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## “Sandhyas Sandhyas Sandhyas!” Indian Thought in *Finnegans Wake*

### Abstract

James Joyce seems to have been well acquainted with Indian thought. In *Finnegans Wake* he abundantly employs Sanskrit terms, especially those connected with Buddhist philosophy. The Sanskrit words are oftentimes straightforward and can be identified with some degree of certainty thanks to the context in which they appear. The aim of this paper is to enumerate and gloss the Sanskrit terms that appear in *Finnegans Wake* with particular attention being paid to Book IV.

Keywords: *Finnegans Wake*, Sanskrit, Buddhism, India.

Although James Joyce is thought to have been very well acquainted with Eastern and “oriental” ways of thought, the way this philosophy was manifested in his work was quite strongly influenced by the sources he most likely had at hand. Krishna Sen, who touched upon the topic of Joyce’s interaction with India, notices that in the case of *Ulysses*, “Hindu and Buddhist iconography functions as decorative exotica.”<sup>1</sup> While Suzette Henke writes that Joyce, “had read Frazer’s *Golden Bough* along with the Kabbalah, the Koran, and various studies of Eastern mysticism.”<sup>2</sup> In addition, he had also studied *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* by E.A. Wallis Budge.

James Joyce’s knowledge of India is said to have come from three major sources, according to Henke they were: *Isis Unveiled* and *Mahatma Letters* by Helena Blavatsky and *Maya: der Indische Mythos* by Heinrich Zimmer.

The first two sources cannot be termed academic or factual and are permeated by with a philosophy of esoteric mysticism formed by Mme. Blavatsky – a sort of cacophony of theosophical theory which took freely from different religious traditions and mixed them at will. Orientalism (in the sense given by Edward Said)

<sup>1</sup> K. Sen, *Where Agni Araftlammed and Shiva Slew: Joyce’s Interface with India*, [in:] *A Companion to James Joyce*, ed. R. Brown, Oxford 2008, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> S. Henke, *James Joyce East and Middle East: Literary Resonances of Judaism, Egyptology, and Indian Myth*, “Journal of Modern Literature” 1986, Jul., vol. 13, no. 2, p. 316.

permeates these works and this can be easily seen in the Indian inspirations that we will find in the works of James Joyce.<sup>3</sup> Besides these literary sources inspired on the topic of the “Orient”, Atherton adds that: “Joyce’s interest in Eastern religions began long before 1936. It started in Dublin when ‘Esoteric Buddhism’ was a fashionable topic with George Russell and his circle. Joyce is said to have made fun of them, and his treatment of the subject in *Ulysses* supports this statement.”<sup>4</sup>

If we compare the Indian inspirations in Joyce’s two great works, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, it is clear that India appears in a much more purposeful manner in the latter. Therefore it is the latter that will be the focus of this paper. *Finnegans Wake* is peppered with references to Indian mythology and philosophy, many Sanskrit words appearing throughout in various contexts. Krishna Sen writes that “*Finnegans Wake* demonstrates a greater synergy between ‘Western and Eastern Approaches’ (FW 604 26) and a more rigorous endeavour to ‘hindustand’ (FW 492 17).”<sup>5</sup> According to Krishna Sen, the leading example is that found in *Finnegans Wake* 80.24:

Agni araflammed and Mithra monished and Shiva slew [...].

Agni is the Hindu god of fire; he is identified with the sacrificial flame and the sun as well as the house and hearth. The verb “araflammed” is perhaps derived from the Latin *ara*, alter, and “aflame”. This is fitting as Agni was a god who was offered oblations of clarified butter during rituals, that is the *agnihotra*,<sup>6</sup> which Sen believes is being referred to here.<sup>7</sup>

Mithra may come from the Sanskrit *mitra*, friend, yet it is much more likely that this is a reference to Mithra, the Zoroastrian god, also lord of the sun. Shiva (śiva) is a well-known personage of the Hindu pantheon, and also its most ambiguous characters, being both the maker and the destroyer of the universe. He is a great ascetic but also a fierce warrior and sensual husband to Pārvaṭī, his consort. Interestingly the passage continues in this vein (what Sen does not mention) and the whole section reads (FW 80.24, 25):

Agni araflammed and Mithra monished and Shiva slew as mayamutras the obluvial waters of our noarchic memory withdrew [...].

The *mayamutras* which appear in this passage also seem to have been inspired by Indian thought, the element *maya*, which must come from the Sanskrit *māyā*

<sup>3</sup> Heinrich Zimmer, on the other hand, was a professor of Indian philology renowned for his work on philosophy and mythology, as well as religious practices connected with sacrifice. The influence of Zimmer’s book on Joyce is perhaps more difficult to detect.

<sup>4</sup> J.S. Atherton, *The Books at the Wake. A Study of Literary Allusions in James Joyce’s Finnegans Wake*, Carbondale 2009, p. 225.

<sup>5</sup> K. Sen, op. cit., p. 209. The references to *Finnegans Wake* given by Krishna Sen [(FW 604 26), (FW 492 17)] are in the standardized format used for quoting the *Wake*, that is, the first number signifies the page number and the second signifies the line number. This is the format I will be using throughout this paper. The edition I have referenced is: J. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 1939 text; with introduction and notes by Len Platt, London 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Sanskrit words are given accordingly to the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (I.A.S.T.)

<sup>7</sup> K. Sen, op.cit., s. 209.

(this point will be developed shortly). It will be remembered that Zimmer’s book on Indian mythology, which Joyce is thought to have read, carried this very word in its title. Perhaps, if we accept that Joyce was strongly affected by the “esoteric Buddhism” that was fashionable in Britain in the 1920s, we could also conjecture that *mayamutra* carries within it an echo of *mahāmudra*, a word that literally means “great seal” but in Buddhism came to signify a specific philosophical outlook connected with the question of existence and its lack.

Suzette Henke is of the opinion that HCE is sometimes identified with Śiva who, as she underlines, is the, “Indian archetype of phallic power.”<sup>8</sup> This is perhaps also the case in *Finnegans Wake* (*FW* 4.36–5.01):

[...] a skyerscape of most eyeiful hoyth entowerly, erigenating from next to nothing and celescalating the himals and all [...] (*FW* 4.36–5.01).

Śiva is often represented by the *liṅgam*, a phallic symbol which came to carry a religious importance. In the above quoted fragment, we could find reference to the myth according to which Śiva transformed himself into an enormous *liṅgam* fire, which was so all-encompassing that none of the other gods could reach its beginning and end.

The examples quoted thus far seem to stand solitary in the opening books of the *Wake*. It is in Book IV that we find the greatest number of Indian references and Sanskrit words. The aim of this paper is to explain the ideas behind the terms which would allow the reader of *Finnegans Wake* to further appreciate the complexity of the work and Joyce’s genius. I will follow the references chronologically, as they appear in the book (some are also given by Chitra Panikkar, and propose an elucidation of the terms).

The book starts with the invocation “Sadhyas Sadhyas Sadhyas!” one that, “will bring to mind T.S. Eliot’s ‘Shantih! Shantih! Shantih!’ and perhaps Joyce’s famous parody of it, “Shan’t we? Shan’t we? Shan’t we?”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps we could also understand this invocation as an allusion to the decidedly Christian “Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus.” The term itself is most probably a play on the Sanskrit word *samdhya*, which holds a variety of meanings, the most basic being “juncture.” In the ritual context, it came to signify the rites which the Brahmins conduct in the morning, at noon and in the evening, so at the three junctures of the day. *Samdhya* is already present in the *Vedas*, the most ancient of Sanskrit texts, which are tentatively dated to around 1500 BCE. The ritual is really a complex series of actions which are both a literal and spiritual purification rites – the worshipper performs various forms of ablution and repeats the applicable mantras.

Panikkar has a very interesting take on this invocation:

Mythologically, Sandhya is the daughter of Brahma, who, when her father tried to molest her, assumed the form of a deer. This Sandhya is also called Saraswati, and in some versions of the myth, she is both the daughter and the consort of Brahma. (The river Saraswati takes its name from her.) Thus, the very word that begins this final section acquires semantic, spatial, temporal, and archetypal significance in the Indian context. These multiple levels

<sup>8</sup> S. Henke, op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>9</sup> Ch. Panikkar, op. cit., p. 462.

of meaning attributed to a single incantatory note would not be important if FW were not concerned with these themes. But the work is full of time that proceeds cyclically through four ages; it is about fall and rise, creation and incest.<sup>10</sup>

The next fragment of *Finnegans Wake* of interest for this article is FW 594.01,02:

Vah! Suvarn Sur! Scatter brand to the reneweller of the sky, thou who agnites! Dah!

The first word, *vah* (FW 549.01), is troublesome. As a verbal root it has many meanings, the principal being “carry” or “lead.” However, it is very unlikely that this is what Joyce had in mind, especially if we take into consideration the place of *vah* in the sentence. As a vocative form which begins an entire paragraph, it was almost certainly meant to be interpreted as a typical Indian exclamation, denoting astonishment or admiration but also disgust. We will also find it abundantly used in Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* and *The Jungle Books*.<sup>11</sup>

“Suvarn Sur!” is a combination of *suvarṇa*, of a “beautiful colour”, “golden”, and *sura*, a “deity.” Hence, the amalgamation would also be an invocation to a golden god, most likely Sūrya, the sun god. It could also be a reference to the god of fire, Agni as Joyce often reaches for this motif. “Suvarn Sur” / Sūrya is called the “reneweller of the sky” – one who is at the same time the “renewer” of the sky as well as the one who upholds it (a newel is a pole that is used to support spiral staircases). He is also referred to as the one who “agnites” the sky – ignites it with *agni*, the Sanskrit “fire.” Agni, fire personified, definitely appears in this portmanteau blend of the English and Sanskrit which also carries in the Latin *igni-*s. The next sentence is another exclamation: “Dah!” which could be interpreted as a Sanskrit word also, namely the verbal root form  $\sqrt{dah}$ , “burn”. This has particular merit if we read it in connection with the sentences preceding it. Hence, we may interpret the whole short passage as an invocation to the sun deity Sūrya, upholder and “igniter” of the sky.

“Svadesia salve!” (FW 594.04) is the next meaningful Indian inspiration in this book. *Svadeśa*, literally means “one’s own country” in Sanskrit. However, this may be a reference to the Swadeshi Movement, an Indian nationalist effort which started with the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon Viceroy of India, in 1905. “A mighty upsurge swept the country. Large meetings were held in different parts of Bengal as a mark of protest against the Partition. People took a solemn vow to use *Swadeshi* (Indian manufactures) goods.”<sup>12</sup> The movement lasted up to 1908 and its core principles were later incorporated by Mahatma Gandhi into his strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience. The movement made a big impact in Great Britain and must have been known to Joyce, so we can speculate whether it was the second connotation he intended rather than the first, literal Sanskrit one. In the context of the sentence, both ideas make sense; it can either be a call to save one’s own country or a call upon a nationalist movement for liberation. It is

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Eg. “‘Wah!’ said Kim in most utter amazement.” R. Kipling, *Kim*, London 1987, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> S.N. Sen, *History. Modern India*, New Delhi 2006, p. 143.

also very likely that both the meanings are implied. In the next line (*FW* 594.05) Joyce writes:

“[We] Durbalanars, theeadjure. A way, the Margan, from our astamite, [...]”.

The phrase *Durbalanars*, which brings to mind “Dubliners” first and foremost, may also be seen as a play on the Sanskrit *durbala* – “weak”. The *Margan* must come from the Sanskrit *mārga* – “path”, “way” but also refers to a basic Buddhist concept of following the “right path” to enlightenment.

Panikkar adds two more words to the list of Sanskrit references in Book IV, in a theory I must disagree with – namely “kal” (*FW* 594.07) and “om” (*FW* 594.12, *FW* 607.22). While I can concur that both these words could be seen as deriving from Sanskrit, “kal” from *kāla*, “time” and “om” from *aum*, the well-known mystical chant, nothing in the text actually drives us to assume it is so. “Om” seems to be used in the quoted passages as a garbled form of “I’m” (in all three cases)<sup>13</sup>, whereas “kal” is rather a form of “call”<sup>14</sup> than a derivative of the Sanskrit *kāla*. Of course, one could argue that Joyce often uses idiosyncratic words that have multiple meanings and that we should not exclude any of them, however, I believe that with very short words, like “om” and “kal” we are often subject to fall into the trap of over-interpreting their meaning.

The next word of doubtlessly Sanskrit origin is “Duhkha” (*FW* 595.22). It comes from *duḥkha*, pain or sadness, and it appears in the phrase “Arans Duhkha.” *Duḥkha* is the subject of the Buddhist four noble truths, which explain the causes of suffering. This is one of the main doctrines of Buddhist religious philosophy and Joyce, as it was stated earlier, was most likely well acquainted with at least the basic ideas of the religion. It should be noted that “Arans Duhkha” was most likely a (politically motivated) play on words, with the whole phrase sounding like the “Iron Duke”, nickname of the Duke of Wellington (interestingly, there was a film called “The Iron Duke” based on the life of Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, released in 1934, just a few years before Joyce published *FW*).

“Atma as evars” (*FW* 596.24) is another interesting phrase, in which we find the word *ātman*, “the individual soul”, essence of life. In Indian philosophical schools, the *Atman* is usually discussed in comparison with the *brahman*, “the universal soul” or, sometimes, god.

*Svapna*, “sleep” can be found three times in Book IV of *Finnegans Wake*: twice in the compound “Svapnasvap” (*FW* 597.04) and also in 595.30, in what seems to be a sort of imperative form, simply “Svap”. “Svapnasvap” is noteworthy because it corresponds perfectly with the whole narrative, in the earlier sentences there is talk of “a sound night’s sleep” (*FW* 597.02) and rolling over, it is one of the easier Sanskrit words to interpret in its context. The meaning “Svapnasvap” gives is of a sort of tautology – “dream-sleep.”

“Shavarsanjivana” which appears in *FW* 597.19 is another fascinating compound that seems to have been compiled of *śava*, “corpse”, and *saṃjīvana*, “made

<sup>13</sup> “make sunlike sylp om this warful dune’s battam.” *FW* 594.12, 13 “Om still so sovvy. Whyle om till ti ti.” *FW* 607.22

<sup>14</sup> “the kal his course”, *FW* 594.07.

alive". The entire compound could refer to a body being brought back from the dead. However, because of the liberties with spelling that Joyce takes when using Sanskrit words, it is possible to understand the compound in a completely different way, namely *śatavarṣam*, "one hundred years", and *jīvana*, "existing." Then, we could understand it as "someone living for one hundred years." Sen proposes to interpret this as a reference the Sanjivani Mantra which "was the occult charm for immortality" and was thought to bring people back from the dead. Whatever the real motivation behind Joyce's choice, there is definitely a "suggestion of rebirth"<sup>15</sup> in this passage.

Both "mahamayability" (*FW* 597.28) and "Mayasdaysed" (*FW* 617.29) contain the already mentioned word *māyā*, "illusion." The term was used in Indian philosophy and religion to denote different things over the ages but at the core there seems to be the idea that the world surrounding us is all *māyā*, illusion which is projected by different entities depending on the religious philosophy in which the term *māyā* appears. In all philosophies, however, the aim is to see past this deception and reveal the true nature of the world and attain liberation. The idea of *māyā* is also an important component of the Buddhist ideology, of course, especially of Mahayana Buddhism. There, *māyā* was one of the twenty *upakleśa*, sub-sufferings or secondary, unwholesome mental formations.

Page 598 of *Finnegans Wake* is full of Sanskrit references, at the end of the first paragraph we read:

Now day, slow day, from delicate to divine, divases. Padma, brighter and sweetster, this flower that bells, it is our hour or risings. Tickle, tickle. Lotus spray. Till herenext. Adya. (*FW* 598.11–14)

"Divases," I believe, is a combination of both *divasa*, "day", "heaven", and *deva*, "deity" as is implied from preceding words of the sentence. *Deva* also seems to appear later in the book in the phrase, "By dim delty Deva" (*FW* 614.25). Padma is most definitely *padma*, "lotus", which is very broadly illustrated in *Isis Unveiled* and given as a cult symbol of the Hindus<sup>16</sup> and as such would have probably been well known to Joyce. "Adya" (*FW* 598.14), is probably a rather straightforward reference to the Italian "addio" or French "adieu" perhaps conceptually blended with the Sanskrit *adya*, "now", "today". A few lines later, the word "adyatants" (*FW* 598.25) appears, in which we may indicate an amalgamation of *adya* and *anta*, "the end".

"Loka" *loka*, "world" or "universe", can be found in *FW* 598.28<sup>17</sup> and seems to be used in its literal meaning. On the other hand, "madamanvantora" (*FW* 598.33)<sup>18</sup> is a notable compound which seems to contain, *inter alia*, the Sanskrit phrase *manvantara*, signifying a period in Hindu cosmology said to last 4.32 million human years.

<sup>15</sup> K. Sen, op. cit., p. 211.

<sup>16</sup> H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, vol. 1, p. 91–93.

<sup>17</sup> "To them in Ysat Loka. Hearing. The urb it orbs. Then's now" (*FW* 598.28).

<sup>18</sup> "he age of the madamanvantora of Grossguy and Littlelady."

Another interesting passage is *FW* 600.05,06:

Polycarp pool, the pool of Innalavia, Saras the saft as, of meadewy marge [...]

Here, we may possibly find another two Sanskrit words. As to the first, *saras*, “lake”, “pool”, I do not think there can be any doubt that it was used in its literal sense. The second could potentially be the already indicated *mārga*. However, this is not entirely clear, as the main focus seems to be a play on the word “margin”.

An entire Sanskrit phrase appears in *FW* 601.03–04: “Tasyam kuru salilakriyamu!” This expression, I believe, shows us exactly what a challenge it is to annotate or comment of the works of James Joyce. In *A Reader’s Guide to Finnegans Wake*, William York Tindall comments on it thus:

Tasyam kuru salilakriyamu’ contains two Japanese words: *kuru*, to come, and *yamu*, to cease. The rest, I am assured by Setsuko Ohara, is not Japanese. Indeed the whole sentence, including the apparent Japanese, Miss Ohara tells me, is Telugu (a language of India) for: You should deal fairly with her or do her justice – advice to H.C.E. on dealing with A.L.P. *Tasyam* is by her or to her; *kuru* is do; *salila* is good; *kriyamu* is act.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, McHugh writes that it is Sanskrit, and means “in her (river?) perform water rite.”<sup>20</sup>

As to the Japanese references, I am not competent to comment, however, this phrase is most definitely Sanskrit. It is made up of the words *tasyām* (locative, singular, feminine personal pronoun) and *kuru* (imperative of the root √*kr*, do, act) and a compound that can be interpreted a few ways because of the lack of diacritic markings. *Salila* is “water” and *kriyā* is “act”, “performance” so the meaning of “water rite” suggested by McHugh is most probably correct. *Salīla* (long ‘ī’) means “sporting”, “playing”, which could lead to the other interpretation *salilakriyamu* as “playing games”. However, I do not think that this second option is accurate and, all in all, it does seem that the person speaking is imploring another to carry out some sort of rites in a river.<sup>21</sup>

In “Rinvention of vestiges by which they drugged the buddhy” (*FW* 602.26,27), we find the concept of the *buddhi*, literarily, intellect or belief. *Buddhi* holds a very prominent place in Indian philosophy, as Max Mueller wrote:

*Buddhi*, commonly translated by perception, but really a kind of perception that involves something like what we should call intellect (*nous*). What as far as I can see, is really meant by *Buddhi* in this place is the lighting up of Prakriti or dull matter by intelligence, so as to render it perceptive, as also perceptible. It is the Indian ‘Let there be light’.<sup>22</sup>

The placement of this phrase, so closely linked with the question of human perception, within a paragraph that is a, “collage that is a medley of headlines, a news story, photos, a radio broadcast, and film news,”<sup>23</sup> is also noteworthy.

<sup>19</sup> W.Y. Tindall, *A Reader’s Guide to Finnegans Wake*, Syracuse 1996, p. 329–330.

<sup>20</sup> R. McHugh, *Annotations to Finnegans Wake*, Baltimore 2006, p. 601.

<sup>21</sup> Not an uncommon trope in Sanskrit literature, found for instance in the Rāmāyaṇa 1.043.015a: *pitāmahānām sarveṣām kuruṣva salilakriyām* – “May you perform a water-rite for all your great forefathers.”

<sup>22</sup> M. Mueller, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, Bel Air 2003, p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> R.B. Kersher, *Joyce and Popular Culture*, Gainesville 1996, p. 145.

This sentence appears to close the list of Sanskrit words found in Book IV of *Finnegans Wake*, the most “Indian” of all of the books, however, as the examples have shown, this list cannot be at all considered closed. The necessarily brief analysis of the chosen words gives rise to two issues which must be addressed. On the one hand there is the question of Joyce not being acquainted with the Sanskrit language, although, as Atherton notes, “he used all kinds of people to supply him with words in the languages he wanted to use.”<sup>24</sup> We do not know who supplied Joyce with words in Sanskrit, but if it was a source of the academic value of *Isis Unveiled*, it is possible that Joyce had not even seen the Sanskrit words in their correct spelling before he incorporated them into his extraordinary meta-language, garbling them even further. We cannot say for sure whether there are Sanskrit words hidden in the text that we will not be able to decipher.

On the other hand, there is the problem of over-interpretation; we can easily fall into the trap of looking for things that are not there. For example, the word “*Om*” which is of huge import in the Indian philosophical systems: it would be appealing to imagine that Joyce used it with full intent in the examples mentioned above, however, trying to prove that Joyce had this Indian concept in mind is challenging, at the least. It is especially these very short, monosyllabic words that are most problematic for academics and the most prone to be injected with the greatest variety of symbolism.

Nevertheless, as I hope this paper has proven, Joyce had a working knowledge of Indian and Buddhist ideology which he employed in abundance in *Finnegans Wake*, enriching the work with another layer of complex meaning. Book IV does, in fact, bring to the foreground the transcultural vision of James Joyce.

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<sup>24</sup> J.S. Atherton, op. cit., p. 224.