

Introduction

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This volume of *Asian Studies* is dedicated to India: it comprises a variety of contributions integrated under a broad title *The Indian Subcontinent: Between Tradition and Modernity*, reflecting the continuity, unfolding over millennia, of rich cultural expressions, ever-changing yet linking the past and the present, central and marginal, ancient and modern. This is the second volume of the *Asian and African Studies* journal (since 2013 renamed *Asian Studies*) focused on Indian Studies; the other was volume 14 (2010) marking the 150th anniversary of the birth of Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). Now three years further on, this volume reflects the continuation of the great interest in and focus on Indian Studies in Slovene academia, with new scholars, national and international, emerging, and new endeavours currently underway to introduce Indian Studies at the university level. Initially the plan was only to include articles by Slovenian contributors; however, the many links with scholars worldwide resulted in a collection of articles by international authors, attesting to the transnational character of Indian Studies and acknowledging that the great cultural contributions of the Indian Subcontinent belong to our common human heritage.

The content of the volume largely reflects the two main traditional foci of Indology, i.e. on the one hand, interest in ancient Indian literary sources, particularly ancient Indian philosophies and religions, and on the other, contributions on modern Indian literature, mainly from the turn of the 20th century onwards, though still drawing from and linking to the rich past heritage. To reflect this reality the present volume is divided in two: the first part contains articles on ancient Indian religious traditions and the second focuses on modern Indian literature and art which have to be read through many lenses, to uncover the

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multifaceted, ambiguous and often contradictory images of Indian societies of the past and present.

The first three contributions engage with ancient Indian texts, mainly from before our era, starting with contributions on Jainism, one of the ancient religions of India which has been relatively little researched. The theme of the first paper is the exploration of integrative ontology as presented in the works of two great Jain philosophers, Kundakunda and Umāsvāti, who largely systematized Jain doctrine. Ana Bajželj presents in her paper the Jain model of reality which opposes the ontologies of absolute identity and that of absolute difference and clearly explicates the intermediary synthesis of the two, drawing from the works of the two philosophers. A large part of the article discusses the concepts of substance, attributes and modes and gradually delineates their interrelations, drawing particularly from Kundakunda’s position on the mutual interdependence between substance and the plurality of attributes and how these relate to the specific modes. The article then proceeds to examine the relationship between substance and existence in the context of permanence and change: it delineates the views of both Kundakunda and Umāsvāti who maintain that change occurs with persistence or permanency. Bajželj clearly explicates the Jain ontological model through coordinating permanence and change, and identity and difference.

Jainism is also the topic of the second article which makes a valuable contribution to the study of Jain exegetical literature. Royce Wiles provides, for the first time, a systematic overview of works written in Sanskrit by the major Śvetāmbara Jain canonical commentators, between the 8th and the 13th centuries. The article lists all known published editions and provides an excellent reference point on the available commentarial literature which is an essential exegetical tool for any scholarly research of Jain canonical texts. The systematic overview of the existing commentarial works includes full bibliographical referencing and descriptive information on the works of four major Śvetāmbara Jain commentators. This information is not locatable anywhere else. Wiles comments on the chronological relationship between the commentators and on the process of “canonization” and transmission of exegetical Jain literature, providing a fundamental reference point for future research in the—so far little explored—area of Jain sources in Sanskrit.

The article by Tamara Ditrich focuses on the oldest recorded text on yoga, the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali, exploring the meanings of the concept of *smṛti* (usually rendered into English as “memory”). Ditrich suggests a new reading of *smṛti*:

drawing from the semantic spectrum of the term as represented in early Buddhism, she investigates whether the word may be read instead as “mindfulness.” This interpretation of *smṛti* indicates that mindfulness may have been a component of ancient yogic practices, perhaps lost at some stage in the yogic transmissions of India, to be reintroduced recently by the highly syncretistic trends in the globalised spiritual movements of the 21st century. The article discusses how classical yoga and Buddhism—two closely related yet different ancient Indian traditions—have developed in different directions yet have been recently interlinked in new ways. Both traditions have undergone a radical transformation in the last few decades since being introduced into new milieux and given new meanings and functions in the “West.” Through the multivalent meanings, interpretations and applications of the concept of mindfulness, from ancient India to the 21st century, the article explores the process and the interplay between tradition and change, between continuity, diversification and integration.

The last three contributions focus on modern India, linking the past with the present, reflecting the fluidity and diversity of tradition and change, unfolding over millennia. Ramona Ceciu aims to delineate some representations of the Indian “woman” across two modes of artistic expression, visual and literary, exploring how these reflect what she calls “cultural architectonics” that ascribe particular attributes, roles and identities to women. In her analysis of the dialogue between the work of art and the reader as well as between the artist and the author, she largely employs Bakhtin’s notions of “unfinalizable selves” and “answerability.” She is looking primarily at paintings, mostly by the contemporary Bengali painter Bikash Bhattacharjee, whose portrayals of women are the main focus of the article. In her exploration of the constructions of identities and meanings involving author, recipient and circumstances, Ceciu also draws from other genres, particularly literature and film to delineate how synchronic and diachronic processes lie at the intersections between traditional and modern perceptions of woman. The article explores constructs of women in public and in private, in the roles of goddess, mother and saint, in the dichotomy between traditional and modern images, based on the paintings of Bikash and others, on traditional and modern literature and film, and lastly, on the portrayals of womanhood, emerging in Indian virtual communities. It clearly exemplifies Bakhtin’s proposition to read-view visual or literary work “through the prism of interactions/intersections between the concepts of self, art and answerability.”

Literary and, to lesser extent, visual genres are also touched upon by Alok Bhalla who looks at the works of Rabindranath Tagore, revealing several lenses through which that author viewed and responded to humanity. Unlike the common perceptions of Tagore as poet and singer, praising the poetic beauty of the earth, and as the great archetypal mystic saint of Bengal revered so much by his followers, the article explores Tagore's darker side, his desolate and hopeless moments when he struggled as a human being facing the unspeakable ignorance and suffering of wars and the other atrocities committed by humanity in the 20th century. Tagore's despair is exemplified in many poems, such as "A Weary Pilgrim," which express his hopelessness and anguish. On the other hand, Tagore never gives up his seeking for comfort and inspiration in the beauty of nature and in the ancient wisdom of Indian sacred texts such as the *Upaniṣads*. Apart from Tagore's literary works, Bhalla identifies the reflections of his dark vision in his paintings, especially in his late self-portraits which are "blotted by dark shadows," revealing his dejection and despondency. Bhalla suggests reading Tagore "as a part of a new visionary programme of hope in times of great despair," a visionary who struggles to conquer his pain and yet, unlike many of his contemporary writers, refuses to extinguish the flame of faith and hope.

Bengali cultural heritage is also touched upon in the last article of the volume which focuses on the Indian-born contemporary writer Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, currently living in the United States. Her writings are positioned in diverse cultures and times, drawing from ancient Indian myths and histories, merging and interplaying with contemporary life in South Asia, and the cultural hybridity in the lives of migrants in the United States. The author of the article Metka Zupančič seeks to uncover the ethics of wisdom and compassion in the novels of Divakaruni which she reads as a powerful tool for the transformation of humanity. As discussed in the article, Divakaruni's literary work, often characterized as magical realism, has strong hybrid features that can be labelled as postmodern and postcolonial, with magical and mystical components, reverberating in a continuous interaction and interdependence between the past and present, which is especially evident in her novel *The Palace of Illusions*, the story of the great Indian epic the *Mahābhārata*, retold from a woman's perspective, narrated by the female voice of Draupadi. Zupančič clearly points out that the great contribution of Divakaruni's writing lies not only in her original literary contributions of the highest standard but in her ability to reach beyond: in Divakaruni's novels, the interplay between different worlds, at all levels of human existence—past and present, mythical, "imaginary" or "real"—always reminds us of the human potential for spiritual

evolvment which is indispensably linked to ethical values, to love and compassion. The article by Zupančič thus concludes this volume dedicated to the Indian Subcontinent by providing an example *par excellence* of the diverse cultural Indian heritage which is continuously being transformed and reinterpreted, with ever-emerging new themes and voices, and is articulated through Divakaruni's writing within the contemporary transnational society of the 21st century.