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**Crime masala. The development of detective fiction in literature of North India**

*(Original title: Crime masala. Rozwój nurtu detektywistycznego w literaturze północnych Indii)*

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**SUMMARY**

The dissertation focuses on the crime fiction written in Urdu and Hindi languages between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its main objective, however, is not only to describe and analyze this literary phenomenon, for it is also an attempt to add a missing chapter to the history of the literature from North India. Over the years local crime fiction (called predominantly ‘detective’) has been almost excluded from the history of literature on the account of its alleged low artistic value.

In the field of Urdu and Hindi literature, crime fiction started to be vastly popular during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when local writers turned towards writing in prose which had been nearly nonexistent before in local literature of North India. Thus, a hypothesis may be put forward that crime fiction could have affected a number of stylistic and aesthetic changes that took place on the literary map of India at the time. Therefore, during the course of the dissertation, the answers to at least a few important questions are sought, namely: what benefits for local literature, if any, came from the encounter with foreign crime fiction? Did the themes and motives present in local literature of that time noticeably change? Did the language of local literary works change?

The current (quite poor) state of research on Indian crime fiction could in fact become a research problem in itself, thus the first chapter of the dissertation is fully devoted to an in-depth revision of the history of Urdu and Hindi literature. Special emphasis was laid on the academics’ approach to local crime fiction, for they perceived it as a fatuous copy, a poor imitation of a

Western literary pattern, which is professedly detached and even devoid of historical and intellectual background of its European source. It is a common claim that novel in non-Western cultures arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a western formal influence (mainly French or English) and local materials. Such an overly Eurocentric approach may be observed not only in the works of contemporary Indologists but also in the studies conducted by literary scholar Franco Moretti, who examined the issue of World literature (a concept taken from Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Weltliteratur*). Moretti's method, however, applied to the study of Indian crime fiction yields an interesting result, as it turns out that English literary culture could have had much less impact on the development of local novel than it is usually believed. This observation led to the question, whether the impact of Western – mainly English – literature on Indian literary culture, and on local crime fiction, was in fact of such significance as it has been believed.

In order to answer such a question a study on Persian tradition of dastan (extensive romances of often fantastic character) had to be undertaken. Firstly, it was one of the earliest examples of literature composed in prose known in India, and many of the early novels written in Urdu as well as in Hindi bear quite a few similarities to this adapted genre. Furthermore, studies on crime fiction originating outside the Western literature clearly show that local elements – mainly myths and legends – played an important role in the development of the genre discussed here. The tradition of dastan in North India has not been vastly studied so far, it is likely, however, that it influenced considerably the process of formulating the key elements of North Indian novel, including (perhaps above all) crime fiction.

Interestingly, the concept of suspense and the principle of the gradual release of information, so important to the properly constructed classic crime novel, had been largely unknown to Indian writers before they encountered popular British fiction of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, Indian writers did find Western crime fiction interesting enough to adapt it quickly to the field of local fiction. As a result, original Urdu and Hindi novels and short stories of crime and suspense flooded the region. The question then arises, whether Indians were also willing to adapt the basic tenets of the genre or they just blindly imitated the foreign concepts. In order to examine this allegation, the second and third chapters of the dissertation were fully devoted to the development of both Western and North Indian crime fiction. This way it became possible to examine and highlight similarities and differences between Western crime fiction and its representation in North Indian literature. The subsequent, fourth chapter was devoted to the character of local crime fiction. In this part of the dissertation the nature of crime, figures of

culprits as well as local detectives are investigated, along with narration techniques used in Urdu and Hindi crime novels and short stories. The fifth chapter ties up all of the conducted analyses and aims to dispel previously suggested doubts and to provide the final answer to the question whether Indian writers were mere plagiarists or maybe they did manage to create a completely new phenomenon in the field of local literature. The controversy of “Indianness” of Urdu and Hindi crime fiction – its authenticity and faithfulness to local literary tradition and themes – was also addressed, which led to the reflection on the term *crime masala*, from which the dissertation took its title. The new label was created to challenge the term *detective fiction*, which does not seem to correspond to the character of crime fiction written in both Urdu and Hindi. However, Western as well as some Indian scholars and literary critics years ago agreed on using this term, which, in fact, resulted in misreading and misinterpretation of the Indian representation of the genre.

The dissertation, 251 pages in total, includes five chapters, an appendix with illustrative material and bibliography. It may be perceived as a part of ongoing and extensive studies on world crime literature, however its main aim is to fill a substantial gap in the history of the development of local – that is North Indian – novel. In order to do so, more than eighty novels and short stories written in Urdu and Hindi were studied along with local translations and adaptations of foreign (mostly British) popular literature into local languages. The oldest text examined is from the 1880s, and the most recent one probably from 1941 (however it cannot be said for sure since lots of publications of that time were not dated properly). Most of the authors who were referred to have not been recognized in contemporary studies and works on history of North Indian literature.