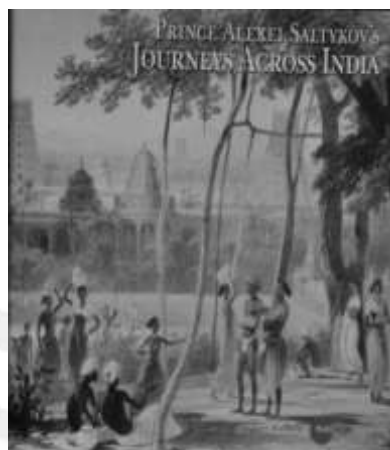


## BOOK REVIEW

Name of the book: Prince Alexei Saltykov's  
Journeys across India  
Name of the publisher: Sankt Petersburg Publishing  
House (Palace Editions)  
Place of publication: Italy  
Year of publication: 2012  
Number of pages: 200  
Reviewed by: Dr. Irina P. Chelysheva  
(*Research Scholar*)



In the month of November 2012, the Embassy of the Russian Federation brought out rare art album under the title “Prince Saltykov’s Journeys Across India”, containing the first ever original translation into English of a Prince Alexei Saltykov’s famous travelogues, supplemented with reproductions of his paintings from the collection of the Russian Museum in Sankt-Petersburg, many of which have been published for the first time. The album was formally released by the President of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Dr. Karan Singh and H.E. Mr Alexander Kadakin, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to India.

The project has been implemented with financial assistance of telecommunication company AFK “Sistema”, Moscow, in collaboration with the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg and the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow. The album is distributed on the complimentary basis to the political elite of the country, well known public figures, libraries and leading cultural and educational institutions.

The album brought out by Sankt Petersburg Publishing House “Palace Editions” was printed in Italy in two languages- Russian and English. It includes two messages for the readers – by H.E. Mr Alexander Kadakin, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to India and Mr E.P. Evtushekov, Director General, AFK “Sistema” Company and articles by the Russian research scholars – survey article about Prince Saltykv by Prof. E.Y. Vanina and about Prince Saltykov’s journey to Himalayas by Dr. I.P. Chelysheva, the first translation into English of the Prince Saltykov’s “Letters about India”, besides the reproduction of more than 50 drawings and watercolors from the collection of “Russian Museum” n Sankt-Petersburg, Puskin’s Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow and reprint of his album “Inhabitants of India” originally published in Paris in 1850 with his own commentaries. The album consists of 204 pages.

Alexey D. Saltykov’s travelogue “Letters from India”, first published in French in 1848 in Paris aroused great interest among readers and was reprinted several times. The 1853 edition comprised three volumes with pictorial works of the author – drawings and water colors. Several of Prince Saltykov’s letters, translated into Russian, were published in the “Moskvityanin” (“Muscovite”) journal in 1849; then two complete editions came out in 1850 and 1851 in Russian, translated by the well-known dramatist L. A. Mey. In Punjab the excerpts from Saltykov’s “Letters from India” related to his trip to Punjab and adjacent territories became known due to British

research scholar H. L. O. Garrett, who translated several excerpts from the original text into English and got it published in *Civil and Military Gazette* in 1932. This translation was published subsequently in the form of small booklet having a limited circulation by Punjab Record Office in 1971 under the title “The Punjab a Hundred Years Ago as Described by V. Jacquemont 1831 and A.Soltykoff 1842”.

1985 saw the academic edition of “Letters from India” (executive editor and author of the foreword - Prof. L.B. Alayev, compiler - T.N. Zagorodnikova) published by the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences. The latter edition and the French original became the basis for this English translation.

Originating from one of the most famous Russia’s aristocratic families, Prince Alexei Saltykov decided to forsake high life and promising diplomatic career and devoted himself to venturing the East, with India always being his favorite destination. He visited this country twice - from 1841 to 1843 and from 1845 to 1846. He travelled along various parts of India - after entering India through Bombay he toured extensively through Punjab state, visited many cities in the Central India - Delhi, Gwalior and Lucknow, in the South he was in Madras, Kanchipuram, Thanjavur and Hyderabad and even managed to reach Bushahr kingdom in Himalaya.

The letters of the Russian traveller attracted readers with an abundance of information which could rarely be found in literature of this kind: courage and unpretentiousness, communicability and a desire for learning, good contacts at the highest level of the British colonial administration and, last but not least, sufficient monetary resources, enabled Saltykov to penetrate those corners of India where Europeans had rarely set foot. It is worth mentioning that the every place he visited he enjoyed very warm reception. He was equally honoured by the high authorities of the British colonial administration and local political leaders. Invitations of Indian nobility he used to accept with the special interest. Taking into consideration that Prince Saltykov originated from the famous Russian family it doesn’t come as a surprise by itself. At that time many Europeans were travelling all over India, being sometimes received by the crowned heads - from the “puppet” rajas to the ruler of the independent and formidable Sikh state. By that time European literature was already familiar with their “tourist impressions”, constantly printed in popular journals, familiarizing Western audience with the “mysteries” and “horrors” of the East. Saltykov’s letters, although transient, often superficial, with many inaccuracies and sometimes errors, devoid of any academic analysis, were, nevertheless, of a completely different kind which immediately caught readers’ imagination. The letters of the Russian traveller track a real view of India, rare for literature of that time.

He was among the first Russian traveller who visited remote areas of Western Himalayas leaving us priceless images of peoples inhabiting the picturesque landscapes. In comparison with several European discoverers he did not travel much in these regions, with his route laying only through *Haridwar, Mussoorie, Simla, Rampur* and *Chini* (modern day Kalpa). Of the fundamental importance however is the fact that he always tried to depict his impressions in drawings which he then transferred into splendid engravings and lithographs, unfortunately almost totally unknown in India. Contrary to the other travelers he did not attempt to describe meticulously all what he saw. Nevertheless, thanks to the tenacious and professional eye of an artist he managed to notice and reflect in his letters many nuances and details which could significantly enrich our knowledge about the life of Himalayan people in those times, to visualize the incomparable beauty, still untouched by civilization, the nature of this region, its history and original culture. He was one of the few bold spirits who, even in the first half of the nineteenth century, risked going to the most distant corners

of the princely state of Bushahr in the Kinnaur area and the most important, probably the first artist to leave behind unique drawings of these places. The well-known British artist in India, William Simpson, visited Kinnaur only in 1864, twenty-two years after Duke Saltykov.

In Saltykov's "Letters" readers glimpse the real India with all its riddles and contradictions, beauty and horrors. The Russian artist visited it in search of beauty – and found this beauty in the Indian landscape, from the tip of *Kanyakumari* to the Himalayas, in its temples and palaces, processions and festivals and above all in its people. Almost devoid of racial and religious prejudice, so characteristic of European thought at that time, he looked at India with an open and benevolent gaze, trying to understand it and not "ameliorate" it.

Being a talented artist Prince Alexey Saltykov depicted images of Indian realities, which he treated with deep affection and adoration, in amazing water color paintings and pencil sketches. "Here are grace and beauty, for which one needs a hundred eyes and a hundred hands to see all and to paint all – forms, faces, draperies; its overwhelming, – he wrote in one of his letters.



Pratibha  
Spandan