

Dr. Bharti Silswal  
Dept. of English, Birla Campus  
HNBGU (A central University)  
Srinagar (Garhwal), Uttarakhand, India  
bhartisilswal@yahoo.in

Artemidorus' Oneirocriticism and the Dreams of Seth Bahramji Naurozji Modi in the *River of Smoke* by Amitav Ghosh

Abstract:

Dreams play an important role in the well-being of human psychology. In the present paper, we shall apply the Artemidorus' oneirocriticism on the dreams of Bahramji Naurozji Modi, a central character in the novel *River of Smoke* by Amitav Ghosh.

Keywords: *Enypnia*, *Oneiroi*, State Dream, Event Dream, Theoretical dream, Allegorical dream, *Kata Nomon*, *Para Nomon*, *Para Physin* and *Aphrodisia*.

Artemidorus Daldianus or Ephesius was a professional diviner who lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. He is best known for his five-volume Greek work: the *Oneirocritica* or *Oneirokritikon* or *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Artemidorus believed that dreams are unique to the individual and that the waking life of a person will affect the symbols in his dreams. Michel Foucault described the text as a practical, experiential guide, the work that reveals culturally salient patterns relating to 'the ethical experience of the *aphrodisia*.'

In the *The History of Sexuality: The Care of the Self*, Volume-3, Foucault mainly focused on the oneiric representation of pleasure. In the first chapter "The Methods of Artemidorus" of this book, Foucault focused on the literature of oneirocriticism particularly *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Artemidorus. Artemidorus drew a distinction between two forms of nocturnal vision: *enypnia* (i.e. dreams), and *oneiroi* (i.e. dream experiences).

- *Enypnia*: They are dreams that express the present affects of the individual and run their course in proximity to the mind. It is grounded in the current state of affairs; it shows the sleeping subject his own state, his deficiency or excess in relation to his

own body, and his fear or desire in relation to his mind. For example, one is in love, one desires the presence of the beloved or one is hungry one dreams of eating.

- *Oneiroi* or *Oneiros*: They are dream experiences, which are different. Artemidorus discovered their nature and function in three etymologies. The *oneiros*, which tells what is real. It tells what is, what is already inscribed in time's unfolding and will come true as an event in the not-too-distant future. It is also that which acts on the soul and excites it—*oneirai*. The dream alters the soul, it fashions and shapes it; it leads it into dispositions and induces movements in it corresponding to what is shown. Further, one recognises in the word *oneiros*, the name of the beggar of Ithaca, Irus, who carried the messages that were entrusted to him.

There is another form of distinction to each of these two categories of nocturnal visions:

1. State Dreams: In state dreams, desires are manifested by the easily recognizable presence of its object; it reveals itself clearly and transparently. They are of two types. In the first case, desire and aversion are manifested directly without any concealment. It was the case with inexperienced common people. In the second type, dreams are manifested through signs, not directly. It happens when man knows how to interpret his own dreams. This is because his mind plays tricks on him in a rather ingenious way. State dreams never appear to virtuous person because he knows how to subdue their irrational movements e.g. passion, desire, fear, deficiency and excess. Plutarch believed that it is a sign of progress when a person no longer dreams.
2. Event Dreams: In the state dreams, it is the object of desire that manifests itself in the dream and reveals the desire; whereas in the event dreams, the desire is manifested through some events, scenes or appearances. They are of two types: Theorematic dreams and Allegorical dreams.
  - (i) Theoretical Dreams: They open directly onto the thing it announces, without leaving any room for interpretation. They are direct, showing its actual appearance that which already exists in the future mode, e.g. one sees in a dream the sinking of a ship on which one will later suffer shipwreck. Virtuous individuals—who do not have *enypnia* but only *oneiroi*—commonly experience the clear vision of theorematic dreams. Greeks believe that by this way God speaks directly to souls that are pure.
  - (ii) Allegorical Dreams: In these dreams, the relation between image and event is indirect. They are not followed by a direct realization. They are subjected to

interpretation. They define the real domain of oneirocriticism, e.g. the image of the ship that breaks apart on the rocks may not signify a shipwreck or even a misfortune but emancipation in the near future for a slave.

Artemidorus' Classification of Dreams

|                               |               | State Dreams |               | Event Dreams |             |
|-------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|
|                               |               | Direct       | Through Signs | Theorematic  | Allegorical |
| In<br>virtuous<br>individuals |               | never        |               | Usually      |             |
| In ordinary<br>individuals    | Expert        |              | usually       |              | Usually     |
|                               | Inexperienced | usually      |               |              |             |

Artemidorus devoted four chapters to sexual dreams. He organised his analysis around the distinction between three types of acts:

1. *Kata Nomon* (those in conformity with the law): This chapter deals with different issues—adultery, marriage, frequenting of prostitutes, resorting to household slaves and servant's masturbation. The important thing is that it is not the form of the act itself that determines the moral value of the dream but the condition and the social status of the partner/the other.

Artemidorus stated as a general rule that woman in dream is a symbol of things that will happen to the dreamer. So that the character and disposition of the woman determine what will happen to him. First he classified women in categories like: the wife, the mistress, and the prostitute. To dream of sexual intercourse with one's own wife is a favourable sign. Same is the case with mistress. It promises benefits and profits of one's trade or occupation. The case of prostitutes is different. As an object from which one derives pleasure, that is also without refusing anything, they have positive value, but at the same time they also portend death. Linguistically the word 'brothel' signifies two meanings: a shop or workshop (*ergastērion*), which has favourable implications; and 'a place for everyone,' 'a common place' like cemetery, which portend death. There is third category of unknown woman. In this case, the dream's value for the future depends on the social value of the woman it

represents. If she is rich, well dressed, adorned with jewellery and gave herself willingly, then the dream promises something beneficial. If she is old, ugly, poor, if she does not freely consent, the dream is inauspicious.

The household provides another category of sexual partners: servants and slaves. They came under the domain of direct possession; they signify wealth and are an integral part of it. So, if one enjoys sexual intercourse with them, it indicates that one will derive pleasure from one's possessions, which will grow greater and more valuable. In this case, the sex of the partner (girl/boy) makes little difference, but the dreamer's position (active or passive) in sexual act is significant. Passivity in any case signifies harm, contempt and disgrace from inferior. Such dreams are ominous.

Next comes the group that comprises friends and acquaintances. It is auspicious to dream that one has sexual intercourse with a woman whom one knows, if she is rich and not married. For a woman who offers herself gives not only her body but also things pertaining to her body—clothes, jewellery etc. In case if she is a married woman, the dream is inauspicious, because married woman is always under her husband's authority, and the act is punishable under law. Thus, the dreamer in this case must expect future punishment of the same type.

If a dreamer is a woman, the dream is favourable in every case, for it accords with the natural and social roles of women. But if it is man who dreams of being possessed by another man; the dream is good if one is possessed by a man older and richer than one self. It promises gifts in future. On the other side, if active partner is younger and poorer or just poorer, the dream is bad, it is a sign of future expenditures. The last set of dreams are related to masturbation, which are closely associated with the theme of slavery. Because what is involved is a service that one renders to oneself and because the word that means 'to bind to a post,' used in connection with the whipping of slaves, also means 'to have an erection.' Therefore, if a slave dreams that he had masturbated his owner, in real life he may be sentenced to a whipping by his master.

2. *Para Nomon* (those contrary to the law): This domain is largely constituted by incest, which strictly means sexual relations between parents and children. As for incest with brothers and sisters, it is assimilated into the category of father-daughter intercourse whereas incest between brothers was put under both *kata nomon* and *para nomon*.

When father dreams of incest either with daughter or son, the signification is always unfavourable. If the child is very young (less than five years old), it signifies his/her death, and if child is more than five years but less than ten years old, then it signifies sickness. If the

child is older, the dream is still bad. In the case of one's own son, it portends a considerable loss of money and conflict in a household. This kind of dream is good in a single case, when father undertakes a journey with his son and so has a joint project to carry out with him. But if in dreams like this father is in a passive position (whosoever the dreamer was, father or son) the indications are ominous, it augurs hostility and conflict. To dream of incest with one's own daughter is also not better for father. It portends substantial loss of money for father. If in case girl is already married this dream indicates that she will leave her husband and will return home, and it will be necessary to provide for her. The dream is auspicious only in the case if the father being poor, the daughter may return wealthy and therefore capable of providing for her father.

However, incest with one's mother (always envisaged by Artemidorus as incest of mother and son and never of mother with daughter) is often a bearer of favourable omens. He did not consider mother-son incest to be morally wrong. The mother is a man's trade; thus to have intercourse with her signifies success and prosperity in one's profession. The mother is one's native land; thus such dream signifies returning home if he is in exile or he can expect success in political life. The mother is also the fertile ground from which one came, so if a man is involved in a lawsuit, such dream portends that he will win possession of the disputed property. If he is a farmer, he will have a rich harvest. But for sick man, to penetrate into this Mother Earth means that one will die.

3. *Para Physin* (those contrary to nature): These acts have two levels. The first concerns deviation from the position set by nature. The second concerns relation in which it is the partner who by his own nature defines the unnatural character of an act.

In the first case, Artemidorus showed us that nature has established a definite form of sexual act for each species. In the case of human, it is face to face position. All the other positions have been discovered by yielding to wantonness and licentiousness. So the dreams which contain the images other than natural union signify defective social relation, bad relationships, hostility and worsening economic situation. He also disapproved oral eroticism and termed them as 'awful act,' a 'moral wrong.' These dreams portend useless expenditure, a rift, enmity, and sometimes death.

In the second case, where the deviation is related to the very nature of one's partner, Artemidorus listed five possibilities: relation with God, with animals, with corpses, relation with one's own self, and relation between women. He found these relations as contrary to nature which always signify inauspicious things. The first type of dream indicates poverty, indigence and suffering. The second promises the birth of children, if one does not yet have

any, or their return if they are away. The third signifies that the children will die, that one will be deprived of women or mistresses or that one will be reduced to extreme poverty. As for the fifth category signifies that woman will engage in futile activities, or will be separated from her husband, or a widowhood, or the communication or knowledge of feminine secrets.

Two traits are visible in Artemidorus' analysis of sexual dreams. First, the dreamer is always present in his dream, and second, these images rarely forecast a sexual act or a deprivation of pleasure. Interestingly Artemidorus discovered a social signification in these sexual dreams. It is because the sexual acts are made up of the same elements as that of social domain.

Artemidorus viewed the sexual act as a game of superiority and inferiority, domination and submission, victory and defeat, activity and passivity, profit and expenditure. For Artemidorus the value of the dream is directly related to its conformity to the waking social realities. A good dream must conform to the general rule of isomorphism, analogy of position and economic adequation. Thus in sexual dreams, the subject of dream must behave according to his real role in society. Thus, to be active with one's slave, prostitute or with boy who is younger and poorer is good; at the same time to be passive with an individual older and richer is also good. It is by this virtue of this rule of isomorphism that the dream of incest with mother is also invested with positive values. By economic adequation, he means that—the cost and the benefit this activity entails must be properly regulated: in quantity (much expense for little pleasure is not good) and in direction as well (not to spend uselessly on those individuals, male or female, who are not in position to repay, offer compensation, or be useful in return). It is this principle that makes it good to dream of sexual act with slaves: one profits from one's possessions; that which one has purchased for the benefit of labour yields the benefit of pleasure besides. Artemidorus also stated his list of prohibition: fellation, incest, sexual relations between women, and above all the usurping of the male's role by a woman.

In the *River of Smoke*, Ghosh analyses the effects of desires on human psyche in the form of dreams and illusions. Bahram Modi is a central character in the novel the *River of Smoke*, the second novel of the 'Ibis Trilogy' by Amitav Ghosh; the other two are *Sea of Poppies* and *Flood of Fire*. He "was a businessman of exceptional ability and vision: . . . a kind of genius" (Ghosh 224). He is "widely liked, even loved. From his employees he commanded an almost fanatical loyalty" (*Ibid.*). He remained a simple village boy at heart. Despite this wonderful persona, Bahram is never fully praised or supported by his in-laws, especially by his two brothers-in-law, who are always discouraging, disapproving and

insulting towards him. As a result, he starts seeking refuge in Canton. He has a wife Shireenbai in India and Chi-mei his mistress in Canton. He has two daughters Shernaz and Behrose with Shireenbai and a son Ah Fatt with Chi-mei.

Applying the methods of Artemidorus we can classify Bahram's dreams into two categories: 'State dreams' and 'Allegorical dreams.' Few of his dreams directly manifest the object of desire, they can be categorized as 'State dream,' while others are indirect, where desire is manifested through some events, scenes or appearances, they are the example of 'Allegorical dream' one of the types of 'Event dream.'

- First Dream: When Bahram's ship Anahita is hit by storm, he goes to the hold to judge the loss of his cargo of opium, there he sees the faces of Chi-mei, Shireenbai, his daughters and son, Ah Fatt under the effect of opium. It is a sort of waking dream, the example of 'State dream,' as it manifests directly the objects of his desire. It is quite natural for him to yearn for his family in the time of crisis.
- Second Dream: When Allow offers Bahram his boat to return to Achha Hong, he sees a dream. Allow buys this boat from Chi-mei. Bahram saw a woman—a prostitute—in his dream. But she is different, not like other cheap sing-song girls, perfumed and painted and decked out with cheap jewellery. She is simple, dressed in grey trousers and a tunic, and least coquettish or flirtatious. There was something oddly comfortable about her presence. It was "as if he were back with Chi-mei now" (300). "Something stirred in Bahram, some deep need, some yearning that had gone so long unacknowledged that he had forgotten its very existence" (*Ibid.*).

"In all his life he had never experienced a lovemaking that was so protracted, so complete and yet so frictionless; it was so pure a union that it was as if neither of them was burdened with bodies—skin, flesh, muscles, sweat—none of this seemed to divide them and when it ended it was as if he had tumbled over a waterfall and was being carried down, very slowly, by a misty cloud" (300-01). This is the case of 'Event dream' where Bahram's desire for Chi-mei comes to him in the form of simple prostitute. According to Artemidorus' dream analysis, it portends some negative turn of events and death in future. After this dream, Bahram is forced to surrender his opium cargo to Commissioner Lin and dies in depression.

- Third Dream: When at last, it is decided that opium will be surrendered by all the members of Fanqui town, Bahram yields to opium smoking. Even in this condition, he

used to dream about Chi-mei. In his daydream, he saw her coming to Acha Hong under the guise of Li Sin-saang. She directly goes to his bedroom after inspecting his office (*dafter*). She offers herself to him but suddenly changes her mind and asks him to come to waters: “Time to go river now. Come, Mister Barry. Here no good” (524). Here it is both ‘State dream’ and ‘Allegorical dream.’ His direct object of desire is Chi-mei, but it is the emancipation from his suppressed, depressed, guilt-ridden and painful life that he desires in reality.

- Fourth Dream: In his last dream, Bahram sees Chi-mei before his death. She keeps calling him to come in her boat. “He smiled. ‘Yes, Chi-mei, I’m coming. It’s time now’” (546).

This is the case of ‘Allegorical dream’ where the sampan, a small boat symbolises his final emancipation from life. The window of Owner’s Suit of Anahita symbolises the door of deliverance, as this is the same window, which emancipated Mrs. Burnham from her painful dilemma. Here water can be seen as one of the *Panchamahabhuta*, ‘five great elements’—earth (*bhumi*), water (*ap* or *jala*), air or wind (*marut*, *vayu* or *pavani*), space or zero (*vyom* or *shunya*), and aether or void (*akash*). It is believed that “all of creation, including human body, is made up of these five essential elements and that upon death, the human body dissolves into these five elements of nature, thereby balancing the cycle of nature” ([www.google.co.in](http://www.google.co.in), <<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>>). Ancient cultures in Egypt, Babylonia, Japan, Tibet and China have same notion of these ‘great elements.’ These five elements are associated with five senses.

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