Nidān: International Journal for Indian Studies
Volume 9, Issue 2. December 2024, pp. 85-88

Book Review

Martin Christof-Füchsle, Razak Khan (eds.). (2024). *Nodes of Translation: Intellectual History between Modern India and Germany*. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg. Pp. viii+350. Price: € 79.95. ISBN: 9783110787139. Hardcover.

Heinz Werner Wessler
Department of Linguistics and Philology,
University of Uppsala, Sweden
Email: Heinzwerner.wessler@lingfil.uu.se

This volume is the result of an international conference in Göttingen that took place in July 2022 as part of a larger project on "Modern India in German Archives, 1706-1989." Since The conference, originally planned for autumn 2021, was still suffering from the turbulence created by the pandemic, some participants had to contribute online. The 13 articles published in this volume indicate and contribute to the blossoming interest in the study of translation and translation politics as part of intellectual histories developed in recent years in different fields of translation expertise. I am providing a summary of the articles contained the volume below:

Anandita Sharma goes into the first Hindi translation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's famous drama "Faust" (part one) by Bholanath Sharma, whose recreation in a highly Sanskritized code of Hindi in late colonial India is on one side an outflow of an Indian nationalist interest in German intellectual history. However, on the other hand, this translation has also been inspired by a direct translation of the "Faust" into Urdu from 1931. As with many other Pandits of his time, the translator was a traditional Brahmin and cultural modernist at the same time, who saw German culture as an antipode to colonialist British cultural dominance in the India of his days. Beyond that, his translation was also meant as a contribution to the emergence of Hindi as the future official language of the Indian Union.

Faisal Chaudhry also goes back to the fascination for German intellectual history in the late colonial epoch and the 'intermediating ideas across languages, paradigms and disciplines' with a focus of Muhammad Iqbal and Zakir Hussain. This article contains an interesting cross-cultural dimension, namely that "German economic ideas have effectively been regarded as essential to the development of what has sometimes been called Indian economics" (p. 46). Not only Hussain, but even Iqbal had a deep interest in economics, as his monumental *Ilm-ul Iqtesad* (The Science of Economics, in Urdu) from as early as 1904 demonstrates.

Catalina Ioana Pavel covers the story of Hermann Gundert and the 'making of modem Malayalam'. Gundert's explorations into his host language, which he was exposed to as a missionary, deeply changed the linguistic setup of the very language he not only studied, but even devoted himself to. While this went together with a time of dramatic changes with the spread of literacy, printing presses, and publishing houses, much of his scholarship was also dedicated in the service of Christian mission. The creation of modern literary Malayalam was a product of intertwined layers of missionary and scholarly zeal, German orientalism, colonial modernity and socio-linguistic resilience on the side of colonial subjects.

Gajendran Ayyathurai focusses on "the German reliance on the brahminical framework to produce Christian texts and images" (p. 98) in early colonial South India. He states that "brahminical sciolism remains inadequately examined" (p. 104), which goes much beyond the particular German missionary and scholarly engagement with South India, particularly in his focus on Roberto de Nobili's "obsession with brahmins and importing brahminicial [sic]

sciolism into Roman Catholicism" (p. 107). The article basically sees the same bias at this place as in the Tranquebar mission, i.e. the Lutheran side. However, early "castefree vernacular Indian" (p. 121) converts develop a resilience towards caste society – a feature that needs further study.

Torsten Tschacher engages with two Hitler-biographies from 1936 in Tamil, one of them written by Hermann Beythan, lecturer of Tamil at the famous Department for Oriental Languages at Berlin University. Beythan stood "in a long tradition of German missionary engagement with Tamil language and literature" (p. 128), who tried to present "Hitler's life as exemplifying the teachings of the Tirukkural" (p. 129) as a clear strategy to influence Tamil public opinion. The second was composed by Vengalathur Swaminatha Sharma infused by an anticolonial spirit. For a modern reader it is difficult to understand how both authors managed to go over the programmatic racism explicit or implicit in any Nazi ideological product and present Nazism as a kind of "anti-imperialist movement" (p. 136).

Mangesh Kulkarni goes into Shankar Ramachandra Rajwade's "appropriation of F.W. Nietzsche" (p. 151) in Marathi. As a free spirit and without institutional support, Rajwade saw himself as a defender of Vedic Hinduism, and took a keen interest in Nietzsche as a kind of Brahmanic soulmate, particularly as a translator of Nietzsche's "Der Antichrist" (German 1895, Marathi 1931). The critique of Christianity "incorporates elements of anticolonial resistance, Vedic revivalism, and Hindu nationalism" (p. 152). Kulkarni calls Rajwade's ideological position as "Brahminical radicalism" (p. 167) after the famous characterization of Nietzsche's philosophy as "aristocratic radicalism" by Georg Brandes. Kulkarni compares this appropriation through translation with similar processes in the translation of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels into Indian language (p. 169).

This is the subject of the following article by Juned Shaikh, who studies Gangadhar Adhikari and S.A. Dange as a "process of domesticating Marxism" (p. 181). Dange saw historical materialism not as a destructive force for Hindu identity, but he "believed in the historicity of mythology and philology" (p. 190). For him, Aryan society was originally an ideal non-hierarchic society, with caste assuming a simply functional role. This romantic view on early Indian history led him to even dismiss the findings of pre-Aryan urban culture in Harappa and Mohenjo Daro in the 1920s. History would begin with textual evidence (a classical Hegelian position), and the inscriptions of the Indus valley civilization remained undeciphered and therefore meaningless.

Sai Bhatawadekar analyses the translations and the fascination for Bertolt Brecht's *Die Dreigroschenoper* in Marathi. It has often been stated that Brecht's epical theatre served the anti-imperialist and socially critical spirit of 20th century Indian intellectuals very well. At the same time, Bhatawadekar points out that certain features of Pu.La. Deshpande's translation (produced 1978) remind him of the musician in a traditional Indian *jugalbandi*, "who takes on the given musical challenge and recreates its sounds" (p. 203), in other words a creative adaptation of a given (musical) theme. Bhatawadekar refers particularly to the prologue of the play, which the translator expands "extensively to set the Mumbai milieu" (p. 204f).

Julia Hauser goes into the repercussions of Mahatma Gandhi's views in the early 1920s in Germany, expressed particularly in Zakir Husain and Alfred Ehrentreich's *Die Botschaft des Mahatma Gandhi*, a selection of 33 articles from the journal *Young India* (started 1919) published in 1924 into German, three years after the enthusiastic welcome for Rabindranath Tagore during his first visit to Germany. Ehrentreich reports in his memoirs how Husain introduced a spinning wheel into his household and used to follow Gandhi's advice to use spare time for hand spinning, which "must have reminded … of the German village life

members of the *völkische Bewegung*" (p. 226f). Naturally, Gandhi's perceived "persönliche Heiligkeit" (personal holiness, p. 229) stood more than his opinions in the centre of the Gandhi reception in post-war Germany, as Hauser's reading points out. Hauser goes into the details of the selection of articles that were chosen to be translated for German readership. The focus was on issues like female chastity, educational reform, and the criticism of industrial modernity. The book however was overshadowed by Romain Rolland's famous (and enthusiastic) Gandhi-biography, which came out the same year in the French original and in German translation.

Martin Kämpchen, probably the most prominent specialist on Rabindranath Tagore in German publishing, contributed an article on Tagore in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. This article has been published before in a volume on hundred years of global reception of the first non-Western Nobel prize winner for literature in 1913. Tagore was published in German mainly by the legendary Kurt Wolff in the publication house under his name. An astonishing number of 25 books by Tagore, including an 8-volume set of collected works, appeared in German from 1914 to 1925. A single first volume of direct translations from Bengali appeared only a couple of years later (Reclam Verlag ca. 1930). These direct translations resumed only in 1961 on the occasion of the Tagore centenary. The East German government publishers tried to appropriate Tagore as "internationalist and propagator of the brotherhood of man" (p. 249) and honoured him by an edition of selected works in four volumes. Gisela Leiste's translation of the novel *Gora* and the story *Nashta Nid* (Das zerstörte Nest) were later republished in West Germany. Kämpchen describes how Tagore-enthusiasm in the German speaking public of the 1920 and its focus on Tagore as "a mystic and wise man" (p. 261) prevented a more profound appreciation of the Bengali author even after World War II and even until today.

Lisa Mitchell goes into the interactions between the "Telugu and German worlds" (p. 267). A special role in these worlds is played by Wuppala Lakshmana Rao, particularly her translations of Heinrich Heine's poetry of the 1950s, and the contributions of his Swiss friend and later wife, Melly Zollinger, who translated from Telugu into German. Zollinger had joined the 1929 Lahore session of the Indian National Congress, had lived in Gandhi's Ashram, and had participated in the famous Salt Satyagraha of 1930. After World War II and India's independence, both turned towards communism and had their connections in East Germany as well as in the Soviet Union. Rao and Zollinger represent "forgotten histories" (p. 283), and this article is part of an approach to shed light onto one of these.

Martin Christof-Füchsle's contribution is on translations from modern Indian languages in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), i.e. East Germany. It demonstrates how the initial rejection of independent India as 'capitalist' turned into a more complex relationship after the death of Stalin (1953) with its implications on governmental cultural and translation politics from 1957 onwards. The number of translations from modern Indian literature from 1953 to 1990 was about 45 books, with 10-12 among them being direct translations from Indian languages. Christof-Füchsle explains the complicated process entailed in the idea of book publishing that changed to translation publishing in detail, that entailed procuring printing permits for these. He sees the process, mainly as a top down, state-induced process. The leading idea behind it was the idea of progressive versus reactionary writing, and the focus on social realism based on "all-pervasive ideological concerns" (p. 317).

The last article is, according to its title, is a broad historical overview, drawing a line "from legibility to mutual intelligibility" (p. 323) by Parnal Chirmuley. It goes back to the beginnings of German travel in South Asia, namely Balthasar Sprenger's travel to Goa 1502, resulting in the romantic interest in India and to the origins of Indology, and to Nazi interest in India. The article goes on to explore post-war Germany's cultural pragmatics in relation to independent India and the momentary opening of the German Book Office (GBO) in recent years. Chirmuley

also covers the rise of Hindutva as a modern political power in India and the controversial visit of the German ambassador in Delhi, Walter J. Lindner, to the headquarters of the Hindu-nationalist RSS headquarters in Nagpur in 2019. It remains a bit unclear how Chirmuley relates his critical view on this breach of taboo to the perceived historical line of argument in his article that explores the question of mutual intelligibility as is stated in the title.

This is not only one more publication on intellectual exchange between South Asia/ India and Germany. This wonderful collection of scholarly contributions on translation is part of a trend that explores the cultural transformation of Indian thought into German and vice versa, without repeating existing research on intellectual history topics that are already well known through a number of publications from Indian and Western scholars. *Nodes of Translation* contains many insights into the politics of translation, and provides readers with an understanding of the setup, of cultural interaction accompanied and initiated by individuals inspired to learn the languages and literatures of the other, and beyond that, the role these languages and literatures played in the history of cultural understanding. The many footnotes, and the reference lists in the volume that accompany the articles, makes this volume into a reference for any future study in the field of cultural interaction between Germany and India.