

## INDIAN RHYTHMIC GESTURE AND *TINTA* IN FRENCH OPERAS OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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**SUMMARY.** As part of a larger study which compresses three layers of analyses — dramatic, visual, and musical — the present article deals with the rhythmic component of the musical phenomenon in French operas within a half century timeframe, 1862–1923. Orientalism and exoticism were represented through melody, rhythm, timbre, and *libretti* in operas by F. David, G. Bizet, L. Delibes, J. Massenet, and A. Roussel. The melodic dimension, discussed in a previous study, offered perhaps more opportunities for the evocation of an allegedly oriental sound than rhythm and meter deliver within the operas, while the timbre of various instruments proposes the sensuality of the Orient — an accepted Western stereotype regarding the East. To identify certain rhythmic formulae of Indian inspiration and to understand the concept of *tāla*, several studies and works of Indian musicians and authors have been consulted, among these Sārngadeva's *Sangītaratnākara*, a thirteenth century treatise considered one of the most important Indian musicological texts. Whether invented or extracted directly from its original source, the article aims to identify composers' rhythmic gestures. The blend of personal musical language with the Indian *tinta* reflected in rhythmic patterns create a romantic texture cognoscible to the discussed French exotic operas: David's opéra-comique *Lalla-Roukh*, Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, Delibes' *Lakmé*, Massenet's five-act grand-opéra *Le Roi du Lahore*, and Roussel's opéra-ballet *Padmâvatī*.

**Keywords:** Hindu rhythm, ethnomusicology, French opera, orientalism, Indian *tinta*, *timbre*

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## Introduction — India as *the Other* and *the Exotic* in French Opera

The current study represents the second part of an investigation that deals with the influences of Indian culture and music in the devising of French operas from the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The first part of this study focused on the libretto, visual and melodic dimensions of Indian themed operas by Félicien David, Georges Bizet, Léo Delibes, Jules Massenet, and Albert Roussel, highlighting the way the visual elements were gradually absorbed by the musical discourse.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Orient was represented in Western music using certain melodic stereotypes, such as sinuous, sensual melodies, the employment of ornaments and melismatic fragments, as well as musical structures that strived to resemble certain modes pertaining to Eastern music (for example the Arab *maqam* scales or the Indian *ragas*). The melodic dimension suggested the composers' attempt to recreate exotic, faraway places, nonetheless the overall atmosphere of the musical discourse was rather Western, resembling the works of the period.

Until the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, musical works of oriental or exotic inspiration were devised according to the rules and requirements of Western music composition. The sound of most of these works was subordinated to the expectations of the period, with only a few striking musical elements that were employed to emphasize the exoticism of the work: certain intervals, such as the augmented second, or the construction of modal scales that were incorporated within certain fragments. These means of representing the Orient could be compared to the stereotype images that were associated with the Eastern world: Locke speaks about the images of women, embodying a *topos obligé* of the Western world regarding the East,<sup>4</sup> while Oriental men are often portrayed as violent and fanatic despots.<sup>5</sup> The composers were not preoccupied with the idea of novelty, as would be the case in the first decades of the twentieth century, when foreign elements (melodic, rhythmic, or related to timbre) would be introduced with the purpose of creating a distinctive and new musical discourse, as well as the illusion of authenticity (as in the works of French composers Albert Roussel and Maurice Delage, for example).

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<sup>4</sup> Locke, Ralph P. "Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint Saëns' *Samson et Dalila*". *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 3 No. 3, Nov. 1991, (p. 261–302), p. 269.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*, p. 280.

An extension of the previously mentioned study, the present analysis strives to reveal the way rhythm and timbre were employed by the composers of the aforementioned French operas, with the purpose of representing Indian themes and emphasizing the differences between the West (and the characters that represent *our world*) and the Orient (represented by characters that portray *the Other*).

Orientalism and exoticism were represented by composers of the nineteenth century through melody, rhythm, timbre, and plot of their works. Nonetheless, the melodic dimension offered more opportunities for the evocation of an allegedly oriental sound than rhythm and meter, while the timbre of various instruments was associated with the sensuality of the Orient (a Western stereotype regarding the East).

Often, the musical representations of the Orient are accentuated through various rhythmic elements employed by the composers. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the rhythmic dimension acquires great importance when associated with orientalist and exotic representations. Thus, the composers focus on repeated rhythmic motifs and structures, the use of rhythmic ostinato (with the purpose of recalling the ostinato in Middle Eastern music or the drone accompaniment in the music of India and Central Asia), the use of repetitive patterns (figurations) and well-contoured rhythmic figures in the accompaniment.

### **Rhythmic simplicity in Félicien David's imaginary Indian exoticism**

Félicien David (1810–1876), whose travels and sojourn in the Orient had a marking impact on his works, was concerned with the authenticity of his sound. In the opera *Lalla-Roukh* (1862) he strived to emphasize the exotic features of the theme using invented melodic ornaments that recall Oriental music. However, the Indian influences are rather related to the theme of the opera and the visual dimension. Nonetheless, rhythm and timbre play an important role in David's musical representation of his Mughal subject, even though the composer remained within the confines of early musical exoticism and orientalism.

The musical language employed by Félicien David in the opera *Lalla-Roukh* was inspired by the composer's previous works. Therefore, the representation of India is limited by the musical practices of early musical orientalism: the purpose is to create the musical depiction of an exotic setting, without striving for cultural authenticity, but at the same time aiming for a certain type of accuracy (related to the musical representation of a cultural group associated with the idea of *the Other*). The composer uses

certain rhythmic formulae (e.g. dotted eighth notes followed by sixteenths) that recall the evocation of the Orient in the *ode-symphonie Le Désert*. The exoticism of his opera can be observed within the scenes where the composer incorporated dance.

The *Allegro* from Act I, No. 4, *Chouer et airs de danse*, is written in cut time, with a *marcato* sign, where the quarter is indicated at 166 and the words are separated by a repeated rhythmic pattern (E.g. 1) of *short-short-long*, that recalls the *dvitiya tāla* formula (001), from Sārṅgadeva's thirteenth century system of Hindu notation.<sup>6</sup> The Greek equivalent of *Dvitiya Tāla* seems to be the anapest rhythm, adapted to the French metric. According to Kulshreshtha "*Tāla refers to the beat set for a particular composition (a measure of time) and is formed with three basic parts (called angas) which are laghu, dhrtam, and anudhrtam, though complex tālas may have other parts like plutam, guru, and kaakapaadam.*"<sup>7</sup> According to Kippen, the word *tāla* has two meanings: first, it represents the North (Hindustani) and South (Karnatic) Indian systems of rhythm; second, it can refer to a specific metric cycle.<sup>8</sup> In Sārṅgadeva's *Saṅgītaratnākara* 120 regional rhythmic patterns (deśī) had been catalogued.<sup>9</sup> These are rhythmical patterns gathered from various regions, ranging from one to twenty-one durations.<sup>10</sup>

E.g. 1



Félicien David: *Lalla Roukh* (1862) Act I, No. 4, *Allegro* (m. 10–11)  
David's rhythmic formula of *short-short-long*

<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopedie de la Musique et Dictionnaire du Conservatoire — Première Partie, Tome I*, Directeur : Albert Lavignac. Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1914, p. 301; also explained in Rîpă, Constantin. *Higher Theory of Music — The Rhythm*, Vol. II, Ed. MediaMusica, 2002, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> Kulshreshtha, Khushboo. *History & Evolution of Indian Music*. New Delhi: Shree Natraj Prakashan, 2010, p. 201–202.

<sup>8</sup> Kippen, James. R.: "*Hindustani Tala*" in Nettl, Bruno; Ruth M. Stone; James Porter; Timothy Rice. *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: South Asia: The Indian subcontinent*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000, p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> Idem, p. 111.

<sup>10</sup> Rowell, Lewis: "*Theoretical Treatises*" in Nettl, Bruno; Ruth M. Stone; James Porter; Timothy Rice. *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: South Asia: The Indian subcontinent*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000, p.37.

In the same number, the flutes create the Indian *tinta* through ornamental runs. Caroline Potter finds an *expansion of the exotic effects in the use of percussion and orchestral color*<sup>11</sup>. The composer's mission trip in the Middle East while a Saint Simonian brother contributed to capturing the colors and feelings of the music heard, yet his ability for musical invention was highly appreciated, *Lalla-Loukh* being on the opera roster for about 40 years.

Since the twenty-first century is preoccupied with authenticity, there was no surprise when *Lalla-Roukh* was revived by *Opera Lafayette* with *Kalanidhi Dance*, an authentic Indian dance group, and premiered with a modern authentic production in Washington D.C. and New York in 2013.

### **Bizet, the Pearls' Seeker — close to an exotic rhythm**

In the works of George Bizet (1838–1875) exoticism is evoked using certain harmonic constructions, chromatic scales, and specific intervals, as well as using rhythmic elements and particular timbres. In the opera *Les Pêcheurs de perles* (1863), Bizet relies heavily on the visual dimension of his subject, nonetheless he manages to transpose his audience to a faraway dreamland with the aid of certain timbres and the employment of fragments that have a pronounced modal sound.

During the nineteenth century the evocation of India was rather circumscribed by the means employed when representing the oriental and exotic. This may be observed regarding Bizet's opera, *Les Pêcheurs des perles*. Despite the fact that the plot of the opera takes place in Ceylon, this setting was often associated by nineteenth century artists and their audience with the Middle East, as Locke observes: "*In the European artistic imagination, the region (n.a. the «Middle East») sometimes stretches still further east, to India and Ceylon (...).*"<sup>12</sup> In his musical evocation of India, Bizet employs certain elements that are prevalent for nineteenth century musical orientalism – these particular features (rhythmic patterns, rhythmic ostinato in the accompaniment, unusual harmonic structures and musical intervals, the use of minor seconds, certain timbres employed with the purpose of emphasizing the sensuality associated with the Orient, etc.) were used by French composers of the period (David, Reyer, Salvador-Daniel, Saint-Saëns) in their musical depictions of Middle-Eastern or Arab

<sup>11</sup> Potter, Caroline and Langham-Smith, Richard. *French Music Since Berlioz*, London and New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Locke, Ralph P. *Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East in 19th-Century Music*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer, 1998), pp. 20–53, University of California Press, p. 21.

themes. The exoticism of Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs des perles* is accentuated using certain rhythmic patterns (like those employed by David in his orientalist works).

In Nadir's aria, "*Je crois entendre encore*", in act I, Bizet deepens the sensual and exotic atmosphere evoked by the Phrygian scale (built on E) and the accompaniment in A minor, by employing metric changes: from 9/8 to 12/8. Metric changes and undulating melodies are associated with the feminine, thus emphasizing the representation of India as female — in Bizet's opera this representation is also associated with the character of Leila. In his work, *Imagining India*, Ronald Inden argues that Western representations of India are based on metaphors, such as India depicted as female, or associated to the image of the jungle.<sup>13</sup> In Bizet's opera India is evoked through the desolate seashore and the Hindu temple in the background (act I), while the music emphasizes the sensuality associated by the Western audience with the East. French plays, poems, novels, paintings, and operas of the nineteenth century are dominated by the stereotype image of the *baydère* and Western adventurers<sup>14</sup> (as this can be observed in Delibes' opera, *Lakmé*, as well).

In the Prelude of *Les Pêcheurs des perles* the composer employs a rhythmic figure, repeated continually in the bass throughout the entire part, its construction like the rhythmic pattern of *ratilila tala* described in Sārṅgadeva's system<sup>15</sup>:

E.g. 2



### Rhythmic pattern of the excerpt

Andante. (M.M. ♩:66)

PIANO.

### Georges Bizet: *Les Pêcheurs de perles*. Prelude (Excerpt)

<sup>13</sup> Inden, Richard. *Imagining India*. Indiana University Press, 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Mohan, Jyoti. *Claiming India: French Scholars and the Preoccupation with India in the Nineteenth Century*. SAGE Publications, 2018, p. xxix.

<sup>15</sup> *Encyclopédie de la Musique et Dictionnaire du Conservatoire - Première Partie, Tome I*, p. 301; Rîpă, Constantin. 2002. Op. Cit., p. 42.

Unlike Félicien David's patterns, which are often sustained by the percussion ensemble and due to it can be abstracted, in Bizet's numbers the rhythmic pattern is often hidden within the melody, which makes the two of them harder to separate. It seems that Bizet is more aware or perhaps more convinced of his exotic rhythmic patterns than Félicien David was.

### **Hindu influences in Massenet's *Le Roi du Lahore* (1877)**

Oriental subjects offered Jules Massenet the opportunity (1842–1912) for lavish visual representations, as was the case with his opera *Le Roi du Lahore* (1877). The work alludes to Indian culture using certain names, deities, and locations in India. At the same time, Massenet aims for musical accuracy, incorporating modal constructions of supposed Hindu origin in his work. The oscillation between major and minor modes, in certain musical fragments, further emphasizes his desire to create an exotic discourse, of modal reminiscence.

In the third act of the opera *Le Roi du Lahore*, Massenet presents a *Divertissement* that offers the composer the opportunity to incorporate a modal melody which serves as foundation for the following variations. Julien Tiersot remarks the composer's endeavor to devise a melody that could be considered authentic by nineteenth century audience, due to its modal sound that resembles Indian music.<sup>16</sup>

Along with the modal sound, the rhythmic construction of the following fragment of the *Mélodie hindoue* (E.g. 3), with its dotted rhythm, asymmetrical patterns, and ornaments which evoke the melismas in Indian music, suggests the freedom and virtuosity of Indian music. The chords in the accompaniment (measures 8-11), recall the strummed drone strings of the sitar.

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<sup>16</sup> Tiersot, Julien. *Notes d'ethnographie musicale* — Première Série. Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1905, p. 73.

**Andantino tranquillo**

**Jules Massenet: *Le Roi du Lahore*  
Act III: *Mélodie hindoue* (excerpt)**

### Rhythm in *Lakmé's* dances

In the opera *Lakmé* (1883), Léo Delibes represented the Indian world through certain elements that are specific for nineteenth century musical exoticism: melismatic melodies, supported by static harmonic constructions or fragments that have a strong modal sound. Moreover, the composer incorporates certain musical fragments of Indian inspiration<sup>17</sup>, focusing on the predominantly melodic aspect of Indian music. His evocation of the Indian characters mirrors Delibes' desire to emphasize the differences between East and West.

Syncopated rhythm is employed several times in the opera *Lakmé*, notably within the scenes that feature Hindu characters. In the *Prelude* to his opera, Léo Delibes employs a syncopated musical motif that will later be incorporated in the scene *Blanche Dourga*, in act I. In the *Prelude*, the motif is first played by the flute, the timbre of which emphasizes the undulating character of the motif, due to its arpeggiated construction and direction of the phrase (ascending and descending):

<sup>17</sup> Tiersot, Julien. 1905. Op. Cit., p. 73–74.

## E.g. 4

The musical score for E.g. 4 consists of two staves. The upper staff is for piano, marked *pp*, and features a series of six chords, each with a fermata and a hairpin crescendo leading to a sharp accent. The lower staff is for flute, marked *mf*, and contains a melodic line with a fermata and a hairpin crescendo. The piece concludes with a 'Ped' (pedal) marking and an asterisk.

Léo Delibes: *Lakmé*. Excerpt from the opera's *Prelude*

In the second act of the opera, Delibes includes three *Airs de danse* with exotic names: *Terâna*, *Rektah*, and *Persian*. In the *Terâna* the composer alternates the 6/8 and the 3/8 metres, and pays great attention to the rhythmic dimension: he employs powerful rhythmic patterns consisting of two (or four) sixteenth notes followed by eighths, which resembles the highly rhythmic character of the *Tarana* (E.g.5).<sup>18</sup> The rhythmic pattern in measures 3 and 4 of the following example (E.g. 5) is repeated through the entire dance, and may suggest the structure of the *kudukka tala*<sup>19</sup> (short-short-long-long). In accordance with the requirements of the period, Delibes endows the dance with the particular features of Western music and dance.

## E.g. 5

The musical score for E.g. 5 is in 6/8 time and marked *Andante. (♩. 50)*. It features two staves. The upper staff is for piano, marked *mf*, and contains a melodic line with a fermata and a hairpin crescendo. The lower staff is for flute, marked *bien rythmé.*, and contains a rhythmic pattern of two sixteenth notes followed by eighths. The piece concludes with a 'Ped' (pedal) marking and an asterisk.

Léo Delibes: *Lakmé*. Act II, *Airs de danse: Terâna* (Excerpt)

<sup>18</sup> The *Tarana* is a Hindustani vocal composition, in which Persian or Arabic phonemes are delivered at a medium or fast tempo. In the *Tarana* dance various rhythmic combinations are employed and expressed through various movements.

<sup>19</sup> *Encyclopedie de la Musique et Dictionnaire du Conservatoire — Première Partie, Tome I*, p. 301; Rîpâ, Constantin. 2002. *Op. Cit.*, p. 42.

The *Rektah* dance is also brief and based on a rhythmic unit of (001), short-short-long, starting on an up-beat which leads us again to the *dvitiya t la* (also seen in David's opera, E.g. 1), while the *Persian* dance surprises with its chromatic runs, brass support in the coda, but no specific repeated rhythm.

Up until the works of Albert Roussel, in nineteenth century French operas exoticism and the image of India was frequently represented through ballet, often devised using repeated rhythmic patterns. Other means were the use of syncopated rhythms and dotted rhythms, as well as shifting the accents off the main beats (which could be related to the asymmetries and improvisatory character of Indian music and dance). Composers were not aiming to formulate novel means of musical expression, as would be the case at the beginning of the twentieth century.

### **Influences of the *t la* system in the works of Albert Roussel — from the first works to *Padm vat * (1918/1923)**

Just as his Italian contemporary, Puccini, who signs his *Turandot* (1924) with *chinoiserie*, exotic *tinte* and bitonal chords, Roussel similarly marks his compositional style with features such as bitonality and bimodality, as well as polyrhythms, encountered in most of his works.

Rhythm was one of the main elements employed by Roussel in the construction and formal development of his works. Some musicologists consider that the anapest, used by the composer in a vast number of his works, serves as unifying, signature-like figure.<sup>20</sup> To identify this rhythmic signature, other instrumental works prior to his opera were investigated.

Indian influences are clearly discernible in the *Suite pour piano*, Op. 14 (1909–1910), notably in the second and fourth movements (*Sicilienne* and *Ronde*). The work was completed after the Roussel's return from his voyage to India and South-Asia, which took place between 1909–1910 and offered the composer the possibility to enhance his knowledge on classical Indian music. The *op ra-ballet Padm vat * (written in 1918 and first performed in 1923) was also composed after this voyage and bears the influence of the Indian music the composer had listened to.

The second movement of the *Suite pour piano*, the *Sicilienne* is inspired by the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italian dance. The tempo of the movement is moderate, while the pastoral character incorporated

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<sup>20</sup> Pincherle, Mark. *Albert Roussel*. London: Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag, 1957, p. 147–148.

the traditional dotted rhythms of the Sicilian dance within a succession of measures that alternate the 6/8 and 12/8 meters. The metrical alternation emphasizes the rhythmic vitality and points to the lack of symmetry. The dotted rhythmic figure appears throughout the entire movement, thus acquiring the role of primary rhythmic motif, which generates the developing discourse. Popley made a correlation between the metric change (two beats followed by four — 6/8 and 12/8) and the Karnatic rhythmic pattern *Rupaka tāla*.<sup>21</sup>

The *Tāla system*, common to both Hindustani and Karnatic music, represents the metrical structure in Indian music and dance, the use of various types of beats and figures combined in metric cycles (patterns) that recur unchanged throughout the performance. *Tāla* also refers to the hand gestures (claps, taps, waves) made by Indian singers during their performances. As concept, *tāla* is analogous to meter in Western music.<sup>22</sup> According to Clayton, *tāl* refers to the cyclically repeating temporal structures within which music unfolds and continually develops.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, there are notable differences between the Hindustani and Karnatic *tāla* Systems. For example, the *Rupaka tāla* in Karnatic music (which served as inspiration for Roussel) is different from the Hindustani *Rupak tāla* (or *Roopak Taal*). The Karnatic *Rupak tāla* consists of 1 *Drutha* (2 beats) and 1 *Laghu* (4 beats), comprising a total of 6 beats. *Drutha* (or *Drutam*) and *Laghu* are two among the groupings of gestures called *Anga*, employed in the scheme of Purandara Dasa (1484–1564), who created exercises still used by Karnatic musicians.<sup>24</sup> *Drutha* is a clap followed by a wave of the hand, while *Laghu* is a clap followed by counts on the fingers.

In a similar manner, Roussel alternates the 6/8 meter (2 beats) with the 12/8 meter (4 beats):

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<sup>21</sup> Popley, Herbert A. *The Music of India*. Calcutta: Association Press, London: Oxford, 1921, p. 178.

<sup>22</sup> Nelson, David Paul: “*Karnatak Tala*” in Nettl, Bruno; Ruth M. Stone; James Porter; Timothy Rice. *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: South Asia: The Indian subcontinent*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000, p. 138–139.

<sup>23</sup> Clayton, Martin. *Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Meter, and Form in North Indian Rāg Performance*. Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson, David Paul. 2000. Op. Cit., p. 139.



The metric structures and rhythmic patterns employed by Roussel in his works contain numerous asymmetries and irregular divisions, dotted rhythms, and rhythmic divisions merged to render the musical discourse more expressive and original. The composition of the *Suite pour piano* represents an important milestone regarding the influence of Indian music on Roussel's musical expression and served as important precursor for the composition of the opera *Padmâvatî*, inspired by an Indian legend.

In *Padmâvatî*, Roussel employs complex rhythmic patterns and emphasizes the importance of dance and pantomime. Despite his Neoclassical attitude and respect for the French ballet tradition (as well as the requirements of French opera regarding the inclusion of ballet scenes within the work), Roussel uses dance as means of underlining the dramatic dimension of his work. Important ballet scenes are included in the first act of the opera, in scene two: *Danse Guerrère* (in 5/4 meter) and *Danse des Femmes Esclave* (in 6/8 metre).

The *Danse Guerrère* suggests the energy and violence of the warriors, due to the asymmetry of the 5/4 meter and the rhythmic and melodic constructions. The composer opposes the irregular, highly chromatic melody of the upper voice to the ostinato figure in the bass.

The second act contains the *Pantomime* and *Danse et Pantomime*, where the composer employs metric changes, asymmetries, and polyrhythm, as suggested by the following example:

E.g. 8

au Mouvt

Albert Roussel: *Padmâvatî* (1923)  
Act II, *Danse et Pantomime* (Excerpt)

Padmāvati's discourse in Act II is influenced and shaped by the music's rhythmic profile. As in the dances of the previous act, the tension gradually increases, culminating with Padmāvati's conjuration of the spirits.

Roussel's rhythm, as a component of his Indian space, plays a major role in conveying his works an expressive character and providing depth of meaning along with the variety of modes employed with the purpose of creating an authentic sound.

In the latter part of his creation, Roussel continued to compose in the Neoclassical style, emphasizing aspects related to rhythm, meter, and tempo. The style of the works composed in this period is remarkable, due to their forceful rhythmic energy and the use of motifs with prominent rhythmic characteristics.<sup>25</sup> Roussel often achieves thematic development through repetition of certain patterns that recur throughout the work, an aspect that may be related to the influence of Indian music and the tāla system. Nadia Boulanger admired the way Roussel handles the rhythmic dimension, referring to the *alternations of irregular meters, rhythmic persistence, dynamic development of a remarkable continuity, an almost total absence of "chains of harmony," of exact symmetry.*<sup>26</sup>

### **The Feminine as Indian *Tinta***

In many instances, the orientalist operas of the nineteenth century are devised with the purpose of evoking an imaginary world that offers the audience the prospect of escaping from the everyday reality, as Parakilas observes.<sup>27</sup> Into this category fall the operas *Lalla-Roukh*, *Les Pêcheurs des perles*, *Le Roi du Lahore* or *Lakmé*.

In his work *Orientalism*, Edward Said emphasizes the idea that the Orient was perceived by colonial powers as "*a locale requiring attention, reconstruction, even redemption*", thus pointing to the weakness, eccentricity, backwardness, and feminine malleability of the East.<sup>28</sup> Said also speaks about Michel Foucault's ideas on *discourse*, as means of structuring the manner in which reality is perceived, or determining what can be considered right or wrong.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Orientalism as a discourse offered the West the

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<sup>25</sup> Eddins, John Marion. *The Symphonic Music of Albert Roussel* — PhD. diss., The Florida State University, 1966, p. 209–211.

<sup>26</sup> Boulanger, Nadia. "L'œuvre théâtrale d'Albert Roussel," *La Revue Musicale*, 10/6-7 (1929), 104-12, 38–52.

<sup>27</sup> Parakilas, James. *The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter, Part I*. *The Opera Quarterly*, Vol. 10, Iss. 2, 1993, (p. 33–56), p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 2003, p. 206.

<sup>29</sup> Idem, p. 3.

possibility to rule over the Orient and create images associated with it, stereotypes that developed and evolved diachronically, and eventually became assimilated by its subjects.

Even though the West promoted an effeminate image of the East, it also supported the stereotype image of the despotic and fanatic oriental males. Orientalism as the Western perspective regarding the East, encouraged the male conception of the world, where women are the products of male power-fantasy.<sup>30</sup> Thus, *femininity* reveals itself as one of the most important characteristics of oriental cultural identity. This idea is also supported by the multitude of feminine depictions in orientalist and exotic works of art.

In numerous artworks of the nineteenth century the antithesis between East and West is portrayed through the relationship between the oriental woman (representing *the Other*) and the Western hero, which further emphasizes the representation of the East as essentially feminine and weak. At the same time, Western depictions of the Orient offer the possibility of addressing issues related to sensuality and carnal desire.<sup>31</sup> This perspective may be encountered in French nineteenth century operas with oriental themes, such as Camille Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila*. Following this approach, French representations of India present a somewhat rigid image of a weak and feminine India, according to Kate Marsh.<sup>32</sup> The author points to the prominence of Indian women in French depictions of India, the stereotype representations of *bayadères* (temple dancers) and the *sati* (Indian widow who performs the act of self-immolation on the pyre of her deceased husband) contributing to the portrayal of India as a *site of sexual availability*.<sup>33</sup>

French operas of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century present a similar image of India. In the Indian themed operas of David, Bizet, Delibes, Massenet, or Roussel, a distinct perception regarding India may be observed, as well as the above-mentioned female stereotypes.

Leila (in Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de perles*) and Lakmé (in Delibes' opera) are feminine characters representing the Indian *other*, both portrayed as *devadasis* (women who serve divinities in temples, who also dance and sing as part of their sacred religious ritual), priestesses of Brahma. In both cases the composers chose the soprano timbre (lyric soprano for Leila and coloratura soprano for Lakmé), which could allude to the virtuosic and ornamental singing of Indian women vocalists. A similar approach on

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<sup>30</sup> Said, Edward. 2003. Op. Cit., p. 207.

<sup>31</sup> Locke, Ralph P. 1991. Op. Cit., p. 269.

<sup>32</sup> Marsh, Kate. *India in the French Imagination: Peripheral Voices 1754–1815*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Idem, p. 43.

behalf of the composer may be observed in Massenet's *Le Roi de Lahore*, where Sita (soprano) is priestess of Indra.

The image of the *sati*, the widow who joins her husband on his funeral pyre, is evoked in Roussel's *Padmâvatî*. However, in this case the composer prefers the timbre of the contralto voice. The tessitura of Padmâvatî's vocal part is situated in the middle and upper middle registers of the singing voice, a choice that emphasizes the expressiveness of the music and enables the singer to focus on the meaning of the words and the color used to convey the musical message. If the Indian female characters of nineteenth century operas suggest the image of a feminine and weak India, Roussel's *Padmâvatî* depicts the woman who chooses to die, rather than giving herself to the enemy, thus shifting the paradigm.

Following the tradition of nineteenth century French orientalism, in their operas based on Indian plots David, Bizet, Delibes, Massenet, and Roussel evoke India through the timbre of certain instruments, such as the double reed woodwind instruments (oboe), woodwinds (flute), or percussion instruments (tambourine, cymbals). Certain timbres that are characteristic for Indian music, such as the timbre of the sitar or the distinct sound of the drone strings are suggested through static harmonic constructions and the rhythmic ostinato in the accompaniment (contemporary of Roussel, Maurice Delage will venture further and evoke this sound using the prepared piano and certain effects demanded from the instrumental performers of his works). The timbre of the woodwind instruments, along with glissando phrases, melodic ornaments, chromaticism, and rapid rhythmic patterns emphasize the idea of sensuality and femininity associated with India (represented as female).

### The Creation of French Images of India — Conclusions

Eighteenth century clichés, regarding India as land of danger and sensuality, continued to dominate the visual and written representations of India in nineteenth century France, however academics and artists in search for authentic representations strove to follow a rigorous process of investigation, thus breaking away from the imaginary representations of their predecessors.<sup>34</sup> In her study regarding the preoccupation of French scholars with India in the nineteenth century, Mohan observes the following regarding the stereotype images associated with India: "*Whether or not these images embodied the 'true India' is not as important (...) as the*

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<sup>34</sup> Mohan, Jyoti. 2018. Op. Cit., p. xxxii–xxxiii.

*rationale behind the conception of a specific India. The lens through which different European powers like Britain, France, Portugal, Germany, and Denmark viewed India was as varied as the images of India which were created.*"<sup>35</sup>

This present study proposes the phenomenon of rhythm in Romantic and late Romantic French operas as the center point to musically paint an Indian image, an Indian *tinta*. Traces of *tāla formulae* were identified in each of the discussed operas. The lyric text is submissive to rhythmic intention and direction, as musical accents on unaccented French syllables may be found throughout the studied works. Although Roussel's bitonality not necessarily adds to the Indian rhythmic dynamic, it certainly contributes to the exotic attribute as well as to the French oriental image. The Feminine plays its role not only on microstructural level (through the invention of exotic female opera characters), but on macro level as well, since India, the Orient or the Exotic is a perceived as *She*.

In the analyzed works, authors' intention was not to hunt for rhythmic models to define them, prove them or box them for each composer. Except for Roussel, who visited India, David, Massenet, Delibes, and Bizet dreamed of it. The direction of the study is to identify a rhythmic gesture within a sonic context, where Indian colors and space are recreated musically on a very French background. *Tāla* system helped authors to identify this gesture, since a rhythmic unit is often repeated throughout an entire scene number. The French text adapts to this rhythmic gesture. Composers did not intent to comply musically to a set of Indian music rules, rather they were inspired dreamers who created through their work an image of the Orient that succeeded in convincing not only the composers' themselves but an entire Western audience.

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<sup>35</sup> Idem, p. xxi.

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