



**COST Action 23144 Europe's Representations of India: Texts, Images, and Encounters (ESIND) 1<sup>st</sup> Training School, Technical University of Liberec, Czech Republic, July 2025**

**Introductory workshop: The Comparative Study of European Representations of India**

Martin Fárek and Jakob De Roover

In the introductory workshop, we will explore our shared task of gaining insight into different peoples' experiences in the comparative study of European accounts of India. What does this cognitive task entail and how could we go about pursuing its realization? As a first step, it is necessary to closely examine dominant views and accounts of European origin. When we do so, some striking problems come to the surface, such as (a) internal contradictions that remain unresolved, and oftentimes are hardly even noticed, and (b) the reproduction of clichés that are endlessly repeated as factual statements and normative judgements, without giving rise to insights into Indian people, culture, and society. Together with the trainees, we will analyse some illustrations of important problems faced by European accounts of India to then raise questions about the roots of these problems. We propose that, as researchers, we need to develop a focus on the impact of culturally shaped experiences and consider how assumptions, questions, clichés, internal conflicts, and other issues inherited from European culture have often shaped our facts, accounts, and debates concerning India and its culture and society. We will focus specifically on the analysis of European conceptions of religion and cognate ideas, but also mention the experiences of different Europeans with horrific effects of the British rule in India.

Associated Prof. Dr. Martin Fárek  
Technical University of Liberec, Czech Republic

Prof. Dr. Jakob De Roover  
Ghent University, Belgium

**Translation as a vehicle for cross-cultural (mis)understanding**

Róbert Gáfrik and Ana Jelnikar

The importance of translation in transmitting knowledge and ideas across languages and societies cannot be overstated. Ideally, translators should be able to accurately navigate the complexities of different languages and cultures, conveying the underlying values and beliefs of the source text within the framework of a legible target language. This helps bridge gaps in understanding and break down stereotypes. Our understanding of the source culture—particularly when it differs greatly from our own—informs our translation. In turn, how we translate informs our understanding. When Europeans first began translating Indian texts during the colonial period, from the 16th century onwards—especially in fields they conceived of as religion and philosophy—they inadvertently brought their own theological concepts and assumptions to bear on their translations, despite efforts at cross-cultural understanding and collaboration with local pundits. Many of these translated texts have since acquired iconic status, not just among Europeans, but also among many Indians. Gandhi, for example, first read the Bhagavad Gita in Edwin Arnold's 1885 English translation while studying law in England, rather than in Sanskrit or Gujarati. He consistently referred to this "spiritual dictionary" as shaping his beliefs and actions. Conversely, William Carey's 1809 translation of the Bible into Bengali arguably helped lay the foundations of modern

literary Bengali, influencing even the non-Christian lexicon and discourse, and subtly shaping literary giants such as Rabindranath Tagore. In short, translation stood at the very fulcrum of both modern European and Indian self-identity.

Focusing on European representations of India, the two workshop sessions will critically explore the role of translation in transmitting ideas about India. We will do so by examining the English translations of the Upanishads and Tagore's Nobel Prize-winning collection *Gitanjali* (1912). We will consider both works not merely as translated texts, but also as 'cultural events' that spawned countless other translations into European languages and influenced many individuals. First, we will familiarise ourselves with some basic tenets of translation theory to understand the difficult choices translators must make when transferring content from one language to another. Then, we will contextualise the two works within the broader cultural backgrounds and colonial relationships between India and Britain, before critically engaging with selected passages and poems—examining lexical choices, punctuation, syntax, and more. Finally, workshop attendees will present translations of the same passages in their own languages and critically discuss them. The aim of this hands-on workshop is to conclude with a comparative analysis of the different translations, in order to gain a deeper understanding of translation practice and its complex role in cross-cultural understanding or misunderstanding.

Associated Prof. Dr. Róbert Gáfrik  
Slovak Academy of Sciences  
Slovakia

Dr. Ana Jelnikar  
Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts  
Slovenia

### **Body, Power, and Representation: Discursive Imaginaries between Literature and Religion in South Asia**

Marianna Ferrara and Antonia Navarro-Tejero

This workshop explores the body as a site of control, transformation, and resistance within both religious and literary discourses of the South Asian context. Through an interdisciplinary dialogue between historical-religious studies and South Asian literatures, the first part examines how the categories of "sacrifice" and "magic" have been mobilized in European colonial discourse to construct religious otherness and assert cultural dominance. The second part focuses on the representation of the female body in contemporary South Asian literature, highlighting dynamics of biopolitics, violence, and agency. In conclusion, the workshop offers a critical reflection on colonizing tropes, aiming to rethink the intersections of power, religion, and representation through a decolonized lens.

Prof. Dr. Marianna Ferrara  
Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Prof. Dr. Antonia Navarro-Tejero  
University of Cordoba, Spain

### **Concept mapping**

Jakob De Roover

A major challenge in reading and analysing texts is to identify the conceptual schemes that have structured their authors' thinking and writing. How can a researcher move from the linear sequences of sentences that form a text to isolating the basic ideas or concepts, the semantic relations between them, and the underlying presuppositions, all of which are present or implied in the text? This challenge is of particular importance in the comparative study of European sources on India from various historical eras, which are written in different languages and historical idioms. To assess

whether the authors of such sources draw on a shared reservoir of ideas and intuitions, we need to be able to identify the structured clusters of concepts and assumptions in their texts, despite the various languages and idioms they have used.

In the past decades, developments in cognitive psychology and information technology allowed for the creation of techniques and tools that allow researchers to analyse texts more systematically in terms of concepts and their interrelations. In this workshop, we will focus on one such technique – concept mapping – and a closely associated tool – idea-processing software. Concept maps are best described as “graphical tools for organizing and representing knowledge,” which “include concepts, usually enclosed in circles or boxes of some type, and relationships between concepts indicated by a connecting line linking two concepts,” which have linking words or phrases that “specify the relationship between the two concepts” (Novak and Cañas 2008, p. 1).

As an introduction to the concept-mapping technique, we will analyze a brief text (“Interlude: Relativism” by Bernard Williams) and create a concept map that represents its core ideas. We will then explore a shareware concept mapping tool called CmapTools, developed by the Florida Institute for Human & Machine Cognition, and use it to concept-map some quotations from historical European texts concerning India.

As a preparation for the workshop, the participants are asked (a) to read the technical report *The Theory Underlying Concept Maps and How to Construct and Use Them* by Joseph D. Novak and Alberto J. Cañas of the IHMC and (b) to download CmapTools and install it on their laptops or tablets via this website: <https://cmap.ihmc.us/>.

Prof. Dr. Jakob De Roover  
Ghent University, Belgium

### **Travel narrative analysis**

Anita Stasulane

The trainees will be engaged in narrative analysis and what it means to understand experience told by travellers. Narratives can be collected from journals, letters, conversations, autobiographies or other sources and then used in narrative research. As a type of qualitative data analysis, the narrative inquiry focuses on interpreting the core narratives from travellers’ personal stories that allow to understand how the individuals experienced India. The narrative analysis allows for a gathering of data on how the travellers expressed themselves, what language they used when describing an event or feeling, and the thoughts and motivations they experienced. A narrative analysis also considers how the travellers constructed their story. Travel narrative is a topical story, i.e. a restricted story about one specific moment in time which provides context around this specific moment in the traveller’s life. The narrative analysis is the appropriate method to analyse the travel stories because they are single or multi-faceted experiences in time. Narrative analysis differs from other qualitative analysis methods in that it attempts to keep the individual narratives intact. It explores an entire story to understand the travellers’ personal story.

Prof. Dr. Anita Stasulane  
Daugavpils University, Latvia

## **Personal research system and data collection of India-related writing in Europe**

Martin Fárek and Zsuzsanna Varga

In the era of sophisticated network tools and flood of informations, there is a growing awareness that we as researchers face several challenges concerning our ability to concentrate, and our abilities to systematically tackle the growing body of easily accessible knowledge. According to recent analyses, the current trends in academia actively decrease our ability to focus on deep, long-term research. At the same time, we have access to both older and new approaches which can give us working answers to the following questions: a) How to stay focused in our research? b) How to take notes and develop our ideas effectively? c) How to organize all the ideas and resources we use in a long-term research? M. Fárek will deal with these questions in the first part of the workshop, providing a selection of the best practices that lead to the desired solutions of these problems, if consciously and systematically applied. The aim of this part of the workshop is to discuss development of a personal research system which would connect well with the systems of other participants in ESIND, and help us to combine our strengths in finding about and analyzing European representations of India.

Z. Varga will focus on data collection for the bibliography of European writing about India. The bibliography will compile bibliographical data about travel writing addressing India and also creative fiction about Indian experiences. Poetry can also represent an important addition to the collection. The session will focus on the methods of data gathering and the use of bibliographical resources drawing on national libraries, relevant databases and other projects. Participants will be asked to provide preliminary information in advance, and will be able to present their resources during the session.

Associated Prof. Dr. Martin Fárek  
Technical University of Liberec, Czech Republic

Dr. Zsuzsanna Varga,  
University of Glasgow, United Kingdom