

Indo-Russian Discourse of Humanism and Transnationality Reflected in Anna Bhau Sathe, Alexander Pushkin and Afanasy Nikitin's Writings



Индийско-российский дискурс
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Александра Пушкина
и Афанасия Никитина

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Afanasy Nikitin and Major Milestones in Indo-Russian Cultural Relations

Republic of India and Russian Federation share a strong bond with each other since years together. Both the countries are willing to strengthen their bilateral relationship by preserving each other's interests. Engaging into various economic, political, diplomatic and strategic aspects is the beauty of their relationship which is being carried forward. They have also explored diverse areas of multilateral cooperation which was benefited to both the side. In difficult times India and Russia both have protected each other by showing their consent directly sometimes indirectly in various matters at the global level. With these important aspects there is one more area of bilateral ties that is cultural relations. Cultural relations of Republic of India and Russian federation had a long history. The traces of this relationship can be traced from the visit of the 1st Russian traveler Afanasy Nikitin to India during Bahamani Kingdom in medieval period. Unfortunately it is very unknowing fact about the first foreign traveler reaching to India even before the Vasco da Gama.

The Significance of Friendship

The relations have flourished throughout diverse areas and it is something beyond needing each other. There is no doubt that both the countries are cooperating. This cooperation has strategic significance which has contemporary importance. «For more than five decades, people from both countries have had warm feelings towards each other, and although the fervor of the 1970s and 1980s has faded somewhat, there still remains the recognition of each other as reliable partners»¹. Russia needs India for several purposes similarly India needs Russia for various reasons. In terms of developing closes relations with India Russia intends to balance the China and its influence over the land and water territories. By doing this it aims for creating a multi polar world which divides powers among several emerging superpowers unlike western countries. Also it is getting vast and trusted market for its goods and services from India. On the other hand side India needs Russia for accomplishing its energy need, getting modern and sophisticated technology. Geopolitically, Russia continues to be a balancing force against any designs China and Pakistan may have in our region. But these relations did not stop here for just fulfilling their need. It is something beyond than that. This relationship has evolved over a period of time which became stronger and time testing.

Afanasy Nikitin and establishment of cultural relations of India and Russia

A Russian traveler Afanasy Nikitin who belongs to Tver City visited India in 1469 and had documented several things about the prosperity of India by exploring its economy, administrations and governance, cultural aspects in terms of faith, belief, worship, and many other realities. This moment was significant in the sense that it established a strong

footprint in the beginning the relations of these two superpowers. Afansy Nikitin observed realities of Indians life. «He also noted: Here in Indian country people and their heads are not covered, breasts are bare, children are born every year and there is a lot of them. The men are all black. Everywhere I go there is a crowd behind me looking curiously at a white man...»² Though he visited India as a merchant, he has documented several things in his famous book «*Voyage beyond three seas*».

Reflection of Indian culture in Afanasy Nikitin's Writings

As far as his writing is concerned it seems to be he had traveled mostly in Muslim dominated area where he changed his name as Khoja Yusuf Khorasani. He faced the process of religious convergence as by faith he was a follower of Christianity. In spite of that he followed Ramzan and other religious practices as he was a liberal person. Afanasy Nikitin could observe the different sects within Hindu religion. These people mostly believe in one god and they have faith. They performed prayers on time especially idols of lord Ganesha and Hanuman. Also they considered cow as a mother and ox as their father. Cow dung was being used as a fuel for cooking.

Afanasy Nikitin also wrote about the food practices of people. Some section of society does not eat non vegetarian food while some of them eat. The social system consisted of the caste, religious factors, mode of occupations, its faith and beliefs, even the food practices have changed. He also observed that the Hindu community people did not hide their wealth while eating, trading, praying etc. he also mentioned about the wars which take place for expanding their kingdom and the system of slavery. There used to be sell and purchase of slaves in market which was consisted of women, males and sometimes even children.

Monuments

Here Afanasy Nikitin did mention about the royalty and richness of palace of Bidar. Bidar not only a capital but also a significant city was well surrounded by walls and situated on the heightened area approximately 2333 feet. «Nowadays there are monuments that testify to the past glory of the city under the Bahamanis and also under the subsequent dynasty of the Barids. It is surrounded by walls with a glasis and dry moat. All bastions are in ruin. The palace is situated in the eastern part of the city. Here you can find lots of ruins of palaces, mosques and other buildings in significant space»³. For mentioning these ruined things he did described about the wars which used to take place for extending their powers and kingdoms. However such things have negatively put impacts on the historical monuments and institutions which diminished the important sources of records.

Besides palace and its royalty, there were also mosques where even today prayers are being conducted. Also there were many luxurious mausoleums located within the city. Establishing various monuments with famous arts is the typical feature of Indian architecture during medieval period.

India USSR Cultural Relations

The relations of India and Russia began developing officially even before India could get independence as India wanted to achieve self-sufficiency by investing into the heavy projects. Since then both India and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics shared good re-

lations with each other. However the relations between these two are dominated by the cold war politics in which USSR was comprises with the ideology of communism against capitalist led block of United States. On the other hand side India initiated the Non Aligned Movement which neither tilt towards any of the superpower. However during wartimes and needy situations of India USSR helped India by proving valuable assistance. By signing the treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation in 1971 the relations started flourishing. After a stagnant phase the relations were revived again and till date the relations have boosted.

Cultural Relations — India and Russia

There is a strong tradition of Indian studies in Russia. Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre at the Embassy of India, Moscow (JNCC) maintains close cooperation with leading Russian institutions, including the Institute of Philosophy (Moscow); Russian State University for Humanities (Moscow); Institute of Oriental Studies (Moscow); Institute of Asian and African Studies at the Moscow State University; School of International Relations at the St. Petersburg University; Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (St Petersburg); Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology & Ethnography (Kunstkamera) — St Petersburg; Far Eastern Federal University (Vladivostok); and Russian Institute for Cultural Research (Krasnodar)⁴.

Language

Language is such an important phenomenon which has connected India and Russia. As in a diverse country like India multiple languages and their dialects are being spoken by people. Many Russian institutions, some schools and even universities offered Hindi language for learning to approximately 1500 Russian students. Besides that other older languages like Pali, Sanskrit, Marathi, Bengali, Urdu, and Tamil are taught in various institutions. Apart from this Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre at the Embassy of India, Moscow conducts classes in other cultural activities including dance performances, music, teaching Yoga to so many students per month. With this reference International Yoga Day was celebrated in July 2018 all over Russia. Many Russians possessed keen interest in learning Ayurveda. As our 1st Prime Minister Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru was quite influenced and impressed by the socialist model of development during his visit to Russia. He wanted to implement the same in India as for its higher growth.

People to People

This is the most important element which have maintained and raised the trust not only formally but also with the hearts of the people. It's not only the governments of both the states believes in its friendship but also even people are connected and good feelings towards each other. Especially in a country like India when it comes to the question of trusted and time tested partner people strongly feel and from heart considered that it is Russia as it has always been there in its bad and needy times with reference to China and Pakistan and the United States. As far as people to people connection is concerned there were performances of Indians in 8 Russian cities of throughout the year 2015 when President of India inaugurated the year of Indian culture 'Namaste Russia' in Moscow. For organizing such big programs the role of regional governments become very crucial. Both the nations have celebrated their 70th Anniversary of the diplomatic relations with a cultural touch of folk dance theme simultaneously in Delhi and Moscow in 2017. In the same year nearly 400 youngsters participated in 19th World

festival of youth and students. Also on 6th September 2018 at the Kremlin Palace festival of India was celebrated with grand celebration in which 10 troupes represented different facets of Indian culture in around 22 cities at 34 locations.

Tourism

Tourism is such an intensive area where relations can be deepened and intensify. «Tourism is yet another sector that can be tapped: flights between Moscow and Delhi are barely 6.5 hours long and cost just over a thousand dollars and are, therefore, affordable and accessible to the middle class in both countries»⁵. «The Sides welcomed the signing of the Protocol for amendment of the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and Government of the Republic of India of 3 December 2004 on mutual travel regime for holders of diplomatic and official passports»⁶. There is an agreement by Joint Working Group on culture and tourism in Moscow for enhancing and developing direct contacts between states institutions and promotion of tourism in August 2015. Mutual travels of certain categories of citizens of the two countries have been simplified. This will not only increase the free flow of people within territories but also it will improve the economy and increase the commercial relations by establishing close contacts between the business representatives at the regional level.

Education and Exchange Programs

The element of education though not considered directly as a part of cultural ties, still it open ups the way towards strengthening bilateral ties which is pivotal in terms of exchanges. It becomes a strong pillar and supportive system to blossom the relations between these two. Together both the countries can trained their manpower and convert them into well equipped skills and assets for country and utilize these workforce for fulfilling their needs efficiently. Recently Embassy of India has organized the third «India-Russia Education Conference» on Monday, February 25, 2019 in Moscow. There has to be introduction of more scholarships and fellowships, organization of more exhibitions and cultural festivals which will keep on strong ties between two. With the same there is also an exchange of information via mass media.

There is a discussion about improvement of educational system through conferences. One such was organized in February 2018 under which several issues were examined comprehensively. The 19th India Russia Annual Bilateral Summit highlighted educational issues and aimed for increasing linkages of higher education between two countries. There is India Russia Network of Universities which has noted a keen interest in exchanging the faculties and students through multiple programs and currently working on Joint Scientific and Educational projects. Scholars and philosophers like Leo Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky, Anton Chekov have influences the world with their renown writings.

Art and Culture

As the title itself suggests the milestones in cultural relations of India Russia bilateral relations, it points out the significant facets of Indian culture. Culture reflects the set of shared values, goals, beliefs, and traditions. It can absorb into any other socio economic aspects and other cultural activities. India has lengthy and strong cultural heritage in

terms of considering its music, folk traditions, theatre and arts performance, historical institutions, paintings and literature writing, rites and rituals since ancient times. For preserving these resources the ministry of culture implements several programs and provide funds for its maintenance.

Cinema has played a grand role in celebration of the 70 years of Friendship of India and Russia. It has deep impacts and reflection of culture and societies. In addition, «Recognizing the role of cinema in the development of mutual understanding and friendly relations between the people, the parties were quite satisfied with the conduct of the Festival of Indian cinema in Moscow and the Russian Film Festival in Mumbai in 2016», reads the statement⁷. There is a collaboration over various issues like news gathering, digital distribution, exchange of professionals etc. both the countries have decided to meet alternatively for annual Indo-Russian Forum for Media Cooperation.

Conclusion...

At various institutional levels India and Russia are co operating each other. But in terms of other spheres of cooperation the cultural area lag behind comparatively. This is the need of the current international situation and time where countries have tilted towards more in economic, and geo-political, and strategic relationship as the global issues and relations are reshaped. But none the less cultural relations do play a significant role in strengthening and deepening the relationship from all perspective due to which countries can be mutually benefitted and relationship can reach beyond friendship. The very first landmark has been set by the visit of Afanasy Nikitin where he came to India for the commercial purpose. However, his visit does not aim only trade but rather reveals the situations and secrets of the society, polity and economy as well. Taking into consideration this important move, India and Russia relations have blossomed over a period of time and even today they are flourishing with trust and time testing partnership.

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