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The Periphery of the USSR: Indian Travellers' Perception of the Eastern Bloc and Non-Russian Soviet Republics in the Cold War Era¹

“Latvia is not in Russia, it is a republic which is a part of the Soviet Union”, an Indian travel writer informs his readers in the opening lines of a chapter on his trip to the Baltics (Gaṅgopādhyāy, 1985/2012, p. 83).² His book is entitled *Rāśiyā bhraman* [Travel to Russia], which adds up to the confusion of where he actually travelled. The explanation seems necessary: although many Indians visited the USSR, especially in the Cold War era, most did not go further than Moscow or Leningrad. In India, the term “Soviet Russia” was used interchangeably with “the USSR” and knowledge of other Soviet republics or countries in the Eastern bloc remained scant. However, there were also Indian travellers who, after visiting what they perceived as the heart

¹ The term “non-Russian Soviet republics”, which encompasses Soviet republics other than the Russian Soviet Republic, is used solely for the purpose of this article as the examined travel literature depicts these parts of the USSR in contrast with the Russian Soviet Republic. Travel literature on the Russian Soviet Republic is the subject of another article by the author: “Bengali Travel Writings on Soviet Russia in the Cold War Era” (Rokicka, 2020).

² Unless indicated otherwise, the quotations from works published in Bengali have been translated by Weronika Rokicka.

of the Soviet world, headed to other countries of Europe that at that time were part of the USSR or the Eastern bloc, i.e. Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, Poland or Bulgaria.

In colonial times, England became for the Indian elite the reference point to measure their country's level of modernity and advancement. However, as colonialism was falling, many had sought a new ideal to look up to, and some found it in Russia and the Soviet system, which became a new synonym of modernity. During the Cold War, Indo-Russian relations flourished, and several Indians toured the USSR and the Eastern bloc. The travelogues they produced offered an idealised image of economic and social progress in the region.

But away from the grandeur of Moscow's buildings and the splendour of Leningrad, in less travelled parts of the Eastern bloc and the USSR, Indians faced a different reality, sometimes less appealing and often simply distinct from the stereotypical image of the Soviet world. This article looks into Indian travelogues of the Cold War era written in the Bengali language to examine how the Soviet republics other than the Russian Soviet Republic, as well as the European countries of the Eastern bloc other than the USSR were depicted in these narratives, and how travel writers constructed their image as the periphery of the USSR. The term Eastern bloc is used in this article in a narrow sense and refers to a group of central and eastern European countries aligned with the USSR in 1945–1990.

It is worth noting that Indian authors of the Cold War era never used the term "Eastern bloc" but called the region "Eastern Europe", and when they travelled to Poland or Bulgaria they perceived it as "non-Russian Eastern Europe". They clearly divided "Eastern Europe" into two parts that formed a binary: Soviet Russia vs the rest of the USSR and the Eastern bloc. The perception was a bit more nuanced before World War II and the term "Middle Europe" was coined in Indian languages in the interwar period, nevertheless most of the countries of what later became the Eastern bloc were classified as "Eastern Europe" at the time.

International relations between India, the USSR and countries of the Eastern bloc

For centuries India had extremely limited contact with Central and Eastern Europe. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Indian merchants travelled from the Mughal Empire to Iran, the Caucasus and eventually to the southern Russian city of Astrakhan (Banerji, 2011, pp. 188–189). However, in the nineteenth century, amid the growing British influence in India, the land trading route ultimately lost its significance (Banerji, 2011, pp. 228–229).

During the colonial period, India had no official relations with Russia or other European states which would later become part of the USSR and the Eastern bloc

(Jayapalan, 2000, p. 152), and India's attitude towards the region was heavily influenced by the British establishment. Colonial elites disseminated a conspiracy theory about barbarous Russians, reportedly planning an invasion to overthrow the British government in India, which would bring anarchy and instability to South Asia (Yapp, 1987). The theory could gain popularity among the local population partially because the British controlled sources of information available to the Indian elite: very few Indians knew the Russian language or had direct contact with Russians, and as a result their knowledge was restricted to information provided in English books, journals and newspapers.

Inauguration of Indological studies in Russia in the late eighteenth century stimulated academic exchange, but for decades the transfer of knowledge continued to be predominantly one-sided, as Russian orientalists focused on learning Sanskrit and translation of ancient texts (Sahai-Achuthan, 1983, p. 324). Among the first Indians who learnt Russian was Nishikanta Chattopadhyay, an Indian lecturer in Sankt Petersburg in the second half of the nineteenth century. After his return, he wrote a book in the Bengali language on Russian literature (Gnatyuk-Danil'chuk, 1986, p. 195).

The Russian Revolution of 1917 marked an important turning point in the Indian perception of Russia. Some in the Indian independence movement, such as Manabendra Nath Roy, the founder of the Communist Party of India, believed that India should learn from the Russian case and that the collapse of the tsarist regime precluded the fall of the British Empire (Bhattacharya, 2017; Haithcox, 1971). Socio-economic reforms in communist Russia were perceived as an inspiration for India, struggling with its problems of illiteracy, poverty and low level of industrialisation. Among those who travelled to witness the change was Nobel Prize laureate Rabindranath Tagore, who, upon arrival in Moscow in 1930, wrote: "I am now in Russia; had I not come, my life's pilgrimage would have remained incomplete" (Tagore, 1931/1960, p. 10; trans. by Sasadhar Sinha).

In the interwar period, for many Indians Eastern Europe became synonymous with Russia. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe which would later become part of the USSR or the Eastern bloc attracted little attention from Indian travellers. Before World War II some went to Prague. It served as a transit stop for those who were on their way from Vienna to Berlin, so it was considered a periphery of Western Europe. The city got more prominence after Tagore visited it, first in 1921 and again in 1926, with an invitation from Czech Indology professor Vincenc Lesný, who translated his works into the Czech language (Hříbek, 2011, p. 51). During his second journey to the region, the poet also went to Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, but he did not write a travel account from the tour, unlike from his visit to Moscow. His *Rāśiyār cīṭhi* (*Letters from Russia*) played a major role in shaping the Indian image of the country and contributed to the increased interest in Russia, while the knowledge of other parts of the future Eastern bloc remained scant.

After World War II, India gained independence in 1947 and chose to follow the principle of non-alignment, distancing itself from the current bipolar world order. However, after the death of Stalin in 1953 Moscow started to make attempts to bring India into its sphere of influence (Mastny, 2010, p. 53; Mohanty, 2019, p. 196). The USSR wanted to present itself as an ally of Asian and African states, supporting their “crusade against imperialism and racialism” and promoting socialism as a way to eradicate poverty (Thakur & Thayer, 1992, pp. 3, 24). Since the mid-1950s, the cooperation between the two states flourished in various fields: the Soviet side exported machinery and equipment at favourable prices, provided India with know-how and development assistance, but also invested in strengthening cultural and academic ties (Engerman, 2018, p. 279; Thakur & Thayer, 1992, pp. 170–172). Indian artists received a warm welcome in the USSR and countries of the Eastern bloc. After Moscow allowed the release of Indian films across the region, many Bollywood productions became box-office hits (Rajagopalan, 2008, p. 3).

Among the initiatives that aimed at building a positive image of the USSR were field visits for journalists, artists, writers, or trade union activists from so-called Third World countries. Most of them came invited by Soviet organisations, such as the Union of Soviet Writers, often to participate in a congress or other grand event. Later they had time to explore the country, although all trips were organised and mainly involved visits to factories, kolkhozes, schools, universities, healthcare facilities and sometimes even to prisons (Rokicka, 2020).

The effort to build a positive image of the USSR in India achieved significant success: in an opinion poll conducted in 1980, 93% of Indian respondents named the USSR as the closest ally of their country in the world (Thakur & Thayer, 1992, p. 84). In a 1987 survey, the USSR was named the second best source of advanced technology after Japan (Thakur & Thayer, 1992, p. 199).

In the Cold War era, Indian intellectuals and politicians could easily perceive of the countries of the Eastern bloc as one political and cultural entity with the USSR, and especially with the Russian Soviet Republic at its centre, because in the international stage, the foreign policy of the Eastern bloc countries remained in line with that of the USSR. For example, in 1971 East Bengal gained independence from Pakistan with India’s support, and all Eastern bloc states recognised the newly independent Bangladesh soon after. On the other hand, trade cooperation and aid policies were generally pursued through bilateral agreements, and the degree of engagement varied from country to country, but some Eastern bloc states developed robust relations with India. The reason for closer ties was rather practical than political: these countries sought new markets for their products and with India they could trade in rupees, roubles or in barter (Mark & Feygin, 2020, pp. 46, 48).

The perception of Europe in Indian travel writing before and after World War II

Although early travelogues on Central and Eastern Europe emerged before World War II, for decades Indian travel writing was dominated by accounts of travels to England (Sen, 2005, p. 7). During the British rule in India travel began to be considered an important secular practice, a way to break free from the “traditional”, “unmodern” lifestyle (Sen, 2005, p. 4). Hundreds of young members of the Indian elite headed to London to see the heart of the Empire and learn how to “modernise” their homeland (Sen, 2005, p. 7).

At that time, several travelogues on Western Europe were written in many Indian languages: e.g. in Malayalam: K. P. Kesava Menon's *Bilāthi Viśeṣam* [News from England] (1916); in Punjabi: Lal Singh's *Merā Vilāiti Safar Nāmā* [My Travels in England] (1931); in Bengali: Annadashankar Ray's *Pathe Prabāse* [On the Road and in Exile] (1931); in Hindi: Rahul Sankrityayan's *Merī Āyrop Yātrā* [My Travel to Europe] (1935) (Das, 2006, pp. 251–253). Among frequent travellers to England was Rabindranath Tagore, who first visited London at the age of 17 along with his brother, and later published his *Āyrop pravāsir patra* (*Letters from a Sojourner in Europe*) (Bhattacharji, 2016, p. 130).

What is significant, most of these early Indian travelogues did not question the colonial system or the colonial discourse present in Western travel writing at the time. Furthermore, they themselves also served as a medium that strengthened the colonial narrative. Indian travel narratives on England or France focused on binaries: unmodern, undeveloped world peripheries (i.e. India) were contrasted with cultural, social and economic advancement of Western Europe, which formed the political centre of the world. The terms “modernity”, “modernisation”, “progress” served as the backbone of the Indian way of thinking about Europe but also the world as such. As Frederick Cooper writes, “modernity has been the model held up before colonized people: a marker of Europe's right to rule, something to which the colonized should aspire but could never quite deserve” (Cooper, 2005, p. 115).

With a growing interest in the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, the number of Indians going to Moscow increased. Although the region never attracted similar crowds of travellers as Western Europe, among visitors were such influential figures as Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore. The former published in 1928 his collection of articles and essays *Soviet Russia* – “a panegyric to the Soviet system” (Haithcox, 1971, p. 90). Two years later Tagore's *Rāśiyār cīṭhi*, written after a brief visit, praised the inclusiveness and accessibility of the Soviet public education. Some among the Indian intellectual elite started to perceive Russia and later USSR as the new centre of the world – the new mecca of modernity, but also a very special place where Indians could experience modernity free from the colonial subordination.

The pre-independence period saw few travel accounts on other countries of the future Eastern bloc. Annadashankar Ray's *Pathe Prabāse* and Ramnath Biswas's *Jārmanī ebañ Madhya Iurop* [Germany and Central Europe] contain chapters on the Czech Republic, but both authors considered the country a periphery of Western Europe or Central Europe, while the term Eastern Europe, used interchangeably with Eastern bloc after 1945, before World War II was synonymous with Russia. A similar perspective is offered in books by Hiranmoy Ghoshal, who worked as a teacher at the University of Warsaw. He left Poland after the war broke out, and upon reaching India he wrote in his native Bengali *Mahattar yuddher pratham adhyāy* [The First Chapter of the Great War] (1941) and *Kulturkamp* (1945), which are part memoirs of his escape from Warsaw, part essays on history and current affairs.

After 1947 the genre of travel literature gained tremendous popularity in India, and as Indo-Soviet relations flourished, the number of Indian travelogues from the USSR quickly grew (Bhattacharji, 2016, p. 135). In the Cold War era, Indian travelogues on the USSR focused on the socio-economic progress in the country. Travelers reported with great enthusiasm the achievements of the Soviet system, especially on the successful eradication of poverty and illiteracy, while passages typical of the genre, such as description of nature, tourist attractions, or interactions with local people (other than officially appointed guides) were rather sketchy. One reason for this peculiar characteristic of Indian travel writing on the USSR is that the majority of authors came on field visits that usually lasted between four and six weeks and were fully organised by Soviet associations that invited them (Rokicka, 2020).

While reporting on life in the USSR, the attention of Indian travel writers was almost entirely concentrated on Russia, particularly its two main cities, Moscow and Leningrad. Having that in mind, it is worth noting that during their journeys they usually visited also one or two non-Russian Soviet republics or a state of the Eastern bloc and included a couple of chapters on those regions in their travelogues. However, very few books had such places as their only subject. Among rare exceptions are Surajbhan Singh's *Kāle Sāgar kā gorā deś Romāniyā* [Romania: A beautiful country on the Black Sea coast] (1988) in Hindi and Mohanlal Gangopdhyay's *Punardarśanāy Ce* [Memories of Czechoslovakia] (1964) in Bengali.

Travel writing in Bengali on countries of the Eastern bloc and Soviet republics other than the Russian Soviet Republic in the Cold War era

Among Indian literatures, the Bengali literature has the richest collection of travelogues on the USSR and the Eastern bloc states in the Cold War era. Many Bengali-speaking Indians were particularly attracted to the USSR because of their political views: communist parties remained popular in the state of West Bengal.

Rabindranath Tagore's admiration of the country and the relatively long history of writing about travels in Russia in Bengali also played a role.

Although most travelogues' titles contain the word "Russia", in fact the majority cover also other Soviet republics in Europe and Central Asia as well as Eastern bloc states, even if the length of this part of the narrative is usually very limited. Five travelogues by four authors were selected for this article: Satyendranath Majumdar's *Āmār dekhā Rāśīyā* [Russia as I Saw It] (1952) includes chapters on Georgia; Jhanprakash Ghosh in his *Elām natun deśe* [I Went to New Countries] (1954) writes about Ukraine, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Armenia and Georgia; Dilip Malakar in *Mascoe theke Mādrid* [From Moscow to Madrid] (1965) and *Ājker Rāśīyā* [Russia of Today] (1972) describes Poland, Belarus, Estonia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria; and Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Rāśīyā bhraman* [Travel to Russia] (1985) covers Latvia and Ukraine. Majumdar and Malakar worked as journalists, Ghosh, a renowned musician, toured the USSR and Eastern bloc with his music group, and Gangopadhyay was one of the most popular Indian fiction writers of the twentieth century. It is worth noting that none of them spoke Russian and upon arrival they were greeted by English-speaking hosts who acted as interpreters.

Non-Russian Soviet republics and countries of the Eastern bloc striving for the ideal

In all travelogues the chapters on Soviet republics other than the Russian Soviet Republic and on countries of the Eastern bloc seem, at first glance, very similar to the rest of the narrative: they are dominated by reports of socio-economic progress and achievements. Gangopadhyay and Ghosh write from Ukraine:

In every Soviet country and in each and every city, a lot of apartment buildings are built up on the outskirts. They all look almost the same. The government's goal is to provide every family with a flat. It is an impressive project and a huge task. (Gangopādhyāy, 1985/2012, p. 86)

We went to visit a kindergarten. It provided care and education to 200 children. It had a playground and children aged 6–7 were running around in black shorts, bare chested. They were daughters and sons of factory workers, but most of them looked like royal children. (Ghoṣ, 1954, p. 60)

Malakar is impressed by Estonia's level of development:

Estonia may be a small country but is very developed industrially. It has shipyards, electronic factories, oil refinery, textile industry, paper manufacturing and many more industries. [...] Looking at the public transport in Tallinn, one might feel jealous. This city is so much smaller than Calcutta but has much more buses and trams. They are all so shiny. And no one travels hanging at the door. (Mālākār, 1972, p. 54)

However, as the travellers leave Russia for “other Eastern Europe” (which meant for them all European countries of the Eastern bloc, including these in Central Europe) the perspective shifts slightly but in a significant way. While in chapters on Russia, the Soviet state and society are frequently compared with Western Europe or the United States (to demonstrate the superiority of the former), accounts on Soviet republics other than the Russian Soviet Republic and on countries of the Eastern bloc regularly draw comparisons with Russia itself. Countries or republics are judged by the level of progress they have made since coming under Soviet influence. Their achievements are praised but attributed to close ties with Moscow:

The country is famous for its oil fields in Baku and it also has deposits of manganese, copper and iron. Since the beginning of the Soviet times, many large factories have been built in Tbilisi. (Majumdār, 1952, p. 115)

I could see that not only in Estonia but all over the USSR: in the last 10 years the situation of common people improved significantly. [...] The Soviet Union demonstrates how much progress a country can make if it is a socialist republic. However, it does not happen overnight. One must wait to see the results. (Mālākār, 1972, p. 59)

Bulgaria used to be in an even worse economic and social state than Russia before the revolution. However, in the last 15 years this country progressed a lot. Bulgaria followed the same path of economic development as Soviet Russia. (Mālākār, 1965, p. 25)

In some instances, this opinion appears in the narrative in the form of a quote that makes it sound more reliable, like in this exchange between Majumdār and a Georgian villager:

“You see what our house looks like today. Our ancestral land was just here. As a child, I used to lay here along with the cattle. Now our children go to school, sing in the local club, have colourful dresses to dance, my granddaughter studies agriculture science in a college in Tbilisi”, he was eager to discuss the poverty of the old days, poverty and current prosperity. (Majumdār, 1952, p. 135)

Such a Russia-centric view of the development of the countries of the Eastern bloc is particularly interesting in travel accounts from the Czech Republic as the country achieved industrial development long before coming under the influence of the USSR. Nevertheless, the focus remains on the positive changes brought by the country's association with Moscow:

The town was established by Bata. It comprises a factory and housing for workers. Later the factory was taken over by the state as Czechoslovakia became a socialist country. As a result, the factory and the town underwent intensive development. (Ghoṣ, 1954, p. 122)

But comparisons with Russia are also made to point out failures in the implementation of the Soviet model. Dilip Malakar is particularly critical of some Soviet

republics and states in the Eastern bloc, blaming them for their inability to achieve similar progress as Russia:

In Poland the government has not yet brought all land under collective farming. Many peasants work on their own land and their housing conditions have not improved. In Poland the situation of peasants in the countryside is not that good because even today the Church has immense influence – unlike in Russia. (Mālākār, 1972, p. 48)

Russia has more collective farms [than Belarus], and on the land brought under the collective farming system, the buildings are all made of bricks and cement. There are tractors, machines, vehicles, schools and clinics there. Furthermore the roads in Russia are better than in Belarus. (Mālākār, 1972, p. 49)

In other accounts, criticism is less direct and opinions less political, but the contrast between the constant admiration they express while in Russia and complaints about other Soviet republics and countries is striking:

[Armenia:] Although I really like Erevan, a couple of times it reminded me of my own country. [...] Here and there nature took over and an unpleasant smell was coming from the city canals. (Ghoṣ, 1954, p. 71)

[Poland:] Then we reached the Orbis Hotel. It was rather old. There were many rooms with no attached bathroom. It was freezing. And the food was foreign but somehow familiar – like the European dishes that are served in India. (Ghoṣ, 1954, p. 97)

[Ukraine:] When we reached Kiev, my mood turned sour. I did not like the hotel room – it was really small, dark, damp and the heating did not work properly. There was only one window and the view was not great: some factory yard with a pile of broken things. (Gaṅgopādhyāy, 1985/2012, p. 107)

Intentionally or not, the narratives build a consistent image of Soviet republics other than the Russian Soviet Republic and of countries of the Eastern bloc as a periphery, lacking in many ways and not as devoted to the Soviet ideals as Russia. One reason for that could be that the authors' sources of knowledge about "other Eastern Europe" were most probably exclusively Russian: in India they had access to Russian books (in English translation), and while visiting the Eastern bloc they first went to Russia, spoke to their Russian guides, journalists and writers, which must have influenced their views.

The USSR and the Eastern bloc as a political entity

Although the Indian authors focused mainly on differences in the level of socio-economic development of various Soviet republics and countries of the Eastern bloc, they also made attempts to explain to their audience cultural differences between

regions. They usually did this in a very brief and superficial manner. For example, Dilip Malakar informs his readers: “The Soviet Union is a diverse country. Fifteen republics of the Soviet Union are different in terms of the size of the territory and of the population, of language and culture” (Mālākār, 1972, p. 53).

All authors provide some information on local folklore: Ghosh includes in his book lyrics of a Polish folk song, Malakar visits an open-air ethnographic museum, describes Estonian folk architecture and costumes. Those examples are supposed to illustrate the diversity of the Eastern bloc, which otherwise is presented in the narratives as a region that is politically and – to some extent – culturally unified. For example, Gangopadhyay writes about Latvian language and literature, but then adds: “Naturally, their ties with Russia are very strong as a famous local poet Janis Rainis said ‘Free Latvia in free Russia’” (Gaṅgopādhyāy, 1985/2012, p. 83).

Similarly, some information on historical differences is included in the narratives, but only to prove that nowadays those countries and republics are better off than in the past, as cooperation or unity with Russia provides them with a unique chance of prosperity and peace. Gangopadhyay informs his readers about Latvia’s history: “In the Middle Ages, Latvia was ruled by German feudal rulers. Repression and violence were terrible [...]. At that time, from the German perspective, the Latvian people were second-class citizens” (Gaṅgopādhyāy, 1985/2012, p. 83). In his view, these dark times ended when Latvia became part of the Soviet Union. A similar view is echoed in the travelogue of Dilip Malakar: “During the last thousand years, Estonia has experienced numerous disturbances. It was frequently attacked by its neighbours, Germany, Denmark and so on. On 21 July 1940, it joined the Soviet Union” (Mālākār, 1972, p. 53).

Conclusions

As demonstrated above, Indian travelogues on Soviet Russia written in the Bengali language over decades created a consistent discourse on the USSR as a country that overcame its imperial past, tainted by blood and suffering of the poor, and became the symbol of progress and modernity. It allowed authors to compare Indians’ experience of the struggle for prosperity and development of their country with the history of the USSR, and to draw inspiration from the Soviet example. Although travel writings on the USSR depicted different reality than earlier Indian travelogues on England, they presented a similar worldview: the dominant narrative was built on binaries modern/unmodern, developed/undeveloped, centre/periphery.

Those Indian authors who after visiting the Russian Republic of the USSR, travelled to other Soviet republics and to countries of the Eastern bloc rarely treated them as separate entities, and the narratives focused on comparisons between them and

the Russian Soviet Republic, the epitome of modernity. In the process they became “other Eastern Europe”, often criticised for its lack of progress and advancement.

Indian travellers could have difficulties in understanding the roots of differences between the Soviet republics and countries of the Eastern bloc, and many were aware of their lack of knowledge about the diversity of the region. At the same time most of them probably did not realise to what extent their perception was influenced by their official guides and Russian intellectuals they met in Moscow at the beginning of their visits. Nevertheless, they decided to include chapters on Soviet republics other than the Russian Soviet Republic and on countries of the Eastern bloc in their travel accounts. In these narratives not only India but also “other Eastern Europe” were presented as the world’s peripheries.

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Abstract

This article examines the perception of countries of the Eastern bloc and Soviet republics other than the Russian Soviet Republic in Indian travelogues of the Cold War era written in the Bengali language. Although most Indian travellers who came to the European countries of the Eastern bloc and the USSR at that period only visited the main cities of the Russian Soviet Republic, some ventured into lesser known territories, e.g. Estonia, Poland, or Ukraine, and in their travel accounts included one or two chapters on those regions. The distinctive feature of their travelogues is the strong focus on various aspects of social and economic life, from the education system, through workers' rights, to public housing, and on the progress Eastern bloc countries made since coming under Soviet influence. The article argues that Indian travellers created the image of Eastern bloc countries and Soviet republics other than

the Russian Soviet Republic as a periphery of Soviet Russia by constantly comparing the two, presenting Russia as the heart of the Soviet world and focusing on problems other parts of the USSR and the Eastern bloc still faced despite of what they perceived as Moscow's assistance.

Keywords: India; Soviet Union; Eastern bloc; Indian travel literature; Bengali travel literature

Peryferie ZSSR: postrzeganie przez indyjskich podróżników krajów bloku wschodniego i nierosyjskich republik radzieckich w czasie zimnej wojny

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje obraz republik radzieckich – innych niż Rosyjska Republika Radziecka – i krajów bloku wschodniego w indyjskiej literaturze podróżniczej w języku bengalskim czasów zimnej wojny. Mimo że większość podróżujących z Indii do ZSSR i bloku wschodniego odwiedzała jedynie główne miasta Rosyjskiej Republiki Radzieckiej, niektórzy odwiedzali również mniej znane regiony, na przykład Estonię, Polskę lub Ukrainę, a potem zamieszczali opisy tych miejsc w swoich relacjach z podróży. Szczególną cechą tych relacji było skupienie się na różnych aspektach sytuacji społeczno-ekonomicznej: od systemu edukacji, przez prawa pracownicze po budownictwo publiczne, jak też na postępie, który miał dokonać się w różnych regionach bloku wschodniego po wejściu krajów w radziecką strefę wpływów. Artykuł pokazuje, jak indyjscy podróżnicy tworzyli obraz krajów bloku wschodniego i republik radzieckich innych niż rosyjska jako peryferii Rosji Radzieckiej poprzez ciągłe ich porównywanie oraz skupianie się na nierozwiązanych problemach – mimo zauważania domniemanego wsparcia Moskwy dla krajów bloku wschodniego i republik radzieckich innych niż rosyjska.

Słowa kluczowe: Indie; ZSSR; blok wschodni; indyjska literatura podróżnicza; bengalska literatura podróżnicza

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