

'Rich India' of Our Ancient Legends (India in the Russian Periodicals of the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century: Social and Economic Aspects)

Indian Historical Review

37(1) 111–133

© 2010 ICHR

SAGE Publications

Los Angeles, London,

New Delhi, Singapore,

Washington DC

DOI: 10.1177/037698361003700106

<http://ihr.sagepub.com>



S.E. Sidorova

Research Fellow, Russian Academy of the Sciences

Centre for Indian Studies, Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow, Russia

Abstract

In comparison with other countries, India and especially its social and economic life could hardly be placed among the subjects which were regularly discussed by the Russian press. Nevertheless, these publications offer an idea about what the image of India was in Russia, what the Russian people knew and thought about India's socio-economic and particularly agrarian problems, what was the range of questions they were interested in, and in what perspective and context these questions were being considered. Russian interest in India was determined by several governing factors, such as existence of certain common tendencies in the social and economic life of both the countries, perception of their own path of development as different from the West, confrontation of Britain and Russia in Central Asia and by pure economic considerations, among them, competition of Russian and Indian commodities in the world market, desire of the Russian commercial circles to start direct trade with India and borrowing English agricultural practice in India. Russian journals became the source for this article, both literary monthly ('fat magazines') and economics journals.

Keywords

Ancient community, Anglophobia, Aryan, civilization, cultural type, foreign trade, India, Indologist, Slavophil, *sobornost*, Westernizer.

'India, which I will tell you about today, is a very remote country, and most of us have very little information about it. Only from time to time, when something that touches our interests occurs there, or our feelings become excited, does that country attract

attention'.¹ In this way in 1897, Professor A.I. Voyeikov, geographer and Corresponding Member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, started his lecture on the state of the Indian grain industry, delivered to the members of the Imperial Free Economic Society. These words offer quite an exact idea of how the theme of India was presented in the Russian press during the period under study.

In comparison with other countries, India and its problems could hardly be placed among themes regularly discussed by the Russian press in the nineteenth century. If we turn directly to publications on India, we can notice that they were mainly discussing history, culture, art, literature, ethnography, native customs and religions, while attention to India's social and economic life remained quite insignificant. This could be explained, chiefly, by the insufficiency of Russian–Indian trade and economic relations and lack of prospects for their intensification throughout the nineteenth century. Though commodity circulation between India and Russia took place for centuries and Russia was a usual consumer of Indian goods, Russia did not establish direct and firm relations with that country until the end of the period under review, due to the lack of a convenient and safe land route through Central Asia and the weakness of the Russian merchant fleet to compete successfully with Great Britain on shipping routes. After India turned into a British colony, its foreign trade fell into the hands of the English. The lion's share of Indian goods came to Russia via Great Britain and other European countries. Consequently, there was no explicit idea even of the volume of Russian–Indian trade and commodity nomenclature. Suffice it to say that official statistical accounts began to place information about Russian–Indian trade in a separate line as late as 1894, and the first Russian consulate in India (at Bombay) was established in 1900. This situation, painful in itself, was aggravated by tensions between Russia and Britain in Central Asia, their rivalry for spheres of influence there, the permanent British fear of Russia's 'threat' to India and repeated Russian attempts to play the Indian trump with the purpose of strengthening its position in its confrontation with Britain in Europe. This could explain the strong desire of Britain to impede the Russian penetration into India, in particular the Indian market, in every possible way.

The limitations and difficulty of Russian–Indian contacts determined an obvious peculiarity of Russian press publications on the Indian economy. It was rare for press contributions to be written by those who had visited India—Russian travellers, participants of research expeditions, merchants (who often fulfilled secret service missions)—however, most of the authors proceeded from information obtained from foreign sources, mainly English, as well as French and German. However, those publications give an accurate account of the public image of India in Russia, of what the Russian people knew and thought about India's socio-economic problems, the range of questions they were interested in, and in what perspective and context these questions were being considered and why.

¹ *Trudy Imperatorskogo volnogo ekonomicheskogo obschestva* [Proceedings of the Imperial Free Economic Society], Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 60.

Though the number of publications on India was relatively small as compared to other topics covered by the Russian press, extensive materials accumulated during almost half of the century to make it possible to answer the above questions. This research is based on the materials from journals which published long and detailed analytical articles. I chose the best-read journals with the greatest influence on the public opinion, which were published in the two Russian capitals—official St. Petersburg and unofficial Moscow. These journals could be divided into two groups. The first group includes literary and political journals, so-called ‘fat magazines’, intended for broad and mixed readership. Among them we should mention such journals as *Vestnik Evropy* (The European Herald), *Vostochnoye obozreniye* (The Oriental Review), *Delo* (Deed), *Mir Bozhy* (God’s World), *Otechestvenniye zapiski* (Home Country Notes), *Russkaya beseda* (The Russian Talk), *Russkiy vestnik* (The Russian Herald), *Severniy vestnik* (The Northern Herald), and *Sovremennik* (The Contemporary), which gained popularity in the mid-second half of the nineteenth century.² The second group of journals, which is of special interest in the context of the present article, includes periodicals of strictly economic orientation intended for narrower readership, which published articles and surveys on the economy of Russia and other countries, official economic materials, statistics and all kinds of commercial information. Such journals appeared in the mid-nineteenth century and their number greatly increased by the end of the century. Among these are *Zhurnal manufaktur i torgovly* (The Journal of Manufactories and Commerce), *Torgoviy sbornik* (The Trade Essay Collection), *Vestnik finansov, promishlennosti i torgovly* (Finance, Industry and Trade Bulletin), *Ekonomicheskiy zhurnal* (The Economic Journal) and *Trudy Imperatorskogo volnogo ekonomicheskogo obschestva* (Proceedings of the Imperial Free Economic Society).³

There was good reason to choose the late 1850s and the turn of the 1860s as a starting point for this work. It was the time when developments both in Russia and India gave a powerful impetus to more dynamic progress of the economies of both countries, to their active involvement in the world trade system and therefore to an inevitable and clearly defined movement towards greater mutual interaction and influence. After the power in India was transferred from the East Indian Company to the British Crown in 1858,

² *Vestnik Evropy*: 1866–1918, St. Petersburg, monthly, in the 1870s its circulation was about 6,000 copies; *Vostochnoye obozreniye*: 1882–1905, St. Petersburg, from 1888—Irkutsk, weekly, in 1901 circulation was 12,000 copies; *Delo*: 1866–1888, St. Petersburg, monthly, in the 1870s its circulation was about 4,000 copies; *Mir Bozhy*: 1892–1906, St. Petersburg, monthly; *Otechestvenniye zapiski*: 1818–1884 (off and on), St. Petersburg, monthly, in different times, its circulation varied from 2,000 to 8,000 copies; *Russkaya beseda*: 1856–1860, Moscow, once in two months; *Russkiy vestnik*: 1856–1906, Moscow, from 1861 monthly; *Severniy vestnik*: 1885–1898, St. Petersburg, monthly, in different time circulation from 2,800 to 4,000 copies; *Sovremennik*: 1836–1866, St. Petersburg, monthly, in the mid 1860s, its circulation was 2,100 copies.

³ *Vestnik finansov, promishlennosti i torgovly*: 1885–1917, St. Petersburg, weekly; *Zhurnal manufaktur i torgovly*: 1825–1866, St. Petersburg, monthly; *Torgoviy sbornik*: 1864–1873, St. Petersburg, weekly; *Ekonomicheskiy zhurnal*: 1885–1893, St. Petersburg, monthly; *Trudy Imperatorskogo volnogo ekonomicheskogo obschestva*: 1765–1915, St. Petersburg, during this period there were 281 issues, there was no accurate periodicity of issuance.

the British authorities, strongly pressured by the bourgeoisie, gave a start to a purposeful government policy of economic and social modernisation of India to create in the colony favourable conditions for the influx and activity of British capital, to switch the Indian economy to the consumption of foreign, mainly British, goods, and service external markets. Economic reforms of the 1860s went hand-in-hand with reforms of government, the legal system, the army and education, which led to the formation of a new bureaucratic, military and personnel infrastructure to suit the new economic interests of Great Britain. Russia also saw tremendous changes at that time. Serfdom was abolished in 1861. It signified a transfer to capitalist relations in the countryside and promoted the labour market required for rapid development of capitalism in agriculture as well as in industry. The next ten years saw other reforms in local government, law, education, finance and the army. Together they laid the foundation of the bourgeois state in Russia and were directed to facilitate further development of capitalism and civil society.

The Russian press showed interest in Indian developments irregularly. Long lulls occasionally intermitted with a flow of publications. At the end of the 1850s it was the Indian Mutiny of 1857–59 which aroused ‘the keenest interest of the present time’.⁴ It is important to note that the attention of Russian periodicals to India was determined not only, and not so much, by the pure cognitive interest as by pragmatic reasons. Russia and Great Britain were old rivals on the international scene. The might of the British Empire rested on its huge colonial possessions, mainly in India. So Russia’s curiosity about the outcome of the Mutiny, as well as the future of the British Empire in India and the status of the Great Britain in Europe and in the world was anything but idle. *Russkiy vestnik* wrote in 1858:

The sheer possibility of the loss by England of its Indian possessions gives publicists ample room for conjectures. What impact will the secession of India have on the general progress of European history? What will be its influence on the current political situation in Europe? ... Will England be able to retain its former significance?⁵

It is clear from this that Russian interest in India was often determined by Russian–British relations, and that many contributions to Russian periodicals were more centred around British activity in the colony than around India itself. This was true not only for the end of the 1850s but for the entire period under consideration.

Anglophobia however did not rule supreme in the Russian press although the weakening of Britain in India was viewed as politically and economically advantageous for Russia. On the contrary, in the same *Russkiy vestnik* we find not merely positive but exalted comments about everything the British were doing in India. So, the reader learned from the article, ‘The Present and the Future of British India’ by Professor G.A. Vyzinsky, who specialised in British history, that India possessed natural resources

⁴ *Russkiy vestnik*, Vol. 13, p. 243

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

which created conditions for 'tremendous economic growth... of that blessed country'. However, the author said, 'India does not produce even ten per cent of what it could produce... There are natural forces, but no sufficient labour and capital to put them into action...'.⁶ It was the British who brought to India what it was lacking. East India Company activities came under scathing criticism during the Mutiny. Vyzinsky, on the contrary, did his utmost to justify it when he asserted that 'during the last thirty years the Company did not overlook any branch of agriculture'. Such energetic work, in the opinion of the author, promised India a radiant future. The poverty and misery of the agricultural class, the author thought, could hardly be blamed on the Company since 'the British found just such conditions when they first appeared in India'.⁷ Full of compassion as 'India had to suffer because the existence of England needed it, or England would have perished', Vyzinsky called upon his readers not to forget that 'together with the merchant, planter, manufacturer, official, soldier, civilization with all its blessings enters India, that it is introduced in that country even despite its will, participation and knowledge. And this justifies many passing drawbacks of British rule in India'.⁸

It is time now to make a digression on certain landmarks of Russian life at that time. The degradation and crisis of serfdom in the 1840s–50s made Russia look forward to inevitable changes. The Russian intelligentsia was heatedly discussing the future national destiny. Two confronting trends emerged in the Russian social thought: Slavophiles and Westernisers. In brief, the main feature of the Westernising ideology was its recognition that Russian development was to take the Western path and overcome its economic and social backwardness drawing on the experience of the advanced Europe. Hence the enthusiastic tone of the above article in *Russkiy vestnik*, which was the principal mouthpiece of the Westernisers in the mid-nineteenth century. Such famous Russian journals as *Otechestvenniye zapiski* and *Sovremennik* initially shared that stance. In 1857, *Otechestvenniye zapiski* published an article on the 'Sepoy's Mutiny' which said:

If there is something to be regretted in this crisis of the British might, it is the future that failed, the work of the whole century that perished, which is to start again from scratch, having to give up for another century the progress of a public civilization that brought such ample fruit....⁹

Sovremennik carried in the same year a large contribution by a prominent Russian public figure, one of the ideological leaders of the revolutionary democratic movement in the late 1850s and early 60s—Nikolai Dobrolyubov, 'A View of the History and Modern Conditions of East India' (the article was published under the pseudonym of N. Turchinov). Not sharing the opinion that the reason of the Mutiny lay in Indians'

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁷ *Russkiy vestnik*, Vol. 13, pp. 293–97.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁹ *Otechestvenniye zapiski*, Vol. 115, No. 11, p. 40.

aversion to European civilisation, Dobrolyubov insisted: 'It [the discontent of the Indian people] was directed most likely against the British method of introducing civilization in India',¹⁰ 'European civilization was applied to the needs of the people awkwardly, their essential welfare was sacrificed to the order of state administration'.¹¹ 'All good intentions of the British served to only further worsen the living conditions of the Indian people instead of improving it... Britain still had as an ultimate object the national and personal self-interest not the cause of civilization'.¹² It was these reasons, not the European values themselves, as introduced in India by the British, which, in the opinion of Dobrolyubov, 'aroused the bitter discontent of the Indian population'.¹³ Placing Russia among the European countries, Westernisers believed that it also was to bring the benefit of enlightenment to indigenous peoples, and in this joint civilising activity they saw the ground for integration of the British and Russian interests in the East.

If Europe has a vocation for the revival of Asia, European peoples including Russia must act in concert and share the happiness of expanding their influence in the East... Each nation for its external influence ought to seek such a field where it could be of benefit to entire mankind. For us such field lies in the East, since we have nothing to teach our neighbours in the West. In the East, on the contrary, our activity could be positive and wholesome. Terrible chaos and numbness reign in Asia. Evolution has stopped there.¹⁴

Slavophiles, on the contrary, insisted on the originality of Russia and its fundamental difference from the West. The Russian specificity, in their opinion, based on those elements of Russian reality which least of all were subject to change since the reforms of Peter the Great (Peter I who reigned from 1689 till 1725), first of all on Christian Orthodoxy adopted from Byzantium in a pure form, and *sobornost* (the community spirit) that became especially apparent in the preservation of the Russian landed community. This made Slavophiles doubt whether the adoption of European political and cultural development patterns was justified for Russia. After the abolition of serfdom, Slavophiles and Westernisers ceased to exist as separate ideologies. However, the ideas they had elaborated concerning the roads of Russian development—European or independent—were reflected in the later schools of Russian public and philosophical thought. Thus the ideas of Russian originality added to the arsenal of Narodniks (literarily 'populists', a generic name for Russian democratic forces of various political and ideological affiliations) of the 1870s–80s.

At the turn of the 1860s, Slavophile journals, such as *Russkaya beseda*, were busy with reflections and discussions about the fates of the Slavic peoples and shrugged off

¹⁰ *Sovremennik*, No. 9, p. 88.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁴ *Sovremennik*, No. 4, p. 324

the Indian topic. Later periodicals, favourable to varying extents to the ideas of the specific Russian path, offered in their contributions on India an interesting approach to the evaluation of its situation. The assumption that Russia differed from the West made the authors question the benefit of European values for countries different from the West as well. In particular, they were sceptical about the results of the civilising mission of the British in India, and called to a more sensitive and cautious attitude towards native elements of life in India. Moreover, they found certain similarities between Russia and India.

Keen public interest in the second half of the nineteenth century in the history and future of the rural community in Russia facilitated the attention of the Russian public to the similar phenomenon in India. The moderately liberal *Vestnik Evropy* wrote in 1876: 'As is known, recent conclusions of comparative political economy proved that all Aryan peoples initially had "rural communities", which have vanished by now from a greater part of Europe, and survive only among the Slavs. All types of these "communities" exist in India'.¹⁵ The author insisted that these communities secured welfare and prosperity of the Indian rural population and were 'the most faithful support of the conquerors'. 'The Hindu lives in the community as in a small republic, not worrying about what is on around until his existence as peaceful farmer and patriarch is broken... and, most probably, the government will encourage community system instead of destroying it as it was in other parts of Empire. Acting this way it would be consistent in its wise conduct'.¹⁶

The Indian community often attracted the attention of the journal *Delo*, one of the most influential democratic periodicals, which placed great emphasis on peasant problems. Its assessments bore no trace of the trademark gentle reserve of *Vestnik Evropy*. In 1873 one could read in a contribution by S. Shashkov, famous writer and publicist of his time, that the British land reform, having introduced large and small landownership and destroyed the rural community, 'worsened the people's life in many respects in comparison with the time before the British rule, and brought in its wake economic disorder and poverty'.¹⁷ A few years later, the journal published the article 'British Colonial Policy as a Factor of Economic Progress in India', which made a lengthy description of the Indian community followed by a conclusion, remarkable for its present topicality, regarding the fundamental difference between Western and Eastern cultures:

We willingly assume that there was no civilization in India, as in the entire East, if we mean by civilization a special type of European culture... But why should not we assume that a peculiar culture could emerge in the East without the element referred to as civilization? ... As Europe developed a certain type of culture, which it termed civilization, other peoples could develop their own particular type of world culture as well... As it is not possible to

¹⁵ *Vestnik Evropy*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1876, p. 854

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 856.

¹⁷ *Delo*, No. 2, pp. 86, 90.

measure two incommensurable magnitudes using one yardstick, it is also impossible to compare the benefits and weaknesses of two nations because their cultural types represented two social contrasts that we call individualism and solidarity (the former belongs to the cultural type of Western Europe and the latter—to the East in general terms).¹⁸

Solidarity referred to here was the same as *sobornost* in its Slavophile interpretation and Russia in this context proved to belong to the East, together with India. The author of an article published in the weekly *Vostochnoye obozreniye*, of a liberal and democratic orientation, expressed his opinion harshly as well. He cast doubt on “‘economic progress”, the ruthless companion of the European civilization that drew a distinction between the starving majority and the fed-up minority’.¹⁹ True to the ‘notorious principle’ of *laissez faire*, *laissez passer*, the author contended:

the British never thought that the main reason of the impoverishment of the Indian people lay in the gradual destruction of the ancient Hindu community system... which even the most liberal reforms could not stop... no Britisher is able to understand the concept of property unless it concerns private property... They believed that, having destroyed caste and community, they had done the best that could be required of the ‘humane’ civilization of the European. The result was quite the contrary.²⁰

And further:

Conditions that facilitate the intellectual and material progress of the Indian people can appear only when the British government rejects its favourite principles of arm-chair policy and takes the path of purely popular policy concordant with Indian traditions, in other words, makes sure, at last, that the liberal and bourgeois order and the system of administrative centralisation cannot replace ancient community life and mutual responsibility that existed in India before the British conquest.²¹

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the Narodnik movement, with its belief in the special Russian way, Russian peasantry and peasant revolution, ceased to play a prominent role in the public life of Russia, though some of its ideas survived. At the very end of the century, in 1898, we find in the literary, scientific and political journal *Severny vestnik*, which adhered to moderate liberal positions, the article ‘India and Its Peasantry’. The editorial preface to it said: ‘This article describes the life of Indian peasants and the Indian land community that has much in common with the land system of our peasantry’.²² The author started with a mention of the forty years since the Mutiny of 1857–59, when ‘much was done to develop the material resources

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁹ *Vostochnoye obozreniye*, published in *Glazamy druzeiy. Russkiye ob Indii* [Through the Eyes of Friends. Russians about India], Moscow, p. 282.

²⁰ *Glazamy druzeiy. Russkiye ob Indii*, p. 275.

²¹ *Glazamy druzeiy. Russkiye ob Indii*, p. 280.

²² *Severny vestnik*, p. 159.

of the country... but in spite of all these apparent tokens of progress, public welfare improved only negligibly'. 'For the British administration'—the author continued—'particular features of the economic life of India long remained an enigma. Testifying to how little the administration understood the essence of the land community was the fact that in a greater part of India the British recognized the community acres as the property of zamindars, who were virtually no more than tax collectors. Through this the community was destroyed and the rural population pauperized'.²³ 'In all branches of administration... the English government, guided by the best of intentions and exerting huge efforts, destroyed for no reason at all those ancient grounds that supported the rural order of India and erected an alien system on the sand'.²⁴

At the same time, another wing of Russian society that inclined to West European values and way of development believed that none other than the community system was to blame for the agricultural decline in Russia (principal disputes surely concerned domestic problems) and thought that the replacement of community landownership by private property would be useful. They projected this view onto their evaluation of Indian reality. In 1877, *Vestnik Evropy* published the article 'The Irish Policy and Famine in India', which contained statistics of the number of famines in the colony since the end of the eighteenth century. The author saw the reasons for such distress of the Indian people in insufficient efforts of the British themselves: there was not enough time to cover India with railway and irrigation systems, construction of irrigation systems remained unprofitable and neglected relevant Indian experience... Moreover, turning to the community topic, the author wrote:

It is not to be forgotten that the Hindu does not possess land. Under the community system of landownership he virtually is no more than a tenant who gives half and in some provinces two thirds of his income to the government. Therefore Indians are unwilling to introduce agricultural improvements. To achieve this, land should be given them as permanent property, as it was recommended.²⁵

By the end of the nineteenth century, with the strengthening of capitalism in Russia, increase of the working class and the rise of its movement, the idea of involvement of Russia in the common European historical process found more and more followers. They were actively joined by representatives of the revolutionary democratic movement, who, contrary to the Narodnik ideology, acknowledged the progressiveness of capitalism in comparison to feudalism. Acceptance of the idea of European progress told upon the character of press materials about India. In 1897 the political, literary and scientific monthly *Mir Bozhy*, which popularised the ideas of 'legal Marxism', carried the article 'Famine in India'. Its main idea was that the British government was not to be blamed for all calamities and misfortunes in India. So, a big passage was written to prove that the land rent in the colony, collected from zamindars or peasants, was not

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

²⁵ *Vestnik Evropy*, Vol. 6, No. 11, 1877, p. 390.

high. ‘It is not the tax burden that lies heavy on India. If its welfare falls, it will be for other reasons. But does its welfare really fall?’²⁶ the author wondered. The data then produced by the author demonstrated an increase in the Indian budget and external trade.²⁷ He agreed that the Indian peasant was in heavy dependence on moneylenders. He explained:

But the land rent was not the only, and for the most part not the main reason of the indebtedness of Indian peasantry, and not the rent gave rise to usury... It is not so easy to help the Indian peasant as it would appear at first sight. Together with economic difficulties it is necessary to overcome ideological ones. Some regions of India are overpopulated, in the others, which are not sterile, the population density is very low. But the Indian peasant is extremely conservative; he rather dies of starvation in his homeland than risks to change his residence’.²⁸

As to famines, the adoption of the Famine Code in India made efforts against the latest calamity, in the author’s opinion, more successful than on all previous instances. The author argued with the Russians who viewed famine-related economic troubles of the British with some satisfaction, gloating over that fact that ‘even the civilised British solve the problem of crop failure no better than us’. The author insisted that ‘establishing a correct parallel would be very useful to us—not in terms of self-satisfaction and complacency but, something just the contrary, in terms of the awakening of our respect for European culture and ability to make use of others’ experience’.²⁹

Regardless of what kind of internal policy in India different journals considered to be preferable, we hardly find at least one satisfactory estimate of its social and economic situation, except for occasional positive comments on infrastructural development. The poverty of the Indian people, recurrent famines in which millions perished—such were the facts all journals without exception mentioned. However, we ought to draw attention to the following characteristic tendency. Estimations suggested by journals of the conservative and moderate liberal orientation as a rule were remarkable to certain extent for mildness and reserve, and their comments were full of sympathy with the British, respect for the efforts they made, regret for their failures and misfortunes, and belief that in the future their activities would bring excellent results. At the same time, journals that represented the democratic wing of society were noticeable for special concern about the fates of oppressed peoples, that is to say, sympathy for the misfortunes of the Indian population and consequently harsh criticism of British policy in the colony.

The limits of this work do not allow covering all materials on the related subject presented in the literary and political journals which were in the centre of our attention until now. However, I should like to note some characteristic tendencies of these publications. Probably the most distinguished feature is their definite directivity to

²⁶ *Mir Bozhy*, p. 149.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

consideration of the social problems of India, such as the standard of living and public welfare and a change of living conditions, as a result of particular measures taken by the British. Articles on pure economic subjects were seldom published in this type of periodical. As a rule, information about the Indian economy bore the character of occasional inclusions in publications covering broader topics, and was usually related to the analyses of problems connected with the condition of the Indian people. It is also necessary to say that the periodicals represented different and at times opposite views on the same problems of India. Developments in Russia often had something in common with certain aspects of Indian reality that awakened genuine interest of the Russian public. Their evaluation and treatment usually depended on the inclination of a particular edition to a particular public and political movement in Russia. We cannot but pay attention to another salient feature of the entire nineteenth century Russian press. Russian readers were fairly ignorant on India, so every time the authors started the story about that country with a description of landmarks of its history, location, population, geography, climate, the history of the British conquest of India and principal aspects of British policy in India. The profundity and degree of detailing differed: there were sketchy descriptions as well as detailed and thorough accounts.

Economic journals depicted the socio-economic situation in India from another point. Their materials concentrated on business, with analytical descriptions of particular economic branches—mainly agriculture—and statistics of farm yields, domestic and foreign trade turnover, lists of commodities and specialisation of trade, etc.

Such information was mainly needed by members of the business and trade community, Russian merchants and industrialists interested in the most objective coverage of the domestic and world market situation. Though the publications in economic journals were not overtly political and were rather neutral and circumspect in their assessments, the interest in the Indian economy which they reflected was rooted in practical objectives. Analyses of such publications reveal three factors, which I regard as principal, explaining attention of the Russian business community for certain aspects of the Indian economy.

First, it was Russian–Indian competition in the world market, which gained momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Russian economy was developing in an independent state, which was building an empire of its own. In post-reform Russia, big and small industry was making dynamic progress, while in India, the metropolis was consciously developing agriculture at the expense of local industry. However, Russian industry in the second half of the nineteenth century was still lagging behind Western Europe and America. Unable to compete with European and American industrial commodities, Russia was mainly attractive in international trade as a supplier of agricultural produce and raw materials. It resembled India in that sense. That was why Russia felt an interest in such Indian agricultural commodities that coincided with Russian exports. Second, the involved circles of the Russian community were eager to start direct trade with India and intensify it. Hence their interest in such Indian commodities had no analogues in Russia and had to be imported. Last but not least, Russia was pursuing an active colonial policy to incorporate and develop neighbouring

territories, especially the Caucasus and Central Asia, whose climate and geographic conditions largely resembled that of India. That was why Russians sought to borrow and emulate the Indian economic experience.

As early as 1858, *Zhurnal Manufaktur I Torgovly* carried a contribution titled ‘The Industrial Situation in India’, which aimed ‘to give our readers an idea of industrial and agricultural potentials of India’. It said, in particular:

When the strife presently rending India calms down, no doubt, Her Majesty’s Government will pay deserved attention to the development of the fabulous Indian productive forces. Then, that country will acquire tremendous importance to Europe... Apart from general cognitive interest, this theme specially concerns us because many Indian commodities are also leading Russian exports. Understandably, it is no mere curiosity that makes us wonder what India can offer and so what influence its exports to Europe might have—nay, it is a matter of essential importance to Russian industry.³⁰

Zhurnal Manufaktur I Torgovly mentioned ‘cotton, indigo, sugar, hemp, flax, oil, opium, maize, wheat and rice—a list to which tea, spices, resin and vegetable dyes ought to be added’ among principal Indian products.³¹ However, the Russian press paid the greatest attention only to some of those goods—to be precise, wheat, flax, linseed, jute, cotton and tea.

Russia had been the world’s biggest wheat exporter since the start of the nineteenth century. In the mid-century, Russia and the United States (US) together ‘met half the global need for grain’.³² At that time, India, whose soil suited all European grain crops, did not yet export them. However, Russian traders were uneasy even at that time. ‘So long as India has no easy means of transportation, we cannot say with any certainty what influence Indian wheat, barley or oat might have on European markets. But judging by the unprecedented fertility of the Indian soil, it will eventually be a tremendous influence’.³³ This forecast of 1858 came wholly true. The last fifteen years of the nineteenth century made India the world’s third, after Russia and the US, for wheat exports to Europe. A.I. Voyeikov, with whose words the present work opens, wrote about the situation in 1885–86:

At that time, a majority of West European countries not self-sufficient for grain were accustomed to its imports from Russia and the United States, with their long-established reputation of Europe’s breadbaskets. They were amazed to see skyrocketing grain imports from India, while grain-exporting countries were wary of India as a strong competitor in the international grain market.³⁴

³⁰ *Zhurnal Manufaktur I Torgovly*, p. 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³² Gulimbasharov, *Vsemirnaya torgovlya*, p. 39.

³³ *Zhurnal Manufaktur I Torgovly*, p. 15.

³⁴ *Trudy Imperatorskogo Volnogo Ekonomicheskogo Obschestva...*, p. 60

Great interest of the Russian business circles in Indian wheat was indicative in this context. Though the absolute amount of wheat export from India was far below that of leading countries,³⁵ Indian exports were the first to satisfy importers' demands in case of Russian or American grain shortages. Thus, the bad Russian harvest of 1891, with an ensuing grain export suspension, drastically reduced Russia's share in grain trade in 1892. The problem was easily settled with a bumper harvest in the US and increasing exports from other countries, mainly India and Argentina. 'This tremendously indicative and instructive fact clearly shows that international grain trade could stay afloat without Russian participation... With token exceptions, the US, Canada, India and Argentina alone benefited from the calamity that struck our country...', *VFPT* wrote on the occasion.³⁶

The journals carried long analyses alongside current commercial information that helped the interested public to keep abreast with even the smallest ups and downs in the world grain market. Vast information about Indian grain gave Russian readers a general picture. Wheat had become the dominant Indian export at the expense of cotton by the mid-1880s. Britain was the principal consumer of Indian grain. Other importers included Belgium, France, Holland, Egypt, Spain, Arabia and Italy due to 'special qualities of Indian wheat, especially good for pasta production'.³⁷ Indian export wheat came 'solely from Bombay, Sind and Bengal, small amounts coming via British Burma'.³⁸ The decade of 1876–85 saw Indian wheat exports grow almost tenfold, the greatest increase falling on the last five years.³⁹ However following 1886, reports about grain exports from India and comparison to previous years showed that export was not increasing after the peak of the mid-80s, and even had a negative trend.⁴⁰ In his report of 1897, Voveikov pointed out: 'Even at that time [1885–86] I predicted that India would hardly retain its position of those days'.⁴¹ The author thus explained it: 'Densely populated, India demands a great amount of grain for its own people'. It has not much virgin land, and the scanty available plots 'are mostly wooded or extremely arid' and so demand irrigation. Even if this were provided, it would be far more reasonable to use this land for more expensive plantations, as tea or rice. 'This is why we have small reason to be wary of India as grain-growing competitor, though a certain amount will be exported due to its quality, especially valued in the European south'.⁴² That was why economic journals always took into account the population's grain stock as they evaluated prospects for Indian grain supply to Europe.

³⁵ *Vestnik finansov, promishlennosti i torgovly* (hereafter *VFPT*) published quarterly and annual reports on foreign trade of leading European countries, from which such information can be obtained. These reports show nomenclature and amount of the goods these countries imported including from Russia and India.

³⁶ *VFPT*, No. 7, 1893, p. 424.

³⁷ *VFPT*, No. 36, 1886, p. 627.

³⁸ *VFPT*, No. 11, 1886, p. 762.

³⁹ *VFPT*, No. 5, 1886, p. 333.

⁴⁰ *VFPT*, No. 36, 1890, p. 681; No. 39, 1889, p. 874; No. 7, 1891, p. 406.

⁴¹ *Trudy Imperatorskogo Volnogo Ekonomicheskogo Obschestva*..., p. 60.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 68–70.

Though such information was mainly meant to help Russian traders with planning their own short- and long-term transactions, when we regard it as a whole and in its development, it revealed general trades and processes in the Indian economy. British capitalists were eager to use the Indian economic potential to ever greater effect and so were extremely interested in providing purely economic incentives to improve the quality of Indian farm produce, shift the peasant economy to a commercial footing and re-orient it from the domestic market to the foreign. Great efforts were made to meet those ends. However, even though the latter half of the nineteenth century saw certain progress to start a steady increase of Indian foreign trade, there was oblique evidence indicating that Britain had smaller success in that respect than it would like to. Food had to be stocked up as crop failures and resultant famines were rather frequent in India and the quality of export grain was shrugged off. All this showed that the subsistence economy was still dominant, India was too slow to incorporate into the system of commodity relations, and its farmers were not eager to attract lucrative foreign clients.

In response to the rise in price for wheat and its increased demand in the second part of the seventies, the Indian countryside allowed the maximum increase of the supplies of grain of the quality and quantity it could offer. The long stagnation in wheat exports that followed the upsurge only confirmed the unpreparedness of the Indian agriculture for intensive development, even though Europe was ready to consume substantially more of that product. The indifference of agricultural production to the ups and downs of the market and the demand of external consumers was an even more convincing proof. As a rule, prices for agricultural products were formed by the amount and quality of the local crop and were determined by the existing supply which, in its turn, provided an increased or decreased demand for it—not the opposite, as it was in economically developed countries. This characteristic feature of Indian agriculture was marked by Russian contemporaries. *Torgoviy sbornik* wrote as early as 1864: ‘With the low capital activity in India, the rise in prices for corn and other necessities did not cause relevantly intensive development of production, as it would certainly happen in the country with a fast turn-over of capital...’.⁴³ But twenty years later the situation did not change, according to the journal *VFPT*:⁴⁴

As for the prices... the comparison of the average figures for one quarter of Indian wheat in India and London showing their complete unconformity leads to the conclusion that the prices in India little depend on the ups and downs of the European markets and are determined by other reasons, mainly, by yields.

In a similar way the situation was described by *Ekonomicheskii zhurnal*: ‘Indian wheat prices are mainly regulated by the amount of crop and only partly by prices in the European markets’.⁴⁵

⁴³ *Torgoviy sbornik*, No. 18, 1864, p. 138.

⁴⁴ *VFPT*, No. 34, 1885, p. 562.

⁴⁵ *Ekonomicheskii zhurnal*, No. 4, 1885, p. 67.

Russia is known to be the traditional world exporter of flax and hempen. *VFPT* said in 1886: 'Russia is the principal producer of flax and hemp'.⁴⁶ But, the journal added, 'flax and hemp consumption could probably be higher if cotton and jute—a plant, which can partly substitute them—had not been used'. According to *Zhurnal manufaktur i torgovly* of 1858, 'though flax has been cultivated in India from time immemorial, the emphasis was made not on fibre but on seed, which was used for oil production'. It said further that with proper care, Indian flax could produce fibre competitive with European flax.⁴⁷ But experiments made in India did not change the situation and the country continued to compete with Russia in flax seeds exports. According to the *VFPT*, in 1890 India already exported this product to Europe in an amount twice exceeding the Russian export.⁴⁸ That was why statistics on the flax sown area, yields, prices and exports from India appeared in Russian journals as regularly as on wheat.

The conquest of the European market by Indian jute made Russian producers more anxious. Jute has been known in India since antiquity and was used for the manufacture of tick, sailcloth, string and rough canvas for the packaging of cotton, sugar and other goods. By the 1880s, jute was used also for the production of carpets, upholstery, plush and even velvet. In Europe, jute or 'Indian hemp', as it was also known, appeared in the 1830s. European jute industry began to develop rapidly in the 1850s.⁴⁹ Jute was much cheaper than flax. Therefore, many flax mills, at least in England, shifted to jute spinning. This change became possible because it required only small changes in loom construction. The following figures appeared in the *VFPT*: the number of looms in the British flax manufacture had increased 6.5-fold since 1856 and 23-fold in jute procession.⁵⁰ However the same issue of the journal expressed the following idea, more or less comforting to Russian flax exporters: 'The increase of jute consumption comes from its low price though machinery can hardly reach such an improvement in jute spinning and particularly finishing in the near future that would make it possible to produce textiles none inferior to flaxen'.⁵¹ If this forecast gave Russia grounds to hope for maintaining its positions in flax exports, the situation with hemp did not look so bright. Hempen was made of hemp fibre which was rougher and cheaper than flax. It was interesting for the Russians that hemp in India was 'cultivated not for fibre, but for the extraction of an intoxicating juice it contained with further preparation of a fairly strong poison'.⁵² However, hemp ropes and sacks were more expensive than jute. In 1890, the report of the foreign trade of France for 1888 published in the *VFPT* said: 'The reduction of hempen imports in favour of jute has been common the last

⁴⁶ *VFPT*, No. 35, 1886, p. 554.

⁴⁷ *Zhurnal manufaktur i torgovly*..., p. 14.

⁴⁸ *VFPT*, No. 2, 1890, p. 57.

⁴⁹ *Zhurnal manufaktur i torgovly*..., p. 13; *VFPT*, No. 35, 1886, pp. 554–59; No. 44, 1888, p. 370; No. 43, 1895, pp. 296–97.

⁵⁰ *VFPT*, No. 35, 1886, p. 558.

⁵¹ *VFPT*, No. 35, 1886, p. 558.

⁵² *Zhurnal manufaktur i torgovly*..., p. 13.

twenty years—due to unfair competition of southern fibre plants in the production of cord, sacks and other packaging. That is why hemp sown areas have shrunk.⁵³ The same journal said in 1895: ‘Jute exports to European countries often exceed flax and hemp taken together’.⁵⁴ Indian jute pressed Russian hemp not only in Europe, but slowly began to enter the Russian internal market. *VFPT* reports permanently listed jute among products imported to Russia from Britain (that is, from India). According to *VFPT*:

As a matter of fact, being permanently and noticeably increased, jute import to Russia is still not sufficient, therefore, jute for us is not particularly meaningful... However, comparatively low jute price makes even Russian factories set up little by little the production of jute goods.⁵⁵

Cotton was a common topic in Russian publications. Just like in Britain, textile, the leading industry in nineteenth century Russia, depended on external sources of raw materials. The US and India were principal suppliers of cotton to the Russian and British markets, although the Indian share was smaller than the US. According to *Vestnik Evropy* of 1871, Russia imported annually 1 ml poods (old Russian measure of weight equal to 16.38 kg) from India, and total consumption of cotton exceeded 3 ml a year including 2 ml supplied from America.⁵⁶ ‘Our factories produce a considerable amount of rough and middling cotton fabrics, and so require Surat cotton exported from Bombay for their manufacture. Since there are no direct trade contacts between Russia and India, all this cotton trade is entirely in the hands of foreigners. It is ordered from warehouses in Europe’.⁵⁷ That was why Indian raw materials were too expensive for Russian consumers. Short supply of cotton in the world market in the 1860s caused by the Civil War in the US suspended American exports and made India one of the biggest cotton suppliers for some time. Cotton prices skyrocketed in India, and sown areas and exports considerably increased too. *Torgoviy sbornik* remarked in 1864: ‘A simultaneous rise of prices for flax seed and cotton, which could bring even greater profit, diverted almost all free capital of India for the increase of their production’. At the same time it caused an increased inflow of precious metals to the colony in payment to cotton producers. The journal took note of the above-mentioned ‘peculiar’ feature of the Indian economy with its low dynamism of capital:

in spite of the gold and silver influx to India the value of money is not declining. The reason for that is in the bad education of people whose demands do not correspond to the level of their enrichment as well as the absence ... of a crediting system... Since people do not know

⁵³ *VFPT*, No. 5, 1890, p. 247.

⁵⁴ *VFPT*, No. 43, 1895, p. 297.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Vestnik Evropy*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1871, p. 761.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

saving with interest-bearing securities, they make savings with gold and silver thus absorbing unproductively huge amounts of precious metals.⁵⁸

The peak of the British efforts to improve the quality of Indian cotton in an attempt to make it a competitive alternative to American fibre fell on the years of its deficit. So these efforts were no success. Interest in Indian raw materials had started to decline by the mid-1870s due to that and to the final restoration of the positions of American cotton in international trade. At the same time, those years saw India strengthen its positions as an exporter of short-fibre varieties of cotton extending the circle of its consumers due to the countries of the continental Europe, Japan and China. All these events were not reflected in the Russian press in full. In the 1880s, when serious economic editions appeared in Russia, the situation in the market changed. Cotton became cheaper than wheat and lost its position in Indian exports in favour of the latter. That was why not much was written about Indian cotton, its farming methods, treatment, crop capacity, etc., except for short notes or general remarks. In 1892, the *VFPT* wrote about a market situation which had become common by that time:

In the last years East Indian cotton is less exported to Great Britain and has found its market in other European states, mainly, in Italy, Belgium, Germany, Austria and France. In... the European countries looms at the spinning mills are adjusted to short-fibre cotton, and textiles made of East Indian staple sell well among the working classes.⁵⁹

By the end of the century, the share of Indian cotton in Russian imports shrank with its replacement by raw materials from Central Asia. The active advancement of Russia in that region in the 1860s to 90s was partly caused by its aspiration to acquire its own sources of raw cotton and get rid of the mediating European companies as well as of the necessity to overpay for foreign products. The quality of Central Asian cotton was no better than of Indian. Journal contributions on the development of cotton-growing in the Caucasus and Turkestan in the 1880s⁶⁰ show that Russians were faced there with the same problems as the British in the 1860s in India, which the latter failed to cope with. Besides, experiments in that field of agriculture in India were no longer made in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Due to all that, Russian periodicals lost interest in the vast British experience in cotton farming improvement.

Not much was written about Indian cotton as an agricultural crop. These editions, however, paid much attention to the development of cotton textile industry in the colony. On the whole, it should be noted that Russian press contributions on local Indian industry mainly concerned the textile industry. In the 1850s–70s, it was predominantly critical remarks on British finished cotton articles, their low prices and different preferences in the market which were ruining local Indian production. Later, in the

⁵⁸ *Torgoviy sbornik...*, pp. 138–39.

⁵⁹ *VFPT*, No. 18, 1892, p. 262.

⁶⁰ *VFPT*, No. 42, 1885, pp. 155–58; No. 31, 1886, pp. 274–75; No. 37, 1886, pp. 696–97.

1880s–90s the Russian press wrote much about the recovery of the local textile industry. Here is a report of *Ekonomicheskij zhurnal* of 1885:

The number of factories, spindles and weaving looms doubled in India within ten years, while the amount of processed cotton doubled in the previous six years. Production facilities mainly concentrate in the Bombay region, which might be called the Indian Lancashire. The export of cotton fabrics from India is also growing. The principal consumers of Indian yarn are China and Japan, of textile—Arabia, the eastern coast of Africa and Ceylon. However, compared with Britain, Indian exports of finished products are very small.⁶¹

The *VFPT* echoed *Ekonomicheskij zhurnal*:

As we know, the state of cotton industry in Britain is deteriorating with every passing year with competition rising everywhere... At present, the British pay great attention to the development of cotton processing in East India, which the British formerly considered only a sales market for their goods.

Statistics of the number of spinning mills, workers, and the amount of processed cotton were cited further. ‘The machines and qualification of workers at East Indian factories have lately improved so much that in this respect spinning mills in India are no worse than British. As for wages and raw and construction materials, they are cheaper than in Britain’.⁶² *VFPT* remarked the same year on the reduction of Indian raw cotton exports and yarn imports due to substantial development of cotton spinning in India and the increase of cotton consumption inside the country.⁶³ However, only rough fabrics were manufactured of Indian cotton, as before, which promoted further,

rise of yarn and textile imports even though native manufactories continued to develop strongly and reached substantial sizes... An increasing demand for foreign goods can be explained by the fact that local spinning mills produce textiles of rougher texture and with more primitive patterns, while quality items are imported from Britain, India’s principal supplier of textile, canvas and yarn.⁶⁴

VFPT reports did not offer statistics of Indian tea imports in Russia. That was natural as Russians had preferred Chinese tea before the very end of the nineteenth century. Indian tea came to Russia much later, in the last years of the nineteenth century. Its newfound popularity in the Russian market belongs to twentieth century history. However, the nineteenth century Russian economic press abounded in accounts of Indian tea. Russian public preference for Chinese tea determined the specifics of such publications—they usually compared Indian tea to Chinese in contributions dedicated mainly to the latter. Two factors determined Russian economists’ interest in Indian

⁶¹ *Ekonomicheskij zhurnal*, 1885, Nos 13–14, p. 47.

⁶² *VFPT*, No. 5, 1886, p. 306.

⁶³ *VFPT*, No. 32, 1886, p. 344.

⁶⁴ *VFPT*, No. 26, 1891, p. 781.

tea. First, tea-growing in India exemplified successful agricultural endeavour: vast plantations growing quality produce were thriving a mere several decades after tea bushes were found in the Assam Valley in the 1830s. This experience attracted Russian entrepreneurs, with their persistent attempts to start tea-growing in the Caucasus. The Imperial Free Economic Society launched ambitious experiments there in the 1880s. Indicatively, that was when journals carried numerous contributions describing in detail the history and organisation of tea-growing in India like in the article 'The Trade Turnover of Fuchow in 1884: Tea-Growing in China and India', which appeared in *VFPT* in 1885. It said that after a long period of failure, the year 1867 ushered in a new stage of Indian tea-growing, with,

serious studies of improving cultivation, and profound acquaintance with the situation in the tea market and its demands... Agricultural chemistry made a tremendous contribution with several new fertilizing systems... manual labour was ousted by steam, water and wind machines... Special furnaces were invented to fry tea in India... Special machinery has also been designed for sieving and packing.

Mechanisation not only improved 'the look and taste of tea' but reduced its prices and made it competitive to Chinese tea though labour was much cheaper in China than in the tea-growing regions of India, especially Assam. In conclusion, the author (as well as many other observers of the world tea-growing situation) insistently recommended Russian entrepreneurs to study and borrow the Indian experience despite the Russian habit for Chinese tea.⁶⁵

There was another factor determining tremendous Russian interest in Indian tea. That was its lightning progress in the world market, which badly undermined the position of Chinese tea. Even in 1857, when the Indian tea industry was only in its cradle, a Russian journal made a true forecast: 'This industry will gain strength in East India, and commerce will acquire a grand scale'.⁶⁶ Indian tea had won a steady position in international trade by the 1880s to become part and parcel of some nations' diet. *VFPT* wrote that the reduction of Chinese tea exports and a price slump were due to the rivalry of Indian tea, 'which became formidable in the early 1870s'. The 1888 contribution 'The Decline of Tea Trade in China', said: 'All Chinese chambers of commerce unanimously said in their reports that the decline of Chinese tea trade was due to the competition of Indian and Ceylon teas, which grew with every passing year'.⁶⁷ *VFPT* regularly carried facts and figures on Indian–Chinese tea competition.⁶⁸ In 1890, the journal described the increase of Indian tea supply at the expense of

⁶⁵ *VFPT*, No. 40, 1885, pp. 20–24; for the same topic see *VFPT*, No. 41, 1888, pp. 99–103; No. 23, 1891, pp. 600–01.

⁶⁶ *Biblioteka dlya chteniya*, 1857 // Khmyrov's collection, India, Vol. 7, p. 176.

⁶⁷ *VFPT*, No. 41, 1888, p. 99.

⁶⁸ See for example, *VFPT*: No. 40, 1885, pp. 19–24; No. 41, 1888, pp. 99–103; No. 43, 1888, pp. 270–73; No. 2, 1890, p. 59; No. 5, 1891, p. 289; No. 23, 1891, p. 601; No. 26, 1891, p. 781; No. 41, 1892, p. 76; No. 20, 1894, pp. 1266–67.

Chinese as ‘the usual routine’.⁶⁹ According to statistics for 1892, Indian and Ceylon tea accounted for two thirds of the British public demand and almost entire demand of Britain’s principal colonies in Australia and Canada.⁷⁰ A *VFPT* publication of 1888 testified to an active British intention to supply Indian tea to Tibet and Mongolia, and so oust Chinese traders from those regions.⁷¹ More than that, Indian green tea successfully rivalled Chinese in Turkestan and on the Kirghiz plains.

Tea was great success in the market not only thanks to its quality and reasonable prices. ‘The English are gradually getting accustomed to Indian tea,’ *VFPT* wrote.⁷² On this point the Russian press gave credit to expert promotion of Indian tea in the market. As the taste of Indian tea differed from Chinese, to which the whole world was accustomed, the British ‘deemed it wise not to accommodate Indian tea to the public demand but, on the contrary, change public tastes in favour of Indian tea’.⁷³ Indian tea was initially admixed to Chinese, its share steadily growing. So we cannot rule out that Indian tea penetrated Russia before the officially fixed date as an addition to Chinese, which was imported via Britain.⁷⁴ Indian producers’ expertise in chemistry and agronomy allowed them to regulate taste and quality according to public preferences. *VFPT* quoted facts of interest to Russian readers:

...The East Indian producer noticed that tea did not draw well in the water of many parts of Britain, while it drew with ease in a greater part of Russia, and so made it a point to regulate strength in tea varieties according to consumption geography, with greater or smaller concentration of tannin. Likewise, the English prefer milked tea, unlike Russians, so Britain values tea for strength while Russia for fragrance; East Indian planters, who have won the British market, offer mainly strong teas, while their counterparts in Ceylon, who are out to compete Chinese tea in Russia, pay ever greater attention to the aroma.⁷⁵

Market conquests of Indian tea closely concerned Russian dealers. *VFPT* wrote:

East Indian, though it appeared a mere 25–30 years ago, is successfully competing Chinese tea in the market, so there is every reason to expect that with time it will finally acquire export domination... and win a dominant position in every respect. No doubt, such a revolution in tea trade would have an impact on Russia by upsetting the presently available balance of our commercial relations with China, which mainly depend on tea trade.⁷⁶

The Russian–Chinese trade turnover increased in the 1880s as ‘certainly, the amount of Chinese tea by which its consumption in Britain shrank year after year went to Russia

⁶⁹ *VFPT*, No. 2, 1890, p. 59.

⁷⁰ Subbotin, *Chai i chainaya trgovlya v Rossii*, p. 443.

⁷¹ *VFPT*, No. 43, pp. 270–73.

⁷² *VFPT*, No. 29, 1888, pp. 143–44.

⁷³ *VFPT*, No. 40, 1885, p. 22.

⁷⁴ Subbotin, *Chai i chainaya trgovlya v Rossii*, p. 421.

⁷⁵ *VFPT*, No. 40, 1885, p. 23; No. 23, 1891, p. 601.

⁷⁶ *VFPT*, No. 40, 1885, p. 20.

to annually increase its import to this country'.⁷⁷ However, general trends of world tea trade and the above-stated efforts by British planters to accommodate to Russian market specifics certainly forebode an end to the Chinese tea monopoly in Russia: 'Possibly, Indian teas will find their connoisseurs in Russia, as well... especially due to their comparatively low prices'.⁷⁸

The Russian press paid major attention to Indian infrastructural development with an emphasis on road construction. The economic press regarded the dynamic development of roads, which connected farming and manufacturing localities with commercial centres, as an essential factor promoting domestic and foreign trade and the entire economy of India. All the more indicative were conclusions made in the contribution 'Indian Agriculture and Foreign Trade as Connected with the Development of Railway Transport', which *VFPT* carried in two issues in 1885.⁷⁹ It said that Britain was 'interested in quick and convenient commodity transportation to and from the sea coast' and so was generously financing Indian railway construction. It thus made India 'a debtor doomed to make do with interest payments without any chance ever to pay the exorbitant debt'. A tremendous national debt and 'an ever greater tax burden on the population, mainly land-tillers', was the result. The national economic situation was deteriorating despite foreign trade breakthroughs and the rapid progress of the transport network. 'A nation that might have reached such a stage of development much later, if left on its own, but is prematurely prompted to it from without is doomed to impoverishment, and its agriculture declines instead of thoroughly improving.' As the authors saw it, those alarming trends ought to make the colonial authorities give up their policy of drawing the Indian population, 'contrary to its desires and expectations, into the maelstrom of global trade'. As the journal pointed out, a country as densely populated as India 'could afford only small exports of surplus commodities not to the detriment of local consumers'. That was why the author said the contemporaneous British policy in India was 'bizarre' as colonial authorities were anxious to export at the lowest possible prices the grain that would otherwise be stocked up for lean years.

Other themes on which Russian economic journals wrote included indigo, rice and sesame plantations, the development of mining industry, the monetary reform, the overall financial situation in India in various years, the foreign trade turnover and the famines.

I have mentioned the principal themes, which the economic press discussed most often and which concerned Russian trade and economic interests in India. Since there were no direct Russian-Indian contacts, so Russia paid the greatest attention to such Indian economic branches as they were not only well developed but also involved in foreign trade. The economic periodicals mentioned here did not make general reviews of the Indian economic situation but usually concentrated on its particular aspects and avoided value judgments, preferring statistics. The social problems of India were

⁷⁷ *VFPT*, No. 41, 1888, p. 100.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *VFPT*, No. 39, pp. 913-18; No. 42, pp. 158-60.

analysed only on rare occasions. However, attentive readers could easily discern the leading trends of Indian economic development in the mere enumeration of the most prosperous economic branches. Evidently, rapid progress was made only by several branches of agriculture, lucrative in the world market and supplying raw materials to the British and other European industries. For that reason, such branches received British investments and profited from British knowledge, experience and labour. As for other branches of agriculture and local industries, they remained backward or were still in their cradle. But for the promotion by Britain, the Indian economy did not possess sufficient resources for restructuring, modernisation and incorporation in world trade. Economic growth rates set by the British proved greater than the Indian economy could cope with and so were to its detriment. One of the *VFPT* contributions thus described the Indian economic situation in the second half of the nineteenth century:

The development of a particular mining industry in a colony for ambitious exports has always been the principal goal of British commerce, which never forgets that raw material export makes the exporter country dependent on the markets which it supplies with materials and from which it receives finished items... A country whose exports are dominated by grain and which fails to develop animal husbandry and processing industries parallel to grain-growing risks to fully exhaust its productive forces and come to a crisis.⁸⁰

Economic journals provided information about the development of particular economic branches in India, while literary magazines and political journals focused on the plight of the Indian people. All that gave Russian readers an all-round picture of the social and economic situation in India in the second half of the nineteenth century.

To conclude, the majority of the Russian reading public saw only the informative and entertaining value of press contributions on India. A small circle of people who had commercial or professional interest in India were the only exception. That was possibly why the Russian press mostly dealt with Indian history, culture, art, religions and mythology. These contributions made into-the-night reading but did not add much to the established public opinion of India as an enigmatic country of fabulous beauty. Information about the social and economic situation in India was, from that point, of tremendous importance for the assessment of the current state and prospects of Russo-Indian relations. Still more importantly, it showed the contemporary Indian routine the way it really was, with Indians' troubles and achievements, and so made the far-away land more understandable. This other India appeared to differ vastly from 'the "rich India" of our [Russian] ancient legends, which the Muscovite tsars dreamed of and where Peter the Great sent his envoys, remote dreamland...'.⁸¹ It's not surprising therefore that I.P. Minayev, famous Russian Indologist, professor of the St. Petersburg University, who wrote these lines after his return from the third travel in India put the words 'rich India' in quotes thus refuting the established image. Economic information

⁸⁰ *VFPT*, No. 39, 1885, p. 913.

⁸¹ 'Notes on the Third Travel of I.P. Minayev...', p. 191.

about India in the Russian press was presented in such a way as to form Russian public sympathy for India with its problems. Of varying length and great thematic range, these contributions on the Indian economy were scattered about magazine pages as mosaic fragments. The whole mosaic added to information received elsewhere to form in the Russian mind an integral colourful picture of real India with its unexpected likeness to Russia.

References

- Biblioteka dlya chteniya*, Khmyrov's collection, India, Vol. 7, 1857.
- Delo*, St. Petersburg, No. 2, 1873.
- Ekonomicheskii zhurnal*, St. Petersburg, Nos 4, 13–14, 1885.
- Gulimbasharov, S.O. *Vsemirnaya trgovlya v XIX veke i uchastiye v nei Rossii* (World Trade in the Nineteenth Century and Participation of Russia in it), St. Petersburg, 1898.
- Mir Bozhy*, St. Petersburg, No. 12, 1897.
- Otechestvenniye zapiski*, St. Petersburg, Vol. 115, No. 11, 1857.
- Russkaya beseda*, 1856–1860, Moscow.
- Russkiy vestnik*, Moscow, Vol. 13, 1858.
- Severniy vestnik*, St. Petersburg, No. 4, 1898.
- Sovremennik*, St. Petersburg, Nos. 4, 9, 1857.
- Subbotin, A.P. *Chai i chainaya trgovlya v Rossii i drugikh gosudarstvakh: Proizvodstvo, potrebleniye i raspredeleniye chaia* (Tea and Tea Trade in Russia and Other Countries: Production, Consumption and Distribution), St. Petersburg, 1892.
- Torgoviy sbornik*, St. Petersburg, No. 18, 1864.
- Trudy Imperatorskogo volnogo ekonomicheskogo obschestva* (Proceedings of the Imperial Free Economic Society), St. Petersburg, Vol. 1, part 1, 1898.
- Vestnik Evropy*, St. Petersburg, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1876.
- Vestnik Evropy*, St. Petersburg, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1871.
- Vestnik Evropy*, St. Petersburg, Vol. 6, No. 11, 1877.
- Vestnik finansov, promishlennosti i trgovly (VFPT)*, various issues.
- Vigasin A.A., V.G. Volovnikov and N.N. Zagorodnikova, 'Notes on the Third Travel of I.P. Minayev, Professor of St. Petersburg University, to India–1886', *Russko-indiyskiye otnosheniya v XIX v.* (Russian–Indian Relations in the Nineteenth Century), No. 78, Moscow, 1997.
- Vostochnoye obozreniye*, Nos 9, 10, 12 (1883), published in *Glazamy družey. Russkiye ob Indii* (Through the Eyes of Friends. Russians about India), Moscow, 1957.
- Zhurnal Manufaktur i Torgovly*, St. Petersburg, Vol. 1, No. 1, part 3, 1858.