

Summary

Experiencing Modernity: Indian Travel Writing on Europe 1858–1991

The monograph presents an analysis of Indian travel literature about Europe from the colonial and post-colonial periods, focusing on the transfer of socio-political ideas from Europe to India, particularly the reception of the idea of modernity. The monograph uses postcolonial research methodology to analyse the reception of colonial discourse and European ideas by Indian elites. The source material analysed consists of twenty five travelogues written in the Bengali language. In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, most travellers to Europe reported on the western part of the continent, mainly on England, which was perceived by the authors as the main source of modernity. Nine of such travel accounts have been selected for this analysis. With the rise of anti-colonial sentiment, however, Indian travellers began to seek new ideas elsewhere in Europe. In the early twentieth century, and especially in the interwar period, they found them in Germany and Central Europe, which from their point of view was an interesting region where new states were emerging on the ruins of empires. Five travelogues on this region were selected for this analysis. After the Russian Revolution, a small number of Indians began to travel to Russia and the European part of the Soviet Union. This destination became popular after India gained independence and especially after the death of Stalin, when Indo-Soviet relations were becoming increasingly friendly and cooperation flourished in many fields, including culture. The analysis of travel literature on the Soviet Union consists of three travel accounts from the interwar period and eight from the Cold War period. The monograph presents the experiences of Indian travellers and their perception of Europe over a long and turbulent period in the history of India and the world. By juxtaposing travel accounts from different periods and from different parts of Europe, the analysis shows the changing perceptions of the continent, but also the continuity in reflection on the major socio-political ideas of the era. The idea of modernity remained an equally important point of reference for the authors in both the colonial and post-colonial periods.