Dravidian studies in the Netherlands part 2 (1860s-1970s): Classical India rediscovered

As the Dutch lost their economic stronghold in India to the British, they also lost interest in South Indian studies. The Dutch Republic in the eighteenth century was in decline, and society was dominated by rentiers who profited by dividends from colonial company shares, "living off the legacy of past." (Israel 1995-1975) Voltaire caught a glimpse of the fading glory of Dutch universities in 1737 and marvelled at their ability to attract foreign students with new ideas and methods, especially in science and medicine. Yet economic decay, general despondency and a preoccupation with national decline turned Dutch scholars and publicists away from many of the broader issues debated elsewhere, such as in France. The physics-theological approach of the early eighteenth century - combining empirical science with verenation for an omnipresent God - remained dominant in Dutch universities, while the quality of intellectual life left much to be desired.

Conservatism during this time also extended to Oriental india, in which Oriental studies were traditionally associated with university theology departments and did not go beyond the established field of Semitic languages. After the fall of the Republic (1808) and the consolidation of the Christian Monarchy, the Netherlands still lagged behind other leading European nations. Only in the nineteenth century, when urban liberalburgers gained the upper hand, did the economy and culture begin to rapidly recover; a revised policy in the spirit of imperialist European expansion stimulated Orientalism.

Sanskrit was the first language deemed worthwhile of a chair, and one was estab-

Blavatsky, founder of the theosophical movement (since 1875) following Buddhist and Brahmanic theories of pantheistic evolution and reincarnation. Believing that this movement could instigate Western respect for Asian peoples as well as enhance their self-esteem, he took to spreading theosophy in Europe and in the Dutch East Indies. In 1909 van Manen set off for Madras to work at the Theosophical Society (TS) headquarters in Adyar.

Since the first Dutch contact with TS founders in Java around 1880, theosophy was an important issue for colonial intellectuals. It provided an impetus for research in Asian philosophical systems, contributing to a revival of Buddhist and Hinduism. Back in the Netherlands, Orientalists such as J.W. Boscowitz also became interested in the new intellectual trend. Some even began to associate it with the Western approach to Aryan wisdom. Kern's successor in Leiden, Indian antiquity specialist J.S. Speyer, referred to the subject of Indian philosophy mainly as 'theosophy'.

While in Adyar, van Manen studied Indian wisdom with a Tamil guru and witnessed the discovery and initial education of the future philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, who happened to be his teacher's son. Van Manen was especially interested in Himalayan tradition and aspired to unveil the essential uniformity of sacred eastern philosophy at its two poles: Aryan (north) and Dravidian (south). Unhappy with the TS President van Manen was especially interested in Himalayan tradition and aspired to unveil the essential uniformity of sacred eastern philosophy at its two poles: Aryan (north) and Dravidian (south). Unhappy with the TS President's involvement in Indian politics, he uninstalled the term 'modern' used in reference to Orientalism.

Zvelebil's Dravidology

As education and research grew in importance in the post-war period, universities received increasingly large government subsidies which they could use at their own discretion. By the mid-1960s the Dutch economy was in recovery and flourishing, and many former colonial intellectuals who had to leave Indonesia ended up at university departments of Oriental studies. The attraction of the generation's youth to the spiritual culture and art of modern India stimulated this scholarly interest, another incentive being decolonisation in Asia and the need to build international relations on a new foundation. The Dravidian south of India received much attention at that time (in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, for instance) and at Utrecht University a special Institute of Eastern Languages was founded in 1955, creating a basis for promoting Indological disciplines other than Sanskrit and Vedic studies.

In the early 1970s, the head of that institute, J. Gonda, invited exiled Czech scholar K.V. Zvelebil, who had lectured in the Soviet Union, for instance) and at Utrecht University a special Institute of Eastern Languages was founded in 1955, creating a basis for promoting Indological disciplines other than Sanskrit and Vedic studies.

To make the study of Dravidian languages and cultures part and parcel of Indological research had been achieved. "When I coined the term "Dravidiology", proposing to establish a legitimate field of study on a par with the field of Indology, my approach met with incredulous reactions varying from ridicule to hostility. (...) I am happy to say that nowadays it has become fully acceptable to speak of Dravidianists and Dravidology" (Zvelebil 1991: 5).

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