

## DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE ON INDIA IN THE SCHOLARLY SPACE OF INTER-WAR LITHUANIA

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### ABSTRACT

Next to popular literature and journalism, science was also a significant space that ensured the dissemination of knowledge about India or even its construction in the inter-war period. In Lithuania, this role of spreading the knowledge about Indian culture and history was mainly performed by the scientists of the University of Lithuania, founded in Kaunas in 1922. Based on archival documents and texts written by scientists in inter-war period, knowledge about India was an integrated part of various studies at the University of Lithuania, both in explaining phenomena important to various disciplines, and in delving into the specifics of this Eastern land. This article analyzes the subjects taught in the faculties of humanities, natural-mathematical and social sciences, which revealed different aspects of the dissemination of knowledge about India. While researching humanities, it was discovered that scientists paid the most attention to the knowledge of ancient Indian culture and the Sanskrit language while comparing it with Lithuanian. In the natural and mathematical sciences, the flora and fauna of India were explored, and the influence of the geographical aspects of the land on man was examined. Finally, in the Faculty of Law, scholars delved into the social situation of Indians, not avoiding criticizing the British colonial legal system, imperialism and human exploitation.

**Keywords:** inter-war period; India; University of Lithuania; Oriental studies; humanities; natural sciences; social sciences; imagination of the Orient

### Introduction

The encounter of Lithuanians with Indian culture can be traced back to the 17th century, when the first Jesuits from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – Andriejus Rudamina, Jonas Levickis, and Gabrielius Lentkovskis – ventured to India (Jovaiša 2019). However, news about this distant land seldom reached Lithuania, as the missionaries' letters were sent directly to Rome. It was not until the 19th century, amid Europe's burgeoning interest in Indian culture and history, that Lithuanians began to engage in this, albeit belatedly. Within the Russian Empire, to which Lithuania was annexed, Indology was underdeveloped compared to other specialties of Oriental studies, and the closure of Vilnius Univer-

sity, where Asian studies were to be introduced, further thwarted efforts to study Indian culture. Nevertheless, some knowledge was imparted by Lithuanian nobles, such as Benediktas Tiškevičius, who visited India in 1875–1876 and brought back various artifacts. Unlike countries such as Hungary or Germany, during the Lithuanian National Revival, the intelligentsia did not anticipate significant benefits from studying Indian culture for the restoration of their own cultural heritage. Interest in India and the Sanskrit language primarily emerged in Lithuania following the restoration of statehood in 1918, marked by an increase in translated books, growing enthusiasm for travel, and the establishment of the University of Lithuania in Kaunas.

In inter-war Lithuania, knowledge about India first began to spread in popular culture. Articles on the subtleties of India by travellers, missionaries, and those simply interested in the region appeared in the press. Lithuanian fiction and translated foreign literature, where the setting, the main characters, or the context were related to the Far East could also be considered a specific source of knowledge about India (Ruseckas 1938; Piliponis 1939). The information in such texts was not accurate, often imbued with a Eurocentric narrative, and did not shy away from excessive exoticisation and misinterpretation of details. In other words, knowledge on India was constructed as if from the perspective of Rudyard Kipling's novels: semi-savage people living in an inseparable bond with tigers, unable to comprehend the world without the rules of religion dictating their reasoning. However, Edward Said argues that scholarship was no less important a space for the dissemination or even construction of knowledge about the Orient (Said 1978, 2). He provides a critique of British and French Orientalism of the 19th and 20th centuries, which fundamentally reconstituted, revised, and constructed the knowledge system of the Orient to serve the interests of Western society. Oriental studies became not only a prestigious academic field, but also a mechanism for advancing the political objectives of empires.<sup>1</sup> In the case of India, it was the Indologists whose aim was to understand ancient and contemporary Indians from a socio-cultural perspective. During the interbellum, Indologists from the India-controlling British Empire and other countries organised expeditions to the jungles of Bengal, the Karakoram Range in Kashmir, and the Taj Mahal in Agra, studied the caste problem, and translated and analysed ancient Hindu texts. The situation in Lithuania was somewhat different because there was only one institution of higher education, the University of Lithuania,<sup>2</sup> founded in 1922, which had a specialisation in Indology. However, as Edward Said observed, Oriental knowledge permeated various academic disciplines beyond comparative linguistics or history, extending to fields such as geography, nature sciences, and law (Said 1978, 80). In alignment with Said's perspective, other branches of science at the University of Lithuania encompassed substantial knowledge about India, including Sanskrit, colonial history, natural and social geography of the world, and the history of Indian medicine and law,

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Said's work leaves unanswered questions about how the constructs of knowledge and power in Orientalism manifested in European states that did not engage in colonialism, such as Lithuania. The manner in which scholars from these countries evaluated, perceived, and depicted the East, despite the absence of direct interaction, warrants further investigation.

<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1922 in Kaunas, the University of Lithuania was renamed Vytautas Magnus University in 1930. To avoid confusion, it will be referred to as the University of Lithuania throughout the article.

among other things.<sup>3</sup> Knowledge about India was an integral part of various studies at the University of Lithuania in explaining phenomena important for other disciplines, exploring the specificities of this country, and comparing it with other lands.

Lithuanian historiography was fragmentary in its exploration of scholarly knowledge about India. Regimantas Tamošaitis (Tamošaitis 1998) addressed the contribution of Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius<sup>4</sup> and Vydūnas<sup>5</sup> in this field. His research showed that they mostly studied Indian culture and religion, with Indian philosophy shaping their thinking. Rita Bielskytė (Bielskytė 2012) studied Krėvė's leaning towards Buddhism, which was reflected in his texts. She observes that Krėvė was particularly involved with the Buddhist grandeur of the idea of the human, their power to overcome difficulties, or becoming holier than the Buddha. Laima Petrauskienė's monograph on scientist Pranciškus Baltrus-Šivickis<sup>6</sup> shows the extent to which he was familiar with Asia and how he adapted this knowledge in his lectures at the University of Lithuania (Petrauskienė 2019). In her study, Diana Mickevičienė (Mickevičienė 2000) showed the importance of the Indo-European theory in the scholarship of Lithuania from as early as the eighteenth century. An exhaustive study on the overall evolution of Oriental Studies at the University of Lithuania from 1922 to 1940 was carried out by Simona Šimkutė (Šimkutė 2011), yet in her article emphasis is placed exclusively on the contribution of the scholars of the faculties of humanities and theology-philosophy in their research on the Middle East, Palestine, Egypt, and Arabia. Aldona Snitkuvienė (Snitkuvienė 2011) gave a detailed analysis of the evolution of Egyptology in Lithuania between the two world wars. She noted that the biggest contribution to this discipline was made by Marija Rudzinskaitė-Arcimavičienė, the only professional Orientalist in Lithuania at the time, who taught the general history of the Orient (including India).

Foreign historiography on the traditions of gaining knowledge about India and their meaning in different European countries between the wars is quite extensive. Much research was carried out in the countries that had a tradition of Indology starting in nine-

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<sup>3</sup> Mokslo metų darbų apyskaitos [Activity reports for academic years], 1933–1938 m, Central State Archives of Lithuania (*Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas*, hereinafter LCVA), f. 631, ap. 12, b. 1109, l. 23–141. Abbreviations: f. – collection, ap. – inventory, b. – file, l. – leaf/leaves.

<sup>4</sup> Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius (1882–1954) was one of the most prominent Lithuanian philologists and writers of the interwar period, notable for integrating realism, Lithuanian culture, and Oriental exoticism into his works. In 1913, he defended his dissertation at the University of Kyiv on the origin of the names Buddha and Pratyekabuddha, exploring theories of Indo-European origins. Throughout his career, he frequently engaged with Buddhism, Hinduism, and various Indian cultures. His Oriental knowledge was also shaped from 1909 to 1920 while living in Baku, where he also lectured on Buddhism and Persian culture.

<sup>5</sup> Vydūnas (1868–1953), whose real name was Vilhelmas Storosta, was a Lithuanian philosopher, dramatist, and public figure active in Lithuania Minor. Vydūnas's philosophy is rooted in pantheism, primarily drawing from the Indian Vedas. His writings often incorporate concepts from Buddhism and Hinduism, examining the immanence and transcendence of God as a spiritual absolute connected to the entire world. His work focused on exploring key aspects such as fate, consciousness, and the human mind.

<sup>6</sup> Pranciškus Baltrus-Šivickis (1882–1968) is one of the most renowned Lithuanian scientists in the fields of experimental zoology, hydrobiology, and parasitology. He pursued his studies in the United States and subsequently worked in Manila, Philippines, where he established a marine biology station on the island of Mindoro. Upon returning to Lithuania, he joined the Department of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the University of Lithuania, where he devoted significant attention to the study of various Asian fauna, focusing primarily on arthropods and mollusks.

teenth century where the first experts in this field worked, and which had colonies. As concerns the vast scope of British historiography, a mention should be made of one of the most systematic studies on academic knowledge about India in Great Britain authored by Kenneth B. Swanson (Swanson 1979). His research revealed that British Orientalists brought scientific knowledge about India to a broader public. It served as one of the academic and political gateways for other European countries to gain knowledge about India. Rosane Rocher's study on Henry Thomas Colebrooke, one of the founding fathers of modern Indology, shows that his connections with the East India Company and British universities not only laid the foundations for Indological studies, but also demonstrated their benefits for the purposes of management (Rocher 2012). The study by Tariq Jazeel on the importance of geography for the knowledge about India showed that in the British Empire, this discipline assumed the role of an accountant, systemising the regions, describing cultures, and defining territories (Jazeel 2012). Kris Manjapra's research has revealed that scientists played pivotal roles as shapers of power and constructors of knowledge about colonies, including India (Manjapra 2020). This influence is particularly evident in the work of botanists and zoologists engaged in taxonomy, who assigned universal names to the flora and fauna of the colonies based on European traditions and a Western civilizational perspective. The major Western powers were deeply invested in scientific research, data collection, recording, systematization, and description, as these activities reinforced their sense of superiority and control. Oriental botanical gardens, private museums, and collections emerged as expressions of this imperial pride.

The historiography of German Indology, which achieved impressive results in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, is also abundant. The work by Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee revealed that the rise of Indology in Germany was driven by the desire to discover the greatness of one's own country through racial and linguistic connections with ancient India (Adluri and Bagchee 2014). Searching for one's own identity by accumulating information on the culture and identity of India, and thereby finding ties with India (such as the Indo-European connection between Sanskrit and Lithuanian) helped Germans to form a sense of their own culture and identity. In his study on Sanskrit and Oriental studies in Germany between 1750 and 1958, Douglas T. McGetchin systemised the achievements of these disciplines, actualised the most outstanding German Indologists, and raised the importance of a national narrative for the formation of theories (McGetchin et al. 2004). In another study, he compared the traditions of German Indology with the British aspiration to investigate contemporary India for management purposes and the desire of the French to combine research and romanticism (McGetchin 2009). In a detailed study on the history of German Indology of the eighteenth-to-twentieth centuries, Suzanne L. Marchand showed that Indology studies and Indology scholars, such as Franz Bopp, at the universities of Bonn and Berlin brought about a turning point in scholarship: they moved away from the studies in Sanskrit grammar to comparative linguistics, abandoned romanticisation of India, and moved their focus to the country's sociocultural phenomena (Marchand 2009). The study stressed that Indology laid the foundations for Aryanism in Germany, which was to become a cultural factor in developing the potential of the nation. Robert Cowan has demonstrated that, in the case of German Orientalists, personal experiences, character traits, and desires significantly influenced the collection and construction of knowledge about India (Cowan 2010). Through

his research on 19th and 20th century German scholars such as Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich Schelling, Cowan illustrated that the belief in the Aryan myth, a unique interpretation of history and religions, and reliance on selective sources led to the creation of varied discourses on Indian knowledge by academics, which subsequently permeated broader society. David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye's studies into the history of Russian Oriental studies between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries showed that Russian Indologists mostly researched Buddhist ancient India and did not pay much attention to the Brahman period (Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010). The author observes that despite strong Oriental studies at Kazan and St Petersburg universities, India attracted less interest than China, Japan, or the Arab lands.

Martin Hříbek's study on the significance of Czech Indology showed that in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the scientific knowledge on India was based not on the principles of otherness and inferiority but those of identity and equality, which were much more useful for the purposes of constructing Czech national identity (Hříbek 2011). The author showed that in analysing scientific knowledge about India, it was meaningful to consider the disciplines of geology and geography. Király Attila revealed in his study that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Hungary, Indological scholarship was mostly focused on Buddhism (Attila 2017). The popularity of Indology came to Hungary from the West, and the existence of these studies became a source of national pride. In her work on the history of South Asian studies in Poland, Danuta Stasik not only described the main centres of Indological scholarship, such as the universities of Warsaw, Cracow, and Poznan, but also observed that up until 1939, knowledge about India mostly embraced Indian languages and translations of ancient texts (Stasik 2017).

Still, a number of problematic issues remain in the analysis of this theme. First of all, it is common for scholarly knowledge about India to be confined to the humanities alone, in particular to the discipline of Indology and its evolution in different countries, while the corpus of knowledge of India in other disciplines, such as law or zoology, remains unexplored. Without examining this aspect, it is difficult to assess the overall level of knowledge of India, and the extent to which the scholarly space was more valuable and reliable than popular dissemination between the wars. The second problem concerns the comparison of the information on India in different countries. To what extent did the distinct historical experiences of different countries contribute to a different understanding of the Orient? Does the analysis of the knowledge on India accumulated at the University of Lithuania show the influence of scholarly theories from other European countries, such as Great Britain and Germany, which may be linked to Eurocentric and/or imperialist narratives? Finally, the question arises as to whether all the disciplines that studied the Orient were truly based on an Orientalist stance. This aspect requires a critical examination of the different disciplines and courses taught by specialists. In other words, to what extent did Orientalism influence subjects such as botany, the history of pedagogy, or economic geography?

The aim of this article is to analyse the texts and lecture materials by scholars of various disciplines in order to reveal what the knowledge of India was in the scholarly space of interwar Lithuanian. In this study, the focus is deliberately set on the University of Lithuania, as it was the main research institution in interwar Lithuania. To achieve this objective, three areas of scholarship at the university were selected for analysis:

(1) the humanities and their emphasis on comparisons between Sanskrit and Lithuanian, the knowledge of ancient Indian history and culture, (2) the natural sciences and the study of the flora and fauna of India, with a view to discussing the taming or preservation of the nature of this country in the East, and (3) the social sciences at the University of Lithuania, such as law and economics, Indian socio-cultural issues, the critique of imperialism and its relevance.

Several types of sources from various Lithuanian archives are used in this study. These include texts written by various scholars during the inter-war period, their own lecture material (self-published), monographs, and encyclopaedic-type publications containing information on India. Lecture timetables, descriptions, student lecture notes, the minutes of meetings of the University of Lithuania faculty councils, which addressed the quality of, changes in, and continuity of the subjects taught, were also analysed. The article looks at the archival documents related to the cooperation of the faculties and the library of the University of Lithuania with foreign scholarly institutions and bookshops, from where various types of literature on India were obtained. Last but not least, the scholarly journals of the faculties of the University of Lithuania were also analysed: the journal of the natural sciences *Kosmos* (1920–1940) and the journal of the Faculty of Humanities *Darbai ir dienos* (Deeds and Days 1930–1940).

### **The Significance of Ancient India and Sanskrit for the Humanities at the University of Lithuania**

The absence of Indology among the humanities taught at the University of Lithuania may have been due to the prioritisation of other studies and the lack of specialists who could have laid the foundations for the formation of this specialisation after the founding of the university in 1922. As the university was often cash-strapped, it would also have been difficult to maintain the specialisation, as it required scholars to undertake study visits to India or at Indology centres in the West, to attend international congresses, and to frequently update the expensive literature in the university library. Nevertheless, the humanities were concerned with India, and knowledge of Sanskrit, the history and culture of that country was integrated into other subjects, including comparative linguistics, ethnology, general history, and literature.

At the University of Lithuania, comparative linguistics launched studies in the ancient Indian language in 1922, which later gave the opportunity to see the first graduation works on the comparison of Sanskrit and Lithuanian.<sup>7</sup> Kazimieras Būga was one of the first scholars in Lithuania to study Sanskrit alongside the history of Indo-European languages. Still in 1913, his book *Kalbų mokslas bei mūsų senovė* (The Discipline of Languages and Our Antiquity) was published, which he later used in his lectures (Būga 1913). One of the main points of the book is the similarity between Lithuanian and Sanskrit: 'Even the most distant Oriental Indian is much closer in his language to a Lithuanian

<sup>7</sup> Ričardas Mironas's diploma of graduation from Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. The defended graduation thesis 'Sanskrito ir lietuvių kalbos daiktavardžių linksniavimo bendrybės' [Common Features of Declension of Sanskrit and Lithuanian Nouns], 1933, Manuscripts Department of the Vilnius University Library (*Vilniaus universiteto bibliotekos rankraščių skyrius*, VUB RS), f. 128, b. 1, l. 1.



than the latter's German neighbour. The Indian word *śun-* 'śuo' [a dog] is much more like the Lithuanian dog than the German hund' (Būga 1913, 8). For Western European scholars, Būga's statements were not new: as early as the 1820s and 1830s, Professor Franz Bopp of the University of Berlin compared the Sanskrit, Lithuanian, Armenian, and Persian languages and drew a conclusion about their similarity (Marchand 2009, 123). Būga was well acquainted with Bopp's research and wanted to apply it in Lithuania (1913, 6). In his 1924 article 'Šis-tas iš lietuvių ir indoeuropiečių senovės' (This-and-that from Lithuanian and Indo-European Antiquity), Būga discusses not only linguistic but also cultural ties between Lithuanians and Indians (Būga 1923, 98). The scholar classifies the Balts and the Aryans, the inhabitants of India, as part of the Eastern Indo-European language group and notes similarities between Agni, the goddess of fire, Indra, the god of war, Varuna, the god of truth, and the Lithuanian pagan gods (Būga 1923, 101). To show the archaic nature of the Lithuanian language, he taught students Sanskrit, read ancient texts, and explained cultural similarities. Nine years after Kazimieras Būga's death, Franz Brender (Pranciškus Brenderis), a Swiss scholar, revived Sanskrit as a separate subject at the University of Lithuania.<sup>8</sup> It is likely that the lectures were more focused on the grammar of the language, while the texts read were only a tool for studying the structure of the language, word formation, and comparing it with other Indo-European languages, primarily Lithuanian.

One of Būga's followers, who was interested in the ancient Indian language, was Pranas Skardžius, who in 1930 became an associate professor at the Faculty of Humanities where he taught the history of language and historical grammar.<sup>9</sup> From 1933 onwards, when he gave weekly lectures on Indo-European culture and prehistory, he started paying more attention to India.<sup>10</sup> Drawing mainly on the work of his teacher Kazimieras Būga and the studies of another famous Baltic scholar, the Sanskritologist Jurgis Gerulis, he compared Sanskrit and Lithuanian, analysed the structure of words, and tried to provide proof of the cultural similarities between the languages and the peoples.<sup>11</sup> Like Būga, he focused only on ancient India, which to him was a means of proving the richness of Lithuanian language and culture. The ethnographer Juozas Baldauskas, who was interested in the language of ancient India, Vedic literature, culture, and mythology, took an early interest in comparing marriage traditions. The surviving notes from his student days show that he was influenced by German Indology: he studied the structure, logic, and cultural aspects of the Vedas.<sup>12</sup> He paid particular attention to the Samhita, the main part of the Rigveda, the ancient Hindu religious text, deliberately underlining syllables that should be stressed when reading hymns.<sup>13</sup> His other lecture notes show an interest in later Indian texts, such

<sup>8</sup> Mokslų metų darbų apyskaitos, 1933–1938 m, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 12, b. 1109, l. 75.

<sup>9</sup> L. Dambriūnas, "Pranas Skardžius", *Aidai*, [accessed February 21, 2024], [https://www.aidai.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1715&Itemid=169](https://www.aidai.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1715&Itemid=169).

<sup>10</sup> Skardžius Pr., Indoeuropiečiai, jų kultūra ir proistorija-paskaitų tekstas, 1933, Manuscripts Department of the Vrublevskių Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences (*Lietuvos Mokslo Akademijos Vrublevskių bibliotekos rankraščių skyrius*, LMAVB MB), f. 12, b. 1174, l. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., l. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Baldauskas's excerpts from Leopold von Schroeder's work "Literaturgeschichte, nebst zahlreichen, in deutscher Übersetzung mitgetheilten Proben aus indischen Schriftwerken", 1926, LMAVB MB, f. 12, b. 1172, l. 1–10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., l. 3.

as the work of the sixteenth-century poet Tulsidas.<sup>14</sup> Baldauskas used this knowledge in his most important scholarly work *Vogtinės vestuvės* (Stolen Weddings 1940), in which he drew on Indian traditions. While examining Bengali legends, he noted that some of the greatest wars in history were caused by rulers' willingness to marry princesses from other lands (Baldauskas 1940, 86). He analysed the phenomenon of collective stolen weddings in the subcontinent as a phenomenon shaping socio-cultural relations (Baldauskas 1940, 89). He did not avoid comparisons with Lithuania, arguing that wedding traditions in his home country were intertwined with Indian customs or came to Lithuanian culture from India (Baldauskas 1940, 75).

The linguist Antanas Salys, who undertook Indo-European studies at Leipzig University from 1924 to 1929 and later worked at the University of Lithuania, was also interested in India as a country that had contributed much to Lithuanian culture. He emphasised in his texts that the key to understanding India was its ancient languages and religions (Salys 1985, 464–465). A proponent of experimental phonetics, he saw the influence of Sanskrit on the formation of Lithuanian dialects. In general, research into Sanskrit at the University of Lithuania was largely driven by a desire to learn about the history of Lithuanian and to show its archaic nature. Coming from the German tradition of comparative linguistics and Indology, this narrative was based on the search for a national identity by studying the ancient Indian heritage (Hříbek 2011, 49). The German theory that the past of India could show the origins of one's own nation was taken up by those peoples of Central and Eastern Europe who, wounded by oppression, wanted to regain their self-esteem. In the works of Sándor Kőrösi Csoma, Hungary's most famous Indologist, a comparative perspective was used to reinforce Hungarian identity, while the scholar himself became a national hero in cultural memory (Attila 2017, 10). Czech Indologists such as Vincenc Lesný encouraged interest in India and support for its independence, because raising the self-esteem of the subjugated promoted the principle of equality of peoples, which was also to the benefit of the Czechs (Hříbek 2011, 51–52). In Polish universities, Indologists were less influenced by this tradition and studied ancient India mainly for the purposes of gaining knowledge about the country (Stasik 2021, 14). Because of the historical experience of the Lithuanians and their emerging Lithuanian identity, Lithuanian scholars usually followed the German tradition: by glorifying ancient Indian culture, they were looking for a benefit for their own country.

Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, the dean of the Faculty of Humanities, expressed a different view on the Indo-European past and the significance of Sanskrit for Lithuania in his book on Indo-European studies *Indoeuropiečių protėvynė* (Proto-Indo-European Homeland; Krėvė-Mickevičius 1927). Krėvė-Mickevičius himself had connections with the Orient: he had studied religions and Sanskrit in Lviv, and taught Persian literature, Buddhism, and Islam in Baku (Zalatorius 2003, 157–236). India became a source of inspiration for the writer in the creation of his *Rytų pasakos* (Oriental Tales) and in particular *Pratjekabuddha: Šventųjų Gango vilnių pasaka* (Pratjekabuddha: The Tale of the Sacred Waves of the Ganges; Krėvė-Mickevičius 1913, 1930). Still, the book *Indoeuropiečių protėvynė* brought new insights into the scholarship of Indo-European stud-

<sup>14</sup> A summary of the poem *Ramayana* by the sixteenth-century Indian classic Tulsidas, by Juozas Baldauskas, 1926, LMAVB MB, f. 12, b 1174, l. 1–12.



ies and sought to criticise the drawing of parallels between Lithuanian and Indian cultures, which was so popular in Lithuania. The scholar introduced a theory that refuted nineteenth-century research: India is not the land of Indo-European origin and Sanskrit is not the most important language for understanding the formation of European languages (Krėvė-Mickevičius 1927, 14). According to the author, it is not appropriate to speak of a common origin at all since the branching of peoples and languages happened in several stages (Krėvė-Mickevičius 1927, 7). He believed that linguistic similarities were not enough to prove the Lithuanian-Indian kinship, but that studies by nature researchers, who determine the origin of domesticated plants and animals, were needed (Krėvė-Mickevičius 1927, 26). He argued that the inhabitants of India were more likely arrivals from Eastern Europe because the appearance of the heroes described in ancient Indian tales was anthropologically identical to that of Slavs and Celts (Krėvė-Mickevičius 1927, 144). In his reasoning, Krėvė-Mickevičius moved from the German tradition and towards the imperialist-British tradition, which tended to minimise the significance of India in European culture.

India was also taught in other disciplines of the Faculty of Humanities, such as general literary history, which looked at the work of Indians, for instance, Rabindranath Tagore, and its relevance to world literature.<sup>15</sup> This is what Juozas Ambrazevičius, who started working at the Department of General Literature in 1934, wrote in his review of Tagore's book *The Home and the World*: 'When I got tired of doing something or when heavy thoughts started bothering me after reading one or another European writer of the day, I would pick up the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, which made me feel lighter in my soul' (Brazaitis 1982, 281). Tagore's books were like a counterbalance to modern Western literature, in which Lithuanian literary scholars sometimes missed traditional values, and new creative experiments were becoming tiresome. However, Tagore's texts were strongly influenced by Western culture and were changing the traditions of Indian writing, so it is not entirely accurate to say that Lithuanians easily accepted authentic Indian literature. It remains unclear whether Mykolas Biržiška's idea of a course on the general literary history of fairy-tales materialised. The surviving notes show that he intended to devote part of his lectures to ancient Indian tales, their significance for the development of universal literature, and studies on Indian folklore.<sup>16</sup> In his notes, Biržiška refers to the most famous scholars who had addressed this subject and discusses the meaning and structure of the Panchatantra, one of India's most famous collections of fairy-tales written in Sanskrit.<sup>17</sup>

In *Darbai ir dienos*, the scholarly journal of the Faculty of Humanities, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas wrote about the reception of Indian cultural peculiarities in Western literature when reviewing the work of Vydūnas (Mykolaitis-Putinas 1935). He argued that Vydūnas's worldview, which was a pantheistic theology, was heavily influenced by

<sup>15</sup> During the inter-war period, a number of Tagore's works were translated into Lithuanian, the most famous of which are *Gitanjali* (*Gitanžali*, 1925), *The Home and the World* (*Namai ir pasaulis*, 1925), *The Wreck* (*Laivo sudužimas*, 1932), *The Hungry Stones* (*Alkani akmenys*, 1935), *Sanyasi or The Ascetic; The Circle of Spring* (*Sanyasi, arba Asketas; Pavasario skritulys: dramos*, 1935).

<sup>16</sup> Pasakų literatūros istorija [The History of Fairy-Tale Literature] – Mykolas Biržiška's draft notes, introductory thoughts, excerpts, material collected for 'Pasakų literatūros istorija' [The History of Fairy-tale Literature], 1930, LMAVB MB, f. 12, b. 1284, l. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., l. 1–8.

ancient Hindu and Brahmanic texts and Buddhist scriptures (Mykolaitis-Putinas 1935, 12). In Vydūnas's philosophy, the writer observes a number of terms borrowed from Hinduism, Buddhism, and modified from Buddhism, such as atman, cosmos, astral body, and nirvana (Mykolaitis-Putinas 1935, 15). In his opinion, although Vydūnas's worldview, like all Eastern philosophy, was somewhat strange to a Westerner, it nonetheless contained many positive value-related elements (Mykolaitis-Putinas 1935, 7). Perhaps this is why the leadership of the University of Lithuania awarded Vydūnas an honorary doctorate in 1927.<sup>18</sup>

Lecture timetables of the Faculty of Humanities reveal history courses that included instruction on ancient India. In 1930, a meeting of the dean's office of the faculty decided to allow Marija Rudzinskaitė-Arcimavičienė to teach Oriental history, which focused on ancient civilisations.<sup>19</sup> Although she was a professional Egyptologist, some of her lectures were devoted not only to Egyptian civilisation but also to others, including that of India.<sup>20</sup> The historian Jonas Yčas may have also intended to join this course, because, in order to learn more about the history of the Orient, in 1931 he asked the dean of the faculty to allow him to join a German expedition to the Orient at his own expense.<sup>21</sup> Due to a lack of sources, it is not known whether the request was granted. In the lectures on the history of pedagogy, Jonas Vabalas-Gudaitis discussed the peculiarities of ancient Indian teaching.<sup>22</sup> Although he mentions only the antiquity of the Indian teaching system and the transfer of some of its traditions to China in his book of the same title (Vabalas-Gudaitis 1930, 6–10), the surviving study notes of the historian Zenonas Ivinskis show that the lectures covered more aspects of ancient Indian pedagogy.<sup>23</sup> The Indian system of teaching was presented not only as institutional, but also as a teaching of morals and life.<sup>24</sup> The values of spirituality and chastity and the search for the meaning of life were emphasised by singling out the education of boys only.<sup>25</sup>

In lectures on general history, India used to feature in the themes of the British Empire and covered a much more recent period. The university library had numerous books on empires and colonies, which could add to one's knowledge of Indian history, if there was such a wish. Between 1931 and 1937, the British representation in Lithuania supplied the university with a substantial collection of publications: Godfrey Lagden's book *The Native Races of the British Empire*, the multi-volume work by Charles P. Lucas on historical geography of India, *An Outline History of the British Empire from 1500 to 1920* by P. E. Roberts and William H. Woodward on colonial history, and the like.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the University

<sup>18</sup> Recognition of doctoral degrees for lecturers, 1937, LMAVB MB, f. 12, b. 1041, l. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Mokslų metų darbų apyskaitos, 1931–1938 m, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 12, b. 1109, l. 71.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., l. 71.

<sup>21</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the Council of the Faculty of Humanities, 1931, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 12, b. 544, l. 11–12.

<sup>22</sup> Mokslų metų darbų apyskaitos, 1931–1938 m, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 12, b. 1109, l. 73.

<sup>23</sup> History of pedagogy, university lecture notes, 1928, Manuscript department of Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania (Lietuvos Nacionalinės Martyno Mažvydo bibliotekos rankraščių skyrius hereinafter LNMMB MB), f. 29, b. 44, l. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., l. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., l. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Lists, receipts, and cover letters for books sent to the Vytautas Magnus University Library by the British Embassy and the British Council for Relations with Other Countries, 1931–1937, LMAVB MB, f. 209, b. 185, l. 2–4.

of Lithuania received books on the history of British India from such prestigious academic institutions as Cambridge, Harvard, and Sutton College.<sup>27</sup> The university bought books from foreign bookshops, libraries, and antiquarian bookstores: the Landsmans Bookshop in London sent the three-volume work *Indische Spruche* by Otto von Böhtlingk, with *Indogermanische Forschungen* arriving from an antiquarian bookshop in Leipzig, while the Geneva Sino-Internationale Oriental Library supplied the complete set of the magazine *L'Orient et Occident* of the years 1934 to 1936.<sup>28</sup> The acquired literature included not only general reference books or encyclopaedias but also publications on the history of India since its colonisation written from the British viewpoint. Thanks to the new books, Lithuanian scholars and students were able to deepen their knowledge of India from different perspectives and also had the opportunity to establish contacts with institutions related to Oriental studies.

Situations occurred when the leadership of the Faculty of Humanities did not show much interest in those who wanted to acquire a deeper knowledge of India. In 1923, due to a lack of funds and prioritisation of subjects, despite the recommendations and the scholar's willingness to continue comparative research on Lithuanian and Sanskrit, the university rejected the application of the scholar Teodor Aleksandrov, who taught Sanskrit and Indology at the University of Novorossiysk.<sup>29</sup> The indifference of the University of Lithuania was also evident when it refused to support Antanas Poška, who worked at the universities of Calcutta and Bombay.<sup>30</sup> Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius was repeatedly asked to supervise his dissertation 'The culture of the Aryans and their migrations', which he bluntly refused, because he considered Poška's activities to be of little scientific interest or relevance.<sup>31</sup> In one of his letters to Jonas Šliūpas, a professor of humanities and medical sciences at the University of Lithuania, Poška complained that the university did not value his work and did not intend to support him financially or academically.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from a few exceptional cases, such as Tagore's work or the history of the British Empire, the humanities scholars mostly focused on ancient India, its language and culture in particular. Even though taking guidance from the German tradition of Indology and comparative linguistics hindered the Lithuanian scholars' view of and diminished their interest in the changes, challenges, and achievements of Indian culture in more recent times, it also distanced them from discrediting Indian civilisation, which was characteristic of the large European nations such as the British and the French. However, the glorification of India's past was usually linked to the desire to show the greatness of one's

<sup>27</sup> Receipt for books from Cambridge and Harvard universities, 1925, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 13, b. 174, l. 19–22.

<sup>28</sup> Letters from foreign state university libraries on library activities, 1924, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 13, b. 185, l. 104, 280; correspondence with foreign publishers and universities on the replenishment of the library's book collection and exchange, 1934–1936, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 13, b. 190, l. 141.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Erna Constanta, Arthur's daughter, to the leadership of the University of Lithuania, 1923, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 12, b. 77, l. 20.

<sup>30</sup> Letter of the rector of Vytautas Magnus University to Antanas Poška, 1931-09-13, LMAVB MB, f. 186, b. 210, l. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Correspondence of Vytautas Magnus University with Antanas Poška, 1931, LMAVB MB, f. 186, b. 176, l. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Antanas Poška's notes on J.Š.'s 'Mitologija' sent to Jonas Šliūpas, 1932–1933, LMAVB MB, f. 186, b. 195, l. 1–2.

own nation and its history. In this respect, the occasional exoticisation of ancient India also served as a tool to show the connection between its archaic and unique cultural aspects and the Lithuanian nation.

### **Knowledge of Indian Animals, Plants and the Environment in the Natural Sciences of the University of Lithuania**

Although the natural sciences had hardly any links with traditional Indology, they provided a wealth of information about India from outside the humanities. In the disciplines of geography, zoology, botany, and medicine taught in Lithuania, India was introduced as one of the most unique places on earth. The focus was on understanding the Indian environment and people's relationship to it, but there were also discussions on whether Indian nature had already been tamed by the human or whether it was still deeply mysterious and exotic.

The most favourable discipline for learning about India would be geography, various courses of which Kazys Pakštas taught from 1931.<sup>33</sup> In Western European universities, geography was often combined with Oriental studies to help students relate languages, religions, and history to a particular space. Although geography in Lithuania focused on objective knowledge of the Orient, there were also works dealing with it from an imperial perspective, such as Mykolas Kaveckis's *Kolonialinė politika ir mineralų išteklių* (Colonial Policy and Mineral Resources).<sup>34</sup> Such texts were also typical of other countries that did not have overseas colonies; a good example would be the works by the Czech geologist-geographer Ottokar Feistmantel on the significance of British imperial rule for mineralogy in India (1887, 1888). The British imperial narrative of India was hard to resist, especially given the fact that much of the literature and ideas about that country were produced by British scholars. Yet the courses in economic, regional and historical geography taught by Pakštas were broader in scope.<sup>35</sup> He paid particular attention to India in the study of various cereal crops. According to him, India not only grew cereals for internal consumption, but also exported large amounts of them (Pakštas 1928, 174). He presented economic geography of India from the demographic perspective, arguing that these crops were indispensable for feeding a huge society in a densely populated area (Pakštas 1928, 175). He praised the tradition of rice cultivation, claiming that indigenous irrigation systems were the noblest of human inventions unmatched even by the pyramids of Egypt (Pakštas 1928, 176). However, the scientist Pranas Dovydaitis did not consider rice a positive thing, as he set it out in his article 'Maistas ir rasės' (Food and Races) in *Kosmos*, the journal of the Faculty of the Natural Sciences and Mathematics:

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<sup>33</sup> Proposal to Kazys Pakštas to teach a course on geography at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 1931, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 1, b. 254, l. 21.

<sup>34</sup> Proceedings of meetings of the Faculty of the Mathematical and Natural Sciences, 1938, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 1, b. 250, l. 48.

<sup>35</sup> Lecture timetable of the Faculty of the Mathematical and Natural Sciences, 1937, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 1, b. 185, l. 14.

The downfall of India, which in ancient times was great and renowned for its culture, depends fully and entirely on rice for its people. The Indian race is an example of a decadent civilisation. These deplorable consequences are due to a deficiency of certain vitamins essential for the brain in the diet. (Dovydaitis 1928, 506)

This points to differing opinions of Lithuanian scholars about Indian culture and the influence of different theories. Kazys Pakštas's interest in the Orient was not shared by all specialists in the natural sciences: in a review of Pakštas's book on Africa, the geophysicist Kazys Sleževičius resented the excessive examination of Asia and Africa, which were of little importance to Lithuania.<sup>36</sup> With little regard for the opinions of others, Pakštas went on to explore the uniqueness of India, such as the possibility of harvesting five times a year, or the fact that the region was considered to be the home of sugar (1928, 174). Due to Lithuania's status as an agrarian country between the two world wars, economic geography was perhaps the most important subject he taught, and India may have been a valuable example of more detailed exploration of this field. Pakštas's comparisons of Indian and Lithuanian farming traditions allowed for considering the possibility of adaptation of some of the practices of that country in one's homeland. This should be understood not only in terms of specific techniques, but also in terms of Indian attitudes towards agriculture, their value system, and their appreciation of the bounties of nature.

In zoology, knowledge of India covered existing and prehistoric fauna. The studies of Pranciškus Baltrus-Šivickis, who returned from the Philippines in 1929, and of Tadas Ivanauskas, who had been working at the University of Lithuania since its founding, were significant for the study of the fauna of the time. Although the focus was mainly on Lithuania, the wider world was not excluded, and Baltrus-Šivickis did this in his courses on zoology, comparative anatomy, and embryology.<sup>37</sup> His lecture notes evidence the actualisation of zoogeography, the centres of distribution of animals, and the reasons for their adaptation to live in different locations.<sup>38</sup> India's rivers, jungles, and swamps are given as examples of animal evolutionary adaptation.<sup>39</sup> Pranciškus Baltrus-Šivickis was one of the first Lithuanian scientists who refused to exoticise the animals of India. In one of his articles, he questioned whether tigers, cobras, or elephants should be feared and demonised when they had little impact on human life; far more dangerous were micro-organisms that were invisible to the naked eye and had not yet been studied by science (Šivickis 1940, 138). Baltrus-Šivickis, who was a critical thinker, also brought his knowledge of India to Lithuania as a result of his visit to the British colonies.<sup>40</sup> In 1929, on his way back from the Philippines, he stopped briefly in Colombo and visited the natural history museum where he admired the vast collection of invertebrates, especially crus-

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<sup>36</sup> Kazys Sleževičius's review for the book *Aplink Afriką* [Around Africa], 1936, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 1, b. 254, l. 94.

<sup>37</sup> Pranciškus Baltrus-Šivickis's personal documents, 1932, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 1, b. 254, l. 64.

<sup>38</sup> Šivickis's zoology lecture notes, lists of biological science books, lectures, LMAVB MB, f. 144, b. 561, l. 11.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Šivickis visited Ceylon. Although this island had the status of a separate British colony, it was naturally very close to India.

taceans.<sup>41</sup> From Indian biologists, he would later obtain material on various fauna and present it to students or describe it in articles.<sup>42</sup> Thanks to these contacts, he discussed the differences between Lithuanian and Indian leeches and bees and pointed out that in India, we would not encounter the usual earthworms, but that we would find harmful termites (Šivickis 1940, 339). He was also interested in the molluscs of the Indian Ocean, thanks to which Indians had been foraging for pearls and making jewellery since time immemorial (Šivickis 1940, 265).

Other zoology lectures, such as mammalian biology, entomology, and ornithology were taught by Tadas Ivanauskas.<sup>43</sup> As reflected in his popular science texts, he was not a particularly objective researcher and did not shy away from clichés about India. In addition to the descriptions of exotic animals, the author also discusses unethical uses of reptile skins: crocodile skins are perfect for suitcases and purses, while tortoise shells are good for jewellery making (Ivanauskas 1928, 32–33). India is again depicted as full of dangers and untamed by the human: snakes kill 24,000 people every year, a tiger ‘gets very accustomed to human flesh after tasting it’, and a rhinoceros’s skin is so thick that even a lead bullet from a gun stops when it hits it (Ivanauskas 1928, 35, 77, 98). The gruesome depiction of animals is linked to the desire to attract the reader or, as Andrew Flack puts it, to maintain entertainment or intrigue (Flack 2018, 5). Curated by Tadas Ivanauskas, the Museum of Zoology of the University of Lithuania contributed to the dissemination of more objective knowledge about India: thanks to the naturalist’s acquaintance with British and German scientists, lists of Indian birds and reptiles and several exhibits were brought to Lithuania for the first time (Gaidienė 1999, 22). Indian fauna was described by various authors in the journal *Kosmos*, hunting in India was sometimes criticised, and statistics on the number deaths from human and animal interactions appeared (Etherton 1936, 42–43). Such articles partly undermined the established position of human dominance in the wild and encouraged a view of India’s wildlife as an object to be preserved rather than as an exotic attraction to satisfy Westerners’ desires.

Taught by M. Krašninās-Samarinas and Česlovas Pakuckas, courses in palaeontology, palaeontobiology, and palaeontogeography, which dealt with the prehistoric fauna, showed India to be an excellent field of research in these disciplines.<sup>44</sup> As in the 1930s the science of palaeontology advanced, India became the site of an extraordinary number of excavations, mostly organised by the Germans and the British, which led to the discovery of previously unseen fossils of new genera of dinosaurs, such as the *Indosaurus*, *Indosuchus*, and *Laveisuchus* (Huene, Matley 1933, 1–74). The interest of the Lithuanians in these studies is also reflected in the paleontological journals *Memoires* and *Bulletin* ordered by the University of Lithuania, as well as such books as the Brussels Natural Museum’s *Resultats scientifique du Voyage aux Indes Orientales Neerlandaise de LL. AA.*

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<sup>41</sup> Reminiscences of a voyage on the *Fulga* from the Philippines to Lithuania in 1928 written in 1965, LMAVB MB, f. 144, b. 1157, l. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Pranciškus Baltrus-Šivickis’s personal documents, LMAVB MB, f. 144, b. 1022, l. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Lecture timetable of the Faculty of the Natural Sciences and Mathematics, 1934, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 12, b. 1109, l. 128.

<sup>44</sup> Correspondence between the rector of Vytautas Magnus University and the dean of the Faculty of the Mathematical and Natural Sciences, 1932, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 1, b. 23, l. 15; lecture timetables of the Faculty of the Mathematical and Natural Sciences, 1937, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 12, b. 1109, l. 5.



RR. *Le Prince et la Princesse Leopold de Belgique*.<sup>45</sup> Paleontological research, such as the report on the discovery of megafauna *Baluchitherium Grangeri* in British India, also appeared in the university's publications (Dovydaitis 1925, 220).

In botanical science, knowledge of India mainly spread through the desire to introduce to the public the plants that, albeit well-known, did not grow in Lithuania. The lectures of the university's botanist Konstantinas Regelis and his two-volume works *Augalų sistematikos vadovėlis* (Textbook of Plant Taxonomy) and *Augalų sistematika* (Plant Taxonomy) (Regelis 1934, 1935, 1936, 1941) were of particular importance. These books introduced such exotic plants native to India as sugar cane, coconut palms, kapok trees, and magnolias (Regelis 1934, 105). Considerable attention was paid to produce consumed in Lithuania that originated from India: cinnamon, black pepper, bananas, tea, coffee, and rice, among other things (Regelis 1934, 128–133). In addition, the scientist broadened the knowledge of Oriental flora at the Botanical Garden of the University of Lithuania, of which he is considered the founder. In 1923, a greenhouse for exotic plants, palm trees and a pool of water for aquatic plants was established.<sup>46</sup> In 1938, three sections were fitted in the greenhouse that included Indian flora: the cactus and succulent section of 831 different species, the hot section of 590 different species, and the palm section of 70 different species.<sup>47</sup> On Regelis's initiative, contacts were maintained with botanical gardens in China, Japan, and British colonies.<sup>48</sup> His scientific activities revealed the peculiarities of plant cultivation, care, and biological diversity, while at the same time encouraged the reception of India's unique nature as familiar rather than seeing it as strange, which would have promoted the Orientalist stance.

Sometimes, when natural scientists wished to demonstrate the longevity and significance of their discipline in human history, they also looked back to ancient India and various practices of learning about its antiquity. In an astronomy course, Paulius Slavėnas, a scientist at the University of Lithuania, talked about the evolution of ancient Indian stargazing and its fundamental differences from other civilisations (Slavėnas 1938, 267). Pranas Dovydaitis was also concerned with introducing the Indian's relationship to astronomy in different periods, and in particular to show its relationship to the mythological-religious world: science became a tool for the brahmins to consolidate their power in India (1933, 167–168). There was also a comparative perspective: although the constellations and planetary motions were accurately identified and the first textbooks on stellar astronomy were compiled in India, Greek astronomy was more accurate (Dovydaitis 1933, 169). It is conceivable that at times, the example of ancient India may have been used to extol the scientific progress of Western civilisation.

Published materials from the course on the history of medicine show that Jonas Šliūpas lectured to students on ancient Indian medicine. Its evolution was presented in three periods: the Vedic, Brahmanical, and Arabic (Šliūpas 1934, 65). The Vedic period was depicted as steeped in magic, theurgy, amulets, incantations, and homeopathy (Šliūpas 1934, 66). During this period, diseases were believed to be the curses of discontented

<sup>45</sup> Correspondence with foreign universities, local institutions, and scientific conferences, 1933, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 12 b. 721, l. 10–14.

<sup>46</sup> Accounts of the University Botanical Garden, 1938, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 1, b. 50, l. 3–8.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., l. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., l. 31.

gods (Šliūpas 1934, 66). Šliūpas considered the Brahmanical period to be the age of science and literature, when the first medical works appeared in India, surgery was practised, and a model of human vitality was developed (Šliūpas 1934, 67). In his lectures, he also told the students what an Indian physician was supposed to be like: characterised by morality of the body, suitable mind, and loyalty to the king who gave him the right to practise (Šliūpas 1934, 67). This is how he described how an Indian doctor was expected to look: 'Cut your hair and nails short, keep your body clean, wear white attire, put on a pair of shoes and carry a stick or umbrella in your hand. Let your presence be humble and your disposition pure and without guile' (Šliūpas 1934, 69). Learning treatment practices was also discussed: surgery is practised on fruit and furs; scarification on stretched hairy skin; bloodletting or tooth-pulling on dead animals; probing on trees damaged by woodworms; stitching of wounds on thick clothing, and the like (Šliūpas 1934, 68). The author described the Arabic period as the one taken over following the conquests (Šliūpas 1934, 70). Summarising Indian medicine, Šliūpas argued that it failed to follow the path of genuine science and no longer improved (Šliūpas 1934, 82). Here, he displayed the European view that the reliability of science had to be measured by Western standards. The state of Indian medicine in the first half of the twentieth century was viewed negatively, and the British imperial rule was seen as the only salvation.

Some aspects of India were also taught in the psychology-psychiatry courses of Juozas Blažys, as evidenced in his books *Ivadas į psichiatriją* (Introduction to Psychiatry) and *Tolerancija kaip kultūros principas* (Tolerance as a Cultural Principle) (Blažys 1935, 1936). He argued that India did not have a high prevalence of mental illness; in his opinion, in Western countries, where individuality and activity were more prevalent, there was a greater likelihood of psychological breakdown (Blažys 1935, 28). Nevertheless, India, like the rest of Southeast Asia, was plagued by mental illness as a result of the heavy use of drugs, especially hashish (Blažys 1935, 33). When discussing the meaning of tolerance, Blažys cited the example of the ancient Indian king Ashoka, who was the first in the world to speak of the equality of religions (Blažys 1936, 73–74). The scientist saw the worship of the cow in India as an opportunity to perceive all life in the world as equally worthy of respect and protection (Blažys 1936, 199). Despite that, he condemned the existing situation in India, but the merging of Eastern and Western values could be a way out of a difficult situation (Blažys 1936, 18).

Knowledge of India was disseminated in various courses of the Faculty of the Natural Sciences and Mathematics. While there was still a perception among some scientists that India was alien or even dangerous world, the natural sciences at the University of Lithuania began discussing the uniqueness of India's flora and fauna, the importance of nature conservation, and even the possibilities of learning something from the Indians' relationship with the environment around them. Despite the interest in the study of the East, and the connections between these scientific fields and the East, it was believed that scientific progress in the Orient could be reached by Western intervention.

## From the Knowledge of India's Legal Traditions to a Critique of Imperialism

The social sciences such as law and economics taught about the peculiarities of the ancient Indian social order and the existing colonial experience. The former examined ancient Indian philosophy and religion as phenomena that shaped the legal system in India and beyond, while the latter focused on the existing economic status and the influence of British India, its benefits and its relationship with the United Kingdom. Although at times the leadership of the University of Lithuania questioned the relevance of these topics for Lithuania, some scholars felt the need to delve deeper into the social affairs of Asian countries.<sup>49</sup>

In legal studies, the knowledge of India was presented in the courses on the history of the philosophy of law or the encyclopaedia of law taught by Petras Leonas.<sup>50</sup> Drawing on the syllabus of the history of the philosophy of law of 1930–1931, the professor sought to illustrate aspects of ancient Indian legal thought on the following themes: (1) the search for the path to happiness as the guiding thought of Indian philosophy; (2) Mark Kristián Hochman Mark Kristián HochmanBrahman texts, and (3) The Buddha: the essence of his teaching.<sup>51</sup> He addressed various aspects of Indian philosophy and religion, such as the meanings of the Rigvedic hymns, the mythological world and its implications for human relations, the Upanishads and the Code of Manu, the caste system, and the Buddhist system, among other things.<sup>52</sup> We can see in the published lecture material that the author relied mainly on the works of Jean-Vincent Scheil and Otto Strauss.<sup>53</sup> Petras Leonas also pointed out the essential questions that should arise for students exploring the evolution of Indian legal thought: 'Was there a general concept of philosophy, and if so, what was it in the writings of Indian thinkers, and what is the field (boundaries and method) to which the name Indian philosophy is applied' (Leonas 1949, 73). The lawyer encouraged thinking about these topics in the same way the ancient Indians perceived the world: through exploration, knowledge based on the Vedas, and service to the state (Leonas 1949, 73). The professor did not shy away from taking a critical look at Indian philosophy, in particular at the attempt to reconcile relative and absolute truths, and at the inoperability of the mythological hierarchy, which made it difficult to systematise legal thought in daily life (Leonas 1949, 74). Leonas explained that because the deities were reluctant to uphold values and to be just in mythology, the human was also accustomed to being passive in raising morality (Leonas 1949, 76). Finally, he spoke on Buddhism in India, with which he sympathised (Leonas 1949, 84–85): of the story of the Buddha's ascension, the righteous Eightfold Path to nirvana, the upholding of moral values, the struggle against desires, and the overcoming of suffering (Leonas 1949, 88). Prof. Leonas's fascination with India and the Orient in general was partly due to his twelve years of liv-

<sup>49</sup> Documents sent by the management of Vytautas Magnus University to the dean of the Faculty of Law, 1937, LCVA, col. 631, inv.1, file 202, p. 20.

<sup>50</sup> Lecture timetables of the Faculty of Law, 1932, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 12 b. 632, l. 51.

<sup>51</sup> Petras Leonas's lectures – the history of the philosophy of law, outline of lectures, 1933–1935, LMAVB MB, f. 117, b. 1241, l. 44.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., l. 44.

<sup>53</sup> Petras Leonas's lectures – Chinese Indian, Egyptian philosophy, the life of Buddha, political and economic knowledge of ancient life in those countries, 1932, LMAVB MB, f. 117, b. 1118, l. 40.

ing in Samarkand, which he described vividly and with exaltation in his memoirs.<sup>54</sup> As a liberal Christian, he was interested in other religions, such as Buddhism, and looked to them for truths that were missing from the faith of his own country. His students had to write papers on India on topics such as the Code of Manu, the Buddha and his legal philosophy.<sup>55</sup>

In the course on the encyclopaedia of law, where the dominant discussion was on Western law, the Oriental system was usually criticised and attempts were made to find the reasons for its rigidity: the fusion of military and civil law, the belief in the influence of the power of nature on human life (Leonas 1924, 41, 130). Taking examples of the Oriental countries as despotic countries, the scholar argued that they fell into ruin primarily because they prevented people from fighting for their rights (Leonas 1924, 151). Nevertheless, Leonas's courses were only fleetingly concerned with comparison and much more with the evolution of Indian law as such. In contrast to the humanities, no ancient Indian influence on the Lithuanians or Westerners was sought here.

Vladimiras Stankevičius, who sometimes filled in for Leonas and later took over the teaching of his courses, also saw the importance of talking about India, as reflected in his texts (Stankevičius 1934, 1938). About the latter, he wrote:

Regardless of how you look at it, how you understand it, whichever texts from his vast canons you consider to be true and ancient, everything there is extraordinary, new, peculiar, enticingly fascinating, and subtly captivates our minds and imagination. [...] a European who knows Gautama's teachings cannot fail to appreciate them. (Stankevičius, 1938, 57)

He used the example of the Buddha to talk about the highest moral values and to explain the patterns of legal history in the world (Stankevičius 1938, 83). In his book *Pasaulinės istorijos dinamika* (The Dynamics of World History), which reflects on the cyclical nature of history and the cultural achievements of different periods, Stankevičius revisits Buddhism in India as the highest level of civilisation, which was reached thousands of years ago (Stankevičius 1934, 3). In addition to the Buddha, he introduced the famous King Ashoka of India, who became a Buddhist and was involved in spreading its values beyond India (Stankevičius 1934, 36). Stankevičius saw the Buddha's teachings and Ashoka's activity as the world's first egalitarian cosmopolitan organisation (Stankevičius 1934, 47). The Edicts of Ashoka are presented as valuable evidence of a legal system in Antiquity designed to help the poor or distressed (Stankevičius 1934, 39). At the same time, he saw Ashoka as the first ruler who secularised and talked about government serving the people rather than the other way round (Stankevičius 1934, 42). Despite the fact that Stankevičius's ideas abound in inaccuracies and exaggerate certain historical and religious motives, his texts and lectures became one of the most important sources for the dissemination of knowledge about India in Lithuanian social sciences.

Criticism was also directed at the Indian legal system, at the same time seeking to demonstrate the superiority of the European system and the results achieved over the

<sup>54</sup> Petras Leonas's handwritten memoir 'Mano pergyvenimai ir atsiminimai' [My Experiences and Memories], part 4, 1936, LMAVB MB, f. 117, b. 1077, l. 1–27.

<sup>55</sup> Petras Leonas's lectures – history of the philosophy of law, outline of lectures, 1933–1935, LMAVB MB, f. 117, b. 1241, l. 33.

centuries. For example, the lectures on criminal law by lawyer Simonas Beliackinas focused on the cruel punitive customs that had been ingrained in India since ancient times and abandoned by the Europeans (1930, 23). Drawing on the theory of the Orient as a space of despotism, the scholar pointed out that in India it was common to believe that cruel punishment was the basis of peace in the state and that the people's fundamental task was to remain loyal to their ruler (Beliackinas 1930, 24). Vladas Mačys, an expert in civil law, had a somewhat more empathetic approach. Stressing the importance of the history of Oriental law to the world, the scholar studied the status of women in India (Mačys 1934). In his texts, he did not attach the label of despotic rule to India, because due to its geographical location, it had been isolated from the Asian continent for centuries (Mačys 1934, 134). Mačys was one of the first in Lithuania to try to destroy the myth of the existence of cruel Indian laws based on the cult of religion, as well as the view that ancient texts encouraged the practice of sati, which was the self-immolation of widows (Mačys 1934, 150). According to the Vedic texts, pre-Aryan India was a matriarchal land where women occupied a revered position, and this trait persisted to this day (Mačys 1934, 147).

The study of India's situation at the time focused on its legal situation, problems, and cultural relations with other countries. The scholar Aleksandras Jaščenka saw one fundamental problem in India: the country's inability to be a subject of international law (Jaščenka 1931, 130). Students were taught about the subordination of India to administrative law and the impossibility of taking guidance from the UK's constitution (Jaščenka 1931, 131). In his lectures, Jaščenka used to emphasise that for the British, India was a huge source of wealth, and they would try to keep as long as they could (Jaščenka 1931, 524–525). The scholar's course on international law and the published lecture material are significant for us due to the extensive bibliography on the analysis of Asia and India and the (non-)functioning of international law there (Jaščenka 1931, 630–632). The author's selection of works by scholars of various nations brought together in huge lists demonstrates the opportunity of the University of Lithuania to examine the existing situation of India in the context of international law. The definition of India as a geopolitical entity in the inter-war period was discussed in lectures by Mykolas Römeris. First of all, he explained what we might call a colony: what legal status it had in the international arena, what laws it was subject to, what relations existed between the colony, the country that governed it, and other free states (Römeris 1934, 44). Constitutional law was essentially inapplicable in the colony because the only legal subjects in the colony were the colonists. Indigenous people may be subject to colonial law, which, according to the researcher, was still very little known in Lithuania (Römeris 1934, 45). However, in his work *Konstituciniai teisės principai* (Constitutional Principles of Law), he pointed out that British colonial rule was somewhat more liberal and gave more power to the people it governed, such as participation in the League of Nations, or the delegation of local government to the Maharajas (Römeris 1932, 22). In his view, knowledge of Asia was essential for a better understanding of Western civilisation and, simultaneously, of the foundations of constitutional law, as it was a kind of progressive line pointing the way forward. At the same time, Asia, especially India, was slowly adopting the institutions, knowledge, and science characteristic of our countries (Römeris 1932, 118). Römeris's main point was that the world was becoming more and more transcultural, so knowledge about the present

West was also knowledge about present India. In this context of cultural and knowledge exchange, however, the professor saw one problem: the damage to new research caused by misinterpretations and misunderstandings in the past (Römeris 1932, 84).

In the field of economics, India was mentioned in contexts ranging from banking history to international economic processes. In courses on banking and finance, the economist Vladas Jurgutis acquainted students with the taxes and duties imposed by the British on India, and the profits that the empire was gaining from this colony (1938, 213). He also spoke of the notorious salt tax, its workings, the exploitation of the people, and the ever-increasing prices in the colony, which led to the struggle of Indian people to free themselves from the empire (Jurgutis 1933, 147). In his lectures, Jurgutis did not abstain from criticism of imperialism and disapproved of the British perception that, thanks to taxation and a coercive mechanism, the Indian population was receiving civilised cultural progress as a reward (Jurgutis 1938, 214). He singled out the Indian-specific notion of the 'virtue tax', a tool of the British government used to justify the improvement of life in the colony (Jurgutis 1938, 215).

Researchers Dzidas Budrys and Albinas Rimka investigated the dependence of India's economy on its geographical environment. On one hand, the hot climate, abundant rainfall, and plentiful wild food resources led to slow economic progress because it was simply not needed (Budrys 1929, 11). On the other hand, they saw it as being a hostage to nature (Budrys 1929, 12). It was perhaps for this reason that Teodoras Daukantas, who taught economic geography at the Faculty of Law of the University of Lithuania, had a separate lecture block in it entitled 'Asia: The Continent of Miscellany' as early as 1926.<sup>56</sup> In lectures, India was also presented as a victim of mercantilism in Western-regulated economic processes, where it had much to lose by not being fully aware of the rules imposed on it (Rimka 1929, 80). Rimka's knowledge of the Asian economy, and especially that of India, was due to his reliance on Max Weber's theories of political economic thought.<sup>57</sup> As was typical of nineteenth-century sociology, he conveyed most of the information through concepts specific to Western civilisation or through comparisons between them. Terms such as quasi-commune, serfdom, workshops, and guilds are used to describe the Indian economy, and Indian maharajas are compared with German landlords (Weber, trans. Rimka 1929, 91). Rimka was interested in the importance of Indian kinship and family for the overall system of the national economy and its progress: in his lectures, he talked about the right of inheritance, and the passing of a craft over to the younger generation (Weber, trans. Rimka 1929, 127). He also paid attention to the impact of the caste system on the economy, which was a crucial difference from the West. Here, the author presented the caste system from the economic perspective, its impact on the formation of heavy industry and the tight control of banks and crafts (Weber, trans. Rimka 1929, 216). In the economic history courses taught by Albinas Rimka, India was more of an example to show the overall evolution of the economy of humanity, or draw out differences between

<sup>56</sup> Project of lectures on economic geography at the Faculty of Law, 1926, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 12, b. 246, l. 21.

<sup>57</sup> Rimka's lectures on the history of the economy were based on the works of the famous German political economist Max Weber. It is not without reason that in 1929, on Rimka's initiative, the work of this scholar was translated into Lithuanian as *Ūkio istorija: universalinės ūkio ir visuomenės istorijos bruožai* [The History of the Economy: Features of a Universal History of Economy and Society, with the original German title being *Wirtschaftsgeschichte*].



India and other civilisations. Rimka saw great value in this subject and asked for books in various languages to be sent to him from academic institutions in London and Paris.<sup>58</sup>

For the scholars of the social sciences, it was important to understand the tradition of Indian legal thought as such. This could have been due to a simple desire for knowledge, or a striving to recognise similarities and differences between civilisations. Many scholars sympathised with India's long-standing legal thought and stressed the validity of Buddhism as a philosophy of life. However, the most distinctive feature of these disciplines was their critical insight into the socio-cultural situation of the Indians at the time. The scholars discerned many injustices, did not shy away from commenting on the British colonial system, and saw India as a victim of the effects of the imperial state.

## Conclusions

Although there was no discipline of Indology in the university space of inter-war Lithuania, many scholars from other disciplines tried to learn about India and thus ensured the dissemination of knowledge about that distant land. Knowledge of India served the scholars' of the University of Lithuania own purposes, such as discovering the essence of various scientific phenomena or gaining a broader understanding of the country. The courses taught at the University of Lithuania were based on new research on the Orient, highlighting important issues of the time, such as the significance of cultural links between India and Europe and the impact of imperialism on the country.

The study shows that the humanities at the University of Lithuania taught Sanskrit, ancient and modern Indian literature, the ancient history of the Orient, and that attempts were made to find cultural similarities between Indians and Lithuanians. The great interest in ancient India was due to the adoption of the German tradition of Indology and comparative linguistics, which sought to discover the national potential of their own country by studying ancient India. The 19th-century German pursuit of knowledge about India was intricately linked to the quest for a national identity that could stand on par with other leading European nations. This intellectual curiosity also permeated into Lithuania. The spectrum of knowledge about India in Germany and Lithuania was broad, ranging from disdain for contemporary Indian culture to reverence for its ancient traditions and respect for its historical legacy. The prominent German comparative linguistics of the 19th century significantly influenced interwar Lithuanian scholars, prompting them to explore the similarities between the Lithuanian and Sanskrit languages. It is noteworthy that Kazimieras Būga learned from German scholars about these connections, recognizing the value of investigating linguistic similarities. In comparing Lithuania with other Central European countries, a notable distinction was the institutionalization of Indology in their universities. In Poland, although there was limited attention to the history, culture, and geography of India, academic research in Sanskrit, Hindi, and Bengali was conducted in Warsaw and Krakow. The Czech Republic, adhering to the German tradition, encompassed both linguistic and cultural studies within its Indology programs. Similar to the Lithuanian approach, Czech scholars sought connections with India to

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<sup>58</sup> Correspondence of the Faculty of Law, 1923–1924, LCVA, f. 631, ap. 12, b. 102, l. 42.

underscore the importance of their own cultural heritage. Their exploration of parallels between Indian history and experiences of foreign subjugation yielded insights into national unity, equality, and a collective aspiration for India's resurgence. This perspective was likely influenced by the Czechs' own historical experiences of occupation. In Hungary, the primary academic focus was on Eastern religions, particularly Buddhism, which originated in India. The study of Buddhism in Hungary was also utilized as a means to explore and affirm national identity.

The study proves that compared to the humanities, the natural and social sciences revealed new perspectives on India. The analysis of the natural sciences showed the scientists' desire to explore the unique environment of India. Knowledge of India in the natural sciences was disseminated mainly through courses on geography, zoology and botany. The study revealed that ancient Indian practices had become good examples for showing the evolution of and changes in different disciplines like medicine and astronomy in different countries. Works by scholars of the University of Lithuania show that some of them sought to normalise attitudes towards the large Oriental mammals and exotic plants, while others were still following old clichés and demonised Indian nature. It should be noted that German scientists were highly influential in both the natural and social sciences, paralleling the application of Max Weber's ideas in the teaching of economic history. The influence of the German school in the study of India is further evidenced by the literature acquired from abroad and housed in the university library. Alongside German works, the books of British and French scholars also held a prominent position. Analysis of the social sciences shows that in various courses on law Buddhism, which is rooted in Indian culture, was positively perceived as developing a strong value-based sense of justice. The opposing position to Orientalism was based on the fact that social scholars were critical of the colonial British rule present at the time, especially the taxes imposed on Indians and restrictions on freedoms. An analysis of the works by scholars of the University of Lithuania shows that attempts had been made to dispel myths about Indian society, such as the existence of violent traditions caused by religion. India was an example of the uniqueness and broader extent of the world and an opportunity to introduce it within one's own field of study, which were often confined to the borders of one's own country.

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