

# A STUDY ON WESTERN LITERATURE AND INDIAN LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

India is a rich place for studying influence and intertextuality with its colonial history and modern post-colonial culture. India initially exercised a literary influence on the west through the birth of “orientalism,” a dynamic that was subsequently completely reversed by colonial involvement. Although certain Indians critics were too eager to acknowledge or reject Western influence, Indian authors’ discriminating reactions give more complicated examples of both influence and intertextuality as reception forms.

**Keywords:** Indian literature; colonial influence; post-colonial intertextuality; response and reception.

## INTRODUCTION

To the lighthouse of Virginia Woolf, Charles Tansley, a bright young philosopher, is gained by a friendly Mrs. Ramsay who writes a thesis on “anyone’s influence,” and as if this wasn’t awful enough, reminds her, later in the novels, of the theme “anyone’s impact on something.”<sup>1</sup> In *Small World*, another young research scientist, David Lodge, Persse McGarrigle, whose doctoral thesis focuses on Shakespeare’s influence on T.S. Eliot, plays a little trick in some crass academics when he told them that “it is about T.S. Eliot’s influence on Shakespeare,” and he keeps his smart game by argues that “then we cannot prevent Shakespeare from reading through T. S. Eliot’s lens.”<sup>2</sup> “Influence” is in both cases a gigantic joke, the boring, old thing that some young academics are still doing uncertainly, which can not only be called “influence” but also research or higher academic activity.

However, it would be imprudent and even false to believe that the “influences” (or “traditional” influences, as they are termed) that are discreet and outdated<sup>3</sup> have simply transformed themselves into “intertextuality.” It might well be “influence” at all but the “text” itself, as in the key dictum of Roland Barthes, “Every text is an intertext, “<sup>4</sup> or the author of the text, and his remaining “function,” (as in the Barthes-Foucault debate about the issue),<sup>[5]</sup> or, to put it more broadly, “ingrained notions o’ingrained notions of the subject, “including intertextuality, “<sup>4</sup> or “the dear” author and his residual “function” In modalities of cultural life that intertextuality stands for connectivity and interdependence.”<sup>[6]</sup> Thus, intertextuality declares and celebrates the instability of all communication and meaning as a plane or indeed an instrument of poststructuralism, destabilizing the (old) influence and all significance.

Is it therefore of no use to argue that in the 1960s both Saussure and Bakhtin “inspired” Julia Kristeva’s original (or at least original) formula of the notion of intertextuality? And does it improve problems to claim that her notion of intertextuality, as the discerning Kristeva reader noted, is „explicitly shaped,” or only makes it worse by Bakhtin’s notion of “dialogism?”<sup>[7]</sup> In addition, when Kristeva herself prefers “transposition,” what happens to intertextuality? “As she put it, intertextuality was frequently regarded as a commonplace meaning of “source research?”<sup>[8]</sup> Did intertextuality prove to be dangerously near to influence – in the sense of “study of sources,” even for her theorizing and christian godmother Kristeva? And are we back where we started?

It is not important. The reality remains that, over the last three or four decades, we have talked less and less about “impact” in literary studies and more and less about “intertextuality” over the last three or four decades, and that makes a clear enough empirical contrast. In this article I am proposing to examine the links between Western and Indian literature, especially on the basis of the evolving critical discourse produced on this issue

in India, and the first observation here may be that during the colonial period, it is mostly an “influence.” And it may be too self-reflexive to question whether it is due to the continued impact of western critical practices over critical Indian practice in this regard that this movement from “influence” to “intertextuality” or “hybridity” has itself occurred.

### **Precolonial influence: India and Western literature**

The first recorded transaction between Indian literature and Western literature, perhaps, was the translation into several modern European languages, including Czech, in 1528, and Italian into English, the Panchatantra, a collection of fables compiled about the five-century A.D. from Sanskrit through Middle Persian, Arabic, Greek, Hebrew and Latin. 9 Apparently, it remained a solitary case before Voltaire acknowledged the “Ezour-Vedam” (i.e., the Yajur-veda), until the second six months of the eighteenth century.

Sanskrit text scriptural “definitely preceding Alexander’s expedition” into India in 327 B.C., from which in 1760 he had seen a handwritten translation into French, with the Bagabadam (i.e. Bhagavatam) and selection of the Oupnekhat (i.e. The Upanishade), respectively, translated into English in 1780, Maridas Poulle and Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron in the 1780s.

Though at this time, the French may have gone a bit ahead of the British when it came to translating Sanskrit works, they quickly lost the advanced stage and the struggle for the European ruling authority in India. Driven by the British in Calcutta, Sir William Jones and Sir Charles Wilkins, a body of books were prolifically translated from the Sanskrit in the 1780s, causing tremendous acclaim throughout Europe as they were translated from their English into another European language. That, in Raymond Schwab’s opinion, was the initial influence of the freshly graduated works which only generated a “Eastern Renaissance” in Europe:

Such an argument can appear overly exaggerate in particular after a time, while the extensive penetration of newly discovered Indian literature in works of Coleridge and Shelley is shown in detail in studies such as John Drew’s *India and the Romantic Imagination* (1987) [12].

For his sake, Edward Said, in his preface to Schwab’s book in English: While Swab’s view of the East was “profound and benevolent” and “critical of a friendly cast,” he “helped [the] disorienting aspects of the European Eastern experience” and “methno-and anthropocentric” approaches, although he cannot be considered “the failed one” [13].

In fact, in 1950, he had already pointed to Schwab’s views of “orientalism” (and “maybe no one word is charged with feeling or even passion”) and Said’s views illustrate two approaches to the phenomenon that have been opposed. But although the differences of Schwab and Said are fundamentally different in whether this large collection of Indian translated literature had a good or destructive influence on the west, the influence is both huge and essential. In any event, with British military successes gaining increasingly important strength and reinforcing colonial power in India, their attention to oriental texts seemed to decline correspondingly; its enhanced power over India neither supported nor appeared to be dependent on any increased country knowledge. In fact, they took attempts to create Indians shortly afterwards.

Learn English, explore western literature in one of the most obvious cases of a direct use of power to shift the current and direction of the flow of knowledge [14].

In 1837, the Governor-General of Inde decided to start studying English and literature and Sanskrit literacy through English, after the consequent establishment by several colleges and three universities of India on British models in 1857. The time has passed for orientalism, and a mandate supplanted a form of Westernism. The discovery of the Sanskrit literature may or may not have led to the oriental renaissance in England, but the enhanced colonialization of English literature in India quickly led to the recognition of the Bengal Renewal or “Indian Renaissance” by certain traditional historians [15].

## Western impact

Although Sanskrit literature and the two closely related old languages, Prakrit and Pali, have flourished in India since approximately 1500 B.C. (in Dravidian since approximately 250 B.C. in the southern part of India-Tamil), the ancient and the modern Indian languages have constantly interacted with some of the Central Asian languages and cultures like Turkish, Arabic and Persian. Although the English language belonged to the Indo-European family at least theoretically, its grammar, culture, social customs, values and global perspective were all as dissimilar as possible. That alone would have been enough to produce a significant influence, but that English literature came to us as the literature of our masters is incalculably larger in impact. The impact of English literature on the Indian literati may be one of the greatest and deepest influences exerted by one literature on the other. Nevertheless, the impact of the British colonial rule on India remains very small part, if one could call it, of the great master narrative and is inextricably connected with it. Not just or principally, it was a literary and cultural influence, it was an overall hegemonic oppression. [16]

Many fascinating reports about this influence can be found in Indian autographs or in critical comparisons of what is said of Shakespeare and Kalidasa, the Sanskrit dramatist and poet who had already been praised as the “Shakespeare of India” by Sir William Jones in his preface to his translation of the first play, the *Abhi* (1789). The Bengali poet who won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Rabindranath Tagore, for example

In 1913, he remarked that the “Spirit of Europe” when he was a teenage girl “woke up and shocked him,” and the “impetuosity of [...] desire” in particular of a romantic poet like Byron “moved our veiled heart-bride in the corner isolation.” [17] (This erotic-mystical metaphor is profoundly traditional for the literary influence of the west on the east. It comes straight from India’s long line of devotional poetry, which Tagore was one of the last great practitioners, but the west was still felt and described in unreconstituted eastern terms as it had stirred and swept the influence of the west). A academic narrative written in English (and originally published by the Clarendon Press, in Oxford, in 1948, a year after India became independent) is far more prosaic in tone:

Their bulk was uniform, platitudinous, class-ridden, without any substance, versatility and virility [i.e., Bengali literature]. It gave it importance, diversity, intellectuality and modernity, in contact with English literature. It has become an adult and civilized awareness medium of fitness. It has grown more humanized than anything else. [...] The Bengali author does not need to dwell anymore in the obscurité and in the solitude of his native medievalism. [18]

The edition of the *Venice Preserv’d* by JC, who was one of the first Indians to receive the English version of D.Phil., Oxford and followed his edition of Thomas Otway’s *The Works: Plays, Poems and Love-Letters*, which has just recently been replaced, was authored by J.C. Ghosh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932). He remained with England, although he never got a proper academic job as a university professor of the English languages he seemed to be striving for throughout his whole life with his high skills; he was only capable of managing few peculiar jobs as a pharmacist (for instance assisting in revising the *Short Title Catalogue*). He remained a committed Anglophile, and a grant from the Rhodes Trust wrote his short history of Bengali literature, from which the following excerpt is derived.

The assessment of Ghosh on Bengali literature as not only modernizing but also civilizing shows that he has fully integrated a British colonial assertion that his authority is a civilization mission in India. However, Ghosh’s further claim that this influence has served the “humanization” of the Bengali literature is contradicting Ghosh’s own account of the Bengali beginning of the twelfth century. In contrast, Ghosh’s great epic, which he calls “the Bible of the Bengals” and which is written in the fifteenth century, is contradicted. 19 Yet Ghosh seems to have forgotten, dismissed and even extinguished this poetic tribute to what Bengali literary derives from Sanskrit literature, but 100 pages later in his brief novel for the eulogy of the Western influence of Bengali literature.



## Indian response

Indeed, not many Indian critics were able to take a long view of the longer constitutive and shaping influence of Sanskrit literature on modern Indian language literature as well as the newer, disruptive and transformational influence of western literature on an ongoing basis. Sisir Kumar Das, in his masterly History of Indian Literature, talks not only of the “west impact” but also of “Indian response,” often resistant and antagonistic, and of not only a sense of excitement in the new e-mail: he’s an equally balanced assessment as perhaps any critic has achieved until then.

The constant confrontation between indigenous and foreign principles, beliefs, and sensitivities makes this age distinctive in our literary history.

It was not a contract between two authors or two texts, it was an encounter between two civilizations. The literary encounter became tortuous and difficult in the west, in love and hate. [20]

Although Indian writers acquired some new lithographic genres and forms from Western literature, such as tragedy, the novel, and the essay, in Das they were still resistant to ‘stated ideals’ through such English works. The appeal for the new was “somewhat timid, cautious, and sometimes unimpetuous.” Even when the novelty of the west blinded them, the Indians, as in the case of the novel, didn’t “lost their linkages with Katha, Akhyan and Dastan” – the ancient storytelling forms present in Sanskrit and Perso-Arab literary. Likewise, “a new vision which cannot readily be reconciled with a global order governed by the idea of karma” was introduced, incompatible with the dependably restorative, harmonized, joyful ends of the Sanskrit theater,” and again required a tough balancing act. In fact, our meeting with the west directly resulted from our return to re-look at what we already had and re-evaluate their value and importance. “Never has the past been such a preoccupation, glorification and defence, criticism and introspection, in our literary history,” Das says. [21]

When the Indian author was presented with the alien novel, he went for *kathe* and *dastan* intuitively and was confronted with tragic events for his karma. A true measure of the profound impact of the Western world on India seems to have been the near-equal and opposite reaction that the Indian writer has brought back to his traditional sources.

Regulating Indian literary records at the point of the British’s entrance without a gap at any ‘medieval’ nor ‘dark’ ages in the uninterrupted continuum (if constantly updated). In India we had something traditional, substantial and no less rich of ourselves to receive the Western effects and to cover it, and even to filter it against, as opposed to some other parts of a colonized world, such as Africa and western Indians, and, to a different extent also the white-settler colonies. The Western impact on Indian literature was dialectical and dialogue, making it arguably as extensive and intricate an example of influences and reception anywhere in the global literature.

## The anxiety to be influenced

The Indian criticism of Western influence seems in this context nearly as fascinating as the influence itself, and contributes a paratextual (if not entirely metatextual) layer to the question. This discourse seems to be divided into two major categories: reviewers everywhere who find such influence and from other critics who are either unwilling to see or tend to play down that influence. But the common concern between the two groups is determining what they consider to be implicitly or overtly ‘good’ and allowing for power and distinguishing between bad or sterile influence.

Harold Bloom identified “the anxiety of influence” as a condition of universal sufficient in Western literature to provide a whole “theory of poetry” for him (the main purpose of preserving and protecting our own originality against the possible influence of “strong” previous figures, perceived by Edipally as father figures). [22]

On the other side in colonial India, some Western authors often viewed it as a mark of distinction in the early flush of Western influence, for example, Walter Scott, Byron, Shelley or anything else in Bengal as an appreciation phrase for a writer.

The influencing studies took place particularly at critical discussions of the novel, which was usually regarded to be a form that did not exist in India before the start of the Western influence. One of the most spectacular critical works in this field was the doctorate thesis created in the Indian Academy of Letters Bharat Bhushan Agrawal, somewhat late in his career, when he was already well-known as a Hindi poet and novelist. The 500-page, colourful, psychological treatise *Upanyas par Pashchatya Prabhav* (Western Impact on the Hindi Novel) looks for an account of literary influence like any other criticism made of Hindi. It so deserves to consider its merits and limitations.

Agrawal explores the influence of Westerners on a dozen modern Hindi novelists, whose leading Hindi novelist Premchand was born after his death in 1936. The own text of Agrawal may be in Hindi, however his footnotes are often in English, particularly in the early chapters of theory. He seeks to define the popular Hindi word “prabhav” for “influence”:

Naturally, every thought or sentiment is in one sense [an example of] an influence, because, by definition, each notion that originates or is born in mind cannot exist without the external world having some effect, but there is enough difference – even if it is a subtle sort – between them. There is so a significant degree of influence reaction. And may not necessarily be a favourable reaction, it may be a negative one. The second feature of influences is that it is not entirely but partially by its very nature. The third feature of influence is that it is not mandatory but facultative. It cannot be influenced if there is no reaction at all.

The fourth feature of influence is that it is not permanent or permanent in itself. It was born as a reaction; but then it is either erased in the sense that its sensitivity is freed from and returns to its original nature or it is assimilated in the feelings created by its own sensitivity and becomes part of the nature of a person. [23].

Even if you didn't understand the context, the explanation of the nature of influence would seem to be particularly contextual. It seems to be a palpably post-colonial strategy, however, to suggest that, even though Westerners emphasize either constantly or mitigated, that all reactions may be termed influence, that the influence is as often negative as positive, that it is not mandatory but facultative and that it sooner rather than later disappears into one's own nature

But Agrawal cannot treat all his chosen Hindi novelists as guilty virtual plagiarists till they have been proved innocent, seemingly a post-colonial solidity, as if this were the universally recognized approach to perform studies on influence. For example, in his role as a distinguished editor of journals and anthologies and as a cause of modernism in numerous other Hindustani writers, S. H. Vatsyayan Ajneya (1911–87), the first major modernist poet and novelist in Hindi, is particularly closely interrogated about his possible west sources, some of them openly and b The irony of this reflection on the nature of colonial influence is that while Ajneya's novel *Shekhar: Ek Jivani* (2 Vols, 1941, 1944), Pugh (1874-1930), who was a Fabian socialist and a prominent novelist at the Cockney Realist School, has been recognized as one of the greatest Hindi novels in the 20th century.

In other places, Agrawal seems to be an influential hunter as dogged and even as obtuse as you can imagine. A male person says to a female in an important Hindi novel by Jainendra Kumar, *Sunita* (1936):” ‘You lie, Sunita.’ Sunita. And lie down Sunita.” Agrawal argues that the language here with D. H. Lawrence is uncanny because “exactly the identical line takes place in Lawrence.” Here the passage Agrawal quotes from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in its correct but altered Hindi translation:

“You lie there,” he said softly, and he shut the door so that it was dark, quite dark. With a queer obedience, she lay down on the blanket. [24]

In Hindi novel, it does not appear to be important to Agrawal to say nothing about what is to happen at Lawrence, an act of sexual relations which is candid and direct and cannot conceivably occur at the works of a Gandhite moralist such as Jainendra Kumar. There is no obscurity and no queer obedience, no blanket, nor anything (India, as a hot country). It is perfectly enough for Agrawal to invite both women to lie down and do it; all women lying down are evidently “exactly the same” for him. This may appear to be the case not just for influence studies in general but especially for colonial influence studies, where the text of a colonial author is often sought as to be derived, even if it is only a female, from a western writer.

Jaidev, the professor of English at Shimla University and a critic of the work of his writer, entitled *The culture of pastiche: Existential esthetics in the contemporary Hindi novel* (1993), is widely comparable with Agrawal’s later critic and deals with the work of four subsequent Hindi novelists. Three of his four chosen novelists are described by Jaidev as “captivated by the high modernity of life and existentialism,” both Western literary movements that he claims are irrelevant and unresolving in India. By the term “pastiche,” Jaidev employs interchangeably “influence, imitation, adoption [and] intertextuality” he implies that “willing, almost thanklessly, these novelists let the influence of the [West] to become the prevailing code in their books.” And in the “conclusion,” he explains that his study “was not against the effect on the Hindi novelists by Western authors or movements. Their inappropriate privileges of this influence have been opposed only.”<sup>25</sup> He also cites other passages in parallel from these Hindi novelists and Western romanticists such as Camus and Beckett, and imputes the similarities between them. For instance, at one point the intruder asked Molloy in Beckett, ‘Are you not dead?’ whereas the visitor asked a Hindi hero Krishna Baldev Vaid, ‘Are you still alive?’

So, if there was a significant concern among certain early Indians fans for Western literature to be inspired in the nineteenth century, some Indian literary critics of a later era felt that the west still influenced post-colonial Indian writers. In the case of Agrawal, it could have been a delightful source chase.

Critical play, but it was probably more of an outcry and anguish for Jaidev to find out that although India had gained the Swaraj, or self-government politically by becoming independent, at least some strands of the “literary discourse” of India still had “no place for Gandhi nor for our culture” [27].

## Conclusion

In 1964 Harvard University Press issued a PhD in the *Tales of Henry James*, another novelist who was even more hardened and punished by the Help of Jaidev, Krishna Baldev Vaid (1926–), taught English literature at the University of Delhi College prior to attending the U.S. where he earned a doctorate from Harvard in 1961. He then taught English at the State University of New York at Potsdam for more than two decades before he returned to India. He also wrote translations of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgames Hindi*, of *Alice in Wonderland*, and of the first English book, *Days of Longing*, by *Days of Longing*, and his many books of his own fiction, including his much-applauded first novel, along with numerous Hindi novels, stories and his own plays published in the U.S.

One might argue that Verma and Vaid both know the west more than Rushdie knows India, which he left when he was only a 13-year-old youngster. Rushdie could not possibly translate his own book into Hindi/Urdu/Hindustani to save his life by all available evidence. If intertextuality is not primarily a matter of multilingual punishment and allusion-making in broadly the same culture (as James Joyce does), or a superficial and sensational depiction of the ‘other.’ It is the function of a deeper intermingling of two radically different cultures within the same sensitivity as individuals. As in the case of Salman Rushdie.



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