

## Introduction

The articles gathered in volumes XIV and XV (forthcoming) of *Cracow Indological Studies* entitled *History and Society as Depicted in Indian Literature and Art* address the issues pertaining to the history of India and aim at presenting Indian society in different historical circumstances.

There is no doubt that valuable insights into different aspects of the past can be provided not only by historical documents *sensu stricto* but also by literature and art. The history of India although greatly advanced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century still needs a lot of thorough consideration. One of the sources which should be seriously examined while reconstructing the ancient history of India are specimens of Indian literature. The vast treasury of different literary genres provides valuable data.

However, if one takes the works representing *kāvya* literary tradition, it should be remembered that they, first of all, fulfil the conventional requirements specific to their genres, yet, nevertheless, they contain valuable information indispensable for writing the political, social and cultural history of India. That is why they should be edited, translated and studied carefully.

Of course one cannot expect that Indian poetical works, even if they describe certain historical events, treat about the past with

accurateness of chronicles. In fact, one should be extremely careful not to miss any piece of information interwoven within conventional descriptions, images and metaphors. Obviously the verifiable names, places, military campaigns and battles are not the only ones, though the easiest things to look for. For instance, some of these works can be treated as pieces of propaganda. In order to serve political purposes, certain elements that build the world presented to the audience can even try to hide the historical truth. In this way, however, they testify to the policy of particular rulers or classes of the society. Some other works speak quite a lot about the society and everyday life. The same refers to Indian art. The interpretation of sculptures, paintings, other objects of art and craft can bring rewarding results. While searching for the interpretation of history and reliable picture of modern Indian society, the one-century-old film art cannot be neglected, either.

The subtitle of the first part of the *History and Society as Depicted in Indian Literature and Art* volume (CIS XIV) starts with the word *dr̥śya* – ‘to be looked at’, ‘what should be looked at’. Traditionally, it refers to the art of drama with all variety of plays, starting with one-act monologues to monumental *nāṭakas*, preferably in ten acts. What else can and should be looked at – *dr̥śya* – while trying to gain some materials useful for describing ancient and modern history and society of India? It goes without saying that sculptures and paintings provide interesting details concerning everyday life, religion and rituals. There are also other performing and visual arts which cannot be neglected while describing past and present of Indian society. However, there is no chance to cover all of them in one volume. Out of necessity, it is, therefore, a choice of some areas and issues.

The articles presented here have been arranged subject-wise. The first article “One man and many women: some notes on the harem in mainly ancient and medieval India from sundry perspectives” authored by David Smith evolves the subject of the Hindu harem. The anonymous stanza describing the king and his wives waiting for their *tête-à-tête* with their husband gives a pretext to discuss the images of “royal court with its dozens or hundreds of sexual partners for

the king alone” present in Indian literature and also depicted by sculptors and painters fascinated by the erotic splendour of the king and his many wives. In tune with the reflexive turn in anthropology, Smith addresses the western erroneous notions of harems. Finally, other female multiplicities, including *yoginīs*, are shown.

Elena Restelli in her article aptly shows the evolution of the image of Mahiṣamardinī, the goddess killing the buffalo-demon, in the pre-Kuṣāṇa and Kuṣāṇa periods (c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. – 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.). The authoress tries to explain the context in which the first images of the goddess killing the demon Mahiṣa originated and to understand where their creators drew their inspiration from. For that purpose she draws the historical and social context of the Kuṣāṇa Empire. It seems that its “different urban centres had different composition of population. This should have favoured co-existence, co-mingling and fusion of races and ideas” (Restelli: 17-34 ). Indeed, these traits could be responsible for the composite nature of Mathurā icons, integrating motifs of different provenience, transforming them into new artistic idiom and changing the imagery of the local goddess. In such a way Kuṣāṇa monarchs could have made themselves fitting into the local context and legitimize their claims to royalty.

Sacred geography of India seems to be an extremely complicated and fascinating issue catching attention of many scholars.<sup>1</sup> On the map of India, there are numerous *tīrthas* or places of pilgrimage. And some of these *tīrthas* have their own maps constructing a mythical image of the place they represent. First, the *māhātmyas*, eulogistic texts, depicted the sacred territory of the city of eternal light, counting and describing the qualities of its shrines and places. Then the religious maps took up this task, too. The article of Vera Lazzaretti is dedicated to the evolution of the image of Kāśī or Vārāṇasī in the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>-century “picture maps”. The studies on Banaras pilgrimage maps have been taken up recently by such scholars as Axel Michaels, Jörg Gengnagel

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the newly published book of Diana Eck *India: A Sacred Geography*. New York: Harmony Books, 2012.

and Niels Gutschow. Lazzaretti discusses the work done by these scholars but also adds the maps that have not been studied before and analyses them. The aim of the authoress is to contrast textual and mythological features of Kāśī with the real, physical space of the city and its place in a historical setting.

The article by Natalia Lidova somehow prepares the ground for the next section to come in the volume, the section which consists of three more articles dealing with the treatises on theory of drama and ancient Indian plays in social perspective. Lidova introduces the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the famous manual on performing arts, as the earliest available source for the study of ancient Indian poetics. Then she follows the Sanskrit text of the treatise in order to show its concern with the prosaic speech (*cūrṇa*) and the poetic one (*nibaddha*) with the description of the rhythmic structure of the verse. The prosodic theory as described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is given in detail. The 36 characteristic features, termed *lakṣaṇa*, the ornaments (*alamkāra*) and the merits of speech (*guṇa*) subordinate to them are mentioned. “Thus, a large number of categories and theoretical premises of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* turned out to be much broader than the announced theme – a description of the artistic idiom of the literary drama.” The authoress discusses also the languages, *bhāṣā* used by different dramatis personae. According to Lidova: “To all appearances, it reproduced, to an extent, the linguistic situation in Ancient Indian society.” (Lidova: 61-86). The various kinds of addresses (*vākyaavidhāna*) accepted between drama heroes and explained in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* can also give an insight into the social order and family relationship in ancient India, besides providing the canonical norms for the literary drama.

The article “The Actor’s Social Status and Agency. Fame or Misery?” by two authors: Elisa Ganser and Daniele Cuneo is based on the cross-reading of dramaturgical texts, namely the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and its commentaries and non-dramaturgical texts such as the *Mānavadharmasāstra*, the *Arthasāstra* and literary works.

Ganser and Cuneo aim at interpreting the ambiguity towards the moral and social status of an actor by means of an analysis of

the curse-and-atonement episode related in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The thorough analysis is carried on several levels and the authors arrive at the conclusion: “we may declare that the social and moral position of the performers proves to be inversely proportional to their actual agency. The text of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, its interpretation by Abhinavagupta as well as the whole technology of *śāstra* as applied to theatre represent a device for curbing the autonomy of the artists according to a set of rules and imperatives which can be ultimately seen as corresponding to the single world vision fashioned by the hegemonic strata of a highly hierarchical society” (Ganser & Cuneo: 87-132).

The next two articles by Klara Gönc Moaçanin and Danielle Feller show evidence that Sanskrit dramaturgy belongs to that area of classical Indian literature where very often realism prevails. As Klara Gönc Moaçanin points out these are *bhāṇa* (a one-act-monologue play) and *prahasana* (a comic play in one or two acts) which are, so to say, ‘realism-prone’. The most plastic picture of everyday social life in ancient India is drawn in these particular genres of ancient Indian theatre. To support her claim Gönc Moaçanin brings to our attention the *Caturbhāṇī* and the two *prahasanas*: *Mattavilāsa* and *Bhagavadajjukam*.

One can also look for important information about religion, philosophy and everyday life in the full-fledged form of Sanskrit theatre, namely the *prakaraṇa*. Danielle Feller chooses the *prakaraṇa* play *Mālatīmādhava* of Bhavabhūti to discuss the role of Buddhist nuns in Sanskrit drama against the precepts of the Buddhist *dharma*. Does the demeanour of three fictional nuns really reflect the behaviour of true Buddhist nuns in Bhavabhūti’s time and society? Feller tries to find the answer to this question providing exhaustive information based on Buddhist literature such as the *Bhikṣuṇīvinaya*, or rules of discipline for nuns and quoting appropriate passages taken from the *Mālatīmādhava*.

The paper, “The eightfold gymnastics of mind: a preliminary report on the idea and tradition of *aṣṭāvadhāna*”, authored by Cezary Galewicz and Lidia Sudyka is an attempt to describe the art of *avadhāna* (Skt.: ‘attentiveness, concentration’) well-known in Andhra Pradesh

and Karnataka, of which *aṣṭāvadhāna* (literally: eightfold concentration) seems to be the most popular variety. Besides examining the *aṣṭāvadhāna* as a performance with a clear account of roles and functions of performers, the authors try to sketch a historical and social background of *avadhāna* using available textual and epigraphical material.

Maria Angelillo in her article entitled “Caste in the making, dance in the making” focuses on the social status of female professional dancers in modern Indian society. Postcolonial critiques are referred to as the authoress takes into consideration the impact of the past British colonial presence in India on this issue. The exemplifying material is provided by her fieldwork in Pushkar (Rajasthan) with the Kalbelia caste dancers. Through Kalbelia dance ethnohistory, Angelillo shows that art can be either a product or active agent of historical and social changes. It turns out that even the caste can be considered “the product of a dynamic balance ruled by economic, ideological and cultural requests.”

An interesting example of how to create a new vision of modern history of India, which can be called “sugary” or more convenient but still acceptable for the audience, is provided by an analysis of several Bollywood movies. Tatiana Szurlej in her article “The Indian struggle for independence in popular Hindi films of last decade” shows some methods employed by filmmakers in manipulating the audience.

The last article in the volume is a study of a figure of Bengali detective. Its author Gautam Chakrabarti discusses Bengali literature in which “Bengali fictional detectives have succeeded in creating a dedicated universe of readership”, followed by Bengali detective films. The social perspective adopted by the author shows this fictive character as a product of an interplay between the impact of British colonialism and the sense of Bengali-ness on the one hand and the tension between the past and modernity on the other, *ipso facto* a representative of *bhadralok*, a class which “located themselves in an arc of anglophilic leisure, despite their well-entrenched and, more often than not, radical opposition to British colonialism” (Chakrabarti: 255-268).

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*Lidia Sudyka*