In that year, when Amrita Sher-Gil was born in Budapest in 1913, an Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel-prize for Literature. This event called the world’s and of course Hungary’s attention to India, and in a wider sense to the East. In Hungary one of the first appreciations of Tagore’s Nobel-prize published by Mihály Babits in Nyugat [The West]. “Nyugat” was a well-known periodical between 1908-1941, and as its title denotes, dealt with the western trend of thoughts in the first place. In his article on Tagore, Dezső Kosztolányi, another Hungarian writer, who also belonged to the circle of Nyugat, tried to explain the great surprise brought about the honour of an Indian poet. According to him the Europeans like the Asians with the cultural superiority, until they are away from their circles, but when the Asians enter into their sphere of interest, they look down on them as barbarians. Kosztolányi appreciated Tagore as a poet, but he rejected Tagore’s world-saving admonitions as childish ideas. Nevertheless many people felt in Europe, that it would be necessary to come nearer the two ways of thinking. Tagore was invited to Europe for lecture-tours and his influence, especially during the First World War was significant. Umrao Singh Sher-Gil got in touch with him by letters and called his brother-in law’s attention (and also Mari Jászai’s attention, as we can see later) to the Indian Poet. Baktay wrote a book on Tagore where he translated also some poems from the Gitanjali, the book, for what Tagore was awarded the Nobel-price. Unfortunately Tagore could not come to Hungary in 1921, when he travelled in Europe, as he wrote in his letter to Umrao Singh, but he sent his greetings to Baktay for his book. Eventually he managed to come to Hungary only on 26th of October 1926, but Umrao Singh and Baktay were already in India, and Mari Jászai had died a few weeks before Tagore’s arrival.

Umrao Singh Sher-Gil spent more than eight years in Hungary, where he had got by means of his second marriage. He was born in 1870 in Punjab. He

1 Két szent. [Two Saints] = Nyugat. 1913. December. p. 733-736. The two saints were Tagore and Saint Francis of Assissi.
3 Rabindranath Tagore az ember, a művész és a bölcs. [R. Tagore the Man, the Artist and the Sage]. Budapest. Világitrodalom. 1922.
5 The National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, Levelestár, 1921.
got married first, when he was only fourteen, and he was eighteen when his first son was born. He had four children from this previous marriage. After the death of his first wife, he lived with his family in Lahore. He met Marie-Antoinette Gottesmann, the sister of Ervin Baktay, in Simla, in 1911. She was there as a travelling companion of Princess Bamba, who was the granddaughter of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Marie-Antoinette was endowed with artistic talent, she played the piano very nicely, and had trained as an opera singer. The handsome Indian gentleman fell in love with the Hungarian lady and they got married soon after. For a while they went to Hungary, because Marie-Antoinette wanted her first child to be born in Budapest, where they arrived in December 1912. Their elder daughter, Amrita was born on 30th of January 1913, and their younger one, Indira on 28th of March 1914. They didn’t plan to stay for years in Hungary, but the outbreak of the first World War, prevented them to return to India.

Umrao Singh Sher-Gil was a scholar in Sanskrit and Persian, spoke five languages, he was known as a philosopher, and he dealt with comparative religion, astronomy, photography. And he was also a pioneer of social emancipation, as written by his daughter, Amrita. He continued his scholarly life in Hungary too. He made contacts with a lot of Hungarian orientalists. He wrote letters to Sándor Kégl, the distinguished Iranist, on Persian poets, Omar Khayyam and Hafiz, their correspondent is kept at the library of the Hungarian Academy. Professor Gyula Germanus, who was invited to Shantiniketan by Tagore in 1929, to establish the Islam Department there, wrote about their meetings in his article on Amrita Sher-Gil. He related, that they met in little restaurants, where the basically soft-spoken Umrao Singh Sher-Gil became open, and spoke him about Shankara acharya and the Indian philosophy enthusiastically after the supper.

In one of her letters (dated 20th of February 1914) Marie-Antoinette wrote to Mari Jászai, that her husband would deliver a lecture on modern Indian poetry at the Academy. It’s not clear, that this event happened at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences or perhaps at the Academy of Music, where Rabindranath Tagore delivered his lectures in 1926.

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7 Keserü, Katalin: Ibid. p.9.
Charles Louis Fabri, who later became one of the first professional art critics in India, decided to deal with Indology at the advice of Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, as he mentioned in his letter to Sir Aurel Stein.\textsuperscript{10}

Undoubtedly Umrao Singh had the deepest influence on Ervin Baktay, his brother-in-law, who began to translate the fairy tales by Francis William Bain to Hungarian, and made an abridged Hungarian version of the Mahabharata. In the preface of these books Baktay thanked Umrao for his help, for his contribution to the proper understanding of the Indian text and mythology.\textsuperscript{11} Later he published the selected writings and speeches of Gandhi\textsuperscript{12} on Sher-Gil’s proposal, and wrote a book on Rabindranath Tagore.\textsuperscript{13} The Poet had got knowledge of this book from Umrao Singh Sher-Gil and sent his greetings to Baktay through him, with these words: “...Please convey my thanks to your brother-in-law for his kind feelings towards me and for what he has done to introduce my works to his countrymen.” The letter written by Tagore to Sher-Gil, is kept by the Manuscript Collection of the National Széchényi Library.\textsuperscript{14} Baktay translated also some rubáis by Omar Khayyam, which were published in Nyugat.\textsuperscript{15} He wrote a short introduction to his interpretation, in which he explained, why the Rubáiyat concerned him closely and why he tried to make his own rendering in contradistinction to the lately published Rubáiyat-translation by Lőrinc Szabó\textsuperscript{16}, a famous Hungarian poet. Szabó made his rendering from English by Edward Fitzgerald\textsuperscript{17}, but according to Baktay, neither the English translation by Fitzgerald nor the Hungarian one by Szabó, could reproduce the original content, although he admitted that their renderings had poetical values. Baktay wrote, that he was such a favourable position, that he could access closer to the original poems of Khayyam with the help of an expert of the Persian language, and that’s why he was able to make a more authentic translation of some rubáis, and to reproduce the original Persian metrical form too. Of course this expert, whose name Baktay didn’t mention, was Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, who also explained him the philosophical background of the poems. Baktay translated a book on Omar Khayyam written by Harold Lamb\textsuperscript{18}, and in the epilogue of the book he added some remarks to Lamb’s text in connection with the symbolical

\textsuperscript{10} Mrs. Ágnes Kelecsényi Huszágh quoted the letter in her PhD:
http://doktori.btk.elte.hu/lit/huszaghne/dissszertacio.pdf


\textsuperscript{12} Mahátmá Gandhi válogatott írásai és beszédei. [Selected Writings and Speeches of Mahatma Gandhi] Fordította és a bevezető tanulmányt írta Baktay Ervin. Budapest. Athenaeum. 1926. (Gondolat és írás VII.)

\textsuperscript{13} Rabindranath Tagore az ember, a művész és a bölcs. [R. Tagore the Man, the Artist and the Sage]. Budapest. Világirodalom. 1922.

\textsuperscript{14} Levelestim. 1921.


\textsuperscript{17} Rubáiyat of Omar Khayyám. Transl. by Edward Fitzgerald. London. Harrap. [1909].

sense of the Rubáiyat\textsuperscript{19}. According to Lamb Omar Khayyam didn’t use the hidden allegories of the contemporaneous Sufi mystics, whereas Baktay claimed that the Persian-cultured Indians mostly knew by heart the rubáis and they always attributed deep symbolic sense to them – as he could had heard from Umrao Singh. Umrao Singh taught also yoga to his brother-in-law\textsuperscript{20} and to a circle of interested friends among them Mari Jászai, as mentioned by Géza Bethlenfalvy in one of his articles on Amrita.\textsuperscript{21}

Before the war, Umrao and his wife led the upper class life of the Gottesmann family in Hungary, they used to go to soirees and liked to invite guests to their tea-parties. Even though Umrao Singh preferred to stay at home surrounded with his books to go to parties, he also took part on these social gatherings, and made contacts not only by scholars, but writers and artists. Probably on such an occasion he met Mari Jászai, the famous Hungarian actress. Jászai was the queen or empress of the dramatic art according to one of her biographers.\textsuperscript{22} She played over three hundred roles, among them the title roles in Racine’s Phédra and Schiller’s Mary Stuart. She became well-known for her interpretations of Shakespearean roles. After leaving the National Theatre she recited the poems of Sándor Petőfi and Mihály Vörösmarty in the evening performances. And besides she also wrote many articles and translated from Ibsen and Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{23} She wrote her memoires, but unfortunately she didn’t mention the name of the Gottesmann family, or Umrao Singh Sher-Gil in it. She regularly invited guests to dinner, among them there were artists, writers, foreign aristocrats, and industrialists. Umrao Singh and his wife regularly wrote letters to Mari Jászai, and their correspondence gave further information on Umrao’s life in Hungary, on his scholarly activities in Hungary, and in India after returning home.

The correspondence between Umrao Sher-Gil and his wife and Mari Jászai is kept at the Manuscript Collection of the National Széchényi Library.\textsuperscript{24} Actually only those letters are kept in the Manuscript Collection, which were written by Umrao Singh and his wife. The file kept in the National Széchényi Library contains thirty one documents among which there are twenty eight letters and three visiting cards of Umrao Singh Sher-Gil of Majithia. Sher-Gils sent their letters partly from Hungary (from Budapest, Dunaharaszt and Rozsnyó), and partly from India, after returning home. Among the twenty eight letters, five were written by Marie-Antoinette, while two letters were written together. The other ones were sent by Umrao Singh only, who regularly wrote

\textsuperscript{19} H. Lamb: ibid. p. 270.
\textsuperscript{21} Géza Bethlenfalvy: Ibid. p. 89.
\textsuperscript{23} Péchy, Blanka: Ibid. p. 7. Jászai translated „John Gabriel Borkmann” from Ibsen, which was published in Budapest (1898. Vass; 1907, 1926, Lampel), and she traslated some sonnets from Shakespeare (57, 73, 75), which have come down in manuscript (The National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection, Analekta, 2576)
\textsuperscript{24} Levelestár, 1912-1924.
about his family and his readings. Besides in his letters sent from Hungary naturally the main subject was the First World War, the outbreak of which obliged him and his family to remain in Hungary. Returning home he wanted to preserve his connection to the Hungarian culture which appeared from his letters sent from India. Among the letters the first one was written by Marie-Antoinette dated on 28th of April 1912, but this date is incorrect, because they arrived at Budapest only in December of that year. The last letter was sent by Umrao from Simla in 1924. Mari Jászai died two years later, on 5th of October 1926.

Umrao Singh often listened to Jászai reciting poems (e. g. Szózat by Mihály Vörösmarty), and he also went to see her in the „Savitri”, the play of Árpád Pásztor. He sent his first letter to her on the occasion of the „Savitri”. Árpád Pásztor regularly took part on the tea-parties of the Gottesmann’s and his poem, „Savitri”, was produced on the stage of the National Theatre with Mari Jászai, who played the role of the „Angel of Death”, that is the role of Yama. Árpád Pásztor was also a „rushing reporter” and he visited Tolstoy at his home, and wrote a book on him. Tolstoy had a great influence not only on him, but on Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, Ervin Baktay and Mari Jászai too. As for the play „Savitri”, the contemporary critics were not delighted with it, they lacked its dramatic character and were not satisfied with the stage-effect, but called the audience’s attention to the noble way of speaking of Jászai. This was emphasized by Marie-Antoinette too, who wrote in her first letter (dated 28th of April, 1912 [1913!]) to Mari Jászai, that they would go to the theatre to see her in „Savitri” and to be delighted with her bell-sounding voice. After seeing the play, Umrao Singh related his impressions to Jászai (his first letter is without date). At that time he could not understand too much in Hungarian, but he was pleased with the performance. He wrote as follows: „Yesterday afternoon both of us went to Budapest to see you in „Savitri” and inspite of a few un-Indianism of name and dress and gesture and sentiment on the part of some of the characters, I could not keep back the tears from rising to my eyes throughout the performance. Strongly you recalled to my mind the noble idealism of my people from across the centuries and through the shroud of seeming death of our present – which I hope – sleep only, for I believe, that although early greatness and power of a nation can die, its spirituality must live and make it live.” In this letter Umrao wrote in detail how the Indians were thinking about life and death and the immortality of the soul. In her memoirs Mari Jászai wrote only one sentence of the play: „On Saturday, 26th [April] I played in Savitri putting on a beautiful Hindu clothes which I had got as a present”. Unfortunately she didn’t mention, if she had got that Hindu dress from Sher-Gils or from other people.

Umrao Singh tried to connect and to harmonize the eastern and western way of thinking and manner of living in his personal life, as it can be seen from his letters. In Hungary he didn’t keep all of the rules prescribed for the Sikhs, e.g. he cut his hair, and shaved, but he wore turban and clogs. He was a strict vegetarian, he never ate meat, only milk, bread and fruit. When he returned to India he seemed to be very much westernized in appearance, which shocked the orthodox Sikhs, as mentioned by Marie-Antoinette in her letter to Jászai (dated 20th March, 1921. Lahore). But after a while Umrao Singh readjusted his appearance to the Indian customs and began to look like a real Sikh, and he wrote to the actress as follows: „I have grown a hair and grey beard to my family’s disgust and even my friends are not in favour of it but I keep it comfort, and not to hurt my brother’s feelings who is very orthodox.” (dated 28th July, 1921. Simla). However he observed the rules concerning the births of his daughters. He wrote of the birth of his second daughter, Indira (dated 28th March, 1914): „This morning Amrita’s little sister has come and both the mother and child are doing well. I don’t know what she will look like after a time, but so far she looks so much like me, that I find no trace of beauty in her. Amrita was brought in to see her, and she looked at her most silently and interestingly for several minutes and then turned to me and gave several grants of enquiry and pleasure as if saying „What is this, it is delightfully interesting”. Then she wanted to stroke and caress her and friendly wanted to twist her little hand. Like Amrita the new baby has tasted some Hungarian honey and the „holy” water of Ganga, which holy or not holy still is as sweet and clear as when I filled with it the bottle eighteen months ago. We have named her Indira which is one of the many Sanskrit names for Fortune Laksmi.” In one of his further letter (dated 14th December, 1914) he wrote about his bashful character and his first marriage, when he was not able to reveal his emotions at the presence of other people, e.g. he couldn’t have kissed his first child in the presence of strangers. Then he continued as follows: „My wife can tell you that althothought I am fairly conversant with western manners by this time, I feel a kind of shock when she tries to kiss me in the presence of others – her mother included. From which you will see that my behaviour last night was due to a certain eastern and personal defect. I am self-conscious and self-centered individual do not feel worthy to kiss even your hand.” Umrao Singh Sher-Gil regularly gave accounts of his family not only from Budapest, but from India too, e.g. he wrote about his wife’s success in Simla, where she became a member of the English music club, and the people appreciated her talents very much. He also wrote about the studies of the children, and their illness, e.g. of the operation of Amrita’s eyes, because Mari Jászai especially liked their daughters. The children themselves also wrote a few lines to the actress in the letter sent by his father from India (dated 5th January, 1922), to which Indira

enclosed a drawing, but unfortunately it was not preserved together with the letter. In the same letter Umrao wrote to Jászai about the death of his eldest son, Balram, who shot himself after drinking too much. There came up some problems about his second marriage too. They had already lived in India, when Marie-Antoinette decided to travel to Italy with their daughters for the sake of their art-studies and Umrao was not able to go with them. He wrote to Jászai as follows: „...but I must say that international marriages however good, they may be have this disadvantage, that one or the other party has to be an exile, if the family is to remain together. This is very sad, for every one must love his own land of birth. We are pilgrims on earth for a few decades no doubt, but attachments of country and race are a part of our destiny.” (1st November, 1923. The Holme, Summer Hill, Simla). The very personal tone of his letters show how friendly and close was their relationship.

At the outbreak of the war, Sher-Gils went to Rozsnyó, and stayed in the castle of the Szilvássy family, where they wanted to spent for two months after the birth of Indira. Marie-Antoinette’s family consists of hussar-officers and all of them called up, as she wrote to Jászai (1st, August, 1914.). Her brother, Ervin Baktay, translated the books by Francis W. Bain, at the battle-field. When Sher-Gils stayed at Rozsnyó, they went to the train-station to see the conscripts embarking, which was very distressing. Umrao wrote about his sentiments concerning the war on several occasions. He worried about in particular the destructive machineries used by the warriors: „I feel deeply sorry for any nation that takes part in war, especially in these days of highly destructive machinery and most expensive war expenditure, when even the chance of displaying personal bravery of a hand to hand fight is reduced to a minimum, when men fall dead like flies in a cold wind not knowing whence wholesale death is dealt out to them.” (22nd, August, 1914.). Mari Jászai held similar opinion of the war, as it can be seen in her memoires. In the same letter Umrao quoted some thoughts, as he wrote, „from our Indian Poet”, whose name he didn’t mention: „I was reading the lectures of our Indian poet and came across the following passage which I should like to quote to you: „Civilization must be judged and prized not by the amount of power it has developed, but by how much it has evolved and given expression to, by its laws and institutions, the love of humanity. The first question and the last, which it has to answer is, whether and how far it recognizes man more as a spirit than as a machine?” Of course the Poet was Rabindranath Tagore and the quotation can be found in his book, „Sadhana”. Umrao Singh disapproved the war, but he also added, that it could have had beneficial results, provided that it delivered from oppression and slavery, as in the case of the czarist Russia. He emphasized the role of Tolstoy of whom he wrote: „Tolstoy preached to them [the Russians] the doctrine of Christ which cuts at the root of inhumanity and makes it impossible, but the people are ignorant and kept ignorant by force, and so it was hardly reached
their ears and few comprehended it, but the seed was planted and must grow
though choked by weeds and other poisonous plants.”

During the first World War Umrao Singh and his family moved to a
Hungarian village, Dunaharaszt, to the country house of the Gottesmann family.
Here they had to live a more simple life, because they had only one servant and
Umrao Singh couldn’t receive any financial help from his home. His income
from India began to arrive irregularly and finally ceased coming. Besides, he
was cut from his relatives, his elder sons and his friends due to the war. In
Dunaharaszt he was interested in everyday problems, e.g. he repaired the
church-clock, and he also took part in catholic ceremony. He walked a lot with
his daughters and a white dog in Glázer-forest, as it was mentioned by Miklós
Losonczi on the basis of verbal communications of Sher-Gils’neighbours.29
Dunaharaszt was not very far from Budapest, and it was directly connected with
the capital by the suburban railways, and Umrao Singh often went to there. On
such an occasion he met Antal Szirbik, who was a writer, and was interested in
oriental philosophy. He published his thoughts in booklets, the foreword of
which was written by Umrao Singh yet in Simla, when he returned to India.30
Umrao remembered their meetings as follows: “At the outbreak of the World
War, I was in Budapest. Separating from my homeland and income, I drew back
to a little village, outskirts of the town. From there, I frequently went to the
capital. It happened on such an occasion, that a man dressed in poor clothes,
with a broad forehead and bright eyes, accosted me on the tram. This man was
the author of „Writings”. Soon after he visited me at home and I also went to his
house and we became friends.”31 The literary historians didn’t esteem Szirbik
highly, and didn’t range him among the significant writers. Moreover he was
mocked by the writers belonged to the circle of Nyugat because of his enthusiam
towards the East. In 1912, Szirbik published a book with a title „Tatár
kölykök”32, which was a „declaration of war to the Nyugat-men”. Opposed to
the „Nyugat-men”, Jenő Rákosi, the well-known critic, and the patron of
Szirbik, said on „Writings” once time, that „if I were a Minister of State I would
print and circulate this book in innumerable copies”.33 „Writings” was translated
to English, to German and to other languages. Szirbik got a prize from Budapest
for this work. A Hungarian newspaper, „Pesti Hírlap”, wrote on Szirbik, that he
was better known in abroad, than in Hungary, and also added that he was called
by some people as the „Hungarian Rabindranath Tagore”, maybe for that he

29 Losonczi, Miklós: Amrita Sher-Gil művészetének forrásai. [The Sources of the Art of Amrita Sher-Gil] =
31 Szirbik, Antal: Írások. p. 3. This remembrance of Umrao Singh can be found only in the preface of the
Hungarian edition.
32 Tatár kölykök – Hadüzenet a nyugatosoknak. [The Tartar Kids – The declaration of war to the Nyugat-men]
Budapest. Kelen Könyvtár. 1912.
33 Szirbik: Writings. Ibid. p. 3-4.
wrote prose-vers as Tagore. Others has named Szirbik the „Socrates of the twentieth century”, or a „lately sent apostle of Jesus Christ”\textsuperscript{35}. Obviously Umrao Singh was that „Hindu gentleman”, who delivered a lecture on Szirbik at the seat of the viceroy of British-India, in Simla. According to the journalists, one man among those who were present, shouted in his surprise, that the thoughts of Szirbik were a scheme for harmonizing the Univers. This event was mentioned in Hungarian newspapers\textsuperscript{36}, and according to Ferenc Tóth the viceroy was present personally at the lecture. The thoughts, composed by Szirbik in his Writings, reminded Umrao Singh of the ideas of the Bhagavad Gita, and of other Indian philosophy, but he denied that he would had mediated the Hindu philosophy to Szirbik, although he admitted, that they talked about it. Umrao named Szirbik as „an apostle of the harmony of the Universe”\textsuperscript{37}. Sámuel Diósszilágyi was the first who gave news of the proposal of Szirbik to the Nobel-prize. His admirers sent Szirbik’s works to the Nobel curator-committee (according to Vilmos Sz. Szigethy to the Hungarian Minister of Education\textsuperscript{38}), because of his writings suited well to the fundamental rule of the Nobel-prize, proclaiming a high quality of ethics.

Sher-Gils managed to return to India in 1921, and they sent their greetings to Mari Jászai in March already from Simla. Umrao Singh was not a British loyalist in contrast to the other members of his clan. Actually he was a nationalist and he had links with the Gaddar Party, a revolutionary group fighting for Indian independence during the first World War. This was discovered by the British Intelligence Service, in consequence of which, most of his lands were confiscated and his income from India began to come irregularly and finally ceased coming. In the postscript of one of his letters he hinted at his relation with the British: „I sometimes wish I were an English man and not Indian, whose nation is oppressed by the English, for then I might have had a better time in Hungary, as all the English have even in this war time, but I loath to belong to a nation of oppress and I am after all content to remain an Indian inspite of what has come. The more I see of life in Europe, the better I like my own country.” (dated 25th October, 1916). After returning to India, he rejected any active involvement in politics, although he wrote to Jászai, that he would have had the opportunity to hold an office, as his brother, Sunder Singh did: „My brother is one of the principal members of the Punjab government, executive council, and I am staying with him since leaving Delhi. It would be easy for me to take part in the councils of the British Empire like my friends,

\textsuperscript{37} Szirbik Antal: Írások. Ibid. p. 5.
relatives, but you know I like to lead a retired life with my books” (dated 20th March, 1921.)

Before they went to Simla, they spent one month in Delhi at the house of Sirdar Jogendrasingh, who was the editor of the East & West magazine and whose aim with this periodical was to achieve an East and West synthesis. With his purpose Jogendrasingh resembled Tagore, who sought a cultural synthesis of what was best in both the East and the West. Besides Jogendrasingh published some books, e. g. Nur Jehan and was a member of the Upper House.

The Hungarian culture had a deep impression on Umrao Singh as we can see from the letters written to Jászai from India. In contrast with his daughter, Amrita, who liked very much the works of Endre Ady and Frigyes Karinthy, Umrao Singh liked Petőfi, which was due to the enthusiasm or adoration of Mari Jászai towards the famous Hungarian poet of the 19th century. He translated some short poems from Petőfi, which were published in the East & West magazine. He promised to the actress, that he would post those numbers of the magazine for her, which contained his translations and the critics of them by his brother-in-law, Ervin Baktay. He wrote about his renderings in his letter as follows: „I was glad and felt honoured to get your kind letter enclosing the poem I asked for: Petőfi’s Ítélet. I have already translated it and it will probably appear in the East & West, my friend Jogendrasingh’s magazine, if it exists next year. I am sending you by this mail, a copy of the November number of this magazine, which contains several translations from Petőfi which I did as best as I could, though of course they are poor, for who can render the poet except another Petőfi, but my idea was to give the English reading public of India some idea of Petőfi’s spirit”. (dated 29th December, 1921). In this letter he also related to Jászai, that he was asked by some of his friends to deliver a lecture about his experiences in Hungary during 1919: „Some months ago I was asked by some friends to deliver a lecture about the evils of Bolshevism, and the East & West circle founded by my friend Jogendrasingh was keenly interested to hear my personal experiences of those times in your country. The circle consist of Indian and English people who are sympathetic to one another.” Umrao Singh shared these experiences with Rabindranath Tagore too. His letter to the Poet is kept at the Archives of Rabindra Bhavan in Santiniketan. In his letter dated 6th of April 1922, he wrote a few words in Hungarian, then he expressed his opinion in connection with a news written by Mari Jászai on Petőfi and count Széchenyi. Mari Jászai related him, that there came to light a letter by count Széchenyi, which could have proved the fact, that Széchenyi was the real father of Petőfi. In fact this was a misinterpretation, because in his letter Széchenyi called Petőfi as his son only in a spiritual sense. Umrao Singh responded to this

39 Petőfi Sándor: Az ítélet. (1847)
news as follows: „you gave us the sensational news that it has been found from old letters of Count Széchenyi, over seventy years ago, that your greatest poet was not the son of a village butcher but the Count’s son. This is very interesting, though to me it would be still more interesting to know, that such a great genius could be the child of ordinary people. All the same I think that his mother must have been a very remarkable woman, for genius is seldom, I think the result of the father’s abilities, but generally comes through the mother. I say „through”, purposely, because it really comes from heaven, or the invisible spheres, as Petőfi himself has said, the poet is the child of heaven. „S költő nem a föld fia?” Although he only asks: „And is not the poet the child of the earth?” I say „Indeed he is not”."

Knowing of Jászai’s adoration towards Petőfi, Umrao Singh sent a poem by Muhammad Iqbal, the famous urdu poet and philosopher. The title of Iqbal’s poem was „To Petőfi”, and it was originally published in the East & West magazine. Ervin Baktay wrote two articles41 on Iqbal, and in one of them he mentioned that the poet heard about Petőfi from Umrao Singh, who delivered a lecture on Hungarian poetry and also on Petőfi42 and he must have read Sher-Gil’s translations of Petőfi’s poems, which were published in the same magazine. Living for years in Europe, Iqbal was aware of the values of the western civilization just as well as its faults. He felt and apprehended similarly to Tagore, that the purpose for the West as for the East to bring the best values and tradition of both cultures together. Umrao posted two or three copies from Iqbal’s poem, one of them he sent for the Library of the National Museum (now is The National Széchényi Library), for the request of his brother-in-law, enclosing with a letter for him (dated 17th of April 1924): „My dear Ervin, I am enclosing herewith a copy of the poem on Petőfi by Sir Mohammad Iqbal our great poet, in his own handwriting which you had requested for the National Museum of Budapest, and which I have been at last able to obtain from the poet. I have added the translation of the same on the other side in type, and which also signed by the poet.”43 Ervin Baktay one month earlier already published Iqbal’s verse with his rough translation in his article of the „Magyar Bibliofil Szemle”44. Perhaps he used for his translation those copy (dated 22nd of September 1921), which can be found in the Manuscript Collection of the National Széchényi Library45, together with an other copy (dated 14th of April 1924), which was sent by Umrao to Mari Jászai. This latter one comprises the verse in Persian with a handwriting by Iqbal, its transliteration also by him, and its English translation, or its literal rendering by Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, with

42 Magyar Bibliofil Szemle. Ibid. p. 139.
43 Levelestár 1924.
44 Magyar Bibliofil Szemle. Ibid.
45 Analekta, 2452
some remarks and explanations by him for Mari Jászai. Perhaps the first copy Umrao sent both to Baktay and Jászai, because he asked from the actress in his letter dated 1st of November 1923, if she had got Iqbal’s poem, which he had sent her in order to recite it at the centenary celebration of Petőfi. Baktay wrote in his article, that Iqbal’s poem was the most precius document of the Centenary. According to Gyula Germanus, Iqbal’s poem was translated to Hungarian by Elek Londesz too, but Germanus didn’t mention where this translation was published. Elek Londesz, who was a writer, poet and journalist, could have translated the poem from the original Persian, because he had translated Omar Khayyam and Firdusi also from Persian, and these can be found in one volume, which comprises the translations of Londesz. The latest Hungarian translation of Iqbal’s poem „To Petőfi” rendering by Gábor Zsille, was published in Magyar Napló in 2010.

In the letters written by Umrao from India, he often remembered their mutual friends (e. g. Mrs. Szirmay, Mária Czeke, Elek Koronghi Lippich) and always sent a copy from the East & West magazine, if that comprised Hungarian-related articles. It is noteworthy, that Ervin Baktay, after returning home from India, in 1937, began to issue a periodical with a title of Kelet és Nyugat [East and West], for which probably the East & West magazine served as a model, though he didn’t refer to this at the preface of the periodical. Unfortunately only two numbers of the magazine were published, then it ceased to issue.

Umrao Singh was deeply attached to the cultures of both the East and the West, and especially to the Hungarian culture, since he spent eight years there.

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46 Új indiái költőnagyság. Ibid. p. 4.
50 Mrs. Oszkár Szirmay was a friend of Jászai’s.
51 Probably she is identical with Marianne Czeke (1873-1942), who was the first Hungarian woman-librarian, and she was in correspondence with Romain Rolland.
52 Elek Lippich, nagykoronghi and kulcsárfalvi (1862-1924), his pen-name is Elek Kadocsa, he was a poet, writer and he was one of the patrons of the Artist’s Colony in Gödöllő. He was the leader of the Art Department of the Ministry of Education.
1. ábra Sardar Jogendrasingh, the editor of the East and West magazine (his photo was sent by Umrao Singh to Mari Jászai). The National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection

2. ábra Muhammad Iqbal (his photo was sent by Umrao Singh to Mari Jászai). The National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection
3. ábra Umrao Singh Sher-Gil in Budapest. The National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection

4. ábra Marie-Antoinette Gottesmann in Budapest. (Új Idők. 1913/7. p.171.)
5. ábra Sher-Gil's salon in Budapest (Új Idők. 1913/7. p. 172.)

6. ábra The study of Umrao Singh in Budapest (Új Idők. 1913/7. p. 172.)
7. ábra Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, 1924. The National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection

8. ábra Marie-Antoinette Gottesmann and her daughters, the photo was sent by them to Mari Jászai. The National Széchényi Library, Manuscript Collection