

## Dream Pavilions

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Once upon a time in India, when someone suffered a continuous insomnia, tormented by the heat, the mosquitos and the inner beasts, they would wrap that person in linen, moistened with wet soil, and take him to one of the dream pavilions. The oneiric temples were modest low-rise buildings with a roof curved to the sky like a bird's wing. They would place the insomniac in a boat-like bed in which every bone and every tissue of the body lightened, as if the flesh itself levitated over the tormented soul. The head they would place in a basin filled with iced coffee which cooled the scalp. The caffeine graciously invigorated the scalp, and the brain would unfold like the wings of a butterfly leaving its cocoon. The body of the sufferer would be sprayed with tiny droplets of green tea, revitalizing and awakening every pore of the skin. Each of the pavilions were built in such a way so that there would always be a faint air current, a light breeze would never stop caressing the exhausted by the heat martyr. Finally, the blissful sleep would come, more beautiful and winged than anything ever dreamed of on this earth. No one touched or woke the sleeper in the dream pavilion. Sometimes people there would sleep so deeply that they wouldn't open their eyes for days.

The Pujari would choose the gauntest, most sleep deprived wretch, whose eyes had turned white, and their gaze blurred and murky like that of the blind. Among the lower caste there were people whose faces would darken like ash, and their eyes would dry from the lack of sleep. There were those whose hearts would boil with thirst that wouldn't let them sleep, and others whose nights were haunted by horrible chimeras, keeping them awake from dusk till dawn. There were also those unable to sleep because of hunger, of pain or because of inexplicable sorrow. Some of them would turn into half-living ghosts, their skins would turn transparent, and their eyes would glow like neon, estranged and cold from the flight of their sleep.

Those sleeping in the pavilions looked like dead people whose souls had left them for other universes, but their faces glowed illuminated by a blissful tranquillity. Passers-by would observe them from afar and dream that one day they could take their place because dreams

were scarce for everyone, and life was filled with emptiness and fears. And everyone waited for the big sleep that never came. Men and women walked around in the pavilions listening to the murmur of the fountain, the only sound disrupting the silence around the sleeper, taking their mind far away from this world. Sometimes it would happen for those people to hear a sigh, barely audible, torn away from the sleeper, and then, without knowing why, tears would cover their faces. The rich would pay the Pujari in gold to be let inside the pavilions and then, when time came, to part with their last breath under the aegis of sleep.

The dream pavilions were holy temples. The Pujari who looked after them had been prepared for this ministry from an early age and followed strict, age-old rules. If someone destroyed a pavilion, or if they stole so much as a splinter or a tiny rock from its divine architecture, that someone was immediately punished with death. Travelers would come from far away just to catch a glimpse of the magical buildings. The Maharajas would touch their feet to the cold stone floor and have prophetic dreams.

Today, fragments of the pavilions – a piece of the roof, a darkened with time basin, or a slab from the walls – hang in world museums, relics without a clear purpose, objects without a soul and memory. There they are constantly photographed by tourists and are every second chucked in the chemical oblivion and indifference of photography. And, at the same time, the world doesn't stop pulsating, more feverish and numb with insomnia than ever before.