

Introduction

“...the soil of one country
to another sends its fragrance:
this aroma floats in the air
and crosses over, on the birds' wings.
And the vapor from one land
in another land turns into water
and falls on the ground”
(Rāmdhārī Singh Diñkar, *God's Postmen*)¹

“Left to itself every literature will exhaust its vitality, if it is not refreshed by
the interest and contributions of a foreign one”
(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *On Art and Antiquity*)²

The collection of papers, initiated by the Editorial Board of *Cracow Indological Studies*, focuses on the processes of cross-fertilization between various cultural contact zones in South Asia, as well as on the links with foreign cultures that have been developing since

¹ Rāmdhārī Singh Diñkar, *Bhagvān ke dākiye*, transl. by T. Dubyanskaya from the Hindi original, online: <http://www.anubhuti-hindi.org/gauravgram/dinker/bhagwan.htm> (accessed on: 31.05.2014).

² *Goethe's Literary Essays*. A Selection in English Arranged by J.E. Spingarn. With a Foreword by Viscount Haldane. 1921. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co.: 92.

the pre-modern period and till date. India and its neighbouring countries have often been seen, especially by independent and distanced observers, as a vast yet tightly interconnected area where ongoing exchange of myths, themes, ideas and stories has created a common cultural “cloud” reaching out to various communities and ethnic groups far beyond the borders of South Asia itself. If South Asian connections with distant parts of the world do not always appear extensive during the so-called “classical” period, cross-fertilization between particular regions within South Asia was a major factor in its synchronized cultural development: the cardinal role of religious and epic traditions all over the Indian Subcontinent, the existence of dense and vibrant nets of intellectual exchange, the growth and distribution of Buddhism and Jainism, the interconnections between Sanskrit and Tamil poetical traditions, are just a few examples of this major trend.

The advance of medieval empires, such as the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, obviously intensified foreign influences, first of all from the Islamicate cultures, but also brought the local cultural exchange, if not cultural bonding, to a new level. In pre-modern and modern times, when the number of political players on the grounds of South Asia increased dramatically, it was the East India Company that became the dominant power. With the advance of time, its cultural agencies could find support through freshly-created opportunities and progressive technologies, starting from the opening-up of new ways and directions of traveling, the development of printing devices, the creation of a new environment for education and intellectual exchange, the facilitation of the press, etc. The Indian Subcontinent of the pre- and modern periods, as well as South Asian countries after Independence, can only be seen in the context of this deep churning and the dramatic changes in the cultural equation of this region which started happening about three centuries ago. The richness, inventiveness and innovativeness of literary works created in various South Asian languages (including those in English) suggests that none of the literary cultures in question have actually ever been, to use Goethe’s

expression, “left to itself”, but they were constantly “refreshed” by intensive inter-regional and foreign contacts.

The current volume is the result of joint efforts of an international team of 14 authors—from Poland, India, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Finland and Latvia who have contributed to the research on the multi-cultural nature of South Asian, in particular Indian literature. Although the papers invited for this volume followed only very general thematic suggestions from the editors, the outcome reveals notable convergence of topics and approaches in many contributions. All the participants stress the fundamental openness of Indian culture and its ability to find inspirations from most incredible sources. The articles brought together in this volume provide a detailed and deep con/textual analysis of particular cases from literary and cultural history—migration of stories, manuscripts, books, and authors, exchanges of themes and techniques, various adaptations and re-creations of both Indian and foreign texts.

This volume could not do true justice to all major cultural regions of India: it so happened that, with a few exceptions, the papers mainly discuss the texts stemming from or somehow connected with the Northern or Eastern parts of the Indian Subcontinent—Delhi and Calcutta, Punjab, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The source materials are largely (but not only) in early and modern Hindi, Bengali and English. Among a few entirely unintended convergences that became evident once the volume started taking its shape are a special cultural role of the Himalayas and Bengal and very productive albeit at times unexpected literary links between India and Russia, delineated in four papers.

The whole collection is divided into two parts, titled, in a rather straightforward and self-explanatory way, “The Home” and “...and the World”; inside each part, the papers are arranged according to a chronological principle.

The opening article of the “Home” section looks into the narratives of two cities—the archetypal foundation myth behind Ayodhyā and a 16th-century narrative about the origins of Bengaluru. With the emphasis

on the travelling myths and floating narrative templates within the Indian cultural space, Giorgio Milanetti’s “Between Enduring Urban Models and Shifting Cultural Trajectories...” perfectly sets the tone for the whole volume. It points out that the foundation myth behind the ancient Ayodhyā mirrors the establishment of an urban civilization based on the advent of plough agriculture; the fact that the myths about the emergence of Bengaluru in the early-modern period similarly stresses the role of plough, establishes this city’s affiliation to the “Ayodhyā archetype”. Thus, the paper investigates the processes by which narrations on cities evolve. The author maintains, that any narrative holds vital relations with the values and the practices that structure society. Narrations and stories—not exactly historical sources in a strict sense—are, in his words, a “treasure trove of information”, as they represent the values and practices of the human society (Milanetti: 24). The process of deciphering these hidden messages may lead to a better understanding of the nature of narration and its creative dynamics.

In his article “The Reliable Poem. A 17th-century Hindi Poet in His Words”, Piotr Borek discusses the life of a famous Braj-bhasa poet Bhushan, the author of *Śivarājabhūṣāṇa*, a *rītigranth* most probably committed by the emerging Maratha ruler Shivaji. Although many literary histories of Hindi give details about the life of the poet, including the bits and pieces of information drawn from a Maratha chronicle (*bakhar*), it is *Śivarājabhūṣāṇa* that appears to be the only text providing consistent data on Bhushan’s life and creativity. Adjusting to the political situation, Bhushan made a decision to connect himself to a different cultural region of India, leaving Braj for the culturally alien North-Western parts of Deccan, providing, thus, an example of a rare cultural volatility among the *rīti* poets.

The next paper, “Wandering Writers in the Himalaya: Contesting Narratives and Renunciation in Hindi Literature”, speaks about, for the first time in this volume, one of the richest and most enigmatic regions in the North of India, a culturally fertile soil that has been igniting story-telling for hundreds, if not thousands of years. Nicola Pozza shows how the landscape and cultural ambience of Himachal Pradesh and

Uttarakhand—places often associated with spirituality and renunciation—inspired a number of prominent Hindi littérateurs of the post-Independence India. Taking his examples from the stories by Agyeya, Mohan Rakesh, Nirmal Verma and Krishna Sobti, the author argues that specific ethnographic details and somewhat exotic traditions of the hill stations rarely remain in the center of writers’ attention, as the Himalayan setting is mainly used as a “narrative device to explore and contest the relationship between the mountain world and the intrusive presence of the external world” (Pozza: 80). The “wandering” characters, often socially disengaged and lost, are preoccupied with their own quest for spiritual liberation and finding the meaning of life.

The marginality and non-mainstream contributions to literature are one of the central concerns in the article by Monika Browarczyk, titled *“From the Other One to the Only One. Prabha Khaitan and Her Autobiography”*. It explores an autobiographic text by Prabha Khaitan, a female Dalit writer, whose extraordinary life was full of social and personal challenges. Looking at the specific cultural situation of the protagonist (who was born in a Marwari-speaking family in Calcutta, studied in English, but chose Hindi as her tool of expression), the article suggests a cross-regional role of the text in question and discusses the autobiography in the context of gender and cast-related struggles, especially applying the imagery of archetypal female divinity—Sati and Shakti. The author stresses the emerging role of female autobiographies in India, arguing that the increasing importance of this particular kind of self-narrative is linked directly “to the rise and growing visibility (...) of the Hindi Dalit autobiographies in the 1990s” (Browarczyk: 91).

The second and most voluminous part of this collection explores literary connections between India and the world. It opens with the article by Gautam Chakrabarti “‘Pure and Mixed’ in East India: Gerasim Lebedev’s Intercultural Enthusiasms” that looks into the contributions of a Russian musician, scholar and theatre-enthusiast Gerasim Lebedev in the late 18th-century Calcutta. Rather ‘cosmopolitan’ from his socio-cultural background, he made his personal and literary journeys

in a linguistic-cultural domain totally alien to him. Lebedev's unique effort in establishing Bengali theatre is often considered to be one of the pathbreaking cultural enterprises of early-colonial times.

In her essay “Travelling Tales: Some Stories From the Middle Himalayas”, Namita Gokhale presents a spectacular example of stories making a journey through time and space. We learn about a fascinating collection of fairytales from Kumaon and Garhwal, recorded in the late 19th century by a Russian indologist Minayev during one of his expeditions. Soon enough, the stories from the Himalayas were published in the Russian translation. Regretfully, their original versions could not be found among the field notes made by Minayev. And yet, these texts have made an impressive comeback to India, having been recently translated from Russian into English. Two of the fairytales from Minayev’s collection *Clever Wives and Happy Idiots. Folktales from the Kumaon Himalayas* (New Delhi: Yatra Books 2015) are published together with this essay.

The paper “A Hundred Years of Tagore in Finland”, authored by Klaus Karttunen, leads us further ahead on the chronological scale. The history of Tagore’s works in Finland is rich and imposing: the first translations were available for the Finnish readers as early as in 1913. Listing all existing publications until the very recent ones, of Tagore’s poetry, plays, novels, the author reveals an imposing panorama of Finland’s engagement with the Indian Nobel-prize laureate. The paper ends with a review of Tagore’s poem “Apaghat” (1929) commenting upon the Finnish Winter War.

Donatella Dolcini’s “Premchand’s Encounter with Tolstoy” discusses an example of cultural ties between India and Russia in the early 20th century. She goes into the details of Premchand’s literary interaction with Tolstoy, that started with the Hindi author’s review of *Anna Karenina* and culminated in Premchand’s recreation of Tolstoy’s short stories written for children and peasants in *Yasnaya Polyana*. The article looks at this experiment of literary transition as an effort to re/indianize those short stories which Tolstoy himself said to be of Indian origin.

The name of the great Hindi littérateur Agyeya (Ajñeya) once again comes into focus in the volume, this time in connection with his aesthetic

theory. Teresa Miążek poses the cardinal question—‘...kahāniyā ākhir bantī kaise hāñ!?’ (...how, after all, do stories originate?!?)’—already in the extended title of her paper, “The Clash Between Indian and Western Literary Tradition in Ajñeya’s Short Stories”. One of the most prominent theoreticians among Hindi writers, Agyeya formulated in clear terms the concept of the so-called new story movement (*naī kahānī*) in Hindi literature; several of his stories were written largely with the purpose of exemplifying the principles of his literary work, given that personal experience was considered by him to be one of the most important sources of a writer’s creativity. Agyeya’s texts analyzed in this article provide a testimony to his modernist attitude towards Indian literary traditions and reflect his deep interest in Western aesthetics.

Tatiana Dubyanskaya’s article yields yet another example of creative exchange between Indian and Russian writers. “Ivan Denisovitch of Delhi—an Indian Story of Survival?” investigates the roots of Uday Prakash’s interest in the famous hero of Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s novella. The modern Hindi writer brings to life an Indian “double” of Ivan Denisovich, suggesting an equation between the everyday existence of a destitute Delhiite and that of a prisoner of the Gulag. Pointing out the circumstances and certain personal features of the Indian protagonist, the author finds it possible to discern, in Uday Prakash’s stories, a revival of a classical “little man” figure, originating from the 19th-century Russian prose.

The “English” subsection of the present volume opens with a panoramic review of four major novels of the 20th-century. Lucio De Capitani in his article “Weaving Cross-cultural Narratives: Hybrid Forms and Historico-political Discourse of the Anglophone Indian Novel” examines the principal texts that contributed to the development of a heterogeneous literary space—Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Anita Desai’s *In Custody* and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*. While emphasizing divergences between the four authors, the paper investigates how these key-texts, in their own way, generate strong cross-cultural messages, at the same time managing to keep a delicate balance “between English and vernacular languages,

between a global and local understanding of reality, between Indian and non-Indian esthetical possibilities” (De Capitani: 246).

Carlotta Beretta deliberates upon the role of ancestral culture in the writings by Amitav Ghosh. Her article “A Genealogy of the *Ibis Trilogy*: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Bengali Culture” explores “tho author’s” increasing attentions towards the local components, marking his departure from “subaltern cosmopolitanism”. The author examines how nationalism and cosmopolitanism were dealt with by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray, landmark figures of the Bengali world. She argues that Ghosh’s relationship with his cultural heritage occupies the central place in his philosophy: Bengal, representing “a domestic and homely sphere”, remains the anchor that does not allow one “to reject India in favour of a worldly or diasporic citizenship” (Beretta: 266).

Ira Sarma investigates two famous interconnected images of Partition: the *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh and a collection of photographic documents made at the time of Partition by an American photographer, Margaret Bourke-White. As we learn from the article (“...Clash of Narratives or Postmemory Project?”), the two narratives were brought together in 2006, in a golden jubilee edition of the novel, edited by Pramod Kapoor. Contrary to the common perception, this book—the author argues—presents rather conflicting than mutually-supporting versions of the events. By connecting different points of view and adding his own comments, the editor engages himself into a personal postmemory project, “an exercise in remembering and admonishing”, thus suggesting a way for the second generation to deal with the past experience and prevent “a recurrence of this tragic chapter” in Indian history (Pramod Kapoor, cited in Sarma: 289).

The closing article of this collection is the only contribution that looks at modern poetical texts. A meditative and thought-provoking essay by Toms Kencis is based on certain subjective associations between two littérateurs, who, at first glance, make a rather unlikely match—Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Sudeep Sen (born 1964). At times drawing upon allusions, “Heidegger on Poetry: What

is Sudeep Sen for?” focuses on various possible points of connection between Sen and Heidegger, while applying Stephan Greenblatt’s new historicism theory.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the authors of this volume for responding to the invitation to write for *Cracow Indological Studies*, for submitting most interesting papers and for cooperating with the Editorial Board during the months of preparation in a very dedicated and enthusiastic manner. One hopes that this enriching academic exchange would lead to more joint projects in the future. This collection could not have been possible without the most valuable feedback from our reviewers. Being generous well-wishers and true mentors, they dedicated their time and efforts to help us improve the quality of the articles and the standard of this volume in general.

And, finally, my most heartfelt appreciation to the esteemed Editorial Board of *Cracow Indological Studies* and, personally, to my dear friends and colleagues, who have been maintaining and creatively developing the journal since its inception. I am deeply grateful for your trust, consistent support and precious guidance.

Tatiana Dubyanskaya