

# The Image of India in the Russian Historical and Culturological Literature

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## Abstract

Relevance of the topic depends on the necessity to study the main directions, dynamics and logic of evolution of Russian-Indian relations, which show patterns of progress and regress of knowledge of India in Russia. This article aims to achieve the following goals - understanding of problems of historical and culturological image of India in Russia in the works of authors of our country. Leading approach to the study of this topic is to elucidate the genesis of knowledge about India in Russia, creation and reflection of historical and culturological image of India in Russia in domestic literature. The article deals with the phenomenon of historical-cultural perception of India in Russia, compiles and systematizes the studies of Russian authors of pre-revolutionary, Soviet and modern periods in which the number of research parallels is observed that marked their continuity, or representing the original author's positions on the designated topic. Article materials may be useful in determining the actual directions of traditional and new issues of the theme.

**Keywords:** Russian historical and culturological literature, cultural exchange between East and West, historical-cultural perceptions of India in Russia

## 1. Introduction

The problem of reflection in Russian history and culture of the spiritual heritage of the East is a debatable one in the domestic oriental studies. Argumentativeness of the problems is determined by the fact that the scale of cultural contacts requires a strict scientific study.

Efforts to see Russia "only from Europe" or "only from Asia" prevented a real understanding of its unique cultural subregion of "middle" position. Significance of the problem is due to the fact that the eastern basis of culture of ancient Rus and medieval Russia received a thorough and contradictory implementation at different stages of the country's history.

The problem finds a special significance in the era of recession or revival of cultural exchange between East and West. The theme of "Russian East", and therefore "Russia-India" received detailed coverage in the domestic humanities and disciplines.

Russian-Indian relations were based primarily on practice, national interests and social needs. Their quality, scientific and social value is determined by the accumulation of objective knowledge about India and the special interests of the state and society to their comprehension. They were based on a variety of foreign policy, trade and economic, scientific and cultural factors of unique national culture needs of the peoples of Russia in connection with the people of India.

In the second half of the XVIII-XIX centuries, varied the ideological principles of study of Russian-Indian relations. In the XX century, the researches in the field of reflection of Indian realities in Russian history and culture get a systematic, comprehensive and integrated character.

Modern Russian Indologists, and other experts - historians, philologists and culture experts - notice that one of the most popular research topics is the problem of "East-West" paradigm of Russian culture, the problem of "Russia-India" as a unity of diversity (Mrathuzina, 2001; Nasrutdinova, 2010; Shaumyan, 2011; Zagorodnikova, 2008).

## 2. Literature Review

The first native historians found traces of Indian influence on Russia since ancient times. The founder of Russian Indology Gerasim Lebedev at the end of the XVIII century sought to discover the religious and cultural affinity between the two countries (Lebedev, 2009).

His biography is based on his own works, letters, autobiographical, diary notes. A seminar "Gerasim Lebedev - the founder of modern Bengal theatre" was held in 2009 in the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Calcutta, organized by the Consulate General of Russia and members of the theatre group "Malyy narodnyy teatr" with the demonstration of a documentary directed by Bengal director W. Datta "In Search of the theatre." In 2011, the International seminar "Gerasim Lebedev and his heritage- a chronicle of Russian-Indian relations" was held in Calcutta, organized by the University of Calcutta. At the initiative of the Russian side in 2009 in Calcutta at the site of the theatre created by Lebedev was opened a memorial in his honour, and one of the central streets of the capital of West Bengal bears a name of our great compatriot. Since 2005, the Institute of Linguistics of the RAS functions the project "The scientific heritage of the first Russian Indologist Lebedev: comprehensive study and preparation of texts for publication". Archive search and digitization of preserved manuscripts, textual analysis, commenting on his work was executed. In Yaroslavl in 2008 was opened a permanent exhibition complex of History Museum, in 2010 the name Lebedev was given to Centralized Library System of Yaroslavl.

Despite the fact that Lebedev is rightly called the first Russian indianist, his works are in the nature of practical textbooks, descriptive and contain almost no elements of the study. However, unlike many Western scholars, Lebedev approached to the study of India not from a Eurocentric position, but was able to estimate the significance of Indian culture for the culture of the universal, to see its integrity and diversity. The importance of his work is difficult to overestimate; he was ahead of his time. Due to the lack of appropriate educational institutions he had no one to pass this knowledge, so a printing house built by him after his death was inactive and its traces are not preserved, and his unpublished works during his lifetime have not seen the light, some of them even lost.

The image of India in Russia, formed before, was in a different layer of consciousness near the messages of Tver merchant Afanasy Nikitin (Nikitin, 2003).

Notes of Nikitin, have become one of the most important monuments-symbols of ancient Russian of social thought. This is probably, the first monument of intelligence and analytical content. Judging from the fact that several manuscripts of "Khozhdeniya" (Walkings) were preserved, it has spread among the Russian educated public. However, the story of an eyewitness had almost no effect on the idea of this country in ancient literature, but the significance in political terms, as a sign of likings of Russians for Indian culture and the desire to study it dispassionately is preserved.

They are relevant in the sense of cultural similarities and research of Roerich. XX century is connected with the research activities of their family. An exceptional phenomenon in the history of Russian and world art and science, is more obvious and valuable, taking into account the Tatar roots of Roerich (Roerich, 1994; Roerich, 2000; Roerich, 2004).

Nicolas Konstantinovich Roerich (1874-1947) - a painter, theatre designer, philosopher, traveller, and public figure had the 140th anniversary of the birth last year. In the present - the anniversary of 80-year-old, the date of the signing of the original project "Roerich's Pact" the first in the history the International Treaty on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, signed in Washington on April 15, 1935. In Kazan took place a set of measures on this occasion: Press conference, Opening Ceremony of the exhibition of Roerich's paintings, the Round table "Preservation of cultural heritage in the XXI century", Presentation of the "Roerich Pact. History and present times" project.

Roerich's life is like a legend, starting their way in Russia, passing Europe and America, they finished it in Asia. It is amazing how they came by the soul to India, such enthusiasm in the paintings of Nicholas and Svetoslav Roerich. Elena Ivanovna Roerich, wife of Nicholas Konstantinovich dealt with analogies of Buddhism and Christianity. In an atmosphere of interest, which was based on the energy field of Russian culture, thinkers Roerich could become global figures.

Due to the efforts of his son Svyatoslav and daughter-in-law Devika Rani in 1993 the International Roerich Memorial Trust was registered. In its disposal passed all the property of the family estate in Naggar. Government of Himachal Pradesh in recent years has reconstructed Urusvati - the Research Institute of the Roerich. Today the building is used to display collections, collected by Roerich during the expeditions in the Himalayas and Central Asia. Roerich estate was declared a cultural heritage of India. Unfortunately, Russia is not always capable to

decide the fate of their cultural and scientific heritage abroad. However, the joint Russian-Indian, and in the future Tatar-Indian, projects on preservation of Roerich's heritage would open up perspectives for researchers.

### 3. Results

Two culturological types - Old Indian literary realities and ancient Indian historical realities, represented the united «image» of India in Russia. Primary material is an attempt to systematize the ancient Indian contacts with medieval Russian culture.

Direct contacts between the two countries in ancient times were sporadic, and ideas about distant lands often had a fantastic character. Therefore, one can wonder how early Russian-Indian contacts were found, as they are manifested in many ways, as organically image of India enters the ancient Russian literature.

The first acquaintance of Russian culture with ancient India almost concurs with the beginning of the Russian literary tradition that arose after the introduction of Christianity into Russia, which simultaneously caused the needs in the texts constituting the Old Russian literature. Educational activities of Grand Prince Vladimir I, his immediate successors and companions, one of whom, was Prince Yaroslav, who has initiated an intensive translation work, and the other - Metropolitan Hilarion who has laid the foundation of a serious original literature of Kievan Rus, allowed Russian scribe in a short time to master a huge translated literary heritage.

Adoption of Eastern Christianity and the whole system of cultural values has enabled East Slavic "book" region to join the eastern Mediterranean cultural-historical civilization. The centre of this world was the Greek literary and written language. After the introduction of Christianity into Russia the Greek and South Slavic books appeared, Indian names, themes and motifs became known, ideas about India, formed in Byzantium, penetrated.

Contacts of Ancient Russia with India then little gave for knowledge of the Indian culture. Trade relations have brought unimportant ancient Indian cultural material. You can note the appearance of chess in Russia, which came from India. It is permissible to assume that the elements of ancient Indian mythology penetrated into Russia through the motives of medieval Indian fabrics and decorations. It is quite possible that the Russian watched with interest the ancient customs of Indian traders in Central Asia and other eastern centres. Russian slaves, who came back from India and other Asian countries, something communicated about their customs and manners. Evidences of Russian books about India laid in the ambiguity of the material that was obtained from the translated literature.

To determine the place of ancient Indian realities in the spiritual values of medieval Russian culture in the studies of domestic authors specified what Russia received as a result of transplantation in its culture of Eastern Mediterranean texts connected it with the culture of India. Russian scribe included ancient India in its historic entity as well as the Byzantine chronicler and Bulgarian translator. One of the important objectives of the study of ancient Indian realities in Russian medieval culture was seen in an attempt to correlate the material with historical reality of India.

The appearance in the national didactic writings of ancient Indian literary of realities enriched Russian literature. Received by Russian through the ancient and early medieval historical traditions of ancient Indian historical realities expanded the perspective of historical and cultural thinking of Russian scribe. He learned that in ancient times, along with the Hellenic world there was a great country of the East India.

Images of ancient and modern India in the minds of Russian society almost did not overlap. Term for modern India - "Hindustan" adopted "by the people", was different from the book concepts related to ancient India - such as "Rahman". Basic information about Indian antiquities in Russia is received from book tradition, isolated from live contacts.

Mentions of India in "geographical" narratives of XV century do not bear scientific objective information about Indian culture. In the XVI-XVII centuries, in Russia there were summary proceedings, where the book details picked up from the writings of the ancient geographers, contained practical information of travellers of modern times. The overall approach was changed; particular attention is now paid not to miracles, but let us say, to spices and silk. Gradually, the book image of India began to contradict the real information and gradually retreated to fairy tales, entertaining read. By the end of the XVII century, the overseas country was imagined in Russia more by western books and reports of its travellers than the ancient literature. Although the book image of India and specific historical data about it existed at the same time. On the eve of the new time, there was a need for critical evaluation of the book editions. Book images were not the property of one booklore; they were quickly reflected in the oral poetry, folk beliefs and rituals.

In XVIII - early XIX centuries, scientific and cultural relations between Russia and India based on mutual interest were established. The study of classical heritage of India emerged in the Academy of Sciences, and then

at Moscow University.

The first important area in acquaintance with Indian culture is the development of linguistics, which at that time was significantly associated with the study of ancient Indian literary language Sanskrit. One of the first academics of St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and Russian antiquities researcher, founder of the history as science in Russia Siegfried Bayer begins a book publishing and translation of Sanskrit literature. The first monument to Indian literature appeared in Russian in 1788 - the book "Baguat-Geta" (Bhagavad Gita). Russian reader received a complete philosophical work of the epic "Mahabharata".

The next significant stage was the emergence in a "Moscow Journal" in 1792 in Russian of scenes from the drama of Kalidasa "Shakuntala". In the preface to his translation, N.M. Karamzin highly evaluated the artistic merits of the work, and supplied the text by footnotes. In general, the Russian reader has received a number of new and true information about India, which was a matter of historical importance.

Still in the works of Russian writers, India was mentioned fragmentarily. Times of stories about the country passed, but real knowledge of it accumulated not enough. M.V. Lomonosov sought to comprehend, to bring India to Russia. He persistently pointed out the government on the task of establishing of trade relations, the necessity of finding a northern sea route to India between the shores of Russia and America, and wrote a "Brief description of the different travels ... in the East India" (1763). The thinker A.N. Radishchev (1792) treated India with attention and had information about it. His poem "Pesn istoricheskaya" (Historical Song) contained an overview of the important events in world history. Epithets and definitions of Radishchev are remarkable by precision and depth.

The founder of Russian Indology G.S. Lebedev strove for discovering the religious and cultural proximity between the two countries, having lived in India for 12 years (1785-1798). From that moment, the Russian science of India begins to develop in an independent way. In 1802, Alexander I assigned him in the service in the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the position of a translator where he spent the rest of life. In 1805, he published his major work "Bespristrastnoe sozertsanie system Vostochnoy Indii..." (Impartial contemplation of systems of Eastern India ...). It is noteworthy that Lebedev has opened the first Europe printing press, equipped with machines with Bengali alphabet, and then published in London "Grammatika chistykh y smeshannykh Ost-Indskikh dialektov" (Grammar of pure and mixed East India dialects) - Calcutta Hindustani language spoken form.

In the part "Pyteshestvie v Indiyu" (Trevelling in India) of the sixth volume of "Istoriya" (History) N.M. Karamzin (1817) reported for the first time to readers about "Khozhdenie za tri morya" (Walking over three sea) A. Nikitin. In subsequent years, several editions of the text and the fundamental works were dedicated to him.

Many Russian scientists begin to speculate about the ancient Indian relations of Russian folklore. Notably, Professor of Kazan Theological Academy, a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences, the historian of Russian literature I.Ya. Porfiriev was engaged in cultural analogies. For example, he clarifies the origin of the main story "Povest o Varlaame y Iosafe" (Story about Barlaam and Josaphat) (1873), which enjoyed a reputation as a popular legend exposition of biographies of the Buddha, where the name Josaphat comes from the Indian name of Buddhist saints - "Bodhisattva."

Indologists S.F. Oldenburg and F.I. Shcherbatskoy also were engaged in the reconstruction of Buddhist prototypes and individual motifs, for example, in "Slovo o dvenadtsati snakh Shahaishi» (The lay about twelve dreams of Shahaishi) (1892). It is interesting that on the eve of the First World War, a group of scientists of the Academy of Sciences at the initiative of Oldenburg has proposed the construction of a Buddhist temple in St. Petersburg. Committee provided transportation from Bombay of Hindu temple, planned to show exhibits of religious monuments, of applied art and artistic craft monuments.

In the last decade of the XVIII - the second half of the XIX century previous occasional contacts, which were an initiative of individuals, gave place to sustainable scientific and cultural ties. The contents of these links were enriched; channels of information, forms and methods of implementation were expanded. Unlike most European countries in Russia, a public interest in India bore predominantly educational and informative character.

The Russian press was an important means of acquaintance with India. In the progressive press, information and publicity materials were published. Leading periodicals addressed to the Indian theme. In the press, appeared articles and literary works titled "Indiyskaya povest": "Chtenie dlya vkusa, razuma y chuvstvovaniy" (Reading for taste, mind and feelings) (1792), "Pismo indiytsa o nrvakh evropeytsev" (Letter of Indian about customs in Europe) (1784), "Istina, indiyskaya skazka" (Truth, Indian Tale) (1802) and others. Such works are conventionally associated with India and are not based on scientific and historical knowledge.

By 1770-80th years, India theme appears in Russian journalism. The representative of the Russian Enlightenment N.I. Novikov in the "Pribavlenie k Moskovskim vedomostyam" (Additions to the Moscow News) focuses on British policy in India. In the 1783-84th, dozens of articles about India were published. Despite the fact that the articles were descriptive, gave reference material, they condemned the colonial policy of the Englishmen. Editors of Russian "Vedomosti" drew the information about India from foreign publications, and some translated articles bears the imprint of the negligence to the Indians peculiar to Western Europeans of that time.

Certain aspects of Russian-Indian relations appear in periodicals. In the first half of the XIX century, scientific and socio-literary magazines published studies of Russian and foreign authors, translations of Indian epic fragments, their reviews, bibliographical notes. Magazine "Otechestvennye zapiski" (Domestic notes) becomes a leading in Russia. Since V.G. Belinsky headed the department of criticism and bibliography in the middle of 1839, later A.I. Herzen started to cooperate with it.

Number of publications about India on various topics increased. Of greatest interest are those authors who have spent long time in their modern India. In 1844, an article by Russian traveller A.G. Rotchev "Neskolko zamechaniy kasatelno angliyskoy Ost-Indskoy kompanii v Indostane" (Some remarks about the British East India Company in Hindustan) appeared, who as a translator visited India in the 30s and 50s of the XIX century. Interest in India is different from the democratically minded publishers A.I. Semen and A.A. Stojkovic, factual material on India was realized by them from leading social positions.

In the second half of the XIX - early XX centuries such areas of culture as literature and art came to the forefront. Of particular importance in acquaintance of Russians with India was a visit by the Russian artists (A.D. Saltykov, V.V. Vereshchagin). They created the image of an ethnically and socially unique India. Paintings by Russian artists travelled to India differed by scales of talents and artistic skills. With an image of the majestic monuments of Indian architecture in art, they introduced new subjects - genre scenes and ethnographic sketches.

Invaluable meaning of cultural communication has literature. First introduction in India with the most famous word artist of Russia referred to the beginning of the 70th of XIX century. Leading intellectuals of Bengal played a significant role in this. In journals "Bharati", "East" published literary articles about Russian novelists - I.S. Turgenev, F.M. Dostoevsky, and A.P. Chekhov. In 1870, on the Bengali language was published a collection of fables of I.A. Krylov, the translator and author of the foreword Mudhushudon Chattopadhyay. In the 1879-81th, the scholarship holder of the Ministry of Education was attached to the St. Petersburg University Nishikanto Chattopadhyay for learning Russian. Notable are his articles and letters about the Russian folklore and works of A.S. Pushkin.

It is well-known interest of L.N. Tolstoy to the East, his correspondence with Taraknath Das and Mahatma Gandhi. In addition to art, literature and poetry spread genre of journalism. This manifested itself in attracting by M. Gorky in 1912 to cooperating in the journal "Sovremennik" of the editor of "Indian sociologist" Shyama Krishnavarma. In Russia, the popularity of R. Tagore grew, especially after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913.

Progressive social thought of Russia (N.G. Chernyshevsky, N.A. Dobrolyubov) studied India irrespective of academic and university Indological School. Materials of India published in the wake of the current events in the form of popular science articles and reviews, political pamphlets, reviews, informative notes and short communications in the "Politika" (Politics), "Khronika" (Chronicle), "Bibliografiya" (Bibliography). Progressive Petersburg magazines "Russkoe slovo" (Russian word) (1859-66 biennium.) "Delo" (Case) (1866-88) published materials with capacious contents with the Indian theme.

Russian interest in the visual arts and architecture of India increased during the XIX century. This was due to the expansion of urban development in Russia itself, the search for new architectural forms. In 1871, the Russian Academy of Arts sent to India architects, including L.V. Dahl (son of V.I. Dahl), for "the study of ancient architectural monuments that can serve the development of archaeological materials for the foundation of Russian architectural style." Materials about various genres of art in India - surveys, reviews, popular science articles - were regularly published in "Zapisky Vostochnogo otdeleniya Russkogo arheologicheskogo obshchestva" (Notes of the Eastern Branch of the Russian Archaeological Society), "Zhurnal ministerstva Narodnogo prosveshcheniya" (Journal of the Ministry of National Education), "Khudozhestvennye novosti" (Art News).

The political situation in Hindustan did not give the possibility to establish bilateral relations, in the eastern policy of the Russian ruling circles India played a role subordinated Russian-British relations. Russian-Indian relations were based not on a formal basis. This, on the one hand, gave them the immediacy and humanity, on the

other - deprived of their consistency and regularity. However, relations between peoples of Russia and India have tended to sustainability. The prerequisites of mutually beneficial cultural and scientific exchanges were created.

#### 4. Discussions

In the pre-revolutionary period of theoretical discourses dominated one-dimensional formula in the interpretation of a number of problems and schematic understanding of Russian-Indian cultural contacts. Costs of such approach are obvious exactly in the cultural paradigm the relations between Russia and India have gained an adequate place of their role and relationship system. Nevertheless, among the authoritative experts of this period can be noted a whole pleiad of researchers. However, their works used today indirectly to a greater extent because of their inaccessibility (Porfiriev, 1891).

Historical-culturological literature of the Soviet period, which touches the issue of "East-West", pointed out the inconsistency of the ideological approach. Previously, the theme of "Russia-India" were covered along with comprehensive views, the focus was made on the specificity of trade and political contacts in specific historical boundaries. A similar statement was the result of a simplified approach to research; this fact makes it possible to its critical perception. However, thanks to the researchers of this period little known documents were available (Shokhin, 1988; Vigasin, 1983).

In modern Russian historiography, there were many comparative cultural studies of India heritage reflection in the culture of Russia. With regard to the post-Soviet period, we can talk about the new conceptual opening of geographical and semantic space of the East. Despite the fact that the changed socio-cultural circumstances assumed equal opportunities for access to the study of previously forbidden cultures, analysis of the literature of the late XX - early XXI centuries allows to conclude about explicit differentiation of value developed chronotopes of "non-Russian". Artistic images of European states, North and South America countries, even Israel, consistently marked as "other", "foreign", "alien" space. India appears as the world, which is close, related to the direction and nature of philosophical and spiritual quest.

Modern authors draw their image of India, found different points of counting and the original framework of opposition of East and West. India comprehended in a new way, faced with numerous positions, of certain styles and genres, little considering the accepted criteria. Author's approaches finds support in most of the Indian traditions, which identify the different levels of existence: elements of the universe, the seasons, the colours of the spectrum, with an emphasis on the mentality of Russian culture, peculiarity of the Russian way of life and thought (Gachev, 1993).

For intellectual line of modern Russian literature it is significant an appeal to the image of India as the original sample of harmonious existence of man in himself and in the world, self-sentiment and rhythm of existence. This is an example of contemplation, lack of vanity, self-reflection that distinguishes Western mentality of people with their mobility, cold logic and endless race for the prizes of life. Rethinking of the principles of life refers us to the history, culture and religious beliefs of India, changes the nature of our worldview, which conditions our belonging to the most ancient strata of the concept "Russian national character", rooted in the ancient Indo-European culture (Nasrutdinova, 2010).

Interesting is the problem of the so-called "feedback", i.e. the study of the image of Russia in India. Appeared the first in domestic research science on the characteristics of the formation of Russia's image in the mass consciousness of the peoples of India, giving to it positive characteristics and saturation of new content (Shaumyan, 2011; Zagorodnikova, 2008).

In the future, historians see the further research, which will be designed to demonstrate the ideological, aesthetic, and scientific value of historical and cultural heritage in the various relations of the peoples of the Volga region and Hindustan. Tatarstan and India have already identified the areas of cooperation, including scientific, cultural, allowing Tatarstan authoritative experts to go on a serious international level, what is absolutely deserved. (Mrathuzina, 2001)

Historiographical boundaries of the article does not allow to dwell on all the judgements of identifying of realistic image of India in Rus and in Russia. So the question is considered only insofar as it is necessary for an understanding of the meanings of these realities.

Considered aspects of the designated theme were not considered in previous studies in a generalized sense.

#### 5. Conclusion

Thus, the most appropriate national identity of Russian culture and the essence of Russian life remained literature - the most imaginative and ideological art form. Hence the so-called "centralism of literature" of

Russian culture, due to which the philosophy and social thought, to a large extent were inspired by literary images, stories and ideas, which undergone approbation in literary works. In addition, in literary criticism, closely associated with journalism, there was "literating" of social reality and its perception through the prism of literary images: characters, situations, scenes.

Censorial conditions and plant vigilance in culture stimulated only by the fact that literature became a civil platform in Russia, assumed the universal functions. There are several possible explanations: sacralisation of words, especially written, associated with the origins of the Christianization of Rus and Orthodox culture traditions; "rehabilitation" of the word as meaningful centre of Russian literature, carried out during the XVIII century. In Russia; the growth of social influence national journalism in the XIX century. A literature of the late XX century became a specific mechanism of survival in culture in extremely difficult for it social and historical conditions.

Thus, ancient Greek travellers and philosophers have outlined the first image of India - "the land of miracles and wise men", and at the turn of XVIII-XIX centuries. The European romanticists created the image of India - an ideal, spiritual, mystical country, opposing material, pragmatic, rational West. These images were conditional, reflect their own aspirations and needs of their creators, matched with the real illusion. Antique image of India prevailed throughout the Middle Ages and early modern times, and its real image rooted in European, including Russian, culture only in the XIX-XX centuries.

It should be noted that the theme of the Indian realities and realities in Russian culture requires a fundamental study of a variety of sources and a wide range of typological parallels in the history of cultural and ideological traditions.

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