Narrative Strategies
for India in Transition

Narratio Aliena?

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Editors' Preface:
Narrative Strategies for India in Transition: The Long Nineteenth Century

Anna Kollatz/Tilmann Kulke

As early as 1992, Martin Kreiswirth[1] recognized that a 'narrative turn' had occurred in the humanities and social sciences:

> ... there has recently been a virtual explosion of interest in narrative and in theorizing about narrative; and it has been detonated from a remarkable diversity of sites both within and without the walls of the academia.[2]

However, most of the analyses of India's cultural history still miss this turning point. Although leading Indian historians have recently called for an examination of the rich arsenal of texts reporting on premodern India in terms of their normative and deeper meaning, this call has so far remained largely unanswered.[3] Hence, the overwhelming majority of texts on India before the twentieth century are still analysed without a fixed methodology, and their testimonies are reproduced almost verbatim. This is particularly the case with regard to India's period of transition in the long nineteenth century, which is most often characterized as a time of utter decline, shaped by self-imposed Hindu and Muslim political mismanagement and cultural stagnation.

With a focused and consistent narratological analysis, we seek to explore the question of what multi-faceted narrative strategies our traveling authors

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[1] Kindt, Tom. 2009. 'Narratological Expansionism and Its Discontents'. In: Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer (eds), *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 35–47, 40.

[2] Kreiswirth, Martin. 1992. 'Trusting the Tale. The Narrativist Turn in the Human Sciences', *New Literary History* 23, 629–657.

[3] Alam, Muzaffar and Sanjay Subrahmanyan. 2012. 'Introduction: The Old and the New in Mughal Historiography'. In: Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyan (eds), *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1–32, 22.

used to describe India in a time of transition.[4] We will show that contemporary observers did not perceive India solely through the lens of decline. Although they do indeed report the downfall of state institutions, such as the Mughal Empire, and the resulting social insecurity and poverty, our authors are equally, and often much more, impressed by wide-ranging economic and structural progress, social security, freedom of opinion, and multifaceted social mobility. With this volume, we propose to apply, for the first time, a narratological approach to the exploration of narrative sources on India in this fascinating and controversial period. We do not understand narrativity as a purely literary art form, but as a phenomenon closely interconnected with the reality of life and thus with history. Rather, we consider narration to be a cultural pattern of understanding which, in its individual forms, belongs to every human society and which is central to practically every expression of human cultural action. Furthermore, narratology as a discipline dedicated to the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation also offers an approach that is not restricted to the study of texts as literary objects of art: "Narratology applies to virtually every cultural object".[5]

Following Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, who recently declared a 'belated cultural turn' in studies on the Mughal Empire, we propose to develop this cultural turn into a '*narrative turn*' in relation to India's history during a transitional period.[6] We therefore focus on a broad range of narrative sources mirroring the manifold ways people on the move perceived the subcontinent between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time in which the history of the subcontinent, like other transitional areas of the world such as Japan, Europe, or the United States, was characterized by various social, political, and cultural departures and upheavals.

Our wide-ranging textual material includes different and fascinating perspectives on India, perspectives that allow to study narrative approaches to India from different spatial and cultural starting points, while all texts have one thing in common: they are shaped by the experience of mobility. All

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[4]   Agai, Bekim and Stephan Conermann (eds). 2017. *'Wenn einer eine Reise tut, hat er was zu erzählen'. Präfiguration – Konfiguration – Refiguration in muslimischen Reiseberichten.* Berlin: EB-Verlag.

[5]   Bal, Mieke. 1999. 'Close Reading Today: From Narratology to Cultural Analysis'. In: Walter Grünzweig and Andreas Solbach (eds), *Grenzüberschreitungen. Narratologie im Kontext = Transcending boundaries: narratology in context*, 19–40. Tübingen: Narr Francke.

[6]   Bachmann-Medick, Doris. 2007. *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften.* Reinbek: Rowohlt Enzyklopädie.

of our sources clearly indicate the great extent to which the perception of India in transition was determined by their writers' individual regions of origin. Finally, in all of these narratives, India appears as a transitional region among many others worldwide, torn between stagnation and the departure to 'modernity'. Within this period, we argue, the travel accounts produced were far more complex, thoughtful, sophisticated, and artfully arranged than has been acknowledged by literary, cultural, and historical studies so far. No less than this, we seek to show that multifaceted reporting on the 'other' (or, more precisely, India) did not depend solely on the age and experience of colonial knowledge production and European dominance over the subcontinent. Rather, it started earlier and was generated by various players from multiple perspectives, by different narrators in diverse genres. By no means did the paradigm of decline dominate the narratives of India. Instead, our volume will dissect multiple pictures and emotions connected to India, using a focused transcultural narratological approach.

The present volume is organized according to two main principles. First, we aim to dissect images of India in transition from multiple perspectives. Second, we seek to introduce narratology into the field of Indian cultural history as an innovative methodological tool that allows us to delve through the words of a text to its worlds and to generate our findings within a consistent theoretical and methodological framework and to compare them transculturally. To achieve our goals, we will include six case studies, each analysing a thrilling and somewhat exceptional encounter with India during the long nineteenth century. The articles are framed by an introduction to theory and method by Stephan Conermann and Anna Kollatz, an introductory prelude to the historical context by Michael Mann, and a final conclusion discussing transcultural comparative findings by Tilmann Kulke and Anna Kollatz. The overall questions are: Did India evoke similar or completely different opinions, emotions, and ideas in our writers on the move? Did they change during their stay in India? Which narrative strategies did they chose to communicate their individual views on India? To answer these larger questions, we will follow a common approach, which means that the case studies will proceed according to common key questions as described below. This consistent approach will use the benefits of narratology for the study of our period and will allow us to compare our findings in transcultural terms. Our study thereby seeks to facilitate future comparisons within Indian cultural and historical studies through the unique joint theoretical design and methodological procedures we have applied.

Historical and social contextualization of the author and the source

When it comes to the analysis of narratives, several basic factors have to be considered. Among them, the historical and social contexts of the writers shaped perceptions of their environments and their decision to write about certain matters, places, or events. The individual backgrounds of the writers thus also shape their views on India and have to be explored.

Genre

The body of sources on which our case studies draw is a fairly wide one, including travelogues, ego-documents, and even novels. Their common ground is their relationship with the mobility experienced by the authors. We aim to read our source material sensitively, with clear regard for each genre's characteristics and the impact of the genre chosen by the author on the narrative's intended message. In doing so, we are able to show that all texts considered in this volume contain highly individual narratives guided by personal views, normative convictions, and emotions. Therefore, we argue, it is not possible to provide answers to notorious questions about the 'perception of the foreign' and the 'development of modern individuality' without thorough study of the texts' narrative strategies, which give us insight into their guiding (hidden) agendas. Against this backdrop, our main goal is to describe narrative strategies and their potential for creating meaning and to analyse texts as partial fabrics of culture-specific narrative networks.

Narrative analysis

As already stated, it is of prime importance for us to read our sources in relation to their emic contexts. To avoid involuntary interpretations from our modern outsider's perspective, it is crucial to not only prepare translations, but also to explore the historical semantics and specialties of the different texts in connection to their contexts; focused and careful historical-critical translation of relevant excerpts from the sources are therefore the bias of each of the articles. To make our findings comparable, we not only approach the

sources with a common method, but also utilize four main analytic lenses in each case study.

Setting analysis

The first lens to be regarded is the setting, India. Which parts of India does the text describe? Is the plot set in urban or rural contexts? Does the author reflect notions of mobility or immobility? Do they directly compare their Indian surroundings to their homelands and, if so, which narrative strategies do they apply?

Character/Figure analysis

To explore our authors' perceptions of India in transition, it is also crucial to analyse their ways of presenting and characterising the Indian people, as well as other travellers. How do the authors describe the religions and different characters they encounter? How does the mode of travel affect their descriptions? Do we find particular traces of curiosity in the writer's narrative regarding India's multifarious alterities?

Analysis of the emotions evoked by and described in the text

Through a focused analysis of textual atmosphere and emotions, we come to a better understanding of the author's individual narrative strategies. By leaving the analysis of factual description aside, we seek to analyse which emotions the authors sought to evoke in their intended recipients. What are the main emotions our authors apply to India in the period of transition: fearful or confident, positive or negative, sad or happy, optimistic or pessimistic? Why, when, and in connection to which places, characters, etc. do they evoke these emotions?

Analysis of intended recipients

For most of our sources, it is very difficult to identify their real recipients, whether readers, viewers, or listeners. However, thanks to particular methodological approaches such as analysis of the recipient (*Rezipientenanalyse*), it is nonetheless possible to gain a better understanding of the potential intended audience our authors had in mind. A narrative directed towards a possible patron in India, for instance, would be composed along different lines than a narrative intended to inform people in the author's homeland, such as Tibet, Europe, or Iran. It is also vital to ask what emotions related to the Indian setting the author wanted to evoke in his or her intended recipients. Which nar-

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