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Cluj Center for Indian Studies

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Editor-in-chief: Mihaela Gligor

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CONTENTS

REVIEWS

EDITORIAL

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> "India is seen as a country of immense diversity, of distinct hopes, of vast and disparate beliefs, of extraordinary customs and a genuine feast of opinions.
>
> The cultural heritage of contemporary India combines the Islamic influences with the Hindu ones, as well as those pertaining to other traditions, and the outcome of the interaction among different religious communities can be fully seen in literature, music, painting, architecture and many other fields." (Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize laureate)

India is a mixture of emotions, colours, feelings, music, happiness, sorrow, life and death, gods and people. India is an endless puzzle which each soul that meets its mystery tries to solve. India is infinite, just as untrammelled as the fascination that it produces in the others.

India is an incredible rich culture, with a history of thousands of years. It saw the rise of various civilizations, religions, dynasties, human groups, cultures and arts. India has been presented and represented in many forms in literary discourses, arts and heritage symbols. But the country is so vast that there always remains an area to be explored. Moreover, there are many new things to be interpreted. Any discussion on anything belonging to India and its culture is incomplete without interdisciplinary dialogue between various cultural aspects and elements.

Through its incredible stories, India has always attracted people of distant places from archeologists, travelers, merchants, artists to scientists and academic researchers. Its rich diversity and its myths, legends, arts or music fascinated and allured many minds. The languages of India, from Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Tamil, the regional languages from the ancient times, to Persian and Urdu from the medieval times, and English, Bengali or Hindi from the modern period, were and still are fascinating for linguists and researchers.

The *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* seeks and encourages interdisciplinary approaches in linguistics, literature and literary studies, Indian philosophy, history of religions, political philosophy, history of ideas, science, anthropology, sociology, education, communications theory, history, and performing arts. One of its primary aims is the integration of the results of the several disciplines of the humanities so that its articles will have a synthetic character in order to acquaint the reader with the progress being made in the general area of Indian Studies.

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STUDIES

The Principal Kingdoms of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa as reflecting the four puruṣārthas

B.N. HEBBAR
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Abstract: This study looks into the metaphorical understanding of the four principal kingdoms of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, i.e., Ayodhyā, Kiṣkindhā, Laṅkā and Mithilā, in terms of the four puruṣārthas of Hinduism, i.e., dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa. The question is whether Vālmīki was creating a story to illustrate the four puruṣārthas in the form of a magnificent epic with all its plots, twists, intrigues and excitements. Not only do the three main kingdoms fit the trivarga order but seemed to be so aligned geographically north to south with Mithilā being the apavarga as does mokṣa among the puruṣārthas.

Keywords: Ayodhyā, Kiṣkindhā, Laṅkā, Mithilā, dharma, artha, kāma, mokṣa, puruṣārtha.

Introduction

There are four kingdoms that are important in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. Three of these, i.e., Ayodhyā, Kiṣkindhā, and Laṅkā, are central and crucial to the epic story line, while the fourth, i.e., Mithilā, though important, is nevertheless, peripheral and 'out of line' (*apavarga*) in more ways than one.

I strongly believe that the four kingdoms of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa reflect the four *puruṣārthas* of the Hindu value system. These four *puruṣārthas*, in traditional order, are *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. And the four kingdoms are so arranged. Ayodhyā represents *dharma*, Kiṣkindhā symbolizes *artha*, Laṅkā reflects *kāma*, and Mithilā enunciates *mokṣa*. How so, is the question?

Rāma, the hero of the Rāmāyaṇa epic, is and has been regarded throughout the length and breadth of the vast history of the Hindu religious tradition; leave alone by the epic itself, as the very image of dharma (righteousness).[1] Everything Rāma is, thinks, speaks and does is said to be dharmic. Of course, there are a few glaring exceptions, i.e., the killing of Vālī and the treatment of Sītā in the Uttarakāṇḍa. However, the Hindu populace and theologians, fully aware of these, ignore them or explain them away in the greater light of Rāma's dharmic character. From his paternal filial piety, his maternal affections, his brotherly love, his sense of propriety towards holy men, to his sense of humility, patience, forgiveness, decency, duty and the dignified way he carried himself, Rāma is presented as the ideal moral man[2] by Vālmīki. In a certain sense, Hindu civilization needed the moral model of Rāma to save it from the vast pious indecency that preceded him in the Vedic Age and succeeded him in the Kṛṣṇa era. From the episode of Brahmā marrying his own daughter Sarasvatī, to Indra's dalliance with Ahalyā, to Śiva molesting of Pārvatī's chambermaids Jayā and Vijayā, to Viśvāmitra's lusty behavior towards Menakā, Rāma brought in the much-needed moral behavior to Hindu civilization as a whole. Because the kingdom of Ayodhyā was dharmic,

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[1] *rāmo vigrahavān dharmaḥ* (*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, 37:13).

[2] *ātmānaṃ mānuṣaṃ manye rāmaṃ daśarathātmajam* (*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, 105:10).

it is the only one of the three major kingdoms where the older brother (Rāma) who had lost his kingdom to his younger brother (Bharata), gets back his throne after fourteen years. In short, it was just a temporary loss. In the other two kingdoms, i.e., Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā, where there was an element of *adharma* in each case, the loss of the kingdoms of the respective rulers (Vālī and Rāvaṇa respectively) to their younger siblings (Sugrīva and Vibhīṣaṇa respectively) became permanent.[3]

The kingdom of Kiṣkindhā represents *artha* in more ways than one. The sole issue at stake in Kiṣkindhā is the kingdom (*rājya*) itself. Artha is wealth primarily, i.e., gold (*suvarṇa*) and silver (*rajata*). But it is not limited to that in Hindu culture. It includes livestock (cows and horses) as well as land (*bhūmi*). In the case of kings, it is the kingdom, *rājyalakṣmī*. So, when Vālī and Sugrīva fought, it was over the rights to the Kiṣkindhā kingdom. Vālī went off ballistic, quite unfairly, against his younger brother Sugrīva who assumed the throne in the absence of his brother and was quite prepared to return the rulership to Vālī when he returned and demanded back the throne. It was Vālī's sense of autocratic arrogance and unforgiveness that ultimately did him in. And once Sugrīva got the kingdom permanently after Vālī's death, he gave his army (which is also a form of *artha*) in the service of Rāma's righteous cause.

The kingdom of Laṅkā represents *kāma* in the full sense of the term. From Śūrpaṇakhā's visit to Pañcavaṭī where she tried to seduce Rāma, to her running-off to Laṅkā after her disfigurement by Lakṣmaṇa and then, besides complaining to her mighty brother Rāvaṇa, describes Sītā to him in sensuous terms enough to arouse uncontrollable lust in him. Then, Rāvaṇa follows through on his lustful instincts to carry off Sītā with devious plans, in vain hopes of gaining her approval to sexually yield to him. Even the dialog between Rāvaṇa and his

[3] Srinivasa Sastri, V., *Lectures on the Rāmāyaṇa*, Madras Sanskrit Academy, 1949, p. 187.

brothers, Kumbhakarṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa, is all about Rāvaṇa's lustful attitude and how adharmic his whole stubbornness has been.

Last but not least, is the kingdom of Mithilā. It is 'out of line' (apavarga) in every sense of the phrase. While Ayodhyā, Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā are in a direct line geographically from north to south, the kingdom of Mithilā is off to the side directly to the east of Ayodhyā, thereby subtly showing that *dharma* is the closest to *mokṣa* among all the four *puruṣārthas* taken together. This kingdom of Mithilā loses its importance in the Rāmāyaṇa narrative after the Bālakāṇḍa. It has no place after Rāma's wedding to Sītā. But how does it represent mokṣa? That is because of its king named Janaka. This king was totally unworldly in his attitude. He was more interested in metaphysical and spiritual matters than worldly issues. In that sense, Janaka was truly a Videha (separated from his body) which incidentally was the name of his kingdom besides being called Mithilā (which was actually the capital city of the Videha kingdom). More importantly, Janaka's spiritually-oriented nature comes out in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad where he patronizes philosophers like Yājñavalkya with whom he has philosophical discussions. Thus, the four kingdoms of the Rāmāyaṇa represent the four *puruṣārthas*. We will see below in detail how this is so.

Four puruṣārthas

The values of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* are collectively referred to as *trivarga* (three in line) in the Hindu tradition as they represent the three this-worldly values. *Artha* (wealth) and *kāma* (material desire) are totally this-worldly materialistic values. *Dharma* (righteousness) is semi-spiritual and thus is the link value connecting the material ones with the ultimate spiritual value *mokṣa* (salvation from the cycle of births and deaths). The value of *mokṣa* is *apavarga* (out of line) as it is

totally spiritual and other-worldly and thus utterly distinct from the other three values.

The reason as to why the value of *dharma* is first even within the *trivarga* is that the other two values of *artha* and *kāma*, worldly as they are, must be (opine the Hindus) tempered with, and totally circumscribed by, the value of *dharma*. In other words, *artha* and *kāma* cannot be unbridled with unrighteousness (*adharma*) in their gain and enjoyment by man (*puruṣa*), but must be harnessed and reined in by the noble and propriety-filled value of *dharma*.

If the value of dharma is not put first in the trivarga, the *ariṣaḍvarga* (the six emotions inimical to human spiritual well-being) will take over the individual. These six emotions detrimental to man are: *kāma* (lust), *krodha* (wrath), *lobha* (stinginess), *moha* (greed), *mada* (vanity) and *mātsarya* (jealousy). Hence, keeping dharma first within the *trivarga* most definitely deflects the malicious effects of the *ariṣaḍvarga*.

Dharma

The term '*dhárman*' is Vedic Sanskrit where it means 'foundation'. In Ṛgveda V:15:2, truth is equated with ritual sacrifice which is the foundation of the gods and the world.[4] In the Vedic view of life, ritual sacrifice is not only the centerpiece and focus of all religiosity but it is the basis for the sustenance of the universe. In this sense, sacrifice is idolized as the truth itself. Through the institution of ritual sacrifice (*yajña*), the term '*dhárman*' gets associated with the three great gods of the Ṛgveda, i.e. Agni, Indra and Soma. The term also is associated with the gods Varuṇa and Mitra.

[4] Brereton, "Dhárman in the Ṛgveda," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 32, 2004, p. 451.

In the sense of the term '*dhárman*' being closely associated with the term '*ṛta*' which eventually gives way to the more enduring term '*dharma*' of post-Vedic times, the association of the term '*dhárman*' with the Vedic god Varuṇa becomes very important. The god Varuṇa, a serious rival of the god Indra, together with his associate the god Mitra, is considered the guardian of *ṛta.*[5]

> "Wise, with your Law and through the Asura's magic power ye guard the ordinances, Mitra-Varuṇa.
> Ye by eternal Order govern all the world. Ye set the Sun in heaven as a refulgent car." (Ṛgveda V: 63:7)

In the Maitreyanī Saṁhitā III:8:9, the gods Varuṇa and Mitra are deemed to be the eternal guardians of *dharma* and also the *dharma* of the gods.[6] In Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa V:3:3:9, Varuṇa is considered the Lord of the Law (*Dharmapati*):[7]

> "For Varuṇa Dharmapati (the lord of the law) he then prepares a Varuṇa pap of barley: thereby Varuṇa, the lord of the law, makes him lord of the law; and that truly is the supreme state, when one is lord of the law; for whosoever attains to the supreme state, to him they come in (matters of) law: therefore to Varuṇa Dharmapati."

The term '*dharma*' now takes on a multivalent role in post-Vedic Hindu tradition. From then on it has come to mean 'cosmic order, universal law, religion, righteousness, duty, virtue, way of life etc.'

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[5] *dharmaṇā mitrāvaruṇā vipaścitā vratā rakṣethe asurasya māyayā. ṛtena viśvam bhuvanaṃ vi rājathaḥ sūryam ā dhattho divi citryaṃ ratham.* (Ṛgveda V:63:7)

[6] *mitravaruṇau dhruvena dharmaneti…..mitravaruṇau vai devanam dharmadharayau.*

[7] *átha váruṇāya dhármapataye.*
vāruṇáṃ yavamáyaṃ caruṃ nírvapati tádenaṃ váruṇa eva dhármapatirdhármasya páti ṃ karoti paramátā vai sā yo dhármasya pátirásadyo hí paramátāṃ gáchati taṃ hi dhár ma upayánti tásmādváruṇāya dhármapataye.

There has never been another term in the Indian context that is so weighty, powerful, emotional and omnipresent as this term. It is a term that one measures oneself up to, as it stands as the formidable gold standard of all that is decent, dignified, right and purposeful in human life. In other words, deviation from *dharma* is impending disaster, leading in full certainty, to eventual downfall of even the most blessed and seemingly omnipotent of individuals.

The final and decisive words in favor of *dharma* and its power are enunciated in Manu Smṛti VIII:15 and which is equally echoed by Buddhism in Theragāthā 303, are:[8] "Dharma protects those who protect it." This above phrase cautions both the king as well as the commoner to abide by the law of righteousness (*dharma*) that keeps the entire cosmos and humanity in harmonious wholesomeness for the eventual benefit and betterment of all.

Ayodhyā and dharma

In the very second verse of the first book of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, the future author, Vālmīki, wishes to know from his guest, Sage Nārada, if there is anyone in this world, who is a contemporary, who is a person of character, heroic and dharmic among other virtuous attributes.[9] Nārada initially admits that it would be difficult to find such a person with all the requisite virtues in one person,[10] but eventually discloses that there is such a contemporary person in this world who is known by the name of Rāma.[11]

The first major test of his dharmic character comes when Rāma unhesitatingly comes before his father when his father Daśaratha sends

[8] *dharmo rakṣati rakṣitāḥ.* (Manu Smṛti VIII:15); *dhammo have rakkhati dhammacārī.* (Theragāthā 303)
[9] *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* I:1:2-4.
[10] *Ibid.* I:1:7.
[11] *Ibid.* I:1:8.

for him in order to accompany the sage Viśvāmitra,[12] and protect the latter from disturbances by demons whilst the sage is engaged in a ritual sacrifice. Rāma follows Sage Viśvāmitra's directives and instructions in detail including the redemption of Ahalyā and finally lifting, stringing and breaking the bow in King Janaka's court at Mithilā.

The biggest of all tests of Rāma's dharmic character comes when he comes in front of his grief-stricken father and at the demand of his step-mother Kaikeyī, without hesitation, agrees not only to relinquish his rights as heir-apparent but also to go into exile into the forest for fourteen years. As he departs for exile, Rāma bears no ill-will towards Kaikeyī or her son Bharata. All through this ugly palace affair, Rāma conducts himself with perfect deportment and respectful etiquette.[13] Rāma, while in his first sojourn in exile at a place called Citrakūṭa, is visited by a huge party led by Bharata hoping to convince his exiled brother to return back to Ayodhyā and resume his rightful position as king (since Daśaratha had died). Lakṣmaṇa, who had accompanied Rāma into exile, tries to convince Rāma that Bharata is coming with a huge army to kill them both. The ever even-tempered Rāma calms Lakṣmaṇa saying that he knows Bharata well and that Lakṣmaṇa ought to get rid of such silly notions.[14] Rāma was proved right. Bharata respectfully requests Rāma to return to Ayodhyā and become king. Rāma, once again, with a full sense of *dharma*, rejects Bharata's sincere offer that he must keep the promise that his father made to Kaikeyī.[15] This episode, more than any other in the whole of the Rāmāyaṇa, that sets Rāma (in the eyes of the Hindus) on a dharmic pedestal from which has not been unseated to this day.

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[12] *Ibid.* I:22:1-3.
[13] *Ibid.* II:19:4-5.
[14] *Ibid.* II:97:9-11.
[15] *Ibid.* II:111:28-32.

Again, Rāma's non-judgmental attitude comes to light when the ever-suspicious Lakṣmaṇa, on two occasions, once when the duo (after the abduction of Sītā) comes across Hanumān, and another when Vibhīṣaṇa comes to seek refuge in Rāma, seeking to warn Rāma about being careful with strangers and people from especially the enemy's camp. On the latter occasion when Vibhīṣaṇa comes to seek refuge in Rāma, the latter not only tells Lakṣmaṇa that he'll grant refuge to Vibhīṣaṇa but will do so even if Rāvaṇa himself were to do so.[16] Rāma's sense of ultimate magnanimity comes when he tells Vibhīṣaṇa to perform his dead brother's funerary rites with the statement that enmity ought to end with death.[17]

Finally, Rāma's sensitivity towards Bharata is shown when he urges Hanumān to make haste to Nandigrāma where Bharata had been living for fourteen years awaiting Rāma's return.[18] Bharata had vowed to immolate himself if Rāma did not return fourteen years to date. Rāma made sure that Hanumān got to Nandigrāma on time enough to stop Bharata from doing something tragic. Rāma's dharmic sense of mindfulness is to be appreciated.

Artha

The term '*artha*' in its narrowest sense signifies 'wealth'. However, in the Hindu context, wealth can take many forms. The goddess Lakṣmī, who is the chief deity of wealth in Hinduism, has eight forms. These are: Dhanalakṣmī (goddess of wealth), Dhānyalakṣmī (goddess of grains), Santānalakṣmī (goddess of children), Dhairyalakṣmī (goddess of courage), Vijayalakṣmī (goddess of victory), Vidyālakṣmī (goddess of knowledge), Gajalakṣmī (goddess of animals), and

[16] *Ibid.* VI:18:33-34.
[17] *Ibid.* VI:109:25.
[18] *Ibid.* VII:125:7.

Rājyalakṣmī (goddess of kingdom). For anyone to be blessed by any of these, the Hindu tradition, firmly believes that they need to be blessed by the Great Goddess Lakṣmī (Mahālakṣmī) as enunciated in the Śrīsūkta.[19]

> "O Mother, bless us with children and grandchildren as well as with wealth, grains, elephants, horses, cattle and chariots.
> O Mother we are thy children, please make us long-lived." (Śrīsūkta 19)

Of all kinds of wealth stated above, the real property wealth is usually the biggest. This is made clear by the two spouses of Viṣṇu, i.e., Śrīdevī and Bhūdevī. The Earth (*terra firma*; *bhūmātā*) has a unique status in terms of all other types of wealth in the Hindu tradition.

Kiṣkindhā and artha

The kingdom of Kiṣkindhā was ruled by an indigenous tribe in the Deccan region known as the Vānaras. To the Aryan kings of the north, these tribal folks seemed 'simian-like' in their features. Further, probably the Vānaras had the monkey mascot as their tribal totem. Anyways, at the time of the Rāmāyaṇa, this kingdom was ruled by a powerful king named Vālī. The second in command in this kingdom was Vālī's younger brother Sugrīva. There were other eminent counselors such as Hanumān, Nala, Nīla, Suṣena etc. who rendered their benign counsels to the two brothers. There was another 'bear' tribal counselor named Jāmbavān. The kingdom seemed to have been ruled benignly but with a firm hand by the eminent Vālī who the Rāmāyaṇa deems to be the incarnation of the god Indra.

In the 34th sarga of the Uttarakāṇḍa of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, we are informed of an episode where Vālī was challenged to a duel by

[19] *putrapautra dhanam dhānyam hastāśvādigave ratham. prajānām bhavasi mātā āyuṣmantam karotu mām.*

Rāvaṇa, the king of Laṅkā. Both Vālī and Rāvaṇa had received boons of near immortality from the god Brahmā. However, in the duel between Vālī and Rāvaṇa, it was the latter that was humiliated and sued for peace and friendship with the former. After this episode, Vālī had nothing to worry about (until the arrival of Rāma).

However, there soon arose a quarrel between Vālī and Māyāvī on account of a woman whom they both loved.[20] When Māyāvī challenged Vālī to a duel, the fight lasted for an entire year in a cave. Finally, Vālī emerged victorious. However, during Vālī's 'leave of absence' on account of the duel, the ministers appointed Sugrīva as king of Kiṣkindhā.[21] Sugrīva had waited at the entrance to the cave for over a year.[22] He saw blood oozing out of the cave, and presuming Vālī to be dead, took over the reins of power. However, Vālī was alive and after his victory headed back to his capital only to find that his brother Sugrīva was now king. This made Vālī furious.[23] Sugrīva, who was not the contentious type, tried to explain to Vālī that he had no intentions of usurping the throne, and that he would gladly return the kingship back to him. However, Vālī, being egotistical as he was, would just not hear his brother out.[24] With this, Sugrīva just yielded the throne, and on the advice of Hanumān, fled to the Ṛṣyamūka Mountain where Vālī could not touch him.[25] The sage Mātaṅga had cursed Vālī that if he ever set foot on Ṛṣyamūka mountain he would die instantly. So, Ṛṣyamūka became Sugrīva's safe haven. Hanumān was one of the ministers who

[20] *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* IV:9:4.
[21] *Ibid.* IV:9:21.
[22] *Ibid.* IV:9:16.
[23] *Ibid.* IV:9:22.
[24] *Ibid.* IV:9:26.
[25] *Ibid.* IV:46:21-24.

joined Sugrīva. It is here that Sugrīva eventually met the two brothers Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.

Finally, a pact was agreed upon by Rāma and Sugrīva in which the latter and Vālī would engage in a duel, and Rāma would kill Vālī from behind a tree. In turn, Sugrīva would then press his entire Vānara army in the service of Rāma so that he could fight Rāvaṇa and his demonic hosts and defeat them.

So, the main issue in the Kiṣkindhā kingdom was the kingdom itself. Nothing else was at stake. A kingdom is *artha* (wealth). It is considered *rājyalakṣmī* (wealth of kingdom) in the Hindu tradition. *Rājyalakṣmī* is one of the eight forms of the goddess Lakṣmī. So, one might add that Rāma who had lost Mahālakṣmī (Sītā) met Sugrīva who had lost *Rājyalakṣmī*.

Kāma

The term '*kāma*' means desire in general, but materialistic desires in particular. Even here, the term eventually gravitates towards sexual desire which is considered the most burning of all desires.

All know of the Kāmasūtra which is a manual of the ancient Indian erotic arts. The notion of *kāma* is not just associated with brutes with raw sexual appetites in Indian culture, but is not only considered a part of human life, but also indulged in quite freely by the gods (*devas*) and holy visionaries (*ṛṣis*).

Among the gods, Brahmā who is ever meditating and reciting the Vedas, lusts after and eventually marries his own daughter Sarasvatī.[26] The god Śiva is not only the great ascetic, but is also the greatest erotic. He dances with his wife Pārvatī and lusts after her chambermaids Jayā

[26] *Ṛgveda* X:61:5-9.

and Vijayā. Kṛṣṇa, the 8th incarnation of Viṣṇu, is said to have 16,108 wives.[27] The god Indra lusts after Ahalyā, the wife of Sage Gautama.[28]

Among the holy men, Sage Parāśara falls in love and has sexual relations with the ferry-boat maiden Satyavatī who begets him a son named Vyāsa,[29] the great compiler of the Vedas, the author of the Mahābhārata and the 18 Purāṇas. Vyāsa is also the author of the Brahmasūtras, the foundation text of the Vedānta system of Hindu thought. This same Vyāsa who has an unpleasant visage, then sexually forces himself on two beautiful young princesses Ambikā and Ambālikā without their consent to father a blind fellow (Dhrtarāṣṭra) and a pale fellow (Pāṇḍu).[30] The sage Viśvāmitra falls in love and sexually satisfies himself with the celestial nymph Menakā.[31] The sage Bharadvāja, once while resting on the banks of a river, saw the nymph Ghṛtācī and emanated semen which then fell into a leaf cup to bear a child named Droṇa.[32] The sage Śaradvān beheld the beautiful nymph Jānapadī and his semen fell on the weeds which then developed into two children Kṛpa and Kṛpī.[33] The wife of the sage Jamadagni, i.e., Reṇukā, fell in love with a handsome young king that she saw near a river bank.[34]

Even an utterly spiritual text, the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad VI: 4:9 in the context of the *Vājapeya* rite says:[35]

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[27] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* X:59:33.
[28] *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* I:48:16-33.
[29] *Mahābhārata*, Ādi Parva (Vaṁsāvataraṇa Parva) LXIII.
[30] *Mahābhārata*, Ādi Parva (Sambhava Parva) CV.
[31] *Mahābhārata*, Ādi Parva (Sambhava Parva) LXXII.
[32] *Mahābhārata*, Ādi Parva (Sambhava Parva) CXXX.
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] *Mahābhārata*, Vana Parva (Tīrthayātrā Parva) CXVI.
[35] Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads*, George Allen & Unwin (1953), p. 323.

> "If one desires a woman (with the thought) may she enjoy love with me, after inserting the member in her, joining mouth to mouth, and stroking her lower part, he should recite […]."

To not defile the teacher's bed, i.e., not sleep with the teacher's wife is admonished to the student in Chāndogya Upaniṣad V:10:9.

If sexuality had not been a part of an occult religiosity, Tantric sex as well as depicting sex openly in art as in the temples of Khajurāho would not have been allowed. It obviously was accepted as a sort of an eternal tension between itself (eroticism) and asceticism.

Laṅkā and kāma

Though *kāma* means material desire in general, in the context of the Laṅkā characters of the Rāmāyaṇa, i.e., Śūrpaṇakhā and Rāvaṇa, it is taken in its literal and narrowest sense of the term, i.e., unbridled base lust for the opposite sex.

Śūrpaṇakhā, the younger sister of Rāvaṇa, the king of Laṅkā, comes to Rāma's domicile at Pañcavaṭī and entices him to give up Sītā and marry her. Upon beholding Rāma, Śūrpaṇakhā was overwhelmed with desire. On hearing Rāma's voice, she was consumed by passion and tormented by the pangs of love. She burst out:[36]

> "Deformed, without beauty, she is not worthy of thee, whereas I should prove a well-matched partner, my beauty equal to thine own; do thou look on me as thy consort. This unsightly grim-visaged human female, of lean abdomen, will be devoured by me this day in thy presence, together with that brother of thine. Thou and I shall wander on the summit of the mountains and through the forests together, exploring the whole region of Daṇḍaka, according to thy whim."

[36] *Ibid.* III:17:26-28; Shastri, *The Rāmayana of Vālmīki* (Shanti Sadan, London), Vol. 2, p. 40.

Speaking thus, the demoness threw impassioned glances at Rāma. When Rāma sent her to Lakṣmaṇa, Śūrpaṇakhā tried to entice him. She said to him with deep lust:[37]

> "My beauty renders me a worthy wife for thee; therefore, come and we will range the Dandaka forest and mountains happily together."

Lakṣmaṇa, of course, disfigures her when she lunges towards him. The disfigured Śūrpaṇakhā then flees to Laṅkā where she not only complains to her brother Rāvaṇa, but evokes lust in him for Sītā by saying:[38]

> "And Rāma's virtuous, tender and wedded wife, of large eyes, whose face resembles the full moon, is ever engaged in what is pleasing to her lord. With her lovely locks, well-formed nose, and beautiful shoulders and her grace and dignity, one would deem her to be a forest divinity or Lakṣmī herself. With a skin of color of molten gold, nails that are rosy and long, that surprisingly lovely woman is Sītā, the slender-waisted princess of Videha. No woman so beautiful has ever appeared in the world, either among the gods, gandharvas, yakṣas or kinnaras. […] With her natural amiability, her marvelous beauty which is without equal on earth, she would prove a worthy consort of thee. […] It was to bring thee this lady of shapely hips and well-rounded breasts, and charming features that I put forth my endeavors. […] When thou dost behold Vaidehi, […] thou shalt be instantly pierced by the darts of the God of Love."

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[37] *Ibid*. III:18:7; Shastri, *The Rāmayana of Vālmīki* (Shanti Sadan, London), Vol. 2, p. 41.
[38] *Ibid*. III:34:15-22; Shastri, *The Rāmayana of Vālmīki* (Shanti Sadan, London), Vol. 2, pp. 72-73.

When Rāvaṇa arrives at Pañcavaṭī dressed in the garb of an ascetic with the intention of abducting Sītā, he shamelessly and lewdly addresses her with the following words:[39]

> "Art thou a nymph of graceful aspect? How even white and sharp are thy teeth, how large thy slightly reddened eyes with their dark pupils, how well proportioned and rounded are thy thighs, and how charming thy legs, resembling the tapering-trunk of an elephant! How round and plump are thy cheeks. [...] How enchanting is thy bosom decorated with pearls! O Lady of sweet smiles, lovely teeth and expressive eyes, [...] dost thou steal away my heart, O Graceful One. Slender is thy waist, glossy thine hair, thy breasts touching each other enhance thy loveliness. […] Till this hour, I have never seen any on earth so perfect; thy youth, thy beauty and thy grace are unequalled in the Three Worlds!"

Despite ravenously abducting Sītā, Rāvaṇa cannot touch her because of a curse laid on him long ago that "he cannot have any woman without her consent". So, Rāvaṇa tries to convince Sītā (now held prisoner) to assent to him by directly telling her that he desires her.[40] Rāvaṇa (with the help of his magician Vidyujjihvā) even goes to the length of showing the fake decapitated head of Rāma in order to convince Sītā[41] to now finally submit herself to his desire as her husband is no more. His lust for her has no limits. When it comes to fulfilling his lust, he cheats and lies without any limits.

The curse that was put on Rāvaṇa that he cannot violate any woman without her consent came from his nephew Nalakūbara. Rāvaṇa had

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[39] *Ibid*. III:46:17-23; Shastri, *The Rāmayana of Vālmīki* (Shanti Sadan, London), Vol. 2, p. 96.
[40] *Ibid*. V:20:3 & 6.
[41] *Ibid*. VI:31:37-46.

molested and raped Rambhā, the wife of Nalakūbara. When Rāvaṇa saw Rambhā, he was smitten with lust. He then said:[42]

> "Where art thou going, O Lady of lovely hips? [...] Who is about to enjoy thee? [...] Who will caress those two breasts? [...] Who will stroke thy large hips?

Rāvaṇa then exploding with lust ravished the nymph Rambhā. Eventually, her husband Nalakūbara came to know of what happened and in sheer disgust, cursed his paternal uncle Rāvaṇa by saying:[43]

> "On this account, he will never be able to approach another youthful woman unless she shares his love; if carried away by lust, he does violence to any woman who does not love him, his head will split into seven pieces."

Mokṣa

In the Hindu tradition, *dharmārthakāma* are referred to as *trivarga* (three in line) as they are all this-worldly in their focus. *Mokṣa* alone is referred to as *apavarga* (out-of-line) as it is the only one of the four *puruṣārthas* that is other-worldly in its orientation.

The Indian religio-philosophical traditions (Hindu, Jaina and Buddhist) all believe that the individual has beginninglessly gone through many births on account of his karmic deeds which necessitate rebirth. *Mokṣa*, which is earned through spiritual enlightenment and selfless good deeds, then represents a permanent terminus to this seemingly endless cycle of births and deaths.

Let me now spell out the entire *saṁsāric* cycle and the methodology of breaking of the cycle leading to *mokṣa* in the Hindu

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[42] *Ibid.* VII:26:13-18.
[43] *Ibid*. VII:26:43-44; Shastri, *The Rāmayana of Vālmīki* (Shanti Sadan, London), Vol. 3, p. 466.

tradition. The uncreated and eternal soul (*ātman*) has been, without beginning, under the spell and grip of primal ignorance (*anādi avidyā*). This primal ignorance creates material desires (*kāma*) within the soul which then impels and compels the soul to perform selfish deeds (*kāmya karmas*). These deeds can be good, bad or morally neutral. On another axis, they may also be verbal, physical or mental. Good selfish deeds lead to the accrual of merit (*puṇya*), and bad selfish deeds lead to the accrual of sins (*pāpa*). Morally neutral selfish deeds are not karmically efficacious. The Law of Karma is based on the simple axiom "as one sows, so one reaps". Given the factor of death and the Law of Karma, rebirth of the soul into a new body becomes necessitated as one life is not enough to reap the karmic consequences of one's deeds. This rebirth and re-death cycle will keep happening until the soul attains spiritual enlightenment and thereby stops performing selfish deeds and does only selfless good deeds (*niṣkāmasadkarma*) and practices other forms of spiritual pursuit (*sādhanā*) such as religious piety, study of scriptures, and meditation. Good selfless deeds alone do not accrue merit or sin. Then, finally, upon death, the soul is permanently released from the cycle of *saṁsāra* (rebirths and re-deaths). This is salvation (*mokṣa*).

The condition of the soul in salvation differs among the various systems of Hindu philosophical thought. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system upholds the view that the soul just merely exists without either consciousness (*cit*) or bliss (*ānanda*). The Prabhākara school of Mīmāṁsā wholly concurs with this view. The Sāṅkhya-Yoga system believes that the soul not only exists but has consciousness, though no bliss, in salvation. The Kumārila school of Mīmāṁsā opines that the redeemed soul exists with potential consciousness and potential bliss. The Śaṅkara school of Vedānta believes that the soul merges

inalienably with the Absolute (Brahman) leaving no trace of self-identity. It is like (sort of) a drop of water merging with the ocean. The Rāmānuja school of Vedānta believes that the redeemed soul possesses existence, consciousness and bliss and becomes almost like God barring a few exceptions. The Madhva school of Vedānta holds that the liberated soul also has existence, consciousness and bliss but only up to its innate spiritual capacity and no more.

Mithilā and mokṣa

Finally, let me talk about the real "out of line" (*apavarga*) kingdom (both geographically as well as metaphorically) in terms of the *puruṣārthas*. This is the kingdom of Videha whose capital city was Mithilā.

The name of this kingdom, i.e., Videha, itself is a patent aspect of its *apavarga* affiliations. The term 'Videha' may be dissected into two, i.e., '*vi*' (prefix, which signifies 'separated from') and '*deha*' (noun, which means 'body'). In other words, it signifies, according to Hindu metaphysics, the soul's separation from the body at the time of the attainment of salvation, i.e., *videhamukti*. The Janaka family of monarchs which ruled Videha seemed to have been interested in metaphysical and spiritual matters besides being rulers.

During the time of the Rāmāyaṇa, it was one Śīradhvaja Janaka who was its ruler. His immediate second-in-command was his younger brother named Kuśadhvaja Janaka. Śīradhvaja Janaka's own daughter Ūrmilā got married to Lakṣmaṇa. His adopted daughter Sītā[44] (whom he found as an infant in a box during an agricultural ploughing festival) became the spouse of Rāma. The two daughters (Māṇḍavī and

[44] The word 'Sītā' means 'plough' in Sanskrit.

Śrutakīrti) of Kuśadhvaja became the wives of Bharata and Śatrughna respectively.

Anyway, the Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad from III:1:1 to IV:4:23 mentions how one Janaka, king of Videha, inquires and dialogs about metaphysical and spiritual matters with the great sage Yājñavalkya. In the third chapter, Janaka merely wants to find out who is wise among the Brahmin priests officiating over his sacrifice. The other priests do the questioning here. And Janaka merely listens. However, in the fourth chapter, Janaka does both the intense questioning and listening. It is all about Brahman and salvation. Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad III:1:3-6 ends with the refrain '*sā muktiḥ sātimuktiḥ*' (this is freedom, this is complete freedom). In Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad IV:4:5-6, Yājñavalkya tells Janaka the entire process of karmic retribution and the way to get out of it.[45]

> "According as one acts, according as one behaves, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good; the doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action. […] A person consists of desires. As his desire, so is his will; as his will, so does the deed he does. Whatever deed he does, that he attains.
>
> Exhausting the results of whatever works he did in this world, he comes again from that world, to this world for (fresh) work. […] But for the man who does not desire, he who is without desire, who is freed from desire, whose desire is satisfied, whose desire is the self, his breaths do not depart. Being Brahman, he goes to Brahman."

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[45] '*yathākarī yathācārī tathā bhavati. sādhukārī sādhur bhavati, pāpakārī pāpo bhavati. puṇyaḥ puṇyena karmaṇā bhavati; pāpah pāpena. sa yathākāmo bhavati, tat kratur bhavati, yat kratur bhavati tat karma kurute, yat karma kurute, tat abhisampadyate. [..] prāpyantam karmaṇas tasya yat kim ceha karotyayam tasmāllokat punar aiti lokāya karmaṇe iti nu kāmayamanaḥ, athākāmanayamānah, yo'kāmo niṣkāma āptakāma ātmakāma, na tasya prāṇā utkrāmanti, brahmaiva san brahmāpyeti*' (Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad IV:4:5-6).

King Janaka is prepared to offer handsome sacrificial fees and ready to serve the savant who can impart to him this esoteric mystical spiritual knowledge so that he can embark upon this spiritual path. Janaka is very transactional in this sense.

Whether the spiritually inclined and inquisitive King Janaka mentioned in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad is the exact same King Janaka mentioned in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, is difficult to establish. There is no elaborate description of King Śīradhvaja Janaka in the Bālakāṇḍa of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa outside of the Śiva's bow incident and the brief enumerative dynastic description of the monarchs of Videha as Śīradhvaja Janaka's dharmic royal ancestors.[46]

Conclusion

While I have upheld each of the four kingdoms in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa as reflecting one *puruṣārtha*, it is important to point out that the other three *puruṣārthas* are present in these kingdoms. Let us look at this angle briefly in each case.

In the Ayodhyā kingdom, the value of *artha* is present because the succession issue in the kingdom is the main reason that Rāma was demanded to go into exile by his step-mother Kaikeyī. The value of *kāma* is present because it was Daśaratha's lust-filled maddening love for his beautiful wife Kaikeyī that the old king was ready to kill even innocent people if only she would recant her demands. Lastly, the value of *mokṣa* is present due to the fact that Rāma is considered the incarnation of God[47] who eventually makes a very soteriological declaration in the Yuddhakāṇḍa to grant refuge (interpreted as salvation) to all beings (regardless of who they are) in the context of awarding that protection to Vibhīṣaṇa, the good-natured brother of the evil-minded Rāvaṇa.

[46] *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, I:71.
[47] *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, VI:21:22.

In the Kiṣkindhā kingdom, the value of *dharma* in the form of its counter corelate *adharma*, is present in the context of Vālī's unforgiving arrogance towards his innocent brother Sugrīva, and the value of *kāma* is present in the context of Vālī's love and abduction of Rumā, the wife of Sugrīva. The value of *mokṣa* is present in the Kiṣkindhā kingdom through the personality of Hanumān who is the incarnation of the god Vāyu, and who according to the Taittirīya Upaniṣad, is the perceptible Brahman.[48] And attaining the imperceptible Brahman (the only thing higher than perceptible Brahman) is considered *mokṣa* (salvation).[49]

In the Laṅkā kingdom, the value of *dharma* manifests itself in the three royal brothers in a lopsided manner. Vibhīṣaṇa, the youngest brother represents *dharma*, the middle brother Kumbhakarṇa represents *dharmādharma*, and the oldest brother and monarch of Laṅkā, Rāvaṇa, symbolizes *adharma*. *Dharma* departs Laṅkā when Vibhīṣaṇa is thrown out for his benign counsels. Kumbhakarṇa knows that Rāvaṇa did wrong by abducting Sītā, but based on "blood is thicker than water" logic, Kumbhakarṇa ultimately decides to support Rāvaṇa.[50] And Rāvaṇa himself, for all his greatness and occult spirituality, is ultimately without an ounce of goodness, and hence digs his own grave by stubbornly sticking onto the path of *adharma*. His uncle Mārīca and his wife Maṇḍodarī counsel Rāvaṇa about his adharmic path, but true to the Sanskrit proverb "*vināśakāle viparīta buddhiḥ*" ("intellect becomes ever more perverted and stubborn when the time for one's doom sets in"), Rāvaṇa refuses to listen. The value of *artha* is there as Rāvaṇa is an opulent and magnificent monarch ruling over Laṅkā that he

[48] *namas te vāyo, tvam eva pratyaksam brahmāsi*, Taittirīya Upaniṣad I:1:1.
[49] *brahmavid āpnoti param*, Taittirīya Upaniṣad II:1:1.
[50] *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, I:18:10-11; VI:12:28-40.

eventually loses. Finally, Vibhīṣaṇa represents the *mokṣa* element as the recipient of Rāma's all-encompassing refuge. Vibhīṣaṇa is also one of the seven immortals (*saptaciranjīvīs*) in Hinduism. In fact, even Rāvaṇa and Kumbhakarṇa ultimately attain *mokṣa* as they are, in their original forms (*mūlarūpas*), Jaya and Vijaya, the door-keepers of Vaikuṇṭha (the heaven of the god Viṣṇu), who had manifested themselves on earth on account of the curse pronounced upon them by the eternally youngish quartet of spiritual seers known (in the Hindu tradition as a whole) as the Sanakādi ṛṣis.

In the Videha kingdom, *dharma* is very much central to Janaka. He is curious to know about what *dharma* is, and how it can lead to *mokṣa*. Janaka uses *artha* to understand *dharma*. He points out that he will pay handsome sacrificial fees (*dakṣiṇā*) to the priest who will impart to him the secrets to *dharma*.

> "In this Janaka of Videha arose a desire to know which of these brahmins was the most learned in Scripture. He enclosed (in a pen) a thousand cows. To the horns (of each cow) were fastened ten coins (of gold)."[51]

The value of *kāma* is present as it is his daughters and the two ones of his younger brother that become the spouses of king Daśaratha's four handsome sons.

On a few other matters, I have some final thoughts. The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa is certainly a text of Aryan elitism as it treats the Vānaras of Kiṣkindhā as subhuman and the Rākṣasas of Laṅkā as inhuman. However, I must equally add that the Hindus actually worship Hanumān and deeply admire Vibhīṣaṇa. In fact, both of them are among the seven immortals (*saptaciranjīvīs*) of Hinduism. The killing

[51] Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad III:1:1; Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads*, George Allen & Unwin (1953), p. 211.

of Vālī by Rāma from behind a tree is justified by Rāma as being alright in all senses since Vālī was an ape and not a human being.[52] Firstly, the Vānaras were not monkeys but tribal people of the south-central Deccan region who had the monkey mascot as their tribal totem. But to Aryan eyes, the tribal folks seemed like apes. In fact, this is not a modernist interpretation. Vimalasūri in the *Paumacariyu* (Jaina Rāmāyaṇa) of the 2nd century CE mentions that the Vānaras were not apes but tribal peoples with a simian totem.[53] Secondly, there is something deeper going on here. Vālī is an incarnation of the god Indra, the great deity of the Vedic Hindus. Rāma is the incarnation of Viṣṇu who is also known as Upendra (deputy Indra). Upendra has not yet fully displaced Indra in the history of Hinduism. Therefore, Rāma cannot kill Vālī directly. Upendra has to slowly rise in the ranks to outrank and displace Indra. This situation continues in the Mahābhārata as well. Kṛṣṇa, who is the 8th incarnation of Viṣṇu, acts as the charioteer of Arjuna who is the incarnation of Indra. Kṛṣṇa, again fulfils his role as Upendra, but supersedes Indra by having Arjuna ask him questions and Kṛṣṇa, in the process, becomes not only his teacher but also becomes the 'Teacher of the World' (*jagadguru*).[54] Arjuna, ultimately bows down to Kṛṣṇa. The mighty Vedic god Indra is finally superseded and subordinated by Viṣṇu. This is the hidden crowning achievement of the Bhagavadgītā in terms of Hindu theological history. Finally, two wrongs ultimately did make a right. In the Rāma incarnation, Viṣṇu (Rāma) killed Indra (Vālī) unfairly for the god Sūrya (Sugrīva). This was "set right" (karmically) in the Kṛṣṇa incarnation

[52] *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, IV:18:40.
[53] Dharwadker (ed.), *Collected Essays of A.K.Rāmanujan*, (Oxford, 2004) p. 146.
[54] *kṛṣṇam vande jagadgurum* (Bhagavadgita dhyana sloka #5).

where, Viṣṇu (Kṛṣṇa) got killed Sūrya (Karṇa) unfairly by the god Indra (Arjuna) when Karṇa's chariot wheel was stuck in the mud.

To conclude with the issue of *mokṣa*: There are two types of salvation acknowledged by some systems of Hindu thought, i.e., jīvanmukti (redeemed while alive) and videhamukti (redeemed after death). The Janaka kings of Videha (in my view) seemed to have been truly interested in videha (pun intended) mukti.

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Caring for Life before Birth.
Pre-Natal Rites of Passage in Hindu Tradition[*]

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Abstract: Man is often told that life begins with birth. Hindu tradition is one of those examples that highlight the fact that life begins much earlier, with early stages of pregnancy. We shall not adopt a position from a medical or ethical point of view, but will emphasize this claim judging by the care and effort put into the well-being and good health of foetus and expectant mother by members of this religious tradition from ancient times. Archaic Hindu society was very strongly under the spell of the supernatural and magical, which surfaces in many sacred texts. It is interesting to notice and understand how the supernatural, religious and social intertwine and bring order into the lives of its people.

The present paper focuses on pre-natal rites of passage as having an *ordering quality* in man's life, mentioning key examples from sacred texts related to cultural and religious details that are the backbone of Hindu tradition. It is a shy attempt to bring to light features in the thought process of the ancient Hindu society in order to better relate and comprehend the treasures of its rich past.

Keywords: pre-natal rites, Hinduism, rites of passage, cultural studies.

[*] The present paper is the English translation, with little variation, of the third chapter (*Riturile pre-natale/Pre-natal Rites*) of my volume entitled *Saṃskāra – rituri de trecere în hinduism. De la închipuire la dezrobire – parcursul ritualistic al omului într-o cheie filosofică* (*Saṃskāra – Rites of Passage in Hinduism. From womb to tomb – the ritualistic journey of man in a philosophical key*), Lumen Publishing, Iași, 2020.

Introduction

In times long forgotten, the first attempt to form a family was marked by prayers to the gods, both for protection and for the fulfillment of desires; consequently, even the first night spent together by the spouses (marked by the rite of passage of the *laying of the seed – Garbhādhāna*) was a special event (also for the community) and was deserving to be turned into an intimate celebration.

Caring for the birth of descendants was a pressing concern in archaic India –for religious reasons as well, which have not lost their strength with the passage of time. But the cult of the birth of a descendant of a certain sex – male – was perfected in *Puṃsavana*, that is, precisely in the rite in which prayers are addressed to *produce the birth of a son*. Understanding religious explanations, doubtlessly of a ritualistic level, are the key to accepting the mentality of people different from one's own belief system. Last but not least, the interest of individuals for the well-being and protection of the future mother, as well as of the unborn baby, surfaces strongly in *Sīmantonnayana*, the rite meant to keep away any negative energies that could cause suffering to the woman in the most delicate period of her life.

Garbhālambhana/Garbhādhāna – the laying of the seed

We have not received any information about procreation and family from the pre-Vedic period, but we may confidently assert that before it became a *saṃskāra,*[1] *Garbhādhāna* went through a long period of

[1] The term is to be understood here in a pragmatic sense, according to the teachings of the *Mīmāṃsā* tradition, where the idea of effectiveness and usefulness of the performed activity is paramount; Śabara explains *saṃskāra* as that thing which, once done, makes the work or man worthy of a certain purpose (see Kane, Pandurang Vaman: *History of Dharmaśāstra – Ancient and Mediæval Religious and Civil Law*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1941, vol. II, part I, pp. 190-191); in *Tantravārttika*,

development. In the Vedic age, there was a growing interest for descendants, as certain hymns bear testimony, in which the blessing with offspring was requested, or long life for them was desired: *Ṛg Veda* VIII.35.10-12, contains a kind of refrain regarding the desire for heirs, "bestow upon us progeny;" in the same text, I.89.9, the desire that during one's lifetime "our sons become fathers in turn" is expressed. The *Atharva Veda* abounds in hymns that state ways to attract the love of a virgin: I.34; II.30; III.25; VI.8, 9, 82, 89, 102 are just a few examples.

Before marriage became the basis of the relationship between a man and a woman, the ripening of their union being the emergence of a child, people enjoyed bodily pleasures whenever their senses were awakened, without thinking about offsprings or possible consequences, as explained by Pandey as well.[2] The moment the sacred texts led man to marriage and emphasized that the birth of a child exempts the parents from paying the debt to the ancestors, the need for a ritual became more poignant because the religious sphere weighs more in the life of a Hindu than the social one.

Kumārila says that *saṃskāras* are those actions and rites that share health (of a spiritual nature) – which is of two kinds, resulting from the removal of sins and, respectively, from the generation of new qualities (merits) (ibidem). Austerities (*tapas*) eliminate sins, and rites generate new merits. In *Vīramitrodaya Saṃskāra Prakāśa*, *saṃskāra* is defined as a specific excellence obtained through the performance of prescribed rites residing either in the soul or in the body – it is believed to be of two types: the first, capable of making man eligible to perform other actions (i.e. *Upanayana*, which opens the door to Vedic study), the other removes sins or various contaminations (ie *Jātakarma*, which removes the impurity given by the physiological process of birth) – see Kane, op. cit., p. 191.

[2] Pandey, Rajbali: *Hindu Saṃskāras – Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1994, 2nd edition, p. 48.

The theory of the *threefold debt*,[3] the development of which began in the Vedic period, applied to every individual, and without their repayment, the hope of liberation from the cycle of reincarnation was in vain. As a result, the birth of infants was no longer just a natural consequence of sexual intercourse, but a necessity that brought adults closer to liberation; perhaps that is why we have hymns with a text in which the womb is prepared to receive the seed:

> "1. May Viṣṇu form and mould the womb, may Tvaṣṭar duly shape the forms, Prajāpati infuse the stream, and Dhātar lay the germ for thee./ 2. O Sinīvālī,[4] set the germ, set thou the germ, Sarasvatī: May the Twain Gods bestow the germ, the Aśvins crowned with lotuses. [...]"[5] (*Ṛg Veda*, X.184.1-2)

Further, in the *Atharva Veda* (for example in Book XIV, Hymn 2), Sinīvālī reappears due to Ṛgvedic influence, the idea of fertility, the birth of offspring, living in harmony with the descendants and husband is resumed: "Rise, mount the bridal bed with cheerful spirit. Here bring forth children to this man thy husband." (XIV.2.31)

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[3] How the *theory of the threefold debt* (*ṛṇatraya*) is explained in the sacred texts: "A brāhmaṇa on birth is born with a threefold debt, of pupilship to the Ṛṣis, of sacrifice to the gods, of offspring to the Pitṛs. he is freed from his debt who has a son, is a sacrificer and who has lived as a pupil [...]" (*Taittirīya Saṃhitā*, VI.3.10.4) – trans. Arthur Berriedale Keith: *The Veda of the Black Yajus School entitled Taittiriya Sanhita* in Harvard Oriental Series, ed. Charles Rockwell Lanman, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1914, vol. XIX, p. 526.

[4] Monier-Williams has the following entry: f. (of doubtful derivation) name of a goddess (in Ṛg Veda described as broad-hipped, fair-armed, fair-fingered, presiding over fecundity and easy birth, and invoked with Sarasvatī; in Atharva Veda, she is called the wife of Viṣṇu) [...]. Monier-Williams, Monier: *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Etymologically and philologically arranged with a Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, London, 1960, new edition, revised and added, p. 1217.

[5] Trans. Ralph T. H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rigveda*, E. J. Lazarus & Co., Benares, 1897, vol. II, p. 607 – in appendix, p. 613.

Until the appearance of the *Gṛhyasūtras*, the period is shrouded in darkness, so we do not know details regarding the performance of rituals. But, as we saw above, examples of hymns revolving around the subject of children and fertility are found in the Vedas. As Pandey[6] points out, the husband approached his wife and invited her to conceive, prayed to the gods for the successful placement of the seed, and completed fertilization; the procedure seems simple and no other information is known. For this reason, Pandey considers that, initially, the ceremony was probably part of the wedding rite. With the beginning of the *sūtra* era, details emerge regarding the rules of married life, in which we find the purpose of giving birth to worthy descendants: fasting, the right time of the month for fertilization, prohibitions and recommendations of auspicious nights, astrological implications, prayers requesting to be blessed with children having certain qualities etc. (*Gṛhyasūtras* and *Dharmasūtras*) However, the rite has retained its original structure, with subsequent changes being made to the initial skeleton.

How can we clarify whether *Garbhādhāna* is a rite of passage or not? We refer to the issue voiced by Pandey in his work,[7] concerning *garbha-saṃskāra* and *kṣetra-saṃskāra*: the first direction of interpretation was that the rite is one of the embryo, based on Manu's arguments,

> "Know that he for whom (the performance of) the ceremonies beginning with the rite of impregnation (*Garbhādhāna*) and ending with the funeral rite (*Antyeṣṭi*) is prescribed, while sacred formulas are being recited, is entitled (to study) these Institutes, but no other man whatsoever" (II.16),[8]

[6] Pandey, op. cit., p. 50.
[7] Pandey, op. cit., p. 56.
[8] Trans. G. Bühler, *The Laws of Manu* in *The Sacred Books of the East*, ed. F. Max Müller, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1886, vol. XXV, p. 32.

respectively Yājñavalkya,

> "The castes are the Brāhmaṇas, the Kṣatriyas, the Vaiśyas and the Śūdra. Only the first three (of these) are twice-born, the performance of the ceremonies beginning with the rite of impregnation and ending (with the funeral rites) in the cremation-ground, of these only, is prescribed with sacred formulas" (II.10).[9]

The second tradition interprets *Garbhādhāna* as a *kṣetra-saṃskāra*, in other words, a consecration of the wife; the arguments would be as follows: "having once cohabited with the wife ceremoniously one should approach her in future ordinarily (without any ceremony),"[10] or "a child born in her without the *Garbhādhāna* attains impurities";[11] the exponents of this tradition believed that this rite should be performed only once, at the first conception, because the field, once consecrated, attributes purity to future fruit, Pandey adds. The conclusion is that the rite started as one of the embryo, acquiring along the way a value of unrepeatability, in an attempt to simplify it or even to give it up – of course, a late decision; whatever interpretation we hold by, there is no doubt that we are dealing with a rite of passage, its accomplishment causing an irreversible change in the status of the individual.

We agree that the interpretation as a *garbha-saṃskāra* is the right one, judging especially by all the astrological and developmental implications of special qualities that parents want for their children (even if these are further evolutions). As for a Gennepian[12]

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[9] *Yājñavalkya Smṛti with the Commentary of Vijñāneśvara Called the Mitākṣarā and Notes from the Gloss of Bālaṃbhaṭṭa* în *The Sacred Books of the Hindus*, trans. Rai Bahadur Śriśa Chandra Vidyārṇava, Indian Press, 1918, vol. XXI, p. 18.

[10] Apud Pandey, op. cit., p. 56.

[11] Ibidem.

[12] Arnold Van Gennep, an ethnographer and folklorist, is well-known for his work in the field of rites of passage. "Consequently, I propose to call the rites of separation

interpretation, we could say that it brings together all the components of the rite, *of separation* because she will no longer be a virgin and, after fertilization, the desire is for the woman to get pregnant and change to happen in her status; once pregnant the woman is in a *liminal* zone, the period being a long and delicate one, and, of course, *of aggregation* through the fact that her status will be that of a future mother, respectively mother, after birth. Nothing is left to chance, everything is calculated and the help of the gods is requested in such a way that the result leads to heirs with the best possible qualities.

***Puṃsavana* – prayer for a male heir**

After the laying of the seed, the embryo was blessed with the rite called *Puṃsavana*, meaning the rite through which a son is obtained. The Vedic era left a legacy of hymns in which divine forces are called to help the birth of a son; let us stop at a hymn in the *Atharva Veda* and briefly analyze the contents:

"1. From thee we banish and expel the cause of thy sterility.
This in another place we lay apart from thee and far removed.
2. As arrow to the quiver, so let a male embryo enter thee.
Then from thy side be born a babe, a ten-month child, thy hero son.
3. Bring forth a male, bring forth a son. Another male shall follow him.
The mother shalt thou be of sons born and hereafter to be born.
4. With that auspicious genial flow wherewith steers propagate their kind,
Do thou obtain thyself a son: be thou a fruitful mother-cow.
5. I give thee power to bear a child: within thee pass the germ of life!

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from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal* (or *threshold*) *rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites.*" Van Gennep, Arnold *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960, p. 21. We have included his terminology as it is extremely useful in comprehending the change in status and ordering quality of the rites of passage.

Obtain a son, O woman, who shall be a blessing unto thee. Be thou a blessing unto him.

6. May those celestial herbs whose sire was Heaven, the Earth their mother and their root the ocean,

May those celestial healing Plants assist thee to obtain a son."

(*Atharva Veda*, III.23)[13]

The references for a son are clear, as is the presence of healing herbs that should help the development of a male fetus – we will soon return to the importance of sons. It seems that this rite was called *Prājāpatya*, but this detail is not seen in Griffith's translation; instead, it appears in the volume of W. D. Whitney.[14] Unfortunately, we have no other information regarding the performance of this rite and we will be content with that until we enter the *sūtra* literature.

In the *Gṛhyasūtras*, the rite receives rules for the correct time of performance (month of pregnancy, day when the moon is in a male constellation etc.); ritual bath, new clothes, fasting, various herbs or juices with protective powers were prescribed, the liquid being introduced into the wife's right nostril (in addition to providing a male offspring, the gesture was probably related to the fear of miscarriage).[15] The appropriate moment for the rite is not clear, the opinions being diverse: from the second month of pregnancy to the eighth, the exegetes could not set a date, also due to the fact that the commencement of symptoms differs from woman to woman. What is clear is that all precautions were taken against the evil eye, to protect the fetus and the

[13] Trans. Ralph T. H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Atharva Veda*, E. J. Lazarus & Co., Benares, vol. I, ed. a 2-a, 1916, pp. 116-117.

[14] Whitney, William Dwight, *Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā*, în Harvard Oriental Series, ed. Charles Rockwell Lanman, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1905, vol. VII, p. 128.

[15] For all the details, see, for instance, *Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra*, I.14; *Khādira Gṛhyasūtra*, II.II.17-23; *Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhyasūtra*, I.20-21.

future mother from evil spirits and disease – perhaps, we could trust Pandey's view, which states that the rite may have been born out of the medical knowledge of the people.[16]

Let us return, therefore, to the question of the pre-eminence of the male offspring and the burning desire of the parents for the firstborn to be a boy (according to an Atharvavedic hymn, all children should be boys):

> "137. Through a son he conquers the worlds, through a son's son he obtains immortality, but through his son's grandson he gains the world of the sun.
> 138. Because a son delivers (*trāyate*) his father from the hell called Put, he was therefore called *put-tra* (a deliverer from Put) by the Self-existent (*Svayambhū*) himself.
> 139. Between a son's son and the son of a daughter there exists in this world no difference; for even the son of a daughter saves him (who has no sons) in the next world, like the son's son". (*Manusmṛti*, IX.137-139)

From a religious point of view, the debt towards ancestors intervenes,[17] which can be repaid only by male descendants, the ancestral line being kept intact on the paternal line; only sons have the right to give offerings to please their ancestors, just as only sons are competent to perform the funeral rites of the father. Socially, the pre-eminence of sons is explained by the fact that, aforetime, men were the only ones who worked, and the birth of many sons meant more manpower and support in the household; in addition, sons did not leave home, but married and lived with the wife in the parental home – the duty of caring for parents at old age fell upon sons, since they were the ones who remained in the family. The boys were also the ones who inherited the ancestral wealth, which was passed down from generation

[16] Pandey, op. cit., p. 63.
[17] For a more comprehensive note on the *threefold debt* incurred by a Hindu, see note 3.

to generation, from father to firstborn (preferably male; if not, to the first son in the family).

To sum up, although a simple rite initially, about which we have no important details; it was enriched with social and religious rules over time. Here, too, the issue brought up by Pandey earlier, *garbha-saṃskāra* or *kṣetra-saṃskāra*, resurfaces; in the case of the first tradition, the rite must be repeated with each pregnancy for the purification of the fetus, whilst in the second, the singular performance is plentiful.

***Sīmantonnayana* – the parting of the hair**

This rite has a strong cultural root, intertwined with the medical science of the time; Indians believed that the pregnant woman is in a delicate position both in terms of health, and in terms of her vulnerability to external attacks (negative energies, evil spirits, the evil eye, diseases). Consequently, they found the solution of establishing a rite to protect the mother, along with the fetus, from anything that could endanger their well-being. Specific cultural trends can be seen in the next passage, in Āśvalāyana's words,

> "Evil demons bent on sucking the blood come to the woman in the first pregnancy to devour the foetus. In order to remove them, the husband should invoke the goddess Śrī, as the lurking spirit leave the woman protected by Her. These invisible cruel flesh-eaters catch hold of the woman in her first pregnancy and trouble her. Therefore, the ceremony named *Sīmantonnayana* is prescribed".[18]

The medical knowledge of the time seems to have left a strong mark on the way the pregnant woman is viewed, and the special treatments aimed at the well-being of the mother and foetus. The mind

[18] Apud Pandey, op. cit., p. 64; the original Sanskrit may be consulted in *Vīramitrodaya Saṃskāra Prakāśa*, electronic edition, ed. Hari Pārṣada Dāsa, 2014, vol. II, pp. 172-173.

(*manas*) is formed in the fifth month of pregnancy, the foetus waking up from its prior unconscious sleep, according to *Suśruta Saṃhitā,*[19] one of the only main texts of *Ayurveda* that survived the test of time. The process of mind formation was symbolically emphasized through this rite,[20] Pandey explains.

The expectant woman had to take great care of her health, in order not to harm the development of the foetus in any way – thus, prohibitions were born, but also advice regarding the delicate period of pregnancy.[21] It is only natural that many of the habits have been implemented to please the woman and keep her in a good mood; *Sīmantonnayana* was an occasion during which she was the center of attention of the whole family, she was exempt from effort and the performance of household chores, participating in sacrifices in a special role, overwhelmed with positive epithets and praises; moreover, she was allowed to wear special clothes and various ornaments, even receiving gifts (*Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhyasūtra*, I.22). In most *sūtras*, the woman is likened to a tree rich in sap, yet another example of the interest in a prosperous family, not only in financial stability, but especially in the number of members.

As for the favourable time for the performance of the rite, we cannot specify an unequivocal period; the texts vary from the fourth to the eighth month of pregnancy; it should be noted that, if for objective reasons, the rite cannot take place before birth, ten days after birth the

[19] *The Suśruta Saṃhitā*, introduction, notes and trans. by Kaviraj Kunja Lal Bhishagratna, Bharat Mihir Press, Calcutta, 1911, vol. II, p. 139.
[20] Pandey, op. cit., p. 64.
[21] Pandey lists three classes of rules to be followed by future parents: the first, based on superstitions, includes protecting the pregnant woman from evil spirits, ready to hurt her; the second class provides the rules meant to protect the future mother from physical exhaustion; the latter, contains those indications intended to preserve the physical and mental health of the woman. (Pandey, op. cit., p. 67)

baby is placed in the mother's lap and everything is dully fulfilled as dictated by the precepts of tradition (*Śankhāyana Gṛhyasūtra, V.7*). Initially, as we can already imagine, the rite was of a simplicity not found today: after the specific sacrifice and prayers, the husband parts his wife's hair three times, starting from the front, with an instrument specially designed for this purpose, after that an episode of music and rice offerings takes place; once astrological prescriptions came into fashion, it was mandatory that the rite be performed under a male constellation (about the propensity of Indians for male offspring we discussed in the previous rite, *Puṃsavana*), fruit – symbolizing the fertility of the wife – not missing from the sacrificial tools. As above-mentioned, the rite was performed to protect the mother and foetus, but also to ask the gods to bless both with health and long life, a birth without complications so that the little one may later become a respected descendant, and the mother to give birth to other children, such as a tree rich in sap.[22]

As is the case with *Garbhādhāna* and *Puṃsavana*, there is a difference of opinion on the singular or repetitive performance of the rite; after Āpastamba (VI.14.1), Śāṅkhāyana (I.22.1) and Pāraskara (I.15.3), *Sīmantonnayana* is a *kṣetra*-type rite, that is, performed only once, at the time of the first pregnancy – let us refresh our memory, a woman, who was once purified through the rite, will give birth to already blessed infants, protected from evil spirits and diseases, being the clean field from which they rose. For the sages associated with the second direction of thought, the first and singular performance of the

[22] We happened to come across a particularly beautiful perspective on the significance of this rite in one of the teachers of the *Chinmaya Mission* (see the bibliography): the father, much like a locksmith, parts his wife's hair with a comb, removing all obstacles that might be in the way of his child's well-being; in other words, he *opens* his destiny, mind and intellect with the tools at hand, following tradition.

rite was not enough, considering it a *garbha*-type rite – an anchoring in tradition of each individual. We may consider the pregnancy period as a *threshold*, given the liminal state in which the future mother is; the change in status is not yet accomplished, her becoming a mother only after childbirth.

We believe that this rite evolved into a ceremony far from the original, embodied into a party similar to the Western *baby shower*. Celebrated most often in the seventh month of pregnancy, *god bharāī*[23] is a show of joy and impatience, in anticipation of the new family member. The future mother is pampered with various gifts and blessings, protected from negative influences with amulets; depending on the customs of the area, the woman is adorned as a bride, the prayers said and the songs sung being all for her welfare and that of the foetus, for an easy birth and long life for both. The fertile woman, in her position of a plentiful field or fruitful tree, is elevated to the rank of symbol for the society desiring strong and long-lived descendants.

Conclusion

Much of ancient practice translated into modernity, which only proves their resilience over centuries of change. Man needs an anchor, a root to come back to, from time to time. As modernity uproots and makes balancing a full plate difficult, a return to tradition brings order and dependability. The present paper's goal was to shed light upon the ontological structuredness that Hindu tradition stands by, even when caring for life before birth.

[23] The different names in different parts of India are: *valakappu/sīmantham* (Tamil), *srīmantha* (Kannada), *śād* (Bengali), *dohale jevan* (Marathi).

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Online sources: http://www.chinmayamission.com/

On the image of Padmasambhava in Tibetan texts preceding Zangs gling ma

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Abstract: This paper reviews five texts regarding Padmasambhava, which were written before *Zangs gling ma* (*dBa' bzhed* and four manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang – *Pelliot tibétain* 44, IOL Tib 321, IOL Tib J 644 and *Pelliot tibétain* 307), in an attempt to outline a historical portrait of Padmasambhava, different from the mythologized portrait shaped by *Zangs gling ma* and the revealed biographies following it.

Keywords: Padmasambhava, Buddhism, *dBa' bzhed*, Śāntarakṣita, first spread of Buddhism in Tibet.

1. Introductory considerations

In this paper, our aim is to explore the issue of Padmasambhava's historicity and to outline, insofar as possible, a historical portrait thereof, in reliance upon old Tibetan texts subsequent to the 8th century, when Padmasambhava lived. This means a scrutiny into the image of Padmasambhava from a perspective different from that established by tradition, more specifically by *Zangs gling ma* and the biographies of Padmasambhava subsequent thereto; they created what can be referred to as the *myth of Padmasambhava*, centered around a mythologized image of the great master (in which supernatural events and beings are commonplace), therefore, our endeavor aims to leave

aside the legendary visage of the master and to focus on his historical correspondent.

Tibetologists who dedicated their work to the history of Tibet in the 8th century and the events connected to the first spread of Buddhism in Tibet were inevitably concerned with Padmasambhava. Although tradition ascribes to him a crucial role in the durable rooting of Buddhism in Tibet, Padmasambhava was more than once regarded by scholars with distrust and skepticism, going as far as to openly deny his historicity. In that respect, is relevant the opinion of two well-known tibetologists such as David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, who stated as follows:[1]

> "It remains possible that Padmasambhava is simply the ideal of yogin-magician and so represents any number of actual sages and is thus no one historical person at all. The details of the story of his visit to Tibet could quite conceivably be a later fabrication, intended to give authority to the teachings promulgated by his followers in complete analogy with the case of *gShen-rab*, the supposed founder of *Bon*. There is nothing in either 'biography' of which the historical validity is guaranteed."

After that, the same tibetologists also submitted an eventual explanation on why an image of Padmasambhava had to be drawn up,[2] in consideration of the historical context of defining the great Tibetan Buddhist schools:

> "It is not unlikely therefore, that seeing how the newer orders were busy constituting themselves during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, some genuine Tibetan followers of the older Indian Buddhist traditions that had been developing 'underground' since the eighth and ninth centuries should

[1] David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2003, p. 171.
[2] Ibidem, p. 172.

have set to work to make themselves into a recognizable and self-constituted order. They needed a founder, and having decided that this must be Padmasambhava, concerning who a vast amount of legendary stories were already in existence, they set to work to produce his biography."

Other tibetologists, far less reserved in respect to Padmasambhava, posited that *Nyang ral* would most likely be the creator of Padmasambhava's myth.[3] We are referring here to the master and tertőn *mNga' bdag Nyang ral Nyi ma 'Od zer*, who lived in Central Tibet between 1124 and 1192 and discovered *Zangs gling ma*[4] as *gter ma*, revealed teaching, most probably somewhere in the late 12th century. *Zangs gling ma* is the earliest known biography of Padmasambhava, which means that, indeed, it may be regarded as the stepping stone in the myth of Padmasambhava; despite having been followed by a large number of biographies of the same master, which continuously appeared in the Tibetan cultural area century after century, *Zangs gling ma* may have remained the most renowned among them and constituted a precedent and an example for all other biographies of Padmasambhava: it remains the trailblazer for the long string of *rnam thar* biographies which were discovered, starting from the 12th century almost up to the present day, concerning the life and teachings of the great Indian master of the 8th century. Therefore, we can set out from the thesis that *Zangs gling ma* is allegedly the stepping stone in the myth of Padmasambhava, and that *Nyang ral* is allegedly the creator, or

[3] Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism. Conversion, Contestation, and Memory,* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 162. Janet Gyatso, "A Partial Genealogy of the Lifestory of Ye shes mtsho rgyal," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*.

[4] Lewis Donney, *The Zangs gling ma. The First Padmasambhava Biography. Two Exemplars of the Earliest Attested Recension,* IITBS GmbH, International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2014. Yeshe Tsogyal, *The Lotus-Born. The Life Story of Padmasambhava,* translated by Erik Pema Kunsang, Boston: Shambhala, 1999.

architect, of that myth, since *Zangs gling ma* is the first revealed biography of Padmasambhava. This would mean that we can also take into account an approximate time when the myth of Padmasambhava came into existence: somewhere after mid-12th century, at the earliest.

This allows us to conclude that, in order to ascertain the historicity of Padmasambhava and to outline a historical portrait of the great Indian master of the 8th century, we have to examine and, potentially, to corroborate the Tibetan texts preceding *Zangs gling ma*, which contain references to Padmasambhava.

2. The sources

Five texts are widely known which meet the two conditions referred to herein above: to refer to Padmasambhava and to have existed before the mid-12th century, when *Zangs gling ma* was discovered by *Nyang ral*.

The first of these sources, by far the most prominent among them, is *dBa' bzhed* (alternate spelling *sBa bzhed* or *rBa bzhed*), known as the "Testimony of *dBa'*" or the "Testament of *dBa'*". This text[5] is our main source in the attempt to outline a historical portrait of Padmasambhava.

The other four manuscripts are among the Dunhuang manuscripts, discovered in the early 20th century in the Mogao caves in Dunhuang oasis, located on the old Silk Road, currently in the Chinese province of Gansu. They are parts of the collections IOL Tib (*India Office Library Tibetan*) in the *British Library* and *Pelliot tibétain* in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, and are classified as *Pelliot tibétain* 44, IOL Tib 321, IOL Tib J 644 and *Pelliot tibétain* 307. Herein below, these four

[5] Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed: the royal narrative concerning the bringing of the Buddha's doctrine to Tibet,* Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000.

manuscripts[6] will be referred to, in short, as PT44, IT321, ITJ644 and PT307, and each of them will be further explored in a separate section of this paper.

The texts referred to above have been scrutinized by several tibetologists, therefore, we will not endeavor to do the same; our intention is merely to bring together and to compare them, in an attempt to identify shared elements, able to validate the historicity of Padmasambhava and, insofar as possible, to outline the historical portrait of the great Buddhist master.

3. *dBa' bzhed*: the Testimony of dBa'

We will start in our approach by examining *dBa' bzhed*, known as the *Testimony of dBa'* or the *Testament of dBa'*, one of the key works in the early history of Tibet and the oldest text containing references to Padmasambhava.

3.1. *dBa' bzhed* and its connection to the clan of dBa'

Known as *dBa' bzhed, sBa bzhed* or *rBa bzhed,*[7] *dBa' bzhed* is a story attributed to *dBa' gSal nang* (sometimes named *sBa / rBa gSal snang*), who is one of the protagonists of the story and a ranking

[6] Please see, in connection with PT44, IT321, ITJ644 and PT307, the following papers: Jacob Dalton, "The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet: A Study of IOL Tib J 644 and Pelliot Tibétain 307," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 124, no. 4, 2004, pp. 759-772, accessed on 14 March 2020. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4132116; Robert Mayer, "Geographical and Other Borders in the Symbolism of Padmasambhava," *About Padmasambhava. Historical Narratives and Later Transformations of Guru Rinpoche,* Schongau: Garuda Verlag, 2020; Lewis Doney, "The Lotus-Born in Nepal: a Dunhuang narrative and the later biographical tradition," *About Padmasambhava. Historical Narratives and Later Transformations of Guru Rinpoche,* Schongau: Garuda Verlag, 2020; Jacob P. Dalton, "The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet: A Second Look at the Evidence from Dunhuang," *About Padmasambhava. Historical Narratives and Later Transformations of Guru Rinpoche,* Schongau: Garuda Verlag, 2020.

[7] Pasang and Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed*, op. cit., p. 3.

member of the Tibetan clan of *dBa'*, one of the strong clans in the imperial period of Tibetan history.

It is generally admitted that *dBa' bzhed* has the meaning of testimony / perspective / account of *dBa'*, in connection with *gSal snang,*[8] however, no less trustworthy is the thesis that the accurate meaning is that of perspective of the *dBa'* clan, and not of a single member thereof.[9] This thesis relies on several arguments which are far from negligeable, such as: first of all, *gSal snang* is not the only member of the *dBa'* clan, regarded as the protagonist of *dBa' bzhed*: in addition to the Tibetan king *Khri srong lDe btsan*, the Indian scholar Śāntarakṣita (*Ā tsā rya Bo dhi sa twa*) and *dBa' gSal snang*, the text of *dBa' bzhed* also considers as protagonist another member of the *dBa'* clan, *'Ba' Sang shi*;[10] second of all, the story is not told in the first person, as if it were written by *dBa' gSal snang* himself, but in the third person, and his death is related in the text,[11] which suggests that the text was written by someone other than *dBa' gSal snang*, possibly by another member of the *dBa'* clan or by someone in his service.

Besides, this also touches on the matter of the authorship of this text: although attributed by tradition to *dBa' gSal nang*, the text is more probably an anonymous compilation based on a report by *gSal snang*, a royal edict or the king's speech, to which the compilator made additions based on his own experience or on Buddhist texts to which he had access.[12] It is not at all impossible that, although *dBa' bzhed* accounts the perspective (albeit biased, as any other perspective) of the *dBa'* clan, the compilator sought to attribute to it the undisputable and

[8] Ibidem, p. 1.
[9] Ibidem, p. 5.
[10] Ibidem, pp. 7-8, pp. 89-90.
[11] Ibidem, p. 4.
[12] Idem.

transpartisan authority of the king, by using, in the title of the text ("The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha's Doctrine to Tibet") the term "royal narrative" (*bka' mchid*).

At any rate, *dBa' gSal nang* must have played a decisive role in drawing up *dBa' bzhed*, therefore, it cannot be overlooked. Also known as *Ye shes dBangs po* or *Ye shes dbYangs*, he was a minister of king *Khri srong lDe btsan*, sent by the latter to India in order to invite the great buddhist scholar Śāntarakṣita to Tibet. He is counted as one of the seven Tibetans who were the first ordained Buddhist monks (the "seven men who were tested", *sad mi'i bdun*) and among the twenty-five disciples of Padmasambhava (*rje 'bangs nyer lnga*).[13]

Even though it is undeniable that *dBa' gSal nang* must have played a rather important role in the events which led to bringing Buddhism to Tibet in the 8th century (since he was sent by the king to India after Śāntarakṣita, who, in his turn, suggested that Padmasambhava should be invited to Tibet), we are highly skeptical that the crucial role described by *dBa' bzhed* is even real; as specified above, *dBa' bzhed* places as protagonists of the royal narrative the Tibetan king *Khri Srong lde btsan*, the Indian scholar Śāntarakṣita *(Ā tsā rya Bo dhi sa twa)* and two members of the *dBa'* clan, *gSal snang* and *Sang shi*; and this rather clearly suggests, in our opinion, an attempt by the clan to have the lion's share in the credit for bringing Buddhism to Tibet, together with two characters which, after all, could not have been avoided at all in a narrative such as this: the representatives of temporal power (the Tibetan king) and of spiritual power (the Indian master). And such a legitimizing intention by the members of the *dBa'* clan could be explained by their wish to settle the old rivalry between the

[13] Arthur Mandelbaum, "Yeshe Yang," in *Treasury of Lives*, accessed on 18 April 2021, https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Yeshe-Yang/9141.

dBa' and the *'Bro*[14] clans, which clashed more than once for the privileges and dignities of the royal court in the late Tibetan empire.

3.2. What is *dBa' bzhed*

There are several designations for the same writing, among the best-known being *dBa' bzhed, sBa bzhed* and *rBa bzhed*; from these, *dBa' bzhed*, translated by Pasang and Diemberger, and which will be referred to herein, is a manuscript in 31 folios, largely matching the better known *sBa bzhed*.

It is considered that the core of the narrative consists of a text written by *dBa' gSal nang* himself which, despite not having survived to our days, was preserved and extended in later manuscripts, and repeatedly quoted by Tibetan historians. There are at least three versions of the extended text[15]: the first is the version published by Marc Aurel Stein in 1961, known as "*the supplemented sBa bzhed"* (*sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma*) because of the numerous additions it contains (*sBa bzhed* A), thought to originate from the 14th century; the second is the version published in Beijing in 1980, which combines three versions of the text, considered to originate from the 12th century (*sBa bzhed* B); and the third version, sometimes referred to as *rBa bzhed*, consisting of ample fragments of the text in several versions, quoted in the work *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* ("Scholar's Feast") written by *dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba* in the 16th century (*sBa bzhed* C).

Although the date of compilation is not specified in the text, compared to the three versions referred to above, *dBa' bzhed* seems to be the oldest:[16] this text not only uses the *dBa'* spelling for the name of

[14] Pasang and Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed*, op. cit., p. 8.
[15] Ibidem, pp. 1-2.
[16] Sam van Schaik and Kazushi Iwao, "Fragments of the Testament of Ba from Dunhuang", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 128 (3), 2009.

the clan, as also written in the Dunhuang manuscripts (with the spelling *dBa'* or *dBa's*),[17] but, furthermore, it also contains several archaic terms, which may also be encountered in the old Dunhuang manuscripts,[18] and several matches with dynastic sources in the Dunhuang manuscripts.[19] The style of the above-mentioned *dBa' bzhed* text seems to reflect some form of transition between the archaic Tibetan dynastic style, specific to the Dunhuang manuscripts, and the early classic / Tibetan canonic style.[20] Van Shaik and Iwao go even further when dating the *dBa' bzhed*, originally attributed to the 11th century, and suggest the 9th or 10th century as the period when the text was drawn up, in reliance upon obvious similarities with two fragments discovered among the Dunhuang manuscripts.[21] If we take into account the fact that the events described in *dBa' bzhed* happened somewhere in the late 8th century, dating the manuscript to the 9th century (in the best-case scenario) could mean a significant decrease of the period of time lapsed until they were recorded in writing, down to less than one century.

3.3. Padmasambhava in *dBa' bzhed*

Out of the 60 pages (31 folios) of the *dBa' bzhed* manuscript, no more than 7 of its pages refer to Padmasambhava (folio 11a, 11b, 12a, 12b, 13a, 13b, 14a), and, after those, there is another brief (albeit not at all insignificant) reference to him in folio 14b.

The fragment in *dBa' bzhed* concerning Padmasambhava can be broken down into seven scenes or narrative units, each autonomous, to a certain degree, from the rest of the narrative: the first one tells the

[17] Pasang and Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed*, op. cit., p. 3.
[18] Ibidem, pp. 11-12.
[19] Ibidem, p. 13.
[20] Ibidem, p. 11.
[21] van Schaik and Iwao, "Fragments of the Testament of Ba from Dunhuang".

story of Padmasambhava's arrival in Tibet and taming of the local spirits; the second one, of the meeting between Padmasambhava and the Tibetan king *Khri srong lDe btsan*; the third one, of the mirror divination; the fourth one, of the water vase fallen from the sky; the fifth one, of the dignitaries' opposition to Padmasambhava's suggestions; the sixth one, of Padmasambhava's departure from Tibet; while the seventh and last scene tells the story of Padmasambhava's attempted murder. Please find herein below an examination of each of these seven scenes.

3.3.1. Padmasambhava's arrival in Tibet and taming of the local spirits

After *dBa' gSal nang* came back from China, the Tibetan king (*bTsan po*), who had just decided that Buddhism might be practiced in Tibet, sent *dBa' gSal nang* to the border territory with Nepal (*Mang yul*), to bring the Buddhist scholar Śāntarakṣita (*Bo dhi sa twa*) back to Tibet. The latter suggested to *dBa' gSal nang* that Padmasambhava (*Pad ma sa[m] bha ba*) should be invited to Tibet, and therefore *dBa' gSal nang* started on his way back home, accompanied by Śāntarakṣita, Padmasambhava and a Nepalese temple building expert.

As soon as he entered Tibet, Padmasambhava (here referred to as *mKhan po*, a Tibetan term meaning a Buddhist scholar, a *dharma* master or teacher) started to tame the local spirits, which were antagonist to Buddhism. This confrontation only involves Padmasambhava, and not his travelling companions, who are not even mentioned, together with him:

> "On his arrival at *sNyi mo thod kar*, *Pad ma sam bha ba* said: "There is a *nyi tshe ba* hell on tomorrow's route, and I have to show compassion for this". Then he arrived at *sNam*, a place with boiling water. [Padmasambhava] meditated for one morning and threw a *gtor ma* into the

water. The water calmed down and the steam stopped for three nights. Then, passing through *Gal ta la*, *mKhan po* (Padmasambhava) said: "There is a wicked white *nāga*-child which does not allow the practice of the doctrine in the country of Tibet. It needs to be subdued and bound by oath. In its vicinity there is a further *nyi tshe ba* hell (Pratyekanaraka), and there too, compassion must be shown". Afterwards, he arrived at *sNying drung*. All the strong winds said: "Let's see the fight (*thab*) against the *mKhan po*". The *mKhan po* boiled the carcass of a bull in a copper cauldron, then he put his foot on top of it and made it disappear. Then, a cloud appeared on the snowy top of *Thang lha* in the middle month of winter. Wild flashes of lightning and thunder-claps came. Hail and round snowflakes fell [from the sky]. From then onwards, the area in that direction was brought into subjection and, even though they went on fighting, [the winds] were meeker than before. Then, in *sNying drung* he meditated for three days and threw *gtor ma* in the boiling water. The steam stopped and the water calmed down."[22]

We can note that, on two occasions, at the beginning and at the end of this confrontation with the local spirits, Padmasambhava threw in boiling water *gtor ma*, cakes made of barley flour and butter, frequently used in Tibetan Buddhism rituals, as offerings to gods and spirits. Therefore, we would assume the text is not dealing with an open fighting with the spirits, but rather with their taming, since offerings are made to them. Moreover, it is also to be mentioned that the wording of this fragment is not shy in attributing supernatural powers to Padmasambhava, as early as his first occurrence in *dBa' bzhed*.

[22] Pasang and Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed*, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

3.3.2. The meeting between Padmasambhava and the Tibetan king

Further on, we are told that Padmasambhava arrives at the Tibetan royal court and prostrated to the king, after that Śāntarakṣita gives a long speech before the king, reminding him of the difficulties faced by Buddhism in Tibet and argues why Padmasambhava is needed there: "At present, nobody in *'Dzam bu gling* possesses greater powers in the use of the mantra than the *mKhan po* of *U rgyan*, called *Pad ma sa[m] bha ba*". Then he adds that "this master of mantra can perform the mirror-divination (*pra phab*) of the Four Great Kings (*rGyal chen bzhi*) and make the relevant interpretation", and thus concludes that "this master of the mantra is capable of letting the holy doctrine be practiced in future."[23]

At a first glance, this is a highly acclamatory speech, praising Padmasambhava and pointing out the importance of his coming to Tibet, however, at a closer look, this fragment is aimed at determining a certain hierarchy between Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava: the only one speaking to the king is Śāntarakṣita, and immediately afterwards Padmasambhava merely starts to perform the mirror divination, without uttering a single word. Therefore, this fragment seeks to underline, in a rather unambiguous manner, Śāntarakṣita's preeminence over Padmasambhava and the latter's subordination to the Buddhist scholar.

This idea derives, even more clearly, if we take into account a small detail at the beginning of the scene: Padmasambhava prostrated to the king, although we already know that Śāntarakṣita did not do the same; on the contrary, immediately after their first meeting, the king had prostrated to him three times, while Śāntarakṣita was meditating.[24] In

[23] Ibidem, pp. 54-55.
[24] Ibidem, p. 47.

order to correctly appraise the not small significance of this gesture on the relationship between the temporal and the spiritual, notice is to be made that the master prostrating to the king is missing from other versions of the manuscript, where, in exchange, we see the king bowing down before Padmasambhava;[25] the same happens in *Zangs gling ma*, where the master affirms his preeminence above the king, and the latter bows down before Padmasambhava and treats him with great respect.[26]

3.3.3. The mirror divination

Immediately after the end of Śāntarakṣita's speech, we see Padmasambhava performing the mirror divination, a tantric ritual where he utters the name of those gods and evil *nāga* which had caused recent natural disasters in Tibet, as well as the names of their clans, in order to summon and bring them before him.

Then, they are turned into humans and threatened by Padmasambhava, and, after that, Śāntarakṣita teaches them (in Tibetan, with the help of a translator) the Buddhist doctrine of cause and effect. In the end, Padmasambhava tells the king that the local spirits had been bound by oath; however, in order to take full effect, the ritual would have to be repeated two more times.

A little further, after the end of the fragment in *dBa' bzhed* telling the story of Padmasambhava (folio 11a-14a), the editor of the text remembers this ritual and inserts a brief annotation, intended to act as a conclusion (folio 14b):[27] "The ritual by *mKhan po Pad ma sa[m] bha ba*, even if performed only once, resulted in great benefit. The rain fell at the right time, epidemics among people and cattle ceased." Therefore, despite the fact that he had just described Padmasambhava's

[25] Ibidem, p. 54 (footnote 152).
[26] Yeshe Tsogyal, *The Lotus-Born*, op. cit., pp. 65-67.
[27] Pasang and Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed*, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

banishment from Tibet, the author of *dBa' bzhed* nevertheless feels the urge to acknowledge his merits relating to this ritual.

3.3.4. The water vase fallen from the sky

The meaning of the following scene is difficult to decipher, where Padmasambhava recommends to someone close to the king that the hair of the Tibetan king be washed with water brought from the *rTa rna* spring on the *Ri rab* peak, because this will grant long life and considerable political authority to the king. This could signify Padmasambhava's intention to perform a ritual of longevity for the king, especially if we take into account that *Ri rab* is the Tibetan name of Mount Meru, the mythical mountain considered to be the center of the universe in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, and *rTa rna* is the Tibetan name of Aśvakarṇa (meaning "horse-ears"), one of the mountains placed by the legends in the immediate vicinity of Mount Meru.[28]

Afterwards, Padmasambhava took an "empty silver vase shaped like a bird and with the images of the eight auspicious articles (*bkra shis rdzas brgyad*)," and after uttering a few mantras, threw it in the air, and it soared higher and higher, towards the North. Later, on the same morning, the vase returned to Padmasambhava, who opened it and found it full of light milky water, after that he said that it was precisely the water to be used for washing the hair of the king. It was water from Mount Meru, the text thus suggests, miraculously brought there by the power of the mantras uttered by Padmasambhava over the empty vase.

The scene has an unexpected ending, because the king's ministers (*zhang blon*), who witnessed what had happened, talk with disdain about the water miraculously brought from the sky and order that it be

[28] Ibidem, p. 56 (footnote 165).

thrown away.[29] Hence, we can understand that the increasing influence of Padmasambhava with the king had already aroused the envy or fear of high dignitaries of the Tibetan court, and they sought to undermine his actions and keep him away from the king.

3.3.5. The dignitaries' opposition to Padmasambhava's suggestions

Further on, we find out that Padmasambhava delivers several suggestions as to how to turn the dry Tibetan soil into fertile land, able to afford more efficient agriculture for the inhabitants: to turn a sandy area into a meadow, to develop springs, to create lakes and rivers with dams and crossings. The text gives specific clarifications of several places envisaged for such plans, but in order not to go into too much detail, suffice it to say that all the sites are located around the *bSam yas* monastery, for the building of which Padmasambhava and the Nepalese building expert had been brought in Tibet.

Then, in order to prove that all these are possible, Padmasambhava recites mantras for a sandy plateau, in a half-day long ritual, and it turns into a meadow with springs, during only one morning. Afterwards, he meditated one afternoon for two other places: they turned into forests, and water sprang from barren land.

The scene's ending is similar to the ending of the previous scene: the small assembly (*mdun sa chung*), meaning a counsel of the court's dignitaries, stopped all these, and a minister reported to the king that, given that he possessed such magical powers, Padmasambhava could usurp the political power. As a consequence, the king became suspicious, and ordered that all of Padmasambhava's rituals be stopped and any other rituals be prohibited in the future, including the ritual of

[29] Ibidem, p. 57.

taming the local spirits, which had to be repeated two more times, in order to take full effect.[30]

3.3.6. Padmasambhava's departure from Tibet

Later on, the king asked Padmasambhava to return to his country, because the purpose of his presence in Tibet had already been achieved: namely, taming the local spirits. In reply, Padmasambhava blamed the king that he had let himself be influenced, and that he did not wish the power of a king.

The king's request was accompanied by generous offerings and gifts for Padmasambhava, and the king circumambulated him three times, as a sign of respect. Nevertheless, Padmasambhava proved to the king that the gold powder he had given to him as a gift was worthless for him, by turning into gold powder a little sand he picked up from the ground. In the end, he agreed to take with him a small amount of the gold he had been gifted, in order to please the king, and then left on his way back to India.

3.3.7. Padmasambhava's attempted murder

In the last scene of the text we are told that the small assembly of Tibetan high dignitaries decided that, if Padmasambhava were not killed, he would harm Tibet, and therefore sent several assassins after him, with the instruction to kill him.

However, Padmasambhava foresaw this and told his escort that someone would try to harm him on the following day. And when the assassins sent after him arrived and tried to kill him with arrows, Padmasambhava performed some *mudrās*, ritual gestures used in vajrayāna practices, whereas the assassins completely froze, unable to move, and so the master walked on, right through them.

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[30] Ibidem, p. 58.

Right upon leaving Tibet, Padmasambhava expressed his dissatisfaction at the fact that he had not finished his work in Tibet and foresaw that, because of that, great disputes would arise in Tibet, in the future, among the Buddhists. Then, he sent his escort back with some mustard seeds to give to the assassins, so that they could move again.[31]

3.4. Considerations in relation to *dBa' gSal nang*

The fragment in the *dBa' bzhed* concerning Padmasambhava ends with the reference that, upon hearing what had happened, the king was overwhelmed with sadness.

However, immediately afterwards, the text simply says, near the end of folio 14a, that *dBa' gSal nang* was appointed to a position which bestowed upon him the highest authority in religious matters.[32] This indication could suggest that there was a connection between Padmasambhava's departure and *dBa' gSal nang'*s rising, within the meaning that the master leaving Tibet allowed *dBa' gSal nang* to be immediately catapulted to that religious office. In other words, we could infer that Padmasambhava's presence in Tibet had eclipsed *dBa' gSal nang* and had prevented his ascent. Therefore, *dBa' gSal nang* could appear to be the direct and immediate beneficiary of Padmasambhava's banishment from Tibet.

Such a thesis could rely on two arguments: first of all, even before Padmasambhava's appearance in *dBa' bzhed,* the text is refferring to *dBa' gSal nang* in highly laudatory words: the emperor of China tells him that he must be the Buddhist master the predictions said would come from Tibet, and *dBa' gSal nang* is very flattered by this estimation,[33] therefore, we can assume that the editor of *dBa' bzhed* wished to underline, once

[31] Ibidem, p. 59.
[32] Ibidem, p. 60.
[33] Ibidem, pp. 51-52.

again, the importance of *dBa' gSal nang*; and, nevertheless, immediately after Padmasambhava appears in *dBa' bzhed*, we are amazed to see that *dBa' gSal nang* almost completely disappears from the story, and only reappears after Padmasambhava leaves Tibet: *dBa' gSal nang* is mentioned only once again, precisely when Padmasambhava comes into play, after that he is completely absent from all other scenes (folio 11a-14a) in which Padmasambhava appears.

The silence in the text, in connection with *dBa' gSal nang*, from Padmasambhava's arrival in Tibet until his departure, cannot be random: the editor of *dBa' bzhed* (who, most probably, wrote at the instruction of *dBa' gSal nang* or in reliance upon his report) seems to have attempted to gently suggest a lack of cooperation between the two, or the fact that *dBa' gSal nang* did not wish to be in any way associated with Padmasambhava. Although we have to remember that *dBa' gSal nang* and *'Ba' Sang shi* did not mind being associated with the king and with Śāntarakṣita in the spread of Buddhism in Tibet.[34]

Anyway, since Padmasambhava's arrival in Tibet had cast a shadow over *dBa' gSal nang*, and Padmasambhava's departure seems to have allowed his sudden ascent, it is not at all impossible that *dBa' gSal nang* had regarded Padmasambhava as a rival; we can go even further, and assume that *dBa' gSal nang* kept in touch with the faction of ministers hostile to Padmasambhava, who, through their intrigue, caused the great master to leave Tibet, or that the same ministers firstly provoked master's exile, and, immediately afterwards, the appointment of *dBa' gSal nang* to that high religious office; in both cases, the story in *dBa' bzhed* concerning Padmasambhava could attempt to justify the decision to banish him from Tibet.

[34] Ibidem, pp. 7-8, pp. 89-90.

3.5. Brief conclusions on *dBa' bzhed*

The narrative in *dBa' bzhed* provides a completely different image from that was established by the tradition of revealed biographies: in *dBa' bzhed,* Padmasambhava remains in Tibet but a short while, which is not enough for him to assert himself as master of the king or to complete his work of converting the Tibetans, as he is removed from the court and sent away from Tibet, because of the web of intrigue surrounding the king. On the contrary, in *Zangs gling ma,* he remains in Tibet for several decades, until after the death of king *Khri srong lDe btsan*, and only leaves Tibet during the reign of his son *Mu tig bTsan po*, after a long and fruitful stay at the Tibetan court.

However, since *dBa' bzhed* must have been written at the instruction and in the interest of the *dBa'* clan, it is quite easy to assume that it was not Padmasambhava's image which constituted the priority of the editor of the text, but the image of the clan in general or of *dBa' gSal nang* in particular; and this would be even more true in the thesis posited above, where *dBa' gSal nang* had been in contact with the faction of ministers hostile to Padmasambhava, who, by court intrigue, warranted him the king's disgrace and departure from Tibet.

Therefore, we can notice that the image of Padmasambhava in *dBa' bzhed* was painted not at the instruction of a disciple or admirer of the master but, on the contrary, either by the order of someone indifferent to him, or at the request of a rival. In both cases, it is very likely that, in *dBa' bzhed,* there is a certain dose of minimizing and fine-tuning Padmasambhava's portrait to the detriment of *dBa' gSal nang's* portrait,[35] which means that the narrative in *dBa' bzhed* must be regarded with reserve in that respect.

[35] Daniel A. Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born: Padmasambhava in the History of Tibet's Golden Age,* Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2016, p. 14.

It is illustrative that, out of the seven scenes in *dBa' bzhed* regarding Padmasambhava, the first three showcase him in positive and even laudatory colors, after that the following four scenes describe the hostility which he faced at the Tibetan royal court and the intrigues against him. From these four scenes, we can understand that, at the royal court of Lhasa, there was either hostility against Buddhism in general or personal hostility against Padmasambhava, aimed at preventing him from receiving the much-disputed royal preference. However, the thesis that at least two Buddhist factions existed at the royal court, and it was not long before they collided, is much more plausible for us: one benefiting from the support of high dignitaries and the protection of the king, including *dBa' gSal nang* and maybe even Śāntarakṣita; and the other having Padmasambhava as their leader, but apparently lacking the support of Tibetan noblemen or royal protection.

Such an assumption would concord with the thesis of Kapstein, within the meaning that Padmasambhava's stay at the royal court was brief, and that he carried out most of his missionary activities in South Tibet and Bhutan, in areas where the control of central authorities was more diffuse than in Lhasa.[36] This would fully explain why Padmasambhava's representation is so different in the memory of *dBa'* clan and in the memory of those who followed his teachings as disciples, and regarded him as a superhuman being.

We should keep in mind that the stories in *dBa' bzhed* regarding Padmasambhava are, very likely, biased and rather unfavorable to the great master, as they aim to emphasize the role of the *dBa'* clan members (especially that of *dBa' gSal nang*) and to minimize Padmasambhava's role in spreading Buddhism in Tibet. Viewed from that perspective, as a portrait painted at the order of a rival, the

[36] Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, op. cit., p. 159.

narrative in *dBa' bzhed* concerning Padmasambhava (and the superhuman powers thereof, as mentioned in all seven scenes) seems as greatly flattering for the great master, irrespective of how contested he might have been at the Tibetan court and by the members of clan *dBa'*.

4. The four Dunhuang manuscripts

Further, we will review herein below the four manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang which refer to Padmasambhava: *Pelliot tibétain* 44 (PT44), IOL Tib 321 (IT321), IOL Tib J 644 (ITJ644) and *Pelliot tibétain* 307 (PT307).

All these four manuscripts may be dated as being from the late 10th century, most likely[37]: in respect of PT44 and IT321, dating would be firm after 980, while for the other two, it may be assumed, based on indirect arguments, that they are from the late 10th century.

4.1. Padmasambhava as *vidyādhara* and the second buddha, in ITJ644

ITJ644 is made up of two parts,[38] of which the former consists of an overview of the nine-vehicle system[39] (*yāna*), which later became characteristic of the *rNying ma* school in Tibetan Buddhism, while the latter consists of a discussion on the various levels of *vidyādhara* (meaning "knowledge-holder or wisdom-holder")[40] which a Buddhist tantra practitioner may accomplish in relation to various vehicles: kriyā[tantra], yoga[tantra], mahāyoga, anuyoga and atiyoga.

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[37] Dalton, "The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet," op. cit., p. 30.
[38] Ibidem, p. 33.
[39] According to the classification of the nine *yāna* in the *rNying ma* school, vajrayāna contains three external tantras (kriyatantra, caryatantra or upayatantra, yogatantra) and three internal tantras (mahāyoga, anuyoga, atiyoga or *rdzogs chen*).
[40] Vidyādhara (*rig 'dzin*) is, in *rNying ma* school, a tantric practitioner who has acquired supernatural powers by gaining accomplishment in vajrayāna practices.

Upon accomplishing mahāyoga, the text indicates that there are four levels of *vidyādhara*, and for the fourth level, namely *mahāmudrā vidyādhara*, it clarifies as follows:

> "a *mahāmudrā vidyādhara* is endowed with the five kinds of omniscience, i.e. Ācārya Padmasambhava and the like. The five kinds of omniscience consist of the *vajra* eye, the *vajra* ear, the *vajra* mind and the *vajra* miracles. He is called a 'second buddha'. Alike in every way, he should be understood as such. There is no difference between a second [buddha and the first]; he is equal. He is called 'second' only because of the different methods he uses to gain accomplishment."[41]

Therefore, as early as the late 10th century, Padmasambhava was regarded as a holder of the supreme *vidyādhara* level in mahāyoga, the ideal of tantric practitioners and "second buddha", equal to Śākyamuni himself. And even if the phrase "second buddha" may seem like an ordinary epithet for Padmasambhava (and, indeed, it is often used in reference to him), we have to admit that it is not solely attributed to him, but also to other masters with a similar level of accomplishment.[42]

In ITJ644, there is another reference to the "second buddha", when examining the levels of *vidyādhara* in kriyā, however, without mentioning the name of Padmasambhava here too. Nevertheless, this fragment points to the Asura cave and the Vajrapāṇi tantric deity, as well as the Aśvakarṇa spring, on the Southern face of Mount Meru, all these elements may suggest that they also refer to Padmasambhava:[43] about the same spring, there is also a reference in *dBa' bzhed*,[44] and the Asura and *Yang le shod* caves (in Pharping, at the southern end of

[41] Dalton, "The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet," op. cit., p. 35.
[42] Ibidem, pp. 35-37.
[43] Ibidem, pp. 39-41.
[44] Pasang and Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed*, op. cit., p. 56 (footnote 165).

Kathmandu Valley, in Nepal) are particularly associated with Padmasambhava, the latter being indicated in *Zangs gling ma* as the place where he meditated in order to accomplish the *mahāmudrā vidyādhara* level.[45]

4.2. Padmasambhava as master of the Vajrakīlaya tradition, in PT44

Also referred to as Vajrakumāra, Kīlaya or, in short, Kīla, Vajrakīlaya (in the Tibetan language *rDo rje Phur pa* or *rDo rje gZhon nu*) is a tantric ritual widely known in Tibetan Buddhism[46] (one of the Teachings of the Eight Sadhanas[47]), whose tradition (transmission lineage) is strongly associated with Padmasambhava. PT44 describes precisely the Kīla (Vajrakīlaya) ritual, emphasizing the beginnings of this tradition in Nepal.

Thus, the text[48] tells us that Ācārya Sambhava starts from *Yang le shod* toward Nalanda, in India, in order to bring the 100,000 verses tantra of Kīla. On the road, he finds out that four *bse* goddesses kill people by stealing their breath, and so he takes them prisoners and keeps them in his hat. The gesture of imprisoning turbulent spirits in a hat seems to be unusual in Buddhist symbolism, where, in general, the

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[45] Yeshe Tsogyal, *The Lotus-Born*, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

[46] Vajrakīlaya or Kīlaya (*rDo rje Phur ba*) is one of the eight primary deities in mahāyoga, also referred to as the Eight Herukas.

[47] The Teachings of the Eight Sadhanas, in Tibetan referred to as *bKa' brgyad* or *sGrub pa bKa' brgyad* and in Sanskrit as *aṣṭamahāsādhana*, are the eight main divinities in mahāyoga (together with their mantras and sadhanas), also referred to as the Eight Herukas: Yamantaka (*'Jam dpal gShin rje shed* or *'Jam dpal sKu*), Hayagriva (*rTa mgrin* or *Pad ma gSung*), Vishuddha Heruka or Śri Heruka (*Yang dag He ru ka* or *Yang dag Thugs*), Mahottara Heruka (*Che mchog He ru ka* or *bDud rtsi Yon tan*), Vajrakīlaya (*rDo rje Phur ba*), Matarah (*Ma mo rBod gtong*), Lokastotrapujanatha (*'Jig rten mChod bstod*) and Vajramantrabhiru (*dMod pa Drag sngags*).

[48] Doney, "The Lotus-Born in Nepal," op. cit., pp. 100-103; Dalton, "The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet," op. cit., pp. 42-45.

master himself is viewed on the head,[49] however, when he reaches Nalanda he opens the hat, and from it comes out an extraordinarily beautiful woman (as the manifestation of the four *bse* goddesses), whom he forces to become a protector of the Kīla ritual followers.

Then, Padmasambhava starts on the way back to Nepal and meditates in the *Yang le shod* and Asura caves, in the latter together with three other tantric practitioners, gaining accomplishment in Kīla and the powers (*siddhi*) specific thereto. After that, we find out that Padmasambhava transmitted the Kīla ritual to two other tantric practitioners, and the text further gives a list of practitioners who received and conveyed further the Kīla transmission, thus seeking to legitimize the transmission lineage of the tradition, by tracing it in time back to Padmasambhava.

There are certain similarities between the elements of the narrative in PT44 and those in the second fragment of ITJ644, referring to the Asura cave, although the name of Padmasambhava[50] is not mentioned, which reinforce the above-mentioned assumption that this is also about Padmasambhava.

However, PT44 also contains obvious similarities with chapter 5 of *Zangs gling ma*,[51] where Padmasambhava meditates in the *Yang le shod* cave in Nepal, simultaneously gaining accomplishment in the Kīla ritual and in the Viśuddha[52] practice. The story in chapter 5 concerning the Vajrakīlaya ritual ought to be connected to a brief remark in chapter 3 of *Zangs gling ma,*[53] from where we find out that Padmasambhava allegedly received the Vajrakīlaya teachings from the great Indian

[49] Mayer, "Geographical and Other Borders in the Symbolism of Padmasambhava," p. 79.
[50] Dalton, "The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet," pp. 39-41.
[51] Doney, "The Lotus-Born in Nepal," p. 107.
[52] Yeshe, *The Lotus-Born,* pp. 52-53; Doney, "The Lotus-Born in Nepal," pp. 105-107.
[53] Doney, "The Lotus-Born in Nepal," p. 109.

master Prabhahasti,[54] and thus we acquire an overview where we can notice more than a few common elements between the PT44 text and the story in *Zangs gling ma* regarding the Vajrakīlaya teachings.

4.3. Padmasambhava as author of tantric comments, in ITJ321

ITJ321 consists of a comment to a mahāyoga tantra named *Thabs kyi zhags pa* ("The Noble Noose of Methods" or "Lasso of Means") and what makes this manuscript unique is the fact that it contains interlines annotations mentioning Padmasambhava, in three instances, as the author of that comment.[55]

However, mention is to be made that certain reserves were raised in connection with Padmasambhava's authorship of the comment,[56] suggesting that Padmasambhava's role in connection with manuscript ITJ321 would not be merely that of author of comments.

4.4. Padmasambhava as tamer of evil spirits, in PT307

The fragment concerning Padmasambhava in PT307 is contained in a short work about the feminine protectors in the *maṇḍala* of the tantric divinity Śrī Heruka.[57] The fragment opens with a description of the seven Tibet goddesses,[58] about which we are told that they are "also

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[54] Yeshe, *The Lotus-Born,* op. cit., p. 43.

[55] Cathy Cantwell and Rob Mayer, *Representations of Padmasambhava in early post-Imperial Tibet*, Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2013, p. 24. Dalton, "The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet," pp. 47-48. Jacob P. Dalton, *The Taming of the Demons. Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism,* New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2011, p. 67.

[56] Cantwell and Mayer, *Representations of Padmasambhava in early post-Imperial Tibet*, op. cit., p. 25. Mayer, "Geographical and Other Borders in the Symbolism of Padmasambhava," op. cit., p. 82.

[57] Śrī Heruka, also named Viśuddha Heruka (*Yang dag he ru ka*) is one of the eight main deities in mahāyoga, also referred to as the Eight Herukas (*bKa' brgyad*).

[58] Dalton, "The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet," op. cit., p. 49.

known as *ḍākinīs*, the powerful women, the seven great mothers, or the seven great *rākṣasis*"[59] and only then Padmasambhava enters the scene:

> "After that, both the Indian Padmasambhava and *Rlang dpal gyig seng ge*[60] subjugated and suppressed them. Bestowing upon these ladies of Tibet *vajras* to hold, they gave them names for being in the company of [the buddha] Vajradhara. Since then, they have aided and supported those who accomplish the secret mantra in accordance with the scriptural systems, and they have been entrusted as the eternally unfailing guardians of Tibet."[61]

The seven Tibet goddesses should be seen in connection with the seven mother-goddesses of Hinduism, known as *saptamātṛka*, which may be recognized in the sculpted images spread across Northern India and the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal; they played an important role in the tantric practices of India in the 8th century and were strongly associated with violent rituals.[62]

In Tibet, *saptamātṛka* are recognized by Buddhists of the 10th century, and references to the seven mothers may be found in the Dunhuang manuscripts, where they are called *ma bdun* (meaning "seven mothers"); however, in Tibet, *ma bdun* are not seen in connection with the Indian *saptamātṛka*, but as pre-Buddhist spirits relating to certain places in Tibet, usually sacred mountains, valleys and lakes.[63] Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the seven goddesses existed in Tibet before Buddhism arrived, but, rather, that *ma bdun* is the Tibetan replica of *saptamātṛka*, where seven of the many local divinities of pre-

[59] Ibidem, p. 50.
[60] *Rlang dpal gyig seng ge* (whose name means the "Glorious Lion of Rlang") is regarded as one of the eight important disciples of Padmasambhava.
[61] Dalton, "The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet," p. 50.
[62] Ibidem, p. 51.
[63] Ibidem, p. 52.

Buddhist Tibet were gathered together and suffered the transformative influences of Indian Buddhism.[64]

We should point out how the seven spirits hostile to Buddhism are converted into guardians of Buddhism: they are offered *vajra* (*rdo rje*), a ritualic object specific to tantric Buddhism, and their old name is changed into a Buddhist name containing the word *rdo rje*.[65] Thus, they are integrated into the pantheon of divinities and guardians of tantric Buddhism,[66] and they are assigned a new role, that of protectors of Buddhism.

Mention is to be made that the taming of local spirits and forcing them to become Buddhist guardians is a theme often encountered in the Tibetan literature concerning the first spread of Buddhism in Tibet. We may also find such scenes, both in *dBa' bzhed* and in *Zangs gling ma*, all of them having the same protagonist, Padmasambhava. Moreover, we can see similar scenes even before Padmasambhava's arrival in Tibet: manuscript PT44 tells the story of how the four *bse* goddesses of Nepal were subdued, imprisoned in a hat and forced to become guardians of Vajrakīlaya ritual practitioners.[67] All these scenes seem to be very naturally in the narratives connected to Padmasambhava, since "the theme of violent subjugation was and is crucial to Tibetan culture, and Padmasambhava is the demon tamer par excellence".[68]

[64] Ibidem, p. 54.
[65] Ibidem, p. 55.
[66] Mayer, "Geographical and Other Borders in the Symbolism of Padmasambhava," p. 77.
[67] Ibidem, pp. 77-79.
[68] Dalton, "The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet," op. cit., p. 58.

5. Conclusions

Upon reviewing all the texts above, it may be noticed that all of them attribute supernatural powers to Padmasambhava: we can see him performing miracles (such as turning sand to gold), taming spirits hostile to Buddhism, which he forces to become guardians of Buddhist teachings, or described as the second buddha and *mahāmudrā vidyādhara* (the highest level as *vidyādhara*), endowed with five kinds of omniscience.

Out of the seven scenes into which we have divided *dBa' bzhed,* there is only one where Padmasambhava is not involved in any way in supernatural occurrences: the scene of his meeting with the Tibetan king, immediately after his arrival in Tibet. However, even in that scene, Śāntarakṣita introduces Padmasambhava in a particularly commendatory manner, as the holder of totally unique powers ("at present, nobody in *'Dzam bu gling* possesses greater powers in the use of the mantra than the *mKhan po* of *U rgyan*")[69] or even miraculous powers (he "will be able to compete with all the Tibetan followers of non-Buddhist traditions in performing miracles.")[70]

Further, from the four Dunhuang manuscripts subject to our review, we cannot but remark that only one seems to refer to Padmasambhava as to an ordinary being: ITJ321, where he appears as the author of tantric comments. However, we ought to point out that this position does not exclude, in the least, the possibility for the author of that manuscript to have seen Padmasambhava in the same light, as a being endowed with supranatural powers.[71]

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[69] Pasang and Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed*, op. cit., p. 54.
[70] Ibidem, p. 55.
[71] Cantwell and Mayer, *Representations of Padmasambhava in early post-Imperial Tibet*, op. cit. p. 25. It should be noted that Cantwell and Mayer state that the references in ITJ321 are references to an exceptional, mythologized being, and not to a mere human.

Therefore, the sources previous to *Zangs gling ma* reveal not only a human and historical character, but rather a superhuman being,[72] to which powers above the ordinary are attributed. The most important theme in the mythological profile of Padmasambhava, the taming of evil spirits, is already present,[73] both in *dBa' bzhed*, and in two Dunhuang manuscripts, *i.e.*, PT44 and PT307, and a certain continuity may be noticed between them and the scenes of *Zangs gling ma,* where Padmasambhava subjugates spirits, particularly chapters 9 and 5.

As a consequence, quite surprisingly, Padmasambhava's image seems to be mythologized from the earliest texts,[74] being, at the same time, both history and beyond history.[75] The five texts referred to above (being rather hagiographic, than historical, in nature) do not allow us to draw up a historical portrait of Padmasambhava, which means that his historicity may be neither denied, nor confirmed, by means of historical evidence, beyond any doubt.

Contrary to the thesis from which we set out in this endeavor, we may assert that the myth of Padmasambhava did not begin at the same time as *Zangs gling ma*, in the 12th century, but long time before, possibly as early as the 9th century, immediately after the fall of the Tibetan Empire;[76] and *Zangs gling ma* took over and developed several themes already existing in older literature,[77] starting from the taming of spirits hostile to Buddhism, the performing of miracles and the superhuman status of Padmasambhava.

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[72] Doney, "The Lotus-Born in Nepal," op. cit., p. 99.
[73] Ibidem, p. 110.
[74] Idem.
[75] Mayer, "Geographical and Other Borders in the Symbolism of Padmasambhava," op. cit., p. 88.
[76] Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, op. cit., p. 157.
[77] Cantwell and Mayer, *Representations of Padmasambhava in early post-Imperial Tibet*, op. cit., p. 22.

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Fig. 1: Vajrakīlaya (*rDo rje Phur ba*)

Tibet, 1800-1899, *rNying ma* lineage. Source: https://www.himalayanart.org/items/7658

Fig. 2: Śāntarakṣita

Tibet, 1800-1899, *dGe lugs* lineage. Source: https://www.himalayanart.org/items/65798

Fig. 3: King *Khri srong lDe btsan*

Tibet, 1800-1899, *rNying ma* lineage. Source: https://www.himalayanart.org/items/820

Fig. 4: Padmasambhava together with
Khri srong lDe btsan and Śāntarakṣita

Tibet, 1800-1899, *rNying ma* lineage. Top: Samantabhadra, the primordial buddha, with Buddha Amitabha (left) and Avalokiteśvara (right). Middle: the two main consorts of Padmasambhava, Mandāravā (*Ma da ra ba*) and *Ye shes mTsho rgyal*. Bottom: Śāntarakṣita (left) and King *Khri srong lDe btsan* (right). Source: https://www.himalayanart.org/items/188

The House of Tagore

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Motto:
Something undreamt of was lurking everywhere, and every day the uppermost question was: where, oh where would I come across it?
(Rabindranath Tagore)

Abstract: Rabindranath Tagore was the first Nobel laureate of Asia. In 1913 he received the prestigious prize for *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*), his volume of poetry. He was born in Calcutta into a wealthy Brahmin family. He was well educated and very talented. He was a poet, philosopher, writer, playwright, songwriter, painter, and educator. He was a very charismatic person and he traveled a lot. He held lectures at several important universities of the world, had encounters with extraordinary people, and received many honorific degrees. During his life time he created a remarkable oeuvre, and his legacy is monumental.
At 160 years after his birth, Rabindranath Tagore's genius is celebrated across the globe. This study presents a short history of his incredible family, which had an important role in the Bengali cultural renaissance.

Keywords: Tagore, Jorasanko house, Bengali tradition, philosophy, arts, influences, Tagore's legacy.

No other place in India is so imbued with the personality, and cultural, material, and spiritual heritage of the great Rabindranath Tagore as Bengal. And it is normal to be so, since the poet was born in Calcutta, spent a significant part of his life in this city, and nearby, in Shantiniketan, he founded Visva Bharati, a model university for those times, a benchmark for today's academic research, a rallying center of international culture.

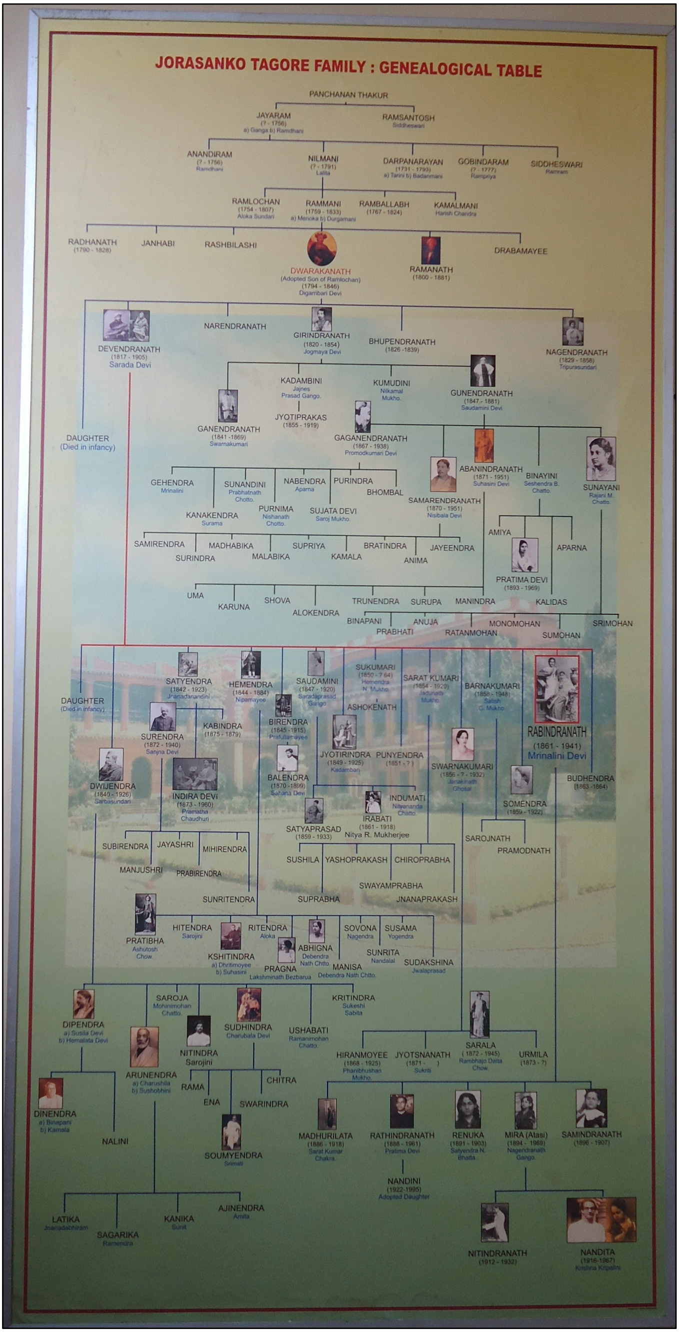
Somewhere in the middle of Calcutta, sheltered in the shade of huge palm trees, I found Jorasanko Thakurbari, the home of the Tagore family. It is located at No. 6 on what is known today as Dwarkanath Tagore Lane. A majestic red house, with a large garden, full of blooming flowers and trees, a wonderful interior terrace which was used by the family for different events, merely artistic. The Tagore house dominates its neighborhood and it is very clear that this incredible family had an important role in the Bengali cultural renaissance.

> "The original part of the house was built in 1785, then it was renovated and much enlarged by a British company appointed by Dwarkanath Tagore. […] A *son et lumière* show in the grounds of the building gives the usual romantic interpretation of the history of the Tagore family."[1]

The name Tagore is also the result of a wonderful story. The first in the family to be known by the surname Tagore was Panchanan,[2] who migrated to Calcutta from the district of Jessore (now in Bangladesh).

[1] Krishna Dutta, *Calcutta. A cultural and literary history*, Supervova Publishers, New Delhi, 2015, p. 44.

[2] The Genealogical Table of Jorasanko Tagore Family, presented in the next page, can be seen in Jorasanko Museum in Calcutta. Photo from January 2016. © Mihaela Gligor


JORASANKO TAGORE FAMILY : GENEALOGICAL TABLE
PANCHANAN THAKUR
JAYARAM
(? - 1756)
a) Ganga b) Ramdhani
RAMSANTOSH
Siddheswari
ANANDIRAM
(? - 1756)
Ramdhani
NILMANI
(? - 1791)
Lalita
DARPANARAYAN
(1731 - 1793)
a) Tarini b) Badanmani
GOBINDARAM
(? - 1777)
Rampriya
SIDDHESWARI
Ramram
RAMLOCHAN
(1754 - 1807)
Aloka Sundari
RAMMANI
(1759 - 1833)
a) Menoka b) Durgamani
RAMBALLABH
(1767 - 1824)
KAMALMANI
Harish Chandra
RADHANATH
(1790 - 1828)
JANHABI
RASHBILASHI
DWARAKANATH
(Adopted Son of Ramlochan)
(1794 - 1846)
Digambari Devi
RAMANATH
(1800 - 1881)
DRABAMAYEE
DEVENDRANATH
(1817 - 1905)
Sarada Devi
NARENDRANATH
GIRINDRANATH
(1820 - 1854)
Jogmaya Devi
BHUPENDRANATH
(1826 - 1839)
NAGENDRANATH
(1829 - 1858)
Tripurasundari
DAUGHTER
(Died in infancy)
KADAMBINI
Jajnes
Prasad Gango.
KUMUDINI
Nilkamal
Mukho.
GUNENDRANATH
(1847 - 1881)
Saudamini Devi
JYOTIPRAKAS
(1855 - 1919)
GANENDRANATH
(1841 - 1869)
Swarnakumari
GAGANENDRANATH
(1867 - 1938)
Promodkumari Devi
ABANINDRANATH
(1871 - 1951)
Suhasini Devi
BINAYINI
Seshendra B.
Chatto.
SUNAYANI
Rajani M.
Chatto.
SAMARENDRANATH
(1870 - 1951)
Nisibala Devi
GEHENDRA
Mrinalini
SUNANDINI
Prabhatnath
Chotto.
NABENDRA
Aparna
PURINDRA
BHOMBAL
KANAKENDRA
Surama
PURNIMA
Nishanath
Chotto.
SUJATA DEVI
Saroj Mukho.
AMIYA
APARNA
PRATIMA DEVI
(1893 - 1969)
SAMIRENDRA
SURINDRA
MADHABIKA
MALABIKA
SUPRIYA
KAMALA
BRATINDRA
ANIMA
JAYEENDRA
UMA
KARUNA
SHOVA
ALOKENDRA
TRUNENDRA
SURUPA
MANINDRA
KALIDAS
BINAPANI
PRABHATI
ANUJA
RATANMOHAN
MONOMOHAN
SUMOHAN
SRIMOHAN
DAUGHTER
(Died in infancy)
SATYENDRA
(1842 - 1923)
Jnanadanandini
HEMENDRA
(1844 - 1884)
Nipamayee
SAUDAMINI
(1847 - 1920)
Saradaprasad
Gango.
SUKUMARI
(1850 - ? 64)
Hemendra
N. Mukho.
SARAT KUMARI
(1854 - 1920)
Jadunath
Mukho.
BARNAKUMARI
(1858 - 1948)
Satish
C. Mukho.
RABINDRANATH
(1861 - 1941)
Mrinalini Devi
ASHOKENATH
KABINDRA
(1875 - 1879)
BIRENDRA
(1845 - 1915)
Prafullamayee
SURENDRA
(1872 - 1940)
Sanjna Devi
JYOTIRINDRA
(1849 - 1925)
Kadambari
PUNYENDRA
(1851 - ?)
SWARNAKUMARI
(1856 - ? - 1932)
Janakinath
Ghosal
BUDHENDRA
(1863 - 1864)
DWIJENDRA
(1840 - 1926)
Sarbasundari
INDIRA DEVI
(1873 - 1960)
Pramatha
Chaudhuri
BALENDRA
(1870 - 1899)
Sahana Devi
SOMENDRA
(1859 - 1922)
INDUMATI
Nityananda
Chatto.
SATYAPRASAD
(1859 - 1933)
IRABATI
(1861 - 1918)
Nitya R. Mukherjee
SAROJNATH
PRAMODNATH
SUBIRENDRA
JAYASHRI
MIHIRENDRA
MANJUSHRI
PRABIRENDRA
SUSHILA
YASHOPRAKASH
CHIROPRABHA
SWAYAMPRABHA
SUNRITENDRA
SUPRABHA
JNANAPRAKASH
PRATIBHA
Ashutosh
Chow.
HITENDRA
Sarojini
KSHITINDRA
a) Dhritimoyee
b) Suhasini
RITENDRA
Aloka
PRAGNA
Lakshminath Bezbarua
ABHIGNA
Debendra
Nath Chtto.
SOVONA
Nagendra
SUSAMA
Yogendra
MANISA
Debendra Nath Chtto.
SUNRITA
Nandalal
SUDAKSHINA
Jwalaprasad
DIPENDRA
a) Suslia Devi
b) Hemalata Devi
SAROJA
Mohinimohan
Chatto.
SUDHINDRA
Charubala Devi
USHABATI
Ramanimohan
Chatto.
KRITINDRA
Sukeshi
Sabita
ARUNENDRA
a) Charushila
b) Sushobhini
NITINDRA
Sarojini
HIRANMOYEE
(1868 - 1925)
Phanibhushan
Mukho.
JYOTSNANATH
(1871 -)
Sukriti
SARALA
(1872 - 1945)
Rambhajo Datta
Chow.
URMILA
(1873 - ?)
RAMA
ENA
CHITRA
SWARINDRA
DINENDRA
a) Binapani
b) Kamala
NALINI
SOUMYENDRA
Srimati
MADHURILATA
(1886 - 1918)
Sarat Kumar
Chakra.
RATHINDRANATH
(1888 - 1961)
Pratima Devi
RENUKA
(1891 - 1903)
Satyendra N.
Bhatta.
MIRA (Atasi)
(1894 - 1969)
Nagendranath
Gango.
SAMINDRANATH
(1896 - 1907)
NANDINI
(1922-1995)
Adopted Daughter
LATIKA
Jnanadabhiram
SAGARIKA
Ramendra
KANIKA
Surjit
AJINENDRA
Amita
NITINDRANATH
(1912 - 1932)
NANDITA
(1916-1967)
Krishna Kripalini

It is presumed that his moral qualities won for him a high regard from his neighbors who started addressing him as 'Thakur,' an appellation which means a godly man. This Bengali word became 'Tagore.' In fact, in Bengal, when referring to Rabindranath Tagore, people often say 'Rabi Thakur.'

Rabindranath came from a large family and was the youngest of fourteen siblings. Rabindranath's grandfather,

> "Dwarkanath (1794-1846), was an impressive merchant-prince, with indigo and saltpeter factories, coal mines, sugar, tea and agricultural estates, cargo fleets, and a bank. […] His father, Debendranath (1817-1905), known as Maharshi, or great sage, had done with Brahmoism, all the time building the family fortunes further and maintaining the synthesis between the worldly and the spiritual."[3]

It was there, at Jorasanko, that Rabindranath Tagore was born on 7th May 1861, corresponding to Bengali 25th Baisakh 1268. He often described his Bengali family as "a confluence of three cultures: the Hindu, the Mohammedan, and the British."[4]

He remembered with nostalgia the city he was born in:

> "The Calcutta where I was born was an altogether old-world place."[5]
> "Looking back on childhood's days, the thing that recurs most often is the mystery which used to fill both life and world."[6]

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[3] Nita Kumar, "The Educational Efforts of Rabindranath Tagore," in Debashish Banerji (Editor), *Rabindranath Tagore in the 21st Century. Theoretical Renewals*, Springer, India, 2015, p. 132.

[4] Rabindranath Tagore, "A Poet's School", *Santiniketan Vidyalaya 1901-2000*, Calcutta, Visva-Bharati, 2001, p. 18. For a wonderful analysis on Tagore's life and work, see Amartya Sen, "Tagore and His India," in Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, Penguin Books, India, 2005.

[5] Rabindranath Tagore, *My Boyhood Days*, Calcutta, Visva Bharati, 1945, p. 3.

[6] Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, London, Macmillan, 1933, p. 20.

> "I remember my childhood when the sunrise, like my playfellow, would burst into my bedside with its daily surprise of morning; when the faith in the marvelous bloomed like fresh flowers in my heart every day, looking into the face of the world in simple gladness; when insects, birds and beasts, from common weeds, grass and the clouds had their fullest value of wonder; when the patter of rain at night brought dreams from the fairyland, and mother's voice in the evening gave meaning to the stars."[7]

As Amartya Sen writes, Rabindranath

> "[…] grew up in a family atmosphere in which a deep knowledge of Sanskrit and ancient Hindu texts were combined with an understanding of Islamic traditions as well as Persian literature. It is not so much that Rabindranath tried to produce – or had an interest in producing – a 'synthesis' of the different religions."[8]

Some of his brothers, and sisters were directly responsible for his education; among them, his elder brother, Satyendranath, his sister-in-law, and their son Surendranath and daughter Indira; his third older brother, Hemendranath; his fifth older brother, Jyotirindranath, a musician, composer, poet, and his wife, Kadambari; his sister Swarnakumari, and her two daughters, Hiranmayi Devi and Sarala Devi. In addition to the family members there should have been so many servants appointed to take care of the children's education, the young Rabindranath among them.

Influences between family members were considerable. Among Bengal's pioneers in the arts were his brother, Jyotirindranath, and his nephews, Gaganendranath, and Abanindranath. From them, young

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[7] Rabindranath Tagore, 'Crossing,' Poem no. 71, *Lover's Gift and Crossing*, London, Macmillan, 1923, p. 110.
[8] Amartya Sen, "Tagore and His India," in Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, op. cit., p. 90.

Rabindranath would learn different techniques, and from Hemendranath he understood that his education should be in his mother tongue, Bengali, and not in English, the language used in Indian administration during those years.

> "In Bengal, the impact of English education had produced new classes and consciousnesses, as well as familiarity with European literature and philosophy. After the first flush of the encounter with the West, most educated Indians had also turned to their own past (and continuing) values and practices because of a half-understood conviction that true creativity could arise largely from there. In these experiments that lasted over the second half of the nineteenth century, Bengal was at the forefront in India, and the house of Tagore was at the forefront in Bengal."[9]

Rabindranath was very fortunate to have inherited an enlightened family, who shared an interest in literature and art. The walls of his home breathed music and it echoed everywhere. Most of his brothers were well-known people of the time. Dwijendranath was a philosopher and prose writer, whereas Jyotirindranath was an artist. It was a common practice to conduct cultural activities at home and most of the dramas written by anybody at home were staged at home itself. So that Rabindranath, from his earliest days, grew up in one house where all the surging waves of the Indian Renaissance could flow round his daily life.

Young Rabindranath Tagore was influenced by the teachings of the *Upanishads* and, like the English romantics and the American transcendentalists before him,[10] came to believe in its pantheistic

[9] Nita Kumar, "The Educational Efforts of Rabindranath Tagore," op. cit., p. 134.

[10] For more details on this subject, see Yeager Hudson, *Emerson and Tagore: The Poet as Philosopher* (Asia and the Wider World Series, Vol. 1), Notre Dame, Indiana, Cross Cultural Publications, 1988. The influences of Indian philosophy on the English romantics and the American transcendentalists are obvious. Emerson's "Brahma" and

teachings. In this regard, his firsthand influence was his father, a leading member of a religious movement called the Brahmo Samaj[11] who, Tagore explained, believed in "a strict monotheism based upon the teachings of the *Upanishads.*"[12]

When he was around 12 years old, Rabindranath accompanied his father to the Himalayas, and they spent four months there. Those were the most consciously formative for Rabindranath's childhood. In the mountains he learnt about the values of discipline in freedom, and of nature as a teacher. It was there that he realised about the incomparable importance of studying in the middle of nature, and later he used those discoveries when starting the Shantiniketan School.

In the same time,

> "Rabindranath rejected, to a considerable extent, the authority of the father as it existed in contemporary *bhadralok* society. Simultaneously, he rejected the models of schooling and institutionalization, imported from Europe that threatened native paternalism in some respects, but were aligned with it in others. Most pertinently, he recoiled from the shadow of nihilism that was implicit in a world of youth in rebellion against father, teacher, and state and that appeared to consign the individual to insignificance and death. He put forward, instead, a theory of child-rearing

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"Hamatreya," Thoreau's *Walden*, and Whitman's "Song of Myself" are examples of the influences of the Upanishadic philosophy.

[11] Brahmo Samaj was founded in Calcutta in 1828 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy as a religious movement. It was centered on the belief that there is one God, who is omni-present and omniscient. The Brahmo Samaj has played a significant role in the renaissance of India, and the roots of much of the modern thinking in India can be traced back to the Brahmo movement. It was an attempt to reform Hinduism of its overbearing ritualistic practices and Tagore's father Maharshi Debendranath was a prominent member of the movement. The Brahmo religion is now practiced in many parts of the world.

[12] Cf. Anthony Soares (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore: Lectures and Addresses*, London, Macmillan, 1970, p. 8.

and education that emphasized a freedom that was restrained by a reformulation of nature and society and by love – including love of authority itself."[13]

Young Rabindranath had so many influences, and all of them shaped his understanding of what education means and how a good education can change the life of people. He became intimate with Bengal countryside and loved to spent time with people, learning from them, and finding inspiration in their life and wisdom. It was not a great surprise when he started his own school and tried to establish a different university in rural area of Shantiniketan.

"The formal inauguration of Visva-Bharati took place on December 22, 1921, exactly twenty years after the founding of the Brahmacharyashram. The motto of the university reflected the global scope of the undertaking: *yatra visvam bhavati ekanidam* – 'Where the world meets in one nest.'"[14]

Visva-Bharati University in Shantiniketan (*Visva-Bharati* means the communion of the world with India), was designed as an experiment in which individuals learned to live together, and developed awider relationship of humanity. From the very beginning, Visva-Bharati was referred as an Indian, Eastern and Global cultural centre, whose goals were:

"a) To study the mind of Man in its realisation of different aspects of truth from diverse points of view.

[13] Satadru Sen, "Remembering Robi: Childhood, Freedom and Rabindranath Tagore," in Debashish Banerji (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore in the 21st Century*, *Theoretical Renewals*, Springer India, 2015, p. 115.

[14] Kathleen M. O'Connell, "Rabindranath Tagore: Envisioning Humanistic Education at Santiniketan (1902-1922)," in *International Journal on Humanistic Ideology*, Vol. 3 No. 2, Autumn – Winter 2010, p. 38. This was a special issue on "The International Tagore," edited by Mihaela Gligor. In her paper, Kathleen M. O'Connell offers a detailed analysis of Tagore's school from Shantiniketan.

b) To bring into more intimate relation with one another through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity.
c) To approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia.
d) To seek to realise in a common fellowship of study the meeting of East and West and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres.
e) And with such Ideals in view to provide at Santiniketan a centre of culture where research into the study of the religion, literature, history, science and art of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Zoroastrian, Islamic, Sikh, Christian and other civilizations may be pursued along with the culture of the West, with that simplicity of externals which is necessary for true spiritual realisation, in amity, good-fellowship and co-operation between the thinkers and scholars of both Eastern and Western countries, free from all antagonisms of race, nationality, creed or caste and in the name of the One Supreme Being who is Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam."[15]

It was there, in Shantiniketan, where young Mircea Eliade met Tagore and it was one of those encounters that changed his life. Years after, when Eliade was living in Paris and was, already, a world recognized historian of religions, he declared in an interview:

"I was fortunate to be received several times by Tagore at Shantiniketan. I took a lot of notes after our conversations. [...] I admired at Tagore his effort to combine the qualities, the virtues, all the possibilities of the human being. He was not only an excellent poet, an excellent composer [...], a great musician, a good novelist, a master in conversation [...]. His life itself had a certain specific quality. [...] It was a rich and complete life,

[15] *Visva-Bharati Prospectus*, 1922, p. i.

open to India and the world. [...] He was passionate about the school he had founded in Shantiniketan."[16]

Tagore not only implemented a new educational system, but he managed to use it and played an important role in the social, political and cultural movements of India of those times. Rabindranath Tagore's school eventually became a platform for transforming India.

A poet, short-story writer, song composer, playwright, essayist, an actor, a philosopher, painter, a social reformer, an educationist, and a humanist, Tagore was unique among the Nobel laureates.

"In his philosophy of life, the best of the east and the west is reconciled into a harmonious whole enriching the quality and substance of life which he always saw steady and saw it whole."[17]

Rabindranath Tagore's universe is unchanged. Bengalis, and not only, respect his legacy. The tribute to Tagore is an endless ritual, and the house of Tagore still is at the forefront in Bengal's cultural life.

"The aesthetic rhythm that binds the works of Tagore marking a distinctive tradition in the Bengali literary imagination is the result of a confluence of associations from both the home and the world."[18]

For today's Bengalis, this eternal reverence is a deep experience, an intimate connection, over time, with the one who opened their eyes and minds, planted in their souls the desire for knowledge, and showed them the way to the sensitivity that lay within each of them.

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[16] Mircea Eliade, *Încercarea labirintului*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 1990, pp. 50-51.
[17] Monali Chatterjee, "The Delineation of the Female Subject in Rabindranath Tagore's Novel *Farewell, My Friend,*" in Debashish Banerji (Ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore in the 21st Century. Theoretical Renewals*, op. cit., p. 146.
[18] Anuradha Ghosh, "Tagore and the Northeast: Dialectics of Human Intellection and the Nature of Aesthetic Reflection," in Debashish Banerji (Ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore in the 21st Century. Theoretical Renewals*, op. cit., p. 189.

In his recently published memoirs, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, himself a result of Shantiniketan School, remembers details from his childhood, when tragic news about Rabindranath's death arrived:

> "Rabindranath Tagore died in August 1941. I was then still at St Gregory's School in Dhaka. The headmaster gave us the tragic news in a hastily called school assembly, and declared a suspension of teaching for the day. As I went home, I wondered why the likeable bearded man I knew as a family friend, and who I went to see with my grandparents or my mother whenever I was in Santiniketan, was so important for the world. I knew that Rabindranath was a much admired poet (I could even recite a few of his poems), but it was not obvious to me why he was thought to be so momentous a person. I was then seven, and had no idea how radically Tagore would influence my thinking in years to come. […]
> I too was deeply saddened by Rabindranath's death, especially as its implications sank in. I liked him greatly as a benign elderly person who seemed to enjoy talking with me, but I was also full of curiosity about what I was now being told about the importance of his ideas and the power of his creativity. I became determined to learn more about the much-admired man to whom I had not paid as much attention as I felt I should have done. My dedicated pursuit of Tagore's thoughts thus began just after his death and has given me a lifetime of rewarding engagement."[19]

Amartya Sen had a strong connection to Shantiniketan and Rabindranath Tagore, as his maternal grandfather, Kshiti Mohan Sen, the eminent Sanskritist and scholar of ancient and medieval India, served as the second Vice Chancellor of Visva Bharati University from 1953 to 1954. Amartya Sen returns to Shantiniketan quite often and

[19] Amartya Sen, *Home in the World. A Memoir*, Penguin Random House, first published by Allen Lane, 2021, pp. 49-50.

many of his works mention Rabindranath Tagore's oeuvre and his intellectual legacy.

The house of Tagore is closely linked with the growth of Bengali culture, but also with some important events from India's history. Rabindranath Tagore's family had a major role in promoting cultural values:

> "The particular history of Rabindranath's family points to the processes of synthesis and the change that characterizes the history of India and explains his own choices."[20]

In Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore is seen as a god. Bengalis are extremely proud of his heritage, and the fact that two countries have chosen his poems as their national anthems: India, with *Jana Gana Mana*, and Bangladesh, with *Āmār Shōnār Bānglā*. So proud than some of them declare:

> "We freely admire Tagore – Thākur, in Bānglā. [...] We know him in Bānglā, the language of his love, hope, and despair."[21]
> "Tagore gave us something to be proud of, a humanity that we Bengalis so dearly cherish."[22]

Cherished and loved in his homeland, for many of us Rabindranath Tagore is a role model. Today, in 2021, at 160 years after his birth, and 80 years after his death, Rabindranath Tagore's genius is celebrated everywhere across the globe. We are all fortunate to be able to read his writings and take his legacy further.

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[20] Nita Kumar, "The Educational Efforts of Rabindranath Tagore," op. cit., p. 132.
[21] Sudeep Chakravarti, *The Bengalis. A Portrait of a Community*, New Delhi, Aleph Book Company, 2017, p. 135.
[22] Ibidem, p. 137.

Rabindranath Tagore (7 May 1861 - 7 August 1941)

The Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913

Photo from the Nobel Foundation Archive
https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1913/tagore/facts/

Nobel Prize motivation: “because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West.”

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Bengal's Folk Music and Rabindranath's Songs: Influence and Revelation

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Abstract: Folk music and folk culture of Bengal had a profound effect on Rabindranath's musical essence. The various forms of folklore, the beauty of its rhyme and literary value influenced the poet's literary pursuits in many ways. Rabindranath brought a new form by breaking and re-modelling the structure of various folk-melodies and by mixing those with his self-created tunes. This paper will try to examine the influence of folk music in *Rabindra Sangeet* and will try to trace the journey of Rabindranath's perception of the same.

Keywords: Folk-music, Provincial rural melodies, *Rabindra Sangeet*, Adaptation, Mixing.

Rabindranath Tagore was a poet and orator. From an early age, Rabindranath had a very clear idea of the nature of Indian music. As he was nurtured in the climate of classical music, he noticed that successful music could not be composed without proper melody. According to him:

> "The singers place the music on the unconscious mass, I want to bring it to life, they sit down to bring out the melody, but I connect the melody to express the meaning of the words properly."[1]

[1] Rani Chanda, *Aalapchari Rabindranath*, Visva Bharati Publication, 1905, p. 120.

This is why he set out to open the door to new possibilities of music in the place of lifeless court-music – composing songs, which are truly unique in nature, one by one. But he did not only stop there, rather he started mixing ragas to establish life in the tunes, indulging in a revolutionary experiment; and with the touch of his extraordinary genius, they became an eternal treasure. At the same time, he did not neglect the various rural tunes of Bengal, his *Rabindra Sangeet* included the essence of *Baul*, *Kirtana* and much more from the heart of Bengal itself. Moreover, not only did he successfully compose his own songs by applying melodies of different provincial music, but his songs also amalgamated different melodies of western music, that came hand in hand with the Indian ones.

The development of the composer Rabindranath and of his music took place at several stages – the characteristics of the different melodies were not so evident in most of the songs, created during his adolescent period. In the second phase, his songs got a new momentum with the combination of western tunes, different ragas and *Baul* tunes from Bengal. It is at this stage that the prelude to *Gitanjali* can be seen in the songs of the *Naivedya*. Besides, he also experimented with new rhythms like *Navtaal*, *Ekadashi* etc. during this period.

Then the bold and strong melodies of *Swadeshi* songs came. Songs influenced by the tunes from *Kirtana* also came into existence at this time. And in the third stage, there is a wonderful variety in the melody of the songs, composed for the dance-dramas like *Shyama*, *Chandalika*, *Shaapmochan* and *Chitrangada*. In this way, very consciously, Rabindranath instilled a new momentum in music.

The richness of Bengali folk music is unquestionable. Variety can be seen in its tunes, as well as variety lies in the words and in the Bhava. Folk music is a means of expressing the happiness and sorrows

of the common people, spirituality, social rituals, festivals and all humanistic appeals. Intense consciousness of the 'folk' reflects through folklore. Therefore, it is conceivable that folk music will have a profound effect on Rabindranath's essence. The various forms of folklore, the beauty of its rhyme and literary value influenced the poet's literary pursuits in many ways.

In this context, Arun Kumar Basu wrote in his book *Bangla Kavya Sangeet O Rabindra Sangeet*:

> "From the beginning of the poet's life till the last age, Bengali folk literature and folk culture were manifested with a unique glory and significance in Rabindranath's mind and consciousness."[2]

It is known from Rabindranath's own words that he was particularly attracted by the variety of ideas, language, melodies and subject-matters of folk music. He says himself:

> "Just as many tiny and big rivers spread their nets in the courtyards of Bengal, so did the streams of music flow in different streams. Yatra, Panchali, Kathakata, Kabir-gaan, Kirtana and so much more resounded all over the country; I don't know if there is any other country with so much diversity in folk music."[3]

However, among the innumerable variations of folk music, the influence of *Baul*, Kirtana, Ramprasadi, Saari etc. can be seen quite prominently in *Rabindra Sangeet*. Of these, *Baul* songs were the ones that overwhelmed the poet's mind the most. He had to go to Shilaidaha area more than once for zamindari work and during this time; he came in contact with several *Baul* songs. As a result, the influence of *Baul* in

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[2] Arun Kumar Basu, *Bangla Kavya-Sangeet O Rabindra Sangeet*, Dey's Publishing, 1978, p. 728.
[3] Rani Chanda, *Aalapchari Rabindranath*, Visva Bharati Publication, 1905, p. 122.

his numerous songs can be seen quite noticably. Rabindranath himself did not hesitate to acknowledge this effect in an unequivocal voice. In his words:

> "Those who have read my writings know that I have expressed my affection for *Baul* verses in many writings. When I was in Shilaidaha, I always met and conversed with the *Baul* team. In many of my songs, I have adopted various melodies from the *Bauls* and in many songs, *Baul* melodies have merged with other melodies, knowingly or unknowingly. From this it can be easily understood that the melodies and words of *Baul* have spontaneously merged in my mind at some point."[4]

The word "Sahoj", widely used by the *Bauls*, is used repeatedly by Rabindranath in his songs as well; Songs like *Sahoj Hobi, Sahoj Hobi,* or *Ja Peyecchi Prothom Dine* etc. are noteworthy in this context. He was able to capture and realise the beauty in Lalon Fakir's various *Baul* songs. On the one hand, as he was fascinated by its natural and simple art-sense, the inner-thought of these songs attracted him in particular. However, he did not imitate the melodies of any *Baul* song completely. In almost every song, he efficiently mixed other tunes with some of the *Baul* tunes and created something unique.

Rabindranath's song *Amar Sonar Bangla, Ami Tomay Bhalobasi,* which has won the hearts of both the Bengals, is based on the melody of the *Baul* song: *Ami Kothay Pabo Taare, Amar Moner Manush Je Re.* In the same way, songs like *Jodi Tor Daak Sune Keu Na Ashey* or *Ebar Tor Mora Gangey* are also influenced by *Baul* tunes such as *Harinam Diye Jagat Matale*, *Man-Majhi, Shamaal Shamaal Dublo Tori* etc. Also, the song *Amar Praaner Majhe Shudha Achey* been composed by

[4] Ibidem, p. 129.

the imitation of popular *Baul* song of Burdwan district: *Ma Yashoda, Tor Chele Ghore Jaay Ki.*

Like *Baul*, Rabindranath was also greatly influenced by *Kirtana* songs. The works of several Vaishnava poets like Vidyapati, Chandidas, Gyanadas, Govindadas and many others had immensely influenced Rabindranath and the effect can be observed in his compositions of *Vanusingh'er Padaavali.* He composed 22 verses under the pseudonym Vanusingh, which was mainly inspired by Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda.*

Rabindranath brought a new form by breaking and re-modelling the structure of *Kirtana* verses. He has mixed the melody of *Kirtana* in many songs; such as: *Amar Mallika-boney, Na Chahile Jare Pawa Jay, Majhe Majhe Tobo Dekha Pai, Shukhey Achi, Shukhey Achi, Shokha Apon Mone* etc.

The songs that attracted Rabindranath right after the *Baul* and *Kirtana* songs were the devotional music, composed and tuned by Ramprasad Sen. Rabindranath composed many songs in these simple and authentic Bengali melodies; such as: *Ami Sudhu Roinu Baki, Dekhbo ke tor kache ashey, Priye Tomar Dhenki Hole* etc.

Saari-Gaan or Saari-songs are one of the most popular folk songs in East Bengal. The boatmen while rowing the boat sing the Saari-songs together. Rabindranath did not totally imitate the melodies of the Saari-songs, rather just like *Baul-Kirtana*, he gave it a new form with efficiency. Songs like *Aaj Dhaaner Khetey,* or *Ami Maarer Sagor Paari Debo* etc. are composed with an impression taken from the Saari songs. The number of Rabindranath's songs with the combinations of multiple melodies is more than the usage of just a single melody, collected from folk music. In this regard, eminent *Rabindra Sangeet* artist Suchitra Mitra remarked:

> "When the genre of Bengali music was especially tied to the heights of ragas, the composer Rabindranath's exuberance became overwhelmed with the recognition of neglected folk music. Rabindranath used the immense richness of the musical variety of rural Bengal and the melodies of folk music in his various songs."[5]

Just as he has combined *Kirtana* with *Baul* melody on one side, he has also mixed Saari and Vatiali on the other. In that sense, each of the *Rabindra Sangeet* influenced by folk music is therefore bright and distinctive in its own right.

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[5] Suchitra Mitra, *Rabindra Sangeet Jigyasa*, Nabapatra Publication, 1983, p. 18.

The import of Hindi popular films in Communist Romania. Brief radiography of the context

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Abstract: During the Communist period, Romania encountered an interesting phenomenon, specific for several Socialist countries: the import of Indian (mostly Hindi) films – a visual and musical treat for the Romanian audience. Their appeal can be analysed in numerous ways: Hindi films were special for their look into foreign places, for their musical quality, for their escapism, for their appeal to the Roma community. Taking into consideration the history of the India-Romania intersection, the import of Indian films provided a premiere: for the first time, Indian cultural objects were accessible for a larger number of people, because of cinema's quality to address the masses.

Keywords: Bollywood, Hindi films, import, hippie community, Communism, popular cinema.

The import of Indian films on the Romanian film market was a consequence of both the evolution of cinema, the screening's techniques, distribution tactics and globalisation that occurred at the end of the XX century and the beginning of the XXI century. Before this global process, the Romanian space has got in contact, in the previous centuries, with diverse South-Asian sources and influences, mostly through different artists' opera. The Indian films democratised the access to Indian culture, rites, languages, way of being, for cinema

being the cheapest entertainment and the one that didn't need a specific level of education – moving images, along with the right subtitles, could provide direct and highly effective communication between the spectators and the screened characters and situations. The Indian films were highly popular, their songs were memorised by heart and provided a unique kind of entertainment for Romanian citizens.

In Europe, the knowledge and the exploration of what has been named by the intellectual European elite as Orient was constantly an interest, either for political motives, commercial or military ones. India began to figure on the map of the European expansion only at the middle of the 2nd millennium, some hundreds of years later than the European interest for the Hebraic, Persian, Sirian or Egyptian culture and civilization. In the same period when the English forces began to be more dominant in the Indian subcontinent (XVII-XVIII centuries), in the erudite groups located in West Europe, the Oriental Renaissance was flourishing, as Edqar Quinet named it (according to Edward W. Said.[1]) The concept was later developed by Raymond Schwab in *La renaissance orientale.* More specifically, in the XVIII and XIX centuries, a multitude of translations and manuscripts of Oriental studies and texts (including texts in Sanskrit) penetrated the European countries. The entire culture of the zone became accessible in the light of the territorial conquests in Asia and Africa, executed on behalf of Europe's expansion.

It is interesting to observe the mutations that appear in those centuries's literature, as a consequence of writers and intellectuals studying written sources from the East. Edward W. Said, discussing the research of Quinet and Schwab, notes

[1] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1979, p. 42.

> "there was the virtual epidemic of Orientalia affecting every major poet, essayist, and philosopher of the period. Schwab's notion is that «Oriental» identifies an amateur or professional enthusiasm for everything Asiatic, which was wonderfully synonymous with the exotic, the mysterious, the profound, the seminal."[2]

Said considers that naissance of romanticism was provoked by the context of oriental mythology and spirituality being translated into European languages. Romanticism, for example, has manifested in literature through the cancellation of harmony rules imposed by classicism, and, instead, proposed the cultivation of subjectivity, investigation into the human past, some themes such as life, death, cosmic space, exotism, isolation in nature. Amita Bhose, Mihai Eminescu's translator in Bengali, is the author of articles and studies in the Romanian language that aim to trace the symbols' origins and dramatic details from a poem such as *Luceafărul* in antical Indian mythology. Bhose considers that many thematical references of Eminescu' have their genesis in legends and myths about the creation of the Universe, such as in *Mahābhārata* and Vedic texts such as *Ṛgveda* and the *Sāṃkhya* philosophical system. The association is not exaggerated, having into consideration that Eminescu was interested in the Sanskrit language and literature and even undertook the translation of Franz Bopp's[3] works while studying Sanskrit in Vienna.

In Eminescu's company, other Romanian artists such as Lucian Blaga, Constantin Brâncuşi and Mircea Eliade had been influenced by Indian culture and spirituality, as a consequence of a

[2] Ibidem, p. 51.
[3] Amita Bhose, *Maree indiană. Interferenţe culturale indo-române*, Mihai Dascal (Editor), Bucharest, 1998, p. 146.

"historical phenomenon such as the one of grand subcontinent culture's outpouring outside its geographical borders."[4]

Lucian Blaga even asks himself in an issue of *Saeculum* magazine:

"[w]hy the Indian philosophy has exercised an obvious attraction to one of the most eminent Romanian spirits?"[5]

Yet, their artistic opera (Eliade being an exception) had not always been analysed in relation to their South-Asian philosophical influence. The absorption of this inspiration had been subtle and the roots have not been investigated enough, maybe because of the rarity with which the Romanian academics were interested in South-Asian studies (Sergiu Al-George being the most known). Returning to Blaga's interrogation, it is symptomatic how the Orientalist studies have been accessible just for the educated classes, the ones who could read translated texts in other languages of European circulation, such as English, French, German or Italian.

These examples are meant to better contextualize the moment of Indian commercial film in Communist Romania, of the Oriental baptism created by this import, that debuted in the Romanian cinemas following World War II and as a consequence of the settlement of Communist power – a period that does not coincide with the one of activity in Romania for the above-mentioned authors. Even though these cultural antecedents do not justify the impact of Indian popular films, they may have exercised a national conception (an Orientalist one) of the Indian space and mentality. These traits can be traced even in the titles of Mircea Eliade's works: *Maitreyi* (novel named after a

[4] Sergiu Al-George, *Arhaic și universul. India în conștiința culturală românească*, Bucharest, Eminescu, 1981, p. 8.
[5] Ibidem, p. 7.

woman's name, published in 1933), *Asian Alchemy / Alchemia asiatică* (published in 1935), *Nights at Serampore / Nopți la Serampore* (published in 1940), *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom / Yoga. Nemurire și libertate* (published in 1954) – a blend of sensuality and mystery, myth and fantasy, several terms closed to Schwab's perspectives, as to how they were resumed by Said.

In the same period when Hindi films were a public attraction in cinemas, a hippie subculture crystallized in some Romanian cities – it was a variant of North-American hippie movement, a massive counterculture, very influential on socio-political grounds. It is well-known that hippie philosophy has its roots in the Hindu philosophy.

For Alexandru Matei,[6] the hippie expansion in Romania is closely related to the events of the year 1968 (the protests in France in the West and the Prague Spring in the East). The protests in May and August 1968 fought for a social-political reconfiguration of the system, either democrat or authoritarian. Nicolae Ceaușescu was in opposition with USSR, supporting Czechoslovakia's aim to implement "a Communism with a human face," yet, meanwhile, the Romanian citizens that lived an alternative lifestyle were suppressed. The ideal image was the one of the working man and the hippies were criticised exactly for their poor productivity and their low social contribution. Matei nuances a wider perspective on how Romanian hippies were seen:

> "the Romanian hippie is a parasite – he does not work, does not earn – dirty, semidoct (Yoga amateur, of which he does not have a clear idea)."[7]

[6] Alexandru Matei, "Mai 1968 în România: a fost sau n-a fost? (I)", https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/mai-1968-in-romania-a-fost-sau-n-a-fost-i/, published on 25th of June 2018, accessed on 15th March of 2021.
[7] Ibidem.

Inside the hippie community in Romania, as to how Matei mentions, there was an interest in Yoga. This practice, along with meditation, was initially accepted in the liberalisation period (1965-1971). Books about Yoga were published and in 1970, a Yoga Commission, belonging to the Health Ministery, was initiated. These practices were suppressed the next decade, raising turbulent conflicts in those times. In 1982, Romania banned Yoga, becoming the only country in the world that prohibited this activity. Afterwards,

> "in 1982 and 1983, through some decisions of the Culture Council, some works about Yoga are removed from libraries."[8]

A testimonial of a Yoga practitioner, Nicolae Catrina, extracted from the CNSAS[9] files, places in a more detailed manner the perspective of the State against the Oriental interests of some of its citizens:

> "They were so stubborn to stop our access to this form of culture, of essential knowledge, so much that they were also stopping other inoffensive things. For example, how I learned Sanskrit. I studied for a year with Amita Bhose, she was teaching an optional class at University. When we began to attend the classes, things changed. Because there were too many people interested, too many were participating. What have they said? Whoops! Look, the mystics are learning Sanskrit! Why do they need it? It is just an example of how stupid the secret police was in preventing the devitations from the Communist doctrine […] preventing the youngsters not to be by any chance corrupted by the decadent mystic currents."[10]

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[8] Final Report presented by Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (in Romanian: Raportul Final întocmit de membrii Comisiei Prezidenţiale pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România), Bucharest, 2006, p. 504.
[9] National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives.
[10] Gabriel Andreescu, *Reprimarea mișcării yoga în anii '80*, Iași, Polirom, 2008, pp. 26-27.

The hippie community in Romania was persecuted in the same years in which the Romanian public could have seen characters such as Sunita (Zeenat Aman), in *Yaadon Ki Baaraat* (dir. Nasir Hussain, 1973) or Somna (Sadhana) in *Ek Phool Do Mali* (dir. Devendra Goel, 1969) praying to Hindu Gods in Hindu temples. Such sequences were probably considered inoffensive, but nowadays they raise questions regarding how the repressive apparatus worked: some practices could have been seen, yet never emulated by the audience. It deserves to be mentioned that the praying sequences did not have the spiritual charge that the secret police could have identified in Romanian yogis' practice. Aman even enters the temple with a low neckline and she is closing some of the blouse's buttons while she is praying.

The Indo-Romanian history of intersections encompasses moments of philosophical inspiration of some well-known Romanian authors and also a hippie movement, which was formed not only of eminent Romanian spirits. Simultaneously with the distribution of Hindi films in Romania, the hippie groups were trying to democratise the access towards spiritual Eastern sources, being thereafter persecuted. The difference between the film's content and the content of Eliade's work, for example, lies in the fact that the films did not put an accent on spiritual beliefs or mystic emancipation. These were always portrayed as some commodified forms of religious behaviour and never questioned – this was happening only in Parallel Cinema, in a film such as *Devi* (dir. Satyajit Ray, 1960), for exemple. If Sunita in *Yaadon Ki Baaraat* is not characterised as spiritually educated and is praying only in cut-off times, in *Devi*, Umaprasad (Soumitra Chatterjee) confronts his father-in-law (Chabi Biswas) with a logical and rhetorical hypothesis to convince him that his daughter (Sharmila Tagore) is not the reincarnation of Kālī goddess – and this is even the plot of the film.

In comparison with Eliade or the Yoga manuals, the Hindi popular cinema is inoffensive in its potential to train the audience to undertake spiritual endeavours or threatening analyses of the system's discourse.

Despite this rather shallow perspective on the popular films, it should not be neglected the fact that once these films have appeared in Romania, a new connection with the Indian space and culture emerged. The access to Hindi culture and language changed. The knowledge of a foreign language was not mandatory for the information to be deciphered, the access was not restricted by the spectators' level of education and taking part in screenings did not provoke stigmatisation, marginalisation or even criminalisation (as in the case of Yoga practice). The new fascination for India can be justified by the new cultural consumption practices of the masses (and the persistent need for entertainment in these difficult and turbulent times), by the unique and syncretic structure of commercial Hindi films and by the socio-political context of the decades following World War II.

For the first time, a more solid rapport between the two geographic spaces (Romania and India) is enhanced, for the Romanian public's solid presence at the Indian films' screenings and TV broadcasts ["concerning us, the most seen films are either the Romanian ones or the Indian melodramas;"[11] "among the films that have been broadcast on TV the biggest audience of the decade was for *Vandana*[12] (in 1976): 92% of the total potential public."[13]] In this case as well,

> "[c]inema thus became the epistemological mediator between the cultural space of the Western spectator and that of the cultures represented on the

[11] Ștefana Steriade, Pavel Câmpeanu, *Oamenii și filmul. O privire sociologică asupra spectatorului de film*, Bucharest, Meridiane, 1985, p. 12.
[12] *Aradhana* (original title).
[13] Ibidem, p. 21.

> screen, linking separate spaces and figurally separate temporalities in a single moment of exposure,"[14]

an aspect that arises diverse relations of power between the actors and the public. These relations are less vigorous in the written space, of literature, travel journals and touristic guides, where the reader does not receive a visual and dynamic representation (as in the case of cinema) but a series of attributes that help the reader to form an own image of what is being read. Thus, for the first time, the Roma community, for example, could have had the possibility to identify in the details of the screen, such as the physiognomy of some character or different rites – a unique chance in the context where the Roma minority was

> "a segment of the Romanian population deliberately 'invisibilised' by the allegedly egalitarian communist society."[15]

Before World War II, Indian films have not been bought and screened in Western countries. The situation changed once India gained Independence, yet in a slow rhythm. From 1947 to 1962, India had produced a number of "4500 feature films, from which just 90 or 100 were seen in the West (a 2% percentage)."[16] Romania figures as a main Socialist country which had imported Indian films. Between 1956-1962, India receives from Romania 52 000 Indian rupees (USSR gives 909 000, Poland 143 000, Hungary 38 000 and Bulgaria 18 000). The first reference of an Indian film premiere in Romanian cinemas

[14] Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 93.
[15] Adina Brădeanu, Rosie Thomas, "Indian Summer, Romanian Winter", *South Asian Popular Culture*, 2006, 4:2, accessed on 17th November 2020: https://www.academia.edu/2073347/Indian_Summer_Romanian_Winter.
[16] Jerzy Toeplitz, *Close-Up: The Indian Film Scene* (1970, 3rd edition), p. 84.

nominalises the year 1957, when the premiere of *Awaara* (dir. Raj Kapoor, 1951) took place – the mention belongs to Adina Darian.[17]

Beginning with 1969 and until 1980, a number of 14 films were imported, according to some official governmental files such as *Anuarul Cinematografic,*[18] edited by the Romanian Film Archive (ANF). In addition to the films mentioned in *Anuarul Cinematografic*, other documents, named *Anul Cinematografic,*[19] provides the names of other 24 feature films screened and broadcasted in Romania. In total, taking into consideration just the archives from ANF, it can be stated that between 1960-1979, almost 53 Indian feature films were imported. Moreover, taking into consideration the years between 1960 and after 1979, the Indian films were certainly way numerous, but the precarious national archiving process affected proper research into the exact number. Most of the films were commercial ones, shot in Bombay, during different decades of the evolution of Hindi cinema. The most famous of them were *Awaara*, *Ek Phool Do Mali*, *Yaadon Ki Baaraat*, *Aradhana*, *Haathi Mere Saathi* (dir. M. A. Thirumugam, 1971), *Mother India* (dir. Mehboob Khan, 1957).

[17] Adina Darian, *Lumea indiană și filmele ei*, Bucharest, Meridiane, 1990, p. 22.
[18] Cinematographic Yearbook (in English translation).
[19] Cinematographic Year (in English translation).

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Diana Smeu has studied Screenwriting and Films Studies at UNATC (University of Theatre and Film "I.L. Caragiale") Bucharest, graduating with a Bachelor thesis on the import and reception of Hindi films in Communist Romania. She had published film reviews in several Romanian and international outlets. Her activity ranges from film criticism to film festivals' organizing.

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THE JOURNAL'S INTERVIEWS

Anuradha Roy
in conversation with Mihaela Gligor

Anuradha Roy is the author of *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008), *The Folded Earth* (2011), *Sleeping on Jupiter* (2015) and *All the Lives We Never Lived* (2018). *Sleeping on Jupiter* won the DSC Prize for Fiction 2016 and was long-listed for the Man Booker Prize 2015. *All the Lives We Never Lived* won the Tata Book of the Year Award for Fiction 2018, and was longlisted for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction 2018. It was also shortlisted for the International Dublin Literary Award 2020. Her new novel, *The Earthspinner*, was published by Mountain Leopard Press in September 2021.

Mihaela Gligor: A few days ago I started to read your novel, *All the Lives We Never Lived*, and found myself immersed in the story for so many reasons. It seemed that *my whole India* is present in your novel. I especially liked the fact that you were merging fiction and non-fiction and found a special connection between worlds that seem distant, but yet so close to each other. What was the inception point of your novel? Where do you find your inspiration? I believe you are very brave to merge fiction and non-fiction and the result is remarkable.

Anuradha Roy: As I approach the end of writing a book, I honestly feel as if I might never write another one and I start thinking

maybe I'll become a fulltime potter or dog-slave (those are my other possible occupations). But at some point, often quite unobtrusively, some sort of image or a character starts nibbling at the edges of my consciousness and I find I am thinking of that more and more, and there comes the need to find a world for it.

All the Lives We Never Lived started with the idea of a boy who can enter pictures and live in their world – through his imagination. I wrote quite a few false starts with this boy and nothing seemed right. Then came my second visit for Bali, for the Ubud Writers Festival and a whole world slowly started taking shape at a museum there, looking at the paintings of Walter Spies. I discovered Tagore had met Spies during his travels; that Beryl de Zoete, who wrote a book with Spies, had come to India to write on dance. This was how I decided to merge fact and fiction, as you say a somewhat rash move, but I knew by then that my fictional characters would be living in a historical context – and their context had to be including people who had actually lived. Bringing them together felt a natural thing.

Mihaela Gligor: Your book explores the loss, memory, conflict, war and freedom of India itself. Were all these inspired by your own feelings?

Anuradha Roy: Right now, things feel very difficult and troubling here. Both in the natural and political realms, (which are interconnected) many of us feel devastated that we have lost the country we knew. I did not start out writing this book to explore that kind of loss, but as the characters and themes developed, it was clear that the historical period I was writing about had clear and startling parallels with the present. As I found out more about Spies, Tagore and de Zoete, who lived during a fraught historical period, it felt as if that past and my present were floating in and out of each other. Things like

nationalism were deeply and passionately debated during the movement for India's freedom from colonial rule and many of Tagore's predictions about toxic nationalism are coming true not only in India but elsewhere in the world.

Mihaela Gligor: You mention Maitreyi Devi's novel, *Na Hanyate*. I must confess that her story, as told by Mircea Eliade, changed my life. I was in high school when I first read *Maitreyi* (*Bengal night*), the novel written by Eliade after his returning from India. Immediately after that I decided to study Philosophy, as Mircea Eliade did, hoping that one day I could see India. After years, when I first came to India and met her family, I realised that even the craziest dream may become real. Since then (2007), India has a special place in my life. How reading *Na Hanyate* changed your perception on Indian women and Indian way of life? Is Maitreyi a model for you? Should she be taken as a model for young people in our times? I know, now, so many things about her and I think she is an incredible woman, so strong and polyvalent. What is your opinion on her, both as a woman and as a writer?

Anuradha Roy: *Na Hanyate* has been a late life discovery for me even though it is such a well-known book in Bengali. It is strikingly modern. Its mode of narration, the direct, unashamed depiction of female desire, the dissection of her own inner state by the narrator, the searching, honest, unsparing depiction of Indian society and patriarchy, the absolute clarity with which the hypocrisy of family life is exposed – all this makes it a very contemporary novel.

That it is 'autofiction' held a different kind of appeal for me. Maitreyi Devi was my aunt, as her husband was my father's first cousin, which as you know from your connection with India, is considered a close relationship here. Her book came out in the 1970s when I was a child and immediately became more or less contraband in

our large, conservative joint family in Calcutta. This is why I came to it so late, reading it only when I was casting around in my research for memoirs and fiction from the 1930s. And once I read it, her Amrita and my Gayatri seemed to be deeply connected. The heroine of *Na Hanyate* is an extraordinarily courageous woman who questions everything around her and lives unconventionally even after she is married. Knowing the kind of background Maitreyi Debi came from – conservative Bengali elite – I am sure even writing about such a fictional character was difficult – especially as most people knew it was an autobiographical novel. Most of her contemporaries, for example my other aunts her age, would not have dreamed of writing such a book or living such a life.

> **Mihaela Gligor**: I know that many Bengali writers are famous all over the world and their novels are very much appreciated. I also believe there is something special about Bengal, Calcutta, especially, which is a city with an old tradition in arts and humanities. How growing up with such a legacy influenced you?

Anuradha Roy: I have not actually grown up in Calcutta nor had an especially Bengali upbringing. Very early in life, because of my father's work, we began to move and the bulk of my nomadic childhood was spent in south India, in Hyderabad, where I went to a Muslim girls' school. That is still the place I feel more deeply tied to in terms of childhood and growing up. I came back to Calcutta for college and I came to Bengal's literature very late, and literally taught myself again to read Bengali when I was in my thirties because I knew I was missing out on a rich literature I wanted to read in its original language.

I have a curious feeling of being both an outsider and an insider where Bengali writing is concerned. Emotionally and intellectually I will never feel connected in the way most educated Bengalis do, yet a

part of me does belong there very deeply. So I have the admiration of an outsider as well as the pride of an insider for the passion most Bengalis have for writing and the arts. My own writing however, is influenced both by the Bengali literature I read and by writers from all over the world whom I read in English or in translation. I had read Mircea Eliade's *La Nuit Bengali* in English long before I read *Na Hanyate* for example!

> **Mihaela Gligor**: Anything you want to say to our students? Do you have any advice for them? Why do you think reading is important in our times?

Anuradha Roy: I would not presume to give advice to anyone, least of all students – I know from experience that the young experience and invent the world afresh for they and nobody can really tell them about it. I feel badly for the young right now – to think of all they have to deal with. The loss of all this time locked up away when the world is at its most exciting for them; the loss of physical touch; the weight of knowing the planet is being destroyed by climate change. How do seventeen or eighteen year old minds grapple with all of this? Reading would provide perspective, some way of breaking out of confinement at least in their minds, so I hope they carry on reading.

December 10, 2020

Tanya Abraham
in conversation with Cătălina-Ioana Pavel

Tanya Abraham is the curator and director of Kashi Art Gallery in Kochi, Kerala, and the founder of the NGO called The Art Outreach Society. Tanya was born and raised in Fort Kochi, a town of multicultural flavour and antiquity, where her family has been living for the past eight generations. Originally from the region of the famed ancient port of Muziris and born to parents of two different Christian communities, the differences in traditions and religious influences based on history always fascinated her. Tanya Abraham worked as a journalist for the last fifteen years for Indian as well as international publications. An art curator, educator, and writer, she also wrote a book on the history of Fort Kochi. *Eating with History: Ancient Trade-Influenced Cuisines of Kerala* is her second book.

Cătălina-Ioana Pavel: In your book *Eating with History: Ancient Trade-Influenced Cuisines of Kerala*,[1] you take the reader on a culinary journey around Kerala and, at the same time, you bring up your own childhood experience, growing up in a society influenced by multiple cuisines and belonging to parents from two different Christian communities. I know that in Kerala there are different communities of Christians; could you tell us more about their different cuisines and how did you experience the coming together of two different ways of thinking about religion and, implicitly, two different ways of connecting to food?

[1] Tanya Abraham, *Eating with History: Ancient Trade-Influenced Cuisines of Kerala*, Niyogi Books, New Delhi, 2020.

Tanya Abraham: Kerala is a melting pot of cultures and religious influences which translates into a melting pot of cuisines as well. The food trail is extensive. In the past, spice trade brought many communities to the shores of Malabar Coast because pepper was regarded as an asset even more valuable than gold. It was actually called "the black gold." I come from a Christian background but on one side I have Syrian Christian roots and on the other side, Catholic ones.

In the *tharavadu* (ancestral home) where I grew up, my grandmother's *kusinchya* (kitchen) was the epicentre of my world. It was the place that kept the home alive and stirred my imagination through the various foods from different corners of the world that combined with our local food habits. For example, I remember her between stone jars of pickles, the smell of firewood and burning coal, dressed in *chatta* and *mundu*, the traditional attire of a Syrian Christian woman. I remember the pepper roast chicken, a Latin Catholic dish, *the Breudher*, a Dutch bread which is still made in Fort Kochin even after two centuries. In a Kerala kitchen it is never about combining different food cultures, they are already so intertwined that it is hard to find the origins. The marrying of different spices and cooking traditions gave birth to what we call today as Kerala cuisine and food remains even nowadays an expression of our identity, of our cosmopolitan history and culture.

> **Cătălina-Ioana Pavel**: The southern Indian state of Kerala is known to be a melting pot of cultures because of the extensive trade that was going on for centuries. Despite being so diverse, do communities share dishes or are there spices that are used and dishes that are cooked only within one community?

Tanya Abraham: The cultural identities which developed through foreign contact, in spite of the tolerant climate that prevailed, held tightly to identities in the form of rituals, religious practices and

specific food habits. Specific types of food remained closely attached to specific cultures. For examples, Syrian Christians are known for their variety of breads (*appams*): *palappam, neiappam, kaluappam*, etc. Jews would never mix meat and milk and they had their different dishes that would be cooked and eaten only within the community (for example, *Koubbah*, meatballs cooked in a gravy rich with spices and curry leaves, a dish that is eaten during the Festival of Lights). Similarly, Muslims are fond of dishes based on beef while these could never be found in a Hindu household.

Cătălina-Ioana Pavel: There is one quote from your book: "I am unable to separate memories from my writing. I search for the soul of what makes people who they are. I found that food is an expression of identities and histories, of people's families and experiences." What can you tell us about your identity and how did it shape the way you think about food?

Tanya Abraham: I fell in love with flavours in my grandmother's kitchen. My ammama believed the family remained nourished from the fires burning in her kitchen. Her food was largely Latin Catholic. She had an array of cuisines to the large joint family and this is how my interest for new flavours picked. I loved her *pada*, a pickled made of coconut vinegar, red chilli powder and garlic. Then, the steamed *appam* with coconut milk and ripe Kerala banana or her *vindaloo* (a Portuguese-influenced dish); these are dishes that we continue to make at home and are part of our identity, of our memories. Through taste and smell, just like the tasting of the madeleine in Proust's novel, we can instantly travel back in time, to our childhood.

Cătălina-Ioana Pavel: While mentioning your childhood in Kerala, you talked about the inspiration you got from your grandmother. "It made me think of all the women like her, who ran households and brought to life

recipes passed down generations in their kitchen." We can notice that women held an important role in a *tarawad* (ancestral home). How did women exert their authority in the kitchen?

Tanya Abraham: The kitchen is the main artery of a household. Cooking was always like a festival back in my childhood days. My grandmother always reminded me of the importance of wise dining, she taught me to use cutlery and chew my food slowly while she was forming cutlets with one palm, throwing them in hot fat in a continuous rhythm while stirring curry with the other, and simultaneously monitoring the cooking for at least forty people at any given time. Annie Burleigh, my grandmother, was not only a culinary expert, but also a freedom fighter, founder of the Mahila Samajam in Kerala and a municipal councillor. Whilst the men of the household dedicated themselves to business and Indian Independence, she preserved the household, the base for the freedom movements in Cochin for more than half a century, keeping it nourished every day. Women were the ones organizing and conducting feasts and events, their dishes had the power to unite people, to make them come back, to connect and stir new ideas for the future.

Cătălina-Ioana Pavel: What are some innovative and unique cooking methods or food habits that were brought by traders to the shores of Kerala?

Tanya Abraham: One of the many innovations brought by the traders is the *borma*, the oven. Kerala did not have a tradition of baking things. It came with the Dutch who were used to bake their famous bread. That is how *Breudher*, a Dutch bread, can still be found even nowadays in Kochi, where Dutch people resided for some centuries. Another example is the habit of making pickles. Vinegar was never used in our cooking before the Portuguese came. Red chilli, pineapple,

custard apple or tamarinds were also products brought by the Portuguese. Eating habits changed as well. Natives who ate from the banana leaf began using utensils of porcelain and sat on chairs in special dining areas, eating at a table and not on the kitchen floors.

> **Cătălina-Ioana Pavel**: How is religion an identity factor that marked certain food traditions in Kerala? Are there any religious taboos regarding cooking or eating some particular dishes?

Tanya Abraham: Religion did play an important part regarding the cuisines of various communities. For example, Jews never mix milk and meat. Coconut milk was used instead for the cooking. A Jewish recipe found a new flavour by using a local ingredient: coconut milk. Therefore, their original recipes got enriched with local ingredients that could be found only in Kerala and this created a fusion between very different food cultures.

> **Cătălina-Ioana Pavel**: At some point in your book, you are describing the preparations that used to take place for the Christmas period. It was very interesting for me to read about your Ammama's special vanilla ice cream spiced with orange-rind. Could you describe maybe once again the special preparations that used to take place in the kitchen at that time? What were the usual dishes and how did the ingredients change for that occasion?

Tanya Abraham: When Christmas drew near, everything changed in the kitchen, from the ingredients on the shelves to the number of people helping my grandmother. Pork was salted, fresh fruit preserved in sugar syrup. Halwa, cakes, and wines from different fruits were churned out incessantly, wrapped in decorative paper and sent cycling to neighbouring houses. The lawns were decorated with white and blue lights, crockery hired and bearers wore starched white uniforms. Cooking was shifted to the temporary open-air kitchen and a *kokie*

(cook, a derivative from Portuguese) was hired in order to help with the preparations for the big event. The dining table would be filled with delicious dishes like suckling pig, leg of ham or traditional Latin Catholic curries. Ice cream was a rarity in those days, but my grandmother was famous for her own vanilla ice cream spiced with orange rind. Her Christmas parties were always the talk of the town.

Cătălina-Ioana Pavel: Thank you so much!

August 26, 2021

About the interviewer:

After having completed a B.A. in Anthropology and Comparative literature with a thesis on Shiva and Kali, **Cătălina-Ioana Pavel** went on to study Arabic and Hindi at the University of Bucharest. She is now enrolled as a M.A. student at CeMIS (Center for Modern Indian Studies), Göttingen University, Germany. She is mostly interested in the history of Malabar region, spice routes and anything related to the Islamic history in India.

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REVIEWS

Dev Nath Pathak, *In Defence of the Ordinary: Everyday Awakenings*, Bloomsbury Publications, New Delhi, 2021, 249 pp., ISBN: 978-93-90358-09-0.

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> "The ordinary [...] is always at the mercy of everything that can obscure ordinariness." (p. 5)

In our most ordinary thoughts of everything around us, including ourselves, we are ever lost in the puzzle of extraordinariness. No wonder why we ruminate helplessly on every small occurrence of our lives, trying to control everything that happens to us. But to take a step back and ask, do we really ruminate? That's what the author puts us through in this book, suggestively titled *In Defence of the Ordinary*. The tussle with our ever 'becoming' selves doesn't grant the ordinary a fair chance to retain its ordinariness. The ordinary may look like banality of everyday, eating-working-sleeping, and repetition of the same. But there's a rhythm to this cycle of repetition, and no note in a rhythm is ever the same. This taste of variance in the most uncelebrated, mundane rubrics of our lives, from birth to death, is what Pathak picturesquely draws out before us from 'lived' experiences, allowing association to the readers. In a forlorn attempt to mute the

ordinary all of us encounter our vulnerabilities as consumers in every role we play out. Consumption is also a regular need, but I believe in the call for an extravaganza to meet the larger socio-economic and political standards, one relinquishes the beauty of living. As a child, friend, lover, partner, teacher, a parent or even a strange citizen in the neighborhoods, all roles and social negotiations that the author has touched upon, reveal the survival of the personal. This is however under the haze of the norms of public consummation. Avoiding any high-decibel academic hypothesizing and taking no technical measures for proving it, the author walks beyond the dynamics of null and void like any ordinary engagement with the social. Drawing from the epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, to citing snippets from popular parables and poetry, the author surely invites the keen observers of everyday and the habitual researchers to soak in something more plainly delicious.

This book is indeed about the everyday awakenings. But the high handedness of any awakened or trying-to-awaken spirit is surely not in the prescriptions or proscriptions of the text. The awakenings are rather like allegorical engagements with oneself and therefore the other, 'generalized' or 'significant'. The book is divided into four sections, namely, *When There Was Nothing, There Was Something, Cacophony of Celebrations,* and *Thou Shall Be There, Nonetheless.* This kind of schematic arrangement of ideas on life's ordinariness reinvigorates the logic of a grand analytical realism, as seen in Talcott Parsons' unit act, whereby the actor continuously engages and detaches from the demands of social action. However, the author has succinctly made his way past such theoretical finitude and offered some traversing dialogue between different states of ordinariness on the larger canvas of life. To begin with, the very first section draws attention to the embryonic

manifestations of ordinary emotions around birth, parenting, love, anger, trust and nudity. As aptly said, 'when there was nothing', leads to note that 'nothingness' defines the ordinary ways of conduct. The author recalls experiences of babysitting and says,

> "No matter how perfectly you think out everything, you soon detect a snag. You sing the same lullaby more loudly, and it is funnier than before. Babies demand more improvisation than you can do. A new rhythm ought to be invented, some new wording must follow and a novel melody must overcome both, the singing and the listening. When it happens, ordinary creativity engenders mundane aesthetics." (p. 35)

The beauty of growing up together for both, the child and his or her parents, through mutual improvisation is the only way of becoming a not-so-extraordinary duo. It is not so much about being an ideal mother or father, as about rejoicing the chores while being equally unarmed like the ordinary child. Further, Parents with their extraordinary zeal try to construct a childhood that is synonymous with innocence to the extent of appearing ignorant. Unwonted attempts are made to hide every trace of adult sexual love or nudity from the child's purview, as if it doesn't exist, leading to some kind of a make belief for the nascent mind. Pathak rightly puts across his views:

> "We have killed the ordinariness of sexual union of bodies by adding such spectacles to it that even partial nakedness can give nightmares to kids. This should not be taken as advocacy to indulge in private sexual acts in front of the children. It is actually about informal, family-based enculturation on the issues of love, intimacy and even sex." (p. 51)

Having delved into such ordinary activities of copulation and intimate bonding, one is bound to think of the varied emotions encircling them. The author doesn't leave us parched at that too. He has

beautifully hinted at the duality of emotions in any relationship. There is absolute genuineness in evocative expressions of love as in expressions of hatred and anger. The extraordinary supremacy of love over hatred, friendship over animosity, loyalty over unfaithfulness is not how emotions operate in an ordinary parlance. He says:

> "Emotions can seldom endure purity, just like value (vice or virtue) is always in flux. Love is susceptible to doubts, and so is hatred. Both can have almost an uncanny romance, reminiscent of the elegance of mingling darkness and light." (p. 42)

Thus this ordinariness of emotional rigmarole can never be overpowered by any industrious attempts of the market to cast them in neat binaries for extraordinary profits.

The overwhelming expectations of ordering our lives into extraordinary events of celebration is something that often makes the ordinary appear insignificant, thus painful. The author ponders on this very pain in the section *There was Something*, wherein the ordinariness of human bonding is challenged at every turn by the monumental structures of morality and even more by monstrous greed of a liberalized economy. From a man-woman relationship to a teacher-student bonding, all seem to have been idealized to a level of infallibility and it apparently takes one far away from the true ideals that are often co-created in a struggle for togetherness. Thus the author says:

> "Instincts common to humans, animals and may be even in the vegetation around us seem to have acquired extraordinary appearances. Repressed in the regime of morality, the ordinary human instincts have radically overpowering manifestations in the regime of commerce." (p. 88)

The author enables to question, shall one preach against the instinct of an animal or the nonchalant suavity of civilization? One can actually

find lust in both, the innocence of basic instinct and the polished and painted expression of the same. Being lustful is an ordinary expression, be it a one-sided infatuation or a consensual love. Similarly, the author reaches to the repressed corners of our fragilities and tries to point out how the politics of ordering runs over the natural ensemble of things. For instance, our scope for ordinary dialogues, disagreements and departures are now seen as pathologies in our everyday interactions. Let it be that of the kind between the 'guru' (teacher) and 'shishya' (student) or two friends. We have started to expose ourselves so much to the glitz and glamour of a celebrated life that we turn defenseless of our home-grown role models, folklores for festivals and mundane ideas of the divine. Pathak very rightly says, "The aesthetic ordinariness of faith dwindles." (p. 137)

The hunger for disproportionate success in our extraordinarily lives coaxes us to become spectacular performers and even more stunning consumers of the same. From naming our streets after Gandhi or Nehru to capitalizing Gandhian ideas to promote political propagandas, we consciously distance ourselves from the ordinary practices and promises of these thinkers and rolemodels with socially committed roles. Deaths that follow in such orchestrated culture of happiness are indeed alarming. One begins to question the success of such manufactured happiness upon reading and making sense of the ordinary in Pathak's lucid yet critical enquiry. It is truly unraveling of a society where one has to yearn to come to terms with an ordinary death after having lived an equally ordinary life. The author hammers hard on our conscience while observing, "Avoiding, delaying, cheating any sign of death is a super hit business." (p. 233)

Being aware of our mortal lives and its contestation of the ordinary, one ponders how the conscience keepers, the intellectual social

scientists, and the ordinary men or women function. How would they coalesce to dish out an ordinary recipe for living and making sense of the same? It's all commonsensical they say, one just needs to defamiliarise. If C. Wright Mills had asked us to imagine sociologically by unraveling the commonsense understanding, I think it is here that we start questioning the taken-for-granted extraordinariness and bare open the humdrum of routinization. The social thinker and practitioner, both in one frame can garner the methodological acumen of humming and echoing the subjectivities embedded in the ordinary, without always having to frame a technical research question in the field out there. And, I believe, several sections in the book, drawing from Rahim Das (medieval bhakti poet) to Rabindranath Tagore, let open sudden indentation in a tacitly free-flowing mind, thus freeing oneself from the confusion between the taken for granted and the ordinary. However, some anxiety does nudge a reader after putting down the book. How does one deal with the ordeal of clinging on to the ordinary in the face of extraordinary temptations? I believe one can possibly give it several more reading to arrive at plurality of solutions.

About the Author:

Arunima Bhowmick is presently associated with the Department of Sociology, Jadavpur University Kolkata, working on a PhD thesis on *Exploring Adolescence: Revisting extracurricular activities in the urban schools of Kolkata*. She is also teaching Sociological theory, Sociology of Media, Visual Sociology, Urbanization and Religion, Sociology of Education, and Cultural studies at Salesian College, Siliguri, India.

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Namit Arora, *Indians: A Brief History of a Civilization*, Penguin Viking, New Delhi, 2021, 304 pp., ISBN: 978-0670090433.

Mihaela GLIGOR
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I first got in touch with Namit Arora in 2010, when I was translating Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian* into Romanian, and wanted to use Namit's words for a blurb. He was extremely kind and even helped me to understand many unknown (at that point) details about Indian culture. We remained in touch and became friends, and several years later, I received his book, *The Lottery of Birth: On Inherited Social Inequalities* (Three Essays Collective, 2017), a wonderful collection which shares some insights on undisclosed and sensible matters of Indian society, a book that could be used as a moral compass and a guide by the young people in India.

When I read the news about *Indians: A Brief History of a Civilization*, published at the beginning of this year by Penguin Viking, I knew I had to read it and wrote to Namit, asking for a copy. It came shortly, and it is simply amazing!

For someone working, for the last 10 years, on Indian studies as a passion transformed into an almost full time job, books on Indian history, culture, religions and Indian literature are extremely necessary in order to gain knowledge and to keep it up with the evolution of ideas in the field. You have to know as much as possible before sharing the information with your students, and for that you need to read both

clasics and recent books, so that you can have your own point of view and could easily participate in a conversation.

When receiving Namit Arora's *Indians*, I already had a good idea on Indian history, and the incredible transformations this country supported during times. I also read some reviews praising Namit Arora's work, especially because he "researches like a scholar, travels like an adventurer, and tells the story of a civilization like a born storyteller." (Arvind Krishna Mehrotra) I had great expectations and, after reading the book, I'm pleased to say that *Indians* is the most wonderful and amazingly well written history of India I have ever read!

India, with its multiple languages, scripts, religions, cultures, interferences, and confluences, is more like a continent than a country. In his careful selection of themes, Namit Arora manages to shape Indian history into something manageable, into a story that could be told and understood by the most sensible reader. "Inseparable from every story is the storyteller's sensibility, shaped by her politics, identity and culture." (Introduction, p. 3) Yes, Namit Arora's book has a lot of sensibility! It also has a soul. As Peter Gordon wrote for *The Asian Review of Books*, "the title refers to the people rather than the country; the subtitle calls out civilization rather than nation." I believe this apparently random arrangement represents the soul of this volume. Or, as Namit himself writes:

> "In my storytelling, I wish to promote neither pride nor shame in our past, but to increase understanding of the diverse and complex journeys of our ancestors. I see the past as a dynamic interplay of migration, conflict, mixing, coexistence and cooperation led by various existential motives. […] At the end of the day, what will always make a 'better story' of the past is the reader's discernment in the present." (Introduction, pp. 5-6)

Eleven chapters zoom across nearly 5000 years of India's history, from the Bronze Age to the time of the Buddha, Mahavira and the early *Upanishads*; further to fascinating observations of Megasthenes, the Greek Ambassador in Pataliputra or Ashoka's work which transformed Buddhism into a pan-Asian religion. The ideas of Nagarjuna and the journeys of Chinese pilgrims in India, as well as contributions of Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing and the beginnings of Nalanda University are important subjects for Namit Arora. All these are followed by the story of Alberuni, a brilliant scholar who spent thirteen years studying Indian culture, including the amazing Khajuraho caves who later became world famous and are visited by millions every year, even today. The sailings to Malabar Coast bring famous travelers to India, as Marco Polo, and Namit Arora highlights this fascinating encounter too. Many scholars spent important time in India, and Namit tells us the story of François Bernier, a French physician who spent 12 years in India, working at the court of Aurangzeb. The volume ends with Varanasi, the famous city situated on the banks of Ganga, "home to many major and minor faiths," a place deeply rootened into Indians collective mind.

Several themes traverse the various chapters of this volume: one is the rise of caste, a subject on which Arora also insisted in his previous volume. But here, in *Indians*, he agrees that

> "The roots of the Indian caste system almost certainly trace back to the Aryan substrate. Further, patriarchal practices like Sati, too, appear to be a legacy of the Aryan substrate. Sati's earliest noted occurrence in India dates to the fourth century BCE, as recorded by two first-century-BCE writers, Diodorus Siculus and Strabo." (p. 36)

The rise and then almost complete disappearance of Buddhism is an important matter on which Namit Arora insists in his book. The story of

Buddhism appears in several chapters, and it could be told also because the involvement of Chinese monks Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing, who visited India in the 5th to early 7th centuries, and studied Buddhism, at Nalanda, the famous monastery which became a world recognized university. Their stories remained unknown for centuries.

> "This changed only after the travel writings of Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing were discovered and translated by European Indologists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their eyewitness accounts of geography, society, customs, material life and religion greatly expanded our understanding of the Indian past." (p. 76)

The Chinese monks are followed by the early 11th-century Persian traveller Alberuni (al-Biruni). Next famous traveller is Marco Polo. A series of Italians, Persians and Portugueses travellers are on the list of people who wrote about India and its customs, during times. Namit Arora seems particularly interested in the story of François Bernier, who was at the Mughal court for a decade in the mid-17th century. From Bernier we have a vivid description of India of those times:

> "He wrote what is now a rare and insightful portrait of seventeenth-century India, decades before the arrival of European colonizers. […] He expressed fondness and affection for many people and things, but a good part of his account is an indictment of Indian society." (pp. 226-227)

Varanasi, an old city situated on the banks of Ganga, offers an appropriate ending to this book.

> "Varanasi brims with religious mythologies. […] Varanasi's mystique has long attracted foreigners; many have left vivid accounts of the city. It is also associated with famous natives and sojourners like the Buddha, Jain Tirthankaras, Dhanvantari, Sushruta, Patanjali, Sankara, Ramanuja, Kabir,

> Ravidas, Tulsidas, Nanak, Lakshmihai, Annie Besant, Premchand, Malviya and Radhakrishnan." (p. 229)

Besides these famous writers, "Varanasi's reputation for religious pluralism is empirically well-earned too," as Arora writes. (p. 240) "In Hindu lore, anyone who dies and is cremated in Varanasi gains instant moksha." (p. 249) This is, in fact, one well known image, often present in documentaries about Varanasi, or Banaras, sometimes called 'the city of death'. Arora describes the whole process:

> "Chants of 'Ram Naam Sat Hai' reverbetate all day on both burning ghats. The bigger, Manikarnika, hosts fifty to sixty cremations a day, which happen round the clock. […] The funerary process is simple and unadorned. (p. 250)
>
> "Watching the spectacle on the burning ghats from the rooftop, I feel an invigorating calm. […] The greatest wonder, as Yudhisthira says in the *Mahabharata*, is that 'each day death strikes, and we live as though we were immortal'" (p. 256)

This is a true and simple conclusion for a wonderful journey through history of Indians, proud people who shaped the history of ideas, and world religions, and gave some of the most incredible stories of human civilisation.

Among the best things that this book accomplishes is that it drags the reader out of ancient, medieval and modern epochs, and offers him/her a place in the first row, where history is happening just in front of his/her eyes, and stories of the past are alive and full of meaning, even today.

Indians: A Brief History of Civilisation, remarkably written by Namit Arora, is an extensively researched social and cultural history of India, a necessary reading for all those interested in Indian studies. The volume is completed by an extensive Reference list and elaborated

notes, and it also contains a very useful Index. For all these, and so many other reasons, *Indians: A Brief History of Civilisation* is a pleasure to read.

I feel fortunate to be amongst the readers of this remarkable journey, and to visit the sites of India's civilizations. It's a reading journey I heartily recommend!

Ori Z. Soltes (Ed.), *Growing Up Jewish in India. Synagogues, Customs, and Communities from the Bene Israel to the Art of Siona Benjamin,* Niyogi Books, New Delhi, 2021, 320 pp., ISBN: 978-93-89136-81-4.

Mihaela GLIGOR
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India is a land of many faiths and religions. The presence of Jews in different parts of India is attested especially at different port towns, as they were an important part of trading network of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. King Akbar the Great, a Muslim ruler who ruled between 1556 and 1605, threw open the meetings to non-Muslim religious experts, including Hindu pandits, Jain and Christian missionaries, and Parsi priests, or Jewish rabbis. A comparative study of religions convinced Akbar that there was truth in all of them but that no one of them possessed absolute truth.

During the same time, a large number of merchants came to India for trade, and many of them were Jewish. Most of them arrived in Kerala; others found their home in Goa, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Pune, Calcutta or other cities. As Ralphy Jhirad writes in the Foreword of *Growing up Jewish in India*, an amazing collection of writings on Jewish communities in India,

> "The three main Indian Jewish communities – the Bene Israel, Baghdadi and Cochini – are easily remembered as the 'BBC Jews of India'. These

communities are unique in the manner in which they exhibit a most dynamic combination of the Jewish and Indian heritages." (p. 11)

This volume, edited by Ori Z. Soltes, comprises centuries of history and culture, as well as personal feelings and insights from the very heart of Jewish community in India.

"The Jewish story is broad and vast. It begins with a single narrative that branches out and reaches to the four corners of the globe." (Erica Lyon's preface, p. 31)

The Jews of India are often seen as lucky. In India they experienced a Philo-Semitism, not Anti-Semitism as their brothers encountered all over the world. The only exception was the unprecedented attack on Jews in Mumbai on 26 November 2008. Before that episode, their status was different and they were respected. After partition of India, and the coming into existence of the state of Israel, in 1948, a substantial migration of Jews began. Many of them were trying to find their way toward Israel. But a couple remained, and they keep the legacy of their ancestors alive.

"This volume is intended to be a bit idiosyncratic," (p. 33) as the editor let us know from the very begining. The volume contains three important and well-written essays that focus on the three largest and historically most significant Jewish communities in India: the Baghdadi Jews (a chapter written by Jael Silliman), the Bene Israel Jews (chapter written by Ori Z. Soltes), and the Cochini Jews (by Orna Eliyahu-Oron and Barbara C. Johnson).

These three large groups, together with smaller ones, arrived from different places at different times to find a home in the vast Indian subcontinent. In fact, as Ori Z. Soltes writes,

> "Indian Jews are – obviously, by definition – both Indian and Jewish. As such, in the broadest of senses, they are part of two interwoven historical and geographical continua, each with its own unique features.
> India is not only a vast country with dynamic contrasts between its towering mountains and its coastal lowlands and all that lies between. It is historically complex in terms of ethnicity, religion, culture and language." (p. 37)

They found a new safe home in India, and they prospered while bringing some interesting influences from their former cities.

> "Jews are also typically referred to by different quasi-ethnic terms, depending upon what is regarded as their point of departure prior to dispersion. Thus Mizrahi Jews come from the Middle East – a subset of which, as Arab Jews, are properly referred to as Must'arabi Jews – and north Africa; Romaniot Jews trace themselves back through two millennia in Rome; Sephardic Jews associate themselves with Spain and Portugal, and Ashkenazi Jews are considered narrowly Rhineland Jews and more broadly Jews from the larger realm of northern and eastern Europe. India's Jewish community, as we shall subsequently note in more detail, is the consequence of several diasporic moments in Jewish history. It also consists of a range of different 'kinds' of Jews: mainly Mizrahis, Sephardis, and Ashkenazis." (p. 41)

In India, when talking about Jews, several questions arrise immediately: "which community really arrived first – and when, and from where?" (p. 51). This volume tries to offer some answers, and also to tell some stories.

I've never visited Kerala or Goa, so I can't personally relate to the stories from those areas, but I had the opportunity to see an amazing Kerala Synagogue in Israel Museum, in Jerusalem. Interior of the Kadavumbagam synagogue, from Cochin, constructed between 1539-

1544, offers to visitors of Israel Museum a beautiful encounter with a part of India's history, and a chance to learn more. The chapter written by Orna Eliyahu-Oron and Barbara C. Johnson does the same. As readers, we have the oportunity to learn more about the Kerala synagogues, as this chapter tells the story of "the 'Cochin' Jews from Kerala [who] moved to Israel in the mid-1950s, [and] left behind their eight beloved synagogues." (p. 115)

The story of Jews in Kerala spans over centuries, and during all this time, the synagogues were central to Kerala Jewish life, as the authors of this chapter write.

> "Kerala Jewish history was strongly influenced by European colonialism, beginning with Portuguese dominance from 1498 to 1663. After the naval power of Portugal prevailed over Arab competition for the India trade, Portuguese colonies were established in key port cities, including Cranganore and Kochi. [...] When the economic prosperity of Kerala declined in the 19th and early 20th centuries, some Cochin Jews moved to Bombay, Calcutta, or even Rangoon for work, but almost all maintained connections with their home communities and rejoined them in the 1950s, immigrating to Israel as Cochinim." (p. 119)

"In the local Malayalam language, *palli* is the word for a synagogue, a church or a mosque: a place for monotheistic congregational worship." (p. 121) The chapter written by Orna Eliyahu-Oron and Barbara C. Johnson tells the story of the buildings themselves, discussing shared and unique features of their architecture and contents, along with what is known of their history. It's an incredible journey through history of Kerala and an inventary of images with synagogues that are no more, distroyed by storms or indifference. This chapter is incredibly well documented and offers important bibliographical and archival details (like Sassoon's manuscripts) for

those interested in this subject. The authors are well connected to academic world, so it's not surprising that this chapter respect all academic norms. What is highly appreciated, from my view, at least, are their personal touch and their implication, as we often learn reading their chapter:

> "When Orna Eliyahu-Oron visited Ernakulam in 1995 with a research group from the Center for Jewish Art [from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem] they documented the building and the sparse contents of its interior but did not inquire about the old synagogue, which had been torn down in 1939. It was only during her return research trip in 1996 that she began to learn about the earlier *palli*. Barbara Johnson began to investigate the former *palli* in 1999, using references from a Malayalam Jewish women's song." (p. 158)

It's refreshing to know that Kerala's Jewish history and Jewish legacy are on such competent hands.

I never walked on Cochin's streets, but I walked on Paharganj area in old Delhi and I have seen traces of Jewish community residing there, and I heard Hebrew language on the streets of Indian capital city. I also visited Calcutta, several times, and learned a lot about Jews of the city of joy, and about their involvement in the community and also their cultural legacy. So I am very pleased to read in this volume a wonderful chapter written by Jael Silliman about the synagogues and Jews of Calcutta. "Today there are fewer than 20 Jews left in Calcutta but there are still three impressive synagogues – Neveh Shalome, Beth El, and Magen David." (p. 193)

Like everywhere in India (and the world),

> "The Jews were active in all spheres of Calcutta's social, political, economic, and cultural life. These synagogues have garnered significant

national and international attention for the beauty and grandeur of their architecture." (p. 193)

But Jews of Calcutta were also thorn apart their multiple identities. They identified themselves both as Indians and Jews, keeping alive both traditions and being proud of their heritage.

"While the Jews of Calcutta embraced India as their home, they also supported Jewish charities and religious institutions in the Holy Land, especially the four cities – Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias, and Hebron – with sacred historic associations for which charity boxes were set up in the synagogues." (p. 197)

In her chapter, Jael Silliman, a very active promoter of Jewish values among the multicultural universe of the city of joy, as Calcutta is known, gives us a very elaborate description of Calcutta's synagogues, which tell the story of a community, but also the story of a city that flourished and became India's cultural capital.

"Calcutta's synagogues tell a complex story of the community – their origins and Judeo-Arab orientation, their rapid rise, economic success and Anglicized orientation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and their steep decline in number that occurred in the 1940s/50s as a result of tumultuous global and national events. The synagogues speak to the fundamentally religious nature of the members of the community, the wealth they amassed, their wide trading network, and their on-going understanding, engagement, and involvement in matters pertaining to the larger Jewish world. The synagogues also bear testimony to their very philanthropic gestures that took care of the poorer and otherwise disadvantaged members of the Jewish community in Calcutta and in the wider Jewish world. The synagogue structures and furnishings also track the cultural shift of the Baghdadi Jews of the Middle East from their Judeo-Arabic to their Anglo-Judaic identity." (p. 210)

I admit that Calcutta chapter is my favourite, as a former resident of the city of joy, and a Bengali by heart. I had the chanse to see some of the places described by Jael Silliman, and I recognized the importance of Jewish community for de cultural development of the city. So it brings me a lot of joy to travel again, through this chapter, in the city I love the most and in which I hope to return, soon.

I am convinced the readers of this wonderful volume will learn so many things about the history of Jewish community in India. Beyond the first hand informations, as the title announces, this volume is artistically completed by the uniquely transcultural art of Siona Benjamin, who grew up in the Bene Israel community of Mumbai, then moved to the US, producing work that reflects a broad range of Indian, Jewish, and other influences.

This important volume tells the story of Jews across eastern Asia, offering a portrait of a unique slice of the Indian world for all those interested in history, art, religion, and culture of incredible India. I heartly recommend it to those who love India and its amazing culture!

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Alan Brill, *Rabbi on the Ganges: A Jewish-Hindu Encounter*, Lexington Books, 2019, 290 pp., ISBN: 978-1-4985-9708-1.

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Alan Brill is a rabbi and professor for Jewish-Christian studies at Seton Hall University. Brill's book *Rabbi on the Ganges* is informed by his Fulbright stay at Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi. The book combines an introduction to the religious traditions of Hinduism with personal anecdotes of Brill's time in India and references to the differences and similarities between Jewish and Hindu philosophy and religion.

One goal of Brill's book is to dispel the prejudice that either Hinduism or Judaism is still practiced in what he calls their "Iron Age versions" (p. ix). His interest lies not so much with the exoticized forms of the other tradition but the encounter with people who are in many ways like him: academics and other middle-class people who want to be true to their faith but who live modern lives and face modern challenges. The result is a presentation of Hinduism that is free of romanticism and sweeping claims. Even on contested issues, Brill shows that there are many varieties of thought and practice within both the Hindu and Jewish traditions, and that on almost any topic there are voices within these two religions that can enter into a substantial dialogue.

Brill describes how he noticed among the staff and students at Banaras Hindu University many patterns of behaviour that he knew from his own alma mater, Yeshiva University. These included the

students kissing the sacred texts, and even the Sanskrit dictionaries, or pausing at the doorway to touch the floor, just as Jewish students may kiss the mezuzah (a small case with verses from the Torah) that is affixed to the door jambs in Jewish houses. Within this setting, Brill found that some of the most esoteric ideas of Jewish thought were easiest to relate to for his Indian students:

> "Theoretical kabbalistic discussion of whether God is separate from the world, whether the world is all God, and how God infuses the world are similar to the topics discussed in their standard fare courses in the scholastic Hindu metaphysics of Vedanta, Yoga and Shaivism." (p. 4)

While Brill poses critical questions, his discussions are always respectful towards Judaism and Hinduism in their varied forms. One can sense both a certain regret and amusement when he describes his encounters with Jews and Hindus who believed the other tradition to be strange, inferior or dangerous. In a particularly lively scene, he describes the earnest debates among Jews who had found out that the wigs that are worn by some Jews also for religious reasons might be made of the hair of Hindu pilgrims who had come to Tirumala, one of the world's most visited and wealthiest holy sites. Brill explains that the rabbis who have to decide on whether the hair has to be rejected, feared that the hair was given as a Hindu sacrifice, when in reality it was a votive, with the hair being cut two blocks away from the statue, and without any placing of the hair before the statue taking place. Musing that unsophisticated Hindus could confuse the bathhouse with a temple is for Brill like claiming that an unsophisticated Jew cannot tell a mikveh (Jewish ritual bath) from a synagogue (p. 200). Brill's vignettes nicely illustrate the contemporary entanglement of religious traditions, as well as the importance of Leonard Swidler's fourth principle for dialogue: that one should compare the other practice with one's own

practice or the other's ideals with one's own ideals, but not the other's practice with one's own ideals.

The strongest parts are those where Brill develops a conversation between Hindu and Jewish thought, such as when he creatively envisages how a Hindu may have reacted to the story of Jeroboam setting up golden calves for worship (p. 13) or Abraham shattering his father's idols (p. 15). He thoughtfully engages both the themes where Judaism and Hinduism differ, such as on the desirability of visual representation, and where they are remarkably similar, such as the rules for ritual performance. He also touches on parallels beyond the contemporary mainstream, pointing out, for example, that from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century, many Jews believed in reincarnation (p. 124) or that Ethiopian Jews, too, used to build huts to isolate menstruating women out of considerations of ritual purity (p. 225). Despite all factual information that is passed on in the books, Brill's approach is fundamentally experiential. This includes the insight that some associations that occur in interreligious contact may not only be unexpected but even undesired, such as when Brill writes that unfortunately the bathhouses at Tirupati made his

> "Jewish eyes occasionally flash images of head shearing and showering upon entry to a concentration camp." (p. 198)

Such difficult experiences, too, show that Brill is writing about a Hindu-Jewish encounter, as the book's subtitle states, not a Jew's complete entering into the Hindu world.

The book is structured into nine chapters that are dedicated to topics such as the philosophical systems, worship, or modernity. Each chapter is structured into short sections with their own thematic headings. This makes the book easy to navigate, despite the wealth of

different topics and approaches. The first chapter introduces the Jewish encounter with Hinduism, on the theological level but also presenting a practical initiative like the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit that first took place in Delhi in 2007. The second chapter presents the Vedic worldview, starting with the importance of sound and orality, also in comparison to the Jewish tradition, and then moving on to the role of sacrifice and the recurrent concepts of the Upanishads. The third chapter is dedicated to the six "orthodox" schools of Indian philosophy. The fourth chapter presents the most important Hindu denominations, Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism. The fifth chapter discusses Hindu sacred narratives and piety, with a focus on the *Bhagavad Gita*, the afterlife and devotional love in both the Hindu and the Jewish traditions. The sixth chapter discusses conceptualisations of the divine, including the concepts of emanation, the role of visualization and the natural world, and the issue of foreign worship. This leads over to the central theme of worship in chapter seven, which discusses both private and public forms of worship. Chapter eight broadly discusses issues relating to the natural order, ranging from law and the rites of passage that structure the believer's life cycle to food and the status of women. Chapter nine, on modernity, introduces the most important thinkers of Neo-Hinduism as well as some spiritual teachers that contemporary Jews may have heard of, and also discusses the Hindu diaspora in the US. The epilogue closes with some intriguing questions, such as:

> "If medieval Jews had studied Nyaya and Vedanta instead of Plato and Aristotle, would it have changed Jewish theological thinking?" (p. 262)

The whole book can be read as an invitation to join Brill in his imaginative journey.

The book's primary readership will be educated Jewish readers who want to know more about Hinduism in relations to their own tradition without having to deal with numerous footnotes or the details of scholarly debates. Brill explains the key concepts of Hinduism on their own terms and by pointing out parallels and differences to Judaism. The emphasis is clearly on providing systematic information on Hinduism, and information on Judaism is added only where useful and informative in relation to Hinduism. The book could also appeal to Hindus who want to know more about their own tradition and Judaism. Also, people who have already knowledge on both Hinduism and Judaism, such as many students of Religious Studies will find the book a valuable read in that it helps to reshuffle the conceptual boundaries that are often assumed to run between the "Dharmic" and "Abrahamic" traditions. The book can offer a useful corrective to other introductions to Hinduism, which may start out from an implicit or explicit Christian perspective. Brill's book can enrich the understanding of Hinduism also because it decouples Hinduism from the presentation through a Christian lens, offering a new perspective and fresh images that can offer a great learning experience also for readers with a Christian or other background.

Brill shows that in many respects the practice of Judaism is closer to forms of Hinduism than to Christianity. He points out that both Judaism and Hinduism were presented as legalistic and hence ethically inferior to Protestant Christianity. He asks Jews to think twice before adopting pejorative statements about Hinduism from the Christian writers of the past – not least because these same claims may have been made against Judaism. At the end of the book, Brill suggests that the best way of learning about Hinduism will be to speak to Hindus themselves. Throughout the book he highlights the importance of going

where the Hindus go, and not to content oneself with the spectacles that are staged for tourists.

Thinking of critical points, I would say that I would have liked to see the author go into more detail when presenting possible parallels in Jewish thought. Brill's knowledge of the richness of the Jewish tradition is impressive, and I would have liked to learn more of it. Another minor point shows some inconsistencies in the transliteration of Sanskrit terms and some orthographic mistakes.

Overall, *Rabbi on the Ganges* is an excellent introduction to Hinduism especially for those with some knowledge about Judaism, either from personal background or academic training but also for anyone who is interested in learning more about the world's religions. Brill's approach will be particularly welcomed by those interested in comparative theology and comparative religion.

About the Author:

Dr. Melanie Barbato is a researcher at the University of Münster, Germany and the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, UK. Her current research project, (DFG) - Project number 411280951, analyses the documents of high-level Hindu-Christian relations with focus on the communication of the Vatican and the World Council of Churches. She is also interested in the dialogue between Hindus and the representatives of religions other than Christianity.

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Santosh K. Singh (Editor), *Remembering India's Villages*, Aakar Books, New Delhi, 2021, 266 pp., ISBN: 978-93-5002-720-2.

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The agrarian crisis in India has existed for a couple of decades now. It has been ongoing for so long, that much of national leadership and public discourse has either conveniently brushed it under the carpet, or fails to recognise it as a crisis anymore. In this context, *Remembering India's Villages* is an appropriately titled collection of essays that urges us to revisit the villages where the crisis manifests. The focus of the book however goes beyond the agrarian crisis, although it is not ignorant of it. The book does a thorough academic engagement with the once prevalent and popular idea/field/topic/site of the 'village'. In that it is appropriately titled, as it calls forth both the nostalgia of the attention to village, and the politics of its forgetting.

Santosh Singh's introduction to the book provides a thorough historical/genealogical review of the trajectory that the notion of the 'village' has taken in academic, political and popular cultural discourse; spanning the colonial, post-colonial and now post-liberalisation era in India. With this, he deftly paves the way for the journey that is to follow in the rest of the book. The central concern that is predominant in all essays in the book is the assessment of what really is happening to the villages today – socially, culturally, economically and politically. Referring to the growing amnesia regarding the village in India, in public, political and academic discourse, a pertinent question that the book asks, is whether the villages are vanishing.

The contributors through their essays show that rather than disappearing, the villages are drastically getting reconstituted and reconfigured. The essays in the book are a nifty compilation of theoretical perspectives and field-based knowledge, spanning different rural settings. The collection has a common concern of villages and the rural landscape, but the compilation brings together the much-needed diversity that characterises the village/rural in India. The sequence of the book begins with three chapters exploring the theoretical, social and cultural contours of the idea of 'village' India from varied perspectives.

Dev Nath Pathak explores a tri-logue between Gandhi, Ambedkar and Tagore (three towering figures that gave era-defining perspectives on the 'village' and modern India); and locates the mutation of the idea of the village, as opposed to its decline.

Bhavya Chitranshi and Anup Dhar draw from a study in South Odisha to explore the idea of the rural as the dialectic of circuits of global capital and the world of the third, and propose the idea of the rural as the future.

Priyasha Kaul analyses the mainstream Hindi film industry's (Bollywood's), trajectory of the representation of the rural from a romanticized ideal to the shameful aspect of India's growth story.

These are followed by discussions derived from different kinds of fieldworks and research done in villages across India. Through ethnography in Odisha, Ishita Dey makes a case for a methodological turn towards multispecies ethnography and the imagination of the village as the intersection of human and non-human.

Revisiting the discourse on violence on Dalits in village India, Bidhan Chandra Dash explores Ambedkar's views on village, and the possibilities of the conception of an emancipatory politics in the social

construction of village India, advocating a discursive engagement within the 'Dalit Discourse' with the metaphor of the village.

Mapping the occupational profiles of caste groups in three villages in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Ishita Mehrotra questions the nature of change in the rural, and the disproportionate burden of labour where Dalit women from labouring households fare the worst.

Anjana John advances a critique of the exclusionary mechanism of the dominant development paradigm in relation to the politics on infrastructure relating to energy, by drawing from action research of electrifying households in tribal hamlets in Madhya Pradesh.

From Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Shalini Bhutani's ethnography explores the nuances of GM seeds, its politics and effect on the lives of marginal farmers; while Chandri Raghava Reddy and P.K. Munnangi elaborate upon the transition of agricultural knowledge from 'Polyvalent' to 'Monovalent' knowledge system dominated by market -led ideology of higher yields.

Santosh K. Singh highlights the transformation caused by agribusiness through a study in Uttarakhand, noting the ambivalences in the business model.

While Sukhwant Singh Sidhu, based on a study of rural Punjab, assesses the social impact of land acquisition, in relation to the peripheral urbanisation of Chandigarh and social mobility.

The enumeration above is meant to highlight the theoretical and methodological rigour that has been captured in the book. The volume adeptly puts together a diverse set of issues, under a common thematic of village studies. The compilation brings together a range of questions concerning village/rural India. The central focus of the book thus lies in this thematic diversity.

Remembering India's Villages would prove to be an invaluable reference to social scientists, and scholars across disciplines interested in learning, and engaging with village India, rural India, agrarian production etc. Apart from a reference point to further research on village India, its theoretical review provides a rigorous genealogy of the development of sociology and anthropology in India, as well as the dominant political, social and cultural discourses in relation to the idea of both 'village' and 'India'.

Irrespective of the theoretical and disciplinary orientation of the reader, this book would further prove to be a wake-up call, to all those who have swept 'rural India' into the hinterland, and it reinvigorates the imagination of the village as not disappearing but rather reinventing and reconfiguring both itself and the future social, cultural, political, economic trajectory of India.

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Call for papers

The *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* invites researchers and academics to contribute to the sixth issue (2022).

Contributions are welcomed in the form of studies or book reviews. The materials will be accompanied by an *Abstract* (10 lines) – except for book reviews – a list of up to ten *Keywords*, and by the author's bio-note. The language in which materials will be published is English. The deadline for the submission of the papers is 1 September 2022.

Materials, as well as general inquiries, can be sent via e-mail at mihaela.gligor@ubbcluj.ro.

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