
Introduction

Czech Indian Studies - retrospect & prospect

In Bohemia, the study of Indian languages, which in Europe has a tradition of more than two hundred years, gradually grew from a purely philological specialisation (Sanskrit) as a part of comparative Indo-European studies into a broadly conceived specialisation oriented on culture, history, cultural history, literature and linguistics. Though the knowledge of tradition, of the sources of modern culture, modern religions and literatures continues to be an integral part of Indological studies and research, our Indology, in the same way as Indology abroad, gradually turns its attention more and more to the present.

This change in the contents and methods of Czech Indology was especially brought about by Professor Vincenc Lesný (1882-1953) and his contemporary Professor Otakar Pertold (1884-1965), who in the first half of the 20th century prepared the ground for the rise of modern Czech Indology. It was thanks to them that after World War II, their pupils were able to develop the study of modern Indian languages (Hindi, Bengali and also Dravidian languages, particularly Tamil), and of modern literatures, religions and history.

Paradoxically, the period of the so-called normalisation after 1968, brought the teaching of all Indian languages with the exception of Hindi to a halt. Two eminent representatives of Czech Indian Studies, Kamil V. Zvelebil and Ivo Fišer, left the country, and other scholars and teachers, Dušan Zbavitel, Vladimír Miltner a Hana Preinhaelterová were prevented to work in their respective fields. This caused a significant break in educating new generations of Indologists at least for twenty years. It seemed that the normalisation regime did not wish to develop professional studies of languages and cultures of a subcontinent, whose population was nearing one billion.

After 1989, there was a significant change.

It was possible that in spite of a radical reduction of the number of posts in the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences, some former workers could return to the Institute.

At Charles University the Institute of Indian Studies was re-established. In the last decade the Institute has been offering also Romani and Indonesian, besides Indian languages. Thanks to the new conditions it was possible to resume the older traditions. The University strives to create good conditions so that our Indology can develop in the international context and that our students may combine their purely philological studies with the studies of modern humanities.