

Summary

Specific Worlds of India and Russian Ethnography: Contacts and Contexts. Materials of studies and reports. Section at the XV Congress of Anthropologists and Ethnologists of Russia. June 26–30, 2023, St. Petersburg / Edited by S.I. Ryzhakova and M.B. Shcherbak. M.: POLYMEDIA, 2023.

Indian studies are a specific area of scientific and cognitive activity. Sometimes they go beyond the boundaries of a purely academic discipline, intersect with literature and artistic creativity, various practices (in particular, psycho-physical and musical) and spiritual search. Many ties (ethno-cultural, linguistic, social) unite the Indian subcontinent and the entire space of South Asia.

Nowadays, we are witnessing an extremely mixed picture of Russian research in the field of Indian ethnography. The community of professional anthropologists (each dealing with a particular subject) is rather small. At the same time, there is a significant number of near-scientific publications around it, audio-visual products, all kinds of activities of different levels, quality and popularity. At the same time, it is important to take into account that India itself as a whole is a conglomerate of many “specific worlds”, a kind of “islands”, consisting of separate peoples and social groups, divided into castes (jatis), estates (varnas), ethno-confessional groups, tribes. Some of them are legally fixed and united in the categories of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes, and since 2015 they also distinguish special backward classes, particularly vulnerable tribes and others.

In 2022, the project “Specific Worlds” of India: small nations and social groups was conceived, Ethnocultural Strategies for Preserving and Smoothing Differences” under the direction of Svetlana Ryzhakova with the participation of young Indologists Evgenia Renkovskaya, Maxim Demchenko, Maria Shcherbak and Anastasia Kinyaeva. In 2022 the project received support from the Russian Science Foundation. It is devoted to a comprehensive cultural and anthropological study of a number of communities in India, identifying models of their interaction and isolation, their communication strategies, linguistic and ethno-cultural

processes and mechanisms for maintaining and blurring differences. The main areas of our work are the study of individual ethnic, ethno-cultural and ethno-confessional groups living in India, their languages, oral heritage (mythology, folklore), historical memory and problems of socio-cultural identity. We explore such “island” communities of India as autochthonous tribal peoples (scheduled tribes in the official nomenclature), migrant communities, as well as communities that build their identity on the basis of belonging to a particular religious movement or a particular profession in the field of art. Within the framework of the project, the work of the section of the XV Congress of Anthropologists and Ethnologists of Russia “Specific Worlds of India and Russian Ethnography: Contacts and Contexts” was organized (section leaders S.I. Ryzhakova, M.F. Albedil). The materials and abstracts of the reports of the section are presented to the attention of the readers of this brochure.

The section was attended by scientists from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Nizhny Novgorod. The following reports were made: “Study of the population of Hindustan during the Soviet-Indian expedition of 1971–1983: some results”; “India on the banks of the Neva: ethnography in a museum context”; “What is new about Gerasim Lebedev, and what remains to be known”; “Barefoot nobles: Nayars in the travelogues of Venetian merchants in the second half of the 16th century”; “In the land of warriors, camels, elephants, horses and tents”: the Sikh world in the reflection of the letters of Prince A.D. Saltykov”; “The special world of Punjab in publications, diaries and collections of I.P. Minaev”; “Historical and ethnographic heritage of domestic natural science expeditions to India on the eve of the First World War”; “Ethno-national identity of the Naga: the connection of the past and the present”; “Tribal Ramnami from Chattisgarh as a specific world in the space of South Koshala”; “Qawwali and Qawwalis: Ritual and Secular Formats of the Same Song Tradition and the North Indian Musical Community”; “Traditional methods of cremation of the Hindu population of Agra”; “Indian Parsis: Survival Strategies in a Different Ethnic and Different Confessional Environment”; “The influence of the research invasion on the socio-cultural and ethno-psychological state of the minor ethnias on the example of the Central Asian Indo-speaking group Parya”; “Specific Worlds of Calcutta: Rapprochement, Borders and Contacts of Ethnocultural Communities”; “Caste Identity of urban highly educated middle class Indians in Kerala and Maharashtra (based on 2019 and

2023 field studies)”; “Baba Yaga at the junction of diaspora communities: the unexpected heroine of Salman Rushdie”; “From Kerala to Pakistan: refraction of social, religious and gender conflicts in South Asian society through the film adaptation of Arundhati Roy’s “The God of Small Things”; “Travel blogs and forums as a reflection of the “specific worlds” of India”. Reports were made by Arutyunov S.A., Albedil M.F., Vasilkov Ya.V., Vozchikov D.V., Demichev K.A., Kotin I.Yu., Lemeshkina K.V., Maretina K.A., Bychkova A.A., Demchenko M.B., Kinyaeva A.V., Alekseev Yu.A., Kryukova V.Yu., Oranskaya T.I., Ryzhakova S.I., Stasevich A.V., Chelnokova A.V., Kostina E.A., Shcherbak M.B. ■