

INDIAN CULTURE AND MUSIC AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR FRENCH OPERA COMPOSERS

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SUMMARY. The current paper strives to discover and reveal the influences of Indian culture and classical Indian music in French operas. At first, the evocation of India was obtained through the subjects of the operas and stunning scenic designs, fulfilling the requirements of exoticism. Gradually, the composers attempted to include in their musical discourses exotic rhythmic and melodic elements, in some instances inspired by Indian classical music, thus aiming to evoke a genuine image of India. At the same time, the use of elements pertaining to Indian music (rāgas, rhythmic patterns, timbres) offered the musicians the possibility to create novel sound discourses. The analysis focuses on several operas, composed between the eighteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, following the evolution of Indian representations in several dimensions: dramatic (libretto), visual (scenic representations, dance), and musical (melody, rhythm, timbre). The present paper investigates the way Indian themes influenced the conception of the libretto, and at the same time the visual dimension of the works (setting, costumes), observing how these visual elements were gradually absorbed into the musical discourse (analysis of the melodic structures), through the incorporation of Indian rāgas in works conceived according to the rules of Western music composition.

Keywords: exoticism, orientalism, India, French opera, rāga

Introduction

Orientalism, as an expression of exoticism, has served as a pretext for artists and musicians from various periods, for the devising of artworks noteworthy due to the originality of the subjects and sources of inspiration.

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Among French music compositions, influenced by the direct or indirect contact with the Orient, several operas inspired by the culture and music of India distinguish themselves.

Indian influences were suggested, at first, through certain rhythmic constructions or timbres, which had a marked exotic sound, and could easily be identified with the image of an exotic dimension (in this instance, with the image of India). Gradually, the composers became interested in employing novel musical language, thus melodic elements inspired by, or belonging to classical Indian music were incorporated in their works. A careful analysis of several operas reveals the evolution of the musical discourse employed by the composers: both the visual and musical dimensions become equally important.

The present study is divided into two sections: the first, represented by the current paper, focuses on the Indian themes that influenced the creation of the libretto and the visual dimension, analyzing the way in which, gradually, the visual elements were absorbed by the musical discourse (the incorporation of scales that resemble or aim to recreate Indian *rāgas*). The analysis focuses on the way melodic elements pertaining to Indian music are employed by Félicien David, Georges Bizet, Léo Delibes, Jules Massenet, and Albert Roussel, in works belonging to the genre of *opéra-comique* and *grand opéra*: *rāga* scales, melodies, particular intervals associated by the Western listener with the Orient. The composers use these elements for various purposes:

- at first, these are used as *ornaments* with the purpose of conveying the musical discourse a *picturesque* quality.
- to create the illusion of *authenticity* (the particular *couleur-locale* employed) and firmly delimit the Western world from the Indian space of the *Other*.
- to obtain a novel sonority and original sound effects, through the introduction in the musical discourse of *foreign* elements, or its adaptation to the requirements of Indian music (a pretext for the much-sought musical innovations from the beginning of the 20th-century).

The second part of the study (to be published) will investigate how rhythm and timbres were employed in French operas to evoke India, and how these elements were influenced by the distinct features of Indian classical music.

Although the resources of 19th-century Western music permit a limited approach and understanding of the particularities of Indian music, nonetheless the composers will strive either to adapt their own resources or alter the borrowed content, with the purpose of creating musical representations of an

exotic dimension that is more distant than the Middle East or the northern regions of Africa. This may explain the prevalence of the sound and features of Western music in the analyzed works. Despite this fact, it is important to note that these operas are the products of Indian inspiration, and not an attempt to compose a work that satisfies the requirements and characteristics of Indian music.

The evolution of a musical discourse inspired and influenced by Indian music is closely connected to the stereotypes associated with orientalism, as well as the archetypes that represent the premises of exoticism, as Lacombe observes. Although inspired by universal models, exoticism cannot be reduced to the image of these: *“Exoticism is a complex process whose changes through history must be respected, partly by avoiding reduction to archetypes, even though exoticism itself arises from archetypes.”*³ The complexity of this stylistic phenomenon can be observed in the numerous transformations it underwent during various periods and artistic creations.

India represented in French operas composed between 1750-1850

Although at first exoticism was one of the *elements* employed in the conceiving of works destined for stage representation, exotic subjects will gradually serve as a basis for musical discourses. Thus, the devising and development of certain methods employed for the representation of the exotic become possible: rhythmic and melodic formulae, timbral and orchestral effects, etc.

In operas from the previous centuries, exoticism served as an embellishment or an excuse for the introduction of humorous situations, often providing a basis for original plots. Nonetheless, a delicate sense of nostalgia could be perceived, related to the exotic image of *elsewhere*. For the artists of the Romantic period, inspired by the works of their predecessors, exoticism offered the possibility to evoke real or imaginary worlds (often inspired by the artist's contact with the Orient), upon which the aspirations and desires of the 19th-century individual could be projected.

In the period preceding the French Revolution, an epoch noteworthy for the musical activity of several important figures (among which Gluck), the Parisian public witnessed the flourishing of the *opéra-comique* genre: the decade between 1760-1770 represents the golden period of the genre, dominated by the works of François-André Danican Philidor, Pierre-Alexandre

³ Lacombe, Hervé. 1999. *The Writing of Exoticism in the Libretti of the Opéra-Comique, 1825-1862*. Cambridge Opera Journal, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Jul., 1999, pp. 135-158), p. 135.

Monsigny, and André Grétry.⁴ Among these works, operas inspired by the image of India can be discovered, exotic due to their subject and staging. On a libretto by Michel-Jean Sedaine, Monsigny writes in 1766 the opera (*ballet-héroïque*) in three acts *Aline, reine de Golconde*. The subject of the opera is inspired by Stanislas-Jean de Boufflers' story: the action takes place in India and the plot revolves around the love story between Saint-Phar, the French ambassador to the Indian Kingdom of Golconda, and the queen of Golconda, who recognizes in the figure of the ambassador her long lost love. Disguised as a shepherdess, the queen tests Saint-Phar, the work concluding with the two lovers reunited. The opera contains numerous elements that are characteristic for the musical works of the epoch, the placement of the action in India serving only as a pretext for the devising of an original plot. Monsigny's music is adapted to the exigencies of the genre and the demands of the French public of the era. The revised version of the work contains features that reflect the musical innovations brought about by Gluck. The only *grand opéra* written by Monsigny, *Aline, reine de Golconde* was criticized by some authorities: for example, Collé considered the work trivial, stating that the music does not differ from the works of the Comédie-Italienne (Théâtre-Italian)⁵. Nonetheless, the opera remained in the Opéra's repertoire until 1782, which could indicate that it enjoyed the public's appreciation.

Exoticism influenced the aesthetics and particular features of music and dramaturgy in the second half of the 18th-century, as well as the evolution of certain musical genres (for example, the *opéra-comique*). The first half of the 19th-century was strongly influenced by the works of the previous periods. Thus, the works of composers such as Étienne-Nicolas Méhul, Jean-François Le Sueur, or Luigi Cherubini, who were active during the French Revolution, had a strong influence on the following generation of French composers.

Because during the 18th-century and in the first decades of the 19th-century voyages to the Middle East and North Africa were more frequent and accessible than traveling to India, the visual and musical representations were most often inspired by images and tales from these regions, such as *One Thousand and One Nights*, for example. Direct contact with Arab music (the music from North Africa and the Arab Peninsula) offered the composers the opportunity to integrate in their works distinct features or elements pertaining to this music. Thus, the Orient became more than a simple motive for the conceiving of exotic subjects.

⁴ Giroud, Vincent. 2010. *French Opera: a short history*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p.71.

⁵ Collé, Charles. 1807. *Journal historique : ou, Mémoires critiques et littéraires sur les ouvrages dramatiques et sur les evenemens les plus memorables, depuis 1748 jusqu'en 1772, inclusivement*, Vol. 3. Imprimerie bibliographique, p. 251-252.

The latter half of the 18th-century and the 19th-century was also the period when the first French Indologists emerged, the first works related to Indian culture were published (François Solvyns, Abbé Dubois, François-Joseph Fetis), and the French contact with India was facilitated due to the French colonies in this region. Gradually, the evocation of India in musical works became more than an excuse for the visual representation of the exotic. During this period, the public was eager to (re)discover an authentic world, unaltered by the contact with the Western world,⁶ which led to the publication of materials aiming to acquaint the Occidental audience with this *different* world. In 1849, the French magazine *L'illustration* publishes the first in a series of letters from India (*Lettres sur l'Inde*)⁷, enriched with sketches that depict scenes from the quotidian life, architectural monuments, or exotic characters (fakirs and brahmins).

Often, the artists created evocations inspired by their perceptions of the surrounding reality: faraway places and historical times, remote from the artist's present, were idealized, the border between dream, imaginary, fantasy, and the daily reality intermingled. In works such as Grétry's *comédie-féerie Zémire et Azor* (1771), or Auber's *Le Cheval de bronze* (1835), both belonging to the genre of *opéra-féerie* due to the elements of magic incorporated in the stories, the Orient represents the most suitable motive for the evocation and depiction of fantasy worlds.

A few decades later, Georges Bizet chose to set the action of his opera, *Les pêcheurs de perles* (1863) in Ceylon, India, a choice that imparts the work a distinct atmosphere, seemingly evoking an Indian story, which offered the composer the possibility to integrate into his work numerous exotic elements.

Placing the plot of an opera in exotic surroundings invests the work with a certain exotic savour, but at the same time serves as means for emphasizing the differences between the Western and Eastern cultures.⁸ The action of the *opéra-comique Le Château de la Barbe-Bleue* (1851), composed by Armand Limnander on the libretto of Henri Saint-Georges, takes place in India and France: the first two acts of the opera take place in Madras, while the third occurs in Saint-Germain-en-Lay. The libretto enhances the differences between French and Indian customs. The *opéra-comique Le Nabab* (1853), by Fromental Halévy, has a similar structure: the events

⁶ Lacombe, Hervé. 2001. *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 180.

⁷ *L'illustration – Journal Universelle*, No. 345, Vol. XIII, Samedi – 10 Mars 1849, p. 23-24.

⁸ Lacombe, Hervé. 2001. *Op. Cit.*, p. 189-190.

occur in India and England. Regarding the musical discourse of these works, the oriental traces are only slightly suggested, the placement of the action in India offers the possibility to create visual exoticism (stage setting, costumes) and a unique dramatic context.

Among the three dimensions that make the representation of India possible (visual, musical, dramatic), in French operas from the first half of the 19th-century the musical dimension has a modest contribution, a fact that could have multiple explanations:

- for the most part, the composers used means of musical expression that are characteristic of Western music, the exotic element being *suggested* through the employment of certain rhythmic or melodic formulae (but these interventions, as well, are rare).
- the Western audience of the 19th-century was not yet used to the distinct sound of Oriental music; therefore, the composers were constrained to adapt the borrowed or transcribed music material (when this existed), conforming to the taste of the epoch. Concerning this aspect, the confession of French composer Francisco Salvador-Daniel, regarding Arab music, is noteworthy: *“Like everyone else, I at first recognized in it only a frightful medley, devoid of melody or measure. However, when I had become habituated to it, from a sort of education of the ear, a day came when I could distinguish something resembling a tune.”*⁹

In his ample work describing his voyage to the Orient, *Le voyage en Orient*, Gerard de Nerval makes the following statement about the music heard at a wedding in Egypt: *“Le cortège avançait fort lentement, au son mélancolique d’instruments imitant le bruit obstiné d’une porte qui grince ou d’un chariot qui essaye de roue neuves. Les coupables de ce vacarme marchaient au nombre d’une vingtaine, entourés d’hommes qui portaient des lances à feu.”*¹⁰ Nerval’s point of view reflects, to a certain extent, the perception of the 19th-century French spectator regarding oriental music, at the same time supporting the previous affirmation concerning the public’s reaction when confronted with novel influences, of oriental provenance, in the musical works of the period.

⁹ Salvador-Daniel, Francisco. 1915. *The Music and Musical Instruments of the Arab: With Introduction on how to Appreciate Arab Music*. London: William Reeves, p. 43-44.

¹⁰ Nerval, Gérard de. 1862. *Voyage en Orient – Vol. I*. Paris: Libraire-Éditeur Charpentier, p. 90.

Indian influences in the libretto, settings, and costumes

In French operas from the second half of the 19th-century, India continued to be evoked mainly through elements pertaining to the visual dimension: settings, costumes, ballet. In their turn, these were also inspired by the libretto of the opera. Up to that time, the librettos had contained scenes that could have served as motives for the devising of exotic moments within the opera, but the librettos themselves had not yet become exotic in their entirety, as Lacombe observes: “*It took a long time for librettos to become exotic throughout and not just in a handful of characteristic scenes.*”¹¹ The libretto could provide indications concerning settings and costumes, the librettists aiming to offer as precise information as they could, regarding the evoked oriental space. The images presented in the libretto, or the indications accompanying the text, evoked images from nature (the starry sky, the jungle, wild animals, etc.), objects and customs of the depicted cultures, deities. The libretto’s exoticism was rather non-functional, its purpose was to transport the audience to an imaginary world, at the same time serving as a source for dramatic contrasts.

One of the most important composers of the French musical orientalism, Félicien David revived the musical exoticism of the first half of the 19th-century with his *ode-symphonie Le Désert* (1844). Exoticism is a feature that characterizes his following works as well, among which his masterpiece, the opéra-comique in two acts, *Lalla-Roukh* (1862). The work was first performed by the Opéra Comique in Paris. The libretto written by Michel Carré and Hyppolite Lucas was inspired by the Thomas Moore’s homonymous poem, written in 1817. The action takes place in Kashmir and Samarkand, evoking the love story between king Nourredin and princess Lalla-Roukh. The exoticism of the work anticipates works such as Bizet’s *Djamileh* (1872). The libretto contains several stereotypes, characteristic for the conventional spectacle: the king disguised as an ordinary man, images, and formulae that evoke oriental love poems.

David’s influence can be perceived in George Bizet’s opera *Les pêcheurs de perles* (1863), composed on the libretto of Eugène Cormon and Michel Carré. The work was represented for the first time at the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris. The action takes place in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the plot revolving around the friendship of Zurga and Nadir, two friends whose oath of eternal friendship is threatened the moment when the two realize they love the same woman, Leila (a priestess of Brahma). The libretto contains numerous allusions to Indian culture, the librettists contriving a

¹¹ Lacombe, Hervé. 2001. Op. Cit., p. 188.

genuine set of related words, consisting of the names of customs, objects, deities from the Hindu pantheon, or places in India, for example: *encens*, *sacrifice*, *déesse*, *brahmines*, *Brahma*, *Siva*, *Candi*. The ballets represented an excellent opportunity for the invention of exotic moments, nonetheless, the composer was not preoccupied with the authenticity of his representation.

Le Roi du Lahore (1877), opera in five acts, composed by Jules Massenet on the libretto of Louis Gallet, was first represented at the Palais Garnier in Paris. The action of the opera unfolds in Lahore, in the 11th-century, during the Muslim invasions. Inspired by an Indian legend retold in Marquis de Beauvoir's *Voyage autour de monde*, the work is a musical depiction of the love story between Sitâ and Alim, king of Lahore. Alim is defeated in battle and dies, gaining a place in the paradise of Indra. At the hero's request, the god allows him to return to earth, to be closer to his beloved. But the two lovers will only be united in death. The work contains allusions to Indian culture (the name of the characters, locations in India, deities from the Hindu pantheon), offering the possibility for spectacular arrangements of scenery (the paradise of Indra). In 1909 Massenet composed the opera *Bacchus*, but even though the action takes place in India, the subject of the work is not relevant regarding the evocation of subjects inspired by India, nor concerning the influence of Indian music on the evolution of French musical orientalism (the libretto emphasises the opposition between Buddhist asceticism and the orgiastic rites of Bacchus).

Composed by Léo Delibes on the libretto of Edmond Godinet and Philippe Gille, the opera in three acts *Lakmé* (1883) had its first representation on 14th April 1883, at the Opéra Comique in Paris. The libretto was inspired by Théodore Pavie's *Le babouches du Brahmane*, and Pierre Loti's novel *Le Mariage de Loti*. The action takes place in late 19th century India, during the British Raj, the opposition between East and West being suggested by the relationship between Lakmé and the British officer, Gérard. The cultural differences which make the relationship of the two characters impossible are emphasized in the libretto and the music of the opera as well. Like the previously presented operas, the libretto of *Lakmé* mentions the names of deities from the Hindu pantheon, as well as images associated with Indian culture. Considering the conventions of the genre, Delibes' opera is saturated with the influences and requirements of visual exoticism.

Towards the end of the 19th-century and the beginning of the 20th-century, there was a growing interest on behalf of the composers, regarding the achievement of a novel musical discourse. Thus, a libretto with an exotic subject could serve as a motive for the incorporation of sound structures inspired by Oriental music. Influenced by his voyage to India, Albert Roussel composed the *opéra-ballet* in two acts *Padmâvatî* (1923), a work that was

first performed at the Opéra Paris. The libretto written by Louis Laloy is based on Théodore-Marie Pavie's *La légende de Padmanî, reine de Tchitor*. Pavie was inspired by the epic poem *Padmavat* (1540), written by the Indian Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayas, which narrates the story of the siege of Chittor by Allaudin al Khalji, to conquest Răni Padmâvatî, the wife of Ratan Sen. The plot of Laloy's libretto takes place in 14th-century Chittor, in India, after the marriage of Padmâvatî and Ratan Sen, recounting the events that lead to the tragic ending of the legend. With *Padmâvatî*, French orientalist opera reaches an important point of its evolution at the beginning of the 20th-century. The images evoked in the libretto (characters, customs, deities) are harmoniously blended with the musical discourse, the visual elements seem to be absorbed in Roussel's complex orchestral writing. The subject of the epic poem allows Roussel to conceive a work that lies at the border between musical genres: the composer titled his work an *opéra-ballet*, the choreographic moments equalling in importance the vocal and instrumental parts.

Roussel's choice of devising and introducing several ballets and pantomimes in his opera could also be motivated by the chosen subject: in Indian culture dance has an important spiritual dimension, closely related to certain quotidian rituals, or moments of human life (traditional dances), as well as to the sacred facets of art in Hindu tradition (classical dances). The ballets in the first act of the opera offer the composer the opportunity to evoke the image of certain figures, which the Western audience can associate with the Indian world, while the ballets in the second act are remarkable due to the complexity of the musical discourse and represented symbols. The choreographic moment titled *Danse et Pantomime* (act II), evokes the image of the goddesses Durga and Kali, symbols of transformation and death. At the same time, the idea of dance is closely related to Shiva, one of the principal deities in Hinduism, and his cosmic dance. Roussel's ballets evoke the two aspects of Shiva's dance: *Lasya* (the delicate form), which creates, and *Tandava* (the vigorous form), which destroys.

In a first phase, the image of India and the elements associated with its civilization – as these are presented in the libretto of the operas and visually transposed through the settings and costumes – were employed to offer certain visual support, investing the work with authenticity and a certain *couleur locale*. Gradually the Indian subject could be used to emphasize the differences between the Western world and the exotic world of the *others*. Finally, by introducing *foreign* musical elements, of Indian origin, the composers discovered the possibility of devising a novel musical discourse.

Melody

In the work *Notes d'ethnographie musicale*, musicologist and ethnomusicologist Julien Tiersot dedicated an entire chapter to Hindu music, observing the fact that due to the ancient history of Indian culture and civilization, sources containing precise information regarding ancient music practices had not yet been discovered by Indologists.¹² In the final decades of the 19th-century, French composers strived to introduce in their works of Indian inspiration musical elements believed to pertain to this culture. Up until that point, however, sound evocations were devised using methods representative of French musical orientalism.

Even though in his previous works Félicien David was concerned with the authenticity of his sound, in the opera *Lalla-Roukh* the composer's attention is directed more towards emphasizing the work's exoticism. Although the action is indicated to be taking place in Kashmir and Samarkand, the story is rather the evocation of an imaginary tale, thus offering the spectators the possibility of escaping the quotidian reality. The way the composer handles the orchestra reflects David's refined and distinct style, avoiding harsh or violent harmonies. By introducing secondary characters, such as Mirza or Baskir, and engaging them in amusing situations, the work approaches the bouffe operas. Due to the musical discourse employed by the composer, a slight digression from the tradition of the opéra comique may be observed, evoking a certain lyricism characteristic for the works and style of Gounod.

Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de perles* follows the direction proposed by David, drawing on elements that are like those employed by the composer of *Lalla-Roukh* in order to invest his work with slight exotic touches. Even though the music of Georges Bizet is not rich in oriental elements, the lyricism of the discourse and the use of certain timbres encourage the spectator to be transposed to an imaginary world. Locke observes that the music through which Bizet strives to evoke this world is invested with a certain degree of eroticism, drawing nearer to dream than reality.¹³ The distinct atmosphere of Nadir's aria in act I, "*Je crois entendre encore*", is remarkable due to the melodic line that evokes a Phrygian scale (built on the note E), over the accompaniment in A minor (E.g.1). The melody sung by the tenor voice is first presented, in the beginning of the aria, by the oboe.

¹² Tiersot, Julien. 1905. *Notes d'ethnographie musicale* – Première Série. Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, p. 57.

¹³ Locke, Ralph P. 1998. 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. 37.

Andante ♩ = 60

p

Je crois _____ en - ten - dre enco - - - re ca -

pp

5

ché sous les pal miers

**Georges Bizet: *Les Pêcheurs de perles*
Act I – Nadir: “Je crois entendre encore” (excerpt)**

The modal atmosphere and sonority are a feature that can be perceived in Bizet’s other operas, as well. For example, in his opéra-comique *Djamileh* (1872), on the libretto of Alfred de Musset, the composer employs the Aeolian mode to create a specific mood:¹⁴

¹⁴ Bellman, Jonathan. 1997. *The Exotic In Western Music*. Northeastern University Press, p.120.

Andantino ♩ = 66

p

Nour - ed - din, _ roi de La - ho - re,

4

Est _ fier comme un dieu!

pp

**Georges Bizet: *Djamileh*
No. 3 *Ghazel*: “Nour-Eddin, roi de Lahore” (excerpt)**

The opera *Le Roi du Lahore* offers Jules Massenet the opportunity to devise a complex discourse, with rich orchestration and monumental choral interventions, and to integrate spectacular ballets, depicting the paradise of the god Indra (act III). The vocal line of the main characters (Sita, Alim, and Scindia, the latter is the negative character represented by the baritone timbre) is demanding, and the structure of the work is based on the model exemplified by the works of Gounod and Ambroise Thomas, with an alternation between grand ensembles, duets, and arias.

The first moment in act III (No. 10) is introduced by a *Marche Céleste* followed by a *Divertissement*, which offers the composer the opportunity to integrate a certain melody, entitled by Massenet *Mélodie Hindous*. The melody, which will serve as the basis for future variations, is

first presented by the solo flute and is preceded by a short section of virtuosic character. The exoticism of this musical moment is emphasised through the particular musical construction and the timbre of the wind instrument. Julien Tiersot remarks on the similarity between Massenet's melody and a Hindu melody analysed in his *Notes d'ethnographie musicale*.¹⁵ The modal sonority and construction in Massenet's fragment (E.g. 3) are also emphasized through the constant oscillation between the major and minor modes.

E.g. 3

Andantino tranquillo

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-7) is marked *p*. The second system (measures 8-12) is marked *dolce* and *p*. The third system (measures 13-16) includes markings for *rall.*, *dim.*, and *pp*. The score is in 2/4 time, key of D major, and consists of piano accompaniment for a solo flute melody.

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

French composers from the 19th-century were attracted especially to the melodious character of the Indian *rāgas*. Their interest regarding the incorporation of certain modes, other than the major and minor scales employed in the Western music of that epoch, could also reflect colonial expansion.¹⁶ The meeting between Orient and Occident, between *the other* and *the self*, is evoked in operas as early as the 17th-century, but the

¹⁵ Tiersot, Julien. 1905. Op. Cit., p. 73.

¹⁶ Pasler, Jann. 2000. *Race, Orientalism, and Distinction in the Wake of the "Yellow Peril" in Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music*, ed. By Born and Hesmondhalgh. California: University of California Press, p. 88.

complexity of this topic is further revealed in Bizet's *Carmen* (1875) and Delibes' *Lakmé*. Furthermore, a new perspective is presented: the meeting between the Western soldier and the exotic space, represented by the woman belonging to a particular foreign culture, opens up new possibilities for underlining the cultural and racial differences, as Parakilas also observes.¹⁷ Placing the action of the opera in an exotic space is no longer sufficient in order to create an orientalist opera, the representation of the differences reclaims, on behalf of the composer, the use of novel musical or compositional methods. It is necessary for the visual dimension to be supported by a musical discourse that can convey the work authenticity (or at least the illusion of authenticity).

The musical discourse assigned by Delibes in the opera *Lakmé*, to the characters representing the Western world, is conceived according to the rules and distinct sonority of Western music, while the evocation of the Hindu characters, their customs, and rituals is achieved through a discourse in which the composer integrates exotic elements. In each act of the opera, the Hindu characters perform melodies with a noticeable exotic sound. The discourse utilized within the moment *Blanche Dourga*, in the first act of the opera, is an interesting example: the melismatic melody, supported by static harmonic constructions, has a modal character (E.g. 4). At the second repetition of this prayer, the accompaniment is enriched, the chorus supporting Lakmé à la bouche fermée (singing with closed mouth, as the composer indicates, to obtain a distinct sound and timbre).

E.g. 4

Blan - che_ Dour - ga, Pa - le Si -
4
val. Puissant Gaue - ca!

Léo Delibes: *Lakmé* Act I: *Blanche Dourga* (excerpt from Lakmé's vocal line)

¹⁷ Parakilas, James. 1993. *The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter, Part I*. The Opera Quarterly, 1993, Vol. 10, Iss. 2 (p. 33 – 56), p.34.

Throughout the opera, Lakmé's vocal line has an interesting construction: when the character addresses Gérard, the composer employs a musical discourse that is characteristic for late 19th-century Western music, revealing Lakmé's exoticism only within the musical moments that depict her among Hindu characters, such as the previously mentioned moment in act I (*Blanche Dourga*), or the well-known bell song in act II, "*Légende de la fille du paria: Où va la jeune Hindoue?*". The bell song evokes the tale of a young girl, a pariah's daughter, who saves the god Vishnu, materialized in the form of a traveller. The aria begins with a vocalise, the composer aiming to underline the vocal virtuosity of the performer, while at the same time evoking a well-defined image of the Indian character, whose emotions are stronger than the will of the intellect. This representation places the Orient in opposition to the Western world, governed rather by the intellect, as Derek B. Scott observes: "(...) *the lack of verbal content pointing to a contrast with the «rational» Westerner*".¹⁸ The ornamental quality of Indian music is recreated through the virtuosic vocal passages.

The observation made by Tiersot, regarding the chiefly melodic aspect of Indian music¹⁹, may be perceived within the bell song as well. The accompaniment doubles the vocal line in octaves, in a manner that resembles the vina accompanying the Indian singers. To emphasize the authenticity of this moment and the character's belonging to a *different* world than the Western, here as well Delibes employs modal influences within the musical discourse (the Aeolian and Phrygian modes).

Tiersot also reveals that the second act of Delibes' opera contains certain fragments of Indian inspiration but mentions that these cannot be easily identified.²⁰ One of the main opportunities for the visual and musical evocation of India is offered by the ballets in act II. Entitled *Airs du danse*, these ballets bear the names of oriental dances: *Terana*, *Rekhtak*, and *Persian*. The musical construction of the dances suggests the Indian influence, as well as the composer's desire to create an authentic discourse.

The exotic formulae used by Delibes in his opera, *Lakmé*, are among the most employed modalities for the musical representation of the Orient, at the end of the 19th-century. The sonority of the musical discourse is subordinated to the requirements and expectations of the period. The

¹⁸ Scott, Derek B. 2003. *From the Erotic to the Demonic: On Critical Musicology*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 157.

¹⁹ Tiersot, Julien. 1905. Op. Cit., p. 64.

²⁰ Idem, p. 73-74.

composer is not particularly interested in the introduction of *foreign* elements, for the purpose of obtaining a novel musical discourse. Through his evocation (due to the use of certain timbres and compositional resources), Delibes succeeds in creating the impression of authenticity, at the same time emphasizing the differences between the characters belonging to the Indian world, and those belonging to the West. Nonetheless, his representation closely follows the models devised by his forerunners: the evocation of India is, in fact, the evocation of an imprecise oriental dimension, where the various cultures are represented using similar resources (associated by the Western spectator with a *foreign*, exotic world, that is *different* from *our* world).

During his sojourn in India, Albert Roussel visited Chittor, in Rajasthan, a visit that had an important influence on the way he devised the musical discourse of his opera *Padmâvatî*, affecting the scenic representation of the work as well. The musical discourse has a distinct sound, with exotic touches obtained through the amalgamation of various sound structures. An interesting feature of the work is the incorporation of constructions that aim to recreate certain Indian rāgas.

The first introduction of a structure that contains an Indian rāga appears in the beginning of the opera, within the discourse of Gora, who asks the people of Chittor to listen to his words (E.g. 6). According to Daniélou, this scale is the rāga Shri (or Shree – E.g. 5), the construction of which resembles rāga Purvi (or Puravi), both belonging to the Poorvi (Puravi or Shri) that (“Parent scale”, or mode-type).²¹ The difference between these two rāgas is the note A: rāga Purvi is formed with the note A (containing a major sixth), while rāga Shri contains A-flat (forming a minor sixth).

Rāga Shri, used in Hindustani music, is commonly associated with the figure of the god Shiva. Due to its mood, this rāga is performed in the second part of the afternoon, conveying a contemplative atmosphere and inspiring devotion. Roussel employs this rāga within a scene in which his character asks to be hearkened to.

²¹ Daniélou, Alain. 1949. *Northern Indian Music. Volume One – Theory and Technique*. London: Christopher Johnson, p. 130.

E.g. 5



Rāga Shri (Shree) in Western notation, as transcribed by Danielou²²

E.g. 6

Un peu retenu

8 Notre an - cien en - ne - mi se pre - sente au - jour d'hui dans Tchi - tor sans me
nace et sans ar - mes. Il de - vien - dra par un ser - ment ju - re le
15 fre - re de nos fre - res, le pro - tec - teur de nos mai - sons et le ven - geur de nos in - ju - res.

Un peu retenu

**Albert Roussel: *Padmāvati* (1923)
Act I, Scene I - “Guerriers, artisans, marchands(...)”
Excerpt from Gora’s vocal line**

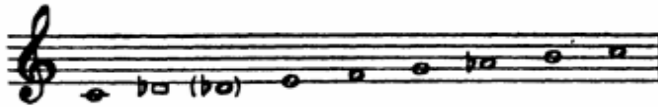
Roussel’s concern with the authenticity of his musical representation can be remarked in numerous scenes of the opera. For example, in the final part of the first act, within the first vocal intervention of the character Padmāvati, the composer employs two scales that begin on the note C. The sonority and atmosphere of these constructions resemble two distinct rāgas from Northern Indian music: *rāga Bhairav* (from the Bhairav group), and *rāga Bhairavi* (from the Bhairavi group).

The first scale, constructed on note C is based on the *rāga Bhairav* (E.g. 7), used in Hindustani music, the mood of which it embodies. This construction is used in the conclusion of the act as well (E.g. 9).

²² Idem, p. 130.

According to Danielou, rāga Bhairav (E.g. 7), is traditionally performed after sunrise, belonging to the Bhairav group of early morning rāgas.²³ The construction of this rāga is similar to rāga Bhairavi (E.g. 10), its mood is soft, melancholic. In Hindu tradition, rāga Bhairav is associated with the image of the god Shiva: Bhairava is the name of Shiva when he takes the form of a hermit, with his body smeared with ashes. The devotion and sobriety of the hermit are traits that characterize this rāga as well: Bhairav evokes an atmosphere of devotion, encouraging introspection. This may explain Roussel's choice for employing a musical structure inspired by this rāga. The composer uses this particular modal construction in order to emphasize the dramatic action: Padmâvatî ponders the unfolding events and reflects on the fact that her prayers are no longer received by the gods (E.g. 8).

E.g. 7



Rāga Bhairav in Western notation, as transcribed by Danielou²⁴

One of the most common scales in Northern Indian music, rāga Bhairav contains two identical harmonic tetrachords, closely resembling the chromatic mode in European music. The sound of this rāga, due to its major third, also resembles the Hijaz maqam (like an altered Phrygian scale, referred to as the Phrygian dominant scale). However, Bhairav differs because of an additional augmented second, between scale degrees VI and VII. In the Carnatic tradition, rāga Bhairav is also known as Mayamalavagowla.

²³ Daniélou, Alain. 1954. *Northern Indian Music. Volume Two—The Main rāgas*. London: Halcyon Press, p. 32.

²⁴ Idem, p. 33.

E.g. 8

Les dieux ne m'e-cou - tent plus... quelle este donc mon of - fen... se?

La place este de - ser - te comme un ri - vage ou la

va - gue sou-daine a pas - se...

Albert Roussel: *Padmâvatî* (1923)
Act I, Scene IV - “Aux armes...il est trop tard...”
Excerpt from Padmâvatî’s vocal line
The scale employed by Roussel echoes the rāga Bhairav

E.g. 9

Librement

Albert Roussel: *Padmâvatî* (1923)
Act I, Scene IV - “Aux armes...il est trop tard...”
Excerpt from Padmâvatî’s vocal line – in the conclusion of the act
The scale employed by Roussel echoes the rāga Bhairav

Between the two occurrences of rāga Bhairav, Roussel inserts a fragment (E.g. 11) that echoes rāga Bhairavi (E.g. 10), which is part of the Bhairavi group of late morning rāgas. The construction of the scale is like the Phrygian mode. Its mood is melancholic, the sadness mingles with pleasure and enthusiasm.

E.g. 10

Rāga Bhairavi in Western notation, as transcribed by Danielou²⁵

²⁵ Daniélou, Alain. 1954. Op. Cit., p. 72.

Les hom - mes e - prou - vent le tran - chant des epees

Et les fem - mes au fond des cham - bres se la - men - tent

Albert Roussel: *Padmâvatî* (1923)
Act I, Scene IV - “Aux armes...il est trop tard...”
Excerpt from Padmâvatî’s vocal line
The scale employed by Roussel resembles rāga Bhairavi

The sound structure devised by Roussel within Padmâvatî’s discourse oscillates between the aforementioned rāgas. The IIIrd (E) and the VIIth (B) scale degrees function as mobile steps: in the first section of the musical discourse, the lower and upper tetrachords of the rāga Bhairav are used, in constructions which emphasize the augmented second between scale degrees II and III, respectively VI and VII (the role of the augmented second is emphasized chiefly within the ornamental groups of notes, as illustrated in examples 8 and 9); in the middle section of the scene, the vocal discourse is placed in the upper-middle register of the contralto voice (between B-flat and E-flat²), with scale degrees III and VII lowered (to E-flat and B-flat), in a structure that echoes rāga Bhairavi (as shown in example 11); the concluding section returns to the structure of the first segment (rāga Bhairav), with notes E and B. The overall mood of the entire scene is that of profound sadness and resignation, beautifully expressed by the composer through the incorporation of the two rāgas.

Conclusions

The musical evocation of India was obtained, at first, through means that are characteristic of the orientalist musical works from the first half of the 19th-century. The composers’ contact with oriental music (directly, through voyages to the Orient, or indirectly, through the accounts of contemporaries who had travelled there) facilitated the association of Oriental music with certain melodic, rhythmic, or timbral features. Musicians strived to recreate these specific sounds in their compositions, as illustrated by David’s opera *Lalla-Roukh*.

The musical representation of India was also obtained using certain rhythmic constructions, which conveyed the work an exotic sound and could easily be identified with the image of India. Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles* is an interesting example in this sense: even though elements pertaining to Indian culture are referred to (in the libretto), the music does not reveal Indian influences. Rather, the composer strives to depict a dream world, offering the spectator the possibility of evading from the quotidian reality.

From the vague evocation of a faraway land and its music, gradually artists and musicians became preoccupied with the discovery and conception of authentic means of musical expression, which offered composers the possibility of operating with novel or unusual sounds. Although the musical representations of the Orient were influenced to a serious extent by the direct contact of several French composers with regions in the Middle East or Northern Africa, India remained within reach in the 19th-century. Massenet incorporates in his opera, *Le roi du Lahore*, certain fragments which resemble Indian tunes; however, the work is still devised according to the means employed in orientalist operas, with a significant importance allotted to the visual evocation.

Gradually, composers became interested in the musical representation of cultural differences, as shown in Delibes' *Lakmé*. The evocation of India is still influenced by the general techniques employed by musical orientalism, but the composer's desire to emphasize the exoticism of his characters, their belonging to a different cultural space, may have urged him to incorporate in his work Indian tunes, as mentioned above.

It is only with composers such as Maurice Delage or Albert Roussel, that the influence of Indian music can be clearly discernible within the musical discourse. Due to their voyages to India and their direct contact with the music of this sub-continent, both Delage and Roussel incorporated in their works scalar structures influenced or inspired by Indian *rāgas*, striving to capture the particular timbres of the instruments used in Indian music (Hindustani or Carnatic), as well as its various moods. Roussel's purpose was to obtain a novel musical discourse, by introducing *foreign* melodic elements. Thus, his use of Indian *rāgas* may have served as a pretext for the much sought-after musical innovations of the early 20th-century.

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