Spiritual and Corporeal Selves in India

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Approaches in a Global World

Edited by

Carmen Escobedo de Tapia
and Alejandra Moreno-Álvarez

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INTRODUCTION

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Spiritual and Corporeal Selves in India: Approaches in a Global World offers images of contemporary India where "glocalization" is undoubtedly present. The twelve chapters included in this volume provide different perspectives on the relationship between the corporeal and the spiritual. The contributors highlight the union of both soul and body, which has been present from the very beginning of the Indian civilization. The essays compiled here approach the concepts of body and spirit from various fields, such as the arts, literature, philosophy, and social sciences.

The fusion between body and spirit in India dates back to the beginning of time, as we can see in various texts that address different traditions of spiritualism in the Indian subcontinent: the *Bhagavad Gita* (S.VI-III B.C.), the Upanishads (S.VI-SII B.C.), and the *Dhammapada* (S IV-V B.C.). In these sacred texts lies the seed of yoga, understood as a technique of personal self-achievement. The word "yoga" is etymologically related to the root of the term "yoke," which means "union," and consequently refers to an ancestral philosophy which fuses the bodily and the spiritual dimensions of our selves. This becomes explicit in ancient texts like the *Yoga Sutras* by Patanjali (S. III B.C.) and the *Yoga Vasishta Maharamayan* by Valmiki, as well as other more contemporary works like *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by Mahendranath Gupta (1942), Paramahansa Yogananda's *The Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946), and *Anguttara Nikaya* by Nyanaponika Thera, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi as *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (2012). Yoga has also inspired Western scholars like Mircea Eliade, who offers a rigorous study of yoga in *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (1933), and Georg Feuerstein in *Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice* (2001) and *The Deeper Dimension of Yoga: Theory and Practice* (2003). Unfortunately, the original philosophy of yoga has become a commodity in the present day.

Apart from yoga, India had ancient philosophical traditions with different schools of thought that offered a rich intellectual argumentation on the relationship of reality and the human. We must bear in mind that there is not one single Indian philosophy because, as it is known, there are many regional practices, like the Vedic philosophical tradition of the Aryans in the north, or the *Shaiva Siddhanta*, characteristic of the Dravidian culture in the south (Ganapathy 1993). Even if we cannot consider one single Indian philosophy, there are aspects that are common to the different traditions, like the concept of the self included in the Sanskrit word *purusha*, which refers to the eternal and authentic spirit. On the other hand, the Indian scholar Dasgupta (2014) observes three common doctrines that are significant to these philosophical trends: *karma* – the principle of causality; *mukti* – related to the cycle of life; and the soul, ātman – the inner-self of the human person. Understanding the latter is fundamental in the Indian philosophical tradition since it is key to visualizing the relationship between the body and the soul. Most traditions relate the soul and the body as the "embodied self," where both parts comprise the whole of the human being. The body makes experience possible and the self makes sense of that experience. As the *Sankhia School*, one of the oldest philosophical traditions in India, explains: "Just as a chariot requires a charioteer, coordination of our experiences reveals a consciousness which makes that coordination possible" (Mahalingam 2000, 146).

The different approaches to the body that the various Indian schools of thought agree that the soul is at the centre of the growth of the human person. The self is immortal and is part of the Divine. In fact, the ultimate goal of the soul is to achieve union with the Divine, and this is considered the purpose of human life, which moves in a continuum in the cycle of reincarnation (Saṃsāra). The Vedic tradition holds that the purpose of life is to realize spiritual improvement so as to reach the fundamental truth about one's self, which is being "one" with *brahman*, thus achieving the ultimate realization of the human soul: the *moksha*, which means the liberation from the cycle of reincarnation. Therefore, the spirit of the self is the centre of the human life in India. The interdisciplinarity in this book aims to gather different spheres of Indian artistic representation to analyse, in the most enlightening way, the relationship of the body and the spirit, in a diverse civilization such as India.

Together with the ancestral philosophical Indian traditions, it is also important to consider the complexity of the history of the subcontinent, which has influenced the development of the Indian self in relation to time

and space. The diversity that defines India is the result of its historical evolution. Especially significant was the colonizing period, which was a landmark in the definition of the Indian identity and, consequently, the relationship of the corporeal and the spiritual to define the postcolonial self, which inevitably endured the inheritance of British colonization. Undoubtedly, this book, read from this perspective, illustrates the two dimensions of the Indian self as a result of the contact between two cultures with an evident and reciprocal influence on each other, because "an explicit concept of self implies some sort of idea of not self, for every concept must be defined as much by what it excludes as by what it includes" (Bruner and Greenfield 1971, 637).

New identities were shaped in the subcontinent due to historical reasons based on the Western colonization that took place particularly during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Imperialism defined "the self" (the colonizer) in terms of "the other" (the colonized) and placed the West above the East. These ideas have been extensively explained and developed by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). The British Empire left profound traces in the subcontinent and the encounter meant a clash between two utterly opposed cultures, with contrasting mythological, philosophical, religious, social and cultural standpoints. A new postcolonial identity was developed that would fuse the inheritance of two hundred years of British colonization with the most ancestral social and cultural Indian traditions.

During colonial times, the conception of the known world was redefined and a new outlook on life was certainly transferred. At the same time, the Indian tradition offered new perspectives to the British. One of the most gratifying elements that India "exported" to the West was a strong sense of spiritualism. As we know, within a Western framework, reality has been defined in terms of dichotomies and opposites: black and white, north and south, rich and poor, life and death, mind and body, east and west, etc. But for other cultures such as India, life is a continuum, and existence a cyclical conception. Time is a cycle, and nothing ever ends, as Mircea Eliade explains in *The Myth of Eternal Return* (1949). Life brings death, and death is part of life; thus, the endless cycle of reincarnation (Saṃsāra) gives human beings the chance to achieve the *Brahman*, the Divinity.

Western artists and scholars have always been attracted by such spiritualism. Throughout history, well-known Western literary and musical artists have looked to the subcontinent with the desire to achieve spiritual inspiration – Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Butler Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Annie Besant,

Herman Hesse, The Beatles, to name but a few, are paradigms of how Indian culture and philosophy have left traces in the West. On the other hand, representing another culture is not an easy task. As Said states: "The problem every writer on the Orient has faced … [is] how to get hold of it. How to approach, how not to be defeated or overwhelmed by its sublimity, its scope, its awful dimension" (1978, 12). The task seems to be to transmute and absorb. This justifies the various dialogues this book aims to provide the reader with in order to understand the spiritual and corporeal relationship that defines the glocal/global Indian self/selves.

The postcolonial era was the preamble of the global era. The Indians' identity was still ill-defined, and it would have to experience a sense of self-recognition to become the Indian self of today. The complexity of the Indian civilization proves a highly self-conscious culture, and the contact with the West provided a new self-awareness. India's history is tinged with uninterrupted encounters with foreign cultures which exercised an influence on Indian self-perceptions, hence its complexity. The meeting with the West was something qualitatively different. Never before had the disparity in cultural, political, and economic matters been so apparent. These circumstances forced an intensity of introspection of the self (Philip 1986, 8). Therefore, inevitably, the new Indian individual self needed a reaffirmation that involved a search for the soul through the relationship between body and spirit. The most ancient Indian traditions had to merge with a new culture. The corporeal and spiritual dimensions of the Indian self today fuse time, space, and history and illustrate the global/glocal self. This book proves, through interdisciplinary dialogues established within different fields, that a "symbolic universe" can be considered, which, as Peter Berger says, "establishes a memory that is shared by all with regard to the future. It establishes a common frame of projection for individual actions" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 95).

This volume offers clues to understanding the differences and similarities that characterize the East-West encounter through artistic representations in the era of globalization. It also enhances the importance of re-inscribing the fusion of the spiritual and the corporeal into the academic research agenda. In Western theory, the body has arguably been dismembered and separated from the spiritual. Thus, the present work opens up a range of possibilities to tackle and debunk the dualism of both the corporeal and the spiritual, suggesting a rupture of the "logic" of binary thinking (Derrida 1978) that has always characterized the East, as opposed to the West. The contributors specifically focus on the Indian culture and analyse how we can empirically and theoretically reconcile mind and body with the aim of

promoting active and reciprocal exchanges among educators, students, researchers, social activists, and those professionally and spiritually engaged with Indian studies.

This collection of essays challenges different issues that are of direct interest for an interdisciplinary market. The concepts of the corporeal and the spiritual are of main concern in a contemporary world immersed in the technological revolution. The interdisciplinary approaches provided by the contributors allow global readers to understand the need to recover the fusion between body and mind and proves the need to rethink our essential condition as human beings in a global world. The referential framework of the volume attests the rich conceptual and philosophical issues viewed through different Indian artistic representations, offering a model in which the corporeal and the spiritual are, or should be, considered a unit.

The volume opens with the short story "The Landing" by Rohini Bannerjee, lecturer at Saint Mary's University, Canada. This story shows the cyclical conception of time while directly appealing to the reader's senses. An Indian Canadian character of Punjabi origin visits an ashram. She finds herself in a completely different context, and the reader perceives with nostalgia a physical and spiritual feeling of dispossession of identity. She finally identifies herself with a sensual and ethereal butterfly, which metaphorically represents a subject in process.

In chapter two, "Neo-Vedanta: Some Conceptual Issues in the Contexts of Indian Discourses," Murali Sivaramakrishnan (University of Pondicherry, India) explains how Indian thinking is compiled in the philosophy of Vedanta, which gives shape to the Indian philosophical understanding. The concept of Vedanta contains the essence of Indian thinking, which is based on spiritual oneness. In the current world – that is, in the age of globalization and the posthuman – there seems to be a widespread conception of the world as materialistic, and far from moral or ethical values. It is in this vein that neo-Vedanta acquires meaning. Professor Sivaramakrishnan establishes a comparison between philosophy and *Darsana* and suggests that Sri Aurobindo provided integral hermeneutics, which was to be called neo-Vedanta. Sivaramakrishnan explains this philosophical thinking which relates mind and spirit – the spiritual nature and logic of reason – as so necessary in these days of postcapitalist and transnational markets, when all values are reduced and globalization has come to homogenize the world. The spiritual seems to be relevant to highlighting differences, thus giving meaning to the concept of the glocal, recognizing that the Hindu way of thinking is amorphous and

heterogeneous. On the other hand, it reminds us of the need to relate both body and spirit as complementary elements of the human being. Professor Sivaramakrishnan finally suggests that this harmonizing relationship should in turn be translated into the cultural sphere from technological progress to cultural progress, which would precisely mean thinking with the spirit so as to recognize humanity as a whole, which is the essence of the neo-Vedantic feeling.

In the third chapter, "Bodies and Functionings. Indian Experiences in the Capabilities Approaches of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum," Javier Gil (University of Oviedo, Spain) relates India and the West through a comparison between Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's philosophical approaches to the context of Indian culture. He refers to the devastating famine of 1943 in Bengal through an explanation of poverty and social marginalization in India, using his experience in order to develop his philosophical theories, departing from Rawls's *Theory of Justice* (1971). Sen emphasizes real differences among human beings that are mainly bodily, and connects them with vulnerabilities and inequalities, these being the explanation for social injustice like the ones the lower caste individuals have to undergo in India. Gil explains how Sen epistemologically underlines how the presence of bodies and functioning in multiple ways are invariably translated through social economic indicators and measures to reach a diagnosis of the present situation in India and beyond. On the other hand, Sen seems to ignore yoga and the spiritual side of human beings in his writings of human wellbeing. Gil further explains Nussbaum's approach, embracing Sen's theory of capabilities and development and diving into the Indian culture, working mainly with groups involved in gender and women's concerns. She isolates ten central capabilities which, as Gil explains, shape a partial theory of social justice and the basis for a feminist political agenda. From this standpoint, the body becomes a file of experimentation through which Nussbaum denounces gender injustices through both violence and body-centred "functionings" that favour female empowerment.

In "Statues of Flesh, Art to Be Touched," Eva Fernández del Campo tackles one of the greatest contributions of India to universal art history – sculpture. Indian sculpture has always grabbed attention in the Western world. This chapter gives specific clues to understanding its meaning and artistic significance in terms of its form and spirit. Indian sculptures are characterized by a significant formal eloquence that is complemented by the expressiveness of the materials used. Indian art is commonly considered a "spiritual expression," which contrasts with a Western

perception of art where the eye of the spectator is frequently the focus. Through Indian art we can leave the corporeality of the world and become one with its spiritual dimension. Fernández del Campo tries to make the reader understand that the most important sense for perceiving Indian sculpture should be touch, not sight, considering that sculpture is not a representation but a materialization of the sacred. Indian art in this way started to fulfil the spirit of longings and fantasies of many Europeans from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, creating a mystified vision of Indian sculptures based on spirituality as opposed to the Western materialistic viewpoint. The author underlines the idea that the aim of Indian art differs from Christian art connecting the physical with the divine. Indian art is a matter of the senses making the spiritual tangible. By offering some of the most important Indian examples of sculpture from Medieval times (Ajanta, the Durgā Temple in Aihole, the Kailasanatha Temple in Ellora, the Arjuna's Penance relief of Mahabalipuram), Fernández del Campo illustrates Anand Kentish Coomarasuamy's theory explained in *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1994), whereby, in the Indian conception of art, each object of the phenomenological world becomes a guide to the metaphysical order. Art empirically represents its environment, and the human becomes one with nature, being a temple of corporeal manifestation. Everything flows in a continuum, and Indian art is the result of an interplay among tensions: the inner and the outer world, the present and the past, popular and cultural traditions, etc. It has a strong connection with natural elements. The principles *pakriti* (the primal matter) and *puruṣa* (the vital sentient) are expressed and represented through Indian art. Flesh and stone illustrate the body and the spirit, which become one through Indian sculpture.

Indian poetry has always been a reflection of the most profound inner spiritual Indian essence, and this is evinced in "The Text, the Body and the Self in A. K. Ramanujan's Poetic Universe" by Guillermo Rodríguez-Martín (director of Casa de la India, Spain). With Rabindranath Tagore and his *Gitanjali*, Indian poetry in English became internationally acknowledged. The development of the poetic texts was neither as quick nor prolific as fiction, but it is a genre that truly represents Indian sensitivity. Rodríguez-Martín dives into the poetics and aesthetics of modern Indian poetry in English – since the Romantic-Symbolist tradition, post-independent poets turned inward, back to the "self," from both an intellectual perspective and "emotional" inwardness. Rodríguez-Martín outlines and explains the evolution of post-independence Indian poetry in English from the 1950s to present-day postmodern and postcolonial paradigms. Through this evolution, critical approaches of modernist Indian

poetry from the 1950s onwards were clearly concerned with the text rather than the aesthetic experience, and suggest the need to consider the poets' inner experience of art and creation which shapes the writers' poetic identity, fusing the poetic self, the text, and the body. Through an analysis of A. K. Ramanujan (1929–93) – a South Indian poet, multidisciplinary scholar, and translator of Mysore (Karnataka), widely considered to be part of the canon of IPE, and poet of the *Navya* (new) movement in the Dravidian Kannada language – Rodríguez-Martín identifies the three elements of poetic self, text, and body, considering the latter as the site for aesthetic experience and interpretation of the self. Ramamujan's poetic universe is a perfect example of the fusion between the corporeal and the spiritual.

From poetry we move on to narrative with "Ecospirituality as a Crucial Reconciliation with the Inner Self: Uma in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*." In this chapter, Ángela Mena-González (University of Oviedo, Spain), offers an introductory explanation of how an eco-oriented way of life in the current world helps to attain our completeness as human beings. The sense of belonging is expanded to consider the relationship between humanity and the Earth in a cosmopolitan and globalized world in which we have almost no time to fulfil the basic needs of our inner self. According to Cronnon, the wilderness appears as "the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul" (1996, 80). As Mena explains, the first law of ecology states that everything is connected; human beings live in a mutually interrelated development of all the Earth's life systems in a global diverse contemporary society. Having said this, ecocriticism becomes a necessary approach to the literary text since it gathers and explores nature in harmony. Mena proves in her analysis a critical view that aims to improve our lives, and consequently our relationship with nature and our surroundings. This view proves to be a postcolonial ecocritical alliance, which would bring out the need to understand the ever-changing relationship between people and the environment. Mena highlights that the ecocritical approach allows for realizing the importance of turning our eyes to other cultures in an attempt to recover lost values of existence and coexistence. She shows that the link between the postcolonial and the environment is perfectly portrayed in the Indian English text and, in particular, the corpus of Indian women writers, such as the well-known Anita Desai. Mena chooses Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) to analyse the development of the main female protagonist, Uma. This female character stands as a representation of upper-middle-class Indian women. Mena depicts the intimate relationship of the physical and the spiritual, making the reader witness the breakup Uma achieves

with the socially imposed ties; that is, she surpasses the corporeal dimension and encounters spiritual strength in nature. Ecospirituality and ecocriticism together raise a basic necessary element in our contemporary world which is crucial for finding our inner harmony in present-day society. It is precisely in the confluence of the corporeal and the spiritual that Uma achieves personal and spiritual freedom and attains her true self.

In the next chapter, "Entrenched Evil against Women: Corporeal and Spiritual Violence in Anuradha Roy's *Sleeping on Jupiter*," Jorge Diego-Sánchez (University of Salamanca, Spain) analyses the character of Nomi in Roy's 2015 story – a girl torn away from her family in the north of India at midnight, later abused in an ashram, and almost gang-raped in a train station on her return to India as an adult woman. Diego-Sánchez examines how this Indian writer represents the social, cultural, and political structures of Indian society as a hypocritical assemble that promotes how Nomi suffers both corporeal and spiritual violence throughout the twenty years the novel spans. In this sense, Roy depicts the emotions of pain, hate, fear, and disgust in Nomi, but also in the characters of Gouri, Latika, and Vidya, who show how the relation to bodies, language, and emotion has been outlined socially and imposed politically and religiously upon women for the sake of being representatives of sex. Roy exposes how these four women face, experience, and silence communal violence, family rejection, physical beatings, spiritual dominance, child abuse, and the power of local religious leaders. Similarly, the novel shows how Indian and international society prioritize family, political, and religious structures that allow for the taking of advantage of this corporeal and spiritual violence inflicted upon women. Accordingly, and following the work by Sarah Ahmed (2004) and Emma Dawson Varughese (2013), Diego-Sánchez proves that a further study about how emotions are embroidered, described, and entrenched upon women throughout the novel will let us understand how dominating political, cultural, and literary structures are defied by Roy as a woman writer who appeals to a vast international audience to denounce the "entrenched devil" (Kandasamy 2015) that women in India and elsewhere must face.

The 2012 New Delhi gang rape opened up debates about the epidemic of sexual violence in India due to its fatal ending. In "Asking For It? Crime Narratives in the 2012 New Delhi Gang Rape," Elena Avanzas-Álvarez (University of Oviedo, Spain) analyses how Jyoti Singh's rape and ultimate death are not isolated events typical of the so-called "Third World countries," but rather respond to a global epidemic of sexual violence against women. These crimes do not exist outside crime narratives, and

hence it is important to analyse how the crime fiction tradition – with its representations of victims, criminals, and the corpse through language – affects the way in which society consumes written news about rape. Consequently, rape stories also have an impact on our understanding of the crime, so that crime fiction, as well as the media, plays a key role in rape culture and gender prejudices. Avanzas underlines how contemporary literature with a colonial past has pioneered the representation of rape in mainstream literature from a feminist point of view. By analysing Louise O'Neill's *Asking For It* (2015), Courtney Summers' *All the Rage* (2015), and Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You: Or Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017), Avanzas explores the aftermath of rape for young women in their respective postcolonial settings, "where their countries' historical pasts play a subtle yet key role in the understanding of their own bodies, and the violence committed against them" (127).

The art of dance, which is inherent to Indian culture from ancient times, is tackled in "The Communicative Dimension of Dance in Bollywood Movies of the Last Two Decades." In this chapter, Francesca Rosso (independent scholar, Italy) explains how there is no dichotomy between physical structure, mind, and soul in Indian culture, and how dance expresses the connection between corporeal and spiritual dimensions of the body. In Bollywood movies, dance is the most authentic part because it exists only if someone dances, which means that dance is embodied in the performer. Dance gives films the opportunity to be totally reliable – if words can lie, bodies can only tell the truth. That is why dance in films expresses feelings, dreams, desires, and spiritual needs, and enhances emotions. Following Laura U. Marks (2000), Rosso claims that dance in Bollywood movies functions as "the skin of the film." If eyes and ears can be considered as objective sensory organs, touch, smell, and taste are subjective, connected with our inner parts because what we eat, smell, and touch becomes us. According to yoga, the senses relate to the spirit, and the same is valid for dance. Bollywood dance comes from classical and folk Indian dance mixed with Western dance like hip hop and jazz. It represents not only the national but also the Indian diaspora from England to Africa, and from Australia to Europe, and directly focuses on emotions through its excess and flamboyant style. It is a manifestation of the fusion between tradition and modernity representing a specific idea of India and, being a transnational phenomenon, it enhances the significance of the glocal. Bollywood cannibalizes popular music and dance, becoming a metonymy of "Indianity," where the body becomes central in relation to spirituality. As Rosso states, "it comes to signify to the nation a hedonistic philosophy that is in conflict with the ascetic idea constructed through

mind-body opposition in Indian thought and culture." Rosso concludes by underlying that dance expresses the connection of the corporeal and the spiritual dimensions of the body. Through Bollywood films, music and dance become the embodiment of Indian thought – the tangible and the intangible.

In chapter ten, "The Female Yoga Body in Contemporary Weight-loss Media," Rocío Riestra-Camacho (University of Oviedo, Spain) elucidates how the Western culture of the nineteenth century became embedded with the values of Romanticism and Parnassianism, of which perhaps the most visible was the incorporation of "exotic" and "oriental" elements from Chinese and Hindu communities. With the advent of modern society and capitalism, however, those cultural incorporations have, in many cases, become mere commodities. As far as yoga is concerned, there has been a recent tendency to reduce its spiritual value in favour of a bodily functionality, namely transforming it into a weight-loss product. This new conception – or, rather, appropriation – of yoga can be analysed from the perspective of applied somatechnics. In this sense, empirical evidence may come from different sources, including online data. Focusing on an exploration of health publications of online journals and blogs, Riestra-Camacho proves how this new functional conception of yoga has succeeded over spiritual ones and those emphasizing non-corporeal aspects. It is remarkable how, for example, blogs continuously expose the benefits of yoga as a weight-loss tool and leave as an incidental comment the fact that it can also help you reduce mental stress. Riestra-Camacho studies this together with the incorporation of fashionable specialized yoga clothing for optimum slimming results, sold in brand stores offering sports equipment (e.g. Oysho), so as to ultimately show the latest subversion of yoga by Western socioeconomic interests.

In "Chakras: the Symbolic Body in Yoga and Hindu Mysticism," María Tausiet (University of Valencia, Spain) proves that body and soul are united through an inseparable bond, the same as the material and the spiritual. Since ancient times, Hinduism has postulated the existence of an intermediary element between the physical body and the soul – the so-called subtle or energetic body, invisible and immeasurable. The concept of an energetic body, considered as an exceptional vehicle of consciousness, led to the development of a sophisticated allegorical anatomy. According to this, the vital force (*prana*) flows in each body through a wide network of channels (*nadis*) and converges in specific centres or circles (*chakras*). Although the number of *chakras* could, in theory, be infinite, the Upanishads mention six, and some yoga treatises

expand the figure to fourteen. Lined up from the base of the spine to the crown of the head, the *chakras* were seen as a focus for meditations and were represented as different pictorial diagrams (*mandalas*). Since the end of the nineteenth century, some scholars have established a connection between these symbolic centres and the endocrine glands. Today, the widely accepted standard number is seven. Tausiet first explores the tradition of Asian and Eastern countries in relation to the *chakras*, and then focuses on yoga and places it in the context of the current world. There has been a reductionism involved when considering the seven *chakras*, as opposed to eighty-four thousand pondered by Hinduism. Tausiet examines some of their principal symbolic and psycho-spiritual associations, providing a description of the seven *chakras*. She proves that they represent the bond between humans and the rest of the universe, each *chakra* being linked to one or more bodily organs with colours, elements, sensory functions, glands, planets, signs of the zodiac, smells, sounds, and forms of music. Tausiet ends the chapter by reminding the reader that, beyond the recent commercialization of yoga, we could perhaps challenge ourselves to find personal meaning through these circles of energy which might illuminate certain parts of our body, even if it only serves as a reminder that what we call our body is not merely a mass of flesh and bones, but a sensitive and thorough reflection of the mysteries of our innermost being.

In the last chapter of the volume, "Colonial and Postcolonial Ghosts: Victorian and Indian Spectral Narratives," Antonio Ballesteros-González (UNED, Spanish University of Distance Education) makes the reader consider the relationship between the East and the West, the body and the spirit, through an approach to the spectral elements that confirm the superstitious nature of the identities that resulted from the clash between the British and India. Ghosts are polysemous and ambiguous entities whose spectral ductility and elusiveness makes them apt to represent symbolically different aspects and facets of reality. From this perspective, this chapter analyses the two-sided relationship of Victorian England and India – a territory where folkloric and literary spectres proliferate – as it is reflected in their ghost stories, and deals with the complex and strained connections between the British colonizers and the Indian colonized. Attention is paid to the ambivalent reception of the ghost story both in India and Britain during the "golden age," where colonial nightmares were projected, among other forms, into fictions of "invasion scares" and fears of "reverse colonization" under the aegis of the British Empire. The ghostly narratives of Rudyard Kipling, Saki, H. G. Wells, W. W. Jacobs, Wilkie Collins, and Conan Doyle, among others, in this respect portray the

colonial anxieties and obsessions related to Indian stereotypes of mystery and exoticism, mostly based on colonial misunderstandings. On the other hand, Ballesteros-González takes into account the inverse phenomenon of the trace left by Victorian ghost stories in the Indian collective unconscious as seen from a literary perspective, represented by writers like Satyajit Ray, Sudhir Thapliyal, and Jug Suraiya, demonstrating that both Britain and India are deeply and mutually haunted by their ghosts as a result of the imperial encounter.

To conclude, in the age of the posthuman we seem to have come to believe that we are superhumans. The increasing and uncontrolled development of technological advance has made human beings forget about the real meaning of being "humane," which involves considering both our inner and outer selves, our spirits and corporeal beings, as the present circumstances caused by COVID-19 seem to require. Once more, and more than ever, time has come to make the world realize the importance of the value of the spirit so as to take care of our bodies. More than ever, humankind needs to stop and fathom the real and strong relationship between spirit and body that comprises our selves. Only through considering this union will the world be able to recover the truest values that would help to maintain the equilibrium of our planet, whose sense of loss seems to favour the unrestrained expansion of global viruses.

Spiritual and Corporeal Selves in India: Approaches in a Global World is appearing at the right time, since it sheds light onto the thoughts and reflections of the vulnerability of our body and the need to emphasize the refinement of the spiritual self to survive in a troubling world. The world seems to have come to a compulsory self-revision with the probable need to redefine our identity in new global and glocal scenarios.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE LANDING

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Butterflies usually land on flowers. Those were his words.

It was in our taxi, struggling to find an exit, hovering close to my face, making me uncomfortable. Its rapid movements attempted to find stability in the air as our seats jerked back and forth in the chaotic traffic of the nearby railway station. I was squinting hard, making sure I didn't actually see its crimson orange wings, the same dissected wings my science teacher had asked us to observe in the biology lab back in Nova Scotia, the same displayed wings I had acknowledged in a massive glass case in the British Museum two years prior, the same transformed wings that used to be furry legs on a little caterpillar.

And then, suddenly, we stopped. The overly tight seatbelt squeezed on my torso with the momentum of the jolt. My neck rocked forward with the impact. In front of me, the same silhouette fluttered, unharmed.

"*Aap ko patha ke ye tithali hai*?"

His voice was raspy and rough, like a breadknife slowly zigzagging through his voice box, breaking my grip from the dashboard as I tried to stabilize myself. It wasn't polite not to respond, I thought. I undid my seatbelt, stood up in the jeep, wiped my still moist eyes, and looked out of the passenger window where he was now standing.

"*Ji*, *patha hai*. I know, it is a butterfly."

From the corner of my eye, I knew the insect had landed on a stack of CDs near the cupholder, still sticky from the driver's sweet morning chai. Its

thin legs seemed wobbly and unsure but there was a slight confidence in the way the wings danced to find balance, making micro re-adjustments as the early evening breeze flowed through the open car window.

Shamsher was standing with his hands in his pockets. His jeans were a solid acid-wash, stiff and well-pressed. He ducked down and peered into the passenger window. His English was crisp and clear.

"Madam, the Ashram is open now."

I opened the car door, gently, so as not to rattle the butterfly from its place. He took the door handle from me, his rough, abrasive hands touching mine.

"I close it, so you don't disturb the *tithali*."

He was matter of fact now, pushing his thumb down on to my fingers, using his other hand to remove mine from the door. I looked up. His eyes were bigger than from when I first noticed them at the airport just an hour before, a sandalwood brown, wide and bright. His shoulders still broad from when he lifted my bag on his back, like a Sherpa, walking with such confidence and humility to his taxi. I could see the outline of his biceps.

"I see it. *Mehr bhani*."

I heard the car door slam and thought about the butterfly, wondering if it had lost its balance from its stance on the dashboard. I turned around and did a quick, almost childlike wave back, my hands seeming floppy and awkward compared to his. I had felt his skin on mine, I thought. He swivelled his head back and forth affirmatively. I saw him readjust his belt and pull his oversized jeans back onto his lean, svelte waist. His green and white checked button-down shirt was a little untucked. He leaned back to pull his bangs back away from his face and smiled. I looked up and had somehow crossed four lanes of traffic, my eyes still focused on the taxi and its driver behind me. I stood in front of the Ashram. I had landed.

I saw the butterfly fly off.

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Jyoti was a round woman, with thick angles and full hips. Her *kurta* hit her in all the right places and then some. Her thick braid, highlighted with deep-maroon henna, trailed around her neck nearly to her navel. She was
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already standing at the front lobby when I walked in the main door, hands behind her back.

“You are the foreigner, right?”

She rolled the letter “r” like my aunts did, like the Peruvian barista at the campus coffeeshop back home did, like the tip of her tongue was a motor. How did she know I was foreign? I was wearing a *kurta* similar to hers, with ordinary jeans and “simple hair” as instructed by my mother.

“Don’t make fashion or eyeliner a priority when you are in the Ashram, Romila, this trip is not about that.”

I attempted to echo Jyoti’s light, feathery voice, a voice that didn’t quite match her thick arms and hands.

“Canada. I was born in Canada. My parents are from Himachal. We are Punjabis.”

We. That was the first time I had included myself, in actual words, in that box.

“*Aacha-cha*. *Teek hai*.”

Her eyebrows lowered, as did her gaze. The silence was a little unbearable and my mind flooded with thoughts. Was she judging my bad accent? Could she tell I was from Canada from my stance? Was I too forward with my gaze, looking her in the eye? We walked down the main hall where the walls were nicely decorated with bright red flowers. There was very little sound except the humming of a neon light near a doorway where we stopped.

“Here, this is where you will be sleeping.”

Clearing her throat, Jyoti opened the wooden door. It was a small square of a room, barely enough for the two of us to enter, so we didn’t.

“You keep all your things with me. No possessions. You understand? *Teek hai*?”

Her voice was deliberate and monotone. She gave me a long skeleton key on a plastic keychain, from which hung a mini Taj Mahal.

I knew what she was thinking. This *pardesi* won't last. And then I realized that my backpack was still in the taxi. Shamsher must have been long gone by now, probably eating a roadside *pakora* on his way to my *Dada's* house in Kangra.

So I lied.

"I have no things. Just what I am wearing." I struggled for words. "I will need maybe some soap and a facecloth."

"Fine," she hesitated and added. "A little strange, no? Coming all the way from Canada with no clothes. This is not a military camp, right?"

She howled a cackle so piercing that I felt my entire body vibrate. How could I admit to her I had simply been careless and a little distracted? I looked down at my feet while she opened the narrow door a little more, encouraging me with her eyes to enter the room. As I stepped forward, she turned rapidly and returned back to the lobby, without giving me a chance to ask her about finding a toilet. I could hear her *chappals* stick to the grey cement floor of the hall and knew it was too late.

Two steps forward and I was at the foot of the bed. A brown gecko zipped past the adjacent wall and onto the grey windowsill. I stepped back only to hit the door. Geez, it's tight, I thought. It was a good thing I didn't bother bringing any luggage, it would not have fit in here anyway.

I sat on the edge of the bed, which was surprisingly comfortable and inviting. A light pink blanket lay on the soft mattress, smelling like lavender. I lay down, letting the creaks guide me exactly where to go. My neck felt tight and so I let myself sink deeper into the mattress. I didn't notice the ceiling fan was a bright blue or that the trimmings on the wall had painted flowers on them. It was all quite quaint, actually. Not really ashram-like at all, whatever that meant. Turning to my side, my gaze landed on the window just inches away. The electricity pole lines obstructed my view of the clouds. I began to wonder how far along the main road he was.

I closed my eyes. I relished in the thought of Shamsher realizing my bags were in the trunk of his car. He would unzip my bag and delicately take out my clothes and belongings. I hoped his callused hands would discover my silk undergarments, the ones I snuck in my bag when my parents weren't looking. I opened my eyes, my neck was warm and my thighs were tight. Resting my hands onto my belly, I felt my body oscillate up

and down with my breath and I continued to lie and wonder. I was tempted to move my hand further down and respond …

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"Chee Chee, sleeping with those ugly shoes on the bed!*"*

Jyoti had stormed in, hollering with her hands on her chest, holding her breasts as they bounced to and fro. I stood up with a jolt, feeling a little landlocked with Jyoti's protruding belly close to mine.

"Sorry, so sorry. *Maaf karo, Didi.*" I removed my sandals, and pulled back my limp ponytail into a bun, at attention. My eyes were not quite focused, but I could feel that my neck was better.

"The dhal and rice are prepared, so please go and wash. And never put those shoes on the bed."

Jyoti had clearly not accepted my apologies. Her lips barely opened as she spoke, and her eyes remained fixated on my shoes. A pair of ballet slipper-like sandals appeared at the foot of the bed. I slipped them on and made my way behind Jyoti towards the fragrant kitchen.

I walked into a kitchen full of people, full of pots and pans, full of steam in the air, full of noise and the buzzing around of spatulas and *thali* plates. All of this for dhal and rice, I thought.

I could feel the penetrative gazes of the chefs with their full moustaches and wide collar uniforms stirring the large pots of moong dhal, tilting their necks, spatulas in mid-circle, pausing to look at me. I kept my eyes on the back of Jyoti's shoes, not looking up. The fullness of the room seemed to deflate as I walked through it. Jyoti motioned towards a long dining room where there were benches and tables set up.

"Here. This is where we will eat. And then we will go over there, on the other side, to begin the yoga training."

I found a seat at one of the three tables in the room. I noticed the yellow rose petals scattered over the green tablecloth were fresh and almost glistening under the sunlight now peeking in as Jyoti opened up the curtains of the three large windows. The stainless-steel bowls placed at every seat were like the ones my mother used at home, little ones for *dahi wada* or *keer.* A pitcher of water was at the far end and so was he.
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"These were in the boot of my taxi."

He was actually here, speaking to me.

"*Aap ko tho yeh cheezein kay zaroorath hai, nayheen*?"

How could he be here? Why was he here? He had changed his clothes, wearing a deep burgundy cotton *kurta* with gold-coloured buttons. He had trimmed his beard and slicked back his hair, pulling his bangs away to reveal more of his radiant face.

"*Aap*?"

It was like a dialogue from an old '80s Bollywood movie my father would watch late at night.

"*Ji.* Your clothes for your yoga training?"

And from in between his long, strong legs, I saw the embroidered Canadian flag on my forest green backpack. I sat motionless, hoping Jyoti had left the room by now, that the chefs were too busy spicing and stirring the dhal to notice Shamsher was with me, alone. The grand dining room seemed smaller than ever; whatever light had been streaming through the windows seemed to faintly disappear. As he got up and walked towards me, my neck stiffened up again and I could feel trickles of sweat running down my back.

"Yes, thank you. I can't believe you turned around for me."

My gaze moved downwards as I could hardly breathe looking at his full lips and sharp jawline.

He nodded and left the bag by my leg. I could see his hands were unstable, and his forearm was flexed as he let go of the handle ever so gently. His fingers were warm as they grazed my wrist and rattled my silver bangles. He paused and added:

"Yoga is not training, Madam," rolling the "r" like Jyoti had done earlier, this time with a bit more force, like he was convincing me of something.

"Yoga *tho* track and field *nayheen hai.* No competition. It is about breathing with all of your body, that is it, *bus, yeh hee hai.*"

His full smile, soaked with personality and mischief from his eyes, enveloped me. I stood up and greeted him, hands together, trembling:

"*Namaskar*."

I sighed heavily as he turned around and waved back, sauntering through the now quiet kitchen. Jyoti was watching his every move at the doorway, ensuring he had left the building and returned to his taxi.

The bowls on the table shook a little from the slamming of the front door.

I picked up my bag and followed the fragrance of his aftershave, because butterflies only land on flowers.

CHAPTER TWO

NEO-VEDANTA: SOME CONCEPTUAL ISSUES IN THE CONTEXTS OF INDIAN DISCOURSES

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Vedanta, as we generally understand it, is the wisdom which occurs at the end of the Vedas, perhaps even as the essence of the Vedic wisdom. And as many scholars see it, this could be interpreted as the ultimate objective and the totality of the Vedas – *atmanjana*, or the inner spiritual awareness. Some would even argue that the Advaitic or monistic view would subscribe adequately and squarely for the entire Vedic vision as a whole. However we see it, in the final analysis, Vedanta holds forth the essential Vedic Darsana, the entire philosophy of spiritual oneness and being. There is no equivalent for the word "philosophy" in Indian thinking; the nearest is the Sanskrit Darsana, a sort of spiritual perception. What, then, is neo-Vedanta? Without going deeper into the intricacies of scholarly debates, we could settle for a sense of contemporary continuity of this unified view, a darsana or philosophy of spiritual becoming in a different format. Despite the overt challenges and difficulties proffered by various cultural and historical interventions, the spiritual element in Indian speculative thinking has continued to survive and even prevail, albeit in several strata. In what follows we will examine some of the various tenets of this neo-Vedantic worldview and elaborate the systematic conceptualizations of one of its major practitioners.

As is generally accepted, knowledge that is acquired through the senses is codified and systematized through a two-way system: either with the

[1] Note: Some early drafts of this essay were presented at two conferences on Vedanta Philosophy.