

West Sees East: Cultural Stereotypes in Twentieth-Century Czech Discourse about Indian Religions¹

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Abstract

The history of the humanities suggests that no scholarly discipline or theory can function without the models and categories it generates and relies on. Since they are necessarily conditioned by the cultural and ideological context in which they are developed, however, they readily become distorting stereotypes. During its academic history, the academic study of religions has been formed by philosophical perspectives and worldviews drawn from Evolutionism, Positivism, Historicism, Scientific Atheism, Theology, and other schools of thinking. This article explores this use of stereotypes through the example of shifting perceptions of a different culture in the history of Czech understandings of Indian religions during the 20th century, on the basis of a critical analysis of Czech discourse about Indian religions in several academic disciplines: theology, philosophy, history, study of religions, sociology, etc. We see that the religions of India were repeatedly evaluated through stereotypes and a European colonial mindset of cultural values, such as the Western search for doctrinal order in the 'Oriental chaos', an emphasis on Western 'activity' as opposed to perceived Oriental 'passivity', or seeing Catholic hierarchy reflected in the Indian caste system. These stereotypes were also deeply entrenched in Czech popular understandings of Indian culture, despite the low levels of contact between Czech and Indian society. Both in academic and in popularized discourse, we can recognize the uncritical and mechanical adoption of models, categories and values from a Western European cultural framework rather than as a result of scholars' empirical experience and scholarly evidence.

Keywords: Czech Study of Religions, Indian Religions and Culture, Orientalism, Stereotypes

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Much of the significant development within the modern study of religions has been heavily inspired by the findings from the study of Oriental religions. An important role was played in the emergence of European scholarly interest in the Orient by the growth of a greater openness towards different religious traditions and cultures, not grounded in Europe's common history and values. Further important incentives came with the emphasis on 'the other, the mysterious and exotic', rooted in Romanticism, and finally, in contemporary projects of cultural, economic and religious colonialism.

Favorable conditions for the development of Czech Oriental Studies came about after the First World War, although the initial boom had come already at the end of the 19th century. The first Czech Orientalist lecturing at the Charles University was Jaromír B. Košut (1854–1880), who focused on the study of Arabic language and culture. Later, the Charles University was the home of Rudolf Dvořák (1860–1920), considered Košut's successor and the founder of Czech Oriental Studies. Dvořák's interest in Oriental traditions was very wide, but he concentrated mainly on Chinese culture, and translated some of its main works, for example *Tao Te Ching*. Rudolf Růžička (1878–1957) was one of his important disciples. Others include the internationally-known Arabist, traveler and Catholic theologian Alois Musil (1868–1944). Musil often traveled around the Middle Eastern region, and was a great popularizer of the Arabic world. Alois R. Nykl (1885–1958) was the first to provide a scholarly translation of the Quran into Czech (1934). The basis for the study of ancient India was laid at the end of the 19th century by Josef Zubatý, followed by Vincenc Lesný (1882–1953) and Otakar Pertold (1884–1965). Other well-known Orientalists included the 'Czech Champollion' Bedřich Hrozný (1879–1952), famous for the decryption of the Hittite hieroglyphics and a founder of world Hittitology. Biblical studies and Semitology were the main themes for Jaroslav Sedláček (1860–1925), Václav Hazuka (1875–1947), Slavomil Daněk (1885–1946), Vojtěch Šanda (1873–1953), Antonín Kleveta and others (Zbavitel 1959, 20–66; Dudák 1992, 7–15; Gombár 1994, 54–73).

In reflecting theoretically on the formation of the modern study of religions and its interdisciplinary framework, it is very important to pay critical attention to each scholar's personal involvement, in our case with Indian tradition, in order to uncover the ideological background from which the stereotypes characteristic of that scholar's vision first took shape. It needs to be stressed that stereotypes, that is to say, specific and characteristic cultural and ideological generalizations, emerged within each of the widely varied contributing disciplines, including theology, philosophy, history, sociology,

ethnology, the study of religions, etc. It is also clear that the stereotypes in question drew their strength not only from European understandings of science – Positivism, Historicism, Evolutionism, and Empiricism – but also from the personal faith and world view of the scholars themselves.

Firstly, it is important to define the term ‘stereotype’ and to explain how it will be used throughout this study. Human thinking in general tends to produce normative generalizations which can be understood as cognitive and evaluative simplifications about certain objects of our cognition. By ‘stereotype’, however, I mean those generalizations which present a distorted view of reality. Walter Lipmann, probably the first to elaborate on the concept of stereotyping about specific groups of people, proposed that our thinking creates such preconceptions even before analyzing the collected data. The question thus arises as to which is primary: the experience of reality, or the construction of reality; and how these interact on each other. Stereotypes can therefore be seen both as the basis of our personal tradition, and as a defense of our position in society (Lipmann 1921, 93); they are often not results of our own experience, and are not based on individual cognition, but are rather outcomes of the transfer of the particular onto the general. As the contemporary philosopher Lawrence Blum points out, ‘stereotype generally has a negative valence’ (Blum 2004, 251) and also has other connotations, especially of value and moral judgment. It is therefore vital to discuss to what degree the stereotypes used disqualify our understanding of the researched reality. The problem is that generalized characteristics often do not correspond with empirical fact, and that they tend to create a falsely homogeneous picture of a reality which it is in fact varied and heterogeneous, and in this way stereotypes distort reality itself. Moreover, the inappropriate application of our cognitive and moral values can prevent us from seeing a group of people or phenomena as a set of varied individuals, and from respecting their diversity (Blum 2004, 271). Blum understands stereotypes as ‘false or misleading generalizations’ (Blum 2004, 256), ‘rigid false generalizations (overgeneralizations) about groups’ (Blum 2004, 265), or ‘false or misleading associations between a group and attribute that are held by their subjects in a rigid manner, resistant to counterevidence’ (Blum 2004, 288). He also draws attention to the fact that a stereotyping ‘cognizer’ is not capable, in the light of new evidence, to adequately revise their own false generalizations (Blum 2004, 256–60). Blum points out that stereotypes are characteristically negative and disrespectful, stemming perhaps from fear of the unknown, of confrontation, of the loss of one’s own integrity or identity, and from the need to demarcate or highlight one’s own feeling of

exceptionality and uniqueness. My task here is to typologize the stereotypes about Indian spiritual traditions found among European scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries, and identify and explore the socio-cultural contexts within which these were valid. For this purpose, I stress the importance of cultural stereotyping as discussed by Lawrence Blum, and more precisely the socio-cultural dimension of cognition (rather than its individual dimension), because knowledge is the fruit of a whole set of social processes.

The epistemological standpoint of the work includes focuses both on the Christian value system deployed by many of the scholars in question, and the framework of Marxist-Leninist theory used during the socialist era. Each of these conceptual frameworks in turn was dominant in the Czech lands during the twentieth century. The Christian framework impacted especially on the assessment of non-Christian religions, while the Marxist-Leninist frame influenced the evaluation of religion as such. Both of them served as a basis for the negative demarcation of otherness, whether this was seen as competition in values, or as simply backward. The value criteria of 'better' and 'worse' and of 'true' and 'false' were typical for such assessments.

An equally important research question is why certain generalizations became generally accepted while others were not. Contrary to Blum, I shall argue that stereotypes can be not only false but, at the same time, can be partially true – not in the sense of being true in relation to the researched group, but rather true in revealing the character and nature of the cognizer. In other words, I believe that the stereotypes used in the Czech study of Indian spiritual traditions tell us more about us, about the nature of Czech and, by extension, of European culture, and are thus in a way our 'mirrors'.

The sources used for my analysis include a mixture of popular and scholarly works. One subset of the works examined focused on original sources written in Sanskrit and Pali (Lesný, Pertold, Herold, Zbavitel, Zvelebil, Merhautová). To provide a broader and more complex discourse, however, I shall also refer to the works of philosophers (Rádl, Máša, Hubík), theologians (Kadeřávek, Kubalík, Kaňák, Žilka, Polák, Spisar, Lochman, Heller), sociologists (Karola, Sekot), and ethnologists (Nahodil), who relied mostly on secondary literature about India. One of the reasons for including popular works is to highlight the proclivity of writers in the humanities to be driven by the 'ideology of the time'. All quotations in English from Czech scholars are my own translations.

In order to locate this knowledge examination within a broader perspective on studies of India, and in order to provide a general framework of research history, these findings will be presented in the research context of

Ronald B. Inden's work *Imagining India*, which discusses very analogous issues not from a national, but from a global perspective. Inden's main task is a critique of 'the Indological branch of "orientalistic discourse" and the accounts of India' (Inden 2000, introduction). Inden writes:

When Indologists, historians, and anthropologists depict Hindu thought as opposed to a Western, male rationality, they have mostly had in mind as their exemplar of world-ordering rationality the science of the heavens or natural philosophy that their Enlightenment forebears had fashioned (2000, 87).

Inden sees Orientalist discourse as a product of 'imperial knowledge', originating in the era of the Enlightenment. This discourse was adopted within many disciplines, such as history of religion, anthropology, economy, and political philosophy, each of which created its own various constructs about India. In his Indological focus, India is seen as a feminine, irrational, chaotic culture, in opposition to the masculine, rational, organized thinking of the West. Inden particularly argues that India and the West should not be seen as opposites, and that such a view is the result of the 'essentialist' discourse in Western thinking (Inden 2000, 2). Inden's critique of such constructivism is especially important for the placement of the Czech discourse into an international research context.²

The Orient in the Light of Philosophical and Theological Assessment

In Czech literature of the 20th century, the Orient is often portrayed as an idyllic place, the home of mystics and ascetics, a world of fantasy and magic, a world that is colorful and varied.³ At the same time, however, it is

² Ronald B. Inden was influenced by R. G. Collingwood and adopted his term 'scale of forms' (Inden, 20, 22, 25, 33–5, 214, 217, 220, 226, 256, 264, 268), which he put in opposition to the so-called 'hierarchy of essences'.

³ An example of a Czech thinker greatly influenced by Indian philosophy and Buddhism is František Čupr (1821–1882), who wrote *Bhagavadgita: pantheistic teaching of a God of revelation: old Indian religious book composed long before the birth of Christ*, Prague 1877; *Učení staroindické, jeho význam u vznikání a vyvinování názorů zolášť křesťanských a vůbec náboženských* (Old Indian Teaching, its Importance for the Formation and Development of Ideas, Christian in particular and Religious in General, I–III, Prague 1874–1881). Later, Emil Svoboda and Leopold Procházka (1879–1944), the enthusiastic promoter of Buddhism whose main works include *Buddha a jeho učení*, (Buddha and His Teaching, Pilsen 1926), *Buddhismus světovým názorem, morálkou a náboženstvím*, (Buddhism as a World View, Ethics, and Religion, Prague 1928), *Buddha a Kristus* (Buddha and Christ, Pilsen 1933). Among the writers there were Jaroslav Vrchlický, Julius Zeyer, and others.

also seen as chaotic, confused and based more on instinct and momentary mood. Oriental life is supposed to flow slowly, without any significant upheavals, its mysticism mingling with a scent of local spices. The religions of India, in comparison with western Christianity, are seen more as streams of moods, and it is claimed that they are so wide and slow that they almost lack boundaries and basic orientation (Rádl 1925). While European thinkers often speak about Indian culture in connection with irrationalism and mysticism, Czech theologians have mainly emphasized its paganism. In some cases, the Indians are seen as the most educated pagans of the past (Kadeřávek 1897, 11). Another recurrent emphasis is put on the contrast between Western culture and Eastern tradition. Western culture is understood as a product of modern thinking, its irresistible yearning for knowledge resulting from the desire to rule and to exercise power. Moreover, Western thinking is characterized by a characteristic subject-object vision of the world, whereas Eastern thinking is objectless, and thus, viewed from the point of moral endeavor, it is nonsensical (Heller 1995, 163–9).

The personal experience of the renowned philosopher Emanuel Rádl, who – having grown up in a Protestant background, was then confronted with the reality of Asia and India, was described in his book *Západ a východ* (West and East, 1925). It is interesting that he characterized the local situation as similar to that in the West, where religion was undergoing a serious crisis. As evidence for this claim, he cites contemporary attempts at a revitalization of Buddhism. The signs of secularization are, in his view, no longer typical only for Europe and America, but are even more common in the Orient. Rádl mainly attempted to point out cultural, cognitive and religious differences. He does so by means of basic philosophical contradictions, e.g. order and chaos, rationality and irrationality.⁴ He assumed that life in India was not guarded by similar ideas as in the West, where life is seen as the fruit of intellectual crises. Since prehistoric times, the Indian upbringing ‘led people to mysticism, theosophy, syncretism, gnosis, to unclear and fantastic speculations’ outside the realms of control and practice. Rádl sees the main obstacles of the free development of the fantastic in Western society particularly in Greek criticism, in the specificity of Jesus, in ethics as well as in the Roman sense of organization (Rádl 1925, 177). The fantastic in Indian culture, which he sees as negative, is supposedly best illustrated by the rich Indian religious tradition, which he characterizes as follows:

4 Ronald. B. Inden claims that ‘it is wrong to see Indian thought as essentially dreamlike and to view Indian civilization as inherently irrational’ (Inden 2000, 48).

The religions of India are all blended into one, so that you cannot tell where one ends and the other begins and no one (with the exception of Mohammedans) really knows what they believe. It is because each of these religions exists only as a folk faith, a half-conscious habit and none of them really functions as a teaching. In this chaos, a European sociologist identifies several religious areas, which he labels: the religion of Vedas, Brahmanism, Buddhism and the remaining chaos collectively titled as Hinduism. (Rádl 1925, 105.)

Rádl suggests that the attempts to compare today's religions of India (for which he, unlike Pertold⁵, uses the label of Hinduism) with Christianity can only be done on the basis of folk Catholicism, and not its theological foundation. On this level, Hinduism represents a form of religion based on habit (national folklore, tradition), and not a belief or faith. The folk quality is understood as instinctive, habitual, anonymous, lacking in criticality and historicity (Rádl 1925, 122). Rádl sees Hinduism as a historical continuation of Brahmanism, as a jungle⁶, a result of folk imagination, a mixture of cults, legends, gods and sects, without doctrine, exact theological boundaries and logical processing (Rádl 1925, 126–7). In order to achieve new understanding, Rádl suggests using the already existing model of 'folk Catholicism', thus enabling the 'comparison of the comparable'.

Rádl's approach takes for granted that Christianity is characterized by its doctrine, teachings and dogmatic system perceived as truthful. When lacking the ability to grasp other religious systems theoretically, we either use a 'suitable' analogy, in this case folk Catholicism, or we label them as 'non-existent', in other words, we claim that they are not valid religions. When encountering spiritual traditions completely different from the Biblical religions, the attempts to understand them are built on similarities to schemes of thought present in our own culture. The reasons for searching for doctrine, truth, reason and order are often of a pragmatic character, because these categories better facilitate an intellectual orientation and they aid the scholar. This parallelism represents only one of the important features of Rádl's thinking, as of European thinking more generally. In his case, Catholicism as a doctrine-based religion serves him as a suitable model

5 Otakar Pertold was the founder of the Czech study of religions in the inter-war period. Religious forms that came into existence in India within the last two thousand years are commonly labeled by the European indologists of Pertold's time as Hinduism. Pertold himself considered this title incorrect and used the term 'New-Indian religion'.

6 R. B. Inden claims that 'probably the most widely used metaphor, though, is that of Hinduism as a jungle' (Inden 2000, 86).

for understanding a system which is culturally completely different. Such parallelism is, however, inadequate.

Not only philosophers, but especially theologians relied on their knowledge of Christianity and of Greek philosophy for the exploration of non-Christian religions. Based on the use of theological and philosophical models of thinking, they arrive at interesting claims. Brahmanism, for example, is characterized by its pantheism, and the Brahman world did not come into existence through creation, salvation does not rest in anything but cognition, and is only a feature of individual (egoistic) endeavor. To understand the development of religions in India the scholars made use not only of folk Catholicism, but also of parallels based on the comparison of Catholicism and Protestantism. Hinduism, for example, is seen as the result of the reaction of Brahmanism to the spread of Buddhism. In other words, Hinduism is understood as reformed Brahmanism. Some theologians even claim that Hinduism experienced the formulation of a Hindu Trinitarian image, a trinity called *Trimurti* (Žilka 1924, 11–16). Likewise, they speak of Hinduism as an old polytheism headed by a trinity of gods called 'Trimurti', seen as 'one deity in its triplicate agency' (Spisar 1921, 110). Such attempts to see the elements of Christian doctrine in non-Christian religions were not uncommon in the Czech Catholic and Protestant theology and philosophy (Kadeřávek 1897, 10–11).

Other examples of the use of already existing and easily comprehensible stereotypes can be found in the work *Teologie a náboženství* (Theology and Religions, 1963) by the Protestant theologian and philosopher Jan Milíč Lochman. Like Emanuel Rádl, Lochman saw the world of Hinduism as a jungle in the sense of 'uncultivated chaos' (Lochman 1963, 46), because its incredible variety and fertility forbid exact definition (Lochman 1963, 28). A similar problem, suggests Lochman, is posed by the question of truth, which can only be proved within an enclosed system of thought. Lochman used another model of thinking, based on Biblical eschatology. The basis of the *Upanishads* is in the teaching on *Brahma* and *atman*. In Lochman's view, it gives rise to significant consequences concerning eschatological speculations. Biblical eschatology is based on God's final interference in history, where God guarantees true existence. The eschatology of the *Upanishads*, on the contrary, leads to a yielding to the final reality. Therefore, there is no expectance of a god's coming or, we might say, interfering with history. Hence, Lochman claims that Indian 'eschatology is rid of its dynamic. It is not seen in the categories of time' (Lochman 1963, 39). The decisive agent in the fate of a human being is not God or gods, but humans themselves

and their deeds. Human 'Karma' determines the eschatological future. The path to salvation leads through the negation of one's own desires. What this argument illustrates is how the Biblical emphasis on divine influence on history and divine activity benefiting humanity led Lochman to an assessment of the Oriental culture emphasizing its passive, self-centered character, relying only on its own strength and abilities.

Lochman's critical stand is also clear from his evaluation of Bhakti, where he sees the possible parallels as a potential threat to Christianity. He does not look for theological appropriations, but on the contrary he stresses the incommensurability of Bhakti with Christianity. Hence he also claims that:

Biblical devotion is fully directed to God and his deeds; the religion of Bhakti [...] concentrates on the world of humans. The Bible is concerned mainly with God, His word, which certainly comes from the other bank and determines and also creates our complete reality. [...] The point of orientation is particularly in God's objective truth, which we do not have, with which we can only agree. The approach of Bhakti is different. The possibility of change of deity as the subject of devotion suggests that the centre of attention is the devotion itself, not the subject of it. The point of orientation is humanity and its world, its religious experience and experience of salvation. The question of truth stands back overshadowed by the interest of internal experience. (Lochman 1963, 44–5.)

Biblical experience, in Lochman's perception, is characterized by its theocentrism, whereas Bhakti is typified by its anthropocentrism. Lochman sees the 'proximity' of Christianity and Bhakti as relative, and as resulting only from a superficial view. Thus, he holds that in its essence Christianity must stand in fundamental tension against Bhakti. His views clearly show how a scholar can support his negative stand with theological and philosophical categories. However, it says more about the character of Christian theology, in this case of a theology oriented on Karl Barth, than about the character of a specific Indian religious tradition.

Czech Catholic theology also acknowledges the European 'enchantment' with India. India is portrayed as a land of fairy-tales and mystical knowledge, decorated by oriental eloquence and shielded by its mysterious veil, attractive to the naturally curious as well as to the Czech mind (Kubalík 1984, 78–94). Indian teachings are seen as hallowed with the best of human thought, and that is perhaps the reason why an educated Christian needs to know the Indian teachings, to take the 'correct' approach to them.

Despite the diversity of the Indian religions, attempts were also made to search for a common religious base, stemming from an original divine revelation. These attempts were particularly characteristic of the cultural-history school of Wilhelm Schmidt. Their main endeavor was to look for Biblical themes in other religious traditions, in the hope of justifying the Bible's universality. One such apologia set out to use linguistic research to find theological connections between Christianity and the religious imagery of the ancient Aryans.

Thus for example Josef Kubalík, a Catholic theologian, historian of religions and follower of Wilhelm Schmidt's theory, sees in his *Dějiny náboženství* (History of Religions, 1984) the most important similarity between these two traditions in the belief of the ancient Indians in *Dyaus pitara* (patar) or *Dyaus asura*, which later gave way to the influence of other gods such as 'The Father of Heaven', the Lord of Heaven and the greatest of gods as well as the lord of gods and humans. This common image of the greatest of gods could correspond to the Biblical Divine Creator, *Yahweh*. *Dyaus pitar* is not seen as the god of nature, but of ethics, and his features are similar to that of *Yahweh*, the Biblical God. *Dyaus pitar* is not an animistic god and his origin cannot be derived from the devotion to ancestors. Therefore Kubalík concludes that the Aryans originally worshipped one personal and omnipotent god. The original faith in one god, the god of ethics, is thus considered the common legacy of Indians and Europeans. Later development is seen as religious decline. The importance of *Dyaus pitara* for the Indians is said to have gradually diminished. At the same time, though, its influence grew in Persia, where it was enhanced by the reform of Zoroastrianism (Kubalík 1984).

Catholic theology searched for proof of the Biblical assumption concerning the original monotheism, as well as for a 'High Religion', which is found in various archaic cultures – in our case, in the culture of the ancient Orient. Studying the history of religions should not serve to criticize Christianity, but to defend it. Not attributing a negative status to non-Christian religions undoubtedly presents a significant change in the view of Catholic theology. Studying non-Christian religions is now defended as a way of searching for and finding similarities that can help support Christianity within the strongly secularized European society. Unlike the Protestant scholars, Catholics (because of their study of non-Christian religions) found certain grounds for the defense of the historicity of Biblical revelation, a concept frequently criticized by modern philosophy and other disciplines.

Oriental Pessimism and Western Engagement

In the context of European thought, the oriental mentality, when compared with Western culture, was traditionally seen as somehow passive and feminine, characterized by a pessimistic approach to life, low motivation, and unwillingness to change its environment. The notion that Indians and people of the Orient in their desire for happiness evoke the 'negation of the self' and the permanent suppression of natural desires was quite deeply rooted in the theological and philosophical literature, as well as in the public cultural awareness. It also gave rise to a general assumption that the Eastern religions and societies are characterized by their resignation to reality, escapism from the state of existence or even for tolerance to social evils. These presumed features are then contrasted with the forcefulness, energy and creativity of the Euro-American, Western, Northern peoples, supposedly proved by the development of Western culture as such, its cultural and material riches, and care for the socially disadvantaged. In such a reflection, the West is equated with optimism, order, rationality, technology, richness and civil society, whereas the East is associated with pessimism, stagnation, lack of organization, backwardness, poverty and social problems. Let us, for a moment, ignore the fact that the economic reality of many Asian countries has significantly changed over recent decades, and focus instead on the critical reflection of this issue in the Czech scholarly literature.

Some of the intellectual stereotypes are undoubtedly worse than others, and, depending on the time period, they can represent a serious threat to certain minority groups. Many of these stereotypes simply display racist overtones, and thus are in their essence very dangerous. For example, at the time of the rise of Fascism in some European countries, the Protestant theologian and philosopher František Polák, in his treatise *Bráhmanství a buddhismus* (Brahmanism and Buddhism, 1932) held that after the arrival of the Aryans in India, and as a consequence of their integration into the existing society, northern Aryans supposedly lost the natural lively and energetic temperament of the Northerners, assimilated to the new situation, degenerated, became passive and tired, and lost their pugnacity and vitality. This idea of Polák's eventually led to his reference to India as 'the land of thinkers' (Polák 1932, 11–12). Brahmanism arose out of skepticism and became the religion of the elite, while the Indian hierarchy developed into castes, but never of the 'poor in mind'. The moral relationship of religious Indians to their gods is in Polák's eyes purely selfish, based on reciprocity. He sees the 'curse' of India mainly in the persisting caste system, the main cause of the lack of unity and obstacle to unifying national forces against

external enemies. From the social point of view, he considers the division of Indian society as the greatest evil, and as to moral progress, Polák assesses it as doubtful. He believes that the characteristic Oriental negative approach to the world as a basic metaphysical concept gives rise to 'the endless pessimism of the Brahma religion' (Polák 1932, 25). Polák's theological assessment then holds that Indians have found neither the Creator, nor the Father, but only pain and sadness. 'India is the land of such personal means, means for searching for the meaning of life. And what do we see as its result? Sadness [...].' (Polák 1932, 97).

He also characterizes Buddhist ethics as 'negativism', bringing it closer to the approach of the Old Testament: thou shall not kill, thou shall not fornicate, and thou shall not steal. The central goal of Buddhist ethics is not compassion with fellow creatures, but egocentrism and the love of oneself, forcing Buddhists 'not to oppose evil'. In other words, Buddhism supposedly impressed upon India the 'mark of non-opposition' (Polák 1932, 110).

Polák accepts the ideas prevalent in Europe at that time concerning racial differentiation and antagonism, and the superiority of the Aryan race. This then gave rise to the assumption that mixing with other races leads to stagnation, backwardness, decline and overall degeneration.⁷ Thus, it was necessary to strive for racial purification of the Aryan race. Aryans, northerners and the Western world are seen as those who change the world, whose vitality leads them to care for the world and humanity. By contrast, the Indians and the world of the Orient stress concentration on the self, a type of egoism leading to passivity and to a lack of social engagement. This contrast arises from the different theological understandings of these traditions. The God of the West, of Christianity, is God interfering with history and pressing humans to action, whereas the gods of the Indian religions are assumed to be subject, like humans, to the law of Karma. Thus the given state is a necessary result of one's own deeds and there is no sense of engagement for the benefit of others. Life for others vs. life for oneself, altruism vs. egoism,

⁷ Inden similarly claims: 'How were Indologists and others to explain this degeneration or decline? Scholarship earlier in the nineteenth century had assumed that the "natural" religion of the Vedic Aryans was the earliest form of religion. When they looked at the religion of the Vedas they assumed they were looking at an ancestor of their own religion. They had thus looked on India civilization as fundamentally Aryan and had attributed the rise of India's excessive mentality to isolation and climate. Later, attempts to construct an explicitly imperial polity centered on London and to account for new historical and ethnological evidence led them to postulate the existence of still earlier and more primitive stages of society and forms of religion and to associate these with different "races". With this shift in focus came a change in the causes for India's peculiarities' (Inden 2000, 119).

argues Polák, are examples of the features which significantly differentiate Indian and Western cultures. It is particularly Western society which, led by Christ's example, cares for both its own poor and for strangers in need. The road for Indian society to be saved, in Polák's view, lies through the Gospel and liberation from the individual and social sin. He thus assumes that the main problem of the Indians rests in themselves, not in oppression by the colonial powers.

It can be seen here how Polák, perhaps without reflection, relies on racial theory in his assessment of Indian religions and culture. Through the prism of the Biblical understanding of God, the collective idea of engaged devotion and the demand for vicarious sacrifice, he defends the superiority of the Christian West, its culture and understanding of humanity.

However, we can also encounter corresponding stereotypes (with the exception of those motivated by racial theory) in the works of scholars of the Marxist-Leninist 'scientific' school. It is particularly striking to encounter in Marxism-Leninism the application of some originally Christian theoretical constructs. Traditional Christian stereotypes thus mingle with those derived from completely different grounds and in fact antagonistic to religion.

Otakar Nahodil, for example, an ethnologist and a pupil of the founder of the Czech study of religions, Otakar Pertold, argues that Buddhist teaching, with its prescriptions and proscriptions, leads its followers into 'complete passivity'. Nahodil, who was also one of the main Czech proponents of 'scientific atheism' during the 1950s and 1960s, sees this tendency as damaging in principle and, what is worse, he sees passivity as constituting the basis of Buddhist teaching. Buddhism, like Brahmanism, 'reflected and strengthened the powerlessness of folk masses in the caste-divided Indian society, in the conditions of which it came into existence' (Nahodil 1960, 63).

Nahodil sees salvation in Buddhism as a state of indifference and placidity which can lead to love of people even across caste-based differences. This, however, results in the working class's resignation to exploitation and class oppression, as he wrote in *Mimokřesťanská náboženství* (Non-Christian Religions 1964, 40–1). On the other hand, Nahodil stresses the political aspect of Buddhism, its ability to quickly and operatively adapt to external situations and social conditions. In the gradually advancing socialist order supposedly proved by the history of the Soviet Union (Nahodil 1964, 42), Buddhism thus conveniently masks its contra-revolutionary activities (Nahodil 1960, 71–2). The Orientalist Timotej Pokora also asserts that a Marxist-Leninist approach can reveal how in a socialist society, Buddhism not only fulfils its religious function, but at the same time also plays a counter-political and

truly subversive role. Therefore, the Marxist-Leninist criticism of Buddhist monastic life is reminiscent of the Marxist-Leninist criticism of Christianity. They particularly criticized Buddhist adaptation to Japanese war feudalism, its contravention of the Buddhist version of the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill', the power of Buddhist monasteries, the alleged existence of armed sects and the defense of accumulated wealth (Pokora 1964, 244; 1966b, 154; 1966a, 15–17).

How similar is this attack on Buddhism to the attacks on the Catholic Church in socialist Czechoslovakia during the 1950s? Buddhism had not significantly spread within the socialist world at the time, apart from certain Asian territories of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it was also represented in the Czech lands as a significant alternative spiritual system. Its comparison to what was seen as inadaptable and politically non-conformist Catholicism constitutes a somewhat ironic paradox. On the one hand, Buddhism was assessed as a product of Oriental pessimism and non-engagement; on the other hand, it was seen as a social-ideological element resistant to Communist thinking. These are, however, undoubtedly perspectives imported into Czech scholarly research from the Soviet Buddhology of the period.

One of the significant aspects of alleged Oriental pessimism and passivity is the pacifism of many of the religious traditions of India. In the view of some scholars of the scientific atheism school, Indian pacifism is based on the principle of 'inactivity', often further strengthened by encounters with western thought. This 'pacifism of passivity' is perceived, since because it 'gives space to reactionary forces' (Hubík, Karola, Sekot 1987, 38–9), i.e. to violent capitalist and bourgeois thinking. Moreover, for these scholars, even where Indian cultures actually display some activity in the form of anti-western criticism, this is ultimately perceived only as a kind of rhetoric incapable of significantly changing anything anyway. Marxist-Leninist critics argue that peace has to be fought for. Passivity does not solve anything. Similarly skeptical was their evaluation of the presence and the role of modern Hinduism in the West, despite the applicability of some of its precepts in discussions concerning the contemporary ecological crisis (Hubík, Karola, Sekot 1987, 63).

Indian Religions and Caste System from the Perspective of Marx-Leninist Discourse

The ideologization of the humanities in the socialist period can clearly be seen not only in a marked decline in the study of religions, ethnology and

philosophy, but also of Oriental Studies. This discipline had traditionally been strong in the Czech lands, but it could not now escape the scholarly discourse of the time.

[D]iscourses on India have wanted to represent the actions of Indians as expressions of a spirit or mind, of as Indian (Hindu) culture, tradition, or mentality differing from Western one. [...] That mind is also governed by passions rather than will, pulled this way and that by its desire for glory, opulence, and erotic pleasures or total renunciation rather than prompted to build a prosperous economy and orderly state. (Inden 2000, 264.)

The generation of scholars from the interwar period represented a significantly different perspective for research than that which gained currency after the Communist coup of February 1948. Not only did the ideological influence of Marxism-Leninism now become dominant, leading to the ostracization of some scholars and the favoring of now 'politically acceptable' topics, but the Communist authorities restricted access to academic literature and to language studies as well, and, last but not least, the opportunities for personal contact with scholars from abroad. Each research journey abroad then evoked suspicions among academic colleagues of having 'earned' the privilege by cooperating with the secret police. This was a completely new and challenging situation for anyone who intended to stay within academia and to work within their field of interest. The academic career of many was halted for political reasons. Some took the first chance to emigrate, and many older scholars were overtaken by political change and were prematurely proclaimed emeritus. There were some, however, who in spite of the academic purges and very limited resources available within the constraints of Marxist-Leninist doctrine survived, endured, and even excelled.

Oriental Studies, too, came under strong political pressure and had to approach sensitive topics of the time through a certain prism. Among these topics, of course, were religious issues, which were not considered a priority subject of research. However, individual religious traditions were acknowledged as constitutional for the study of the relevant cultures, and knowledge of them as therefore necessary.

Oriental Studies had to take often an unwanted and oppressive pro-Soviet direction. This undoubtedly resulted in disruption within Czech academia, as well as in the loss of many long-established contacts with western scholars and institutions. These changes are obvious mainly in the scholarly publications of the time, not only in the prestigious Czech Orientalist periodicals,

e.g. *Archiv orientální / Oriental Archive* and *Nový orient / New Orient*,⁸ but also in monographs. The classical Orientalist themes and approaches now became yoked alongside those which were ideologically appropriate: for example, Soviet Studies of the Orient, the economic build-up of Asian countries, industrialization and agriculture, national liberation, peace efforts, mutual aid, the question of Indian pre-communism and materialism, criticism of imperialism, Asian liberation movements, problems of labor in Asian cultures, etc. To illustrate the tendency, let us list some specific, often politically engaged titles of articles published in *Nový Orient* in the early 1950s: 'The struggle for liberation in the Orient' (Friš, O.), 'J. V. Stalin's message of peace to the Japanese people' (Hilská, V.), 'China is building a democratic economy' (Palát, A.), 'The first detailed record of a strike in human history' (Žába, Z.), 'The army of the Chinese people' (Neděla, J.), 'What was brought by the October Revolution to the women of the Soviet East' (Cejpek, J.), 'Ghándism and the fight for national liberation of the Indian people' (Zbavitel, D.), 'Feudalism in Syria' (Veselý, R.), 'The slave system in ancient India' (Friš, O.), 'Beginnings of the workers' movement in China' (Hrdlička, Z.), 'The worker's movement in India' (Krása, M.), 'My first encounter with Comrade Klement Gottwald' (Průšek, J.), 'A telegram of condolence from the Czech Academy of Science to the Academy of Science of the USSR on the death of the Chairman of the Board of Ministers of the USSR, Generalissimo Stalin', 'Plans of Soviet Oriental Studies' (Krása, M.), 'Soviet Orientalists in Prague' (Bečka, J.), and 'Lenin and the liberation movement in India' (Filipský, J.).

The influence of Soviet scholarship and Marxist-Leninist ideology thus became obvious in several ways. It influenced the choice of topics and the criticism of religious thinking; the majority of foreign scholars translated into Czech in the early 1950s were Soviet authors. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile looking into the work of Czech Orientalists to see the characteristic ideological standpoints which, even if only briefly, took hold of some of these significant figures, some still respected today.

Many Czech scholars, thinkers and travelers had made visits to the Orient in the early 20th century, but not all of them were able to continue traveling after the Communists seized power. In 1957, however, three Indologists

8 The main Orientalist scholarly periodical is *Archiv Orientalni / Oriental Archive: Journal of African and Asian Studies* (ArOr), published since 1929. Its founder was Bedřich Hrozný and the publisher is the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic. Another popular-scholarly journal is *Nový Orient / New Orient* (NO), founded by Vincenc Lesný in 1945. It is also published by the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Science.

who were members of the Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science – Erich Herold, Dušan Zbavitel and Kamil Zvelebil – made a journey to India and as a result published a large travelogue book titled *Indie zblízka* (India in close-up, 1960).

From the outset, these three Indologists clearly reveal their scholarly enthusiasm, and their ambition to spread their ideas among those who are interested (Herold & Zbavitel & Zvelebil 1960, 7). All the more striking, then, is their sharp criticism of Western society and its way of life. The fact that *Indie zblízka* was written as a popular book for a wide audience makes it even more valuable as a reflection of the *zeitgeist* of the period. It contains a whole range of personal standpoints, opinions and bitter assessments. The following examples of what is in effect communist propaganda will serve to illustrate the atmosphere. Describing the (now unfamiliar) experience of leafing through western and American magazines, the authors point out advertisements which supposedly show that it is possible 'to buy for one's child for example an exact model of the panzerfaust'. Elsewhere, the authors do not understand why the Holy Ghost needs a bank:

While in the Bible the merchants and moneymen did their business in the House of God, here, on the contrary, the one to whom the temple is devoted started doing business at an airport. The Vatican's Banco di Santo Spirito has a branch here and tries to use the hustle and bustle of an international airport to earn some money for the Church's moneybox. (Herold & Zbavitel & Zvelebil 1960, 11–12.)

They also claim that 'Pakistan "clung" to the U.S.A. and turned into a military state' (Herold & Zbavitel & Zvelebil 1960, 75). We can encounter similar rhetoric in other sections in which the authors evaluate Chinese restaurants in Kalimpong. Their sympathy is gained by the simple fact that 'they mostly ostentatiously declare their origin in the People's Republic of China, even though they are almost always locally owned' (Herold & Zbavitel & Zvelebil 1960, 209). They cannot refrain from ironic comment that the praying wheels and flags of Buddhist practice cannot be the final version, as they would be significantly sped up by a 'modern high-pitched engine!' (Herold & Zbavitel & Zvelebil 1960, 210–11).

While visiting India, the three scholars naturally encountered religious symbols at every step, and they certainly did not refrain from making judgments. Concerning Hinduism, they comment that it represents an entity with an 'ambiguous religious ideology' (Herold & Zbavitel & Zvelebil 1960, 79).

As to the vitality and authority of Hinduism in contemporary India, they note that at first sight the foreigner may be 'pleasantly surprised' by how 'almost dead it is and how its influence is limited to several religious fanatics and backward elders, and how the caste system is something which here and there does exist in theory, but is of no importance' (Herold & Zbavitel & Zvelebil 1960, 81). Nevertheless, longer exposure to village life reveals the contrary. The authors, however, optimistically emphasize that there are more and more progressively thinking people, who reject the caste system on basic democratic principles. In other words, the illiterate Indian village⁹ preserves features of Hinduism and thus significantly slows down the spread of modern ideas. Cultural traditions, especially religious ones, are contrasted with modernism and progressivism. Hinduism is described as a stubborn preserver 'of old cultural and spiritual traditions of the country, but also old anachronisms and superstitions, against which the young new India has to fight ruthlessly. This fight for the future of the country is still ahead of India.' (Herold & Zbavitel & Zvelebil 1960, 85).

In describing the atmosphere in the south-Indian temples, they use an anti-Christian condemnation often heard from Marxist-Leninist spokesmen, describing the temples as a throwback to the Middle Ages (Herold & Zbavitel & Zvelebil 1960, 103). Anti-American, anti-western and anti-Christian rhetoric is thus strongly contrasted with the 'critical love' of India proclaimed in the introduction to the travel book. When speaking of its future development, however, the authors do not wish India well. How else can we understand their statement that India had responded by 'establishing socialism in its country' and the basic steps which had already been taken, mainly in the economic sphere, i.e. the economic base? (Herold & Zbavitel & Zvelebil 1960, 305).

In a subsequent collective work titled *Bozi, bráhmani, lidé* (Gods, Brahmans, People, 1964) edited mainly by the Indologist Dušan Zbavitel, several authors display similar regrettably stereotyped thinking, often lacking in deeper reflection. They emphasize progress and modernity as highly positive values (Zbavitel 1964, 217), contrast reason with superstition (Zbavitel 1964, 160), and call into question the education system and the overall standard of the priests (Zbavitel 1964, 178). Together with their negative view of the

9 'An issue that dogged discourses on rural India in the nineteenth century was the question of whether the village holds or owns its lands in common or whether the cultivating households of an Indian village hold them severally. The writings of Marx and Engels were central to this debate, either directly or indirectly, because of the role they gave to the village in their idea of an Asiatic mode of production.' (Inden 2000, 134).

impact of the caste system on the life of Hindus (Zbavitel 1964, 216–7) their rhetoric points to ideological clichés typical not only of Marxism-Leninism. Similar value judgments also appear in some earlier theologians and philosophers from Protestant circles, for example Emanuel Rádl or Jan M. Lochman.

The ideological character of the 1950s can be further documented by claims such as: ‘the massive majority of believers have remained for a long time in the captivity of both the yearlong and everyday cycle of religious rituals and social relations required by the orthodox tradition and the local Brahman’ (Zbavitel 1964, 219), and ‘it is ridiculous [...] to see a generally modern educated Indian repeating the unengaged whispers of the prescribed mantra after the priest and in a resigned way undergoing all rituals’ (Zbavitel 1964, 178). They are seen to do so ‘under the pressure of the deeply rooted tradition of Hindu society, which cannot be altered even by the new social and economic changes’ (Zbavitel 1964, 178). Nevertheless, in its struggle with the caste system, India will in the end ‘gain victory’ when it aspires to reach ‘the truly just arrangement of its social issues and open its way to real progress’ (Zbavitel 1964, 217). And that will undoubtedly and without dispute be ‘the largest revolution in its history – a revolution shaking not only the thousand-year-old structure of the Indian society, but also the very basis of the phenomenon we call Hinduism’ (Zbavitel 1964, 217).

These glimpses into the situation and the internal atmosphere of Czech Oriental Studies in the 1950s and 1960s make it clear that this field was not spared from the ideological discourse of the time and that it transferred a whole range of intellectual schemes of Marxism-Leninism into the assessment of the research subjects. It is interesting that the very same stereotypes traditionally used to criticize Christianity and medieval Catholicism, such as the critique of the clergy, feudal system, and indeed tradition as such, were easily and perhaps even unconsciously transferred into the evaluation of Indian traditions. They were contrasted with progressiveness, faith in reason and progress toward a just (classless) society, modernity and the necessity of a revolutionary change of the traditional order.

The Caste System of India through the Prism of Anti-Clerical Reminiscence of the Enlightenment

Since the Enlightenment, Western scholars have striven to emancipate philosophical thought from Christian dogma and a religious view of the world, in parallel with the criticism of clerical hierarchy and of ritual practises. The justification for this was based both on opposition to the churches’ authori-

tarian approach to the pursuit of knowledge, deployed to limit the freedom of thought, and also on a belief that the best path of virtue is represented by an individual moral life and the search for truth. The Enlightenment is thus characterized by the rational project to examine and interpret the nature of religion independently of the doctrine of the Church. The only authority in the quest for truth was reason itself, and it was presumed that (true) religion cannot be in contradiction with reason. This also therefore predicates that everything irrational must necessarily be eliminated, and religious argumentation must be reduced to a minimum.

The rise of Enlightenment criticism was dependent upon both the religious and political division of Europe, and also on the fact that many scholars were no longer recruited from the clergy. Both the Enlightenment mindset, and its approaches to handling problems, must have, consciously or unconsciously, reflected secular thinking. Nevertheless, Enlightenment thinkers still dealt with a variety of major questions in the history of Christian theology and philosophy.

Enlightened criticism of the ecclesiastic understanding of religion, of clerical hierarchy and of theology outlived the limits of its own era. The philosophy and science of the 19th and 20th centuries were largely created under its on-going influence, and one of the ways in which this can be seen is in the transfer of stereotypes which had taken shape in the critique of the Catholic Church's medieval models of organization and authority to the evaluation of other religious traditions as well. Thus, if some non-Christian traditions display features similar to those of the Catholic Church, then a similar form of criticism and terminology is used. This type of critique is directed mainly against clerical forms of religion, which some scholars saw reflected in the Indian caste system or in some forms of Buddhism. Such a view was for example expressed by the Indologist and founder of the Czech study of religions, Otakar Pertold, in his work *Jest buddhismus náboženství hone pro European* (Is Buddhism a Religion Suitable for European Men?, 1911, VI/10).

Many scholars have seen Hinduism as a unique religion specifically on the grounds of its caste system,¹⁰ not stemming from any creed, nor indeed requiring one. In Hinduism, the castes are seen as a basic unit of Indian society, and their preservation as one of the prime duties of a Hindu (Merhautová 1966, 137). It is sometimes claimed, perhaps correctly, that for

10 Although the 1949 Constitution of India prohibited discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, it did not prohibit the caste system as such. Currently, there are approximately 50 million Brahmins in the Indian society.

devout Hindus it is not important who believes in what, but with whom they share a table. Therefore, the caste system and the hierarchical division of the society are seen as more essential than theology or doctrine, which, as has already been discussed, are classically assumed to form the basis of Christianity. In this context, it is assumed that the universal character of Buddhism and its spread beyond the borders of India is based specifically in its rejection of the caste system and related social structures, as the Czech Hussite theologian Miloslav Kaňák noted in the textbook *Přehled dějin mimokřesťanských náboženství* (Outline of the History of non-Christian Religions, 1954, 175–83).

In subsequent years, Enlightenment criticism of Indian society was perhaps most eagerly embraced by Marxist-Leninists, framing similar ideas by the theory of ‘classless communist society’. Central stereotypes were imported from Soviet Orientalist literature, where the Indian caste system constituted one of the main topics of academic interest. The caste system was seen as ‘reactionary’ or as a ‘reactionary anachronism’, on the grounds of the unequal status of people based in the teachings on Dharma, Karma and reincarnation (*Naučnyj ateizm* 1975, 90).¹¹ Both the system of Indian society as such, and the priestly castes, were condemned as conservative and as the main obstacle to social progress preventing the removal of caste barriers. The highest castes, i.e. the priests, are criticized as imposing a heavy economic burden on the lower castes, which must pay to maintain them (*Náboženství v dějinách i v současnosti* 1961, 24–29). ‘Hindu religious ideology’, as it is sometimes called, is considered ‘fertile ground for the Indian reaction standing against the people’ (*Vědecký ateismus* 1975, 90). By contrast, Jainism and Sikhism are evaluated positively, as their followers do not believe in the inequality of the castes.

The existence of the caste system is assumed to explain not only socio-economic, but also gender-oriented inequality, such as the traditional role of women in families and the position of women more generally, which is, of course, evaluated on the basis of the western European emancipation movement and the civil rights already established in western society. Another strongly criticized feature is arranged marriage, with the inability to choose one’s own partner. The caste system in India is thus labeled as a ‘social religious obstacle’.

11 The book *Vědecký ateismus* (Scientific atheism) was translated from the Russian original *Naučnyj ateizm* (Moscow, 1974). Although this is originally a Soviet publication, it is mentioned here because some sections were written by Czech authors, and it was thus well known in the Czech environment.

Although Hinduism is recognized by these Marxist-Leninist scholars as an extremely complex fusion of heterogeneous beliefs, habits, rituals and sects, they frequently characterize it using terms such as 'dogma' or 'Hindu dogmatics', similarly to the terminology used in discussing Catholic doctrine. It is even claimed that the basic 'dogmas of Hinduism' were formed during the Early Middle Ages, which is not only historically inaccurate but also undoubtedly strongly ideologically colored. Ever since the Enlightenment, the Middle Ages have been seen as a dark age, mainly because of the dominance of the Catholic Church. Therefore, not only the Catholic, but also the Hindu Middle Ages are perceived as a dark age in the development of human society.

The idea of a classless society preached in Marxist-Leninist teaching was related to important stereotypes used in critiquing the Indian caste system; yet the Buddhist universal demand of love for all creation, posited as the opposite of the Hindu caste system, was criticized too. It too was unacceptable for Marxist-Leninist 'science', since it contradicted the Marxist concept of mutual hatred between classes. Buddhist universal love was thus seen as standing in the way of revolutionary (and violent) change. The rejection of violence towards sentient beings in some sectors of Indian society and culture, and the consequent adoption of vegetarianism is also seen as problematic, on the grounds that it exacerbates perceived problems of nutrition, making them practically unsolvable.¹²

It is likely that the criticism of clerical hierarchy in some religious traditions, in this case Brahmanism,¹³ does indeed have its origins in the Enlightenment criticism of Catholic clericalism, hierarchy, feudal order and the structure of the Church, here subsequently adopted into the discourse of a modern and egalitarian society. The widespread assumption of the static role of the clergy – its deliberate silencing of religious enthusiasm, creation of complicated ritual systems, strengthening of its own exclusive position and assertion of a hierarchical society – continue to be found in scholarship well after the 18th and 19th centuries. Moreover, these arguments were even utilized in the evaluation of cultures of which Europeans had or still have minimal historical experience. Finally, criticism the 'class societies'

12 The religious ban on killing and consuming meat or a fellow creature had, according to some authors, significant influence on the famine situation in 1980's India.

13 But critical description of Brahmins is possible to find even in the classical work of the early 19th century titled *Description of the Character, Manners, and Customs of the People of India* (London, 1817) written by the Catholic author Abbé J. A. Dubois.

was voiced not only in Marxist-Leninist 'science', but also in the defense of Western colonial policies, as well as for the dissemination of democratic thinking and values.

Conclusion

The stereotypes I have presented here can certainly be found not only in Czech studies of Indian religions, but also in many works by European scholars from previous times. During the last fifty years European and Western thinking in general has gone through a period of self-examination, a critique of its own epistemological foundations and reflection on the limits of knowledge. Within the context of the study of religions and its self-examination, non-European religions were often explained and interpreted in the framework of Christian theology and philosophy, employing Christian categories, terms and perspectives. Therefore the contrasts drawn between European and non-European understandings of religion and culture can no longer be overlooked. A European concept of religion was very often uncritically adopted even by non-European scholars. Such a concept of religion ignored cultural differences, and was for example inappropriately applied to religious plurality in societies such as India. More recently, the concept has been understood less as a modern ideological product but rather as an instrument (used both consciously and unconsciously) in the Europeanization, Westernization and colonization of the world. In this context, the quest for doctrine, logic, truth or order was reduced to a pragmatic character, without respecting real difference and otherness. A Western critique was used mainly to facilitate intellectual orientation of scholars or social groups, and at the same time, it supplied specific political and economic strategies to rule and to control.

It is a widespread view that Indian religions are not doctrinal in nature, and thus are chaotic. European scholars, used to a doctrine-based explication of the world and to a coherent and closed system (order) of thought (with opposite categories such as true/false), created them wherever they could not find them. The following instance will serve to illustrate the application of existing ideas and concepts in the study of religions: Protestant theologians, who historically exercised a significant and positive influence on the study of religions as a discipline, projected certain elements of Reformation theology into their interpretation of other religions. Nonetheless, they promoted a generally open and tolerant attitude to other religions. The study of religions as a secular field of studies originated also in the

idea of 'toleration', in the concern about religious fundamentalism, and in the appeal to 'liberalism' and democracy resulting in the idea of universal priesthood, and in defending the quest for 'truth'.

On the one hand, Catholic theological works contain statements simply disqualifying anything reminiscent of the Reformation version of Christianity; on the other hand, however, the Catholic ethnological school was looking for 'similarities' between the biblical form of religion and non-Christian religions. Surprisingly enough, even the scientific atheism of Marxism-Leninism did in fact address traditional concepts in Christian theology. Its critique of the passivity and pessimistic worldview of some religious traditions ultimately stemmed from the biblical idea of the transformation of the world and of openness to change. The demand to change social conditions in Marxism-Leninism is thus a secular version of the biblical idea of transformation, then applied as a critique of religious systems that emphasize tradition and a stable political order. Even the Marxist idea that evil is part of the social system has biblical roots. The Marxist-Leninist theoretical critique of some religious traditions is based on their perceived inability to establish real social change through the use of violence, precisely as a consequence of their emphasis on internal change in human life. For example, in Buddhism human suffering represents an existential fact, in Marxism-Leninism it is a conditioned social factor. In the former, suffering is a necessary existential fact; in the second it is a social fact, conditional and thus removable.

What does this mean for scholarly research on religions, or on humanities more generally? Prior to the founding of the study of religions as a distinct discipline, research into other religions was often inadequate, and it frequently applied a parallelism which is no longer acceptable. Obviously, as the study of religions within the context of modern humanities strove to achieve autonomy alongside the other humanist disciplines, scholars began to create its new conceptual apparatus still partially relying on older ones. Very often, however, these attempts were not solid enough and therefore these theoretical models became little more than a mere mix of empirical facts modeled by cultural assumptions, shaped by inherited religious and philosophical terminology. Thus many theories are rather sums of opinions, often of a scientifically-philosophical (and ideological) nature, depending on the values and worldviews of the scholar, i.e. on personal as well as social ideology. This is clearly exemplified in the case of the Czech study of Indian religions in the twentieth century. These findings confirm that each frame of reference has its characteristic mechanisms and terminology by

means of which to approach and grasp 'otherness'. However, they are even more significant for the understanding of our own culture and our way of thinking. In other words, they say more about us than about the 'others'.

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