

**Panel title: RADICAL POLITICS IN 20TH CENTURY PUNJAB**

**Session 1.**

**A Long, Strange Trip: The Travels of Har Dayal**

**Benjamin Zachariah,**

**Department of History, Sheffield University/ Fellow at ZMO**

This paper sets out to map the travels of Har Dayal, with a focus on his years in Germany, Turkey and Switzerland during the First World War, where he was famously a key player in the 'Indo-German conspiracy' to subvert the British Empire. It concerns itself with tracing the trajectories, ideologies and contradictions of Har Dayal's positions, including his attempted recantation of his revolutionary politics in order to be allowed to return to India.

**Scientism and its Discontents: The Indo-Muslim “Fascism” of Inayatullah Khan al-Mashriqi**

**Markus Daechsel,**

**Department of History, Royal Holloway College, London**

This essay offers a detailed reconstruction of the thought of Inayatullah Khan al-Mashriqi, a camp-follower of fascism in inter-war India who sought to reformulate Islam as a “Religion of Science” according to the precepts of Darwinian evolutionism. Mashriqi has so far been neglected because his political impact was only short-term and did not contribute to the larger story of decolonization in India and Pakistan. But far from being marginal, Mashriqi’s philosophical ruminations actually provide a window for a much-needed re-evaluation of the meaning of colonial modernity. While there was much in Mashriqi’s writing that conforms to the usual picture of anticolonial nation-building—his obsession with the truth of science, for instance, and his emphasis on disciplinary political methodologies—the by now standardized critique of such features in the “postcolonial” literature no longer suffices. Behind a facade of continuities with nineteenth-century “Enlightenment” traditions stood a much darker vision of modernity that no longer had any recourse to the certainties of a grand narrative of modernization. Instead, it was a vision that fluctuated between mystical exuberance and deep pessimism. The only sense of certainty was provided by a radical notion of emotional authenticity and a related belief in quasi-religious leadership figures. The larger conclusion to be drawn from the dualistic and contradictory structure of Mashriqi’s “fascism” is that the intellectual history of inter-war South Asia needs to be given relative autonomy from the standard nationalism–modernization narrative, for rather than the continuation of an earlier modernity, it should be interpreted as the starting point of a new and much darker formation that arguably continues into the present.

**‘Om Shantih, Ameen’: bridging the distance between communalism and anti-colonial nationalism**

**Name: Neeti Nair,**

**Department of History, University of Virginia**

Historiography on communalism in the first half of the twentieth century has tended to sharply differentiate between those allegedly invested in deepening rifts between religiously defined communities and those who participated in a more inclusive anti-colonial nationalism. With this binary in place, all religiously informed protests have retrospectively taken on a

pejorative cast. My paper will examine the radical politics of Swami Shradhanand, a member of the Congress, a social activist and an Arya Samaji preacher, during the movement to repeal the Rowlatt Act and show how his wide ranging politics effectively disturbs the binary between a 'secular' anti-colonial nationalism and a 'religious' communalism.

## **Session 2.**

### **Communism and 'democracy': Punjab Radicals and Representative Politics in the 1930s.**

**Name: Shalini Sharma,  
Department of History, Keele University**

In the late 1920s the organised left, under the aegis of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, the Communist Party and the Kirti Kisan movement had a very clear and definite vision of democracy. 'Real' democracy was not to be based upon the Westminster model. Nor was it simply to be a replica of the Soviet system. Actually, the new world, quite as much as Russia, influenced and inspired many of these young radical socialists. Some young Punjabis had made America their home, and they had been influenced by living in a country where liberty, rights and freedom were written into the constitution. Speeches by the radicals warned the people of the Punjab of nationalist politicians who claimed to speak for the people. Their emphasis was on the emancipation of the masses. Calling upon Punjab to question accepted notions of deference and representation, they questioned the standing of nationalist leaders and instead urged a variant of communism tailored to the needs of the Punjabi peasantry, which eschewed communal politics, got rid of caste inequalities and above all would win India freedom from colonial oppression. By the late 1930s these very same people were appealing to different religious communities in a very specific religious idiom, comprehensively aligned with the Indian National Congress and fully participating in the legislative proceedings imposed by the British Raj. So how do we explain this? This paper will try and understand the constant u-turns and flip flops which characterise communist politics in India by looking at the constraints and opportunities through which they operated and how their choices then determined local understandings of communism and, in this case, democratic practice.

### **The Muslim League and the Punjabi Left, 1942-48**

**Name: Ali Raza,  
Department of History, Oxford University**

Relative to other themes, the political and social history of the Left in British India, and particularly, in Punjab, has rarely been subjected to serious and sustained study. Moreover, within the gamut of works available, the focus is largely on studying the relationship of the Punjabi Left with the Colonial State and the Congress. While this emphasis is understandable, it inevitably misses out on the Left's politics relating to other protagonists in the Punjabi political space. This paper will therefore aim to rectify this gap by charting the evolving, and often tense, engagement between the Muslim League and the Left in British, and later, West Punjab.

The precursor to the active engagement between the two was the 1942 endorsement of the Muslim League's demand for Muslim self determination by the Communist Party of India. In subsequent years the nature of this engagement progressed from mere rhetoric to direct activism. Beginning in 1944-45, and especially in the run up to the 1946 elections, Communist workers actively campaigned alongside, and increasingly, within the Muslim League in its attempt to replace the Unionists as the ruling party in the Punjab. Both parties had of course their own vested political interests in this arrangement.

In the run up to Partition however, their relationship, tentative at the best of times, began to turn sour. Moreover, disillusionment with independence and the horrors that accompanied it quickly turned the Communists, or at least the few who were left in West Punjab, into an active oppositional force to the Muslim League. In this sense 1947-48 marked the complete breakdown of relations between the two, especially as the nascent state quickly picked up from where its colonial predecessor had left off in its relentless persecution of communists. Such persecution was only to continue in later years when the Communist Party of Pakistan was banned and its members incarcerated and exiled.

While a political history of the Left and its engagement with the Muslim League is a narrative that deserves attention its own right, it also reveals significant insights into the colonial and post-colonial political landscape. Firstly, it highlights the social and political limits of Radicalism and the resultant choices and compromises it had to make in order for it to remain a viable socio-political alternative. Secondly, it also deepens our understanding of the nature of the colonial state and, more crucially, the continuities between it and its post colonial successor, an observation that communists were quick to make following independence. Consequently, and most importantly, such an examination also challenges the triumphalism and chauvinism inherent in nationalist historiography, whose hegemony only serves to silence dissenting voices.

**The Renegades Within: The Punjabi Communists and the CPI Name: Kamran Asdar Ali,  
Department of Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin**

At the moment of Pakistan's independence, the areas that constituted the territories of the new state were economically underdeveloped and lacked industrialization. For example, Pakistan inherited only nine percent of the total industrial establishment of British India and the industrial workforce was estimated to be around 480,000 within a total population of seventy five millions in both wings. However, there were some cities that had large industrial enterprises foremost among them was the Dalmia Cement Factory in Karachi, Sir Sri Ram Cotton Mills in Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) and Premier Sugar Mills in Mardan. The Karachi dock and port workers were organized and so were workers in the largest industrial enterprise in the country, the Moghalpura Railway Workshop in Lahore, which was in the public sector (Alavi 1983:44).

In the Punjab and in Sind there were some peasant-based organizations that at the time of partition had links to the CPI. For example the Sind Hari Committee under Haidar Bux Jatoi's leadership was active in certain rural districts. Similarly, in Punjab since the 1920s there were Ghadar Party influenced peasant and workers groups. The most prominent among them were the Kirti-Kisaan Party (peasant-workers party), the Kisan Sabha and Naujawan Bharat Sabha. Most had a large percentage of Sikh membership and they also dominated the leadership positions, although they were 14 percent of Punjab's population, in relation to 56 percent Muslims and 26 percent Hindu. In the early 1940s two dominant tendencies of left activism, primarily the factions in the Kirti Party in Punjab, had been brought together by the CPI headquarters in Bombay to constitute the Communist Party of Punjab. This Provincial Party by 1947 had two dominant groups. These factions were led by Teja Singh Swatantara and Sohan Singh Josh respectively and included prominent Muslim communists like Ferozuddin Mansoor and Fazal Elahi Qurban within its fold. By mid 1947, the difference between the Teja Singh faction, which included Qurban, and that of Sohan Singh's (which was more closely aligned with the CPI central leadership and had Mansoor in its ranks) became more acute. The new Party position which considered Muslim League and its demand for Pakistan as reactionary was resisted by Qurban in his discussions with Ajoy Ghosh, who was the central leader in-charge for Punjab. When the central party leadership did not pay heed to their arguments, Qurban and Swatantar along with their allies decided to form an independent

Pakistan Communist Party in June of 1947, basing it on the older (1943) thesis of national self determination of the Muslim populace.

This paper is part of a larger study on the history of the labor movement in post 1947 Pakistan. It will trace the history of the political crisis within the CPI and the expulsion of the Teja Singh/ Fazal Elahi Qurban group from the main party after the formation of the CPP in March of 1948. In recalling these events the paper will show how Teja Sing Swatantar and Fazal Elahi Qurban were against the central leadership of the CPI about the change of position on the Pakistan question and hence provide a lesser known history of early communism in post 1947 Pakistan.

### **Session 3.**

#### **The Indian Workers Association Coventry 1938-1990: Political and Social action**

**Name: Talvinder Gill,**

**Department of History, University of Warwick**

My interest in researching the Indian Workers' Association (IWA) came from a personal curiosity about post war Indian immigration to the UK. As a rank and file member, my father spoke highly of the role of the Indian Workers' Association in helping migrants fight discrimination and assist in matters of civilian life. As I was soon to discover, little of these stories were recorded in history books or official media, especially from the perspective of the workers and migrants themselves. This paper gives a summary of my research project which is particularly interested in the IWA's political ideology and how it affected the culture and identity of Indian migrants and wider British society in light of contemporary debates surrounding 'multiculturalism'. This includes an investigation of wider Punjabi political consciousness pre 1947. The IWAs' contribution to a specific British Indian identity and their constructive social engagement can be linked to struggles and movements that began outside of its diaspora origins. I will illustrate how their campaigns and political convictions indelibly changed the face of modern Britain. The Coventry IWA alongside its sister branches were at the forefront of anti racist campaigns in the late twentieth century and were active creators of their social environments through political action. They challenged existing power relations by seeking public acknowledgement, resources and representation as opposed to mere tolerance of ethnic difference. Also, in line with their radical left politics, the IWAs viewed their race and status as immigrants as inextricably linked to their position at the lowest rung of the working class. Hence, their fight for acceptance as an ethnic minority was also a class struggle that concerned all sections of society. Consequently, I seek to find a history of the IWA that reconnects class to a social history of modern Britain.

#### **The Punjab Lok Party: Language and Progressive Politics**

**Name: Virinder S Kalra,**

**Department of Sociology, Manchester University**

The issue of language has often remained peripheral to progressive politics with an emphasis on material emancipation. However, since Ngugi's path breaking 'Decolonisation of the mind' the recognition of the importance of language in progressive politics has found wider resonance. In the context of Punjab, there are two stories to tell. On the one hand the mobilisation for the Punjabi suba in the Indian union (in the 1960s), was basically a call for a state that would be Akali/ Sikh dominated, as the communalisation of language in the Punjab had taken place much before this agitation began. However, in West Punjab, where Punjabi was never given any status vis a vis the national language of Urdu, its importance for progressive politics was as a

non-communal force as well as one in which socialism could be advanced. The case of the Punjab Lok party is an example of an early 1980s progressive group that forefronted the secular and unifying nature of language in contrast to the prior communal history of Punjabi in the region.

### **Radicalism, Strategic Alliances and State Responses in the Punjab and Pakistan**

**Name: Imran Ali,**

**Department of History, Lahore University of Management Sciences.**

The paper will discuss several sequences during the twentieth century in which radical politics interfaced with both adversarial classes and the power structure, as represented by the pre-1947 colonial and post-1947 Pakistani states. The nature of these conflicts and their outcomes will be analyzed, to try and identify some of the fundamental dynamics that have impacted on the political economy of this region. The notion of radical politics will not be confined to micro-activities and forms of participation in radical political organizations, but will be treated as a force representing stakeholder interests whose interventions, and state responses to whose interests, led to significant impacts on historical processes. The interaction between state, elites and the threat of radical politics was played out in multiple arenas and over diverse issues, whose analysis here will hopefully unravel the nature of authority and its contestations in this region.

Examples of the tensions between radical sentiment or movements and state power, to be analyzed in the paper, will be the agrarian protests in the Punjab Canal Colonies around 1907, the ongoing Akali agitation, and the protest against the rule of primogeniture on horse-breeding grants in western Punjab. The political consequences of agrarian tensions in the 1930s, during the international economic depression, and their subsequent relationship with communal nationalism, are then discussed, in the context of the nodes of power and authority as they emerged at decolonization in mid-century. In Pakistan itself, the successful response of radical politics to the authoritarian rule of the 1960s led to significant reversals in national strategy during the 1970s, with various developmental implications. The current crises facing the Pakistani state, if they are taken in a wider context than the West's terror war, also represent an escalation of the radical challenge, albeit mostly articulated through religious extremism.

### **Session 4.**

#### **Modern Martyrs and their Museum**

**Name: Radhika Chopra,**

**Department of Sociology, University of Delhi.**

Museums as sites of officially sanctioned histories of nations are state supported institutions where 'heritage' and history are jointly constituted. Within the Museum a sense of common destiny and history are forged through remembrance and willed forgetfulness.

But the past, Marx warned us in his Eighteenth Brumaire, weighs like a nightmare on the living, producing an intense sense of disquiet. It is to the past as a nightmare that I address myself in this paper, focusing on the history of martyrdom represented in the Museum within the sacred precincts of the Darbar Sahib in Amritsar, Punjab, and a premier sacred site of Sikhism. I focus particularly on the 'production' and remembrance of the martyrs of 'Operation Bluestar', the army operation that scarred the sacred landscape with violence. While a created lineage of medieval to modern martyrs created in the layout of museum spaces as well as through visual representations, remembrance remains incomplete; certain

key martyrs are missing from the walls of the Museum. Paying particular attention to the visual as an ordering narrative of memory and memorialising within the overarching landscape of the Golden Temple, I re-look at the politics of representation and elision to think through issues of a nightmare remembered and the production of modern martyrdom.

### **Reflections on Communism in Punjab**

**Name: Gurharpal Singh,**

**Department of Theology, University of Birmingham**

Almost 25 years ago I completed a doctoral dissertation on Communism in Punjab from the 1920s upto 1967. The work was subsequently published and is probably the most comprehensive assessment of the movement so far. In this paper I want to revisit the research to explore how the unstated assumptions and the context of the study strongly influenced of my research. These assumptions, I believe, foreclosed a more engaging evaluation of the Communist Movement that would have explored its wider influence in Punjabi society, culture and ideas – beyond the narrow fixation with organisational outcomes. It will also highlight how the simultaneously rise of Sikh militancy at the time in East Punjab from the early 1980s onwards further underscored and understanding of political radicalism as being inextricably linked with the Sikh tradition of revolt, a link that had serious political consequences.

In addition to these concerns, however, I also want to explore how the Communist Movement which was for so long seen as the touch stone of radicalism and dissent became, from the mid-1960s onwards, the handmaiden of state policy. The movement's transformation from rebellion to state respectability had little to do with achievement of political power. Rather, as I argue, it was the climax of a long standing policy of seeking to influence from 'politics of from above' in order to compensate for social and organisational weaknesses.

Finally, I want to suggest that the history of the Communist Movement in Punjab demonstrates that political radicalism was not a minor or fragmentary episode in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Punjab but was intimately connected social change, discontent and ferment of new ideas from the 1920s onwards.