Digitisation and Presentation of Historical Materials in a Virtual Exhibition 'The Image of India in Bulgaria: from the late 19th to the late 20th Century'

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Abstract. The main contribution of this project is the study of collections of valuable documents related to the image of India in Bulgaria. Digital repositories of selected samples are constructed using modern information technologies. The results are presented in a virtual exhibition 'The Image of India in Bulgaria: from the late 19th to the late 20th century'.

Keywords: Historic Heritage, Collections, India, Digitisation, Metadata, Virtual Museum

1   Introduction

As a part of a nation's overall worldview on one hand and as a basis for forming the image of itself on the other, the image of other countries through adoption, interpretation and symbolisation of foreign cultural forms and their conversion to stereotypes becomes a significant element of societies' cultural traditions.

The studies of the topic 'The Image of India in Bulgaria: from the late 19th to the late 20th century' show that from the Renaissance period, when the first reports of that country reach Bulgaria, to the end of the 20th century India has a permanent and tangible presence here. Despite the geographical distance, the interest towards India often exceeds the strictly informative frames and grows into live emotional perception.

The main reason for India's popularity in our country during the second half of the 19th century may be G S Rakovski's[1] search for a connexion between India and Bulgaria in his hypothesis of the Indian origin of Bulgarians and the attempt to prove this connexion through the material in Veda Slovena[2]. Rakovski's theses were declared groundless, and Veda Slovena proven a hoax, but they continued influencing the

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[1]   Georgi Stoykov Rakovski (1821-1867) was a figure of the Bulgarian Renaissance, the founder of organised national revolutionary struggle for the liberation of Bulgaria, a revolutionary democrat, publicist, journalist, historian and ethnographer.

[2]   *Veda Slovena* is a collection of folk songs published by the Bosnian Croat Stefan Verković under the title *Veda Slovena: Bulgarian folk songs from the prehistoric and pre-Christian era*. The collection was printed for the first time in two volumes in 1874 and 1881.

process of Bulgarians' self-identification. After the late 1970s the ideas about similarities and ancient contacts between Bulgaria and India were revived and even found their way into official bilateral relations between the two countries.

Under the changing conditions, the image of India underwent various transformations, with different features becoming prominent at different times. At the same time, there is continuity in its reception and representation. It can be traced both in the manner of the country's presentation – deeply sentimental, metaphorical, filled with romance, – and in the content: for example, India's image as a focus of human wisdom is widely popular throughout the period.

The aim of this study is to explore and choose collections of historical sources presenting the image of India and to develop digital archives and exhibitions using modern technologies.

2   Historical Sources in Bulgaria Related to India

The quick access to digital content and the creation of new content is a key to prosperity in today's world, and therefore the need for digitization of India-related historical sources in Bulgaria is evident. The study brings together the effort of scientists from the Institute of Historical Research and the Institute of Mathematics and Informatics, BAS (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences). The team aims to carry out as wide a survey as the available funding allows of India-related historical heritage, with a view to the opportunities for digitization of the sources [4].

The digitisation of the India-related historical heritage in Bulgaria would contribute to its long-term preservation (studies done at the St Cyril and St Methodius National Library and in the library of the Academy of Sciences show that some of the materials are in an extremely bad state), provide an answer to the lack of space, and guarantee quick access to the sources

The sources studied are heterogeneous (textbooks, periodicals, archival documents, popular fiction, travelogues, photos, pictures, letters, etc.). [1-3, 5-13]. Bulgarian textbooks of Indian history (schools only teach the country's ancient history within the course of Old World history, and mention her occasionally in connexion with major events in European history) are a compilation of foreign textbooks—mainly Russian and German ones until the mid-20th century and Soviet ones afterwards. They reflect the ideological stereotypes officially adopted in Bulgarian education—the Eurocentrism of western textbooks and the Marxist-Leninist theory of development dominant in the Soviet ones. It is noteworthy that although their positions are not challenged, they are far from dictating the formation of attitudes towards the country.

The press and media, which focus mainly on the coverage of current events, constitute the most important source for the development of India's political image and the contemporary attitudes and sentiments towards the country. Although the Bulgarian press has been publishing materials related to social relations, religion, customs, etc., as early as the Renaissance, they become most abundant after WWI, with the growth of the anti-colonial movement. There are many publications on India's domestic and foreign policies during the period of independence. They bear witness of the new

dimensions acquired by the country's image as well as its increasing importance for Bulgarian society.

The archival documents and materials, including such as come from the personal archives of the Bulgarian intelligentsia, letters by Bulgarian citizens, etc., from the funds of CSA (Central State Archive), BAS and MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), are a valuable source of evidence of the Bulgarians' ideas of India and their attitude towards it. They show examples of sincere admiration and homage to its ancient history and are indicative of the dominant importance of its cultural image in Bulgarian society.

Popular fiction and travelogues are also evidence of the Bulgarian society's admiration of India. Apart from two books dedicated to Rabindranath Tagore, no such works by Bulgarian authors appeared until the mid-20th century. During the rule of the Bulgarian Communist Party, writers, artists and journalists travelled to India with the mission of acquainting the Bulgarian people with various aspects of that country's life. Their books are an indication, on one hand, of the officially cultivated features of the image resulting from Bulgaria's policy towards India, and on the other, of the gradual widening of the ideological frameworks stemming from the Marxist-Leninist approach to the interpretation of social development.

3 Digital Collection of Historical Materials 'The Image of India in Bulgaria: from the late 19th to the late 20th Century'

The project 'The Image of India in Bulgaria: from the late 19th to the late 20th century' is part of the idea of digitizing and representing the historical heritage on the relations between India and Bulgaria. Within the overall study several stages are planned, some of which are already being implemented [4], while others are future tasks in need of additional funding:

1. Study of the India-related historical heritage of and the possibilities of digitising certain collections;
2. Digitising the samples from the chosen collections;
3. Creating a digital repository with added metadata and security;
4. Constructing the foundations of a Virtual Museum of Bulgarian–Indian relations (BIM) with galleries and exhibitions of digitised collections;
5. Expanding BIM with a basic exhibition of historical materials 'The Image of India in Bulgaria: from the late 19th to the late 20th century';
6. Expanding BIM with a 3D exhibition of chosen collections of 3D digital objects from the India-related cultural heritage.

In connexion with the project for full digitization of the historical heritage relevant to the relations between India and Bulgaria a thorough study was made of the sources in Bulgarian archives, libraries, museums, etc. (section 2), and some of the results of Stage 5 are presented in the exhibition 'The Image of India in Bulgaria: from the late 19th to the late 20th century', which is BIM's basic collection.

The main objective of Stage 5 is to explore and digitize samples related to India's image of, which shall be stored in digital repositories.

Tasks related to 'The Image of India in Bulgaria: from the late 19th to the late 20th century':

- A study of the heterogeneous sources with a view to their digitisation;
- Digitising, annotating and indexing the samples according to their type;
- Creating digital text and photo archives of the collected samples;
- Presenting the digitised objects in a virtual exhibition.

Studies were carried out to select standards and requirements for the digitization of the historical heritage related to India's image of in Bulgaria. With the help of modern information technologies the selected samples were digitized and annotated. The information on the digitized objects includes historical information about the object, archival photos, digitizer, date, etc. Metadata are added to the digital objects for indexing and protection, to facilitate future research in this area and as a guarantee to preserve the information on this significant historic treasure.

The contents get described and classified according to certain criteria. Description of digital resources supports activities such as searching, detecting, filtering, etc. of objects in a big resource array. The standard used is Dublin Core [14] and a technology of adding metadata, attached to the digital resource.

Rules have been developed for access to and management of the digital collections, functions for fast access, reliable and long-term storage, protection of information with steganographic methods and maintenance of the archived information to prevent losses. A digital repository of information collected from sources was organized—text and photo digital archives with metadata and protection added to the digital objects.

The archive management include the services of data management (store, view, sort and organize all objects), meta-data management, data security management and data preservation. This ensures that data are well-managed in the present, and prepared for preservation in the future.

The functionality of the repository was developed with regard to the methods of storage, access to and management of the digital components, design, support, compression and optimization. Functionality of the archive allows standard operations with objects such as input, editing, reviewing and removing objects, indexing of digital resources, also adding and maintenance of metadata, searching the archives. It offers a quick find in the digital array by certain indications and classifications; options for selecting and creating different web collections of objects of the archive (for licensed users with administrative rights); protection of the information in the archive using steganography and other methods; functions of maintenance of the digital archive.

The collection will be presented in Bulgarian and English.

The overall digital repository will be available to libraries, institutes, museums, schools and other organizations. The digital information will be made accessible on the Internet as a virtual exhibition of historical materials 'The Image of India in Bulgaria: from the late 19th to the late 20th century' (a basic exhibition in BIM [4]) in

order to promote the historical heritage of the relationship between India and Bulgaria.

Table 1. A sample of part of the metadata on digitised objects 1 and 2 (Fig.1 and 2)

|	Object 1	Object 2
Title	A picture by Iliya Petrov. Madras	A letter by Indira Gandhi
Description	A picture from Iliya Petrov's book *A Journey to India*, Sofia, 1964	A letter by Indira Gandhi to a Bulgarian girl who was named Kamala after Mrs Gandhi's mother
Original	Book	Letter from a personal archive
Rights	St Cyril and St Methodius National Library	Kamala Rasheva, Vratsa
Digitiser	scanned by an official	Kamala Rasheva
Date	29.07.2012	02.2011
Type and method	Image (scanner)	Image (scanner)
Format/horizontal resolution	JPG /600 dpi	JPG /300 dpi

4 Conclusion

This work illustrates the practical application of the digital representation and preservation of historical heritage. Valuable collections of documents related to the image of India are digitized and presented. The digital repository and BIM are constantly replenished with new collections.

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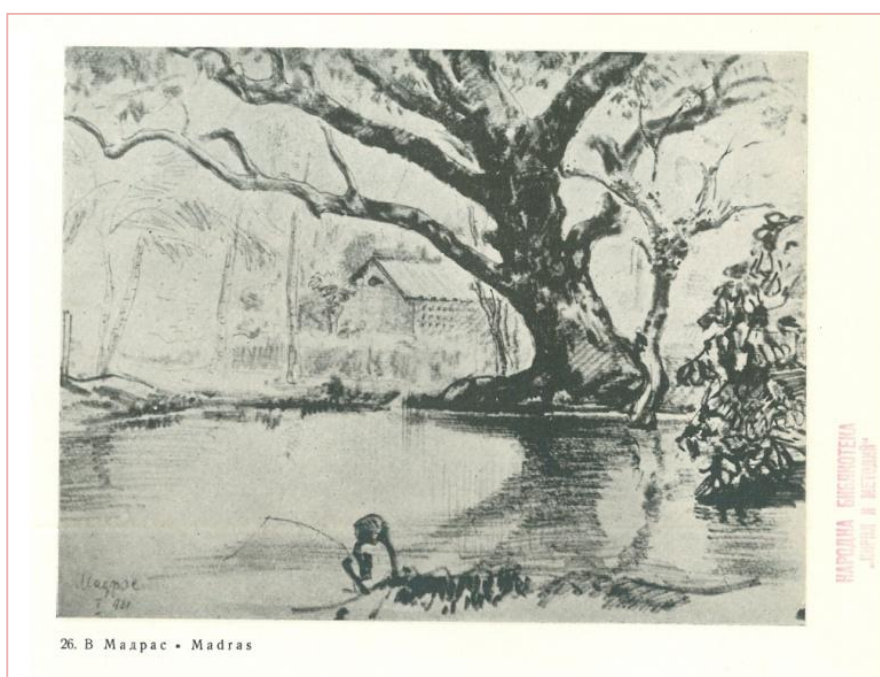
Fig. 1. Iliya Petrov. Madras

No.777-PMH/67

December 10, 1967

Dear Mrs. Petkova,

     Thank you for your letter of the 16th October which was received after I left your country and has now been forwarded to me here.

     I am pleased to learn that you named your daughter after my mother. My mother was a wonderful person, sensitive and courageous. In our language, 'Kamala' means lotus. The lotus is our national flower and is very beautiful. It grows above water.

     As you have asked for a photograph of my mother, I am enclosing one*. Unfortunately, she did not photograph well and I do not have a single photograph which does justice to her looks.

     Little Kamala has my blessings and good wishes. I am glad she is doing well in her studies. May she always be a source of joy to you. I hope that specially because of her name she will learn to know India and will be a link between our two countries.

     My visit to your beautiful country was both enjoyable and interesting. Your people are warm-hearted, friendly and gracious.

     With greetings to you and your family,

     Yours sincerely,

     (Indira Gandhi)

Mrs. Slavka Konstantinova Petkova,
Village Liliache,
Dt. Vratsa
(Bulgaria)

* the photograph is being sent separately by post.

Fig. 2. Indira Gandhi's letter to young Kamala

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