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‘India belongs only to me’: Reworking Mother India

This paper will undertake a parallel investigation of the figures of Aurora da Gama Zogoiby, a fictional construct in Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, and the Indian painter on whom the character is loosely modelled: Amrita Sher-Gil. Even if Amrita’s “determinedly village-oriented” paintings seem to differ strikingly from Aurora’s “densely crowded” canvases, they nevertheless share commonalities. With reference to their reworkings of “Mother India,” the conventional representation of India as mother goddess, this presentation will look at the ways Aurora, the fictional character immersed in the Bombay art-scene, and the real-life Hungary-born Amrita defied stereotypical nationalist conceptions of art and put forth alternative visions of India-as-mother. Indeed, both artists opposed the portrait of the Indian peasant woman, circulated most notably by the cult film *Mother India* (1957), “as bride, mother, and producer of sons; as long-suffering, stoical, loving, redemptive, and conservatively wedded to the maintenance of the status quo.”