

INDOLOGY IN CRACOW – FACING NEW CHALLENGES, VIEWING NEW PERSPECTIVES

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In the paper the author, apart from a short presentation of the main facts concerning a history of Indological studies in Cracow, comments briefly on some of the central and general problems connected with the state of the discipline. She refers to the present state of the Indology Department at the Jagiellonian University: the programme of studies as well as the organisation of the teaching process in the light of the newly imposed Bologna system and the main fields of research of the scholars. She also mentions some possible directions for the future development of the department.

PAST

The tradition of Indian studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków goes back to the year 1860, when a linguist, Professor Bernard Jülg, began his lectures on Sanskrit. This was the beginning of Indian studies in Poland, which were then continued by Jan Baudouin de Courtenay who conducted a course of Sanskrit from 1894 to 1898. Later Jan Rozwadowski lectured on Sanskrit from 1899 to 1926.

In 1912 the lectures at our University were begun by an eminent Polish Indologist, Andrzej Gawroński (1885–1927), who received his doctoral degree in Indian philology from Leipzig University. In 1916 he was appointed a Full Professor at the Jagiellonian University. Gawroński carried out research, among other things on the origin of Sanskrit drama and he wrote the first Sanskrit grammar in Polish, accompanied by readings in Sanskrit. This work has often been used to this day as a textbook at Polish universities.

In 1927, Helena Willman-Grabowska was appointed the head of the Department of Sanskrit. She taught Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrits, Tibetan and Dravidian languages. She also translated into Polish the *Vetālapañcaviṃśatikā*, fragments from the *Kathāsaritsāgara* and some passages from the *Mahābhārata*. She founded the 'Indo-Polish Friendship Society' in Calcutta/Bombay, the Honorary President of which was Rabindranath Tagore.

From 1948 to 1973, the Department of Indian Studies at the Jagiellonian University was closed down for political reasons and Professor Willman-Grabowska was expelled from the University. In 1973, the Department of Indian Studies was re-opened. The Head became Tadeusz Pobożniak, Professor Willman-Grabowska's disciple. He taught Sanskrit and introduced Hindi into the curriculum. His research included studies on Polish Gypsies as well as on the Romani language, numerous Indian and Iranian languages and Indian literature. He founded the Krakow branch of the 'Society of

Friendship Between Poland and India' and popularised Indian civilisation by giving public lectures on it.

After the retirement of Prof. Tadeusz Pobożniak, Mr. Józef Łączak, a very talented linguist and teacher, acted as Head of the Department till his unexpected death in 1989 and then, after the death of Prof. Tadeusz Pobożniak in 1991, young scholars from the Department had to find other teachers. Therefore they started to conduct their work in co-operation with many leading centres of Indological studies in Europe, which has resulted in eight doctoral degrees and two post-doctoral theses (habilitations) during the last dozen or so years.¹

PRESENT AND FUTURE

At present the Department of Indian Studies of the Institute of Oriental Philology at the Jagiellonian University shares the common problems and fears of the academic community, especially connected with the humanities, and in particular disciplines which are not perceived as a priority by the authorities, or even viewed as "exotic" and "non-practical". This is especially connected with a very Europe-centred point of view and with neglect of the role and possible impact of Asian cultures and nations on the future of humanity in general.

On the other hand, it is surprising that there is a kind of a fashion to establish new entities within Universities of so-called Oriental, regional, cultural etc. studies of Asia, very often without a real academic basis and specialists in Asian studies. These strange hybrids often apply a form of unfair competition with our Departments. We believe that very soon the problem of such doubling up of studies will have to be dealt with.

Many humanities disciplines are now in the position of defending their right to exist, though we hope that the idea of the University as a place of unlimited, non-hindered, but also reliable, deep and good-quality inquiry and research on any possible subject will last and will enable disciplines such as ours to continue.

We also share the same problems with adjusting our discipline to modern trends in academic research, such as interdisciplinary activities and a more practical and fieldwork-based approach. We do answer these challenges, we do try to make our research more efficient, useful, valuable and also connected with the main trends within Indology as an international discipline. We do try to participate in the mainstream activities and projects undertaken in Europe, India and in the United States. Many of our activities involve direct cooperation with many Indological centres all over the world.

a) Teaching

One of the important problems we have to face is that of keeping high standards in teaching our discipline, despite the fact that there are general trends to make academic

¹ More facts concerning the history of Indological studies in Cracow and Poland may be found, for example, in the works listed in References below.

disciplines more easily appropriated, simpler and even more 'user-friendly' for students. Sometimes in this pursuit of numbers of students quality could be the first victim.

On the other hand, we have to face the formal standards of our University, for example the compulsory minimum number of students for a course to be opened. In the case of such disciplines as Indology it is sometimes difficult to reach this required number for particular specialisations. In our Department, in which we had, and we still have in the new programme of 3 + 2, two main specialisations in Sanskrit and Hindi, this could be a real danger.

In general, we do not see many advantages in the so-called "Bologna system" of 3 + 2, namely B.A. and M.A. Most of us are of the opinion that in the case of such disciplines as Indology, in which the students have to begin from very scratch and need much longer to learn not only totally unknown languages but also a lot about the cultural context, this kind of division does not make sense. We, however, were not asked about our opinion of that change – it was just imposed on us. The decision about the 3 + 2 system multiplied the number of problems we have to face, since we cannot be certain how many students will stay with us at the second, namely M.A., level, and thus we do not know if we will be able to create the minimum allowed number of participants at all levels. Even in our Department, in which we accept every year 20–25 students for the first year, we cannot be certain about it. I would like to add that we are choosing these 25 students out of a many more candidates, because the interest in India and Indian studies is still much bigger in Poland than in many other European countries. Taking this into consideration, we will probably enlarge the number of students accepted for the first year of study.

Our own research depends on our ability to attract enough students, since we are employed and given money for research on the basis of the number of students. Every year we have to demonstrate our right to exist at the University, not only by our own research and publications, but also by the level of interest, which equals number, of students.

The Indology Department at the Jagiellonian University admits between twenty and twenty-five students each year. Under the old system of 5 years of M.A. studies, which is now coming to an end, during the first five semesters (for two and a half academic years) all students took the same set of obligatory subjects included in the curriculum, and then in the third year students divided into two groups: for Sanskrit, this being the more classically directed group and Hindi, the more modern Indology-oriented group. The students of classical Indology continued with Sanskrit and learned Vedic dialect. The students of modern Indology continued with Hindi and took a beginners course in Urdu. The students of both classical and modern Indology could further choose to specialise in Literature or Linguistics.

From the academic year 2008/2009 the B.M. + M.A. system was introduced. At present the first students to be part of this new system are finishing the third year of B.A. and from the academic year 2010/2011 they will have the opportunity to continue Indological studies within the framework of the two-year M.A. course. They will be able to take up specialisations with Hindi or Sanskrit as a leading language.

The main subjects taught in the department are: Sanskrit, Hindi, Sanskrit Literature, Hindi Literature, Introduction to Indology, History of India, Philosophy of India, Culture and Art of India, Vedic dialect – grammar and text readings, Sanskrit Readings (kāvyā, epic, religious and philosophical texts), Indian Poetics, Hindi Readings, Geography and Ethnography of India, Urdu, Pro-seminars and Seminars.

As for the syllabi of the newly imposed 3 + 2 system, at present we have decided to maintain as general a formula as possible, giving to our students at the first B.A. level the whole range of different subjects, two Indian languages (Hindi and Sanskrit) included. This policy is due to the fact that from our experience it is clear that candidates who begin their studies in the first year of the B.A. often do not have any particular interests within Indology, usually being unaware of its richness, and have very limited knowledge about India and Indological studies. Therefore our idea was to give them the opportunity to try different subjects, those more connected with classical Indology as well as modern Indian studies, to enable them to find their own orientation within the very broad subject area that is Indology. Only then, after three years of the B.A., are they able to make mature and well-grounded decisions about continuing their studies and the direction of further studies. Therefore only at the second stage, namely during the two-year M.A., can they choose between Hindi and Sanskrit as leading languages, which means also between a more classical and more modern-oriented direction of their further development.

At the second level we would like to offer to our students additional Indian languages: in the case of Hindi specialisation it is a course in Urdu, in the case of Sanskrit specialisation a course in one of the Dravidian languages. These courses will be also supplemented by lectures on Urdu and South Indian Literatures. The second level of our studies is meant not only for Indology graduates but also for students of other subjects who nevertheless have adequate knowledge of at least one of the Indian languages. Hence the proposed subjects as well as Seminars, apart from being philologically (linguistically and literary) directed, will concern also Indian Culture in its many general aspects. This is possible since the scholars of our Department specialise in different Indological subjects, among them Indian History, Religions, Philosophy, Art, etc.

Our idea was to enlarge the range of subjects available at M.A. level, because we believe that language is the key to culture. For this reason, after providing the key we would like to offer to our students the possibility to use it in the many different course areas which Indology encompasses.

As for languages, at that level we offer Urdu, which has already been in the syllabus of our old five-year system, but we are also determined to introduce a course in one of the Dravidian languages. Judging from the last three years, during which we had an opportunity to offer one semester of Malayalam during the visit of Prof. C. Rajendran from the University of Calicut, and from experience of three years of the optional course of Tamil, we know how much our students appreciate this opportunity and how much the teaching of a Dravidian language is looked forward to by them. We do hope that our already four-year-old effort to get a native speaker of this language in our Department will end in success.

This is the present stage of the programme in Cracow, but I have to admit that where the shape of the studies is concerned, we are still in the process of discussing the programme and we are aware of the fact that we will have to modify it as the situation requires.

b) Research

The subjects and directions of studies we offer to our students are strictly connected with the research of the scholars and this research covers the broad range of Indological subjects, beginning with the study of the languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu and, recently, the beginnings of research on the Dravidian languages), then the literature written or rather (since it could be also oral tradition) created in these languages. Apart from these very philological subjects my colleagues and I research into Indian philosophy, Indian history, Indian religions, Indian art, and present-day India with its many social, economic, political and other issues.

Classical Indology is strongly represented in our Department. Apart from the usual study of literary sources, it has acquired some new directions due to several research projects directed towards the classical tradition in its present-day form. This applies especially to field research among some communities of followers of classical traditions still present particularly in the Southern part of India. We are also aware of the enormous impact of Indian Culture in South-East Asia, and for this reason we have established a new research group on South India and South-East Asia and are seeking to introduce Dravidian languages as a part of the syllabus. We do believe that for classical Indology research in this area is the core of our work, facilitating an immediate connection of past with present day India. It also involves an interdisciplinary aspect that we find to be very important, and which in fact could help the classical discipline not only to survive but also to develop in very interesting and fruitful directions. We, or at least most of us, strongly believe that classical Indology could and has to be a modern discipline, facilitating the proper understanding not only of ancient, but also of modern India.

We – and again I should probably say most of us – also have the conviction that so-called modern Indian studies cannot be limited to languages and literature, but needs a more broad perspective, as well as an immediate connection with present-day developments in the internal and external situation of India. Thus subjects connected with politics, economics and sociology should also be introduced to attract students and give them indispensable knowledge about present-day India.

Taking all this into consideration, we are trying to establish our new syllabi in accordance with this modified direction of our own research. We are seeking to enlarge our own fields of interest and to present to our students all possible streams of this very broad, and sometimes difficult to be defined, discipline which is called Indology.

The scholars of the Department (5 for Hindi, including a native speaker of Hindi, and 6 for Sanskrit) conduct their academic research accordingly, in classical and modern Indology, very often in cooperation with many scholars and academic Institutions in India and Europe, sometimes also in the United States. They are working within the framework of several research projects, some of them being international and

cooperative undertakings (cooperation with Vienna, Milan, Leiden, Oxford, Paris, Delhi, Calicut), some being their own projects financed from many international scholarships (Gonda, Mellon, Coulson, ICCR), as well as scholarships and research grants from the Jagiellonian University and the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

Though it is not easy to get funds for such a discipline as Indology, which is not perceived in Poland as a priority subject, the scholars of our Department are developing their discipline intensively and try to use the results of their research in their teaching, remembering that the University is not necessarily a place for producing professionals, but above all a place of research, reflection, and the stimulation of young minds by original academic work.

For our existence at the University and the further development of our discipline we also do need the support of India, especially of institutions such as the Ministry of Education and ICCR as well as representatives in Poland, namely the Indian Embassy. I would like to stress the fact that for many years we have been receiving many demonstrations of interest and support from this side, but I also have to admit, considering all the above-mentioned difficulties, that we still need it, for example with respect to broadening the scope of our studies by adding Dravidian languages to the curriculum.

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