

Cultural Agents of Indic Sciences' Migration in Post–War Latvia

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Introduction

This study is a natural continuation of the first part of the research conducted by the author of this article, which covered the period from the middle of 19th century till the 1940s and is titled ‘The Origins and Proliferation of Indic Sciences in Latvia’ (Abrola 2019: 40–67). A brief summary of Part I is provided below.

The first stage of the research highlighted the importance of the ‘Young Latvians’ movement, the main activists of which were four young students at the University of Dorpat¹: Krišjānis Valdemārs (1825–1891), Juris Alunāns (1832–1864), Atis Kronvalds (1837–1875), and Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923), all of whom had been influenced by the German national movement of 1848 as well as the translations of Latvian folksongs and ideas of nationalism propagated by the German philosopher, theologian, poet, and literary critic Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), who had come to Riga in 1764 to work as a clergymen. The Young Latvians published the first nationally oriented periodical, ‘*Sehta, dabba un pasaule*,’² between 1860–1893. One topic of interest to the Young Latvians was Indic culture. Thus, in 1891 Latvian readers were introduced to Indic customs, religious views, virtues, and culture based on the oldest ancient Indian scripture — the Rigveda — in an article by Weismaņu Jānis (1867–1913), “*Indeeschu wecakā kultura un literatura*,”³ published in Jelgava in Notebook No 6 of the periodical (Veismanis 1891: 28–55).

Therefore, it is very likely that the famous Latvian poet and politician Rainis (birth name: Jānis Krišjānis Pliekšāns (1865–1929)), who also might have been influenced by these publications as well as the rising interest of the Latvian intelligentsia in the Orient⁴,

1 University of Dorpat or Universitāt Dorpat — the previous name of contemporary Tartu University in Tartu, Estonia.

2 “Homestead, Nature, and the World.” In old Latvian orthography. Hereinafter all translations from Latvian into English are performed by the author. Available at: http://www.lingvistiskakarte.lv/tag/seta_daba_pasaule [accessed 19.08.2022.].

3 ‘The Oldest Indian Culture and Literature,’ in old Latvian orthography.

4 The term ‘Orient’ was prominent during the time period under discussion. It is a historical term for the East, traditionally comprising anything that belongs to the Eastern world, in relation to the Western world, the Occident.

translated from German⁵ one hymn from the tenth Maṇḍala of the Rīgveda and one poem by Bhārtrihari⁶ into Latvian; later, the poem was published in Rainis's collection *Restless Heart. Songs from All Over the World* (Rainis 1921: 9–10). One of the first poems in the collection, 'The Beginning of Things,' was in its essence a cosmogonic type of hymn and one of the most famous and renowned hymns of the Rīgveda; inclusion of the poem in the collection depicts the poet's interest in cosmogony and the Orient. It has also been acknowledged that beginning from his college days Rainis was fascinated and influenced by the grandeur of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749–1832) mind and literary, philosophical, and scientific works.⁷ Goethe in his turn was a close friend of French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) disciple Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), who, according to German scholar Friedrich Wilhelm, was among the pioneer Indologists in Germany at the outset of the 19th century (Wilhelm 1961: 395–405). It is also known that Rainis possessed a vast collection of books covering such themes as Orientalism, Psychology, Philosophy, Ethics and Theology — namely 230 items, in some of which he made notes⁸. Among them, one can find works by many German philosophers such as Herder, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), and Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829). As the Latvian philologist Jānis Kušķis notes, apart from his interest in modern languages, Rainis had also been acquainted with an Old Indian language – Sanskrit. Unfortunately, Kušķis does not provide any additional information on this apart from some minor notes. (Kušķis 1968: 78). Alongside Rainis, there were many more literati fascinated and influenced by Eastern cultures and philosophy: for instance, the poet Andrejs Pumpurs (1841–1902) and his friend, the poet Auseklis (birth name: Miķelis Krogzemis (1850–1879), the poet Jānis Poruks (1871–1911), who had studied at Dresden Royal Conservatory in Germany from 1893–1894⁹, the writer Viktors Eglītis (1877–1945), the writer Jānis Veselis (1896–1962), the poet and writer Mirdza Bendrupe (1910–1995), the poet, translator, and philosopher Rihards Rudzītis (1898–1960), and the bibliographer, philologist, and translator Kārlis Egle (1887–1974).

Another Latvian amateur researcher and a writer who was highly valued by his contemporaries for his research on comparative linguistics, mythology, and Latvian language history was Voldemārs Leitis (n. d.). Leitis published at his own expense four books on comparative mythology, linguistics and etymology, and anthropometric features of Asian and Latvian

5 The reference to the book (Jolowicz 1856: 55–266) was given in Rainis's diaries on March 24, 1921. A link to Rainis's diaries: <http://www.korpuss.lv/klasika/Senie/Rainis/Dienasgr/1921.html> [accessed 18.02.2022.].

6 The poem 'Verzweilung' — Aus dem zweiten Hundert betitelt: 'Buch der Pflichten'. Bhārtrihari (Bhārṭṛhari) — (ca. 400–500? CE). Translated into German by German scholar of oriental culture and languages Peter von Bohnen (1796–1840) from The Śātakatraya — a collection of three books called 'The Three Hundred Poems of Moral Values.' Hereinafter, where necessary, a Sanskrit text will be transliterated in The International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST).

7 More details on the life and works of Rainis at: <https://runa.lnb.lv/63652/> [accessed 18.02.2022.].

8 A full bibliographical list was provided by Literature and Music Museum (LMM) in Riga.

9 More on the life and works of Jānis Poruks at: <https://www.letonika.lv/literatura/Section.aspx?f=1&id=2190863> [accessed 29.07.2022.].

people; he also was working on a Latvian — Aryan dictionary (*'Latviešu – āriešu vārdnīca'*, 1935). Latvian pastor and folklorist Jānis Sanders (1858–1951) and painter, art theoretician, publicist, researcher of castle mounds, and founder of Dievturi¹⁰, Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1942), alongside other amateur researchers, were actively involved in the work and oftentimes gave lectures on their results at the Society of Researchers of Latvia in Antiquity (*Latvijas senatnes pētītāju biedrība*).

It must be admitted that a number of societies established during the pre-war period played a key role in attracting like-minded people, thus becoming a beacon that disseminated the newly obtained knowledge throughout Latvian society via different channels. There were a great many of societies, both of small and larger scale; within the scope of this study only the most significant will be mentioned, the ones that served as a springboard for the upcoming political turmoil.

The Society of Parapsychology (*Parapsicholoģijas biedrība*) established in Riga in 1925 by Emma Apare (n. d.) and four others. The main goals of the society were to explore different psychological phenomena and Oriental metaphysics. The society later changed its name to The Centre of Yoga Sciences in Latvia under its chairperson and keen yoga practitioner and propagator, Harijs Dikmanis (1895–1979), and officer Jānis Veselis (n. d.; a cousin of a writer with the same name). Dikmanis had acquired Sanskrit to some extent and was learning Hindi. The main (but not only) goal of the society became the propagation of yoga as a new and alternative way to obtain physical and mental health. (Krūmiņa-Koņkova 2014: 153–188). The Latvian Society of Vegetarians (*Latvijas Veģētāriešu biedrība*) was established on August 31, 1927¹¹. Its main objectives were to propagate vegetarian ideology and practical vegetarianism, to conduct scientific studies on vegetarianism, and to combat all forms of cruelty. Among the leaders of the society were doctor Epplē (n. d.), doctor homeopath Haralds Lūkins (1906–1991), and doctor Augusts Vilis Kļaviņš (n. d.). The Latvian Anthroposophical Society (*Latvijas antroposofiskā biedrība*) was established in Riga on July 3, 1929, by 15 members under its first chairperson, doctor Arthur Weaber (n. d.), and second chairperson, Woldemar Fridrichson (n. d.). The society embraced and disseminated the ideology of Rudolf Joseph Lorenz Steiner (1861–1925) and Carl Unger (1878–1929). Membership reached 45 by 1939. The Latvian Roerich Society (*Latvijas Rēriha biedrība*) was officially established on October 13th, 1930, by doctor homeopath and ophthalmologist Fēliks Lūkins (1875–1934); however, the first ideas were overseen by Vladimirs Šibajevs (1898–1975), who had met Nikolay and Helen Roerich in London in 1920¹². Latvian

10 Dievturi — religious movement in Latvia, established in 1926 by its founder Ernests Brastiņš. “Dievturība is a national (primarily — ethnic) religion, rooted in the Latvian traditional culture and folklore, inspired by National Romanticism (*tautiskais romantisms*) since the 2nd half of the 19th century, and eventually selectively systematized and canonized during 1920s. It is an autochthonous pan-en-heno-theistic religion — it possesses the characteristics of both panentheism asserting interdependence of the world and God which is immanent in everything within the universe.” (Nastevičs 2018: 91–92).

11 The Articles of *The Society of Vegetarians* on August 31, 1927. Latvian State Historical Archives (LSHA) Fund No 2479, 1st entry, No 1, 1927–1940. There is another copy of Articles in German language.

12 Latvian Roerich Society: <http://www.latvijaserihabiedriba.lv/images/RXLVlat.htm> [accessed 30.08.2022.].

military officer Aleksandrs Balodis (1897–1961), together with his wife Emma Apare-Balodis, became the first chairpersons of The Society of Latvian Spiritual Sciences (*Latvijas spiritisko zinātņu biedrība*). The Society was established on December 24, 1930; the founders temporary left in 1933 only to re-join before, along with a collection of Russian and German activists, establishing The Promotional Society of Cosmosophic Sciences in Latvia (*Kosmosofijas zinātņu veicināšanas biedrība Latvijā*) on December 19, 1933 (Krūmiņa-Koņkova 2014: 155–161). The Vegetarian Consumer Producer Society ‘Laikmets’ (*Veģetārais patērētāju-ražotāju kooperatīvs “Laikmets”*¹³) was established on March 22nd, 1934¹⁴. At the beginning of 20th century, in addition to the above-named spiritual societies, Latvian–Estonian itinerant Buddhist monk Kārlis Augusts Tenisons (his spiritual name Vahindra Mantramitra, 1883–1962) actively participated in the dissemination of Buddhism and its doctrine without adhering to particular schools or sects. At the same time, Tenisons carried a controversial personality: holding himself to be a sacerdotal person, he left a written legacy of several books and pamphlets, of which three were eventually translated into Latvian. The writings contained certain inconsistencies in autobiographical data and many fanciful events, including meetings with persons whom he had supposedly met yet likely did not (Šlāpins 2008). His contemporary, chemist Aleksandrs Miķelis Janeks (1891–1970), who had written a couple of books of teachings on Buddhism, criticized the work of Tenisons; despite this, Tenisons left a significant footprint in the history of Buddhism by creating a third migration path of Buddhism to the West — the Baltic way. Another noteworthy fact indicating the profound interest in Indic sciences in Estonia (where Tenisons originated) was the introduction of Sanskrit as a subject at the University of Dorpat in 1837 (Krūmiņa-Koņkova 2019: 178–180; Abrola 2019: 53). Art historian Gunta Rudzīte notes that her father, Rudzītis, had studied ancient languages there¹⁵.

A little less is known about the translation into Latvian of the work on the Buddhist Catechism originally written by American Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), the co-founder and First President of the Theosophical Society. The translation was done in 1908 by Tenisons’s contemporary, the writer and publicist Augusts Deglavs (1862–1922). His initial works embraced realistic sentimentalism; he was overwhelmed by Marxist ideas, yet he did not get engaged in the New Current Movement (*Jaunstrāvniece*). Hence, his works gradually evolved to cover the aesthetics of naturalism¹⁶. Thus, in the foreword of the translation (in gothic orthography), Deglavs writes that the purpose of the book is not to convert readers to Buddhism or propagate its doctrine, but simply to get them acquainted with it, in turn allow them to comprehend the origins and development of deities and religions (Deglavs 1908: 60).

13 Original orthography is retained here.

14 LSHA Fund No. 4698, entry No. 1 (years 1934–1937), Articles, p. 13.

15 The interview with Gunta Rudzīte and Alvis Hartmanis, registered No. 4614 in the catalogue of the Archive of National Oral History (ANOH).

16 More on the life and works of Augusts Deglavs at: <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/55762> [accessed 21.02.2022.].

Another noteworthy fact: the social activists engaged in the work of the aforementioned societies often collaborated with each other and organized joint events. This helped them greatly after the change of political power and during the outset of the ruthless and unpredictable Stalin¹⁷ regime in 1939.

Since the scope of this research covers several domains of cultural life in Latvia, the author will highlight the influence of only a few of the most remarkable agents of Indic sciences in Latvia, thus leaving space for further investigations. This research embraces the archives of the Misiņš Library of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia, the Literature and Music Museum, the Imants Ziedonis Museum, Latvia State Radio and Television Centre, and Riga Film Studio; in addition, consultations with Dzintars Vilnis Korns on the history of Latvian Yoga Society were conducted during research. Interviews with other respondents were recorded between January 26 and May 9, 2019. However, only three interviews were relevant to this research¹⁸. The audio recordings of the interviews were deposited at the Archive of National Oral History (ANOH).¹⁹ The fourth interview was retrieved from the repository of ANOH²⁰.

The geopolitical situation in Latvia from 1938–1970, in brief

Abundant idiosyncratic biographical data and opinions are described in the long-letter written by Bendrupe in October 1987²¹, addressed to Latvian poet Jānis Peters and describing her difficulties securing a visa to India in the 1930s. The reader must be prepared and view the information carefully, bearing in mind the extravagant nature of the poet and her tendency to exaggerate facts:

And here started a set of political plotting: Ulmanis loathed me — I loathed him. Not only for personal reasons: he did not issue me a visa to India in '38–'39. Not only to me! Everybody was locked up. Exclaimed: 'I am staying in my place; you stay in yours.' Locked us up as in lair. (Bendrupe [1987]: 11)

- 17 Joseph Stalin (1878–1953) — Soviet Communist Party and leader of Soviet Union — a dictator, who created terror and totalitarian regime — from 1929 till 1953. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020).
- 18 The interview with Baņuta Rubess, registered No. 4698, the interview with Gunta Rudzīte and Alvis Hartmanis, registered No. 4614, and the interview with Dzintars Vilnis Korns, registered No. 4620 in the catalogue of ANOH.
- 19 The Project of National Oral history, hosted and conducted by Institute of philosophy and sociology, University of Latvia, Riga. Available at: <http://www.dzivesstasts.lv/lv/free.php?main=502> [accessed 30.08.2022.].
- 20 The interview with poet Velta Sniķere, registered No. 53 in the catalogue of ANOH.
- 21 Academic Library of University of Latvia (ALUL RK No. 11577/7. Mirdza Bendrupe, No. 1 bibliographical-ly philosophical letter "I want to yell. Bite. Fret and fume..." (*Man gribas kliegt. Kost. Špert zemes...*), pp. 64. Typewritten part of letter to poet Jānis Peters, written in October 1987.



Image 1. Bendrupe with her first husband Lev Vinogradov in Riga, early 1930s. Literature and Music Museum, RMM No 539774



Image 2. Extravagant Mirdza Bendrupe in early 1930s. Literature and Music Museum, RMM No 374571

Although, Bendrupe claimed that nobody was granted a visa to India, seven newspaper articles titled 'Visiting Pundits of India' introduced readers to the impressions and experiences of *A. Aka* (n. d.), a member of the Yoga Society visiting the Yoga Institute and its founder, their spiritual guru, Shri Yogendra²², in Bombay (contemporary Mumbai) sometime during 1939. The article, published in seven parts, narrated very vividly the yogic practices, teachings, culture, and everyday life of India (Aka 1940).

Based on publication by her schoolmate, the theologian Haralds Teodors Biezais (1909–1995), who emigrated to Sweden in 1944, it was believed that Bendrupe was favoured by the fourth president of Latvia, Kārlis Augusts Vilhelms Ulmanis (1877–1942), who led the country during the interwar period from 1936–1940 (Biezais 1984: 41–44). However, as one realizes after reading her personal notes, the situation was quite the opposite.

22 Shri Yogendra — born Manibhai Haribhai Desai (1897–1989). Indian yoga guru, author, poet, researcher, and founder of the Yoga Institute in 1918.

1940, was one the most complicated periods in Latvian history; according to Bendrupe, she and her first husband, Russian architect Lev Vinogradov (n.d.), endured the hardship by practicing yoga:

Read with both eyes, listen to, with both ears! Then — frustrated as we could not get to India we were longing for, as well as physically half ill — we decided to toil ourselves with yoga for days in order to recover. We did not leave the flat (only for bread) — did not read newspapers, did not receive guests. One day I went out to a small shop — suddenly I see — the plane with the red star flying low over Riga! [...] I bought the newspaper — reading: early this morning Soviet military forces enter Latvia... What can yoga do about it — we divided the money and out [...] to the Soviet Embassy [...]. (Bendrupe [1987]: 12) See the images No. 1 and No. 2.

German occupation followed; and on the basis of a poem devoted to her stepfather, Alfrēds Akmens (1895–n. d.), Bendrupe was mistakenly accused by the German authorities of praising former president Ulmanis (Bendrupe [1987]: 10–11).

After Latvia's first occupation by Soviet Union in 1940, Stalin's regime was implemented immediately and all privately established societies were banned; their adherents could meet only secretly in their homes. According to the biographic memories of Latvian entrepreneur Brunis Rubess (1926–2009), as reflected by writer Nora Ikstena in the book *As a Miracle... (Brīnumainā kārtā..., 1999)*, Bendrupe's flat in 1940s was one such meeting place, drawing together likeminded people to share the knowledge and yogic practices that had been handed down by the leaders of societies. Interestingly enough, Bendrupe and her husband had been adherents of several societies, and she herself mentioned that she had been associating with Catholics, Dievturi, and even the Social Democrats in 1930s²³ (Bendrupe [1987]: 5; Bendrupe [1932]). She had also been close to the leader of The Centre of Yoga Sciences in Latvia, Harijs Dīkmanis, and Aleksandrs Balodis from The Promotional Society of Cosmosophic Sciences in Latvia. Then, in early 1940s, Bendrupe met the young Rubess when he was taken by his schooltime sweetheart Mirdza Avotiņa (n. d.) to a meeting in her apartment; there, Rubess was introduced to the teachings of yoga and cosmosophy by Bendrupe and her husband. Bendrupe even requested Egle, who was the head of the Misiņš Library, to give him books on the subject.

Bendrupe's literary work was not disrupted by the restless time during World War II; it was during the war that she published the collection of short stories and novels, *Maelstroms of God (Dieva viesuļi, 1942)*. Good insight into Bendrupe's experiences with yoga, her philosophical views, and her religious beliefs related to Christianity, Buddhism, and Dievturi was divined by Latvian philologist Anita Rožkalne during an in-depth interview with Bendrupe in 1994 (Rožkalne 1994: 9; Rožkalne 1999: 105–119):

Yes. All my life I have been doing yoga, and it says: evil is ineradicable, it only changes its disguise. [...] Yoga seeks a way out...[.] in Nirvana, but one must grow into it, so

23 The time span mentioned here is most likely 1932–1934 based on her notes in Bendrupe's diary.

that a man gets tired of everything that is disgusting, and seeks for the way out [...]
(Rožkalne 1999: 107).

Another of Rožkalne's article informs that among Latvian poets influenced by the East during the interwar period and henceforth, one can list: Rihards Rudzītis, Mirdza Bendrupe (also prose), Velta Sņikere, and Roberts Mūks (Rožkalne 2019: 564).

Sņikere, who firstly emigrated to Germany in 1944 and later on to the UK in 1946, was not only a poet, but Dikmanis's apprentice and yoga practitioner. Moreover, she had learned Indian dance in the 1950s and together with other peers established the society the British Wheel of Yoga, where she was known as Velta Wilson. Sņikere represents British yoga teachers at the Yoga Teachers' Association²⁴.

WWII brought changes in the lives of the literati and activists of the afore-mentioned societies. Many inhabitants of Latvia decided to migrate under the influence of Nazi German propaganda (Zellis 2007: 61–64). Germany became one of the first destinations for evacuation or migration, including for Dikmanis in 1944. Eventually he migrated to the United States of America, where he continued his work as a yoga practitioner, teacher, and a writer. More details on the life and work of Dikmanis, so devoted to the propagation of yoga as well as the related societies in the pre- and post-war periods, are given by Latvian philosopher Solveiga Krūmiņa-Koņkova in her recent article *Migration of Religious Ideas: Some Cases* (*Reliģisko ideju migrācija: daži gadījumi*, Krūmiņa-Koņkova 2019: 177–184).

The societies were closed down, and any activities could be continued only by the hidden fervor of their adherents. The geopolitical situation of Latvia from 1940–1945 was extremely complicated. Although Latvia was included in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1940, was renamed The Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR), and many organizations including the Chief Literary Administration were taken over by the occupational regime of USSR, Latvia also existed under the pressure and propaganda of Nazi Germany. This altogether was a period of unease in Latvia (Zelmenis 2007: 15–44; Feldmanis 2007: 47–60). Even though the victory of the USSR over Nazi Germany took place in 1945, the actual reoccupation of Latvia lasted from 1944–1946 (Pavlovičs 2007: 253–270). As a result of the political turmoil, many Latvian inhabitants became victims of Stalin's regime, being accused of treason against the Motherland. Soldiers of the Latvian Legion²⁵, having fled to the West, were forcefully taken to war camps where they became prisoners of war.

24 See more on the biography of Velta Sņikere here: <http://www.literatura.lv/lv/person/Velta-Snikere/872029> [accessed 19.02.2022.].

25 The Latvian Legion (Latvian: *Latviešu leģions*) was a formation of the German Waffen-SS — during World War II. It was created after Hitler's written order on February 10, 1943 and consisted mainly of Latvian volunteers. However, in reality, all the men born from 1906 till 1928 were subjugated to total mobilization in 1944 based on Latvian War Conscription Law (Neiburgs 2017).

A story of two Latvians: a prisoner-of-war and a prisoner of a gulag

This chapter gives insight into the fate of two Latvian soldiers who utilized knowledge expressed in Old Indian Scripts and yoga practices to survive the horrors of war and later on the hardships of a POW camp in Belgium and a gulag²⁶ in Russia.

Rubess's biographer Ikstena reveals that after the first encounters with yoga and Indian philosophy at Bendrupe's get-togethers, the young Rubess (aged only 15 or 16) met Balodis and was fascinated by his personality²⁷. Although neither his autobiographical books nor his daughter Baņuta Rubess²⁸ provide in-depth information on his practicing of yoga later in life, other than headstands and quasi meditation, Ikstena's biography certainly gives evidence of practicing yoga during the 1940s. The following lines reveal the intensity and absolute belief in the power of knowledge that was communicated to him at a young age:

'Lion (Bendrupe's husband — Lev Vinogradov; author's comment) taught us that nobody who chants the sacred sound *'om haung juung sah'*²⁹ one hundred and nine times a day as a mantra, would die unnatural or violent death. I can say, it has come true.' (Rubess, Ikstena 1999: 68)

Being a high school student, Rubess was recruited into the Latvian Legion in 1944, into Regiment No 33 of Colonel Vilis Janums (1894–1981), and served until 1945. He and some friends from his regiment then traveled to Germany, where they struggled for survival, and finally were seized and taken to a POW camp in Zedelghem, Belgium, that was used mainly for Baltic soldiers (Vecrumba & Vecrumba n.d.). Rubess was a prisoner of war in Zedelghem from 1945 through 1946; while there, he served as a translator and was an editor of a daily newspaper, *Laika Griecšos*, and a humorous magazine, *Atskabarga* (Rubess n.d.). Based on his biography and his daughter's recollection, he used to have a picture with a lotus flower and a sacred symbol OM³⁰ on the wall at the camp. There, in Zedelgheim, he experienced a miraculous encounter with the father of yoga in Latvia, Harijs Dikmanis. Rubess remembered that Dikmanis read his mind by answering an unvoiced question. Having considered the situation retrospectively, his daughter, Baņuta Rubess, is skeptical about Dikmanis's telepathy. Yet, she assures Dikmanis possessed so called paranormal abilities such as slowing down his heart rate and enlarging the

26 The Gulag — Main Administration of Camps — the government agency in charge of the Soviet forced-labour camp system set up under Vladimir Lenin and reached its peak during Joseph Stalin's rule from the 1930s to the early 1950s.

27 Aleksandrs Balodis publishes a book *Joga Jnigacs Noimantagara mācība Kosmosofija* under his wife's name, Emma Balodis, and all the adherents of this formation called themselves — *inriēši*.

28 Interview with Baņuta Rubess, registered No. 4698 in the catalogue of ANOH.

29 The mantra Vinogradov taught to Rubess is called *Mahāmṛtyuñjaya bīja* (seed) mantra to prevent death and restore health. This mantra is a shortened form of Rudra mantra, or also known as the *Tryambakam Mantra* — a verse of the Rigveda (RV 7.59.12). The full mantra text: "tryāmbakaṁ yağamahe sugandhīm puṣṭivardhaṇam / ūrvāruḥkam iṣaṁ bandhañān mṛtyor mukṣīya māmṛtāt[]." (Autores Varii, 2022)

30 In Sanskrit — ॐ.

pupils of his eyes. Even though, she never remembered her father chanting mantras or using prayer beads called ‘malas,’ his daughter admitted the power of yoga and its positive impact on his personal and professional life. Rubess became a very influential person — a chief strategy officer at German automobile company *Volkswagen AG* from 1988 till 1991.

‘I have practiced yoga, meditated. It has helped me a lot in keeping myself fit mentally and physically. I am certain that mystical powers exist, and I think that I have made them work unawares and partially knowingly. By concentrating. By connecting to energy sources of the universe. By establishing peace in body and spirit. [...] Every time when it was necessary, I was able to fall asleep in a few minutes. [...] it definitely comes from yoga exercises. From standing on head.’ (Rubess, Ikstena 1999: 71–72)

Notwithstanding his fascination with yoga and meditative practices, over the years Rubess had eventually syncretized several religious belief systems as he likewise deemed himself ‘*dievturis*’ — an adherent of Dievturi, and also gladly donated to Protestant Church.

Another amazing personality was Ernests Laumanis (1908–1968), Major of Division No 19, assault battalion in the Latvian Legion and a victim of political repressions who was convicted to twenty years’ penal servitude for treason against the Motherland³¹ by the War Tribunal of The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs of The Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) on March 2, 1946. Fate took this officer to the East — to a gulag in Vorkuta, Russia — where he spent ten years. His crime was dismissed according to a September 17, 1955, decree on amnesty issued by the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union (Neiburgs 2015).

Letters from the gulag to his daughter cast some light on Laumanis’s life and activities during his imprisonment. We can be grateful for his daughter’s keeping his letters: Brigita Ližbovska and his granddaughter, Katrīna Ližbovska, have immortalized his legacy as a school project in a BlogSpot. Judging by the epistolary evidences dating back to 1960, one can assume that his first imprisonment under Stalin’s regime must have been extremely severe: no communication with the outer world was allowed. Presumably, the living conditions might have been far better during his second conviction by The Supreme Court of LSSR on June 18, 1957, after he had been denounced. This time he was convicted for five years and sent to Potma Camp in Mordovia, Russia. His daughter recalls that:

‘[...] During deportation, father started showing interest in Indian literature. Translated Vedas. Read a lot. In his letters he recommended me some books. My father knew French, English, Russian, as well as good German, and had acquired a bit of Sanscript (sic)³². (Ližbovska n.d.)

31 Treason against the Motherland was one of the most severe criminal charges according Criminal Code of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic) Codex, namely, Article 58. For more details see here: <http://www.cyberusrr.com/rus/uk-rsfsr.html> [accessed 22.02.2022.].

32 ‘Sanskript’ — the accurate spelling would be Sanskrit. Brigita Ližbovska might have not known about this language, that could be the reason for misspelling.

The fragment of Laumanis's letter to his daughter Brigita Ližbovska narrates the influence of Indian philosophy on his views:

'I read Indians a lot whose works somewhat relate to Roerich's sceneries. I was interested in Indian philosophy when I was seventeen, eighteen, and then came a period in my life when I had no time nor need for such things. Now, returning to the Eastern ideas again, reading them with the eyes that have experienced a lot, tested them with joy and sorrow, astonished I realized that the things I had read many years ago and seemingly completely forgotten have influenced my manner of thinking, have influenced my decision making, have connected with real life and formed my life and world view'. (Mordovia, March 19, 1964; Ližbovska n.d.)

Apart from persons who were directly engaged in military operations, there were many civilians, especially intelligentsia, who propagated views alien to Soviet ideology. Based on the memories of Gunta Rudzīte, the members of the Latvian Roerich Society, after closing down in 1940, continued meeting each other covertly until 1947. The same year, Rudzītis published a poetic essay, *Ages (Mūži)*; soon afterwards, his entire library was confiscated. In 1948, Rudzītis was convicted to penal servitude for 10 years and deported to The Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1949 his wife, actress Ella Rudzīte (n. d.), was also deported, leaving their three children in Latvia. Later on, he was moved to gulag camps in The Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. After Stalin's death he was released; he returned to Latvia in 1954. Unfortunately, all his literary works were prohibited and remained in Special USSR Archives. His last and unfinished work, *The Fraternity of the Holy Grail (Svētā Grāla brālība)*, was a life-long work undertaken between 1935 and 1960; in it, he investigated the origins and semiotics of the legend of the Holy Grail, exploring its veracity. This work was finally published in 1994 and reprinted in 2010³⁵.

Among many translations — for example, the works published by Theosophical Society, Roerich's family, and the great Indian philosophers — there were also the works of sacerdotes: Swami Vivekananda (birth name: Narendranath Dotto; 1863–1902) and Ramakrishna or Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahansa (birth name: Gadadhar Chattopadhyay (1836–1886)). Rudzītis had also translated into Latvian Vivekananda's *Karma Yoga (Karma Joga)*, which was circulated amidst the adherents covertly in typewritten, unbound form. See image No. 4. Significant patronage to print and circulate the works of the Latvian Roerich Society was provided by its loyal member, the doctor Haralds Lūkins (1906–1991), son of F. Lūkins. Immense work towards the dissemination of copies translated into Latvian and Russian after her father's death was performed by G. Rudzīte. She remembers that people used to come to her apartment in Riga from all over the USSR to obtain and make copies of those works. When asked how the people learned about the works and her, she answered that inmates at the gulag used to share this information among each other³⁶.

35 More on the life and works of Rihards Rudzītis at: <http://literatura.lv/person/Rihards-Rudzitis/872560> [accessed 22.02.2020.].

36 Interviews No. 4614 and No. 4620 at ANOH.

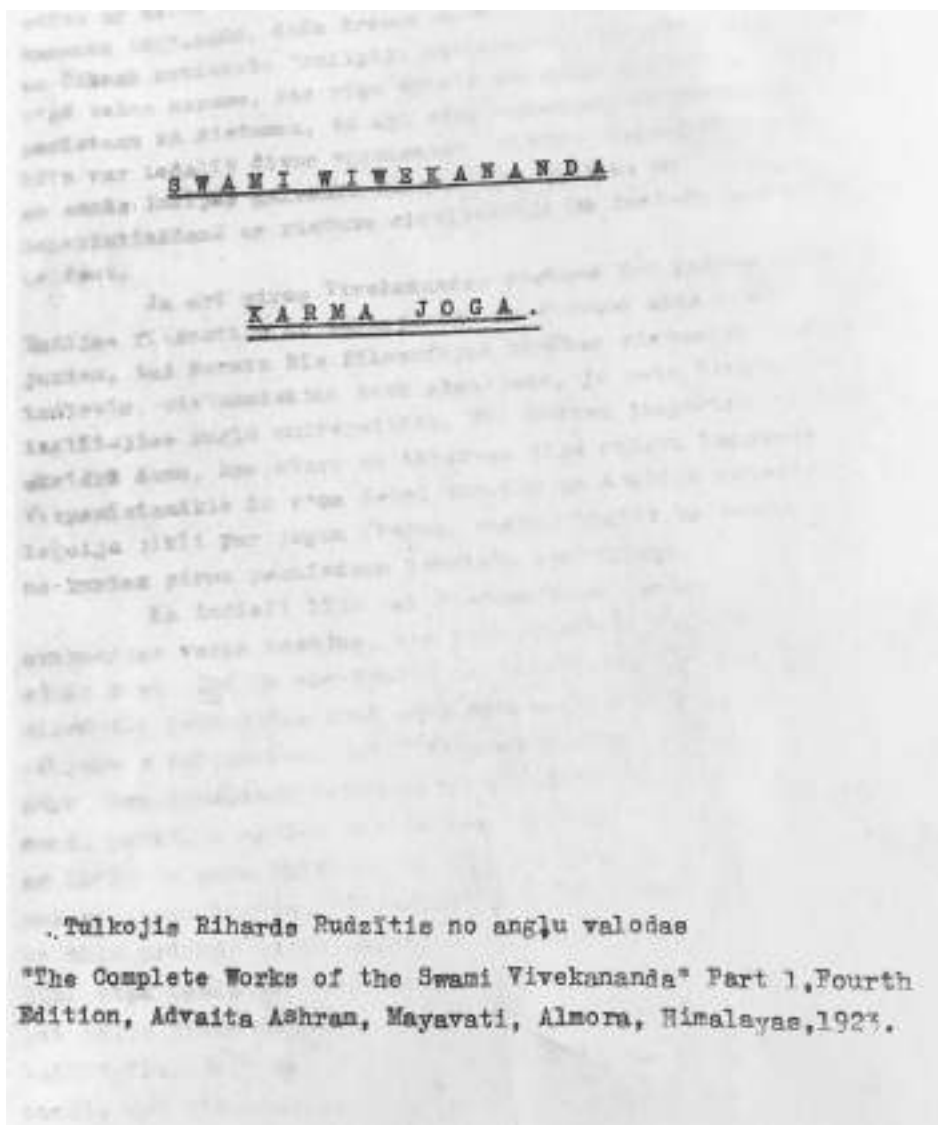


Image 4. Karma Joga translated by Rudzītis. Personal funds of the late Dzintars V. Korns

Cultural and political ties with India during the rule of Soviet nomenclature

A breakthrough in bilateral relations between the Soviet Union and India began after India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), paid a visit to the Soviet Union in 1955. This was his second visit to the country: he visited Moscow in 1927 with his father, the lawyer and politician Motilal Nehru (1861–1931), to participate in the 10th anniversary celebration of the October Revolution (Mohanty 2015). Henceforth, the relationship between the two large states developed rapidly. Soviet peoples were introduced to Indian culture: films, art, literature, dance, and music; this was welcomed and supported by Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971).

The political rule of Khrushchev was considerably more liberal; this was noted by Bendrupe in her letter to Peters. Nehru's visit in 1955 certainly fostered future political visits, the exchange of cultural programs, and scientific and literary collaboration. Series of events depicting the culture life of India were organized in Latvia and were filmed as documentaries to immortalize the new ties between the countries:

1. Cinematography journal *Ausland Woche* No 634/72: The leader of the Indian freedom movement S. H. Bose together with German officers receive a parade of the Indian Legion in 1943³⁷.
2. Drawings of Indian children at the Museum of Latvian and Russian Art in 1956³⁸.
3. Indian applied art exhibition at State Fine Arts Museum in 1957³⁹.
4. Indian Social activist Rajkumari Amrita visits Riga in 1958⁴⁰.
5. Indian traditional dancer Indrani visits Riga in 1959⁴¹.
6. India Prime Minister Indira Gandhi meets poet Mirdza Ķempe in Moscow in 1965. Mirdza Ķempe reads her poem "Neru's ashes". Ballet master Helēna Tangijeva-Birzniece conducts rehearsal of ballet *Shakuntala* at The House of Opera

37 LSHA Fund No. 194; Collection of the Cinema Chronicles and Documentary Filming (CCCDF); dokument No. 1007.

38 LSHA Fund No. 8, document No. 1279. Riga Studio of Feature Films and Chronicles (RSFFC). Director: Hermanis Šuļatins; cameramen: Vladimirs Gailis, Aleksandrs Gribermans, Ļevs Dovgillo, Inna Korecka, Mihails Poseļskis. In Latvian language. Contemporary Latvian National Museum of Art.

39 LSHA Fund No. 8, document No. 1552. RSFFC. Director: Aloīzs Brenčs; cameramen: Jānis Celms, Laimons Gaigals, Mihails Šneiderovs. In Latvian language.

40 LSHA Fund No. 8, document No. 1594. Riga Film Studio audiovisual, photo and sound documents. Director: Irina Masa; cameramen: Jānis Celms, Laimons Gaigals, Vladimirs Gailis, Gunārs Indriksons, Mihails Poseļskis, Rūta Urbaste. Persons: Eduards Smilģis (1886–1966), Vija Artmane (1929–2008), Zigrīda Stungure (1928–2010), Artūrs Dīmiters (1915–1986). In Latvian language.

41 LSHA Fund No. 8, document No. 1619. Riga Film Studio audiovisual, photo and sound documents. Director: Aloīzs Brenčs; cameramen: Laimons Gaigals, Vladimirs Gailis, Mihails Poseļskis, Gunārs Indriksons. In Latvian language.

and Ballet. A fragment from a ballet *Shakuntala*. Starring: Velta Vilciņa, Ausma Dragone featuring Doe, Haralds Ritenbergs featuring Dushyanta.⁴²

(Credit: See, Hear Latvia! Digital archive of audio-visual, photo and audio documents of the Latvian State Archives of Audio-visual Documents)

In the post-war period, the predominant source to watch films, especially foreign-produced films, was the cinema, as television had just started evolving. The author retrieved information on films from two sources: the Latvian National Digital Library (LNDL)⁴³ and informal, unrecorded conversations with a few interlocutors, the contemporaries of the epoch. Unfortunately, Latvian State Television does not keep records in their archives of the feature films that have been broadcasted. Hence, only the above-mentioned sources have been used.

The online repository LNDL provides the following list of Indian films shown at Latvian cinemas: Raj Kapoor starring in *Vagabond (Klaidonis)*⁴⁴ and *Mister 420 (Kungs 420)*;⁴⁵ *Calcutta – The Cruel City (Divi bighi zemes)*⁴⁶ shown in 1954; then Indian comedy *New Delhi* (1956; *Jaunā Deli*) and *Hum Log (Gaismeklim jādeg)*⁴⁷ shown in 1960; in 1961 *Four Hearts, Four Roads (Četri cēli)*⁴⁸; in 1963 *Masoom* (1959; *Ar smaidu sirdī*), and *Raja Harishchandra (Rādža Hariš Čandra)*⁴⁹; in 1964 *Look, the Path is Visible (Ceļš jau saskatāms)*⁵⁰; in 1965 *Dhool Ka Phool (Ziediņš ceļa putekļos)*⁵¹, *Awakened Man (Tauta mostas)*⁵², *Anuradha (Milestības vārdā)*,⁵³ *Baiju Bawra (Beidžu bavra)*⁵⁴, and *Ganga Jamna (Ganga un Džamna)*⁵⁵; in 1966 *Shebar Aur Sapna (Tūkstoš nakšu akmens gulta)*⁵⁶; in 1967 *The Big*

42 LSHA Fund No. 8, document No. 2109. Riga Film Studio audiovisual, photo and sound documents. Director: Gunārs Piesis; cameraman: Valdis Kroģis. Persons: Kurts Fridrihsons (1911–1991), Indira Gandhi (1917–1984), Mirdza Ķempe (1907–1974), Helēna Tangijeva-Birzniece (1907–1965). In Latvian language.

43 Available at: www.periodika.lv [Accessed 23.02.2022.]

44 Original title in Hindi *Awaara* (1951).

45 Original title in Hindi *Shree 420* (1955).

46 Original title in Hindi *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953).

47 Original title in Hindi *Humlog* (1951).

48 Original title in Hindi *Char Dil Char Raabein* (1959).

49 Original title in Hindi *Raja Harishchandra* (1913).

50 Original title in Hindi *Paadhai Theriyudhu Paar* (1960) is a drama Tamil language directed by Nema Ghosh (1914–1988).

51 Original title in Hindi *Dhool Ka Phool* (1959).

52 Original title in Hindi *Jaag Utha Insan* (1959).

53 Original title in Hindi *Anuradha* (1960).

54 Original title in Hindi *Baiju Bawra* (1952).

55 Original title in Hindi *Gunga Jumna* (1961).

56 Original title in Hindi *Shebar Aur Sapna* (1963).

*City (Lielā pilsēta)*⁵⁷; in 1968 *Journey beyond Three Seas (Ceļojums pāri trim jūrām)*,⁵⁸ and *You My Life (Tu mana dzīve)*⁵⁹; in 1969 *Wish (Mīla Kašmīrā)*⁶⁰, *In the Arms of the Bombay Night (Bombeja nakts skāvienos)*⁶¹, and *Sangam (Sangama)*⁶²; and finally in 1970 *Anupama*, which was shown at the Daile in Riga.

In spite of the fact that contemporary critiques did not consider the production of Indian cinematography as artistically and professionally valuable — for they were generally perceived as sentimental melodramas — in 1969 a newspaper article announced such films as the most visited by the inhabitants of Liepāja city. Of note, the film *Wish* attracted 32,000 spectators (Rasa 1969).

Unlike the situation with Latvian State Television archives, the archives of Latvian Radio broadcasting have more records to offer on Indic theme. There are three radio programs on which Mirdza Ķempe was a guest:

1. On February 27, 1965 Latvian poet Alfrēds Krūklis (1921–2003) converses with the poet.
2. On June 7, 1966, Mirdza Ķempe narrates about the Indian shawl.
3. In 1965 the poet performs in Bauska.

There were seven radio programs which broadcasted the literary works of Rabindranath Tagore as translated by Kārlis Egle, including one interview with the translator:

1. Rabindranath Tagore recites his poetry (no date, no place is known)
2. In 1961 works of Rabindranath Tagore are recited by actors: Elza Radziņa (1917–2005), Edgars Zile (1908–1986), Osvalds Krēsliņš (1911–1974), Lauma Amatniece (1927–1997).
3. On May 23, 1962, Alfrēdis Krūklis converses with Kārlis Egle about Rabindranath Tagore.
4. In 1964 Edgars Zile recites Tagore's poetry.
5. On February 18, 1964, Ludmila Tarasova reads the novel *Gitanjali*. Translator: Egle Rūdolfs (1889–1947).
6. In 1968 an actress Radziņa recites poetry and prose by Rabindranath Tagore. Translator: K. Egle. 1st part.
7. In 1968 Radziņa recites poetry and prose by Rabindranath Tagore. Translator: K. Egle. 2nd part.

57 Original title in Hindi *Mahanagar* (1963).

58 Original title in Hindi *Pardesi* (1957). Film produced in collaboration with Soviet and Indian filmproduction companies.

59 Original title in Hindi *Tu Hi Meri Zindagi* (1965).

60 Original title in Hindi *Arzoo* (1965).

61 Original title *Bambai Raat Ki Babon Mein* (1968).

62 Original title *Sangam* (1964).

Media exposure was developing gradually; the number of radio and TV programs on Indic themes increased considerably after Latvia gained its independence in 1991.

Indian dance, poetry, and music in Latvia

During her concert tour of the Soviet Union in 1959, the Indian traditional dancer Shrimati Indrani performed in Riga. With a band of musicians, she performed at Riga Philharmonic and surprised spectators with a scene at a temple entrance (Spēlmanis 1959).

One can also find a great many publications about the Latvian ballet dancer Vija Vētra, who spearheaded the performance of Indian sacred dance in Latvia and who emigrated to Australia in 1948. A digital repository of periodicals (LNDL n. d.) shows 1,059 articles published between 1940–1970, informing of her performances in the USA, the UK (London), Canada, Spain, Sweden, Australia, and elsewhere. She resumed performing in Latvia only after 1990. Her contemporary, the poet and yoga teacher Sņikere, had also studied and danced Indian classical dance in Ram Gopala's⁶³ (birth name: Bissano Ram Gopal (1912–2003)) dance troupe. This experience conferred extraordinary expression to her poetry readings, as such readings were enhanced hand gestures and body movements called mudras.⁶⁴ There is one documentary that reflects on the creative life, work, and philosophical views of Sņikere: *The Shining Paddler: The Poet Velta Sņikere* (*Spodrā bradātāja: dzejniece Velta Sņikere*), directed by Maruta Jurjāne (2009).⁶⁵

Ballet *Shakuntala* in Riga

One of the most remarkable and prominent events to strengthen the cultural ties and to deepen the erudition of Latvian society regarding India's cultural heritage was undoubtedly the staging of the ballet *Shakuntala*, a classical, ten-act Indian drama composed in Sanskrit by Indian classical poet and writer Kālidāsa⁶⁶. LNDL shows 520 publications

63 More on the life and work of Indian dancer and choreographer Ram Gopal at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ram-Gopal> [accessed 20.02.2022.].

64 More on the life and work of Velta Sņikere at <http://lalgaba.lv/index.php/lv/velta-snikere> [accessed 20.02.2022.].

65 The documentary available for purchase at <http://www.dzivesstasts.lv/lv/free.php?id=16067> [accessed 20.02.2022.].

66 *Shakuntala* — also known as *Abhijnanashakuntala* or *The Recognition of Shakuntala* (*Abhijñānaśākuntalam*), is a Sanskrit play by the ancient Indian poet Kālidāsa (ca. 4th–5th century CE) narrating the love affair between Shakuntala and Dushanta. More on *Shakuntala* at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Abhijnanashakuntala> [accessed 10.03.2022.].



Image 5. A stamp released in USSR, in 1956. Available: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stamp_of_USSR_1948.jpg?uselang=ru [accessed 18.10.2022.].

devoted to the ballet *Shakuntala* from 1940–1970. Presumably, the idea to stage this world-famous, classical Indian drama emerged a few years earlier, after a number of publications on Kālidāsa and his literary heritage in 1956. In 1955, the World Peace Council in Vienna invited people to pay tribute to Kālidāsa (Debroy 2005: 14), which perhaps also stimulated interest. In 1956, the call to pay tribute was republished in number of Latvian newspapers after the original publication in TASS photo chronicles (*Brīvā Vēstis; Padomju Alūksne, Sarkanais stars* 1956). In order to honour and commemorate the Viśva Māhākavi (the World Poet), the USSR Philatelic Department released a new stamp, depicting two books: Kālidāsa's *Śākuntalam* and an Indian woman, palm trees and the *Bodhi Gayā Temple*. See image No 5.

The ballet *Shakuntala*⁶⁷ was premiered on December 28, 1963, at Riga Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre⁶⁸, and as a Latvian ballet master and director Elga Drulle recalled:

[...] *Shakuntala* is the most beautiful gift to spectators of Riga. It combines classical ballet traditions with Indian national dance tradition. 'Shakuntala' is a performance that strengthens the friendship between Soviets and Indians. (Drulle 1964)

In this article, critic Vladimir Vinogradov⁶⁹ praises the music composed by eminent composer and Kabalevski's pupil, Sergey Balasanian (1902–1982). Balasanian, of Armenian origin, was remembered for the eastern themes of his music, such as Tajik, Afghan, Armenian, Indian, and

67 Conductor: Jānis Hunhens; *Shakuntala*: Velta Vilciņa/ Marta Bilova; Dushyanta: Haralds Ritenbergs/Artūrs Ēķis; Durvas — A. Lembergs; featuring Doe: Ausma Dragone/Ingrīda Auzāne; episodic roles: Inese Jurgene, Tāmāra Jakovļeva, Marina Sizova, Janīna Pankrate, Ināra Gintere, Jeļena Pankratova, Inese Jurgene, Valentīns Bļinovs, Alfrēds Spura, Aija Baumanē, J. Garance.

68 Contemporary name — Latvian National Academic Opera and Ballet Theater.

69 Victor Vinogradov (1899–1992) — Soviet musicologist, folklorist, social activist, and merited artist of the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic.



Image 6. Haralds Ritenbergs with Marta Bilova — featuring Dushianta and Shakuntala. Literature and Music Museum, RMM No 412764-OBT

Indonesian. Vinogradov also appreciated the work of ballet master Helēna Tangijeva-Birzniece (1907–1965). He noted the costumes were of warm, poetic tones, which combined well with the laconic staging that represented the characteristic features of Indian architecture — all designed by artist Edgars Vārdaunis (1910–1999) (Drulle 1964; Hakobian 2017: 94). The performance was staged and prepared with great care to details: two Indian artists — Artistic Director at Delhi State Drama and Dance Institute Maya Rao (1928–2014) and the winner of the Calcutta Rabindranath Tagore classical Indian dance contest, Shiv Shankar (n. d.) — were invited to Riga as consultants. Moreover, art admirers developed a deep affinity for the ballet; it remained on stage for nine seasons, and reached its 100th performance in 1972 (Staņa 1972). Two high-level Indian diplomats — the Ambassador to the USSR, Triloki Nath Kaul (1913–2000), and First Secretary of the Embassy, Ayilam Panchapakesha Venkateswaran (1930–2014) — attended *Shakuntala* during their visit to Latvia in 1965 and gave the highest appraisal to the artists (*Rīgas Balss* 1965). See images 6, 7, and 8.

Egle's personal archives reveal that Kaul and his entourage were invited to enjoy the less-formal atmosphere of a private reception for the poet Ķempe. See image No 9.



↑ Image 7: Haralds Ritenbergs featuring Dushianta.
Literature and Music Museum, RMM
No 619993-OBT

→ Image 8: Haralds Ritenbergs with Marta Bilova a. o.
Literature and Music Museum, RMM
No 619987-OBT

Envoys of Indian culture in Latvia

Speaking of cultural envoys, one cannot miss the immense translated work of Tagore's literary heritage performed by Rudzitis and Egle from 1927 through 1934, resulting in nine volumes of Tagore's translated works. Another devotee of Tagore's genius, Viktors Ivbulis, a philologist and the first true Latvian Indologist, continued this work by conducting an in-depth study on Tagore and Gandhism (Ivbulis 1970). Later, he translated Tagore's works from Bengali into Latvian. Furthermore, the Latvian reader was acquainted with the pearl of Indian philosophy, namely canonical Vaishnava text Bhagavad Gītā, which was translated into Latvian by Bendrupe in 1994, and five years later, the Latvian linguist, poet, and translator Valdis Bisenieks (1928–2017) translated it from Sanskrit⁷⁰. Between 1940 and 1970, several of Tagore's novels and short stories were reprinted alongside the translations of

70 A fragment from Bhagavad Gītā recited in Sanskrit and Latvian by Valdis Bisenieks. Available: <http://valdis-bisenieks.blogspot.com/2013/06/bhagavad-gita-valda-bisenieka.html> [accessed 30.06.2022.]



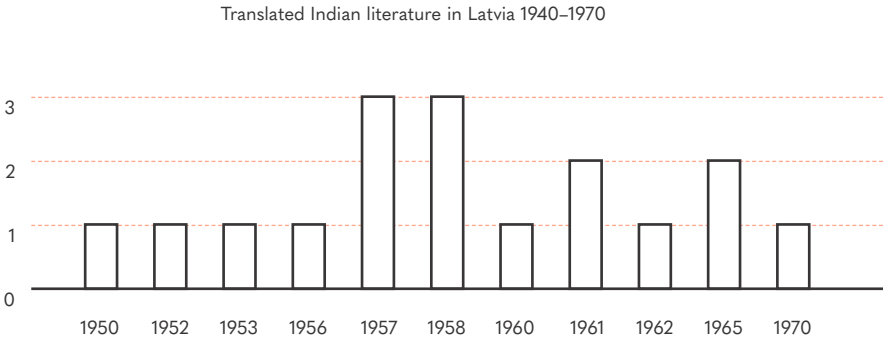


Table 1. Publishing dynamics of translated Indian literature in Latvia 1940–1970. Data from the Misiņš Library of the Academic Library of University of Latvia

other Indian authors’ works⁷¹, classical Indian literature such as fairy tales, aphorisms from *Hitopadeśa*, and epic *Mahābhārata* in both Latvian and Russian. In total, 20 books were discovered at the Misiņš Library that cannot be traced via electronic catalogue: three translations into Latvian and 17 works related to the history, culture, and politics of the Middle Eastern and Asian countries, including India — all in Russian language. All are available at the National Library of Latvia. Noteworthy is Egle’s commentary that the number of reprints published during the Soviet era outnumbered the first printings in pre-war time (Egle [n.d.]). See the table No 1.

From the beginning of the 20th century the number of friends of Indian culture among the intelligentsia continued growing⁷² (Egle [n.d.]); among the supporters were the most active and prolific authors of their time: Kārlis Egle, Rihards Rudzītis, Velta Sniķere, Alise Eka, Mirdza Ķempe, and Mirdza Bendrupe (though her activities were less exposed), Viktors Ivbulis, and Imants Ziedonis (1933–2013).

In 1961 the Recognized Cultural Activist of the LSSR, Kārlis Egle, was awarded for his relentless work with the R. Tagore Medal — the award that was established to commemorate Tagore’s 100th birthday (Literatūra un Māksla 1962).

71 The most translated authors: Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004) and his novels: *Kuli* (in Russian (1941) and Latvian (1962)); short stories *Maharadža un bruņurupucis* (in Latvian (1958). Krishan Chander (1914–1977) and his works: *Plamja i cvetok* (1952), *Kogda probudilisj polja* (1953), both in Russian, *Simts rupijas* (1957), *Aļģārnais koks* (1958), *Viena meitene un tūkstoš pielūdžēju* (1965); all in Latvian. Rabindranath Tagore and his novels: *Katastrofa* (1956 reprint), *Dārznieks* (1958), *Poetry* (1961) and *Stories* (1957); all in Latvian) a. o.

72 Ibid No. 7. The notes describe some get-together of 50 people at the Misiņš Library. Among them are mentioned: actress Elza Radziņa, Arājs (no name), Viktors Ivbulis, Kārlis Sūniņš.



Image 9. Indian Ambassador to the USSR Triloki Nath Kaul at the reception at Ķempe's flat. Riga, July 12, 1965. From left: Mirdza Ķempe, Triloki Nath Kaul, Usha Venkateshvar. The Academic Library of University of Latvia, Kārlis Egle' fund, No 8738 (No 876), item No 11

A pivotal point in Indo–Latvian cultural collaboration occurred with the visit of prominent Bengali⁷³ linguist and philologist Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1890–1977) to Riga in 1964. An explicit insight about this visit is given by Egle in his personal notes (Egle [n.d.]): Egle narrates that during his four day stay in Latvia, Chatterji, who was already aged 75 and shared views with his longtime friends Nehru and Tagore, showed sincere interest in the cultural and linguistic history of Latvia. He visited Soviet Latvia and Lithuania as an extension of his visit to celebrate the birthday of the Ukrainian poet Taras Hryhorovych Shevchenko (1814–1861) in Kiev, Ukraine. Chatterji was a member of All–Union Committee established for the occasion. The aim of his visit was to acquaint with the languages and people of the two Baltic countries. During his visit, Chatterji was accompanied by a member of Foreign Affairs Committee of the Moscow Writer's Union (MWU), Viktor Borisovich Ramzes (1940–1987) — who served also as translator, as all conversations were mainly held in English. At first, they met the poet Valdis Lukss (birth name: Voldemārs Lukss; 1905–1985), First Secretary of the Board of the Latvian Writers' Union (LWU). Other literati from

73 Bengal — a state in the Eastern part of India.



↑ Image 10. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee visiting Latvian writers at the Writer's Union. Riga, 1964. From left: Kārlis Egle, Mirdza Ķempe, Valdis Lukss, Suniti K. Chatterji and Ādolfs Talcis. The Academic Library of University of Latvia, Kārlis Egle's fund, No 8738 (No 877), item No 17. Photo by J. Lerhis

← Image 11. Suniti Kumar Chatterji has received Rainis's play *Fire and Night*. India, 1965. The Academic Library of University of Latvia, Kārlis Egle's fund, No 8738 (No 877), item No 6

↗ Image 12. Vice-president of Culture Relations society with the Soviet Union from Rajasthan branch with another Rajasthani author in Latvia, 1966. From left: Kārlis Egle, Amal Chandra Mukherji (VP), Rami Lakshmi Kumari Chandarata, Mirdza Ķempe. The Academic Library of University of Latvia, Kārlis Egle's fund, No 8738 (No 876), item No 14



The Institute of Language and Literature of the Latvian Academy of Sciences⁷⁴ also joined the meeting: linguist and journalist Hermanis Bendiks (1911–1978), scientific assistant Antonija Ahero (1924–2019), linguist Rasma Grīle (1922–2013), and poet Ķempe. The latter actively engaged in the conversations and gifted the visitor a poem dedicated to India (Egle [n.d.]), written in Latvian and English. Egle's notes display the titles of Ķempe's poems: "Hindu Bard in Riga" (*Hindu dziesminieks Rīgā*); "Water of Jaipur" (*Džaipurā ūdens*), "Friendship" (*Draudzība*), "Ashes of Jawaharlal Nehru" (*Džavaharlala Neru pelni*), "Indian Girl Speaks in Calcutta" (*Indijas meitene runā Kalkatā*). Since Chatterji had already been acquainted with the works of Krišjānis Barons, Rainis, Jānis Endzelīns, et al., he expressed his wish to introduce Rainis's works to Indian readers. To personalize the relationship, Ķempe and Latvian writer Ādolfs Talcis (1904–1983) took him around Latvia: they visited Jūrmala; then a fishermen's kolkhoz in Skulte, its Culture House and a school; then the picturesque town of Sigulda. In Riga he visited Rainis's graveyard, The Brothers' Cemetery⁷⁵, and the Open-Air Museum, where Chatterji found much resemblance with the early life of Indian peasants. See images No 10, 11, and 12.

This visit launched a lifelong friendship and prolific collaboration between Egle and Chatterji: they maintained their communication in the form of eleven letters sent between

74 Original name in Latvian — ZA Valodas un literatūras institūts.

75 The cemetery is a memorial to and burial ground for thousands of Latvian soldiers who were killed between 1915 and 1920 in World War I and the Latvian War of Independence.

1965 and 1972. The correspondence reveals that they exchanged periodicals, books, and lecture materials, and that Egle presented Chatterji with a gift — a collection of Latvian Dainas⁷⁶ translated into French, *Chants Religieuses Latviennes*, by Michel Jonval, which was conducive to the completion of his book, ‘Balts and Aryans in Their Indo-European Background’ (1968). On July 30th, 1964 Chatterji addressed a letter to the Minister of Culture of the LSSR, Vladimirs Kaupužs, in which he expressed his tribute to the unique cultures of Latvia and Lithuania, especially the creative works of Rainis, and invited the Minister to arrange the translation of his works into English, French, and German. He also mentioned his correspondence with Ķempe, calling the poet his ‘sister,’ as well as his communication with the Indologist Ivbulis. This visit was well publicized in the newspapers: for instance, *Cīņa, Literatūra un Māksla, Rīgas Balss*, and *Sovetskaya Latvia*; a few years later, in 1966, Chatterji paid one more visit to Latvia and his friends to conduct a comparative study of the Latvian language and culture with the Vedic culture. Perhaps the most remarkable and unusual expression of his friendship was his greeting to Egle on his 80th birthday, in a form of a poem composed in Sanskrit. (Egle [bez dat.]). See image No 3.

As a result of Ķempe’s fruitful activities in building and strengthening the cultural ties between India and the LSSR, she was appointed Chairperson of the Indian Friends’ subdepartment at LWU in 1969; three years later, in 1972, she was awarded *honoris causa* at Visva-Bharati University, which was established by Rabindranath Tagore in Shantiniketan in 1921.

Very little has been known about another very influential and loved Latvian poet – Imants Ziedonis — with regard to his interest in the East. By the kind support of researcher Katrīna Kūkoja from the Imants Ziedonis Museum, a new dimension of Ziedonis’s personality has been discovered. It is no secret that the poet had serious health issues — he suffered for years from tuberculosis. Treatment methods at that time were exhausting and painful. In one of Ķempe’s letters, dated March 29, 1939, to a writer Anšlavs Eglītis (1906–1993), she describes eloquently and vividly her state of mind after she received treatment to combat tuberculosis for several months at Vaiņode sanatorium for tubercular patients⁷⁷:

‘Thank you for your peculiar letter which indeed amused me in this house of sorrows where they pull out nerves and gas and burn lungs [...]’ (Eglītis [bez dat.])

Although the treatment methods were tormenting, the communication between Ziedonis and another patient, writer and translator of poetry Viktors Līvzemnieks (1936–2015), during his treatment at Cēsis sanatorium⁷⁸ reveals that Ziedonis was a fighter who encouraged his comrade not to surrender to the disease (Ziedonis [1957]) and to apply autosuggestion and deep breathing methods (Ziedonis [1960]) — indirect hints to yogic Pranayama.

76 Latvian folk songs.

77 More on the sanatorium that used to be treatment house for State employees: <https://www.zudusilatvija.lv/objects/object/14995/> [accessed 10.06.2022.].

78 More on Cēsis sanatorium for tubercular patients here: <https://zudusilatvija.lv/objects/object/8832/> [Accessed 10.06.2022.]. This is the place where both the poets met and befriended.

In his personal notes, Līvzemnieks mentioned that in 1958, while he was being treated at Mežciems sanatorium, he successfully combated the liquid in lungs by help of Hatha–Yoga exercises (Ziedonis [1957–1967]). Although information exchange on their application of yogic exercises is scant, nine handwritten, battered (seemingly from frequent use) sheets of paper found in Ziedonis's personal archives⁷⁹ display a detailed description of deep breathing techniques, namely 12 that are outlined in Shivananda's book *Yogic Therapy or Yogic Way to Cure Diseases*, among them Sahaj Pranayama (sic Sahaja Prāṇāyāma) and Bhraman (sic) Pranayama. They are described as techniques facilitating breathing, with healing effects and not requiring any special previous training. Bhraman Pranayama — a technique applied while walking — is particularly aimed at combating tuberculosis. (Shivananda 1960: 431–445) In addition to Pranayama, there are eight yoga exercises called asanas — namely, Biparatikarani mudra — combats aging and skin swelling, fatigue⁸⁰. Bhujangasana⁸¹, or cobra pose, strengthens the heart, nerves, muscles, and alveoli; Yoga Mudra⁸² and Sahaj Bastikriya⁸³ combat low blood pressure; Ustrasana⁸⁴, or camel pose, combats pleurisy; Paban Muktasana⁸⁵ and Pashchimottasana⁸⁶ stretch the body; and Dhanurasana, a bow⁸⁷ pose, stimulates the liver and intestines. Apparently, the source of this information came from unofficial Latvian translation of Shivananda's 'Yogic Therapy or Yogic Way to Cure Diseases' performed by the adherents of Latvian Yoga Society in 1950s⁸⁸; evidently it was Bendrupe who introduced yoga lore to the young Ziedonis. Although it is known that Ziedonis was admitted into membership of LWU in 1961 right after the release of his first poem collection titled *Sand of Earth*

79 Credit: Imants Ziedonis Museum.

80 Alternative name: Viparita Karani Mudra, or topsy-turvy pose, is a shoulder stand (Shivananda 1960: 357–359). Available: <https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/10923/viparita-karani-mudra> [accessed 10.06.2022.].

81 Bhujangasana — a serpent pose — is a gentle backbend practiced from a face-down position that warms and strengthens the spine while opening the chest (Shivananda 1960: 354–356). Available: <https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/5404/bhujangasana> [accessed 10.06.2022.].

82 Yoga mudrasana — a deep forward bend, is one of the best anti-aging poses as it helps the practitioner to look and feel younger. Available: <https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/6594/yoga-mudrasana> [accessed 10.06.2019.]. (Shivananda 1960: 426–428).

83 Shahaj Bastikriya — a term used in Swami Shivananda's book *Srimat Swami Shivananda Saraswati 'Yogic Therapy or Yogic Way to Cure Diseases'*. Translated by Dr. B.C. Ukil. Assam: Brahmachari Yogeshwar Umachal Yogashram. 2nd edition. 1960. Pp. 465–469

84 Ushtrasana — is a backbend that boosts shoulder flexibility, increases core strength and stretches the entire front of the body. (Shivananda 1960: 426). Available: <https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/5508/ustrasana> [accessed 10.06.2022.].

85 Pavanamuktasana is a healing pose that is effective in helping release gas in the abdomen while massaging the entire back and spine. Available: <https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/7885/pavanamuktasana> [accessed 10.06.2022.].

86 Pashchimottasana — lower body stretch pose (Shivananda 1960: 399–403).

87 Dhanurasana — a bow pose — Dhanurasana is a backbend that deeply opens the chest and the front of the body. (Shivananda 1960: 426). Available: <https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/6314/dhanurasana> [accessed 10.06.2022.]. (Shivananda 1960: 361–362)

88 The author consulted an amateur researcher of Latvian Yoga Society history — Mr. Dzintars Vilnis Korns, who possesses a battered copy of Latvian translation.

and *Dreams* (*Zemes un sapņu smiltis*). Most likely he had met Bendrupe much earlier, as she was a good friend of Ķempe who in turn was a mentor of young, yogic literati. Although, it may seem that Bendrupe's interest into yogic lore was rather influenced by her late stepfather Alfrēds Akmens and husband Vinogradovs, it is not quite so: her personal archives contain several works on yoga (Bendrupe [1940]) and Tibetan Lamaism (Bendrupe [1942]) and attest to her profound knowledge of yoga philosophy and comprehension of intricate Sanskrit terms and notions, which she elaborated in great detail in series of letters she exchanged with Ziedonis between 1965 and 1977 (Ziedonis [1965–1977]). In total they exchanged 61 letter and one postcard. Their communication was prolific, revealing their deep professional intimacy and the close friendship they maintained between their families. Bendrupe was a great influence on Ziedonis's philosophical views as well as his profound interest in the East. She was also well-known for performing Astrological readings, and oftentimes she gave outright predictions and warnings concerning the poet's health and social life. She was a covert Guru to him, deduced by Ziedonis's handwritten marks and highlights on the edges of her letters. One is fascinated by her manner, style, and richness of expressions, even when she nags about household needs and daily matters. Unquestionably, this friendship between Ziedonis and Bendrupe had significant positive effect on Ziedonis's literary production and physical health.

All things considered, this influence resulted in a poem titled *Poem on Milk* (*Poēma par pienu*), published in 1977, in which the reader notes Eastern themes and concepts such as cows and milk, implicit condemning of animal killing as a food source — the concept of 'ahinsa'⁸⁹, or non-violence, familiar in several schools of Indian philosophy and religion. One blog reveals a tiny piece of paper found between the manuscript pages of the poem dated 1973/1974. It clearly shows the influence of Vedanta philosophy on the poet, as Ziedonis had been studying the Rigveda and Upanishads at Viļa Lāča LPSR bibliotēka⁹⁰ (today the Latvian National Library) before he composed the poem.

Another letter from Bendrupe to doctor and writer Jānis Liepiņš provides an inkling of the co-existence of other covert groups that propagated a healthy lifestyle — namely, the first sprouts of the movement nowadays called veganism. Bendrupe griped about young poet and publicist Arvīds Plaudis, who had fallen under the influence of some spiritual sectarians and had given up consuming meat, fish, dairy products, and eggs due to tuberculosis, which all had turned him as skinny as rake:

I find their spiritual leader a sectarian, because he talks about yoga, but by willing to be more catholic than a Pope, observes more severe disciplines than Indian yogis who at least get protein in through milk in all possible ways [...]. (Liepiņš [bez dat.].

89 Sanskrit — *ahiṃsā* — a concept of non-violence; one of the concepts regarded in Hindu, Jainist, and Buddhist philosophy.

90 More information with the photo and deciphered text at: https://www.ziedonamuzejs.lv/lv/muzejs/andreja-upisa-blogs/imants-ziedonis-un-biblioteka-18?fbclid=IwAR1YIaupzq6jndDIVCI73aBQtGCxIndOC6H-dHfkN957FVtIL4i_1kQGqOyk [accessed 24.02.2022.].

One can observe that owing to the covert and relentless activities of the remaining adherents of the closed societies during the Soviet era in Latvia, the dissemination of Eastern philosophies and culture was pursued almost uninterrupted. Likewise, access to the translated literature and the works of Russian scholars on Orientalism available at the libraries, plus the expansion of cultural and political ties between India and the USSR, provided conducive conditions for the emergence of the next generation of poets, writers, dancers, and yoga practitioners whose works eventually were permeated with fine threads of Eastern philosophy of life.

Summary

The beginning of WWII introduced many changes in the lives of the Latvian people, who became citizens of the USSR. In spite of the censorship of literature and virtually anything that was imported to the USSR, including the revision of the existing public and private domains of literary and other works, this study proves that even during the war and even at POW camps the cultural agents of Indic sciences in Latvia continued disseminating their knowledge. Their work also resulted in new translations of Yogic lore, for instance, the translation of *Bhagavad Gita* into Latvian by POW Ernests Laumanis. The Latvian translation of Shivanda's book *Yogic Therapy or Yogic Way to Cure Diseases* by anonymous adherents of the Latvian Yoga Society is another example of dedication and profound interest. The yogic treatment methods — breathing and physical exercises — described in it helped the poet Imants Ziedonis survive tuberculosis. Regardless of the difficulties adherents had to face under Stalin's regime, they continued their activities covertly. Even though the leader of Latvian Yoga Society, Dikmanis, migrated to Germany in 1944, and later to America, his work was continued by his most ardent adherents, including Mirdza Bendrupe, her husband, and Velta Sņikere. Sņikere emigrated to the UK and became one of the first teachers of yoga in the UK, later co-founding the British Yoga Wheel. In 2019 Sņikere was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award honoring her achievements in literature.

Due to the limited scope of this paper, only the brightest and influential literati have been studied. Among all the literati, one can point to a few who loved Indic sciences and contributed most in disseminating the knowledge: Rudzītis and Egle, for their relentless work in translating Tagore's literary heritage. Both also published many informative articles to introduce Latvian society to Indian culture, philosophy, and literature. They were among the first who coined new terms and interpretations in Latvian language, as each of their translated volumes contained a glossary of terms translated from Hindi and Sanskrit.

After Stalin's death, when Khrushchev came to the rule, the air in political and cultural life became warmer and more conducive to international collaboration; bilateral ties with India were fostered. Rapid and significant changes in bilateral relationships could be observed after Nehru's visit to the Soviet Union in 1955. Although, only a few Indian politicians, literati, and scientists visited Latvia from 1955–1970, even that fostered a fruitful exchange of cultures between the countries.

Some of the societies shut down by the Soviets still continued their activities under cover during the Soviet Latvia era; the most active were the aforementioned: Latvian Yoga Society, The Promotional Society of Cosmosophic Sciences in Latvia, and the Latvian Roerich Society. Their respective leaders: Harijs Dikmanis, Aleksandrs Balodis, and Rihards Rudzītis. Although Dikmanis and Balodis migrated to Germany and later to the USA and France, their adherents continued their activities in small groups covertly. After the amnesty of Rudzītis 1954, all his works were prohibited, yet he continued his work on *The Fraternity of the Holy Grail*, which was published for the first time in 1994. After his death in 1960, the Society continued its activities in a fragmented manner, as no large meetings were possible due to the political regime. Rudzīte devoted her life to continuing her father's work.

The brightest and most visible friend of Indian culture among all the literati was Mirdza Ķempe, who eventually became Chairperson of the Indian Friends subdepartment at LWU in 1969; three years later she was awarded *honoris causa* at Visva-Bharati University. Her friend Mirdza Bendrupe could be juxtaposed for being less exposed to the media lime-light, a penalty of her strained relationship with the political regime. This study reveals that Bendrupe played a pivotal role in disseminating yogic lore to her friends; she even served as a de facto Guru to the prominent Latvian poet Imants Ziedonis. Moreover, her expressive style and language in epistolary communication is as powerful as prolific, vividly displaying the people and life under Soviet rule: It would be worth publishing some of her works and letters.

The material provided in this research has outlined the most visible cultural agents and revealed some lesser-known facts concerning the influence of Indic sciences on their lives and works. The next step in the research will be to examine the proliferation of Indic sciences from 1970 through the present day.

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