THE STATE IN EURASIA

Local and Global Arenas

Edited by
Anita Sengupta
Suchandana Chatterjee

MINISTRY OF CULTURE • GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD INSTITUTE OF ASIAN STUDIES

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LOCAL AND GLOBAL ARENAS

Anita Sengupta
Suchandana Chatterjee

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Contents

1. Post Soviet Indo-Russian Relations and the Image of India in Post Soviet Russia

Hari Vasudevan

I

It has become a near orthodoxy in the twenty years following Soviet disintegration that the tenor of Indo-Russian relations has been a pale shadow of the intimacy of the Indo-Soviet friendship. The Druzhba that Surjit Mansingh termed 'not quite an alliance' has not only failed to find new force in the two decades that followed the end of the USSR, but within half that time, its vivacity and vigor diminished to a point where the relationship lacked distinction and luster. Possible explanations are easy to find in whispers at South Block or in the debating circles of the Institute for International Relations and the International Economy off Leninskii Prospekt in Moscow. However, they drift into the vagaries of personality and chance and seldom provide that far reaching clarifying insight that is genuinely instructive.

Figures such as Andrei Kozyrev and G. Kunadze of the Ministry of External Affairs of the Russian Federation have been fall guys for what took place—the Westernisers who broke with Soviet friendship and evolved the pander to Washington and London that are said to have characterised the early years of the Yeltsin Presidency. But that this 'phase' in Russian foreign policy (firmly denied by Kozyrev in his memoirs) lasted for merely two (albeit crucial) years, is ignored in such arguments.

A firm conviction, meanwhile, has been expressed by India's 'old Russia hands' that the new Russia wished to distance itself from the Soviet legacy and policy moved to work away from stress on old commitments such as the one to India. This has been an important over-arching

explanation, and draws in a range of actors in the changing scenario of post-1991 and the cultural mood of its social and political elites. But the perspective requires more subtle nuances integrated. For, as I have pointed out elsewhere, when dealing with the economic relationship, changes in the discourse on needs and requirements might alter, but they could also find common ground.[1] Again, by the same logic as that applied to India, Iraq and Syria should have been abandoned, and the lack of any tendencies in this direction is an indication of limitations to the proposition.

To revert, finally, to arguments that trade fell away, and that this crucially changed the character of the relationship, there is evidence to suggest reorientation and continuity rather than fall in trade from 1992 if the territories of the Russian Federation of the USSR are considered independent of the Former Soviet Union. There is also evidence to indicate greater force in the economic relationship than is customary, given the enterprise of India's private sector. It may also be stressed, that changes in trade patterns had begun during the Gulf War when the three way 'swap deals' between Iraq, India and the USSR came to an end. Hence, the malaise that affected the relationship must find other factors by way of explanation that are more long term than those that relate to the disintegration of the state or the policies and character of the Russian Federation.

Apologists for the Indo-Russian relationship—mainly to be found in the SIS of the JNU in Delhi and the ranks of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow—have pointed to a troubled time of economic disruption in Russia during the privatisation and inflation of the Yeltsin reforms. They have also pointed to compulsions innate in the logic of post-Soviet dismemberment that required introversion in Russian foreign policy and a focus on the 'near abroad' (i.e. the countries of the former Soviet Union). The implications of the reading are that the apparently low level of India-Russia interactions came of disorientation and material weakness. They have also pointed to clear evidence that this did not prevent bonhomie between India and Russia, citing Russian steadfastness in supplying India with cryogenic rockets despite the US opposition, continuous take-off of

aircraft from Russia by India in the mid 1990s, a steady stream of high level summits and the ebullience of Evgenii Primakov's approach to India both as Minister of External Affairs and as Prime Minister. In the 2000s, the list expanded to include President Putin's inclusion of India in the list of investors in Sakhalin oil, the commitment to raise trading levels announced in 2006, and the easily worked out commitment by Russia to supply nuclear energy plant to India in the aftermath of the Indo-US nuclear deal.

This does not make room for the clear indication that firm coordination of policy in crucial areas such as Central Asia was not sought. Nor does it explain why industry that was still prey to the controls of the state ignored links with Indian economic actors, whether statist, para-statal or private. It fails to draw in changes in Indian perspectives. Indian policy makers, led by Montek Singh Ahluwallia in the domain of economics and finance, and Brajesh Mishra and Shiv Shankar Menon in the realm of foreign policy, have systematically made a bipartisan commitment to a new relationship with the US that has become the cornerstone of India's international relations, fervent denials notwithstanding.

A bottom line that may be universally accepted in the circumstances—and better left as a pro-tem verdict on the subject—is that Indo-Russian relations has not been the same as Indo-Soviet relations. The world had changed and the countries with it. Computations of the balance sheet to arrive at positive or negative balance is, as in all such cases, a matter of the calculator, the figures and the assumptions of the person undertaking the calculation.

II

What has been remarkable in the ping pong of the discussion of Indo-Russian relations, though, is that all the assessments have been based on rapid scissors and paste work from the press and the internet, supplemented by learned interviews with learned/unlearned statesmen and policy makers—often mixed with excellent but unexplored insight. There has been, for instance, no analysis of the economic relationship of the level that was conducted by Nirmal Chandra or Padma Desai for the

Indo-Soviet relationship. There has certainly been no examination of the social context, or the impact of the changes that have taken place because of disintegration.

It is within this context, I would argue, among the subjects that require attention, is the subject of mutual image construction as it has evolved in the last two decades. In circumstances, especially in Russia where image-building has radically altered since 1991 and the social apparatus for negotiation and engagement with image construction is weak, this is a subject that cannot be ignored. In many ways, some of the issues mentioned above—the chinks in the Indo-Russian relationship—are the upshot of nature of communication and conception at a social level. They are linked to national and personal projections in the other country and must be treated and analysed as such. To do so is not easy, but it is the intention of this lecture to take a short step forward. Working out of a historical perspective, this article presents an evaluation of image formation of India in Russia today against a background of perspectives on the past.

The discussion does not limit itself to the strictly visual or verbal. This has been done in the case of the current subject, by R.H. Stacy in his focus on literary metaphor in pre-revolutionary Russia,[2] or writing on the painter, Vasilii Vereshchagin's, India series.[3] However, it has been clear that these aspects of 'image' have taken shape in a broader context to obtain and evoke elaboration and authority. The implications of the sociological literature on the subject, some deeply philosophical, have pointed to this. Images are often phenomena that are centred in political and economic discourse, and sometimes pivot on personalities or groups of personalities that draw on such discourse. The image of India in Russia and vice versa has been composed of all of this over time. It has also been made up, as in the past, by the technological parameters generated by time and circumstance. Today's circumstances are a particular diversion along a path well trodden, but constituted now by distinct factors.

III

The foundations of this subject have been the focus of earlier scholarship. Over two decades ago, during the heyday of Perestroika

in the USSR, in a major statement on the image of India in Russia in the past, G. Bongardt Levin and A.A. Vigasin[4] traced sources of the imaging of India in Russia from the middle ages onwards. Drawing attention to the importance of texts such as the Alexandrine Romance in the early second millennium CE, they showed how these Byzantine collections of stories of India during Alexander the Great's campaign to the Indus spawned illustrations and descriptions. They further showed the importance within a limited sphere of the 15th century traveller, Afanasii Nikitin and others—somewhat later—in the 18th century, such as Raphael Danibegashvili and Gerasim Lebedev.

Vigasin's later writing showed the complex nature of this image formation—pointing to the contribution made by Indian traders, who not only supplemented Russian links and connections with Iran, Central Asia and India, but also provided inputs into pictures that members of Russian society were keen to form of India. This is clear from the Indologist's remarkable essay on the Astrakhan merchant, Raghunath, his fellow merchant and relative Narotam, who stayed in St. Petersburg in 1733 at the palace of Prince Cherkasskii—heir to the Kabard explorer and cartographer of the Caspian and Central Asia—appealing before the Senate against judicial decisions taken against him in the matter of the succession to Raghunath's property. They provided information about Indian languages to the 18th century official G. Ya. Ker, and this led to larger conversations.[5]

The late 18th and 19th century further developed the points of contact and communication, through Russian translations of ancient Indian classics and a firm awareness of the British Empire in India. The visits of Saltykov and Vasilii Vereshchagin provided important images in Russia of India. As P. Shastitko and Tatiana Zagorodnikova have shown more recently, it was further supplemented by images provided by Helena Blavatskii, Tsarevich Nicholas, Nicholas Roerich, and those coming to Russia by chance from India—Maharajah Dilip Singh, the adventurer Balaji, the musician Inayat Khan, and so on.What remains uncertain is the range and importance of such image formation.

Certainly before the early 19th century, a degree of rigor and

sophistication was wanting, and the images and notions were the concern of a limited elite in Russia—though communities existed (the Tatars for instance) where this was less so. Cartography in India, while existent, was not well developed and certainly was not widely known. Impressions were linked to specific individuals and experiences. A substantial difference can be noted from the late 18th century at this level, and travel became easier and information more accessible in the mid-19th century. In Russia at the same time, the social life of such imaging acquired a greater force with alterations in the use of the print media. The images formed during this time and after have had a degree of importance overall in the period that has followed, even if they have been reformulated off and on.

In political circumstances where what the British officer Connolly called the 'Great Game' was unfolding during the mid-19th century, the geography and security arrangements for British India had a specific value. But it is uncertain how far Indian conditions attracted public attention and left an impression on the Russian society. Information concerning individual events connected with India has been noted. When Vasilii Vereshchagin exhibited his oils of India done in the 1870s—oils that covered an area from Rajasthan to Delhi and the Himalayas,[6] his exhibition received attention according to the statistics. But the circumstances leave an unclear picture. In 1880, Vereshchagin presented his India series—along with his Balkans series. The exhibition took place at the Bezobrazov house on the Fontanka in St. Petersburg. The footfall was over 3,00,000; and when he repeated the show at the Society for the Encouragement of Art in 1882 the footfall came to 32,000.[7] The meaning of these figures remains an enigma, though. Was the footfall a testimony to Russian nationalism concerning the Balkan wars or Russian curiosity concerning the east? Why did Vereshchagin present the series in tandem? The only conclusion to be drawn is that the exhibition was placed before a large number in the public and finds echoes in Vereshchagin's Central Asia series and Palestine series. Whether in passing or directly, they focused attention on 'oriental' locales. This certainly was the feature of Imperial Russian public life.

That this, as well as the reviews in the 'thick journals' of the time

of histories and other literature on India, developed a taste for things eastern is beyond dispute – as was to be demonstrated in other instances (such as the other 'events' and occurrences mentioned above). True, the Russians were primarily fixed on their own history—and mobilised the whole gamut of social and human sciences to pursue it. Equally, private enterprise, such as that represented at the Moscow exhibition of 1888, had almost nothing from 'oriental' spaces of the Empire.

In Russia, 'images' in the strict sense, at the time of the Revolution, were formed, with a degree of modern technical sophistication, at three levels. Sound was mass produced and circulated in country bars as well as the homes of the rich.[8] But this tended to be almost wholly Russian songs. The magic lantern had been in existence since the end of the 19th century and focused, where used, on Russian locales, but could run to use of photographic material on China and Central Asia, but not India.[9] Film was exclusively Russia focused, with some work on the border provinces of the Empire—though with nothing that is known about India. These areas supplemented the highly advanced print media—all of which (journals, newspapers, novels, essays), though, included India material, normally culled from British sources.

Such images supplemented high and low theatre and folk practice—some of which included song on military campaigns. The theatre certainly included Indian themes (as in the case of the showing of Shakuntala on the eve of the Revolution). That 'oriental' taste figured among the Russian public and were the product not only of official concern, but private curiosity, and local enterprise, cannot be doubted. Equally, though, it must be stressed that these were tastes focused on China, Central Asia and Persia—countries and regions in various ways under Russian influence.

What took shape as an 'image of India' varied in the circumstances. It drew from the local lore of different communities—Muslim and Buddhist especially—which was never generalised in the newspapers and thick journals that made up the core of public perceptions. In the mid-19th century, in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and in the press, the image of an exotic colonised nation stood out. The notion of deep commitments to mysticism and philosophy were the focus of Indologists and publicists.

The modernisation of the country, even in the Presidency towns, was hardly ever touched on. Rebellious sentiments against British rule and regions on the point of insurrection were also to draw attention, though there were no discussions of the implications of such rebellion for the Russian Empire.

IV

It was under the Soviet state that the Planned Economy and the rigors of an all-Union perspective on cultural policy guided by the CPSU, and many pluralist aspects of the manner of image formation in the Russian Empire disappeared. This is not to say that much did not survive in memory, in academic study and in the course of the development of religious practice. But at the time of standardisation through a system of universal education that originated in the 1920s, the printed word came to have great social compass and meaning—and a uniformity was introduced into what was produced and recommended. The range that the state and the Communist Party possessed to direct and regulate culture was reinforced by material aspects of Soviet society—especially the formation of centrally regulated housing around the industrial centres that grew up around the Planned Economy. These blocks of communal flats were structured with mass entertainment inbuilt (mainly 'clubs' and cinema houses). Collectivisation of agriculture achieved some element of regulation in the countryside after its first onset in the troubled years of 1929-32. The private space of the home and the shared apartment was penetrated by radio (before the war) and television (from the 1960s).[10] The state, and through it the Communist Party, had full control over these media, as it did over the major newspapers and journals.

From the 1950s, independent India came to have a unique place in the list of recommended subjects for interest in educational institutions, succeeding a special place that China had occupied in the years immediately following the Communist revolution. India fitted into the ranks of the countries that had special relations with the Soviet state without being a direct part of the Warsaw Pact and the Comecon. Whatever images existed or were sponsored about politics or history in

India, they came to receive greater stress than was the case of many other countries in Asia an Africa. Both in the printed media, the radio and the visual media, programmes on India were given special status from the time of a special mention of the country during the Khruschev years, when K.P.S. Menon was ambassador.

The composition of this image was quite at variance with that which had evolved in public life under the Russian Empire. It was a picture that was built up by a new breed of Indologists who specialised in the Soviet version of Oriental Studies that took shape in the 1920s, which integrated less industrially developed and colonial nations into an overarching framework of patterns of economic and social change, based on Marxist categories. A considerable mobilisation of material took place to provide the foundations of this endeavour. It was undertaken by the All Union Association of Oriental Studies, the Scientific Centre for the study of Colonial and National Problems and other prominent institutions of the 1920s. It did not deal with esoteric literature concerning religion and mysticism—though the Oriental Studies Institutes were permitted to continue with some research on these areas. S. Oldenburg and A. Scherbatskoy led this trend in 'continuity'. But others focused on other issues. The names of Snesarev, Reisner, Diakov, and Antonova presented a new image of India. The character of industrial, commercial, and agricultural change, the main features of local politics, and the character of imperial policy became the focus of attention as Indians were promoted from exotic and mystical medievals to fellow workers in the cause of universal liberation.

The propaganda pamphlets of the early USSR conveyed these impressions. And when India's independence came, in the mid 1950s, following Nehru's visit to the Soviet Union and the Khrushchev-Bulganin visit to India, the aspirations of the national state were projected. In Moscow, a shop with fine products and curios from India attracted attention of the Soviet nomenklatura from the 1960s.

It should be emphasised, however, that the character of cultural policy had a firm Soviet centre to it. The construction of 'nationality', especially after the Stalin years, was more restricted than was the case in

the Russian Empire, whatever the nature of a heavy Russian accent on the Empire at that earlier time. The 'construction' excluded the elaboration of the experiences of Soviet 'nationalities' outside the territories of the USSR in the past and ideology and rhetoric foreclosed any positive assessment of alternatives other than the political choices that brought them into the Russian Empire. The interest displayed in broader spaces that were associated with ethnicity, religion and history that were part of the character of cultural self awareness as it manifested itself among different communities during the time of the Empire, was now circumscribed. Only when these could be used to the advantage of the USSR were they encouraged. Hence, Tatar and Buryat nationalism narrowed in range. Armenian and Turkmen nationalism that could be used to effect in Persia, was permitted a different range. Quite distinctly, as a result, India lost a degree of standing in nationality areas that were Muslim or Buddhist. However, the overall focus on this 'friend of the Soviet Union' provided a more enhanced status at an authoritative central government level than had been the case in the past.

Most important, at a broader, non-governmental level, the Hindi feature film came to acquire a special role in Russian public life, where the run of the mill entertainment from Hollywood penetrated in dribs and drabs. After the display of Hindi films at a festival of 1954, the products of Bombay filled a special role in Moscow's life—as they did in Soviet life generally. These ranged from those films in which Raj Kapoor acted ('Awara') to Mithun Chakravarti's output ('Disco Dancer'). They provided a lightness and happiness that the somewhat grim output of Soviet cinema could not compete with. The products of Hollywood of this era were that too soul searching and complex for Soviet audiences looking from a break from a hard life of queues and a production line that was slow to innovate on labour saving technology.[11]

V

The streamlining of culture in the USSR, and the exceptional role given to India in what took shape, quickly transformed in the successor states in the post disintegration period. In the Russian Federation, this

was partly linked to the technological revolution that took place in the country, where the visual media were suddenly open to digital modes of which state organisations had no real knowledge. The 'opening' of the country to foreign enterprise and the lifting of curbs on circulation of foreign print, visual and audio material occurred at the time of a major change in such media in the west when the internet and PC and the mobile phone became a source of cultural construction. Opportunities galore were suggested by the new technology. There could be no government choice in the matter of what was seen except in terms of the refusal of permission of various organisations to set up their organisations in Russia and steps to prevent access to material. The complexities and limitations of doing this have been evident in regimes such as those in Central Asia and Myanmar, not to mention the PRC, once computers and internet services are accessible. Curbs in the Russian case became even more difficult given the lack of preparedness of Soviet official institutions to deal with this material and—more important—the lack of certainty about when and how curbs were to be applied at a time when Russian public/official life was proceeding through major changes and 'democratic' values were in the ascendant.

The early years post-1991 witnessed the arrival of visual diskettes in large number—to be followed quickly by VCDs and DVDs, and the generation of this material in Russia. Private enterprise on small and large scale participated in the distribution of the profusion of visual images in the country. In parallel, authorisation was given for the formation of a series of major TV stations that were associated with private business houses. These included the oligarch Gusinskii's NTV. Standard TV became more diversified and imaginative. Regional channels also arrived and with them cable television, which gave access to a variety of locales. In border areas, a series of channels from the newly independent states were also available—catering to a range of tastes and ethnic interests.

The film output of the US and various dubbed versions of European soap operas held pride of place in the entertainment industry of the new Russia. This occurred at the time of further changes in everyday life. Consumption and consumer products became loaded with culture-

specific tags. In the USSR, advertising had been rare in any developed form. In Russia, it became the rage in a short time. The profile of consumers was set around a 'Russian' core in the country, even if there was no large scale out-migration of non-Russian group in cities or regions. In numerical terms, non-Russian ethnos with whom Russians had coexisted came to be concentrated in newly independent states other than Russia when disintegration took place. This affected the advertising strategies that new companies, independent of state curbs and directives, devised for the Federation. Material that drew from Eastern European and Western European lifestyles and customs was found appropriate for such strategies.

This was even more so since the bulk of companies that provided advertising learned their lessons from the West. What is left of this first wave is symbolised by Tom Gins, Mikko Lehtinen, Vesa Manninen, and Joachim Back—major producers in the late 2000s of commercials. Equally, although a host of private companies from various countries set up shop in the Federation in the post 1991 years, there was a tendency for US and European companies to lead the pack, working from the advantages bestowed on them by the Freedom Support Act and the various packages originating in EBRD schemes for Russia. Although many withdrew over time, they provided templates in production, packaging, and production that remain prominent.

In the circumstances, India gradually lost status in what may literally be called the public eye. The Hindi film, for instance, which had been a major item of popular consumption, had to compete with other fare that achieved similar ends. Potential viewers normally subscribed to special channels. Indian products found their way into the Russian market, but normally as low cost items with little advertising. It was only in the case of tea that India acted as a ready reference point—with projections of the country around the product. But even here, the competitive edge of Sri Lankan and Kenyan products limited the edge of the image.

In a number of republican locales within the Russian Federation, however, individuals who had failed to make the 'big list' in the case of the USSR, suddenly found attention. Initiatives were also undertaken at

a regional level that gave India prominence. In Bashkortostan, the fresh look at distinguished individuals of the past included a positive evaluation of Togan Validov, a major Bashkir nationalist of the revolutionary era who ended his life in Turkey. Significantly, any mention of his life automatically led to India since he had conducted a correspondence with the liberal politician M.A. Ansari. Elsewhere, in Tatarstan, a singular case may also mentioned that has an 'India' flavour that is of interest. Musa Bigi [Musa Bigiev] (1875-1949) found attention in the new literature on the Tatar intelligentsia, and with him accounts of a larger world of Islam that he represented that drew him to India. Bigiev's life was one of those included by the Tatar Republic in its list of biographies recommended for schools and higher institutions of learning.[12]

Bigi went to the Apanaev madrasa in Kazan relatively early in life—completing his early years in a Russian school at Rostov on the Don, and moving on in accordance with the wishes of his mother, Fatima Khanum who wanted to see him a religious Islamic scholar. He was clearly not satisfied by the Kazan's atmosphere, where the Muslim community was dominated by influential traders, living within the confines set for them by official life run by Russian gentry and the Orthodox Church.[13] The changes the educationist and public activist Ismail Bey Gasprinskii was inspiring at this time were yet to take seed against the background of conservative Islamic commitment and Tatar-Bulghar pride. Bigi then spent years between an Islamic education (in Bukhara and Samarkand) and Russian schools until he drifted to Istanbul.

Here, under the influence of the Tatar Akhet Zade he decided on more disciplined study in Egypt and the Hijaz, which led him to India and scholarship that was Hindu and Muslim. He met scholars of different faiths, read the Mahabharata and a range of Hindu literature, learning Sanskrit as he did so. Years of further reading followed, initially in Egypt (three years) and later Syria—from where he returned to Russia in 1904.

Quickly emerging as an activist, Bigi worked with newspapers in St. Petersburg during the revolutionary years (1904-05). Following this up with scholarship on the history of the Koran he took a hand in the administration of a madrasa in Orenburg. Comparative religion

attracted him repeatedly. For instance, he pointed to the problem of long fasts for Muslims of northern regions, after a visit to Finland in summer 1910 in his essay 'Fasting during Long Days'. He evolved an eclectic sense of Islam—with a concern with the forgiving nature of God, taking issue with eminent figures of Islam in Tatar country, such as R. Fakhruddin and Z. Kamali. He remained in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution, and met and discussed issues of Muslim education with Lenin, before setting out to travel and read in 1923, proceeding by way of Berlin and publishing a strident critique of Marxism in his 'ABC of Islam'. This earned him a term in prison on his return. But he was able to get out and left the country by way of Turkestan and Xinjiang—never to return—in 1930.

Bigi spent some time with friends in Bombay before making his way back to his old haunts in West Asia. But his ecumenical sense of faith drew him once again to India and to studies of Sanskrit texts in Banaras as well as to Berlin and a series of journeys in search of complex patterns in Islam. Although years in British prison in Peshawar and a wandering existence were his fate during this time, Bigi's devotion to his spiritual quests was unrelenting—leading him to exhaustion and death in Cairo in 1949.[14]

Important to note, the fresh attention paid to Bigi's life in Tatarstan does not imply that this has been a figure around which there has been a 'gathering' in favour of India. But attention to a range of figures whose catholicity of interest allowed them to think more broadly has permitted local exploration of connections where India figures. This, however, has had to vie with the rise of fundamentalist Islam among Muslims as a whole in the Federation—as a consequence of which attention to India might not always lead to positive perspectives.

Let me draw attention to another local instance of attention to India in the Federation.

In the town of Samara, the projection of an image of India, stretching over a large provincial domain and extending to a larger national space, has been the achievement of a local organisation whose roots lie in innovative aspects of latter day Soviet educational thought that has been given new life in the Federation post-1991.

That image is firmly connected with an initiative of Nikitina and Yuri Rodichev and their Centre of Spiritual Culture. This was a venture set up during late Perestroika, before Soviet disintegration, when institutions were falling apart, goods were in short supply and inflation was picking up. Many felt it important to focus on what held people together and made life worth living—without costing vast sums. Using the technology available, the founders evolved a school, an exhibition space, and, with some Indian help, a publishing house. From this base, they organised travelling exhibitions—which targeted other provincial towns, and went abroad. India figured prominently in their permanent exhibition: the attractions of India as a place of contemplation and the draw it had exercised over Russians such as Nicholas Roerich; and the range of Indian culture more generally. Over time, the Centre became a place for young people to get together, for mothers to leave their children knowing that this would not be an ordinary creche.

The departure was not unusual. Educational initiatives outside the routine of state schooling were jealously guarded under the Soviet state from Party encroachment and disciplinary action. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* was the centre in the 1980s of the journalists who supported out of the ordinary education that projected the most creative aspects of the world. Initially such initiatives were the focus in the so-called 'communard' movement organised by the Communist educationist I.P. Ivanov, who detested the bureaucratic straightjacket of Stalinist education. The tradition was taken up by Richard Sokolov, V. Khiltunen, O. Marionicheva, B. Minaev (the chief editor of the 'free thinking' journal *Ogonek* during perestroika), the Nikitins and V. Iumashev (whose principles finally led him to head Boris Yeltsin's administration).[15] It was into the hands of a group stimulated by this tradition that the reputation of India had passed in Samara.

The modern building and exhibition halls that feature India prominently are the upshot—as are translations of the 'Ain-i-Akbari' in Russia and large Roerich calendars for 2007.

Such records may be supplemented by others. The list would include the regular tourist migration to Goa, the ISKON sponsored visits to

Brindavan and the pilgrimages of Russian Buddhists to Bodh Gaya and Dharamshala. They would also include the special popularity of the work of Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth among the rapidly growing readers of English in the Russian Federation.

VI

These elements, distinctive though, have not snowballed into a phenomenon of significance even with the stout support of the Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre of the Indian Embassy in Moscow on occasion. They have remained a piecemeal even if important to groups and regions. The state of affairs contrasts firmly with, say, the image of the US or China or smaller countries such as Britain or France.

Why this is so is an important question. Many possible arguments exist—some of which revert to the issues highlighted during the introductory section of this presentation. To point to the more serious possibilities here, however, is beyond the scope of this article, which is more concerned with drawing out the rough outlines of the anatomy of a phenomenon rather than providing a more general evaluation of its significance.

Notes

1. Hari Vasudevan, *Shadows of Substance. Indo-Russian Trade and Military Technical Cooperation,* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 2010).
2. R. H. Stacy, *India in Russian Literature,* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1985)
3. Bruk, Yakov, *Vasilii Vereshchagin,* (Moscow: Skanrus, 2004)
4. G. Bongard-Levin and A. Vigasin, *The Image of India,* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984)
5. *Izuchenie*, p. 66 ff.
6. Yakov, *Vasilii Vereshchagin.*
7. *Ocherki Istorii Leningrada* (Nauka 1956) vol. 2, p. 646.
8. See Ivan Bunin's first novel, *The Village*, set in post 1905 Russia, for instances of the gramaphone's use in the most.
9. For some of the range covered by Russian photographs, see Chloe Obolenskii, *The Russian Empire. A Portrait in Photographs*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980). To date, there is no evidence that Russian visitors to India photographed at this time, let alone filmed. But the full output of the Consulates in Bombay and Calcutta have not

been examined from this point of view.

10. TV arrived in Soviet Russia before the Second World War, but its large-scale use dates to the 1960s.
11. See Sudha Rajagopalan, *Leave Disco Dancer Alone. Indian Cinema and Soviet Movie going after Stalin* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008). Rajagopalan quotes many instances to demonstrate the popularity of the Hindi film. Typical is the following statement. 'Once I had children, I did not go out much. However, I went once a week to the Indian film club—This time was sacrosanct, non-negotiable. A friend was in love with Mithun...she recently travelled to India, looked for his home and waited outside to meet him. It was only her return ticket home that forced her to abandon her wait.' (p. 30).
12. *Tatarskie Intellektualy. Istoricheskie portrety,* (Kazan: Magarif, 2005).
13. See the fine essay on Kazan province in B.B. Veselovskii, *Istoriia zemstva za sorok let,* St. Petersburg, 1909-11, vol. 4.
14. *Tatarskie Intellektualy* op.cit. pp. 203-212.
15. V.V. Shubin, *Ot 'zastoia' k reformam 1917-85 gg,* (Moscow: Rossspen, 2001).

Since the emergence of post-Soviet states in the Eurasian space there has been considerable reflection on the role that the state has played in the local and global arenas. Transformation from being part of the 'Soviet' to independent existence has meant state involvement in the forging of new nations out of disparate identities based on the criteria of national languages, the reinterpretation of historical events, depiction of personality-centric themes, the portrayal of illustrative careers and the rhetoric of development. This volume focuses on some of the aspects of this involvement through studies of the performative role of the Central Asian states in the arena of politics, diplomacy, culture, historical memory, and their interaction within the Eurasian space. It reflects on ways in which the state reacts to society and how discourses in the field of economy, society and culture dovetail with or diverge from the political discourse about state-building. Relations between formal institutions and informal structures; emerging conceptions of democracy in the context of the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the disruptive events in western Kazakhstan during the twentieth anniversary of the republic's independence; the nature of bilateral and multilateral alignments among regional and interregional actors are some of the aspects through which the role of the state has been examined by the authors. The volume seeks to address the question of how the state acts as an agent of influence and control not just on performative traditions but also in the creation of a single community as the basis for a nation.

Anita Sengupta is Fellow at the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata. She works on the Eurasian region with Uzbekistan being her area of special interest. She has published on issues like boundaries and state formation, the question of minorities and minority identity, gender, geopolitics, problems of transitional politics and culture in the Eurasian region.She was awarded her PhD in Political Science from the University of Calcutta on the theme *Language, Religion and State Formation in Central Asia - A Case Study of Uzbekistan* in 2001. Her e-mail is anitasengupta@hotmail.com.

Suchandana Chatterjee, Fellow at the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata, has been associated with the institute since 1993. Her research interests include regional and connected histories of Eurasia, marginalized identities of Eurasia, representations on Eurasia's transition, the Buddhist space of Asiatic Russia and Central Asia etc. She is currently working on the project *Post-Soviet images of Kazakhstan: a cosmopolitan space with borderland anxieties.* A student of history, she was awarded doctorate degree by Calcutta University in 2002 for her thesis *Emirate of Bukhara, 1868-1924: Encounters with transition*. Her e-mail is suchandanachatterjee@hotmail.com.

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