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# SPIRITUALITY, ATROCITIES AND *IT* – GERMAN IMAGES OF INDIA

ABSTRACT  Imaginations of India have been an important ingredient of the German literary and media landscape since the end of the 18th century. Though they are highly diverse, these images are equally often emotionally charged and situated somewhere between euphoric glorifications and deprecating condemnations. When Germany and India were celebrating the 60th anniversary of their diplomatic relations, the time had come to investigate why Germans until today, even in the so-called age of information, have so diverse perceptions of India. By reference to the three dominant German images of India, this article seeks to understand the various factors that influence our perception of another culture.

Keywords: Cultural Studies, German Perception of India, Imaginations, Intercultural Relations

## INTRODUCTION

Between September 2011 and April 2013, Germany and India were celebrating their diplomatic relations of sixty years. These celebrations were inaugurated by the German partner in India under the motto "Germany and India 2011-2012: Infinite Opportunities," while the Indian side started celebrating "Days of India in Germany 2012-2013" under the motto "Connecting Minds, Connecting Capabilities, Connecting Ideas, and Connecting Cultures" in May 2012. When we compare the events[1] and sponsors[2] on both sides, we realise that not only did the initiative come from the German side, but that additionally German activities in India prevailed over the events in Germany organised by India. Although both sides tried to represent their countries through a host of diverse events among which cultural ones dominated, the interest of Germany in India was seemingly of a specific character and becomes most visible in the thematic focus, namely "StadtRäume – CitySpaces." The following quote makes it comprehensible why the German initiators were able to win many sponsors from the field of business:

*Cities are currently home to an estimated 30 per cent of the Indian population and contribute about 60 per cent to India's total GDP. In the next 20 years these figures will rise rapidly. It is estimated that 40 per cent of the Indian population will be living in cities by 2030, producing as much as 70 per cent of India's total GDP.*[3]

Looking at these numbers, it becomes clear that the motto "Germany and India 2011-2012: Infinite Opportunities" was not only focussed on the diplomatic or cultural relations between these two countries, but rather served as a mantra for the area in which, over the last fifteen years, hope and the vision of new infinite opportunities have been continuously fostered. I am referring to nothing less than the area of economy and

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[1]    A simple search on the Internet for the events organised by both partners shows that the German side was far better organised and its events easily outnumbered those organised by India in Germany. On the website Infinite Opportunities: Germany + India 2011-2012, at <http://www.germany-and-india. com/>, created for the German activities in India the number (724) of events of cultural, educational and economic nature is overwhelming (*Complete Programme – Germany and India 2011-2012: Infinite Opportunities*, Infinite Opportunities: Germany + India 2011-2012, at <http://www.germany-and--india.com/en/events-list>), while the Indian side did not even host an extra website but informed the German audience only sporadically through the websites of its embassy in Berlin or its consulates in Frankfurt, Hamburg and Munich. Today (the article was submitted in 2014), only two years later, it is even difficult to get an overview on the Indian activities in Germany, and the ones which can be found (cf., e.g., IMC, Archive for the "Days of India" Category, at <http://www.imcradio.net/daysofindiain-germany>) are dominantly cultural events organised together with German partners.

[2]    While activities from both sides were heavily sponsored by government institutions, the German side could also win sponsors from the field of business – Bajaj/Allianz, BASF, Bosch, Deutsche Bank, Siemens, Airbus, DHL, Metro, Volkswagen, etc. (*Partners Overview*, Infinite Opportunities: Germany + India 2011-2012, at <http://www.germany-and-india.com/en/partner>) – whereas I could not find a single hint that any of the Indian events in India were co-financed by Indian companies, except for the usual self-financed participation of Indian companies in trade fairs in Germany.

[3]    *Thematic Focus – 'StadtRäume – CitySpaces,'* Infinite Opportunities: Germany + India 2011-2012, at <http://www.germany-and-india.com/en/page/222/cityspaces>.

business. The books below which were published following the economic growth in India after its economic liberalisation in 1991 emphasise this point: *Wirtschaftsmacht Indien: Chance und Herausforderung für uns*[4] (Economic Power India: Chance and Challenge for Us); *Weltmacht Indien: Die neue Herausforderung des Westens*[5] (World Power India: the New Challenge for the West); *Indien: Aufstieg einer asiatischen Weltmacht*[6] (India: Rise of an Asian World Power).

These book titles are only three among many publications which have contributed to the creation of a new image of India in Germany – an image I refer to as "the profitable India image." The most figurative phrase in this context, "Indien – der Elefant erwacht" (India – the elephant is awaking), or "Der indische Elefant erwacht" (The Indian elephant is awaking)[7], could be read and heard several times in the German media, and also reflects the title of the final book from the list above pretty well. And although Germany was celebrating its relations with India between 2011 and 2013 under the motto "Infinite Opportunities," which might rather lead to the conclusion that the Indian elephant was already awake and ready to do anything with its German partner, in fact more and more companies in Germany have been slowly realising that the Indian elephant is not necessarily an early bird and the opportunities in India are limited. The growing expectations regarding the Indian economy since its liberalisation faded right on time: in 2012, when the German-Indian celebrations were well underway, the Indian growth rate reached, with five per cent, a new low. While celebrating, the German sponsors must have been realising that the German image of India as a land of infinite economic opportunities seemed exaggerated.

However, this was not the first time that a German image of India did not meet the expectations of its viewers. These two countries were celebrating only sixty years of diplomatic relations, but the diverse, direct and indirect cultural contacts between them are much older, and full of infinite opportunities for imagining each other. The profitable India image is only the latest and still most colourless image of India in Germany, while the other two dominant and more colourful images – the romantic and the atrocious – have a long history of expectations, fulfilments, and disappointments.

## TERMINOLOGY

Before discussing these three German images of India it must be noted that, although the terms "India" and "Germany" are frequently used in this article, these two enti-

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[4]   O. Müller, *Wirtschaftsmacht Indien. Chance und Herausforderung für uns*, München 2006.

[5]   O. Ihlau, *Weltmacht Indien. Die neue Herausforderung des Westens*, München 2006.

[6]   D. Rothermund, *Indien. Aufstieg einer asiatischen Weltmacht*, München 2008.

[7]   A reference to another Indian animal was made for instance in the slogan "Outsourcing nach Indien: der Tiger auf dem Sprung" (Outsourcing to India: the tiger is set to leap) by the Deutsche Bank, cf. Deutsche Bank Research 'Outsourcing nach Indien: der Tiger auf dem Sprung,' 11 October 2005, at <http://www.dbresearch.com/PROD/DBR_INTERNET_EN-PROD/PROD0000000000191727/Outsourcing+nach+Indien%3A+der+Tiger+auf+dem+Sprung.pdf>.

ties as we know them today were, at the time the first modern German images of India were consolidated in the 19th century,[8] in a very different shape and not states at all. But although there was no German state, but solely the German Confederation, the consciousness of Germanness based on the identification with the German language had already existed for centuries. This feeling of Germanness was not reflected in a common political administration of the regions where the language was prevalent, but rather in the fruitful exchange of intellectual output among the educated elites of the various German-speaking regions. When the German state finally appeared, it did not encompass all these regions which are thus not a part of "Germany" though linguistically German.

In the case of India, which as a state even today is so heterogeneous that it is difficult to identify the glue which holds this huge country together, the situation was even more complex. It was neither *one* language which created a common identity, nor any other tangible commonness among its inhabitants. Today, the most important force which unites the Indian population seems to be the idea of an Indian nation which has successfully achieved dominance in the collective imagination of its citizens. But initially only outsiders imagined an Indian entity. This is demonstrated by the very fact that the term "India(n)" is derived from the Iranian word "Hindu,"[9] which was simply a geographical term, and then a denomination for the inhabitants of the subcontinent living to the east of the river Indus. It was used primarily by outsiders – Iranians, Greeks, and then other peoples of East and Central Asia and Europe, and only rather late, in the 19th century, as self-denomination by members of the educated local elite in British India. Additionally, the boundaries of British India were also very different from the borders of the Indian state today, and, furthermore, this India cannot be equated with the geographic entity "Indian Subcontinent," nowadays being referred to more and more as "South Asia." So, when people in the past wrote about "India," or, to make it more complicated, "Hindustan," we simply cannot be sure which entity they had in mind. As a case in point, German usage until well into the 20th century often subsumed South-East Asia under "Indien,"[10] and differentiated this from South Asia by the terms "Hinterindien" and "Vorderindien" respectively.

For the sake of simplification and better understanding, I will nonetheless stick to the rather problematic terms "Germany" and "India."

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[8]   Images of a real or imaginary "India" are, of course, much older, but it was only in the 19th century that "India" entered the consciousness of larger sections of the populace, hand in hand with a widening of German horizons both geopolitically as well as academically.

[9]   For a detailed account of the various connotations of the terms "India," and "Hindu" and "Hindustan," see K. Karttunen, 'The Name of India' in C. Galewicz et al. (eds.), *International Conference on Sanskrit and Related Studies, September 23-26, 1993. (Proceedings)*, Cracow 1995 (*Cracow Indological Studies*, 1) and A. Sharma, 'On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva,' *Numen*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (2002), at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156852702252772759>.

[10]   Cf. "Indies" in English and "Indië" in Dutch, the latter, when narrowed down in meaning, even referring rather to Indonesia than to India. The subsequent explications "East Indies" and "Oost-Indië" are, of course, to be understood in contrast to the West Indies of the Americas.

Much has been written on Germans and their perception of India in the course of time,[11] for which reason it serves no purpose to repeat in detail what has been written many times before. Hence, I shall focus on the three dominant images which can be found in German literature, mass media, or simply in the attitude of individuals and certain groups towards India. Furthermore, two main questions shall lead us through the whole article: how could these contrary images of India emerge? And why even today – in the age of information and unlimited access to knowledge – are all of them so persistent among the German population? Of course, neither of these questions can be answered completely, nor can the oversimplification of the German perception of India in the form of only three images help us to fully understand the complex processes of perceiving and projecting another culture. The musings in this article aim, rather, to contribute to self-critical contemplation, especially among those wishing to play a role as intermediaries between cultures.

## THE ROMANTIC INDIA IMAGE

The oldest image of India – the romantic India image – has its roots in the end of the 18th century. Particularly, the influential German philosopher and poet Johann Gottfried Herder[12] revealed a passion for India in some of his works that were mainly influenced by translated myths of Sanskrit literature and travel books[13] but not by his own experiences in this faraway region. Herder raves about India, for instance, in his poem 'Indien':

*Sanftes Gefühl der Indier gab dem Schalle zum Führer*
*Nicht die gröbere Luft, gab ihm den Aether zum Reich.*

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[11] Cf., e.g., R.P. Das, 'Contemporary India in the German View' in B. Subramanian (ed.), *Yearbook of the Goethe Society of India, 2001-2002*, Chennai 2003; M. Durzak (ed.), *Bilder Indiens in der deutschen Literatur*, Frankfurt am Main 2011 (*Mäander*, 10); W. Eckel, C. Hilmes, W. Nell, (eds.), *Projektionen – Imaginationen – Erfahrungen. Indienbilder der europäischen Literatur*, Remscheid 2008 (*Komparatistik im Gardez!*, 6); A. De Zoysa, *"Blutrünstige Braminen am heiligen Strome." Indienbilder in der deutschen Unterhaltungsliteratur zwischen Aufklärung und Restauration*, Frankfurt am Main 1997 (*Europäische Hochschulschriften*, Reihe 1: *Deutsche Sprache und Literatur*, 1597). A short essay which refers to questions similar to those raised in the present study and investigates the dichotomy of the romantic and atrocious German India image was written by Jürgen Lütt, '"Heile Welt" oder Rückständigkeit? Deutschland, Indien und das deutsche Indienbild: Das romantische und utilitaristische Indienbild Europas,' *Der Bürger im Staat*, No. 1 (1998). Lütt calls these images "romantisches" (romantic) and "utilitaristisches" (utilitarian) (e.g. ibid., p. 60).

[12] Other German authors in the end of the 18th and during the 19th century who *contributed to the Romantic understanding of India, including* [Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph] *Schelling, Novalis,* [Joseph] *Görres,* [Friedrich] *Creuzer,* [Johann Wolfgang von] *Goethe, M*[atthias] *Claudius, and,* [more than any others,* [were] *the Schlegel brothers* – W. Halbfass, *India and Europe. An Essay in Philosophic Understanding*, Delhi 1990, p. 73. On August Wilhelm Schlegel and his brother Friedrich Schlegel cf., e.g., E. Behler, 'Das Indienbild der deutschen Romantik,' *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, Vol. 18 (1968).

[13] Cf. Ch. Maillard, 'Entzauberungsphantasien: Indienrezeption und Seelenkunde in Johann Gottfried Herders Lyrik der 1790er Jahre' in W. Eckel, C. Hilmes, W. Nell (eds.), *Projektionen – Imaginationen – Erfahrungen...*

*Er nur bildet den Ton zur zarten himmlischen Stimme,*
*Die die Empfindungen spricht, die die Empfindungen weckt,*
*Und entführet der gröberen Luft die Seelen der Menschen*
*In ein einsam Gebiet, in das ätherische Land,*
*Wo nicht rasselt der Wagen, der jetzt den Wolken entschwebet,*
*Wo nur häusliches Glück bildet der Götter Genuß,*
*Wo Sakontala lebt mit ihrem entschwundenen Knaben,*
*Wo Duschmanta sie neu, neu von den Göttern empfängt.*
*Sey mir gegrüßt, o heiliges Land, und Du Führer der Töne,*
*Stimme des Herzens, erheb'oft mich im Aether dahin!*[14]

Herder draws a romanticised picture of India where people live in harmony with nature and religion. The poet yearns for this imagined holy country whose inhabitants seem to be innocent and gentle. These topoi of a mythical and wondrous India were already known from the Medieval Ages,[15] but through the translation of Sanskrit literature into German, for instance Kālidāsa's play *Śakuntalā* – translated from English in 1791 by Georg Forster,[16] to whom Herder refers in his poem 'Indien' – this romantic India image received new and durable impetus and could now unfold to its full extent without any opposition until its counterpart, the atrocious India image, found its way to Germany.

## THE ATROCIOUS INDIA IMAGE

This negative image of India was born almost at the same time as the romantic India image. In no other country than in Great Britain, the colonial power in India at that time, could this image unfold in bright colours and dominate the perception of

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[14]  J.G. Herder, 'Indien' in *Joh. Gottfr. v. Herder's Gedichte*, ed. J.G. Müller, Stuttgart 1836, p. 333.
'Gentle emotions of the Indians gave the clangour as a leader
Not the coarser air, gave the aether as its realm.
This alone fashions the sound for the tender heavenly voice
That speaks the sensations, that wakes the sensations,
And carries off the souls of humans from the coarser air
To a solitary region, to the aethereal country,
Where the chariot does not clatter, the one that now wafts away from the clouds,
Where only homely bliss constitutes the gods' pleasure,
Where Sakontala lives with her vanished boy,
Where Dushmanta receives her anew, anew from the gods.
Be greeted, o holy country, and you, leader of sounds,
Voice of the heart, raise oft me away in the aether!'

[15]  Cf., e.g., U. Knefelkamp, 'Das Indienbild in Reiseberichten des Spätmittelalters' in O. Engels, P. Schreiner (eds.), *Die Begegnung des Westens mit dem Osten. Kongressakten des 4. Symposions des Mediävistenverbandes in Köln 1991 aus Anlass des 1000. Todesjahres der Kaiserin Theophanu*, Sigmaringen 1993.

[16]  G. Forster, *Sakontala oder der entscheidende Ring. Ein indisches Schauspiel von Kalidas*, Aus den Ursprachen Sanskrit und Prakrit ins Englische und aus diesem ins Deutsche übersetzt; mit Erläuterungen von G. Forster, Frankfurt am Main 1803.

this faraway region, while it played only a minor role in Germany. Rather, this image reached a larger audience only very slowly and selectively through writings of authors like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx.[17] The atrocious India image was enriched with ideas of cruelties like widow burning, human sacrifices, poverty, slavery and the unjust caste system. In contrast to the romantic India image which stylised a civilisation in harmony with itself and nature, its counterpart drew just the opposite picture: a picture of an uncivilised region whose population submitted itself unresistingly to nature. For instance, Karl Marx wrote in his article 'The British Rule in India' (25th June 1853) on the in his opinion mistakenly romantic image of the village communities in India:

[...] *we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all. We must not forget that this undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence, evoked on the other part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction, and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindostan. We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to be the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact*

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[17] Aijaz Ahmad wrote a whole chapter on Karl Marx's writing about India in his book *In Theory* (A. Ahmad, *In Theory. Classes, Nations, Literatures*, New Delhi 2003, pp. 221-242). Being a so-called Marxist theorist, it is not surprising that Ahmad felt the urge to contextualise Marx's negative take on India that was, for instance, highly criticised by Edward Said (cf., e.g., E. Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*, New Delhi 2001, pp. 153-157). Thus, Ahmad wrote on Marx's rhetoric (A. Ahmad, *In Theory...*, p. 224): *For it is equally true that Marx's denunciation of pre-colonial society in India is no more strident than his denunciations of Europe's own feudal past, or of the Absolutist monarchies, or of the German burghers; his essays on Germany are every bit as nasty*. Furthermore, he claimed that Marx's comments on Indian rural life were solely *a virtual paraphrase of his comments on the European peasantry* (ibid., p. 225) and *remind one, [...], of the whole range of reformist politics and writings in India* [...] (ibid.). However, although Marx's motivation for drawing a negative India image was different from that of the British colonial power, from other quotes later in this article it will become evident that Marx did consider British society superior to the Indian when he wrote his articles on India in 1853. In his ideology he was as much influenced by the legacy of the Age of Enlightenment as the British colonial conquerors and the local reformers in India, who had enjoyed a thoroughly "Western" education that had produced local elitists who paternalistically, like Marx, often thought they knew better what was good for the masses, namely the fruits of so-called "Western" modernisation. Ultimately, in their mission to reform their own society, they often contributed as well to the atrocious India image – another instance of well-intentioned criticism leading to the same result as ill-intentioned criticism: a unidimensional negative image.

*that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow.*[18]

Marx's critique of Indian society clearly draws a picture opposite to the romantic one fostered until then by poets like Herder. Both these images – the positive and the negative – have been existing until today in Germany, though the colours in which they are painted might vary from time to time and individual to individual.

## THE PROFITABLE INDIA IMAGE

The third India image – the profitable one – emerged at the turn of the millennium. As already mentioned, it mainly consists of perceptions that India is a rising economic power, a future global player, a place where investments will quickly lead to huge profits, and a new strong market that eagerly awaits German products. It was shocking and surprising for many Germans when in spring 2000 their government planned to give Green Cards to a foreign IT workforce, with Indians leading the way. An outcry went through parts of the German media landscape and the political opposition at that time, particularly the CDU (Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands [Christian Democratic Union of Germany]), started a campaign against these plans under the motto: "Kinder statt Inder!" (Children instead of Indians!).[19] For a nation that had for centuries imagined India as a romantic, spiritual, or underdeveloped place, it was just too shocking that this country had something economically relevant to offer to one of the most developed and richest countries in the world. It was even more embarrassing when the German government implemented its plans and the Indian IT rush towards Germany failed to materialise; Indian IT experts dominantly preferred migrating to English speaking countries or staying in their home country, and showed little interest in migrating to Germany.

Fifteen years on, many Germans are now quite aware that India has indeed something to offer economically, but here also expectations were pushed up by exuberant reports in the mass media until the economic growth in India slowed down in 2012. Until then, the profitable India image seemed to have been dominant in the German media for a few years, while the romantic and the atrocious played a rather marginal role. The comeback of the atrocious India image by the end of 2012 was not only made possible by the fading of the profitable one in the course of economic stagnation, but was fed with atrocities against Indian women, mainly in the form of gang rape and

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[18]   K. Marx, *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization. His Despatches and Other Writings on China, India, Mexico, the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. and introd. by S. Avineri, Garden City, NY 1969, p. 94.

[19]   This unofficial but popular slogan at that time is based on the following quote by the CDU politician Jürgen Rüttgers: *Statt Inder an die Computer müssen unsere Kinder an die Computer* (Our children have to be on computers instead of Indians on computers) – '"Kinder statt Inder": Rüttgers verteidigt verbalen Ausrutscher,' *Spiegel Online*, 9 March 2000, at <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/kinder-statt-inder-ruettgers-verteidigt-verbalen-ausrutscher-a-68369.html>.

murder. Nevertheless, especially the atrocious and romantic India images continue to exist simultaneously even today in various forms in Germany. The one could never fully replace the other, since the preference for one over the other seemingly depends on factors that have nothing to do with the actual realities in India. This becomes visible already when we look at the emergence of these images.

## REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF THE ROMANTIC INDIA IMAGE

As mentioned above, the romantic India image attained prominence in the end of the 18th century. Building on older notions of the enlightened East, as encapsulated in the phrase *Ex oriente lux*, it was fuelled by the translation of Sanskrit works whose images and characters found their way into German literature, as the example of Herder's poem 'Indien' has shown. German intellectuals welcomed this new material from this culture in the East and started an intellectual hysteria regarding India. Furthermore, this urge to explore the myths, secrets and philosophies of this exotic country led ultimately to the establishment of a new academic discipline in Germany: Indology. The establishment of this subject was also closely linked to the rise of linguistics, above all comparative and historical linguistics, and in particular "Indogermanistik" – the study of Indo-European languages. Until the discovery of the Hittite language as the oldest Indo-European language at the beginning of the 20th century, Sanskrit, in the form of its predecessor Vedic, was considered the oldest Indo-European language known, for which reason the study of Sanskrit and Vedic was an integral part of Indo-European studies, and an Indologist was unavoidably also a linguist.

Today, both subjects are separated from each other, but nonetheless Germany still has, under the label of Indology, the highest number of professorships for Sanskrit outside of India,[20] although the focus of this subject varies from university to university. Nowadays, Indologists also claim to be exploring modern day India, and in some cases also other South Asian countries and their languages,[21] whereas at the beginning of this discipline, in 19th century Germany, the foci of Indology were avowedly nearly always old texts, and attempts to reconstruct the social and religious life in ancient India based on these documents. These unidimensional dealings with India, its culture and people based on ancient texts uncritically mostly given the status of empirical documents, could ultimately lead only to an unrealistic, in this case a highly romanticised image of India. But why did this romantic image become so strong in Germany, while in Great Britain the opposite image emerged?

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[20]  None of the professorships are explicitly for Sanskrit, but are, rather, for Indology. However, since Indology in Germany is largely synonymous with Sanskrit studies, there is little difference.

[21]  In actual fact, though, it is the new discipline of South Asia Studies which is filling this gap, since the "modern" aspect of German Indology is as a rule confined to the additional study of Hindi or, in a few cases, some other contemporary South Asian language, and even that more or less as an afterthought.

## REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF THE ATROCIOUS INDIA IMAGE

The most obvious reason seems to lie in the fact that Great Britain had intensive relations with India at that time. Although the romantic India image could be found among certain groups in Great Britain, too, for instance among the Theosophists in the second half of the 19th century, the deductions from first-hand encounters with India and its society ultimately superseded the romantic image. The mass of German intellectuals, on the contrary, simply lacked the chance of intensive encounters with India.

An exception to this was the Royal Danish Halle Mission, which from the beginning of the 18th century sent exclusively German missionaries, actually from my home town Halle, to South India, namely to Tranquebar, to spread the Christian gospel among the locals. But instead of extensive descriptions about the local population, their culture and religion in the manner of British administrative reports, the Protestant missionaries concentrated on understanding the local population and their languages in order to convert them. Especially Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, the best-known missionary of the Mission, is even today, in both Germany and India, held in high esteem for his linguistic contributions regarding the Tamil language and for being *the first scholar to record the self-reflections of the Indians and [the first who] thus allowed them to speak for themselves.*[22] Seemingly, the lack of economic and political interest in the local population allowed missionaries to draw a rather "neutral" picture of the local population, a picture which, while not being negative, was nonetheless anything but romantic. However, their writings reached only a limited audience in Germany,[23] so that their impact too was limited.

As a contrastive example, Karl Marx, who lived for many years in England, was regularly exposed to wide-spread first-hand descriptions and opinions by and of British travellers and colonial officers, and thus could develop a low opinion of India in sync with that of the British elite. The creation of the atrocious India image in Great Britain is often seen from today's perspective – mainly of those assignable to the so-called Postcolonial and Subaltern schools – as nothing more than a justification to colonise the Indian Subcontinent. Especially the highlighting of alleged atrocities against Indian women, e.g. widow burning,[24] in the portrayal of India in Great Britain has been criticised by many scholars of Indian origin in the last quarter of the 20th century. One of

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[22]   D. Jeyaraj, 'Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's Perceptions of Indian Society and Religions' in H. Wrogemann (ed.), *Indien – Schmelztiegel der Religionen oder Konkurrenz der Missionen? Protestantische Mission in Indien seit ihren Anfängen in Tranquebar (1706) und die Sendung anderer Konfessionen und Religionen*, Berlin 2008, p. 27 (*Quellen und Beiträge zur Geschichte der Hermannsburger Mission*, 17); cf. also G. Dharampal-Frick, *Indien im Spiegel deutscher Quellen der Frühen Neuzeit (1500-1750). Studien zu einer interkulturellen Konstellation*, Tübingen 1994, pp. 85-108 (*Frühe Neuzeit*, 18).

[23]   Cf. G. Dharampal-Frick, *Indien im Spiegel deutscher...*, p. 106f.

[24]   Ironically, similar outcries from the side of European scholars would surely have arisen if European societies had been reduced solely to the burning of women during witch-hunts in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period.

the most famous and ironical statements in this context was made by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: *[W]hite men, seeking to save brown women from brown men*, [...].[25]

This quote reminds one of similar allegations against the NATO troops in present-day Afghanistan, although actually a serious comparison of the British in 18th and 19th century India with that of NATO in present-day Afghanistan is more than an adventurous challenge. Nevertheless, the status of women in Afghanistan has been used as one of the justifications for military intervention there.[26] Interestingly, even the critics of the intervention claiming that only the economic interests of the NATO powers, with the USA leading the way, were the actual cause of the war in Afghanistan, the liberation of Afghan women being only a lame justification, ultimately do not dispute the perceived need to act in the interests of Afghan women.

Of course, even if it be assumed that the role of women might have indeed been just an excuse for invasive actions, it does not automatically mean that descriptions of atrocities against women were therefore based only on fantasies. However, the emergence of a certain image of a country, society or culture seemingly does not only depend on actual encounters, but often on the individual or common interests the viewers have or do not have with regard to the object of their imagination. It is, therefore, not astonishing that the atrocious India image was prominent in Great Britain, and might indeed have served as a justification for consolidating British rule in India, for it correlated well with British interests; conversely, it took quite some time for this image to spread in Germany, where interests of a similar sort were lacking.

## VIEWERS' IMAGININGS OF INDIA AND THEIR OWN SOCIETY

Besides these external factors, such as the access to information about India or the political and economic interests of elites, one main factor for individuals to give space to the romantic or the atrocious India image seems to lie, rather, in the viewer's attitude towards her/his own society. Even Herder, who can be considered to be one of the founders of the romantic India image, was quite aware that India was not free of "atrocities":

*The view of India held by Herder is not altogether uncritical. He deplores the treatment accorded pariahs [...]; the Hindu seems to him to lack sympathy and to give in too easily to destiny [...]; the Hindu practise of suttee, whereby Hindu widows throw themselves upon the funeral pyres of their husbands, is incomprehensible to him.*[27]

So, although Herder might not have had such an extensive access to first-hand accounts on India as intellectuals in Great Britain, he was quite aware of the factors

[25]  G. Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge, Mass. 1999, p. 303.

[26]  Cf. M. Cooke, 'Saving Brown Women,' *Signs*, Vol. 28, No. 1: *Gender and Cultural Memory* (2002).

[27]  A.L. Willson, *A Mythical Image. The Ideal of India in German Romanticism*, Durham, N.C. 1964, p. 1051.

which determined the atrocious India image. Nonetheless, he raves about the inhab-
itants of India:

*Herder speaks [...] of the purity of their senses, unspoiled by intoxicating beverages; he*
*praises with a quiet exaltation their guileless hearts thriving under the propitious blessings*
*of their homeland [...]. He finds that the Hindus are graceful, peaceful, unblemished, in-*
*nocent, and that they maintain a tranquil and democratic pedagogy [...]. What wonders*
*of art may be expected from the Hindus, says Herder, since they are, especially in the higher*
*castes, a well-educated, musical people. One should be aware, he says, that the Hindus are*
*the only folk on earth who have raised erotic pleasures to the level of a beautiful, even a re-*
*ligious art [...].*[28]

The image of India Herder draws must be seen in contrast to his attitude towards
his own society. Herder can be considered as an early Romanticist, as a precursor or fa-
ther of the literary and art movement called Romanticism which lasted from the end
of the 18th century until the middle of the 19th century. This intellectual movement is
known for its critical standpoint against the developments brought by the so-called
Age of Enlightenment. Instead of rationalism, secularism and the estrangement from
God and religion in general, the absolute trust in sciences, industrialisation and urbani-
sation, the Romanticists were yearning for a closeness to nature and religion, to aesthet-
ics instead of rationality, to respect for the emotion and soul of an individual human
being that is not judged by his contribution to the development of his society. Repre-
sentatives of this era had found in India the perfect platform on which to project their
ideas and create its image in strong contrast to their critical perception of the recent de-
velopments in Europe. They idealised India as the cradle of mankind, a place to which
it would be worthwhile to return.[29] In this context, Anil Bhatti, an Indian scholar of
German literature, stated the following:

*Ob positiv oder negativ gewertet, war Indien eine vergangene Größe. Ursprungstraum,*
*verlorenes Paradies, Wiege der Kultur, Kindheit der Menschheit etc. Die Gegenwart war*
*ein matter Abglanz, ja degenerierte Stufe der einstigen Glorie. Neben dieser Verweigerung*
*der Gleichzeitigkeit wurden durch Dichotomisierungen und Abgrenzungen "moderne" Ei-*
*genschaften wie Wissenschaft, Rationalität, Philosophie diesem Indien abgesprochen.*[30]

Unlike the Romanticists, Karl Marx does not project a positive image of India, but
represents the other side of the dichotomous India perception by constructing a nega-
tive image of an uncivilised backward society and, thus, denying this region its contem-
poraneity as well. Marx, a big critic of imperialism in general, and in this case of British

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[28]  Ibid., p. 1052.

[29]  Cf., e.g., ibid.

[30]  A. Bhatti, 'Unser Wissen übereinander' in T. Berberich, J. Clauss (eds.), *Verstand zur Verständigung.*
*Wissenschaftspolitik und internationale wissenschaftliche Zusammenarbeit. Festschrift für Heinrich*
*Pfeiffer*, Berlin 1987, p. 17: *Whether judged positively or negatively – India's greatness was in the past:*
*dream of origin, paradise lost, cradle of culture, childhood of mankind, etc. The present was a pale reflec-*
*tion, indeed, a degenerated level of the former glory. In addition to this lack of contemporaneity, dichot-*
*omies and demarcations led to this India being denied "modern" attributes like science, rationality and*
*philosophy.*

colonialism in India, nonetheless could find something very positive about the British rule there. Even though he was convinced that socio-economic conditions for the Indian population suffered under British rule more than ever before,[31] he believed that exactly these sufferings would ultimately lead to a social revolution in India.[32] His attitude towards the society with which he identified himself – the British at that time – becomes most visible in his explanation of why all other invaders of the Indian Subcontinent were not able to conquer it and leave a similar impact in this region:

*Arabs, Turks, Tartars, Moguls, who had successively overrun India, soon became Hindooized, the barbarian conquerors being, by an eternal law of history, conquered themselves by the superior civilization of their subjects. The British were the first conquerors superior, and therefore, inaccessible to Hindoo civilization.*[33]

Marx saw the development of humankind as an evolutionary process in which Great Britain and Europe were leading the way, as adults, while Asian countries like India were still in their childhood. The ideal state of human society, communism, could only be achieved through an industrialised society and not by going back to nature. Clearly, the reasons why the Romanticists were turning away from their own society were exactly the same that led Marx to the belief that Europe was superior to India: the perceived dichotomy between the civilised, industrialised, rational, rich, secular, and urban Europe estranged from nature, and the uncivilised, backward, irrational, poor, and spiritual India whose population still lives in touch with nature in villages. The personal attitude of Germans towards these attributes are even today often the key elements for turning Germans into India lovers or critics, into agents of the romantic or atrocious India image.

The latest India image – the profitable one – can be seen either as an effort to allow India to catch up with "Western" societies, or as another unconscious attempt to deny India its contemporaneity by creating economic expectations that could be considered futuristic fantasy. But in contrast to the other two dominant images, the profitable India image needs very concrete inputs of economic and scientific success to stay vibrant. Though expectations do play a role, as in all business transactions, these are, at least in this case, hardly related to the attitude towards one's own society, but rather to a rational interest in profit obtainment. As long as there is a stable hope that India could contribute to this profit this image can persist, but otherwise it must wither, whereas the atrocious and romantic India images have been and continue to be fed by manifold, at times rather irrational, fears and hopes. It is no wonder that the profitable

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[31] Cf. K. Marx, *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization...*, p. 89: *There cannot, however, remain any doubt but that the misery inflicted by the British on Hindostan is of an essentially different and infinitely more intensive kind than all Hindostan had to suffer before.*

[32] Cf. ibid., p. 94: *England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution.*

[33] Ibid., p. 133.

India image has, hence, faded in conjunction with the stagnation of economic growth in India (though it might be revived if growth picks up), while the other two images have continued to exist for the last two hundred years regardless of the changing realities in India.

Though this article cannot delve into the details of all factors and reasons which have allowed the atrocious and romantic India images in Germany to live on, at least some important agents and periods that have, in the last one hundred years, contributed to them shall be presented.

## THE ROMANTIC INDIA IMAGE SINCE THE 20TH CENTURY

Franz Osten[34] was the first German film maker who worked extensively on and in India. Although his movies often contained a social critique, his productions served to consolidate the romantic India image. Thus, his first movie, *Die Leuchte Asiens* (*Prem Sanyas*), a German-Indian production which premiered in 1925 in Munich, tells the story of Siddhārtha Gautama, better known as the Buddha. The movie was based on Edwin Arnold's book *The Light of Asia* (1879) written in verse and published in German translation in 1923, only one year after Herman Hesse's novel *Siddhartha*. Both books and the movie present the reader and the viewer with an image of India in the style of the Romanticists. The emergence and success of these books and Osten's film in Germany also must be seen against the backdrop of their time – only a few years after the Great War, a period which had shown the ugliest face of "civilised" modern Europe. It is no surprise that after this traumatic experience many Germans were again seeking new hope and inspiration in India, this time with growing interest in Buddhism.

However, the romantic India image experienced the biggest impetus in the 1960s. During that time, the critique against their own societies, against the alleged atrocities committed by their governments in the past or present in the so-called "Third World" or at home caused many especially young people in "Western" countries, again to turn away from their own culture and towards other "non-Western" countries, in the – often naïve – belief that these were intrinsically "better" by virtue of their being "non--Western." Similar to the reasons that had led to the interest of the Romanticists in India, many Germans were seeking human authenticity and spirituality, factors their own society, in which people seemed to aspire only for material wealth, allegedly denied them. And while in the 1920s the interest in India was rather limited to literature and philosophical aspects of Indian religions, this time the sheer euphoria for India welcomed anything: ashrams, gurus, incense sticks, meditation, music, Neo-Hindu religions, yoga, and even Hesse's novel *Siddhartha*, which again experienced popularity, actually more than in the 1920s. Since the 1960s the romantic India image is more than ever omnipresent in the German public sphere (until 1989 dominantly in Western Ger-

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[34]   For a small publication with biographical notes, an overview of Franz Osten's Indian silent films and German reviews translated into English see G. Koch, *Franz Osten's Indian Silent Films*, compiled, ed. and trans. by G. Koch, New Delhi 1983.

many), though from time to time it is superseded by the atrocious image until it can take over again. In the last few years, the romantic India image has received new support from the rising popularity of āyurveda, yoga, and, above all, Bollywood movies, which offer to their mainly female viewers something their own society seems to deny them: emotions, feelings and a distinct assignment of gender roles. Women are women and men are men, although men are allowed to show their feelings and cry from time to time. Not without reason is Shah Rukh Khan, the "King of Bollywood" famous for his heartbreaking crying scenes, as popular among German Bollywood fans as he is in India.

## THE ATROCIOUS INDIA IMAGE SINCE THE 20TH CENTURY

The atrocious India image has been upheld since the late 1950s particularly by the development agencies established at that time, which seem to see it as their main aim to bring the economic advancements of the "Western" world to India. These development goals often, though by no means only, go hand in hand with the Christian mission, and the explanation of India's economic deficits and human injustices by the backwardness of Indian culture and religion. In 2007, I myself was part of a workshop for German school children that aimed to explain to them the different facets of India. Since the workshop was organised by a church-based institution, a representative from one of the biggest church-based development agencies was invited for the final discussion. After two days of intensive work with the children, with the aim of presenting them with a heterogeneous India image, this person simply explained almost all misery by the backwardness of Indian culture and Hinduism, just like the former colonial power and Karl Marx had previously done. When I was able to invalidate most of his arguments he raised his voice and addressed the school children directly: *Imagine, if you lived in India, your parents would have already married you off to somebody you wouldn't even have met before.*[35] That was the most desperate attempt at defending the atrocious India image I had witnessed until then.

Besides many development agencies which keep the atrocious India image alive, it finds additional support among most mass media outlets, with the public TV channels leading the way. Nowadays, particularly the atrocities against Indian women have been again regularly discussed since the gang rape and murder of a female student in Delhi on December 16th, 2012. In both cases, i.e. German media and development agencies, the emphasis on a negative India image might be well-intentioned, but, as already mentioned before in the context of Karl Marx's writings on India, a well-intentioned criticism can lead to the same result as ill-intentioned criticism: a unidimensional negative image.[36] By contrast, in the case of German literature images of India have not much changed since the Romanticists spread their imaginings on India. One exception to

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[35]  The discussion took place in German, and this quote is a free translation from the original.

[36]  Cf. note 9 above.

these romantic images was made by Günther Grass. The well-known German author travelled several times to India and lived with his wife for five months in 1986/87 in Calcutta where he wanted to explore the "real" India extensively.[37] But already during his first journey to India in 1975 he perceived an atrocious India that was reflected in his novel *The Flounder* (German: *Der Butt*) from 1977. The protagonist of this novel states, for instance:

> There are no separate slums, or bustees, in Calcutta. The whole city is one bustee, or slum, and neither the middle nor the upper classes can segregate themselves from it. [...] Wherever the traffic leaves a free space, there are people living in the roadway. [...] People flushed into the city by the last famine (just a year ago), those whom the bustees have expelled or found no room for stay on in such places. [...] Why not a poem about a pile of shit that God dropped and named Calcutta. How it swarms, stinks, lives, and gets bigger and bigger. [...] Hope has no place in a poem about Calcutta. Write with pus. Rip off scabs.[38]

Grass's literature about India stands in strong contrast to the India image the Romanticists created. He describes an India full of poverty, dirt and injustice. Literary critics in Germany reacted annoyed and disgusted. Indians themselves were reminded of the polemics the British colonials used in the past. Grass was confronted with people who saw him to be arrogant, intolerant, one-sided racist, or simply ignorant of the beauty of India. But Gregor Neumann sheds new light on Grass's atrocious India image in an article from 2007. He states that Grass was drawing this negative image in protest against the widespread romantic India image in Germany. He was hoping to draw the attention of the German public sphere to the negative facets of India by shocking them and leaving them no opportunity to romanticise India's poverty.[39] Whether this strategy, if indeed such a strategy actually existed, has worked is not known. But then the question arises whether it is, in any case, possible to influence individuals regarding their attitude towards India.

## PEOPLE CHOOSE THEIR INDIA IMAGE

According to the explanation above, Grass, like Herder almost three hundred years before, was clearly aware that there was also another India, but he consciously selected only negative aspects to convey his message, in the same way as Herder portrayed

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[37]     As a result of his stay in Calcutta in 1986/87 Grass published *Zunge zeigen* (1988), a book based on his diary written during his time in Calcutta, drawings of daily life scenes in Calcutta, and the poem 'Zunge zeigen.' Already the rather dark drawings of, for instance, poor people on the streets of Calcutta leave a nightmarish feeling. The work has been translated into English as *Show Your Tongue* (trans. by J.E. Woods, San Diego 1989).

[38]     G. Grass, *The Flounder*, trans. by R. Manheim, London 1989, pp. 182-186.

[39]     G. Neumann, *Bestandsaufnahme eines Missvergnügungsreisenden. Das Indienbild des Günter Grass*, 2007, p. 15 (*Südasien-Informationen*, 13), at <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/savifadok/volltexte/2007/62>.

only a very romantic India despite knowing of negative aspects. Especially today, in the so-called age of knowledge and information, it is clear that in present-day Germany neither is there a lack of access to information about India, nor does one India image lead to the extinction of the other, although one image might at times dominate the mass media. The question is not what we can see, but rather what we want to see. Do we want to see a romantic India, an atrocious or a profitable one? Or do we give India the chance to be, in our imagination, as diverse and heterogeneous as any other country?

It depends on the viewer and his or her very personal motivations to highlight individually preferred aspects of India. And as long as the viewer is not confronted with the reality, it actually might not matter at all – neither for the viewer nor for India. But what happens when the viewer is so overwhelmed by her/his imaginings as to want to face the imagined image in reality?

## UNIDIMENSIONAL INDIA IMAGES DISAPPOINT

Already at the beginning of this article it was pointed out that unidimensional India images might lead to disappointments. And indeed they do. During my numerous travels to India I have met several people who were escaping the alleged terror of consumerism in Germany hoping to find spirituality in India. But when they were cheated upon arrival, on the way from the airport to their cheap hostel by transport operators they were disappointed – the first, but not the last time. I have met several people who changed their plane ticket in order to leave this allegedly spiritual country much earlier than planned, because they had had several nervous breakdowns. I know of several Indology or South Asia Studies students who changed their subject of study right after they travelled for the first time to India. A friend of mine who recently visited India to relax from the hectic daily life in Germany was almost squeezed to death among a religious crowd that wanted to see the Dalai Lama, and was severely traumatised. Development helpers sometimes return to Germany as racists after they have realised that the people whom they want to help accept the material aid, but do not want to give up their social and religious norms which are, in the eyes of the helpers, the main cause of their misery. And what about the businessmen who fail in India? German businessmen had to realise that people in India were not waiting for them. They have to work in India as hard as in any other country, and it might sometimes be even more difficult, since widespread German-Indian business relations are still in their infancy, and unrealistic expectations – actually from both sides – are still prevalent. And is it not possible that even on a political level misunderstandings and disappointments might arise and cause diplomatic tensions due to wrong imaginings and expectations? Indeed, the opportunities for possible disappointments and misunderstandings caused by unidimensional images seem to be infinite. But what can we do about this?

We, scholars of cultural studies or regional studies, in my case South Asia Studies, cannot dictate what to think of another country or culture. But, nonetheless, I believe

that it is our task to offer diverse images and approaches to another culture and raise uncomfortable questions, questions that make people leave their own comfort zone and perspective. And above all, is it not also our task to create awareness among our students so that when we study another society we have to study and understand ourselves and our attitudes towards our own society first, attitudes which influence how we see not only ourselves, but others too?

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