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Media case study on Italy

Elena Borghi

DEMO-India Research Report 2015/12

DEMO-India
Developing Evidence based Management and Operations in
India-EU Migration and Partnership

Research Report
Thematic Report
DEMO-India RR 2015/12

Media case study on Italy

Elena Borghi
PhD Researcher, EUI

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European University Institute
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Italy

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DEMO-India – Developing Evidence based Management and Operations in India-EU Migration and Partnership (DEMO: India-EU MaP)

The Demo: India-EU MaP project, co-funded by the European Commission, is a continuation of the Carim India project (www.india-eu-migration.eu) and it examines the multiple facets of Indian migration to the EU. Its overall aim is to improve migration management between India and the EU, strengthen EU-India relations, and produce in-depth empirical knowledge about the different migration streams and pathways of Indian nationals in the EU. Its specific goals include providing:

1. Evidence based research for more informed policy making and state intervention.
2. Improved source country capacity in managing migration.
3. Raising awareness among potential migrants of the risks of irregular migration.
4. Collaboration with civil society groups.
5. Empirical research and analysis of Indian communities across the EU, and their impact.

The project is led by the Indian Centre for Migration in Delhi with the partnership of the Migration Policy Centre, RSCAS, EUI.

For more information:

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (EUI)

Villa Malafrasca

Via Boccaccio 151

50133 Florence

Italy

Tel: +39 055 46 85 817/892

Fax: + 39 055 46 85 755

Email: mpc@eui.eu

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

<http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/>

Abstract

The paper discusses the representation of the Indian community in the Italian press. Taking into account articles from national and local newspapers published in the last three years, the author analyzes the ways in which the press generally depicts Indian immigrants in positive and sympathetic tones, noting that this comes at the price of a widespread essentialisation. Such simplifications are particularly evident in press reports dealing with Indian culture and religion, and in analyses of the gender rules and roles governing the private and family life of Indian people. The relatively recent character of Indian immigration to Italy, the low-profile and often isolated lives Indian people lead, mixed with common sense notions and stereotypes about Indians, at times hinder balanced representations of this community. Several efforts in this direction are nonetheless visible in many of the articles analysed in this paper.

Key words: Indian migrants, immigration in Italy, Sikh, Italian press, bergamini (dairy workers)

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1. Introduction

Unlike other immigrant communities in Italy, Indian people are usually positively portrayed by the Italian press. This is due to the fact that most lead low-profile, isolated existences, as illegal workers either in the *cascine* (farms) of Lombardy, Piedmont and Emilia Romagna, in northern Italy, or hidden in the fields of the Agro Pontino region, in Lazio. While other ethnic groups are frequently stigmatised as opportunists with criminal tendencies, the press describes Indians as a peaceful and friendly community, obedient, silent and hardworking enough for the Italian majority to rely upon. When it comes to this group, the press thus often speaks of its members as a workforce, as well as highlighting positive interaction with the Italian community.

Another major issue covered by the press is Indians' religious belonging, something often considered strictly related to (if not coinciding with) Indian culture as a whole. Many Indians settled in Italy are Punjabis and so Sikhs, and their symbols, garments and habits arouse both curiosity and discussion of appropriateness. The religious element has played an essential role in shaping Italians' consideration of Indians as especially suitable to work in the dairy industry as *bergamini* (cow milkers). According to widespread common-sense notions about Indian religion, Indians are cow worshippers, hence their skilfulness in looking after cows in the work place.

The first three sections of this paper thus deal with press representation of the Indian community in relation to: the labour market; interaction with the majority community and integration initiatives; and, the area most covered in the past three years, culture and religion. Another topic that comes up in representations of Indians in Italy is business and investment (confirming the widespread understanding of the subcontinent as a powerful emerging economy): this is the subject of the fourth section. Education and gender, though covered less extensively by the press, also form an important part of the issues related to the Indian community in Italy. These are analysed in the last two sections of this paper.

The main source base of this paper consists of national and local newspapers. The former group includes the most widely read daily papers, covering the entire political spectrum – from the right-wing *Il Giornale* and *Libero*, to the left-wing *La Repubblica*, *Europa Quotidiano* and *Il Corriere della Sera*, to *La Stampa* and the business papers, like *Il Sole 24 Ore*. A number of local newspapers have also been analysed, for they convey best the feelings, prejudices and stereotypical beliefs of Italians with respect to issues like migration. This second group of sources includes the newspapers published in the regions with a conspicuous Indian population: *Alto Adige*, *Il Trentino* and *La Voce del Trentino*, covering Trentino; *Brescia Oggi*, *Il Giorno* (Milano), *L'Eco di Bergamo* and *La Provincia*, covering Lombardy, and the free-press papers *Lecco News* and *Varese News*; *Piacenza Sera*, *Il Resto del Carlino* (Bologna), *La Gazzetta di Parma* and *La Gazzetta di Reggio*, covering Emilia-Romagna; *Il Corriere di Latina* and *Il Tempo* (Roma), covering Lazio; and *Il Giornale di Vicenza* and *Il Mattino di Padova*, covering Veneto.

2. Labour market

Two research missions conducted in Italy by Amnesty International in 2012 revealed the scale of exploitation of migrant workers in the Italian agricultural sector. The phenomenon is especially severe in the province of Latina (in Lazio), where up to 80% of agricultural labourers are non-Italians. The research focused on the community that forms the majority of such foreign workers, about 12,000 Sikhs from Punjab. One of the leading Italian daily papers, *Il Corriere della Sera*, spoke of the migrants' condition in the Italian fields as hell and defined Indian labourers as slaves: *Le voci dall'inferno dei migranti: a Latina il primato "schiavi" indiani [Voices from the migrants' hell: Latina has the record of Indian "slaves"]*. Indian workers spoke to the article's writer of inhuman

shifts, wages of a few hundred euros per month, and endless discrimination and mistreatment by employers.¹

The exploitation of Indian Sikhs was also denounced by another major newspaper, *La Repubblica*. In 2013, an article described the town of Sabaudia (one-hundred kilometres south of Rome) as “a small Chandigarh”. According to the piece *Sabaudia, invisibili e sfruttati: il popolo Sikh si racconta* [*Sabaudia, invisible and exploited: the Sikh people tells its story*], about 40,000 Indians have left Punjab since 2006 and have settled in the province of Latina. They work there for two to four euros per hour, but the abuses from which they suffer “do not turn into a desire for redemption”. According to an interviewed Italian activist, for Punjabi labourers “work is the way leading to heaven... so they are willing to accept any conditions”. The article emphasised how Sikhs “are afraid to denounce their situation, for them Italy is a ‘wonderful chance’ and a ‘marvellous place’, and Italians are ‘beautiful people’. If they report episodes of racism, they always speak of the past, and quickly add that ‘now everything’s ok’”.²

Il Corriere della Sera covered the issue again in May 2013, after a Sikh labourer was run down by a drunken driver on the evening of International Workers’ Day, as he was walking to his barracks after a long day in the fields. *Terracina, bracciante indiano investito. Continua la strage dei Sikh ridotti in schiavitù* [*Terracina, Indian labourer run down. The massacre of Sikh slaves continues*] meant to denounce the unbearable conditions of “the workers with turbans” in the province of Latina, where Indians are deprived of their documents (when they possess any), ignorant of the local language, underpaid and accommodated poorly in over-crowded huts. The article, however, also featured extraneous elements that seemed to be there only to reinforce widespread stereotypes about the Indian community. “Child brides” is the title of a paragraph within the article: “the community lives... according to its own cultural and religious traditions”, and a marriage arranged between a fifteen-year old Indian girl and her adult cousin is reported, and his subsequent arrest for having stalked and stabbed her as she did not agree to marry him. Another paragraph is entitled “From victims to oppressors”, the journalist reports the death of an Italian mother and daughter, “slaughtered” by the Indian husband/father, the wife’s accomplice in a fraud involving illegal Indian migrants. The article thus takes the labourer’s accident as an excuse to look at alien marriage traditions and gender relationships.³

In 2014, the issue hit the headlines again. The non-profit organisation InMigrazione wrote a report on Sikhs being forced to take drugs to stand the hardships of agricultural labour in the Agro Pontino area, *Doparsi per lavorare come schiavi* [*Taking drugs to work like slaves*] (InMigrazione 2014a). National newspapers once again denounced how the Sikh labourers were treated. *La Repubblica* made an investigative video report on the situation, *Agricoltura, gli schiavi indiani dell’Agro Pontino* [*Agriculture, the Agro Pontino Indian slaves*].⁴ The newspaper also reported InMigrazione’s research in the article *Indiani Sikh nell’Agro Pontino costretti a drogarsi per lavorare 15 ore al giorno nei campi* [*Indian Sikhs in the Agro Pontino region forced to take drugs to work 15 hours a day in the fields*].⁵ The work of InMigrazione and the CGIL union (that authored the report *Agromafie e*

¹ *Il Corriere della Sera* [Roma, online], 18.12.2012: Marangon, M., Le voci dall’inferno dei migranti: a Latina il primato “schiavi” indiani.

² *La Repubblica* [online], 26.2.2013: Bagnarol, G., Sabaudia, invisibili e sfruttati. Il popolo Sikh si racconta.

³ *Il Corriere della Sera* [Roma, online], 2.5.2013: Marangon, M., Terracina, bracciante indiano investito. Continua la strage dei Sikh ridotti in schiavitù.

⁴ *RepubblicaTV*, 2.4.2014: *Agricoltura, gli schiavi indiani dell’Agro Pontino* [online], available on: <http://video.repubblica.it/le-inchieste/agricoltura-gli-schiavi-indiani-dell-agro-pontino/160585/159074> [Accessed 20 October 2015].

⁵ *La Repubblica* [online], 16.5.2014: Polchi, V., Indiani Sikh nell’Agro Pontino costretti a drogarsi per lavorare 15 ore al giorno nei campi.

caporalato)⁶ led, in June 2014, to the visit of some MPs to the fields of the Agro Pontino. Reported by *Il Corriere*, the visit was described as of only limited use, due to the Indian labourers' reticence to openly denounce their conditions.⁷ The Sikh workers interviewed for InMigrazione's new report, *Sfruttati a tempo indeterminato [Permanent-contract exploitation]*, published in October 2014, were not so reticent (InMigrazione 2014b). "I work ten hours a day, but the boss notes down only two. I've been in the fields every single day of the month, even on Sundays. He noted down only six days in total. This is not fair", denounced a Mr. Singh. One of his colleagues added: "The boss is smart. I know that outside the cooperative there's a warden, and when the police come to control, the warden tells the boss, and he sends the Indian illegal immigrants away. Then he calls them back. Six or seven industries do this... When the Carabinieri or the Guardia di Finanza come, [the warden] calls the boss and he sends the Indians away. In this way, no one sees anything. All is fine. But there is exploitation. A lot of it".⁸ Discussing the same report, *Il Corriere* titled: *Trenta giorni di lavoro e sei di paga: nei campi tra i nuovi schiavi indiani [Thirty days of work, six paid: in the fields among the new Indian slaves]*.⁹

The other sector employing large number of Indian workers is the dairy industry. Indians have become an essential part of the Italian dairy-industry, replacing the old *bergamini*, who traditionally came from southern Italy. This is especially the case for northern Italian regions, where this sector is prominent: Trentino, Emilia Romagna, Piedmont, and Lombardy. The phenomenon has even been noted by *The New York Times*, which covered it in 2011, with an article then translated by several Italian newspapers.¹⁰ Slowly but surely, Indians have entered the collective consciousness as workers who, 'by nature and culture', are more suited than others for milking and looking after cows. An article on Indian dairy-workers replacing Italians in the northern region of Trentino appeared on the local newspaper, conveying a number of stereotypes and misrepresentations. The article's subheading reads *Sparita la manodopera trentina ci si affida agli stranieri. Perché dall'India? "Perché loro si affezionato alle vacche"* (As the workforce from Trentino disappears, people rely on foreigners. Why from India? 'Because they grow fond of cows'). The article's incipit offers a 'racialised' reading of the issue, with the author reporting the dairy workers of Trentino have "shed their skin", an expression obviously hinting at the change in the workforce's skin colour. The journalist deemed "very interesting" the words of the Farmers' Federation, according to whom Indian men are suited to dairy work: "given their culture, they especially love animals and therefore create a wonderful relationship with them". Interviewed by the author, an Indian dairy man, settled in Trentino since the early 2000s and said to come "from the Indian state of the Panyab" (sic), confirmed the same narrative: "We Indians really love animals, we grow fond of the cows we milk". The article also mentioned his nephew, who allegedly moved to Italy as in India "he was starving".¹¹ "We understand animals", a Sikh *bergamino* told the journalist of *Il Secolo XIX* writing a piece on the Sikh temple being built in Pessina Cremonese. "We have the ability to understand their necessities. Not everyone does... When our brothers first arrived here, they brought such gift along. And they used it".¹²

⁶ See Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto 2014.

⁷ *Il Corriere della Sera* [Roma, online], 14.6.2014: Marangon, M., Braccianti indiani, parlamentari in missione nella terra degli sfruttati.

⁸ *La Repubblica* [online], 17.10.2014: Polchi, V., Indiani Sikh, "Dieci ore a lavorare sui campi ma te ne pagano solo due".

⁹ *Il Corriere della Sera* [Roma, online], 20.10.2014: Marangon, M., Trenta giorni di lavoro e sei di paga: nei campi tra i nuovi schiavi indiani.

¹⁰ *The New York Times* [online], 7.9.2011: Povoledo, E., In Italian heartland, Indians keep the cheese coming. Among the articles in Italian newspapers making reference to the NYT's report, see *Il Corriere della Sera* [online], 8.9.2011: Senza gli, Indiani addio Grana Padano. L'inchiesta del New York Times: sono loro che mandano avanti l'industria casearia del nord Italia.

¹¹ *Il Trentino* [online], 9.5.2012: Bridi, C., Mungitori, mestiere in crisi. E in soccorso arrivano gli indiani.

¹² *Il Secolo XIX* [online], 18.8.2011: Cresci, L., "Un tempio sikh sulla terra lavorata dai nostri padri".

Similar images of the Sikh *bergamini* permeate most articles. Mixing superficial popular knowledge, curiosity, paternalism and a touch of exoticism, they typically offer highly stereotyped representations of the Indian community. It is the case, for instance, of a piece in *La Gazzetta di Parma*, speaking of the Sikhs representing 70% of the workforce producing the renowned cheese *parmigianoreggiano*: *Sikh, gli indiani che conquistano la Food Valley* [*Sikhs, the Indians who conquered the Food Valley*]. “We have only recently noticed the Indians working in the *grana* industry, as their children have now appeared in our schools. Theirs is a silent presence, made of solitary lives in farms, Indian-only marriages, absent from the crime news sections”, wrote the journalist. She described Indians’ everyday life as monotonous, punctuated by pre-dawn alarms, religious festivals, and very strict familial relationships when it comes to gender roles, with young, pretty, and colourfully-dressed wives always walking “a step behind their husband”. The author explained that marriages are in most cases arranged and are strictly endogamous. The Indian community is characterised by “conservatism and the desire to preserve its culture and traditions (who does not remember *Monsoon Wedding*?). But slowly everything merges, like milk and rennet”.¹³

The bonds that tightly connect the Sikh community to the *parmigianoreggiano* region hit the headlines again after the earthquake that devastated parts of northern Italy, in May 2012. *Si invoca Dio contro il sisma: messa ortodossa e preghiera sikh* [*People invoking God to prevent earthquake: Orthodox mass and Sikh prayers*], was an article in *Il Resto del Carlino*. The article reported Indian Sikhs, “fundamental for the economic and social fabric” of Emilia Romagna, praying to ward off other tremors. In the Sikh temple of Novellara, the main Italian *gurdwara* and one of the largest in Europe, Indians organised rounds of *preghiera perpetua* [continuous prayers], and read an ancient Sikh text non-stop. “Many among Reggio Emilia residents do not know that there are people, in India, who are praying for the safety of our land”, the article reported, as several Sikhs settled in the city asked their fellow countrymen to join them in prayer.¹⁴

3. Interaction with the majority community and integration initiatives

The Indian community’s visibility increased, and its relationship with Italy and Italians became tighter after the incident occurred off the coast of Kerala in February 2012, when Italian Navy marines opened fire on an Indian fishing trawler, killing two members of its crew. Sergeants Latorre and Girone have been detained since then by Indian authorities, and this has given rise to heated debates in the two countries. Italian public opinion wishes India to give the two *marò*’s into the custody of Italy, and some right-wing politicians have gone so far as to link the maritime incident to the rights and integrity of the Indian community in Italy. Giacomo Chiappori (a *Lega Nord* former *Lega Nord* MP and the mayor of a tiny town in Liguria)¹⁵ threatened Indians living in Italy, calling them “adoratori di vacche” [cow worshippers]. He published a status on his Facebook wall that received several likes and supportive comments: “Be careful, Indians, you can say whatever you wish, but if you sentence our *marò* to death, or give them a life sentence, you will have to sort it out not with the Italian government, but with Italians, and then it will be your own f...ing business. An Indian will be thrown in the sea every minute”. The news was reported by *stranieriinitalia.it* (an on-line magazine covering topics of interest for migrants and ‘new Italians’), in the article *Il sindaco leghista: “Marò condannati? Indiani in mare”* [*The Northern League mayor: “Marò convicted? Indians in the sea*].¹⁶

¹³ *La Gazzetta di Parma* [online], 25.7.2011: Cabassi, C., Sikh, gli indiani che conquistano la Food Valley.

¹⁴ *Il Resto del Carlino* [online], 2.6.2012: Pederzoli, C., Si invoca Dio contro il sisma: messa ortodossa e preghiere sikh.

¹⁵ Established in the mid 1990s, *Lega Nord* [Northern League] is a political party popular mainly in the northern regions of Italy, whose economic and political interests the party claims to protect. *Lega Nord* is euro-skeptic and opposed to immigration, and its spokesmen have often voiced xenophobic and racist arguments.

¹⁶ *stranieriinitalia.it*, 26.3.2013: Il sindaco leghista: “Marò condannati? Indiani in mare”.

Recently, another *Lega Nord* politician took action on the *marò* issue, given what he believed was the government's inaction. Gianluca Buonanno (Euro-MP and the mayor of Borgosesia, a town in Piedmont) decided that "Indian residents will be granted access to municipal aid only if they sign a declaration condemning the Indian government's attitude, and asking for the immediate release of the Italian *marò*", as "the security, justice and solidarity enjoyed in Italy by Indian citizens must be reciprocated in India, or we will have to resort to the Biblical 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'". Once again, the news was reported in sarcastic tones by *stranieriinitalia.it*, in the article *Niente aiuti agli immigrati indiani che non sostengono i marò* [No aids to the Indian immigrants who do not support the *marò*].¹⁷ *La Repubblica* also covered the news in equally sarcastic tones, in the article titled *Borgosesia, niente sovvenzioni per i residenti indiani non solidali con i marò* [Borgosesia, no aid to the Indian residents who do not express their solidarity with the *marò*].¹⁸

Declarations of solidarity with the two marines from Indians in Italy have, it must be said, been countless in the last three years. Indians have organised a number of initiatives in praise of Italian-Indian friendship, like marches and demonstrations, held in every region with a substantial Indian community. The press has given them wide coverage, generally cooperating to lessen the tension and portraying Indians as sympathetic to Italian concerns. In so doing, the press has thus backed the Indian community's concern to preserve its traditional friendliness with Italians. Almost all articles covering the topic, moreover, have reported the words of Indian spokespersons, thus giving the community a direct say. This is especially praiseworthy, given the Italian press' widespread habit of overlooking interlocutors, when it comes to minority groups.

As a demonstration of solidarity, several collections of signatures were organised by Sikh communities all over Italy. Gurwinder Singh, the owner of a restaurant in Trento, collected the signatures of 8,000 Sikhs settled in Italy, who appealed to the Indian government to release the two *marò*. Interviewed by a journalist of the online paper *iltempo.it*, he said: "Italians are always asking us why their fellow countrymen are detained in India, why they are not released. This is not good for us". *Noi indiani a fianco dei marò* [We Indians side by side with the *marò*s] appeared in *iltempo.it*.¹⁹ The Sikh community in Cremona collected some 4,500 signatures among "perfectly integrated families, tired of bearing the burden of the diplomatic crisis between the two countries". In the article *Marò: 4,500 indiani firmano petizione per liberarli* [Marò: 4,500 Indians sign the petition to have them released], the leading wire service ANSA quoted the words of Jatinder Singh, president of the Indian Sikh Community of Italy: "We feel Italian, and we cannot wait for this issue to be positively resolved, as we are facing several difficulties due to this whole situation".²⁰ Opinions similar to these were voiced to *La Repubblica* by Sukhdev Singh, president of the Sikh community settled in Lombardy, and reported in the article *Milano, i Sikh al governo indiano: "Trattate i marò come i nostri fratelli in carcere"* [Milan, the Sikhs to the Indian government: "Treat the *marò* as our brothers in jail"]. The article reported Sukhdev Singh's words: "My fellow countrymen and I start to be afraid... The climate has changed, for us. We have always been considered as friends, and treated well thanks to our able work. But in the past few months we have felt an unpleasant atmosphere around us, a sort of diffidence, as if, seeing our turban, people immediately linked us to that issue. We are facing severe difficulties, we do not want to lose our jobs".²¹ Such impressions contradict what Sikh representatives had foreseen in 2012, shortly after the incident, when figures like Vikramjit Singh Khalsa (president of Italian Sikh Council) stressed that the relations between Italians and Indian Sikhs were "as good as

¹⁷ *stranieriinitalia.it*, 5.9.2014: "Niente aiuti agli immigrati indiani che non sostengono i marò".

¹⁸ *La Repubblica* [Torino, online], 2.9.2014: Borgosesia, niente sovvenzioni per i residenti indiani non solidali con i marò.

¹⁹ *Il Tempo* [online], 16.2.2014: Rocca, L., "Noi indiani a fianco dei marò".

²⁰ *Ansa.it* [online], 24.3.2014: Marò: 4,500 indiani firmano petizione per liberarli.

²¹ *La Repubblica* [Milano, online], 23.4.2014: De Vito, L., Milano, i Sikh al governo indiano: "Trattate i marò come i nostri fratelli in carcere".

ever”, and minimised the racist outbursts of some right-wing Italian politicians. Among the first to report Indians’ views on the *marò* issue, *stranieriinitalia.it* published the article *Caso marò. Gli indiani in Italia: “I nostri popoli amici come sempre”* [*The marò case. Indians in Italy: “Our peoples are friends as they have always been”*] as early as March 2012.²²

Besides collecting signatures, Indians in Italy also organised marches as public displays of sympathy. The Indian community in the Alto Adige, for instance, gathered in Bolzano to demonstrate its solidarity with the two *marò*. The event was covered by the local paper *Alto Adige*, which published a video interview with the Sikhs’ spokesman Ravinderjit Singh in which he wished for a peaceful and friendly resolution of the issue between Italy and India. *Bolzano: manifestazione dei Sikh indiani per la liberazione dei marò* [*Bolzano: Indian Sikhs’ demonstration for the liberation of the two marò*].²³

Other examples of positive interaction between the Indian and Italian communities, unrelated to the *marò* issue, have also found a place in the pages of newspapers. In the article *Torpignattara, romani e indiani con scope e rastrelli puliscono il quartiere* [*Torpignattara, Rome residents and Indians clean up the neighbourhood with brooms and rakes*], *La Repubblica* covered an initiative organised by local politicians and civil society organisations, held in a multicultural neighbourhood of Rome, Torpignattara. Despite its title, the article did not refer specifically to Indians participation in the cleaning (outside the title), but generally spoke of “foreigners” joining forces with Italian residents. Yet, the reference to Indians in the title might be indicative of general attitudes to Indians who are seen as the most integrated.²⁴ Another example of Indians’ participation in Italian civil society was recently praised by *La Gazzetta di Reggio* in the article *I Sikh di Novellara donano un’auto alla Croce Rossa* [*The Sikhs of Novellara donate a car to the Red Cross*]. The subheading reads: “The idea came after the 2012 earthquake, when Punjabi Indians offered their help to the town, and appreciated the work of the [Red Cross] volunteers”. The article describes Sikhs as a community perfectly integrated in the social life of Novellara, their donation to the local Red Cross branch being a demonstration of this. The association *Gurdware Singh Sabha* raised funds among the Sikhs and donated a special car, equipped for blood transports: blood samples are daily brought to a nearby hospital to be analysed. “In Italy, this is the first time an immigrant community makes such a donation. It is an evident sign of Indian Sikhs’ integration in the community who has hosted them”, said the president of the local Red Cross branch. The article also takes the opportunity to praise the Sikh community for having raised funds to build their temple in Novellara, thus contributing to the city’s image as “positively multicultural, peacefully invaded each year... by a colourful and peaceful crowd of ten thousand Sikhs” who gather to celebrate Vaisakhi festival.²⁵

For their part, the local administrations and civil society organisations of more than one city have organised integration initiatives involving the Indian community. This was the case in a town of the Agro Pontino, where many Indian migrants still face very hard working conditions. *Il Corriere di Latina* reported on the initiative “La bellezza dell’accoglienza” [“The beauty of welcoming others”] organised by Legambiente in Sabaudia in April 2014, when an olive tree was donated as a sign of peace to the local Sikh community, to be planted in the courtyard of their temple under construction. The article explained the initiative as aiming at fostering tolerance where indifference and impatience with migrants are widespread among the local population. This initiative, however, also worked as a pretext for the journalist to speculate about the new Sikh temple. A Sikh association was erecting a

²² *stranieriinitalia.it*, 22.3.2014: *Caso marò. Gli indiani in Italia: “I nostri popoli amici come sempre”*.

²³ *Alto Adige video*, 1.6.2014: *Bolzano: manifestazione dei Sikh indiani per la liberazione dei marò* [online], available on: <http://video.gelocal.it/altoadige/locale/bolzano-manifestazione-dei-sikh-indiani-per-la-liberazione-dei-marò/30307/30349> [Accessed 2 April 2015].

²⁴ *La Repubblica* [Roma, online], 22.3.2014: Monaco, L., *Torpignattara, romani e indiani con scope e rastrelli puliscono il quartiere*.

²⁵ *La Gazzetta di Reggio* [online], 13.2.2015: Ariosi, V., *I Sikh di Novellara donano un’auto alla Croce Rossa*.

building that, “on the paper”, was said to be a confectionery workshop. But “in town everyone says that the Indians are actually building a temple”, suggested the journalist, and concluded: “Was this authorised?” This piece on *Il Corriere di Latina* thus reveals a picture of the relations between Indian and Italian communities that is less rosy than those portrayed in many of the articles mentioned above. The article’s subtly suspicious tone, as well as its content (the initiative “La bellezza dell’accoglienza”) bespoke a very different attitude to Indian immigrants from that of the northern regions, in terms of both working conditions and level of interaction with the majority community.²⁶

4. Culture and religion

Indian culture continues to appeal to many Italians, and is often represented in the press in stereotypical terms, echoing popular discourse. The press, whether the subject is Indian cuisine or Indian folklore, rarely escapes orientalist views, and usually fills its descriptions of Indian (or generally Asian) cultural manifestations with words like ‘magic’, ‘spiritual’, ‘mysterious’, ‘sensual’, ‘exotic’ and the like. “Indian restaurants? Exotic atmospheres, golden elegance, indecipherable mixtures of spices and aromas are the keys of their seduction”, summarised an article on Indian restaurants in Milan, published by *Il Corriere della Sera*.²⁷ Speaking of Indian cuisine, *Il Secolo XIX* instead utilised plainer tones in the piece *Chicken masala: far gli Indiani a Chiavari* [*Chicken masala: being Indian in Chiavari*].²⁸ The article reported the new opening of an Indian restaurant in Chiavari, and presented a very balanced picture. It featured the story of the restaurant’s owner, a Punjabi who opened his first restaurant in Milan in 1998, giving ample space to his own words, and recounting his initiative and the restaurant’s dishes in detail, without resorting to superficial orientalist descriptions.²⁹

On the contrary, orientalism loomed large in the article published in *Il Mattino di Padova* covering *Festival d’Oriente*, the Oriental Festival that took place in Padova in December 2014. *Dagli origami al Feng-Shui, spazio alla magia d’Oriente* [*From origami to Feng-Shui, make way for Oriental magic*] was the article title. The incipit read: “A body-and-soul dive into the magic of the East, which will make visitors fall in love, will take them by their hand towards a universe that is both spiritual and sensual, to discover exotic flavours and faraway countries, which they will not be able to avoid visiting at least once in their lifetime”.³⁰ *La Stampa* utilised similar references in an article reporting the publication of a book on Ayurveda. In its incipit, *A Torino il cuore pulsante dell’Ayurveda* [*The pulsating heart of Ayurveda in Turin*], stated that “speaking of Ayurveda, one cannot but sense the incredible aroma of spirituality”, and described the interview with the book’s authors as “oozing spirituality”. While the article did not focus specifically on Indians settled in Italy, the questions to the authors of the book are revealing of widespread simplified ideas about India and Indian culture: India was thus said to have left “indelible signs of magic and spirituality” on the authors. The workshops they hold in Turin were described as “sensorial experiences, connections with the world around ourselves and a whole lot of Oriental flavour” (“*tanto, tanto sapore d’Oriente*”).³¹

Public expressions of Sikh religion are usually described by newspapers in positive terms. “Peace, welcome and acceptance of differences are the key values of Indian Sikhs”, a journalist of *La Gazzetta di Parma* stated in his article on a Sikh celebration held last June in Parma. *Festa grande per i Sikh di Parma* [*Great celebration for the Sikhs of Parma*] described the people participating in the festival

²⁶ *Il Corriere di Latina* [online], 4.4.2014: Cammarone, R., La bellezza dell’accoglienza, se ne parla a tavola con la comunità sikh.

²⁷ *Il Corriere della Sera* [Milano, online], 26.4.2012: Visintin, V.M., Indiani al top.

²⁸ The title puns on the phrase ‘fare l’Indiano’, an idiomatic Italian expression meaning ‘playing dumb, feigning ignorance’.

²⁹ *Il Secolo XIX* [online], 20.10.2013: Moretti Clementi, E., Chicken masala, far gli Indiani a Chiavari.

³⁰ *Il Mattino di Padova* [online], 5.12.2014: Artico, M., Dagli origami al Feng-Shui, spazio alla magia d’Oriente.

³¹ *La Stampa* [online], 15.7.2014: A Torino, il cuore pulsante dell’Ayurveda.

celebrating a Sikh saint: “Wrapped in their traditional costumes, men and women, elderly people and children silently enter the temple, collecting themselves in prayer in front of the sacred book. Everything happens in the name of sharing, included the lunch, made of rice and vegetables in observance of vegetarianism, deeply rooted in their culture, together with the prohibition on consuming alcohol and tobacco. And preaches honesty. A teaching which, in our territory, Indian Sikhs... apply in their everyday lives”.³² Similar descriptions of Sikh religious manifestations as harmless and peaceful appeared in *La Repubblica*, which covered Baisakhi celebrations in Rome. *I Sikh sfilano per l’uguaglianza, un pensiero per il prof aggredito* (*The Sikhs march for equality, a thought for a beaten-up professor*) quoted the words of Hari Singh Khalsa, president of the Unione Italiana Sikh, according to whom Sikhs “do not see any difference among men”, and condemn any form of racism and violence. The Sikhs of Rome would have liked to have a stage for their celebrations, but they were not formally authorised to set one up, so they had to be content with the procession, as Khalsa reported: the article noted that the march took place in a “peaceful way”.³³ Baisakhi celebrations in Brescia were covered by *Il Corriere della Sera*, which titled *Fiori e turbanti: la città si colora della festa sikh* [*Flowers and turbans: the city coloured by the Sikh festival*]. The article repeatedly highlighted the peaceful, friendly and colourful atmosphere “scratching the humid autumn greyness raging in Brescia”, and described the march as being perfectly organised. The piece concluded: “The Sikh festival is no longer a novelty for the people of Brescia, but it still gives rise to some wonder, both for the atmosphere it generates and because it makes the diverse cultural richness of 2012 Brescia”.³⁴ Covering a Sikh religious festival in Novara, *La Stampa* utilised tones similar to those used by its fellow newspapers. *Sciabole, labari e fiori. La sfilata degli indiani sikh ha colorato Novara* [*Sabres, banners and flowers. The march of Indian Sikhs coloured Novara*] reported that the participants walked four kilometres barefoot despite the extremely high temperature, amid curious glances and applause from the Italian population of Novara; Sikhs, the article stressed twice, offered Italians Asian dishes, drinks and pizza.³⁵

Besides festivals and ceremonies, Indian religion hits the headlines when debates about religious symbols break out. Among Indians settled in Italy, it is again the Sikh community that has experienced the most heated discussions, as symbols of its faith like the turban and the *kirpan* are especially visible and unusual in the eyes of the Italian majority. The press has generally been eager to treat such issues in depth, showing sympathy and understanding for Sikhs’ right to display the symbols of their religion, and giving those Sikhs involved in the debates the opportunity to have a say.

The Sikh turban has been an issue since 2011, when a diplomatic incident broke out between Italy and India, after a Sikh golf trainer was asked to remove his turban during security checks at an Italian airport.³⁶ Since then, other similar incidents have troubled regular Sikhs living and working on Italian territory, rather than high-level figures capable of mobilising international diplomatic networks. In the Agro Pontino, disregard for Indians’ religious sensibility constantly weighs on the community, as denounced in *La Città Nuova*, a blog on *Il Corriere della Sera*’s website. In March 2013, the post *I Sikh senza turbante nell’Agro Pontino “perché il padrone non vuole”* [*Sikhs without turbans in the Agro Pontino, “because the boss doesn’t want them”*] quoted the words of Rajinder, a Sikh

³² *La Gazzetta di Parma* [online], 23.6.2014: Rotolo, V., Festa grande per i Sikh di Parma.

³³ *La Repubblica* [Roma, online], 15.4.2012: I Sikh sfilano per l’uguaglianza, un pensiero per il prof aggredito.

³⁴ *Il Corriere della Sera* [Brescia, online], 14.4.2012: Bonomo, M., Fiori e turbanti: la città si colora della festa sikh.

³⁵ *La Stampa* [online], 3.8.2013: Lodigiani, R., Sciabole, labari e fiori. La sfilata degli indiani sikh ha colorato Novara.

³⁶ On the 2011 episode, see Lum 2012: 23.

agricultural labourer. He removed his turban and shaved his face, as his “boss wished it. ... But I don’t feel good this way, I cried a lot”, Rajinder told the journalist.³⁷

In August, an episode identical to the 2011 episode, required once again the intervention of embassies. The security of Fiumicino airport, in Rome, asked a Sikh delegation to take their turbans off and, at their refusal to do so, kept them waiting for 24 hours. The Italian ambassador in Delhi was summoned by the Indian foreign minister, who recalled the importance of respecting Sikh people and their religious practices, and invited Italy to resort to the EU legislation, which recommends that inspections on Sikh people’s turbans be made in special rooms, rather than in airports’ public spaces. *La Repubblica* covered the incident in the article *Fiumicino, tensione con Sikh per i turbanti. L’ambasciatore italiano convocato a New Delhi* [Fiumicino, tension with the Sikhs over turbans. Italian ambassador summoned in New Delhi]. The article kept to plain language and did not resort to any stereotyping explanations.³⁸

One more episode of discrimination related to the turban broke out in the world of football in 2013. The referee forbade a Sikh player of a youth football team near Brescia to play, if he did not take his turban off. Reporting on the episode, the Brescia section of *Il Corriere della Sera* called it “an instance of intolerance” in the article “*Col turbante non giochi*”: calciatore sikh lasciato in panchina dall’arbitro” [“You’re not going to play with that turban on”: Sikh football player kept on the bench by the referee]. The piece sympathised with the boy: “Gurpartap Singh went and sat on the bench, incredulous and disheartened. For, according to his religion, that turban cannot be taken off. For he has played football for many years, and he has never been asked such an absurdity by a referee, precisely because his turban is not dangerous, either for himself or for the opposing players”.³⁹ *Brescia Oggi* also sided with the young Sikh football player when, a month later, it covered the positive verdict of Federcalcio (Football League), stating that players are allowed to wear turbans, preferably matching the team’s colours. The article *Abete ha detto sì: col turbante si può giocare* (Abete said yes: turbans can be worn during football matches) called the decision of Federcalcio’s President “a happy ending”.⁴⁰

The right-wing newspaper *Liberò*, on the contrary, had a different opinion on the matter. In March 2014, it published an article that utilised recent events in the sports world as a pretext to convey a number of gross generalisations and racist comments. The subheading read: “Nel nome di Allah” [In the name of Allah]; and the title: *Calcio, dalla Fifa ok al turbante. Ma vieta le magliette...* (Football, Fifa says ok to the turban. But it forbids T-shirts...). Reporting on the decision of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association to allow football players to wear *hijabs*, *niqabs*, *chadors* and turbans, *Liberò* commented: “Football, too, kneels down towards the Mecca”. And, speaking of the Sikh turban: “It will be funny when the first players takes to the pitch wearing Sikh turbans: they will definitely stand out against anyone in the goal area. From the Aldo-Serena header, to the Sandokan-styled header”. Again, commenting on the FIFA’s recommendations on the turban’s colour: “The only thing FIFA asks is that turbans match shirts. Of course: aesthetics come first. No one cares whether a centre forward is wearing a helmet, as long as it matches his outfit”. In the article’s conclusion, the journalist described FIFA’s verdict as “a leap backward”, depicting religious symbols like the turban as signs of other cultures’ backwardness, contrasted with a European ‘modernity’.⁴¹

³⁷ *Il Corriere della Sera* [Milano, *La Città Nuova*, online], 11.3.2013: Pasta, S., I Sikh senza turbante nell’Agro Pontino “perché il padrone non vuole”.

³⁸ *La Repubblica* [Roma, online], 8.8.2013: Rocca, D., Fiumicino, tensione con Sikh per i turbanti. L’ambasciatore italiano convocato a New Delhi.

³⁹ *Il Corriere della Sera* [Brescia, online], 30.11.2013: Trebeschi, M., “Col turbante non giochi”: calciatore sikh lasciato in panchina dall’arbitro.

⁴⁰ *Brescia Oggi* [online], 14.12.2013: Laffranchi, G.P., Abete ha detto sì: col turbante si può giocare.

⁴¹ *Liberò* [online], 2.3.2014: Giordano, M., Calcio, dalla Fifa ok al turbante. Ma vieta le magliette....

The paper *La Provincia* took, instead, a more balanced and informed stance on Sikh turbans. Reporting on the festival celebrating the turban, which would take place in Casalmaggiore, the article *Raduno europeo dei Sikh* [*Europe-wide Sikh gathering*] informed its readership about the turban's symbolic role. The incipit read: "The turban is a particularity of Indian Sikhs, a fundamental part of their appearance to which a very important festival of their religious calendar is dedicated". The article then quoted some of the people organising the festival in Casalmaggiore, thus giving the readers the chance to learn about the turban from Sikhs themselves. "To us, the turban is way more than a hat: it symbolises our connection to God, it singles us out as his devotees, it is a declaration our belonging to the Guru, and wearing it allows us to live according to his teachings. The turban represents us and we are proud to wear it, it is a part of our body and a symbol of independence and freedom of worship". *La Provincia* thus worked as a bridge between the Sikh community and its Italian readership, letting the former speak for themselves and putting first-hand information at the latter's disposal.⁴²

Yet, many more such efforts will be necessary, before discriminatory episodes can be said to belong to the past. In January 2015 a Sikh boy was prevented from taking part in his basketball team's game, as the referee would not allow him on the court if he did not take off his *patka*. *L'Eco di Bergamo* covered the news in an excellent way, quoting the boy's words all over the article, title included: *Parla il ragazzo: un'umiliazione. "Ho pensato di smettere di giocare"* [*The boy speaks: a humiliation. "I've thought about giving up basketball"*]). The subheading read: "I have played for five years, but nothing similar had ever happened to me before. I was hurt, to me it was very humiliating". He adds in the article itself: "People must understand that I'm not wearing it because it's fashionable, but for religious reasons".⁴³ Covering the same episode, *Il Secolo XIX* chose instead not to let its protagonist speak. *Giocatore sikh in campo col turbante, l'arbitro lo espelle* [*Sikh player on the court with his turban on, the referee expels him*], though portraying the fact in plain and respectful language, missed the opportunity to give its readers a first-hand version of the issue. Overlooking the protagonists' agency, articles like this risk suggesting passivity and victimisation that often hinder the majority community's understanding of other groups and of their rights.⁴⁴

The *kirpan* is an even sorer point than the turban. Considered illegal by Italian law, the Sikh ceremonial sword is the cause of Italy's refusal to formally recognise Sikhism, that has been reiterated several times since 2005.⁴⁵ The most recent episode concerning the misinterpretation of the *kirpan* took place in February 2014, when a young Sikh man was fined 23,000 euros by the police of Treviso for not removing his *kirpan*. *Il Giornale di Vicenza* reported on the episode in a narrative style, playing with the fear and curiosity raised by the ceremonial sword. The episode dates back to February 2013: "When the doctors at Treviso's hospital saw that curved knife under [the patient's] clothes, they feared the worst and asked for the police's intervention. The man with the sword and the long beard tried in vain to explain that it was a *kirpan*, a symbolic object related to his religion". The article then quoted the words of the man's lawyer, who specified that the *kirpan* is not to be considered a weapon and explained its religious significance. The piece also mentioned a similar case, dismissed in 2009, interviewing the lawyer who represented the Sikh man prosecuted at the time.⁴⁶

⁴² *La Provincia* [Casalmaggiore, online], 31.7.2014: Raduno europeo dei Sikh.

⁴³ *L'Eco di Bergamo* [online], 19.1.2015: Parla il ragazzo: un'umiliazione. "Ho pensato di smettere di giocare".

⁴⁴ *Il Secolo XIX* [online], 19.1.2015: Giocatore sikh in campo col turbante, l'arbitro lo espelle.

⁴⁵ *La Stampa* [online], 23.7.2012 Amabile, F., Il pugnale sacro che fa litigare Italia e Sikh.

⁴⁶ *Il Giornale di Vicenza* [online], 25.2.2014: Mutterle, P., Pugnale sikh, multa da 23 mila euro.

5. Business and investments

When it comes to Indo-Italian business relationships, the press' perception of the subcontinent becomes less indulgent than it usually is when speaking of the low-profile immigrant community. *Il Giornale* published an especially harsh article in January 2014, after the Indian government withdrew from the agreement it has stipulated with the Italian aeronautic industry Agusta for the purchase of helicopters worth 500 million euros. The article explained that behind India's decision was Finmeccanica's bribery charge.⁴⁷ "According to the prosecution, [Finmeccanica] would have bribed some of those turban-wearing authorities", wrote Vittorio Feltri, shaming India in his attempt to improve the image of Italy and the corrupted Italian group ("I know what the readers think. We think the same: if you want to sell stuff overseas, you need to grease wheels, or else you do not get anything done"). According to this reading of the matter, "India has it in for us due to the two *marò* issue"; the article then goes on sketching a partial picture of the marine controversy, describing the two marines as "risking life and limb for a crime they have not committed" and "in the hands of an unreliable court".⁴⁸

Italian companies investing in India have also been worried about the consequences of the *marò* issue for Indo-Italian economic relationships. "This huge issue is killing commercial relationships", said an Italian country manager living in Pune to a journalist of *Il Giorno*. The article quoted the words of several other Italian managers working in India, who invariably depicted the country as "somewhat primitive and ferocious", superstitious and characterised by "infinite corruption". Yet, "for the Made-in-Italy India is now an opportunity", the article concluded.⁴⁹ Similar considerations were behind the seminar organised in Varese by the Associazione Imprenditori Europei (European Entrepreneurs Association). The seminar "India, mille opportunità" ["India, a thousand opportunities"] was dedicated to Italian entrepreneurs wishing to delocalise part of their production or hoping to sell their products in India. Reporting on the event, *Varese News* published an article titled *L'India economica: gioie e dolori da esplorare* [*Economic India: exploring its joys and sorrows*], giving stereotypical descriptions of India and its people. Indians are said to be mostly unreliable and needing close scrutiny to perform their duties, while the country itself is described as "an unexplored world" where Italians might make good business. Orientalism looms large in the articles dealing with Indo-Italian commercial relationships, as it does in those mentioned above, covering Indian culture and religion. The latter mainly resort to 'positive' orientalism, filling their descriptions with concepts related to spirituality, peacefulness, mystery and colourfulness; the former, on the contrary, often feature a negative version of orientalism, which seems to be based on old colonial notions of a lazy, chaotic, corrupt and unreliable 'oriental Other'.⁵⁰

Yet, it is imperative for Italy to keep good relations with India, given its economic growth and its dimensions as an emerging market. Moreover, the capacity of some industrial groups to invest has become evident, with the major investments Indian companies have recently made in Italy. Since 2014, for example, the Franco-Indian group ArcelorMittal, has been interested in the acquisition of Ilva, an Italian steel industry; likewise Jsw Steel, led by Sajjan Jindal, is the new owner of Piombino steel mill; in January 2015 there was an agreement signed between Italtel and the software industry Mahindra Tech, which has now hired 46 Italian redundant workers. Another Indian economic player in Italy is Mahindra&Mahindra, a car industry from Mumbai led by Anand Mahindra and interested in the acquisition of the renowned car design firm Pininfarina, founded in Turin in 1930.

⁴⁷ Finmeccanica is the Italian industrial group controlling the aeronautic sector.

⁴⁸ *Il Giornale* [online], 2.1.2014: Feltri, V., Giudici e indiani: schiaffo all'Italia.

⁴⁹ *Il Giorno* [online], 7.4.2015: Minotti, R., Il braccio di ferro sui *marò* piega i manager lombardi: "L'India ora è impossibile".

⁵⁰ *Varese News* [online], 24.3.2015: Radman, S., L'India economica: gioie e dolori da esplorare.

Aware of the need to maintain friendly relations with India, the press has been careful in its reports about Indian investments, and has usually produced plain and balanced accounts. Still, similar patterns can be found within newspaper reports of negotiations like these, which bespeak the conflicting emotions generated by massive Indian efforts. In their article titles, all Italian newspapers have repeatedly stressed the investors' nationality, an element generating a mix of pride (for the global appeal of Italian industries and firms) and subtle fear (for Italy's need to resort to Asian capital and for the resulting potential degeneration of Italian economy and traditional products). The online magazine *Formiche* published an article titled *Chi sono gli indiani di Mahindra&Mahindra che vogliono Pininfarina* [*Who are the Indians of Mahindra&Mahindra who want Pininfarina*], whose incipit read: "Asian shopping in Italy continues".⁵¹ *La Repubblica: Dopo Pirelli ai cinesi, Pininfarina finisce nel mirino degli indiani* [*After Pirelli ended up in Chinese hands, Indians now have Pininfarina in their sights*].⁵² *Il Sole 24 Ore* on Mahindra Tech: "Il gigante indiano Mahindra entra nel mercato italiano e recluta esuberanti Italtel" [*The Indian giant Mahindra enters the Italian market and hires Italtel's redundant workers*].⁵³ On the Ilva case, *Repubblica* ran the title: *Corsa a tre per l'Ilva: sfida miliardaria indiani-arabi* [*Three competitors for Ilva: millionaire challenge between Indians and Arabs*].⁵⁴ *Europa Quotidiano: Ilva, indiani in Puglia? ArcelorMittal conferma l'interesse all'acquisizione* [*Ilva, Indians in Puglia? ArcelorMittal confirms its interest in the acquisition*].⁵⁵ When an Italian group joined the competition for the acquisition of Ilva, *Repubblica* published an article whose title included its name, Marcegaglia; ArcelorMittal and Jindal were, instead, simply "the Indians": *Prima offerta per Ilva da Marcegaglia e gli indiani* [*First offer for Ilva by Marcegaglia and the Indians*].⁵⁶

6. Education

Bilateral agreements between the Indian and Italian governments on cooperation in the field of science and technology have been in place since 1978. They were strengthened in 2003, when the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Indian Ministry of Science and Technology signed the new Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation, recognising "the growing importance of technology with respect to the economic, social and cultural relations of the two countries". The programme now in place, the Executive Programme Science&Technology 2012-2014 (extended to 2015), involved twelve projects for the exchange of researchers and six joint research projects of particular relevance in the following fields: agriculture and food science technology; design engineering and technology; electronics and information communication technology; energy and the environment; health, biotechnology and medicine; nanotechnology and advanced materials; space and physics; technology applied to cultural and natural heritage; transport systems and automotive technologies (MAE 2012).

There are several instances of scientific cooperation between individual research centres and universities in the two countries.⁵⁷ Italy and India cooperate within the *Centro Internazionale per la*

⁵¹ *Formiche* [online], 28.3.2015: Miranda, R., Chi sono gli indiani di Mahindra&Mahindra che vogliono Pininfarina.

⁵² *La Repubblica* [online], 25.3.2015: Dopo Pirelli ai cinesi, Pininfarina finisce nel mirino degli indiani.

⁵³ *Il Sole 24 Ore* [online], 14.10.2014: Prisco, F., Il gigante indiano Mahindra entra nel mercato italiano e recluta esuberanti Italtel.

⁵⁴ *La Repubblica* [Genova, online], 7.9.2014: Minella, M., Corsa a tre per l'Ilva: sfida miliardaria indiani-arabi.

⁵⁵ *Europa Quotidiano* [online], 23.9.2014: Colimberty, M., Ilva, indiani in Puglia? ArcelorMittal conferma l'interesse all'acquisizione.

⁵⁶ *La Repubblica* [Bari, online], 17.11.2014: Minella, M., Prima offerta per Ilva da Marcegaglia e gli indiani.

⁵⁷ See Ambasciata d'Italia, New Dehli, *Accordo di cooperazione. La cooperazione S&T tra Italia ed India* [online], available on:

Genetica e la Biotecnologia (ICGEB), founded in 1987 for genetics and biotechnology. The centre's headquarters are in Trieste, its laboratories in Delhi and Cape Town. *Il Piccolo* speaks proudly of this research centre as a gem in the article *Icgeb, il mondo della ricerca è di casa a Trieste* (Icgeb, Trieste is home to the world of research).⁵⁸ The University of Trento and several Indian universities have cooperated, since 2003, within the India-Trento Program for Advanced Research (ITPAR), one of the bilateral initiatives agreed upon by the Italian and Indian governments. The program focuses on computer science, neuroscience, nanotechnologies, cognitive sciences and telecommunications. It is led by the Indian scientist Vijayalakshmi Ravindranath, and foresees exchanges of researchers, financial resources and infrastructure. *La Voce del Trentino* was very positive in its article covering the scientific committee's meeting, held in Trento in October 2014.⁵⁹

The theme of education has also appeared in the news for high school exchanges. In some such instances, local newspapers have covered the initiative, as was the case with *La Provincia*, which reported on the twinning between a high school in Lecco and one in Indore, whose students were hosted in Lecco for ten days in May 2013. The article's title betrayed surprise: *Lecco, studenti indiani al Parini, gemellaggio fuori rotta* [*Lecco, Indian students at Parini's, an off-course twinning*]. In the incipit, the article defined the initiative as being "off the beaten track", "a twinning that will make history, at least at the local level. It's not everyday you can host a school from India".⁶⁰ *Lecco News* also mentioned the twinning in an article on Parini school's end-of-the-year show, in which the Indian students ("the young Asians") performed dances in traditional costumes.⁶¹ The amazed and somewhat maladroit tone of the articles in these two local papers with respect to the twinning bespeaks the relative newness of such exchanges. In fact, the topic of education in relation to the Indian community is a relatively new theme for the Italian press.

7. Gender

When it comes to gendered representations, press reports, though not frequent, generally resemble those provided by the article in *La Gazzetta di Parma* mentioned above. If Indian men, in the Italian press, are trustworthy and industrious, women have nice features, they are silent, their lives are shaped by tradition and mostly relegated to the domestic sphere. Indian women are those who, as the journalist of *La Gazzetta di Parma* claims, walk "always a step behind their husband", and are brought over from a conservative India through strictly endogamous arranged marriages.⁶²

Such views loomed large in the articles covering the murder of Balwinder Kaur, that took place in Piacenza in May 2012. The young Indian woman was killed by her husband, who then threw her corpse into the Po river. *Piacenza Sera* reported the words of the investigators working on the case, according to whom "the girl was considered [within the Indian community] to be a girl who smiled too much at strangers and who was too friendly in the workplace". The article stated that the woman was "allegedly strangled by her husband because she wore western-style clothes", and compared her story to the one of Hina Saleem, the young Pakistani girl killed by her father a few years earlier. "Both these women were looking for very normal things, such as independence from their families, and ended up dying precisely because of those families".⁶³ According to the title of Today.it's article, *Ha ucciso la moglie perché "vestiva all'occidentale"* [*He killed his wife because "she wore western-style*

(Contd.) _____

http://www.ambnewdelhi.esteri.it/ambasciata_newdelhi/it/i_rapporti_bilaterali/cooperazione%20scientifica/accordo_di_cooperazione [Accessed 20 October 2015].

⁵⁸ *Il Piccolo* [online], 10.3.2015: Regina, S., *Icgeb, il mondo della ricerca è di casa a Trieste*.

⁵⁹ *La Voce del Trentino* [online], 9.10.2014: *India-Trento Programme for Advanced Research*.

⁶⁰ *La Provincia* [Lecco, online], 20.5.2013: Pagano, L., *Lecco, studenti indiani al Parini, gemellaggio fuori rotta*.

⁶¹ *Lecco News* [online], 29.5.2013: *Scuola: i ragazzi festeggiano con il Progetto Zebra e con balli indiani*.

⁶² *La Gazzetta di Parma* [online], 25.7.2011: Cabassi, C., *Sikh, gli indiani che conquistano la Food Valley*.

⁶³ *Piacenza Sera* [online], 28.5.2012. *Kaur strangolata e gettata in Po. Confessa nella notte il marito*.

clothes”].⁶⁴ *Piacenza24* instead reported the words of the husband’s lawyer: *Pontini, il legale del marito*: “*Tutta colpa dei matrimoni combinati*” [*Pontini, the husband’s lawyer*: “*It’s all the fault of arranged marriages*”]. The lawyer resorted even claimed that the man’s decision to throw Balwinder’s corpse into the river was “an Indian funeral practice”.⁶⁵ All articles thus portrayed Indian gendered identities as immutable and rooted in ancient traditions, where attempts at subversion lead to death. The first two pieces blamed Balwinder’s husband inability to cope with her westernisation: the third drew upon the lawyer’s opinion and blamed arranged marriages for forcing people into relationships they do not choose and that they cannot escape. In both cases, the resulting picture confirmed a paradigmatic ‘clash of civilisations’, and at the same time depicted Indian people (the husband and the members of the community interviewed by the investigators) as apparently governed by rules over which they possess no agency. This cultural reading not only provided stereotypical representations of the Indian community, but also failed to investigate the femicide’s real roots: a transcultural and universal patriarchal mind set, not specific community traditions.

Il Giornale indulged in the same caricature of Indian ‘culture’ in its report on selective abortions in Italy. “Chinese and Indian women go to a clinic and fix an appointment for an ultrasound. When they discover they are waiting for a baby girl they ask to get an abortion. ‘A female? No, my husband will kill me’”. After this incipit, the article reported some statistics on the sex ratio within the Chinese and Indian communities, then turns to a discussion of domestic violence. The doctor interviewed explained that the problem often begins during a woman’s pregnancy (when the male partner starts to “exercise a form of possession and supremacy”) and “does not concern only foreign women, but many Italians too”. Yet, the title of the article made reference to the phenomenon of selective abortions, thus shifting the readers’ attention to two specific non-Italian communities, rather than tackling the wider issue of sexism and misogyny.⁶⁶

8. Conclusions

The Italian press is quite homogeneous in its representations of the Indian community in Italy. On the whole, its depictions of Indian immigrants are positive and sympathetic, far friendlier than those related to other non-Italian communities. However, this comes at the price of a widespread essentialisation of India and Indians, something particularly evident in press reports dealing with Indian culture and religion, and in analyses of Indian gender roles, which decide the private and family life of Indian people. The sheer variety of the Indian community is largely overlooked by the press, which tends to represent it as uniform and responding to shared beliefs, norms and habits. The relatively recent character of Indian immigration in Italy, the low-profile and often isolated lives Indian people lead, mixed with ‘common sense’ notions and stereotypes about India and Indians appropriated by the Italian press, hinders balanced representations of this community. Efforts at a deeper understanding, though, are visible in many of the articles analysed in this paper.

⁶⁴ *Today.it* [online], 28.5.2012: Ha ucciso la moglie perché “vestiva all’occidentale”.

⁶⁵ *Piacenza24* [online], 28.5.2012: Aimi, G., *Pontini, il legale del marito*: “*Tutta colpa dei matrimoni combinati*”.

⁶⁶ *Il Giornale* [online], 30.3.2012: Sorbi, M., “Sarà una bambina? Allora non lo voglio...”. Aborti selettivi a Milano.

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Appendix. List of Media sources

National daily newspapers

Europa Quotidiano (leftwing, ceased publication on 31 October 2014)

Il Corriere della Sera (leftwing, average daily circulation: 358,000 copies approx.)

Il Giornale (rightwing, average daily circulation: 180,000 copies approx.)

Il Secolo XIX (read mainly in Liguria and Piedmont, average daily circulation: 100,000 copies approx.)

Il Sole 24 Ore (business paper, average daily circulation: 330,000 copies approx.)

La Repubblica (leftwing, average daily circulation: 301,000 copies approx.)

La Stampa (average daily circulation: 250,000 copies approx.)

Libero (rightwing, average daily circulation: 100,000 copies approx.)

Local daily newspapers

Alto Adige

Brescia Oggi

Il Corriere di Latina

Il Giornale di Vicenza

Il Giorno (Milano)

Il Mattino di Padova

Il Piccolo (Trieste)

Il Resto del Carlino (Bologna)

Il Tempo (Roma)

Il Trentino

L'Eco di Bergamo

La Gazzetta di Parma

La Gazzetta di Reggio

La Provincia

La Voce del Trentino

Piacenza Sera

Piacenza24 (online newspaper)

Webmagazines

Formiche

Stranieri in Italia (specialist website dealing with topics related to immigration)

Free press

Lecco News

Varese News

Today.it