I ABSTRACT I The imagination of Indian migrants to Europe is colored by memory, of things learnt in high school or university and remembered as Europe’s rich cultural heritage; media and cinematic images of Europe add to celebrate it as a continent that surpasses their present circumstances in every possible way. Conversely, the mobility of potential European migrants to India is, among other things, shaped by the idea of another life that possibly awaits them, in an imagined ‘exotic’ space, rich with the heritage of a spiritual past that appeals to them. They seek a new or alternate culture that provides the promise of an imagined future beyond their present experience in Europe. Both sets of migrants also have views about their own societies that add to the impetus for migration; they await the realization of their aspirations in starkly opposing ways and their voices animate our understanding of how we frame disparate migrant worlds.

Social class imbricates differences among Indian immigrants in northern Italy who are not all engaged in a culture of writing whereas European migrants are privileged by their access to education and have recorded their lives through autobiography (in this case, by Mira behn, Gandhi’s disciple) and a biography (written with the help of detailed interviews and observation of Tenzin Palmo, a Buddhist nun). Through an understanding of this binary of imagined social landscapes, this paper seeks to provide an analysis of how imaginations, based on social class, educational status, and lived experience, construct social landscapes in vastly different ways.

I ABOUT THE SPEAKER I Meenakshi Thapan, is Professor of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, and Co-ordinator of the Prof. D.S. Kothari Centre for Science, Ethics and Education, University of Delhi. She has been Co-ordinator of the European Studies Programme (funded by the European Union, 2010-2011), University of Delhi and Country Partner for the EUFP7 Project EuroBroadMap co-ordinated by Prof Claude Grasland at the University of Paris VII Diderot (2009-2011). She is also a Trustee of the Krishnamurti Foundation (India) since 2012. Her first book was Life at School: An Ethnographic Study (Oxford University Press ,1991, 2006) and the most recent are (ed.) Ethnographies of Schooling in Contemporary India (SAGE, 2014), (ed.) Contested Spaces. Citizenship and Belonging in Contemporary Times. (Orient Blackswan, 2010) and Living the Body: Embodiment, Womanhood and Identity in Contemporary India (SAGE, 2009). Her other books focus on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu in India and France, transnational migration and the politics of identity, as well as on anthropological journeys through fieldwork. She is also Series Editor of a five volume series on Women and Migration in Asia (SAGE, 2005-2008) and has now initiated a new Series on the Sociology and Social Anthropology of Education in South Asia (SAGE, 2015-2019). In addition, she has published research papers and articles in a several journals in India and abroad.

I DATE I Wednesday, 01 October 2014
I TIME I 3.00pm to 4.30pm
I VENUE I Malay Studies Seminar Room, AS7 #04-13, Kent Ridge Campus, NUS

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