

INTRODUCTION

We are presenting the professional and interested public with a collective monograph which is the result of a discussion among twenty-odd scholars of various disciplines from India and Europe during a meeting at Charles University in Prague with the co-operation of the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences and with the financial support of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi. At the meeting on June 17–19, 2010 we were discussing the contents and purpose of Indology and we hope that the result may be an inspiration for a broader discussion on what the subject should deal with, both at the level of University teaching as well as research.¹ The present volume comprises much more than the presentations at the meeting at Charles University and the individual contributions reflect the impact of these discussions on the relevant topics. The principal question of the International Seminar on *Indological Studies and Research: Languages, Literature, History and Culture – Indological Identities* was what Indology used to be, what Indology is, and what it should be. In other words, it dealt with the **traditions** and **perspectives** of Indology. The term Indology is a typically 'continental' term, if seen from the European perspective, while in English (and also in American English) the more commonly used term is 'Indian studies', though perhaps its contents may be slightly broader.²

The discussion opened up the layers of history and meanings embedded in the term Indology, its past, present and future. For some participants, it carried a somewhat unedifying colonial baggage; for others, especially those located in Central and East European Universities, with no history of colonial conquests, the term appeared neutral, the virtual equivalent of Indian studies. If Aloka Parasher-Sen and Harbans Mukhia expressed strong reservations about the restrictive use of 'Indology', others,

¹ This was not the first meeting of specialists in Indology in Prague. It was already in 1995 that over twenty specialists from all over Europe met at Charles University to discuss the future and contents of various disciplines in Indian studies. This was organised jointly by the then Institute of Indian Studies of Charles University in Prague (J. Vacek) and the Institute of Indian Philology and History of Art of the Free University of Berlin (A. J. Gail) with a generous financial support of the *Volkswagen Stiftung* (Germany). The results were published in the *Studia Orientalia Pragensia Series* in 1998 with a support of the *Stichting J. Gonda-Fonds* (The Netherlands): *Trends in Indian studies. Proceedings of the ESIS*. Edited by J. Vacek and J. Dvořák. *Studia Orientalia Pragensia XVIII*. Karolinum, Praha 1998, 187 pp.

² However, the term Indology is also used in English publications in India, cf. e.g. *Dictionary of Indology: Detailed Description of Indian Scriptures, Sanskrit Books, Authors and Trends* by Vishnulok Bihari Srivastava (Pustak Mahal, New Delhi 2010, 296 pp.).

like Martin Hříbek, elegantly explored the multiple meanings it carried in lieu of the singular meaning attributed to it and traced out several directions in which it had led those studying India in the past as well as now. However, it is notable that there was no clear-cut dividing line drawn along regional or spatial identities. There was unanimity that while we needed to understand and value the knowledge of India generated within the rubric of 'classical' Indology, we also need to go beyond it to encompass the ever-expanding dimensions of a country and a region in a mighty state of flux. Hence the title of this volume, *Understanding India: Indology and Beyond*.

On the European continent Indology initially developed as a philological discipline based on Sanskrit, liberating or separating itself from the Indo-European comparative linguistics of the 19th century. Only a few countries had an earlier tradition of dealing with other Indian languages and cultures, particularly those countries whose contact with India had been developing before the discovery and first definition of the Indo-European language family at the end of the 18th century. This epoch-making discovery was due to the knowledge of Sanskrit, an ancient language preserved and excellently described as a reflection of the genius of India two-and-a-half to three thousand years earlier. In the context of the European classical philological tradition, early interest was concentrated mainly on the study of classical language(s) and literature(s) and only slowly did other disciplines, like history, religion and culture, and also modern languages, come into academic focus. But we should make it clear that this is a never ending story and therefore a solid philological basis (so far as non-Indian Universities are concerned) should become a point of departure for a more versatile knowledge of India, of its past and present.

No doubt India's past, present and future are of great interest for specialists as well as the general public in Europe and in other parts of the world. Consequently, the study of India is to be defined and redefined in the context of the progress of the various disciplines dealing with India's history, languages, literatures and culture in general, which have traditionally been the heart of Indological studies, important as these are. Indeed, these are just as important for Indian scholars themselves, as several of the contributions from India emphasise. But the present and the future of India encompass several other dimensions such as the political, the economic, the sociological, the ethnic, etc. All of these dimensions must be part of the fabric of any attempt at understanding India. The study of any single facet of India makes best sense when it becomes part of the study of India as a totality. However, there is certainly no doubt about the fact that some of the aspects of 'classical' Indology are indispensable, particularly when teaching about India outside of India. On the other hand, Indian historians, ethnologists, specialists in literature and other disciplines do not necessarily have to study the relevant modern languages as a particular discipline, because these are a part of their everyday life. But the study of India's classical languages, literatures and cultures is as important for Indian scholars as it is for those looking at India from the outside. This may also be true of certain aspects of culture.

So it was very useful to meet and discuss 'Indological Identities' with this perspective in view and to see how we can inspire each other and in what ways the individual

branches can be developed for a better understanding of India in the West (and not only in the West) and of the West (and not only of the West) in India. This also explains the differences between the individual presentations. Some underline more the past history of the discipline at their universities and the nature of current syllabi. Others concentrate more on questions of the 'contents' and methods of the individual branches, not only in the past but also with a view towards the future, including new methods of research based on advanced information technologies. Realising the broad scale of the potential topics does not prevent us, nor should it prevent us, from pursuing one of the disciplines more deeply, although (and this must be underlined particularly with regard to non-Indian 'students' of the topic) always with a broader information background in some of the other fields, especially languages and cultures. So dealing with any aspect of Indian history or culture without knowing any Indian language but English can only have limited validity. This statement is substantiated by a concrete 'historical experience' from the 70s and 80s of the last century in Prague, and possibly also in other countries of Eastern Europe. Communist Party membership and 'Marxist methodology' was a sufficient qualification to work in many branches of humanities and it also included Oriental and African studies at that time. This, of course, affected negatively the development not only of Oriental studies but of other disciplines as well. Fortunately, this is no more true and since 1990 we have been striving to overcome this political 'digression' from merit based on solid research. But we cannot and should not forget this 'historical fact' that in some subjects one generation of specialists is missing.

In the context of this, the contribution of the Indian presentations in this volume is particularly important, because it demonstrates the relevance of the knowledge of the general context, linguistic or cultural, of a special topic. And a European, or rather non-Indian, student has to be taught these subjects, starting from the very beginning. This, of course, has consequences for the practical composition of the University syllabi at non-Indian Universities. It is with this intention that we offer the Indological public the main results of our discussions and we hope that this discussion will be carried on for the sake of a better mutual understanding and also for the sake of a better understanding of all the existential dimensions of the complex image of India's past, present and future.

Section 1 of the volume deals with specific topics within individual disciplines, starting from the more general questions of the definition of the discipline as a whole and continuing with methodological problems of history, philosophy, philology and linguistics and adding also an outline of the use of advanced information technology in the discipline.

To begin with, C. Rajendran gives an appropriate overview of Indology and its future prospects. He traces the evolution of Indology in Europe and India, underlines its value as well as its present-day crises and laments the loss of interest in the study of philology as an entry point into the study of India, which was the hallmark of early Indologists as well as the great Indian masters. He ends up with a plea to restructure syllabi in India as much as in Europe to draw in ever-expanding areas of knowledge of societies.

Aloka Parasher-Sen and Harbans Mukhia have problems not only with the term 'Indology', but also with the restrictions its very nature imposes on exploring the

complexities and magnitude of Indian society – its past, present and future. They are especially dissatisfied with the focus of Indology on elite languages and cultures, neglecting to take into account the vast domains of history, culture and the social organisation of people located at the lower rungs of society's ladders.

Martin Hříbek enters into a dialogue with these concerns. He cautions against treating all of Europe as a single unit with a uniform understanding of Indology and charts out different trajectories traversed in different European regions by both the term and its many constituents. Placing the evolution of 'Indology' in the context of Orientalism as constituted by Edward Said, he examines its special location in terms both of older and of current Czech scholarly perspectives when looking at India as a subject of study.

Early Indologists had placed the Western and the Indian modes of thinking into two clear, self-contained categories: one was rational, the other mystical, a division which has not quite outlived itself. K. Srinivas re-examines the premise underlying the division and argues that the reason for it lay in the nature of the basis of philosophising in Indian tradition, which encouraged dialogue, debate, and argument. Of course 'reason' itself carries different connotations in the two contexts: in post-Enlightenment Europe, 'rationality' was defined in counterposition to even the touch of religiosity; reason and religion did not quite constitute each other's negation in India.

Zdeněk Štípl stretches the discourse of Indology to the present and examines the strengths and tensions that have marked India's past and present. Both the strengths and tensions inhere in what is felicitously, though routinely, termed unity in diversity.

The more linguistically motivated presentation of S. Dash takes us along the route of establishing some common principles of grammar across languages as well as their differences, with Sanskrit and Tamil as case studies.

But Indology is not the study of India's language(s) alone, even if that were the starting point. Surinder Singh brings into focus one very valuable constituent of Indian society and culture, indeed of the Indian ethos, namely the contribution of Islam and of the Muslim civilisation and religion. Vast as the expanse of Islam is, Professor Singh perceives Indian Islam through three apertures: the establishment of Indo-Muslim states on hitherto unfamiliar patterns, the abiding Sufi religious philosophy and practices and, not least, oral traditions deeply embedded in the common people's memory and often guiding their daily life.

Jaroslav Strnad in some ways picks up the threads in a slightly different, though still recognisably medieval Indian context, i.e. the ways of looking at the texts of medieval India's saint poets, especially Kabīr. Weaving linguistic, literary and historical contexts together, he unearths hidden layers of meaning and their changing character.

The last presentation by Petr Duda brings to our attention the benefits of frontline technology, i.e. the internet and electronic devices in general, which are in relatively common use in the study of the ancient discipline of Indology nowadays.

Section 2 deals with the development and future tasks and prospects of the few European Indologies represented at the Prague meeting. Though this includes only one segment of the European scene, it may also be an inspiration for further consideration of contemporary demand concerning the necessary content and specialisation involved

in both teaching and research within the broadly conceived discipline of various specialisations.

The section starts with a short history of regional co-operation in Indology in recent years in Central and Eastern Europe by Danuta Stasik. This has proved to be a very useful networking instrument which will hopefully catalyse a more systematic discussion of the various Indological topics in the coming years and we hope that it will also regularly involve our Indian partners.

The following papers deal with the problems of the history of the discipline in several of the Indological centres in this part of Europe, starting with Indology in Cracow by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz and Indology in Croatia by Klara Gönc Moaçanin. Both of the papers also discuss some general questions concerning the status of Indology, its tasks and goals, and define the requirements for its solid academic footing. Then follow two papers devoted to Hindi in Prague, the history of teaching Hindi in the Czech Republic by Svestislav Kostić, and some questions of teaching, research and translating Hindi literature in the Czech Republic by Dagmar Marková. Both Charles University and the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences have had a tradition of Hindi teaching and research since the middle of the last century, with a number of outstanding achievements to their credit.

Of special interest is the paper by Anna Trynkowska dealing with the concrete question of developing the curricula of the first and second cycle study programs at the University of Warsaw, with a discussion of the problems involved and also including surveys of the curricula. As far as non-Indian Universities are concerned, this is a subject to be dealt with again very seriously in the future. The final paper by Jaroslav Vacek summarises some of the discussion of the contents of Indology as a complex branch of knowledge, against the background of some aspects of the history of this discipline as it has been developing in Prague during the last 160 years. Besides summarising the ups and downs of the discipline in the context of the rather troubled history of the latter half of the 20th century, it advocates the essential need for a good philological background on the part of non-Indian students and researchers into subjects Indian.

So we present this volume, the result of concentrated and occasionally passionate but deeply involved and serious discussion, to those interested in the further development of knowledge of specific Indological fields and their function within the whole picture of Indology. We hope that on that basis, we can contribute to promoting not only a deeper professional understanding, but also a mutual human understanding and respect in the long-standing dialogue between East and West which, however, nowadays takes place within a globalised world.

In conclusion we should like to express our thanks to all those who contributed to the preparation of this volume, especially to Dr. Mark Corner for going through the English. We owe special thanks to the ICCR, which supported financially the meeting in Prague in 2010 and also contributed an equal share to the publication of this volume. We are very happy that this publication is a joint venture of the Charles University Karolinum Publishing House and of the ICCR.

Editors