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Panel 11: Interbellum internationalisms and India: towards a social history
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Panel Abstract:

The panel proposes to examine and invite papers on relations between India and a wider world in the inter-war period. This includes people as well as ideas on the move. The travels, writings, and political activities of large numbers of Indians and Indian exiles, elite as well as non-elite, had an impact on the political social and mental horizons of Indian public opinion.

This internationalist milieu emerged in the 1920s in the aftermath of and in reaction to the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution. The 1920s and 30s saw an unprecedented array of social movements whose framework of engagement was not limited by geographical boundaries. The main protagonists were not states but a wide variety of social actors whose range of interests included Aryanism, pacifism, national sovereignty, pan-Asianism, pan-Islamic solidarity, anti-imperialism, feminism, socialism, communism, eugenics, fascism, civil liberties, romanticism, youth. Their divergent ends and objectives were held together, if temporarily, by a euphoria for the vastness and integratedness of the world and the desire and optimism to remake it and shape the future of humanity.

These experiments in political and social mobilization have not been adequately historicised. Histories of South Asia in the 1920s and 1930s have largely focused on local, community, and national narratives, while this panel encourages scholars to expand the frames of analysis to incorporate international, transnational, and global dimensions as well. Frameworks for understanding the world and one's place in it included not only the local or national, but also relatively distant elements as diverse as the work of Sigmund Freud in Vienna and fascist economics in Italy. These became part of the everyday. 'Europe' or 'America', Berlin, London, Paris, Tokyo or Moscow, were part of the worlds and world views of people not necessarily involved only in elitist discussions and cosmopolitan solidarities.

Paper abstracts:

Towards Paris: British surveillance and the curious journey of Khushi Mohammad Sepassi in interwar Europe
Suchetana Chattopadhyay

This paper treats the curious journey of Khushi Mohammad Sepassi, a communist émigré who settled in Paris between the two world wars. Khushi Mohammad Sepassi's odyssey began in British-occupied Lahore during 1915 and involved travel through Kabul, Tashkent, Moscow, Berlin and Marseilles; it was to end abruptly in Nazi-occupied Paris. An attempt is made to relate Sepassi to the wider social milieu and historical processes in which diasporic migrant communities and individuals from the British colonies found themselves entwined while seeking political asylum in interwar Europe. The role of the British surveillance network in repulsing Sepassi's attempts to return to India is treated along with the constant watch kept on his activities as a Comintern functionary working on behalf of the Communist Party of India and encompassing France, Germany and Russia. The process of imperial monitoring continued until his 'disappearance' in

1940 from Paris when the city came under the heels of the Gestapo. By tracing his journey through a critical reading of British intelligence records and French archival sources, an attempt is made to situate Khushi Mohammad Sepassi in a history encasing the unexpected and the transitory, exile and secrecy, political conviction and death.

Indian Students in Inter-war Berlin
Joachim Oesterheld

After World War I Berlin became the destination of many students from India. As long as the stipulations of the Versailles Treaty were in force they had to overcome various hurdles before reaching the German capital, then the third largest city in the world. After 1933 they were facing challenges of a different kind in Nazi Germany. Within two decades and despite all odds, about 40 Indians managed to submit successfully their Ph.D thesis at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-University (today's Humboldt University Berlin). The paper will first briefly deal with the circumstances under which Indian students opted for higher education in Germany and the consequences for them after returning to India, and in a larger part deal with various aspects of their academic and non-academic activities in Berlin.

International influences in modernist Hindi literature
Stefanie Rotsaert

The publication of *Tār Saptak*, an anthology of poetry edited by Saccidānand Hīrānand Vātsyāyan 'Agyeya', in 1943, heralded the beginning of modernism in Hindi literature, known as *Prayogvād* (Experimentalism), which later evolved into *Nayī Kavītā* (New Poetry). The writers of this trend, in which the search for new modes through experimenting is central, are known for assimilating influences from around the world. This paper will investigate which non-Indian (mainly western) influences shaped the ideas and works of some of the modernist Hindi authors, namely 'Agyeya' and Gajānan Mādhav Muktibodh. This paper will not be restricted to literary influences, but will also include influences on the political, social, cultural... level. By putting together biographical information I hope to be able to uncover how these Indian authors came in contact with the ideas of Western intellectuals such as Marx, Freud, Jung, T.S. Eliot... Did the modernist Hindi writers travel to the West and meet some of these intellectuals or did they stay at home and learn about them through their education, the reading of literature, etc.? The main focus will thus be on modes of reception, but will not be limited to it.

"Foreign Women are Leading Our Way": Indian Women's International Networking in the Early Twentieth Century
Shobna Nijhawan

This paper resituates Hindi vernacular sources of the early twentieth century from nationalist and colonial contexts to explicitly political feminist and transnational ones. It is well acknowledged and researched that Western women such as Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins were pioneering figures of the Indian women's movement. The early twentieth century, however, also witnessed numerous writings of Indian women such as Rameshwari Nehru, Uma Nehru and laywriters in Hindi women's periodicals, which I will be analyzing in this paper. Hindi women's writings and women's activism in the Hindi belt were fed by news about women's social liberation and political emancipation from the British mainland and the United States. What also formed news for women came from the colonial neighborhood (Burma, plantation colonies such as Fiji) and the non-Western world (Japan). Japan and Burma in particular were held high as models for civilization and progress

for women. Based on such writings this paper argues that Indian women writers were searching for colonial and non-Western models and not simply appropriating and emulating all that came from the supposed modern Western world. My examples will discuss how the writers were forging a pan-Asian identity of the colonized woman that was modern, but distanced from Western characteristics. It seeks to understand these writings in a new interpretative framework that may perhaps be marked as global and not simply anti-imperial or colonial.

Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany: ideal templates for India's economic development?
Maria Framke

Europe in the interwar period, particularly political, economic and social developments in Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany in the 1930s constituted a focal point in Indian public opinion and significantly influenced debates on education, foreign policy, economic development and not least Indian nationalism. Both resident and exiled Indians together with those who frequently were travelling to the western nations reported widely on the phenomena called 'fascism' and 'national socialism' in newspapers and journals published from South Asia. Through their writings they contributed to the perception of and responses towards fascism/national socialism and their various aspects in India.

The paper examines the spread of fascist ideas into the South Asian subcontinent in connection to themes of development and economics. These themes were widely discussed in South Asia, particularly against the background of Indian nationalism and the independence movement. While critical voices rejected the Fascism/National Socialism as fitting models for India's economic development, the 'planned economy' model as embodied in the Four-year-plans of Nazi-Germany and the model of the cooperative state, implemented in Italy, attracted not only intellectuals like Benoy Kumar Sarkar, P.N. Roy or Brij Narain, but also politicians in general.

Therefore, the paper not only looks at the public debate in the Indian press but also at the discussions that arose within different political parties, like the Indian National Congress, the Congress Socialist and the Hindu Mahasabha. A necessary inclusion will be the nature of exchange of ideas and personnel between fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and the Indians who travelled to these two countries.

'Oppressed Peoples of the World' and India, 1927-1930
Michele L. Louro

This paper examines the relationship between Jawaharlal Nehru and the League against Imperialism, a significant, oft-mentioned, yet little studied organization established in 1927 to coordinate anti-imperial forces worldwide. The League offered a significant space for Nehru, and by extension the Indian National Congress, to interact and build partnerships with political leaders in other colonies, mandates and dependencies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America; as well as with North American and European social reformers concerned with working class and racial equality. As this paper argues, the relationships unfolding within the League, and between Nehru and the League, proved to be elastic in some cases, but fragile in other cases. By examining the collaborative and contentious moments between Nehru and League members, this paper will contribute to an understanding of the possibilities and limitations of interwar international organizations to India's anti-colonial nationalism. A history of Nehru and his League connections also underscores the significance of the international and transnational terrain in which Indian nationalists contested empire. The paper ultimately encourages scholars to rethink the history of Indian anti-colonial nationalism as a complex set of interactions on the ground in India, but also beyond and through the colonial borders of the subcontinent.

Speaking With Free Lips: the Transnational Vision of the Progressive Writers' Association Maia Ramnath

This paper is part of an ongoing exploration of South Asian participation in a continuous transnational field of political activity and intellectual cross-fertilization, by which I hope over time collaboratively to weave the complex genealogy or composite portrait of an emancipatory counter-modernity. This entails differentiating anti-colonial liberation struggle conceived in broader solidarities and a principled systemic analysis, from particularist, *volkisch* nationalism; it also entails an ongoing rearticulation of national liberation struggle with both leftist and Pan-Islamist transnational grids of solidarity, identity and aspiration.

I focus here on the Progressive Writers Association, whose manifesto was formulated in London in 1935 by Sajjad Zaheer, Mulk Raj Anand and others. This focus allows me to illuminate themes central to the larger project: for example, what is a meaningful periodization for an "interwar" period? What are the subjective units of self-determination? How is a modernist agenda of social transformation prioritized in relation to anti-colonial and anti-capitalist mobilization? How are we to situate Indian diasporic radicalism in a shared field with Pan-Africanism, particularly given the PWA's later association with the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau during the post-war Bandung era? And last but not least, how is one to navigate the sometimes ambivalent relationship of art and literature to political action and social change?

Yearning for Revolution: Indian Radicals in Moscow during the Interwar Period Ali Raza

For many Indian radicals, exiled or otherwise, certain localities beyond the shores of British India provided an intellectual and political space for contesting Empire within the subcontinent. By the same token, such spaces were also utilized for striving towards an ambition of global change that was centered on notions of solidarity with the working classes as well as those oppressed by colonialism. While places as spatially distant and diverse as Berlin, San Francisco, Kabul, Paris and London remained important in the realization of this project, none was as crucial a focal point as Moscow.

This paper then, seeks to trace Indian revolutionaries who, inspired by the ideals of communist internationalism, traveled to Moscow during the interwar period. More specifically, it will examine these individuals as case studies in the hope of revealing how intellectual horizons and political inclinations evolved through the very experience of travel and engagements in spaces which afforded opportunities for radical politics. Additionally, for the purposes of a social history that has been stripped of its essentialist undertones, the main protagonists for this paper will be non-elites who were at the forefront of creating and reshaping this intellectual and political project.

More generally however, this paper seeks to uncover the internationalist aspect of the interwar period which has largely been subsumed by narratives centered on the history of Indian nationalism. Furthermore, this paper may also be interpreted as an attempt to create some space within historiography for non-elitist articulations of socio-political alternatives. Lastly, it is hoped that this project will contribute to the inclusion of the 'global' in the conceptually and territorially bound ambit of South Asian historiography.

Mahendra Pratap's Pan-Asianism and the ideological flexibility of interwar internationalism Carolien Stolte

Between the two world wars, an unprecedented increase in movements occurred, whose scope of engagement was not limited by geographical boundaries. Actors from different levels of society developed a variety of definitions of 'Asia' and initiatives for Asian unification founded on widely divergent ideas. For some ideologues, 'Asia' was no more than a vessel that could be filled with meaning to incentivise co-operation with other movements on the continent. To others, Asian unification was an end in itself, the means to which justified a certain ideological flexibility. The latter case is aptly demonstrated by the life of revolutionary 'Raja' Mahendra Pratap. By exploring Mahendra Pratap's Pan-Asianism, this paper will focus on the variety of alliances he engaged in to achieve his ideal - ranging from Islamism, to communism, to Japanese pan-Asianism and even eugenics. As such, this paper will demonstrate that his pursuits, while they remained closely wedded to the anti-imperialist project throughout his life, show a flexibility of discourse that can be contextualised by the larger history of Indian interwar internationalism, in this case routed through the Asian.

The "Beirut Indians" and Europe: changing political and religious concepts in the writings of Abdul Jabbar Kheiri and Abdul Sattar Kheiri
Heike Liebau

The paper concentrates on the political and religious ideas and activities of two Indian Muslim intellectuals, the brothers Abdul Jabbar Kheiri and Abdul Sattar Kheiri. Having graduated from the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh, they continued their studies in Baghdad, Cairo and Beirut. At the outbreak of the First World War, the Kheiri brothers articulated their desire to collaborate with Germany. The brothers' further career was shaped by the War years and the 1920s which they spent in Europe, basically in Berlin. The Kheiri brothers returned to India in the beginning of the 1930s.

Through their political and religious activities both during and after the war the brothers were confronted with a wide range of ideas and ideologies. The paper will ask how their political, religious and social opinion on world order, the British Empire, "Western" civilization and the role of Islam were shaped by the war-years. It tries to analyse how they integrated these experiences and knowledge into their religious, cultural and political self-perception as well as how they implemented them into their activities in Europe as well as in India.

The contribution will be mainly based on analysing publications and writings of Abdul Jabbar and Abdul Sattar Kheiri ranging from periodicals like *Islam* (Berlin 1922) and *Journal of the German Society* (Aligarh 1934/6) to books like *Indien und seine Arbeiterschaft* (India and its working class, Berlin 1927) or *Dīn aur us kī ḥaqīqat* (Religion and its truth, Delhi 1940).

The surveillance of Indian anti-colonialists in Britain, France, and Germany
Daniel Brueckenhau

The paper analyzes the surveillance of Indian anti-colonialists who were active in Britain, France and Germany in the inter-war period. It argues that being under constant government surveillance led the anti-colonialists to create networks across national borders – writing and publishing their pamphlets in "safe" spaces, or moving back and forth across national borders to escape the grasp of the political police forces. The Indians' "subversive" movements across space, in turn, led to a higher degree of cooperation and information exchange between the different countries' authorities. Thereby a feed-back cycle was created in which trans-national connections on both sides of the colonialist/anti-colonialist divide were intensified. At the same time the paper examines the underlying contradictions between the authorities' proclaimed belief in national sovereignty and

their efforts to build an “anti-anti-colonialist Holy Alliance.” This conflict led to heated discussions in the public sphere which sometimes could be used by anti-colonialists to strengthen their own position.

Internationalisms in the Interwar Years: The Travelling of Ideas, With People and Without Benjamin Zachariah

This paper is an attempt to trace channels and networks of ideas and ideological exchange, in particular between Europe and India, between the two world wars. It thus has two main aims: firstly, it will raise a few methodological questions about the connections between international social histories and intellectual histories. Secondly, by way of grounding the above questions in a specific context, it examines the politics and ideological exchanges of a group of Indian exiles in Germany through their lives and connections with ‘home’ and the rest of the world, during the First World War, in the Weimar Republic, and in the Third Reich. In so doing, I seek to study the international historical dimensions of a social and intellectual history of South Asia, and specifically the ideological movements of communism, fascism and nationalism, thereby contributing to histories that demonstrate the tendency of ideas to travel across contexts and state boundaries.

This paper, therefore, attempts a mapping of individual social histories, institutional and ideological networks, flows and movements of people, and the influence of world events that made up what might be called the internationalist moment of the interwar period, asking what made that moment different (in intensity, the quality and quantity of exchanges, promises of liberation) from other historical moments, and asks whether our understanding of the movements of ideas in this period, but perhaps also in general, needs to be revised.

At Home and In The World: International Dimensions of the Organisation of Youth Movements in India in the first half of the 20th Century” Franziska Roy

The paper will seek to outline the possibilities for a comparative social history of the mobilisation of youth in different political or 'social' movements in India and Pakistan, c. 1915-1950. It will focus on the ubiquitous importance of the international context within the national arena, pointing to an international interconnectedness of tendencies, moods and ideas that penetrate the practices of youth and volunteer organisations. Social and structural similarities will be highlighted. I seek to overcome the focus on the 'manliness' of such organisations by looking at youth of either sex.

The profile of different youth organisations was often similar and in various ways interconnected. Despite their ideological diversity, they shared rigid notions of discipline, typically including a paramilitary outfit. Movements sometimes used the same physical spaces, shared personnel, or had personnel who moved between youth movements in unexpected trajectories. The ‘uplift’ and protection of the ‘community’ was typically one of their responsibilities and volunteer bodies of other ‘communities’ would be set up to keep up with the existing ones. A mutual game of deterrence furthered the vicious circle of communal anxieties. At the same time, youth movements close to the Congress started various international cooperations often with a pacifist outlook. What permeated all the movements was a sense of necessary self-purification or 'awakening' achieved by selfless service, the ultimate object of which was almost invariably the 'nation'. Even 'apolitical' groups were informed by the need to make the power of youth available for the organic national body, a phenomenon linked to the interwar Zeitgeist. The study thus can shed new light on 'national discipline' within the process of 'nation-building'.