THE IMAGE OF INDIA IN 19TH-CENTURY SLOVAK LITERATURE[1]

Róbert Gáfrik[2]
(Institute of World Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava)

Keywords: Slovak literature, 19th century, India, Slavic homeland
Słowa kluczowe: literature słowacka, XIX wiek, Indie, ojczyzna Słowian

Abstract: Róbert Gáfrik, THE IMAGE OF INDIA IN 19TH-CENTURY SLOVAK LITERATURE. "PORÓWNANIA" 2 (21), 2017, P. 163–170. ISSN 1733–165X. The European Oriental Renaissance began with the discovery of Sanskrit which gave birth to comparative philology, the pre-eminent academic discipline of the 19th century. The Czech philologist Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829) and the Polish scholar of Sanskrit Walenty Skorochód Majewski (1764–1835) very soon discovered similarities between Indian and Slavic languages and consequently many Slavic scholars began to see India as the Slavic homeland. The great Slovak Romantic poets such as Ján Hollý (1785–1849) and Ján Kollár (1793–1852) considered India to be the homeland of the Slavs, as did Ľudovít Štúr (1812–1856), the main leader of the Slovak national revival in the 19th century, although, as a Hegelian, he was critical of Indian religion and of the caste system. The paper reconstructs the image of India in Slovak literature of the 19th century which ranges from a fascination with the idea of the Slavic homeland in India in the first half of the 19th century to its refusal in the light of the theory of Aryan invasion in the second half of the 19th century. It focuses on the changing image of the Indian Other and on the self-image of the Slavs vis-à-vis India.

Abstract: Róbert Gáfrik, OBRAZOWANIE INDII W XIX-WIECZNEJ LITERATURZE SŁOWACKIEJ.„PORÓWNANIA" 2 (21), 2017, S. 163–170. ISSN 1733–165X. Europejski renesans orientalny rozpoczął się od odkrycia sanskrytu, które zrodziło wybitną dyscyplinę akademicką XIX wieku: filologię porównawczą. Czeski filolog Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829) i polski badacz sanskrytu Walenty Skorochód Majewski (1764–1835) bardzo szybko odkryli podobieństwa między językami indyjskimi i słowiańskimi, wskutek czego wielu słowiańskich uczonych zaczęło postrzegać Indie jako ojczyznę słowiańską. Wielcy słowaccy poeci romantyczni, tacy jak Ján Hollý (1785–1849) i Ján Kollár (1793–1852) uważali Indie za ojczyznę Słowian, podobnie jak Ľudovít Štúr (1812–1856), główny przywódca słowackiego odrodzenia narodowego w XIX wieku; jako heglista był on jed-

1 This research was supported by the VEGA grant no. 2/0082/15 "Zobrazovanie Indie v slovenskej literatúre".
2 E-mail: rgafrik@yahoo.com.

nak krytyczny wobec religii indyjskiej i systemu kastowego. Artykuł rekonstruuje obraz Indii w słowackiej literaturze XIX wieku, od fascynacji ideą słowiańskiej ojczyzny w Indiach w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku do jej negacji w świetle teorii inwazji aryjskiej w drugej połowie XIX wieku. Główna uwaga poświęcona została zmieniającym się obrazom indyjskiego Innego i własnym wizerunkom Słowian w odniesieniu do Indii.

In 1882, in his lectures for the candidates for the Indian Civil Service published under the title *India, What Can It Teach Us?* the prominent Oxford orientalist Max Müller designated as liberal that education which "will enable a man to do what the French call *s'orienter*, that is to 'find his East', 'his true East', and thus to determine his real place in the world; to know, in fact, the port whence man started, the course he has followed, and the port towards which he has to steer." Müller (31–32) concludeshis reflection by saying: "We come from the East – All that we value most has come to us from the East […]."

Almost seventy years later, the French man of letters Raymond Schwab claimed in his monumental book *La Reneissance Orientale* (1950) that the world became complete only when Europe turned its attention to the Orient: "With the establishment of oriental studies an entirely new meaning was introduced for the word 'mankind'. We can hardly imagine that the acquired meaning, which we take for granted, has not always been present in humanity's consciousness. Nevertheless, it is a young idea. Anquetil's arrival in India in 1754 and that of William Jones in 1783 seem unimportant events; yet because of these events the bases for many judgements became something they had never been before. Suddenly the partial humanism of the classics became the integral humanism that today seems natural to us." (Schwab 4).

And of course, it was Edward Said who in his highly esteemed but controversial book *Orientalism* (1978) showed the role of the Orient in the making of the European identity. His book laid emphasis on the Islamic Middle East, but Said was aware that the methodology applied to Middle East Orientalism had come from Indology (Said 98–99).

India definitely played a special role in the imagination of 19th-century Europe. The European Oriental Renaissance, as Raymond Schwab called it, began with the discovery of Sanskrit which gave birth to comparative philology, the pre-eminent academic discipline of the 19th century. Sir William Jones (1746–1794) contributed to the rise of historical linguistics with his famous lecture at the Asiatic Society in Bengal in 1786. He pointed out the relationship between Sanskrit and several other European languages such as Greek, Latin, Gothic, and Gaelic, and suggested that there might have been a common language from which they had developed. In the first half of the 19th century India became a popular candidate for the cradle of mankind among European scholars. Already in the late 18th century European scholars were very enthusiastic about emerging sciences, especially linguistics and archaeology, and began to question the historicity of the Old Testament chronology, which was previously accepted almost unconditionally. In addition, the emerging colonialism

enabled knowledge of other cultures that claimed great antiquity. They contributed to the revision of the biblical version of human origin. An intense debate started whether all of mankind is Adam's offspring, whether all languages in the world evolved from the language of the descendants of Noah, and what happened after the Flood. When the pioneers of Indology discovered Sanskrit texts, they expected to find previously unknown historical information.

However, even before Sir William Jones, some scholars noticed similarities between Indian and European languages. The Croatian Carmelite monk Paulinus of St. Bartholomew stayed at the Court of the Maharaja of Travancore between 1776 and 1789. He wrote several books on Indian culture, including a book on Sanskrit grammar. This was the first book on Sanskrit grammar to be published in Europe. He was one of the first to detect the similarity between Sanskrit and European languages, though not the first. That honour goes to the English Jesuit priest and missionary Fr Thomas Stephens (1549–1619).

The Czech philologist, historian and one of the most important figures of the Czech national revival, Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829), also noticed the similarity between European, especially Slavic languages, and Indian languages. It is uncertain whether he came to this finding independently of William Jones. Dobrovský drew on the work of the Czech Jesuit Karel Přikryl (1718–1785), who had been sent to India in 1748. Přikryl wrote a grammar of the Konkani language entitled *Principia linguae brahmanicae*. Dobrovský came across the book around 1791 and noticed the structural similarities between Slavic languages and Konkani, and developed an interest in India and Sanskrit (see Strnad). Later also the Polish scholar Walenty Skorochód Majewski (1764–1835) discovered similarities between Indian and Slavic languages in his book *O Słowianach i ich pobratymcach* (1816). Consequently many Slavic scholars began to see India as the Slavic homeland.

Slovak poets and scholars of the first half of the 19th century picked up the discourse on the Slavic origins in India with great enthusiasm. The famous Slavic philologist Pavel Jozef Šafárik (1795–1861) subscribed to this thesis in his *Geschichte der slawischen Sprache und Literatur nach allen Mundarten* [The History of Slavic Language and Literature According to all Dialects] (1826). "The Slavs come from India," he says, "as the Germans, their eternal neighbours, from Persia" (Šafařik 1869: 2). Later he distanced himself from this assertion and saw it as only an alternative to the autochthonous origin of the Slavs (Šafařik 1837: 22).

Ján Hollý (1785–1849), who was dubbed "the Slovak Homer", devoted more than 500 verses of the epic *Svatopluk* (1833) to the Indian origin of the Slavs. He describes India as "najprvná je našého prenárodu matka" [the first mother of our nation] and compares it to a paradise (Hollý 218). He further claims that the Slavs left India after a big drought in which a major river dried up. They consulted the sage Vizva who advised them to leave their homeland. The relation of the Slavs to India is supposed to show their antiquity vis-à-vis the Germans. Hollý depicts the Great

Moravian Empire as a Slavic kingdom led by Svatopluk who fights against the Germans.

Similarly, in the long poem *Slávy dcera* (1832), the great ideologist of Pan-Slavism, Ján Kollár (1793–1852), considered India to be the homeland of the Slavs. His works played an important role in their time. His poetry is held in high esteem but his scholarly work is ignored. One of the scholarly controversial issues which is absent from the Kollár research is Kollár's theory of the Indian origin of the Slavs. He propounded this explanation also in the now almost forgotten treatise *Sláwa Bohyně a původ gména Slawůw čili Slawjanův* ("The Goddess Sláva and the Origin of the Name of the Slavs or Slavyans", 1839).

Kollár glorified the Goddess Sláva whom he presented as a symbol of the Slavic race. This goddess never existed as a worshipped deity and is probably only a product of Kollár's imagination. The reason for writing the book *Sláwa bohyně* was allegedly Šafárik's request to Kollár to read his *Slovanské starožitností* ("Slavic Antiquities", 1837) and to point out any errors in it. Kollár felt prompted to a literary duel by Šafárik who had also written about the origin and the meaning of the word "Slav" and had argued with the views expressed by Kollár. Kollár saw this response in the form of the book *Sláwa bohyně* as the result of his lifelong investigation.

The purpose of the book was to support his claim that Sláva was actually the old Indian Goddess Svāhā and the name of the Slavs derived from her. Kollár saw a mythological name for the nation as evidence of its antiquity. He was aware that the concept of nation was a new one and that it had begun to shape only in his time. The nationality of the ancient people, he explained, was based on their religion: they distinguished themselves according to the gods and goddesses they worshipped. Their religions were national, i.e. the gods and goddesses were there only for their nation. But not only were the ancestors of the Slavs, but also their neighbours, the Germans, proof that the nation's name was derived from a god. Kollár cited *Germania* by Tacitus (first century AD), in which it is said that the Germans worshipped a god by the name of Tuisto; hence the name of the Teutons. But he went so far as to see the Scandinavians as worshippers of the Indian god Skanda.

A great part of Kollár's book is devoted to the comparison between Indian and Slavic languages and myths which should confirm his conclusion. However, its aim was also to show that not every European nation had the same right to look for their origin in India. Drawing on the racial theories of Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), Kollár claimed that there are five races and each race is associated with a specific colour: white, brown, black, yellow and red. The white colour is the colour of the Indo-Europeans which include Indians, Persians, Slavs, Germans, Thracians and Celts. The Slavs, as other proper "Indians", love the white colour. However, Kollár saw this affection for the white colour diminished among the Germans. In *Slávy dcera* as well as in *Sláwa bohyně* Kollár was negative about the Germans. He saw the root of the antagonism between the Slavs and the Germans in the Indian history of

both nations. The Slavs were, Kollár argued, followers of Brahmanism and the Germans followers of Buddhism, i.e. they were rebels against Brahmanism. The Slavs also left India later than the Germans and therefore they are closer to the Indians, to their original culture.

Ľudovít Štúr (1812–1856), the main leader of the Slovak national revival in the 19th century, also believed in the Indian origin of the Slavs. He repeated the thesis of the origin of the Slavs and Germans from India and Persia respectively. This proposition is attributed to the Austrian Orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856). However, it was not taken seriously by German scholars themselves who, by the mid-19th century, considered India as the homeland of the Germans.

Štúr studied in Germany at the University of Halle where the Indogermanist August Friedrich Pott (1802–1887) was teaching. It is very likely that Štúr, who was interested in linguistics, learned the basics of Sanskrit from him. However, there are indications to believe that he started familiarizing himself with the language even before his studies in Halle. He might have read *De causis linguae Sanscritae*, a short Sanskrit grammar written in Latin, which was published in 1831 in Pressburg (Bratislava) by Stephanus Tamasko (1801–1881) after the return from his studies in Göttingen. Štúr admired the Sanskrit language for its systematic structure and grammar. One can even find occasional comparisons between Sanskrit and Slovak in his Slovak grammar *Nauka reči slovenskej* (1846).

Although Štúr subscribed to the thesis of the Indian origin of the Slavs and, according to him, from the Indian forefathers the Slavs also inherited their pantheism which can be found in Slavic folk songs (Štúr 1955: 41), as a Hegelian, he was critical of Indian religion and of the caste system. For him, India was chaotic, magical and unchangeable, frozen in the stage of the development of the spirit which it achieved in the antiquity. In the footsteps of Hegel, Štúr denied history to the Indians. But not only that, he also denied the existence of their own free will, of laws and morality. For him, they were immoral, vengeful and merciless thieves, murderers and tyrants (Štúr 1956: 34–44).

Štúr's Hegelian view of the movement of universal history gave the Slavs who suffered in Europe under foreign domination a hope for the future, but it also forced him to rationalize colonialism and deny this hope to the exploited peoples of Asia. In his treatise "Azya a Ewropa", he approved of British rule in India and spoke of "the mission of Europeans in Asia" (Štúr 1843: 58). Unlike Kollár, who saw the uniqueness of the Slavs in their closeness to the Indians, with whom they shared a common homeland, Štúr adopted Hegel's interpretation of universal history that rationalized the European civilizing mission in Asia and dehumanized its peoples.

In the first half of the 19th century, India was considered the cradle of mankind in academic circles. However, already around the 1850s, it came to a major change of view (see Bryant). With the advent of British rule in India a new theory emerged according to which Indians were not the original inhabitants of India. They were

supposed to come to India, where they subjugated the original Negroid population, from outside, from an Aryan homeland. Slovak scholars of the second half of the 19th century studying Slavic folklore and mythology such as Viliam Pauliny-Tóth (1826–1877), Ľudovít Reuss (1822–1905) and Ján Miloslav Hroboň (1859–1914) therefore viewed the idea of the Indian origin of the Slavs as outdated, although they very often referred to Indian mythology in their writing. Sanskrit lost its position of the mother of all Indian and European languages and was substituted by the Indo-Aryan language. Thus the fascination with the idea of the Slavic homeland in India was succeeded by its refusal in the light of the theory of Aryan invasion in the second half of the 19th century.

It was common to trace a nation's origin to India in the 19th century. The idea was popularized by German romanticists. Those Slavic nations which grew under the umbrella of German education picked it up quite naturally. However, interestingly, they started regarding their link to the original homeland as more immediate than that of the Germans. The French historian Marc Bloch, who co-founded the Annales School of French social history, criticised the historian's obsession with origins in *The Historian's Craft* (1949) and provided an explanation best describing this kind of effort: "The explanation of the very recent in terms of the remotest past, naturally attractive to men who have made of this past their chief subject of research, has sometimes dominated our studies to the point of a hypnosis. [...] In many cases the demon of origins has been, perhaps, only the incarnation of that other satanic enemy of true history: the mania for making judgements." (Bloch 29–31).

The romantic philology of the fathers of the Slovak nation was necessarily overcome by a more critical scholarly approach. However, this obscure phenomenon, which fell into oblivion for its unscientific nature, gives an interesting twist to the formation of Slovak identity in the 19th century and adds to our knowledge of the interplay of various national images that were at work in this process.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bloch, Marc. *The Historian's Craft*. Transl. Peter Putman. New York: Vintage Books, 1953.

Bryant, Edwin F. *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture. The Indo-Aryan Migration Debate*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Hollý, Ján. "Svatopluk". *Básne Jána Hollého.* Turčiansky Sv. Martin: Kníhkupecko-nakladateľský spolok, 1908. P. 138–335.

Hroboň, J. Mil. "Niektoré solárne slavnosti u Slavianov. Rozprava z odboru srovnávacej mythologie". *Slovenské pohľady* 3 (1883): 1. P. 59–69.

Kollár, Jan. *Sláwa Bohyně a původ gména Slawůw čili Slawjanův.* Pešť: Tiskem J.M. Trattner-Károlyoho, 1839.

Kollár Jan, Putna Martin C. *Slávy dcera. Báseň lyricko-epická v pěti zpěvích. Překlad a výklad Slávy dcery z panslavistického mýtu do kulturní historie*. Praha: Academia, 2014.

Majewski, Walenty Skorochód. *O Słowianach i ich pobratymcach*. Warszawa: W. Dąbrowski, 1816.

Müller, Friedrich Max. *India, What Can It Teach Us? A course of Lectures Delivered Before the University of Cambridge*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1883.

Pauliny-Tóth, Villiam. *Slovenské bájeslovie*. Turč. Sv. Martin, 1876.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 2003.

Reuss, Ľud. A.: "Bájeslovie a príbuzné vedy". *Slovenské pohľady* 2 (1882): 5. P. 407–422.

Schwab, Raymond. *The Oriental Renaissance. Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*. New York: Columbia University, 1984.

Šafařik, Paul Joseph. *Geschichte der slawischen Sprache und Literatur nach allen Mundarten*. 2nd edition. Prag: Verlag Friedrich Tempsky, 1869.

Šafařik, Pawel Josef. *Slovanské starožitnosti*. Praha: Jan Spurný, 1837.

Strnad, Jaroslav. "India as Reflected in Czech Consciousness in the Era of the National Revivalist Movement of the Nineteenth Century (ca. 1800–1848)". *Archiv orientální* 75 (2007). P. 279–290.

Štúr, Ludevít. *Nauka reči slovenskej. I. faksimile pôvodného vydania na vydanie pripravili Ľubomír Ďurovič, Slavomír Omdrejovič*. Bratislava: VEDA, vydavateľstvo SAV, 2006.

Štúr, Ľudovít. "Azya a Ewropa". *Tatranka*, (1843). Vol. 2. P. 37–66.

Štúr, Ľudovít. "O národných povestiach a piesňach plemien slovanských". *Dielo v piatich zväzkoch*. Vol. III. Bratislava: SVKL, 1955.

Štúr, Ľudovít. "Z prednášok o histórii Slovanov". *Dielo v piatich zväzkoch*. Vol. II. Bratislava: Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1956.

Tamasko, Stephanus. *De causis linguae Sanscritae*. Posonium: Typis Haeredum Belnayanorum, 1831.