Article:
Brandist, C. orcid.org/0000-0002-8119-9693 (2022) Soviet Indology and the critique of colonial philology: the work of Aleksei Barannikov in the light of Dalit studies. Language & History, 65 (3). 4. pp. 201-219. ISSN 1759-7536

https://doi.org/10.1080/17597536.2022.2116896

Soviet Indology and the Critique of Colonial Philology: the Work of Aleksei Barannikov in the light of Dalit studies.

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The postcolonial demonstration that Indo-European philology provided 'orientalist' ideology with its 'technical characteristics' (Said 2003 [1978], 131), and that its research agendas, modes of conceptualization and generalization were shaped by the colonial project has proven very productive. A series of important works on the history of philology (Olender 1992; Trautmann 1997; Arvidsson 2006; McGetchin 2009; Ahmad 2018 and others) have undoubtedly moved scholarship forward and have had a salutary effect on the field. Quite often, however, postcolonial thinkers paint European scholarship about the East in rather too monochromatic tones, especially when deploying Foucault's ideas of discourse and power-knowledge as their master trope. A rather too monolithic, and indeed monologic, account of a European 'episteme' is here complemented by an (often unspoken) assumption that pre-colonial societies constituted organic wholes. Philology is thereby viewed as a European imposition on the cultures of the East, the result of an unfolding Enlightenment rationality, inseparable from the colonial project itself. As in other areas, however, the reality was much more complex, and it is India that provides the clearest examples of there the problems with such postcolonial caricatures lie. Colonial philologists relied decisively on indigenous collaborators, who were not merely passive objects of manipulation, but actively shaped the discipline in pursuit of their own distinct interests and according to their own ideological predilections. As often fascinated by the languages and cultures they studied as they were working according to colonial agendas (Karttunen 2015, 59–63), European philologists, guided by indigenous scholars, translated the Vedic canon into English and Indian vernacular languages and made them available beyond the ranks of brahmans familiar with Sanskrit for the first time. This not only helped colonial administrators to 'nativise' their framework of civil law (Ahmed 2018), but consolidated the upper-caste claim that the foundation of all Indian culture was brahmanism.

The current article, which is part of a larger project on neglected areas of Soviet and Indian radical thought, considers the ideology critique of Indo-European philology that emerged in revolutionary Russia. The central figure here is the radical philologist Aleksei Petrovich Barannikov (1890–1952).[1] It also considers intellectuals associated with the anti-caste movement in India, and the incipient, counter-hegemonic philology that was forming there. Where mainstream Indo-European philology resulted from a successful, institutionalized and ongoing collaboration between brahman and colonial intellectuals, anti-caste intellectuals and the Soviet-led, international movement against imperialism interacted only in fragmentary ways, collaboration was poorly grounded in institutional forms and, at best, intermittent. This is cause of a long period of neglect, but does not make the work of the intellectuals concerned any less important in terms of historical significance, nor in its critical potential today. New engagements with the intellectual history of the Russian Revolution in an international context, recent Marxist critiques of postcolonial theory,

[1] For an overview of Barannikov's life and work see Beskrovnyi and Kal'ianov (1953), Chelyshev (1990), and Polinshchuk (2015).

the return of a social history of Sanskrit and the rise of Dalit studies in India now make it both possible and urgent to consider the unrealized potential of anti-brahminical and anti-colonial philological thought.

Counter-hegemonic philology

Dalit studies have brought these hitherto neglected dimensions into sharper focus by foregrounding the history of caste oppression and discrimination and struggles against them. [2] Questioning the simplistic dichotomies of colonial rule and brahman-led nationalism, Dalit studies have also foregrounded a number of low-caste intellectuals who began to appear in the late nineteenth century and who contested the cultural leadership of brahmans (Mani 2015; see also Figueria 2015). The ideas of the first intellectuals of the anti-caste movement such as the Marathi activist Jottirao Phule (1827–1890) and the Tamil Pariah Iyothee Thass (1845–1914), who wrote in their local vernaculars, have recently become available to an Anglophone audience, seriously complicating the narratives of postcolonial studies. Particularly notable is the fact that the experience of caste oppression was such that early anti-caste campaigners saw British rule as preferable to that of Brahman nationalists, and sought to strengthen the independence of British administrators by liberating them from intellectual reliance on manipulative brahmans. This involved revealing the extent to which colonial philologists had assimilated the brahmanical narrative and so obscured the true history of India.

The most advanced counter-philology was developed by Thass, who treated Tamil literature, in printed and manuscript form, as a 'historical archive', made up of 'linguistic fossils that could speak of an erased past' (Jayanth 2019, 86). The objectivity of the narrative of Indo-European philology, according to which, through the caste system, Aryans had raised the culture of the region to new heights, was decisively questioned. As Douglas Ober (2016; 185–86) puts it, Thass drew upon 'deep readings of ancient Tamil literature and a solid grounding in Sanskrit and Pali texts' to argue:

> …the mleccha (Tamil, *milechar*), a term typically used to denote foreigners or non-Aryans were the Aryans themselves. When the Aryans came to India, they disenfranchised the already present Buddhist kings, occupied their *vihāras*, Brahminized the histories to make it appear as if the Vedic traditions were here first and then inflicted the stigma of outcaste on this "indigenous [Buddhist] other."

Names that once denoted 'occupations and activities of individuals and groups were now transformed into appellations of ascriptive communities that is castes' (Aloysius 1998, 139). The aim was to place Aryans at the top of a system of mutually exclusive and rank-ordered castes able to live off the labour of others. The notion that 'the people categorized as Pariahs were the original inhabitants of India and Buddhism was the pre-Vedic indigenous religion' became a fundamental tenet of Dalit Buddhism (Ober 2016, 186), but it was only with B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956) that

[2] On the specific conjuncture that gave rise to Dalit studies see Rawat and Satyanarayana (2016: 3-8)

the symbiotic relationship between colonial masters and the governing caste become clear to anti-caste intellectuals, and that the struggle to extricate India from colonial rule was bound up with liberating the lower castes from their oppression.

The Russian Revolution and after

The key event between the era of Phule and Thass, and that of Ambedkar, which illustrated the link between imperialism and various forms of oppression, was the Russian Revolution and its aftermath. The period of productive interaction between anti-colonial movements and the Bolshevik regime was relatively short, lasting for the first four congresses of the Communist International (1919–1924), until international movements were gradually subordinated to the defense of the USSR. Nevertheless, contacts between the anti-caste movement and Soviet intellectuals persisted. Two important figures from the anti-caste movement and the Indian Buddhist revival, that culminated with Ambedkar's 'Navayana Buddhism', visited Leningrad in the late 1920s and 1930s to work with Soviet Indologists. Dharmanand Kosambi (1878–1947) and Rahul Sankrityayan (1893–1963) were accomplished scholars in Buddhism and philology and each, in different ways, sought to combine Marxism and Buddhism as the ideological basis of the anti-caste movement. The Indians particularly valued the work of Fedor Shcherbatskoi (aka Theodor Stcherbatsky, 1866–1942), and the school of Buddhology in Leningrad that he established, for studying Buddhism as an egalitarian and rigorous philosophy of reason whose value to world culture rivaled that of Greek classical philosophy. This approach was in marked contrast to the majority of European perspectives on Buddhism, and the Russian's work on Tibetan and Mongolian texts rather than only Sanskrit materials clearly appealed to Indians seeking to capture what the influential Tamil activist Lakshmi Narasu (1907) called the rational *Essence of Buddhism* for contemporary times.

Unfortunately the visits of Kosambi and Sankrityayan, like that of the leader of the Tamil 'self respect movement' Periyar E. V. Ramasamy (1879–1963), coincided with Stalin's 'revolution from above', which involved repression of Soviet 'renovationist' (*obnovlencheskii*) Buddhism that had sought to unify Buddhism and Marxism, and this was soon followed by the destruction of the Leningrad School of Buddhology itself. The repression also rendered attempts by Indian anti-caste campaigners to make common cause with the Indian Communist Party impossible. After a period of extreme sectarianism at the end of the 1920s, Moscow swung the Comintern to prioritise support for 'progressive bourgeois nationalisms', which sidelined issues of caste as feudal survivals destined to disappear with capitalist development (see also Omvedt 2012, 45–7). Such complacency clashed with Ambedkar's insistence that proactive measures must be taken to ensure the 'dissolution of stigma through the inclusion of Dalits in capitalist social life' (Rao 2013: 54). This had a marked effect on what was published in the USSR, and was consolidated after independence when India and the USSR drew close. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this is the prominent 1959 collection *Noveishaia istoriia Indii* where a unified process of national liberation was posited (Balabushevich and D′iakov eds. 1959, 23), and Ambedkar's struggle for the advancement of Dalits was condemned in the same breath as Hindu chauvinism (1959, 206–7, 211–13, 264–75) for playing into the hands of British imperialism.

Early Soviet Indology and Philology

This subordination of scientific to statutory authority was not an even process, however, and areas relatively detached from practical politics retained greater autonomy. The new Indian philology that arose in contradistinction to the classical traditions was a case in point. Barannikov was they key figure here. He belonged to a new generation of linguists concerned with the sociological dimensions of language such as the influence of the war and Revolution on Russian (Uchenye izvestiia 1918, 32–35; Barannikov 1919), the language of the city (Uchenye zapiski 1919, 25–28), the ethnography and language of Russian and Ukrainian Gypsy communities (1931a; 1934) and their influence on the wider urban language (1931b). Barannikov studied ancient Indian languages and cultures in Kiev under the German Sanskritist Friedrick Knauer (1849–1917), and he taught Sanskrit and comparative linguistics in Samara and Saratov Universities during the Civil War. He moved to Petrograd (from 1924 Leningrad) after the war to study under Sergei Ol′denburg and Shcherbatskoi, and in the mid-1920s he wrote some generally positive articles about Buddhist communities in Russia (1926) in his role as scholar at the ethnology section of the Russian Museum in Leningrad (1921–8). Thereafter Barannikov concentrated on developing resources for the study of modern Indian philology at the Institute of Living Oriental Languages and at Leningrad University. In 1934 he began working at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences and in 1936 created a Modern Indian section of the institute, staffed with researchers who had previously worked under Shcherbatskoi in the Indo-Tibetan section. Barannikov's modern Indian Philology now appeared as a new 'Soviet' Indology in contradistinction to the 'old' version, and in 1938 he became head of the Institute.

From 1932 until 1950 Soviet linguistics were dominated by the ideas of the Georgian archaeologist and philologist Nikolai Marr (1865–1934), who presented Indo-European philology simply as the expression of, and ideological cover for, colonial interests. While Marr had relatively little to say specifically about Indian languages, his ideas were shaped by Indo-European philology in fundamental ways, even while he opposed its conclusions. Marr adopted the narrative of India being formed by the incursion of Aryan Invaders who subjugated the native Dravidian population and created a unitary but segregated society through the caste system, but inverted the evaluation in the same way as Phule, and Thass, before applying the theory to Europe. For Marr, European society had been created in exactly the same way as Indian society, with Indo-European languages of Aryan invaders 'crossing' (*skreshenie*) with the 'Japhetic' languages of the subjugated original peoples of Europe (Brandist 2018). The consequence was that modern European languages, like those of India, are stratified according to the social position of their speakers. Modern languages thus have a 'class character' (*klassivost′*), where typological similarities between the speech of peoples of the same social standing, even when speaking different languages, can be identified. Comparative linguistics had concentrated attention on similarities between kindred (Sanskrit-related) 'princely' (*kniazheskii*) languages and consigned the oral cultures of the subjugated peoples to the status of mere curiosities. Marr aimed to give them a central position and to reveal their contributions to world history and culture. For Marr, the specific features of the 'Japhetic system' (which he used instead of Japhetic *family*) were best viewed in those European languages that remained anomalies for the comparative philology that focused on Indo-European languages: Basque, Georgian and Etruscan. This putative Japhetic system expanded in Marr's later work until it finally incorporated Dravidian languages. Marr's *klassivost′*

had nothing to do with the Marxism it rhetorically emulated, but would more appropriately be called the *kastivost'* or caste-character of languages.

Interestingly, the major representatives of Marrism who did engage with Indian languages and cultures did not concentrate on the correlation of class or caste and language. Marr's own main intervention in the area was an attempt to trace the origin of Indian place names, and he mainly endorsed the French Buddhologist Sylvain Lévi's 'brave' insistence that 'India has been too exclusively examined from the Indo–European standpoint' (Marr 1927: 224–5).[3] Marr's colleague Boris Bogaevskii (1926) seized upon the recent archaeological discoveries of the Harappan civilization to question the coherence of the Indo-European narrative, and to outline its compatibility with Marr's ideas. More significantly, Izrail′ Frank-Kamenetskii (1935; 1938) subjected Vedic myths to Marr's particular brand of semantic palaeontology to show that such myths displayed traces of semantic shifts common to cultures that had no genetic connection. It is this approach that resembles that of Phule and Thass.

New Soviet Indology: Aleksei Barannikov

The relationship between the Indian caste system, Sanskrit and the rise of modern Indian languages became a central concern for Barannikov in the 1930s and 1940s. This path-breaking agenda anticipated Sheldon Pollock's important social history of Sanskrit (Pollock 2006: see also Ramaswamy 1999) by more than half a century. Barannikov's attitude towards Marr at the time is not clear, but the formation of the 'new' Indian philology oriented on the Indian vernacular languages in opposition to the 'old' Sanskrit-focused philology was very much in accordance with his general precepts. Nevertheless, while in harmony with Marr's ideology critique of Indo-European philology, Barannikov's linguistic work derives little or nothing from Marr's own eccentric and extravagant theories. Instead it should be seen alongside the remarkable advances in sociological linguistics in the USSR in the 1920s, such as the work of Lev Iakubinskii (1892–1945) and Viktor Zhirmunskii (1891–1971) on the relationship between 'social dialects' in the formation of the Russian and German national languages, and Boris Larin's (1893–1964) work on the language of the city and argot. While none of these thinkers contradicted Marr's work, each owed more to Jan Baudouin de Courtenay's (1845–1929) sociologization of the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt and to Antoine Meillet's (1866–1936) sociology of language (see Barannikov 1919). Baudouin, it should be noted, had been sharply critical of the 'old aristocratic attitude which was inspired by admiration for the erudition of philology and which considered worthy of investigation only noble, literary languages conferred with divine or regal power' (Baudouin de Courtenay 1972 [1904], p. 241). He regarded the 'overestimation of Sanskrit's importance *vis-à-vis* the study of less ancient languages' to be symptomatic of a general 'scorn for the surrounding world, for the *linguae vulgaris*' (Baudouin de Courtenay 1972 [1889], p. 127). Such a perspective clashed with the Sanskrit-centred Indology of pre-Revolutionary Russia,

[3] See also the challenge of the Marathi anti-caste reformer and founder of the Bombay Depress Class Mission (in 1906), Vitthal Ramji Shinde (1873-1944) written sometime after 1911 (Shinde n.d.). Shinde subsequently published, in Marathi, an extensive history of untouchability on the basis of the methodology outlined in this essay. I am indebted to Nachiket Kulkarni for this reference.

though not with the study of the spread of Buddhist ideas into Tibet, Mongolia and ultimately Siberia.

The ‘aristocratic attitude’ that Baudouin identified was not, for Barannikov, simply a product of European colonialism, not least because the study of Indian languages and literatures had a much longer history. This pre-colonial tradition had divided Indian languages into ancient Indian languages and mediaeval Sanskrit on the one hand, and middle-Indian (Prakrits) and modern Indian languages on the other. The prejudice that only the first division was worthy of study was widespread in India, ‘where brahmans, defending their caste interests and striving to block the lower castes from access to culture, first proclaimed middle-Indian languages (Prakrits), and later modern Indian languages simply to be distortions of the ‘unitary literary language of India’ i.e. Sanskrit’ (Barannikov 1941: 186). The codification of Sankrit by Pānini (560–480 BCE) and others was an attempt to ‘reconstruct’ a ‘pure’ language, and this coincided with the challenges to brahmanical authority by Buddhists and Vaishnavites, who had recourse to ‘tainted’ popular languages (1941: 170). Mediaeval ‘standard’ Sanskrit, was an ideological instrument to consolidate brahmanical authority, which was then projected back onto the dialectal forms of Vedic texts. Languages that deviatied from the new standard were labeled Prakrits. Mediaeval Sanskrit thus played a functional role akin to mediaeval Latin, serving as the language of the priesthood, and texts written according to Pānini’s norms being chiefly scholastic in character. The language of epic texts such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* which achieved their definitive editorial forms in this period, deviated significantly from those norms, but Sanskrit was nevertheless proclaimed as the ‘mother of Prakrits’.

‘European Indology was in many areas indebted to Indian grammarians’ (1941: 179), and while the theory of Sanskrit as the original language was in ‘full contradiction with the historical facts’ (1941: 180), it was nevertheless accepted by British and especially by German scholars, who ‘reinforced it with the racist conclusions from their Indo-European theory’ (1941: 186). The cultural achievements of India were accordingly held solely to be those of the Aryans, the true representatives of whom were the upper castes, and particularly brahmans (1941: 183). This Indo-European ‘theory’ provided ideological justification for British rule in India because as Aryans and, ‘having deprived the Moghuls of power’, the British could claim ‘merely to have restored historical justice’, since the ‘power over the ancient Aryan property passed into the hands of Aryans’. True enough, these were not the former, Indian Aryans, but the Aryans of the West, close to them by blood and therefore having the moral right to inherit power over India’ (1941: 184). Rule by the Western Aryans was allegedly unavoidable because the ‘creative part of the population of India, ie. Aryans-Brahmins’ had been ‘drained of blood’ under Moghul rule, leaving the ‘inferior mass, unable either to govern themselves or to create cultural values. The British now had to ‘manage India until it could attain "maturity"’ (1941: 184). From this perspective, the Bengal Renaissance, lead by Brahmin intellectuals who were accomplished specialists in Sanskrit, was a claim to having achieved this maturity.

Brahmanical contempt for Prakrits and then for modern Indian languages was quite understandable, since they ‘penetrated into literary usage as a means for the expression of openly antibrahmanical ideas, as a means for spreading “heretical” ideas of social equality among the masses’. The struggle against national languages and literatures was actually a struggle against ‘the lower, oppressed castes that were

striving to liberate themselves from the upper-caste yoke and struggling for the ideals of social justice' (1941: 181). The poets who Barannikov particularly highlighted in this regard were the Hindi poet Kabir (1414–1580) and the Marathi poet Tukaram (1608–50), whose bitter denunciations of brahman privilege was met with direct repression (1941: 181–82). Barannikov did not suggest that all texts written by brahmans were rigidly conservative or that all texts written in the vernacular were directly oppositional, but that vernacular texts were permeated by non- and even anti-brahminical perspectives, even if they were contained within forms that ultimately affirmed the status quo. The consolidation of modern Indian literary languages in and through literature in the vernacular was advanced by writers associated with Vaishnavism, the cult of Vishnu, which more often ignored caste than attacked it, 'accepting representatives of all castes, and even those who had lost their caste, and even Moslems' (1937, 16). Representative of this democratic orientation was the Hindi poet and brahman Tulsidas (1532–1623), whose 'liberal views on the interrelationship between castes, and protesting against the self-isolation of brahmanism' led him to 'reject Sanskrit and write in Hindi' (1937, 23).

Barannikov translated, edited and wrote extensive critical studies of landmark texts in the formation of modern Indian literature: the *Ramcharitmanas* (1948), a retelling of the Sanskrit *Ramayana* by Tulsidas, and *Prem Sagar* (1937) by Lallu Lal (1763–1835), based on the tenth book of the *Bhagavata Purana*, the legend of Krishna. These were written in the vernacular Awadhi and Khari Boli dialects of Hindi respectively, and while Pandits regularly claimed these were merely inferior retellings of Sanskrit originals, Barannikov insisted they constitute 'two works on one and the same theme' with 'different compositional devices and means of expression' (Barannikov 1959 [1939]: 174). The vernacular texts were written for a wider audience than the brahmans to whom the Sanskrit texts were accessible. As a result they incorporated ideas and perspectives that derived from lower-caste oral traditions, especially the Bhakti movement, i.e. the various sects that arose among artisans worshipping Vishnu in his incarnations as Rama and Krishna. Rather than strict observance of rites and dogmas, devotion to God was central to these sects, and for this caste divisions were regarded as irrelevant. As a result 'Tulsidas was able to present a clear picture of contemporary life, along with all the complexities of its social structure' (1937: 27).

Barannikov's argument was here similar to that of his contemporary Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), who viewed prose genres in European literature as permeated by popular perspectives and social languages rather than sealed off from them as in epic poetry. While in Europe it was prose genres that 'orchestrated' the realities of the socially stratified common language, 'heteroglossia' [*raznorechie*], in India this occurred within verse genres in the vernacular as opposed to the sealed texts of the Sanskrit epics. It should be noted at this point that Bakhtin did not regard works written in verse as excluded from the novelizing forces in culture, and regarded texts such as Byron's *Don Juan* and Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin* as approaching the status of novels in verse (Bakhtin 2012 [1940–41] 515–21; 2012 [1939] 602–07). However, Barannikov argues that authors like Tulsi Das wrote in conditions where centrifugal challenges to brahmanic hegemony from Bhakti sects were accompanied by a more general threats to the Hindu community as a whole from the oppression of Moghul invaders. Thus, while the author gave voice to demotic perspectives, this was

subordinated to the patriotic aim to show the people 'how to save the country and its culture at a time of terrible struggle with conquerors' (1948a: 13–14).

Given that Barannikov produced his translation during a period of exile due to the invasion of the USSR by Nazi Germany, and that he published the work in the period of the post-war anti-cosmopolitan campaign, such sentiments are understandable. They did, however, provoke criticism from one of the USSR's foremost historians of India, Igor Reisman (1898–1958) who, mindful of the USSR's aim to make an ally of newly independent India, argued Barannikov underestimated the extent to which Muslims were assimilated into India, the acceptance of Islam by sections of the Indian population and, unwittingly echoing Ambedkar (2014 [1936], 50), that a unified Hindu community simply did not exist (1948: 79–80). In actuality Barannikov (1941: 175) had argued that Vishnuism and Islam, with its democratic slogans, had together landed powerful blows against the privileges of the upper castes.

Recent research on the Bhakti movement and associated literature (Eaton 1978; Tsvetkov 1987; 60–63; Hussain (ed.) 2007; Omvedt 2008; Pillai 2013; Shahida 2016) supports Reisman's argument inasmuch as it questions the unity of the Hindu, and indeed that of the Moslem, communities, but it nevertheless confirms Barannikov's insistence on the democratizing influence of Islam, though in its reformist form. Bhakti was formed in dialogue not only with brahmanism, but also with the reformist Sufi movement in Islam, with which Bhakti shared certain important features. As Govinda Pillai (2013: 156–7) argues, where Bhakti sought to 'reform Hindu society and save it from Brahminic orthodoxy, the ubiquitous caste system, the irrelevant ritualistic practices whose original meanings were forgotten', Sufis rejected 'the crassly materialistic tendencies [of the Mughal court] and stood for an ascetic life marked by simplicity, morals, prayer and truthfulness'. Moreover, both Bhakti and Sufi poets played central roles in the formation of Indian vernacular languages, with the effect that a cross-fertilization of ideas persisted in spite of Islam's position as the religion of the court. Crucially, however, Reisman's comments were not based on any such research, but on concern that presenting the clash between the Muslim and Hindu communities as something fundamental 'distorts the facts and converges with the conclusions of today's Hindu and Moslem chauvinists counterposing the "special interests" of Hindus and Moslems to the common front of India's toilers for their social and national liberation' (1948: 80).

Whatever the ideological determinants and scholarly shortcomings of Barannikov's argument, there is an important element that finds support in recent research in Dalit studies. This is Barannikov's presentation of Bhakti-based literature as both incipiently oppositional but unable to escape the limits of brahmanism. In her survey of the history of anticaste intellectuals Gail Omvedt (2008: 18), for instance, argues that Bhakti sects developed visions of an 'earthly utopia', and drew upon a 'nonbrahmanic, nonbrahman traditions, including Buddhism and early versions of Saivism, rejecting the ritualism and inequalities of traditional, elite thinking'. Yet such visions remained only partially developed since 'these subaltern intellectuals had no access to a language of reason and analysis, to a study of history; they were forced to work within and subvert the basically brahmanic religious framework that was hegemonic. Their "ecstasy" of utopia was envisaged in some timeless place' (2008: 18).

Soviet Indology after 1950

Soviet Indology could not escape the institutional struggles, bureaucratic impositions, opportunistic invocations of political rhetoric and condemnations of prior trends in philology as reactionary that accompanied the consolidation of Marrism. In this context the establishment of a section of modern Indian philology at the Institute of Oriental Studies, presented as a new Soviet discipline, inevitably suggested the classical philology of the Ol′denburg-Shcherbatskoi school was a 'bourgeois' relic. Thus Sergei Serebriany (2015: 139) argues that Barannikov studied Sanskrit in his earlier years 'but in the 1930s made his career by criticizing Ol′denburg and Shcherbatsky as "reactionaries" who preferred the "dead" Sanskrit to the living "languages of the people"'. No evidence to support this assertion is provided, however, and none appear in Barannikov's published works. Barannikov certainly criticized Ol′denburg's claim that 'Sanskrit literature… is the basis and essence of all Indian literature' and that modern Indian literatures provide but 'pale glimpses of the beauty of ancient India' (1937: 6). Yet the purpose was to criticize the one-sidedness of pre-Revolutionary Indology rather than to consign it to the dustbin of history. This is a constant refrain in his work on the discipline. While hostile ideological comments about pre-Revolutionary philology are indeed common in the period, Barannikov's published references to his predecessors appear overwhelmingly respectful, and in a 1948 survey of current Soviet Indology he bemoans the 'weakened state of the study of ancient Indian cultures', which had resulted from the extensive purges of many leading orientalists, as a 'serious inadequacy' (1948b: 11; see also Chelyshev 1990, 93).

Barannikov's focus on the centrality of caste in Indian culture, and his death in 1952, made it easy to caricature him as representative of a period in Soviet Indology marked by ideological dogmatism, vulgar sociologism and repression.[4] As Aleksandr Formozov (cited in Alpatov, 1997, 17) notes, after Stalin's June 1950 attack on Marr, a return to 'the traditions of Russian scholarship of the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, positivist in its spirit' was prescribed. The 'nostalgic feelings' that dominated the late Stalin period reappeared at various points in the late Soviet period and was amplified after the fall of the USSR. From 1950 developments within Soviet philology and history, which had more directly been affected by the vagaries of Soviet nationality and foreign policy, converged. The April 1955 Bandung conference catalyzed a shift in Soviet cultural policy for Soviet orientalists to engage intellectuals of decolonizing nations, specifically through events such as the International Congresses of Orientalists, the 25th of which took place in Moscow in 1960, and the Afro-Asian Writers Association, which held international conferences and awarded the Lotus Prize between 1958 (in Tashkent) and 1979 (in Luanda). Oriental philology now had an important role to play in supporting the consolidation of postcolonial nation states and facilitating their alignment with Moscow. Internal socio-economic inequalities, especially those with roots deep in Indian culture such as the caste system, that did not obstruct this aim, were decisively deprioritized in favour of a single, unified process of national liberation. Thus, one of Barannikov's students, Igor Serebriakov (1972: 42) noted that Barannikov's 'view that the literature in Sanskrit – inasmuch as it was the creation of the Brāhmanas-was quite conservative did not gain

[4] This is despite the fact that Barannikov's last article (1952) met the requirement of rejecting Marr's legacy and focused upon Pānini's anticipations of Western comparative linguistics.

acceptance and was not reflected in the works published in the fifties'.

Soviet theories of ethnogenesis, which drew on Marr's ideas of the convergence and merger of peoples, survived Marr's own posthumous fall from grace, and undergirded the historical legitimacy of the USSR in Stalin's time and after. The prerequisites for the formation of the USSR could, according to this theory, be traced back into ancient history where constantly interacting and closely interconnected states laid the foundations of a shared economy, polity and culture (Shnirelman 2005, 105). In the context of decolonization and the Cold War, the same underlying logic came to be applied to the USSR's allies, including India. First Prime Minister of independent India Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), who visited the USSR in 1927 and 1955, most likely partook of these ideas in his vision of Indian nationalism as the subjective recognition and conscious culmination of a *longue durée* 'inner urge towards synthesis' of the many *particularities* of language, religion, caste and custom that were distinctively Indian (Nehru 1956 [1946], 78; see also Seth 1995, 200–204). As in Europe, the newly achieved nation state was to be justified by being projected into the distant past through a range of ideological means. Historical studies of Indian literature in the USSR soon began to foreground this process of nation formation, such as in Serebriakov's *Literaturnyi protsess v Indii (VII–XIII veka)* (The Literary Process in India (VII–XIII century.) 1979). Sanskrit literature here came to be viewed primarily as a common stock of Indian myths and narratives regardless of caste and the plurality of modern literary languages and to play a crucial role in common literary process. Such a position chimed with the 1958 report of the Indian Sanskrit Commission, which insisted 'Sanskrit has been the Great Unifying Force of India, and that India with its nearly 400 millions of people [sic] is One Country, and not half or dozen or more countries, only because of Sanskrit' (cited in Ramaswamy 1999, 341).

Barannikov's work did find supporters after his death, but those who drew on his work shifted the focus decisively. Leading historian Aleksei D′iakov (1896–1974) wrote about the importance of Bhakti sects in the 15th to 17th centuries, singling out Barannikov's work for particular praise (D′iakov 1954), but characterized Bhakti as the ideology of anti-feudal, urban artisans rather than an intervention in the caste-based socio-cultural struggles of Indian society. While the antipathy of sects towards caste was mentioned, D′iakov's central focus was an artisanal and peasant-based protest against feudalism in circumstances where (as in Russia) the class forces for a successful capitalist challenge was absent. This formulation appeared in a number of historical works in the 1960s and 70s (Alaev 2017: 189) and also in cultural analyses. Following Japanologist Nikolai Konrad's controversial idea that renaissance marks a stage of the 'global literary process' (Chelyshev 1969, 202), Barannikov's student, the prominent specialist in Indian literature Evgenii Chelyshev (1921–), celebrated his teacher's work for 'opening up new possibilities for typological comparison [of Bhakti poetry - CB] with certain trends in world renaissance culture' (1990: 208). Such ideas were intensively debated until the late 1980s (for an overview see Petrov 1989), and led to some interesting work in comparative literature and cultural analyses, but were all symptomatic of a widespread imperative to integrate non-European societies and cultures into a unilinear pattern of development. If Soviet accounts of economic development followed the Stalin-era five-stage formula of primitive communism, slave society, feudalism, capitalism and communism, then cultural history followed the corresponding pattern of ancient, mediaeval, renaissance, enlightenment and socialist realism. Renaissance marked the beginnings of a

transitional period between feudal and capitalist society, while enlightenment marked its more mature and conscious stage, but in colonial conditions enlightenment coincided with the rise of ideas of national liberation. When, from the 1970s, attention turned to the 'Indian enlightenment' then it was upper-caste intellectuals who featured, pursuing the 'bourgeois reformation of Hinduism' (Rybakov 1981) and developing modern Indian literature (Chelyshev 1991, 23–93).[5] As in much postcolonial theory later, the contested nature of the European Enlightenment, caught between those who sought to harmonise reason with religious prejudices and more radical, atheistic and egalitarian trends, was obscured before being applied to the colonial world.

After the fall

The radical implications of Barannikov's work highlighting the integration of questions of language, religion and caste with socioeconomic structures remained unexplored in Soviet studies of India in the post-Stalin era. At this very time, however, such perspectives remerged in India, perhaps in response to the weakening of Moscow's influence over progressive intellectuals following the invasion of Hungary in 1956 and the Sino-Soviet split, which led to a major rift in the Communist movement in India as elsewhere. In the historical work of figures such as D.D. Kosambi (1907–66, son of Dharmanand Kosambi), R.S. Sharma (1919–2011), Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (1918–93) and others, the radical and socialistic traditions indigenous to India began once again to be revealed. In the widely received survey *The Hindu World: An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism* by Benjamin Walker (1983 [1968], 363), 'the Sanskritization of Indian thought and the brahmanization of Indian social codes by the scribes' were presented as central elements of the reassertion of brahmanical authority in post-Mauryan society. Brahmanical hostility towards vernacular languages, intolerance of religions other than non-Vedic brahmanism and institutionalized prejudice against lower castes were here held to be characteristic features. By the beginning of the 1990s caste had become recognized as a 'legitimate political category and a modern and living one, as opposed to its prior representations as primordial, backward, and reactionary' (Rawat and Satyanarayana 2016) and neglected thinkers who had pursued a much more radical version of enlightenment than celebrated brahminical nationalists, who sought a reconciliation between reason and Hinduism, were given due attention.

While Stalinist dogmas began to fade during the *perestroika* period, it was only in the year of the collapse of the USSR that Dalit thinkers emerged fully as an object of sustained research in Russian oriental studies, with the publication of a collection of essays foregrounding subaltern religion. The editors, Boris Kliuev (1927–2000) and Aleksei Litman (1923–92), who had previously written about Indian social thought within the framework of the Soviet narrative, now 'posed the problem' of Bhakti as a 'phenomenon of Indian social thought' (Kliuev and Litman 1991) outside those limits, while Irina Chelysheva (1991) presented the first article in Russian on Ambedkar's 'Navayana Buddhism'. In 1991 the Institute of Ethnology of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, completed a collective project on ethnicity and caste in India under the direction of Mikhail Kudriadtsev (1911–1992), who had extensive contacts with Indian scholars (Reshetov 1992, 154). Kudriadtsev's (1992) monograph on the

[5] Two major collections of the time are Turaev (1970) and Braginskii (1973).

Indian caste system, which supported Ambedkar's conclusion that the caste system and Hinduism are inseparable, was published posthumously. This sudden appearance of research compatible with Dalit studies illustrates the extent to which Soviet scholars had taken note of the assertion of Dalit politics beginning with the Dalit Panthers' movement in the 1970s, even if they had not published on the question. The intellectual ground had been laid by Barannikov, with whom many had direct or indirect connections. It was not until 2003 that Russia's first monograph about the Dalit movement appeared (Iurlova 2003), by which time the points of continuity between Bhakti and Dalit Buddhism were accentuated.

Conclusion

Barannikov's work gains particular relevance today for connecting the radical critique of Indo-European philology in the USSR with the emerging agendas of Dalit studies and contemporary critical scholarship about the cultural and political heritage of colonialism. In focusing on the ways in which the ideologies and scholarship of colonialism emerged through dialogues between the colonial intellectuals with those of privileged sections of indigenous society, and some of the ways in which this was contested from below, his work points us in directions that require research today. This includes more detailed investigation of many of the areas he pioneered, but also areas in which the specific political and institutional environment in which he worked rendered inaccessible.

One of these is the link between struggles over the role of Sanskrit and how this converged not only with the question of colonial domination but also with emerging forms of indigenous socialism that were marginalized by Stalinism. New histories of the anti-caste movement, the Buddhist revival and the Communist movement in India are proving to be very productive (Aloysius 1998; Geetha and Rajadurai 1998; Datta Gupta 2006; Vaitheespar and Venkatasubramanian 2015; Ober 2016), as are new engagements between Marxism and the Dalit movement (Teltumbde 2017; Raja and Muthumohan 2018) but the philological dimension needs further development. This has been made more urgent by the rise of Hindu nationalism in India, which seeks to re-empower Sanskrit as part of a Hindutva myth. Barannikov was able to make these connections only with reference to the Bhakti movement because positive engagement between Soviet Indologists and the contemporary anti-caste movement was effectively blocked. Anti-caste intellectuals like Kosambi and Sankrityayan travelled to the USSR in search of a rational philosophy to undergird the anti-caste movement, but engaged not with Barannikov's (then incipient) modern Indian philology, but with the older, much less political, Buddhology of Shcherbatskoi and Ol′denburg. The fact that each in his own way sought to combine Buddhist rationality with Marxism illustrates the potential that existed. The one figure who tried to bridge the gap between the ancient and modern was Mikhail Tubianskii (1895–1937), but he left to work in Mongolia in 1927 and was executed ten years later in the purge that also claimed figures central to the Soviet Buddhist renovationists, Tsiben Zhamtsarano (1881–1942) and Agvan Dorzhiev (1854–1938) (Brandist 2015). Barannikov's work on Bhakti sects consequently failed to link up with the Buddhist revolt against rising brahmanical power and with the Indian Buddhist revival, which was central to the emergence of the modern anti-caste movement. Research today needs to make these links for, as Ober (2016, 22) argues, far from disappearing, 'there was a robust memory of Buddhism among the educated Indian populace and that even

among those populaces where knowledge of Buddhism was blurred, it still represented an important symbol of anti-Brahminical activity'.

While colonial authorities exerted hegemony over the upper castes by understanding, engaging and reconstituting their pre-colonial forms of ideological domination, the Communist movement fundamentally failed to win hegemony over oppressed castes because it did not fully understand, engage and reconstitute their emerging ideology of resistance and liberation. As we have seen, the intellectual resources to facilitate a productive engagement existed within the USSR, and there was an emerging stratum of 'organic intellectuals' within the anti-caste movement willing to engage with them. Instead, the resources were squandered and potential allies were alienated. The problem was that by the time the Communist movement had achieved an organized form in India, the international movement had been subordinated to a bureaucratized Soviet regime that prioritized the maximization of its influence within the international state system. The revolutionary imperative of winning leadership of the subaltern masses by developing a structured and coherent worldview that integrated the perspectives of oppressed groups into a unified political programme was displaced by the aim of ensuring a government friendly to Moscow in the event of an international conflagration. The entire debate about colonial and postcolonial societies was affected by these developments and rigid dichotomies were institutionalized by the Cold War. There are now hopeful signs that the terms of debate are shifting, and intellectual history has an important role to play in making that shift a productive one.

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