



South-south crossings: the reception of Paz, Neruda, and García Márquez in India

Cruces Sur-Sur. La recepción de Paz, Neruda y García Márquez en India

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Resumen

Los mundos post-coloniales de América Latina y de India, incluso a pesar de sus diferencias, comparten puntos históricos, sociológicos, políticos y culturales en común, los cuales parecen haber creado condiciones favorables para el intercambio y la recepción literaria intercultural. Pablo Neruda ha sido considerado en la India como un sensible poeta del amor y, al mismo tiempo, un marxista políticamente comprometido, casi reverenciado por los literatos de izquierda de todo el subcontinente. Su obra *Veinte poemas de amor* ha sido traducida a muchos idiomas locales y ha sido interpretada, cantada y recitada a lo largo del país junto con poemas de la última etapa de Neruda. En el mundo literario hindi es sin duda el poeta más famoso del mundo de habla hispana. El autor colombiano Gabriel García Márquez también ha dejado una profunda impresión, especialmente en el cine y en la literatura malayalam. El premio Nobel mexicano Octavio Paz, que fue embajador de su país en la India durante casi seis años, estableció un intercambio artístico con muchos poetas y artistas hindis. Con el objetivo de contribuir con la investigación actual en este campo, el presente artículo

ofrece un panorama de los ámbitos y agentes no académicos que han facilitado la recepción de los escritos latinoamericanos en la India.

Palabras clave: relaciones indo-hispánicas; Sur global; conexiones Sur-Sur; estudios de recepción, Literatura Comparada.

Abstract

The postcolonial worlds of Latin America and India, sitting far away from each other, share many historical, sociological, political, and cultural commonalities, which seems to have created favourable conditions for intercultural literary reception and exchange. Pablo Neruda is generally held in India as a sensitive poet of love and, at the same time, a politically committed Marxist, almost revered by left-wing literati in the entire subcontinent. His work *Veinte poemas de amor* has been translated into many local languages, and it has been performed, sang, and recited throughout the country along with poems of Neruda's later phase. In the Hindi literary world, he is undoubtedly the most famous poet from the Spanish speaking world. Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez has left a deep impression as well, especially on Malayalam cinema and literature. Mexican Nobel laureate Octavio Paz, who was his country's ambassador in India for almost six years, established an artistic exchange with many Hindi poets and artists. The present article seeks to contribute to current research in this field by offering an overview of the non-academic spheres and agents that have facilitated the reception of Latin American writings in India.

Keywords: Indo-Hispanic relations; global South; South-South connections; reception studies; Latin American Literature; Comparative Literature.

If not for India, the New World or the Americas, as it is called today, would have a different history altogether. As things turned out, through Columbus, India is equivocally but permanently linked with the Americas and, especially, with Latin America. This is perhaps the reason why the two societies, sitting at two extremes of the planet, share a peculiar but warm affection for each other. More importantly, historical similarities such as the colonial experience, social inequality, globalisation, developmental challenges, and political and social problems bring these two different worlds

together. In this context, it is interesting to note that almost all Nobel prize authors from Latin America have a special connection with India. Octavio Paz tops the list with his more than half a decade long residence in India (Dhingra, 2004: 161-168). He is followed by Pablo Neruda, who visited the country four times and who includes many references to India and Rabindranath Tagore in his writings. Gabriel García Márquez shared a friendship with the Late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and would have revisited the country if she had not been killed in 1984. Gabriela Mistral had a passion for India and corresponded frequently with her Indian friends, including her Latin American friends who lived in India. Miguel Ángel Asturias was recognised at the Modern Indian Language Department of Delhi University and delivered a lecture on the occasion (Bose, 2015). Jorge Luis Borges grappled with Bengal tigers and Buddhism, and Rubén Darío coloured his imagery with many Indian themes. Meanwhile, on the other end, India has been paying back the due by earnestly receiving Latin American literature.

Indeed, India and Latin America, though sitting afar, have become part of the ever-increasing area of studies known as “South-South Relationships”. Susanne Klengel and Alexandra Ortiz Wallner, in their pioneering study on the subject, underline that these relationships are not limited to the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), but rather extend to a multitude of other combinations, as evidenced by the transnational movement of goods, capital, people, and imageries in diverse directions throughout the Global South (2016: 7). In addition to institutional and academic collaborations, substantial programs of South-South cooperation have been pushed forward by the cultural wings of governments as well, such as the Indian Council of Cultural

Relations (ICCR) in the case of India.¹ The ICCR not only sends Indian scholars to Latin American countries and the countries of the Global South but also invites scholars from these regions. Most of the work done by such scholars have bolstered the slow but steady work for South-South cooperation. The inception of the Centre for Contemporary Indian and Asian Studies and Services (CESICAM) at the Universidad Externado de Colombia, the first Latin American centre dedicated to the study of India in Latin America, attests to a growing multi-centric developmental mode of Globalisation that has fuelled the ongoing South-South cooperation:

CESICAM is the first Latin American centre dedicated to Studies and Services for a systematic analysis of modern India and to the strengthening of the relationship between Colombia and the South Asian country. It functions at the Facultad de Finanzas, Gobierno y Relaciones Internacionales of the Universidad Externado de Colombia, with the support of CIPE, the Centre for Research and Special Projects, which is comprised of 60 researchers from different branches of the Social Sciences.²

¹ The ICCR seeks to establish lines of cultural and literary collaboration with the outside world, especially in the fields of Indology and the promotion of Classical Indian Studies. It has established sixty-nine chairs of Indian studies in different parts of the Global South. While it communicates with the North, too, it has many programs focused entirely on the Global South, such as the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC), which includes Latin American countries.

² “CESICAM es el primer centro de estudios y servicios en América Latina, dedicado al análisis sistemático de La India moderna y al fortalecimiento de las relaciones de Colombia con los países del Sur de Asia. Opera en la Facultad de Finanzas, Gobierno y Relaciones Internacionales de la Universidad Externado de Colombia, con el apoyo del CIPE, el Centro de Investigaciones y Proyectos Especiales que agrupa a más de 60 investigadores en diferentes áreas de las ciencias sociales.” For more details visit their website, <https://cesicam.uexternado.edu.co/en/quienes-somos-2/>

This Project has also produced a pioneer work titled “India-Latin America: An Alliance for the Future” (2013), which perhaps will help connect scattered works on the topic. These inter-state collaborations, which focus on economic and political cooperation, also open an avenue for cooperation in cultural, spiritual, and intellectual spheres. However, it seems that there has been a lack of systemic and encompassing research and compilation of writings produced in these fields.³

As a starting point for this much needed labour, in this essay, I have tried to look at the non-academic spheres and agents that have also contributed to creating an avenue for the reception of Latin American writings in India.

1. A Poetic Bridge Between Latin America and India

As an ICCR lecturer at the Facultad de Educación y Humanidades of Universidad de Desarrollo, in Chile, the historian, archaeologist and epigraphist Sachidanand Sahai remarked that many of the poets he had studied back in India had a strong connection with Neruda and were especially interested in his characteristic use of free verses and time alterations. The scholar underlined that, in turn, Neruda had managed to transcend the fixity of the present, past, and future in order to incorporate the concepts of rebirth, multiple

³ Klengel and Ortiz Wallner have underlined that “in the recent critical historiography of Globalisation, [the] *histoires croisées* or ‘entangled histories’ of the ‘South’ have been seen as an increasingly relevant field of research”. They note, however, that the majority of studies in this area “rarely focus on exchanges with a cultural, spiritual and intellectual perspective” (2016: 7).

lives, and reincarnations, which are essential features of Indian poetry and philosophy.⁴

Fernando Roa, the Head of Humanities at the Universidad de Desarrollo, who conducted the talk with Sahai, helped establish the bridge by crediting Neruda for his sensibility to get the best of Indian poetry. It has even been argued that Neruda was born as a poet in India, because there is clearly a before and after his sojourn, particularly in relation to his engagement with the Indian concepts of reincarnation, karma, and cyclic time (Anon, 2011). In this regard, however, it is important to note that Neruda refuted any kind of influence, even when discussing his *Residencia en la tierra*, which he wrote during his eastern sojourn (Neruda, 1978: 85). His Marxist commitment seems to have dominated his experience in the East, and thus, he must have found it difficult to consent to the influence of esoteric and mystic comfort zones. Additionally, he did not enjoy his diplomatic stature among the British ruling class, as he explains in his candid memoir:

All the esoteric philosophy of the Oriental countries, when confronted with real life, turned out to be a by-product of the anxiety, neurosis, confusion, and opportunism of the West; that is, of the crisis in the guiding principles of capitalism. In the India of those years, there was little room for deep contemplation of one's navel. An existence that made brutal physical demands, a colonial position based on the most cold-blooded degradation, thousands dying every day of cholera, smallpox, fever, and hunger, a feudal society thrown into chaos by India's immense population and

⁴ The event was organised by the Indian Embassy with the collaboration of Armando Roa, Director of Humanities, and Pradeep Kapur, the Indian Ambassador to Chile.

industrial poverty stamped such great ferocity on life that all semblance of mysticism disappeared. (Neruda, 1978: 83-84)

Yet, in spite of Neruda's political critique of Indian philosophy, his writings still reveal an engagement with some of its concepts at a poetic level. Such is the case in *Veinte poemas de amor* (1924). Neruda, a reader of Tagore's poetry, acknowledged in the Afterword to the 5th edition of this work that he had paraphrased Tagore's poem "Tumi Sandhyara Meghamala", translated into Spanish as "Tú eres la nube del crepúsculo que flota en el cielo de mis sueños" by Zenobia Camprubí and Juan Ramón Jiménez. Indeed, his poem 16 is titled "En mi cielo al crepúsculo eres como una nube". This became a scandal in 1934, when the young Chilean poet Volodia Teitelboim, also a communist, criticised this choice in an anonymous article published in the journal *Pro*, which was edited by Neruda's rival Vicente Huidobro (Wilson, 2008: 72). At a more substantial level, the point can be made that the work of Neruda is deeply connected with Indian sensibilities in the sense of resistance to the harsh reality that he had encountered in the East. He called this phase the most painful period of his poetry, and he was able to see the broad and profound reality of India:

And this is the golden age of world poetry. While the new songs are hunted down, a million men sleep by the roadside, on the outskirts of Bombay, night after night. They sleep. They are born and they die. There is no housing, no bread, no medicines. Civilized, proud England left her colonial empire like this. She parted from her former subjects without leaving them schools, or industries, or housing, or hospitals, only prisons and mountains of empty whiskey bottles. (Neruda, 1978: 79)

Perhaps the similarity in the social realities of Latin America and India made it easy for him to understand the darker side of this part of the global South. The shared challenges of a post-colonial experience—the dependency on the Global economy headed by the USA, a legacy of cultural hybridity, socio-economic inequality, weak democracy, and political corruption, the destruction of natural resources, the helplessness of the common citizen, and the apathy of the ruling class perhaps—create parallels among these two worlds.

It is also important to highlight that due to Neruda's ideological commitment and poetic refinement, his powerful poetry of love and protest was well received by artists in India. For instance, renowned Hindi Poet Ashok Vajpai sees Neruda's poetry as a combination of passion and revolutionary impulse enriched by a profound sensibility, a combination that was popular in Indian poetry. He has rightly mentioned that Neruda had influenced the poets of the 1960s and 1970s in India (Ahluwalia, 2004). One should not be surprised to learn that the interest of some Hindi authors in Spanish poetry began with Neruda, and that his first poems were translated into Hindi by influential Hindi poets, such as Dharamavir Bharti, Kedarnath Singh, and Kunwar Narain. The latter even went on to produce multiple versions of *Puedo escribir los versos* in Hindi (Narain, 2017: 275). Subsequently, Neruda would become known throughout the length of the country thanks to readily available translations into English and, later, into a plethora of Indian languages. Hindi poet Kedarnath Agarwal began translating Neruda in 1950 and published four of his translations in a collection of foreign poetry translated into Hindi. His admiration for the Chilean poet grew further and he ended up translating twenty-four poems. He has published them along with his translations of Ezra Pound, Pushkin,

Whitman, and Mayakovski (Agarwal, 2010: 5). On his part, as suggested earlier, Neruda seems to have been disappointed with his Indian experience. He does not have collections of poems focused on Oriental themes. This does not mean, however, that he did not engage with his Indian experience. His sojourn led to materialistic questions, rather than the spiritual answers that the East supposedly offers. In this sense, Neruda appears to be a precursor of less romanticised views of the East and its perceived exoticism.

As Edward Said would underline in his magnum opus, “the Orient was almost a European invention” (1994: 1). And we must not forget that the relation between Latin America and the Orient was form in a large part during the colonial era. The voyages of the “Galeón de Manila” (1565-1815), a colonial-era commercial connection that was discontinued after the independence of Mexico, left a deep imprint on the Spanish American culture, especially in Mexico. Beatriz de Alba-Koch, in her paper titled “La Grandeza mexicana y los aportes asiáticos a la Nueva España: lujo, ‘mestizaje cultural’ y espiritualidad,” which she presented at the first *Congreso Ibero-asiático de Hispanistas Siglo de Oro e Hispanismo general* (New Delhi, 9-12 November, 2010), discusses the impact of the colonial era encounter. In this context, she cites Gustavo Curiel’s idea of *triple mestizaje*, which highlights the importance of Asian influence on the Mexican cultural realm. She highlights the spiritual aspect, which she considers to be the least studied:

Another aspect in need of more study is the Asian contribution to Novohispanic spirituality. The evangelical efforts of the Jesuits and the Franciscans in those lands was a model for the Christianisation in the northern area of the

vicerealty, and, in a New Spain that was willing to gain sanctity, the martyrdom of one of its children in Japan, San Felipe de Jesús, not only gave impetus to spirituality but also nourished the Creole patriotism.⁵

Alba-Koch analyses this connection through the study of the baroque-style poetic work *Grandeza Mexicana* (1604), by Bernardo de Balbuena, who described the role of the Orient in the making of the magnificent capital city of Mexico. Likewise, Timothy J. Reiss, following the postulations of Roberto González Echevarría and Mariano Picón Salas, traces the global connection through Balbuena's baroque verses:

Silver from Peru, and from Chile gold
comes to lodge here and from Ternate
fine clove and cinnamon from Tidore.
From Cambrai fabrics, from Kinsai contraband,
from Sicily coral, from Syria nard,
from Arabia incense, and from Ormuz garnet;
diamonds from India, and from valiant
Scythia fine rubies and emeralds,
from Goa ivory, from Siam dark ebony.⁶
(Reiss, 2002: 428)

⁵ "Otro aspecto que ha sido poco estudiado es la aportación de Asia a la espiritualidad novohispana. La labor evangelizadora de jesuitas y franciscanos en aquellas tierras fue modelo de cristianización para el norte del virreinato y, en una Nueva España deseosa de santidad, el martirio de uno de sus hijos en Japón, San Felipe de Jesús, no sólo impulsó la espiritualidad, sino que nutrió el patriotismo criollo" (Alba-Koch, 2011: 17-32).

⁶ "La plata del Pirú, de Chile el oro/ Viene a parar aquí y de Ternate/ Clavo fino y canela de Tidoro./ De Cambray telas, de Quinsay rescate./ De Sicilia coral, de Siria nardo./ De Arabia incienso, y de Ormuz granate;/ Diamantes de la India, y del gallardo/ Scita balajes y esmeraldas finas./ De Goa marfil, de Siam ébano pardo" (Balbuena, 1927: 77).

However, it is important to note that India was not as directly connected to the colonial Hispanic world as it was to the Philippines. It was not until much later that a Mexican poet arrived in India through the port of Mumbai and went on to explore the cultural, philosophical, artistic, and literary treasures of India. This poet was Octavio Paz. The most durable and deeper interaction between India and Latin American was cemented by the poetic bond he established. Paz's ideological flexibility made it easier for him to adjust to the crude Indian reality that Neruda was incapable of negotiating. Koyamparambath Sachidanandan, an award-winning poet, translator, and academic who has written numerous works on Neruda and Paz, observes that the latter left an indelible impression on many Indian writers and artists. One may read the significance of India in Paz's life when he calls it the land of his "second birth" (1997: 22-23). He goes on to acknowledge his experience very explicitly in the description of his trip:

We also traveled a great deal in the south of India: Madras, Mahabalipuram, Madurai, Tanjore, Chidambaram. Many of these names appear in my poems from those years. And the leap, the leaps, to Ceylon, that is now called Sri Lanka. [...] I have mentioned these names as though they were talismans that, upon being rubbed, bring to life images, faces, landscapes, moments. And they are like certificates: a testimony that my education in India lasted for years and was not confined to books. Although it is far from complete and will remain forever rudimentary, it has marked me deeply. It has been a sentimental, artistic, and spiritual education. Its influence can be seen in my poems, my prose writings, and in my life itself (Paz, 1997: 23)

It was also in India where he met and married his second wife, Marie-José Tramini. During his tenure as the Ambassador of

Mexico in New Delhi, he immersed himself in the literary and cultural world of the capital and made friendship with great writers of that time, such as Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Ruth Jhabwala, Ramesh Thapar, Nirad C. Chaudhury, Agyeya, Srikant Verma, Sham Lal, Khushwant Singh, as well as with painters Krishen Khanna, Ram Kumar, K. Swaminathan, and Satish Gujral. All of them have praised Paz in their works, and his interaction with some of the most eminent Indian artists and writers of the time led to artistic and literary collaborations. For instance, as a result of his visit to the New Delhi *tertulia* at the house of his journalist and *litterateur* friend Sham Lal, during his visit to India in 1985, he wrote a collaborative poem titled 'Poem of Friendship' with renowned Hindi poets Agyeya and Srikant Varma. It was written following the Hindi and Urdu poetry tradition, with one beginning and three different endings. Written by all three of them, it was included in his essay collection *In Light of India*.⁷

POEM OF FRIENDSHIP

O. P. Friendship is a river and a ring.
 A. The river flows through the ring.
 The ring is an island in the river.
 S. V. The river says: before there was no river,
 after there is only a river.
 Before and after [...]
 O. P. We live between oblivion and memory:
 this moment
 is an island weathered by incessant time.
 (Paz, 1997: 31)

⁷ The experience was modelled after Paz's collaborative writing of the poem "Renga," which he wrote in Paris, in 1969, with Charles Tomlinson, Jacques Roubaud, and Edoardo Sanguineti.

Another collaboration worth mentioning is that with acclaimed painter K. Swaminathan. Swaminathan's son, K. Kalidas, mentions that his father persuaded Octavio Paz to write the catalogue essay for the 1963 exhibition of his artistic group *Group of 1890*, inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, whom Paz also befriended (Kalidas, 1998).

It is perhaps the network in which Octavio Paz moved around in India that led to the translation of his poetry into Hindi by Prayag Shukla and to its publication by the prestigious Sahitya Academy, the national academy of letters, in 1996. This version triggered many subsequent translations in other north Indian languages. His poetry, along with Neruda's work, influenced an array of important Hindi poets, including Shamsheer and Kedarnath Singh. Keki Daruwala and Prayag Shukla have also underlined Paz's friendship with Indian writers. Sahitya Academy winner K. Satchidanandan, who is considered to have been heavily influenced by Latin American poetry, and in particular by Paz and Neruda, opens his essay "Poetry Against Violence: A Prayer for Peace" with a mention of Octavio Paz, and he closes it by quoting the Mexican writer: "The poet is one whose very being becomes one with his (read 'her') words. Therefore, only the poet can make possible a new dialogue" (Satchidanandan, 2018). In this way, the essay establishes a poetic conversation with Indian readers through Paz's words.

Finally, another role that Paz played in his visits to India was that of a keen observer of society. He wrote, for instance, about the contrast between Buddhist and Brahmin culture, which he found to be in constant struggle, and he underlined that in India, many nationalisms live together, fighting one another but co-existing and forming their future course.

Furthermore, Bose Krishnamachari, a contemporary artist and curator, describes Paz's deep involvement in the 1968 Triennale-India held at the National Academy of Arts in New Delhi. Highlighting the complexity of Paz's interactions with Indian culture, Hispanist Minni Sawhney considers him to have gone far beyond the surface of reality in terms of social and cultural observation. She believes that this may have created a reason for discontent both among the radical left and the radical right:

I hear strident criticism in my own country about Octavio Paz's *In Light of India* from leftist intellectuals who decry his "Eurocentric" approach to Indian reality as well as his anti-Left stances during the second half of his life; equally strident criticism comes from those on the Right who object to his stray comments on nationalism and the caste system. (Sawhney 2004: 10)

Thus, taking the different elements that I have traced in this brief review of Paz's activity in India, we can propose that he has left a long and complex literary, cultural, and social legacy for scholars to explore.

2. García Márquez and India

Klengel and Ortiz Wallner have established that, with a few exceptions South-South interrelationships on a cultural level are mostly unacknowledged. Among the contributions they cite is the research carried out on the reception of magical realism in the Global South by Stephen Slemon (*Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse*, 1995) and Mariano Siskind (*The Genres of World Literature: The Case of Magical Realism*, 2012). It is also important to remember that the USA based Indian literary theorist Homi Bhabha long ago proclaimed that

magical realism is “the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world” (Bhabha, 1990: 6). Building upon Bhabha’s claim, it is possible to see an Indian wave of magical realism flourishing in the writings of Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Uday Prakash, Pankaj Bisht, Vinod Kumar Shukla, Manoj Das, O.V. Vijayan and a multitude of other authors. So even though magical realism is identified with Latin American literature, and especially with *Boom* authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, and Julio Cortázar, there are numerous writings in this genre that have been produced in Indian contexts, sometimes acknowledging the Latin American influence.

To mention an example, Salman Rushdie has certainly brought about the global recognition of Indian magical realism with his magnum opus *Midnight’s Children* (1981). In addition to the controversy he generated with his *Satanic Verses* and the multiple international awards he received, including the Booker Prize and the Man Booker, Rushdie set out what can be seen as an Indian continuation of the Latin American *Boom*.⁸ Priya Joshi, in her study on the Indian Postcolonial novels, observes the following:

What the 1980s inaugurated in Indian literature is a liberation from the cultural and linguistic anglicization that persisted among Macaulay’s Children well into the 1970s. The arrival of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in 1980

⁸ Instead, Roanne Kantor considers that the Indian *Boom*, which he sees as part of the extension of the Latin American Boom in the Global South, begins in 1993, with the successful publication Vikram Seth’s novel *A Suitable Boy*, and that it is further fuelled by the Booker prize awarded to *The God of Small Things* (1998), by Arundhati Roy. She also proposes that subsequently, *The White Tiger* (2008), by Aravind Adiga, created a ripple not only in India but in the entire English-speaking world (Kantor, 2017).

delivered an international attention and destiny to the Indian novel in English, and while its Western readers have made much of Rushdie's post- modern credentials and his affiliation with García Márquez and Günther Grass [. . .] his Indian readers and critics have noted [that] his confident claim of English as an Indian language, alongside his indigenization of the novel into an Indian form. (Joshi, 2002: 229)

In particular, García Márquez's influence on the Malayalam literary world is worth mentioning. He is among the top twenty-five novelists read in the Malayalam language, and this list includes native Malayalam writers. Almost all his works have been translated into Malayalam. He is considered a household name in Kerala, and he even appears in literary jokes, such as the claim that Márquez is the best-known Malayali writer in Latin America and the first Malayalam author who has won the Nobel Prize (Press Trust of India, 2014). Ravi Deecee, publisher at DC Books, affirms that "there could hardly be any other foreign writer who has been celebrated by *Malayalis* as [much as] García Márquez." The translation of *Cien años de soledad* has sold over 100,000 copies over the last three decades. Akbar Kakkattil, the vice president of Kerala Sahitya Akademi, considers García Márquez a felicitous writer who has achieved a unique place in Malayalam translation history (*Press Trust of India*, 2014). Indeed, in Kerala, García Márquez is not only received enthusiastically by the literati but also by the cinema world. Lijo Jose Pellisery, a Malayali director considered to be the first to have experimented with magical realism, in his movie *Amen* underlines the similarity between García Márquez's world and his own world:

An interesting feature of his works is that *Malayalis* can easily identify with many of their aspects, despite Colombia

being a hemisphere away. The sensibilities are the same, we too have innumerable legends and supernatural tales borne out of a wild imagination, strong beliefs, huge families and a culture of family values; perhaps it also has to do with the strong Christian culture and its rituals in our state. (Soman, 2014)

His statements echo the words of Rushdie in an obituary titled “His World was Mine,” published in *The Telegraph*:

When I first read García Márquez I had never been to any Central or South American country. Yet in his pages I found a reality I knew well from my own experience in India and Pakistan. In both places there was and is a conflict between the city and the village, and there are similarly profound gulfs between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, the great and the small... I knew García Márquez’s colonels and generals, or at least their Indian and Pakistani counterparts; his bishops were my mullahs; his market streets were my bazaars. His world was mine, translated into Spanish. (Rushdie, 2014)

As far as García Márquez’s more general reception in India is concerned, *Cien años de soledad* has been translated into almost all major languages in India, including Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Bangla, Marathi, and Gujarati. An annotated translation was made in 2001 at the Centre for Spanish at JNU. Titled *Versión anotada de cien años de soledad en Hindi: práctica y problemas de traducción literaria*, it was prepared by Maneesha Taneja as part of her doctoral project (Taneja, 2002). A translation by Sonya Surbhi Gupta, a senior Hispanist, came out in 2003 with the title *Ekant ke Sau Varsh*. However, it must be noted that, unlike the Malayalam translation, these versions did not sell much, and Indian

readers have mostly depended upon the English translation by Gregory Rabassa.

Hindi critic Vishwnath Tripathi considers that, in general, the writings of Latin American authors have been very well received in India and have inspired third world authors to tell stories without losing their ethnic identity and history (2016: 13). More specifically, Manohar Shyam Joshi, a celebrated Hindi author, in an interview with Prabhat Ranjan, acknowledges the importance of the postmodern approach of Jorge Luis Borges and the utility of the model he represents for literary creation. Joshi has read the translation of Borge's *Fictions*, and he believes it is not a coincidence that most of this author's writings are considered post-modern in the Hindi literary world (Ranjan, 2013: 82).

3. The Teaching of Latin American Literature in India

The Indian academy has played a significant role in dissemination of Latin American Literature in the country. In particular, the socialist inclination of university politics has contributed to its warm reception among the students. Due to its active role in the Non-Alignment Movement and global decolonial politics, India has always been involved with Latin America. Consequently, when Indian universities opened their departments of International studies, Comparative Literature, and Foreign Language, there was a significant interest in its literature and culture. Way back in 1983, R. Narayanan, a senior academic on Latin American studies, described the following situation:

Educated class[es] in India have long been accustomed to talk of the “common problems” of Asia, Africa, and Latin America [...]. It was only a decade ago that a modest effort

in this direction was begun in the School of International Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India. The program is now attracting somewhat greater interest from students, researchers, and agencies than was anticipated by the few enthusiasts who launched it ten years ago without any prospect of financial support from education authorities and funding agencies. In keeping with the evolving intellectual interest in Latin America, social studies curricula of middle and higher-level schools have begun to highlight the vast economic potential of the South American countries. At the undergraduate level, some universities have included courses on the histories and political dynamics of some major South American countries as part of their syllabi in social sciences. Development strategies and problems of economic development of the leading South American countries figure increasingly in classroom discussion that attempt to analyse on a comparative basis the developmental problems of the Third World countries.

(Narayanan 1983: 179-184)

Departments dedicated to the study of Spanish language, literature, and culture at Universities such as Jawahar Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University, English and Foreign Languages University, and Jamia Milia Islamia have played a crucial role in the dissemination of Latin American literature in India. Minni Sawhney, professor of Hispanic studies at Delhi University, recalls her time as a student at JNU:

Our literature class bibliography consisted in the main of the *Boom* generation authors: García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar, and Mario Vargas Llosa, as well as the obligatory and unclassifiable Jorge Luis Borges and Juan Rulfo. As can be imagined, we read the politics of the times into their stories. We generally didn't pay much attention to

literary history with its emphasis on the continuities between one generation of writers and another. Instead, the texts magically echoed to us what was happening on the Indian street.

(Sawhney 2014: 9)

Similarly, the Comparative Literature departments at Jadavpur University, Vishwa Bharti, Delhi University, and English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) have contributed to the diffusion of Latin American literature. In particular, the latter made South-South relations the focus of its Comparative Literature and India Studies Department, set up in 2009. Among its main “responsibilities,” the department seeks to “examine the literatures of the global south and develop an alternative to the western models of comparative literary studies,” as well as to “develop a tri-continental comparative literary model comprising literatures from South Asia, Africa and Latin America due to an innovative paradigm shift.”⁹

These objectives follow the line of the first Comparative Literature department in India, established at Jadavpur University in 1956, which placed emphasis on Latin American, African, and Australian literatures to remediate their neglect at the major departments of Indian universities: “In the last years of the seventies, along with Indian literatures, Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* became a part of the syllabus with a few other texts from Latin American Literatures and then Literatures from African countries were included” (Dasgupta, 2016a: 13). The program’s courses titled “Literatures of Latin America I & II” encompassed pre-Colombian text, such as the *Popol Vuh*, as well as Brazilian

⁹ https://www.efluniversity.ac.in/india_studies.php.

literary works. Due to the central role that Latin American literature has occupied since then, its study is much more developed than other foreign literature departments.

Another example of the importance of Latin America authors in the university curriculum can be found in The School of Open Learning at the Delhi University, whose English BA program includes the study of four poems by Pablo Neruda in English translation.¹⁰ The book in which these poems are included, *Living Literatures: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry*, published by Orient Blackswan in 2007, is also required by the University Grant Commission, the central regulatory body for credit-based undergraduate courses. It also includes works by Gabriel García Márquez, Mahashweta Devi, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. These inclusions are representative of the fact that English departments in India teach more courses on Latin American literature than the Spanish and the Comparative Literature departments together. Almost all major universities in India teach Latin American literature as part of post-colonial literature modules. In addition to Delhi University, this is the case at institutions such as Goa University, University of Kashmir, Diamond Harbour Women University, Ambedkar University, BHU, Central University of Haryana, JNU New Delhi, AMU Aligarh, JMI New Delhi, EFLU, and Assam University. For instance, at Diamond Harbour Women’s University, the MA English program offers the option of studying “Latin American Literature in English Translation” in lieu of the study of translations of Ancient European Classics such as Sappho,

¹⁰ Campus for Open Learning is one of the largest and prominent remote course providers in India. It is run by the Delhi University, a benchmark institution located in the capital of India.

Sophocles, Virgil, and Horace. This option includes four units among the following alternatives:

Fiction of the Latin American 'Boom': Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*/ Mario Vargas Llosa, *The War of the End of the World*/ Carlos Fuentes, *The Old Gringo* (any one)

Later Fiction: Isabel Allende, *The House of the Spirits*/ Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*/ Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate* (any one)

Short Stories: Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Aleph', 'The South', 'Borges and I', 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' and Julio Cortazar, "Continuity of Parks," 'The Condemned Door'

Poetry: 2 poems each by Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, Cesar Vallejo, Gabriela Mistral, Giannina Braschi

Non-fictional Prose: José Enrique Rodó, *Ariel* ('Introduction') and Roberto Fernandez Retamar, *Calibán* (chapter entitled 'Caliban: Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in our America')¹¹

I believe that the paradoxical provision of space for Latin American letters in the English department is a clear sign of a Sur-South affinity and a Post-colonial connection, which echo Rushdie's words: "García Márquez's world was mine, translated into Spanish" (2014).

¹¹ https://dhwu.ac.in/Syllabi_2020_22.aspx. Diamond Harbour Women's University is a women's university located near Kolkata. It was established in 2013 and began its courses in the 2014-15 academic session. Its inclusion of Latin American literature at the outset attests to the growing connection between South-South cultures and literatures.

Final Remarks

In closing this overview, it is important to consider the particular Latin American form of Orientalism that Martín Bergel calls *orientalismo invertido* as another vital factor in the Indo-Hispanic encounter (2006: 99). Bergel shows how the idea of the Oriental as a form of barbarism and despotism was rife in the Latin American imagination, perhaps most notably in Domingo Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845), but it would take a positive turn in the next centuries. Notable intellectuals, such as José Vasconcelos, José Mariátegui, Victor Haya de la Torre, Ernesto Quesada, as well as literary and cultural magazines, such as *Revista de Oriente*, *Sur*, and *Amauta*, would play a central role in its resignification. Subsequently, a positive image of India, and of the *Orient* in general, would spread among Latin American writers, including Rubén Darío, Jorge Luis Borges, Barba Jacob, Severo Sarduy, and Octavio Paz. Latin America would even gain its own set of Indologists in the figures of Vicente Fatone (1903-1962), Fernando Tola (1915-2017), and Carmen Dragonetti (1937-2018), among others. Today, a revived Latin American interest in the *Orient* can be seen in the re-emergence of the South-South political discourse. While examining Said's path-breaking work, Klengel and Ortiz Wallner underline the weight of the Southern-Hemisphere connections: "Orientalism," they explain, "became a 'general' concept for a multi-faceted theory production in which the formerly marginalized perspectives of the Global South are now increasingly moving to the forefront as active elements in the discourse". In this context, they highlight the current academic interest in "the *concrete* relationships between the Occident and the Orient, though from a different perspective: the West-East relationships [that]

originate not in Europe but in Latin America and India, and are thus SUR/SOUTH relationships as well” (2016: 7).

Axel Gasquet postulates a particularly significant role for Orientalism in Argentine culture:

Argentine Orientalism was not just a copy of the European one, or another fashionable imported trend; instead, it involved a large work of adaptation. Orientalism was felt as an endogenous element in American barbarism. The original defect of America was having been struck by the Orientalist fatalism in political matters. From that point on, Orientalism would become an indispensable conceptual tool to analyse the deficiencies of institutions and the national political organization.¹² (Gasquet, 2007: 12)

Thus, it is possible to propose that the conceptual value of the Latin American connection with India as “the Orient” has been a significant factor in the slow but steady flow of literary interchange I have discussed earlier. The postcolonial connection is undoubtedly a vital element where these two worlds converge, exchange, and share multiple commonalities. In addition to the cultural connections to magical realism that can be found in the literary sphere, the academic world in India has been a close adherent of anti-colonial discourse, and Latin American elements get a fair share in it. Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta, an academic at Jadavpur University of Calcutta,

¹² “[E]l orientalismo argentino no fue mera copia del europeo, como una de las tantas modas de importación, sino que implicó un fuerte trabajo de adaptación. El orientalismo fue sentido como un elemento endógeno de la barbarie americana. La tara original de América era estar golpeada por la fatalidad orientalista en materia política. A partir de aquí el orientalismo debía de constituirse en una herramienta conceptual indispensable para analizar las deficiencias de las instituciones y la organización política nacional” (Gasquet, 2007: 12).

points to these connections in the Comparative Literature syllabus at this institution:

Questions of solidarity and a desire to understand resistance to oppression along with larger questions of epistemological shifts and strategies to bridge gaps in history resulting from colonial interventions were often the structuring components of these areas in the syllabus. Later during the nineties, Area Studies papers on African, Latin American, Canadian literatures and literature of Bangladesh were introduced. (Dasgupta 2016b: 1)

In this context, the need of a systemic and broader study of the connection between Indian and Latin American literatures becomes fully apparent. In particular, magical realism emerges as a phenomenon to be studied in a serious manner in the framework of literary and cultural exchange between India and Latin America in the ongoing Sur-South relations.

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