

Universalist hopes in India and Europe: the worlds of Rabindranath Tagore and Srecko Kosovel

Jelnikar, Ana, author

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Abstrak

In 1913, Rabindranath Tagore received the Nobel Prize in Literature. World famous overnight, he was translated into numerous languages. Meanwhile, in Slovenia, a young, still anonymous poet felt strongly drawn to the newly available works of the Indian bard. This young man was Srecko Kosovel, who is today hailed as Slovenias leading avant-garde poet of the interwar period. But what could Kosovel, then barely out of his teens, have in common with a figure of Tagores stature? Deeply affected by Italys conquest of parts of Slovene-populated territory, Kosovel was able to identify with Tagore and relate to the historical predicament of colonial subjugation. Despite coming from different backgrounds, they were kindred spirits-a dynamic, creative ideal of universalism lay at the core of their concerns, as opposed to the more readily available nationalisms of the time. What is interesting about Kosovels reading of Tagore is not that he took inspiration from Tagore, but that the two writers shared a similar set of preoccupations. The contours of an expanding internationalist stage of the 1920s also united the two writers-who never met-in their world view as Kosovel identified with Tagore. Moreover, as a true universalist, in the sense of feeling empathy with the less fortunate, it was more in the spirit of equality that Kosovel approached Tagore rather than as an Eastern guru or an inferior Oriental. This book is the first comparative study of the writings of these two poets who lived worlds apart but spoke in strikingly similar voices. It explores the links between India and East-Central Europe in the early decades of the twentieth century and gives voice to responses from within Europe that have largely been overlooked in postcolonial and cultural studies.