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Review of Martin Kämpchen, *Indo-German Exchanges in Education:  
Rabindranath Tagore Meets Paul and Edith Geheeb*

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MARTIN KÄMPCHEN, *Indo-German Exchanges in Education: Rabindranath Tagore Meets Paul and Edith Geheeb* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2020), 216 pp. ISBN 978 0 190 12627 8. £41.99

Indo-German connected histories have received renewed attention in recent years. Martin Kämpchen is one of the pioneering scholars who have long worked to prepare the ground for more recent explorations. His research work, particularly on Rabindranath Tagore, German history, and the German imagination, remains inspiring.<sup>1</sup> Now, years of his research on exchanges of ideas between Indian and German intellectuals—particularly in the realm of education—have been made available to a broader audience through the book under review.

As the title suggests, the book is about exchanges in education between Rabindranath Tagore in Shantiniketan and Paul and Edith Geheeb's schools in Germany and Switzerland. Let us start with the conceptual apparatus before getting into the rich empirical material. Kämpchen uses the category of exchange to map these histories, whereas others have used connected, comparative, and entangled approaches. This emphasis on exchange is an important reminder to think about the politics of entanglement and the question of equivalence. Exchange raises questions of asymmetry, but also provides a basis on which to think about mutual dialogue and interchange. This allows us to move beyond Europe to the colony and to explore the role of not just Germans, but also Indians in the making of these histories.

Education is particularly fertile ground for thinking about Indo-German exchanges under British colonialism. Moving beyond colonial hegemonic discourse on English education, alternative education projects in the wake of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, the pan-Islamist Khilafat movement, and Gandhian mass nationalism in colonial India offer another counter-narrative in the history of education. The outcome of these exchanges in colonial India was not just an inward turn to religious and nationalist certainties, but also to global cosmopolitanism—particularly a turn to the alternative offered

<sup>1</sup> Martin Kämpchen, *Rabindranath Tagore and Germany: A Documentation* (Kolkata, 1991); id., *Rabindranath Tagore in Germany: Four Responses to a Cultural Icon* (Shimla, 1999); id., *Dialog der Kulturen: Eine interreligiöse Perspektive aus Indien* (Nordhausen, 2008).

by European and especially German educational ideals and practices. This was evident in Tagore's educational projects at Visva-Bharati University, Zakir Husain's leadership of Jamia Milia Islamia, and the Gandhian Wardha Scheme of Basic Education, all of which engaged deeply with debates and educational ideas in Germany. The reimagination of education was crucial not only to anti-colonialist politics, but also to visions of decolonization in colonial and post-colonial India.

Over the course of three dense chapters, Kämpchen's book explores the history of the connections, exchanges, and entanglements between Germany and India. He focuses on the famous German educationists Paul and Edith Geheeb and on Indian educationists, of whom 'spiritual comrade' Rabindranath Tagore was the most famous, but certainly not the only one. In this history, Tagore's Brahmacharya Ashram in Shantiniketan, Visva-Bharati, the Odenwaldschule in Germany, and the later Ecole d'humanité in Switzerland were connected through educational ideals, experiments, and visions of creating a 'school of mankind', which are discussed in chapters one and two. We are also introduced to other understudied but critical intercultural individuals: Aurobindo Bose, who played an essential role in forging these connections; Kaushal Bhargava; Anath Nath Basu; Shrimati Hutheesing; Saumyendranath Tagore; and V. N. Sharma. There were also connections between Germany and the Ramakrishna Mission through Swami Yatiswarananda at Belur Math. Chapter three documents contacts with the Ramakrishna Mission and Aurobindo Bose's influence in Germany and Switzerland, giving insights into themes, concepts, and the 'affinity of their educational visions' (p. 2). The book also highlights links with the New Education Fellowship started by Beatrice Ensor, which brought together German and Indian educationists. Thus Indo-German connections were part of a more significant global history of educational exchanges.

Chapter two provides a comparative analysis of the educational philosophies and ideals of the Oldenwaldschule, the Ecole d'humanité, and Shantiniketan. These institutions shared a vision of the 'school of mankind' based on fostering 'the natural progress of a child' rather than on discipline, control, and domination through the institution of the school (p. 82). An affinity emerged regarding the roles of nature, religion, and the teacher in this shared educational vision; however,

Kämpchen also analyses the differences and limitations, highlighting how the socio-economic dimension shaped educational ideals and practices—most notably through the theme of manual labour, which was sublimated into the discourse of service (*seva*) in the Indian context (p. 105). This offers a starting point for understanding the politics of religion, class, and caste and for discussing the history and the politics of education in India, and is a theme that needs to be explored further.

Kämpchen pays particular attention to the history of not just the leading men, but also the women working behind or alongside them. In chapter three, Edith Geheeb emerges as a remarkable and complex individual living in the shadows and working tirelessly for her husband Paul—though she got her due recognition when another famous woman, Indira Gandhi, identified her talent and put her in charge of educating her young sons Sanjay and Rajiv at the Ecole d'humanité during a visit to Switzerland in 1953. Edith Geheeb and Indira Gandhi formed a friendship based on trust and respect shared through a correspondence that lasted the rest of their lives. The book analyses rare letters and photographs, and offers many great insights into Edith Geheeb's visit to India in 1965–66, as well as her observations of personal and public histories during a turbulent year of Indian history.

The book also traces the origins of these Indo-German connections in colonial and post-colonial contexts, as well as in inter-war and post-Nazi Germany. The histories of colonialism, fascism, and post-colonialism are therefore the key historical movements in which we must situate this book. Kämpchen has carried out meticulous research and translation work, drawing on archives in German, Bengali, and English. This is well represented in the book, with very relevant and useful references provided in the footnotes and appendices. Thus the book provides a useful guide to hitherto underexplored sources, especially personal letters exchanged between the Geheebes and their Indian correspondents. I was particularly struck by the salience of personal letters as public documents which provide an interesting 'affective' archive for writing not just shared histories, but also emotional accounts of private life stages marked by personal trauma, happiness, betrayal, reconciliation, and hope. I believe this sustained focus on genres of 'affective' archives—especially letters—will receive further attention in future works on Indo-German connected histories.

Kämpchen's book is full of research insights that only come with years of experience. However, it would have benefited from engaging with recent historiography beyond the history of education in Bengal in order to situate the topic in a larger global history framework. Even within the Indian context, a comparison with educational experiments at Jamia Milia Islamia would have provided interesting insights. Moreover, the question of Indian agency in this exchange needs further elaboration in terms of exploring the personal papers and writings of Indian educationists. I suppose the problem is a methodological one when studying Indo-German entanglements more broadly. How does one find a balance in evaluating intellectual exchanges? These are seldom equal, so the challenge is to reflect the politics of exchange while understanding how people and ideas come together and metamorphose, despite their differences.

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