



CULTURE: A CATALYST IN INDO-POLISH RELATIONS

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Abstract

Since ancient times movement of people from one part of the world to another has played significant role in transmission of culture and tradition. The cultural relations between India and Poland can be traced back as far as 15th century as depicted in various accounts. During the Second World War the role of Maharaja Jam Sahib of Nawanagar in rescuing the Polish gentry brought India and Poland even closer. India had good political relations with Poland during the cold war period which had gone in to oblivion with the Euro centric image of Poland since 1989 and attaining of its European Union membership in 2004. The cultural ties between the two countries continued to survive throughout the period and retain its contribution till the date to bring forth old golden days of their relations.

Keywords: *Poland, Warsaw, Sanskrit, Maharaja, Polish*

Introduction

Poland and India officially established their international relations in 1954 but their cultural relations are traced back from 15th century. A small number of Polish writers, nobility, statesmen, merchants, soldiers and missionaries visited India. One of the earliest recorded account is of Pawel Palczowski of Palczowic (Polish nobleman and statesman from the distinguished senior Silesian Polish nobility House of Saszowski family), the Polish merchant Gaspar da Gama from Pozna, and of Krzysztof Pawlowski who provided the first

description of India in Polish, recorded in a letter dated 1569. These accounts are impressive and their description of Indian culture, history, society and literature generated interest about India in Poland. As a result, a lot was mentioned about India in Polish language and literature. [1]

During the Cold war period bilateral relations between both the countries were close and cordial, with regular high level visits, planned trade and economic interaction through state trading organizations, cooperation in defense, science & technology and cultural exchanges. Agreement on cultural cooperation between India and Poland was signed in 1957. [2]

Today Poland hosts around 3,000 members of the Indian community who are mostly traders and settled in Poland after the collapse of communism. [3] They traded in textiles, garments and electronics that came along with multinational or Indian companies and software, IT experts. [4] Their presence in this central eastern European country has given the pace to cultural relations between the two countries which were gone into oblivion at the end of cold war.

The objective of the present study is to:

- Depict the role of past as a tie between the two countries
- The role of vivid instruments in strengthening the bond between India and Poland

Methodology

The methodology adapted for this study is doctrinal. Sources in the form of text books, journals, newspapers, magazines; internet have been employed for analysis.

Vivid Instruments

Literature:

During the 19th century, several Sanskrit classics were translated into Polish by the Polish scholars. An important work in Polish was titled as "History of Ancient India" that described about Indian history, culture and



social structure, and it was one of the first of this kind that was published in Europe. Gradually research and teaching in Indian languages and literature began in the universities of Kraków, Warsaw, Wrocław and Poznań. There was regular exchange of ideas between writers, artists, painters and designers. [1] Sanskrit was being studied at six hundred years old Jagellonian university in Krakow (the oldest in Poland) in 1860-61. Here a chair of Sanskrit was established in 1893.

The Indology Department of the Oriental Institute at the University of Warsaw was established in 1932 is the biggest centre for Indian studies in Central Europe. The ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) funds two Indian professors who are teaching Hindi and Tamil at Warsaw University. [5] Hindi Teachers have also been deployed, with ICCR support, at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow and Technical University of Gdansk. [6] ICCR sponsored the first central and eastern European regional conference of Indology in Warsaw University in September 2005, in which 198 scholars from 11 countries participated. [5]

Indological publications in Poland e.g. Professor Schayer's 'History of Indian Literature' or Professor Byrski's translation of 'Kamasutra' did impress the wide audience who were able to draw their own conclusions which was later developed, modified and used in the populace press. [7]

In India Polish is being taught at Delhi University, Banaras Hindu University and soon there will be Polish centers at one of the old universities of India the Calcutta University & the one is in prestigious Manipal University. [7] There is Hindi translation available of some Polish poetical works e.g. 'Otwarty dom (khula ghar)' by Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert's 'Obszar pamięci' (Antahkaran ka Ayatan), Wisława Szymborska's 'Może być bez tytułu' (Koi shirshak nahin), Adam Zagajewski's 'W cudzym pięknie' (parayi sundarata mein), 'W

środku życia (Jivan ke bichombich)' by Tadeusz Rozewicz. Famous Hindi language poet Ashok Vajpayee has contributed in popularizing Polish literature in India by giving speeches and lectures, translating Polish works e.g. Szymborska's masterpiece 'Nic dwa razy' in collaboration with R. Czekalska. [7]

Art & Architecture

The Indo Polish artistic amalgamation can be observed in the work of famous Polish artist Stefan Norblin who fled to India along with his wife when Nazis invaded Poland in 1939. [7] He was commissioned by the Maharaja of Jodhpur to decorate the Umaid Bhawan palace, where his work can be seen. [4] He combined his European creativity and technique with ancient Indian tradition. His themes were based on Ramayana, stories of Shiva and Parvati depicted in the form of Art Deco murals. By the end of 1990s his work in the palace was in distorted condition and needed restoration which could be done after an agreement with the Maharaja Gaj Singh II of Jodhpur. The active role played by Polish Ministry of Culture and National heritage in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who allocated finances and a group of Art deco restorers were employed for the purpose. In September 2011, the regional museum in Stalowa Wola organized the Stefan Norblin exhibition for the first time. [7] It reflected the fusion of Indo Polish art to the Polish art lovers.

A documentary film based on his life is made by Małgorzata Skiba, a Polish artist living in India who was supported in her work by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The premier took place in the Umaid Bhawan Palace in Jodhpur and the film was screened in vivid locations in India and Poland. [7]

Feliks Topolski was another famous Polish painter. His oil painting of Mahatma Gandhi assassination is displayed even today in Rashtrapati Bhawan. [4] In 1949 Nehru invited him to participate in the celebrations which marked India becoming a republic (26 January



1950). Topolski took with him his huge painting 'The East' which Nehru had bought for India. [8]

Good Maharaja Square, A monument commemorating Jam sahib Dig vijayasinhi Ranjesinhji Jadija of Nawanagar was unveiled on 31st October 2014, at the Square of Good Maharaja, Ochota District Warsaw, Poland. [5] There are three streets commemorating Indian leaders in Warsaw named after Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rabinder Nath Tagore. [5] Krakow and Lodz also have streets named after Mahatma Gandhi. Several bus stations are also named after these leaders. [6] A bust of Mahatma Gandhi has been placed in the library of Warsaw University. It was unveiled on May, 13, 2002 by the then Lok Sabha speaker Shri Manohar Joshi.[5]

Academics

There are various MoUs and Agreements between universities and educational institutions of both the countries for exchange of scholars and students. Under the exchange program students from Poland are given scholarship under ICCR schemes to study in India each year. Polish scientists academics and other opinion makers have visited India under ICCR's 'Distinguished visitors program'. Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra provides scholarships to polish students to study Hindi in Agra. Polish candidates have also utilized the training slots under the ITEC (Indian Technical Economic Cooperation) program. [5] Nearly 100 Polish officials have availed of the ITEC capacity building training since 2007. [6] Indian students have been studying in Poland on private basis in areas such as medicine, engineering, town planning, ship building and coal mining. [5]The number of such students has climbed to over 2500. [6]

University of Warsaw has institutional arrangements with several Indian universities, including JNU, University of Calcutta, Manipal University, Mangalore University, under which Indian professors visit the university and conduct classes. They also participate in

seminars/conferences and share their perspectives at public lectures focused on India's development priorities/agenda among others. [6]

A Polish school is named after the Maharaja Jam Sahib, on 11 March, 2016; the Polish Parliament unanimously passed a resolution honoring the kindness and generosity of the Maharaja on his 50th death anniversary. The Maharaja had accepted Polish refugees, mainly children, as they escaped the depredations of the Second World War in the 1940's. [6]

Yoga & Ayurveda (Indian Medical Science)

Wincenty Lutoslawski (1863-1954) was probably the first intellectually prepared propagator of yoga in Poland. A philosopher and an expert on Plato's works he studied the treatises of Vivekananda which became the basis of his own philosophical version of yoga popularized later in Poland. Lutoslawski shared his views with Indian readers publishing articles in magazines including 'East and West', 'Vedic Magazine' or 'Young India'. [7]

Yoga is the heritage of Indian culture which helps to improve health by using breathing techniques, exercises and meditation. 21st June is declared as International yoga day by United Nation General Assembly. International yoga day was organized in 21 cities in Poland on June 21st, 2015. An estimated 8000 people participated in public events. The flagship event was held in central city Warsaw. Three prominent polish celebrities Natalia Przybysz, Edyta HEBUS, Malgorzata Pieczynska, were ascribed as Yoga ambassador who attended the event in Warsaw. Their involvements generated the tremendous buzz in the local media. [4]

The third International Day of Yoga was organized in June 2017 in *Pole Mokotowski* Park in Warsaw. [6] Yoga for stress free life was the motto of the festival in 2017. People enjoyed the whole day program devoted to that included Yoga training, lectures. As yoga is



closely linked with healthy life, participants in yoga feast had a chance to get acquainted with Ayurvedic medicines, taste natural and Indian food. They could buy eco products and bio cosmetics. [6]

Currently around 1000 centers and 8,000 teachers are propagating Yoga in Poland. There are over 3, 00,000 yoga practitioners in the country. [6] Yoga is constituted as part of the syllabus under physical education department of universities in Poland for e.g. University of Warsaw. Students not only from Poland but also other Erasmus students from other European countries register for this credit course and thus popularize India's tradition. The Opole University, in collaboration with Ayurveda and Yoga Centre of Sulislaw, offers a degree course in Ayurveda & Yoga. Ayush scholarships are offered annually to the Polish students to study Ayurveda & Yoga in India. [6]

Cinematography

Poland is becoming major destination for shooting Indian films. Bangistan, Aazaan, Fana are some of the films shoot here. [4] Several Bollywood films including 'Fana' and "Ae Dil Hae Mushkil" have been released in Poland, simultaneously with their global release. [6] The advent of Bollywood films also started in December, 2004 when 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham' was shown with Polish subtitles; suddenly Shah Rukh Khan an Indian actor became a household name for polish youth. [9] The first ever Indian Film Festival in Poland was organized in October 2017 on the occasion of the 70th glorious year of India's independence. Indian Film Festival showcase of Indian cinema which was jointly curretted by Captain Rahul Bali & Mr. R.C Dala and organized by India International Film Festival World Wide under the patronage of the Embassy of India in Poland ,The Polish Institute New Delhi , Indo Polish Chamber of Commerce , Indian Association of Poland and India international Foundation. This was started in Warsaw on 7th October and closed on 10th October at Krakow. There were

interactive events –Indo polish music concerts, Bollywood dance performances by polish dancers, Indian food festival in Poland took place. [10] Film Festivals have turned to be the major events that not only establish the reputation of cities where they are organized but also a channel to depict culture, traditions, art of the organizing country via cinema. This boosts the tourism and cultural interaction between the countries.

Indian organizations

The Indians in Poland started vivid organizations to cater their social, economic and cultural needs. The first group of this kind was formed before the independence of India by Rabinder Nath Tagore the Indian Nobel Laureate in 1937. After the Second World War the Poland India Friendship club was re established with polish economist Oscar Lang and Indian vice president as founding members in 1957. This organization with several divisions in different cities of Poland was very active during the communist period. By the mid of 1990s after the collapse of communism it was dissolved. [11]

There are friendship societies constituted from time to time for promoting Indian culture and people to people contact which are as follows: Indo Polish cultural committee (IPCC), Indian Association of Poland (IAP), Mantra culture and Community centre (MCCC), Friends of India in Warsaw (FIW), Friend of India in Poland, Warsaw (FIPW), India International Foundation, Warsaw (IIF), Indian culture and sport centre, Warsaw [12]

Indo Polish cultural committee (IPCC)

Indo polish cultural committee was formed in 19th July 2003; Mr Umesh Nautiyal became its first president. Management board of association IPCC head Quarter is based in Krakow where at Jagielionia University where Mr Umesh Nautiyal is giving lectures for the past 15 years in Hindi language. Its aim is to promote Indian culture celebrating Indian



festivals mainly Diwali & Holi and strengthening cultural bond between Indian and polish people. One of its functions is to keep alive the Indian culture in community of Indian origin. IPCC has five divisions at Warsaw, Poznan, Silesia & Zagłębie, Pomerania, lesser Poland & Sub Carpathian province. It has served as polish partner for the Indian council of cultural relations & the Indian embassy in Poland in the organization of Indian classical music, dance, and art exhibitions. IPCC also offers free Hindi languages classes at cultural centre in Krakow Podgorze district. [13]

Indian Association of Poland (IAP)

Indian association in Poland was established in 1966 in Warsaw by Indian businessman J.J Singh; initially it had around 60 members. It organizes cultural events and cooperates with polish organizations as well as with minority groups on different multicultural occasions. [14]

Mantra culture and Community centre (MCCC)

Mantra Cultural and Community Centre was established in 2011 in Gdansk with the aim to cater the interest of Indian community. The centre also organizes yoga classes and Hindi language classes regularly. The centre also organized performances of Indian classical dance, exhibitions of Indian paintings. The centre has organized very successful Indian week (*Made in India*) in the Gdansk University. It also arranges lectures and shows of Indian classical dance for schools. Lectures have been conducted in the Institute of Technology of Gdansk. The centre also participated in different events organized in Malls for the promotion of Bollywood and Indian Culture. It also sponsors Indian snacks etc. during events organized by different groups for promoting India. For the last 3 months, it is regularly showing Bollywood films once a month, which is attracting more and more viewers.

Friends of India in Wroclaw (FIW)

Friends of India in Wroclaw (FIW), has become a focus for Indian cultural events and the growing interest amongst Indian community in Wroclaw and Polish people in India generally. FIW have sponsored a variety of Indian cultural presentations such as concert by Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Geeta Chandran Bharat Natyam, Anu Kapoor, Sharmistha Mukherjee performance, Indian Film festivals, supporting Indian artist in Brave festivals and Brave kids which have been well received by both the Indian and local populations. FIW is also actively organizing International Yoga Day and other functions like Diwali, Holi, and yoga festival.

FIW organized orientation programme at Wroclaw University of Technology for the new batch of students depicting Indian Culture and also organized Brave Festival in July 2017. This (Brave Festival) is a Polish festival being organized since 2005 by Song of the Goat Theatre Association in Wroclaw. Each edition presents concerts, theatre, performances, rituals, prayers and art of the people, tribes, groups or individuals from all over the world. [16]

Friend of India in Poland, Warsaw (FIPW)

Friend of India in Poland in Warsaw has the largest Indian community members. FIPW has been active in projecting various facets of Indian culture and has created awareness about India and its culture in the populace. It organizes cultural events, Indian festivals – Diwali, Holi etc at large scale. FIPW also facilitates and coordinates celebrations of National Days on 26th January & 15th August. It arranges Indian musical artists from India for their performances in Warsaw. The Group also supports in a major way in celebrations of International Yoga Day in collaboration and coordination with Yoga ambassadors/schools and other organizations in Poland. FIPW regularly hosts Indian artists and cultural troupes. FIPW is committed for its support in



organizing/supporting for promotion of Indian culture, dance etc all over Warsaw. [17]
India International Foundation, Warsaw (IIF):
India International Foundation was established in 2015 with the aim to promote to assist the Polish-Indian cooperation, and promote the culture of both the countries. IIF is very active in promoting Indian culture, art and cuisine and celebrates Indian festivals at a larger scale. It promotes Indian dances and has organized performances and screenings of Bollywood films as well as live Indian DJ and also Mandala / Henna artists workshops, games for children, Carom, traditional Indian cuisine and handicrafts. IIF also supports in a big way in organizing events such as World Hindi Day, Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas, Constitution Day and National Day celebrations. During 2017-18, IIF is scheduled to celebrate major Indian festivals Diwali, Holi, Navratri & Dandiya Festival and other activities promoting Indian culture and tradition. [18]

Indian culture and sport centre, Warsaw

Indian Culture and Sport Centre established in 2014 with the aim to promote Indian culture in Poland especially in Warsaw. The centre has been organizing Indian dance classes (Bharatanatyam, Bollywood, Chhau, Kathak, Odissi), Hindi classes as well as yoga classes. Since its establishment, the Centre has organized more than 90 events of various kinds which were attended by over 5,000 participants. All events were to promote and to spread the knowledge about the Indian culture. The centre has also been organizing carom classes and has organized three Polish Youth Carom Championships. [19]

Vital role of Indian Embassy

The embassy of India in Warsaw regularly organizes Indian cultural programs in Poland with the help of (Indian Council of Cultural Relations) ICCR. [4] Over the years several cultural troupes have visited Poland and stage performed in many Polish cities. From the

Polish side several musical, art and film shows have been organized in India. [6]

Incredible India road show in Poland was organized in July, 2015. Ministry of tourism with support of Embassy organized road shows in Krakow and Warsaw on July 9th & 10th, inviting Polish tourists to enjoy the richness and diversity of a resurgent India. Around 18 tour and travel operators from India participated in the events. [6]

Indian ambassador Anil Wadhawa in March 2004, promoted Indo Expo India, brought many commercial & cultural troupes and himself toured practically every corner of Poland. He promoted translation of Urdu poetry. The work of great masters like Mirza Ghalib, Mir Taqi Mir, Firaq Gorakhpuri and many others are available in Polish language. Janusz Krzyzowski is the one person who has made unique contribution to promote Indian literature. [9]

In 2014 Poland and India celebrated the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties. To mark this landmark occasion, Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs published archival material documenting the establishment of diplomatic relations including communiqués on exchange of ambassadors with India and the appointment of first three Polish ambassadors Jerzy Grudziński (1954-57), Juliusz Katsuchy (1957-62) and Przemysław Ogródzki (1962-67). [20]

H.E. Prof. Piotr Kłodkowski, the then Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to India highlights this special relationship thus, "Poland and India officially established diplomatic relations in 1954 but our cultural bonds should be dated back much earlier. In fact, as early as 1893 the Chair of Sanskrit at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow was established which introduced scholarly research on India. At present the pillars of our cooperation are very stable and well defined. Our shared interests in the energy sector, our long-lasting military ties, and collaboration in the defense industry, point to significant cross-cultural diplomatic exchanges that have



formed the bedrock of Indo-Polish ties. In the realm of culture, excellent links and growing mutual artistic inspirations are our best assets in the strengthening of bilateral relations. I am deeply convinced that this platform covering multifarious aspects of political and cultural life will enable India to explore Poland as a land of unlimited opportunities where creativity and entrepreneurial spirit can be materialized in the best possible way." [20]

In India

Polish Institute for culture

It was established in New Delhi in June 2012, the Polish Institute for culture is an extension of the Polish diplomatic mission to India. Its premises is located in Jorbagh. [4] Polish Institutes are present globally in Europe, North America and Asia. Their aim is the promotion of Poland and Polish culture through public events in collaboration with Poland's local partners and friends. The Institute works primarily in the disciplines of visual art, design, literature, music, theatre, film, architecture and academic research.

Dr. Tomasz Gerlach assumed his duties as the Director of the Polish Institute in New Delhi in May 2017. India was the first country of his diplomatic tenure as the Counselor for Culture, Science and Technology. During his stay in India (1993-99), he organized concerts, exhibitions and scientific meetings with Indian scholars. One of the most interesting exhibitions was "Art Deco for Maharajas", dedicated to Stefan Norblin, the Polish graphic artist, who during WWII was employed as a court artist of Indian Maharajas in Jodhpur decorating their residences. [20] Thus in India Polish Embassy and its vivid units are playing a role in promoting cultural ties.

During the Second World War, the then Maharaja Jam Sahib of Nawanagar had extended hospitality to some 6,000 Poles, mainly orphans released from Siberia. The survivors have formed the World Association of Poles from India. The members of the Association had donated funds for relief and

rehabilitation after the Gujarat earthquake in January 2001, and continue to visit India frequently. [21] There has been the people to people contact since the past which definitely should be intensified.

Today Poland is the sixth largest economy of European Union [22] which can cater to the demands of one of the fastest growing economy of the world i.e., India. The cultural aspect can be a catalyst to strengthen its relation with Poland.

Conclusion

Indian people are cultural ambassador to Poland though they are few yet their number is rising steadily each year that is coming in the form of traders, professionals and specially students. They are the big hope to enhance not only the cultural but also the revival of strategic and economic relations between the two countries which were neglected at the end of cold war. The cultural relations shall be helpful in promoting tourism industry of both the countries. The government of India should initiate the visa on arrival scheme on the other hand Polish government should make visa processing less complicated and there should be the revival of direct flights between India and Poland which shall not only be time saving but also a plain sailing for people of both the countries. There is still need to take certain measures which will bring the glory of past cultural relations on fore front with which people of both the countries are less aware.

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