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INDIA AND THE YUGOSLAVS

A SURVEY OF THE CULTURAL LINKS

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PREFACE

This Transaction is a resume of a lecture delivered at the Indian Institute of World Culture by Mr. Ivan Slamnig, of the Department of Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Arts of the Zagreb University.

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A SURVEY OF THE CULTURAL LINKS

The cultural relations between India and the Yugoslav peoples—Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians—are at the same time very old and very recent. The cultural ties between the modern states of Bharat and Yugoslavia, between their politically organized nations are as new as the states themselves: the contacts of the Southern Slavonic people inhabiting ancient Illyria with the impressive cultural complex of the Indian Subcontinent are very old and sometimes more direct and profound than one would expect. Here we have to consider also the vision of India as expressed in the works of old Yugoslav authors, and in the anonymous tales and songs.

The oldest actual contact, as the Zagreb linguist Radoslav Katicic has pointed out in a recent colloquy dedicated to Indo-Yugoslav relations, is to be found in the primeval religion of the Slavs, which was by origin Indian, partly through Persian intermediation. However, this fact, proved by the analysis of the expressions for deities, is common to all the Slavonic peoples. Southern Slavonic people exist as a special group only since the middle Ages.

India for medieval Europe meant sometimes as much as any distant and little known country, "The Land of Prester John." This mythic concept of India is shown in a number of South Slavonic folksongs, tales and sayings and was supported by the fact that in the older and dialectical Serbo-Croat the word "indi" or "indje" meant "in some other place, elsewhere." Nevertheless, the greatest number of written texts show a fairly good knowledge of the geographical position of India—the Croat humanists knew it through the history of Alexander the Great, and the merchant poets of Ragusa had even more direct sources of information. The humanists in their turn purported a vision of an ancient political unity of the South Slavonic peoples and India, namely in Great Macedonia. The Dalmatian sixteenth-century humanist Priboevius - Pribojevic in his Latin lecture on the Slavs (later printed in Venice) speaks of a great Slavonic empire extending from Illyria to India, and from the Adriatic Sea to the Ganges, basing it on the pleasant myth that the Macedonians of yore are identical with the Slavic people inhabiting ancient Macedonia since the sixth century. Alexander the Great who "overcame Porrus, the most courageous king of India, and annexed the Indians to his state" was a Slav for Croat humanists, as well as for the later baroque poets. The false conception that the Yugoslavs are indigenous on their present territory was successfully perpetrated by a number of enthusiasts up to the nineteenth century.

The humanist Priboevius applied all the scientific apparatus of the times to prove his assertions. Earlier than that the romantic and misdated stories on Alexander the Great with fanciful descriptions of India fascinated the Slavonic-speaking audiences in Croatia, Serbia and Bulgaria as early as the fourteenth century, and bearing the name of "The Serbian Alexandria" came into medieval Russia, thanks to the versions in Old Church Slavonic which could be understood by all the Slavs. These Slavonic romances about Alexander the Great including descriptions of India were of Western origin and were first retold in Croatia. The basis for the fabulous description of India in these Alexandreids was a twelfth-century Latin text known as *The Letters of Prester John* which in its turn followed another not much older Latin text, *De Adventu Patriarchae Indorum*, which appeared after the visit to the Indies in 1122 of a Patriarch Joho, and was written presumably by his interpreter. This first text aroused the fantasy of the Western audiences telling of immense riches and miracles in this mythic far-away land, of the building in Malabar of the church of Saint Thomas, of strange peoples and animals. *The Letters of Prester John* were addressed to the Byzantine emperor Manuel Comnenus (died 1180). Pope John, the Christian priest-king of the Slavonic manuscripts, calls himself "the tsar of the tsars, the mandarin," the lord of the Three Indies,

potent, rich, happy and virtuous. We know *The Letter of Pope John* to have been copied in Serbia as early as the thirteenth century in a variant of Church Slavonic understandable to the Bulgarians and the Russians, who recopied it many times. As the text is of Western origin, even here we might assume a missing link belonging to the Croatian Glagolitic literature which contained both the Western and Byzantine elements. The simple Croatian scribes compiling the medieval popular encyclopaediae known as the *Lucidars* gave a description of India similar to the one in the *Letter of Pope John*. In one India lie the very high mountains where Paradise is situated, surrounded by portentous serpents. In another India there are giants having lion heads, feathers, and paws like the marten. And so on.

Another pleasant Croat myth is the Dalmatian origin of Marco Polo, who was allegedly born on the Island of Korcula in the Adriatic. There are still people who consider this a fact, although Marco Polo is certainly a Venetian whose family may have been of Dalmatian origin. In a naval battle just near his alleged Dalmatian native town he was wounded and captured by the Genoese, in whose prison he dictated his most famous book on Chinese and Indian wonders. No doubt it was well known in Dalmatian towns too, as even now there are popular humorous sayings on Marco Polo, his travels, and his Dalmatian nature. Surely Polo's book stimulated the interest for India in the Dalmatian coastal merchant towns, especially in Dubrovnik, which town is maybe better known by its Romance name of Ragusa. Polo retells the story about Apostle Thomas' death—he was shot by accident in a peacock hunt—while the apocryphal legend about Saint Thomas' martyrdom in India tells about his skinning by the pagans and the miracles he performed with his hide.

Polo speaks distinctly favourably about the Brahmans, while the older legend, preserved in several Serb and Croat manuscripts, tends to convey a malignant vision of pagan India, so that the later Yugoslav "singers of tales" speak sometimes of the "cursed India."

Maybe more impressive and more frequent is that opposite vision of the rich, happy and wondrous India, intensified and reiterated by the tales told by Polo's Dalmatian colleagues by trade, sea merchants who had seen it, and by the evidence of the expensive products which came from that country. The vision, of India equals sometimes the vision of Paradise on Earth, and in fact it was sometimes placed in the Third India. A Slovenian folk song says: No country on Earth is more beautiful than the country of India. The people there do not dig, do not plough but still are harvesting three times a year." India is the happy country of a Croatian folk song "where pepper and oranges grow, where each maiden makes love with two boyfriends, and where the year has no winter."

A noteworthy description of the fabulous Indies in old Croatian literature is to be found in the prologue of the comedy *Uncle Maroje* by the sixteenth-century playwright Marin Držić. The prologuing negromant gives a discourse upon the bellicose co-existence of the true and the would-be men, which is the basis of all the troubles of Mankind. The would-be men originated by magic from symbolic statues in India, and started fighting the true men first there, or more precisely in the Old Indies, as he also speaks about the Great Indies "where the asses, herons; and apes speak like humans," the Little Indies, "where pigmies, little manikins, wage a war against the cranes," the New Indies—and that might be America, as the old number of the Indies is three— "where the dogs are leashed with sausages, where in bowling one plays with golden balls, where the singing of frogs is as appreciated as that of nightingales with us." The placid Old Indies is a true Paradise on Earth, "the rich fields with their ripening fruit trees are not surrounded by thorny fences, avarice does not deprive people of the fruits, but everything stays open to everybody. There do not exist the words 'mine' and 'thine', but everything belongs to everybody, everybody is the master of every

thing. And the people inhabiting that country are good-humored, placid, peaceful, prudent.” They are also beautiful and sincere, or as the author says, “they bear their hearts in front of their eyes.” These are the *true men*. Most probably part of the author’s inspiration for the character of the *true men* came from Marco Polo’s description of the Brahmans who are, as the famous traveller says, “the best and the most honest merchants in the world and they would not tell a lie for the whole world.... They are very careful not to do anything that could possibly be a sin: they would rather die.” But the most important source for this vision of India is certainly the Slavonic *Letters of Prester John*, although we can also assume some other local information. The assertion that the land cannot be private property in India reveals a more direct source, as this was how some Europeans understood the ancient Indian agrarian system. Just this point was the issue of a rather bitter polemic between the early indologists Du Perron and Paulinus at the dawn of the late century.

Another sixteenth-century Ragusan author, Mavro Vetranic, wrote a *mascherata*, a carnival song, where the acting maskers are Arab and Indian merchants. The description of their journeying includes encountering dragons, three-headed serpents and other mythic animals thronging the roads and byroads of India, but what they brought to the Ragusans was actually of Indian origin: nutmeg, cinnamon, perfumed water, thyme and other incense.

The city-republic of Ragusa, which gave to the English language the word “argosy,” had direct contacts with India, competing with the Portuguese and the Venetians in the spice trade. Some Ragusans stayed in India and attained rather high positions there. We know that a Jacob the Ragusan, having the title of “Viceroy of Delhi,” came to the Turkish Sultan as the ambassador of the king of Gujarat to ask for aid against the Portuguese fortification in Diu. The mission was successful and an Egyptian fleet was sent to help the Indians. Another Croat was a member of the crew, a George Hus, who described the journey in Latin. Surely he was not the only Yugoslav on the Turkish ships, as from Portuguese sources we come to know that on captured Egyptian ships were found books “in lingua dalmatica,” and that among the enemies of the Portuguese were also cannon-founders from “Esclavonia.”

The theory that Malik Ayaz himself, the famous lord of Diu who victoriously fought the Portuguese at the beginning of the sixteenth century was a Ragusan inspired Ivana Brlic Mazuranic, a Croatian authoress of books for youth, widely read in Yugoslavia and translated into several languages, to write a novel about him. It was based on a study written by her father Vladimir Mazuranic. The book was titled *Jasa the Dalmatian, Viceroy of Gujarat*. Jasa would be the original Serbo-Croat form of the name Ayaz or Yaz. The Portuguese speak of him as being of “Russian faith,” captured by the Turks somewhere on the borders of the European Turkey. We cannot be sure if he really was a Yugoslav and Ragusan, but one thing is very sure: *Jasa the Dalmatian* was a most popular book read, I might say, by all the Croats of my age. It propagated love for India, for the Gujarati, as we, following the deeds of our Jasa, were on his side, against the Portuguese. Again, as in time of our panslavist humanists, but in a more impressive way for our youthful and eager souls, India was just a remoter part of our own country.

The Ragusans with their patron and emblem Saint Blaise, whose initials sometimes were maliciously interpreted as “Seven Banners,” managed to be on good terms with the Portuguese too, and the fortified church of Sao Braz in the ramparts of Goa was the nucleus of an important Ragusan colony, which had a certain autonomy.: The Ragusan ships left Goa for good at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Ragusan Republic was, occupied and abolished by the French general Law de Lauriston, a native of Pondicherry.

Besides the facts and fancies about India based on written stories or on the yarns of Dalmatian sailors, we find in old Yugoslav literature a number of retold Indian stories. The most popular religiously instructive tale on Barlaam and Josaphat (or Varlaam and Joasaph) is really the story of Buddha, and in the name of the Christian Saint Josaphat the name of Bodhisattva could be retraced through Arab distorting mediation. The story was translated into Church Slavonic from Greek, and in that form was popular among the Serbs and Bulgarians, who transmitted it to the Russians. In the life and works of the Serb national saint Sava the influence of Josaphat could be noticed. Among the Croats the story came also in its Latin version, and was adapted by the most important of the Croat humanists, Marko Marulic, whose Latin works were brought to India by Saint Francis Xavier, the Apostle of the Indies, as his only reading beside the Bible.

Another Indian literary product popular in all the European literatures are the body of tales known as the *Panchatantra*. These tales were transmitted through Persian, Arab and Greek. The South Slavs have early adaptations from Greek of these tales known by the title "Stephanites and Ichneutes" in the literary Slavonic used by Serbs, Macedonians and Bulgarians. The originally Greek names are modeled on the Arab ones, which in their turn are modeled on the Persian Pahlavi *Kalilah and Dinnah*, "The Stolid and the Sly."

The Persian text **was** rewritten **and** expanded in the fifteenth century, connected with the name of Pilpay or Bidpai, the sage narrator, and was the basis for later Turkish and French versions. A Ragusan by the name of Vincent Bratuti, in the capacity of the official interpreter to the Spanish court, made the first Spanish version from the Turkish one in seventeenth century, while in the eighteenth the enlightened officer M. A. Relkovic made a Croat version from a French one. In the nineteenth century we have the first translations of some Indian tales from Sanskrit into Serbo-Croat (by Petar Budmani) and into Slovenian (by Karol Glaser); the complete Arab text of "The Stolid and the Sly" has been recently translated into Serbo-Croat by the Bosnian orient list Besim Kor- kut. In addition a number of adaptations of the *Pancha- tantra* from French and Russian have been published in the post-war Yugoslavia.

The Gypsies settled on the Balkans conveyed something of their Indian patrimony to the Southern Slavs, especially music. Slovenian linguist Franc Miklosic wrote the first scientific studies on Romany, and also collected Gypsy songs. The Bosnian professor. Rade Uhlik, now the greatest expert on Balkan Gypsies, dedicated his life to the study of Romany language and folklore.

At the beginning of the scientific indology in the second half of the 18th century, a missionary of South Slavonic origin played a leading part. It was the Carmelite monk John Philip Vesdin, better known as *Paulinus a Sane to Bartholomaeo* (1748-1806). His family belonged to that branch of the Croats who retreating from the Turks established new settlements in the bordering tracts between Hungary and Austria. He studied in Sopron, Linz, Prague and Rome. As a missionary Paulinus was vicar-general on the coast of Malabar. He wrote mostly in Latin, and Italian. The majority of his works he published in Italy, some in Vienna. His is the first printed European Sanskrit grammar, *Sidharubam seu Grammatica Samscrdamica*, Rome 1790, based on Indian works and on the manuscript codexes of other missionaries. In 1804, he published a revised and expanded textbook of Sanskrit *Vyakarana*.

His *Systema Brahmanicum* (Rome 1791) is generally considered as his most important work. He reconstructs and interprets the religious and civil organization of Brahman India, adding a list of manuscript references, which include the dictionary of Amarasinha, first part

of which (*De Coelo*) he published seven years later. *Systema* was translated into German in an abridged version by Johann Reinhold Forster, the German scientist born in Poland who followed Captain Cook on his second journey.

Most popular in its time was Vesdin's *Viaggio alle India Orientali*, Rome 1796, again translated into German by Forster. This German version was translated into English by W. Johnston (*A Voyage to the East Indies*, London 1800). The French translation of the *Voyage* was out in 1808, together with Forster's remarks and with a commentary by Anquetil Du Perron, who particularly made fun of Vesdin's studies in comparative philology. Finally De Sacy revised the whole edition since Du Perron, as well as Paulinus, died before the publication. Du Perron's commentary included the already mentioned discussion on the Indian landowning system, and the remarks were sometimes extremely caustic. But the close is reconciliatory: "It is diverting to see two nearly *impotantes* old men exhausting themselves for the progress of Indian literature, while thousands of strong, brisk, well-fed young people after having lolled to satiety in their beds, go to rim round India just to amass rupees."

Paulinus among his numerous dissertations published also two comparative studies prompted by the early reading of Sajnovics' dissertation on the identity of the Hungarian and Lappic. Vesdin's works are the first documented studies on the affinity of the Indo-European languages. *De Antiquitate et Affinitate Linguae Zendicae, Samscrdamicae et Germanicae* was published in Padua in 1799. Vesdin shows in it a good knowledge of earlier theories on the origin and cognation of languages. The assertion on the affinity of Old Persian and Sanskrit was earlier formulated by the English sanskritologist William Jones, but Paulinus claims that Jones "produced no documents for his assertion."

Paulinus' other dissertation of this kind is *De Latini Semonis Origine et cum Orientalibus Connexione*, Rome 1802. While in discussing the affinity of Zendic and Sanskrit he was very cautious about the possible connection of Latin with Sanskrit, here he boldly claimed that both of those oriental languages, and especially Sanskrit, in the majority of words "so happily, so precisely harmonize with Latin expressions, and just as similarly conjugate the verbs, that an egg does not match another better." The parent language he calls "unus primordial is samcrdamicus sermo."

Vesdin in his works, particularly in his *Voyage*, which was also the most popular one, cited and translated passages of Indian classic literature with a commentary, and that not without taste (e.g., the play Calabadi) so his activity is of some interest for the student of comparative literature too, and not only of comparative philology.

In the wake of Paulinus followed Antun Mihanovic, the author of Croatian national anthem, who in a study published in Vienna in 1823 demonstrated the cognation of Sanskrit and Slavonic. Platon Atanackovic did the same for literary Serbian in 1843, while a year later the Slovenian philologist Franc Miklosic recensing the first edition of the famous comparative grammar by Franc Bopp wrote another prominent study on the affinity between the Slavonic languages and Sanskrit.

The first translations of the works of classic Indian literature directly from Sanskrit into a South Slavonic language were made by the already mentioned Croat philologist Pero Budmani, a Ragusan, who translated *Sakuntala* into Serbo-Croat in 1879. Before that Simo Popovic, a Montenegrin translated a number of Indian classical works from German. Karol Glase translated a whole series of Indian works into Slovenian and wrote a number of studies on Indian classic drama. Of other Serbo-Croat versions made directly from Sanskrit

we must mention *The King Nal* by To mo Maretic and *Bhagavadgita* by Pavle Jevtic. The last mentioned author, a Serb and the best of Yugoslav elder indologists, published in London in 1927 his dissertation "Karma and Reincarnation in Hindu Religion and Philosophy," while Pero Slijepcevic seven years earlier published in German his "Buddhismus in der Deutschen Literatur." At home Indology was not yet established as an independent scholarly discipline, so our scientists increased the body of indological works in other languages.

On the other hand, Our writers, philosophers *and* politicians got acquainted with Indian philosophy, Vedantism and Buddhism, first through German works. That is valid especially for the Western parts of the present Yugoslavia which before the First World War formed part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. But this knowledge was still tinged with exoticism. A distorted, always exotic vision of India was intensified by the books of Rudyard Kipling and the Italian Emilio Salgari that were translated and widely read by Yugoslav youth.

A new attitude towards India, with richer knowledge and deeper insight, started to develop in the first decades of the Yugoslav state formed after the First War. The Croat poet Tin Ujevic made an interesting parallel between Gandhi and Tolstoy, finding for their philosophy, as understood in Yugoslavia between the wars, a similar local ancient variant, a grafting base: that would be so called bogomilism that flourished in the medieval Bosnia, a neomanichean heresy ultimately originating from a Persian faith that spread into India too. Gandhi's attitudes and his political struggle influenced the tactics of the opposition in monarchical Yugoslavia. Not by chance the leader of the Croat Republican Peasant Party Stjepan Radic wrote the introduction to the translation of Romain Rolland's book *Our Gandhi* in 1924.

The first book dedicated exclusively to Indian philosophy was published in new Yugoslavia in 1958. It is *Indian Philosophy with a Selection of Texts* by the Zagreb indologist Cedomil Veljacic. The supplemented texts include the translation of the Rig-Veda, considered as the best translation of classic Indian verses into Serbo- Croat. Veljacic also wrote the introductory study to the Serbo-Croat translation of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's *Indian Philosophy*, Belgrade 1964. Veljacic's Study of Buddhism induced him to try the life of a Buddhist monk on Ceylon.

A new era in getting acquainted with Indian literature started with Yugoslav versions of Rabindranath Tagore. Shortly after his own English version of *Gitanjali* and his Nobel Prize in 1913, a Serbo-Croat translation was published in Zagreb, made by Pavao Vuk Pavlovic. This translation was followed by others, the most recent of which was published in 1960 by the Croat poetess and India-enthusiast Vesna Krmpotic. Other works by Tagore were many times published or produced in Yugoslavia. These include *Chitra*, *The Crescent Moon*, *Nationalism*, *The Gardener*, *The Home and the World* *The Wreck* and others. Tagore's popularity greatly increased with his visit to Yugoslavia in 1926. The numerous Yugoslav versions of his works are fertile ground for comparative study, as was shown by the Zagreb expert on Tagore in Yugoslavia, the able comparators and indologist Sveto Petrovic who on it tested his views on what he calls *intermediation style*. Tagore himself, as Petrovic points out, used the intermediation style in interpreting his own poetry for the English-speaking audiences in terms of European literary tradition; this practice was naturally followed by Yugoslav translators.

Even in the post-war translations of Indian authors Tagore is at the head of the list, followed by Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, R. K.

Narayan, Premchand, Jainendra Kumar and others. Nehru's *The Discovery of India* and *Letters from a Father to his Daughter* have been translated into Slovenian, Serbo-Croat and Macedonian. A number of books on India written by Yugoslav authors have been published in the last few decades, containing sometimes very valuable and first-hand information.

With all this it is clear that the position of Indology as a university discipline had to be changed also. Even before the war there were some courses in Sanskrit, and there has been continuous teaching of that language by R. Katicic at Zagreb University since 1958. Indology as a subject in its own right came to be regularly taught at Zagreb in 1962, as a cathedra of the Department for General Linguistics and Oriental Studies, led by Professor Katicic. F. S. Barlingay opened a series of courses by Indian teachers. This Department, together with the Institute for Literature of the Yugoslav Academy, organized in 1965 an exhibition and a scientific colloquy on the theme "The Yugoslavs and India." The same theme was previously outlined in a homonymous study by S. Petrovic. The exhibition demonstrated successfully the variegated continuity of Yugoslav-Indian contacts. The catalogue of the exhibition is a digest of the theme and I, as a grateful afterthought, frankly admit that this brief outline is based mostly upon it.

AH of us do sincerely hope that this activity is only the beginning of the more intense and more frequent reciprocal contacts so generously supported by the two governments.
