

Summary of Dissertation

The Linguistic and Cultural Picture of India in the Writing of Paulina Wilk

The notion of the linguistic picture of the world has been of interest to Polish scholars at least since 1978 when the term was defined by Walery Pisarek. This issue has been later explored by linguists of Lublin, namely Jerzy Bartmiński and Ryszard Tokarski, who perceived the linguistic picture of the world as a collection of judgements about the world which are recorded in language, hence they chiefly applied the concept to non-literary Polish. However, Renata Grzegorzczkova and Anna Pajdzińska pointed out that the linguistic picture of the world may also be reconstructed through poetry. Moreover, it is worth remembering that the linguistic picture of the worlds also contains the cultural picture of the world, which is described by scholars (among others, Janusz Anusiewicz, Anna Dąbrowska, Michael Fleischer) as its superstructure. The dissertation *The Linguistic and Cultural Picture of India in the Writing of Paulina Wilk* makes an attempt to reconstruct both the linguistic and cultural picture of this Asian country.

The research material was excerpted from Paulina Wilk's publications about India. The key to selecting press releases and online entries was the subject matter of India and references to the selected aspects of Indian reality, namely: LIFE, POVERTY, HINDU MEN AND WOMEN, WATER, FOOD and CLOTHING (the listed aspects were chosen based on how frequently they occur in P. Wilk's publications and, consequently, on how broad and lexically diverse research material they offer).

The first two chapters define the key terms (profiling, profile, cognitive definition, point of view, frame of experience, scene, aspect, linguistic picture of the world, cultural picture of the world, cognitive metaphor, stereotype) and literary genres used by the author: stories and short stories, reportage, article, blog. The subsequent chapter focuses on the biography of P. Wilk. With it, the theoretical part of the dissertation is concluded. The following three chapters are analytical and attempt to reconstruct the linguistic and cultural picture of India emerging from P. Wilk's writing with reference to phenomena which are important to its inhabitants, as well as fundamental elements of their reality. Moreover, the picture of each aspect of Hindu reality described in the dissertation is compared to the corresponding linguistic and cultural pictures in everyday Polish language.

The reconstructed linguistic and cultural picture of Hindu life emerged as heterogeneous and contrastive. It consists of, on the one hand, facets, such as: man, existence, being on earth, element, value, everyday life, noise, collectivity, motion, chaos; however, on the other hand, life is a burden, death is salvation (either characterised as an antithesis of life or as its next stage), life may sometimes be devoid of the possibility to participate in the life of a collective, hence, it is close to death. Finally, the lexeme *life* does not apply in *Lalki w ogniu...* [*Dolls on fire...*] solely to the finite earthy being, but also to the soul's existence which does not end with the death of the flesh, but starts over. One may hold that there is no consistent picture of Hindu life since it is made up of multiple aspects which are not connected by any principle.

Indian poverty, which unfortunately is a part of Hindu everyday life, is also full of contradictions and paradoxes, much like everything in this Asian country. On the one hand, it is a state which Hindus try to overcome; on the other hand, it is a result of their caste and belief system, therefore, is a part of tradition. Poverty is conceptualised as an active organisation or entity (often a woman or a spectre). Moreover, it is described by metaphors alluding to an area, state or liquid.

Poverty in India is so widespread and diverse that it is described with lexemes originating in different semantic fields: ocean, fear, helplessness, theatre, cinema, hunting, tourism and war. Moreover, it is depicted as an unlawful world within a world, the root of crime and coercion. In addition, poverty is also the antithesis of developing India.

A beggar's lot, which results from poverty, is conceptualised as non-life, a state which rather resembles death, than everyday functioning. Poverty is also a weapon in the struggle for survival since begging may sometimes be a source of income. Poor people undertake many tasks which are subjected to social judgement. Those, who are the lowest in the social hierarchy simply beg, others clean toilets or trains. Individuals who have a higher standing amongst the poor carry luggage (this activity is perceived as one which is fair and non-disgraceful).

The poor are persistent, accustomed to waiting and, sometimes, idleness. They are also people who take care of objects which surround them, are able to create a substitute for a home even on the streets, who face adversities, including atmospheric conditions (it is important to note that their care for ensuring decent, albeit temporary conditions is the sole reason of their

positive judgement). The poor make up such a large portion of the Indian society that political candidates currently make promises specifically tailored for this specific group in the course of electoral campaigns.

The next chapter recreates the picture of a Hindu woman. The stereotypical image of an Indian woman emphasises attention to her outlook (hair, in particular). Despite this, activities related to one's appearance are done in hiding because of a conviction that highlighting one's beauty, especially the curves of the body, may lead to rape. A woman's body is actually perceived as space which is ruled by men. It is praised in poetry, but objectified in everyday life.

Similarly to a Polish woman, a Hindu woman is conceptualised as a mother whose duty is to feed and take care of a child. She is also a housewife who in silence (silence is a characteristic of Hindu women) serves men and eats leftovers herself. Incidentally, only in performing daily chores women may feel important; only then do they cease to be silent and start to talk or even laugh. In other situations, they do not speak about their needs, but rather hide them and temporarily give them up.

Moreover, women are perceived as inferior to men; they are not only financially dependent, but their very lives are deprived of meaning without a male guardian. Women are often poorly educated and convinced that only a male descendant can guarantee a decent living for them. It must be added that women are also hated and their killings (from time to time conceptualised as rituals) are so frequent, that the Hindu criminal code uses separate terminology in relation to such crimes.

The way women are being looked at differs depending on their age. Young women are described with words from the lexical field of a doll – they are petite and silent; middle-aged women are characterised by excess weight and heaviness; old women are, once again, smaller, as if shrunken.

It is noteworthy that in P. Wilk's writing, India is depicted as a country full of paradoxes. This principle also applies to Hindu women, whose beauty, on the one hand, is praised in poetry – and also underlined in the analysed texts – and, on the other hand, they are being met with hostility rather than respect. Women are at times conceptualised as goddesses; at other times,

their bodies are considered as objects which may be disposed of by men as they please. Women may feel free and safe in two situations: during everyday chores and religious rituals. Only then are they subjects, persons and their sexuality ceases to be central to their existence.

The picture of a Hindu woman as someone enslaved, someone who lives under constant threat is incomplete, however. There are or were women in India who are or were convinced about their subjectivity; therefore, Paulina Wilk wrote about, among others, women in sports or in politics.

One more characteristic of the picture of women in Wilk's writing must be referred to; namely, the writer and journalist has often revealed her personal point of view in her descriptions of Hindu women. She is overt in her disapproval of the lack of regard for women's rights and dignity. The analysed Wilk's publications – *Lalki w ogniu...*, press articles and blog posts – are occasionally written from the perspective of a person who subscribes to Western values, which are based on equality.

Hindu men are allowed to do more than Indian women. Men are also bound by principles of living in Hindu society; they must meet their family's expectations and requirements. Despite this, Hindu men are conceptualised as individuals who retain a degree of freedom and are able to fulfil their needs (with the exclusion of sexual needs connected with cultural and social taboo).

Hindu men are characterised by freedom to behave as they please in public places. Their lives are linked to this sphere. They are seen as rulers of a territory who perfectly merge with the surroundings and become a part of nature. Moreover, they perform the most important religious functions.

Hindu men are conceptualised as social creatures who are more valuable than women (however, P. Wilk's use of irony in descriptions of men and their behaviours allows to infer that the author does not share this standpoint).

Hindus are characterised as persevere men who are convinced of their volition. They are characterised by activity and energy (although P. Wilk also describes men who are bored and

poor). They are gainfully employed and are better educated than women; therefore, a newspaper is a male attribute since reading is the man's domain in India.

In the book and articles, P. Wilk employs contrasts in the description of Hindu men: they are both guardians and oppressors of women, they are bound by conventions, but also free to defy them.

The final analytical chapter reconstructs the picture of water, food and clothes. The selected examples allow to conclude that the linguistic picture of water in Paulina Wilk's publications is almost identical to the picture of water in Polish. Since water is a substance necessary for life, and sometimes difficult to come by in India, the author devoted much attention to this element in her writing.

Water is an element in constant motion; it is accompanied by certain noises. This motion is nearly always vertical, from top to bottom, only sometimes it is horizontal. Water was also given human or animal attributes. It is conceptualised as a master of life and death, a dangerous element which is mightier than man. Occasionally, it is described with lexemes from the semantic field of the femme fatale; at other times, of a fighting creature or actress. In result, the use of these lexical measures renders the diversity, indeterminacy and heterogeneity of water.

It is important to remark that in order to convey the diversity of water's characteristics, numerous metaphors were employed, e.g. a fan, a motorway, a monument, a brittle object, a host and a crowd. Water also acts as clothing for the otherwise bare river channels. Moreover, it is a border, both in the physical and metaphorical sense (it is associated with the beginning and end of life since it washes a newborn baby, as well as the body of a deceased). Furthermore, water is a link between the sacred and profane; it is endowed with divine power. Water is used during religious rituals. It is governed by gods.

The fundamental characteristic of water is its purity. Clear water is sometimes conceptualised as medicine, as something which is precious and luxurious. Conversely, contaminated water is a liquid which has an unpleasant smell and is a source of disease. Therefore, it may not be used to quench thirst or wash dirt away. To the contrary – it pollutes and brings death.

Water is conceptualised as a reward and punishment, a substance which directly affects the quality of life. Water beautifies the world, but it also has destructive powers; it facilitates life, but also prevents movement from one place to another. It is depicted as liberation, but also as an element which brings death.

Due to geographic and economic conditions, the Indian picture of the world renders water as a particular good (an aspect, which appears to be overlooked in the Western world).

Food in India, apart from the primary function of nourishing the body, serves numerous other roles: its type, the diversity of dishes and sizes of servings allow to determine the social status and faith of a given person; food is something that connects and divides people; sometimes it is only a pretext for cultural discussion; another time, it is an addition to play. It thus fulfils physiological functions, as well as social and ludic roles. Moreover, the act of eating certain dishes may indicate someone's strong relation to tradition or a desire to break up with it in pursuit of a dream of a Western life.

Conceptualisations of dishes and the manner of their consumption refer to such semantic fields as: the military, music, sports, theatre, water, magic, ballet. Therefore, it is a diverse picture which affects many senses – not only taste, but also sight, touch and smell.

The aspect of purity and impurity of food must also be pointed out. However, the issue does not apply to cleanliness understood as good standards of hygiene (paradoxically, dishes considered as pure are often prepared in unhygienic conditions), but rather to beliefs and tradition. Dishes seen as pure by members of one social class or religion may be impure to members of another community. Therefore, food is conceptualised as a taboo. Restaurants are regarded as relatively safe spheres, however. An interesting distinction must be made in relation to kitchens: while restaurant kitchens are associated with male presence, house kitchens are places where women may be found.

Due to the still persistent problem of malnutrition, Indian food acts as a currency in illegal trade, as well as a bargaining card during elections. It also happens to be a remedy to many illnesses caused by undernourishment. Moreover, fasting sometimes is not caused by a lack of food, but is a result of a conscious decision. Therefore, fasting is conceptualised as an expression of love to a deity and willingness to worship it.

The last issue raised in the dissertation, namely Indian clothing, is interesting due to the range of existing dresses. Hindus choose clothes which are similar to European fashion, but also traditional, typically Indian garments. A common denominator is the protective function of clothing: they are to shield users from adverse weather. Clothes also create their wearer's image, they improve looks and cheer Indians up by adding colour to their lives.

Clothes also denote their wearer's ethnic belonging, financial standing or, at times, education. They are conceptualised as narrators who tell their wearer's story. They can highlight femininity or masculinity. Some items of clothing are described with lexemes from the semantic field of a (royal) dynasty, other are depicted as goods which pretend to be luxuries, still other – especially those ragged and worn – are more akin to rags than garments. Clothes also may be uniforms which allow to effortlessly determine the profession of a given individual.

Thanks to clothes, Indians can manifest the sense that they are unique and special. By rejecting typically Western styles and choosing cotton garments, Hindus protested against the colonisers and their system of values. Traditional clothing may, thus, symbolise the birth of self-awareness and attachment to Indian roots. Hence, clothes are symbols of the fight for independence and are, therefore, conceptualised as weapons.

It is worth noting that wearing traditional clothing comes naturally to Indians; their movement is very gentle and graceful. Traditional clothes also make a characteristic sound when moving. Moreover, properties of clothing adjust to the time of day (it is important to mark the poetic mood of the description of the evening dress, which was given oneiric, smooth and gentle properties).

Traditional clothing was included in the politicians' scope of interest. They intend to make a symbol out of traditional weaving: a business which will allow Indians to become rich. Weaving is perceived as a spectacle; its products as stories about culture.

Moreover, clothing is conceptualised as objects of shopping. They become marvels sold by vendors who use tricks which are almost magic. Places of trade are specified as kingdoms or depots, depending on the assortment and properties of the sold goods.

Finally, one cannot forget that clothes create a kind of a map of India. Hindus who live in different parts of this country wear traditional garments of different cuts and colours. In order to differentiate themselves from nature, they unknowingly create a mosaic of colours and shapes. Their clothes may be an expression of pride, a manifesto of identity or a sign of belonging to a religious group.

The linguistic and cultural picture of India rendered in the writing of the Polish traveller who, despite attempts to remain objective, often describes the country from her own perspective, from the angle of European values, presents conceptualisations which are simultaneously quite similar and dissimilar to the Polish picture of these ideas. The reconstruction of the discussed aspects of Hindu reality is an attempt to determine the most relevant characteristics of the Indian world and, perhaps, an introduction to research on other aspects of India, such as travel, trade and feelings.

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