subject with the motherland, while, at the same time, make relocation more acceptable. In *Queen of Dreams*, the healing comes from the correct interpretation of significant dreams. Placed in the mother-daughter scenario, dreams are understood in two major ways: as Vishnu's act of creating the world by dreaming it, invested with meanings that should be decoded in the process of acquiring knowledge, and, secondly (since the plot is located in the United States) as the American dream, the crowning of good steady efforts by success and fulfillment. If the mother is a professional of dreams, which come to her from other people and which she has to interpret correctly, the daughter is a painter of nature, who has dreams she would like to see come true. The common ground between dreams as contact with the transcendent and dreams meant to become the reality around us is nature: the generous, unspoiled nature of America (or of Divakaruni's California), which constitutes healing in itself if one manages to reconnect to it.

This article aims to read *Queen of Dreams* as an ecology of dreaming, which makes relocation, interhuman and intergenerational communication meaningful as knowing experiences. Dreams can be of many kinds, but they all seem to bring us closer to our nature and, thus, to Nature, to the universe which we are all part of. My reading is based on traditional Hindu perceptions of dreams as well as by Bruno Latour's warning to us to face our Mother Earth and what we have done to her in *Facing Gaia* (2018) and postcolonial ecocriticism (Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, 2010).

Keywords: dreams, ecology, Indian-American, intergenerational conflict, migration

While western thinking has tended to associate dreams with mysticism and, at best, with repressed desires in Freud's influential work, in the Indian tradition, dreams have always played a far more important part. In her book *Dreams, Illusions and Other Realities* (1984), Wendy Doniger points out that, in India, dreams teach us about reality, just as myths do. The book's title goes as far as to suggest that all three are realities whose continuity and mutual interaction are sources of knowledge for those wishing to pursue their true path and find

themselves.[1] As Claudine Bautze-Picron's edited collection *The Indian Night* shows, India is rich in dream traditions, each with its own complex symbolism and philosophy of its own. Far from being accidents, dreams are sites of communication between our limited being in this world and the absolute. They are the primordial locus of knowledge about the cosmos, the gods and the self and, when interpreted correctly, they give important directions about the past, present and future. Dreams "are fascinating because they reflect a hidden part of ourselves,"[2] and in traditions such as the Jain or the Shaiva, there are strict rules as to how to sleep and what to dream, on when one can or cannot share a room with someone else (see chapters by Nalini Balbir or Marie-Luce Balazer-Billoret).[3] Such rules of sleeping and dreaming seem to have caught Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's interst in her 2004 novel *Queen of Dreams*,[4] one of her many explorations into the usefulness of traditional Indian knowledge when one relocates to the United States.[5]

However, dream interpretation is no easy matter and it requires a gift which, in its turn, has an impact on the extent to which the interpreter can take care of his/ her own life when compared to that of others. The novel's protagonist is the daughter of a dream interpreter, Rakhi. As she lives out her own – sometimes challenging – American dream as a second generation US-born child of Bengali immigrants, Rakhi struggles to read the meanings of her life in the mirror of her own relationship with her dream-teller mother, Mrs Gupta, who can help others through her interpretations, but not her kin. This metaphor, which ultimately tells that our lives, with all their good and bad parts, can only be our own (Mrs Gupta once explains to her daughter that true love is that which asks nothing of the beloved person) leads on to a complex exploration of the difficulties of reinventing oneself in a new country.

In *Queen of Dreams*, the healing of the dislocation trauma (shared by both generations in different ways) thus comes from the correct interpretation of significant dreams. Placed in the mother-daughter scenario, dreams are understood in two major ways: as an important world-generating process (Vishnu's act of creating the world by dreaming it, invested with meanings that must be decoded correctly in the process of acquiring knowledge),[6] and, secondly (since the plot is located in the United States) as the American dream, the crowning of good steady efforts by personal and material success, representing God's reward to the hardworking and

[1] Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusions and Other Realities* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3.
[2] Claudine Bautze-Picron, *The Indian Night: Sleep and Dreams in Indian Culture*, New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2009, x.
[3] Bautze-Picron, *The Indian Night*, 103-172.
[4] Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams* (New York and London: Doubleday, 2004).
[5] See also Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).
[6] Alain Daniélou, *Mythes et dieux de l'Inde: Le Polythéisme hindou* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 230-31.

resourceful people of America.[7] If the mother, Mrs Gupta, is a professional of dreams, which come to her from other people and which she has to interpret, the daughter is a painter of nature. She has not inherited her mother's gift, but has dreams of her own which she would like to see come true. Art is, as the novel shows, an alternative to the magic world of dreaming.

The common ground between dreams as contact with the transcendent and dreams meant to become the reality around us is nature: the environment people live in, the generous, unspoiled nature of America (or of Divakaruni's California), which constitutes healing in itself if one reconnects to it. On the difficult intergenerational meeting ground between Rakhi and her dream-teller mother, art and dreams coincide as connectors between everyday reality and another, transcendental, imaginary world, made of dreaming for the mother and of art for the daughter. That the two imaginary worlds meet at some point, Rakhi learns towards the end of the novel when, having read her mother's dream journals translated by her father, she establishes with Mrs Gupta a closer communication than ever, post-mortem as it may be. I argue that, beyond claiming the American dream for the South Asian immigrant community through an adaptation of Indian traditional knowledge to American realities (as so many of Divakaruni's novels do), *Queen of Dreams* ultimately relies on Indian dream traditions to highlight nature (be it America's iconic nature, which has played such an important role since the Pilgrim fathers, human nature or the aestheticized nature of the eucalyptus grove Rakhi paints) as the main site of knowledge.

It is this complex nature, an overarching emblem of perfection that holds the key to all mysteries, that Mrs Gupta's dreams teach us about. It is on its basis that a dream of a better multiethnic America can also be constructed, following Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's views on postcolonial ecocriticism as they claim that

> human liberation will never be fully achieved without challenging the ways human societies have constructed themselves in hierarchical relation to other human and non-human communities, and without imagining new ways in which these ecologically connected groupings can be creatively transformed.[8]

This proposition of an ecological view of how humans connect to each other in society and in life by respecting each other and respecting nature seems to be the guiding thread that connects dreams and reality in the novel. Thus, after her mother's death, Rakhi discovers her mother's journals, written in a language and an alphabet she cannot understand, but which become accessible to her gradually, through her father's translation. Her father unexpectedly

[7] See James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (1931) (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2012).
[8] Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2010), ii.

reveals himself to be a rather knowledgeable guide into a culture that she longs for, but has never had full access to, as well as into her mother's past, which brings him closer to his daughter than he has ever been able to be before. When he also offers his Indian cooking skills to help her reinvent her formerly unsuccessful business, *The Chai House*, as *The Kurma House*, the father (himself equally excluded from his wife's life, which, after Rakhi's birth, is fully taken up by her dreaming gift), suddenly reveals an aspect of parenting Rakhi has never enjoyed before, but also a cultural togetherness which, in the post-9/11 context, becomes highly meaningful from the point of view of culture.

The particular kind of Americanness one can find at the *Kurma House* is, in many ways, more authentic than the commercial one of *Java*, the chain café across the street: it is an America of immigrants (as true America actually is), which, despite its internationalism (powered by a whole variety of decorations donated by customers coming from all over the world), preserves the enthusiastic energy of the first settlers in a way that has, to a great extent, been lost by the more recent, global America. While the *Java* chain is representative of the mental and emotional pollution brought about by an exacerbated spirit of competition, *The Kurma House* is powered by the togetherness of people who are part of an extended family, so much so that they help rebuild the café after the destruction of its kitchen in an accidental fire and stand against the storm of excessive nationalism that afflicts post-9/11 America. Through its metaphoric discourse promoted by the parallel (and, from a Hindu perspective, all the more real) world of dreaming, Divakaruni's novel proposes an alternative plot, which takes intergenerational and inter-ethnic conflicts one level up, into the world of climate change brought about by the Anthropocene.

In his book *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (2017), Bruno Latour uses the last noun phrase in the title to describe the Anthropocene as, mostly, a time of serious damaging of the earth (Gaia) by man. Against this predicament, Latour's lectures on how nature itself should provide the model of how to build a better (more ecological) society.[9] It is from nature itself, read honestly, with attentions, that man can best learn how to protect both nature and human civilization itself. By extension, since American nature has such an important tradition of being a source of knowledge (described by Transcendentalist philosophers – Emerson and Thoreau – as the book of God that teaches us the ultimate knowledge),[10] this should be even more true of Divakaruni's beautiful, yet fundamentally

[9] Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime,* trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge and Medford, MA: Polity, 2017).
[10] See, for instance, Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Boston: James Munro and Company, 1836).

multiethnic California. As it goes through the chaos of 9/11, people living in this particular part of the world have to seriously rethink the ways in which they relate to each other across ethnicities, as well as how they all relate to that common ideal referred to as the American dream.

The American dream, defined by James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book *Epic of America* as "a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as a man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had slowly been erected in the older civilizations, unrepressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being of any and every class,"[11] is also very much about creating the right symbiosis with nature. This glamorous flourishing of human potential would not have been possible in the first place without the generosity of American nature, advertised since the beginnings of colonization as one of America's perks. Thanksgiving, a major American holiday (on the fourth Thursday of November) is a celebration of this generosity of nature (a reflection of God) to the first Puritan settlers, the Pilgrim Fathers, who, having inhabited the new continent (the Plymouth plantation) for a year, give thanks to God for their first successful crop in 1621. Reading the book of nature has a long tradition in mainstream American literature, but numerous approaches to nature, giving it equal importance, even though powered by a different symbolism, can also be found in non-European migrant traditions. Of them, the Asian one is a noteworthy example. Apart from Divakaruni, one may think of Amitav Ghosh's ecological reading of climate change in his 2017 book of essays *The Great Derangement.* Many of Ghosh's novels also provide keen illustrations of the above-mentioned reconsideration of how humans can better relate to each other in a cleaner, more ethical environment.[12]

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels – which, as Donna Seaman notices in a review of *Queen of Dreams*, are "socially and psychologically precise," while also, most often, possessing a "mystical dimension"[13] – are generally less concerned with migrants' radical choices for one country over another. They tend to leave open the possibility of both integration in the host society and the temporary and/or partial return home, whether in reality or just in the characters' minds. As the conditions of migrant life are changing, so are the strategies of overcoming the dislocation trauma, which call for radical rethinking. This

[11] Adams, *The Epic of America*, 405.
[12] On Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* read in an ecocritical perspective, in the light of Ghosh's book of essays *The Great Derangement*, as well as for further discussion on non-mainstream American traditions of interacting with nature, see my article "A Sea of Violence and Love: Precarity, Eco-Fiction and the American Factor in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*," *Angles: New Perspectives on the Anglophone World.* 10 July 2019, https://journals.openedition.org/angles/1175.
[13] Donna Seaman, Review: *Queen of Dreams,* in *Booklist*, July 2004, 1798.

process of rethinking involves resistance to new cultural norms and adaptations of one's background culture in the new space. In the landscape of contemporary South Asian American literature, Divakaruni's merit consists precisely of her insistence on the importance of preserving and valorizing the immigrants' native backgrounds. She specifically focuses on women and the challenges they encounter both in India and the United States, as well as their imaginative potential to reinvent both their families and their individual selves in a new country that, despite appearances, does not need to exclude all the features of the old.

At first, *Queen of Dreams* seems yet another novel about how the difficulty of any mother-daughter relationship intensifies in conditions of migration. Mrs Gupta's unusual job consists of dreaming and interpreting other people's dreams (even though she proves helpless with her own daughter's dreams), and thus warning them – sometimes against their will – about dangers they are about to face, some of which are connected to the difficulties of adjusting to the foreign land. This makes it difficult for her to be a good mother to her daugher Rakhi, a second-generation American-born daughter of Indian immigrants, a recently divorced painter and mother of a little girl, Jona. Rakhi longs for her unknown country of origin. While making a living from an Indian-style café (the imaginatively traditional, arty *Chai House*) in partnership with her friend Belle, she paints an imaginary India from photographs and stories told by other people.

In contact with the harsh realities of capitalist survival and especially when 9/11 aggravates ethnic differences and the aggressive version of America becomes apparent, the struggle for the American dream – of success and integration in the U.S. society – is counteracted by an alternative order of dreaming. As the Chai House is threatened by the commercial interests of competition, represented by the more commercial imaginary *Java* chain, a whole symbolical system representing the purity of human contact with the earth is brought by Rakhi's artistic imagination as a counter-argument to the threat. This is represented by the eucalyptus grove, Rakhi's source of inspiration for painting and a symbol of her mother's "other world" of dreams, which, to her, is the only connection to the country of her prenatal origin.

In the aestheticized world of Rakhi's imagination, nature provides inspiration and also gives meaning to everyday reality. It is the magic green color of the eucalyptus grove, and later on, the mysterious man in white who practices yoga and Tai Chi in the grove (and who ends up being part of her painting, also proving to be a messenger for both Rakhi and her mother) that give her the power to move on from her failed marriage and, later, even reinvent it. It also helps her gradually direct her artistic attention from an imaginary country her parents have never taken her to onto her immediate reality, by discovering a magic that comes

to her from her art and is similar to the one her mother derives from her dreams. Nature and the contact with the earth is recreated as a source of authenticity perceived as symbolic of one's native country, but also as a symbolic habitat of transcultural humanity, which justifies her perception of the world as a symphony of colours:

> She's thinking of green. Deep-forest green, gold-gray green, green-tinged with foggy silver of dawn, edged with the brittle brown of time passing. All the colors of the eucalyptus grove she walked to earlier this morning. She's thinking of the colors she will have to mix in order to re-create that green, colors that are not green at all. It is the closest thing she knows to magic in a world that has disappointed her over and over with its mundane workaday habits.[14]

This mysterious green stands for the magical force of Nature (as opposed to culture and its conditionings) that allows for a reconciliation between Rakhi's creative process as a painter and her mother's complex exploration of human nature. Ultimately, it gives Rakhi the necessary understanding through which she overcomes her various traumas (coming from dislocation, divorce and her mother's death). For Rakhi, painting nature, turning it into art (and the mysterious man in white who, throughout the novel, comes to be associated with impending destiny, which can only be avoided to a certain point) at a time when her business is not doing very well, is a therapeutic, life-saving activity:

> The only thing that takes me out of my miserable self is the painting I'm doing of the eucalyptus grove. It's still not completed, but I'm determined to have it ready for the show. (...) I've sketched in the man I saw at the grove practicing Tai Chi. I'm pleased with my decision, though so far he's only a blur of white against the greens. When I glance at the painting edgewise, craftily, he seems to be moving. But something's still out of balance – only I can't figure out what. The not-knowing lodges inside me, irritating as a mango fiber caught between two teeth.[15]

Like her mother's dreaming (even though in a less painful way), painting gives Rakhi access to a healing world of imagination, where some of the conflicts of the "real" world are solved, her own discourse through which she builds herself as who she really is.

Rakhi spends years trying to understand the intricacies of her mother's dreaming, a science in its own right:

> There were two kinds of interpreting that my mother did, though there may have been others.
> My knowledge of this facet of her life is furtive, fragmented, gleaned through eavesdropping.
> The first – as she had reluctantly told me – was when someone came to her with a dream, and she explained to her what it meant. (But why do I say her? I suspect that men came to my mother, too, though I imagine them to be more awkward about it).[16]

Later in the chapter Rakhi continues:

> The second kind of interpretation occurred when my mother dreamed. These dreams were not about herself, or us, or anyone she knew. All the people in these dreams were strangers, and usually they didn't believe in dreams. Or they believed – but in spite of themselves. Which was worse, because when you're forced to believe in something you wish you could dismiss, it makes you an angry person.

[14] Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams*, 10.
[15] Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams*, 64
[16] Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams*, 38.

> My mother's duty was to warn these angry people of what was about to happen to them."[17]

For Rakhi, dreams seem a connection to the unknown India she longs for, the country her parents come from, but never speak of and have never taken her to. By not encouraging her to do that and, ultimately, by recognizing her lack of the dreaming gift, her mother pushes her to seek integration more fully in the American context she belongs to:

> To be an interpreter of the inner realm seemed so *Indian*. (Of course I deluded myself. Weren't the American papers filled with advertisements about psychics?) I hungered for all things Indian because my mother never spoke of the country she'd grown up in – just as she never spoke of her past.[18]

Rakhi would like to be a dream-teller herself in order to understand her origins better, but also become more popular at school – a vanity her mother senses. At 13, unlike her Indian classmates who want to have nothing to do with India, Rakhi comes home with a pile of books on India from the library and with Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which she soon loses interest because "it focused too much on Western mythology." As her mother confesses in one of her dream journals:

> In these pages I can admit what I'd never tell her. It was a disappointment to me, too, that she couldn't decipher dreams. To have had her company on this path would have eased my loneliness. I'd wished for it when I was pregnant with her. But that gift wasn't mine to give.[19]

Even though sceptical, Mrs Gupta accepts that they sleep in the same room one night for her to be able to feel whether her daughter also had the gift of dreaming. The night is restful for Rakhi, who had probably been longing for more closeness to her mother. She wakes up with a slight headache, but no memory of any dream. The experience, in contrast, is severely painful for the mother:

> My mother's face was drawn, her eyes rimmed with dark circles.
> "Do you remember anything? Anything you saw?" she asked. She sounded hoarse, as though she was coming down with the flu.
> When I shook my head, she looked disappointed and relieved at the same time. "It didn't work," she said. "I'm sorry".
> Her words were like a door closing, with her on the other side, beyond my reach.
> "It's all right," I said, turning away, my voice as casual as I could make it. "It doesn't matter. Thanks for trying, anyway."
> I've never been able to fool my mother. I could feel her eyes on me, sharp and sad. But she only said, "Maybe it's for the best. Being a dream interpreter isn't as glamorous as you think."
> A year later, I would learn how right she was.[20]

Sleeping in the same room means sharing one's dreams with one's co-sleeper, which is why dream interpretation has to be done without it. For Rakhi's mother, her gift of dreaming and

[17] Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams*, 41.
[18] Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams*, 39.
[19] Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams*, 56.
[20] Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams*, 41.

interpreting other people's dreams takes a high toll and condemns her to an isolation that includes even her family. When the dreams warn about serious threats some people are about to face, she wakes up with migraines. In the series of chapters entitled the *Dream Journals*, where the narrating voice is the mother's, we discover a whole psychology and philosophy of dreaming. Yet she cannot interpret her daughter's nightmares, nor warn her against the dangers of her own life.[21]

After her mother's death (which, in the subjective chronology of the novel, is the first event that is predicted in a chapter of Mrs Gupta's *Dream Journals*), Rakhi is forced to, actually, come of age. From a long series of attempts to please her mother, whose carefully preserved distance she never fully understands, Rakhi's life finally has to become her own. She is forced by the tragic circumstance to look more into her own self as a woman and an artist, which she finally succeeds – and this is when her own American dream comes true. In this, her mother's dream journals play a very important part in bringing her closer to her father (who must translate them from Bengali into English) and revealing the mystery of her mother's life.

When little Jona, however, makes drawings of her disturbing dreams of people trapped in burning buildings, two planes crash into the Twin Towers in New York. Mrs Gupta's journals had predicted 9/11. In dreaming and then drawing the disaster that was to follow, Jona – who proves to have inherited her grandmother's gift – symbolically completes the circle that links her to the two previous generations. For Rakhi, on the other hand, it is not Mrs Gupta's dreams, but her dream journals that help her find a way out of her confusion, reconnect her self to herself and to her daughter and also find a solution to how to save the Chai House (by turning it into something radically different from Java by introducing Indian food and thus giving it the touch of authenticity which her mother had suggested was necessary). Mr Gupta helps with the Chai House – refashioned as the Kurma House –cooking pakoras instead of cookies, which boosts the business, and even singing old Indian songs, which also helps him overcome his lifelong depression and drinking. So does Sonny, Rakhi's ex-husband, who brings in all his friends and is secretely (and, as the open end of the novel suggests, quite successfully) hoping to get his wife back. It is through Jona's asking them to dream together, by both of them putting their heads on her pillow when she runs a fever, that Rakhi can overcome her past grudges and start dreaming of bringing her own family together again. Even after Mrs Gupta's death, dreams prove to be healing and help Rakhi soothe her daughter's fears "It's ok, baby. (…) It's only a dream."[22] Along the novel's plot, through the

[21] Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams*, 58-59.
[22] Divakaruni, *Queen of Dreams*, 229.

real or symbolical births, deaths and symbolical rebirths of the characters, dreaming is transformed from a rather scary predicament that asks for personal sacrifice into a beneficial means of contact with a world of the absolute that gives characters clues as to how to live their present lives better. Dreaming thus provides paths for reconciliation and, ultimately, through the new *Kurma House*, a re-balancing of inter-ethnic relations in multicultural America.

Divakaruni's ecology of dreaming in *Queen of Dreams* thus makes both relocation and intergenerational (and generally interhuman) communication meaningful, while also proposing a more ecological view of American society as a more equal, plural place. In the light of Huggan and Tiffin's postcolonial ecocriticism (which can be extended to multiethnic ecocriticism in the contemporary United States), one can argue that, in Divakaruni's world, dreams can be of many kinds, but they belong to an ecological understanding of the world that reconnects us to our nature and, thus, to Nature, to the universe we are all part of.

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"*WHAT DOES A WALKING MAN DREAM OF?*"[1]: DREAMING AND MOVING IN HARI KUNZRU'S *TRANSMISSION*

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Abstract
This article discusses the joint dynamics of dreaming and moving in Hari Kunzru's 2005 novel *Transmission*. It addresses the various dreams of movement experienced by the characters, notably under the influence of mass media. Through the many types of movement represented, the novel also suggests that the dromocracy – the regulation of social order by speed (Virilio, 1977) – has become a "*dream*ocracy": a dream factory leaving behind those who do not move fast enough. The paper finally contends that the displacement mechanisms inherent to dreaming operate in the novel as a narrative drive and as an opportunity to address the symbolic components of globalization.

Keywords: displacement, dreamocracy, dromocracy, globalization, transmission.

Introduction

Hari Kunzru was first known as "the bloke who got the big advance."[2] The writer received a £1.25 million advance for the manuscript of *The Impressionist*, his 2002 debut novel, which also earned him a flurry of awards. The story of an opportunistic shape-shifter moving from colonial India to England and then to Africa, it was widely read as a novel take on the subversion of imperial power, carrying a strong intertextual dialogue with established figures of the literary canon such as Joseph Conrad or E.M. Forster.[3] Three years later, Hari Kunzru published *Transmission*, a novel that can be read as a continued interrogation on matters of identity, authenticity, global flows and power, yet transposing these matters into the turn of the 21st century. Since then, the writer has published three other novels, and his latest work,

[1] Hari Kunzru, *Transmission* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 50.
[2] Rachel Cooke, ""I'm the Bloke Who Got the Big Advance,"" *The Guardian*, May 16, 2004.
[3] James Green and Peter Childs comment on this legacy in *Aesthetics and Ethics in Twenty-First Century British Novels: Zadie Smith, Nadeem Aslam, Hari Kunzru and David Mitchell* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 64-65.

Red Pill, is set out to be published as this paper is being written. He now lives in New York, regularly publishes opinion pieces and criticism in major media outlets (*The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Review of Books*), and is an active member of PEN International, an organization that defends freedom of speech for writers around the globe.

Transmission centres around Arjun Mehta, a young Indian IT genius who leaves New Delhi after he has been offered a dream job in California. But Arjun's dream of being an "NRI," a "Non-Resident Indian," falls short of his expectations: he is brought from one menial IT job to the next by a temp agency, before he ends up bullied by his boss and ultimately fired. Arjun decides to unleash a minor computer virus named after his favourite Bollywood star Leela Zahir, a virus only he can stop – thus hoping to save the day and get his job back. But the virus reaches a global scale and Arjun becomes the number one public enemy; he has to go in hiding across the United States and Mexico. The story of Arjun and his virus is enmeshed with two main narrative threads: the story of Leela Zahir, the eponymous Bollywood star, and that of Guy Swift, a British communications expert who is obsessed with progress and the future.

Much like Hari Kunzru's highly successful debut novel, *Transmission* was also the subject of critical acclaim. Various aspects of its approach to globalization have been studied; many centre on the uncertainty fostered by an acceleration of human movement. Iwona Filipczak, for example, analyses the "liquid fears" surrounding the migrant character in the post-9/11 context.[4] In *Transmission*, the "liquidity" of planetary flows theorized by Zygmunt Bauman is depicted as a double-edged sword that can ease circulation for some, but exclude others from the most thriving circles of the economy, lest they should threaten this global order one way or another. Hence, one can understand *Transmission*'s concern for globalization as Peter Childs and James Green do in *Aesthetics and Ethics in Twenty First Century British Novels*. They read *Transmission* together with Hardt and Negri's theory of "Empire," as a novel moving from "the imperialism of European authority and capitalist expansion" to "the global order of transnational corporations, non-governmental organizations and media conglomerates (…)."[5] The virus motif, which is central to the plot, displays how this global order can be undermined by its very assets, one of which is digital technology.

Key to addressing the thematic stakes of *Transmission* is the role of imagination. The characters are deeply involved with imagination, whether they imagine other realities for

[4] See for example Iwona Filipczak, "Immigrant to a Terrorist: On Liquid Fears in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*," *Brno Studies in English* 40, no. 2 (2014): 67–76, https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2014-2-4, accessed July 29, 2020.
[5] Childs and Green, *Aesthetics and Ethics*, 61.

themselves and for others – Guy Swift takes his clients on "inspirational visual journeys"[6]– or possible new dimensions in information technologies. Bound together by the heightened propagation of imaginaries through mass media and digital technologies, the characters in *Transmission* share a *praxis* of the imagination, or what Arjun Appadurai famously calls the "work of the imagination," that is, the sphere in which "(…) individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern".[7] In the novel, the reader witnesses this constant negotiation, and is made to question their own dreams and aspirations in regard to the heightened flows of the global era.

This article argues that *Transmission* portrays dreaming and moving as two co-dependent dynamics, both of which question the displacement of people, objects and ideas in the globalized world. In this analysis, dreams are not limited to the realm of sleep; rather, they are understood as "a cherished hope or ideal,"[8] including transient images, desires and fantasies. First, dreams of movement pervade the novel, and the desire for migration relies on the circulation of spatial representations. The novel can also be read through the lens of Paul Virilio's dromocracy, or the regulation of social order by speed. I suggest that this dromocracy leads to a form of *dream*ocracy, whereby dreams of speed and circulation become a stake of power. Dreams ultimately function as a narrative drive, leading the reader through a game of semantic displacements that mirror the characters' movements.

Dreams of movement

In *Transmission*, dreams are often dreams of movement. The two main events of the novel are Arjun's migration to the United States and his subsequent release of the *Leela* virus. These events echo Arjun Appadurai's influential analysis of mass migration and mass media as the two diacritics to understand our times: to him, these two contemporary phenomena determine modern subjectivity outside the limits of the nation. In *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai explains that the juxtaposition of mass media and migration act as an incentive on the imagination: "(…) electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination."[9] *Transmission* can be analysed in this light: through the joint movement of

[6] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 21.
[7] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.
[8] Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, "Dream," *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*.
[9] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 4.

characters and of images from the internet or television – epitomized by the *Leela* virus – the narrative addresses the importance of movement in contemporary imaginaries.

The novel thus explores how the desire for dream-like, faraway places is impacted by mass media. On several occasions, the reader is introduced to globalized imaginaries of migration, which take the form of stereotypes but also objects or places observed through the media.

Arjun Mehta's dreams of migration initially seem to be detached from any national symbolism. In this regard, they respond to Appadurai's analysis of the imagination of migrants:

> For migrants, both the politics of adaptation to new environments and the stimulus to move or return are deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space.[10]

But where the dream of a frictionless, borderless world might pervade the imaginaries of globalization, the language used to describe Arjun's consciousness betrays the flipside of this ideal. Initially, his migration dream is not a dream of the United States *per se*; before his job interview, he dreams of it as "*Amrika*. Residence of the Non-Resident Indian."[11] Through this seemingly oxymoronic definition, the United States is pictured as a cardboard replica of India, a temporary place of residence among a community of Indian nationals. From the very start and even before Arjun leaves, "Amrika," a misspelled misunderstanding, has little chance of materializing.[12] The term "Non-Resident Indian" is itself a historically unstable category which resists definition. Often used under the acronym NRI, it is most often encountered in the field of taxation; yet Marie C. Lall notes that "the terms 'People of Indian Origin' and 'Non Resident Indians' have been used interchangeably by the government of India (…) as well as by the Indian press" since the latter appeared in 1984.[13]

Furthermore, the young immigrant's dream of being an NRI in "Amrika" is undoubtedly nurtured by what Appadurai calls "a mass-mediated imaginary." Upon approaching the airport in Delhi, Arjun notices: "[w]ith their billboards promising denim and sports shoes, the clothing outlets on the approach road beckoned like a premonition of the American future."[14] Arjun's dreamed "Amrika" is only imagined by touches, the fashion accessories standing as a synecdoche of a place that can never be whole for the migrant-to-be. Associating America

[10] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 6.
[11] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 8.
[12] Interestingly, this phonemic spelling is often used in contemporary fiction in English when using the perspective of South Asian diasporic characters: it appears in one of Hari Kunzru's other novels, *Gods Without Men* (53), or Indra Sinha's *Animal People* (66, 149, 247, 256, 358), to name but a few.
[13] M. C. Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity: India's Relationship with the Non Resident Indians* (Ashgate Publishing, 2001. Reprint, London; New York: Routledge, 2019), 1.
[14] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 31.

with the future locates the United States in the realm of hopes and fantasies, far from an actual experience of place.

Interestingly, the mass-mediated imaginary of migration extends to the private sphere. In a strikingly pathetic scene surrounding the departure of the young man, Arjun's relatives accompany him to the airport and follow him to the very end of the passport line; at this stage, we are told that "Mrs Mehta started to sob in earnest, comforted by her next-door neighbour and digitally recorded by Ramesh for posterity."[15] The film shot by Arjun's cousin indirectly turns Arjun himself into an element of the mediated imaginary of migration; while he leaves for the United States, he becomes, in turn, part of a recorded memory that might nurture the dreams of others. Paradoxically, this departure is highly laughable, as shown by the clearly unnecessary presence of a "next-door neighbour" and the dramatic crying of Arjun's mother. While this comical staging hints at the frequency of such scenes in South Asian airports, the parodic tone might have another function: the characters' exaggerated behaviours can be read as an excess of well-known mechanisms that contrast with Arjun's unknown future abroad.

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The proliferation of imaginaries of movement runs parallel to the way space, more generally, is depicted in the novel. Peppered through the narrative are references to planes,[16]

[15] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 31.
[16] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 12, 47.

escalators,[17] gates[18] – transitional spatial entities, all of which seem to point to what Marc Augé termed "non-places". The sociologist defined non-place, a token of modernity, as lacking the key components of place: history, relations and identity.[19] Non-places derive from what Augé identified as a "spatial overabundance," an excess of speedy movement but also of spatial representations through the media.[20] This overabundance of spatial representations is portrayed in *Transmission*, and the shifts from one character's story to the other contribute to a sense of multiplication that makes the reader lose their bearings. Most of the places described lack "history, relations and identity," and some are even emphatically portrayed as artificial and fake, such as Dubai, which Guy Swift visits for work.[21] It is also the case of Arjun's home neighbourhood, Noida, the North Okhla Industrial Development Area of New Delhi. Following the character back in his parents' home, the reader is plunged into a neighbourhood full of shopping centres built up from scratch. Noida is described in imaginary terms: "The promotional literature called it "the new industrial fairyland of the nation.""[22] Yet Noida is soon revealed to be a nightmare rather than a dreamy "fairyland," as the reader is told that its former inhabitants were brutally removed so that the area could be turned into this consumer's dream.[23] The novel indeed tackles the major discrepancies in the speed and ease with which people move in the globalized world, and subsequently, the question of agency that is central to many contemporary migrations.

From dromocracy to "*dream*ocracy"

In 1977, French urbanist and philosopher Paul Virilio published *Vitesse et Politique: essai de dromologie*, in which he explained that modern societies increasingly function according to the demands of speed. Initially used in the military as a strategic and logistic asset, speed has entered the fields of economy and politics, and become the norm against which all success and progress is measured in a given society.[24] This system produces and maintains systems of inequality, and leads to what Virilio called a "dromocracy," or the rule of speed (*dromos* meaning race).[25] Speed severs us from reality, from others and from our

[17] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 11.
[18] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 53, 61.
[19] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*,1992, trans. John Howe. (London ; New York: Verso, 1995), 77-78.
[20] Augé, *Non-Places*, 34.
[21] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 177.
[22] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 14.
[23] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 14.
[24] Paul Virilio, *Vitesse et politique : Essai de dromologie* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1977), 131.
[25] Virilio, *Vitesse et Politique*, 53.

selves; ultimately, the omnipresence of speed can be perceived as a threat to the experience of the physical world, and to our experience of reality.[26] While bearing radical assumptions, Virilio's lifelong analysis of the socio-political stakes of speed might help decode recent globalizing patterns in imaginaries of movement and place, and the way we narrate them. In *Transmission*, Hari Kunzru playfully addresses this dromocratic shift: the rule of speed determines the characters' relations, their evolution, and in the end, reveals a fundamentally strategic use of dreams and imagination.

In *Transmission*, several relations to motion are introduced and seem to display a clear-cut hierarchy in relation to speed. Arjun Mehta, Leela Zahir, Guy Swift and his partner Gabriella Caro all circulate at a different pace, unveiling what forms a strictly regulated politics of speed. As Peter Childs and James Green point out, Guy Swift is aptly named since he is the most mobile character in the narrative, making extensive use of plane travel and hotel rooms in distant lands with a disconcerting ease and speed.[27] Gabriella Caro, a public relations officer and Guy Swift's partner, also moves very swiftly when she has to run from London to Scotland and take charge of the crisis taking place on Leela Zahir's film setting. Depicted as a European socialite from a wealthy background, Gaby "had always been in motion."[28]

Leela Zahir, the actress whose image is used to spread the virus, is moved from India to Scotland to shoot a romantic Bollywood film in a seemingly authentic setting. She might seem like a mobile character at first glance: Leela's image continuously circulates worldwide, especially after it is used as the avatar for the virus. But the girl herself seems trapped in a career she did not choose. She happens to be a child star manipulated by an intrusive mother:

> From their first audition, and her inspired idea to change the girl's Persian name to something Hindu-friendly, Leila-Leela's marvellous career had taken her on an upward path of almost unprecedented rapidity."[29]

In this particular passage, the managerial perception of speed by Leela's mother transpires through the use of two fake-sounding adjectives that echo one another, "upward" and "unprecedented." While the possessive "their" encapsulates both Leela and her mother, in the end, it remains unclear whether the "upward path" is that of Leela or her mother, especially after Leela's own identity has been toyed with.

Arjun Mehta, the main character, similarly lacks agency in his movements. In fact, he appears to be an outcast of this dromocracy, struggling against immobility. Upon arriving in

[26] Virilio, *Vitesse et Politique*, 133; for developments on the consequences of the dromocracy, see also Paul Virilio, *Esthétique de la disparition*, 1980 (Reprint, Paris: Galilée, 1989), 58.
[27] Childs and Green, *Aesthetics and Ethics*, 88.
[28] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 73.
[29] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 143.

California, he is placed on "the bench" together with other Indian IT geniuses, waiting in a shared house to be called for a job.[30] The word "bench," here referring to American team sports, is one of the terms that has lost its "linguistic glamour"[31] for Arjun since his arrival in California. Yet the term is repeated, as if to emphasize its newfound emptiness, but also the sense of stasis that Arjun undergoes over a full chapter.[32] Arjun dreams of movement again, when *Databodies* offers him a mission in Portland. But four weeks later, he is "back on the West Coast, on the bench,"[33] the conclusive "b" alliteration echoing his fateful return to the margins of the dromocracy.

Soon, Arjun realizes that what most hinders his American dream is his pedestrian condition. A series of noun phrases describes pedestrian Arjun, from "the non-driver"[34] to "the walking man."[35] Hari Kunzru had explained in an interview that this pedestrian character was the initial mental image that inspired the novel, through his own experience of being a non-driver in California – he called it an "entire space automobile-dictated."[36] The writer's concerns with the social aspects of movement and speed transpire through Arjun's oppressive experience of slow, constrained movement, that turn his American dream into a nightmare of immobility. In a reflection on the need for driving lessons, the internal focalizer points to the gap between his dreams and reality:

> At first it had been because he did not feel confident, settled enough. Then it was because he was never in one place. More recently, now that he was desperate, now that the sense of being diminished by this environment had become a suspicion of *actual physical shrinkage*, it was because he no longer had the money for driving lessons. Living his dreams was proving hard.[37]

The italics and the redundant adjectives "*actual physical*" highlight the character's struggle to draw the line between his imagination and reality. Arjun's relation to space demonstrates a form of placelessness, an impossibility to find his place in California, and the passage culminates with the representation of the environment as an active force attacking Arjun, "shrink[ing]" him as a science-fiction machine would. Hari Kunzru's focus on pedestrian life relies on a desire to shift the perspective from the glossy glamour that usually pervades representations of sunny California. Discussing the homeless men he spotted walking along the roads near the Mexican border, Kunzru commented that "their version of California is so

[30] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 39-40.
[31] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 40.
[32] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 38-47.
[33] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 46.
[34] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 39.
[35] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 50.
[36] Nick Ryan, "He's the Millionaire Scribe," *The Globe and Mail*, May 25, 2004, http://www.nickryan.net/articles/kunzru.html, accessed July 29, 2020.
[37] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 39.

utterly different."[38] Arjun's version of California also puts forth a marginalized narrative: that of a promising "brain drain" emigration that resulted in immobility. The frequent references to Arjun's disappointed dream are also reminiscent of the debate surrounding the Dream Act, which initially aimed at giving permanent residency to children and young people who arrived in the United States as minors.[39] *Transmission* was published early during the Dream Act debate, as the law was first introduced in 2001 in the United States Congress.

This attempt at comparing narratives of movement translates as an extensive use of gaze-shifting in the novel. After this same passage narrating pedestrian movement, it is Arjun's gaze which directs us upwards towards the sky, a visual indication of the hierarchy of speed: "He knows what lies above him, the sublime mobility of those who travel without ever touching the ground."[40] While at first glance the ideas of "mobility" and "lying above" seem antithetic, they reveal the immutability of a social order regulated by the access to movement. This ambivalence between movement and paralysis is further reinforced by the use of the adjective "sublime," a type of beauty that Edmund Burke identified as petrifying through its effect on the soul.[41]

With this sentence, Arjun directs us towards characters like Guy Swift, the communications expert, whose company called *Tomorrow** is obsessed with the idea of the future. Guy and his French business partner Yves Ballard epitomize what Paul Virilio called "dromomaniacs" (*dromomanes*). In the *Ancien Régime* the term was assigned to soldiers suffering from a traumatic disorder, who kept wandering in a frenzy. Virilio redirected the term to define anyone who is obsessed with the pursuit of the future, and with arriving first in this race.[42] The two men's obsession with speed is regularly ridiculed in the novel, for instance when Yves Ballard tells Guy that they should not have lunch: "We don't want to get fat. Fat people move slowly. Fat companies too."[43] In Yves Ballard's peremptory statements, the dromocracy pervades even the simplest bodily needs, and the hierarchical order of speed is again likened to a survival of the fittest. These passages testify to Kunzru's use of social

[38] Nick Ryan, "He's the Millionaire Scribe".
[39] American Immigration Council, "The Dream Act, DACA, and Other Policies Designed to Protect Dreamers", 25 August 2016, accessed July 29, 2020, https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/dream-act-daca-and-other-policies-designed-protect-dreamers. The most recent attempt at putting forth a version of that law dates back to May 2019.
[40] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 47.
[41] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. 1757, James T. Boulton ed. (Notre Dame, Ind. and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 58. "The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature (…) is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror."
[42] Virilio, *Vitesse et Politique*, 15; 68.
[43] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 125-126.

satire, which led Robinson to identify *Transmission* and *The Impressionist* as "intellectual comedies."[44] The absurdity depicted here is indeed a token of the writer's recurring engagement with authenticity:[45] through these driven yet depthless characters, Hari Kunzru reveals the vacuity lying behind the veneer of globalized corporate speech and provides an opportunity to re-think our relation to language.

These semantic concerns reveal that it is not only speed itself which is at stake, but also dreams of speed. *Transmission* shows how the dromocracy relies on a struggle for control over the imagination, or what could be called a "*dream*ocracy." Indeed, the urge to move quickly is triggered by the imagination, and the novel focuses on the strategic use of imaginary language and by-products in the race for speed.

One example of this is Arjun's interview to become a consultant at "*Databodies*." The name of the company is telling in itself, creating an imaginary in which the workers' bodies are likened to computer data travelling via routers. The vocabulary of mobility is used extensively by the interviewer:

> '(…) I'm going to send you to America and start making you rich.'
> Arjun could not believe it. 'Just like that?'
> 'Just like that, Arjun. When you're a Databodies IT consultant, things happen. Your life starts moving forward. You start to become who you always dreamed of becoming. That's what we stand for.'[46]

Arjun's gullible reaction emphasizes the fake undertones of the manager's promise. The man's empty, unspecific pledge of "becoming who you always dreamed of becoming" is immediately questioned: the dream is merely a sham, something that the company "stands for," represents or embodies but without any guarantee of actualization. Strikingly, the promise of movement makes no mention of Arjun's agency: he will be sent, but will not be able to move freely.

Controlling dreams of movement also becomes the main objective for Guy Swift and his company *Tomorrow**, who are hired by the European border agency for their new communication strategy. From the start, the company's aim to control imagination transpires through expressions of warfare; Guy notably tells his employees that they must "shoot [their] creative essence further and with greater force."[47] Such martial metaphors undoubtedly echo Paul Virilio's theory that the demand for speed originated in the need for efficient assault

[44] Alan Robinson, "Faking It: Simulation and Self-Fashioning in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*". In *British Asian Fiction: Framing the Contemporary*, Neil Murphy and Wai-chew Si ed., 77–96 (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2008, 77).
[45] Robinson, "Faking It," 77.
[46] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 10.
[47] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 227.

methods. Similarly, Yves Ballard, Guy Swift's French counterpart, presents their advertising goals for Europe in these terms:

> But this is the economic power of Hollywood! It is imperative we compete! Europe needs its own factory for dreaming! Not for vanity. For economic reasons. (…) We must have a programme to fund the promotion of positive images of Europe all through the media. The cinema, television, *bandes dessinées*, everything. At the moment it is like the Cold War and we are not even fighting.[48]

Yves Ballard's use of Cold War rhetoric demonstrates the importance of owning the collective unconscious. Yves intends to rage a war on the American dream– which, interestingly, was Arjun's dream – and replace it with a massive outpour of European cultural artefacts. Far from the nationalist intentions of creating a collective narrative, his is a more purely pragmatic, economic goal. Through Yves Ballard and Guy Swift, the narrative engages with the craft of creating collective dreams, and by doing so, unveils the persistence of cultural competition despite the underlying pretence of global homogeneity and cosmopolitan harmony.[49] By doing so, it also hints at persisting intents of cultural supremacy and conquest. The irony of Yves's vacuous speech and expletives is further reinforced by the fact that this discourse merely targets the happy few: indeed, their client is the European border patrol and the campaign is meant to promote stronger border control in the European Union.[50] Like the dromocracy, the "dreamocracy" called upon by Yves Ballard with his "factory for dreaming" serves a highly divisive purpose.

But besides their role in maintaining the social status quo and pushing forth political agendas, the narrative shows another aspect of dreams and their expression in language: the characters' imagination is used structurally, as a narrative tool leading the reader through the layers of the plot.

Following the dreams

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud identifies "displacement" as one of the steps in the mechanics of dreaming (the dream work): a meaningful element of a dream can be displaced and hidden behind an insignificant manifestation, and vice-versa.[51] Even though the novel addresses daydreams, desires and hopes rather than dreams in the Freudian sense, such re-direction and re-assignment of meaning are prevalent in *Transmission*. Whenever dreams

[48] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 256.
[49] For a critical discussion of cosmopolitanism in *Transmission*, see Ashley T. Shelden, "Cosmopolitan Love: The One and the World in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*". *Contemporary Literature* 53, no. 2 (2012): 348–73.
[50] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 262.
[51] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1899, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1998), 340.

appear in the narrative, they act as a manifestation, which drives the reader into another dimension of the plot and structure. Hari Kunzru has acknowledged that *Transmission* was conceived with "a network form," and that the virus is a key component of this mechanics.[52] The use of dreams and imagination can also be read as a part of this "network form," insofar as they make visible some symbolic relations scattered through the narrative.

Throughout the novel, the main character Arjun is shown daydreaming, often under the influence of his favourite Bollywood films. He dreams about his future, blending it with fictional images of film, and the internal narrative voice makes the reader follow the very process of dreaming. While we follow the stories Arjun creates for himself in his dreams, the gap between his fiction and the reality of the world that surrounds him keeps widening. The reader is made to witness this gap, observing it from a distance. This device first and foremost has a proleptic function for the reader: we quickly understand that Arjun's struggle to tell reality from dreams will eventually have disastrous consequences. But these daydreams also have a structural function in the narrative. In her book *Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U.S. fiction in the Twenty-First Century*, Caren Irr operates a difference between narratives of migration focused on trauma, and a more recent body of work which she calls "digital migrant novels." She explains: "(…) the new migration fiction posits the narrator as a router, filtering and processing an overwhelming multisensory global system."[53] While the focalizer of a traumatic migration novel is centripetal, focused inwards towards the sense of loss caused by migration,[54] the narrative voice of a digital migrant novel obeys a multidirectional logic and constantly re-directs the narrative, like a router transmitting the data it receives.

Arjun's daydreams operate according to this router function. *Via* the internal focalizer, his imagination directs the narrative towards the complexity but also the pitfalls of his transnational experience. Early in the novel, Arjun has just been told that he will be sent to the United States by his new employer *Databodies*, and he daydreams during his journey home:

> Arjun Mehta walked back out to Janpath, grinning at the drivers leaning against their cars at the taxi stand. Amrika! Becoming his dreams! (…) His current favourite daydream was set in a mall, a cavern of bright glass through which a near-future version of himself was travelling at speed up a broad black escalator. (…) As the bus trundled over the Yamuna bridge, past the huge shoreline slum seeping its refuse into the river, he ran several variations of this basic fantasy, tweaking details of dress and location, identity of companion and soundtrack.[55]

[52] Fredrick Luis Aldama, "Hari Kunzru in Conversation," *Wasafiri* 20, no. 45 (June 2005): 11–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/02690050508589956, 12, accessed July 20, 2020.
[53] Caren Irr, "From Routes to Routers: The Digital Migrant Novel,"in *Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U.S. Fiction in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), *28*.
[54] Caren Irr cites the fictions of Jhumpa Lahiri, Maxine Hong Kinston and Julia Alvarez as narratives of trauma.
[55] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 11.

In this example, Arjun's dream gives several directions to the narrative. First, it is a recurring daydream, indicating that Arjun is a serial dreamer for whom the borderline between reality and the imagination is systematically blurred. Besides, the character's stereotyped vision of American consumerism, together with the contradictory image of the "cavern of bright glass," hints at the various setbacks Arjun will experience later on in the novel. Like an inhabitant of Plato's cavern, Arjun is limited to the confines of his imagination until he moves and experiences the world. As they watch Arjun's joyful stroll, the motionless taxi drivers also seem to foretell his paralyzing experience of emigration to the United States. Finally, the dream runs parallel to the movement of the bus; yet this movement leads to a slum and to an ominously polluted river. Sharing a sense of dramatic irony with the mocking narrative voice, the reader can foresee a harsh return to reality for Arjun while he naively continues to adjust his mental narrative.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau contended that there is an analogous movement between speaking, dreaming and walking. He borrowed the previously mentioned Freudian classifications of the dream work, asserting that the practice of walking produces

> precisely the body of legends that is currently lacking in one's own vicinity; it is a fiction, which moreover has the double characteristic, like dreams or pedestrian rhetoric, of being the effect of displacements and condensations.[56]

Every time the character of Arjun is shown walking but also moving in vehicles, he seems indeed to draw on this mechanics of "displacement," taking up the prevalent symbols that pervade his mind and drawing from their interpretations to create elaborate daydreams. In the previous example, the character wanders both physically and mentally, creating "Amrika" in his mind from the few elements he has been given. Arjun's movements through his neighbourhood actually make him realize what is "lacking in [his] vicinity" and what he is yearning for:

> In many respects his daydreams were superior to Noida. Noida was upheaval. A properly organized daydream had formal coherence. It could respond to commands, reconfiguring itself according to well-understood operations. Outcomes could be built as required. Obviously the preferable choice.
> But dreaming was penalized. If you ignored the world, it tended to ignore you back.[57]

Arjun's daydreams respond to the same logic as his habit of computer programming: they are planned and predictable, almost binary, with a "preferable choice" and a less appealing option. The semantic field of programming could extend to the reader's experience: in the style of a "Choose your own adventure" story, the reader is made to guess not only Arjun's

[56] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 1980. Translated by Steven F. Randall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, 107.
[57] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 15.

"outcomes" but also the interconnections between the different characters introduced in separate passages.

"NOIDA Sect 18 station." Author: varunshiv. Licensed under Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.

The title of the novel, *Transmission*, can be read as another lead to understand the novel's structure. From a thematic standpoint, it is an obvious hint at the fears of invasion and infection that surrounded computer viruses in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but also the migrant character in the post-9/11 world. As many commented, the virus motif bears heavy symbolism in the context of growing fears and prejudice against racial and religious minorities in the United States.[58] Richard Brock also read this motif as a metaphor for the suspicions and violence surrounding the HIV crisis of the 1980s.[59] However, one cannot but notice that the idea of transmission is not only thematic and topical: it is also embedded in the structure of the novel. As the plot moves from one character's subplot to the next, it actually seems to reveal the role-playing inherent to the transmission of imaginaries: Arjun is the subject who dreams, Guy Swift is the dream-maker, producing illusions and imaginaries, and Leela/*Leela*, both the Bollywood actress and the eponymous virus, constitute the object of many dreams, manifested through a plethora of symbols.

Leela Zahir, who is called "India's (…) dream girl" on several occasions,[60] ends up generating what Appadurai calls a "community of sentiment": "a group that begins to imagine

[58] Iwona Filipczak, "On Liquid Fears." See also Liam Connell, "E- terror: Computer Viruses, Class and Transnationalism in Transmission and One Night @ the Call Center". *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 46, no. 3–4 (1 July 2010): 279–90, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2010.482377, accessed July 29, 2020.
[59] Richard Brock, "An "Onerous Citizenship": Globalization, Cultural Flows and the HIV/AIDS Pandemic in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 44, no. 4 (1 December 2008): 379–90, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449850802410499, accessed July 29, 2020.
[60] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 4; 10.

and feel things together."[61] This group extends far beyond India: images of the Bollywood star and of her electronic avatar are circulated so widely across the world that they create a unity in chaos. In this chaos, even the reader trying to follow Leela/*Leela*'s tracks becomes part of the community of sentiment. It all seems as if Leela/*Leela* were a metonymy in the narrative: the meaning carried by the name is displaced whenever it appears in a new story and context. As the virus keeps mutating, changing names along the way – *Leela01*, *Leela02*, and so forth[62]– Arjun starts to interrogate the possibility that others might share his dreams of the Bollywood star:

> *Ringtone* is also one of several Leela variants which have never been conclusively linked to Arjun Mehta, a gap in the record that opens up vertiginous and troubling possibilities. Were other people out there dreaming of Leela Zahir?[63]

Through the circulating virus, Arjun's dreams of Leela Zahir are thus duplicated into the dreams of others and extend to the reader's gaze. It dawns on us as readers that the "vertiginous and troubling possibilities" of evolution mirror the act of interpretation carried out by the reader: the narrative voice proposes that there are as many "Leela variants" as there are followers of Leela's story, whether inside or outside the diegesis.

Leela/*Leela* is also the central link between all the different stories, connecting the plotlines of Gabriella Caro, Arjun Mehta, Guy Swift and Leela Zahir. Each of the subplots ends up being related to the Bollywood actress/virus, and the final chapter reveals how the entire world was impacted by "Greyday," a new compound noun used for the day when the virus caused so much noise in the system that no form of signal or transmission was clear any more.

This interpretative maze can be read as an attempt to reflect on the semantic anxieties borne by the global age. In *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, Zygmunt Bauman addressed the overuse of the term "globalization": "All vogue words share a similar fate: the more experiences they pretend to make transparent, the more they themselves become opaque."[64] Arjun's propensity for dreaming, Guy Swift's shapeless, oneiric world-class scapes and the extreme duplication of *Leela* variants that blur the line between the virus and the actress character, all testify to the opacity surrounding the meaning of globalization. For want of being a clear-cut, clearly defined experience, globalization can only ever manifest itself through the imaginary. In the manner of Freud's dream work, *Transmission* artfully weaves

[61] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 8.
[62] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 113; 150; 153; 157; 176.
[63] Kunzru, *Transmission*, 157.
[64] Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. 1998. Reprint, Cambridge: Blackwell, 2013, 1.

together a number of cultural symbols of globalization, and it is for the reader to unravel and make sense of these along the narrative.

Conclusion

In what could be read as an echo to Langston Hughes' poetic line "What happens to a dream deferred?"[65] Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* seems to ask the following question: what happens to a dream displaced? In other words, what happens to our dreams and our imagination as we move or as we are moved? By exposing the violence experienced by the outcasts of globalized movement, the novel also dares to echo the last line of Langston Hughes' poem: "Or does it explode?" The reader is indeed led to wonder what may result from the migrant subject's frustrated dream, the way Hughes pondered over the dreams of the African American community. Arjun's dream of working and living in the United States as a first-class citizen is ceaselessly deferred throughout the novel, until the very ending suggests that he might be secretly touring the world with Leela Zahir.

Because it addresses the notion of movement through a wide variety of social and political angles, Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* is a versatile narrative that demands renewed attention. In *Transmission*, there is no defeat of the imagination against the era of hyper-connectivity. Rather, the novel shows that imaginaries and dreams only proliferate more in a context of transnational communication. What prevails, ultimately, is the way they are built, and the subjective importance we give them. As the characters in *Transmission* move with variable ease around the globe, the novel exposes that dreams and ideals of movement are always underpinned by collective fears of invasion and interference. But these should not be taken at face value: the writer's use of an open ending, together with social satire, collage and gaze-shifting, invites us to question cultural hegemony and interpretative authority. Considering the worldwide impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as the words of this article are being typed, it goes without saying that the notion of transmission is an essential component of the 21st century experience, and one that will keep "invading" our imaginaries.

[65] Langston Hughes, "Harlem". In *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, edited by Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel. New York: Knopf, 1994.

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Part IV
Out of the Indian Cinema Dream Factory

THE POETICS OF THE DREAM IN HINDI POPULAR CINEMA

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Abstract

According to the psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar, Indian cinema is "perhaps the one that is the closest to daydreaming." It is known for its ability to invite the viewer to escape into fantasy. In Indian cinema, dream is most often represented as a flashback nourished by impressions lived before sleep. Likewise, it is shown as the projection of a desired future (a prolepsis) or a repressed desire. It can also be premonitory. In Hindi films, dreams entertain, summarize a story (directly or in parallel) or offer a concentrate of narrated time. The presence of musical sequences helps infuse the dream world into the movies. This article studies the poetics of dreams, i.e., the narrative and visual forms that constitute them in popular Hindi films.

What do dreamlike spaces represent in Hindi films? From the nebula of dreamlike *mises en scène* in popular Hindi films, I isolate some exemplary and representative objects that have been established and deconstruct a dream built according to the Freudian model (*Awaara*, Raj Kapoor, 1951) and endowed with a rich Oedipal symbolism but also others, whose universe is nourished by Indian culture such as *Neel Kamal* (Ram Maheswari, 1968), which deals with the hallucinations of a sleepwalker, and *Kanhaiya* (Om Prakash, 1959) evoking the dream of a divinity and resulting in the birth of a vocation in a character.

The conclusion sustains that the poetic language of the filmmakers give substance to dreams by using a free combination of images, motifs, symbols and sounds.

Keywords: Hindi cinema, dream, dreamwork, hallucination, divination, Raj Kapoor

In the West as in the East, in many literary, theatrical or pictorial works, characters often resort to dreaming. Dreaming is an important element of the work, being part of the mechanisms that help build its drama. In Sanskrit works, the story of a dream has its place as *antara sandhi* (internal junction). It intervenes, for example, in the same way as the reading of a missile-like letter received or sent and as the invisible voice heard from behind the scenes. If the dream narrative or its figuration have been part of a dramatic work long before the birth of the cinema, moving images, as soon as they were invented in 1895, and dreams have been put in parallel thanks to the directors observing that the "filmic device

is dreamlike in itself."[1] By offering spectators the possibility of "dreaming", in the sense of "inventing" oneself, cinema not only allows spectators to escape into a "dreamed" world, but can be considered one of the levers of resilience, a striking and recurring feature of the characters in twentieth-century Indian films.

Cinema exerts a strong fascination on the spectator; it transcends borders and even enters such unexpected places as ashrams. It was known to Ramana Maharshi, the spiritual master of the *Advaita Vedanta*[2], who compares the illusory effect of the film to the three states experienced by man such as "waking, dreaming and sleeping":

> The three states [waking, dream and sleep states] are changes which do not affect the individual. The experiences are like pictures passing on a screen in cinema. The appearance and disappearance of the pictures do not affect the screen. So also, the three states alternate with one another, leaving the self unaffected. The waking and dream states are creations of the mind. So the self covers them all.[3]

Thus, this power of attraction appeals to scientists, in spite of themselves, so to say, as is the case with Sigmund Freud. At the time of the invention of the cinematograph, Freud noted that "the meaning of dreams is the fulfilment of an unconscious desire."[4] Four years later, he published a theory devoted to the analysis of dreams, *Die Traumdeutung* or *Interpretation of Dreams*. As Agnès Dorion, a psychoanalyst, reminds us in her article on the cinema image, it was by chance that the father of psychoanalysis encountered cinema in 1907. It took place in the Piazza Colonna in Rome, where he stayed alone. He immediately saw the illusory and hallucinatory aspects. In a letter to his children, he scoffs at being attracted, in spite of himself, to these "uninteresting and infantilizing" moving images, so much so that he is "under the spell", fascinated by the cinematograph.[5] Although moving images give the impression of the illusion of reality, it is worth emphasizing, with Christian Metz, the difference between a "filmic situation" and a "dreamlike situation." According to him, "true illusion is specific to the dream and to it alone. For cinema, it is better to stop with observing the existence of a certain *impression* of reality."[6] As for the principle of reality and illusion, Psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar, in an interview with Livio Boni, recalls that "Hindu theories evoke a certain "elasticity" of reality, deconstructing the pure and hard distinction between illusion and reality established by Freud. For a

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[1] Jean-Louis Baudry's formula in *L'Effet-cinéma* (Paris: Albatros, 1978), 10, evoked by Marie Martin, "La poétique du rêve du point de vue d'une théorie des effets. Autour d'une configuration originaire," in *Rêve et cinéma. Mouvances théoriques autour d'un champ créatif,* ed. Marie Martin and Laurence Schifano (Nanterre: Presses universitaires de Nanterre, 2012), 63-85. OpenEdition Books: 16 juin 2016. https://books.openedition.org/pupo/3493#ftn7, accessed August 15, 2020.

[2] Non-dualistic doctrine (Hinduism).

[3] Probal Dasgupta, "Popular Cinema, India, and Fantasy," in Vinay Lal and Ashish Nandy, eds., *Fingerprinting Popular Culture. The mythic and Iconic in Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12. For the quotation from Ramana Maharshi, see T.N. Venkatraman, ed. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Shri Ramanasramam, 1978), 467.

[4] Sigmund Freud, *Sur le rêve* (*Über Den Traum*), with a preface by Didier Anzieu (Paris: Gallimard, Folio/essais, 1901 reprinted 1988), 9.

[5] Agnès Dorion, "L'image de cinéma," *Décence de rêve*, *Surgence*, n° 17 (Autumn 2018):150.

[6] Christian Metz, *Le signifiant imaginaire. Psychanalyse et Cinéma* (Paris: Christian Bourgois Editeur, 1977 reprinted 2002), 123.

Hindu, there exist different realities: concrete reality, mystical vision, memory, dream."[7] In his study *The Self Possessed, Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilisation*, Frederic M. Smith adds to these considerations another specificity that derives from the South Asian context which recognizes different states of consciousness:

> I should acknowledge that "states of consciousness" have different constructions in the contexts of South Asian philosophical and religious textuality: deep sleep, dream, waking, or, in the *Upanishads* and elsewhere, *turīya*, a fourth transcendent state. It has also been construed as a momentary finite unit connected by time or innate tendency.[8]

If the effect produced by the film as a medium can be compared to that of a dream, we note that the dream content is often motivated by the story "but its boundaries are more porous" as Marie Martin[9] notes. Thus, dreams, daydreams, hallucinations, or *fantasmes*[10] invade the narrative space of films. This observation is particularly true with regard to the popular Indian film, which is, according to Sudhir Kakar, "perhaps the closest to daydreaming"[11] because, one might add, it is only rarely concerned with the desire for the real or the representation of the real. The dream sequences preferably blend into the space reserved for the musical sequences that allow the characters to escape into parallel worlds. These interludes in which are distilled the creativity and imagination of the choreographers, artistic directors and directors invite the spectator to discover a dreamed or fantasized virtuality. In this regard, Kakar points out that

> Indian cinema, in its way of putting the emphasis on unconscious fantasies rather than consciously perceived facts, demonstrates a profound and reliable understanding of the topography of desire. Beneath the surface, the fantasies (*fantasmes*) offered by commercial cinema, even if they are repeated from film to film, are not so banal and involve astonishing reversals in the conscious social perception of various types of human relations in Indian culture.[12]

Without the Indian film director necessarily being familiar with Freudian dream theory, he organizes the sequence around the elements of "dreamwork" as analyzed by Freud. That is to say, by mobilizing different means of filmic expression (costumes, make-up, sets, visual effects - rigging, shooting, lighting, editing, voice, sound effects, etc.) he tries to *metre en scène* (stage) an imaginary dreamlike atmosphere or, in other words, he creates a poetic language and puts it at the service of the

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[7] Livio Boni, *L'Inde de la psychanalyse. Le sous-continent de l'Inconscient* (Paris: Campagne Première, 2011), 65.
[8] Frederic M. Smith, *The Self Possessed, Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 58.
[9] Martin, "La poétique du rêve."
[10] In this article, I use the French term "fantasme" which could be translated into English as "phantasm" or as "fantasy."."Fantasme" in the field of psychoanalysis deals with "imaginary construction, conscious or unconscious, allowing the subject on stage to express and satisfy a more or less repressed desire; to overcome an anguish" (as defined in *Atilf, Dictionnaire de la langue française informatisé* (CNRS, http://atilf.atilf.fr/, accessed August 15, 2020) unlike "fantasy," a term which "deals with what is imagined and with possibilities" according to MK. Raghavendra. For more about the term "fantasy," see Raghavendra "Is there 'fantasy' in Indian cinema? The answer isn't as clear as film enthusiasts might believe," in *Firstpost*, July 1, 2018. https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/is-there-fantasy-in-indian-cinema-the-answer-isnt-as-clear-as-film-enthusiasts-might-believe-4609781.html, accessed August 15, 2020.
[11] Sudhir Kakar, *Eros et imagination en Inde* (Paris: éd. Des Femmes, 1990), 54.
[12] Kakar, Ibid., 56.

cinematic dream. Thus, in the dream sequences, we find *condensation* and *displacement*, *dramatization* or the putting into images of an unsatisfied desire from the day before, atmospheres often associated with anguish due to *repression* and *deformation*. The dreamlike space in the films then lends itself ideally to sexual symbolism and associations of images freed from space and time. Without falling into cultural determinism, it should be pointed out that if the *mise en scène* of dream can be considered analogous to the dreamwork analyzed by Freud and considered "timeless," the visual symbols used by Indian filmmakers are inevitably inspired by Hindu mythology. Let us recall with Heinrich Zimmer, that every Hindu dream and myth is an illustration of Maya, "the cosmic dream" or the illusion projected by Vishnu out of him. Thus, according to Zimmer:

> Faced with the reality of the myth, we can behave in the same way as we do with regard to dreams. Myths are peoples' dreams; but the way in which they are remembered within an anonymous tradition makes them resemble those figures that a waking man constructs from his dreams: their images are illuminated with meaning and as if riveted to each other, their evanescent contours have been strengthened by the contribution of meaning.[13]

Thus, the poetics of the dream, as it is understood in this article, wants to give an account of a relationship between dream and cinema by following, on the one hand, Freud in the metapsychological examination of the dream and by observing, on the other, the cinematographic language nourished by references specific to Indian culture. This poetic space allowing for an exacerbated creativity can be invested as much by the manifest content of a dream with its enigmatic symbolism to be interpreted, as by the latent content which, according to Marie Martin, "directly exposes the unconscious complexes and spawning, eliciting less interpretation than emotion."[14] For Marie Martin,

> It is […] one of the characteristic features of the dreamlike fabric of the film to think of filmic creativity in terms of a maximum effect that only dreamlike intensification and figurability, as well as the scenarios specific to the dream, can achieve. The poetics of dreams thus becomes a form of creation modelled on an elusive nocturnal referent, to which certain works indeed manage to get near in order to better reconfigure the experience of ordinary people of cinema.[15]

The typical example of a dream sequence that scripts the dreamwork and invites a Freudian analysis is *Awaara*'s "Dream sequence," (1951, Raj Kapoor). The longest musical interlude ever conceived for a popular Hindi film is the result of teamwork and two months of shooting. The sequence lasts ten minutes and consists of three musical parts, with about thirty sets representing

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[13] Heinrich Zimmer, *Maya ou le rêve cosmique dans la mythologie hindoue* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris, 1987), 36-37. The French translation of the German text reads: "Devant la réalité du mythe, nous pouvons nous comporter comme nous le faisons à l'égard des songes. Les mythes sont les rêves des peuples ; mais la manière dont ils sont remémorés au sein d'une tradition anonyme les fait ressembler à ces figures que l'homme éveillé construit à partir de ses rêves : leurs images sont enluminées de sens et comme rivées les unes aux autres, leurs contours évanescents ont été renforcés par l'apport d'un sens." The English translation provided in my article is mine.

[14] Martin, "La poétique du rêve". The original passage in French reads: "C'est […] un des traits caractéristiques de la fabrique onirique du film de penser la créativité filmique en fonction d'un maximum d'effet que seuls l'intensification et la figurabilité oniriques ainsi que les scénarios propres au rêve permettent d'atteindre. La poétique du rêve devient ainsi une forme de création modelée sur un référent nocturne insaisissable, dont certaines œuvres parviennent en effet à s'approcher, pour mieux reconfigurer l'expérience de l'homme ordinaire du cinéma." The English translation provided is mine.

[15] Martin, "La poétique du rêve."

paradise (fig. 1), hell (fig. 2), transcendence (fig. 3) and nightmare (fig. 4)[16]. Often analyzed, this sequence has indeed become a school of thought in Indian cinema studies.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

[16] The settings were created by the art director of R.K. Films & studio M.R. Achrekar.

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

The first part stages the work of the dream and its effects of *displacement*, *condensation* and *figuration*[17] (fig. 1); it melts into sets composed of elements of phallic forms (bizarre Greek columns, tower with a collimated staircase). The whole set is drowned in clouds of a milky aspect: an atmosphere symbolizing the sensual desire of Raj (the hero) and Rita (the heroine). Added to this are the ascending and descending movements of characters on steps which, according to Freud, "relate to the sexual act."[18] The slide on the toboggan completes this erotic panoply. Rita, like a goddess, seems to represent Raj's sublimated "superego."[19] The sinusoidal snake-shaped decoration on the Greek columns is reminiscent of a decorative element in the palace where Rita lives with her guardian, Judge Raghunath, who is in love with her. This somewhat strange element refers to the snakes (*nâga*), which are highly venerated in India; they represent the symbol of life, fertility and the perpetual cycle of time

[17] 1) condensation: "[...] the first accomplishment of dreamwork", which amalgamates several concepts into one for purposes of disguise; 2) displacement: "[...] replacing something with an allusion [...] which is more distant"; and 3) figuration: "[...] which transforms thoughts into visual images." Sigmund Freud, *L'interprétation des rêves,* Sigmund Freud, "Le travail du rêve," in *L'interprétation des rêves* (Paris: PUF, Paris, 1967), 241-432 and Freud, *Sur le rêve*.

[18] Freud, *Sur le rêve*, 137.

[19] "Superego sublimated, ideal, transcendent. The superego continues the action of parents, teachers, society; it holds the self in guardianship and exerts on it a constant pressure," *Atilf.* Dictionnaire de la langue française informatisé, CNRS. http://atilf.atilf.fr/, accessed August 15, 2020.

and immortality.[20] Rita, standing at the top of the horizontal steps that form a summit representing a mother's breast, stands next to a giant rope.[21]. Her gaze is directed towards the moon. Nasreen Munni Kabir compares the rope to the umbilical cord that would link the maternal womb and the transcendental world. According to this journalist and historian of Indian cinema, Rita would represent the incarnation of salvation.[22] According to ancient Hindu texts "the power of the moon is similar to nectar... Nectar is part of fire. In the presence of nectar, the fire grows."[23] The lyrics of Rita's song confirm the hint coming from the *Upanishads*. Rita burns with an inner fire. She goes down the steps, calls Raj and sings her desire.[24]

The dreamwork once again produces elements of *displacement* and *condensation*: the hero stands in the middle of the sets representing hell and sings "Zindagi ye nahin" [This is not life] (fig. 2). His "superego" appears this time in the form of an evil monster[25] holding him in his hand like King Kong. The dramatization of the music increases, the skeleton hugs Raj; the evil characters surround him with a frantic dance. In this space, the "sexualized" fire, to borrow the adjective used by Bachelard, is omnipresent. According to the French philosopher, fire represents "the hyphen of all symbols. It unites matter and spirit, vice and virtue" and "primitively, only changes by fire are profound, striking, rapid, marvellous, definitive changes." [26]

The aesthetic universe of the third part of the dream (third aspect associating *displacement* and *condensation*) resembles the first, unlike the presence of the symbols of divinities, heavy with meaning (fig. 3). The statue of *Trimûrti* (Trinity) of the first shots designates the origin of the world according to Hindu beliefs: return to the sources. Raj's "superego" takes the form of a dominant, superhuman, sublime, religious authority. Rita pulls Raj towards her,[27] helps him to climb the steps. They are facing the statue of Shiva, god of destruction. The choice of Shiva whose foot is crushing a small person evokes the cruel attitude of the father (Judge Raghunath) towards his son Raj. According to Girish Karnad, author and director, this father-son relationship is recurrent in Hindu mythology:

> It's almost the exact reverse of the son's aggression toward his father that Freud found central to Western psychology. Knowingly or unknowingly, Indian fathers demand that their sons sacrifice themselves, or even destroy themselves, for their gratification. Take the example of Shiv who unwittingly beheads His son and then replaces the destroyed head with that of an elephant. Or

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[20] Eva Rudy Jansen, *Iconographie de l'hindouisme* (Haarlem: Binkey Kok Publications BV, 2006), 51.
[21] The element inspired by one of Vincente Minneli's *Ziegfeld Follies* sets, 1946.
[22] Nasreen Munni Kabir, *The Dialogue of Awaara, Raj Kapoor's immortal classic* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2010), 244-245.
[23] *Brihad Jabala Upanishad [Great Jabala Upanishad],* based on P. R. Ramachander's English version in Open Source Typing, Translation and Discussion of Sanskrit Texts. http://www.vedarahasya.net/brihadjabala.htm
[24] "Tere Bina Aag Yeh Chandni" roughly translates as "Without you, the moon is like fire."
[25] Moral censorship assimilated by Freud to the death instinct. Self-punitive, demanding, rigid, severe, scrupulous superego. "As soon as a growing man notices that he is destined to remain a child forever, that he cannot do without protection against foreign superpowers, he confers on them the traits of the paternal figure, he creates gods for himself, which he fears, which he seeks to win and to which he nevertheless transfers the care of his protection," Sigmund Freud, *L'avenir d'une illusion* (Paris: PUF, 1927, reprinted 1973), 21.
[26] Gaston Bachelard, *Psychanalyse du feu* (Paris: Folio-Essais, 1994), 81-103.
[27] "Ghar Aaya Mera Pardesi" roughly translates as "The wanderer has returned home."

> Yayati who demands that his sons restore him to his lost youth, by giving him theirs. When the four elder sons refuse, they are cursed for their selfishness. The young son Puru agrees to make the sacrifice, and is rewarded for enabling his father to spent a thousand extra years in sensual pleasure. The most famous example of course is that of Bhishma in *Mahabharata* who vows never to sleep with a woman so that his father can possess the woman he wants: even the gods hail Bhishma for his exceptional sacrifice[28].

The crane shot of Raj and Rita, framed from Shiva's feet, only reinforces the crushing sensation of the two characters. The last shots of the sequence turn it into a nightmare, causing a positive split in Raj's mind. As Raj and Rita, hand in hand, walk away on a bright path, they are suddenly confronted by Jagga, a criminal who manipulates Raj (fig. 4). His size is gigantic. Raj's mentor and guru (father figure) attacks the young men with a knife, symbol of castration and premonition of the oedipal drive that brings death. The ideal world collapses for Raj. He wakes up with a strong determination to change his life.

The advantage of this sequence is that it uses a variety of aesthetic forms and symbols. By mixing the visual symbolism of different cultures, Western and Indian, it could be positioned, on the one hand as the basis of this kind of sequences and on the other, as a bridge between cultures. That said, while the film was acclaimed by viewers in Asia and the Far East, in the West, despite its sought-after modernity, the reception of the film was disappointing[29]. At the time, what impressed the viewer was the effect of the thick, cloudy fog, which filled the lower space of the frame for two-thirds of the sequence. Staged for the first time in Hindi cinema by Kapoor, the realization of this visual effect required a search for technical solutions, hitherto unheard of in Indian film production. Many tests were made to make the clouds as white and thick as possible. In his memoirs, Radhu Karmakar, cinematographer at R.K. Films & Studios, recalls his participation in the technical research during the shooting of the film:

> Luckily, I had a friend, a chemist at Bengal Chemical, who suggested the use of solidified carbon dioxide and ice. We experimented and found it gave the best effect… even I was surprised at the superb perfection of the whole sequence[30].

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[28] Quoted by Kabir, *The Dialogue of Awaara,* 248.

[29] At the 1953 Cannes Film Festival, the film went almost unnoticed, arousing mixed interest among film critics. Jean de Baroncelli, in his article in *Le Monde* of 27 April 1953, was ruthless in his opinion on *Awaara*: "*Awara*, an Indian film, deserves a long chronicle because of the thoughts it arouses. It took two years to make and cost a million dollars to make. 70,000 metres of film were recorded to make it. Already its success in India is prodigious. Such an effort and such a success are attracting attention. [...] This is what the heirs of one of the most original civilizations in the world consider to be one of their masterpieces! I came out of the film stunned, disconcerted, appalled above all, as if I had seen a sign of a curse strike the art we love." (My translation). The original passage reads like this: "*Awara*, film indien, mériterait une longue chronique à cause des réflexions qu'il suscite. Sa réalisation a duré deux ans et a coûté un million de dollars. 70 000 mètres de pellicule ont été impressionnées pour le mener à bien. D'ores et déjà son succès aux Indes est prodigieux. Un tel effort et une telle réussite retiennent l'attention. […] Voilà donc ce que les héritiers d'une civilisation les plus originales du globe considèrent comme un de leurs chefs-d'œuvre ! Je suis sortie de ce film abasourdi, déconcerté, atterré surtout, comme si j'avais vu un signe de malédiction frapper l'art que nous aimons."

[30] Radhu Karmakar, *The Painter of the Lights* (Delhi: Prafulla, 2005), quoted in Kabir, *The Dialogue of Awara,* XIV-XVI.

Materializing – making visible – the effect of mist in the dream sequence represents an aesthetic revolution in India, where the metaphor of the veil or cloud, which obstructs the mind or vision and prevents one from seeing reality, is very common. In philosophy, for example, the metaphor of "autumn clouds dissipating" accompanies the image of the process of enlightenment reported by Frederic M. Frederic M. Smith:

> When illumination truly arises as a result of [holding up] the lamp of knowledge, then the *jīva*'s[31] delusion of will [*saakalpamohan*] dissipates, like clouds in autumn. The sense of willfulness disappears as the body becomes quiescent.[32]

The director may have been inspired by Hollywood cinema of the 1940s where fog is often part of the set[33]. Using it in the Indian context increases its imaginary power. Becoming a major component of the dream, this metaphor put in cinematographic image conveys a philosophical and religious context. The presence of the element "water" in the dream sequences echoes the strong Hindu symbolism, described by Heinrich Zimmer:

> In the symbolic language of dreams, waters signify the depth of the unconscious. From their reflecting surface emerge forms which, in dreams as in life, populate our inner world. So, according to Indian cosmology, the very shape of the outside world emerges from the depths of the waters. It floats on abyssal waters. It rests on the head of the serpent called "Infinite" - Ananta - also known as Shesla, that is to say "the remnant", which remains formless and infinite when the completed form of the universe emerges from these waves. The serpent carries the cosmic egg on its head, but in the aquatic depths where it inhabits is also the home of the turtle, the other mythical inhabitant of the waters. The turtle too embodies the element on which everything rests.[34]

Mist, fog, water drops visually form a veil that diffuses the material and makes invisible the cuts between shots. It fluidifies and dissolves reality, allowing the "condensation" and the "displacement" of daytime thought-images towards dream-like thought-images. This volatile and transparent material accompanies the dream narrative in the same way as music, ubiquitously composing sequences that aim to express the unspeakable through the "desemanticized" language of music.[35] As for the mixture

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[31] *Jīva* is a Sanskrit term coming from the verbal root *jīv* which means "to live" and means "life" or "individual soul" or "living being". In Indian philosophy, *jīva* has the meaning of "individuality" or "individualized self".

[32] Frederic M. Smith, *The Self Possessed, Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 322.

[33] The generation of directors of the age of Kapoor was strongly inspired by the aesthetic universe of American musicals, Vincente Minneli's, for example, or by Victor Fleming and King Vidor's *The Wizard of Oz*, 1939, etc. (see Jitka de Préval, "Le mélodrame de l'incompréhension dans l'œuvre de Raj Kapoor, 1924-1988, Inde," PhD thesis, Université Paris 3 Sorbonne-Nouvelle, 2017).

[34] H. Zimmer, *Maya ou le rêve cosmique,* 67-68. The French translation of Zimmer's original German text reads like this: "Dans le langage symbolique des rêves, les eaux signifient la profondeur de l'inconscient. De leur miroir surgissent les formes qui, dans les rêves comme dans la vie, peuplent notre univers intérieur. Ainsi, selon la cosmologie indienne, la forme même du monde extérieur émerge de la profondeur des eaux. Elle flotte sur les eaux abyssales. Elle repose sur la tête du serpent appelé « Infini » – Ananta – connu aussi sous le nom de Shesla, c'est-à-dire « le reste », ce qui subsiste de l'élément informe et infini lorsque la forme achevée de l'univers surgit de ces flots. Le serpent porte l'œuf cosmique sur sa tête, mais dans les profondeurs aquatiques qu'il habite se situe également la demeure de la tortue, l'autre habitant mythique des eaux. Elle aussi incarne l'élément sur lequel tout repose." The English translation provided above is mine.

[35] Anna Morcom, *Hindi Films Songs and the Cinema* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 14-15 quoted in *L'Inde de la psychanalyse. Le sous-continent de l'Inconscient*, ed. Livio Boni (Paris: Édition Campagne Première/ Recherche, Paris, 2011), 236.

of symbols from Hindu, Greek, Judeo-Christian and Freudian mythologies,[36] it must be said that it is typical not only in Kapoor's work but also a recurring phenomenon in Indian cinema, which is constantly enriched, like a universal unconscious, by any surrounding multicultural influence. Another example of cultural and aesthetic blending among many others is Kumar Shahani's *Maya Darpan* (1972), whose story is inspired by *Madame Bovary*. Here too, the heroine, who dreams of escaping from her world, finds herself submerged in a misty atmosphere of contrasting colours.

Kapoor's *mise en scène*, sets and visual effects of the "Dream Sequence" inspired other Hindi filmmakers, opening the way to a new mode of expression. We find similar sets and atmospheres in the films of Kapoor's contemporaries, in Guru Dutt's 1957 film *Pyaasa*, for example, or in Naresh Saigal's *Main Nashe Mein Hoon* (1959). In this period, sexual desire staged in dream sequences is often suggested with modesty, hidden behind traditional erotic pictorial symbolism. It gets unbridled over time.[37]

While *Awaara*'s dream sequence has inspired many directors, Kapoor's own work follows in the footsteps of his mentor Kidar Sharma, who gave him his first major role in 1947.[38] Invited to play the hero of his *Bawre Nain* (1950), Raj Kapoor is filmed as the object of the heroine's desire, played by Geetha Bali, in the dream sequence entitled "Hy Beejoor Beejoor" (fig. 5).

Fig. 5

This sequence is integrated between two segments of a scene that takes place in the hospital. In the absence of transition shots to signify the change from waking to dreaming states (overprints, optical distortions, etc.), one image is sufficient to announce it. In the close-up of the sleeping hero's face, the superimposed small heroine, Tara, says, "Chand, I come in your dream." The hero opens his eyes to contemplate the dream depicting the young woman sitting on a luminous vase. While she sings, a dancer turns around her. The dream sequence stops as abruptly as it begins, without any transition. In *Jan Pahchan*,[39] the heroine (Nargis), a simple villager, believes that the hero knows that "he has entered her dream" and blames him for it. On the other hand, the *mise en scène* of the dream follows a "protocol" similar to that used by Raj Kapoor in *Awaara*, i.e., signifying by a play of superimpositions

[36] In the *Old Testament*, the serpent is a metaphor for the Devil, while in Hindu mythology it symbolizes life.
[37] Raj Kapoor's work bears witness to this evolution, for example in *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (1978); see the dream sequence "Chanchal Sheetal Nirmal Komal" which roughly translates as "Quick Silver Fresh, Pure, Tender."
[38] *Neel Kamal*, Kidar Sharma, 1947.
[39] *Jan Pahchan*, Fali Mistry, 1950.

Nargis's immersion in a dream world. The decors set up to represent a sublimated space shine brightly. The hero appears at the top of the steps of a wide staircase, like a fetichized and venerated object, and engages in a dance chase with the heroine. The fantasy (*fantasme*) ends with the appearance of the shot showing Nargis in bed, flooded with light (fig. 6).

Fig. 6

The special effects marking the beginning and end of the dream sequences and the whimsical settings compose the elementary poetic language of the dream. While there are many dream sequences in popular Hindi films that idealize the hero or heroine in an eroticized environment, there are others that use the same device to stage the birth of devotion, i.e. to show the main character's love for a deity. In this case, the desired one ("he" or "she") who enters a character's dream is a god or goddess; very often it is Krishna or another avatar of Vishnu. This phenomenon was first staged in 1921, in Ganpat Shinde's *Tukaram*, of which a mere five-minute fragment has survived. The opening card announces that Tukaram, a legendary devotee, wishes to see the lord. The character is shown asleep, dreaming, and then receiving a visit from a deity. The *mise en scène* is very sketchy. A simple trick produces the effect of the appearance and disappearance of the divine after a blessing ritual of Tukaram, by the god Vitthala or Vithoba (an avatar of Vishnu).

A few decades later, in Om Prakash's *Kanhaiya* (1959), the heroine Shanu (Nutan) sees and hears Krishna in her dream. This naive and innocent villager is seized with love for Krishna during a *raslila* performance. She is seated on the floor with the other village spectators. The moment of her revelation is highlighted by a front tracking shot focused on her wide-open eyes, which literally "drink" every word and watch every movement on stage. The spectator familiar with *bhakti*, the devotional current of Hinduism, understands the power of *darshan*, the power of contemplation of a deity in the making. Thus, the experience of *darshan* is seen as reciprocal, meaning that while the devotee looks at a deity, the deity returns it to him with a look and a blessing. This eye contact strikes the young woman with force. Before falling asleep, the heroine hears the words of the actress performing Radha and the

sound of Krishna's flute. She closes her eyes and a mist invades the frame. As soon as the mist dissipates, she finds herself in a dreamlike world, chasing Krishna, who is hiding in fairy-tale settings. To close the sequence, the director makes the fog cover the frame. The dreamlike landscape vanishes and Shanu's sleeping face reappears in close-up.

The story of *Kanhayia* takes place in a village. All the characters are simple villagers, ignorant and gullible. A perfect setting for the case of divination produced by the dream to take place. It should be noted that the cases of characters visited by deities in their dreams are recorded in certain Indian cultures and communities – as confirmed by Frederick M. Smith, who is interested in different types of divination, possession or hallucination –, and described in Sanskrit texts or evoked by oral tradition. Smith also mentions cases of links between dreaming and children's divination, which *Kanhaiya* may have echoed:

> In *Mantras et Mandarins,* Strickmann discusses the nexus of dream, divination, and possession, showing their convergence within the realm of Tantra. This is an attractive association, and Strickmann works it into a discussion of a ritual performed on children that produces initiatory dreams. In this ritual a mantra is recited 108 times, a *mudrā* is formed with the fingers, the child falls into a kind of sleep or reverie, possession descends (it is here that Strickmann uses the word *āveśa*), and the child then will relate matters good and bad. Much of this, it appears, is derived from rites of *svasthāveśa.* […] all three – dream, divination, and possession – are regarded as authoritative when emanating from children[40].

Whether in a romantic melodrama or in a devotional film, we are struck by the analogy of aesthetic treatments: the dream sequence is designed to reveal the desire for union between the characters, whether between the hero and the heroine or between the main character and the representation of a divinity. If the staging shows the characters freed from constraints and obstacles, free to approach and touch each other, then the poetry sung during these musical interludes makes it possible to express the sublime or the unspeakable. The staging is eroticized and the characters display their fantasies without any inhibition. Unconsciously or consciously, the directors privilege the sets that Freud designates as sexual symbols, as we have seen. On the other hand, films that tell stories of possession and hallucination where characters are confronted with ghosts, as in Ram Maheswari's *Neel Kamal* (1968) or Bimal Roy's *Madhumati* (1958), or are possessed by spirits as in Mani Kaul's *Duvidha* (1973) – and in his 2005 remake of Amol Palekar *Paheli* – use a specific poetic language. We could observe that they mix the diegetic reality with the imaginary without staging the work of dreams or using dreamlike settings. Only a few tricks can complete the illusion of the magical power of the spirit that takes over the hero's body in *Paheli*. The film tells the story of a woman who is seduced by a *bhūt* (spirit) in love with her. Taking the form of her husband, he takes advantage not only of the latter's absence (sent by his father, a businessman, to a faraway town), but also of the husband's lack of interest in his wife. Neglected by her husband, she appreciates the love that the spirit bearing the physical identity of the absent person offers her. If, according to Frederic M. Smith, in Western culture possession can only be

[40] Smith, *The Self Possessed,* 477.

"sinister, demonic, and evil," in Indian and Asian culture, which recognizes the multitude of the self, possession by a spirit [*bhūt*] can take a positive and sympathetic form, as *Paheli* shows:

> Soon, the *bhūt* is drawn into his own self-construction, and at the end of the film he appears to merge with the character that he has replicated, making the possession complete and, we believe, satisfying and permanent. Thus, the *bhūt* possesses, first, his own shape-shifted construction and, eventually, its more substantial prototype. […] *Paheli* illustrates the Indian (and other Asian) recognition of selfhood as mutable, multidimensional, nonlinear, and (at least in Buddhism) fabricated, a moving part among other moving parts. The *bhūt* maintains his self-possession, his own identity as a *bhūt* (the wife also knows this—it is their great secret), aware that he has instigated his own construction.[41]

The ghosts of popular Hindi cinema are not always balanced and harmless like *Paheli's bhūt*. In *Neel Kamal* (1968), Chitrasen (Raaj Kumar), coming from the past, wants to retrace the love that cost him his life and lure the heroine into his darkness. Another time sculptor, it is a ghost that exerts power over the young Sita (Waheeda Rehman), an identical portrait of the princess he was in love with centuries before and whose sculpted portrait he created. This is possible because the heroine is a sleepwalker. She follows the voice that calls her and invites her to join her at night. Sita's "illness" is a taboo in her in-laws who mistreat her because of her nocturnal absences. In the musical sequence "Aaja Tujhko Mera Pyar Pukare" sung by Mohammed Rafi, the hero who has been condemned to death evokes his love for Sita while the workers build a stone wall around him to bury him alive. In a state of daydreaming, he relives moments of happiness with the princess, such as images of cartoons rising out of the mist or fading away. The creativity of the hero-artist is often understood as a metaphor for that of the director. Both the cinema and the dream act as ferrymen, as Emmanuelle André points out:

> The dream is a go-between: it partakes in this unconscious of thought, analyzed by Freud, in which works of art are inscribed, and which will later render possible the interest expressed in everything that falls within the domain of meaninglessness.[42]

In works of art, says Etienne Souriau, "the dream has a significant value not only for the dreamer in diegesis, but also in relation to the real world where the author lives."[43] In other words, the dream world, imagined and staged in films, is haunted by the author's unconscious, which rubs off on the unconscious of his work. Cinema is a mass medium and a vehicle for fantasies (*fantasmes*) common to many people. If the word fantasy evokes an excess of feeling, eroticism, eccentricity, disturbing or extravagant, it should be understood, in particular, in the sense used by Sudhir Kakar, namely as a term for the "universe of imagination fuelled by desire, which provides us with an alternative space in

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[41] Smith, *The Self Possessed,* 16.

[42] Emmanuelle André, "Logique d'images. Du rêve, des sommeils et de l'art," in M. Martin and L. Schifano, eds. *Rêve et Cinéma. Mouvances théoriques autour d'un champ créatif* (Nanterre: PUN, 2012), 263-276. The original French text reads like this: "Le rêve est un passeur : il participe de cet inconscient de la pensée, analysé par Freud, dans lequel les œuvres d'art s'inscrivent, et qui rendra plus tard possible l'intérêt porté à tout ce qui relève de l'insignifiance." The English translation provided is mine.

[43] Etienne Souriau, *Vocabulaire esthétique* (Paris : PUF, 1990), 1225.

which to continue our ancestral struggle with reality.[44]. Motivated by the desire to escape, this poetic language of the filmmakers uses the free combination of images, motifs, symbols and sounds to give substance to dreams. The choice and organization of its visual and sound elements are fuelled by the author's aesthetic unconscious to recreate emotions and sensations produced by the "dreamwork."

[44] Kakar, *Eros et imagination en Inde,* 50.

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Filmography in the chronological order

Tukaram (1921) – silent, Marathi, directed by Ganpat Shinde.

Neel Kamal (1947) – Hindi, directed by Kidar Nath Sharma.

Bawre Nain (1950) – Hindi, directed by Kidar Nath Sharma.

Jan Pahchan (1950) – Hindi, directed by Fali Mistry.

Awaara (1951) – Hindi, directed by Raj Kapoor.

Pyaasa (1957) – Hindi, directed by Guru Dutt.

Madhumati (1958) – Hindi, directed by Bimal Roy.

Kanhaiya (1959) – Hindi, directed by Om Prakash.

Main Nashe Mein Hoon (1959) – Hindi, directed by Naresh Saigal.

Neel Kamal (1968) – Hindi, directed by Ram Maheswari.

Maya Darpan (1972) – Hindi, directed by Kumar Shahani.

Duvidha (1973) – Hindi, directed by Mani Kaul.

Satyam Shivam Sundaram (1978) – Hindi, directed by Raj Kapoor.

Paheli (2005) – remake by Amol Palekar of the Mani Kaul's *Duvidha.*

Appendix: *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*, dream sequence « Chanchal Sheetal Nirmal Komal » (R. Kapoor, 1978)

DREAMS AND FILMS IN INDIAN MARRIAGES

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Abstract

Based on data collected during two studies with fieldwork in India and in the U.S., this paper deals with the three intimately interconnected topoi: dreams, films and marriages in the Indian and diasporic context. Marriage and family remain the core components of social life in India and they constitute in the popular acceptance "the idea of India", to borrow the phrase and title of Sunil Khilnani's work.[2] Marriage is therefore a cherished and fertile source of the imaginary for popular Indian cinema.

Meanwhile, among the myriad forces of subject formation at play, films remain a significant influence in a country of more than a billion with a robust film industry. The ideal family and home, as constructed by Indian films, have been shown to have vast and wide appeal. So it is possible to read a certain intertextuality of film and family, be it in India or the diaspora. However, films in India, as elsewhere, are widely perceived as an escape from reality. This perception can in turn be read as a denial of dreams: that of renouncing the land of dreams when faced with the frustrations of daily life. Still, it is common to compare one's marriage to a film, which in turn becomes a way of enacting the imaginary in real life. Indian films (regional and Bollywood) are essential to the aspirations of diasporic marriages as well. They help strike a balance between the cultural/spiritual presence in India and the physical absence from the homeland.

Keywords: marriage, Indian commercial cinema, dreams, Bollywood, diaspora

Clichés abound in descriptions of India: "land of dreams", the official "Incredible India" or the Orientalist "land of mystics." In much the same way, Indian weddings serve as a globally-circulated trope for contradictory extravagance midst poverty and inequality. Yet, in India and its diaspora, marriage is an incontrovertible rite of passage, an exchange between families and communities. The significance of marriage to contemporary Indian society, even in its most

[1] Madhura Joshi would like to thank the Département des Langues et Civilisations, Université Toulouse 1 Capitole for their financial support towards travel expenses to Paris for the SARI conference held in May 2019 during which this jointly written paper was presented.
[2] Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004).

traditional "arranged marriage" form, is both documented and celebrated by a popular television show called *Indian Matchmaking* streaming over summer 2020. Young Indians and their families, both in India and its diaspora, organize and invest familial resources for an individual member's marriage. It is clear that the institution of marriage provides social legitimacy to relationships among Indians and functions as a lever for class mobility and social support in the absence of other social security systems. But marriage also contributes to the control of bodies, as evidenced in historical and contemporary practices such as *sati* and *dowry*, and in physical and emotional abuse within families. As contentious as it may be, marriage is a site of investment for many Indians with the promise of future returns, and increasingly so through the lens of current neoliberal economic ideals.

In this paper, we examine how commercial Indian cinema is also intricately linked to the historically and socially charged institution of marriage in India and its diaspora. Around the world, commercial cinema relies on meeting the constantly changing tastes of its audiences for sustenance and profitability. A universal leitmotif of commercial film production has, therefore, been to satisfy capricious consumers. In India, films were produced early in the history of cinema[3]. The multilingual setting of the country also meant that films were quickly accepted as a mode of mass entertainment, evolving a visual language for Indian cinema that transcended regional and language barriers. Invariably, Indian cinema frequently cuts across caste and religious communities and social classes in a country that is otherwise quite insular within its various social groups. This cinematic language evolved over time to reflect the aspirations of modern Indian society and grew to play an important role in shaping the imaginary of Indians in the country and its diaspora, especially with regard to marriage and family.[4] Cinema could be considered a metaphor and a mirror (albeit a distorted one at times) of contemporary Indian society, and popular Indian cinema, in particular, entails a co-construction of spectacle by its audience.[5]

It seemed then *a propos* to discuss this intricate relationship between the vast "fabric of dreams" that is Indian cinema (with nearly 2000 films produced every year) and the omniscient socio-cultural institution of Indian marriage for the twin SARI theme of India Dreaming / Dreaming India. We begin by elaborating our understanding and use of "dreams."

[3] The first Indian short film *Ankurachi Wadh* (1907) and the first full length film *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) were directed by Dadasaheb Phalke, often regarded as the "father of Indian cinema". The first "talkie" *Alam Ara* (1931) was directed by Ardeshir Irani. The Dadasaheb Phalke award, is given by the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in recognition of outstanding contributions to Indian cinema.
[4] Priya Joshi, "Cinema as Family Romance," *South Asian Popular Culture* 10, no. 1 (2012): 7-21.
[5] Probal Dasgupta, "Popular Cinema, India, and Fantasy," in *Fingerprinting Popular Culture. The Mythic and the Iconic in Indian Cinema*, Vinay Lal and Ashis Nandy ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13.

Next, we examine some changes on the landscape of Indian cinema by drawing on recent research on films in India. Then we outline our research methodology and analyze data from two studies, one in India and the other in its Indian-American diaspora, where participants linked dreams and films to their marriages and social relationships. Finally, we argue that films provided a discursive category through which participants in both these studies constructed an idea of self. While at times producing stereotypes of normative practices, films also offer "lines of flight"[6] to future possibilities, to imagine other constructions of reality and validate practices which would otherwise be perceived as non-normative, such as the mixed marriages in the study conducted in India. For those in the Indian diaspora, cinema became a cultural bridge to the homeland, a *swapna vaahan* or literally, a vehicle for their dreams, a vector of potential futures axed on the dialogic production of diasporic representation and identity.[7]

Dreams – an interpretation

Dreams are an integral part of life though they are habitually held in opposition to the "real". More literally, dreams give expression to the unspoken, the denied, the implicit, all freed from the constraints of the "real"[8]. They represent the aspirations of the subject, who can then visualize, experience and name multiple dimensions of the self. Dreams are also muti-hued with a strong visual element where different tones and colours hold meaning for the dreamer. Historically, Indian cinema, as a mass medium, has sought to draw on the imaginary and the symbolic through the "dream sequence". *Khwab*, *sapna*, *swapna*, *kanavu*, *kala*, *ooha* – are some terms that designate dreams in Indian languages and oppose them to *haqeeqat*, *asliyat*, *sachchai*, *sach*, *khara, nijam* – oppositions that precede and follow, serving to truncate dream sequences from the "real life" plot in popular Indian cinema.

Indian commercial cinema – a changing landscape

In economic terms, Indian commercial cinema is considered a fast-moving-consumer-good, which means that its products, mass-produced Indian films, are frequently and widely consumed by different strata of the Indian population. One of the major transformations in the Indian film industry has been the way films are produced and financed, a response to the

[6] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Introduction," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, 1-25 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
[7] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 36 (1989): 68-81.
[8] From the entry on "*Rêve*" in the *Dictionnaire Culturel de la Langue française*, ed. Alain Rey (Paris: Le Robert, 2005),Tome IV, 294-295, our translation and interpretation.

shifting demographics of the commercial moviegoer in the country.[9] Public spaces in India have undergone changes that reflect an evolving and urban-centered economy. Since the turn of the 21st century, the erstwhile single-screen cinema halls have been replaced by the advent of the multiplex. Movie audiences reflect these changes as well: films that were previously made for the "masses" are now made for the "classes", and going to the movies has become a truly expensive venture.[10] The themes explored in contemporary high-budget Indian films are those that resonate with urban youth and diasporic audiences. Indeed, more recently and increasingly, Indian commercial films have simultaneous releases for the domestic and international markets. This cinema specifically evokes the diaspora and appeals to it (*Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* 1995, *Pardes* 1997, *Swades* 2004, *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna* 2006, to name a few high-grossing Bollywood films), frequently delving into an "effortlessly acquired affluence."[11] This sub-genre also has biopics that connect Indians with the imagined lives of lesser known historical figures (*Paan Singh Tomar* 2010, *Bhaag Milkhaa Bhaag* 2013, *Padman* 2018) or even some period films (*Jodha-Akbar* 2013, *Bajirao-Mastani* 2015, *Padmaavat* 2018).

Within Indian commercial cinema, the Hindi film industry or Bollywood dominates other regional language film industries.[12] Bollywood cinema is also the primary focus of current research on films in India. This research covers a broad range of topics: films, family and migration,[13] films and nationalism,[14] films and languages,[15] films and politics,[16] or films and the Indian psyche.[17] Yet, few studies discuss the regional language film in India. Much like the print media, regional and multilingual film distribution, and therefore consumption, were historically limited in India by technological and financial limitations. This was also the

[9] Tejaswini Ganti, *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012). Lakshmi Srinivas, *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
[10] Ganti, ibid.
[11] Patricia Uberoi, *Freedom and Destiny: Gender, Family and Popular Culture in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2009).
[12] Ashish Rajadhyaksha, "The "Bollywoodization" of the Indian Cinema. Cultural Nationalism in a Global Arena," In *Global Bollywood*, Anandam P. Kavoori and Aswin Punathambekar ed. (New York and London: New York University Press. 2008), 17-40.
[13] Uberoi, ibid.
[14] Tejaswini Niranjana, "Integrating Whose Nation? Tourists and Terrorists in *Roja*," *Economic & Political Weekly* 29, no. 3 (1994): 79–81.
[15] Tejaswini Ganti, "No One Thinks in Hindi Here: Language Hierarchies in Bollywood," In *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labour*, Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).
[16] M. Madhava Prasad, *Cine-politics: Film Stars and Political Existence in South India* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2014).
[17] M. Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). Ashish Nandy, *The Secret Politics of Our Desires. Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema (*Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

case in the Indian diaspora where Indian films meant Bollywood films until quite recently. It was only with the arrival of bootleg internet copies that consumption of regional language films matched that of the more widely distributed Bollywood output, with worldwide official releases of regional films now matching that of Bollywood. Scholarship has likewise been skewed towards studies on the influence of Bollywood to the detriment of a better understanding of regional film audiences in India and the power of regional language cinema on the Indian psyche. This paper and its findings contribute to narrowing this gap in contemporary Indian film studies.

Films and the dissemination of dreams

This paper is based on two independent studies by the authors. The first was a sociolinguistic study in India about mixed marriages (inter-caste or inter-community) with formal and informal interviews conducted between 2007 and 2009 of close to one hundred subjects in the cities of Alibag, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Pune. The second study was an ethnography of the Indian diaspora in the city of Atlanta in the United States. Immigrant women from India on a highly restrictive visa were interviewed about their educational and career aspirations. Interview data from a dozen participants was supplemented with field observations at their homes and at Indian community events in Atlanta.

The paper addresses the theme of India Dreaming /Dreaming India vis-à-vis an analysis of the triad of dreams-films-marriage. This triad functions as a unit, a whole in contemporary Indian life, be it in discursive habits or in the collective habitus. The triad falls into place through a process of depicting "the real" and the "imaginary" on the silver screen and a reflexive borrowing from films for collective expression about dreams and marriage. In most Indian films, familiar marriage/family themes transcend regional linguistic barriers through depictions that share an exaggerated language of emotions and melodrama. Thus, the viewer understands and identifies with the plot and its characters beyond linguistic barriers that may separate her from the film. So it is not uncommon that, even with poor subtitling standards, Indian films are consumed inter-regionally within the country, with marriage and family as a common affective thread for audiences.

India Dreaming

Anyone consuming Indian films can be caught tossing a filmy dialogue or two around to punctuate their speech. This is especially true when it comes to discussing marriage. Films

create a space where the imagination can thrive even as reality is depicted, where the bodies of actors provide a space for enacting the dialogues, thoughts and actions that contribute to the arc of the protagonists. Similarly the glorification of romance in films, be it in love-at-first-sight sequences, or by a seemingly impossible turn of events, lends itself to the comparison of real life encounters.

In the study in India, at least four interviewees compared their marriage or their meeting with their spouse as it may have occurred in a film:

> JB6: **how I met him is a very (*laughs*) typical Hindi picture story** (Mumbai, 2008)
> SK2: **Like a film story only (*laughs, M laughs*)/ actually we met on the internet/** and euh while chatting on the internet we didn't know that we'll/ ever meet and we'll get married (Bangalore, 2007)
> KR 26: a Hindu boy married a Muslim girl that rarely happens in India because Hindu Muslims always fight/ that too it happened **like a movie story**/(…) in my case also (Bangalore, 2007)
> VK 10 : (…) the only love marriage/ I saw while growing up was that of one of my *aatya's* (paternal aunt) my father's cousin/ and she did it in **quite a filmy style** (…) **I was quite keen on love marriage because it is glorified in films and all and you find this idea very you know exciting which I am sure many youngsters do/ I was not the only one I mean I hope**/ but you kind of paint a dream that it will just happen you will never know when it will happen/ that was when I was a teenager/ **as I grew up what became more important for me was that it was me who took the decision throughout my life because I won't say my parents were very democratic** (Pune, 2009)

Real life and reel life borders were blurred when subjects used comparison with films, comparing their marriages to something "unreal", something bordering on the lines of fantasy, of the unimaginable. Mixed marriages became the uncommon, the extraordinary as opposed to the norm, the intra-community marriage. Comparing their marriages to a "filmy" experience offered subjects a reprieve, an immediate identification of their situation that was unacceptable to their families. Through this comparison, subjects now had avenues for imagining other possible realities.

Using common parlance, interviewees spoke of their family's reactions to their marriages. They described these reactions not as conversations between family members but as film "dialogues", as enunciations full of dramatic pathos. The word "dialogue" was cited in interviews in Marathi, Hindi and English to narrate the dramatic experience of the verbal exchange with their families, to de-dramatize a painful experience in narration. One of the interviewees from Pune, Anwar, speaking of his inter-religious marriage, described his mother-in-law's hostile reaction thus, “There were those typical dialogues." Interviewees also compared reactions from their families to "drama":

> MJ 25 : What's your opinion on marriages in India?
> SA 26 : I think it's a big issue / the child's whole upbringing / the whole thing is geared towards marriage / it's made to be a very important affair / so I think probably it's a good thing that's why marriages last longer (…) when you grow up it's always like when you'll get married this when you'll get married that / everybody's involved/ I remember my mother calling up my aunts telling

> them about the marriage/ **that I am getting married to a Hindu and it was a big drama crying and all (*laughs*) (…) / my mother did a little bit of drama crying / it was really sad**. (Mumbai, 2008)
> Madhu: all kinds of reactions or you know whatever I remember I used to I mean I don't even know the word I used to get a pang I used to remember any irrelevant part and I used to get this feeling in my stomach no whatever happened I just want to deny/ this has never happened this has not happened to me it can't happen to me I am just living a bad dream. (Pune, 2009)

Along these lines, participants in the study in India denoted the implicit norm of arranged intra-community and endogamous or "non-mixed" marriages by comparing their own mixed marriages with films. In other words, films offered these subjects dreams that provide "lines of flight"[18] to borrow the Deleuzian expression. Mixed marriages depicted in films with happy or tragic endings validated their marriages, thus providing a space for the existence of these lines of flight for mixed-marriage subjects.

Dreaming India

The Indian diaspora also consumes and of late, inspires Indian cinema at an unprecedented rate.[19] In the study in Atlanta, Indian films nurtured and reinforced vital social bonds among Indian immigrant families. Large multiplexes in Atlanta regularly screen films on the day of their Indian release for not just Bollywood but also regional language films such as Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam films. The study in Atlanta aimed to document the experiences of Indian women who had moved to the U.S. when their techworker husbands found employment there. Under a problematic visa category, the H-4 visa, that disallows employment, the women navigated restrictions imposed by the state and their specific familial context. Their dreams and aspirations were deferred to keep their marriages and families intact. In their interviews, these immigrant women described imagined futures, either for themselves or for their families, where films served as vectors for these new possibilities.

Films as a cultural bridge

Beginning with their arrival in the U.S., study participants spoke of the intermingled nature of dreams, films and their marriages. Nisha had been a techworker in Bengaluru before

[18] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari analysed the multiplicity of dimensions, lines, directions that constitute an assemblage. For any assemblage to hold together, there need to be connections or lines, which in turn must be dynamic for the survival of the assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari thus distinguished between lines of rigid segmentarity or molar lines, which hold the structure of the assemblage together, and the lines of supple segmentarity or molecular lines that enable the structure to be dynamic and adapt itself. So lines of flight reach outside of the assemblage, they escape the structure and reach out to other assemblages, thus creating connections with other structures (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Introduction," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press), 22).
[19] Ganti, 2012.

she migrated to the U.S. after an arranged marriage. Unable to seek employment due to her visa status, Nisha placed her educational and work aspirations on hold. In their apartment in Atlanta, she described an initial period of binge-watching Indian films and American television shows. She argued that this specific pattern of media consumption helped her to bridge her two realities – the homeland that she had left behind but where she dwelled in spirit, and the, as yet, unfamiliar country where she was physically present. Nisha listed a specific, glocalized consumption of media at the time – besides American television shows, she had watched Bollywood films and the latest regional language, in her case Telugu, films. Both Nisha and her husband were fans of the Tamil "superstar" Rajinikant. So they never failed to watch the latest "Rajini film" at a local Atlanta multiplex. At other times, Nisha made sure that family visiting from India, her mother-in-law or her parents, had an uninterrupted supply of their specific daily regional language media.

> Nisha: My mil watches Kannada movies. Kannada channels are not coming now for some reason. I watch Hindi channels and they play well. She's not able to watch her serials and is getting bored. We force her to go out when we go for a walk. There are a lot of Indians you can talk to them in the neighborhood. But you know in India, they go to family functions, they are all about family family… (Atlanta, 2015)

For the diasporic subject, it is vital to demonstrate Indian media consumption to their visiting Indian family. It is a means to perform and prove their Indian-ness in the absence of other social opportunities to demonstrate one's investment in Indian familial values. For Nisha, it was one way to gain social capital in her married life, while she put her individual dreams on hold. Regular consumption of Indian films and movie-going in Atlanta served as cultural agentic acts for this immigrant couple. It helped them bridge their dreams, made in India for their lives in the U.S., even as these dreams were temporarily on hold. After pausing Nisha's career aspirations for four years, the couple decided to return to India where they both found employment again. Yet, within a few months after their return to India, Nisha had begun looking for jobs outside the country again.

***Swapna vaahan*: vehicle of dreams**

For the Indian diaspora, a few Indian films have become what can be aptly described as "*swapna vaahan*". They are vectors for the dreams of the diasporic subject, much like the different modes of transport of deities in Hindu mythology or *vaahan*. Films such as *DDLJ*[20] (1995) in Hindi and *Bommarillu* (2006) in Telugu are iconic in the diasporic psyche.

[20] An immensely popular Bollywood film, especially with the Indian diaspora, *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (1995), is widely known by its acronym *DDLJ*.

These films act as vehicles of cultural values that appeal to the Indian abroad, and her ideal of what a family or marriage or romantic love ought to be.

By watching these films, the Indian diasporic subject performs what Stuart Hall[21] describes as a postcolonial political act of imaginary cultural re-unification. As vectors of cultural ideals, films and their viewership accord the diasporic subject a means to narrow the gap in their yearning for cultural re-union with the homeland. Hall describes how the diasporic subject's engagement with cinema produces this subject in a continuous and dialogic process. Representation of the diasporic subject thus also produces diasporic cultural identity along the axes of similarity and difference.

In the Atlanta study, Gita was a mother of two young children who frequently discussed her concern that her children would grow up with little to no knowledge of their Indian heritage. In one interview, Gita described her efforts to book tickets for the screening of a new Marathi language film (*Katyar Kaljat Ghusali* 2015). The film was based on a play about Indian classical music traditions. Gita emphasized the pedigree of the film and its music, and the fact that her extended family and friends in India had been discussing it on social media.

> HT: Are the kids excited about the film?
> Gita: Yes but I just told them, it may happen that you don't like the movie, but don't speak inbetween because everybody is there to see the movie and they are very much into that. If you

[21] Stuart Hall, ibid.

> don't like it, just eat popcorn and sit (*laughs*). Especially my daughter, she will ask what will happen next, what next…(*embarrassed tone and laughter*). (Atlanta 2015)

For Gita, the family outing to this particular film was a means to ensure, through familial biopolitics, that her children respected their cultural heritage. Gita's father in India had extensive knowledge about the play, the film and its music. He had told her all about it. Gita hoped that in the dark of the movie theatre in Atlanta, her children could imbibe a distilled version of Indian culture. The act of engaging the entire family with this film was Gita's way of ensuring their participation, even as diasporic subjects, in the conversation among the extended family on social media. It was a way to lay claim to diasporic Indian-ness by guiding the family towards their ideal Indian selves. So as *swapna vaahan*, Indian films acted as catalysts in the dream-weaving and sharing processes of the diaspora. Movie-going was a shared social activity among couples in the study, as one participant remarked, "All the wives first watched the film, the next day the husbands' group went." The dreams and ideals of the group were echoed and reiterated through these group outings to Indian films.

Even within a diasporic marriage, in its more intricate negotiations, Indian films factored into cherished futures for study participants. Ria had lived in the U.S. with her husband, Arun, and their two daughters for over a decade. Arun's work kept him away from home all through the week, in a different city and on a new project every few months. He flew back home each weekend. Ria compared her family life to that of a single mom. She was an avid movie watcher and listed watching Malayalam, Hindi, Tamil and Bengali films. In one of her interviews, Ria compared two films, one in Tamil (*O Kadhal Kanmani* 2015, OKK) and the other in Hindi (*Shaadi Ke Side Effects* 2014, SKSE). OKK was a young urban romance where the protagonists sought to pursue an unconventional relationship and marriage, trying to hold on to their individuality beyond marriage. SKSE, meanwhile, was about an urban couple with young children, where the wife was the primary parent and the husband traveled for work.

> Ria: I really preferred Shaadi Ke Side Effects, especially in the end, she goes on an official trip too. He joins a dad's group. She keeps the phone down and picks up a glass of wine. I like that ending very much, we need a break too. (Atlanta 2015)

Ria clearly identified with the latter film and its characters. While OKK proposed an ideal relationship between two individuals, SKSE offered an alternative dream, a much-needed break from an almost single mother's familial responsibilities. Ria read OKK through a deeper understanding of the triad of dreams-films-marriage and preferred SKSE for its more "realistic" portrayal of marriage, one where a break from the mundane was a cherished dream that also implied equality in the marriage. In her disapproval of OKK, Ria was also affirming

herself and her marriage, which she saw as better reflected, and in a relatively more ideal form, through the latter film.

Indian commercial cinema is now in its 106th year with about 2000 films produced every year. We argued in this paper that this cinema transcends Indian reality to weave dreams for the masses both in India and its diaspora. The stories in these films bring together a specific aesthetic that mingles with commercial appeal to create products for mass consumption. Indian cinema reflects upon current social norms and provides topoi of discourse and identification. For the Indian diasporic subject, films are diffusers of dreams, cultural ambassadors and mirrors of potential future selves. The dreams-films-marriage triad in India and among Indians thrives as a symbiosis, each interlaced with the other on the contemporary Indian social canvas.

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Filmography in chronological order

Ankurachi Wadh (1907) – Silent, directed by Dhundiraj Govind Phalke.

Raja Harishchandra (1913) – Silent, directed by Dhundiraj Govind Phalke.

Alam Ara (1931) – Hindi-Urdu, directed by Ardeshir Irani.

Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge (1995) – Hindi, directed by Adiya Chopra.

Pardes (1997) – Hindi, directed by Subhash Ghai.

Swades (2004) – Hindi, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker.

Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna (2006) – Hindi, directed by Karan Johar.

Bommarillu (2006) – Telugu, directed by Bhaskar.

Paan Singh Tomar (2010) – Hindi, directed by Tigmanshu Dhulia.

Bhaag Milkhaa Bhaag (2013) – Hindi, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra.

Jodha-Akbar (2013) – Hindi, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker.

Shaadi Ke Side Effects (2014) – Hindi, directed by Saket Chaudhary.

Bajirao-Mastani (2015) – Hindi, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali.

Katyar Kaljat Ghusali (2015) – Marathi, directed by Subodh Bhave.

O Kadhal Kanmani (2015) – Tamil, directed by Mani Ratnam.

Padman (2018) – Hindi, directed by R. Balki.

Padmaavat (2018) – Hindi, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali.

Part V
Oceanic Dreams

AN "INDIAN" OCEAN: DREAM OR REALITY?

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Abstract

Since its independence, India's strategic action was mainly mobilized by its border wars with Pakistan in the West and skirmishes with China in the East. The emergence of China as an economic powerhouse has fuelled India's rivalry for dominance in the region. While China is pursuing the string of pearls strategy for energy procurement and the One Belt One Road for the development of its trade, India is strengthening its ties with the US and Australia and participating in the paradigm shift from Asia Pacific to Indo-Pacific. Developing its blue economy and making its presence felt in the Indian Ocean have become India's strategic priorities. In this policy change, India's maritime past and the older diasporas have become instruments in the hands of the Modi government. A dream of transforming the Indian Ocean into an Indian cultural space is now on its agenda.

Key words: Indian Ocean, ownership, India, China, Indo-Pacific

It is not the least of the paradoxes of India that a country that has more than 7000 kilometers of coastline, including 1,197 islands, and which gave its name to nothing less than an ocean, has almost never, over the course of its long history, paid the strategic attention it deserves to the sea. However, Jean-Luc Racine underlines in an article, published in the journal of geopolitics *Hérodote* in 2016, and devoted to the new Indian geopolitics of the sea, that the new maritime orientation of the nationalist government of Narendra Modi seems to

want to rewrite history. He also adds that this new geopolitical orientation has also recently shifted from the Indian Ocean to the Indo-Pacific.[1]

In fact, by putting the ancient and prestigious dynasty of the Cholas, whose maritime trade networks in the 11th century connected South India to Southeast Asia and Indonesia, back in the spotlight, the nationalist right currently in power wishes to make India a nation of sailors. Inspired by China, which recently brought the expeditions of the Chinese admiral Zheng He up to date, Narendra Modi's government is trying to promote a glorious maritime past and a just return of things after more than two centuries of Western domination of the Indian Ocean. In so doing, the Indian nationalist right is showing its desire to glorify a distant past lying in the hazy zone between dream and reality. However, the strictest Brahminical orthodoxy has long forbidden the crossing of the "black waters" or Kalapani considered as a source of ritual pollution calling for purification rites when returning on the Indian soil. According to Jean-Luc Racine, this nationalist account of the Cholas translates a major shift currently taking place in the Indian geopolitics of the sea.

My article aims at exploring some aspects of this topical subject that has its roots in a distant past. After a long neglect of its maritime heritage, India now seems to boast a renewed historiography and displays unprecedented oceanic ambitions, nonetheless constrained by the new geopolitical situation in this region of the world. This strategic repositioning of itself as the owner of this vast ocean will be the focus of this study.

India, the Indies, the Indian Ocean, the East - these names have long been the dream of the West. The Greeks were the first to name the waters bordering the shores of India *Indikon pelagos*.[2] Later, the Romans continued and developed a lucrative trade in luxury goods from the East (silk, textiles, spices, etc.). They made a distinction between the coastal waters, which kept the name of the subcontinent, and the more distant waters beyond the island of Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), which they occasionally called *Mare Prosodum* or the Green Sea. This name undoubtedly referred to the turquoise colour of the waters bordering the Lakshadweep Islands, and perhaps the Maldives, which are located further south of the Indian coast and are a part of an old maritime route. The ancient itinerary, crossed the Indian Ocean vertically from north to south and represented a central sea lane that extended from the

[1] Jean-Luc Racine, "La nouvelle géopolitique indienne de la mer : de l'océan Indien à l'Indo-Pacifique," *Hérodote*, no. 163 (April 2016): 10.

[2] See Vikram Doctor, "The naming of seas: The associated problems and their resolutions," *The Economic Times* (August 4-2017) https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/heres-how-seas-receive-names-and-the-associated-problems-and-resolutions/articleshow/59922770.cms , accessed August 20, 2020.

aforementioned islands and continued south through the archipelago of the Chagos islands along the central Indian Ocean ridge to the Seychelles and Mascarene Islands (Reunion Island, Mauritius and Rodrigues) and the south of the Ocean. From there, traders could decide to sail westward towards Madagascar and the Comoros and then southward through the Mozambique Channel to Sofala or, to the north-west, towards the islands of Kilwa, Zanzibar, Pemba, the Lamu Archipelago and other numerous Swahili commercial centres dotting the East Coast of Africa. The other names that appear over the centuries to name the Indian Ocean on the maps of Arab and Western merchants are just as exotic, as for example, the term Eritrean Sea or Ethiopian Sea for the part of the Indian Ocean that covers today what we call the Arabian or Oman Sea, from the name of the sultanate located in the South-East of the Arabian Peninsula. We may also mention the term Eastern Ocean, which is opposed to the traditional Chinese term Western Ocean, and the term *Mare barbaricum* or Sea of the barbarians. Arab navigators called this part of the Indian Ocean *Bahr al-Hind* or Sea of India. Thus, it seems that for Western or Arab foreigners who traded in the Indian Ocean through the ages, the subcontinent played a key role and remained a receptacle of dreams, fantasies and ambitions. India, owing to its geographical position in the north-central ocean, has long been an important trading hub between Europe, the East African coast, and Southeast Asia.

To its ancient inhabitants, the Indian Ocean was known as *Ratnakara* in Sanskrit, a term that refers to both the "ocean" and "the storehouse of jewelry."[3] Another allusion to the wealth and luxury associated with the subcontinent for a long time.The contemporary situation is very different, even if India is unquestionably a key player in the geopolitics of the region.

Indeed, the adjective "Indian" attached to the name of this ocean does not seem to please everyone and makes many people envious, as Vikram Doctor recalls.[4] He mentions some anecdotes about the feeling of injustice felt by a number of countries bordering the Indian Ocean, in particular Pakistan, which considers that India is displaying an illegitimate determination to claim ownership of the history of the whole Sub-continent and that a more appropriate name should be found for the Indian Ocean. Some Pakistani authors suggest[5] that the term "India" should no longer be used except to designate the Sub-continent before 1947. According to them, the Indian part (except Pakistan and Bangladesh) should be called Bharat. These authors thus agree with the opinion of certain members of the Indian Nationalist Party.

[3] See Wisdom Library, https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/ratnakara, accessed August 20, 2020.
[4] Doctor, Ibid.
[5] The names of these authors are difficult to retrace. We have to rely on Vikram Doctor's allusion alone.

Others consider that India should accept a compromise and that the term Indo-Pak Ocean[6] would allow a fairer sharing of the cultural, historical and geographical heritage of South Asia.

Others wish to broaden the debate and stress that religious coherence in this part of the world should lead to this ocean being called the Muslim Ocean because many riparian countries host Islamic societies.[7] In any case, some stakeholders will be disappointed and the feeling of injustice will continue. This issue illustrates the whole difficulty of naming maritime and oceanic areas without real visible borders, such as evidenced by the dispute between the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Gulf, or even the Sea of Korea or Japan. This is the reason why Vikram Doctor suggests in his article that India's ownership of the ocean was accidental.

It seems that the Indian Ocean owes its name to Western imagination which has long seen India as the ultimate Orient, source of unimaginable wealth, route of spices, silk and so many other luxury goods and commodities. Paradoxically, it appears that the greatest threat to the name of this ocean comes from Indian ultra-nationalists, as the journalist points out:

> Oddly the only threat to it [the name Indian Ocean] might come from ultra-nationalists who believe in elevating the term Bharat over India. They argue that this internal name should be the external one too, ignoring the long global history of the use of India. They might want to consider how imposing this change would delight maritime minded Pakistanis since the chances of getting the world to accept the idea of a Bharatiya Ocean accepted are nil.[8]

These disputes over the name of one of the world's vast oceans may sound anecdotal, but they indicate this ocean's strategic role in today's globalized world. This central role of the Indian Ocean is not new, as we shall see below.

Indeed, the Indian Ocean is today, as it has always been, at the center of a vast transit zone for international trade, which is gradually witnessing emerging and assertive nationalisms, especially Chinese and Indian ones. As for India, it is, above all, a question of containing or even thwarting expanding Chinese power in what it considers to be its "backyard."[9] Indeed, Beijing's ambitions have been known for a long time now thanks to the so-called "string of pearls" strategy. For the Chinese, it is a question of circumscribing Indian ambitions thanks to

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[6] It is rumoured that Pakistan's second president Ayub Khan wanted the Indian Ocean to be renamed Indo-Pak Ocean. In some science journals, the term Indo-Pak Ocean is used as a merely geographical area.
[7] Bangladesh, Union of Comoros, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Oman, Somalia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen are members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association established in 1997.
[8] Doctor, Ibid.
[9] Business Insider India, "China: The Indian Ocean can't be India's Backyard," *Business Insider*, July 2, 2015. https://www.businessinsider.com/china-the-indian-ocean-cant-be-indias-backyard-2015-7?IR=T, accessed August 20, 2020.

a belt of military bases distributed around the Subcontinent in areas and existing ports close to India and the development of its presence in the Indian Ocean thanks to the projection of its Navy. Thus, the Indian press regularly echoes the rivalries of New Delhi with China in Sri Lanka, the Maldives, the Seychelles or Myanmar, not to mention the growing concern about the port of Gwadar in Pakistan near which the Chinese intend to build a new military base. All this is part of the Chinese One Belt One Road (OBOR) project,[10] a symbolic rebirth of the famous Silk Road connecting China to Europe via Central Asia with an oceanic component that takes over old maritime routes thus bypassing India on both sides, by land and sea.

China's One Belt One Road, Image copyright: www.eurasiareview.com

In order to anticipate the risk on oil supplies following a possible Sino-Indian rivalry in the Middle East, India is betting on two fronts: on the one hand the Iranian port of Chabahar[11] and on the other, the "Look East Policy"[12] inaugurated in the early 1990s and intended to connect with the dynamic economies of Southeast Asia. A little later, in the 2010s, this policy took the

[10] Initially entitled 'New Silk Road, New Dreams,' the project has now been re-named 'Belt and Road Initiative.' See Andrew Chatzky and James McBride, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," Council on Foreign Relations, January 28, 2020. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative, accessed August 20, 2020.

[11] Uddipta Singha Lahkar, "India's unofficial strategic "necklace of diamonds" could be a game-changer in foreseeable future," *The Kootneeti*, July 22, 2020. https://thekootneeti.in/2020/07/22/indias-unofficial-strategic-necklace-of-diamonds/, accessed August 20, 2020.

[12] Anna Louise Strachen, Harnit Kaur Kang, Tuli Sinha, "India's Look East Policy: A Critical Assessment, Interview with Ambassador Rajiv Sikri," (New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, October 2009), https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/108694/SR85-SEARPInterview-Sikri.pdf, accessed August 20, 2020.

name of "Act East"[13] and India got closer to the United States by strengthening its diplomatic and military ties with Washington.

India's Necklace of Diamonds, Image copyright: www.thecootneeti.in

All these initiatives contributed to the development of an Indo-Pacific axis that took advantage of the Obama administration's policy of pivoting towards Asia in order to stem Chinese ambitions in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

While China is trying to pivot towards the Indian Ocean and India towards the Pacific, we are witnessing a paradigm shift. The new concept of Indo-Pacific replaces the much broader one of Asia-Pacific. This is a term which the Indian Government does not hesitate to employ.

In this context, India is getting closer to Australia, its main supplier of raw materials, especially uranium, but also to Japan with whom it created the "freedom corridor"[14] project in response to the Chinese "Silk Roads project" which reinforces authoritarian regimes in Central Asia and ignores other democratic regimes in Asia.

As Jean-Luc Racine recalls, the concept of Indo-Pacific was clearly borrowed from the Australians and reflects the widening of India's maritime horizon, which also sees the Indian

[13] Dhruva Jaishankar, "Acting East: India in the Indo-Pacific," (Washington: Brookings Institution, October 24, 2019), https://www.brookings.edu/research/acting-east-india-in-the-indo-pacific/, accessed August 20, 2020.
[14] Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "Pushing back against China's One Belt One Road, India, Japan build strategic 'Great Wall'," *The Economic Times*, May 16, 2017. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/infrastructure/pushing-back-against-chinas-one-belt-one-road-india-japan-build-strategic-great-wall/articleshow/58689033.cms?from=mdr, accessed August 20, 2020.

flag flying over the Antarctic and the Arctic.[15] In another article in *Hérodote*, published in 2012 and entitled "Indian Ocean: *mare Indicum*?" Racine argues that the multiplicity of actors playing in this part of the world - the ships of three American fleets, the strategic maritime routes of oil and gas of the Middle East, which are keys to European energy security, and the route of Chinese container ships conquering Western markets - makes the Indian Ocean both a vital territory for Global trade and a vast area of instability.[16] But then he wonders whether this so-called "Indian" Ocean, which in Arabic has long been referred to as *al Bahr al Hind*i, could ever become an Indian sea in the full sense of the term.

For Lucie Dejouhanet, author of a series of articles on Indian geopolitics in the *Documentation photographique* series entitled L'Inde*, puissance en construction*, the answer is obvious in view of the new ambitions displayed by Narendra Modi's government and its rising awareness of what is at stake.[17] In fact, half of the world trade takes the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. However, the latter is increasingly plagued by an ever growing political instability. For example, Gulf oil production areas are crossed by violent conflicts and have become the core of international terrorism. An unending war that has not removed the Islamist threat, has plagued Afghanistan for nearly four decades. The destruction of the Somali state has dramatically increased the prevalence of piracy along the East African coast. Chronic instability periodically destabilizes countries such as Madagascar, the Comoros, or Mozambique. And last but not least, an increasingly important Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean and on the African continent is threatening to shift the balance of power in the region for a long period of time. Dejouhanet, therefore, argues that India has recently moved closer to partners deemed "strategic," such as Mauritius, to which it delivered its first exported warship, the patrol vessel Barracuda in March 2015.

Besides, India has also activated the first of its 32 radar surveillance stations that will be shared between the Seychelles, the Maldives, Mauritius and Sri Lanka in order, among other things, to control movements in the Indian Ocean and secure the exclusive economic zones (EEZ), thus promoting the development of the "Blue Economy", which deals with strategic departments such as fishing, fish farming, tourism and conservation.

Moreover, India's navy has also been modernized and has become the world's seventh biggest fleet in 2012 with buildings equipped with high-performance missiles, aerial lookout

[15] Racine, "La nouvelle géopolitique indienne de la mer," 102.
[16] Jean-Luc Racine, "Océan Indien : *mare Indicum* ?," *Hérodote,* no. 145 (second trimestre 2012) Introduction.
[17] Lucie Dejouhanet, "L'Inde, puissance en construction," *La documentation photographique*, no.8109 (January-February 2016): 54.

helicopters and patrol planes, which now make it an armed force capable of countering the rise of the Chinese navy. India is thus presenting itself as the hub of regional maritime security by developing its partnership with Mauritius, its bridgehead in the Indian Ocean and the leading investor in India with 35% of foreign direct investment (FDI).[18]

If the politically unstable Maldives have been left aside, the Mauritian government is maintaining close ties with New Delhi, which intends to take advantage of its large diaspora, scattered around the ocean and its cultural influence to enhance its soft power over the Indian Ocean by transforming this transit area into an Indian cultural space. To illustrate this trend, we may mention the headquarters of the World Hindi Secretariat recently established in Mauritius.

India is now dreaming of the sea and rediscovering its ocean, a new attitude in contradiction with the old continental tropism, the main principles of which have governed Indian strategic thought for decades, and even centuries. Indeed, the challenge of land borders in the north of the Subcontinent still opposes China and India over the region of Ladakh in the East and Pakistan and India over the region of Kashmir in the West.

This situation is not new and it is important to recall here the decisive importance of the Indo-Gangetic plain, which has seen, over the course of history, some of the greatest Indian empires (the Mauryas, the Guptas), and attracted many invaders from the north through the famous Khyber pass (Aryans, Mughals).

It is the arrival of the West (in the shape of European sailors and traders) in Indian Ocean waters and the ensuing colonization of its shores that changed the situation, at least for a while. As Jean-Luc Racine recalls, this continental base was undermined by the first wave of globalization implemented by the East India Companies (British, French, Dutch and Danish) which, from overseas commercial ventures, were to become instruments of conquest before giving way in 1858 to the British Indian Empire whose big cities were all trade ports such as Calcutta (Kolkata), Bombay (Mumbai) and Madras (Chennai).[19]

However, after its Independence, India, entangled in its wars with Pakistan and China, did not reassign to the sea the central part it had played in the major historical transformation initiated by the Great Discoveries and carried out by European colonialism.

The rise of the Indian economy, the growing weight of the Indian Ocean in world economy, the intensification of Chinese power in the area and the nuclearization of the India-

[18] Palash Ghosh, " Why Does Tiny Mauritius Invest So Much Money In India?," International Business Times, January 10, 2020, https://www.ibtimes.com/why-does-tiny-mauritius-invest-so-much-money-india-2900410, accessed August 20, 2020.
[19] Racine, "La nouvelle géopolitique indienne de la mer," 102.

China-Pakistan strategic triangle together with the presence of sub-nuclear navies seem to have altered dramatically India's historical perspective on its ocean. As mentioned earlier, India is now dreaming of developing its cultural influence in the Indian Ocean through its large diaspora, scattered throughout the Ocean, from Kenya to Kuala Lumpur, and from Singapore to Durban. This diaspora is often depicted as a byproduct of European colonization because many of its members are thought to have migrated across the Indian Ocean as "indentured labourers" in the nineteenth century. However, most of these communities are, in fact, much older and it is precisely this seniority of the Indian presence around the Indian Ocean that represents a real strategic asset in contrast to China, whose actual presence in the area is much more recent. Nonetheless, India seems to have long neglected this considerable asset to exercise its soft power on the shores of the ocean that bears its name. Thus, the critical question that needs to be asked is: Why has India ignored such a geostrategic asset for so long?

As Historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam underlines in an interview published in the magazine *l'Histoire* and entitled "Indian Ocean: A Heart of the World," published in July-August 2017, Indian historiography seems to have ignored this diaspora which is very small or not even present in textbooks. He also recalls that contrary to a tenacious legend, the Indians, and not only Muslims, have always been very active in inter-oceanic exchanges since the third millennium BC when the merchant cities of the banks of the Indus traded with Mesopotamian City-States established along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Subrahmanyam then adds that fourteenth-century travellers Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta reported the presence of many Indian merchants who were trading in cosmopolitan ports on the coasts of Coromandel and Malabar that were already witnessing the presence of Europeans long before the Portuguese conquest.[20] However, Subrahmanyam points out that the Indian trading traditions of the time were mostly oral, and in the absence of indigenous sources, historians had to fall back on descriptions left by foreign travellers and merchants. It is, therefore, an outsider's gaze.

Moreover, the Indian Ocean was then a polycentric space and India did not exercise any preeminence there. In addition, Buddhist cosmogony, centered on India and on Mount Meru, rejected the ocean in the background, while the Brahmanic tradition went so far as to prohibit the crossing of the sea, which was called in the nineteenth century the "black waters" or kala pani. Effectively, and according to ancient traditions, a Brahmin is expected to perform a number of rites every day with running water from a river, and not with salt water. Similarly,

[20] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Océan Indien : un coeur du monde," interview by Clément Fabre, *L'Histoire* (2018): 76-78.

a boat trip made him unclean. There were always solutions though, such as paying another Brahmin to perform the rites. Besides, merchants belonged to another caste (*banya*), which allowed them to travel to distant places for business purposes without risking their ritual purity.

Over the centuries, travellers, pilgrims and Indian merchants followed one another on the shores of the Indian Ocean like the Cholas, the Gujaratis, the Paravas on the Coromandel Coast in the 13th century, or the Mapillas of Malabar, in present-day Kerala. Until the arrival of the Portuguese, these communities controlled the pearl and spice trade on both sides of the Indian Ocean. Contrary to popular belief, India never had many spices and mostly produced pepper. The rest were from the Spice Islands, such as the Moluccas in Indonesia, and simply transited through India, which was then the hub of all luxury trade and goods from all over the East. Most of these trading communities survived the European stranglehold on trading activities, serving as intermediaries such as local bankers and investing in pawn shops for farmers in trading posts around the ocean. Other groups took advantage of the colonial expansion to acquire a global dimension, as Eric Leclerc recalls in an article published in *L'Information géographique* in 2008 entitled: "Can we speak of an Indian diaspora?"[21]

According to Leclerc, the victim based approach of the members of the Indian diaspora described as coolies or indentured labourers often obscures the fact that many Indian merchants displayed such dynamism that they directly threatened the interests of the British colonists as was the case in East Africa where laws were passed to deny them access to land in order to limit their economic hold. Sailors, who were often from different castes than those of the merchants, swarmed in all the ports of the world. These were the famous "lascars."[22]

Some of these itineraries have been retraced in a few rare works dealing with this subject, for example, a book entitled *Mercantile adventurers: the world of East African Asians 1750-1985* by Dana April Seidenberg published in 1997 or *From Jhelum to Tana* in which Neera Kapur Dromson traces her family's journey from the banks of the Jhelum River in present-day Pakistan to those of the Tana River in Kenya.

If the Indians are not strictly speaking a seafaring people, and even if the subcontinent seems to have, for the most part of its age-old history, turned its back on the ocean that bears its name, it does seem that a new oceanic dream is emerging in a country that is integrating itself more and more into the globalized economy. As an emerging power and as China's great

[21] Eric Leclerc, "Peut-on parler d'une diaspora indienne ?," *L'Information géographique,* no. 72, Paris : Armand Colin (2008): 76.
[22] Leclerc, "Peut-on parler d'une diaspora indienne ?," 77.

rival in the Asia-Pacific area, India wishes to assert itself as a maritime power and revisits its diasporic heritage and its maritime trading past at a time when unprecedented prospects for bypassing Asia via the Northern Arctic route are opening up due to global warming. This new development might downgrade the Indian Ocean, a globalized but unstable territory, to the status of a second rate player in the geostrategy of trade between Europe and Asia.

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