

TEACHING HINDI IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC A HISTORIC OVERVIEW AND CZECH CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF HINDI

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Charles University in Prague is the only institution in the Czech Republic, as well as in the former Czechoslovakia, where Hindi is studied at university level. When India gained state independence, and Hindi its position as national language in 1950, it had been taught in Europe only in a few universities, among them this one.

Great merit in this matter should be conferred upon Vincenc Pořízka, who studied Hindi abroad and after returning to Prague started to teach it at the Faculty of Philosophy.

Odolen Smékal was one of Pořízka's disciples, who continued his linguistic work and also translated Hindi prose and poetry into Czech; he himself used to compose verses in Hindi and to take part in Hindi Kavi Sammelans in India.

The study of Hindi and other New Indo-Aryan (NIA) languages is based on classical Indian studies, i.e. on Sanskrit. Charles University was among the first European universities to promote Indian studies in the 19th century. The study of Sanskrit, for the sake of comparative Indo-European linguistic studies, started in 1850 and it was taught by the famous German comparative linguist August Schleicher (1821–1868), who at that time lived in Prague, then by Alfred Ludwig (1837–1912) and afterwards by the German-speaking Moritz Winternitz (1863–1937), and others.

Early on, some Czech linguists also started to study Sanskrit. The first of them was Prof. Josef Zubatý (1855–1931), whose disciple Vincenc Lesný (1882–1953) is the real founder of modern Czech Indology. Besides Sanskrit, he studied and taught Prakrits and several NIA languages, including Hindi, Bengali, Marathi etc. (Vacek 1998, p. 1). He was the first translator of literature directly from Hindi to Czech in 1911. This was the novel *Devbālā* by Ayodhyāsīnh Upādhyāy (Sinh 1911).

In the period before World War II Prof. Otakar Pertold, the prominent Czech specialist in Indian religions and ethnology, also expert in Hindi, Gujarati, Sinhalese and Tamil, taught Hindi, i.e. Hindustani, as a practical language. It was taught mainly for commercial purposes, as is evident from his textbook *Učebnice Hindustání*, Prague 1939, the first textbook of Hindustani of this kind on the continent of Europe (Smékal 1986; Krása 1984).

Professor Lesný is also the founder of the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences, as well as of the first journal dealing with oriental studies in the Czech language – *Nový Orient* (New Orient). This monthly started in 1945 and is still being produced today. Many translations of Hindi prose and poetry by Hindi writers, including Premchand, Sumitrānandan Pant, Harivaṃśrāy Baccan, Dinkar, Ajñey, Bhāratbhūṣaṇ Agravāl, Śrīkant Varmā and others, appeared in its pages.

When India became independent, and Hindi gained the position of national language, officially with the Constitution in 1950, its international importance became clear. In that period in Europe it had been taught only in few universities, among them Charles University in Prague. Great merit in this matter should be conferred upon Vincenc Pořízka (1905–1983), who, as a Catholic priest and theologian, studied Hindi abroad, and after returning in 1950 was entrusted to teach it. In Central Europe – here, in Prague – it was the first Chair of Hindi and Pořízka was the first university teacher of Hindi, but without previous practical experience and without direct contact with India and colloquial language. He visited India for the first time in 1956 and for the second and the last time in 1958. Both times he went only for one month as a member of a Czechoslovak state cultural delegation. As for learning materials, they were very limited and the only Hindi grammar was Kellogg's Grammar of the Hindi language issued in 1876. Very quickly Prof. Pořízka prepared his own learning materials and wrote a new descriptive grammar of Hindi in Czech (Pořízka 1952). He kept in contact with some Hindi writers; among them were Viṣṇu Prabhākar, whose illustrative prose texts are included in Pořízka's comprehensive Hindi course with grammar (*Hindština, Hindi language course*, issued in 1963, emended edition 1972, 1986). This textbook, and especially its part dealing with the descriptive grammar of Hindi, written in parallel in English and Czech, became a very valuable tool in Hindi studies, not only at this university but also abroad. The book is still very useful, in spite of its outdated textual and lexical components.

Vincenc Pořízka was a prominent linguist and he opened up some very important topics, like verb aspects in Hindi. He started to study this phenomenon due to the parallel semantic phenomenon in Slavic languages, and he compared them both. He also studied participles in Hindi and their ability to convey different manners of verb action. His studies are the first of this kind in Hindi linguistics. We regard Pořízka's linguistic works and original ideas as a considerable contribution by Czech Indology to Indian linguistics and Hindi philology.

Being originally educated in Christian theology, he also was interested in Hindu religion and profoundly studied the *Bhagavadgītā*. On the *Gītā* he wrote several treatises, where he searched for similarities between the *Gītā* and the New Testament. Three studies were in Latin (1937–1938) and one in English (1939/1940) and they were reprinted by J. Strnad (cf. Pořízka 2000).

Pořízka's disciples also were reputable Indologists and teachers like the late Odolen Smékal, who taught Hindi for more than 35 years; Dagmar Marková, who teaches Hindi literature still, the late Vladimír Miltner (1933–1997) and German Indologist Helmut Nespital (1936–2001), both known as excellent linguists and Hindi philologists.

Odolen Smékal (1928–1997) started his career in 1954 as an assistant to Pořízka (Filipský 1988) and from the very beginning he was very productive in writing Hindi textbooks (Smékal 1956–57, 1968, 1970, 1971, 1977, 1984, 1986–88, 1997). Smékal was a dedicated teacher and lover of India and Hindi and its poetry, which fascinated him and encouraged him to write verses in Hindi (Pant 1995). His dedication to Hindi and enthusiastic approach to the literature was probably derived from the general social climate in India after gaining independence, which he learned about through the fairly

regular cultural relations between India and Czechoslovakia in those days, and from the influence of Hindi poets and writers, with which he used to be in contact.

From 1982 till 1996 eleven collections of poems by Odolen Smékal appeared in India (see the list of Smékal's Hindi poetry collections below). The reactions of Indian readers and literary critics have differed but have mostly been positive, and if we take into consideration the fact that a foreigner dared to write poetry in Hindi, it is clear how much Odolen Smékal was fascinated by Hindi. In fact it is a very rare phenomenon – a Westerner who never lived in India, and never stayed there more than a few weeks, was able to compose Hindi verses and even to read his own poems at the Hindi Kavi Sammelans in India.

In 1990, after the so-called Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, Smékal went to India as a teacher of Czech and then, after the division of Czechoslovakia into two parts, he became the first Czech ambassador in Delhi. There he remained till 1997.

I would like to emphasise how the philological approach to India can be very fruitful, something which is evident from the Czech professor of Hindi at this university, Dr. Odolen Smékal, and his enthusiasm for literature, which was appreciated in India (cf. e.g. Pant 1993). As an illustration, I would like to refer to two short poems of his. One concerns the river Ganges, and the other the Hindi language.

गंगे, सुनूँ पुनः

अधिक नहीं
तो मात्र एक बार
तीर-तीर सुनूँ पुनः
झिर-झिर तेरी धारा!

री पावन नदी
तू संसार भर में
आजन्म दिव्य संस्पर्शों से लदी!

अधिक नहीं
तो मात्र एक बार
पुनः तेरे घाटों पर डालूँ
अपना हृदय-हार

री नदी पावन, आशिष दे
एक ही अवगाहन तेरी धाराओं में
है प्राण भर के लिए
सुधि लुभावन!

अधिक नहीं
तो मात्र एक बार
जग के लिए पुनः खोलूँ
तेरे अमृत द्वार।

काव्यसंग्रह "हमारा हरित नीम २" से (पन्ना २०)

Oh Ganges, let me listen again

Not many times
but only once
let me listen again
to the murmuring stream
on your banks.
Oh, holy River,
in the whole world
you are full of divine touches
which endure lifelong.

Not many times,
but only once
let me put again
my heart entranced
on your banks.

Oh, holy River, bless me!
Only one immersion
in your streams
is a charming memory
for a whole life.

Not many times
but only once
I'd like to open again
for the world
your celestial door.

हिन्दी ज्ञान

इस उपमहाद्वीप में
यह बात अब जानते सभी हैं –
कि था इस जीवन में
हिन्दी ज्ञान
मेरे लिये अमृत-पान
जितनी बार पिया उसे
उतनी बार मिला उससे
उल्लासोन्माद-दान

और मेरी निधि
इस लोक लीला के मेले में
था स्वयम् भारत
थी स्वयम् हिन्दी –

– जिह्वा पर इसका राग
इस में निरंत बात करने की
जोशीली आग
थी मेरे इहलोक की सिद्धि

काव्य संग्रह "हमारा हरित नीम २" से (पन्ना ६७)

Hindī jñān or Knowledge of Hindi

In this large Peninsula
now everyone knows that –
there was in my life
the knowledge of Hindi
that was like ambrosia for me

How many times I drank it,
so many times I received it
as a gift and intoxicating joy

And my treasure
in the pilgrimage of this world's play
was India itself
was Hindi itself

Its melody on the tongue
with ardent desire
to speak interminably
was my accomplishment
in this world.

The translation of Hindi poetry and prose literature has its own tradition, beginning with Lesný's already-mentioned translation. Brief literature texts, mainly short stories or poems, are published in the monthly *Nový Orient* (New Orient), and other literature journals, or as translated books. Smékal used to translate not only poetry (collection of modern Hindi poetry by 24 poets – *Země se sněžnou členkou* (Smékal 1975), but also prose, like Premchand's novel *Godān* (Prémčand 1957), Rājendra Avasthī's novel *Janḡal ke phūl* (Avasthī 1987), *lok kathās* or folk tales together with Jiří Marek (Marek 1979) etc.

Dagmar Marková translates Hindi short stories and novels too. She has translated novels by Rājendra Yādav *Sārā ākāś* (Jádav 1976), Mohan Rākeš (Rākeš 1979) and

Kamaleśvar (Kamléšvar 1981); short stories by Premcand, Jayśaṅkar Prasād, Ugra, Jainendra, Yaśapāl, R. Yādav, Nirmal Varmā, Mannū Bhaṅḍārī, Bhīṣma Sāhnī, Himāśu Jośī, Sudhā Arorā etc. (Marková 2000).

Vladimir Miltner (1933–1997) translated, besides modern short stories, Old Hindi poetry and wrote a book on *Aṣṭachāp* (“eight seals”) poets, concerning the voluminous sectarian literature of Kṛṣṇa songs (Miltner 1994).

One more contribution of Hindi studies in Prague is a comprehensive Hindi-Czech dictionary, prepared by the Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences in collaboration with the Indology department of the Charles University (Strnad, Marková, Kostić, Svobodová 1998). Actually, an extensive lexicographic work was done many years before it by Vincenc Pořízka. It was pursued very accurately, but unfortunately it was never published (Marek 1984).

At the Charles University Hindi has been taught continuously, without any interruption, from 1950. Then courses usually started at five-year intervals and only five or six students used to be enrolled.

Recently the study of Indology with Hindi, as well as other Indic languages, as subject fields, has been organised in accordance with the European educational system, as three-year B.A. plus two-year M.A. studies. Usually 20 to 25 students are enrolled and after 5 years about 7 to 10 students finish their study and receive an M.A.

Students who have graduated in Hindi philology work in diplomacy, in different governmental departments, in the media (newspapers, radio and TV), in non-governmental organisations and businesses which deal with India and neighbouring countries. Many of our students, having at least basic knowledge of colloquial language, co-operate with tourist agencies, which organise regular trips to India. Thus they have opportunities to visit India and to work as guides even during their studies, or when they have finished them.

The curriculum of Hindi includes, besides the language courses (from basic grammatical courses to advanced conversation), Hindi literature, historical grammar, history of India, linguistic, literature and history seminars, reading and translation prose and poetry, Hinduism, modern history and society of India etc. This is the basis of philological study in its traditional sense.

University students of Hindi, as well as of other Indic languages, start to learn the language from the very beginning – first the Devanāgarī script, pronunciation, basic words, reading and simple conversational phrases. It is really not easy to learn during of couple of semesters, each semester lasting 12–13 weeks, to speak, to write, and even to deal with Hindi literature. Of course, the achievement of language skills depends on the individual student, on his dedication and diligence, and needs many hours of home-study. The faculty provides only three lectures per week, each lasting 90 minutes. This quota of hours also includes two hours of conversation with a native Hindi-speaking lecturer.

We pay special attention to the study of phraseology, esp. to the verbs and their semantics, which facilitates good orientation in the literature texts. We consider translations of original literature texts directly from Hindi (e.g. into Czech) to be the best

link between the source and the target language and culture. The introduction of Hindi abroad should be carried out through presenting original literature. For this reason we choose to use prose texts and special attention is given to short stories from the 20th century, where Premchand has the prime position. To the M.A. students we provide reading and translation lectures from Old Hindi literature dialects (Braj, Rajasthani and Avadhi).

The modern approach to the language studies brings more liberal and less academic approaches and enables student to learn a language more spontaneously, through contacts with native speakers and during language training courses in India. Our students have facilities to spend one year, i.e. two semesters, at the Hindi Sansthan in Agra. We recommend this course after the grammatical course here, i.e. only after the second or the third year. Our students have also facilities to spend one or more semesters at a European university, according to EU exchange programmes.

As for other kinds of co-operation with India and with Indian universities, some 15 years ago we involved a guest professor of Hindi for the period of one year. After that we have engaged in the teaching process a native Hindi speaker living in Prague, who is a philologist by background.

In accordance with our agreement concerning cultural exchange, we are going to engage again through the ICCR programme an Indian guest professor, who besides Hindi could give lectures on Indian culture, modern Hindi literature and similar topics.

As for modern multimedia and other tools, which can be used during the teaching process, we use them occasionally in classes, and we recommend listening and watching at home, and distribute copies of audio and video materials (audio lessons, Hindi films etc.).

To conclude our short exposition on teaching Hindi, I would like to emphasise that we are aware that Hindi is one of the most widespread Indian languages, one which, as a real “grand-daughter” of Sanskrit, has dignity and an opportunity to serve as medium of cultural exchange, mainly through the literary works translated into Czech.

On the other hand, Hindi is the most widespread language in the second nation of the world, and naturally it deserves to be popularised abroad, outside India, and even to become one of the official languages of the United Nations.

In spite of the fact that it is declared a national language by the Constitution of India, and in spite of the positive language politics of modern India in relation to the home language, and in spite of tremendous efforts of many institutions which promote the wider use of Hindi, it cannot replace the role which English plays more than 60 years after the colonial period.

Our experience, as well as the experience of students who visited India and spent almost one year there, is that along with globalisation Hindi is becoming more and more influenced by English, especially its colloquial style. Moreover in many cases, and in many fields, English predominates over Hindi. However, Hindi is a standardised language and it has also standardised vocabularies for different styles, even scientific vocabularies. Its technical terminologies are established on the basis of Sanskrit or *tatsama layer* of the lexicon. So it is to be expected that the role of Hindi in communication will develop further.

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