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Orienting India : Interwar Internationalism in an Asian Inflection, 1917-1937

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Citation
Stolte, C. M. (2013, October 8). *Orienting India : Interwar Internationalism in an Asian Inflection, 1917-1937*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/21864

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Cover Page

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Author: Stolte, Carolina Margaretha
Title: Orienting India : interwar internationalism in an Asian inflection, 1917-1937
Issue Date: 2013-10-08

Orienting India

Orienting India:
Interwar Internationalism
in an Asian Inflection, 1917-1937

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof. mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op dinsdag 8 oktober 2013
klokke 13:45 uur

door

Carolina Margaretha Stolte
geboren te Groningen
in 1983

Promotiecommissie

Promotores

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Dit proefschrift is financieel ondersteund door de Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO) onder projectnummer 021.001.121.

انقلاب

نہ ایشیا میں نہ یورپ میں سوز و ساز حیات

خودی کی موت ہے یہ اور وہ ضمیر کی موت

دلوں میں ولولہ انقلاب ہے پیدا

قریب آگیی شاید جہان پیر کی موت

Revolution
Death to man's soul is Europe, death is Asia
To man's will: neither feels the vital current
In men's hearts stirs a revolution's torrent
Maybe our old world too is nearing death

جمعیت اقوام مشرق

پانی بہی مسخّر ہوا بہی ہے مسخّر

کیا ہو جو نگاہ فلک پیر بدل جائے

دیکھا ہے ملوکیت افرنگ نے جو خواب

ممکن ہے کہ اس خواب کی تعبیر بدل جائے

طہران ہو گر عالم مشرق کا جنیوا

شاید کرۂ ارض کی تقدیر بدل جائے

An Eastern League of Nations
Conquered the waters, conquered the air
Why should old heaven change looks, not wear?
Europe's imperialists dreamed – but their dream
Soothsayers soon may read a new way!
Asia's Geneva let Teheran be
Earth's book of fate new statutes may see.

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938),
Zarb-i-Kalim/The Rod of Mozes, 1936

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List of abbreviations

AAPSC	Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Committee
AAPSM	Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Movement
AAWC	All-Asia Women's Congress
AICC	All-India Congress Committee
AITUC	All-India Trade Union Congress
AIWC	All-India Women's Congress
APAC	Asia, Pacific, and Africa Collections, British Library
ARC	Asian Relations Conference
ARO	Asian Relations Organization
ASD	Archivio Storico Diplomatico (Archive of Diplomatic History, Rome)
Comintern	Communist International
DIB	District Intelligence Bureau
DMP	David Morse Papers
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
GUF	Gruppo Universitario Fascista (Fascist University Group)
ICWA	Indian Council of World Affairs
IFTU	International Federation of Trade Unions
IIL	Indian Independence League
IISH	International Institute for Social History
ILO	International Labour Organization
INA	Indian National Army
INC	Indian National Congress
IOR	India Office Records
KMT	Kuomintang (Goumindang)
KUTV	Kommunističeskij Universitet Trudjaŝihsja Vostoka (Communist University of the Toilers of the East)
LaI	League against Imperialism
LoC	Library of Congress
LoN	League of Nations
MCC	Meerut Conspiracy Case
MSA	Maharashtra State Archives
NA	Nationaal Archief (National Archives, The Hague)
NAI	National Archives of India
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
NTUC	National Trade Union Congress
NTUF	National Trade Union Federation
PPC	Private Papers Collection
PPTUS	Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat

RCCSRMH	Rossijskij Centr Hranenija i Izučenija Dokumentov Novejšej Istorii (Russian Centre for Conservation and Study of Records for Modern History)
RCI	Rapporten Centrale Inlichtingendienst (Central Intelligence Reports)
RG	Raccolte Generale (General Collections)
RGASPI	Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Arhiv Social'no-političeskoj Istorii (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History)
RILU	Red International of Trade Unions
RBA	Rabindra Bhavan Archives
RNBP	Roger Nash Baldwin Papers
RNPP	Rameshwari Nehru Personal Papers
SMML	Seeley Mudd Manuscript Library
SPP	Savarkar Private Papers
UN	United Nations
VB	Viśva Bharati
WBSA	West Bengal State Archives
ZMO	Zentrum Moderner Orient

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Acknowledgments

This project came to life in the fall semester of 2008 in New Delhi. I was welcomed to Jawaharlal Nehru University by Pius Malekandathil, who introduced me to the staff of the Centre for Historical Studies and the comforts of Aravali Guesthouse. Memories of the JNU library canteen, the campus wildlife and the friendly staff of the P.C. Joshi Archives will stay with me for years to come. I have felt welcome at all of the archives I visited over the course of this dissertation, but the P.C. Joshi Archives will always stand out for helping me practice my Hindi and for including me in their afternoon tea breaks.

Off-campus, the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library at Teen Murti gave me smiles, great food, a wealth of sources, and a tennis elbow from the microfilm wheel. It also gave me Subah Dayal and Maria Framke, who even evicted their third housemate so that I could live with them in tranquil Gulmohar Park and share an auto to our second home at Teen Murti every day. I really do owe the NMML a great deal, including the friendship of Michele Louro, and through her, of Benjamin Zachariah, Franziska Roy, Ali Raza and Maia Ramnath. Before that winter, all of us had thought ourselves alone with our stories of interwar internationalists. During that winter, we discovered that our projects were complementary, and many projects have followed since. Without 'the internationalists,' writing this dissertation would have been a lonely enterprise.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to the participants of the States of Transition conference in Medan in 2009 for their advice at the conference itself but even more so since: especially Tim Harper, Sunil Amrith, Marieke Bloembergen, Remco Raben, and Henk Schulte Nordholt. Later that year, Lakshmi Subrahmaniam offered a home at Jamia Milia Islamia University during a second stay in Delhi. Looking back, most of the research for this dissertation was made possible by friends around the world who opened their homes and lives to me. I am thinking especially of Michele, from whose home I commuted to Princeton; Matthijs Geneste, who provided shelter in London; Ben, for creating a base of operations in Berlin; Anjana Singh, for introducing me to Mumbai; and Rebecca Byerly, for keeping me sane during my last months of research in Delhi with long runs through the Rajokri Protected Forest.

However, the long write-up of this dissertation was done at Leiden, and I owe my biggest thanks to the Colonial and Global History group – for motivating and distracting me, probably in equal parts. I was especially fortunate to have Jos Gommans, Marijke van Wissen, Leonard Blussé, Alicia Schrikker, Andreas Weber, Karwan Fatah, Amrit Dev, Nira Wickramasinghe, and Sanjukta Sunderason among my colleagues. I also thank the students of Cosmopolis. They form a unique micro-cosmos within the Institute for History, and have always included me in both late-night library sessions and in much-needed downtime. Leiden also remains the home base of the journal Itinerario and I have learned, and am learning, much from being a part of its editorial team.

Finally, I thank Lincoln Paine for his editorial comments, and Mahmood Kooria for designing the cover. However, there is only one person who has patiently endured my long absences, read most of this dissertation at various stages of the process, saved me from mixed metaphors, helped me think through research problems whenever I got stuck, and made tea when I could not get unstuck. This dissertation is dedicated to him.

Introduction

> In the name of religion the missionaries, and in the name of science the scholars, have been rousing the worst passions of Oriental humanity. They dare do this because they know that Young Asia is unarmed and disarmed. And they can afford to exasperate eight hundred million human beings as long as these peoples remain unrepresented by independent armies, independent navies and independent air-fleets … Only then, in the event of Asia recovering its natural rights from the temporary aggressors and illegitimate usurpers, will sanity prevail in the deliberations of the great Peace-Council convened by the Parliament of Man. The futurists of Young Asia are looking forward to that spiritual re-birth of the world.[1]

With these words, polyglot internationalist and sociologist Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887–1949) opened his *Futurism of Young Asia*, published in Berlin in 1922. Rejecting both imperialism and cultural nationalism, he appealed to all of Asia to modernize, quickly and completely, in order to play a role in the world that befitted its size and population. He was not alone in his appeal to supranational affinities. In the years between the two world wars, Indian artists, intellectuals, activists, feminists, religious revivalists, trade unionists, and others framed their thoughts and actions on an Asian scale. Their projects for Asian unification ranged from specific causes, such as drawing international attention to the dismal working conditions in Asian industries, to political unification in an Asian federation. This regionalist enthusiasm occurred across the political and religious spectrum. Under the banner of Asia, they wrote texts, started movements, professed solidarity, built networks, crossed borders, and organized conferences.

In order to appeal to Asia, one first had to establish that Asia was a relatively homogenous space, or at least shared certain characteristics. What the Asianist projects analysed in this dissertation had in common, therefore, was the projection onto Asia of collective identities and historical trajectories. These ranged from commonalities in culture or religion to the shared experience of European domination. They also shared visions of a decolonized Asia, even if those visions themselves differed. In this sense, this dissertation follows Manu Goswami's assertion that the temporal referent of internationalist movements must always be the future.[2] Second, if Asia were to be more than an idea or ideal-type, one had to establish what it encompassed geographically. The size and shape of the resulting 'Asia' in these projects differed. It could not be located on a map. Its territory was fluid and its capitals were many.

This dissertation examines different expressions of Asianism that originated on the Indian subcontinent, and asks how they functioned as appeals to translocal solidarities. In doing so, it is emphatically not looking for any specific 'Asia'. Rather, it takes the fluidity of the geographical concept of 'Asia' as a given, seeking to avoid John Steadman's lamentation

[1] B. Kumar Sarkar, *The Futurism of Young Asia and Other Essays on the Relations Between the East and the West* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1922), 21–2.

[2] M. Goswami, 'Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms', *American Historical Review* 117:5 (2012): 1461–85: 1461.

that what plagues 'specialized discussions of Asia is the tyranny of the word and the concept. Because one talks about "Asia", because one has an idea of "Asia", one assumes that it must actually exist. … Many a writer on Asia treats the Orient as though it were a single entity (which it is not) and thus postulates a unity that has no real existence outside his own imagination'.[3] We are dealing here not with geographies but with metageographies: spatial structures that ordered knowledge, justified movements, and visualized the potential shape and role of Asia in a decolonized world. 'Asia' was thus a blank canvas on which meaning could be projected if and when a particular agenda so required.[4]

In dissecting the ways in which the blank canvas of Asia was given meaning, the following questions are kept in mind. Firstly, what were the concrete motives of Indian Asianists to appropriate the concept of Asianism? Why did they chose a continental, rather than a national or local scale? This dissertation seeks to add an 'Asian scale' to the historiography of a period which has been predominantly viewed from local, communal and national perspectives. This is in keeping with larger historiographical trends. A focus on the mobility of people, goods and ideas is no longer the exclusive domain of global or world history, or even of regional approaches such as Atlantic or Indian Ocean history. David Armitage recently phrased this in strong terms: 'if you are not doing an explicitly transnational, international or global project, you now have to explain *why* you are not. There is now sufficient evidence from a sufficiently wide range of historiographies that these transnational connections have been determinative, influential and shaping throughout recorded human history, for about as long as we have known about it. The hegemony of national historiography is over.'[5]

Secondly, this dissertation seeks to illuminate the concrete results of these Indian Asianisms, and how they manifested themselves politically and culturally. In doing so, two interrelated questions are asked, keeping the same question of scale in mind: how were Indian Asianists connected to the larger international networks and organizations of the interwar period? And how were their views and activities shaped by local, communal, and nationalist agendas? Situating Indian Asianists in the mobile environment of interwar internationalism, as well as examining the impact of their activities on their respective local environments, serves to clarify the relative weight of Asianist activities in the interwar years. Were these networks self-referential, the purview of a cosmopolitan elite? Or were they part of a wider Asianist enthusiasm that included the public sphere as well as less elite groups? In other words, was 'Asia' an integral part of anti-colonial activism in interwar South Asia?

Recent scholarship demonstrates an increased interest in the versatile meanings that regions have acquired throughout history in order to lay claim to or contest political, cultural, and economic hegemonies.[6] 'Asia' as a region has arguably seen the most marked surge in

[3] J. Steadman, *The Myth of Asia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 14–5.

[4] For this point, see also M. Frey and N. Spakowski, 'Asianismen seit dem 19. Jahrhundert. 'Asien' als Gegenstand nationaler und transnationaler Diskurse und Pratiken', *Comparativ* 18:6 (2008): 7–15; M. E. Lewis and K. E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), ix.

[5] M. van Ittersum and J. Jacobs, 'Are We All Global Historians Now?', *Itinerario* 36:2 (2012): 7-28: 16.

[6] See P. Duara, 'The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism', *Journal of World History* 12:1 (2001): 99–130.

studies of regionalist movements. However, many of these studies focus on Asianist initiatives driven by national governments and intended ultimately to serve national interests. The available source corpus is partly responsible: the archive is often nationally structured.[7] If Asianism is stripped of its statist connotations and understood as a set of initiatives inherently meant to cross borders and subvert empires, one is left with actors and projects that do not conform to neat national or linguistic categories, which makes them both harder to track down in the archive and harder to study within the current disciplinary divisions of academia. The multilingual and shifting borderlands where much of this interaction takes place are more often departmental afterthoughts than coveted academic territories.[8] Central Asia is a case in point. Ongoing initiatives seek to overcome these obstacles. One example is the two-volume collection edited by Sven Saaler and Christopher Szpilman, which brings together Asianist texts from various geographical locations and thus greatly facilitates access to multilingual sources on Asian regionalism.[9]

So far, this interest in Asianism has largely bypassed South Asia. South Asian historiography itself may have begun to transcend its formerly narrow nationalist frames, but the study of Asianism as a concept is still largely the purview of East Asian regionalism.[10] If Indian actors are represented at all in the historiography of Asianism, they figure merely as recipients of ideologies that originated in places far removed from the subcontinent. They are presented as (self-)exiled revolutionaries, intellectuals, and academics whose ideas are derivative of Asianist concepts circulating at various moments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Ottoman Empire or Japan.[11] A notable exception to this rule is Rabindranath Tagore, whose Asianism might be said to constitute a field of study unto itself.[12] However even in the case of Tagore, his links with Japan, however important, are often emphasized to the point of erasing his many other Asianist engagements.[13]

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[7] See, in particular, Ann Stoler's point of the archive as 'the supreme technology of the late nineteenth century imperial state.' A. L. Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87–109: 87.

[8] See W. van Schendel, 'Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia', in P. Kratoska, R. Raben, and H. Schulte Nordholt, *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2005), 275–307: 279.

[9] S. Saaler and C. W. A. Szpilman, *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History*, 2 vols. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011).

[10] See, among others, E. Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War 1931–1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); P. Katzenstein and T. Shiraishi, *Network Power: Japan and Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); P. Duus, 'Imperialism without Colonies: The Vision of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 7:1 (1996): 54–72.

[11] See, in particular, Ç. Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[12] For example R. Barucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); M. Frost, '"That Great Ocean of Idealism": Calcutta, the Tagore Circle and the Idea of Asia, 1900–1920', S. Moorthy and A. Jamal, *Indian Ocean Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 251–79; C. Stolte and H. Fischer-Tiné, 'Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism, ca. 1905–1940', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54:1 (2012): 65–92.

[13] See, for instance, Tagore on Western Asia: *Journey to Persia and Iraq* (Santiniketan: Viśva Bharati, 1994).

The pull of the Khilafat, the impact of the Russo-Japanese War, and the charisma of modernized Japan have been well documented.[14] But this narrative of 'derivative Asianism' is reductive in two ways when applied to South Asia. It leaves no room for Asianist visions that originated on the subcontinent itself and were driven by locally-shaped agendas, and it overlooks visions of Asia that did not focus either on East Asia or on a Muslim world that was conflated with Asia. In fact, viewed from South Asia especially, Asian regionalism could take on many shapes indeed, depending on one's perspective. With the option of looking towards the Arabian Sea, the wider Indian Ocean, the caravan routes into Central Asia, the Soviet Union, or elsewhere, myriad political, cultural, or religious identities could determine a regionalist agenda. And in the first half of the twentieth century, Indian thinkers, revolutionaries, and activists explored all of these.

(Pan)Asianism

This dissertation thus seeks to move away from an approach to (Pan)Asianism as the exclusive domain of East Asia, in which Indian actors are only accorded a role as recipients or transmitters of ideas, rather than as their creators. However, the term (Pan)Asianism is still used, which is therefore in need of some qualification. Firstly, its use here does not follow Louis Snyder's concept of Pan-movements as macro-nationalisms. Indian (Pan)Asianism was more than 'nationalism writ large'.[15] Some Indian Asianists were self-consciously antinationalist and sought to establish a single Asian state; others saw Asian solidarity as a means to achieve independence for Asian nations (including India); and still others wanted to abolish states altogether. Second, Indian (Pan)Asianism was not necessarily anti-Western.[16] As is shown in the third chapter, Asianists' relationship to the West, and to Europe in particular, were much more complex. Although all projects in this dissertation were anti-imperialist, there were several who sought to work with continental Europe against the British, or who saw in fascist Italy and the Weimar Republic potential models for fast, state-driven modernization and industrialization. Moreover, although the West was an important point of reference for most Asianisms, especially those with strong anti-imperialist overtones, many Asianist projects challenged traditional orders in Asia as much as outside ones.[17] Third, and more generally, (Pan)Asianism is taken here to be more than an 'anti-movement. While different expressions of Asianism could be anti-Western, anti-imperialist, anti-European, antimodernist, or even anti-Islamic, 'Asia' was more than a term of exclusion. Many Asianists ascribed positive characteristics to Asia, believing strongly in the existence of an Asian 'identity' or an Asian 'culture'. Fourth, Pan-Asianism and Asianism should be distinguished from one another. Though mindful of Saaler and Szpilman's point that variations of the term—including the term 'Greater Asianism' as it is often translated from Chinese or

[14] M. Hasan and M. Pernau, *Regionalizing Pan-Islamism: Documents on the Khilafat Movement* (Delhi: Manohar, 2005); M. N. Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British-Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement 1918–1924* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

[15] L. L. Snyder, *Macro-Nationalisms: A History of the Pan-Movements* (Westport: Greenwood, 1984), introduction.

[16] Aydin, 'The Politics of Anti-Westernism'; T. Miyagi, 'Postwar Japan and Asianism', *Asia-Pacific Review* 13:2 (2006): 1–17.

[17] Saaler and Szpilman, 'Introduction', 9.

Japanese—overlap to the point of being essentially synonymous, I have chosen here to use Pan-Asianism for those projects that sought the political unification of Asia, and Asianism for the rest.[18] A few inconsistencies do occur, but these are due to terms employed by the historical actors themselves.

Finally, the choice to qualify the Indian regionalist projects of the interwar years as 'Asianist' is due to the historical use of the term. 'Region' as a concept is rarely encountered in the interwar period, and while this does not necessarily exclude it as a useful term of analysis, the subject of this thesis is specifically the invocation of 'Asia' by Indian men and women from every possible religious and political affiliation. The fact that they all appealed to 'Asia' presupposes a strong belief in the translocal solidarity, and shared sense of belonging, that Asia represented. It presupposes that being 'Asian' meant something to them, and that their audience would immediately understand what it was. This is what struck me when I first started reading newspapers and pamphlets from this period. It is also what inspired the writing of this dissertation. I have chosen to emphasize this by using the term itself in my analysis, and not a substitute. It is in no way intended to refer to or invoke the pejorative British term 'Pan-Asiatic', which, like its cousin 'Pan-Islamic', suggested primarily subversion, deviation, and threat.

Internationalism

Despite the use of the term (Pan)Asianism, this dissertation thus seeks to move away from the framing of Indian Asianist projects as a subordinate part of the history of (East Asian) Pan-Asianism. Instead, it views these projects as part of the larger internationalist enthusiasm prevailing in the interwar period. In this way, it seeks to connect with recent histories of what has come to be termed 'interwar internationalism'.[19] This interwar internationalist moment is currently the favoured unit of analysis to describe the emergence and proliferation, in multiple centres around the world, of analogous practices of association and claim making. This period has also been dubbed the 'internationalist moment', and the period in which 'global civil society' took hold.[20] This proliferation of internationalist projects, associations, and societies built on ideas and movements that originated in the period 1880–1914, but intensified during the years between the wars.[21] The First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the

[18] Idem, 38.

[19] Mrinalini Sinha was arguably the first to apply the term to South Asia. See M. Sinha, 'Suffragism and Internationalism: The Enfranchisement of British and Indian Women under an Imperial State', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 36:4 (1999): 461–84: 478. See also M. Ramnath, *The Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Santa Cruz: University of California Press, 2011). For a more general and somewhat Eurocentric overview, see D. Laqua, ed., *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars* (London: IB Taurus, 2011). For an overview less of the internationalist ideas circulating in the interwar period and more on the international connectedness of the period, see H. Liebau et al., *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia (Leiden: Brill, 2010).*

[20] For the internationalist moment, see the essays in A. Raza, F. Roy, and B. Zachariah, *The Internationalist Moment* (New Delhi: Sage, 2013). For the global civil society approach, see A. Arsan, S. L. Lewis and A. Richard, 'The Roots of Global Civil Society and the Interwar Moment', *Journal of Global History* 7:2 (2012): 157–65.

[21] For these earlier engagements, see H. Fischer-Tiné, 'Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces': Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War', *Journal of*

establishment of the League of Nations all gave more or less impetus to the internationalist projects of the interwar years that makes this period qualitatively different from the preceding decades. When this period ends is another question entirely. The interwar period in Asia ended before the traditional marker of 1939, with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in July 1937, and the internationalist enthusiasm of the interwar years had important afterlives during and after the Second World War, albeit in a changed global environment. This is further problematized in chapter 5.

In placing the ideas, activities and projects of Indian Asianists in the context of interwar internationalism, this project seeks to contribute to the increasingly voluminous scholarship on the internationalist moment by locating a series of internationalist expressions in this period in less likely physical and mental locales. Indian Asianists operated in conversation with, but often removed from, the European metropolitan centres of activism and the halls of the League of Nations at Geneva. This point is elaborated further in chapter 1. The question, then, remains what terms are best used to describe the intensification of traffic between South Asia and the wider world in this period. 'International' is not a favoured term for its lingering associations with the Communist International. 'Transnational', 'global', and 'cosmopolitan' are currently the most popular alternatives. However, 'transnational history' marks the crossing of borders as exceptional, thereby reifying those borders, which is the very thing it claims not to do. And while 'global history' may remedy that particular issue, that term invokes a totality that research projects subsumed under that category rarely realize. It might be more constructive if that term continued to refer to the study of historical globalization and was not employed as a clever way to avoid the use of terms that presuppose the domain of the national. 'Cosmopolitan', even though the versatility of this term has been convincingly demonstrated by Kris Manjapra and Sugata Bose, is usually associated with the projects of highly mobile intellectual elites.[22] Though these do figure prominently in the following pages, the Asianist moment in South Asia was wider than that. In fact, international ideologies, texts, and places became part of the everyday in this period. New York, Berlin, and Paris as well as Tashkent, Shanghai, and Moscow were included in the worldviews of people not necessarily involved in elite discussions or cosmopolitan solidarities. The resulting international networks and routes were travelled as much by scholar-activists such as Benoy Kumar Sarkar as by lascar-revolutionaries such as Amir Haider Khan, who are treated in chapters 3 and 4, respectively. This dissertation uses the term 'international' to refer to these projects, as this is the term privileged by the historical actors involved, who projected no statist connotations onto it. This arguably becomes more problematic during decolonization: non-alignment and its associated groups and movements in the Cold War era must be understood in the context of states acting within the more rigid rules of a post-war 'international' domain—which by that time had come to refer to 'inter-state'. What follows here, however, is a history of Asianism in the interwar period: a part of the internationalist moment in a regionalist inflection.

Global History 2L3 (2007): 325–44; Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*; F. Roy, H. Liebau, and R. Ahuja, *When the War Began, We Heard of Several Kings: South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2010).

[22] K. Manjapra and S. Bose, *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Sources

This dissertation relies on a combination of sources. These can be grouped in, roughly, three categories: archives produced by the state; published and unpublished documents produced by groups; and published articles, private papers, and oral histories produced by individuals. The first category consists primarily of intelligence files produced by regional branches of the British Indian police. It is no surprise that the government of India considered most Asianist projects and ideas subversive and grouped them in much the same category as 'Bolshevik' or 'Pan-Islamic' threats. This means that the groups and individuals involved found themselves under surveillance. It also means that the historian encounters them in categories produced by the colonial state, which projected characteristics (and adjectives) onto them that, in hindsight, are exaggerations in some cases, underestimations in others, and wrong in most.[23] The resources and manpower devoted to the surveillance of these often very small groups speaks to the threat that international affinities were perceived to pose. Richard Popplewell's estimation of many Indian revolutionaries as 'breathtakingly incompetent' is condescending and unkind, but the importance that colonial police attached to the eclectic ideas of often solitary figures does take the present-day historian by surprise.[24]

Other than the 'big fish', reports about whom made it into reports to London and, ultimately, the India Office Records currently held in the British Library, the bulk of information on Indian Asianism is located in reports of day-to-day surveillance found in archives produced by police departments in cities with large number of activists, such as the trade unions of Bombay and the academic associations in Calcutta; or by those in major ports, where harbour police monitored the traffic of texts and people. These documents often include not only the voice of the colonial administration, but also that of the 'subversive' him- or herself, through intercepted letters and telegrams, reports on meetings by informants, or interviews with returning travellers. Of course, all of these voices passed through the filter of the administration that recorded them. Correspondence was selected for censorship or interception; informants report on (or sometimes adapt to) what their paymaster seeks to learn; and interviews with returning travellers are shaped by the fact that the mere act of travelling was suspect. A traveller was always at risk of coming into contact with dangerous ideas and people in the spaces he or she transited. Of course, this perception of danger was danger to the colonial state rather than to the individual in question.[25] A critical engagement with this 'prose of counter-insurgency' is called for, but if these sources are read carefully and supplemented where possible with other materials, they can be informative nevertheless.[26]

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[23] For an elaboration of the categories produced by the colonial archive, see A. L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), esp. 35–9.

[24] R. Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire, 1904–1924* (London: Routledge, 1995), 4.

[25] A. Raza and B. Zachariah, 'To Take Arms Across a Sea of Trouble': The Lascar System, Politics and Agency in the 1920s, *Itinerario* 36:3 (2012): 19–38: 21.

[26] For an elaboration of this point, see R. Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', in N. B. Dirks et al., *Culture, Power, History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 336–71.

The second category consists of pamphlets, minutes, telegrams, and periodicals produced by groups that identified themselves as a movement, organization, association, or society with common aims. Examples considered in the following pages are the League against Imperialism, the Asiatic Labour Congress, the Greater India Society, and the Oriental Students' Organization. A certain institutional bias is unavoidable here: individuals involved in these groups might simultaneously be involved in other groups, or they might subscribe to some of a group's tenets, but not all. However, the activities of these groups, and especially the ways in which they presented themselves to the outside world and were perceived in turn, reveals much about the currency of their ideas in their respective locations and contexts.

The last category consists of published works, private papers, and oral histories produced by individuals. For obvious reasons, the first of these was overwhelmingly produced by educated and mobile elites. They had the means to travel, and their texts stood a greater chance of being published outside the British Empire. In addition, many vocal Asianists were branded 'subversive' and had warrants issued against them. Several chose to reside abroad permanently, or moved around regularly, and published in the places in which they stayed. Regardless of the circumstances, their publications are more accessible than their often scattered private writings. However, for a large number of Asianists, India remained their permanent home, and the writings of many are now kept in the National Archives of India or the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Others were either deemed ineligible for such a distinction or did not write much at all. However, as is argued in the fourth chapter, there are ways of receiving a glimpse of their stories nevertheless. Finally, the Nehru Memorial Museum has, over the course of the last thirty-odd years, collected the memoires of those involved in various movements in the decades leading up to independence. Drawn from a wide political spectrum, these included not only nationalists but also former *muhajirs*, Indian National Army officials, communists, feminists, and many others. Though an invaluable source, these accounts do suffer from all the problems associated with such histories: recorded several decades after the fact, they reveal as much about the anti-imperialist narratives constructed by the postcolonial state and its historians as about the events they recall.[27] Read with care, however, they reveal important networks of affinity that are difficult to find in other sources: the intersections and overlaps of international Asianist movements through friendships, relationships, meetings, and networks, often over great distances and sometimes in unexpected places.

Structure

This dissertation seeks to demonstrate that Indian (Pan)Asianism was a particular expression of interwar internationalism: it had specific concerns but existed in conversation with other internationalisms. In this way, this dissertation adds an 'Asian scale' to local, communal, and national narratives of interwar South Asia, and examines the interactions between these different levels. By looking at the activities of Indian Asianists on both local and international scales, it also assesses the relative weight and importance of the Asianist momentum of the interwar years. Finally, and most importantly, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate that this

[27] On the instability of perceptions of the past, see P. Thompson, *Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 2006), esp. 68.

Asianist enthusiasm in India existed across the political and religious spectrum. This will be illustrated by exploring Indian Asianism through four different lenses: the Asianism of labour activists; of intellectuals; of (self-)exiled revolutionaries; and finally its Nehruvian finale, the post-war Asianism of the New Delhi Asian Relations Conference, held in March–April 1947. This conference marked the last time that many of these groups and individuals met.

Chapter 1 will explore the interwar internationalist moment in a broad sense, and India's place within it. Moving from interwar internationalism in general to the specific Asian inflection that is the subject of this thesis, it asks how the category of 'interwar' should be understood in an Asian context; whether a different chronology applies; and if so, whether it can still be considered part of the same 'moment.' This chapter further seeks to shed light on how this moment of regionalist enthusiasm should be understood, which forces shaped it, and whether and how it related to the simultaneous high point of nationalism in this period. This chapter will further explore the diversity of Indian Asianisms in this period, and clarify which geographical concepts of Asia underlay these different Asianist expressions.

Chapter 2 seeks to highlight the importance of Asianism in the international engagements of the Indian trade union movement, and the solidarities and opportunities, but also challenges and antagonisms that the Asian theatre posed. The All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) faced several options for trade union cooperation in Asia, and in 1929 the Congress actually split into two rival federations over the issue of its Asian affiliations. On one side we find the reformist faction of AITUC, which sought to address Asian labour issues through the machinery of the International Labour Organization and cooperated with Japanese Trade Union Federations to convene an Asiatic Labour Congress in the early 1930s. On the other side, the revolutionary faction courted cooperation with the Asian branch of the Red International of Trade Unions, the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat. Both factions consciously sought out Asian platforms to express anti-imperialist solidarities in the context of specific Asian labour issues. This Asianism in a labour inflection became impossible for the revolutionaries when Soviet withdrawal of support for activities in colonial Asia led to the disbanding of the secretariat in 1936. For the reformists, it ended when their primary interlocutor in Asia, Japan, invaded China in 1937.

Chapter 3 explores the Asianism of Indian intellectuals and academics by examining their conceptions of Asia as a unitary civilization based on shared spiritual, religious or cultural identities. It also considers the 'India Magna' or 'Greater India' thesis. This latter discourse, which came to occupy an important place in the Indian public sphere of the interwar period, refers to the historical spread of cultures and religions from the Indian subcontinent to the rest of Asia, with a focus on Southeast Asia. It celebrated the historical links between Asian regions, and believed that decolonization would re-forge those severed ties. While acting as a catalyst for a variety of archaeological and cultural missions, Greater India thought had far-reaching implications through the networks it generated. This 'academic Asianism' was strongly tied to Bengal's Viśva Bharati University, founded by poet and Asianist Rabindranath Tagore, which functioned as a nodal point of not only academic but also Asian revolutionary networks. Finally, Greater India thought grew from an idea that held particular appeal for Bengal, to a Pan-Indian and even transcontinental movement, and the Greater India Society became a hub for Asia scholars with a variety of agendas. Like the labour Asianism discussed in chapter 2, this Asianism as expressed through academic

networks was eclipsed in the late 1930s thanks in part to its links to several European academic networks that were caught in the maelstrom of politics in fascist Italy. Here, too, the Sino-Japanese war inhibited both physical and intellectual operation in Asia, but its European interlocutors also lost their internationalist enthusiasm as war loomed on the horizon and the League of Nations project failed. The Italo-Indian networks dissolved with Italy's invasion of Abyssinia, which exposed it as an imperialist power.

Chapter 4 considers the Asianist engagements of Indian (self-)exiled revolutionaries, primarily in Central and East Asia. Roughly, the individuals and groups considered here fall into two categories: political exiles, who could not return to India because of Asianist politics and made a temporary or permanent home elsewhere in Asia; and expatriates, members of the sizeable Indian mercantile and student communities that could be found throughout Asia. Both categories were fluid and overlapping; one might pass from one to the other or temporarily be both. The chapter explores the varied activities of these exiles. Two main networks of revolutionary Asianism are examined, one across the Asian landmass and one connected by shipping routes. The first network was held together by Asian continental caravan and trade routes, and connected, among others, Tashkent, Baku, and Moscow. These three cities saw considerable Asianist engagement following the Bolshevik Revolution and thanks to the Soviet Union's Asian policies in the 1920s. In Southeast and East Asia, by contrast, revolutionary networks were held together by shipping routes. Port cities such as Kobe, Yokohama, and Singapore were the site of a variety of Indian Pan-Asianist projects—the former two in collaboration with, and more often in opposition to, Japan's own Asianist policies. Both the Central Asian and East Asian centres were informed by explicitly anti-imperialist ideologies, but their visions for a decolonized Asia were radically different. But however much their goals were opposed, it is shown that Indian revolutionaries often moved between different Asianist centres and different ideological expressions of Asianism with great ease. As anti-imperialists and Asianists first, they were not at all impressed with borders, whether physical and ideological. Two sections seek to shed light on itinerant Asianists who connected the various Asianist centres across the continent and linked them to larger networks: Mahendra Pratap, a colourful revolutionary exile from a privileged background who traversed Asia several times over land; and Indian mariners who acted as couriers across the seas but could also be Asianists themselves, demonstrating that both elites and non-elites were involved in Asianist projects.

Chapter 5, finally, explores the afterlives of the networks discussed in the previous chapters through the lens of the Asian Relations Conference held at New Delhi in March 1947. In current historiography, this was the first of a series of Asian Relations Conferences that would eventually culminate in the foundation of the non-aligned movement at Belgrade in 1961. It is argued here, however, that this conference was the product of the connections made by Nehru and other Asianists during the interwar years. Among the conferences held between 1947 and 1955, the New Delhi gathering was unique in two ways. It convened academic and cultural organizations representing the nations of Asia, rather than political representatives. And it was the only conference to invite all of Asia, including not only Soviet Russia and the Central Asian Soviet Republics, but also US-occupied Japan. It is therefore argued that in its set-up, the conference answered to the internationalist spirit of the interwar years rather than to the newly emerging constellations of decolonization and the Cold War.

Nevertheless, those new constellations did have an impact on the proceedings. These changes form the backdrop to this chapter. Finally, the years from the Asian Relations Conference up to the Bandung conference of 1955 will be treated. Bandung, too, is often viewed as the finale of a period of internationalist enthusiasm. It is argued here, however, that the continuity of the internationalist moment of the interwar period should not be located in the inter-state Asianism of Bandung. Rather, the afterlife of interwar Asianism is found in non-state movements such as the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Committee, whose activities heralded a new form of regionalist cooperation and conclude this dissertation.

1. Mapping Indian Asianism in the interwar period

1.1 Interwar internationalism and Asia
1.2 Situating India in Asia
1.3 Four Asian cartographies
1.4 Conclusion

1.1 Interwar internationalism and Asia

The twenty years spanning the period 1917–37 were not the first in which the interconnectedness of the world was celebrated, or India's place in it. The impact of the Russo-Japanese war on Asian thinkers and activists in general, and on India in particular, is well documented.[1] Indian anti-imperialists had worked alongside Irish activists in New York, and professed their solidarity with Egyptian anti-imperialists in London, and had even joined the Rif-Rebellion led by Abd al-Karim to fight.[2] The Balkan Wars, too, had seen several Indian activists side with the Ottoman Empire. Some cited anti-imperialist solidarity; others saw their involvement in terms of Asian or Islamic brotherhood.[3] However, as noted in the introduction, the First World War, the Bolshevik revolution, and the establishment of the League of Nations changed the nature and potential of international encounters.

The First World War, first of all, had profoundly changed perceptions of European power structures. The War had been unprecedented in the scale and size of its destruction of lives and lands. It had also destroyed an international order, which, with the collapse of several of its constituent empires, was impossible to revive. There was an increasing realization around the world that the post-war international environment should and would be structured differently. The war also called into question the civilizational models put forward by the European empires that had fought it. This gave further impetus to anti-imperialist movements. Prasenjit Duara's argument, that the transformation of concepts of civilization following the First World War was fundamental in shaping anticolonial nationalisms, can be extended to its shaping of anticolonial *inter*nationalisms.[4] The idea that the values of Christianity and Enlightenment were the only categories by which civilization was measured, was no longer a given. Neither was the imperial 'civilizing mission', which by the outbreak of

[1] Among others, B. Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia (1900–1947)* (New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1979), 41–5; D. Wolff et al., *The Russo–Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero*, Vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 2–3; T. R. Sareen, 'India and the War', R. Kowner, ed., *The Impact of the Russo–Japanese War* (London: Routledge, 2007), 239–49.

[2] Fischer-Tiné, H., 'Indian Nationalism and the "World Forces": Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War', *Journal of Global History* 2:3 (2007): 325–44: 332–5. See also K. O'Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919–1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

[3] S. T. Wasti, 'The 1912–13 Balkan War and the Siege of Edirne', *Middle Eastern Studies* 40:4 (2004): 59–78. See also G. Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 34–37.

[4] P. Duara, 'The Discourse of Civilization and Pan–Asianism', *Journal of World History* 12 (2001): 99–130.

the war had come to be the most important legitimation for colonialism.[5] As Duara argues, Civilization went from being singular, with a capital 'C', to plural, with a lower case 'c'. If this caused new national movements to turn towards their own civilizational traditions, as argued by Duara, so too did new models that appealed to larger collectives and identities present themselves. Pan-Asianism and Pan-Islamism were among the alternatives favoured by Asian thinkers.[6] Quests for an 'Asian identity' or 'Asian culture' in this period, too, were influenced by the possibilities inherent in this transformation of civilizational concepts. Couched in the language of regionalism, the First World War had literally de-centred Europe for Europeans and non-Europeans alike: from *the* region, it became *a* region.[7]

The Bolshevik Revolution had likewise opened possibilities for international engagement. It had an immediate and momentous impact on European politics.[8] But its effects were felt globally, and especially in territories under colonial rule. At the inaugural congress of the Comintern, the newly established Soviet Union declared itself sympathetic to the plight of the subject nations.[9] As early as 16 January 1918, it had abrogated all former Russian claims that infringed on the Persian right of self-determination. A year later, with the civil war in Central Asia in full swing, this declaration was reaffirmed. In 1921, it was made official: Lenin repudiated all secret treaties contracted between the Czar and the imperialist powers regarding claims to Asian territories:

> The Government of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republics brands as criminal the policy of the Government of Czarist Russia, which, without the agreement of the peoples of Asia and under the guise of assuring the independence of these peoples, concluded with other states of Europe treaties concerning the East which had as their ultimate object its gradual seizure. The Government of the RSFSR unconditionally rejects this criminal policy as not only violating the sovereignty of the States of Asia, but also leading to organized brutal violence of European robbers on the living body of the peoples of the East.[10]

This declaration may well have been circulated in Asian anti-imperialist movements at least as widely as the Wilsonian declaration of self-determination.[11] Asian anti-imperialists used it to prove that the Soviet Union had no designs on Asian territory and that it had delivered on

[5] D. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 202–6; M. Mann, 'Torchbearers upon the Path of Progress—Britain's Ideology of "Material and Moral Progress" in India: An Introductory Essay', H. Fischer-Tiné and M. Mann, eds., *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India* (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 1–26.

[6] Ç. Aydin, 'Beyond Civilization: Pan-Islamism, Pan-Asianism and the Revolt against the West', *Journal of Modern European History* 4:2 (2006): 204–23.

[7] For the European case, see A. I. Richard, 'Competition and Complementarity: Civil Society Networks and the Question of Decentralizing the League of Nations', *Journal of Global History* 7:2 (2012): 233–56.

[8] E. H. Carr, *International Relations Between the Two World Wars, 1919–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1947).

[9] G. Adhikari, ed., *Documents on the History of the Communist Party of India*. Vol. 1, *1917–1922* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1972), 105.

[10] 'Stalin and Iran', *Fourth International 7:5* (1946): 132–3.

[11] On the competition between these two 'moments', see A. Mayer, *Wilson vs. Lenin: Political Origins of the New Diplomacy 1917–1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), esp. 329–67.

its promises: instead of appropriating the semi-colonial countries at its borders, which would have been easy prey in the tumultuous years after the War, it had done the opposite. It had given up without compensation all former claims on Chinese territory and renounced the Russian share of the reparations levied on the Qing Empire in the wake of the Boxer Rebellion.[12] Moreover, it had recognized China by exchanging ambassadors.

In this sense, it is important to note that the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution on most Indian Asianists was less ideological than practical. This does not deny the existence of important and early engagements with communist doctrine and with the possibilities of revolution both at home and in the world, such as those of M. N. Roy, M. P. T. Acharya, Abani Mukherjee, and others.[13] However, from an Asianist perspective, the establishment of the Soviet Union, with its professed anti-imperialist principles, provided a powerful model and alternative to the governmental structures of Europe. In addition, with a small leap of the imagination, this was a model that could be appropriated as 'Asian', as opposed to its 'Western' alternatives. In this sense, the 'Leninist moment' far outlasted its 'Wilsonian' counterpart.

However, neither should this 'Wilsonian moment' be too easily discarded. Erez Manela has argued that the 'Wilsonian moment', which he understood mainly as the impact of Wilson's declaration of self-determination, provided a powerful universalist message to anticolonial leaders across Asia. Anticolonial leaders, particularly in India, China, Egypt, and Korea, appropriated the Wilsonian language and used it to claim their place on the newly erected stage of Geneva. The international institutions and norms created there after the war enabled anticolonial nationalists to challenge colonial powers on an international platform, the League of Nations. This supposedly circumvented and thereby weakened the imperial relationship. Manela's account, however, studies not *inter*nationalism but rather the internationalization of nationalisms, and it thus fails to take into account any Asian contribution to the internationalist enthusiasm that drove the post-war world. Moreover, the Indian League of Nations delegates were carefully selected by the Government of India and drawn mostly from ruling members of the Princely States. Rather than weaken the imperialist relationship, the League of Nations delegations reaffirmed it in their composition.[14] As far as Asia was concerned, the proceedings at the League of Nations itself quickly turned the Wilsonian moment into Wilsonian disillusion.

Wilsonian enthusiasm did exist, but elsewhere: the new international institutions had created a large network of associated institutions, leagues, societies, and associations that sustained the work of the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization in turn. As Susan Pedersen has pointed out, every aspect of the League's work was marked by a 'symbiotic relationship with interest groups and publicity'.[15] The League was a meeting place for numerous organizations and people with no official relationship to it who were drawn into the League's orbit to lobby, to organize, and to profess international solidarity on a variety of matters. Issues pertaining to imperial exploitation, a decolonized future, new regionalisms,

[12] Russia was not the only country to adopt such an arrangement; the United States converted the indemnities into a scholarship program for Chinese students.

[13] P. Saha, *The Russian Revolution and the Indian Patriots* (Calcutta: Manisha Granthalaya, 1987).

[14] This was less so in the case of the International Labour Organization, which is treated in chapter 2.

[15] S. Pedersen 'Back to the League of Nations', *American Historical Review* 112:4 (2007): 1091–1117: 1092.

and many other geopolitical concerns were all hotly debated in the networks that surrounded the League. It was in these networks that the interconnectedness of the world was celebrated, and in which interwar internationalism was enacted. If the Wilsonian moment existed, it was not among Woodrow Wilson's Asian interlocutors, but here.

Even if the League of Nations never achieved global representation, it was in its associational orbit that the interwar internationalist moment was truly global. Just as the effects of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution were felt worldwide, so too were those of the new Geneva system. Together, the war, the revolution, and the league were instrumental in forging an internationalism that was equally global. The internationalist platforms that emerged from this temporary euphoria over the interconnectedness of the world believed that the hard-won international peace could be sustained by international encounter and dialogue beyond borders, races, and empires. Significantly, these encounters and conversations were not limited to the Geneva circles, or even to the metropolitan cities of Europe, but occurred in places as far apart as San Francisco and Colombo, and places as hard to reach as Baku or Tashkent. The internationalist moment was not only a global moment in terms of participation. It also occurred simultaneously in places across the world.

Reformists and revolutionaries

However, two caveats about the implied homogeneity of this 'interwar internationalism' need to be made. First, internationalism in this period was multi-dimensional, with agendas that were sometimes complementary, but more often mutually exclusive. In the case of international anti-imperialist projects, there were divergent ideas of what shape a decolonized world should take. Second, though this dissertation does follow the argument that the internationalism of the interwar period was sufficiently different from that of the surrounding decades to warrant a label of its own, there are differences between the 1920s and 1930s that deserve special mention.

The issue of multidimensionality is best visualized by reading interwar internationalism as constituting a moment that fed off the competition between two competing styles of internationalism: that of reformists and of revolutionaries. Patricia Glavin makes roughly the same separation in recognizing a 'liberal' and a 'communist' internationalism in this period, with the liberals laying their claims before the League of Nations in Geneva and the communists theirs before the Comintern in Moscow.[16] Although Glavin views interwar internationalism predominantly from the perspective of European civil society, this distinction roughly holds true for non-European internationalists as well. However, the terms 'reformist' and 'revolutionary' are used here instead, because they cover a wider range of thought: reformists did not always seek to address the institutions of Geneva; and revolutionaries were not necessarily communists, and they did not necessarily look towards Moscow, as is shown in chapter 4. This separation follows Glavin's definition insofar as it also divides those who sought to participate in the existing international system from those who sought to overthrow it. This had everything to do with imagined postcolonial futures: for reformists, this future

[16] P. Clavin, 'Conceptualising Internationalism Between the World Wars', D. Laqua, ed., *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars* (London: IB Tauris, 2011), 1–14: 5.

was to be achieved through full inclusion of the colonized and semi-colonized world in the international environment, on equal footing with the West. To revolutionaries, it was precisely this international arena that had to be overthrown in order for a more just and equal world to emerge.

One further complication should be made at this junction. In the associational mania that surrounded the League of Nations on the one hand, and the European obsession with the Bolshevik threat on the other, it is these two internationalisms that have received the most attention from historians to this day. However, this does not do justice to the multi-dimensionality of the international engagements of the interwar period, which fitted neither category—although there were significant overlaps—but likewise pursued internationalist agendas. World Peace and World Federation movements, for example, had adherents from every political direction and cannot be classified under either label.[17] Yet others had visions of new forms of world citizenship that were deserving of a label of their own, such as the ideologically and geographically diverse networks that together constituted the Theosophical movement.[18] The activities of the All-Asia Women's Congress in 1931 (section 1.4), the Congress of Asian Students in Rome in 1933 (section 3.4), or Barkatullah's attempts to reconcile communism and Pan-Islamism (section 4.1) are other cases that are hard to classify under either internationalist mode. In addition, the classificatory labels that do suggest themselves, in this case feminist, fascist, or Pan-Islamic, impose an ideological consistency on these movements that they often did not possess. Especially in the early interwar years, ideas that would seem contradictory to present-day eyes were seen rather as multiple opportunities to arrive at the same goal. In the case of Asianist movements in particular, the connections and alliances made to further aims such as Asian unification or Asian decolonization were flexible and varied.

This had everything to do with developments in the interwar years itself. If the 1920s were marked by a fairly unproblematic mixing of ideologies, the 1930s saw a hardening of ideological lines. The internationalist encounters of the 1920s resulted in sets of ideas that were, or at least appear so today, far from internally consistent. The projects of many interwar groups shared a patchwork internationalist grammar drawing on a variety of texts, theories, and thoughts. For example, many Asianist labour leaders in the Indian trade union movement used idioms now associated with communism without necessarily considering themselves communists. As shall be seen in chapter 2, many affirmed they were revolutionaries but not communists; yet others, although they availed themselves of the same rhetoric, ended up firmly in the reformist camp or even in the halls of Geneva. The appeal of the egalitarian

[17] There are many studies on American pacifist movements, which increased exponentially during the First World War, and especially the role of women in pacifist movements. See J. K. Nelson, *The Peace Prophets: American Pacifist Thought, 1919–1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967); H. H. Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993). Fewer studies exist of international peace leagues and movements. See P. Brock, *Pacifism since 1914: An Annotated Reading List* (Toronto: P. Brock, 2000). On world federalism, see J. Bartelson, *Visions of World Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009), esp. 1–18, 159–60.

[18] On Theosophy in an Asianist mode, see A. Banerjee, 'Liberation Theosophy: Discovering India and Orienting Russia between Velimir Khlebnikov and Helena Blavatsky', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 126:3 (2011): 610–24. See also below, chapter 3.

message of world socialism should not be viewed too strictly, for it spoke to the lived realities and concerns of all trade union leaders in question.

The 1930s, by contrast, saw a 'closing of ideologies' that made it more difficult for anti-imperialist groups to draw and borrow from various movements and ideas, or to seek broad-based support for their agenda. Internationally, this hardening of ideological lines was influenced by the global financial crisis, the Soviet Third Period (1928–33), increasing militarism in Japan, and the Manchuria crisis, all of which shaped the regional and global alignments of Indian Asianists. From the early 1930s onwards, these developments made the initial dream of post-war international peace and decolonization increasingly less plausible. The 1930s are now largely associated with the rise of totalitarianism (whether in communist or fascist form).[19] But to Indian internationalists far removed from either continental European or Japanese politics, the 1930s still held possibilities. Until the mid-1930s, Italy, Japan, and Germany, were still widely perceived as holding important lessons for colonial territories that sought to achieve fast modernization and a one-generation transition to great power status.[20] Soon, however, European movements and parties started to disappear from the international stage, the League of Nations faltered, and the Soviet Union brought its international projects under tight control from Moscow. In Asia, Japan shattered the relative peace. Faced with these changes, the number of international platforms shrank, and their membership became less diverse.

In South Asia itself, a similar hardening of ideological lines occurred. This stood in direct conversation with these international changes, although oftentimes masked as events that seemed more 'local' than they really were. The most famous of these is the Meerut Conspiracy Case. This court case marked the last and most sustained attempt by the Government of India to combat 'communism'. The state set out to prove the alleged communist sympathies of the accused largely through an examination of their international contacts, and those of the organizations they belonged to. In the process, the Meerut Conspiracy Case defined which international interlocutors posed a threat to the state and public order, and which did not. Earlier histories that have noted these connections have subordinated them to local and nationalist narratives, ignoring their international dimensions. The case is usually viewed either as part of the history of Indian communism or of Indian nationalism.[21] Though it was indeed linked to both, the Meerut trial is also part of the larger history of the anti-imperialist internationalism of the interwar years, and can be seen as a point where divergent groups united, if temporarily, in a common struggle. The 'internationalization' of Meerut is a narrative that has recently started to emerge in the wake of other histories of international anti-imperialist movements in the early twentieth century.[22]

[19] For a recent complication of this picture, see J. Augusteijn, P. Dassen, and M. Janse, eds., *Political Religion Beyond Totalitarianism: The Sacralization of Politics in the Age of Democracy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[20] M. Framke, *Delhi–Rom–Berlin: Die indische Wahrnehmung von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus 1922–1939* (Darmstadt: WBG 2012), esp. 179–88.

[21] See, for instance, P. Ghosh, *The Meerut Conspiracy Case and the Left Wing in India* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1978); D. Singh, *Meerut Conspiracy Case and the Communist Movement in India* (Meerut: Research India, 1988).

[22] See in particular S. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 146–99.

The fact that international groups came together in support of the Meerut defendants, ranging from Meerut defence committees in Scotland to speeches in Trinidad and even an avant-garde theatre play, is a testament to the translocal solidarities that marked this period.[23]

The interwar internationalist moment, in which the Asianist movements in this dissertation are situated, was thus marked by an 'open' 1920s and a 'closed' 1930s. Furthermore, as noted in the introduction, its periodization in Asia was slightly different from the European definition of 'interwar': almost all on-going projects for Asian unity were shut down with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, which spelled the end of the Asianisms treated in the second, third, and fourth chapters. However, the hopes for Asian unity that had driven these movements were not necessarily shattered along with them. It is important to note that the Second World War was an interruption, not a rupture. The Asianist rhetoric that resurfaced in 1945 was similar in both content and form to that of the interwar period. Its global setting, however, had changed. This Asianism had to relate to the new international constellations created by decolonization and the establishment of the United Nations, but was slow to adapt their precepts. The continuities of Asianist thought and ideas up to the Asian Relations Conference of 1947 and its aftermath in the early 1950s are therefore included in the last chapter of this thesis. The specific cartographical expressions of Indian visions of Asia, which follow in the next section, are therefore viewed in this extended timeframe.

1.2 Situating India in Asia

How did this internationalist enthusiasm, and more specifically, this Asianist enthusiasm, relate to the simultaneous existence of various nationalisms on the Indian subcontinent? Sugata Bose has opened this discussion by examining the role of extraterritorial identity and universalist aspiration among the people of the Indian Ocean in the age of global empire.[24] He demonstrates that the dreams and goals of the colonized were never fully constrained by the borders of colonial states. Nationalism and universalism, far from being in an adversarial relationship, were bound in a strong symbiotic embrace.[25] Anticolonialism as an ideology was both tethered to the idea of homeland and, paradoxically, strengthened by extraterritorial affiliations. This, he maintains, is a powerful political theme, the importance of which political theorists and historians obsessed with territorial nationalism have failed to grasp.[26] Using examples such as those of 'expatriate patriots', pilgrimage networks, and Islamic universalism, Bose demonstrates that there were, in fact, many transterritorial aspects to the 'nation in formation'. This view is supported by several other theorists of internationalism who maintain that these phenomena always transcend but do not always subvert the nation-state.[27] This blurring of lines between national and transnational identities is reflected in the Indian case. On the one hand, many anticolonial internationalists had visions of a new Asian

[23] C. Warden, *British Avant–Garde Theatre* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 79–80.

[24] S. Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[25] Idem, 31.

[26] Idem, 68.

[27] Among others, Ramnath, *The Haj to Utopia*, 3–8; Goswami, 'Imaginary Futures', 1461–2; Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 55.

order in which India would occupy an important place. On the other hand, we encounter Indian nationalists whose visions of independence also included visions of a new Asian order.

According to Birendra Prasad, the first expressions of Asian solidarity in India were a direct consequence of the First World War and widespread disillusionment when the British government reneged on its wartime promises. Instead of self-rule or other concessions, India received the Rowlatt Acts and the Black Act.[28] The imposition of martial law in Punjab and the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre had followed.[29] In this tense atmosphere, the All-India Khilafat Conference was convened. It was presided over by Gandhi, who urged all Hindus to cooperate on this issue, for it presented another case where wartime promises had been neglected: the terms of the treaty imposed upon Turkey belied previous announcements that Turkey would not be deprived of its West-Asian territories.[30] Moreover, when the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres were announced on 14 May 1920, it turned out that Mecca and Medina were no longer under the control of the Caliph. The Khilafat movement had important Pan-Islamist dimensions, but its extension into an all-India issue gave it a distinct Asianist inflection. Ansari, who had previously led an ambulance mission to Turkey in the Balkan Wars, declared that the Khilafat question was one of India's honour and freedom, but also of the emancipation of 'all the enslaved Asiatic people from the thraldom of the West'.[31] The Indian National Congress (INC) leader and later Home Affairs Minister of independent India Chakravarti Rajagopalachari reversed this idea by stating that the Khilafat movement itself was a product of the Asian consciousness of the Indian people.[32]

This Asianist dimension of the Khilafat was not just a translation for the nationalist mainstream of the translocal solidarities the Khilafat movement sought to invoke. Khilafat periodicals, too, framed their concern with the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire as a matter of Asian solidarity. The *Khilafat Bulletin*, published by the Central Khilafat Committee, stated in its editorials that Britain had 'alienated Asiatic feeling' throughout the Empire and that 'India and all of Asia' could not condone the wrong done to Turkey.[33] It also placed the Khilafat issue in a wider context of imperialist wrongdoings to Asia as a whole, which reads as a warning to the world that Asia was being taught that their claims had to be accompanied by a collective show of force:

> We never had much hope of the League of Nations, and what little of a doubting kind we may have had has been destroyed by the League's absolutely servile confirmation of the Syria and Palestine Mandates; proving that the League is only, as we thought that it would be, a device for conferring a show of sanction and of international legality on the brigandage of the Allies. … The members of the Palestine delegation, it

[28] Passed in 1919, the Rowlatt Acts gave the government unrestricted powers to control the press, abolished habeas corpus, and enabled trial of political offenders without jury. The Black Act was the name coined by nationalist leaders for the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, also passed in 1919.

[29] See most recently T. C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India* (London: Routledge, 2009), 14–37.

[30] Lloyd George, quoted in Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia*, 75.

[31] Dr Ansari, quoted in Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia*, 83.

[32] Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia*, 87.

[33] Respectively, 'England's Hostile Attitude towards Turkey' and 'The Khilafat Question', 7 July 1922, pp. 2 and 4.

> would seem, have yet to learn the lesson which the Turks have learnt from terrible experience: that appeals to England or to any power of Europe by an Eastern people are no use unless supported by a show of power—a power which Asiatic peoples have to raise in Asia by their organization and alliances.[34]

The mandate system was perceived to have introduced a new form of imperialism to Asia, and the mandates in the Middle East were the final reason for the Central Khilafat Committee to reach bolder conclusions: that recent events had caused Asians to realize that they had allowed themselves to be divided by borders not of their own making. And in the realization that these borders were meaningless, Asian unity was rediscovered:

> From India to Palestine, it is not a far cry, and a common feeling, though hardly yet articulate, runs through the minds of the different people. With increasing facilities for closer understanding between the people of India and their brethren beyond the artificial boundaries that separate them, there is the consciousness of their common culture and unity of purpose. Though by ignorance they have allowed themselves to be divided into water-tight ethnological compartments, the realization is gaining that at bottom they all belong to one common group, comprising the whole of Asia, and that in the long run the major issue will be Asiatic unity and civilization versus European culture and godless materialism of the West. The present is the beginning of the end, and world events are forcing—unconsciously though—the pace of a pan-Asiatic movement, broad-based on the common heritage of Oriental civilization.[35]

As the Khilafat issue unfolded, other Asianist initiatives emerged from the INC conferences. Prominent leaders of the INC took up an Asianist agenda, including the wish to turn the perceived 'fundamental unity of India, China, and Japan' into the basis of a successful struggle against the cultural hegemony of the West.[36] In the INC, explicit Asianist tendencies can be found early on. In 1921, the possible foundation of an Asian Federation was discussed at the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress.[37] President Chittaranjan Das was convinced that 'such a bond of friendship and love, of sympathy and cooperation, between India and the rest of Asia … is destined to bring about world peace'.[38] Both the delegates and the general press welcomed his idea, but concrete steps towards its execution failed to materialize. This is not entirely surprising given that even Jawarlahal Nehru, the Congress's most enthusiastic proponent of Asian relations, had his doubts. When the proposal was tabled again, he wrote to his friend and revolutionary-in-exile 'Chatto' (Virendranath Chattopadhyaya): 'The Congress passed a resolution about summoning a Pan-Asiatic

[34] *The Khilafat Bulletin*, 'Notes of the Week', 28 July 1922, 2.
[35] *The Khilafat Bulletin*, 'Notes of the Week', 11 August 1922, 2.
[36] I. S. Friedman, 'Indian Nationalism and the Far East', *Pacific Affairs* 13:1 (1940): 17–29: 18.
[37] M. Krása, 'The Idea of Pan-Asianism and the Nationalist Movement in India', *Archiv Orientální* 40 (1972): 38–60: 46.
[38] Ibid.

conference in India in 1930. Nobody quite understands what this means. … I doubt if it is at all possible to hold any such gathering in India'.[39]

Such doubts did not deter others from initiating similar initiatives. In March 1923, AICC member Ghulam Muhammad Bhurgri revisited the idea of a Pan-Asiatic Federation with the argument that the world needed a '*real* League of Nations'.[40] The Muslim League endorsed his speech, declaring that a federation of Asian nations would 'enlarge and support the Oriental Culture and maintain good and friendly relations between the various nationalities all over the East'.[41] Four years later, following widespread publication in India of the Afghan king Amanullah's pan-Islamic and anti-British policies, several Indian political groups supported Amanullah's project of setting up an Asiatic League. In a rare display of Hindu-Muslim unity, the Asiatic League initiative was not only taken up by the remnants of the various Khilafat committees across India, but also by a much less likely supporter: the Hindu Mahasabha (Hindu nationalist party). During Amanullah's visit to India in December 1927, the Mahasabha officially thanked him for his understanding of Hindu sentiments, and endorsed the establishment of an Asiatic League.[42] As may be seen from the Mahasabha's narrower understanding of Asia during the presidency of Veer Savarkar in the 1930s, this moment was very much part of the 'open' 1920s.

In the turbulent decades surrounding independence, two interlinked questions thus figured prominently in the Indian public sphere alongside the national question per se: how an independent India would situate itself in a decolonizing Asia, and how and by whom this new 'Asia' was to be shaped. But if this Asia could be accorded an identity and a mission, this left unanswered the question of who and what this 'Asia' included as a continent. What cartography, or cartographies, accompanied such visions of Asia? It is worth 'mapping' what these different Asias included and excluded, for they clearly express the intentions of its proponents. The analysis below is informed by Sumathi Ramaswamy's use of the concept of the 'geo-body'.[43] Taken as an expression that is 'ephemeral unless hard and regular work is undertaken to produce and maintain its materiality', the geo-body is inherently fragile, yet capable of producing powerful reverence and affinity.[44] Her views on the cartographic 'peninsularisation' of India, moreover, help one visualize Asia as seen from India.[45]

A closer look at different points of the compass as seen from India may serve to illustrate the diversity of Asianist engagements. The following four cartographies of Asia co-existed in the turbulent decades surrounding independence, but were informed by very different ideas of what constituted Asia. Here, the image of Asia as a 'blank canvas' onto which various regionalist visions could be projected is particularly apt.[46] As noted above, all should be viewed in the context of an expanding League of Nations (and later the United

[39] P. C. Joshi Archives of Modern History, Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi, League against Imperialism File 7: Nehru to Chattopadhyaya, 16 January 1929. Chattopadhyaya is further treated below in chapter 2.
[40] Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia*, 108. Emphasis added.
[41] Ibid.
[42] *Indian Quarterly Register* 2 (1927): 330–4.
[43] S. Ramaswamy, 'Visualising India's Geo-body: Globes, Maps, Bodyscapes, *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36 (2002): 151–89.
[44] Ramaswamy, 'Visualising India's Geo-body', 152–3.
[45] Idem, 166.
[46] Steadman, *The Myth of Asia*, 35.

Nations) membership, which was slowly starting to include Asian nations, the emergence of Soviet republics in Central Asia, and from 1945 onwards, a rapidly decolonizing Asia. Faced with these changes, the question of what 'Asia' encompassed and how its constituent parts should relate to each other became particularly acute. As Stephan Hay reminds us, 'each Asian Orientophile has entertained a somewhat different notion … his image of the East consisting usually of an expanded version of those particular traditions he most wished to revitalize'.[47]

The next sections thus explore a directional 'view from India' which makes the Asianisms discussed here unique from their counterparts elsewhere in Asia. The 'Province of Pan-Asia' as envisioned by revolutionary exile Mahendra Pratap will be examined, which included a mythical Turan in the heart of the continent among its five 'districts'. Rameshwari Nehru looked further north in defining an Asia working for peace and nuclear disarmament, which explicitly included the whole Soviet Union as an Asian country. The third Aga Khan emphasized India's ties with West Asia based on a conception of Asia that he could propagate publicly as India's chief delegate to the League of Nations. Finally, Hindu Mahasabha president Veer Savarkar looked east in claiming Asia as a Hindu-Buddhist space, the cartography of which reinforced the Mahasabha's views of India's own Hindu identity. These four cases have been selected because they represent cardinal points on the compass, and therefore the different ways in which Asia could be viewed from India.

1.3 Four Asian cartographies

The Asian heartland: Mahendra Pratap's 'Turan in the Province of Pan-Asia'

Mahendra Pratap (1886–1979), born in the minor Indian princely state of Hathras, embarked on his first trip around the world at the age of twenty-one.[48] As a self-styled revolutionary exile, he devoted his life to achieving the unification of Asia. To Pratap's mind, Asian unification was a crucial prerequisite for his ultimate goal of World Federation. The 'Province of Pan-Asia' was to become one of five provinces that would form the government of a federated world. Pratap's quixotic Pan-Asianist thought has been largely forgotten today. So too has his periodical *World Federation*, which had to be smuggled into British India, in which he reported his activities and explained his plans for Asia and the world. Pratap's activities as a highly mobile Pan-Asianist revolutionary exile are treated in detail in chapter 4. What is relevant to this overview of Asianist cartographies is the fact that he took Central Asia as the core of a united Asia.

This focus on Central Asia is noteworthy in itself. Over the course of the twentieth century, the spatial form of Central Asia shifted many times. The political upheavals in Central Asia in the opening decades of the century created multiple political divisions. The erasure of Tartary from global geography during the time of the Soviet Union has been termed a form of 'cartographical dismemberment', while after the Second World War, Central Asia disappeared almost entirely from the geographical imagination—eventually disappearing into

[47] S. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 315.

[48] For a more detailed account of Pratap's life and thought, see C. Stolte, '"Enough of the Great Napoleons!" Raja Mahendra Pratap's Pan-Asian Projects (1929–1939)', *Modern Asian Studies* 46:2 (2012): 403–23.

the disciplinary cracks of Area Studies in the 1950s.[49] However, as Central Asia was receding from view in western cartographies of Asia, it re-emerged in others. One of its incarnations was as Turan.

Although consistently referring to (parts of) Central Asia, the term Turan has multiple connotations. In post-Avestan traditions, it referred to the area north of the Oxus River (Amu Darya). From the seventh century, it became identified with those areas of Central Asia inhabited by Turkic tribes. In Safavid Persia, 'Turan' was conflated with Uzbek. In a more general sense, 'Turan' was often used to contrast the nomadic areas of Central Asia to the urban or sedentary cultures of, for instance, Persia. To yet others, the term invoked conquerors and empire-builders.[50] This ascription of particular characteristics to the otherwise vague cartography of Turan took unexpected forms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—notable proponents include Sultan Galiev, the 'Red Tartar' who briefly dabbled in a socialist Pan-Turan on behalf of the Bolsheviks,[51] but also Puccini, who composed Turandot ('Daughter of Turan') in 1926.[52] In the latter days of the Ottoman Empire, Turanism became a political ideology that offered an alternative to Pan-Islamism. A movement towards closer association with, or even outright expansion to the Central Asiatic plateau as the semi-legendary home of the Turkic peoples, it extolled a Turkic ethnicity as opposed to the theocratic interracialism of the community of Islam.[53] In this understanding, Turan included the Crimean Tatars, Turkmens, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Kirghiz, but could really encompass any people from the Black Sea to Vladivostok. Pan-Turanists from outside the Ottoman Empire, such as the Hungarian Orientalist Ármin Vambéry, even accused the Ottomans of having become 'de-Turkified', their Mongol characteristics lost beneath a cultured urban veneer.[54]

How did Pratap, an Indian anti-imperialist, come to incorporate Turan in his conception of Asia's future? The term 'Turan' itself had long been in use in India, with 'Turanī' referring to invaders on horseback but also to the feared and valued military leaders from across the Himalayas during the Mughal period.[55] In the early twentieth century, it was immortalized by Iqbal, who in his *Payam-i-Mushriq* (A Message from the East) wrote: 'You are still tied to colour and to race / So you call me Afghan or Turkoman / But I am first of all a man, plain man / And then an Indian or Turanian'.[56] However, it is more likely that Pratap's

[49] M. Lewis and K. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 177–8.

[50] T. Lothrop Stoddard, 'Pan-Turanism', *The American Political Science Review* 11:1 (1917): 12–23: 16.

[51] M. Hauner, 'Russia's Geopolitical and Ideological Dilemmas in Central Asia', R. Canfield, ed., *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, 189–216 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 202.

[52] Turandot may be considered somewhat of a Pan-Asian opera in itself, with a cast consisting of a Chinese emperor, Timur as the dethroned and exiled king of the Tatars, a prince of Persia, a Mandarin bureaucrat, and a prince of unknown origin who turns out to be Timur's son but falls in love with the Chinese emperor's daughter.

[53] G. Arnakis, 'Turanism. An Aspect of Turkish Nationalism', *Balkan Studies* 1 (1960): 19–32: 23.

[54] Arnakis, 'Pan-Turanism', 26.

[55] J. Gommans, 'Turanis in Mughal India', paper for the 'Cultural Encounters Across Central Asia' workshop, Leiden University, 28 September 2012.

[56] M. H. Husain, *A Message from the East: A Translation of Iqbal's Payam-i Mashriq into English Verse* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1977), 161. See also M. Ishaque, *Modern Persian Poetry* (Calcutta: Israil, 1943), 145.

incorporation of Turan in his cartography of Asia was strategic. Always in search of allies, before embarking on his expedition to Afghanistan in 1916 (treated further in chapter 4), he was in touch with the Turkish War Minister Enver Pasha, the most famous proponent of Pan-Turanism.[57] And at least one of Pratap's colleagues on this expedition, Kasim Bey, discussed Pan-Turanism with King Habibullah.[58] In a similar vein, Pratap had high hopes for the Soviet Union's Pan-Turanian sentiments. Although abandoned by the Bolsheviks in the mid-1920s, a group of Russian intellectual exiles still advocated Eurasianism by emphasizing the commonalities offered by the Turanian myth; others saw a natural alliance with Russia's 'Asiatic sisters' against the Romano-Germanic colonizers.[59] The latter idea would have been particularly appealing to Pratap as a Pan-Asianist and anti-imperialist. It is no coincidence that Pratap's Turan was actually an acronym: *T*urkey, *U*kraine, *R*ussia, Siberi*A*, Turkesta*N*.

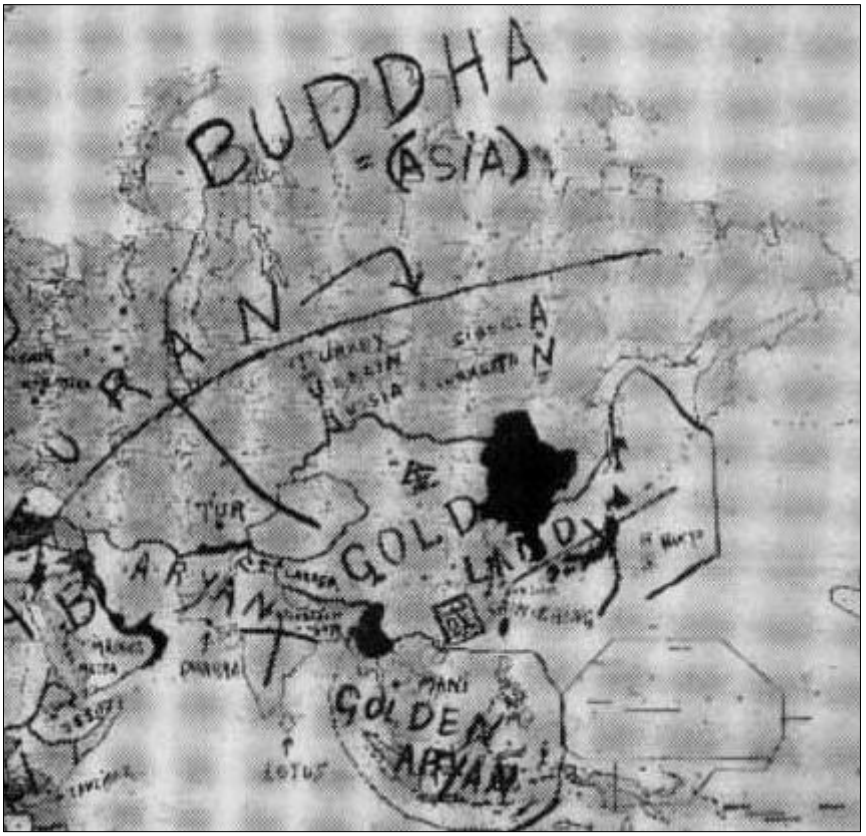

Fig. 1. Sketch of Turan in Pan-Asia, by Mahendra Pratap [*World Federation* 7: (1935)].

This map (fig. 1), published in *World Federation* in mid-1935, reveals some of Pratap's plans for Asia. First of all, the Province of Pan Asia was also known as 'Buddha' (he dubbed Europe and Africa 'Christ' and 'Mohemmod' respectively), a religion which parts of Central and East Asia had in common. In Pratap's cartography of Asia, Turan did indeed bridge both,

[57] On Enver Pasha's visions of a future Asia, see S. Yilmaz, 'An Ottoman Warrior Abroad: Enver Paşa as an Expatriate', *Middle Eastern Studies* 35:4 (1999): 40–69.

[58] T. Hughes, 'The German Mission to Afghanistan, 1915–1916', *German Studies Review* 25:3 (2002): 447–76: 469.

[59] Hauner, 'Russia's Geopolitical and Ideological Dilemmas in Central Asia', 207–8.

'from Turkey to Kamchatka'.[60] His choice of Srinagar as the intended capital of the Province of Pan-Asia, too, seems to have been inspired by its importance to Pratap's treasured Central Asian caravan routes. The capital of Turan was to be Tashkent.[61] Pan Asia was further to be divided into four districts: Turan (Central Asia), Aryan (South Asia), Golden Aryan (Southeast Asia), and Golden Land (East Asia), of which Turan was by far the largest. Interestingly, the Middle East had no place in Pan Asia: it was attached to Mohemmod/Africa as the district 'Arab'. However, this seems to have been rather a consequence of Pratap's focus on Central Asia as the basis of his cartography, than indicative of a conscious exclusion of Islam as an Asian religion. In fact, Pratap would later be at loggerheads with the Hindu Mahasabha over this issue, maintaining that Islam was as 'Aryan' as Hinduism and Sikhism.[62]

Although Pratap lived in Japan for most of the 1930s, Central Asia continued to determine his spatial understanding of the continent. After the Pan-Asiatic Conferences of Nagasaki and Shanghai, Pratap proposed to hold the third conference in Kabul. When this conference failed to materialize in the late 1920s, he revisited the plan in 1937 and proposed hopefully: 'So far the Japanese Government has not taken any official steps to organize Asia. Here is an opportunity for the government of Afghanistan to take a lead in the matter. Afghanistan can invite Asiatic governments to send their representatives to the next Afghanistan national festival. On that occasion we can have the first Asiatic Official Conference … accepting the principle of a World State'.[63] Pratap thus formulated a unique cartography of Asia in which Turan figured not only as the geographical heart of the continent, but also as its future core. With Srinagar as the capital of Pan Asia, Kabul as an important base of operations, and Tashkent as the capital of Turan, Pratap quite literally re-centred Pan-Asianism.

Looking North: Rameshwari Nehru and the Inter-Asian Relations Conference

Pratap's contemporary Rameshwari Nehru (1886–1966) was similarly fascinated by the landmass north of the Himalaya, but gave expression to her cartography of Asia in a completely different way. Having spent much of her early career as a social reformer and women's rights activist, she became active in the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) during the interwar years, and especially so from the 1930s. Her Asian engagements started here. The AIWC had convened an All Asia Women's Conference in Lahore in January 1931, which brought together delegates from Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Persia, Afghanistan, Nepal, Ceylon, Burma, and Japan.[64] Heralded as a 'New Dawn in the East', the Rani of Mandi opened the conference with the following words:

[60] M. Pratap, *World Federation*, September 1939.
[61] M. Pratap, *World Federation*, October 1939.
[62] M. Pratap, *World Federation*, April 1938.
[63] M. Pratap, *World Federation*, January 1937.
[64] According to the *Hindustan Times*, 'All Asian Women's Conference in Lahore', 22 January 1931. Basu and Ray give only Afghanistan, Burma, Ceylon, Japan, and Persia: A. Basu and B. Ray, *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference 1927–1990* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), 132. However, given that the *Hindustan Times* also published a list of delegate's names, their list is probably correct.

> This is the first gathering of its kind in Asia. We meet to promote cultural unity among women of Asia to place at the services of humanity these qualities which are peculiar to our Oriental civilization: to stamp out those evils which have crept into our civilization; to pick out and adopt those qualities of civilization and culture which have elevated the West to a pinnacle of social and material prosperity; to benefit ourselves by exchange of experience in our respective countries; and lastly, to advance the cause of World Peace.[65]

Rameshwari Nehru had attended this conference, and became one of the founders of a permanent committee, which hoped to convene more All Asia Women's Conferences in the future. In 1932, this led to a collaboration with the Oriental Women's Conference at Tehran.[66] In 1934, the committee grew into a large but short-lived 'All Asia Committee' with fifty members from across India.[67] The All Asia Women's Conference was officially represented by a permanent delegate to the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship in Geneva. And when this Alliance held its twelfth Congress in Istanbul in 1935, the Asian Committee sent a delegation who reported that 'Asiatic Womanhood was fully represented, demanded, and was readily granted, an equality of status and opportunity in trying to solve the problems which affect the womankind of all countries and nations'.[68]

A second All Asia Women's Conference failed to materialize because it was to be convened in Japan, and as the 1930s progressed that country became an increasingly unattractive location for an international conference. Rameshwari Nehru's and her colleagues in the AIWC voted against a merger with the Oriental Women's Conference 'on the grounds of maintaining their identity'.[69] This had more to do with their mental geography of Asia than with the group itself, which propagated a reformist route to gender equality and was connected to the same international platforms as the Oriental Women's Conference. However, 'Oriental' in this group was taken to mean largely Middle Eastern and Persian, which did not correspond to the identities of many members of the Asian Committee. Given these difficulties, the Sino-Japanese war dealt the final blow in 1937, and Rameshwari Nehru and her colleagues of the All Asia Committee felt that it served 'no useful purpose by merely keeping up an association which exists more on paper than in reality'.[70] The Committee was disbanded and until revived in the wake of Rameshwari Nehru's Asianist activities after independence.

In the meantime, Nehru directed her attention towards other Asianist initiatives. Initially, during the 1940s and especially in the years immediately after independence, she became a vocal advocate of inter-Asian governmental cooperation. She was a consultant for several of the newly established Indian ministries, including the Ministry of Home Affairs.

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[65] 'To Advance World Peace', *Bombay Chronicle*, editorial, 21 January 1931.

[66] Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), All India Women's Congress (AICW) archive: All Asia Women's Congress (AAWC) Correspondence: Report, 165.

[67] NMML, AIWC Archive, AAWC 1934–1936: Minutes of the meeting of the members of the Permanent Committee of the All Asian Women's Conference, held at Karachi on 2 January 1935.

[68] *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 'Lessons of Istamboul—Asiatic Women in International Conference', 4 August 1935.

[69] NMML, AIWC Archive: AAWC circular no. 6 of 1936 Ujjain, 9 June 1936.

[70] NMML, AIWC Archive: AAWC circular no. 6 of 1936 Ujjain, 9 June 1936.

When it decided against international cooperation in combating the trafficking of women, she replied that 'there is an international traffic in oriental women and girls … and the bulk of this traffic is traffic in Asiatic women from one country in Asia to another'.[71] To her mind, 'closer collaboration between the Inter-Asian authorities' was crucial.[72] After Independence, however, her Asianist activities shifted from governmental work to civil society organizations working for peace and disarmament, notably the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society and the All India Peace Council. The resulting voyages and conferences were essential to the Asian vision she propagated in later life.

As a board member of the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society, she advocated cooperation with Soviet Russia on the basis of its contribution to Asian culture, hosting a Russian ballet group, a folk dance party, and several musicians.[73] To the *Indian Express* she declared that there were several aspects of Soviet life that India 'could profitably learn from'.[74] Aware that the inclusion of Russia in her understanding of Asia might not be shared by all, she declared:

> I am afraid at present there is a great deal of suspicion and misunderstanding in connection with Russia. We mix it up with communism and particularly the Indian Communists, and, therefore, anything however innocent connected with Russia is looked upon with suspicion and disfavor by practically all politicians whose horizon is limited to politics alone. I therefore feel that it is necessary for us to cultivate contacts on all non-political levels to remove external and internal tensions.[75]

As president of the All India Peace Council, Rameshwari Nehru was the driving force behind the Conference of Asian Countries held in New Delhi 6–10 April 1955. The story of this gathering has disappeared in the wake of historians' overwhelming attention to the Bandung conference, which opened eleven days later and in which the other Nehru—Jawaharlal was a first cousin of Rameshwari's husband Brijlal—played an important role.[76] However, whereas Bandung was an intergovernmental meeting, the 1955 Delhi conference followed directly in the footsteps of the 1947 Asian Relations Conference by gathering non-governmental representatives for an international discussion on the future of Asia, which was to be built on a shared sense of continental solidarity.[77] It also copied the 1947 conference by structuring its

[71] NMML, *Rameshwari Nehru Personal Papers* (RNPP), Subject File 3—Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women.
[72] Ibid.
[73] NMM, RNPP, Subject File 24: Indo-Soviet Cultural Society Correspondence, Notice: 25 September 1953.
[74] NMM, RNPP, Subject File 24: Indo-Soviet Cultural Society Correspondence, 13 August 1954, RN to editor, *Indian Express*.
[75] NMM, RNPP, Subject File 24: Indo-Soviet Cultural Society Correspondence, 23 September 1953, to Zakir Hussain.
[76] On the Bandung Conference as a crucial moment in the history of decolonization, see C. Lee, *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010). On the symbolic importance of Bandung, see N. Shimazu, 'Places in Diplomacy' *Political Geography* 31:6 (2012): 335–36.
[77] On the 1947 conference, see G. H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966); A. Acharya, 'Will Asia's Past Be Its Future?' *International Security* 28:3 (2004): 149–64. In this connection, it should be noted that the widely accepted historiographical narrative that the Asian Relations Conference sparked

proceedings in discussion groups on diplomatic, cultural, and social issues, including women's rights. The 1947 Asian Relations Conference has gone down in history as the only Asian conference ever to invite the Republics of the Soviet Union,[78] yet the 1955 conference did so, too. As Jawaharlal Nehru had said in his inaugural address to the 1947 conference, India was uniquely situated to bring Asia together; and Rameshwari Nehru and her colleagues felt the same way. As the abovementioned Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, who was also a prominent peace activist, wrote to Rameshwari Nehru, 'this continent is split into three parts: the Islamic mid-west area, east- and southeast Asia, and India. … India's heart is with the east- and south-eastern people, but history has forged a very strong bond with the mid-west. So she feels she is part of either of these—maybe she is thus in an advantageous position, commanding a perspective which the others do not enjoy'.[79] In this way, the conference situated India as the centre from which Asia extended in all directions.

However, though the conference invited writers, peace activists, scientists and social workers, its final list of delegates showed a considerable imbalance towards 'Red Asia'. Among the attendees were delegations from, among others, Soviet Russia, Communist China, North Korea, and North Vietnam. The Soviet delegation sent representatives hailing from Russia, but also from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, and Turkmenistan.[80] The other delegations included Japan, Nepal, Burma, Laos, Ceylon, Egypt, Pakistan, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, and Mongolia. Interestingly, Indonesia sent a full delegation as well, although the Delhi conference had not been appreciated at all by Sukarno, who felt it might upstage Bandung.[81] Sukarno had complained to Jawaharlal Nehru, who, despite intensive correspondence with Rameshwari Nehru on the matter, did not succeed in discouraging her from holding the conference. As a result, Nehru explicitly dissociated himself from his relative's initiative.[82] Jawaharlal's Asia, once no less inclusivist than Rameshwari's, had become subject to other diplomatic considerations.

Regarding the list of delegations, Nehru was not the conference's only critic. Some felt that Soviet attendance defeated the very purpose of promoting Asian solidarity: 'More! It embraces Russia as an Asian nation. And, what is far worse still, it refuses to take due note of Russian imperialism in Siberia, and in North Korea and Chinese mainland and certain other countries of Asia. … It will force [the nations of Asia] eventually nearer and nearer the heels of Communist Russia in the false pretext of reducing world tension, or of building peace and solidarity in Asia'.[83] But despite the critics, few conferences were ever better attended. As most of the meetings were held outdoors, an estimated 2,000 people gathered to cheer the 188 delegates as they arrived at the conference opening.[84] A dais was erected for the delegates,

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Bandung, which sparked Belgrade, and that therefore the Asian Relations Conference foreshadowed the non-aligned movement, is in need of revision.

[78] According to Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 69.

[79] NMML, RNPP, C. Rajagopalachari to Rameshwari Nehru, 4 June 1956.

[80] NMML, RNPP, File 28 Afro-Asian Solidarity. Preparatory Committee in the USSR: list of names.

[81] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 189.

[82] NMML, RNPP, File 27 Asian Solidarity 1954–8, in particular 24 March 1955: Jawaharlal Nehru to Rameshwari Nehru.

[83] NMML, RNPP, File 26 World Council of Peace, 1953–1960: 'A look into the Conference of the Asian Countries' by C. Parameswaran.

[84] *Bombay Chronicle*, 7 April 1955, 1.

with a specially-made map of Asia showing all the countries represented with their flags. Nationalist dailies such as the moderately left-leaning *Bombay Chronicle* carried reports of each congress day on their front page, which may have contributed to the fact that by the closing ceremony, crowds had swollen to 25,000 people.[85]

The atmosphere was perhaps best reflected in the gathering of writers at the conference. Several Indian associations such as the Romain Rolland Club and the Tagore Society gave a reception, at which Manarasidas Chaturvedi, an Indian MP, emphasized strongly that the conference was not a communist-inspired stage-piece. In accordance with the spirit of the conference, Japanese poet Setsukpo Tammo Kyoko Nagase, Chinese author Pa Chin, Vietnamese poet Tran Khanh Van, and Central Asian Soviet author Mirza Khurshunzade issued a joint statement that 'all the Asian countries had had common cultural bonds for centuries. They had also the common object of establishing lasting peace and building up their respective countries for prosperity and happiness of the people'.[86]

The resolutions at which the conference finally arrived, however, indicated tension rather than unity. The geographical spread of countries covered in the list of resolutions did reflect the inclusivist Asian cartography on which the conference was founded. But the Arab delegations' motion that Israel be considered 'an implement of imperialism' did not carry.[87] The Israeli delegation, already angry because they had been demoted to 'observers' rather than 'delegates' (ostensibly due to an administrative mistake), vehemently protested. In the end, Rameshwari Nehru explained to the Israeli delegation that 'instead of blaming all the Israelites as being aggressors, we persuaded the Arab delegates to limit their remarks to a certain section of the people termed as the 'ruling class'. The Arab delegates did not appreciate it … but agreed to it to avoid the break-up of the Conference. Our acceptance of this resolution was also due to the same reasons'.[88] In the end, the conference could only arrive at a condemnation of colonialism and imperialism, and call for a 'normalization of diplomatic relations between all countries of Asia'. Among the other resolutions were a demand for admission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations; the restoration of relations severed during the war; and that Japan be accorded full equality in the comity of nations.[89]

The Delhi conference, by far the largest undertaking in Rameshwari Nehru's long career as an internationalist social reformer, adopted the most inclusive map of Asia among the cartographies considered here. It also sparked a series of Asian spin-off conferences, such as the Asian Women's Conference and the Asian Writers Conference, which continued to include the Soviet Union and its Central Asian republics.[90] Eventually this Asian people's alternative to the Asian governments' Bandung, which had grown out of Rameshwari Nehru's personal network of internationalist peace and women's rights activists, grew into a People's Solidarity Movement which she led through the 1950s. It convened several more international meetings, but did not long survive after Rameshwari Nehru stepped down.

[85] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 250.
[86] *Bombay Chronicle*, 6 April 1955, 3.
[87] NMML, RNPP, File 26: Arab Delegation.
[88] NMML, RNPP, File 28: 7 May 1955, letter Rameshwari Nehru to 'My dear Friends'.
[89] NMML, RNPP, File 26: Resolutions (incomplete).
[90] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 255.

Looking West: Asia in the imagination of Aga Khan III

Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, the forty-eighth imam of the Shi'a Ismaili Muslims (1877–1956), put forth very different cartography of the continent.[91] He offered a very concrete geographical definition of Asia as 'extending from Aden to Mesopotamia and from the two shores of the Gulf to India proper, from India proper across Burma, including the Malay Peninsula, and thence from Ceylon to the States of Bokhara, and from Tibet to Singapore'.[92] Political scientist Werner Lévi has argued that this statement by the Aga Khan, made in 1918, was the first expression of India as a 'pivot' in the region, and 'has remained fashionable ever since'.[93] The Aga Khan's cartography of Asia was informed by two underlying notions of the shared historical connections that to him defined Asia: those offered by the caravan routes through the Central Asian landmass, not dissimilar to the 'Asian heartland' concept put forward by Pratap; and the common Asian heritage of Islam. For instance, he had always considered Turkey to be an Asian country, and had warned as early as 1913 that 'Turkey must in the future be an Asiatic Power; she must concentrate on Asia'.[94] To a certain extent, the Aga Khan's own family reflected the relations between these two ideas: his grandfather had been forced to leave Persia, taking refuge in Bombay, in which city the Aga Khan, though born in Karachi, spent most of his youth. But his family still retained a large following in Central Asia. So much so, that when Mahendra Pratap passed through the Oxus valley in Badakhshan, the border region between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, he encountered many of the Aga Khan's followers in remote places like Wakhan, Ishkashim, and Shighnan and found this peculiar enough to mention in his diary.[95]

In this regard, it deserves mention that the Aga Khan did not fit well into a Pan-Islamic mould. Much has been written on the Khilafat movement of the early 1920s and its connections to anti-imperialist movements in Asia generally and India in particular. However, the movement's distinctive form of Pan-Islamism in India cannot be equated with Asianism. It offered a vision of a strong *umma*, the community of the faithful, whose territory incidentally overlapped with large areas of Asia; but Asianism was not its driving feature. The Aga Khan's conception of Asia, by contrast, was informed by his Muslim identity and his interests as the imam of the Ismaili, but it was not Islamocentric. While he frequently invoked Muslim sentiments, he considered himself very much part of a diverse Asia with multiple religious and cultural identities. In that sense, his invocation of Islam and his inscription of it into the history of all of Asia is more reminiscent of the multifarious networks across Asia that made up the 'Arabic Cosmopolis' as described by Ronit Ricci, than of the blueprint offered by 'untranslated' Arabian Islam.[96]

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[91] For a brief evaluation of Aga Khan's conception of Asia see Stolte and Fischer-Tiné, 'Situating India in Asia', 72.

[92] W. Lévi, *Free India in Asia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1952), 31–2.

[93] Lévi, *Free India in Asia*, 32.

[94] *Times of India*, 14 February 1913, quoted in K. K. Aziz, ed., *Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah*. Vol. 1, 1902–1927 (London, 1997), 407.

[95] Mahendra Pratap, *My Life Story*, 65.

[96] R. Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2011), 11; 265.

During the 1930s, the Aga Khan received a platform for his ideas through the international institutions in Geneva with which he was involved. As India's chief delegate to the League of Nations between 1932 and 1938, he was also active in the Red Crescent Society and the Geneva Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. At these organizations he chose to put forward his views from an Asianist perspective. The Aga Khan saw no contradiction between his multiple identities as a Muslim, an Indian, and an Asian. Instead, he saw them as complementary, so much so that he advocated political union of West and Central Asia into a federation.[97] But unlike Pratap, who had abandoned his Indocentric views when he went into exile, the Aga Khan viewed every Asian connection through an Indian lens. For instance, when Turkey entered the League of Nations in 1932, he stated that 'the history of India has been linked for countless centuries with that of Turkey, sometimes in the clash of rivalry, but more often with ties of culture and friendship. … India thus gives Turkey a triple welcome to the League: as age-long neighbours and co-operators in culture and civilization; as recent opponents; and now we can say, with confidence, as life-long friends'.[98] When Iraq joined the league, he emphasized the 'long and intimate spiritual, cultural and economic relations between India and the lands that today form the Kingdom of Iraq'.[99]

Central Asia was incorporated into his geo-imaginary Asia through a similar emphasis. He noted 'a big Muslim square' from Samarkand to Sind and from Egypt to Constantinople',[100] and he invoked the same image in incorporating China into this geography, by saying that 'China is our good neighbour … and with her province of Turkestan we have had, since time immemorial, friendly cultural and economic relations'.[101] This inclusion of China through its Turkic provinces is rare. In this period, Indo-Chinese connections were affirmed by many, but primarily on the basis of the shared experience of European domination (by invoking the treaty ports) or on the basis of a shared Buddhist heritage (see below).[102] Insofar as the overland caravan routes were invoked, this was only to demonstrate that they had been travelled by Buddhist monks during the spread of Buddhism.

However, it would go too far to say that Eastern Asia played no role in the Aga Khan's geo-imaginary. When the Sino-Japanese dispute was brought before the League, the Aga Khan volunteered to mediate because 'I felt that it was my duty as India's representative—*as an Asiatic*—to do all I could in bringing about a direct understanding by conversations between China and Japan … while such a departure by an Indian representative, at a time when India was still without self-government, might seem unusual … the value of an Asiatic intermediary in a solely Asiatic dispute might be considerable'.[103] But the majority of his Asianist exultations were directed at West and Central Asia. When

[97] Lévi, *Free India in Asia*, 31.

[98] Speech at the General Assembly of the League of Nations, 6 July 1932. In K. K. Aziz, ed., *Aga Khan III: Selected Speeches and Writings of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah*. Vol. 2, *1928–1955* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997), 906.

[99] Speech at the General Assembly of the League of Nations, 3 October 1932. In Aziz, *Aga Khan III*, 2.911.

[100] Speech, National League in London, 2 July 1933. In Aziz, *Aga Khan III*, 2.935.

[101] Speech at the Special Session of the League of Nations, Geneva, 8 March 1932. In Aziz, *Aga Khan III*, 2.901.

[102] Frost, 'That Great Ocean of Idealism', 263–6; Stolte and Fischer-Tiné, 'Situating India in Asia', 71–9.

[103] Aga Khan III, *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time* (London: Cassell and Company, 1954), 253. Emphasis in original.

Afghanistan was admitted into the League, he proclaimed that 'no representative of India, no Muslim, no Asiatic could play his part on this historic occasion unmoved'.[104] He synthesized India's religious and cultural variety into a single sphere of 'Asian-ness' and directed this amalgam towards a shared commonality with, in this case, Afghanistan:

> For India, however much she may seek from the West her political institutions, remains a true daughter of the East, proud of her Eastern blood, her Eastern languages, her Eastern cultures. These she shares with Afghanistan, and seventy millions of her people share, as I share, with Afghanistan in the glorious brotherhood of Islam.[105]

The Aga Khan consciously played up his multiple identities as a South Asian, a Muslim, an internationalist and the religious leader of a sect scattered throughout Asia, in order to speak in a Pan-Asian idiom. He invoked Asia's historical interregional connections to map an Asia that was held together by the routes of trade and by religion. He continued to look at Asia from an Indian perspective, and in doing so looked largely to West Asia, with which region he had more affinity. But even if the Asian Relations Conferences would later include all Arab countries, in keeping with Nehru's preference of maintaining close contacts with the Arab world, the Muslim East fell off the Asian map for others.

Looking East: Veer Savarkar's religious cartography of Asia

To Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966), who remains a controversial figure to this day, the Muslim East did indeed fall outside of what he considered as 'Asia'.[106] His focus lay entirely on East and Southeast Asia, with India as the westernmost point on the Asian map. The resulting geo-imaginary reflected what he considered as the unifying identity marker of Asia: the Hindu-Buddhist religion. Islam, and with it most of Central and Western Asia, had no place in his cartography of the continent. Where the Aga Khan had approached China through Turkestan, this was precisely the part of China that Savarkar abhorred. Rather Far from being the heart of the continent, Central Asia was depicted as an existential (and external) threat:

> China was once ruled by the Tartars, and when the Tartars embraced Islam, these Moslems made China their home. … But the great Buddhistic Empire which rose on the ashes of the Tartars showed the Moslems their right place and they were more or less thoroughly reduced to unquestioning subjection. But with the fall of the Chinese Empire, the Japanese conquest and the simultaneous rise and spread of the Pan-Islamic

[104] Speech in the General Assembly of the League of Nations, Geneva, 27 September 1934. In Aga Khan III, *Memoirs*, 1039.

[105] Idem, 1040.

[106] Savarkar is simultaneously remembered as a revolutionary advocating armed rebellion, author of *The Indian War of Independence*, father of Hindutva Nationalism, and vocal opponent of Gandhi. Accounts of his life range from the hagiographical to the highly critical. The concern here, however, is with Savarkar's metageography of Asia.

> movement … Chinese Moslims refused to merge themselves with the Chinese, but maintained that they should keep up their separate entity.[107]

Given these diametrically opposed ideas, there was little love lost between Savarkar and the Aga Khan. The mutual dislike dated back to a discussion on Madan Lal Dhingra's assassination of William Hutt Curzon Wyllie in 1909. The moderately loyalist Aga Khan had argued that the attack should be condemned. Savarkar, as a revolutionary nationalist, protested, after which a physical fight ensued. As the communalist issue intensified, so did their enmity. One *casus belli* was the issue of *Shamsi* Ismailis, known to Savarkar as the *gupti* (secretive) Ismailis in Punjab, a community that wore 'Hindu' dress but had followed the Aga Khan since the 1910s. This intensified Savarkar's view that his religion was under threat, and he vowed to 'save the Hindu Society from the dangerous practices of these gupti followers of the Aga Khan'.[108] In the 1930s, as both directed their attention to the future of Asia, their differences of opinion took on literally continental proportions.

In order to claim Asia as a Hindu-Buddhist continent, it was first necessary to establish that Hinduism and Buddhism were one, an undertaking enthusiastically appropriated by the Hindu Mahasabha, in which Savarkar had risen to prominence after his release from jail in 1924.[109] The Hindu Mahasabha Working Committee passed a resolution advocating cultural contact between Hindus and Buddhists in Burma: 'Buddhism, to which the majority of the Burmese belong, was of Indian origin. In fact, in the beginning it was only a reformation movement among the Hindus. Hence Buddhists are as much Hindus as Protestants are Christians'.[110] This was fully in line with the Hindu-Buddhist unity that Savarkar had defined in his *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Of the Buddha he said: 'Thou art ours as truly as Shri Ram or Shri Krishna or Shri Mahavir … when the law of Righteousness rules triumphant on this human plane, then thou will find the land that cradled thee, and the people that nursed thee, will have contributed most to bring about that consummation'.[111] When Savarkar became president of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1937 (the same year that the Aga Khan was elected president of the Muslim League), Hindu-Buddhist Asia became somewhat of a trope in Mahasabha circles. Because of it, relations with Buddhist organizations elsewhere in Asia were actively pursued.

Savarkar's cartography of Asia was influenced strongly by Greater India thought, which held that ancient India had played an active role in the cultural and religious development of Southeast Asia.[112] The thesis that India had been not only a highly developed civilization long before its contact with Europe, but also a hegemon and a civilizational force in Asia, was primarily propagated by the Greater India Society in Calcutta, established in

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[107] V. Savarkar, 'Moslim Chinaman: Hidden Motive of Chinese Moslem Mission to India', *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*, vol. 3 (Chandigarh: Abishek Publications 2007), 525.

[108] NMML, Savarkar Private Papers (hereafter SPP), 6450/23: A. P. Sinha to Savarkar, 5 June 1938.

[109] First in the Ratnagiri chapter, and nationally from 1937. D. Keer, *Veer Savarkar* (1950; repr. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966), 171.

[110] *Hindu Outlook*, 25 May 1940, 3. The resolution itself was made several years previously.

[111] V. D. Savarkar, 'Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?' *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*, vol. 4.484.

[112] S. Bayly, 'Imagining "Greater India": French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode', *Modern Asian Studies* 38:3 (2004): 703–44.

1926, and through publications by its members, notably Kalidas Nag, P. C. Bagchi, and R. C. Majumdar.[113] (The Greater India Society is treated further in section 3.3.) Of concern here is that it was but a small step to claim that India had 'civilized' Asia through the expansion of Hinduism and Buddhism. As the Greater India idea was translated from academic publications into the popular press, this was the shape it assumed in the Hindu Mahasabha. In view of this, it is perhaps peculiar that the Mahasabha did not view India as the natural leader of Hindu-Buddhist Asia. Instead, it looked towards Nepal as the only independent Hindu country in the world. All through the 1930s, the Mahasabha kept up a frequent, if one-sided, correspondence with the Nepali court, urging them to rise to the occasion and show Asia the way, 'now that the awakening of the Pan-Hindu consciousness is making us Hindus in Nepal and outside, realizing the oneness of our life as an undivided and indivisible nation'.[114]

Some in the Mahasabha were even 'devoutly cherishing the hope of a speedy consummation of our great ideal of creating a federation of powerful and peace-loving Hindu nations from the Himalayas to Ceylon and from Sindh to far-off Java',[115] but this went too far for Savarkar himself. His map of Asia, from which Muslim regions were excised, was a call for a united stand against the 'slow penetration of Islam',[116] rather than a proposal for Asian political federation. Savarkar advocated a *Hindu Dharma Parishad*, not a *Hindu Rashtra Parishad*—that is, roughly, a Hindu 'religious' association rather than a Hindu 'national' one.[117] He made the difference explicit when he called for closer contact with East Asia in the name of Hindu religious brotherhood, but explained: 'Hinduism is one of the constituents of Hindutwa [sic] which we share with the Japanese, Chinese and all our co-religionists. The Japanese and the Chinese are our co-religionists but they cannot be our co-nationalists. We have a religion but no nation in common'.[118]

However, the vocabulary of the Hindu-Buddhist Asia concept soon became an idiom in which not only Mahasabhists were conversant, but also those who petitioned the organization with agendas of their own. Savarkar's private correspondence offers insight into both the transnational networks fostered by this perceived Hindu-Buddhist unity and the existing revolutionary networks that were eager to use the rhetoric for their own ends. Savarkar maintained a lively correspondence with Rashbehari Bose in Tokyo, who wrote in 1938: 'The Buddhists are also Hindus, and every attempt should be made to create a Hindu block extending from the Indian Ocean up to the Pacific Ocean. For this purpose, the Hindu Sabha should take immediate steps for establishing branches of Mahasabha in Japan, China, Siam and other countries of the Pacific and sending their representatives for creating solidarity among the Eastern races'.[119] Although Savarkar was reluctant to devote Mahasabha resources for international activities, he had no objection to revolutionaries creating their own

[113] K. Nag, *Greater India (A Study in Indian Internationalism)* (Calcutta: Greater India Society, 1926); P. C. Bagchi, *India and China* (Calcutta: Greater India Society, 1927); R. C. Majumdar et al., *History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951–77).

[114] NMML, SPP, 6449/22: Mahasabha to His Excellency the Maharaja, 1935.

[115] NMML, SPP, 6449/22: Thakur (Rashbehari Bose) to Shinde Esq, V. P. Hindu Mahasabha Ratnagiri, 10 January 1930.

[116] NMML, SPP, 6450/23, Statement by Savarkar, President of the Hindu Mahasabha, 11 August 1938.

[117] NMML, SPP, 6450/23: Savarkar to Rashbehari Bose, 14 November 1938.

[118] Ibid.

[119] NMML, SPP, 6450/23: Rashbehari Bose to Savarkar, 11 July 1938.

momentum. Orders went out through the general secretary in Bombay: 'Our President will be glad and feel obliged if you yourself take the lead and start a branch of the Hindu Mahasabha in Japan even though it may not show a large number of members. But it cannot fail to be an authorized international mouth piece of the Hindu Mahasabha and Hindudom as such in Eastern foreign countries'.[120] Privately he wrote to Rashbehari Bose that his 'scheme of building a Pan-Hindu temple in Japan is excellent'.[121]

1.4 Conclusion

The First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the establishment of the League of Nations, had each influenced the creation of a new internationalist momentum in the interwar years. In India, this internationalist moment had distinct Asianist overtones. Its first expressions after the war took place in the wake of All-India support for the Khilafat question, which caused the Khilafat movement to be expressed in terms of Asian solidarity rather than Pan-Islamism. The 1920s, furthermore, saw the emergence from the mainstream of the nationalist movement of several initiatives for the establishment of a Pan-Asiatic federation.

Asianism thus figured in the visions of alternative world and Asian orders of anticolonial internationalists as well as nationalists. Questions of how an independent India would situate itself in a decolonizing Asia, and how and by whom this new 'Asia' was to be shaped, were intimately linked. However, it is worth mapping out what concrete cartographic images of Asia underlay these ideas, for they reveal the diversity of Asianist agendas in India in this period. This chapter has offered four examples: Savarkar was not in search of Asia's geographical heart, but of a unifying religious identity, as expressed by a cartography that was limited to those regions that still followed the religions developed in India. Like Savarkar, Pratap excised the Middle East from his map of Asia, but for very different reasons. For Savarkar, this cartographical deletion served to demonstrate that Islam was not an Asian religion; for Pratap, the erasure put further emphasis on the dominance of 'Turan'. And while Pratap's 'Turan' overlapped largely with Rameshwari Nehru's focus on the Soviet Union and its Central Asian republics, her inclusivist conception of Asia was based on ideas of post-imperial solidarity and reconstruction rather than on a historical understanding of what the various Asian regions had in common. The latter view was very much that of the Aga Khan, who based his Asia on the shared heritage of Islam as well as the connectivity of historical trading routes.

These four vignettes have demonstrated that in the decades surrounding independence, multiple cartographies of Asia co-existed. These cartographies, while informed by different assumptions of what Asia was and how its future should be shaped, have other features in common: they are not easily reconciled with traditional narratives of Pan-Asianism (as understood in its predominantly East Asianist form). They fail to conform to ideas of a spiritual, non-materialist Asia as opposed to a soulless and industrialized West, as attributed to Tagore and other Indian thinkers. Instead, the four Asianists described here offered cartographies of Asia that were driven by locally shaped agendas and present a view from

[120] NMML, SPP, 6450/23: Rashbehari Bose to Savarkar, 18 August 1938.
[121] NMML, SPP, 6450/23: Savarkar to Rashbehari Bose, 14 November 1938.

India. With the exception of Mahendra Pratap, who refashioned himself as somewhat of an honorary 'Turani' by going into exile and renouncing his Indian citizenship, they saw a special role for India as the geographical, spiritual, or political heart of Asia. While for Savarkar the importance of India to Asia was historically informed, the Aga Khan and Rameshwari Nehru saw India as a potential leader of a decolonizing Asia.

In 1927, nationalist and Gandhian J. M. Gupta envisioned an India that would be 'mistress of the Indian Seas, leader of an Asiatic Zollverein, and upholder of the right of the coloured races throughout the world'.[122] None of the thinkers above were quite as jingoistic as all that. Rather, they demonstrate that in whichever direction the compass pointed, Asia was something of a terra incognita in which multiple regionalist ideas and visions could plant their flag.

[122] J. M. Gupta in the *Indian Quarterly Register* (1927): 374.

2. Labour Asianism

2.1 The All-India Trade Union Congress and the world of labour
2.2 The International Labour Organization and Asia
2.3 Asianism at the League Against Imperialism
2.4 Divergent paths: The Nagpur split
2.5 The Asiatic Labour Congress
2.6 Conclusion

2.1 The All-India Trade Union Congress and the world of labour

> If India determines to become the centre for the support and protection of the labouring classes and regards socialist Russia amongst the Eastern countries, we are certain there will be no failure. The committee is of the opinion that an Asiatic Federation will never fail, provided Asia does not absorb Russia. The Russian in the eyes of the Asiatic, are a semi-Asiatic nation and half of Asia is under their influence. By abandoning the old Imperial Russian ideas, Russia is now fighting for a principle, for which the standard bearer should have been Asia.[1]

This chapter explores Asianism in the Indian trade union movement and seeks to demonstrate the importance trade union leaders attached to Asian cooperation. International workers' solidarity was projected onto Asia, and the potential for combatting both imperialism and capitalism jointly. But Asia also became the backdrop against which future models of development and industrialization were discussed, challenged, and sometimes pitted against each other. For much of the 1920s, the All-India Trade Union Congress saw Asia, and not just India, as the primary site where workers' issues should be addressed, and did so without a clear choice for either reformist or revolutionary trade union methods. After 1929, different factions of the Congress embarked on different Asian journeys.

The history of India's Trade Union Congress begins formally in 1920, although its roots date back several decades before this. India's early trade unions consisted mainly of strike committees that usually disbanded once a particular grievance had been addressed. They were generally led by social reformers or philanthropists connected to the nationalist movement.[2] The first longer-standing unions, such as the Bombay Mill Hand Organization (1890), the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants of India and Burma (1897), and the Printers Union Calcutta (1905), were welfare organizations rather than trade unions.[3] The first recorded attempt to unite trade unions from the various provinces into a central body dates from October 1918. That year saw the formation of a Central Labour Board intended to achieve labour legislation such as a minimum wage for Indian workers collectively.[4] The

[1] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/241: Secret Report, 1925, regarding a proposal by Obeidullah Sindhi to unite 'the oppressed Asiatic Nations'.
[2] B. L. Mehta, *Trade Union Movement in India* (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishing House, 1991), 42.
[3] D. K. Roy, *Trade Union Movement in India: the Role of M. N. Roy* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1990), 6.
[4] Mehta, *Trade Union Movement*, 48.

Central Labour Board never materialized, but it does show that the plan to federate India's trade unions into a single body was already circulating when the urgency to do so suddenly presented itself after Versailles.

That urgency was the establishment of the League of Nations and, more important, its subsidiary the International Labour Organization (ILO). The international labour conferences (the first was held in October 1919 in Washington) were designed to ensure the unique tripartite structure of the ILO: each national delegation was to consist of not only government representatives, but also employers' and workers' delegations. India was one of very few Asian nations to receive a separate seat in the League of Nations and the ILO. As this had been a major victory in the battle for international status as a nation, representation at the ILO was considered vital to the process of shaping that status. To Indian trade unionists in particular, the ILO presented a unique opportunity to address their concerns in an international forum. In that sense, the ILO offered a voice and an agency that the League of Nations itself did not. Whereas the delegation to the League consisted mostly of British Government of India representatives and Indian princes, Indian trade unionists selected their own representatives to the ILO. Prominent scholar and revolutionary Taraknath Das voiced the opinion of many when he remarked that 'the fundamental principle of the British Government was and is that the Indian people should not have any representation with the independent nations and when there will be any representation of India … it should be done by those Indians willing to misrepresent India'.[5]

India's employers were relatively well organized in bodies such as the Jute Mills Association of Calcutta, and the Mill-owners Association of Bombay, as well as by various provincial chambers of commerce. But when the question of a workers' delegate to the first ILO conference in Washington arose, various unions rushed to submit their own candidates. Claims and counter-claims ensued, with each union rejecting the other's candidates. Finally, there appeared to be some consensus for Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a prominent nationalist and social reformer known to the British as the 'father of Indian unrest'.[6] He had been imprisoned for sedition between 1908 and 1914 and under these circumstances, the Government of India could easily select a person of their own choosing, and they put forward the much more moderate trade union leader Narayan Malhar Joshi. The British briefly attempted to create a workers' delegation agreeable to all by sending Tilak to Washington as an advisor to chief delegate Joshi. Unsurprisingly, Tilak declined.[7]

N. M. Joshi was not an unpopular union leader. He had been active in the Servants of India Society from 1909 and had founded the Social Service League in 1911, an organization that still exists today. A prolific writer and social activist, he was nevertheless more agreeable to the British because he sought to ameliorate the condition of Indian workers primarily through legislation and reform rather than through strikes and collective action. Trade unionists loudly challenged the legality of the viceroy's nomination of a workers' delegate. They did not necessarily regard Joshi as unsuitable for the post, but he was *unelected*. It was

[5] APAC, IOR, L/PJ/12/166. Copy of an untitled 1923 pamphlet by Taraknath Das.

[6] D. V. Tahmankar, *Lokmanya Tilak: Father of Indian Unrest and Maker of Modern India* (London: J. Murray, 1956).

[7] S. A. Dange, *All-India Trade Union Congress: Fifty Years Documents* (New Delhi: AITUC Publication, 1973), lxxvi.

clear that trade unions had to devise a forum for the selection of their own ILO delegate to prevent further interventions from the Government of India. The unions in Bombay took the initiative and a gathering of trade union leaders was planned for 31 October 1920.

The first session packed the Empire Theatre in Bombay to capacity. The participants ranged from delegates representing workers and employers to nationalist leaders such as Motilal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Chaman Lal, and many others. The session was presided over by prominent nationalist Lala Lajpat Rai, who had first-hand experience of organized labour in the United States and the Philippines.[8] The gathering founded the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and established an executive committee. The Government of India acknowledged the new All-India Trade Union Congress as the organization most representative of Indian workers, and the AITUC received the right to nominate workers' delegates to the ILO. On its first meeting in July 1921, Lala Lajpat Rai, the elected representative to the second ILO Congress in Geneva, resigned in favour of N. M. Joshi, marking the start of N. M. Joshi's ILO career, which lasted until 1948.[9]

It is important to note that AITUC's ILO delegates, and Indian labour leaders generally, were not, in fact, workers. Nor were they representative of India's labour force as a whole. The unionized wage labourer, generally taken as a norm by labour historians, actually accounted for only a small minority of Indian workers.[10] For much of the interwar period, Indian trade union leadership was drawn from the educated classes, and many rose to prominence in the Indian National Congress. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar has noted that their connection with the workplace was often tenuous and that 'some unions had about as much life as the letterheads which they printed ostentatiously on their notepaper'.[11] Moreover, much of AITUC's moderate leadership was influenced by ideas of top-down social reform, taking it upon themselves, not the workers, to mould workers' rights into a worthy civil cause deserving of notice in the halls of Geneva. As Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us in his study of working class organization in Bengal: an educated man who had been to Europe was not a coolie (unskilled labourer) but a *babu* (gentleman).[12] Many may have thought of themselves as 'one of the workers', but they were often called 'Union Babu' nevertheless, which implies a fundamentally different relationship to those he sought to represent.[13] The act of travelling and the holding of leadership positions disqualified one as a worker. However, it is also important to note that the ILO delegates who were selected by the trade unions were not

[8] D. Ahmad, *Landscapes of Hope: Anti-Colonial Utopianism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 69.

[9] NMML, N. M. Joshi Papers, file no. 2: Letter to Lala Lajpat Rai, 28 September 1921; *N. M. Joshi Papers*, file 1: biographical note.

[10] W. van Schendel, 'Stretching Labour Historiography: Pointers from South Asia', in *Coolies, Capital And Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labour History*, edited by R. Behal and M. van der Linden, 229–62 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[11] R. Chandravarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, ca. 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), 74.

[12] D. Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal, 1890–1940* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1989), 152. On the influence of reformist ideals on trade union leadership, see also D. Chakrabarty, 'Sasipada Banerjee: A Study in the Nature of the First Contact of the Bengal Bhadralok with the Working Class of Bengal', *Indian Historical Review* 2:2 (1976): 339–64.

[13] Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*, 153.

entirely divorced from the trade union scene in India. Both Joshi and R. R. Bakhale, treated below, were involved in the organization of several Bombay strikes in the 1920s. And through the machinery of the ILO, they could bring these experiences, as well as their visions of reform, to a new international platform.

An uneasy coexistence

While the formation of the ILO had been the principal catalyst for the federation of Indian trade unions into AITUC, it soon became apparent that the Russian Revolution had had no less of an impact on the Indian labour movement.[14] Reformists who preferred the parliamentary route to direct action were frequently at odds with militant trade unionists within AITUC. Initially, the points of convergence between the two groups were more significant than what divided them: both were anti-imperialist, both sought to ameliorate the condition of workers; and both felt much was to be gained by taking Indian labour issues to the largest possible audience. In that sense, both groups were resolutely internationalist. Any opportunity of contact with international organizations that would increase AITUC's credibility within India and before the world was seriously considered. AITUC did not yet have a larger political agenda, nor did it have a clear programme of action or basic principles to guide its policy beyond 'organizing Indian labour' to improve the lot of workers.

However, the size—or rather, potential size—of a truly All-Indian Trade Union Congress had not gone unnoticed by the two international labour federations at the time: 'Moscow' (the Third International or Comintern) and its competitor Amsterdam (The International Federation of Trade Unions, IFTU).[15] Moscow and Amsterdam both actively pursued AITUC's affiliation from the start. At AITUC's second session in 1921, the former sent a message of 'fraternal greetings', which reads both as an invitation and a warning, and demonstrates the bitter battle for the allegiance of (colonial) workers between the IFTU and the Comintern that had already erupted. It was explicitly framed in an Asian context:

> Comrades, in wishing you success, we know we are wishing success and freedom to us all. A short-sighted labour movement of the past did not realize this great factor, and permitted the slavery of Western capitalism to be enforced upon the innocent, helpless human beings of the East, and we have now all seen the result. … The soldiers of Britain and of Europe that march into the peaceful countries of the Far East to enslave mankind … are all members of the working classes that are members of the Amsterdam International. … The Amsterdam Trade Union International never took any effective means against, nay, even participated actively in the subjugation of foreign countries like India, Egypt, Persia, Afghanistan and parts of China. … Our

[14] This has been noted by, among others, S. D. Punekar, *Trade Unionism in India* (Bombay: New Book Company, 1948); S. C. Jha, *The Indian Trade Union Movement—An Account and an Interpretation* (Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1970), 90.

[15] On the competition between the two, see inter alia G. van Goethem, *De Internationale van Amsterdam: de wereld van het Internationaal Vakverbond, 1913–1945* (Antwerpen: Houtekiet, 2003)*;* R. Tosstorff, 'Moscow versus Amsterdam: Reflections on the History of the Profintern', *Labour History Review,* 68:1 (2003): 79–97.

> Russian comrades have pointed out to the world who are the real enemies of the workers of the world.[16]

Publications smuggled into India in various inventive ways showed the active interest that international communist trade unionists took in AITUC. Many of these were framed in the context of joint Asian action. The First International Congress of Revolutionary Trade and Industry Unions, for instance, called upon the labour movements in Asian countries to join the Red Trade Unions.[17]

Such bulletins were often sent from Berlin. Although British intelligence were at a loss at the time to find out who had sent them, they most likely came from Manabendra Nath Roy, the most prominent Indian member of the Comintern at the time, and the founder of India's Communist Party.[18] Unable to return to India for fear of arrest, he had established a Labour Information Bureau in Berlin with the purpose of providing a channel of communication between Indian and European labour organizations.[19] He was also working towards an Indian Revolutionary Congress in Central Asia with Soviet help, and tried to get Indian trade unions to collaborate on this project.[20] Roy's influence on AITUC in its early years was not inconsiderable. He was actively in touch with several of AITUC's leftist trade union leaders, such as S. A. Dange, D. R. Thengdi, and Muzaffar Ahmed.[21]

Roy was explicitly in favour of affiliating to the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), which stood more explicitly for freedom of subject nationalities. Roy's thinking on this subject demonstrates the intimate link between nationalism and internationalism at this period: the Indian working class could not be indifferent to the political struggle for national independence. Until they were free from foreign rule, they would not be able to improve their economic condition. However, this political struggle could only become successful if it transcended national boundaries and was fought internationally. Only a full-scale attack on imperialism could really set the working classes free.[22]

But many of AITUC's reformist members, especially those engaged in ILO affairs, favoured affiliation to the IFTU. To them, that body's close relationship with Geneva meant that AITUC's association with IFTU could have strategic value, and might increase AITUC's acceptance as a fully-fledged participant in the international labour movement. Although the

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[16] Quoted in Gupta, *A Short History*, 30.

[17] West Bengal State Archives (WBSA), Police files, 166/22 file 249/22: Red Labour Union Bulletin. Weekly report, 24 August 1922.

[18] On N. M. Roy, see K. Manjapra, *M. N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010); V. B. Karnik, *M. N. Roy: A Political Biography* (Bombay: Nav Jagriti Samaj, 1978). On his involvement with the trade union movement, see Roy, *Trade Union Movement in India*.

[19] Roy, *Trade Union Movement in India*, 8; Manjapra, *M. N. Roy*, 83–4.

[20] RCCSRMH 459-68-2, M. N. Roy to Ya. Z. Suritz, 4 October 1920. P. Roy, S. D. Gupta and H. Vasudevan, eds., *Indo-Russian Relations 1917–1947: Select Documents from the Archives of the Russian Federation Part I: 1917–1928* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1999), 31–4: 33.

[21] WBSA, Police Files, 35/26, file 248/26: Note on the Development of the AITUC and its capture by the Communists. By 1927, Dange was one of the assistant secretaries of the AITUC, and Thengdi one of the three vice-presidents. See Roy, *Trade Union Movement*, 19.

[22] G. Adhikari, ed., *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, vol. 2.1923–1925 (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1974), 77–8.

IFTU and the ILO were not officially linked, there were deep ties between the two in the early 1920s.[23] Moreover, by this time, the IFTU had reserved a place in its council, for one of the 'Asiatic countries, so that they might be able to put their case before the International World more effectively'.[24] In January 1924, the commissioner of police in Calcutta reported that in view of this Joshi had prompted Makunda Lal Sarkar to suggest the affiliation of the AITUC to the IFTU.[25]

For the moment, the increasing competition between reformist and revolutionary trade unionists could be kept in check by not affiliating to either. The issue came up at every annual Congress, but there were two elegant solutions at hand; usually, it was either decided that AITUC was not yet 'fully consolidated' and that further international affiliations should be put on hold until such time as it was; or, that no decision would be made until unity between Amsterdam and Moscow had been achieved. The latter was not an AITUC fantasy; within the IFTU too, some members felt that the organization needed the 'strong and youthful' Russian trade union movement.[26] And in the absence of a clear-cut choice between Moscow and Geneva, no one in the AITUC, not even the reformists, saw any harm in receiving support from either when domestic strikes were on the line. V. V. Giri of the Railway workers federation, for instance, received 25,000 roubles for the workers of Kharagpur, although he would later side with the reformists at the time of AITUC's split.[27] Even Joshi was quoted saying that 'there is no harm in receiving money from Moscow or anywhere else for the support of a strike'.[28] However, a truce is not a peace, and as the 1920s progressed the influence of Communist trade unionists within AITUC increased. By 1927, they realized they might have a narrow majority and they held a secret meeting in the Royal Hotel in Calcutta to discuss ways of ousting Joshi as secretary.[29] Thengdi was one of the initiators of this meeting, along with other leaders of AITUC's revolutionary faction: R. S. Nimbkar (the evening's host), K. N. Joglekar, and Muzaffar Ahmed. No action was taken for the moment, but it was clear that the two factions in AITUC were drifting apart fast.

The fate of AITUC as a unified organization of Indian trade unions would be decided in the period 1927–29 Thanks especially to two factors: the emergence of various new platforms for Asian cooperation in a trade union context, which made the question of international affiliations more urgent; and the infamous Meerut arrests, in which various communist trade union leaders were imprisoned on charges of conspiracy. That latter forced the AITUC to decide whether it was to strive for labour reforms within a parliamentarian context or by a more revolutionary route. This battle was fought almost entirely in the context of Asia, with the emerging Asian labour platforms at the centre of the fight. Up to 1928, however, when the AITUC broadened its international affiliations, the ILO remained the only

[23] This was mainly due to the close personal friendship between the organizations' leaders, Albert Thomas (ILO) and Jan Oudegeest (IFTU). See Van Goethem, *De Internationale*, 129.

[24] WBSA, Police Files, Serial no. 49, file 248/36, Extract from the report on the political situation and labour unrest for the week ending 31 January 1924.

[25] Ibid.

[26] IFTU President Purcell, quoted in Van Goethem, *De Internationale van Amsterdam*, 50.

[27] Roy, *Trade Union Movement*, 21.

[28] M. R. Masani, *The Communist Party of India* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 51.

[29] WBSA, Police Files, Serial no. 49, file 248/36: Secret Report, 24 March 1927.

international body in which AITUC had direct representation. It was also the only international platform to which Indian trade union leaders could travel freely and without being accused of subversive activities. This warrants a closer look at the various ways in which the AITUC delegates used their presence in Geneva to engage with the international labour movement at large, and with their Asian environment in particular.

2.2 The International Labour Organization and Asia

Historiographically, the study of internationalism in the interwar period has tended to focus on the League of Nations, rather than on the International Labour Organization.[30] However, recent years have seen a surge of interest in the history of ILO the tripartite structure of which, and its larger membership vis-à-vis the League of Nations, make it more representative of interwar internationalism. The literature on the ILO within the context of labour history has always been comparatively rich,[31] but the focus is now shifting to studies of the ILO's influence on various larger themes including studies of the ILO's role in the history of human rights and international law.[32] Conversely, the increase of interest in (local) histories of Indian labour has led several historians to explore its international dimensions.[33] Recent studies have considered it within the ambit of the ILO as well.[34] Given these changes in historical interest, it is remarkable that to date, little research has been carried out into the ILO as a key site where non-European actors met in the attempt to bring their specific interests before an international audience. This section explores the ILO not as a space for interstate relations or as the birthplace of international labour legislation, but as a place where Asian workers' representatives could join forces and call attention to the specific problems of Asian labour.

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[30] See, for instance, C. Miller, '"Geneva—The Key to Equality:" Interwar Feminists and the League of Nations', *Women's History Review,* 3:2 (1994): 219–45; M. Mazower, 'Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe', *Daedalus,* 126:2 (1997): 47–63. The following pages also draw on C. Stolte, 'Bringing Asia to the World: Indian Trade Unionism and the Long Road Towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–1937, *Journal of Global History* 7:2 (2012): 257–78.

[31] For institution-focused histories of the ILO, see A. E. Alcock, *History of the International Labour Organization* (London: Macmillan, 1971); N. F. Dufty, 'Organizational Growth and Goal Structure: The Case of the ILO', *International Organization* 26:1 (1972): 479–98; G. A. Johnston, *The International Labour Organization: Its Work for Social and Economic Progress* (London: Europa, 1970); and most recently G. Rodgers et al., *The ILO and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919–2009* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[32] A. Schweizer, *Zwischen Rassismus, Markt und Menschenrechten* (Zürich: Chronos, 2005); E. M. Belser, *The White Man's Burden: Arbeit und Menschenrechte in der globalisierten Welt* (Bern Stämpfli Verlag, 2007); D. Maul, *Menschenrechte, Sozialpolitik und Dekolonisation* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2007); J. van Daele et al., *ILO Histories: Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World during the Twentieth Century* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

[33] Recent years have seen a surge of interest in the historiography of Indian lascars (seamen) as particularly mobile groups. See G. Balachandran, 'Making Coolies, (Un)making Workers: "Globalizing" Labour in the Late-19th and Early 20th Centuries', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 24:3 (2011): 266–96; G. Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour? Indian Seafarers and World Shipping, c. 1870–1945* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2012); Raza and Zachariah, 'To Take Arms across a Sea of Trouble.'

[34] R. P. Behal. M. van der Linden, *Coolies, Capital and Colonialism. Studies in Indian Labour History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); C. Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and its Forgotten Histories* (London, 2003).

As the coveted workers' nomination for the ILO had been one of the principal reasons for the founding of the All India Trade Union Congress, the organization aspired to international activity from its inception.[35] At the ILO, Indian trade unionists could seize upon the novel institutional frameworks of international life to implement their visions of reform. In that context, it is interesting to note that these were not limited to India, but imagined in a wider context of imperial exploitation of Asia. This was not only the case with those internationalist enthusiasts who actually made it to Geneva; the annual AITUC meetings gave a clear mandate to their ILO delegates to frame their concerns about the broader problem of imperialism. At the 1927 Kanpur session, V. V. Giri of the Indian Railwaymen's Union moved that the ILO should be made aware of 'the necessity of including the workers' delegates in the Delegations of countries which are under the administration of Colonial or mandated territories and to the desirability of including the representatives of native or coloured workers in the delegations from countries in which they form a substantial proportion of the population but which are governed by the white people'.[36]

The mandate to address the arrearage of most Asian nations in matters of labour and labour legislation, as well as the mandate to work for an ILO that was more representative of the worlds' workers, was eagerly embraced by the Indian delegates themselves. Their speeches at the annual ILO conferences were often explicitly intended to draw the West's attention to Asia as a whole. Joshi's speech to the 1929 conference is revealing:

> Of the labour conditions in Asia may I say that even in Japan conditions are not actually very much improved? China, Siam and Persia have not yet made a beginning. Afghanistan and some other parts of Asia are not even touched. The imperial States ruling over a large number of Crown Colonies, several of which are vast, have not done much to discharge their responsibilities towards the workers living in them.[37]

Their concerns were thus twofold: first, they explicitly linked imperialism and the lag of working conditions in Asia, since the colonial metropoles had as yet demonstrated little concern for the workers in their colonies. Second, now that there was a platform where these issues could be addressed, Asia was sorely underrepresented and could not make itself heard. For the moment, 'Asia' at the ILO consisted only of India, Japan, China, Persia, and Siam. Of those four countries, only India and Japan sent delegations to the ILO that met the organization's tripartite criteria. China would not send a workers' delegation until 1929; for Siam, this would take even longer.[38] Whereas the lack of Asian workers' representatives

[35] For histories of All India Trade Union Congress, see G. Ghosh, *Indian Trade Union Movement* (Kolkata: People's History Publication, 2005); S. C. Jha, *The Indian Trade Union Movement—An Account and an Interpretation* (Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1970); N. P. Raman, *Political Involvement of India's Trade Unions: A Case Study of the Anatomy of the Political Labor Movement in Asia* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1967); H. Crouch, *Trade Unions and Politics in India* (Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966).

[36] *The All-India Trade Union Congress Bulletin*, December 1927: 'On the ILO Conference of 1927 in Geneva'.

[37] Speech of N. M. Joshi, printed in full in *The AITUC Bulletin*, July 1929, 5.

[38] Siam could not have sent workers' delegates, as Siamese labour in this period was not yet organized. Until the advent of constitutional monarchy in Siam in 1932, trade unions were illegal. On Siam's engagements with the Geneva institutions, see S. Hell, 'Siam and the League of Nations: Modernization, Sovereignty and Multilateral Diplomacy, 1920–1940' (PhD dissertation, Leiden University, 2007), 54.

could be blamed on the individual countries, the problem was exacerbated by the ILO's administrative structure, in which Asia was even more underrepresented. The lack of 'Asian' staff appointments was seen as part of the reason why Asian issues of labour and industry received so little attention at the ILO. As Purushottama Padmanabha Pillai, an Indian interwar ILO veteran, later lamented: 'Europe [with] 402 million gets 12 seats on the Governing Body; the Americas with 274.3 millions, get 11 seats; Asia with 1154 millions or with well over half the total population of the world, gets only 5 seats'.[39]

The quest for more Asian representation at the ILO conferences, as well as in the organization's administration, was the first item on the agenda of Asian ILO delegates. The second item lay in the core business of the ILO: the applicability of its labour conventions to Asia. Most conventions passed by the ILO were based on industrial working conditions in the West, and there were no provisions for partial or gradual ratification.[40] The conditions of labour and industry in most Asian countries meant that many conventions could not be ratified, despite the improvements they might bring. This was a catch-22: delegates did press for a modification of the ratification protocol, 'as being very necessary for Asiatic countries, which have a long and difficult journey to cover'.[41] Partial ratification, even if it would replicate a differential treatment of Asian workers, could still create more favourable working conditions on the ground. On the other hand, in the words of Atul Chatterjee, the first Asian chairman of the ILO governing body in 1932: 'we do not want to be considered a backward nation always and forever'.[42] The conclusion was simple: the International Labour Conference should be more sensitive towards problems of Asian labour. The Asian delegations proceeded to invite the ILO director to tour Asia and visit its workers to learn about specific Asian problems. They managed to convince the ILO director of the need for an 'Asiatic Inquiry', but when the delegations proposed an 'Asiatic Labour Congress' under the auspices of the ILO, the response from the ILO conference was lukewarm, most likely for fear that such a gathering would provide anti-imperialists with a platform.

But most important, the ILO did serve as a space of increased encounter and engagement between Asian delegations. Considering the imperial travel restrictions in place within Asia, Europe remained the most likely place to meet Asian delegations. The delegates of India and Japan, as the only two nations with workers' representation, forged especially close ties. Four characters stand out in this regard. N. M. Joshi and Chaman Lal, as prominent AITUC leaders and inveterate travellers with a strong admiration for the advances made by Japan in the field of industrialization, cooperated closely with their Japanese colleagues. They developed strong personal relationships with Mitsuko Yonekubo and Suzuki Bunji, representing the Nihon Kaiin Kumiai (Japan Seamen's Union) and the Nihon Rōdō Sōdōmei (Japanese Federation of Labour) respectively. Together, they decided that the ILO agenda should be more reflective of their concerns. The 'Asiatic enquiry' by the ILO director was indeed undertaken, and this was seen as a first step. However, the results remained

[39] P. P. Pillai and L. N. Birla, *India and the ILO* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1945), 32.

[40] This was not only a matter of concern to the Asian delegations: some of the ILO's more progressive administrators envisioned the ILO as a creator of universally binding conventions and wanted to dispense with national ratification altogether. See Van Goethem, *De Internationale van Amsterdam*, 128.

[41] Quoted idem, 12.

[42] Ibid.

unpublished and the expected discussion of the mission's findings was not carried out at the next ILO conference.[43] Joshi decided to increase the pressure on the ILO. The fears of European ILO members that a conference focusing on Asian labour problems might have adverse economic and political effects—or might turn into an anti-imperialist platform—could also be used against them:

> The dissatisfaction at the practical achievement of Geneva is growing. Geneva itself has created expectations in the hearts of the workers of the world which still remain to be even partially fulfilled. Moreover, the influence of Geneva is not the only influence which is affecting the imagination of the workers of the world, particularly those of the East. There is the other influence centred in Moscow, differing from Geneva in ideals and methods, which is making a strong appeal to their imagination by the grandeur of its promise. … It is futile to argue that the translation of ideals into actuality is a slow process. The slowness of evolution makes revolution attractive. The workers of Asia and Africa will not wait for many decades to achieve what the Europeans may have achieved in a century.[44]

In other words, Asia demanded to be heard on the international stage. The warning contained in Joshi's message was that if the ILO continued to be deaf to Asians' concerns, the Comintern might be less hard of hearing. However, it is unlikely that this threat carried much weight. The Japanese Federation of Labour, whose members were more explicitly anti-Communist than those of the divided AITUC, would not have backed it. There was little hope that an official Asian ILO conference would materialise. Neither the Japan Seamen's Union nor the Japanese Federation of Labour would ever take their issues to Moscow, but neither would Joshi or Chaman Lal. But one option remained: an independent Asiatic Labour Congress, organized on their own initiative, to discuss matters pertaining to the ILO in Asia. The idea to hold an Asiatic conference first arose in 1925.[45] The suggested venue had been Shanghai, but the political troubles in China prevented the conference from being held at that time and the plans were shelved until 1928.

The organizers—at this stage the core was to exist of Indian, Japanese and Chinese trade unionists—now had to walk a very fine line if they wanted the Asiatic Labour Congress to improve rather than hamper Asian opportunities in the ILO. Even if the organizers were all confirmed reformists who had explicitly rejected the path of the Red International in favour of that of the ILO, the fact that the Congress would not be held under auspices of the ILO was itself cause for concern for the organization's European members. The organizers tried to ease these apprehensions by repeatedly stating that the Asiatic Labour Congress was not meant to operate as an alternative to the ILO to allow Asians to make common cause within the context of the ILO. This would be demonstrated by holding the conference annually, 'five or six weeks' prior to the Geneva conference.[46] In that way, Asian delegations could engage in a preliminary discussion of the ILO's agenda for that year so that a collective Asian stance on

[43] *The AITUC Bulletin*, July 1929, 5.
[44] Ibid.
[45] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Speech by N. M. Joshi.
[46] *The All-India Trade Union Congress Bulletin*, January 1929, 81: Memorandum.

certain issues might be formulated. Lal, Joshi, Yonekubo, and Suzuki drafted a memorandum to this effect, which was put before the next AITUC session. At this point, the AITUC was still enthusiastic about the idea:

> This Congress, in order to draw closer together the exploited workers of the East hereby decides, in accordance with the Memorandum signed jointly by Mr Yonekubo, the Japanese Workers' Delegate to the last International Labour Conference and Mr Chaman Lal, the Indian Workers' Delegate, to issue invitations to the organised Trades of Asiatic Workers … for the holding of an Asiatic Labour Conference as early as possible in Bombay with the object of concerting measures for effective joint action to combat the capitalist offensive against Asiatic [workers].[47]

The full text of the memorandum was prominently published in the May issue of the All-India Trade Union Congress Bulletin. Considering how easily the resolution had passed, it is quite surprising that the Asiatic Labour Congress would eventually cause major trouble to the unity of the AITUC. This was due to the rise of alternatives for Asian cooperation. The next section will therefore explore a different set of Asian labour engagements that arose at the same time that the plans for the Asiatic Labour Congress were coming to fruition.

2.3 Asianism at the League Against Imperialism

In view of the great importance attached to taking Indian labour issues to the international stage and carving out a place at the ILO, it is interesting to note that within a few short years the AITUC had involved itself with a myriad of other Asian activities that were not always related, or indeed even agreeable, to the post-war international cooperation as determined by the rules of 'Geneva'. These activities included cooperation with labour activists from different colonial and semi-colonial parts of Asia, as well as fraternal relations with Soviet-backed labour organisations, both of which were considered seditious by the government of British India and perceived as a threat in Geneva. As noted, it soon became apparent that the Russian Revolution had inspired Indian trade unionism just as much as the establishment of the ILO had done.[48] While AITUC's ILO enthusiasts were dreaming of Asian cooperation, other Asian platforms came knocking at AITUC's door with increasing urgency. By 1927, they had become impossible to ignore.

One such platform was the League Against Imperialism, which was founded at the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities in Brussels on 10 February 1927. This conference drew 175 delegates, of whom 107 came from areas under colonial rule. Invitations had been sent from Berlin in December 1926, signed by the Provisional Committee of the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism.[49] The first three of the considerable list of signatories were Madame Sun Yat-sen, at that time still part of the Kuomintang Central Executive Committee but soon to leave for Moscow; Jawaharlal Nehru; and Hafiz Ramadan

[47] *The All-India Trade Union Congress Bulletin*, Report of the Ninth Session, Resolution 19, 1928, 74.
[48] See also Jha, *The Indian Trade Union Movement*, 90.
[49] IISH, League Against Imperialism Archives, file 1: Invitation to the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism.

Bey, an Egyptian anti-imperialist activist in exile in Paris. All three were conspicuously named before the European members of the provisional committee in the list. Among the latter were German communist Willy Münzenberg, the driving force behind the Brussels Conference, Romain Rolland; Albert Einstein; Dutch architect Berlage; and Dutch poet Henriette Roland Holst.[50]

The agenda read, in part: 'the emancipation movement of the oppressed nations and the support to be given by the labour movement and the progressive parties in imperialist countries; co-ordination of the forces of the national emancipation movement with the forces of the labour movement in the colonial as well as the imperialist countries; and building a permanent international organization'.[51] In other words, the Congress was to link the European labour movement and other anti-imperialists to colonial activists in support of independence movements. The Brussels congress saw labour movements as integral to the anti-imperial struggle, which is reflected in the list of delegates who attended. This was no less true for the Indian delegation, which consisted of—among others—the Ceylonese Trade Union Congress, the Hindoo Workers Welfare League, and the Hindoo Journalists Federation in Europe.[52] The AITUC was conspicuous by its absence, although it had been invited. After much debate, those factions of the AITUC hesitant to send delegates to such a gathering of revolutionary forces had put the question on hold, resolving to revisit the issue if the Brussels congress met a second time.

Later that year, delegates from the League Against Imperialism made a renewed attempt to get the AITUC on board by joining the annual AITUC session at Kanpur in November 1927. However, an AITUC delegation to the League Against Imperialism might never have been formed were it not for the government of India's decision to arrest and deport J. W. Johnston, the League representative to the AITUC. Interpreting this as an open challenge to AITUC's autonomy, even the most reformist, anti-Communist, and pro-parliamentarian among AITUC's leaders felt that it was time to make a stand. The organization affiliated itself to the League Against Imperialism in 'emphatic protest' against the 'unwarranted unrest and deportation order passed against our fraternal delegate Mr Johnston'.[53] K. N. Joglekar, the organizing secretary of the Railwaymen's Union, and D. R. Thengdi of the AITUC executive council, both close associates of S. A. Dange and Muzaffar Ahmed, were selected to be AITUC representatives to the next conference of the League.[54] The only concession to the reformers was that the affiliation was for one year only.[55] However, an AITUC delegation was indeed sent to the Second Congress of the League Against Imperialism, held in Frankfurt two years later. The All-India Workers and Peasants'

[50] Nationaal Archief (NA), Rapporten Centrale Inlichtingendienst 1919–1940 (RCI), 36043: Secret Report, 16 November 1926. Berlage was a member of the Revolutionaire Intellectuelen (revolutionary intellectuals). Henriette Roland Holst had broken with the CPH (Communist Party of Holland) by this time, but supported Münzenberg's anti-imperialist initiative.

[51] Ibid.

[52] IISH, LAI Archives, file 2: List of organizations and delegates.

[53] Resolution 20a of the 1928 Jharia meeting. NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Report of the 9th Session.

[54] P. C. Joshi Archives of Contemporary History, Meerut Conspiracy Case (MCC) file 33: Statement of K. N. Joglekar, 2038.

[55] Ibid.

Party, the Municipal Workers Union (Bombay), the Bombay Trade Council Union, and the Railwaymen's Union were also present.[56]

Asianism in the League Against Imperialism

In the already sparse historiography of the League Against Imperialism, Asianism as a theme has been conspicuous by its absence.[57] This is strange, considering that the very foundations of the League Against Imperialism were Pan-Asian in character: a group of students from several colonial and semi-colonial areas had come together in a Pan-Asiatic League in Berlin prior to the Brussels Congress, and were involved in preparations for the latter.[58] The intent of having the Brussels Congress function as a platform for Asian delegates to meet and organize ways of coordinating anti-imperialist activities was clear from the outset. As Nehru wrote to Roger Baldwin, who participated in the initiative on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union: 'All of Asia is on the move and India is only the point of a mass with immeasurable momentum'.[59] But although co-operation between the Chinese and Indian delegations at the Congress itself has been noted, the scale at which Asian delegations conferred with each other has so far not been touched.

It should be mentioned at this juncture that the Asianist origins of the Brussels Congress were not intended to exclude Africa. Quite the contrary, the gathering was intended for all 'Oppressed Nationalities'. However, the number of African delegates was comparatively small. There was a full Egyptian delegation, but on account of its geographical location, Egypt was considered as part of Arab West Asia, and to all intents and purposes included as an Asian country.[60] The Congress was further attended by several South African trade unionists; a representative of the Sierra Leone Railwaymen's Federation; two journalists, one from Morocco and one from Algeria; and a delegate from the Tunisian Destour Party.[61] However, the famous Senegalese activist Lamine Senghor was a delegate on behalf of all *colonies françaises*, and he was appointed to the executive committee of the League Against Imperialism as representative of the whole 'negro race'.[62]

At a separate meeting in Brussels, the Asian delegates discussed the possibility of founding a more permanent Pan-Asian Organisation in which labour activists could take

[56] IISH, LAI Archives, file 2: List of delegations.

[57] Though mentioned by M. Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography* (London: Oxford UP, 1959), 109–10. On the League Against Imperialism, see further, M. Louro, *At Home and in the World: Jawaharlal Nehru and Global Anti-Imperialism* (PhD dissertation, Temple University, 2010); V. Prasad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007), 16–30; and J. Jones, *The League Against Imperialism* (Fulwood: Socialist History Society, 1996).

[58] N. K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 248.

[59] SMML, RNBP, Box 7 File 30: Nehru to Baldwin, undated.

[60] Egypt was part of many Asianist initiatives throughout the interwar period, and would also be included in the 1947 Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, treated in chapter 5.

[61] SMML, RNBP, Box 8 File 2: League against Imperialism delegates. The Destour party would later also send representation to the Asian Socialist Conference, treated in chapter 5.

[62] NA, RCI, 15497: report from *Le Drapeau Rouge*, 16 February 1927. On Senghor's anti-imperialist activism, see further, B. H. Edwards, 'The Shadow of Shadows', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11:1 (2003): 11–49.

part.[63] Nehru established particularly intensive contacts with the Chinese delegation, which consisted of, among others, the labour federations of Canton and Kwantung and the Federation of Chinese Workers Abroad.[64] It is worth noting that the resolutions arrived at in Brussels demonstrate Asianism at two different levels. On the one hand, the Asian contacts fostered served specific political ends. China and India arrived at a joint statement denouncing the use of Indian troops and resources in the British suppression of China. Their resolution read:

> Ever since the unholy Opium War from 1840 to 1842, Indian troops have been sent to China time and again, in order to secure the power of British Imperialism in that country. Eighty-seven years have Indian troops been abused in this way, and thousands of Indians were stationed as police officers today in Hong Kong, Shanghai etc. They were later used to shoot Chinese workers, which has caused Chinese hostilities against the Indian people to grow.[65]

On the other hand, the resolution also demonstrates the popular topos of 'ancient bonds' between Asian lands, which had longer antecedents and was actively being disseminated by the Greater India Society and related scholarly organizations in the 1920s. This discourse will be elaborated further in chapter 3, but its presence at a communist-sponsored anti-imperialist gathering demonstrates the wide currency of the notion of historical Asian ties on the verge of being restored:

> For more than 3000 years, the people of India and China were united by close cultural relations. From the days of the Buddha to the end of the Mughal period and the start of British rule, these friendly ties were ever-present. … British Imperialism, which has kept us in isolation from one another in the past and has brought so much injustice, is now the very power that unites us in our struggle against it.[66]

The Sino-Indian resolution was one of the few bilateral resolutions arrived at in Brussels. Most resolutions were either based on a particular grievance of one single delegation, or collective stances against imperialist exploitation. Another exception to this rule was a resolution arrived at by the Asian delegations. This was not a small group. 'Asia' in Brussels consisted of twenty-eight delegates from China, fourteen from India, four from Indonesia, three each from Korea and Indo-China, and two from the Philippines.[67] Their joint statement professed the features they had in common. It is reminiscent of the style of the Sino-Indian resolution, in that it emphasised Asian cultural and political heritage and focused on the features that the represented nations had in common:

[63] Brecher, *Nehru*, 109–10.
[64] ISSH, LAI Archives, file 2: List of delegations.
[65] IISH, LAI Archives, file 26: Joint Sino-Indian resolution. Translation from German by the author.
[66] IISH, LAI Archives, file 26. Resolution proposed by India and China. Translation from the German by the author.
[67] IISH, LAI Archives file 2. List of organizations and delegates.

> The International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism, considering, that there are no areas in Asia free from colonial imperialism; considering, that all Asian lands have been the heritage of indigenous nations since centuries; considering, that these nations themselves have built states; considering, that these Oriental nations, who possess an old civilization, have a right, as much as the Western peoples, to determine the course of their own history; considering that political independence is an *absolute requirement* for a people, and that no nation may be subjected to a power it rejects, *demands*, that all groups participating in this Congress as well as the current organization, which must be built on these decisions, must undertake all necessary action, to free Asia from Imperialism and Colonial Oppression.[68]

According to the International Antimilitarist Commission, the Brussels Congress had 'caused feverish excitement to spread through the whole of Asia'.[69] Exaggeration or not, at the Second Congress of the League Against Imperialism, held in Frankfurt from 20 to 31 July 1929, the number of Asian participants had increased and the delegations had become more diverse. The first Congress had consisted mainly of interest groups and exiled activists already in Europe. Examples are the *Perhimpoenan Indonesia*, the successor of the *Indonesische Vereeniging* (Indonesian Association), which had been founded by Indonesian students in the Netherlands in 1922; Kuomintang chapters in Europe and the Federation of Chinese Students in Europe; and the Hindoo Unions of Oxford and Cambridge. There were various reasons for this, the most important being that with the Bolshevik threat looming large, metropolitan governments had tightened control over who was allowed to travel and for what reason—and the League Against Imperialism was not a gathering to which a visa was easily obtained. As a consequence, colonial territories were represented primarily by interest groups already on the ground in Europe. This was not at all a new phenomenon—it was the very reason so many interest groups already existed. The fact that intracolonial gatherings in Asia were all but impossible to achieve, in combination with the fact that an increasing number of colonial students received their education in Europe as the twentieth century progressed, had made cities like London, Paris, Berlin, and Amsterdam important meeting grounds for anti-imperialists of various persuasions.[70]

The shift in the make-up of the second gathering of the League Against Imperialism was partly the fruit of conscious attempts to appeal to local Asian groups and disseminate propaganda in vernacular languages.[71] It was also due to the success of the Brussels congress.

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[68] IISH, LAI Archives file 28: Joint Resolution by the Asian Delegations. Translation from the German by the author; emphasis in original.

[69] SMML, RNBP, Box 8 File 2: Press Service, International Antimilitarist Commission. The Antimilitarist Commission was an organization maintained by syndicalists and anarchists with its headquarters at The Hague.

[70] Among many others, Edwards, 'The Shadow of Shadows'; K. K. Manjapra, 'The Illusions of Encounter: Muslim "Minds" and Hindu Revolutionaries in First World War Germany and After', *Journal of Global History*, 1:3 (2006): 363–82; H. Fischer-Tiné, 'Indian Nationalism and the World Forces: Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War', *Journal of Global History*, 2:3 (2007): 325–44.

[71] In this way, the LaI became the *adhivasitapradeshnṛśasta aur niyantrakaviruddha sabha*. LoC, RGASPI, 542/1/4/22, 22 September 1926. League documentation was also spread in Arabic, Urdu, and Chinese.

British intelligence concluded that the Congress had indeed stimulated Pan-Asian initiatives.[72] This view was supported by a report that all Asian delegates had been subsidized to attend the Brussels Congress with funds originating in Russia.[73] Aside from the close cooperation between Indian and Chinese delegates—who met again at Dutch trade union leader Edo Fimmen's house in March—the prospect of a 'Pan-Pacific gathering' in China later that year was closely watched.[74] Intercepted correspondence from Nehru revealed 'a big Pan-Pacific conference at Hankow in June to which representatives from India, Indonesia and other Eastern countries are being invited'.[75] The Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism was also to send a delegation. This conference was in fact the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Congress (PPTUS), in the process of being founded as the Asian branch of Profintern, the Red International of Trade Unions, which will be treated in more detail in the next section.

The increased participation from the colonies was reflected in the agenda for the Second Congress of the League Against Imperialism. Not only was the majority of the Indian delegation made up of various trade union organizations; the plenary agenda for the Congress even stated 'the All India National Congress, the All India Trade Union Congress and their role in the National-Revolutionary Struggle' as a separate issue.[76] This is not altogether surprising in view of the fact that the League Against Imperialism's impact on the Indian trade union movement had also been considerable. Despite its absence from the first gathering, the AITUC had been meticulous in discussing the League's resolutions. Nehru wrote to Roger Baldwin, a personal friend and active member of the League's executive committee on behalf of the United States: 'the recent session of the AITUC has been the first International great success of the League in view of the fact that all our recommendations have been adopted'.[77]

The Indian delegation's active networking with the other Asian delegations, as well as the AITUC's pro-active attitude to the League, had paid off in terms of interest for the Indian case. In an independent resolution, the League expressed its collective solidarity with the Indian struggle for freedom.[78] But this was a two-way street. Nehru had been drawn into the League by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, a revolutionary exile in Berlin and the League's secretary there.[79] Together, they worked hard to enlist more independence movements. They kept track of editorial comments on the League in dailies in several languages[80] to see who would be willing to affiliate. Just before the second Congress, Chattopadhyaya wrote triumphantly to Nehru: 'There is every reason to believe that we shall succeed in drawing the parties into active cooperation with the League. If that is attained, we shall have the satisfaction of recording the affiliation of all the national movements from Morocco to

[72] APAC, IOR, L/PJ/12/404: Workers and Peasants Parties, excerpted from D. Petrie, *Communism in India*.
[73] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/266, New Scotland Yard to India Office, 15 September 1927.
[74] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/266, Telegram: Viceroy to Secretary of State, Simla, 6 May 1927.
[75] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/266, Note for the working committee by Nehru, 4 April1927.
[76] SMML, RNBP, box 8 folder 3: International League Against Imperialism 1928–1929; invitation to the second Congress.
[77] SMML, RNBP, box 8 folder 3. Nehru to Baldwin, 26 January 1928.
[78] IISG, LAI Archives file 113: Resolution on India.
[79] And, incidentally, also the brother of Sarojini Naidu, who played a prominent role in the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi in March 1947, elaborated upon in chapter 5.
[80] European languages, but also Malay. P. C. Joshi Archives, LAI Papers, file 6.

Indonesia'.[81] Clearly, the wish for a Pan-Asian platform of anti-imperialists had not yet been abandoned. Though the League Against Imperialism would become a vessel for myriad agendas and groups over the years, this does demonstrate at least one of them: the intention of its Indian participants to mould the League into a meeting place for Asian independence movements.

The success of the first two gatherings of the League Against Imperialism in joining European and Asian anti-imperialists, and serving as a platform for Asian nationalists to meet and cooperate, did not last. Into the early 1930s, the League would become an increasingly fragmented affair. The situation in India remained one of its primary occupations, but this was mainly because the organization had been hijacked by radical Indian students abroad. As a result, it became chiefly a solidarity movement between British and Indian communists. Various local committees, most prominently those in London and Edinburgh, took turns vilifying Gandhi and Nehru as traitors to the cause.[82] The main bone of contention was their perceived conciliatory attitude towards their British masters. Hatta of Indonesia and Chiang Kai-shek of China were condemned in the same way. 'They had once been members of the League. Now … they have been expelled from its ranks'.[83]

Pan-Asianist enthusiasm did continue at the local chapters of the League. The Anti-Imperialist Students' Group was started in Berlin in the winter of 1931, mainly through the efforts of the Indian medical student A. P. Petigura.[84] The group came to British attention when the latter was arrested during a raid of the League's headquarters in December 1931.[85] One of the issues they fought was the classification of colonial workers according to culture—'European', 'Asiatic', or 'primitive', for example—holding that they were all victims of imperialism in equal measure.[86] However, the League had become completely divorced from Asia itself and was no longer in touch with any outside groups. The conscious break between its communist members and the 'reformist-nationalist bourgeois' (in the words of the former) had rendered the League inoperative. Attempts to revive it were finally abandoned and in 1935, it was dissolved. The hardening of ideological lines in the 1930s had also sealed the League Against Imperialism's fate.

2.4 Divergent paths: the Nagpur split

The choice to send an AITUC delegation to the second congress of the League Against Imperialism did not sit well with the reformist section of the AITUC. The growing hold of communist trade unions on the AITUC was increasingly making itself felt. This had everything to do with the strong increase in trade union cooperation in Asia. The strong links between Indian trade unionists and the Kuomintang, which had been forced in the League, participation in the incipient Pan-Pacific Trade Union Congress of the Red International, and

[81] P. C. Joshi Archives, LAI Papers, file 6: Chattopadhyaya to Nehru, 3 March 1929.
[82] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/271, New Scotland Yard Report, 15 October 1930.
[83] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/271, Report 24 July 1931.
[84] Ardeshir Phirozsha Petigura would finish his medical studies and remained in the United Kingdom until at least 1947. APAC, IOR, L/P&J/7/12224, National Status of Dr Ardeshir Phirozsha Petigura.
[85] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/273, Communication from the International Secretariat, 8 February 1933.
[86] Ibid.

the plans to convene an Asiatic Labour Congress, could not be reconciled in one federation. The Kuomintang had expelled communists from its ranks in 1927 and was now the professed enemy of the Red International. The Red International itself was more than ever suspicious of the ILO as an instrument of imperialism. Aside from the rift running through Chinese labour, the Japanese trade unions had to be reckoned with. The reformist Japan Seamen's Union was working with Joshi to convene the Asiatic Labour Congress. However, the Japanese Revolutionary Trade Union Council (Hogaiki) took active part in the preparations of the PPTUS.[87] The Asiatic Labour Congress was to consist of Asian ILO-delegations working to better present Asian trade unionism in Geneva, whereas the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat wanted to represent the voice of the Asian worker. Cooperation with one excluded cooperation with the other. Faced between the choice of Asian cooperation within the orbit of the ILO or that of Moscow, political tensions within the AITUC became urgent, especially as the first Pan-Pacific Trade Union Congress drew near.[88]

The Asian activities of the Profintern, or Red International of Labour Unions, make up another story that has not received much attention to date. If the Profintern is mentioned at all, it is usually to demonstrate its lack of relevance: 'it never amounted to much, and for nearly half its active life its dissolution was under serious consideration'.[89] But this view fails to take into account Profintern's activities in Asia, where it played a major role in linking the anti-imperialist activities of various Asian groups. As with the AITUC, the period 1921–27 was crucial. At the first Profintern Congress in 1921, the assembly expressed its interest in the Eastern question, and in early 1922, the Profintern participated in the First Congress of the Toilers of the East.[90] In 1923, this interest was made official by the establishment of Profintern's Far Eastern Bureau. Its main foci were trade union activities in India, Indonesia, and China, but the Bureau would in time include those in the Philippines, Indo-China, and other areas.

This attempt to form a united front in Asia generated much discussion in Profintern itself, since the trade union federations of all these countries, integrated as they frequently were with their respective struggles for independence, often consisted of multiclass parties. To some, including Trotsky, the idea of multiclass parties was reprehensible: 'In China, India and Japan this idea is mortally hostile to … the hegemony of the proletariat and … can only serve as a base, a screen, and a springboard for the bourgeoisie'.[91] Nevertheless, until the late 1920s, a diverse range of groups received Soviet support in Asia, ranging from anti-imperialism to Pan-Islamism, both seen as potential unifying ideologies for revolutionaries in

[87] WBSA, Police Files, Serial no. 49, file 248/36: Draft Propaganda Thesis on the Pan-Pacific Labour Conference.

[88] No studies of India's links to the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat have been carried out as yet. The most informative studies on the Secretariat are J. Fowler, 'From East to West and West to East: Ties of Solidarity in the Pan-Pacific Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, 1923–1934', *International Labour and Working Class History* 66:1 (2004): 99–117; F. Farrell, 'Australian Labour and the Profintern', *International Review of Social History* 24:1 (1979): 34–54.

[89] G. Swain, 'Was the Profintern Really Necessary?' *European History Quarterly* 17:1 (1987): 73.

[90] R. McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Equinox: 2006), 82.

[91] L. Trotsky, *The Third International after Lenin* (1926; reprint New York: Pathfinder, 1996), 223.

the East.[92] India was drawn more closely into the orbit of the Profintern by the formation of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat. A preliminary conference had been organized for October 1926 in Sydney, and the AITUC had endorsed it, promising to send delegates.[93] However, it turned out to be too difficult for most Asian delegates to reach Sydney, so the founding of the PPTUS was postponed and its next conference scheduled for 1927 in China. The invitation read:

> The stormy growth of the trade union movement in the Far East, following the world-changing rise of the national movement in the colonial and semi-colonial countries … the pressing economic problems of the working class in this sphere, which are more sharply acute than anywhere else in the world; and the absence hitherto of any organized relationship between the organized workers of the lands most effected—all combine to make the proposed Congress of the very utmost importance to the whole working class.[94]

As noted above in section 2.1, by March 1927 the communists had a narrow majority in the AITUC. When the invitation to the Hankou Congress of the PPTUS arrived, they decided to send two official AITUC delegates. D. R. Thengdi and S. V. Ghate, both strong communist sympathizers, were selected for the purpose. However, the Government of India refused to issue either of them a passport.[95] As M. K. Johnston, the deputy commissioner of police in Calcutta noted: 'Communism had become more to India than the wordy vapourings of a few unbalanced semi-intellectuals whose influence for evil was exceedingly small'.[96] With regard to revolutionary trade unionism, the Government of India was shifting its policy of surveillance to one of active intervention. No Indian delegation was present at this first Pan-Pacific Labour Congress, but the refusal of passports had no effect whatsoever: the Congress passed a resolution condemning the government's intervention in preventing Indian trade unionists from attending, and India was treated as a full member anyway, receiving a seat on the Bureau of Transport Workers for the Pacific *in absentia*.[97] The question of whether the AITUC should fully affiliate to the PPTUS was put on hold once more.

At the 1928 AITUC session at Jharia, all international affiliations were on the table again. It has been noted above in section 2.3, that this session affiliated the AITUC to the League Against Imperialism for the duration of one year. However, the PPTUS also sent an invitation to its next session at Vladivostok, to be held in August 1929. The message included a little kick: it warned the AITUC against the Asiatic Labour Congress, and urged them to

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[92] RCCSRMH, 495-68-9: Mohammad Abdur Rabb Barq to the Comrades of the Third International, Second Congress, Baku, 10 August 1920, *Indo-Russian Relations: 1917–1947*, edited by In Roy, Gupta, and Vasudevan, part 1.25–6. This point is elaborated in section 4.1.

[93] WBSA, Police Files, Serial no. 49, file 248/36: Draft Propaganda Thesis on the Pan-Pacific Labour Conference.

[94] WBSA, Police Files, Serial no. 49, file 248/36: Invitation from the head of the Preparatory Bureau of the Pan-Pacific Labour Congress.

[95] Mehta, *Trade Union Movement,* 140; Gupta, *A Short History*, 112.

[96] WBSA, Police Files, 35/26 file 248/26: Note on the Development of the AITUC.

[97] X. J. Eudin and R. C. North, *Soviet Russia and the East, 1920–1927: A Documentary Survey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 268.

explicitly 'oppose the splitting proposal of Suzuki in the name of the Asiatic Labour Conference'.[98] R. R. Bakhale, one of the AITUC's most intrepid travellers, had visited the IFTU in person, bringing back the message of IFTU's ardent desire to have the AITUC affiliated to it. Thereafter, Bakhale had visited Russia to study the conditions of workers there and returned with messages of a similar nature.[99] All these invitations were discussed in great detail. The debate on the IFTU was a familiar dance by now, as was the outcome: the AITUC expressed its 'inability to affiliate itself for the present with the IFTU Amsterdam, in view of the fact that there has not yet been achieved trade union unity'.[100] The move to affiliate to the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat was so narrowly defeated that it was decided to neither decline nor accept: the matter was deferred to the next conference.

The Asiatic Labour Congress was next on the list. A memorandum signed by R. R. Bakhale, on behalf of Chaman Lal, and by Yonekubo of the Japan Seamen's Union had been put forward. The memorandum held no more than the information that the Congress intended to convene annually; that all Asiatic countries were welcome and that it would be held in India in 1929 if possible. However, it generated a heated debate. Bones of contention were the fact that 'the agenda shall include the discussion of subjects on the agenda of the ILO Conference', and possibly also that Suzuki was to be its first president.[101] The latter was known to be a fairly conservative trade unionist. But the most vocal objections did not come from the AITUC, but from Jack Ryan, the representative of the PPTUS to the AITUC, which finally decided to adopt the memorandum and invite Asian delegations to India on behalf of the Asiatic Labour Congress'.

The Jharia conference ended in a deadlock between the reformists and the revolutionaries. It had become quite clear that the AITUC was not going to affiliate to the IFTU. However, the Asiatic Labour Congress had scored a temporary victory over the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat. The latter received no clear statement of support from the AITUC, but the League Against Imperialism—also sponsored by the Comintern—did get the AITUC's vote of confidence.[102] None of these decisions was easily resolved, and each was the result of a long congress full of compromise. Several issues had been carried over to the 1929 session. The League would be up for discussion again, as would be the PPTUS. But when the issue of Asian affiliations rose again at the 1929 Congress, the domestic circumstances of the Indian trade union movement had altered the playing field considerably.

Towards the split: the Meerut Conspiracy Case and the 1929 Congress

It was obvious to the reformist trade union leaders of the AITUC that the majority of India's trade union congress was moving in a more militant direction. The Government of India had

[98] Gupta, *A Short History*, 130.

[99] Gupta, *A Short History*, 136–7.

[100] Gupta, *A Short History*, 138.

[101] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Memorandum.

[102] Whether the LaI was actively sponsored by the Comintern has long been a matter of debate. Traffic of funds for the 1927 have not been proven. However, there were strong ties between the organizers of the Brussels Congress and the Comintern. See LoC, RGASPI, 542/1/3/10: Willi Münzenberg to ECCI secretariat, 1926. From 1929, the Comintern was actively running and paying for the Berlin office. See LoC, RGASPI, 542/1/32/36: ECCI to Münzenberg, 22 May 1929.

not failed to notice either and in March 1929,it imprisoned several left-wing trade unionists in the infamous Meerut arrests.[103] Thirty-two trade union leaders were arrested, eighteen of whom were AITUC leaders from the revolutionary faction. Aside from S. A. Dange, the list of detainees reads almost like a record of the secret Calcutta meeting that had attempted to oust Joshi from the leadership: D. R. Thengdi and S. V. Ghate (who had been the selected delegates to the PPTUS), Muzaffar Ahmed, K. N. Joglekar, and R. S. Nimbkar were also arrested. An ordinance was issued under the Public Safety Bill, which provided for detention without trial. The trade unionists were charged under Section 121A of the Indian Penal Code: 'whoever within or without British India conspires to … deprive the King of the sovereignty of British India or any part thereof, or conspires to overawe … the Government of India or any local Government, shall be punished with transportation for life, or any shorter term, or with imprisonment of either description which may extend to ten years'. The indictment was explicitly directed against the AITUC's Asian activities, and the accused's contact with the League Against Imperialism and the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat was part of the charges.

The charges were accompanied by searches of the residential and working premises of the accused. The authorities hoped to find literature pertaining to internationalist theory in general and communist theory in particular, as well as documents relating to the Red International of Labour Unions, the League Against Imperialism, the Youth Communist League, the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, and related organizations.[104] Correspondence with known agitators such as Chattopadhyaya was also on the list. Fascinatingly, all poetry was deemed suspect: any book of English poems, irrespective of its contents, was to be taken into custody.[105]

The search yielded thousands of documents. A snapshot of the exhibits presented in court may serve to demonstrate how the struggle between revolutionaries and reformists had woven its way into the trial. Among the exhibits were leaflets denouncing the 'Geneva Show' of the ILO; leaflets denouncing the Second International; copies of the *Pan Pacific Worker*, the journal of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat; passport applications to the latter's conference; leaflets of the League Against Imperialism; and copies of the *Far Eastern Monthly* and the *Bulletin of the Red International of Labour Unions*.[106] This forced the Meerut accused to defend the relevance of their international activities to their trade union methods. It also caused the Meerut trial to become a battleground where the international affiliations of the reformists and revolutionaries were pitted against each other. The Meerut prisoners accused N. M. Joshi, R. R. Bakhale, V. V. Giri, and B. Shiva Rao, all organizers of the Asiatic Labour Congress, of suffering from a perverted form of internationalism, in which they had 'adopted all that is bad and enfeebling from the reformist trade unions of other countries'.[107]

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[103] On the Meerut case, see A. G. Noorani, *Indian Political Trials, 1775–1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 238–64; P. Ghosh, *The Meerut Conspiracy Case and the Left-Wing in India* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1978). For contemporary accounts, see *The Meerut Prisoners and the Charge Against Them* (London: Modern Books, 1931); L. Hutchinson, *Conspiracy at Meerut* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935).

[104] NAI, HP, 10–4 of 1924: charge sheet Meerut Conspiracy Case.

[105] P. C. Joshi Archives, MCC, File 9: Prosecution Exhibits, 2078: List of articles to be searched for.

[106] P. C. Joshi Archives, MCC, File 48: Prosecution Witnesses PW-104 (18 July 1929–16 August 1929).

[107] Ibid.

Nor was their beloved ILO a viable alternative: the 'complete record' of ILO legislation applied in India consisted of one convention regarding unemployment that 'does nothing for the unemployed', and legislation on the employment of women in mines 'so unsatisfactory as to be condemned by Mardy Jones as an instance of "Government's complicity with capitalist rapacity"'.[108] Joshi and his colleagues were accused of being aware of this, but nevertheless telling the workers 'that their grievances will be redressed by legislation … and, as a reward for this betrayal of the workers, the reformist leaders are given a seat in the Assembly or a free trip to Geneva'.[109] In this way, the proceedings drove a further wedge into the already divided Indian trade union scene.

The impact of the Meerut conspiracy case was enormous. The trials turned into a very public media affair, and a powerful demonstration of interwar anti-imperialist solidarity. In England, Meerut defence committees sprang up in several places. Some were organized by Indian students active in the League Against Imperialism, but several British trade unionists also took an active part. The trials had a profound impact on working classes throughout Britain. By 1932, a Manchester street theatre group was performing a play based on the trial. It had large appeal within the Workers' Theatre Movement and was performed by other troupes as well, including The Red Players and the Red Megaphones, who both staged it during the time of the case.[110] The plight of the defendants was both framed and perceived as rooted in a context of global economic despair, leading to involvement from agitators as diverse as British trade unionist Tom Mann and the Trinidadian activist Adrian Cola Rienzi.[111]

Even if the impact of the Meerut Conspiracy Case did not have the effect the prosecution desired, it did prove to the AITUC's reformist leadership that the Congress had to change. The fact that the League Against Imperialism and the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat had been mentioned in the indictment proved that a continued engagement with these bodies was not in the interest of Asian labour. The reformists, who sought to give Asian labour a voice in Geneva, moved to dissociate the AITUC from further Comintern-sponsored bodies. At the AITUC's meeting at Nagpur in December 1929, the thundering of Asia drowned out every other sound. The battle for Asia had begun, and the reformists appeared to be on the losing side. In the stormy session, the following resolutions were made:

> This Congress resolves to affiliate to the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat and extends a cordial invitation to the Secretariat to hold its next session in India. This Congress further rescinds the resolution about the holding of the Asiatic Labour

[108] P. C. Joshi Archives, MCC, File 157: Statement of R. S. Nimbkar (Accused), vol. 3.2886–2999, 6682. Mardy Jones was a Welsh politician from a mining family.

[109] P. C. Joshi Archives, MCC, File 156: Statement of R. S. Nimbkar, 6661.

[110] C. Warden, *British Avant-Garde Theatre* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 79–80; R. Samuel, E. MacColl, and S. Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left, 1880–1935: Workers' Theatre Movements in Britain and America* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 117.

[111] S. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 177.

> Conference in view of the fact that it is likely to be a rival body to the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat.[112]

The Congress further decided to continue its affiliation to the League Against Imperialism, and 'congratulates the League Against Imperialism on its work in promoting the solidarity of the working class of the Imperialist and oppressed countries and for the emancipation of the colonial people'.[113] The reformists' humiliation was complete when the meeting further resolved that the ILO was 'an organization established by the imperialist governments of Europe for the purpose of their imperialistic designs' and that no further AITUC delegations would be sent to Geneva in the future.[114] It was abundantly clear that reconciliation between the rival factions was no longer an option. The thirty or so trade union leaders who had opposed these resolutions walked out and held a separate meeting. They started writing a statement of their own. The main issue was the fact that the proposed Asiatic Labour Congress had been voted down in favour of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, despite previous resolutions to the contrary. It was left to Nehru himself, who had been called upon to chair the Nagpur congress, to read out a letter from some of the AITUC's most influential leaders, many of whom were former ILO delegates, which explained their absence from further AITUC proceedings. Their statement clearly shows that the battle for Asia was the principal cause for the rift:

> The proceedings of the Executive Council of the AITUC have revealed beyond doubt the fact that the majority of its members are determined to commit the Congress to a policy with which we are in complete disagreement. The point of view of the majority is clearly indicated in the resolutions for … the affiliation of the Congress to the League Against Imperialism, and to the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, and the rejection of the proposal to hold the Asiatic Labour Conference … Under these circumstances, we have to dissociate ourselves completely from the resolutions of the Executive Council and we further feel that no useful purpose will be served by continuing our participations in the proceedings of the Congress.[115]

The letter was signed by N. M. Joshi, Diwan Chaman Lal, V. V. Giri, B. Shiva Rao, and several others. A separate statement was drafted by trade union leaders without international experience, but who were equally uncomfortable with the path the AITUC had embarked upon. Even their statement shows that the AITUC's Asian affiliations were the most important issue: 'The Executive Committee passed resolutions fundamentally opposed to the principles of Trade Unions and the policy of the Trade Union Congress. Affiliation of the Congress to the Pan-Pacific Secretariat is one of such resolutions'.[116] Nehru made a brief attempt to reconcile the two factions, advising that while affiliation to IFTU was undesirable,

[112] Gupta, *A Short History,* 151.
[113] Gupta, *A Short History,* 152.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Gupta, *A Short History,* 158. V. V. Giri became the first president of the seceded federation.
[116] Gupta, 158. The statement was signed by Mrinal Kanti Bose, K. C. Roy Choudhury, K. C. Mitra, and Latafat Hussain.

as 'India and the colonial countries have been studiously ignored by it', affiliation to the Communist International was not advisable either.[117] However, the Indian trade union movement, which had once been the hope of Indian labour as an organized force with a general strike as the ultimate weapon against the government, was irreparably torn. Three days after the Nagpur congress started, sixty delegates gathered at a separate location, not far from where the AITUC was holding its closing session. They decided to found a rival trade union federation, provisionally called the Indian Trade Union Federation, soon to be known as the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF). Giri was selected at its chairman, and Bakhale was to be its secretary. As the AITUC had voluntarily given up the ILO nomination, they decided to continue representing 'Indian' labour in Geneva, and unopposed by revolutionary trade unionists, the NTUF was now free to start organizing the Asiatic Labour Congress in earnest.

2.5 The Asiatic Labour Congress

NTUF's first task at hand, however, was domestic: representing those trade unions that had joined their side in the split—and making sure that they would not regret it—as well as enlisting new unions. This would take some time. It was a difficult task too, for two disastrous strikes among textile and railway workers had left many angry workers in no mood to join the self-designated 'moderate' NTUF, which many believed sought a seat at the imperialists' table. Correspondence with Yonekubo from this period suggests that this was one of the main causes for the delay in convening the Asiatic Labour Congress.[118] Yonekubo, who represented some 92,000 workers of the Japan Seamen's Union and had to explain the delay back home, did not appreciate it. His curt reply, however, included the wish that NTUF would be able to 'overcome the reds absolutely',[119] and tensions were further eased when Yonekubo stopped in Bombay later that year to discuss plans for the conference. They drafted a constitution and decided that the Congress would not be held until Chinese participation had been secured.[120]

It soon turned out that an Asiatic Labour Congress was easier to conceive of than to execute. First, there were many travel restrictions to consider. The fact that the Congress was not sanctioned by the ILO—even if its organizers were ILO delegates—made for uncooperative institutions, be they imperial governments or international organizations. Matters of transportation and communication presented tremendous logistical challenges as well. In choosing a venue, steamer timetables and routes had to be considered. This played into the hands of the Indian delegates' desire to have their country host the gathering. They extolled the virtues of India's many excellent port cities, especially Bombay, which was a convenient stopover for delegates en route to Geneva, and Madras which was convenient for delegations from Ceylon.[121] Other problems were even more basic, such as whom to invite and where to send the invitations. Most Asian nations, and especially the dependent

[117] Gupta, *A Short History*, 165.
[118] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: R. R. Bakhale to Yonekubo, 7 March 1930.
[119] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Yonekubo to R. R. Bakhale, 9 April 1930.
[120] G. O. Totten, *The Social Democratic Movement in Prewar Japan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 274.
[121] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Preliminary meeting Bombay.

territories, were not represented at the ILO, there was no central list of non-ILO affiliated trade unions, and neither the ILO nor the International Federation of Trade Unions in Amsterdam was very forthcoming with contacts.[122]

Ceylon and China represented some hope. On receipt of the draft constitution, the Ceylon Workers' Federation and Provident Association indicated that it would like to join the movement.[123] China, though it had been considered a vital participant from the Congress' inception in 1925, finally joined in 1933 when Li Yu Hosiang, the Chinese Workers' delegate at the ILO, signed a memorandum with the Indian and Japanese delegates. With the long-desired Chinese participation secured and the date for the ILO Conference of 1934 in Geneva decided upon, the plans for the first Asiatic Labour Congress could be finalized. It would be held as the yearly caravan of ships made its way to Geneva. Colombo was chosen as the most appropriate venue—an easy stopover for the Japanese and Chinese delegations, as well as conveniently reached from India. Asian workers' unity at the ILO would finally be a reality.

The first session: Colombo 1934

At the conference, finally held in Colombo on 10 May 1934, only Japan, India, and Ceylon were present. Of the Asian ILO members, the Thai delegates, consisting of representatives of the Thai monarchy and not trade unionists, had remained aloof from the plans. Thai activities in Geneva were targeted as showcasing Siam as a nation on a par with Europe, rather than as a part of Asia. The fact that only the most senior diplomats were present in Geneva is a further testament to the importance attributed to the League of Nations by political elites in Bangkok.[124] The Persian delegates, representing the authoritarian state of Reza Shah Pahlavi, also took no part in the Congress.[125] For Japan, the most prominent participants were Tadao M. Kikukawa, one of the leaders of the Japanese Trade Union Congress and author of *Rōdō Kumiai Soshiki Ron* (On the organisation of labour, 1931), and Suzuki Bunji, president and founder of the Confederation of Japanese Labour.[126] The most distinguished representatives from India were Joshi, the 'father' of the movement, and Jamnadas M. Mehta, president of the NTUF and soon to be mayor of Bombay. Japan's and India's eyes and ears in Geneva were F. I. Ayasawa and P. P. Pillai, respectively. A. E. Goonesinha, president of the All-Ceylon Trade

[122] Although the latter organization could have supplied them if they had been so inclined. For instance, Indonesian trade unions had already applied for IFTU membership. See IISH, IFTU Archives, file 91: Note on the demands of the PVPN, 1932. Several Indonesian unions had federated in 1919, with the communists seceding in 1921. The first workers' representatives for the Dutch East Indies had attended the ILO Conference of 1929. See also R. C. Kwantes, *De ontwikkeling van de nationalistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Groningen: Nederlands Historisch Genootschap, 1975).

[123] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Ceylon Workers' Federation and Provident Association to NTUF, 10 October 1929.

[124] Hell, 'Siam and the League of Nations', 49.

[125] For Persia's international engagements in this period, see S. Cronin, ed., *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921–1941* (London: Routledge, 2003), esp. 82–102.

[126] NMML, *AITUC Archive*, Asiatic Labour Congress: minutes of the first session. On Kikukawa and Suzuki, see S. S. Large, *Organized Workers and Socialist Politics in Interwar Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 163, 184; J. Hunter, *Japanese Economic History 1930–1960*, vol. 5, *Industrial labour in Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 107; S. Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 108; V. C. Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan: Gender, Labour and Activism, 1900–1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 132.

Union Congress, as well as S. W. Dassenaike, member of the Ceylon Labour Party and the Legislative Council of Ceylon were among the attendees from the host country.

Despite its rather limited participation, the Asiatic Labour Congress passed grand resolutions pertaining to the whole of Asia, and there seemed to be no lack of confidence that at the next session, fraternal delegations from other Asian countries would indeed be present. The Congress opened with the singing of the labour song in English, Sinhalese, and Japanese. Joshi gave a history of the movement for convening an Asiatic Labour Congress and emphasized that the Congress was meant not to distance Asia from international machinery such as the ILO, but to be more active in it.

> I wish to make it clear to our comrades outside Asia that … those of us who are meeting here today are not inspired by any spirit of separation. … This movement of the Asiatic Labour Congress is only intended to enable the workers of Asia to come into line with the workers of the other parts of the world so that instead of being a hindrance to the progress of the world we shall be able to march hand in hand with them.[127]

This was even more evident in the speech by Peri Sundaram, Ceylon's Minister for Labour, Industries, and Commerce. His words voiced the desire to have Asia as a fully-fledged member of the international system, cooperating with the West on an equal footing:

> This kind of international cooperation has already been born and developed under the aegis of the League of Nations, and there have also been parallel lines of development amongst various regional units. The West has already made great strides in this direction, but this is the first occasion when the nations of the East are realizing their own responsibilities in the matter of promoting concerted international action to meet common problems. It is in this sense that I consider that this first Congress of yours is going to be an epoch making event in Asiatic history.[128]

As a first order of business, the constitution was approved. The reformists had been true to their name, which had caused uneasy equilibrium between the ideals of the ILO and an anti-imperialist stance. The result was just enough to make the Western ILO members nervous, but not enough to satisfy the more radical elements in the trade union movement. Among their solemn aims were 'to bring about unity among the working classes of Asia'; 'to remove the disabilities of a discriminatory character imposed upon Asiatic workers'; 'to remove the exploitation of workers in Asiatic countries under foreign domination'; and 'to promote the development of International Social Legislation'.[129]

The resolutions arrived at during the conference further affirmed the Asiatic Labour Congress's entrenchment in the Geneva system. But they also explicitly denounced the effects of Western bias in world politics and economics at the time, addressing the detrimental effects

[127] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Minutes of the first session.
[128] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Speech by the Hon. Mr Peri Sundaram.
[129] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Constitution as approved by the Congress on 10 May 1934.

of everything from tariff walls to globalization on the condition of workers in Asia: 'modern economies have now transgressed the bounds of parochialism and nationalism; and in order to cope with the multitudinous and complex economic and social problems of our times and to ensure for the worker his adequate place in the sun, cooperation between the various nations is most urgently needed'.[130] The issue of transnational labour was also prominently addressed, an important issue especially for transport workers and seamen, in whose unions Asian colleagues tended to be unwelcome:[131] 'In many quarters of the world—although owing to overpopulation he is superfluous at home—the Asiatic labourer is unwanted. … He must not only be taught to rise in self-esteem but he must actually rise in the estimation of other nations. Then and not till then will the solidarity of labour become more than an empty phrase'.[132] Lastly, the issue of colonialism was explicitly addressed. The fourth resolution read: 'This Congress records its definite opinion that the grant of political freedom and right of self-determination to such of the countries in Asia as are under foreign domination is essential in the interest of international understanding and world peace'.[133]

The original object of discussing matters pertaining to the ILO was not forgotten. The Congress called for direct representation of colonies and dependencies in the ILO; the allocation of two Asiatic seats in the governing body; and an obligation to apply ILO conventions ratified by a country to its dependent territories as well. Under the existing constitution of the ILO, this was not compulsory. It also called for a tripartite Asiatic Labour Congress under the auspices of the ILO itself.[134] Finally, an attempt was made to salvage the Pan-Asian character of this poorly attended conference by urging all national labour organizations in Asia to invite fraternal delegates from other Asian countries to their annual conferences.

The goal of wider representation at the next gathering was to be achieved through a press offensive from the 'headquarters' of the Asiatic Labour Congress.[135] Great pains were taken to give it its proper panache. When the Federation of Jewish Labour in Palestine joined the Congress, marking the westernmost point on the Congress' Asian map, Yonekubo and Bakhale were quick to praise the Congress as a 'continental body'.[136] However, all this threw the reality of the situation into stark relief: there were no funds to speak of, and there was no 'headquarters'. There was not even any stationary: Yonekubo continued to use the letterhead of the Japan Seamen's Union, and Chaman Lal and Bakhale that of the NTUF.

Towards the second Asiatic Labour Congress, 1934–37

The way the Congress was represented in the press, and remembered by its participants, might be divided into the twin sentiments of 'Asia Awakened' and 'Asia Oppressed'. The two were

[130] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Speech by the Hon. Mr Peri Sundaram.

[131] M. van Rossum, *Hand aan Hand (Blank en Bruin): Solidariteit en de werking van globalisering, etniciteit en klasse onder zeelieden op de Nederlandse koopvaardij, 1900–1945* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2009), 117–50.

[132] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Speech by the Hon. Mr Peri Sundaram.

[133] *The Trade Union Record*, May & June 1934, 10.

[134] *The Trade Union Record*, May & June 1934, 10.

[135] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: 'To the Editors of Newspapers', 20 May 1935.

[136] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Dov Hos, Secretary of the General Federation of Jewish Labour, to Bakhale, 27 January 1935; Bakhale to Dov Hos, 4 July 1935.

not necessarily contradictory, as they were part of the same anti-imperialist narrative, and they were often expressed within the same newspaper article.

'Awakened Asia' is well represented by, among others, the *Bombay Chronicle*. This newspaper featured a series of articles with headlines such as 'Bright Outlook For Asiatic Labour Congress: Colombo Session Inaugurates New Era Of Cooperation Among Eastern Countries', praising it as 'the first fruit' of the 'devoted and arduous work' of Joshi and his Japanese colleagues.[137] While conceding that the Congress's 'potentialities and possibilities were not yet fully appreciated', it concluded that 'till now all international labour alliances and combinations originated from the West. Renascent Asia is now making her experimental efforts in this direction and that is why I consider that this Congress sets up a new landmark in Asiatic history'.[138] The *Times of India* was equally enthusiastic, announcing 'Asiatic Labour Congress: Workers Unity', calling the first session a 'good beginning', and predicting that the Congress was 'likely to grow'.[139] *The Hindu* reservedly called the Congress a 'momentous gathering whose potentialities it would be wrong to measure by its comparatively humble beginnings' and reminded the public that 'it should be remembered that India and Japan between them, representing as they do the two great divisions of Asiatic races, the Aryan and the Mongolian, may well claim to speak for Asia on large questions of policy'.[140] This last view was indicative of the widespread sentiment in India in the early 1930s that Japan and India were to lead the re-awakening of Asia.[141] This view was not absent among the Congress' participants either. After Colombo, the Japanese delegates were proceeding to Geneva and had hardly arrived in Aden when they wrote Joshi:

> We look back on that historic meeting with pleasure and look forward to our future collaboration with the firm conviction that by the united efforts we workers of Asia shall be able to demonstrate our strength, free ourselves from old bondage and contribute to the establishment of social justice and peace.[142]

The vision of 'oppressed Asia' was equally well represented, and the most poignant examples may be taken from the *Times of Ceylon*, which published many of the speeches delivered at the Congress. One editorial maintained that the Congress 'would ultimately serve as the panacea for the evils that the Asiatic Worker is subjected to'.[143] And it cited Goonesinha as saying that 'the most unhappy working man in the world today is the Asiatic, because of the heartless exploitation and ruthless tyranny that he has to labour under'.[144] The article went on to criticize the ILO—which had never been the intention of the Asiatic Labour Congress, which itself wanted to remain close to Geneva—for passing grand resolutions and mapping

[137] *Bombay Chronicle*, 25 May 1934.
[138] Ibid.
[139] *Times of India*, 19 May 1934.
[140] *The Hindu*, 12 May 1934.
[141] I. S. Friedman, 'Indian Nationalism and the Far East', *Pacific Affairs*, 13:1 (1940): 18.
[142] NMML, AITUC Archive, Asiatic Labour Congress: Letter from the S. S. Fushimi Maru to N. M. Joshi, 17 May 1934.
[143] *Times of Ceylon*, 10 May 1934.
[144] Ibid.

out programmes for the benefit of the worker, 'presented to us as a hollow mockery, always reminding us of our helpless position; for those nice things are not for us'.[145] Such a negative image of the ILO was not at all evident from the proceedings of the Congress, but it is likely that the Congress' otherwise anti-imperialist idiom may have bred some confusion in the attending press. The Asiatic Labour Congress was indeed intended to provide 'Asiatic workers' with a new mouthpiece to voice their concerns. It advocated change, but that was to be achieved through participation in the existing international structure of the ILO.

At the second Asiatic Labour Congress, finally held in May 1937 at the Labour Hall in Tokyo, only India and Japan were present. The other members of the Asiatic Labour Congress, Ceylon and Palestine, did not attend. The Congress still professed its determination to work with the ILO and to secure wider Asian representation at that body. In their reports to the press, the Indian delegates emphasized this along with the Congress's anti-imperialist rhetoric and the fact that China's absence was publicly lamented.[146] In the opening address, Nihon Rōdō Kumiai Kaigi president[147] said of the Congress's intentions:

> We must strive to effect a speedy realization of what is laid down in the 'Magna Charta' of the ILO in Asiatic Countries as well, and in this way, work for the prosperity of our new industrial nations. Asiatic nations need not follow in the wake of the leading capitalistic nations of the world and enter into competition with them. Our Congress aims to remove the racial inequalities and the capitalistic and imperialistic domination under which the working classes of Asia are placed.[148]

The only Indian delegate who had also been present at the first Asiatic Labour Congress was Congress' secretary R. R. Bakhale. After the Congress, he was invited on a tour of Manchukuo and Korea, visiting factories and 'studying the conditions of the industrial workers'.[149] He proceeded to China to win affiliations for the Asiatic Labour Congress, but had to admit that 'strained political relations between Japan and China have made the entire Chinese population highly suspicious of anything international with which Japan is associated'.[150] He left China just four weeks before the start of the Sino-Japanese war, somewhat unrealistically 'with a confident hope that by the time the Asiatic Labour Congress meets in India in 1939, we shall have China affiliated to it'.[151]

But despite the presence of an Indian delegation, the Congress had become an exclusively Japanese affair. The principal sponsors of the 1937 Congress, the Sōdōmei and its labour bloc in the Nihon Rōdō Kumiai Kaigi, tried their best to portray the convention as an important milestone in 'Asian' labour history, and retrospectively claimed the movement as a Japanese initiative.[152]Though a third session was indeed scheduled for 1939, the Congress

[145] Ibid.
[146] *The Indian Labour Journal,* 1 August 1937.
[147] The Congress of Japanese Labour Unions, comparable to the AITUC before the 1929 split.
[148] *The Indian Labour Journal,* 1 August 1937.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Large, *Organized Workers and Socialist Politics*, 184.

would not meet again. The next issues of the *Indian Labour Journal*, Bakhale's forum of choice, were devoted almost exclusively to calls for boycotts of Japanese goods, declarations of support for China, and rather prominent announcements of Bakhale's new activities. After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, he had abandoned internationalism and refocused his attentions exclusively on India's own labour policy.[153]

The Sino-Japanese war eclipsed any possibilities for the movement's survival. Much like the NTUF itself, both the Japan Seamen's Union and the Japanese Federation of Labour had been considered moderate unions.[154] If they were uninvolved with the trade unionism of the Comintern, they were equally wary of the increasingly ultranationalist policies of Japan. Suzuki Bunji had been a member of the central committee of the Social Democratic Party (1926–32), which opposed Japan's China policy.[155] He remained involved with the party, which fused with the National Labour–Farmer Masses Party, forming the Social Masses Party from 1932 onwards. But after 1937, Indian cooperation with Japanese organizations in the name of Asian labour, regardless of those organizations' politics, had become impossible. It would generate too much bad press. On the Japanese side, trade unionism had rapidly become too restricted and too small to even survive.[156] On the Indian side, Japanese imperialism, particularly in relation to China, was condemned in the strongest possible terms across the political spectrum and further association with Japanese bodies would have been too damaging for the NTUF.[157] Asianism itself had become tainted.

Meanwhile at the AITUC: revolutionary Asianism after the split

The AITUC had entered a period of factional fighting, in which the issue of Asian affiliations figured prominently. Newly elected leader S. V. Deshpande represented the most militant wing of the Congress. He had condemned the split in no uncertain terms: 'the Right Wing Leaders split away in order to weaken the economic and political struggle of the Indian workers. They split away to help British Imperialism and Indian capitalists. The Right Wing leaders had no mandate from the rank and file to split the trade union movement'.[158] A mere six days after the Nagpur split in December 1929, one of his first actions was to move for official affiliation to both the League Against Imperialism and the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat. It was quite clear in which direction the truncated AITUC wished to move: 'the great Russian Revolution of 1917 had opened up a new horizon for the workers of the whole world. The Indian worker must study closely the history of the Russian Revolution. They must of course entertain no thoughts of violent revolution, but it is unnecessary to make an undue fetish of non-violence'.[159] This fit well with the views of the Far Eastern Bureau of the

[153] *The Indian Labour Journal*, 10, 17 and 24 October 1937.
[154] S. Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 108.
[155] Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women in Japan*, 132.
[156] Large, *Organized Workers and Socialist Politics*, 164.
[157] Cf. newspapers such as *Young India* and the *Congress Socialist*: 'The tentacles of the Japanese empire creep slowly forward abridging Chinese freedom', Dec 21 1935, 4.
[158] WBSA, Police Files, 98/1926 AITUC: Answer of Militant Working Class to the Splitting Policy of Right Wing Leaders, by Deshpande, December 1929.
[159] This was obviously a slight towards Gandhi. WBSA, Police Files, file 98/1926 AITUC: report 1931.

Profintern, to whom the Nagpur split represented a chance to get 'India', as represented by the AITUC, on board.

The AITUC remained in touch with the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat throughout the next year and a half. It was a profitable relationship, for the PPTUS sent funds to help continue the AITUC strikes.[160] Although passport refusals ensured that no direct AITUC representative could travel to the 1929 PPTUS Congress, the revolutionaries in the AITUC maintained their connections to the secretariat in writing. Government bans on trafficking in seditious literature notwithstanding, texts were, after all, easier moved than people. The official organ of the PPTUS, the *Pan-Pacific Worker*, came to rely on Indian contributors to fill its pages. Importantly, these continued to address Asian anti-imperialist solidarities rather than focus on the plight of organized labour in India. The Asianist rhetoric of the journal echoed that of the League Against Imperialism: Asian lands that had been united in pre-imperialist times now stood united against the imperialist powers that had kept them apart:

> Because the Moroccans, Indonesians, Hindus and Chinese are struggling to liberate themselves from the double yoke of militarism and imperialism, they are branded as cruel and blood-thirsty. But if they submit without resistance to the modern forms of robbery and exploitation, the capitalist writers and 'ideologists' are sure to laud the grandeur and beauty of the old civilisations.[161]

However, the already truncated AITUC faced further fragmentation, which would roughly divide it into two sections: those who wanted to concentrate on the national struggle and unify Indian labour towards that end; and a section who wanted to 'purge' the AITUC of all reformist and nationalist elements and affiliate to the Third International as soon as possible. The 1931 session of the AITUC broke up in disorder, with Deshpande, along with several communist splinter groups, staging a walkout. His faction had an interesting afterlife up to 1935 as the Red Trade Union Congress, loosely part of the Red International of Trade Unions.

The disarray in which the AITUC found itself at this juncture was exacerbated by the on-going Meerut trials. The Meerut prisoners were still in jail with no prospect of being released, and suspected communists were closely watched. As a result, many went underground. Communist funds, literature, and messages from elsewhere in Asia were supplied through lascars who could come and go undetected.[162] Their shipping routes maintained the contacts between communist unions throughout Asia and linked organizations such as the Far Eastern Bureau, the League of Oppressed Peoples of the East, and the League Against Imperialism to their Indian correspondents.[163] The opportunity to employ such

[160] Maharashtra State Archives (MSA), Home Special File 543(18) E Pt. I, 1929–1933: Bolshevism—funds. Arrangements for interception and control of funds from Communist sources abroad.

[161] *Pan-Pacific Worker* 1:1 (1927): 11.

[162] On lascar networks, see section 4.3.

[163] Occasionally, lascars were captured. A good example is a sailor travelling under the alias of 'Samuel' plying the shipping route between Singapore and India, among other places. Although he was suspected of acting as a courier, British intelligence services discovered him to be a frequent visitor to the League Against Imperialism. WBSA, Police Files, Intelligence Bureau, Home Dept., New Delhi, 23 November 1932.

clandestine contacts was inherent in these smaller organisations, many of which contained Seamen's Unions that were sympathetic to communist ideas.[164] From intercepted telegrams, it becomes clear that funds were sent from the Colonial Bureau of the Comintern at Moscow, the All-Russian Textile Workers' Federation, the Central Committee of Municipal Workers at Moscow, the All-China Labour Federation, and the Lascars' Welfare League.[165] However, this last and most sustained attempt by the Government of India to combat revolutionary Asianism ensured that concerted Asian action was no longer an option.

If it had become harder for the AITUC to work with its Asian interlocutors, it had also become less interesting to do so. With the failure of the Chinese revolution, hopes that Asia would strengthen the Red International were dwindling in Moscow. The forced collectivization and industrialization under Stalin reoriented Communist policy towards reformist trade unions.[166] This also impinged on the RILU's Asian work. The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat decided it no longer wanted to pursue claims to international unity with class traitors.[167] The evolution of the RILU and, consequently, the PPTUS into instruments of Stalinist policies meant that their role in Asia was effectively finished. The PPTUS lived on into the mid-1930s, but came to focus on Chinese and Japanese seamen plying the Pacific routes and the problems they faced in the United States.[168] With the dissolution of the League Against Imperialism as well as of Profintern in the late 1930s, the Asianism of revolutionary trade unionists was over.

2.6 Conclusion

Indian labour as organized under the AITUC had the potential to organise general strikes and might have become a powerful force in the struggle for independence. Instead, the AITUC fragmented over its Asian affiliations. This demonstrates the importance attached to Asian solidarity and cooperation in the interwar period. Both the revolutionary and reformist groups in the AITUC considered their Asianist projects as a vital part of their trade unionism. Labour Asianism experienced its zenith between 1927 and 1929. In these years, reformists and revolutionaries worked together in the League Against Imperialism, and worked towards building a variety of Asianist platforms. However, as the 1920s drew to a close, so too did the willingness of ideologically distinct Asian labour organizations to cooperate. The British clampdown on revolutionary trade unionism coincided with stricter directives from Moscow. Asian cooperation within the Profintern and the Asiatic Labour Congress came to be seen as mutually exclusive, and the AITUC split into two rival federations whose paths continued to diverge until the Asianist moment drew to a close. The Profintern was disbanded in the mid-1930s, and the Asiatic Labour Congress, whose primary interlocutors were Japanese trade

[164] The Oriental International Seamen's Union provided a vital link. This organization was said to be 'practically a branch of the Red International of Labour Unions. MSA, Home Special file 543(2): Bolshevism—Note by the India Office London on the Indian Communist movement.

[165] MSA, Home Special File 543(18) E Pt. I, 1929–1933: List of organisations, societies etc. from whom telegrams regarding remittances of Communist money might be sent to addresses in India.

[166] Tosstorff, 'Moscow versus Amsterdam', 89.

[167] Idem, 91.

[168] Fowler, 'From East to West and West to East', 113.

unionists, ceased its activities in 1937, two months before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war. One locus of labour Asianism remained: the ILO at Geneva.

Interestingly, the ILO finally addressed the issue of the ratification of labour conventions by Asian countries in 1937, the very year that saw the eclipse of labour activism in Asia. A newly established committee of experts on the ratification of ILO conventions included Atul Chatterjee, a former member of the League of Nations governing body. Chatterjee's report stated:

> The ILO lays down the general principle that any convention ratified by any country should also be applied as far as possible, to that country's colonies, protectorates or other areas which are within its political jurisdiction. This clause is of special importance to Asia, large slices of which are owned by Imperial Powers such as Great Britain, France, Japan, the Netherlands, etc. It would therefore be interesting to note the methods by which the ILO seeks to bring these colonial and other territories also within the orbit of its beneficent influence.[169]

The commission had some effect, for the ILO addressed the application of the Minimum Age Convention to Asia at its annual session that year. The fact that the *Indian Labour Journal* carried this news on its front page demonstrates that this was perceived as a considerable victory.[170] The discussion led to a further examination of existing ILO conventions, whether they carried exceptions for Asian countries, and whether these exceptions were intended as temporary. As it seemed that favourable winds were blowing through the halls of the International Labour Conference that year, Indian delegate Satis Chandra Sen decided that the time was ripe to ask the Conference to revisit the issue of an Asiatic Labour Congress under the auspices of the ILO. Unsurprisingly, he was supported in this endeavour by the Japanese workers' delegate.

> The importance of a regional conference has once again been emphasized in the Director's Report. In the Director's words: 'the Organisation could not fulfill its function if America and Asia always came to Europe and if Europe never had the opportunity of seeing America or Asia. It is essential that the ILO should have closer knowledge of Asia, and should make the affairs of countries such as India its especial concern.[171]

However, not only did the larger ILO conference respond unfavourably to this request, but the Indian and Japanese government representatives—part of the same delegation—failed to lend their support.[172] However, all was not lost. In December 1937, ILO Director Harold Butler travelled to India to attend a session of the National Trade Union Federation. Held in Calcutta

[169] *The Indian Labour Journal,* 10 May 1937, 2: 'The ILO and Colonial Territories'.
[170] *The Indian Labour Journal,* 27 June 1937, 1: 'Comrade Naidu Champions Indian Workers in Geneva'.
[171] Idem, 11 July 1937, 5: Plea for Asiatic Labour Conference; Indian Worker's Delegate's Speech at the ILO Conference.
[172] Ibid.

the week before Christmas, B. Shiva Rao presided over the meeting and impressed upon the Director the significance of his visit to Asia:

> I know I am but voicing your thoughts in extending to them both a most warm-hearted welcome, and in expressing the hope that the Director of the great Institution will be so encouraged by the results of his initial contact with India and other countries of the East that he will pay periodical visits to us, and not only carry with him first-hand impressions of workers' conditions in the East, but make our contacts with Geneva living and intimate. The workers of India owe a very heavy debt, indeed, to the ILO.[173]

However, the NTUF was left with the rather unpleasant task of downplaying Japanese involvement in the Asiatic Labour Congress. It is very revealing that in the presence of Butler, Rao tried to deemphasize the fact that the second Asiatic Labour Congress had been an exclusively Indo-Japanese affair, saying that it had been an opportunity to 'make contact with workers from some other Asiatic countries'. Problems particular to Asiatic workers had received attention 'in a setting more congenial to such consideration than is afforded by Geneva'. Rao continued by stating publicly that Butler's presence in India fed the hope that an Asiatic Labour Conference under the auspices of the ILO would be implemented soon, but hopefully 'under more favourable circumstances than unfortunately obtain in the Far East today'. It is an indication of the predicament the movement for an Asiatic Labour Congress was in by its association with Japan, that Rao, in the remainder of his speech, retreated into the well-worn rhetoric of the historic bonds between India and China and forcefully emphasized that the NTUF unequivocally condemned Japan's aggression there: 'China and India have much in common, and it is my firm conviction that the culture and the spiritual outlook of these two ancient countries must hasten the dawn of the day when righteousness shall again prevail on the earth. But meanwhile cruel sufferings are being heaped upon the Chinese people by their oppressors and our hearts go out to them in deepest sympathy'.[174]

With Europe on the brink of war and Japan about to withdraw from the ILO, an Asiatic Labour Congress under auspices of the ILO was unlikely. But after the interruption posed by the Second World War, the Asianist rhetoric that had led to the foundation of the Asiatic Labour Congress resurfaced. And in a context of imminent Asian decolonization, it now resonated differently at the ILO. At the last wartime ILO conference, held in Philadelphia in 1944, the governing body decided that a Preparatory Asian Regional Conference would be held in New Delhi in 1947, followed by an official Asian Regional Conference in China in 1948.[175] ILO Director David Morse reaffirmed this new course when he said that 'nowhere has the march of events been more fraught with significance for the future than in Asia … of no other part may the truth, that peace must be founded on social justice, be more aptly recalled … an immense undertaking awaits the Organisation in Asia. It

[173] *The Indian Labour Journal*, 26 December 1937, 1: 'Presidential Address at the Third Session of NTUF'.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Labour Forum New Delhi, *Planning for Labour: A Symposium on the Occasion of the Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the ILO held in New Delhi, October–November 1947* (Bangalore: The Labour Publications Trust, 1947), xvi.

can be proceeded [sic] only with the unreserved cooperation and support of the governments, employers and workers of Asian counties.[176]

The four Asian member states of the ILO at this time were China, Persia, India, and Siam. Japan would not re-join until 1951. Nevertheless, the temporary enthusiasm produced by the fact that the ILO had been the only Wilsonian institution to survive the war, and the inclusion of several Asian delegates at the San Francisco negotiations that founded the United Nations, refocused attempts to demand an Asian share in the international system then taking shape. Many still considered the ILO the principal platform for the cause of Asian labour. Asian delegates' attempts to give Asia its due in Geneva redoubled. The same arguments that had disquieted the imperial powers in the interwar period now propelled the plan forward. The very fact that the war had encompassed large parts of Asia led to the assertion that Asian labour should be studied with particular care and that a regional approach would be fruitful.[177] To that end, an inclusive approach was adopted. The Philippines joined the Preparatory Asian Regional Conference, even though it was not yet an ILO member state, and several non-sovereign Asian countries—Burma, Ceylon, British Malaya, and Singapore—were represented separately and not as part of metropolitan delegations.[178]

The Asian Regional Conference opened in New Delhi on 27 October 1947 with workers' delegations from all the invited countries present. Issues that had been addressed by the Asiatic Labour Congress were now discussed under the auspices of the ILO. In terms of wages and workers' protection, the conference took steps to abolish the double standard that had existed in the ratification of ILO conventions between Asia and the West.[179] The conference concluded with a list of recommendations for ILO reform, several of which had been long desired by its Asian delegates: regular meetings in Asia; branch offices and correspondents in Asia; more publications in Asian languages; and better representation of Asia among the ILO staff.[180] By 1948, the ILO counted thirteen Asian countries among its members.[181]

It has been said that 'the history of labour internationalism is a history of failure, of dreams disappointed, ideals compromised and initiatives corrupted'.[182] This statement applies well to the Asianist enthusiasm in the Indian labour movement. The Asiatic Labour Congress was not a success, but that would be a rather instrumental reading of events. The tripartite structure of the ILO allowed the voice of the Asian worker could be heard, and there was sufficient Asianist momentum to convene an independent conference. The Asiatic Labour Congress, and the insistence by the various Asian delegations that Asia deserved due attention at the ILO, should be regarded as an important stepping-stone towards wider representation in that body, as well as towards the ILO's Asian regional organization.

[176] SMML, DMP, Box 19 File 2: Report of the Director General.
[177] Labour Forum New Delhi, *Planning for Labour*, xvi.
[178] Idem, xvii.
[179] International Labour Office, *The ILO and Asia: The Work of the Preparatory Asian Regional Conference, New Delhi, October–November 1947* (Geneva: ILO, 1948), 11.
[180] Idem, 22–3.
[181] SMML, DMP, Box 6 File 4: International Labour Conference, 29th session: appendix.
[182] V. Silverman, *Imagining Internationalism in American and British Labor, 1939–49* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

The first Asian Regional Conference of 1947 was presided over by Nehru himself, retrospectively crowned by historians as the father of Indian Asianism.[183] The foundations of this Asianism, however, must be located in a much wider Indian arena, hotly debated and carefully shaped by a wide variety of perspectives. Faced with several choices for Asian engagement to strengthen the cause of Indian labour, this contested space of cooperation was the main cause of the AITUC's split into two rival organizations. After the split, the AITUC and NTUF continued on divergent Asian paths in the context of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat and the Asiatic Labour Congress. Though their Asianist, anti-imperialist rhetoric was not at all dissimilar, their respective visions of Asia—as a red continent or as a fully-fledged participant in Geneva—were very different. Both, however, represent a moment in Indian associational life when Asianist discourse and practice were an inextricable part of the public sphere.

[183] S. Mathur, *Spectrum of Nehru's Thought* (New Delhi: Mitthal Publications, 1994); C. Jaffrelot, 'India's Look-East Policy: An Asianist Strategy in Perspective', *India Review,* 2:2 (2003): 35–68; and most recently S. Singh, 'From Delhi to Bandung: Nehru, "Indian-ness" and "Pan-Asian-ness"', *Journal of South Asian Studies,* 30:1 (2011): 51–64.

3. Academic Asianism

3.1 Asia as the spiritual antithesis of Europe
3.2 Asianism at Viśva Bharati University
3.3 Shared Asian paths and pasts: imagining Greater India
3.4 Student politics: the Asiatic Student Congress
3.5 Conclusion

3.1 Asia as the spiritual antithesis of Europe

> Now the wild people … would starve themselves to death; and they have their heels in front, with toes and flat of the foot behind; but certain mouthless people were brought to him, a gentle folk; and they live round the sources of the Ganges, and they sustain themselves by means of vapours from roasted meats and odours from fruits and flowers, since instead of mouths they have only breathing orifices; and they suffer pain when they breathe bad odours.[1]

Defining Asia by its supposed spirituality not only has a long history; it is also a topos with its origins in the West. Ever since the Asian travels of Megasthenes, handed down by Strabo and Arrian,[2] Asia has fascinated Europe. While an element of the 'mysterious East' ('mysterious' primarily for lack of accurate knowledge beyond the eastern Mediterranean) had continued to mark subsequent accounts, the seventeenth century saw a shift in the European discourse on Asia.[3] As interaction between the continents intensified, so did flows of information. But despite the availability of more accurate information on Asia, the increasing flow of people and goods also produced a more imaginative discourse, re-mystifying, for various reasons, what had been demystified by the trading companies. A small legion of adventurers, missionaries, Orientalists, philosophers, and armchair travellers started to construct Asia as the spiritual counterpart of Europe.[4] From the late seventeenth century onwards, literature on Asia flooded the public domain. Poets, playwrights, and proto-ethnographers answered the demand for *Orientalia.* Among the much-discussed topoi of the 'Oriental despot', the 'effeminate Asian', and many others, the supposed mysticism of the Orient gradually saw

[1] Megasthenes' observations on Indian religious men, quoted in H. L. Jones, *Strabo: Geography, books 15–16* (1930; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 95.

[2] Megasthenes' own tract *Indika* does not survive, although some of its contents are given by Strabo in his *Geography* (Book 15) and by Arrian. For a translation of the latter, see P. A. Brunt, *Arrian: Anabasis Alexandri Books V–VII and Indica* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[3] Literature on Asia continued in the Middle Ages through accounts such as that Marco Polo and Mandeville, culminating in cosmographies such as that of Sebastian Münster in 1544, whose India still included dragons. However, it must be noted that this discourse was never homogenous and defies categorization as a supposedly uncritical acceptance of a continent populated by dog-faced men and other fantasy creatures. See, in particular, P. Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); J. P. Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[4] For a detailed treatment, see K. Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600–1800* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

itself replaced with an emphasis on the religiosity and spirituality of Asia, which, while informed by Orientalist clichés, was much harder to fit into a worldview of alleged European superiority over a disempowered Asia.[5] To many Romantics, this developed into a new connection between Europe and Asia as the 'head' and the 'heart', or 'reason' and 'spirit', respectively. The German poet Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772–1801) for instance, would propose in *Die Christenheit* that Asia should be acknowledged as partaking in the roots of Greek, Biblical, and Christian traditions, a 'homeland of the spirit'.[6]

The construction of spirituality as a defining characteristic of Asia would become popular in Asia as well as in Europe. In the nineteenth century, this construction of Asian identity ceased to be the purview of European authors.[7] Hindu-reformers like Keshab Chandra Sen also used this well-established myth in writings about what constituted Asian civilization. In an 1883 speech with the programmatic title 'Asia's Message to Europe' he stated:

> We have indeed learnt a great deal from the West … but Europe too must learn of Asia. Who can deny the deep idealism and the lofty spirituality of the East? The marvellous and almost incredible ease with which Asiatic seers have always communed with the Eternal Spirit, gives the lie to the dictum that God is unknowable. Wilt thou, Europe, take away from us our soul substance? Thou shalt not do it. In this sceptical age, Asia must preach with thundering eloquence the Gospel of the Living and Knowable God. … It is un-Asiatic not to know God.[8]

This discursive strategy, which is often and with some justification called 'self-orientalization',[9] is clearly visible in Sen's phrasing. In line with prevalent Orientalist stereotypes, a peace-making and placid Asia is contrasted with a materialistic and menacing Europe. This leitmotiv permeated many early Indian concepts of Asia.

A first international platform for the global promulgation of East–West stereotypes was the World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893 in the context of the World Exhibition.[10] The Parliament offered a unique forum for the representatives of Asian religions to reach a Western audience. At the same time, it was a space for encounters between Asian actors themselves, to be consolidated by future transnational cooperation. Pratap Chandra

[5] The same holds true for archaeology and linguistic research, which increasingly located the roots of European culture, language and religion in Asia. For a dissenting view, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978). Considering the abundance of critiques of Said's work, reference will be made here only to a recent work that tackles this particular issue: P. Rietbergen, *Europa's India: Fascinatie en Cultureel Imperialisme, ca. 1750–2000* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2007), esp. 53–102.

[6] Quoted in Rietbergen, *Europa's India*, 212.

[7] The following pages draw on C. Stolte and H. Fischer-Tiné, 'Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism, ca. 1905–1940', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54:1 (2012): 65–92.

[8] T. E. Slater, *Keshab Chandra Sen and the Brahma Samaj: Being a Brief Review of Indian Theism from 1830 to 1884; Together with Selections from Mr. Sen's Works* (Madras: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1884), 135.

[9] A. Dirlik, 'Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism', *History and Theory*, 35:2 (1996): 96–118.

[10] D. Lüddeckens, *Das Weltparlement der Religionen von 1893. Strukturen interreligiöser Begegnung im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002) and R. H. Saeger, *An illustrated and popular story of the world's first parliament of religions held in Chicago in connection with the Columbian exhibition of 1893*, vols. I and II (Chicago: the Parliament Publishing Company, 1893, repr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

Majumdar, representative of the Hindu reformist Brahmo Samaj,[11] Gyanendranath Chakravarti from the Indian Theosophical Society, and the self-appointed representative of 'orthodox' Hinduism, Vivekananda,[12] all subscribed to the binary East–West cliché. Vivekananda undoubtedly had the greatest impact on his audience. He maintained that, thanks to its inherent spirituality, Asia—and especially India—was the antithesis of the highly mechanized but soulless West. He was also one of the first Indian intellectuals to build bridges between Asian neighbours: on the way to Chicago, Vivekananda visited Japan and speculated openly about a common future for Asian peoples.[13]

Around the same time, the Theosophical Society popularized this idea further through various publications disseminated not only within India but also worldwide. The Society's veneration of the allegedly 'spiritual East' as opposed to the 'materialist West' was directly informed by the textualized approach to Asia of such romantic Orientalists as William Jones and the earlier German Romantic tradition.[14] While European and American members of the Society used the East–West cliché as part of an inner-civilizational critique that sought to define what industrialized Europe had lost, Asian affiliates such as Gyanendranath Chakravarti, the theosophical delegate to the World Parliament of Religions, later employed it for their own specific agendas, as would Gandhi.[15] The cases of Chakravarti and Gandhi exemplify how successfully the Theosophical Society as a globally recognized platform mediated this stereotype between the West and Asia.

Even though the casting of Asia as the spiritual counterpart of Europe, with the accompanying rejection of violence or aggressive nationalism, would at first glance seem to be a largely academic exercise, the interwar period gave it potential for wider application. The most prominent person to reformulate this Asianist essentialism in support of a (nationalist) cause was Gandhi. Within his specific agenda, the 'spiritual unity' of Asia could become an argument against capitalism, industry, materialism, and imperialism, or indeed one in favour of nonviolence. But unlike inveterate travellers and Asian enthusiasts like Vivekananda and

[11] See P. C. Majumdar, *The World's Religious Debt to Asia. Being the Substance of an Address Delivered at the Parliament of Religions*, Chicago (Lahore: Punjab Brahmo Samaj, 1894).

[12] For Vivekananda's speeches at this forum, see J. H. Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions. An interesting and popular story of the world's first parliament of religions held in Chicago in connection with the Columbian exhibition of 1893* (Chicago, 1893), 1.102, 2.968–78. For an analysis, see B. A. Hatcher, *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 47–70; and I. Chowdhury-Sengupta, 'Reconstructing Hinduism on a World Platform: The World's first Parliament of Religions, Chicago 1893', in *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, edited by W. Radice, 17–35 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[13] Vivekananda, 'The Abroad and the Problems at Home', in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 5 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1979), 209–10.

[14] R. King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "the Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999), 141–42; and M. Bevir, 'The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62:3 (1994): 747–67. On the political engagement of the Theosophical Society in India by the same author, see 'Theosophy as a Political Movement', in *Gurus and Their Followers: New Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India*, edited by A. Copley (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[15] For Gandhi's involvement with theosophical ideas, see M. Bergunder, 'Gandhi, Esoterik und das Christentum', in *Esoterik und das Christentum: Religionsgeschichtliche und theologische Perspektiven*, edited by M. Bergunder and D. Cyranka, 129–48 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005).

Chakravarti, Gandhi seemed to regard any involvement with the Asian scene as an unfortunate necessity. When he does speak on Asia, it is to construct an Asia that is Europe's antithesis in every respect, an Asia defined by the teachings of the Buddha and the cultural affinity with spirituality and nonviolence that Gandhi believed all Asians shared. He sought to legitimize this image of Asia by participating in the cultural-historical discourse that pervaded the Indian public sphere of the late 1930s, applying several of its most common *topoi*, such as that of the ancient bonds between India and China, to his own agenda. For instance, he redirected the conceit of the monk–missionary, then a popular image of ancient Asian interconnectedness,[16] to demonstrate the antiquity of nonviolence as a concept: 'It is not yet well enough known in India that Lao Tze who was very nearly the contemporary of Gautama, the Buddha, made universally recognised in China his own teaching of Tao. … Such a spirit of harmony with one's surroundings as Tao's is the very opposite of violence'.[17]

In an article for his newspaper, *Young India*, he brought up this perceived supranational consciousness as a tool in the fight against the imperialist world order, saying, 'Common lot no less than territorial homogeneity and cultural affinity is bringing Asiatic races wonderfully together, and they now seem determined to take their share in world politics'.[18] Still, it would be misleading to portray Gandhi as a champion of Asianism. To his mind, the tension between nationalism and internationalism was particularly strong. Gandhi's goal was autarchy, and on more than one occasion he called a united Asian stand against imperialism (rather than an all-India one) a waste of resources. India should first be capable of standing on her own:

> If we are in effect truly unable to help others and only ask for something at their hands it would not conduce to mutual esteem; nor can a healthy alliance grow. … The link of mere friendship of slavery is not likely to be a real or useful bond. Why do we turn to Russia, China or Turkey? It is not simply the greatness of the past history of these nations that attracts us. … It is because we believe that there are great movements now going on in those countries which furnish matter for useful study or admiring observation.[19]

'Spiritual Asia' in the life and travels of Rabindranath Tagore

The model of a division-of-labour, whereby the West would take care of the material development of the world and the East of its spiritual edification, had considerable influence on the Bengali Nobel Prize laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941).[20] Tagore had

[16] J. Alter, 'Yoga in Asia—Mimetic History: Problems in the Location of Secret Knowledge', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29:2 (2009): 213–29.

[17] *Harijan*, 4 February 1939, 456.

[18] Cited in Prasad, *Indian Nationalism*, 107.

[19] *Young India*, 1 (March 1928): 67.

[20] While Tagore Studies almost constitutes an academic field onto itself, studies of Tagore's engagement with Asianism as a whole rather than with individual Asian countries, though still studied in some detail, are less numerous. See, in particular, M. R. Frost, '"That Great Ocean of Idealism" Calcutta, the Tagore Circle, and the Idea of Asia, 1900–1920', in *Indian Ocean Studies*, edited by S. Moorthy and A. Jamal, 251–79 (New York: Routledge, 2010); S. N. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and his Critics in Japan, China and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); R. Barucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and*

developed a strong personal connection to Japan's prophet of Pan-Asianism, Okakura Tenshin (1863–1916).[21] Okakura visited India in 1901 and 1902 and met both Vivekananda and Tagore.[22] One year later he published a book entitled *Ideals of the East*, the first sentence of which drove his point home so poignantly that it would later become a sort of mantra for Asianists of various persuasions: 'Asia is one'.[23]

Like many other English-educated intellectuals, Tagore was highly receptive to a message that heralded the spiritual greatness and unity of Asia. All the more so when the harbinger of this imagined Asian interconnectedness came from soaring and uncolonized Japan. The Bengali poet stayed in touch with Okakura until the latter's death in 1913, and made Japan the focal point of his attempts to establish a collective Asian identity. He visited the country thrice between 1916 and 1929. After he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, Tagore's fame allowed him to act as the mouthpiece of the intellectual and political elites of his country. In 'The Message of India to Japan', a speech delivered during his first visit to the Imperial University of Tokyo,[24] he succinctly explained his vision of Asia. He argued that, at a time when the West was still barbaric, a blossoming civilization had existed, which united the whole of Asia from India to Japan, and 'which was not political but social, not predatory and mechanically efficient but spiritual'.[25] Secondly, he portrayed the soulless, materialistic West as an existential threat to Asian peoples: the appropriation of European modernity should occur only highly selectively and under permanent consideration of one's own cultural heritage. Finally, he supported the view that the secularized West could not reform itself. This world-historical role was reserved for Asia, and especially for its emerging leading power, Japan: to re-spiritualize the shallow and self-destructive Western civilization and, in so doing, to save the world itself from destruction. The continuity with Vivekananda's concept of a division-of-labour between East and West is clearly visible here.[26] He appealed to the Japanese elites to distinguish themselves clearly from the West, and to refuse those acquisitions of 'European modernity' that might have a dubious impact:[27]

> Of all countries in Asia, here in Japan you have the freedom to use the materials you have gathered from the West according to your genius and to your need. Therefore

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Okakura Tenshin (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); S. Sengupta, 'Continental Contemporaries: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 10:2 (2009): 320–25; S. Das Gupta, *Tagore's Asian Outlook* (Calcutta: Nava Bharati, 1961).

[21] Bharucha, *Another Asia*, 38.

[22] On Tagore's life, see K. Dutta and A. Robinson's *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995).

[23] Okakura Kakuzo, *The Ideals of the East: With Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (London: John Murray, 1904).

[24] A reworked version was published in English: Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1917).

[25] Cited in Hay, *Asian Ideas*, 64.

[26] H. Fischer-Tiné, '"Deep Occidentalism"?—Europa und der Westen in der Wahrnehmung hinduistischer Intellektueller und Reformer (ca. 1890–1930)', *Journal of Modern European History* 4:2 (2006): 189–94.

[27] It must be noted that for all his essentializing of Asia and the 'Asian mentality', Tagore remained a cosmopolitan to the end, cautioning repeatedly against full denial of the West, which he also recognized to have spiritual traditions. See L. B. Williams, 'Overcoming the Contagion of Mimicry: The Cosmopolitan Nationalism and Modernist History of Rabindranath Tagore and W. B. Yeats', *American Historical Review* 112:1 (2007): 69–100; and Bharucha, *Another Asia*, 94–98.

> your responsibility is all the greater, for in your voice Asia shall answer the questions that Europe has submitted to the conference of Man. In your land the experiments will be carried on by which the East will change the aspects of modern civilization, infusing life in it where it is a machine, substituting the human heart for cold expediency, not caring so much for power and success but for harmonious living.[28]

This scepticism vis-à-vis the modern, which was central to Tagore's Asianism, was received as reluctantly in self-conscious Taisho-Japan as were his universalist fantasies of an Asia whose *raison d'être* it was to save the world. Especially criticized in the Japanese public sphere was Tagore's simultaneous critique of Japanese nationalism and imperialism—he viewed both as 'Satanic excesses of the West' with no roots in Asia.[29] His 'unrealistic anti-modernism' and 'naïve pacifism' showed, according to his critics, that he represented a subjected, humiliated nation. On his later visits to Japan, too, the response was mixed. During his second in 1924, he trashed Japanese aspirations to become a great power in scarcely concealed words:

> I have come to warn you in Japan, the country where I wrote my first lectures against Nationalism at a time when people laughed my ideas to scorn. … Let Japan find her own true mind, which will not merely accept lessons from others, but will create a world of her own, which will be generous in its gift to all humanity. Make all other people of Asia proud in their acknowledgement of your greatness, which is not based on the enslavement of victims [and] upon the accumulation of material wealth.[30]

The reactions of his Japanese hosts were as cool this time as they had been eight years earlier. He fared even worse during his short tour of China that same year, especially with the younger generation, and was booed off the stage by Chinese students.[31] Nevertheless, Tagore did redirect some of the hopes he had held for Japan to China, and he felt that China would soon wake up to her great responsibilities to other countries.[32] In Penang he said that his visit to China had made him feel 'like one of the great makers of history in Asia who loom large in the domain of Indo-Chinese culture, of a synthesis of cultures of India and China'.[33]

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[28] Tagore, *Nationalism*, 59.

[29] The Bengali Nobel Prize laureate was convinced that Japan, after it had overcome the 'sickness' of westernization, would come into its own true Asian Self and rediscover spirituality and nonviolence. Only after the Japanese invasion of China did Tagore find himself forced to rethink his optimism. See R. Tagore, 'A Letter to an Indian Friend in Japan', *Modern Review* 63:6 (1938): 622–6; 623–24.

[30] R. Tagore, 'International Relations (A Lecture Delivered in Japan)', *Viśva Bharati Quarterly* 3:4 (1925): 316.

[31] Described in greater detail in D. Sachsenmaier, 'Searching for Alternatives to Western Modernity: Cross-Cultural Approaches in the Aftermath of the Great War', *Journal of Modern European History* 4:2 (2006): 241–59; 250–52; Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, 251–52.

[32] Tagore, 'Speech to the children of the Confucian School, Kuala Lumpur, on 6th August, 192', in S. Das Gupta, *Tagore's Asian Outlook* (Calcutta: Nava Bharati, 1961), 66.

[33] Tagore's address to the Chinese community at Penang, 24 July 1927, quoted in Das Gupta, *Tagore's Asian Outlook*, 66.

Although there certainly was overlap here with concerns held by individual Japanese and Chinese intellectuals,[34] the vision of an 'Asian civilization' as a spiritual 'Anti-Europe' and world-redeemer, so widely spread in Hindu reformist circles, had very limited potential outside of India. This, at least, can be gathered from Tagore's reception in East Asia. That said, Tagore himself never abandon his hopes for Japan. He continued to correspond publicly with Japanese intellectuals such as Yone Noguchi on Asian issues as late as 1938, and speculated that the country would abstain from aggression and find its 'true Asian self' again, writing: 'Japanese and Chinese people, let us hope, will join hands together in no distant future, in wiping off memories of a bitter past. True Asian humanity will be reborn.'[35]

But in India of the 1920s and 1930s, too, marked as it was by the growing impact of the nationalist movement and by Gandhi's campaigns for mass mobilization, few people shared Tagore's condemnation of nationalism. It is here that the tensions between nationalism and internationalism manifest themselves most obviously. People didn't reject Tagore's message of Asianism so much as his rather elitist cosmopolitanism and intellectual antinationalism. Nevertheless, there were many different audiences for Tagore's vision for Asia, even if they were relatively small. He was one of few Indian intellectuals who would extend their concept of an Asia defined primarily by an inherent spirituality that set it apart from the West to an Asia that comprised more than the Hindu-Buddhist lands on the continent. In the early 1920s, Tagore had lectured and published on Persia.[36] In 1932, Tagore toured both Iraq and Persia at the invitation of Reza Shah Pahlavi, who also endowed a chair in Persian studies at Tagore's Viśva Bharati University, which will be treated in section 3.2. On welcoming the first professor to assume the chair in 1933, Tagore had said: 'Once more we are to light our lamps which ages ago Iran and India placed together on the altar of Asia's common culture. The hymns we then sang in languages closely allied will yet again reverberate under Asia's sky; we shall unite our hearts and our minds in quest of the inmost truths of our soul'.[37]

This sentiment of Asian kinship and cultural affinity was strongly present in Tagore's experiences, meetings, and speeches in Iraq and Persia. In the latter, he visited the tomb of Hafiz (ca. 1326–1390), he noted in his travelogue: 'I had the distinct feeling that after a lapse of many centuries, across the span of many deaths and births, sitting near this tomb was another wayfarer who had found a bond with Hafez'.[38] In Shiraz he said 'Asia is wide awake today, she is once more now to offer her spiritual gift to the world, the message of brotherhood of freedom, of federation in the task of establishing peace and goodwill', and that 'The revival of this spirit in Iran has given me new hope for Asia'.[39] In Iraq, he addressed a

[34] See, for example, the writings of contemporary East Asian intellectuals close to Tagore's own position: L. Chi Chao, 'China's Debt to India', *Viśva Bharati Quarterly* 2:3 (1924): 251–61; M. Zumoto, 'Japan and the Pan-Asiatic Movement', *News Bulletin of the Institute of Pacific Relations* (Feb. 1927): 8–15; and M. Anahaki, 'Western Pressure and Eastern Resistance', *Modern Review* 61:6 (1937): 617–8.

[35] Tagore to Noguchi, letter dated 1 Sept. 1938, in Das Gupta, *Tagore's Asian Outlook*, 138–51.

[36] R. Tagore, 'The Indo-Iranians', *Viśva Bharati Quarterly* 1:3 (1923): 1; Tagore, foreword to *The Divine Songs of Zarathustra*, by D. Irani (London: Allen & Unwin 1924).

[37] R. Tagore, *Journey to Persia and Iraq: 1932* (Kolkata: Viśva Bharati Press, 2003), 13.

[38] Tagore, *Journey to Persia and Iraq*, 50.

[39] Idem, 135–6.

banquet given by King Faisal in Baghdad, rejoicing in the fact that 'in this machine-driven age', the king had invited a poet:

> I am sure that this individual fact of a poet belonging to a distant corner of the earth and speaking a different language finding his seat of welcome at your Majesty's table this evening is not a mere accident but has deeper historical significance. It is a generous gesture of the national self-respect of a renascent Asia, its expression of intellectual hospitality. … I pray that Iraq may realize this great responsibility of a coming civilization.[40]

Fig. 2. Tagore in Persia [Saubhadra Chatterjee, 'Tagore's plaque in Iranian Parliament' *Hindustan Times*, 29 October 2011].

Tagore's inclusions of Persia in his geography of Asia, and of the poet and Sufi mystic Hafiz in his genealogy of Asian intellectual heritage, demonstrate that definitions of a spiritual Asia did not necessarily exclude Islam. It also demonstrates that Mark Frost's conclusion that 'in the Tagore circle's discussions of Asian civilization, Islam was particularly conspicuous by its absence' should be treated with caution.[41] This is also evident from the ideas and art of his nephew Abanindranath Tagore, who incorporated Persian themes and styles into paintings. He sought to modernize Mughal styles to counter the influence of Western art, but also created an

[40] Idem, 147.
[41] Frost, 'That Great Ocean of Idealism', 25.

Omar Khayyam series.[42] As founder of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, his vision of Asia, too, was an inclusive one. Okakura Kakuzo, who likewise frequented the Tagore circle, wrote that

> Arab chivalry, Persian poetry, Chinese ethics, and Indian thought, all speak of a single ancient Asiatic peace, in which there grew up a common life, bearing in different regions different characteristic blossoms, but nowhere capable of a hard and fast dividing-line. Islam itself may be described as Confucianism on horse-back, sword in hand. For it is quite possible to distinguish, in the hoary communism of the Yellow Valley, traces of a purely pastoral element, such as we see abstracted and self-realised in the Mussalman races.[43]

A second audience for Tagore's bridge building with other Asian intellectuals, and for his formulation of an Asian identity based on shared characteristics, was Viśva Bharati, the university which he established at the village of Santiniketan near Bolpur in the West Bengal countryside. This university would continue to be a platform for Asianist activities throughout the interwar period. Transcending the strictly academic, it saw a variety of Asian public figures, revolutionaries, and politicians pass through its gates.

3.2 Asianism at Viśva Bharati University

In 1913, Tagore became the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize in literature. Three years later, he embarked on a long trip to Japan and the United States. Partly in reaction to the First World War, he published 'Nationalism', an essay in which he talked about the unity of Man. While on tour, Tagore conceived of a unique educational institution where people would be united with each other irrespective of caste, creed, gender, or nationality: 'The universal family of man that is conceived in future should be initiated in the fields of Bolpur. The stand of Pan Humanism should first be planted here … to free this world out of the sentiments of nationalism is the last task of my old age'.[44] On 23 December 1921, Tagore formally started the Viśva Bharati with proceeds from the prize money of the Nobel Prize.

But Tagore had other reasons for founding Viśva Bharati. While the idea was decidedly cosmopolitan in its conception, it was Asianist in purpose: Viśva Bharati was a conscious repudiation of the education system that had been introduced in India by the British and sought instead to realize the intrinsic values of ancient Asian education. Simplicity was a cardinal principle. Classes were held in open air in the shade of trees where man and nature entered into an immediate harmonious relationship. Teachers and students shared in a single integral sociocultural life. The curriculum included music, painting, dramatic arts, and other

[42] R. Parimoo, *The Paintings of the Three Tagores—Abanindranath Gaganendranath Rabindranath: Chronology and Comparative Study* (Baroda: Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, 1973), 80. With thanks to Byapti Sur for alerting me to this.

[43] Okakura, 'Ideals of the East', 4.

[44] Cited in J. Mitra, ed., *Rabindranath, Santiniketan-Sriniketan: An Introduction* (Santiniketan: Viśva Bharati, 2003), 54.

performative practices. The Indian arts occupied pride of place, but other Asian arts such as Japanese flower arrangement and tea ceremony were also taught.[45]

The Asianist contours of the institution were even more explicitly formulated in its aims and objectives, which remain the guiding principles of the university to this day: 'to bring into more intimate relation with one another, through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity; and to approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of the life and thought of Asia'.[46] Tagore explained his vision in a conversation with educationists in Tehran in May 1932: 'Asia must reorganize her continental life and vitalize her scattered cultures by recognizing their affinities and expressing them in literature, arts, science and civic life'.[47] Scholars from all over the world were welcome in Santiniketan, but to scholars of Asia Tagore had left a more concrete task:

> In the East we must never forget to link up our educational institutions with the fundamental values of our undivided spiritual life, because that has been the greatest mission of our ancient universities, which, as you have said, in spite of political vicissitudes, never allowed their vision of humanity to be darkened by racial considerations. Asia owes it to humanity to restore her spirit of generous cooperation in culture and heal the suffering peoples of modern age now divided by cruel politics and materialistic greed which vitiate even the citadels of education. In order to have this intermingling of minds in Asia we must rid our minds that are dark and against reason, of all the aberrations of local history that repel others and with a spirit of intellectual detachment seek out the treasures that have universal value.[48]

In order to achieve this objective, a steady flow of people and funds were needed. This was facilitated by the erection of several institutes and sub-institutes within the university to consolidate bilateral relations with Asian nations. The chair in Persian studies was one example, and when financial difficulties made it hard to maintain the chair on a permanent basis, Tagore took it upon himself to raise funds under the banner of Asianism. To the Aga Khan he wrote: 'I am sure Your Highness knows that my University at Santiniketan attempts to place before the whole world the best gifts of our Eastern civilizations. … A permanent Persian Chair … is essential in order that the Islamic Culture may be fully represented'.[49] The Nizam of Hyderabad had funded the Islamic department for very similar reasons. Tagore also asked Tsusho Bodyo, a former Japanese student at Viśva Bharati, to return to Santiniketan to set up a Nippon Bhavan (Japan House) in the late 1930s, but the Sino-Japanese War and the

[45] WBSA 69/1925; file 285/25 Note on Viśva Bharati and Santiniketan: 8 December 1930, to the superintendent of Police, Calcutta.
[46] http://www.visvabharati.ac.in/Heritage/Contents, accessed 16 November 2011.
[47] Tagore, *Journey to Persia and Iraq,* 151.
[48] Idem, 153.
[49] Viśva Bharati (VB), Rabindra Bhavan Archives (RBA), Tagore Correspondence, File 4: 17 February 1930, to Aga Khan.

Second World War prevented the plan from being carried out.[50] Nevertheless, a steady flow of books found its way to Santiniketan from Japan throughout the interwar period.[51]

A true hub of Asianist activity was the institute for Chinese studies, founded as Cheen Bhavan (China House) in 1937. Cheen Bhavan was had been built 'to maintain and nourish the distinctive merit of our respective cultures and not to be misled into believing that what is ancient is necessarily outworn. … And can anything be more worthy of being cherished than the beautiful spirit of the Chinese culture that has made the people love material things without the stain of greed?'[52] The years leading up to the foundation of the Cheen Bhavan reveal the number and intensity of people and associations involved in the undertaking. As early as 1927, Tagore had made efforts to invite Chinese students and scholars to visit Viśva Bharati.[53] As plans for the Cheen Bhavan became more concrete in the early 1930s, Tagore's correspondence (and cash flow, as traced by British surveillance) indicates the involvement of the Sino-Indian Society in India, the Sino-Indian Cultural Society in Nanking,[54] the National Research Institute in Shanghai, the Publicity Department of the Kuomintang, and the Chinese Consulate in Calcutta. The latter provided books on China to Viśva Bharati even before Cheen Bhavan was founded.[55] In 1934, it was decided that Cheen Bhavan would provide accommodation to students and teachers, would have two Chairs, in Chinese Culture and Chinese Buddhism respectively, and house a library on China.[56] When the building was finally erected after the monsoon season of 1936, Chen Ta-Chi of the Sino-Indian Cultural Society congratulated Tagore: 'We sincerely follow you in your noble idea to promote the spirit of Eastern culture, of which the Indian and Chinese culture[s] are the main pillars'.[57] A similar sentiment was voiced by Chiang Kai-shek, who maintained a lively correspondence with Tagore in relation to Cheen Bhavan: 'It is the responsibility of your great people and mine to safeguard the Asiatic civilization'.[58]

On the student level, the Viśva Bharati goal of 'bringing into more intimate relation with one another … the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity' was expressed by a steady flow of students to other universities and from other universities to Viśva Bharati. Enthusiasm for this was such that many students found local institutions and patrons paying their expenses. In 1927, Tagore led a delegation from Viśva Bharati to Bali, which 'wonderful opportunities for coming into close contact with a most interesting phase of Colonial Hindu Culture among a people who are staunch believers in the faith of their fathers,

[50] Nippon Bhavan exists today. Kazuo Azuma, the first translator of Tagore into Japanese and a Viśva Bharati alumnus, rekindled the plans and started fundraising in the 1970s. Nippon Bhavan was formally inaugurated in 1994.
[51] VB, RBA, Tagore Correspondence, File 176(i).
[52] 'India and China', *Viśva Bharati Quarterly* 15:1 (1937): 29–34; 32.
[53] VB, RBA, Tagore Correspondence, File 65: 25 June 1927, to Lee Wei-Ja.
[54] Founded in 1933 by Tan Yun-Shan, on his return to China after three years at Viśva Bharati.
[55] VB, RBA, Tagore Correspondence, File 66: 25 June 1931, from C. F. Liu, Consul-General.
[56] NAI, External Affairs—External—progs nos. 329-x, 1943: Sino-Indian Cultural Society.
[57] VB, RBA, Tagore Correspondence, File 65: 23 September 1936, from Chen Ta-Chi.
[58] Idem, file 64: 15 October 1939, from Chiang Kai-shek.

are conscious of their Indian connection and are anxious to renew cultural relations'.[59] In 1939, two Viśva Bharati students, one of whom was Tagore's own granddaughter, embarked on a study of Javanese dancing in the Dutch East Indies.[60]

Fig. 3. Tagore at the Borobudur ['Tagore's visit to Java, 1927': Viśva Bharati Publication Department, Kolkata].

Santiniketan as a nodal point in Asianist revolutionary networks

Although few of Viśva Bharati's students have left traces in the historical record, those who engaged in political activism, ran out of money, or raised funds, have left echoes of their activities, especially in British surveillance files. A few examples may offer a glimpse of the extent of this student traffic in Asia and the ways in which it was perceived by the Government of India. As early as 1925, the traffic through Santiniketan was flagged as a 'matter … of some importance in view of Tagore's reputation and influence abroad'.[61] Two questions wanted answering. What did Santiniketan stand for? And to what extent was 'Bolepur' used by revolutionaries?[62] Soon, it was found that several people at Viśva Bharati were in close touch with the Indian Pan-Asianist Rashbehari Bose, by then a naturalized Japanese citizen, who was wanted in India in connection with the Lahore Conspiracy Case, and who will be treated in more detail in chapter 4. Another person of interest was Balvir Singh Lala, a teacher of Gujarati at Santiniketan. From his intercepted communications, it was learned that Rashbehari Bose was the main contact for receiving and facilitating Viśva

[59] VB, RBA, Tagore Correspondence, file 178: Report of Bali Tour. See also A. Das Gupta, 'Rabindranath Tagore in Indonesia: An Experiment in Bridge-Building', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 158:3 (2002): 451–77.

[60] VB, RBA, Tagore Correspondence, file 178: 14 March 1939 from Surakarta, unsigned.

[61] WBSA, 69/1925; file 285/25 Note on Viśva Bharati and Santiniketan: Home Dept. letter, dated 25 May 1925.

[62] Ibid.

Bharati's students in Japan, possibly to engage them in Pan-Asian activities.[63] It was concluded that 'from the information on record it is obvious at least that attempts are being made by Indian revolutionaries to exploit Dr Tagore and his Institution for revolutionary purposes. There is nothing to show that Dr Tagore is cognisant of what is going on nor that his Institution has any distinctly revolutionary raison d'être'.[64]

From the information available today, it must be concluded that the intelligence branch had miscalculated somewhat. Rashbehari Bose and Tagore shared a strong belief in the re-awakening of Asia, and the need to end European imperialism in Asia in order for Asia to become whole again. Tagore had publicly endorsed the Pan-Asiatic Association in Japan, of which Rashbehari Bose was a member, and this association's mission in India.[65] Tagore's own correspondence, moreover, proves that he was in close touch with Rashbehari Bose throughout the 1930s. Their friendship became strained only in 1937 after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, when it became clear that Tagore rejected Japanese militarism, while Bose still considered a strong Japan as the best hope for the future of Asia.[66]

But earlier, especially in the early 1930s, Bose regularly helped Viśva Bharati students settle in Japan. For instance, two art students from Viśva Bharati, Biswarup Bose and Kari Haran, had been sent to Tokyo to continue their studies, and Bose found two Japanese gentlemen willing to pay their boarding and lodging for three years.[67] Similar arrangements were institutionalized in 1933 when Bose opened two lodging houses for Indian students funded by Japanese well-wishers from various Pan-Asian societies: 'Asia Lodge' in Tokyo and 'India Lodge' in Kobe, where Indian students were subsidized to live for twenty-five rupees per month.[68] But other connections to Japan raised British suspicions. Kesho Ram Sabarwal, another revolutionary who had fled India for Japan, became Rashbehari Bose's secretary there and involved himself with the latter's Pan-Asian activism. In 1926, he attended the Pan-Asiatic Conference in Nagasaki, at which 'vitriolic anti-British resolutions' were passed.[69] Wishing to return to India, he met Tagore on the poet's visit to Japan, after which Tagore offered Sabarwal an appointment at Santiniketan and petitioned the Government of India to allow him to return.[70] M. K. Majumdar, another Indian activist in Japan, earned Tagore's gratitude for assisting another Santiniketan student who went to Japan for his studies.[71] A third famous Indian Pan-Asian activist in Japan and friend of Bose, Anand

[63] WBSA, 69/1925; file 285/25: Secret information about Rabindranath Tagore's Santi Niketan and Bisva Bharati at Bolpur, district Birbhum.
[64] Ibid.
[65] WBSA, 69/1925; file 285/25 Note on Viśva Bharati and Santiniketan. Newspaper clipping 'A': 'The aged poet's speech'.
[66] VB, RBA, Tagore Correspondence, file 37: 10 October 1937, to Rashbehari Bose.
[67] VB, RBA, Tagore Correspondence, file 37: 15 July 1930, from Rashbehari Bose.
[68] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/163 file on Rashbehari Bose 1923–1926. Note from the British Embassy at Tokyo, 31 May 1933. In 1933, this converted to $7.80 for room and board: www.measuringworth.com, accessed 3 April 2013.
[69] APAC IOR, L/P&J/12/163 file on Rashbehari Bose 1923–1926. Anonymous press article, 11 February 1932.
[70] WBSA, 69/1925; file 285/25 Note on Viśva Bharati and Santiniketan: Secret report.
[71] VB, RBA, file 176(i): to M. K. Majumdar, undated.

Mohan Sahay (later of Indian National Army fame), vowed to send his own son and youngest daughter to study at Santiniketan.[72]

In theory, the British were unaware of the letters between Santiniketan and Japan, as there was a gentlemen's agreement that Tagore's mail would neither be intercepted nor censored. The Nobel Prize and his subsequent knighthood (though he returned the latter in 1919 in response to the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre in Amritsar) ostensibly raised him above all suspicion of subversive activities. But the fact that the British were no longer fully convinced of Tagore's own innocence in connection with seditious Pan-Asianist activities (rather than the poets literary exaltations on the merits of Asia), was painfully revealed when a clerk at the Calcutta post office made a mistake. A less than amused Tagore notified the post office that when he opened a letter from Germany, he found a letter from Dacca in the same envelope, from a completely different date. If they were going to read his mail, at least they should try and put it back in the right envelope.[73]

Incoming students were as much of a concern as outgoing ones. While this traffic, too, was always of some concern to the British, it took some time for the net to be tightened around Santiniketan. When a Ms Hoshi proceeded to Santiniketan in 1930, she was flagged as likely to attend the Asiatic Women's Conference, scheduled for 1931 (but postponed to 1933), which was considered to be of some concern.[74] The intelligence officer in question, though, failed to realize that Ms Hoshi was actually Makiko Hoshi, Rashbehari Bose's sister-in-law and one of the most direct connections to revolutionary Pan-Asianism among the Indian community in Japan.[75]

More suspicion arose when in August 1932 three visas were issued to Indonesian students bound for Viśva Bharati from Batavia on the S.S. *Bintang*. All three had been thoroughly checked. Saleh Soeparmaatmadja (sic), nineteen-years-old and of Soedanese (sic) ancestry, had been born in Manondjaja, Priangan (Java) and educated at the Mulo Pasoendan School in Tasikmalaja. His father had guaranteed to pay the school fees. He was joined by an eighteen-year-old boy by the name of Soeprapto, of Javanese ancestry and born in Indramajoe (Java), and a third student by the name of Boediman, whose visa details were unknown.[76] When the local intelligence branch at Suri (Birbhum district) was asked to check whether the students were indeed attending the university, it was found that only Boediman had actually reached Santiniketan, but that he had left during the Puja vacation and never returned. The other two had vanished without a trace.[77] This led the consul general to demand an enquiry as to whether the school was 'tainted with Communism'.[78] The intelligence branch at Calcutta was 'in some doubt as to the present character of the institution, particularly in view of the fact that many terrorists or suspected terrorists have in the past been students at, or were

[72] VB, RBA, file 336: from Anand Mohan Sahay, undated.
[73] WBSA, 69/1925; file 285/25: On Viśva Bharati.
[74] WBSA 69/1925; file 285/25 Note on Viśva Bharati and Santiniketan: 8 December 1930, to the superintendent of Police, Calcutta.
[75] VB, RBA, Tagore Correspondence, File 37: from Rashbehari Bose, 1930.
[76] WBSA, 7/32 file 21/32, Visits of foreigners and suspicious subjects to India: 22 September 1932, CG Batavia to Sec to the Government of India, Simla.
[77] WBSA, 7/32 file 21/32, District Intelligence Branch Office, Suri, Birbhum, 16 December 1932, to Special Assistant, DIB, Calcutta.
[78] WBSA, 20.3.28 file no. 311–27, Intelligence Branch Home Dept., 11 January 1933.

connected with, the Santiniketan, and also that there is little doubt that the terrorist of yesterday is going to be the communist of today'.[79] However, they could still find nothing definite to incriminate Santiniketan, and in February 1933, Viśva Bharati was declared 'not undesirable for Javanese students, despite Bengali terrorist connections, but neither should it be encouraged. The selection of this university is considered suspicious'.[80]

As the 1930s progressed, it became increasingly clear that Santiniketan was used as a gateway to India for a wide variety of travellers, many of whom were neither students nor scholars—or, in some cases, both scholars and activists. Tan Yun-Shan, professor of Chinese Studies, was an example of the latter. Only a few hours from Santiniketan by rail, Calcutta had a sizeable Chinese community and a local branch of the Kuomintang. The Kuomintang's activities in India had distinct Pan-Asian leanings, and a joining of forces between the Asianist engagement of Santiniketan and the KMT was undesirable. This is exactly what happened when Tan Yun-Shan attended a meeting of the KMT, at which he advised Asiatic countries to follow the example of Japan, which was the only independent country in Asia, amidst shouts of 'Long live Republic' [sic], and 'Down with Imperialism'.[81] It was further noted, that many of the KMT's mail was being sent through Santiniketan.[82] In 1942, a KMT delegation of fourteen men and women, including Chiang Kai-shek himself, visited Santiniketan officially.[83] But in the end, it was when Japan joined the Second World War and started to encroach on British territory that Pan-Asianism in relation to Japan came to be considered an existential threat to the Empire. A decision was finally made to suppress Santiniketan and isolate the school from the outside world:

> Santiniketan Viśva Bharati is an organ of terrorist movement of India. … All inmates of this Ashram are pro-Japanese. They create panic all over the world to support terrorist movement of India. In the name of international university they support India's terrorist movement. Boys and girls are corrupted. Please stop all railway communication because their party get strength to create panic and do revolutionary work to help Japanese. … Shortly some members will go to Assam to persuade the people to help them. Here they create wonderful propaganda for victory of Japan. Hindu, Muslim, Parsee, Chinese, German, French, Christian every one of this Ashram make propaganda in their own community to support this terrorist movement and underground activities.[84]

[79] Ibid.

[80] WBSA, 20.3.28 file no. 311–27, note 2 February 1933.

[81] WBSA 20.3.28 file no. 311–27, Extract from Weekly Report dated 23 October 1929.

[82] WBSA 20.3.28 file no. 311–27, undated report from Bolpur.

[83] VB, RBA, Tagore Correspondence file 64: Chinese visit to Santiniketan.

[84] WBSA, 69/1925; file 285/25 Note on Viśva Bharati and Santiniketan: undated [ca. 1942]: to the Chief Secretary, Government of India, New Delhi. It is interesting to note that in positive reports Viśva Bharati was a school or university, and in negative reports an ashram.

Santiniketan as a centre of Asianist academic relations

While Tan Yun-Shan had suffered from 'a proclivity for getting mixed up in political affairs',[85] not all academics at Santiniketan directly involved themselves with politics. Many Europeans and Asians alike, however, used Santiniketan as a base to discuss what constituted 'Asian civilization', whether an 'Asian identity' existed, and how to identify a shared Asian past. While many of their writings dealt with bilateral relations—identifying historical relations between India and specific Asian countries—other contributions dealt directly with Asianism as a theme. The political extension of their arguments was that Asia had been 'one' in a distant past and a reawakened Asia would be so again.

Their visions of a shared Asian identity received a wider audience in Santiniketan's own journals, such as the *Viśva Bharati Bulletin*, the *Viśva Bharati Annals,* and the *Viśva Bharati Quarterly*, the last founded in 1923, only two years after the birth of the university itself. At two annas per copy and with an office in Calcutta subsidized by Calcutta University, Santiniketan could count on receiving considerable publicity. The *Viśva Bharati Quarterly* functioned effectively as the institution's newsletter, research annals, and mission statement all at once. It therefore offers valuable insight not only into academic life in Santiniketan, but also into the kind of research that was carried out and the ways in which the university sought to portray itself to the outside world. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the image Santiniketan chose to project was distinctly Asianist.

A regular feature of every issue was what one might call *Tagoreana*: texts by Tagore himself, or (re)publications and reports from other Asian newspapers writing about the poet. Articles were selected that dealt directly, in some form or other, with the reawakening of Asia. The very first issue reported a rousing address by Tagore attended by over a thousand Chinese students to whom Tagore said, 'You want to listen to me, but I know it is not to me, the man who comes from India, but you want to hear someone speak who is of Asia. You are glad that I have come to you as, in a sense, representing Asia. I feel myself that Asia has been waiting long and is still waiting to find her voice'.[86] He also urged his audience, 'We must rise from our stupor, and prove that we are not beggars. That is our responsibility. Search in your own homes for things that are of undying worth. … We want to find our own birth right. Some of the East think that we should copy and imitate the West. I do not believe it'.[87]

Santiniketan's mission of educational reform, too, was put forward in the journal as both a catalyst for and an expression of the reawakening of Asia. A special issue called 'An Eastern University' was more assertive about the lack of spiritual edification and the lack of a holistic worldview in Western education than the university's original mission statement and emphasized education as the road to a stronger, more united Asia:

> In the midst of much that is discouraging in the present state of the world, there is one symptom of vital promise. Asia is awakening. This great event, if it be but directed along the right lines, is full of hope, not only for Asia herself, but for the whole world. … The time has come when we must use all our wisdom to understand the situation,

[85] NAI, External Affairs—External—progs nos. 329-x, 1943 Activities of Professor Tan Yun Shan.
[86] *Viśva Bharati Bulletin*, no. 1 part II: June, 24: Address at the Temple of the Earth, 25–26.
[87] Idem, 25.

> and to control it, with a stronger trust in moral guidance than in any array of physical forces. … The East, for its own sake and for the sake of the world, must not remain unrevealed. The deepest source of all calamities in history is misunderstanding. For where we do not understand, we can never be just.[88]

In giving other scholars and poets a podium for their expressions of Asianism, the *Viśva Bharati Quarterly* could be even more forceful. An editorial note in one of the first issues tells us that the Viśva Bharati professors felt that their university owed a great debt to 'the subtle unobtrusive influence' of Japanese scholar Okakura Kakuzo in helping to conceive their institution. As Kakuzo's 'dearest dream was this renewal of intimate relations between the members of the Asiatic family of peoples', they published the following excerpt from his celebrated *Book of Tea*, which, for the selection of this particular passage, constitutes something of an academic war cry:

> We Asiatics are appalled by the curious web of facts and fancies which has been woven concerning us. We are pictured as living on the perfume of the lotus, if not on mice and cockroaches. Indian spirituality has been derided as ignorance, Chinese sobriety as stupidity, Japanese patriotism as the result of fatalism. Why not amuse yourself at our expense? Asia returns the compliment. There would be further food for merriment if you knew all that we have imagined and written about you.[89]

In other issues of the journal, scholars from both Asia and Europe contributed to the project of retrieving Asia's past. Some were personally connected to Tagore; others had been visiting professors at Santiniketan. Early on, the British had noted Viśva Bharati's preference for 'continental scholars' (which the British found very hard to understand).[90] This was reflected by the presence, at Santiniketan, of famous Indologists and Asianists such as Sten Konow from Norway, Maurice Winternitz from Austria, and Giuseppe Tucci from Italy (who will be dealt with in more detail below). Winternitz became a regular contributor to the *Viśva Bharati Quarterly* and extended his knowledge of the history and literature of India to wider Asianist frames, comparing, for instance, Zoroastrian ideas to Buddhism and Brahmanism to encounter shared ideas.[91] Other contributions carried titles such as 'Leisure and Modern Youth in the West and the East', 'What Can Christians Learn from Buddhism?', and 'Emerson's Debt to the Orient'. What these articles have in common, is their positive definition of Asia as the site of an alternative modernity. Theirs was a proactive and changing Asia, which held lessons for the West. This was a direct contradiction of the older European stereotypes of an unchanging, static Asia.

The idea of a proactive Asia was carried on in a very different vein by those historians of Asia—from a variety of academic backgrounds—who looked for historical traces of Indian

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[88] *Viśva Bharati Bulletin*: An Eastern University, July 1927.

[89] Author, 'Whiffs of Far Eastern Fragrance', *Viśva Bharati Quarterly*, 2:1 (1924): 15.

[90] NAI, Home Political 181, 1925: 'Political, Social and Educational activities of Sir R. Tagore's school': undated report.

[91] M. Winternitz, 'Ethics of Zoroastrianism from a Comparative Point of View', *Viśva Bharati Quarterly* 1:1 (1923): 33–53.

activity, expansion, migration, mission, exploration, and expansion elsewhere in Asia. In other words: historical traces of an Indian agency in Asia that could be rediscovered and, perhaps, rekindled as the basis for a shared Asian identity. This was primarily due to the presence of academics at Santiniketan, both as visiting and as more permanent professors, like the aforementioned Giuseppe Tucci from Italy, Sylvain Lévi from France, and Kalidas Nag and P.C. Bagchi from Calcutta. While their lyric exaltations on the links between India and ancient Asia fit very well with the Santiniketan mission statement, Viśva Bharati was not at the heart of this movement this time: it merely benefited from proximity to it. The next section will be devoted to the centre of this movement: the Greater India Society in Calcutta and its academic relationships in Asia and Europe.

When Tagore passed away in 1941, he was remembered initially for his contributions to Asia's renaissance. Soon after his death, one of his Philippine friends wrote the following eulogy: 'Begotten Glory of the East that cannot die / As Truth and Lore securely stride on common trail / All mortal hordes devoutly take the pilgrimage / In fellowship of heart and soul with Gurudev / And Asia's mighty poet-seer crosses the bar!'[92]

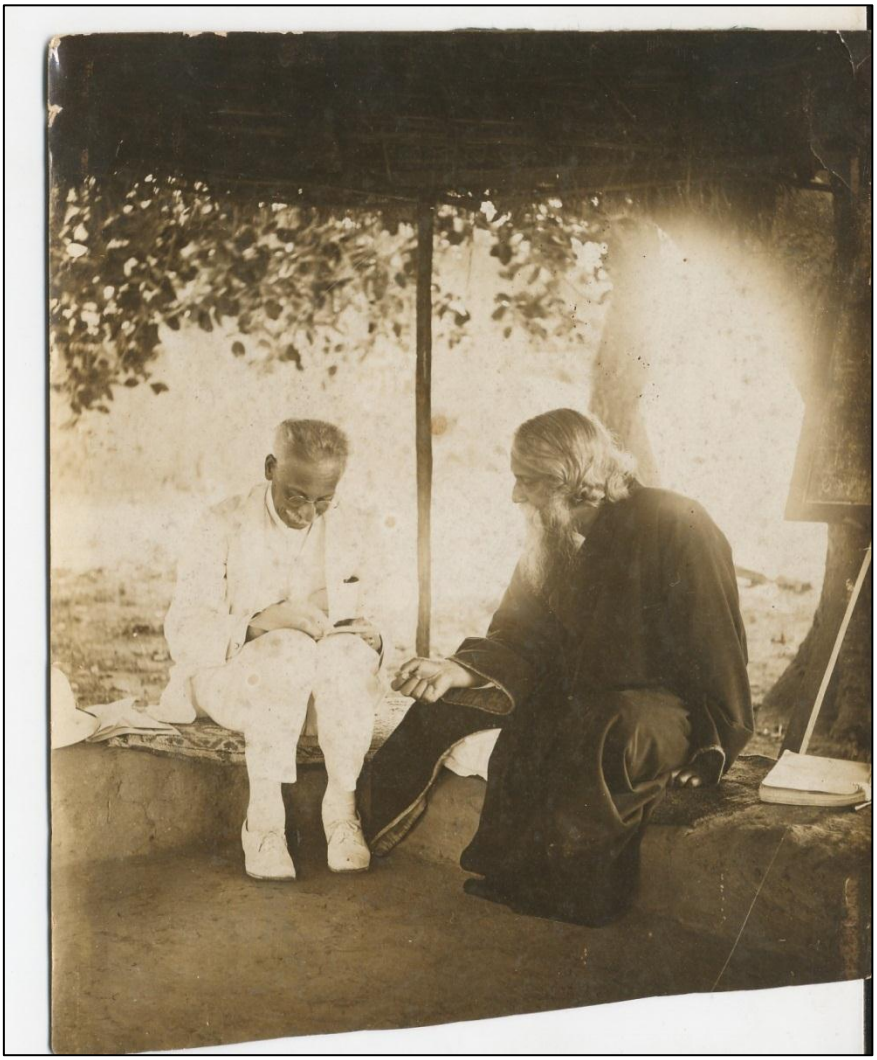

Fig. 4. Sylvain Lévi and Tagore [S. R. Rana Papers, Bhavnagar].

[92] VB, RBA, Tagore Correspondence file 294: poem by Felix C. Driz [excerpt], 21 August 1941.

3.3 Shared Asian paths and pasts: imagining Greater India

Imagining Greater India in France

In view of the emerging anti-imperialist consensus in the Indian and international public spheres, irony does not spare the fact that in the 1920s a further influential Asia-discourse came into being, one that celebrated India's past as a colonizer and 'bringer of civilization' to the rest of Asia. The members of the Greater India Society, established in Calcutta in 1926, were without doubt inspired by Tagore's concept of Asia,[93] but took his idea in another direction. Two of its founders shared an exceptional academic background that was crucial for their views on Asia.[94]

Kalidas Nag (1888–1980) and P. C. Bagchi (1898–1956) had earned their doctorates in Paris with the French Indologists Sylvain Lévi (1863–1935) and Jean Przyluski (1885–1944), and had thus become Orientalists—in the pre-Saidian sense of the word—by training. They derived their concept of Asia from European academic discourses, although they did not draw from the German and English Orientalism prevalent in British India, but rather from the autonomous French variety. What made the theories of Lévi and his students so attractive to Indian intellectuals?[95] In opposition to the widely held paradigms of evolution, which depicted the history of humanity as a sequence of the rise and fall of civilizations (and according to which the 'Oriental' ones were usually represented as extinct or degenerate), French academics were interested in translocal *longue durée* processes of cultural transfer. *Diffusion*, and not *évolution*, explained, in their opinion, the different stages of development, or 'civilizational phases' of nations.[96] In his early writings on the foundation of the fields of epigraphy, literature, and architecture in Indochina, Lévi had pointed to India as the great civilizational force of Asia.[97] Hindu and Buddhist India had, according to him, spread their cultural, spiritual, and material accomplishments throughout a space that reached 'from Persia to the Chinese Sea and from the icy coast of Siberia to Java and Borneo'.[98]

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[93] Kalidas Nag was not only an admirer of the poet but also a close collaborator and friend, accompanying Tagore on his tour of France in 1920, and his tour of Asia four years later.

[94] See Susan Bayly, 'Imagining "Greater India": French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode', *Modern Asian Studies* 38:3 (2004): 703–44; and 'India's "Empire of Culture": Sylvain Lévi and the Greater India Society', in *Sylvain Lévi (1863–1935): Etudes Indiennes, histoire sociale. Actes du Colloque tenu à Paris les 8–10 Octobre 2003*, edited by L. Bansat-Boudon and R. Lardinois, 193–212 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2007).

[95] The popularity of Lévi spread far beyond the small circle of his students. Tagore invited him to Santiniketan in Bengal, where he was the first foreign visiting professor in 1921–22 at Viśva Bharati. See R. Lardinois, *L'invention de l'Inde. Entre ésotérisme et science* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2007), 211, and K. Nag, *Discovery of Asia* (Calcutta: Institute of Asian African Relations, 1957), 10–1.

[96] S. Bayly, 'French Anthropology and the Durkheimians in Colonial Indochina', *Modern Asian Studies* 34:3 (2000): 581–622.

[97] S. Lévi, *L'Inde civilisatrice: aperçu historique* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1938). A collection of his writings on the topic, which Lévi wrote with two of his students, was translated into English by P. C. Bagchi and published in India: S. Lévi, J. Przyluski, and M. Bloch, *Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian in India* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1929).

[98] Cited in K. Nag, 'Sylvain Lévi and the Science of Indology', *Journal of the Greater India Society* 3:1 (1936): 3–13: 12.

Such messages were easily compatible with a nationalist agenda. Indeed, Lévi himself seems to have been not only an admirer of the 'genius of India'[99] but also very sympathetic to the cause of Indian independence.[100] Lévi's Indian followers stressed the active role of ancient India in the cultural fertilization and 'development' of Southeast Asia. These *topoi* were taken up time and again in both academic and popular publications,[101] some of which were translated into Indian regional languages. Although these activities earned Lévi the scorn of the British Indian Government, who declared him 'a French Jew of pronounced anarchical leanings', it made him a welcome guest in Indian academic circles.[102]

An additional French link to the promulgation of the Greater India thesis was Louis Finot (1864–1935), educated at the École des Chartres of the University of Paris. Having studied Sanskrit under Sylvain Lévi, he later became an expert on Southeast Asia and the first director of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient. In that capacity, his work on Angkor Vat, the origins of 'Indian colonization', and Indo-Chinese epigraphy inspired many Greater Indianists, and not least Kalidas Nag.[103] Due to the years Finot spent based, in Hanoi, he was instrumental in creating Asian networks of scholars, both in person and in writing. As a prolific reviewer of Indological works by both Asian and European writers, he came into contact with academic circles in Calcutta. Kalida Nag visited him in Hanoi after his trip though China and Japan with Tagore in 1924. At the behest of Finot, Kalidas Nag visited the 'wonderful monuments of Hindu Art in Champa and Cambodia', including Angkor Wat.[104] It is likely that Nag's admiration of these 'Indian' ruins was at least part of the inspiration for the booklet *Greater India*, which he published two years later. When the Greater India Society was established in 1926, Finot helped launch it in several ways, including a very sympathetic note on the society's aims in the École's bulletin.[105]

A similar role was reserved for Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), an expert in Sinology and Tibetan studies who had likewise been a student of Lévi in Paris. After graduating in 1897, he moved to the École française in Hanoi, where Finot had just become director. In 1908, he became (in)famous for taking a unique collection of medieval Buddhist manuscripts from a

[99] This was already evident from his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France. S. Lévi, *Génie de l'Inde*, edited by R. Lardinois (Paris: Éditions Allia, 2008).

[100] Lévi and P. C. Bagchi belonged to a Paris society called 'Les Amis des Orients' that was shadowed by British intelligence and suspected of involvement in 'seditious activities'. APAC, IOR, L/PJ/12/219: 'Afghans and Indians in Paris', report by Col. Humphrys, 21 Dec. 1925.

[101] P. C. Dasgupta, 'Cultural Affinity between India and Siam', *Journal of the Greater India Society* 17:1 and 17:2 (1958): 269–308; and O. C. Gangoly, 'On Some Hindu Relics in Borneo', *Journal of the Greater India Society* 3:1 (1936): 97–103; Nag, *Greater India*; P. C. Bagchi, *India and China*, (Calcutta: Greater India Society, 1927); B. R. Chatterjee, *Indian Culture in Java and Sumatra* (Calcutta: Greater India Society, 1927); N. P. Chakravarti, *India and Central Asia* (Calcutta: Greater India Society, 1927); and U. Ghoshal, *Ancient Indian Culture in Afghanistan* (Calcutta: Greater India Society, 1928); Sadananda, *Pilgrimage to Greater India* (Calcutta: Swami Sadananda, 1936).

[102] NAI, Home Political 181, 1925: 'Political, Social and Educational activities of Sir R. Tagore's school': undated report.

[103] Among others, L. Finot, *Notes de l'épigraphie indochinoise* (Hanoi: École Française d'Extrême Orient, 1916); L. Finot, *Recherches sur la littérature laotienne* (Hanoi: École Française d'Extrême Orient, 1917); L. Finot, *Le Temple d'Angkor Vat* (Paris: Mémoires Archéologiques, 1929).

[104] K. Nag, 'Louis Finot', *Journal of the Greater India Society* 1 (1934): 171–73; 172.

[105] L. Finot, 'Greater India Society, *Bulletin d'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, 27 (1928): 504–7.

monastery in Dunhuang to Paris. The manuscripts were written in Tibetan, Sogdian, Uyghur, and Sanskrit, among other languages. If this did not get him on the Greater India radar, nothing would. However, his fame in Indian circles increased exponentially when he noted epigraphic evidence of Indian influence in the history of Funan (ancient Cambodia) in the 3rd century CE. Most importantly, he noted the frequent mention of big ships crossing the seas.[106] The inference that these ships must have been Indian was a small step, taken later by Kalidas Nag.[107]

The thesis that India had been not only a highly developed civilization long before its contacts with Europe but also a hegemonic and civilizational force in Asia, was powerful ammunition in the anticolonial struggle for freedom. The famous Indian historian R. C. Majumdar (1888–1980),[108] one of the co-founders of the Greater India Society and a guest of Finot's in the early years of the École française, dedicated a two-volume monograph to the idea of *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East*.[109] He made explicit what Kalidas Nag had only hinted at in *Greater India*: India's past as a colonial power had earned it a place in the family of 'civilized nations'. Moreover, Indian imperialism was superior to its European counterparts because it had aimed solely at 'uplifting' the colonized areas instead of exploiting them.[110] Although this emphasis on India's role as colonizer and bearer of culture in Asia is criticized in current historiography,[111] the Greater India Society used it to disprove the image of India in the West as self-centred and static. Vis-à-vis the British, India could position itself as the superior 'colonial power' because its colonisation had been pacifist and benign: India's was an empire of culture.

There was an additional reason why this particular discourse of Asian connections arose particularly in Bengal. As the seat of the British Indian government, Calcutta had a sizeable colonial bureaucratic elite, known as the Bengali *babus*. Originally a honorific title meaning something akin to 'sir', it was an ambiguous category: as the nationalist movement gained strength, it was also used in a pejorative sense. To Indians, it came to be identified with profiting from and being subservient to British administration, and therefore British rule. To the British, it suggested semi-education and a veneer of modernity. To both, it hinted at a complacent and lazy work ethic. This had everything to do with the British categorization of

[106] P. Pelliot, *Le Fou-Nan* (Hanoi: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1904).

[107] Nag, *Greater India*, 23.

[108] R. C. Majumdar is seen as one of the most influential historians of his generation. Later in life he was known mostly for his monumental publication, R. C. Majumdar et al., eds., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, 11 vols. (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951–77). His work is criticized in part for its conservative Hindu-nationalist overtones. See also D. Rothermund, 'Die Geschichtsschreibung im unabhängigen Indien: Bürgerlich-nationale, marxistische und subalterne Perspektiven', *Comparativ* 11:4 (2001): 31–39; 31–32.

[109] R. C. Majumdar, *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East*, vols. 1 and 2 (Lahore: Punjab Sanskrit Book Depot, 1927). Interestingly, Majumdar's writings on 'Greater India' were republished in the 1990s as *History of the Hindu Colonization and the Hindu Culture in South-East Asia* (New Delhi: Classical Publishers, 1996).

[110] Cited in M. Gottlob, ed., *Historical Thinking in South Asia: A Handbook of Sources from Colonial Times to the Present* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 161–62.

[111] K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 58–59. For the background and content of this understanding of Hindu-'xenology', see also W. Halbfass, *India and Europe: an Essay in Philosophical Understanding* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 172–96.

Indian races.[112] In the order of character traits the British colonizers valued—a love of sport, bravery, 'pluck', and a 'chivalric' approach to women—the Bengalis occupied the lower rungs of the ladder. While the British acknowledged some Bengalis as being among the educated elites, the British stereotype of them was effeminate, bookish, lustful, and lacking in self-discipline.[113] The Greater India thesis, by contrast, cast Bengal in a more active, adventurous role.[114]

Furthermore, Bengal suffered from its less than central location, especially after it ceased to be the seat of government in December 1911. With the British drawing heavily from the more 'masculine' and 'martial' races of the north-western regions of the subcontinent for recruitment into the Indian army, funds, irrigation projects, and agricultural improvements also flowed in that direction; unrest in those areas, especially in the Punjab, had to be prevented at all cost. And with the new British seat in Delhi and the political focus on the Northwest Frontier Provinces, Bengal lay on the periphery of British India. The idea of India as a historical actor of note in Asia, and particularly Southeast Asia, spreading culture, religion, language, and architecture by land and by sea, cast Bengal as a centre of importance. Its proximity to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean placed it at the geographical heart of this perceived glorious Indian past. Both the colonial stereotype of the effeminate, artificial Bengali and the marginalization of the province were turned on its head by the idea of the Bengal region as an expansive, exploring, maritime power. This made the Greater India thesis especially attractive.[115]

The Greater India Society, its publications and impact

How did the idea that India had once exerted influence on Southeast Asia and beyond lead to the establishment of an institution whose main research agenda was to recapture this heritage? Kalidas Nag's leadership, and especially his tract *Greater India* supplied the society with a founding text and an international network.[116] Its propositions became the Society's guidelines for further archaeological and epigraphical projects and cultural missions. In it, the echoes of Lévi and his associates are still audible, but they were translated into specific areas of interest that transcended the strictly academic, and fit the spirit of internationalism, pacifism, and anti-imperialism that permeated international civil society in the interwar period. Nag's *Greater India* itself was born in such an environment. Its first incarnation was as a lecture read at a symposium on 'the role of internationalism in the development of Civilization' at the Peace Congress of Lugano in 1922 before an audience that included such internationalist activists as Romain Rolland, Bertrand Russell, and Hermann Hesse.

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[112] On colonial hierarchies of masculinity, see M. Sinha, 'Giving Masculinity a History: Some Contributions from the Historiography of Colonial India, *Gender & History* 11:3 (1999): 445–60: 449.

[113] J. M. MacKenzie, foreword to *The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, by D. Irani (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), vii. See also I. Chowdhury-Sengupta, 'The Effeminate and the Masculine. Nationalism and the Concept of Race in Bengal', in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, edited by P. Robb, 282–303 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[114] See also Bayly, 'Imagining Greater India', 718–9.

[115] See, for instance, H. B. Sarkar, 'Two Notes on the Cultural Contact between Java and Bengal', *Journal of the Greater India Society* 1:2 (1934): 51–7.

[116] K. Nag, 'Greater India', *The Greater India Society Bulletin*, 1:1 (1926).

In *Greater India*, Nag contended that Ancient India had been the first propagator of internationalism through 'peace and spiritual unity' and was therefore central to the development of internationalism as an ideology.[117] As such, India's internationalism was crucially different from the economic internationalism ('exploitation'), or imperialistic internationalism ('compulsion'), which he identified as Phoenicia and Assyria respectively, though a careful reader might find hints of Great Britain. He considered the invocation of the Vedic gods of Mitra, Varuna, and Indra in a peace treaty in Cappadocia in the fourteenth century BC as proof that Ancient India had played a role as international peacemaker.[118] The universalism of the Hindu Upanishadic texts as well as the fact that both Buddha and Mahavira, the founders of Buddhism and Jainism respectively, had dedicated themselves to humanism and non-injury (*ahimsa*), was a further indication of this spirit of 'tolerance and amity'. Nag called this 'the soul of Asia', for similar thoughts might be located in the writings of Lao-Tse, Confucius, and Zoroaster.

In a chapter called 'Pan-Asiatic Expansion', Nag formulated the influence of Indian internationalism in the first centuries CE: 'This grand movement of spiritual conquest, this noble dynamic of cultural imperialism … soon won for India the inalienable empire over the vast continent, right across Tibet and China to Korea and Japan on the one hand, and across Burma and Indo-China to Java and Indonesia on the other'.[119] This empire was never political, but instead a spiritual conquest 'that remains to this day a marvel of history'.[120] In a translation of this phenomenon to the concerns of interwar internationalist, regionalist and federationalist groups, he noted that 'all the barriers of geography and ethnography have been swept away by the inundation of international amity'.[121]

The next period of importance Nag discerned, after the 'first' and the 'second' millennia (up to 500 BCE and 500 BCE–500 CE respectively), was the 'third', a millennium characterized by 'India as the Heart of Asiatic Humanism'. In it, the 'manuscript roads' laid down by the Indian poets Kalidasa, Varahamihira, Gunavarman, and Vasubandhu, had fertilized the whole of Asia. Listing the first explorations into archaeology by French, German, Russian, and English academics, Nag outlined an agenda for further research into these material finds as well as inscriptions and manuscripts, which 'when thoroughly analysed and digested, would revolutionise our conception about the migration of early culture in Eurasia, now viewed generally from the false perspective of isolated national histories of the different countries'.[122] This would inevitably lead, according to Nag, to a clearer picture of the Indian contribution to the cultural unity of Asia.

Southeast Asia presented more of a problem, since 'this vast area was enveloped in deep obscurity till very recent times'.[123] Most archaeological and epigraphic evidence from this area was dated much later than evidence of Indian influence elsewhere in Asia, mainly in

[117] Nag, 'Greater India', 5.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Nag, 'Greater India', 20.
[120] Idem, 21.
[121] Idem, 25.
[122] Idem, 26.
[123] Idem, 36.

the wake of the spread of Buddhism. The question was how to reconcile the lack of material finds with his periodization of Indian cultural influence. Nag's solution:

> We should consider that long before a king feels inclined to get a grandiloquent panegyric of his career inscribed on a rock or a copper-plate, that long before a community is capable of rearing a great architectural monument, a people discovers another people quite normally, propelled by the spirit of adventure, economic or spiritual. So it is not prima facie improbable that Indian missionaries reached southeastern Asia by the sea route, about the same period that they had been penetrating the Far Western and Far Eastern regions by the land route.[124]

Nag extrapolated the epigraphic finds by Pelliot in Cambodia to the rest of Southeast Asia, and assumed a wave of Indenisation in the Southeast Asian archipelago. He then formulated this hypothesis as the possible manifestation of 'Hindu colonies' in the Malay peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago as the expression of a Hindu renaissance. Both Brahmanism and Buddhism (and possibly other denominations) would have flourished peacefully there. 'The history of the movement of Hindu syncretism and cultural synthesis in this region of Magna India, has yet to be written'.[125] While conceding that Indian influence in Southeast Asia might, at times, have been accompanied by physical occupation, this influence was nevertheless in first instance cultural. The literary and oral evidence of local stories, legends and myths, which incorporated elements of the Indian epics, would attest to this. And so, Southeast Asia too was moulded into evidence of India's spirit of internationalism, voiced in such a way that it was rendered acceptable to an internationalist interwar audience and at the same time, a rejection of (British) political imperialism and its corresponding hierarchies of race:

> The Indian people as a whole stuck substantially to the principle of Peace and Progress. They respected the individuality of the races and nations which came into contact with them, offering their best and evoking the best in others. Thus India managed to leave a record of collaboration in the realm of the Sublime and the Beautiful, quite remarkable in world history. … That is why, when the names of the great kings and emperors were forgotten, the people of these cultural colonies cherished with gratitude the memory of the services rendered by the innumerable Indian monks and teachers, artists and philanthropists—selfless workers for human progress and international amity.[126]

The research agenda thus outlined by Nag and his associates was taken up by other Greater India Society members and their academic contacts. The Society's aims and objects were: 1) to organise the study of Indian Culture in Greater India, i.e. Serindia, India Minor, Indo-China and Insulindia) as well as in China, Korea, Japan, and other countries of Asia; 2) to arrange

[124] Idem, 37.
[125] Idem, 38.
[126] Idem, 44.

for publication of the results of researches into the history of India's spiritual and cultural relations with the outside world; 3) to create an interest in the history of Greater India and connected problems among the students in the schools, colleges and universities of India by instituting a systematic study of those subjects and to take proper steps to stimulate the same; and 4) to popularise the knowledge of Greater India by organising meetings, illustrated lectures, exhibitions, and conferences.

The first of these four aims was met by a variety of projects. Outside of India, cultural missions, joint archaeological excavations and academic exchanges were arranged through contacts with other societies with whom the Greater India Society collaborated actively. Aside from the École in Hanoi, these organizations included the Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen at Batavia, the Chinese Academy of Buddhist Learning at Nanking, the Java Institute of Jogyakarta, and the Sino-Indian Institute of Peiping.[127] Several of the Society's members spent semesters abroad at universities throughout Asia. Moreover, they exchanged their collections and publications, thanks to which the Society was able to set up a sizeable library on Greater India in Calcutta. In India, cooperation with Santiniketan and the Royal Asiatic Society (also based in Calcutta) ensured that international scholars who passed through these institutions could collaborate with the Greater India Society on projects, lectures, and publications. During his time as a visiting professor at Santiniketan, for example, Tucci became a welcome guest at the Greater India Society. This led to collaborative projects throughout India, as well as invitations to Bengali scholars and students to visit Italy. In 1940, the Greater India Society published the report of Tucci's trip to the Swat Valley.[128]

All these activities received wide publicity in the *Journal of the Greater India Society*. This journal, which exclusively published articles related to the study of Greater India, thus met the second of the Society's aims and objectives: publication. In the early years of the journal, the reproduction of epigraphic data on inscriptions in Southeast Asia was predominant. Reference to Southeast Asia in the context of 'Indian colonies', while not absent, was covert as reflected in contributions such as Majumdar's 'The Sailendra Empire'.[129] This historian, later to become somewhat notorious for the Hindu-nationalist overtones in his work, was more nuanced in the Society's journal. Epigraphic and linguistic notes were meant to add to the historiography of, in this case, Sumatra and Java, and not to appropriate it fully as 'Indian'. In a sequel to this article, however, he celebrated the Cholas as a 'great naval power' whose incursions into Indonesia were 'crowned with brilliant success', for reducing the territory of the Sailendras in size. The article also documents Chola embassies to China, where the Cholas received 'unusual honours'.[130] Przyluski framed these

[127] Report, *Journal of the Greater India Society* 1:1 (1934): 85.

[128] G. Tucci, *Travels of Tibetan Pilgrims in the Swat Valley* (Calcutta: Greater India Society, 1940). The collection of sculptures from the Gandhara period, exhibited today by the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome, is one of the most important Gandhara collections in the world.

[129] R. C. Majumdar, 'The Sailendra Empire (up to the End of the Tenth Century AD)', *Journal of the Greater India Society* 1:1 (1934): 11–27.

[130] R. C. Majumdar, 'The Struggle Between the Sailendras and the Cholas', *Journal of the Greater India Society* 2 (1934): 71–91.

sentiments more directly when he titled a contribution 'Indian Colonisation in Sumatra', even if the content of the article was not as jingoistic as its title.[131]

The contributions in the *Journal of the Greater India Society* in later years spoke less to the internationalism of the interwar period as it was practiced in associational life around the League of Nations and the international peace movement than to a more forceful rhetoric focused primarily on reclaiming India's past as a strong expansive power. In 1940, Ordhendra Coomar Gangoly (1881–1974) made this clear in a contribution entitled 'Relation between Indian and Indonesian Culture'.[132] Gangoly had abandoned a profitable career in law to become a professor of arts at the University of Calcutta, was associated with Santiniketan, and had been a board member of the Indian Society of Oriental Art. He 'tried to enthuse people to gain and sustain inspiration and enlightenment from this great reservoir of Indian heritage and wake up to the spiritual wealth preserved in this treasure'.[133] In his article, he claimed a colonial *Sonderweg* for India. While other colonizers had always sent their surplus populations overseas ('second-rate men') and had thus developed colonial cultures inferior to 'parental culture', India had sent 'worthy and distinguished representatives, the finest types of Indian intellectual and spiritual giants'.[134] The outlying areas of Greater India had thus developed 'Indian culture to a level of equal eminence with that of the mother-continent'.[135] Moreover, this impressive feat had led to the fact that Indians did not regard their colonies as inferior reflections of India itself (again, one might discern a slight towards Great Britain), but saw them as integral parts of the 'Great Indian Continent', making it into 'one unified and uniform texture woven by the best Indian hands'.[136] Finally, Gangoly took the discourse one step further by contending that

> There are no features in Indian architecture or sculpture in the 'Colonies' which cannot be explained as the natural development of essentially Indian art forms in a new environment. Indian art in Siam, Indo-China, Malaya and the Indian Archipelago is a continuation and logical development by Indian hands of the principles and symbols of Indian creation, applied and developed under 'Colonial' conditions.[137]

In case anyone had misunderstood what he was trying to say, he noted once more in his conclusion that the historiography of the so-called 'Indian Influences' in Greater India—ostensibly also the writings of his own Greater India Society associates—demanded a serious modification: 'it is not a question of "influences"'; it is a question of a wholesale transportation … in all its characteristic features, elements and textures, with all its social and

[131] J. Przyluski, 'Indian Colonisation in Sumatra before the Seventh Century', *Journal of the Greater India Society* 2 (1934): 92–101.
[132] O. C. Gangoly, 'Relation between Indian and Indonesian Culture', *Journal of the Greater India Society*, 7 (1940): 51–69.
[133] K. K. Ganguly and S. S. Biswas, eds., *Rupanjali: In Memory of O. C. Ganguly* (Calcutta: O. C. Gangoly Memorial Society, 1986), 4.
[134] *Journal of the Greater India Society*, Jan 1940, 53.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Idem, 56.
[137] Idem, 68.

religious polities, its trade-guilds and industrial systems, its canons of architecture and sculpture'.[138]

The third of the Greater India Society's four aims, of spreading the study of Greater India to educational institutions, was met by a strong alliance between the Greater India Society and the universities of Santiniketan and Calcutta University. At Santiniketan, the exposure of students to Greater Indian thought was facilitated greatly by the strong personal connection between Kalidas Nag and Tagore, as well as the visiting professorships at Santiniketan of Asian and European scholars such as mentioned in section 3.2. Ties to the University of Calcutta were more official. The first president of the Greater India Society was Jadunath Sarkar, the vice-chancellor of Calcutta University, and subsequent vice-chancellors would also serve on the Society's governing council. The same was true for the Calcutta Museum, which was strongly linked to Calcutta University in turn.[139] Moreover, the research library of the Society was housed at Calcutta University in the Asutosh building, a stately mansion on the main campus on College Street.[140] Finally, students were encouraged to take part in the proceedings of the Society and in its organizational structure: 'Recruits are needed not only for shouldering the growing business of the Society, but also for improving the standard of its Journal so as to make India's part in the elucidation of the culture of Greater India worthy of its heritage. The Committee appeals to every lover of Indian culture to rally round its banner and it earnestly trusts that its appeal will not go in vain'.[141]

The fourth and final aim of the Society, which was to popularize knowledge of Greater India, was met by a variety of initiatives. First, the membership in the Society was not limited to scholars. Journalists, writers, poets, and artists took an active part in the Society's meetings. Second, an attempt was made to lower the threshold for reading the Society's publications by keeping the prices artificially low. This was possible, in part, through the significant discount on the printing costs of the journal, provided for by the well-wishers of the Society at the Oriental Press in Calcutta.[142] Other discounted publications included Majumdar's sizeable *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East* and P. N. Bose's *The Indian Colony of Siam*. While English-language publications would always be aimed at Calcutta's educated elite, the Society sought to engage a wider audience and to that end, Kalidas Nag's *Greater India* was translated into both Hindi and Bengali, and sold for the below-cost price of one rupee.[143]

Popularization of Greater India was also attempted through the organization of public lectures aimed both at students and a more general audience. Of these, Society scholars gave approximately ten per year.[144] The aim of organizing exhibitions was also met. In 1935, for instance, the goals of engaging both students and the wider public were met by an exhibition of 'Indian Architecture and Allied Arts and Crafts' held at the Senate House of Calcutta

[138] Idem, 69.

[139] E. S. Craighill Handy, 'The Renaissance of East Indian Culture: Its Significance for the Pacific and the World', *Pacific Affairs* 3:4 (1930): 362–69: 364.

[140] Miscellany, *Journal of the Greater India Society* 3 (July 1936): 214.

[141] Annual Report, *Idem*, 218.

[142] Idem.

[143] Prices published on the back flap of the July issue of 1940. This converted to about $0.25 at the time.

[144] Data taken from the annual reports as published in the *Journal of the Greater India Society* for the years 1934–1942.

University from 8 to 15 February and to which local, regional, and international scholars and institutions had contributed drawings, photographs and antiquities. Some of the exhibits related to Greater India were sent by scholars in Southeast Asia themselves (if not by Southeast Asian scholars). Dr Andreas Nell of Colombo, for instance, contributed photographs not only of ancient Ceylonese monuments but also of modern buildings in Colombo on which ancient Indian architectural features were reproduced. Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji contributed a painted scroll from Bali, representing the temptation of Arjuna as described in the *Mahabharata*. The exhibition was also the result of intense collaboration between different institutes in Calcutta. The Fine Arts Seminar of the university exhibited photographs and drawings of Borobudur as well as of Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat. A number of Sinhalese, Nepalese, Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan antiquities were displayed by the Mahabodhi Society of Calcutta. Even private individuals had made contributions to the event in the Greater India spirit: a Mr Abdul Ali and one Srish Chandra Chatterji exhibited their own specimens of Burmese lacquer-work and photographs of Siamese temples respectively.[145]

What was the appeal of the Greater India Society? On the scholarly level, part of its attraction may have been that the Society had an intellectual charisma and an agency all its own. While it drew quite strongly on the scholarship of French Orientalists, its members unequivocally rejected British scholarly notions of what constituted the Indian 'race', Indian 'territory', or what was meant by terms such as 'colonial' or 'oriental'.[146] Even more so, they used these terms but broke them down and rebuilt them to mean something new. In the Society's attempt to rewrite the historiography of Indian interaction with the rest of Asia, its scholars also rewrote the terms with which that interaction was to be described.

According to Susan Bayly, many of the claims of the Greater India Society were rooted in narratives of collective loss and displacement, not dissimilar to concepts of *Grossdeutschland* or *la Syrie intégrale*.[147] While parallels between these and comparable discourses are inescapable, the Greater India Society publications and other of its initiatives were characterized not by a sense of victimization, but rather by a somewhat jingoistic approach to past Indian achievements, which opened the door for a new pride in the long reach of Indian culture and the possible resuscitation of that influence. To the wider public, the Society's appeal may therefore have been located primarily in the reclamation of a glorious past as the basis for a future renaissance. The Greater India discourse did not reject imperialism as a concept, it rejected only British imperialism. If many of the Greater India Society scholars—especially in the Society's later years—viewed India as a former colonizing power, it was still a 'good' colonialism, with the corresponding judgment about British colonialism as 'bad'. This was a facet of the Greater India thesis that could be used for a variety of political agendas, as the next sections will demonstrate.

[145] Data on the exhibition taken from Miscellany, *Journal of the Greater India Society* 3 (January 1935): 83.
[146] Bayly, 'Imagining "Greater India"', 707.
[147] Ibid.

3.4 Student politics: the Asiatic Student Congress

Asianism as international relations propaganda between Italy and India

In the 1930s, the idea of India as an ancient civilizing force in Asia, and the corresponding idea that the 'reawakening' of India would be a catalyst for the reawakening of Asia, transcended academia. Indebted as the discourse had once been to European scholarship, the activities and writings from the Calcutta-based network of scholars now started to influence European engagements with Asia. This section will focus on the ways in which fascist Italy used the scholars of Greater India and their networks to spread cultural propaganda in Asia. Instrumental in the formulation of Italy's policy towards 'Young Asia' was Giuseppe Tucci, who figured in sections 3.2 and 3.3 through his engagements with both Viśva Bharati and the Greater India Society.[148] After an overview of the reasons why Indian students and scholars were attractive to the cultural policies of fascist Italy, the focus will be on the organization which Giuseppe Tucci directed on his return: the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East, or IsMEO). Meetings between Asian scholars and students in Rome under the institute's banner which were intended to forge closer ties between Italy and the East. That these meetings were not driven by academic motivations only, may be gleaned from the presence of Mussolini himself at these meetings.

Why would fascist Italy engage with Asia at all, and with India in particular? Mario Prayer, one of very few historians to have studied the fascist government's policies towards Asia, has offered some suggestions. On a pragmatic level, the young regime needed to gain international legitimacy through fostering relations with other nations.[149] The same held true for trade relations: Asia was seen as a prominent market for new trading ventures for Italian goods. India's advance towards independence would free it from British control, which made it all the more promising. The Italian consulates in Bombay and Calcutta were therefore instructed to encourage Indian groups interested in Italy.[150] A secondary rationale was to encourage Indian princes whose European travels tended to centre on England and France,—to spend time in Italy as well, for it was widely believed that they travelled mainly for the purpose of buying European cars and luxury goods.[151] Another reason had everything to do with the belief that some factions of the Indian nationalist movement were falling under Soviet influence, to the detriment of mainstream of anti-imperialist agitation against the British.[152] This in turn led to the perception that the newly unified state of Italy and India were fighting the same two enemies: international communism on the one hand, and the capitalist-colonialist menace on the other.[153]

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[148] On Tucci, see the recent biography by E. Garzilli, *L'Esploratore del Duce*. Vol. 1, *Le avventure di Giuseppe Tucci e la politica italiana in Oriente da Mussolini a Andreotti* (Rome: Asiatica, 2012).

[149] M. Prayer, 'Italian Fascist Regime and Nationalist India, 1921–1945', *International Studies* 28 (1991): 249–71: 250.

[150] M. Prayer, 'Self, Other and Alter Idem—Bengali Internationalism and Fascist Italy in the 1920s and 1930s', *Calcutta Historical Journal* 26:1 (2006): 1–32; 11.

[151] Archivio Storico Diplomatico (ASD) Rome, Affari Politici 1931–1945, Busta 3 (1934): Miscellanea: Viaggi di Principe Indiani in Europa: Foreign Ministry to Ministry of Industry, 25 April 1935.

[152] *Asiatica*, the journal of the IsMEO, would devote considerable attention to it. See, for instance: C. Astorri, 'Il Communismo in India, 1929–1937', *Asiatica* (1937): 117–25.

[153] Prayer, 'Italian Fascist Regime', 250.

More in line with Greater Indian thought was the notion that Italy and India shared a historical identity as ancient civilizations that had wielded far-reaching influence over their regional environments. Just as India had been a cultural mediator in Asia, so Italy had played the same role in Europe.[154] The sense of an Indian, and a corresponding Asian renaissance, was very compatible with the fascist regime's rhetoric of a restoration of Rome to its former splendour. Fascist Italy therefore framed its rapprochement with India by emphasizing the fact that the Mediterranean civilization of Rome had once been a mediator in East–West relations and now sought to resume that role. The decline of the colonial powers, which was perceived as inevitable, would lead to a re-centring of Italy as the natural mediator between Europe and Asia.

Finally, the notion was put forward that Germany and Britain had forfeited their role in Asia on account of their racist policies. As a similarly 'rejuvenated' nation, Germany might have been Italy's competitor in Asian relations. However, it did not understand Asia's spirituality, and Asians were taking note of their racist propaganda.[155] The British, it was argued, had defined the differences between themselves and native Indians in racist terms. To Indian nationalists, it was expressed that such ideas were in contrast to 'the universal idea of Imperial as well as Catholic Rome and of Italian thought from the philosophical schools in the Renaissance up to Fascism'.[156] Italy offered itself as an alternative site of modernity, with more attention and appreciation for culture and spirituality was found elsewhere in Europe. It proposed itself as the new European interlocutor with Asia, and professed a willingness to support the cause of Pan-Asianism, very much as it had Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism.[157] Both the invocation of past regional hegemony and the argument that Italy was a nonracist, non-colonial power spoke strongly to Indian anti-imperialist sentiments. It was received with enthusiasm in India up to 1936, not only in the small circle of Indian internationalists and Asianists in Calcutta and Europe, but in the wider Indian press.[158] However, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the imposition of racist citizenship laws in the same year exposed another side of the Italian regime and marked the end of this discourse.[159]

From the late 1920s to the early 1930s, however, the relationship between India and Italy steadily intensified, with the Bengali intelligentsia and the academic circle around Giuseppe Tucci at the centre of the engagement.[160] From the Indian side, there were several

[154] Prayer, 'Self, Other and Alter Idem', 2.

[155] R. de Felice, *Il Fascismo e l'Oriente: Arabi, Ebrei e Indiani nelle Politica di Mussolini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988), 28.

[156] 'Idea, questa, che è opposta a quella che fu l'idea universale di Roma Imperiale, di Roma cattolica e di tutto il pensiero italiano, dalla scolastica alla Rinascenza ed al Fascismo'. Foreign Ministry note, cited in De Felice, 29n23.

[157] For Mussolini's contacts with Arab nationalists and Pan-Islamists, see De Felice, 29–30.

[158] This discourse ceased abruptly with the Abyssinian invasion. See Framke, *Delhi-Rom-Berlin*, 240–8.

[159] The 1936 decree on imperial administration ruled out the possibility of Ethiopian subjects gaining Italian citizenship. By 1937, an apartheid regime was in force in Italian East Africa. See F. de Donno, 'La Razza Ario-Mediterranea: Ideas of Race and Citizenship in Colonial and Fascist Italy, 1885–1941', *Interventions* 8:3 (2006): 394–412; 405.

[160] Although the Maharaja of Alwar also contributed by inviting the Italian national tennis team for a tiger hunt on his lands, 'to see something of the Indian State and Indian India'. ASD, Affari Politici 1931–1945, Busta 1: Rapporti Politici, letter dated 27 January 1933.

reasons why Italy was an interesting interlocutor. As noted, the fact that Italy was not, at this point, an imperial power, and that it championed the nationalist cause in India helped foster ties between the two countries. In the early 1930s, Mussolini had offered support to Subhas Chandra Bose—incidentally, also a member of the Greater India Society—for his project to found an international league of 'oppressed peoples'.[161] From a developmental perspective, Italy also appeared to be leapfrogging more advanced countries. This was lauded in Indian newspapers as something to study closely for possibly replication in India. Prayer has noted that 'the rise of fascist dictatorship in Italy might have created in ideological barrier to deter the sympathies of nationalist India, which had for long pursued the road of parliamentary democracy … but that the personal involvement in the Indo-Italian intercourse of important figures of the Bengali intelligentsia points to the fact that they did not look at European politics and ideologies as based on mutually exclusive compartments, but tended to interpret them in the light of India's present requirements'.[162] While this is indeed supported by reports and articles by Indian newspaper correspondents in Italy, it should also be noted that presenting these author's engagements with fascism as something purely instrumental obscures the fact that some seemed to genuinely admire the fascist project for its own sake. Pramathanath Roy for instance, a former student of Tucci's, wrote prolifically on fascist Italy and translated a biography of Mussolini into Bengali.[163]

Personal connections such as these were especially important and in this sense, the Calcutta network built around the Greater India Society and Santiniketan was not a closed circle. Other important connections with Italy were those with, for instance, Bengali academics-in-exile Benoy Kumar Sarkar (who is discussed in the introduction) and Taraknath Das. A sociologist and political scientist, respectively, neither had much patience for exaltations of the former glory of Greater India, yet they were still part of the same network. Sarkar, for instance, was greatly drawn towards Tucci's teacher Carlo Formichi, a Sanskritist whose research had focused on secular and anti-mystic traits of Indian literature.[164] Das shared Nag's agenda of internationalism as a means for India's advance. Both, however, were staunch Pan-Asianists who rejected the inherent spirituality of Asia and looked instead towards the new Italy (as well as the new Germany) as an important model for Asia.

In *The Futurism of Young Asia,* published in Berlin in 1922, Sarkar elaborated on his Pan-Asian project. He saw a collective battle of Asians against the political and intellectual dominance of the West. The *leitmotif* of Asian cooperation to him was 'war against colonialism in politics and against orientalism in science'.[165] He saw no alternative to fast and full modernization. An alliance between Asian nations on that basis would lead to the decolonization and, consequently, the rise of Asia. In his view, Italy deserved attention for its quick rise to an international force to be reckoned with, as well as a new model for state organization and development. In particular, the fact that the Italian economic base was still

[161] De Donno, 'La Razza Ario-Mediterranea', 404.
[162] Prayer, Self, Other and Alter Idem', 3.
[163] See, among many others, P. N. Roy, 'Mussolini and the Cult of Italian Youth', *Modern Review* (1932): 145–46; P. N. Roy, 'Ideologies of Modern Italy', *India and the World* 2:7 (1933): 176.
[164] Prayer, 'Self, Other and Alter Idem', 14.
[165] Sarkar, *The Futurism of Young Asia*, iv.

largely rural made it an important example for India.[166] Sarkar's study of the Italian economy did not go unnoticed in Italy, and in November 1929, the president of the Italian Central Institute of Statistics met with Sarkar to devise a project for economic cooperation between India and Italy.[167]

Taraknath Das echoed these sentiments in works such as *Is Japan a Menace to Asia?*, published in 1917 from Shanghai. He answered his own question in the negative, arguing instead that Japan was only a menace to *European* domination in Asia. Full and fast modernization had put Japan on a par with the European nations. The book received a considerable amount of press, due in part to a foreword by former Prime Minister of China Tong Shao-Yi and an appendix by Ichiro Tokutomi of the Japanese House of Peers. The otherwise pro-British *Far Eastern Review* even dubbed it 'the magnum opus' of the Pan-Asiatic movement.[168] Sarkar saw Italy as the Japan of Europe, and located the success of Italy's 'leap forward' in the fascist regime. But unlike Sarkar, Das was not immune to arguments of historical pedigrees. He ascribed part of Mussolini's success in 'touching the national pride and consciousness of the Italian people' in fascist Italy's revaluation of its cultural heritage. He pointed to Italy as a model for providing the Italian people with the vision of 'a Greater Italy under the leadership of a new Caesar'.[169] In this way, Das actually succeeded in marrying Greater India to Young Asia. In the early 1930s, Das's academic engagements would lead him to collaborate more closely with Giuseppe Tucci and the IsMEO, in whose journal, *Asiatica,* he professed joint action by India, Italy, and other anti-British powers to free Asia from imperialist oppression.[170] He also used Rome as a site from which he could publish other anti-British writings.[171]

Giuseppe Tucci and IsMEO

Giuseppe Tucci, had been a student of the prominent Italian public intellectual and Sanskritist Carlo Formichi, and had specialized in Tibet and the history of Buddhism. He had met Kalidas Nag as early as 1921 on Nag's visit to Italy.[172] In 1925, Tucci settled down at Santiniketan where he developed a close relationship with Tagore. At Viśva Bharati he studied Buddhism, Tibetan, and Bengali, while teaching Italian and Chinese, a language in which he was also fluent. While teaching at Calcutta University, he also became active in the Greater India Society. He remained in India until 1931, when he returned to Italy. Together with the Hegelian philosopher Giovanni Gentile, he was instrumental in the foundation of the IsMEO, of which he became the first vice president in 1933. He taught at the University of Rome La Sapienza until his death. Tucci was Italy's foremost scholar of the East, and his

[166] B. K. Sarkar, *The Politics of Boundaries and Tendencies in International Relations* (Calcutta: Raj Chowdhury, 1926), 1.203.

[167] V. Ferretti, 'Politica e Cultura: Origini e Attività dell'IsMEO durante il Regime Fascista', *Storia Contemporanea,* 17:5 (1986): 779–819; 783.

[168] Quoted in Mukherjee, *Taraknath Das,* 101.

[169] T. N. Das, 'India Pays Her Debt to Italy but not to India', *India and the World,* 38:3 (1925): 286.

[170] T. N. Das, 'Alcune verità sulla politica mondiale nel Pacifico, *Asiatica* (1935): 91–4.

[171] For instance, his book on the Pacific Question, from the viewpoint of 'an Oriental'. T. N. Das, *La Questione Pacifico vista da un Orientale* (Rome: Istituto per il medio ed estremo oriente, 1934).

[172] Prayer, 'Self, Other and Alter Idem', 7.

interests, which ranged from Zoroastrianism to Chinese philosophy and philology, made him in many ways the ideal scholar of Greater India.

However, Tucci's interest in India was not purely academic. His move to Santiniketan had been orchestrated by the new fascist regime, and Tucci was intimately involved in Italy's cultural and economic policies in Asia. At Santiniketan, he encouraged Indian students to study at Italian universities,[173] an opportunity for which the Italian government offered full scholarships to those Indians willing to study in Italy. In many ways, Nag and Tucci shared the same agenda for their respective countries: to foster international links through educational and academic activities that were part of larger projects of international prestige, national reputation, and advance of national economic interests. And, as is evident from both their writings, they considered cultural and historical self-consciousness as a means to revive India's role in the world and as a modern nation and a great civilization.

Tucci was a staunch supporter of Italian Fascism, and he used idealized portrayals of Asian traditions to support Italian ideological campaigns. His collaborator at IsMEO (and a former teacher) Giovanni Gentile, was even more firmly entrenched in the fascist regime. He was arguably fascist Italy's foremost ideologue, having been the ghost-writer for Mussolini's *Doctrine of Fascism.*[174] His writings have caused much debate in the historiography of fascism, and led David Roberts to claim that Italian fascism was driven by a more or less coherent set of ideas and could not be adequately explained in terms of opportunism and bourgeois resentment, as most scholars had argued previously.[175] Gentile stressed an indigenous Italian tradition going back to Vico and even to Renaissance humanism and he reformulated the Italian humanist tradition in order to question the conventional justifications for liberal democracy.[176]

As Minister for Education in Mussolini's first government, Gentile was ideally placed to support Tucci's Indian ventures and his plans for Italo-Indian student exchanges. Under the heading of 'cultural propaganda', requests went out to universities to help Indian students who wanted enrol in every way. The Reale Accademia d'Italia, which had been established in 1929 under Gentile's direction, and of which Tucci and Formichi were members, invited Indian academics such as Atal B. Ghosh.[177] When Nag visited Italy again in 1930–1, the Reale Accademia was his link to Italian government. It gave him the opportunity to establish the India Bureau for mutual propaganda. Surendranath Dasgupta was the driving force on the Indian side. He too would later be invited to Italy for lectures on India by IsMEO.[178] Through the network thus established, some Indian students in Rome became prominent fixtures in the Roman academic scene as well as prolific writers on both India and Italy: Amiyanath Sarkar, Moninda Mohan Moulik, and the aforementioned Pramathanath Roy.

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[173] Idem, 8.

[174] D. D. Roberts, 'How not to Think about Fascism and Ideology: Intellectual Antecedents and Historical Meaning, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35:2 (2000): 185–211: 200.

[175] Roberts, 'How not to think', 185. See also Z. Sternhell, 'How to think about Fascism and its Ideology', *Constellations*, 15:3 (2008): 280–90.

[176] Roberts, 'How not to think', 201.

[177] ASD, Affari Politici 1931–1945, Busta 1: Propaganda Culturale. Letter of invitation, 9 December 1933; note to universities, 10 November 1933.

[178] Prayer, 'Self, Other and Alter Idem', 9.

The plans to establish IsMEO arose at the same time. Tucci sold it to the government as an institute with a cultural façade (*carattere esteriore culturale*), but that would in reality facilitate and promote technical and economic studies of Indian students at Italian institutes.[179] We can only guess at Tucci's actual intentions with the institute, but IsMEO's prolific publication program and its many conferences, archaeological missions, and other ventures suggest that Tucci succeeded in expanding his Asian network and drawing it to Italy (as desired by the regime), as well as in securing ample resources for the actual study of Asian history and culture. In the year of IsMEO's establishment, Tucci and Formichi went on a long tour of Nepal and Tibet, their favourable reception at the Nepali Maharaja's court carefully recorded by the Foreign Ministry.[180] The Institute itself was formally established in 1933 under the aegis of the Ministry of External Affairs, which spoke volumes of the regime's intentions with IsMEO. It was intended to 'construct a channel with the leading classes of the Asian nations on the road to independence, and above all with India, through the benevolent hospitality offered by university institutes to foreign students in Italy'.[181] Young, vigorous students in particular, the future leaders of independent Asian countries, were thought to be able to reinvigorate nationalist movements throughout the continent. It was decided that fascist Italy 'was looking with sympathy and respect … to an independent Asia'.[182] From this point onwards, IsMEO's activities with respect to the Asianist movement can therefore be traced through the archives of the Foreign Ministry. And these activities started immediately upon the institute's foundation, which was celebrated by a 'Settimana romana degli studenti orientali', a 'Roman' week for those Asian students who found themselves in Europe. Funds would be provided to offer hotels and other facilities in Rome to whichever Asian student would like to participate.[183] This Oriental student week in December 1933, and in particular its Asiatic Students Congress, is the subject of the next section.

Claiming Asia: IsMEO and the Asiatic Students Congress

The Asiatic Students Congress was convened by IsMEO from 22 to 27 December 1933. Gino Scarpa, the Italian Consul at Calcutta, had applied to all the Italian consulates in Europe to provide lists of Asian students, so that he might select participants from them. Indian students resident in Britain were among those who responded, to the dismay of the British. However, intelligence services were at a loss to grasp the exact purposes of the congress, or exactly who attended.[184] According to their estimates, eight hundred to one thousand students attended, one hundred of whom were Indians. In reality, the number of attendees was lower and the percentage of Indian students was much higher: of the 585 actual participants, 113 were Indian university students, and an undisclosed number of additional Indian participants came

[179] Ferretti, 'l'IsMEO durante il regime fascista', 785.

[180] ASD, Affari Politici 1931–1945, Busta 1: Rapporti Politici, report 12 December 1933.

[181] 'di construire un canale con le classi dirigenti dei paesi asiatici sulla via dell'indipendenza, e sopratutto con l'India, attraverso la benevola ospitalità offerta dalle istituzioni universiarie agli studenti stranieri in Italia'. Ferretti, l'IsMEO durante il regime fascista', 792.

[182] Prayer, 'Italian fascist Regime and India', 260.

[183] ASD, Raccolte Generale 1927–1946 (hereafter RG), Busta 23: 9 November 1933.

[184] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/475: Institute for the Middle and Far East and the Asiatic Congress.

from the Roman ecclesiastical institutes, mainly from Propaganda Fide. As can be seen from the table below, almost half the participating students came from India and China.

Number of participants by country:[185]	
Afghanistan	6
Arabia	6
China	156
Egypt	54
Japan	39
India	113
Iraq	6
Palestine	12
Persia	34
Siam	4
Syria	30
Vatican	125
Total	*585*

On the first day of the Congress, the assembly was addressed by Giovanni Gentile. The second day, however, attracted far more attention from newspapers and intelligence services alike: Mussolini himself addressed the students and outlined the need for Italian cooperation with Asia. His speech, all but forgotten today,[186] was sent to all Italian embassies and consulates for dissemination, not just in Asian countries, but as far afield as the consulate in New York.[187] It was also sent to the major newspapers of Italy, such as *L'Azione Coloniale*, the *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Lavoro Fascista*. Mussolini himself reiterated his views three weeks later in an article in 'Il Popolo d'Italia'.[188] The excerpt of Mussolini's speech that attracted the most attention and was quoted in full in most correspondence on the congress, was his reflection on the former glory of the Roman Empire which was now being restored to its former greatness and resuming its international role. Rejecting 'someone's' oft-repeated statement that 'East and West will never meet', he stated that in ancient times, Rome had achieved an actual union between Europe and Asia on the shores of the Mediterranean. The 'reciprocal creative understanding' (*reciproca comprenzione creativa*) between West and East thus created was the basis of the history of civilization, and it was to this 'universal' union that one must return in order to preserve civilization.[189] This came very close indeed to the calls for Asia to 're-spiritualize the West' as urged by the early Asianists discussed in section 3.1, and it is also reminiscent of the message promulgated by Tagore, who had met Mussolini

[185] ASD, RG, Busta 24: Congresso Studenti Asiatici a Roma. Copy of *Jeune Asie* 1:1 (1934) with congress statistics.

[186] The only two historians who have mentioned the Congress in some detail are Ferretti, 'Politica e Cultura' and Mario Prayer, 'Italian Fascist Regime'. De Felice mentions it only in passing (pp. 198 and 205).

[187] ASD, RG, Busta 24: Congresso Studenti Asiatici a Roma. Telegramma Convegno Studenti Asiatici a Roma, 26 December 1933; Telegramma destinatorio Consulato New York, 31 December 1933.

[188] B. Mussolini, 'Estremo Oriente', *Popolo d'Italia*, 17 January 1934.

[189] ASD, RG, Busta 24: 'Discorso Duce a Congresso degli student Asiatici'.

twice in the 1920s and had undoubtedly discussed these matters with him.[190] It also echoed Tucci's concept of 'Eurasia' as a unitary civilization.[191]

The next part of Mussolini's speech was devoted to a critique of the imperialist powers of northern Europe, which had, instead of an equal union based on the best of both East and West, created a relationship based on subordination and materialism, using Asia as a market and a source for raw goods (*fonte di materia prime*). These powers, said Mussolini, were incapable of understanding Asia, and they had created and diffused an image of Asia as Europe's enemy. It was these joint forces of capitalism and liberalism, which had taken over the world, that fascist Italy was combating today. The fascist renaissance that Mussolini heralded as a spiritual renaissance above all (*rinascita supratutto spirituale*), would lead Italy and the Mediterranean to resume its role as a cultural unifier. In a time of mortal crisis, civilization could be saved by the collaboration of Rome and the Orient, which was the reason the congress was convened: it would augur in a restoration of a community, of a tradition of millennia, of constructive collaboration.[192]

Fig. 5. Inaugural meeting of the Asian Students Congress [*Young Asia* 1:1 (1934), Kern Collection].

Mussolini's speech was very well received. Italian reports raved especially about the reaction of Indian students who claimed that Il Duce's words 'had penetrated deeply into our hearts' (*sua parola e penetrate profondamente nel nostro cuore*).[193] *Il Lavoro Fascista* confirmed that the young Asians had been full of admiration and interest throughout their stay in Rome. The *Corriere della Sera* printed the speech in full. *Young Asia* also published the speech together

[190] Prayer, 'Italian fascist regime', 252.
[191] R. Gnoli, Ricordo di Giuseppe Tucci (Rome: IsMEO, 1985), 7.
[192] ASD, RG, Busta 24: 'Discorso Duce a Congresso degli student Asiatici'.
[193] ASD, Affari Politici 1931–45, Busta 1: weekly report, 2–9 January 1934.

with statements from several student statements including Bharati Sarabhai, who had also delivered a speech to the Congress. Her statement indicates how well Il Duce's message, and his allusions to the historical grandeur of Asia, had been received. She stated that the old world that Italy represented was not antithetical to Young Italy's aspirations, just as Asia's grand history would form the basis of its future.

> Asia, too, has its wonderful heritage of culture, glory and greatness. It is the mother of religion and the arts. We in Asia today are working to create a harmonious structure on the basis of our ancient civilisation; we are striving to adapt ourselves to the changing conditions of the modern world and to find our legitimate position in the political and intellectual life of the world of today. It is indeed apt that we should meet in Rome, for Italy too has had similar problems to face. At this moment we are in the throes of a renaissance; but we are sure of the future and the dawn of a new era gives joy and enthusiasm to our efforts. We shall bear your words in our minds, Duce; you will not forget our aspirations also, we hope.[194]

The success of this gathering was not lost on the British. They noted that while most of the attending students were only too happy to be awarded a free trip to Rome and regarded it mostly in that context, the Indian, Arab, and Afghan students had taken 'full advantage of the opportunities for discussion' and had succeeded in putting themselves on the map of the regime.[195] The 'Bengali element' was of special concern, in particular the aforementioned Pramathanath Roy and Amiyanath Sarkar, Rome correspondent of the *Liberty* newspaper in Calcutta and an associate of Subhas Chandra Bose, who had also attended the congress, a fact overlooked by many of his biographers.[196] According to British intelligence, Bose took his presence in Rome in December 1933 as an opportunity to study fascist youth organizations.[197] In an interview with the *Giornale d'Italia*, Bose said that 'the Mahatma is more than ever our venerated leader and guide of the national movement, but in the Indian National Congress, to which the Mahatma himself belongs, the active group feels more than ever the need of adopting decisive and efficacious tactics, such as those we admire so much in fascism'.[198]

After the Congress, a Confederation of Oriental Students (Confederazione di Studenti Orientali) was set up by Indian, Syrian, Afghan, and Persian students, and Amiyanath Sarkar was appointed to the board. This confederation, which appropriated the Congress as having

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[194] 'Speech delivered by Miss Bharati Sarabhai, representative of the Indian Students', *Young Asia* 1:1 (1934): 16.

[195] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/475: Institute for the Middle and Far East and the Asiatic Congress.

[196] Subhas Chandra Bose's most recent biography does detail his Rome visit: S. Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle Against Empire* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 93–4. The only other biography to treat Subhas Chandra Bose's activities in Rome is L. A. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj: A Biography of Indian Nationalists Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 276, 278. It is not mentioned in M. Gopal, *Life and Times of Subhas Chandra Bose as Told in his Own Words* (New Delhi: Vikas 1978); H. Mukherjee, *Bow of Burning Gold. A Study of Subhas Chandra Bose* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977); or H. Toye, *The Springing Tiger: A Study of Subhas Chandra Bose* (London/Bombay: Allied, 1959).

[197] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/475: Institute for the Middle and Far East and the Asiatic Congress.

[198] *Giornale d'Italia*, 29 December 1933.

been the first gathering of 'its members', proceeded to speak for all Asian students in Europe.[199] For his part, Sarkar also tried to make Rome the new centre of Indian students in Europe. This served a twofold purpose: it would mean increasing Indian control of the confederation, and by uniting Asia's youth it would serve to fortify 'United Asia' against the imperialist powers. Thanking their sponsors the Gruppo Universirario Fascista (GUF), Amiyanath wrote on behalf of the Confederation that not only had they offered Indian students a safe place to meet in Europe, they had put them in close touch with their brothers of other Asiatic nations.[200]

Fig. 6. Board of the Oriental Students Association with president Suzanne Liao and secretary-treasurer Amiyanath Sarkar under a Roman bust [*Young Asia* 2:1 (1935), Kern Collection].

The confederation was provided with an office at the University of Rome La Sapienza, probably courtesy of the GUF. They proceeded to make a survey of all Asian students in Europe—their universities, the courses they were enrolled in, and where they lived. Confederation members received a multilingual journal that strongly echoed Benoy Kumar Sarkar's philosophy of Asian youth and modernity. The first issue of *Giovane Asia/Jeune Asie/Young Asia* reveals some of the reasons why the students saw Rome as a good place for their Asianist activities. Noting that in Rome, they had come together 'without distinctions of race, nationality or religion' to 'contribute to the progress and the prosperity of all countries of Asia', they once again thanked their sponsors profusely:

[199] To be fair, the constitution did require that at least seven members of the confederation second any statement. 'La Conféderation des étudiants orientaux', *Jeune Asie* 1:1 (1934): 25.
[200] Amiyanath Sarkar, 'Oriental Students Association,' *Jeune Asie*, 1:1 (1934): 32.

> The honour of this lofty initiative belongs to the Great Man of the Italian state, and we should acknowledge its value. I consider it my duty to reiterate once more, on behalf of all my colleagues, our indebtedness to the Chief of the Italian government, to the organizers of IsMEO, to our dear fascist comrades at the university of Rome and finally to all who have helped us in our task and have made us comfortable during our stay in Rome by their reception, their friendliness and their willingness to help.[201]

The Congress, and the Confederation of Asian Students that emerged from it, demonstrates the versatility of Asianism as a rallying point in this period. By proposing the Mediterranean as a site of both historical and current interaction, the Asian Students Conference blurred the lines between the two continents so that Italy could become the sponsor of an Asianism recast in a fascist mould. Supported by a regime sympathetic to the cause of Young Asia, for three years it managed to rally a sizeable number of Asian students in Italy and elsewhere in Europe to speak out against imperialism. The organization was generously funded by the GUF, and *Young Asia* had a lavish layout, with glossy photographs of Asian student gatherings and a heavy cover. It was issued several times, and aside from the regular subscribers it was sent to student representatives and press in both continental Europe and the United Kingdom, albeit it clandestinely in the latter case.

To the dismay of the British, Indian participation in the organization only increased. In June 1934, a group of female Indian students visited Rome and met Mussolini. Their visit, paid for by the Italian government, was publicized in the Italian press as well as in *Young Asia*,[202] and when a second Asian Students Congress was convened in Rome in December 1934, the participation of young Indians far surpassed its previous share of attendees. Members of the Federation of Indian and Ceylonese students abroad were now the most important group of participants, alongside Indian student associations from Berlin, Munich, Rome, Vienna, and Dresden.[203] Aside from the GUF, IsMEO had facilitated this increase: on the wings of the first Congress' success, Tucci had managed to convince the government to make scholarships available for Indian students. Aside from keeping the abovementioned Moninda Mohan Moulik in Italy, these scholarships further fortified IsMEO's Indian connections.[204]

[201] Introduction, *Jeune Asie* 1:1 (1934): 3.

[202] ASD, RG, Busta 32: 'Visita in Italia di Studentesse Indiane', 2 November 1934; 'Il Duce Greets Indian Women', *The Statesman*, 2 October 1934; 'Visit of Indian Lady Students to Rome', *Young Asia* 1:3 (1934): 37.

[203] 'The Second Congress of Oriental Students, Rome 1934', *Young Asia* 2:1 (1935): 1; 'The following is a list of Oriental student organisations in Europe which were represented at the second congress of Oriental Students', *Young Asia* 2:1 (1935): 17.

[204] ASD, IsMEO Files, 1934, 7 November 1934, Calcutta to Rome, Borse di studio per studenti Indiani.

Fig. 7. Visit of Indian women to Mussolini [*Young Asia* 1:3 (1934), Kern Collection].

But the Confederation at La Sapienza was not destined to become an enduring organization. From 1936, the discourse that had surrounded this temporary Italo-Asian alliance started to sound different. Earlier, the invocation of past Roman regional hegemony and the image of Italy as a nonracist, non-colonial power had spoken strongly to Indian anti-imperialist sentiments. But from the Abyssinian invasion and Italy's racist citizenship laws of 1936, the same words took on new meaning.[205] The earlier sympathy for Italy's rise from agricultural nation to industrial and political power of note, gave way to a strong sense of solidarity with Abyssinia. Indian public opinion called for a boycott of all things Italian and regular 'Abyssinian solidarity days' were observed throughout India.[206] The Abyssinian war had exposed the imperialist agenda of the Italian regime and with it disqualified Rome as a sponsor of Asian anti-imperialism.

3.5 Conclusion

The Asianist discourse that emphasized the inherent spirituality of Asia and the Greater India thesis that offered an Asian identity on a more Indocentric basis achieved a large audience in the interwar period. While both the 'spiritual Asia' and the 'India Magna' theses drew on

[205] The 1936 decree on imperial administration ruled out the possibility of Ethiopian subjects gaining Italian citizenship. By 1937, an apartheid regime was in force in Italian East Africa. See De Donno, 'La Razza Ario-Mediterranea', 405.

[206] 'Abyssinia Day', *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 9 May 1936, 8; 'India and the Abyssinian War', *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 24 October 1935, 15.

European thought, they were not driven by it. The interwar years saw a reformulation of definitions of Asian spirituality and Asian culture previously used by religious reformers such as Keshab Chandra Sen. These concepts were tailored to fit a new Asianist agenda that drew on this discourse to reject Western imperialism, Western culture, and Western education. Significantly, this was not a rejection of the global in favour of the local; rather, it was a rejection of foreign elements that were deemed incompatible with a perceived Asian identity.

It is important to note that these Asianists did not link identity markers such as religiosity and spirituality to an idea of Asia as static and unchanging as argued by adherents to evolutionist schools of thought. Rather, the focus was on diffusionist models of civilization, which were more suited to ideas of an Asian renaissance. As a consequence of this focus, there developed a close engagement with the academic centres of continental Europe where such models were prevalent. The transnational academic networks so created radiated outwards from Bengal, with Viśva Bharati and the Greater India Society as its most significant hubs. There, scholars, intellectuals, and artists from all over Asia as well as Europe met and shared their thoughts. Through their respective projects, scholarships, lectures, and publications, these discourses had a far wider reach than the elite minds that had conceived of them.

Another consequence of the collaboration with the academic circles of continental Europe was a close engagement with new concepts of cultural and political rejuvenation as promoted by fascist Italy. Influential scholars such as Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Taraknath Das applied these new concepts to Asia and Asian rejuvenation. These ideas also gained currency among Indian students resident at universities in continental Europe, and found expression in the Oriental Student Association and its journal *Young Asia.* Both the organization and its publications were sponsored by the Italian government. The 'orientalisation' of Rome as a bridge between Asia and Europe and as a sponsor of the anti-imperialist struggle against the powers of Northwest Europe, lost credibility with the outbreak of the Abyssinian war in the late 1930s. *Young Asia* ceased publication, and the Indian public sphere professed solidarity with Abyssinia and abandoned its interest in Italy as a potential model. IsMEO and its great supporter Giuseppe Tucci likewise refocused their attention, directing their efforts at cultural cooperation with Japan. Tucci lectured on 'racial purity' throughout Japan the crucial months of late 1936 and early 1937, during which time the Istituto italo-nipponico (Italian-Japanese Institute) was opened in cooperation with IsMEO.[207]

The discourse of Asian religiosity or spirituality had a longer afterlife. But as the internationalist moment of the interwar period drew to a close, this Asia-concept came to be determined more by what it excluded than what it included. The Asianism of the Tagore circle had not limited itself to a Hindu-Buddhist Asia. The same Asian spirituality was attributed to Persian poetry and art, as well as Islam and Sufism. However, as the internationalist moment of the interwar years drew to a close, so too did such inclusive concepts. Instead, the academic discourses of Asian spirituality and of Greater India set adopted in a Hindu-Nationalist register that explicitly excluded Islam. Such new concepts of Asian identity were given expression by Hindu-nationalist publications such as *Organiser* and *Hindu Outlook*. The former used the Greater India thesis to formulate an Asia that was fundamentally Hindu-

[207] On IsMEO's Japanese engagements in the years leading up to the war, see Ferretti, 'Politica e cultura', 800–1.

Buddhist. In a series entitled 'India's Eastern Empire', Islam was identified as both foreign and incompatible with that identity: 'Hindusthan still lives in the heart of the Javanese. So deep and penetrating was the influence exercised by the Hindu culture that even after centuries of conversion to Islam, the Javanese still have profound admiration for the Epics. Everyone in the island is familiar with them'.[208] This line would harden during the post-war regionalism of the 1940s and 1950s. As Jawaharlal Nehru and his colleagues formulated an Asia that shared trajectories of colonization and decolonization, the Hindu Mahasabha proposed a Hindu-Buddhist bloc against a Muslim bloc in *Hindu Outlook*.[209]

Finally, the Greater India thesis set in into a political register. Nehru, known as a rigorous proponent of secularism, was among its politically more moderate supporters. He cited Sylvain Lévi's *l'Inde Civilisatrice* several times in his widely read *Discovery of India* and *Glimpses of World History*.[210] One might speculate that the attempts at Asian integration during Nehru's term in office were inspired partly by the idea of Greater India,[211] and indeed the theme resurfaced at Asian Relations Conference in 1947, the proceedings of which are treated in chapter 5. At that conference, Sir Sri Ram's welcome address read: 'In future we shall all … visit each other's countries often, … even if not on the scale on which contacts existed at one time between southeast Asia and the kingdoms of the Pandyas and the Cholas'.[212] Sarojini Naidu, the Edwardian poet and ardent interwar internationalist who had been elected to preside over the conference, adopted a similar rhetoric in a conscious attempt to encourage Asianism in the new post-war constellation of a decolonizing Asia. However, one need not take an Asianist perspective to locate problems inherent in conceptions of 'India Magna', especially during decolonization. The idea of India as a benign colonial power was pervaded by a paternalistic attitude towards 'Island India' or Southeast Asia, perceived as culturally similar. Such rhetoric was politically volatile, not least because of the existence of large Indian diasporas in Southeast Asian countries.[213] This was one of the reasons why anti-Indian attitudes prevailed in Ceylon and Malaya, and Burma saw multiple pogroms against Indian minorities in the 1930s.[214]

To the academic circles treated in this chapter, it became clear in the 1940s that the concepts of Asian identity as defined by Asian spirituality or by the spread of Indic religions and cultures, had far outlived their academic base. As independence and the possible partition of the country drew near, the Hindu right firmly appropriated the concept of Asia as a Hindu-Buddhist continent. The idea that 'civilization' was 'Hindu-Buddhist' came to carry the connotation that it was 'non-Muslim', and the rhetoric was domesticated as a Hindu-nationalist tool. The Greater India Society continued its activities, but its voice was inaudible

[208] J. C. Khanna, 'India's Eastern Empire II—Indonesia', *Organiser*, 7 August 1947, 4.
[209] The Editors, 'Foreign Relations Department', *Hindu Outlook*, 25 February 1951, 5.
[210] J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (1946; repr., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 200–10, and *Glimpses of World History* (1934; repr., Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964), 101–5; 136–40.
[211] See also Jaffrelot, 'India's Look East–Policy', 38–40.
[212] *Report on the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi March–April 1947* (New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 1948).
[213] See S. Amrith, 'Tamil Diasporas across the Bay of Bengal', *American Historical Review* 114:3 (2009): 547–72; M. Mann, *Geschichte Indiens vom 18. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert* (Paderborn: UTB, 2005), 207–75.
[214] For Southeast Asian scepticism, see also Keenleyside, 'Nationalist Indian Attitudes Towards Asia', 221.

in the clamouring of the Hindu-right press.[215] Moreover, the Greater India discourse was only tenable in the absence of actual international conflict between the Asian lands whose historical trajectories they sought to unite. The year 1959, which saw the demise of the *Journal of the Greater India Society*, also marked the start of the conflict between India and China, and thus the eclipse of any ideas of Hindu-Buddhist brotherhood.

[215] In particular, 'Long Live Greater Bharat', *Organiser*, 16 November 1949; 'Bharat Must Save Tibet', *Organiser*, 23 November 1949, 'Why India Should Recognize Israel', *Hindu Outlook*, 4 April 1950, 'The International Aspects of Hindu Nationalism' *Hindu Outlook*, 8 November 1953, 'Pan-Islam, A Living Force', *Organiser*, 22 February 1957.

4. Asianism in Exile

4.1 Land routes: revolutionary Asianism in Central Asia
4.2 Asia overland: the travels of Mahendra Pratap
4.3 Shipping lanes: lascar internationalism
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4.1 Land routes: revolutionary Asianism in Central Asia

As noted in the introduction, histories of interwar internationalism have focused strongly on internationalism in Europe and the United States. While these histories do often include anti-colonial activists from across the globe, it is often assumed that metropolitan capitals such as Paris, London, and Berlin, or cosmopolitan centres such as San Francisco and New York, were the only places where activists from different colonial territories and their sympathisers could conveniently meet. While each of these cities saw substantial internationalist traffic throughout the interwar years, this chapter argues that Asian centres were no less important. From Tashkent to Tokyo, the paths of many revolutionaries crossed in Asia, and many Asianist projects emerged where they intersected. This chapter is concerned with the activities of itinerant Asianists in Asia. It is divided in two parts, based on their travels and the places they sojourned: the land routes which connected South, Central, and East Asia, and the sea-lanes that connected ports such as Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, with Singapore, Batavia, and Tokyo.

The routes across the Asian landmass invoke images of the silk road and of caravan trails travelled by monks, missionaries, merchants, and the odd explorer. The silk road also suggests a continuous route across the mountains and plains of Central Asia. In that sense, it is somewhat of a misnomer. The silk road was in fact a series of routes, with many entry and exit points along the way, and few travellers ever traversed it in full. Viewed from China, most routes eventually converged on Kashgar. From Kashgar, there was a series of routes either southward across the Hindu Kush into South Asia, or westwards north of the Pamirs to Samarkand, Bokhara, and Tashkent. South of the Pamirs, one might head on to Merv and from there either via Baghdad to Damascus or straight to the Black Sea and Anatolia. The Pamirs, which had to be traversed by many Indian revolutionaries on the way to these places, were not easy to cross. Marco Polo described the hardship of crossing of the Pamirs: 'There is no habitation or shelter, but travellers must take their provisions with them. No birds fly here because of the height and the cold. And I assure you that, because of the great cold, fire is not so bright here nor of the same colour as elsewhere, and food does not cook well'.[1] Half a millennium later, the journey was no less arduous. Rafiq Ahmad, one of several Indian activists to undertake the journey from the North West Frontier Provinces to Tashkent and back, recollected later:

[1] Quoted in F. Wood, *The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 18.

> The cold in Pamir was unbearable. … Many horses died of strain before we reached Murgab. It was so steep that the animals could not just make it. We were given sugar in cubes, so that if in trouble over breathing we could put it in our mouths. … The clothes we had worn before were no longer serviceable. … Having walked continuously on snow-bound paths, our feet had swollen and our toe-nails had dropped off. … There was no human habitation near this border. Our provisions were exhausted. We had to spend the night in a cave without a bite of food.[2]

Indian traffic across the Pamirs has a long history. Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bokhara all had settled Indian trading communities.[3] Tashkent was a major centre on the pilgrimage route to Ottoman and Arab lands. But the nature of this traffic changed with the onset of the Great Game in the nineteenth century. Russia moved southwards, engulfing the Muslim khanates of Bokhara and Khokand, and later Khiva. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Russia had been separated from British India by about 2,000 miles. By the end of it, this distance had shrunk to a few hundred, with only the Pamirs between them. Russian and British officers could almost wave at each other there, posts being less than twenty miles apart in some places.[4] Well aware of Russian advances in the area, and cognizant of the fact that British agents were conspicuous, Indian *munshis* trained in surveying were sent out to map the area.[5] Other newcomers included archaeologists and manuscript hunters such as Paul Pelliot (see chapter 3), who crossed the Pamirs to get to Dunhuang.[6] After the October Revolution, the route became a revolutionary conduit between British India and Soviet Central Asia, frequented by anti-imperialists in general, and by Asianists and Islamists in particular.

As noted in chapter 1, Central Asia occupied an important place in many Indian geographies of Asia. To those who sought to frame Asia as a Hindu-Buddhist continent, the silk road invoked the wandering monks of medieval times who had taken Buddhism into China and the rest of East Asia. To those who imagined a Muslim Asia stretching from Indonesia to Egypt, the Muslim lands of Central Asia were indispensable parts of pilgrimage routes. And as civil war died down and the region was consolidated into the Soviet Union, the Asian Soviet Republics became symbols of Asian modernity—albeit a very different example of modernity from that posed by Japan. Many perceived Soviet Central Asia, with a variety of languages, religions, and cultures, as a model potentially more suited to India. It was geographically closer than Japan, and the region was widely held to have moved from an agricultural and nomadic state into an industrialized economy through an egalitarian system not infrequently hailed as a variation on *swadeshi*, for its emphasis on locally produced

[2] M. Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India and its Formation Abroad* (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1962), 37–42.

[3] S. C. Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and Its Trade, 1550–1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

[4] Wood, *The Silk Road*, 149.

[5] They were called ‘munshis’ because they were dressed as itinerant religious men, their surveying equipment was masked to look like religious apparel, such as a strands of prayer beads altered for the purpose of measuring distance. Wood, *The Silk Road*, 150. Conversely, itinerant monks from China and Japan on the Indian subcontinent were always under British surveillance on the suspicion of being secret political agents.

[6] Pelliot was fortunate enough to see the caves of Dunhuang before 1921. During the years of civil war in Central Asia following the Bolshevik Revolution, deserters interned in the caves destroyed many of the painting and set fire to a number of artefacts. Wood, *The Silk Road*, 218.

goods.[7] As M. R. Masani, an Indian journalist who travelled extensively in the Soviet Union in the 1930s noted, 'Asiatic Russia held particular appeal to an Indian'.[8]

From the early 1920s and throughout the interwar years, Central Asia played a key role in a set of anti-imperialists engagements with Kabul, Tashkent, and Moscow as its most prominent centres. Maulana Barkatullah and Obeidullah Sindhi (see below) and Mahendra Pratap (see section 4.2) had formed a revolutionary group in Kabul in 1917. M. N. Roy and his associates, who figured in chapter 2, had helped create the nucleus in Tashkent from the fall of 1920. Moscow, prominent from 1920 thanks to both M. N. Roy and Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (discussed in chapter 2), increased in importance with the opening of the University of the Toilers of the East, which will be treated further below.

However crucial they were, it is important to note that these three centres were not exclusively driven by well-known revolutionaries-in-exile such as Barkatullah. Rather, the Central Asian sites treated here hold special significance for their appeal to (relatively) non-elite groups. Some aspiring revolutionaries formulated visions of an Asian future based on variations on the communist model. The Tashkent School and later the University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow were centres where such visions were formulated and taught. Others developed visions of an Asian future that had less to do with communism than with an explicitly anti-imperialist (Pan)Asianism. These found expression in the Pan-Asianist imaginings of Mahendra Pratap and in Asianist reformulations of the Khilafat issue and Pan-Islamism.

The Khilafat connection: pilgrims into revolutionaries

In the thought of Mohammed Barkatullah (1859–1927), Pan-Asianism, Pan-Islamism, and Asian communism were intimately connected.[9] Barkatullah was no stranger to 'Pan'-projects. While the concepts he proposed are an excellent example of the patchwork internationalist grammar that marked the early interwar years, they were consistently internationalist and anti-imperialist. Having 'exiled' himself on political grounds in 1906, he never returned to India. He was a co-founder of the Pan-Aryan Association in New York ('Aryan', here, meaning Indo-American collaboration), and had come into contact with incipient Japanese Pan-Asianism during his years as a teacher of Urdu in Tokyo. Active as a Ghadrite in the United States as well as in Berlin, we find him in Central Asia at the close of the First World War, as an Asianist whose projects had a strong Islamist inflection. This, too, had earlier roots; in Japan, he had published a journal called *Islamic Fraternity*, which, to the dismay of the British, called for anti-imperialist alliances in Asia. Indeed, when Indian involvement in Pan-Asianist projects started to expand in the 1920s, it was to this journal that intelligence services returned: '[Pan-Asianism] may be said to date back roughly some 10 or 11 years when Maulvi Mahomed Barkatullah, then Professor of Hindustani at the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages, … published a paper in Tokyo entitled "The Islamic Fraternity" which … generally advocated an alliance of the Asiatic nations against the domination of the white races'.[10] In 1915, Barkatullah met with Mahendra Pratap in Constantinople before proceeding

[7] Among others, 'Spirit of Swadeshi', *Congress Socialist*, 25 January 1936.
[8] 'The Romance of Baku', *Congress Socialist*, 22 January 1936.
[9] On Barkatullah's travels and activism, see Ramnath, *The Haj to Utopia*, esp. 43–9, 183–8, 218–32.
[10] APAC, IOR, L/P&J 12/157: Indians in Japan.

to Kabul where they intended to ask the Amir of Afghanistan, as well as several other leaders in the region, to declare war on the British. Although this request was denied, Pratap did gain the trust of Amir Amanullah and was sent to Soviet Russia as an extraordinary ambassador to establish friendly relations between Afghanistan and the new regime. He met with Lenin in 1919 and was also active in Soviet Turkestan and Bukhara.

Although well-versed in Islamic theology, Barkatullah was never a pronounced Pan-Islamist.[11] He was sympathetic to Marxist and Leninist theories, and to the Soviet project, but he was not a communist either. During his three-year stay in the Soviet Union, he set out to combine elements of both. In his thought, the unifying factor was Asia. To the *Petrograd Pravda*, he declared:

> I am not a communist nor a socialist, but my political programme at present is the expulsion of the English from Asia. … Thus I concur with the communists and in this respect we are genuine allies. [The annulment by Russia of secret treaties imposed by imperialist governments] united around Soviet Russia all the exploited peoples of Asia and all the parties, even parties far away from socialism. These acts predetermined and brought nearer the Asian revolution.[12]

In order to play his own part in this Asian revolution, Barkatullah wrote a Persian pamphlet entitled 'Bolshevism and the Islamic Nations'. Downplaying the antireligious tenets of the Soviet project and focusing instead on the similarities of the Quranic precepts of *zakat* and *bait-ul-mal* to communism, he focused on the imperialist threat to Asia. He considered a program of aggressive modernization on the Soviet model as a 'divine cry' to liberty, equality, and brotherhood.[13]

> British imperialism holds Asiatic nations in a state of eternal thraldom. It has moved troops into Turkestan with a view to felling the young tree of perfect human liberty just as it is beginning to take root and strength. Time has come for the Muhammedans of the world and Asiatic nations to understand the noble principles of Russian socialism and to embrace it seriously and enthusiastically. They should fathom and realize the cardinal virtues taught by this new system. … They should, without loss of time, send their children to Russian schools to learn modern sciences, noble arts, practical physics, chemistry, mechanics, etc. … Muslims of Russia! Muslims of the East! On this road towards a renewal of the world we await your sympathy and support.[14]

Barkatullah's pamphlet was not the only Indian manifesto written in Tashkent. A sizeable group of revolutionaries had gathered there, one of whom, Abdul Majid, edited an Urdu-

[11] G. Adhikari, *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India.* Vol. 1, *1917–1922* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House 1971), 115.
[12] *Petrograd Pravda*, no. 10, 1919, quoted in Adhikari, *Documents of the History of the CPI*, 118–20.
[13] Adhikari, *Documents*, 1:126.
[14] Barkatullah, 'Bolshevism and the Islamic Nations', quoted in Adhikari, *Documents*, 1:126–8.

Persian paper called *Zamindar*.[15] This periodical, too, framed its activism in terms of an all-Asia project. In their inaugural issue, they declared their intent to 'keep all Eastern revolutionary organizations under once centre'.[16] One of Majid's associates, Muhammad Shafiq, later to be sentenced to three years' imprisonment in the infamous Peshawar Conspiracy Case, wrote an 'Appeal to the Oppressed Peoples of the East'. This echoed a sentiment shared by many exiled Indian revolutionaries: if Asia took a united stand against the imperial powers, Indian independence would emerge naturally, as a by-product of that unity. Conveniently claiming to speak for all of India, Shafiq wrote:

> Respectful greetings from the organization of Indian residents in Tashkent. India with heart and soul hopes for the fulfilment of your desires. India is so sick of the oppressive repression that it is determined to plunge into the battle. Oh, sufferers of the East dreaming of freedom from iron chains, it is your duty to follow the example of India! … Brethren of Bukhara, is not your Amir a pawn of British greed? … Oh, Iranian brothers, is not your Shah busy touring Europe? … Oh, leading members of Soviet Russia, is your country really secure? … Never! It is only when you understand this that you will heed the call.[17]

Who were these 'Indian revolutionaries' in Tashkent? While some had been drawn to Soviet Asia soon after the October Revolution to collaborate with the new regime in either Moscow or Tashkent, the majority had ended up there for very different reasons. They had left after the 1920 Khilafat Congress, aiming to head to Angora (Ankara). These were the so-called *muhajirs* (literally, 'migrants'), who responded to the call for *hijrat* (emigration to escape repression) after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. As noted in chapter 1, the disillusion over unkept British promises with regard to the caliphate and the holy places of Islam had sparked the movement. The muhajirs were thus on their way to Anatolia rather than to Soviet Central Asia. Approximately two hundred muhajirs had set out, mostly from Peshawar, crossing into Afghanistan from the Northwest Frontier Provinces in present-day Pakistan. They had been promised asylum by the Amir who, as their numbers increased and several hundred penniless khilafatists camped near Kabul, retracted the offer. Those who did make it to Kabul met with an unlikely duo: Obeidullah Sindhi, an associate of Barkatullah and a staunch Pan-Islamist, and Abdur Rab, a Soviet agent who, like many of the muhajirs, hailed from Peshawar. Obeidullah Sindhi was connected to the radical section of the *ulema* at Deoband. Mahmud al-Hasan, the principal at Deoband, had declared the struggle for Pan-Islamic goals to be more effective from abroad, thus giving further impetus to the muhajir activists.[18] Obeidullah Sindhi gave this concrete expression by giving these 'Pan-Islamic goals' revolutionary and anti-imperialist content.[19] Rab appealed to similar sentiments, but convinced a group of muhajirs to continue on to Soviet-controlled Central Asia, for 'revolution had taken place and

[15] Abdul Majid was an associate of Rafiq Ahmad mentioned above.
[16] Adhikari, *Documents*, 1:137.
[17] Adhikari, *Documents*, 1:137–39.
[18] K. H. Ansari, 'Pan-Islam and the Making of the Early Indian Muslim Socialists', *Modern Asian Studies*, 20:3 (1986): 509–37: 514.
[19] Ibid., 515.

if they went there they could see and learn many things'.[20] They agreed to proceed there. At Bukhara, they were met by M. N. Roy, who invited them to join the incipient Indian revolutionary core in Tashkent. This caused a split in allegiances, and those muhajirs more interested in Pan-Islamism than in Soviet Asianism departed from the group. They got as far as Baku, but were distrusted by Turkish representation there and refused permission to continue.[21] However, even at the westernmost fringes of Soviet territory there was no escaping Soviet plans for the 'oppressed peoples' of Asia: at least two of the muhajirs, Akbar Shah and Masood Ali Shah, ended up at the Baku Congress of the Oppressed Peoples of the East, which opened on 1 September 1920.[22] They attended the following speech on the first day:

> Comrades! The grey-haired East, which gave us our first notion of morality and culture, will today shed tears, telling of her sorrow, of the grievous wounds inflicted upon her by capital of the bourgeois countries. … We must at last slam shut this book of the accursed past, so that it may never return. We must open a new page of history, when the oppressed peoples of the East will no longer be slaves, when they will not allow British offices to shamelessly plunder the Indians and the Persians, killing, insulting and mocking at everyone.[23]

The Congress of the Oppressed Peoples of the East convened twenty-two Asian nationalities to hammer out a common policy against imperialism in Asia with Soviet party leaders as well as representatives from other European communist parties.[24] Fourteen Indian delegates attended, roughly half of whom belonged to the Indian Revolutionary Association, soon to be merged with the newly established Communist Party of India (CPI).[25] M. N. Roy himself was absent, but M. P. T. Acharya (1887–1951) and Abani Mukherjee (1891–1937) represented the small group of 'card-carrying' Indians who had settled in Soviet Asia for ideological reasons prior to the muhajirs' arrival. Acharya had been a member of the Indian party that visited Lenin in 1918 and an associate of Abdur Rab.[26] But Mukherjee in particular was a revolutionary with a long pedigree in Pan-Asianist activism, whose travels took him to almost all Asianist centres as well as Asianist groups of the interwar period. Having met exiled Pan-Asianist Rashbehari Bose (discussed below) as early as 1914, his revolutionary activities led him to Japan, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies. His Indonesian and Dutch contacts

[20] From the account of Rafiq Ahmad, quoted in Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India*, 15.

[21] Adhikari, *Documents*, 2:27.

[22] Adhikari, *Documents*, 1:52. On the Baku Congress, see J. Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920—First Congress of the Peoples of the East* (New York: Pathfinder, 1993); S. White, 'Communism and the East: Baku, 1920', *Slavic Review* 33:3 (1974): 492–514.

[23] Congress proceedings: First Session—1 September 1920, in Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 60–77.

[24] Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 11. The Baku Congress, moreover, was convened by the Communist International after its second congress.

[25] S. Roy, *M. N. Roy: A Political Biography* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 1997), 58.

[26] Acharya had also been a revolutionary exile since 1907, passing through anarchism, socialism, communism, and back to anarchism. He spent the whole interwar period abroad with a permanent British warrant for his arrest. See M. P. T. Acharya, *Reminiscences of an Indian Revolutionary*, ed. B. D. Yadav (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1991), vi.

acquainted him with communism, and through the offices of Dutch communist S. J. Rutgers he ended up in the Soviet Union and at the Second Congress of the Communist International. During a clandestine return to India, he was briefly engaged in trade union activities, collaborating with, among others, S. A. Dange.[27]

Among the 'non-party' Indians were Nazir Sidiq and Kadir,[28] both listed as members of the presiding committee of the congress. To Akbar Shah and Masood Ali Shah, who, in opposition to the aforementioned revolutionaries at Baku, had ended up at the congress almost by chance, the Baku Congress must still have been appealing. In the proceedings, India and Turkey took pride of place for two reasons: as horrifying examples of how proud, cultured, and rich Asian lands had been destroyed and humiliated by the capitalist-imperialist enterprise; and as Asian lands who had suffered particularly in the First World War. In the resulting 'Manifesto of the Peoples of the East', written during the congress and signed by the presiding committee members, great care was taken to mention all the represented Asian nationalities, but none as frequently as India and Turkey. The injustices committed there are presented as the *casus belli* for Asia to unite and fight the imperialists—under the leadership of Soviet Russia, conveniently presented here as an 'eastern people'.

> [This war] was fought for the partition of the world, and chiefly for the partition of Asia, of the East. It was fought to decide who was to rule the countries of Asia and whose slaves the peoples of the East would be. … Peoples of the East! You know what Britain has done in India, you know how it has turned the many-millioned masses of the Indian peasants and workers into dumb beasts of burden without any rights. … The British officers who rule over [the Indian soldiers], insolent sons of a British bourgeoisie grown fat on Indian corpses, do not regard them as human.
>
> Peoples of the East! Do you know what Britain has done in Turkey? … When the Turkish people refused to accept a peace which would have destroyed them, the British occupied Constantinople, a holy place to Muslims. … They have closed all the points of entry into Asia Minor. In Asia Minor today there is not one piece of cloth, not one fragment of metal. The Turkish peasant must go about without a shirt and till the soil with a wooden plough.
>
> The peoples of the East have long stagnated in the darkness of ignorance under the despotic yoke of their own tyrant rulers and of foreign capitalist conquerors. … We are representatives of the toiling masses of all the peoples of the East. … Peoples of the East! Often you heard a call from your government to holy war, and you marched under the green banner of the Prophet. But all those holy wars were fraudulent, serving only the interests of your self-seeking rulers. … Now we summon you for the first

[27] Aliases included Trailokovich Mukherdzhi (added Russian patronymic) and Dar Shaheer (alias used in Southeast Asia). Mukherjee stayed in the Soviet Union, primarily as an Indologist for the Soviet Council of Sciences, but was purged and executed in 1937. See further the somewhat hagiographic biography by G. Chattopadhyaya, *Abani Mukherji: A Dauntless Revolutionary and Pioneering Communist* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976).

[28] No last name given.

> genuine holy war … a holy war for your own well-being, for your freedom, for your life. Save yourselves, peoples of the East![29]

As yet, the Baku conference has not been recognized as a moment of importance to the Indian anti-imperialist struggle, let alone as a site of anti-imperialist or Asianist significance to India.[30] This is partly due to the fact that Baku was not attended by any of the 'figureheads' of the revolutionary struggle whose travels brought them to the Soviet Union, such as Barkatullah, M. N. Roy, and Virendranath Chattopadhyaya. However, the strong Indian presence at the Baku Congress caused India to become a Profintern priority. Abdur Rab had sent a letter to the Baku Congress on behalf of the Indian Revolutionary Association in Tashkent, urging the delegates, and the Soviet Government in particular, to come to the aid of the oppressed peoples of the East. It is indicative of the Tashkent circle's particular brand of Asianism in an Islamic inflection, that in the letter they vow to work with all the Baku delegates to resolve the 'Eastern Question', but hope that 'help may be given without religious interference', which may be read as non-interference in the region's Islamic affairs.[31]

After the Baku Congress, plans arose to organize a large Indian Revolutionary Congress in Central Asia with Soviet help. M. N. Roy tried to get word of this initiative to Indian trade unions.[32] M. P. T. Acharya, in the meantime, moved to Kashgar to coordinate Indian activities through a Kashgar Union with local activists, although he admitted to difficulties in locating 'workmen's revolutionary unions' there.[33] Mukherjee took yet another approach, and worked to get Indian trade unionists to the Congress of International Trade and Industrial Unions in Moscow, and to help 'about three dozen Indian working men and peasants' to go to Moscow to be trained in trade unionism.[34] This translation from the revolutionary internationalism from the Indian exiles in Central Asia, into trade unionism in India, was not without its effect. This would become clear when its Asia Bureau was founded, and particularly in the years of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat. Conversely, it put the Soviet policy towards Asia in the 1920s firmly on the map of the Indian anti-imperialist struggle. As can be glimpsed from the above letters, Acharya and Mukherjee both had large revolutionary networks within and outside of India, which included the leaders of revolutionary trade unions. Baku delegate Masood Ali Shah, moreover, was in close touch with M. N. Roy, and through him, revolutionary trade union leaders such as Muzaffar

[29] 'Manifesto of the Peoples of the East', in Riddell, *To See the Dawn*, 221–33.

[30] In stark opposition to the recognition of its significance to the Middle East and Persia. J. Pennar, 'The Arabs, Marxism and Moscow: A Historical Survey', *Middle East Journal* 22:4 (1968): 433–47; S. Blank, 'Soviet Politics and the Iranian Revolution of 1919–1921', *Cahier du monde russe et soviétique* 21:2 (1980): 173–94; S. Yilmaz, 'An Ottoman Warrior Abroad: Enver Pasha as an Expatriate, *Middle Eastern Studies* 35:4 (1999): 40–69.

[31] RCCSRMH 495–68–9: Mohammad Abdur Rabb Barq to the Comrades of the Third International, Second Congress, Baku, 10 August 1920. Published in Roy, Gupta, and Vasudevan, *Indo-Russian Relations*, 25–6.

[32] RCCSRMH 459–68–2, M. N. Roy to Ya. Z. Suritz, 4 October 1920, in ibid., 31–4: 33.

[33] RCCSRMH 544–1–11, M. P. B. T. Acharya to M. N. Roy, 17 November 1920, in ibid., 36–7.

[34] RCCSRMH 495–68–5, Abani Mukherjee to S. P. Gupta, 30 December 1920, in ibid., 44–50: 50.

Ahmed.[35]

The University of the Toilers of the East

Meanwhile in Tashkent, revolutionary training became more coordinated with the return of the Baku delegates. In October 1920, a political and military training school for Indian revolutionaries was established. The nucleus was formed by forty-odd muhajirs,[36] who were put up in the Indusky Doma (India House).[37] By April 1921, their numbers had risen to 110.[38] The short-lived school was referred to as *Indusky Kurs*, which suggests exclusive Indian involvement, but according to M. N. Roy it was an 'international brigade' of Indian, Persian, and Russian revolutionaries acting as an auxiliary to the Red Army.[39] The reality was probably less glamorous. The few existing accounts of the Tashkent School note general disappointment in the revolutionary zeal of its students—possibly because of their greatly varying educational backgrounds.[40] The promising ones were enrolled in officer training, including air force training; the non-elite students were enrolled in infantry training. According to Rafiq Ahmad, only one of them actually learned to fly an airplane.[41] This might be the unnamed ill-fated officer who died soon after demonstrating aerial acrobatics to recruits from Afghanistan and Persia when he was attached to the Red Army aviation unit in Leningrad.[42] However, attempts were made to disseminate propaganda throughout Asia generated at the Tashkent School; Shaukat Usmani and Rafiq Ahmad were sent to the tribal areas of Turkestan, away from watchful British eyes, to set up printing presses.[43] Such equipment was both expensive and hard to move—M. P. T. Acharya, too, was entrusted with the care of a typewriter that was moved first to the Kashgar Union and later to Tashkent.[44]

The Tashkent School left many Indians and Soviets alike unimpressed, and after eight months the school was disbanded. However, the attempt to train revolutionaries from Soviet and colonial Asia together in order to form a united Asian anti-imperialist front had not lost its attraction to either the Tashkent circle or to the Soviet leadership: the school was moved to Moscow and merged with the Communist University for the Toilers of the East (KUTV).[45]

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[35] S. Roy, *M. N. Roy: A Political Biography*, 61; S. Chattopadhyay, *An Early Communist: Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta, 1913–1929* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2011).

[36] Adhikari mentions forty students in volume 2, and fifty in volume 1. Given that only twenty-six of the muhajirs actually joined the Tashkent school, the former number is more likely. It is also closer to the account of Rafiq Ahmad, who notes that from an initial group of sixty, a sizeable group never proceeded to Tashkent. M. Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India*, 27.

[37] Adhikari, *Documents*, 2:27.

[38] Manjapra, *M. N. Roy*, 45.

[39] M. N. Roy, *Memoirs* (New Delhi: Allied, 1964), 437.

[40] Roy's own account not excepted; see Roy, *Memoirs*, 464. For the British view that 'from Roy downwards' Indian communists in Central Asia were largely incompetent, see Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 311.

[41] Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India*, 30.

[42] Roy, *Memoirs*, 471.

[43] Ahmad, *The Communist Party of India*, 30.

[44] RCCSRMH 544–1–11, Acharya to Roy, 27 October 1920. In Roy, Gupta, and Vasudevan, *Indo-Russian Relations*, 34–6: 35.

[45] Kommunističeskij Universitet Trudjaŝihsja Vostoka, also known as the Far East University. The university was expanded soon after to include branches in Tashkent and Irkutsk.

This was an addition to the International Lenin School, where European and American students were taught. The two universities were kept separated, with the University of the Toilers of the East geared exclusively towards Asian anti-imperialism. Most of the Tashkent students joined the KUTV. A. C. Freeman, who was allowed to inspect the university on behalf of the New York-based Friends of Soviet Russia Society, reported that the school was a colourful mix of illiterate Muslim peasants and Chinese, Japanese, and Indian political refugees with degrees from Oxford and Heidelberg.[46] Indeed, the 'Turkomans in high black wool hats, Sarts from Bukhara with brightly embroidered caps and almond-eyed Tartars from the Volga'[47] were joined by educated revolutionaries who would soon become important leaders in Asian anti-imperialist networks. Among them were Tan Malaka of the Indonesian Communist Party (KUTV, 1922), Ho Chi Minh (KUTV, 1923), and Liu Shaoqi (KUTV, 1921). Masood Ali Shah, Rafiq Ahmad, and Shaukat Usmani also attended.[48]

In this way, the university created an Asianist network of revolutionaries who not only remained in conversation with each other, but whose paths also crossed with revolutionaries at home. It made Moscow into a centre of Asianist enthusiasm in the first half of the 1920s, causing a variety of Pan-Asianists to include the city in their itineraries. The second anniversary of the KUTV was celebrated with speeches from all colonial territories in many languages, accompanied by a series of Asian dance performances.[49] At the third anniversary, Trotsky delivered a rousing speech. By this time, the school was under surveillance from British intelligence, who dismissed Trotsky's words as a self-congratulatory 'dwelling upon the world importance of the University.'[50] At the school itself, however, his words were received with enthusiasm:

> You must know how to couple the uprising of the Indus peasants, the strike of coolies in the ports of China, the political propaganda of Kuomintang bourgeois democracy, the struggle of the Koreans for independence, the bourgeois-democratic rebirth of Turkey and the economic and cultural and educational work in the Soviet republic of Transcaucasia. … At the moment of these decisive events the students of the Communist University of the East will say: 'We are here. … We know not only how to translate the ideas of Marxism and Leninism into the language of China, India, Turkey and Korea; but we have also learnt how to translate the sufferings, passions, demands and hopes of the toiling masses of the East into the language of Marxism'. 'Who has taught you that?' they will be asked. 'The Communist University for Toilers of the East taught us that.[51]

[46] A. C. Freeman, 'Russia's University of Oriental Communists', reproduced in Adhikari, *Documents*, 1:243–45: 244.

[47] Freeman, 'Russia's University of Oriental Communists', 243.

[48] MSA, Home Special file 543(2) Bolshevism—Note by the India Office London on the Indian Communist movement for the period 21 December 1922 to 10 May 1923.

[49] As noted by former *muhajir* Fazl Ilahi Qurban. 'Revolutionary Training Schools', *Vanguard of Indian Independence*, no. 1 (1923).

[50] NAI, Home Political 220 (1924): The Communist University for Workers of the East.

[51] L. Trotsky, *Perspectives and Tasks in the East—Speech on the third anniversary of the Communist University for Toilers of the East, April 21, 1924* (London: New Park, 1973), 14–5.

The fourth anniversary was celebrated no less festively, with Stalin himself speaking on the 'Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East'.[52] However, his speech suggests that the university was already losing the official backing it had enjoyed under Lenin.[53] His speech opened with the statement that although all students at the university were 'Sons of the East', the differences between students from the Soviet East and from the colonial East were too large to teach the two groups in one educational body. His speech showed the first signs that a large Asian front, of which all constituent parts fought against imperialism and for their own self-determination (an atmosphere which had prevailed at Baku and Tashkent, and during the early years of the KUTV), was not on Moscow's list of priorities. In hindsight, the speech reads more like a closing ceremony. The answer came in the early 1930s, when the university leadership and student body were purged.

4.2 Asia overland: the travels of Mahendra Pratap

How were centres of expatriate Indian activism such as Tashkent and Moscow connected to other Asianist networks? Although the Tashkent and Moscow nuclei had their own imaginings of an Asian future, these visions were not necessarily shared by Asianists from other backgrounds and persuasions. However, as noted, the activities in these centres had put these cities on the Asianist map, and the Asianists who passed through incorporated them into a larger network of Asianist routes. Much like the silk road itself, few people traversed all of these routes in full. This section is concerned with Mahendra Pratap as an Asianist revolutionary who did so not once, but several times.[54]

Like his fellow revolutionaries in exile, Pratap was convinced that the struggle for India's freedom could not be fought from within the country. This resulted in three turbulent decades of travel with a view to seeking outside help to overthrow British rule in India. The majority of his life in exile was spent in various parts of Asia, where he interacted with people and institutions concerned with the future of the Asian continent, from Lenin to the Dalai Lama and from the University of the Toilers of the East in Tashkent to the Pan-Asiatic Society in Japan. While his plans seemed unrealistic at times, even to contemporaries, his decision to work towards a unified Asia—which would, in his view, inevitably lead to an independent India—was not at all uncommon. Through the very act of travelling, he became one of the threads that tied together a web of contacts that functioned as a civil society. Over the course of his nomadic life, he sought out other revolutionary exiles as well as Indian expatriate communities, especially in places that were significant to his larger plan of uniting 'Pan-Asia', notably Moscow, Kabul, Peking, and Tokyo. These cities acted as nodal points in his transit routes, where both exiled Indian activists and local intellectuals exchanged ideas and expressed their solidarity with colonized Asia. This is not to say they were necessarily spaces of unity and agreement. Rather, they offered opportunities for expatriates whose ideas

[52] Published as 'The Political Tasks of the University of the Toilers of the East', *Pravda* 115 (22 May 1925).

[53] Lenin had died in 1924. The university may have suffered from the power struggle between Stalin and Trotsky's. Karl Radek, who headed the university in its early years, was expelled from the party in 1927. He was readmitted in 1930, but sentenced to hard labour in a show trial soon after.

[54] Parts of the following pages were published in Stolte, '"Enough of the Great Napoleons!" Raja Mahendra Pratap's Pan-Asian Projects (1929–1939)', *Modern Asian Studies* 46:2 (2012): 403–23.

ranged from a vague sense of anti-colonialism to the radical establishment of a new Asian order.

To assert that Mahendra Pratap was not the only travelling revolutionary with an integrative function between disparate Asian anti-imperialist networks would be an understatement. The lives of South Asian Har Dayal and Muhammad Barkatullah, or of Tan Malaka and E. F. E. Douwes Dekker, with their (sometimes overlapping) narratives of travel, activism, surveillance, and imprisonment, are well documented.[55] Even so, there are several reasons for focusing on Pratap to map the revolutionary routes through the landmass of Asia. His travels were unusually extensive and his contacts particularly diverse. Moreover, what little literature does exist draws heavily on his autobiography and therefore on information filtered through Pratap's own perceptions.[56] Unfortunately, contrary to what we might expect, this autobiography offers little insight into his thoughts. It is an account of his travels, detailing the trials and tribulations of life on the road, from the price of donkeys in Tibet to armed skirmishes on the steppes of Central Asia.

Another impediment to a balanced account of his life is that several historians have attempted to integrate him more closely into the nationalist narrative, overemphasizing his non-communalism, his connections to the Indian National Congress, and his indebtedness to the thought of Gandhi[57]—who, however, was no internationalist and no fan of Pratap's ideas. Through his secretary, Gandhi once wrote to Pratap: 'Rather than move about from place to place doing nothing, you should take up any kind of settled job, no matter whether it is of plate-washing, or boot-blacking or hawking'.[58] And Nehru, who did share Pratap's internationalist enthusiasm, nevertheless described his first meeting with Pratap in the following way: 'He seemed to be a character out of medieval romance, a Don Quixote who had strayed into the 20th century'.[59] However, Pratap should be viewed as an Asianist and anti-imperialist rather than as a nationalist. According to him, India's independence would materialize if Asia united. Through strategic alliances at various key sites in Asia, he focused primarily on the latter goal.

Mahendra Pratap was born on 1 December 1866, the third son of Raja Ghanshiam

[55] E. C. Brown, *Har Dayal: Indian Revolutionary and Rationalist* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975); M. Ramnath, *The Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Santa Cruz: University of California Press, 2011); H. A. Poeze, *Tan Malaka: strijder voor Indonesië's vrijheid: levensloop van 1897 tot 1945* (The Hague: Smits, 1976); P. W. J. van der Veur, *The Lion and the Gadfly. Dutch Colonialism and the Spirit of E. F. E. Douwes Dekker* (Leiden: KITLV, 2006).

[56] V. Singh, ed., *The Life and Times of Raja Mahendra Pratap* (New Delhi: Originals, 2005); M. Pratap, *Reminiscences of a Revolutionary* (New Delhi: Raja Mahendra Pratap Birth Centenary Celebration National Committee, 1986); M. Hassan Khan et al., eds., *The Contribution of Raja Mahendra Pratap and Prof. Barkatullah Bhopali in Freedom Struggle and its Importance in Contemporary Society* (Kolkata: Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, 2008); D. O. Singh, *Mahāna krāntikārī, Āryāna Peśavā, Rājā Mahendra Pratāpa* (New Delhi: Candramukhī Prakāśana, 2008); D. N. Singh, *Rājā Mahendra Pratāpa: ek bahuayami vyaktitwa* (New Delhi: Raja Mahendra Pratap, 1986).

[57] S. Chakravarti, 'Important Legacies of Mahendra Pratap' in Singh, *The Life and Times*, 6–12; A. K. Patnaik, 'Raja Mahendra Pratap and the Provisional Government of India at Kabul' in Singh, *The Life and Times*, 13–33.

[58] NAI, Private Papers Collection (PPC) Mahendra Pratap, Correspondence file 32. Gandhi's secretary to Pratap, 11 September 1936.

[59] J. Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London: John Lane, 1938), 151.

Singh Bahadur in Al-Mursan. He attended Aligarh Muslim College and married into the ruling family of Jind. Pratap's emerging translocal solidarities first became evident when he went to Constantinople to 'serve Turkey' during the 1912 Balkan War. Some of his classmates from Aligarh had organized a medical mission led by Muktar Ahmad Ansari that he had wanted to join.[60] But by the time Pratap arrived, they had already gone to the front. Like the muhajirs eight years later, he never received Turkish permission to proceed: his host at the Turkish War Office was not only unimpressed by Pratap's devotion to the Turkish cause, he was also highly suspicious of his non-Muslim name.

Undeterred, Pratap fared better in his next attempt to meddle in a war. In 1914, he 'began to feel decisive sympathy for the Germans who were fighting this dirty British Empire' and wanted to see for himself 'what it was all about'.[61] By this time the local magistrate was already complaining of the pro-German attitude displayed in one of the articles in Pratap's periodical *Nirbal Sewak*.[62] Pratap bade his wife and children goodbye and left for Europe. His first stop of note was Geneva, where he met the famous revolutionary Krishnavarma,[63] Ghadar party founder Har Dayal, and later also Virendranath Chattopadhyay, who travelled with him to Berlin in 1915. In that city, he was received with receptions, banquets, and special tours to the front. He had an audience with the Kaiser and received the Red Eagle second class. They discussed his impending mission to Afghanistan to ask the Amir and other rulers in the region to declare war on the British. A list of participants was drawn up and Pratap left for Turkey with the party's German diplomat, Von Hentig.[64] Barkatullah, whose language skills in Persian and Arabic were vital to the mission, accompanied him, as did several Afghan Afridi soldiers who had been interned in Germany as prisoners of war and had volunteered their services. Before leaving for Afghanistan, they were received by the sultan in Istanbul, and the sultan's son-in-law and war minister, Enver Pasha.[65] Despite bouts of dysentery and high fever, Pratap thoroughly enjoyed the journey through Asia. His party reached Kabul on 2 October 1915 and they were received by King Habibullah, to whom they presented letters from the Kaiser and the sultan. Though the king appeared less than enthusiastic about declaring war on the British, Barkatullah and Pratap raised the issue of Indians interned in Afghan prisons for anti-British activities, and pressed for their release. This was a token of good faith that the king could easily provide; and

[60] M. A. Ansari was a medical doctor, educator, and politician and became President of the Indian National Congress in 1927. The medical mission consisted of five doctors and a supporting staff of nineteen. See S. T. Wasti, 'The 1912–13 Balkan War and the Siege of Edirne', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40:4 (2004): 59–78. Ansari was also from Aligarh Muslim College, though he was not acquainted with Pratap at the time.

[61] Singh, *My Life Story*, 35.

[62] Nirbal Sewak (निर्बल सेवक) translates as 'humble servant' and was published in Hindi and Urdu.

[63] Among other things, Shyamji Krishnavarma (1857–1930) founded the India Home Rule Society, the India House, and the *Indian Sociologist* in London. I. Yajnik, *Syamaji Krishnavarma: Life and Times of an Indian Revolutionary* (Bombay: Lakshmi Publications, 1950); H. Fischer-Tiné, *Sanskrit, Sociology and Anti-Imperial Struggle: The Life of Shyamji Krishnavarma (1857–1930)* (Delhi: Routledge India, 2013).

[64] For details on the mission, see A. C. Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad* (Patna: Bharati Bhawan, 1971); T. L. Hughes, 'The German Mission to Afghanistan, 1915–1916', in *Germany and the Middle East, 1871–1945*, edited by W. Schwanitz, 25–63 (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publications, 2004); T. R. Sareen, *Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad, 1905–1921* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1979).

[65] Enver Pasha, like many of the activists in this chapter, was to die as an exile in Soviet Asia.

Obeidullah Sindhi was among those released from prison.

Fig. 8. Pratap (white helmet) and Barkatullah (grey helmet) at the Euphrates river. Pratap's interlocutor is the Ottoman representative Kasim Bey
[Stiftung Bibliotheca Afghanica, Collection Botschafter Werner Otto von Hentig, 1915–7].

On 1 December 1915, Pratap, Barkatullah, and Obeidullah formally established the Provisional Government of India, with Pratap as its 'life president' (until government could be handed over to Congress) and the others as prime minister and home minister respectively. They dedicated themselves to the service of India: 'When the story of the freedom of our country will be written someday this chapter of our Provisional Government of India will receive due consideration. … Once, even a treaty was drawn up between us and Afghanistan'.[66] Although they received some encouragement from court factions eager for war, the Amir himself seems to have interacted with the 'provisional government' as little as possible.

[66] Singh, *My Life Story*, 51. There is no evidence that the treaty was actually concluded.

Fig. 9. Expedition members at Kabul after the establishment of the Provisional Government. Barkatullah (far left), Pratap (centre) [Stiftung Bibliotheca Afghanica, Botschafter Werner Otto von Hentig, 1915–7].

Pratap now pinned his hope on the Russian empire. Pratap sent a letter to the tsar, presented on a solid gold platter, urging Russia to 'establish her influence in Asia on a permanent basis'.[67] The tsar, however, was not inclined to help them. Not much later, the Soviets proved more receptive, even though they seem to have been a bit suspicious of Pratap's initial exchange of letters with the *ancien régime.* Nevertheless, there was more to Pratap's overtures to the Soviets than the sheer size and political influence of Asiatic Russia. As noted in chapter 1, communism and the Soviet Union would play a part in Pratap's political imaginary for his whole life.[68] Pratap travelled west overland once more and met Trotsky, who sympathized with his political views, and declared that he, too, wanted freedom for the oppressed Eastern nations.[69] However, news arrived that the Amir had been assassinated on a hunting trip and that his son and successor Amanullah had declared war on the British. Considering this a more receptive climate for his plan—which now revolved around 'collective action' in Asia to oust the British—Pratap returned to Afghanistan. On his way there, he met Lenin on 7 May

[67] T. R. Sareen, *Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad, 1905–1921* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1979), 180. Despite the Anglo-Russian Entente, Pratap was possibly counting on lingering Great Game rivalry in seeking this alliance.

[68] See, for instance, West Bengal State Archives (WBSA), Police Files, 130/1923, file no. 264/23: 'The Connection of Revolutionists in Bengal with Bolsheviks'. In 1926, the Japanese barred Pratap from landing in Japan for the same reason. Pratap's last known profession of communist sympathies can be found in the 1958 pamphlet 'A Warning', ZMO Berlin, Horst Krüger Nachlass, Box 34, file 256–1.

[69] As later reported to the Indian Press: *Vartman*, 32 February 1924. The British saw this claim to Trotsky's support and Soviet designs in the East corroborated by Trotsky's speech to the Eastern Department of the Academy two months after the appearance of this article. See NAI, Home Political, File 220 (1924): 'Russian Designs in the East', 29 May 1924.

1919. Pratap's vision of the unity of Asian religions (see below) did not sit well with Lenin, who accused him of Tolstoyism. Lenin reportedly had better rapport with Barkatullah, who wrote *Bolshevism and the Islamic Nations* soon after.[70]

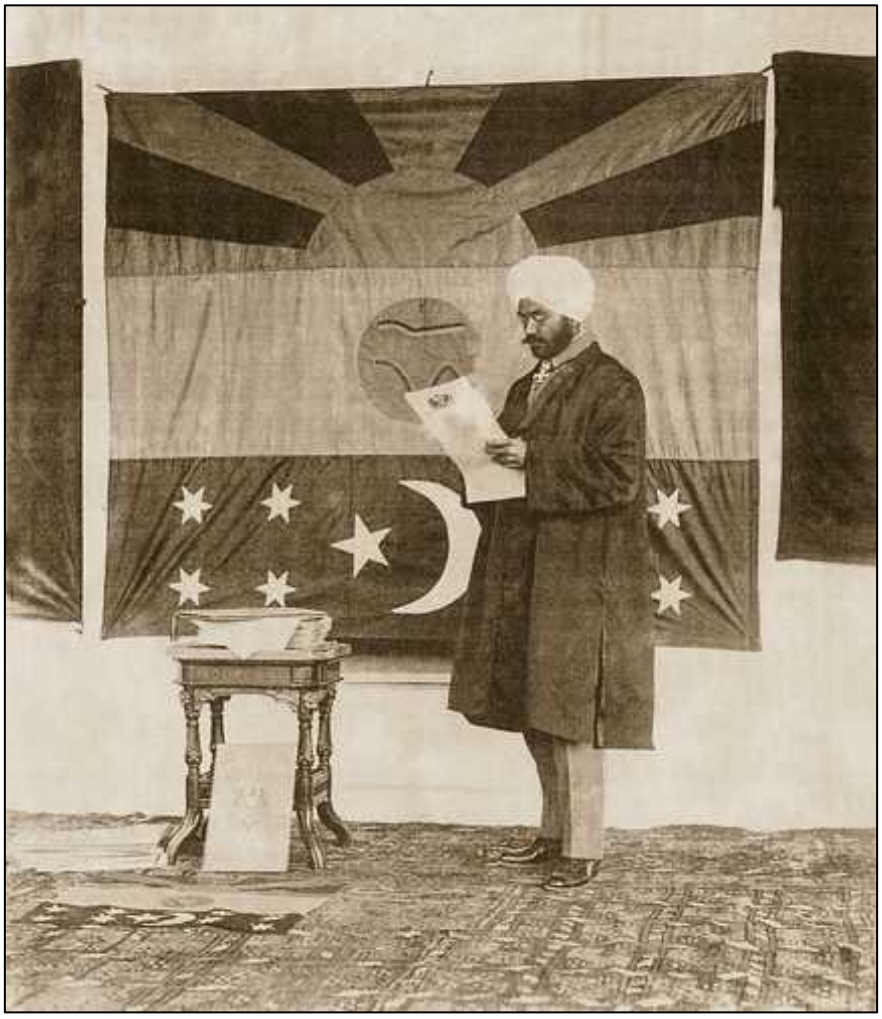

Fig. 10. Pratap 'in office' in Kabul, wearing the Red Eagle and holding the German letter to the Indian Princes. On the wall is Pratap's flag of the Provisional Government
[Stiftung Bibliotheca Afghanica, Collection Botschafter Werner Otto von Hentig, 1915–7].

On his return to Afghanistan, Pratap did indeed find the political climate at Kabul much changed, and in the spring of 1920 he was charged by the king to deliver letters to the rulers of Tibet, China, Japan, Siam, and Turkey. By this time, Pratap had acquired Afghan citizenship and he continued to present himself as an Afghan emissary throughout the 1920s.[71] However, Afghanistan would soon denounce him, and forced him to send back the letters after peace was made with the British in 1922. By this time, Pratap was in Tashkent, talking to what remained of the Indian revolutionary core in that city. From there, Pratap

[70] Written in Persian and translated into various Central Asian languages, this pamphlet circulated from Soviet Asia to Indonesia. See Adhikari, *Documents*, 1:121; L. Muraviec, *The Mind of Jihad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 219.

[71] As a result of his Afghan citizenship, he was no longer a British subject and could therefore not be arrested outside British soil. This greatly reduced the possibility of his arrest.

proceeded to Moscow to be treated for typhoid, but also to meet M. N. Roy, through whom new avenues for exchange with local intellectuals and Indian expatriates were opened at the University for the Toilers of the East.

Two significant events occurred later that year: Pratap visited Japan and met Rashbehari Bose, who was to become a lifelong friend and ally. Pratap was well received and spoke regularly to his Japanese hosts on the subject of the unity of Asia and of changing tides, because 'New opinions of King Amanullah, Comrade Lenin and Dr Sun Yat-sen were prevailing in the East'.[72] He stayed at a Buddhist temple in Kobe, a city with a sizeable Indian community, though few Indian émigrés would support him publicly as a result of his cooperation with Germany during the Great War, visiting him after dark instead. These clandestine meetings would provide entry into the Indian community on his next visit.

Nevertheless, finding the political climate in Japan only moderately supportive of his views for the moment, Pratap returned to Kabul, where the Afghan foreign office still paid his salary. He wanted to embark on another trip around the world to raise money and proselytize for his cause of a united Asia. Permission for this trip was granted, together with 400 gold pounds, and Pratap was dispatched with the parting message from the king: 'It is not now time for Pan-Islamism, we should all work for Asian unity'.[73] At this junction, Pratap decided that an appeal for Asian unity was best achieved by appealing to the widespread discourse of Asian spirituality. This time, he framed it in the context of the Buddhist networks that had once connected the Central Asian landmass, and embarked on a mission to Tibet. It speaks to the Asianist enthusiasm of the period that he managed to raise 10,000 dollars and seven volunteers for his mission.[74]

However, he never reached Lhasa. He wrote to the Dalai Lama from Chamdo, Tibet, in February 1926, but the Dalai Lama, although full of praise for Pratap's mission, would not allow him to proceed to Lhasa.[75] Now stuck in the Himalayas, the seven volunteers grew disaffected with Pratap and proceeded to China, forming new Ghadar *nuclei* in Hankow and Shanghai.[76] Ironically, and rather unfairly, Pratap would later boast of their success in inducing Sikhs to desert from the Indian Brigade in Shanghai.[77] With money running out, Pratap pressed on to China and while there received an invitation to attend the first Pan-Asiatic Conference at Nagasaki in the summer of 1926 (treated in section 4.4). By this time, few people could boast to have travelled overland through Asia as often as Pratap had.

Pratap did not manage to reach Nagasaki either: on the way to Japan his passport was stolen. Japanese authorities were already nervous about the anti-imperialist connotations of this conference, but this was a much more convenient pretext for keeping Pratap out than charges of political radicalism.[78] It took an intervention from his Japanese friends for him to

[72] Singh, *My Life Story*, 78.

[73] At least according to Pratap's own report of his discussion with the king. See Singh, *My Life Story*, 90.

[74] He actually raised $12,000, but distributed $1,000 to a penniless Barkatullah; $500 to Rashbehari Bose, and $500 to three others. NAI, Home Political 831/II (1926), memorandum, 15 December 1926.

[75] NAI, PPC, correspondence file 2: 'Dalai Lama to Mahendra Pratap', 1926.

[76] Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, 411.

[77] NAI, Home Political 28/I (1928), London to Shimla, 13 September 1927.

[78] In order not to offend Great Britain, the conference was moved from Tokyo to the smaller city of Nagasaki. Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism*, 156.

be allowed a few days' leave to visit Osaka and meet some of the conference participants and a few resident Indians. However, he did make it to the Second Pan-Asiatic Conference in Shanghai in 1927. However, he narrowly dodged a British search party with a warrant for his arrest, and was thereafter 'more carefully guarded than a treasure'.[79] The *Japan Advertiser* published a long interview with him on 21 October 1927, and the *Osaka Mainichi* in Japan and the *China Press* in China followed his movements with interest.

The publicity surrounding Pratap, which almost exceeded that of the conference itself, fed the ongoing, behind-the-scenes British debate on the amount of harm Pratap could do, and whether things would be made worse by his arrest. On the one hand, Pratap seemed to be taken seriously in the Far East. That he had support among the Indian diaspora too, was evident: an illustrative example is the arrest of three illiterate migrant workers in their thirties from Hoshiarpur, who declared that Pratap had 'inspired confidence' that he could raise an insurrection with the help of Nepal, Afghanistan, and Russia.[80] On the other hand, British intelligence found comfort in reports that, 'Mahendra Pratap is receiving little encouragement from official circles in Japan'[81] and that the Afghan minister at Moscow regarded Pratap as a 'tiresome and unbalanced individual'.[82] The best evidence of conflicting reports comes from China, where Pratap interacted with both Chinese and Indians from various local organizations and set up an 'Asiatic Culture League' in Hankow, even though it was reported that the local Indians were traders who had little patience for 'Mahendra Pratap's vague and sentimental internationalist schemes'.[83] On balance, the British stood by their former conclusion that Mahendra Pratap's 'power for mischief has been steadily dwindling' and that his communications contained 'clear evidence of a certain softening of the brain'.[84]

The last remark probably referred to Pratap's newest mission. Around this time his plan to form a 'province of Pan-Asia' (which he alternatively called the 'Province of Buddha') is first encountered: 'I just want to see our Aryan [that is, South and Southeast Asia] developed into a free, powerful State, as a part of an autonomous Asia, in our World Federation. My services will go … to arouse the peoples of Aryan to carve out their destiny!'[85] His plans to further this end by organizing a Third Pan-Asiatic Conference in either Tehran or Kabul fell through for lack of interest in either place, but he was undeterred. The 'World Federation Movement' was born in 1929 with the start of his periodical of that name. Apparently, though, the softening of the brain was spreading, as Rashbehari Bose and prominent Pan-Asianists Imazato Juntaro, Shumei Okawa, and Yonezo Fujiwara, declared themselves directors of the Pan-Asiatic League alongside Pratap. They published their new venture in the Calcutta-based *New Forward*.[86] Pratap would spend the best part of the next decade working towards creating 'the province of Pan-Asia''. The next section is concerned

[79] Singh, *My Life Story*, 139. See also NAI, Home Political file 13 (1927), Colonel Holland to DIB, 29 December 1927.
[80] NAI, Home Political 235/II (1926) on the Sikh conspiracy.
[81] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/16 on Mahendra Pratap.
[82] NAI, Home Political 831/II (1926), on the activities of Mahendra Pratap.
[83] APAC, IOR, L/P&S/10/899 on Mahendra Pratap, 1926–1932, Shanghai intelligence.
[84] NAI, Home Political, 831/II (1926) Hodge for DIB, 21 November 1925.
[85] Singh, *My Life Story*, 143.
[86] WBSA, Police Files, 126/1929 n. 234/29 Confidential: Pan-Asiatic League.

with his ideas and their reception: his plans for achieving Pan-Asia, and the formation of an Asian army under Pan-Asian leadership.

Pan Asia, Province of Buddha

The first issue of *World Federation* provides a glimpse into Pratap's plans for Asia. He writes about the 'Eastern Oppressed People's Society' of Nanking, and lets his readers know that Sadhu Singh, an Indian in China, is involved in this cause, and that Pratap's own 'heart is in their midst'.[87] This idea in itself had some currency: through Pratap, Nehru too expressed interest in this society, and said that with some more information he would try and affiliate the organization to the Indian National Congress.[88] Pratap also published Rashbehari Bose's recommendations for the Indian National Congress in this issue, thus providing a platform for linking the Indian community in Japan, who maintained a local branch of the Indian National Congress, to India. He adds that 'Congress should kindly adopt the principle of the World Federation as its creed and agree to support the movement of Pan-Asia as a part of world federation'. Though never adopted, this was not as far-fetched a recommendation as it may seem at first sight—a world federation was a popular ideal at the time, and an important feature of transnational-nationalist contacts.[89]

There were several reasons why Pratap felt that a world federation, in any shape or form, should start in Asia. One was his conviction that all world religions had been born on that continent, that they were all inherently peaceful, and contained elements of Buddhism in some form or other.[90] The message of the Buddha was put forward once more as a potential unifier for all of Asia.[91] The watchwords were 'renunciation and service', a versatile phrase that could serve as an argument to include Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists as well as socialists. He consciously pitted his inclusive definition of Asia against anti-Westernism, which he considered too negative. In the November 1930 issue of *World Federation* he explains: 'The conception of a vague Asian unity has been brought about more by non-Asiatic endeavour than by the Asiatics themselves. … Many people having Asiatic consciousness well-nigh hate Europe and Europeans. We endeavour, however, to correct the attitude of Asiatics and Europeans to one another. We explain that all the peoples of Europe are the children of the early Asiatic colonizers who colonized the north-west peninsula of the old world'. In other words, Asia was to be a cradle once more.

[87] All quotations from *World Federation* are taken from the National Archives of India (New Delhi), Mahendra Pratap Private Papers, which holds microfilms of most of the *World Federation* issues.

[88] NAI, PPC, letter no. 15. Jawaharlal Nehru to Mahendra Pratap, 30 June 1928.

[89] Federationalist ideas were often joined to Pan-Asianist ones. The utopian goal of a world federation emphasized cooperation rather than East-West competition, and could arguably make Pan-Asianist ideas more palatable to Western audiences. Nehru, too, advocated a world federation in this manner. J. Nehru, *Toward Freedom: the Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York: John Day, 1941), 371–84.

[90] He considered 'renunciation and service' to be Buddhist values, but also 'the watch word of all ancient cultures of the East'. *World Federation*, January 1931.

[91] Here, too, Mahendra Pratap was not alone. Gandhi would later say that, 'India was Buddhist in reality. I would say the same thing to China and Japan. But for Asia to be not for Asia but the whole world it has to reclaim the message of Buddha and to deliver it to the world'. *Harijan*, 24 December 1938.

Asian army

By far the most difficult and most controversial of Pratap's Pan-Asian projects was the formation of an Asian army. Considering Pratap's espousal of Buddhist spiritual ideals, it is the hardest to reconcile with his other views. Furthermore, the idea of his Asian army had taken off at the Pan-Asiatic Conference at Dairen—then in the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo—in March 1934, which convinced all non-Japanese in Asia that it was not Pratap's brainchild at all, and that the Japanese just needed 'an Afghan' to propose this bellicose resolution. The choice of Asian army directors exacerbated the issue: they were all Japanese. The *China Press*, for one was puzzled: 'If this outline is regarded not as a work of the imagination of a broken-down adventurer and propagandist, but as one that has been carefully thought out by imperialistic dreamers, it may be read with great interest'.[92] The newspaper found it 'symptomatic of the megalomania that seems to afflict so many Japanese in all ranks of society today', but that does not suffice as an explanation—for how can a 'highly practical people like the Japanese really interest themselves in a movement so fantastic, so fatuous and futile as that of an Asiatic Army?'[93] British intelligence was even less generous: 'The manifesto, it will be observed, is signed amongst others by Pratap and its wording … reveals a very strong resemblance to the latter's usual dithyrambic style'.[94]

But Pratap did not see his Asian army as a purely Japanese project at all. His plan was to find a Pan-Asian directorate for his Pan-Asian Army, which celebrated the Asian landmass. It was to consist of 'one Manchu, one Mongol, one Tibetan and three Chinese'.[95] He speaks of a 'volunteer corps throughout Japan, Korea, Manchukuo, China, Tibet and Mongolia to unite these family members of one great cultural house'.[96] But then Pratap lost the crucial support of the Indian expatriates in China. In their eyes, this latest plan disqualified all his other ideas. As the *China Press* wrote in April 1934: 'The Indians in China are particularly bitter towards the so-called Raja Mahendra Pratap. … Pratap is accused specifically of deceiving his countrymen for the last 15 years by his occasional anti-British outbursts and patriotic phrases which concealed his real object of working for his Japanese masters'.[97] The Asian Army idea was spinning out of Pratap's control. He had willingly taken Japanese support, but was soon told by the Japanese general Kuniaki Koiso that 'the Japanese army would realize all the freedom necessary'.[98] Still, Pratap reports having enlisted over 300 volunteers for the Asiatic army, though even he seems to have doubted that number: 'Some of these names do not count for anything. They simply put down their names at our mere request. But on the other hand, many more are ardent supporters'.[99] Three 'recruiting centres' were opened at Tokyo, Dairen, and Tsingtao.[100]

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[92] 'Indian Puppet Continues Search for Supporters of Fantastic Golden Corps of Pan-Asianism', *China Press,* 18 March 1934.

[93] Ibid.

[94] APAC, IOR, L/P&S/103 on Mahendra Pratap. Dairen to Peking, 17 February 1934.

[95] Volunteer Call, reproduced in the *Japan Advertiser,* 21 October 1933.

[96] Ibid.

[97] 'Indian Puppet', *China Press,* 18 March 1934.

[98] Singh, *My Life Story*, 250.

[99] Ibid., 265.

[100] 'Recruiting centres' should not be interpreted as offices with personnel; the addresses are without exceptions the home addresses of Japanese volunteers.

After 1935, Pratap distanced himself from the idea of an actual Asian army. In his diary for that period, he implies that the word 'army' had been a bone of contention all along, but that it should not be taken literally: 'we work to humanize all walks of life. We hope to create new sense [sic] for the old barbarous terms'.[101] For Pratap, the Asian army ended here. He disengaged himself from the movement, claiming that his vision of the army as a purely 'moral force' had been abused. But his name remained attached to the idea, and by the Second World War, the *Peking Chronicle* for one had tied these earlier initiatives to the future core of the Indian National Army: 'In Indo-China there are about 6,000 Indians, 30,000 in Thailand and 60,000 in the Federated Malay States. Raja Mahendra Pratap is looking to these national groups in particular to form the native army which will finally overthrow British rule in India'.[102] However, the establishment of the Indian National Army was never part of Pratap's vision—his army was to be international, and composed of international leadership, a crucial point that was agreeable to neither the Japanese, nor to the later Indian National Army leadership. It is clear that over the course of the 1930s, Pratap's name had become linked to Japan more than to Afghanistan. As a consequence, his opportunities to forge strategic alliances throughout Asia had diminished. In order to understand how this happened, three interlinked questions need to be asked: how did he really see Japan's role in his project of unifying Asia? How did his travels contribute to a climate of collaboration? And in what way was Pratap useful to the Japanese?

First, Pratap was always quick to say that he was not one of those who believed Japan to be the only leader in Asia. Leadership was a question to be decided by 'all the lands of Asia', but, added Pratap, he preferred 'comradeship' as it was more fitting to the times: 'Let us all be co-workers for our common welfare … we can then all admire the great achievements of the Japanese people as we unhesitatingly pour out praises for the lovely scenes of these flower beds of the sea'.[103] His master plan for the 'Golden district' (the Far-Eastern district of the Pan-Asia he envisioned), was a board of 'enlightened human beings' from both Japan and China who would draw up a plan of mutual cooperation among the peoples of the Far East.[104] Moreover, he ultimately had faith in the good intentions of Japan, and the fact that 'Tokyo is rich in internationalism'.[105] This feeds into the second question. The internationalist circles in Japan, both inside and outside of the Indian community, kept Pratap in Japan for most of the 1930s and also encouraged his faith in Japan as the site from which Asian unity was to emerge. These internationalist circles will be examined in section 4.4. Furthermore, *World Federation* as a publication had an integrative function all of its own, with subscriptions high enough in the early 1930s to warrant both Urdu-Gurmukhi and Chinese-Japanese editions. It was the former, vernacular, edition in particular that led the British to finally ban the publication, which they had initially not seen as a threat.[106]

How was the entry of Indian revolutionary elements into Japanese Pan-Asianism received by the Japanese themselves? If the British intelligence records of the early 1930s are

[101] Singh, *My Life Story*, 268.
[102] 'Peoples of Asia Agree with Axis—Will Struggle for New Order', *Peking Chronicle*, 31 December 1941.
[103] *World Federation*, January–February 1936.
[104] *World Federation*, February 1933.
[105] *World Federation*, August 1937.
[106] NAI, Home Political 29/IV (1931), Issue of Notification under the Sea Customs Act.

to be believed, it would be easy to conclude that Japan regarded Pratap and his colleagues as a collection of overzealous incompetents who had no Japanese political backing.[107] But it has to be taken into account that, in the interest of good relations between Japan and Britain in the interwar period, the chances were slim that Japan would publicly support Indian seditionists on the Government of India's 'most wanted' list. Moreover, the critical attitude of Indian political leaders towards Japan's policy in China was a disappointment to the militarist school in Tokyo.[108] But actions speak louder than words, and from 1933 onwards Pratap was regularly paid to travel to Manchukuo and speak at Chinese schools about the blessings of Japan's leadership in Asia. His visits and his (inevitable) reports that the Pan-Asianist spirit in those parts was growing were widely publicized in Japan.[109] Pratap himself did not feel he was being used by the Japanese. Optimistic right to the brink of war, he felt the Japanese were helping him instead: 'I must confess that this hopeful spirit is especially created by the great victories of the Imperial Army and the Imperial Navy. … With the help of these victorious forces I can build our free Aryan in no time'.[110]

When war broke out, the province of Buddha no longer offered the possibilities it once had. Pratap's corresponding loss of faith in Japan is a notable break in his thinking. He now had to prevent his version of Asian unity from clashing with Japan's imperialist conception of a Pan-Asian union under Japanese leadership. But however ambiguous Mahendra Pratap had been about his plans for Asia in terms of the crucial points of armed struggle and future of Asian leadership, by the time war broke out it had become clear that his vision clashed with that of Japan's Greater East-Asia. As a result, he was forced to lead a quiet life in Japan during the war years and did not involve himself with the emerging plans for the Indian National Army—even though the idea was largely his. He spent most of his time alone, reminiscing in a *World Federation* with dwindling subscription numbers, revisiting the interwar years in which the great Asian landmass had still been a blank canvas with unlimited potential for sketching the unified continent of his dreams.

4.3 Shipping lanes: lascar internationalism

As the sections above have demonstrated, land routes connected Asianist centres as far apart as Moscow, Baku, Tashkent, Kashgar, and others. Travelling by these roads, rather than in the relatively enclosed and controlled environment of a ship, could help prevent detection. Pratap managed to evade arrest for most of his career as an exiled Asianist. However, it was also treacherous: many muhajirs did not survive the crossing of the Pamirs, and several who did survive had to brave the turmoil of civil war in Central Asia. The shipping lanes that connected the cosmopolitan port cities of Asia presented alternative ways of reaching revolutionary centres. Through them, both rooted and mobile communities stayed in touch

[107] NAI, Home Political 59/38 (1938), 15 December 1938. The British Ambassador at Tokyo received assurances that led him to conclude that 'Mahendra Pratap is more of a nuisance than a political embarrassment'.

[108] T. R. Sareen, *Indian Revolutionaries, Japan and British Imperialism* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1993), 44. Pratap's close relationship with Chinese revolutionaries and Indians in China were a cause for concern as well.

[109] *Japan Advertiser*, 21 October 1933; and 18 April 1934; *The Fukiu Times*, 5 March 1934.

[110] *World Federation*, press release of 12 December 1941. 'Aryan' meant the larger South Asian region.

with Asianist colleagues. These shipping lanes formed an important conduit in two ways: by moving texts, and by moving people. The omnipresence of Indian seamen on commercial vessels made it easier to move both.

As noted above, most of Mahendra Pratap publications were proscribed, and his communications were on interception lists from British surveillance. But given the itinerant nature of his activism, the circulation of his messages across Asia was vital to his project. The same holds true for rousing pamphlets such as Barkatullah's *Bolshevism and the Islamic Nations*, which was meant for all corners of Asia from Soviet Azerbaijan to Indonesia. Given the fact that Pan-Islamism and Communism were perceived by the British as two of the gravest threats to the British Empire, such pamphlets could not travel through ordinary channels. However, anyone caught carrying proscribed texts was liable to prosecution. How, then, did political texts written by exiled and expatriate Asianists travel between sites in Asia? Ingenious ways of smuggling texts through 'legal' channels did exist—one of the more notorious examples is Veer Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence 1857*, which was printed in the Netherlands, sent to France for distribution and finally sent to India with book jackets of European classics such as Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.[111] Most contraband, however, was moved by lascars.[112]

In studies of both labour and maritime history, lascars have been called 'forgotten seamen' and an 'invisible underclass'.[113] Though no longer represented in historiography as a group that was either denied agency or incapable of it, studies of the political activities of lascars are still few and far between.[114] The archive is partly responsible, as lascars' experiences rarely come to the historian unfiltered. Unlike prolific revolutionaries such as Pratap, few first-hand accounts of lascar political activism exist, and little is known of their activities outside of unionism, which had direct bearing on their industry.[115] In the volatile 1920s, the Government of India was likewise in the dark about lascar involvement in underground revolutionary networks. Lascars travelled under the radar, invisible (often

[111] V. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence—1857* (1909; repr. Bombay: Popular, 1960), original publisher's note.

[112] The term lascar is derived from Persian and originally referred to conscript labourers in army camps. It may also take the connotation of soldier. Not far removed from the derogatory term 'coolies', the term ceased to be used in the 1970s. It was used officially throughout the interwar period. C. Markovits, J. Pouchepadass, S. Subrahmanyam, eds., *Society and Circulation: Mobile Peoples and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750–1950* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 95. The term is used here for descriptive reasons; the seamen in this chapter used the term to refer to themselves.

[113] C. Dixon, 'Lascars: The Forgotten Seamen', in *The Working Men Who Got Wet: Proceedings of the Fourth Conference of the Atlantic Canada Shipping Project, July 24–July 26, 1980*, edited by R. Ommer and G. Panting, 265–81 (St. John's, Nfld.: Maritime History Group, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1980), 265.

[114] There are more studies about lascars in the age of revolution, particularly in the Atlantic, than in the twentieth century. See, among others, P. Linebaugh and M. Rediker, *The Many-headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); and most recently M. van Rossum, 'A "Moorish World" within the Company: The VOC, Maritime Logistics and Subaltern Networks of Asian Sailors', *Itinerario* 36:3 (2012): 39–60.

[115] With the notable exception of Dada Amir Haidar, *Chains to Lose: Life and Struggles of a Revolutionary* (Karachi: Pakistan Study Centre, 2007). The testimony of other lascars, including voice recordings, has recently been analysed by F. Roy, H. Liebau, and R. Ahuja, '*When the war began, we heard of several kings'—South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2011).

literally, for Indian lascars tended to work below deck), unidentified, their luggage rarely searched. As a group, they were attractive for those seeking to circulate texts, objects, or people between Asia, Europe and the US, or indeed, within Asia itself. To the British, they presented a dual threat: what they might carry, but also who they might be—for who was to say the man behind a lascar certificate was not a revolutionary who had taken his place?

The correct procedure for hiring a lascar was an ideal that had little bearing on reality. Officially, each prospective crew was inspected by the chief officer of the ship and the chief engineer, assisted by the deck and engine room serangs.[116] The names of the lascars were then registered in the ship's articles, a copy of which remained with the shipping master. Each lascar was to produce his continuous discharge certificate, on which the name of the ship was entered with the date of enlistment. This entry was signed by the shipping master and captain and stamped with the shipping master's stamp. In this way—theoretically—one might trace every lascar on his trips around the world. However, on September 1922, the Mercantile Marine Office at Manchester wrote to the Government of India:

> Sir, I attach certificates of discharges for the following lascar seamen: Omed Kazi no. 086046, and Abdool Hawk no. 062274. These men were engaged at Calcutta on May 7th last for a voyage in SS *Bloemfontein*. When the deck crew were being sent yesterday to the Asiatic Home, London, to await transfer to another vessel, the Serang reported to me that these men had failed to join at Calcutta and that the following seamen had taken their places: Abdool Cader Mudoo age 24 born Furridpore Calcutta; Abdool Rahomon Abdool Mojia age 16 born Calcutta. The matter had not been brought to the Master's attention and consequently the names of these two men did not appear on the agreement, neither were they in possession of certificates of discharge.[117]

Letters like these were a common occurrence in the world of mercantile shipping, and the attached handwritten note from the passport office stated that 'Once a revolutionary has left India disguised as a seaman, there is little satisfaction in punishing the Serang responsible'.[118] The fact was that any given crew had about a hundred lascars from ports all over India. Even after the crew had been enlisted, not all lascars might actually turn up for duty on the day the ship was set to sail—it then fell to the serang to supplement the crew with whomever he could find in port. The foremost responsibility of the serang was that the men chosen were fit for the work, not where they came from or what activities they engaged in while in the port. Moreover, who was to say a discharge book was actually a lascar's own? Some lascar certificates read like they were created for the very purpose of being interchangeable, with identifiers no more specific than 'man of colour' or 'head bald'.[119]

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[116] Serang was the term used in this period for a boatswain (supervisor); the serang's mate was called 'tindal'.

[117] MSA, Home Special 543(4)A of 1922 Bolshevism—Measures to prevent the surreptitious departure to continental countries of Indian revolutionaries disguised as seamen: Board of Trade, Mercantile Marine Office, Trafford Road, Salford, Manchester, 28 September 1923 to GOI.

[118] MSA, Home Special 543(4)A of 1922: Passport Office notes.

[119] Markers taken from: MSA, Home Special 543(4)A of 1922: Note on paragraph 3 of letter dated 4 October 1923 from the India Office to the Secretary of the Government of India Home Dept.

Networks and organization

When it came to revolutionary Asianism, the Tashkent circle was of great concern to the British. In terms of the circulation of literature, the Tashkent circle was reported to have developed a courier service. Nalini Gupta, an associate of M. N. Roy who was later charged in the Kanpur Conspiracy Case of 1924, was entrusted with a mission to the port of Calcutta to accomplish this in 1922. He claimed to be successful in organizing lascars to transport communist literature through the 'Sailors' Organization'.[120] Later that year, Roy attempted to post another of his associates in Bombay to do the same.[121] Apparently, he, too, was successful in his attempt, as by 1923, Bombay was reported to be the main site for the import of literature into India from European and Asian ports.[122] Karachi was an important secondary port, and it soon became clear that the literature smuggled into India was not limited to Roy's own propaganda, or Soviet propaganda from the circles around the University for the Toilers of the East, for that matter. In 1922, the *Awakening of Asia* was found on a lascar of the SS *Mandala* when it made port in Karachi.[123] This book was written by Henry Mayers Hyndman, published in New York in 1919 after a long fight with American censors, and immediately proscribed by the British when it was published.

Successful interceptions of literature from Chattopadhyaya's League against Imperialism headquarters in Berlin indicate that a similar network of lascars was used. Mention is made of a 'tall, large-sized, clean-shaven American Negro, aged bout 40 who speaks English well,' who went by the name of Samuel and plied the shipping line between Hamburg, India, and Singapore carrying literature from the League.[124] However, while the specially instituted 'rummaging staff' of the port authorities was occasionally successful, regular complaints of lack of manpower and the inability to effectively search full crews were frequent, and it must be assumed that much literature slipped through the nets.[125] Another measure implemented to first chart and then break the links in the chains of lascar organizations in port cities, was to prevent the flow of funds from the Indian Seamen's Union and the Lascar Welfare League.[126] The British government's assumption was that lascars would only traffic in proscribed literature when paid, and their profit motive was contrasted with the politically-motivated use of the lascar networks by outsiders. The possibility that

[120] The Indian Seamen's Association, which was active in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. On these and other unions, see G. Balachandran, 'Conflicts in the International Maritime Labour Market: British and Indian Seamen, Employers, and the State, 1890–1939', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 39:1 (2002): 71–100; and H. Goodall, 'Port Politics: Indian Seamen, Australian Unions and Indonesian Independence, 1945–47', in *Labour History* 94:2 (2008).

[121] Home Special Dept. 543(3) 1923 Note on the Third International; Activities directed towards India; Measures to prevent bolshevist agents, arms, literature and money from entering India: Memorandum.

[122] Home Special Dept. 543(3) 1923 Bolshevism: Home Department Special Notes, 1922–1923.

[123] MSA, Home Special Dept. 543(3) 1923 Bolshevism: Arms and ammunition and literature seized and detained in 1922 on reports made by the Appraising Department, Karachi Custom House.

[124] WBSA, 7/32 file 21/32 Visits of foreigners and suspicious subjects to India: Intelligence Bureau, Home Dept., New Delhi, 23 November 1932.

[125] MSA, Home Special Dept. 543(3) 1923 Bolshevism Steps taken, both at British and Native State Ports, to stop Socialist agents, arms, literature and money entering Bombay and Sind.

[126] MSA, Home Special File 543(18) E Pt. I, 1929–1933: List of organizations and societies.

lascars might be anti-colonial activists themselves was largely ignored. This gave politically active lascars an opportunity to hide behind colonial stereotypes that viewed them as illiterate and unconnected.[127]

But even if lascars themselves were not widely feared to be revolutionaries, the problem of actual revolutionaries posing as lascars had to be tackled. Shipping masters were instructed to hand over on arrival any seamen who appeared to be 'not of the ordinary lascar class'.[128] However, it was also noted that a thorough check of a full lascar crew was impossible in port for constraints of time, and a check on board after the ship had sailed might take even longer than the actual voyage and would thus be useless in terms of advance warning to the receiving ports in India. Moreover, even if such a check were possible, one still had to act on the assumption that people were sailing under their own name.

Sometimes, however, identity fraud was simply too obvious. The Bombay records flag two Indian lascars, Basanto Kumar Galgooli and Krishna Nidi Bey, who had enlisted in Glasgow and sailed from Liverpool to Bombay. Unable to perform any duties on board, the shipping master threatened to prosecute them. They pleaded for leniency, revealing that they were actually art students. They had gotten 'stranded' in Britain, and through the offices of the Asiatic Association in London, money had changed hands and they had secured passage on the ship. The trail ran cold there—in port, they disappeared before they could be apprehended.[129] Their story, though not inconceivable (the Glasgow School of Art was a renowned institution), was never confirmed. True or false, it demonstrates the usefulness of lascar networks and their potential as an alternative mode of travelling. This remained of concern to the British authorities throughout the 1920s. In 1926, two self-proclaimed revolutionaries were apprehended trying to sign on as lascars in London; two others succeeded in doing so and could not be arrested when they disembarked.[130]

As was the case with the self-described art students above, it was through lascar boarding houses as well as lascar labour unions that connections were made and solidarities expressed. It had also been the Asiatic Home in London, which had arranged for the switch that allowed the abovementioned 'Abdool Mudoo' and 'Abdool Mojia' to travel. The Union of Eastern Sailors, furthermore, coordinated propaganda activities through D. Medzhis, who was also the head of the Madras branch of the Communist Party of India.[131] These activities suggest that lascars should be regarded less as transmitters of political activism than as political activists themselves. If this possibility is taken into account, a different picture emerges in which the lascars' own transregional solidarities played an important role.

The abovementioned courier 'Samuel' is a case in point. He was not a lascar who supplemented his meagre income by ferrying literature across the ocean; he appears in the file as a regular visitor to the League's headquarters in Berlin and, as such, a revolutionary in his

[127] For an elaboration of this point, see Raza and Zachariah, 'To Take Arms across a Sea of Trouble', 19–38.
[128] MSA, Home Special 543(4)A of 1922: To the Passport Officer to Government, Bombay, 7 February 1924.
[129] MSA, Home Special 543(4)A of 1922 Commissioner of Police Bombay to Secretary to the Government of Bombay, 31 October 1923.
[130] MSA, Home Special 543(4)A of 1922 Commissioner of Police Bombay to Secretary to the Government of Bombay, 9 December 1926.
[131] WBSA, Police Files 106/1925; file 87/25 Dissemination of Bolshevik Propaganda through Eastern Sailors (1925).

own right.[132] In addition, seamen's unions were among the first to affiliate to larger bodies, such as the International Federation of Transport workers (ITF), an important platform to unite Asian sailors against discrimination by European-dominated unions.[133] This was perceived as a worrying development—intelligence officer J. Lawson, for example, wrote to the India Office in 1925 that Indian and Arab seamen conferred together on political matters.[134] Two examples of transregional solidarities in which lascars were at the forefront of developments stand out: the domination of sailors' unions in the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, and a decade later, the wartime boycott by Indian lascars of Dutch ships in Australian waters (discussed below).

Strong translocal solidarities had emerged in the context of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS) treated in chapter 2. Whereas the inaugural congress at Hankou had primarily made overtures towards the All-India Trade Union Secretariat and to Red International of Labour Union affiliates, seamen's unions had also taken a prominent part in the proceedings. Early on, a pamphlet had circulated amongst crews that 'there were no foreigners among seamen' and that the Asian seamen had a responsibility 'to help workers from the Asian seaboard to free themselves from … the exploitation of their masters'.[135] The pamphlet concluded with the rallying cry was that 'we must serve as conductors of the revolutionary movement traveling from one shore to the other. We must help our more backward comrades in Asia attain the front ranks'.[136] By 1928, it was through the PPTUS that concerted action by 'coloured seamen' was coordinated.[137]

The boycott during the Indonesian revolution presents a similar picture: on 23 September 1945, a lascar union call went out to halt Dutch shipping in Sydney. Indian seamen met with Indonesian activists to pledge their support.[138] At the meeting, it was said that 'the unity of our people, the people of two important countries, must ensure our ultimate emancipation'.[139] The boycott was jumpstarted when Australian, Indonesian, and Indian unionists worked together to forcibly free a crew of lascars who were made to load Dutch ammunition bound for Indonesia onto a ship in the North Sydney docks. In October alone, two hundred Indian seamen walked off ship and a thousand more had adopted a non-cooperative strategy, staying on but refusing to work with materials bound for the Netherlands Indies.

Both examples belie the lascars' reputation as a 'docile' or 'unintelligent' class.[140] As

[132] WBSA, 7/32 file 21/32 Visits of foreigners and suspicious subjects to India: Intelligence Bureau, Home Dept., New Delhi, 23 November 1932.
[133] Van Rossum, *Hand aan Hand*, 117–35.
[134] Balachandran, 'Conflicts in the International Maritime Labour Market', 86.
[135] *La Presse Revolutionaire*, quoted in Fowler, 'From East to West and West to East', 99.
[136] Fowler, 'From East to West and West to East', 100.
[137] *International Press Correspondence*, 18 January 1929, 63.
[138] Goodall, 'Port Politics', 28. See also: J. Martinez, 'Coolies to Comrades: Internationalism between Australian and Asian Seamen', in *Labour and Community: Historical Essays*, edited by R. Markey, 295–312 (Wollongong: University of Wollongong Press, 2001).
[139] Quoted in Goodall, 'Port Politics', 30.
[140] See, for example, J. P. Jones, 'Lascars in the Port of London', *PLA Monthly* (February 1931); G. E. Mitton, *Peeps at Great Steamship Lines—The Peninsular and Oriental* (London: A. and C. Black, 1913), 58; MSA,

crucial transmitters between activists in ports around the world, they could link Asianist sites when official routes were closed or legal means of transportation not feasible. Port authorities were on the lookout for the move of funds between the PPTUS and the various lascar welfare leagues and unions.[141] But by and large, the British intelligence services failed to acknowledge that transregional solidarities were also to be found among lascars themselves. Colonial stereotyping of lascars as a class made it hard to acknowledge their agency as actors rather than transmitters in internationalist and Asianist projects. This made cosmopolitan port cities across Asia into key sites where Asianist projects developed and from which these expanded to include secondary and non-elite groups.

Finally, it must be remarked that the record left by those who travelled as regular passengers could be equally puzzling. The case of a T. K. Roy, interviewed upon disembarkation at Dhanuskodi port in 1929, is illustrative. The report suggests that this self-described 'student' had been in touch with Asianist groups at least once, but was not forthcoming with concrete information. It is impossible to tell from the interview whether he was uninterested in the revolutionaries he had encountered, or whether he merely pretended to be uninterested to appease his interviewers or to escape prosecution.

> From the trend of his talk it would appear that Roy is rather disaffected with the British administration of India. He further said he happened to see Raja Mahendra Pratap in company with one Chatterjee at the Indian (Hindustan) Association in Berlin about a month ago. … Roy learnt that these two individuals were exiles having been forbidden by the Government of India from entering India. This Chatterjee is reported to be connected with the Pacifist movement which draws together the Subject Countries and Minor States in an alliance against the great powers. Roy says the movement indirectly fights against Imperialism. These two exiles met the Indian students at the association in connection with a tea party. … Roy was not much impressed by the personality of Mahendra Pratap, but learnt that this exile has been fomenting trouble against the British in China and Afghanistan. T. K. Roy's luggage was searched by the Customs but nothing incriminating was found.[142]

Such reports demonstrate that ships, too, offered a mode of travel that was difficult to control, and which offered ample opportunity for revolutionaries to travel between Asianist sites. In 1912, Rashbehari Bose, one of India's most wanted revolutionaries, had sailed to Japan on a regular ticket by pretending to be a nephew of Rabindranath Tagore tasked with preparing the logistics of Tagore's impending tour of Asia.[143] Bose would later report 'there were only two first-class Indian passengers on the steamer including myself, and on the police officer having enquired of the purser as to who and what I was, the latter told him that I was a distant relation of the Poet Tagore and going to Japan for study. This mightily pleased the European

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Home Special 543(4)A of 1922 Bolshevism Secretary Government of Bombay to Secretary Government of India Home Department, 8 August 1923.

[141] MSA, Home Special File 543(18) E Pt. I, 1929–1933: List of organizations.

[142] WBSA, Police Files, 44/1928, file 53/28: Indians returning from abroad at Dhanushkodi, 4 October 1929.

[143] WBSA, Police Files, '185/1925; file 108/25: 'Reminiscences of Rash Behari', from the Chandernagore-based paper 'Pravartak'.

police officer'.[144] Anand Mohan Sahay, an Indian revolutionary in Japan who likewise figures in the following pages, used lascars to carry letters to his contacts in Asia to prevent interception.[145]

4.4 Indian Asianists in Japan

The focus will now move to East Asian sites which were connected by sea, in particular Kobe and Tokyo. Local as well as itinerant Indian merchants, students and activists engaged in Pan-Asianist projects in collaboration with, and sometimes in opposition to, Japanese authority and civil society. The Pan-Asianism of Indian actors in Japan was exceptional in so far that it predated the First World War, making the October Revolution and the 'Wilsonian moment' less of a demarcation point than was the case with Asianist projects elsewhere. Harald Fischer-Tiné has argued that for specific sites including Tokyo, the watershed character of the First World War (argued by Akira Iriye, Prasenjit Duara, and others), stands in need of qualification.[146] Instead, the seminal moment was 1905. Japan's victory over Russia in this year provided an impetus to the nascent Pan-Asianist movement, and sparked a widespread belief in an Asian renaissance, with Japan representing a specific Asian modernity. Subsequent Indian international, anti-imperialist networks grew from 1905 to 1914, the decade of accelerated globalization.[147]

It has become almost commonplace to note the impact of the Russo-Japanese War. Nevertheless, the 1980s showed a historiographical debate, with a number of historians remarking that its importance to Indian activists had been overstated—it was really the Government of India celebrating the victory of its ally in the Far East.[148] The Anglo-Japanese alliance had been signed two years prior to the Russo-Japanese war. However, there is ample evidence to attest to the interest generated in India by Japan's victory, leading Tagore's friend C. F. Andrews to remark that 'even the remote villagers talked over the victories of Japan as they sat in their circles and passed round the *huqqa* at night'.[149] With the increase of Indian interests in Japan, travel to and settlement in Japan increased, with Japanese institutions of higher learning becoming an attractive alternative to those in the United States and Great Britain. Indian students in Japan formed the Oriental Young Men's association as early as 1900, to 'help oriental students in their career' and improve their contacts in Japan.[150] In 1903, there were thirteen Indian students registered in Japan. Within five years of the Russo-

[144] Ibid.

[145] NMML, Manuscript Division, Oral Transcripts, Anand Mohan Sahay, 7.

[146] H. Fischer-Tiné, 'Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces', 328. On 1918 as a 'moment', see A. Iriye, 'Beyond Imperialism: The New Internationalism', *Daedalus* 134:2 (2005): 108–16; P. Duara, 'The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism', *Journal of World History* 12:1 (2001): 99–130.

[147] On globalization preceding the First World War, C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 451.

[148] For this view, see P. A. Narasimha Murty, *India and Japan: Dimension of their Relations* (New Delhi, 1986), 28. For a dissenting view see, among others, T. R. Sareen, *Indian Revolutionaries, Japan and British Imperialism* (New Delhi: Anmol, 1993), 5.

[149] C. F. Andrews, *The Renaissance in India* (London, 1923), 4.

[150] Sareen, *Indian Revolutionaries, Japan and British Imperialism*, 8.

Japanese war, their number had grown to over a hundred.[151] There was a pre-existing mercantile community of Indians, concentrated in two regions close to major shipping ports: Yokohama and Tokyo on the one hand, and Kobe and Osaka on the other. But neither core was particularly active politically until the post-war internationalist moment ignited a series of Pan-Asianist projects with two agitators at the centre: Anand Mohan Sahay in Kobe and Rashbehari Bose in Tokyo.

It is argued here, that given these pre-existing ties, the Indian Asianist projects that evolved in Japan were actually marked by four decisive 'moments' in the opening decades of the twentieth century, of which 1905 was the first. There was increased Indian traffic to Japan on the wings of the post-war internationalist moment of 1918, and 1924 marked a receptive phase among the Japanese public during the closing years of the Taishō democracy (1912–26), accelerated by the establishment of the Pan-Asiatic Society. Finally, the shift in Japanese foreign policy during the Shōwa period and its withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933 had a strong impact on the nature of Pan-Asianist projects among Japan's Indian residents.

Kobe: Anand Mohan Sahay and the Indian National Congress branch in Japan

A full biography of Anand Mohan Sahay is yet to be written. What information on him exists is known primarily through his dictated memoirs, which were not recorded until 1981 and may have been embellished. These can be supplemented, and sometimes corrected, by the writings of other contemporary Indian activists as well as information recorded by journalists and by British Intelligence. By his own account, Sahay left India in 1923 in disappointment with the INC. He had decided to continue his studies abroad and return to the nationalist struggle later. Denied a passport for the United States, he sailed to Japan. He landed in Kobe without funds but with a recommendation letter by W. W. Pearson, a Santiniketan professor who had accompanied Tagore on his tour of Japan in 1917. Finding the local Indian mercantile community in Kobe largely uninterested in or unaware of the anti-imperialist struggle, Sahay decided to stay in Kobe and raise political awareness there. He started working in Indian firms to arouse their employees to take an interest in anti-imperialist politics and rented a room at the local YMCA, through which he could do the same with Japanese students.[152] As an important shipping port, Kobe was a convenient place for this kind of work: less than two years later, Sahay had become acquainted with Sun Yat-sen, who had just delivered his famous Greater Asianism speech in Japan and passed through Kobe on his way back to China.[153] Sahay and Sun were introduced by Rashbehari Bose, who would also introduce Sahay to Mahendra Pratap.

However, Sahay may have shaped this narrative of exile and revolutionary work abroad in hindsight. British intelligence records cast him in the role of informer in this period, which suggests that he might not have arrived in Japan quite the Asianist revolutionary he

[151] Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia*, 45.
[152] NMML, Oral Transcripts, Sahay, 3.
[153] For the speech and a short analysis, see Saaler and Spilzman, *Pan-Asianism*, 2:75–85.

later became.[154] The same contradiction is evident from his interactions with Bose, to whom he refers as both a 'close friend' and as someone completely out of touch with the Indian political situation and who spent his time comfortably at banquets with 'feudal politicians'.[155]

If Sahay was an informer during his first years in Japan, this changed in 1926, and the Indian Political Intelligence Office was slow on the uptake.[156] Subsequent to the Pan-Asiatic Conference at Nagasaki in July–August 1926, he organized a Pan-Asiatic Youth Conference with Bose and a group of Japanese politicians. The main outcome of the Youth Conference—in stark opposition to the main Nagasaki conference—was 'to organise the youth of enslaved Asian countries for revolt'.[157] Since Sahay held a passport that was valid throughout East Asia, he took it upon himself to start acquiring support for this revolt. He took pains to remain inconspicuous, erecting an import/export firm under the rather flimsy name of 'International Trades'. Collecting textile samples, he wrote to a variety of businesses throughout Asia to announce his arrival. In this way, he visited China (Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Canton), Malaya, Singapore, Sumatra, and Colombo.[158] He even managed to return to India briefly from Colombo, arriving in Calcutta in early 1927.

During his stay in Calcutta, he stayed aloof from INC politics, but did get married to Sati Devi, a niece of C. R. Das. Das's plans for establishing a Pan-Asian Federation have been treated in chapter 1. Interestingly, the only person in Calcutta he told about his Pan-Asianist project was Subhas Chandra Bose, who had been released from jail on the eve of the newlyweds' departure for Japan. Sahay returned to Japan via Singapore. When he disembarked at Singapore to give a speech to the Indian community there, British intelligence finally realized that Sahay had become a radical Asianist. Ironically, this was because another informer had been present at Sahay's speech. After a prolonged interrogation at the Police Commissioner's office, Sahay escaped to Japan on a French ship, his freedom intact but his cover blown, which was probably one of the reasons intelligence referred to him as 'suspect'.[159]

Back in Kobe, Sahay's status as an anti-imperialist and Asianist was no longer ambiguous: he started a Japanese branch of the INC, the opening meeting of which was attended by, among others, the well-known Burmese anti-imperialist Paw Tun Aung. Paw Tun Aung would also represent the INC at Sun Yat-sen's funeral in 1929. Seen through the lens of the Japan branch of the INC, the developing break between Japanese support for Asian cooperation and the developing militarist school of Shōwa Japan becomes clear. In establishing the INC, with its connotations of nonviolent struggle, Sahay received no official support. Undeterred, Sahay provided the INC with an official organ, *Voice of India*, which quickly became popular among Japanese university students, and was viewed by the

[154] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/36: Indian National Congress in Japan. Secret note from the Tokyo embassy, 8 January 1928. This is an unusual document and may have been an oversight, as the British IPI documents were usually very careful to protect the informers' identities.
[155] NMML, Oral Transcripts, Sahay, 3.
[156] They did not suspect him of having 'turned' until 1928.
[157] NMML, Oral Transcripts, Sahay, 4.
[158] NMML, Oral Transcripts, Sahay, 5.
[159] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/36: Indian National Congress in Japan. Secret note from the Tokyo embassy, 8 January 1928.

Government of India as a Pan-Asianist periodical that heralded Japan as the liberator of Asia and advocated concerted Asian action.[160]

In order to please the Japanese authorities, Sahay carefully downplayed the INC's commitment to nonviolence. He intensified his contacts with Rashbehari Bose, attended banquets with Japanese military officers, and circulated photos of himself in military uniform.[161] His rapprochement to Japanese authorities paid off: a number of new Indo-Japanese associations emerged, for which Sahay took partial credit.[162] The trade rivalry between Britain and Japan provided a further impetus for Indo-Japanese cooperation. It also hurt the Indian merchants in Japan, who, after years of residency, decided to put their faith in Japan rather than Britain. Indians in Shanghai and Hong Kong also indicated their interest, and support for the liberation of Asia by Japan grew into a larger network of Indians in East Asia. However, as this network became implicated in Japan's expansionist policies, its connection to India weakened. As noted, Indian public opinion turned against Japan, and Nehru notified Sahay in 1935 that his branch could no longer use the INC name.[163]

Finally, during the late 1930s, Sahay was paid by the Japanese government to tour Asia, including Japanese-occupied territories, to create a support base for Japan's Greater India vision under the banner of an 'Indian appeal' to Asia. On the eve of the Second World War, he stated:

> If China and Japan had spent the same amount in consolidating their united strength of the real enemy and exploiters of we all the oppressed peoples of the East, our peoples of all lands would be much happier. … Time has come when all the Asiatics must give up our internal conflicts and quarrels and work hand in hand for the emancipation of us all from foreign domination and exploitation. I have no doubt you will accept the leadership of your great benefactor Mr Wang Ching Wei and will work for peace, progress, and prosperity of China and the rest of Asia. … Time is opportune for the unity of Asiatic peoples. Let us forget the past. Let us create a New Asia of which we all may be rightly proud.[164]

Interestingly, Sahay's visions of Asia's renaissance, which he published in English and Japanese, owed less to Japan's vision of Greater East Asia than to the internationalist enthusiasm of the interwar period. Positioning himself somewhere between Tagore's spiritual Asianism and Pratap's vision of world peace through Asian unification, he writes:

> Peoples in the East need not wait for a guidance or initiative from the outside world. The Orient has to act irrespective of what others think of doing. It is as much

[160] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/366: INC in Japan 1928–1935. Dispatch, 26 October 1932; NMML, Oral Transcripts, Sahay, 6.
[161] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/366: INC in Japan 1928–1935. List of Revolutionaries in Japan, 1933.
[162] NMML, Oral Transcripts, Sahay, 7.
[163] NMML, Oral Transcripts, Sahay, 7.
[164] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/502; AM Sahay 1936–1940. Secret transcript of Sahay's speech in China. Wang Jingwei (1883-1944) was a close associate of Sun Yat-sen and present at the latter's Greater Asianism speech in Japan in 1924.

> necessary for the regeneration of Asia as for the peace and progress of the world at large. We must realize that the East has a mission to fulfil in this world full of miseries and madness. Although the materialist civilization of the West has given the world many useful and beneficial things it has failed miserably to make the world happy and peaceful. That capacity to make the world once again a happy and peaceful abode for humanity the Orient will give, to give birth to [sic] a new Culture suitable for the present world, based on the high ideals of the East.[165]

Tokyo: Rashbehari Bose and Pan-Asian agitation

Unlike Sahay, Rashbehari Bose (1886–1945) had no political roots in the Non-cooperation movement in India. Quite the opposite, he had become involved in violent revolutionary circles first in Bengal in the early 1900s, and was later implicated in the failed assassination attempt on Viceroy Lord Hardinge in 1912.[166] The outbreak of the First World War offered him the possibility of setting up a network throughout Asia for his revolutionary activities, the main purpose of which would be smuggling arms into India to trigger a rebellion against the British. The plan failed, partly due to the arrest of E. F. E. Douwes Dekker (an Indo-Dutch relative of the writer Eduard Douwes Dekker, or Multatuli), who had come into contact with Krishnavarma and other Indian revolutionaries during his exile in Europe. Dispatched to Java to arrange arms shipments from there, he travelled via the Ghadr group in California, but was apprehended in China and return to India, where he divulged the plans in court.[167]

With a strong case being built against him in India, Bose was forced to flee and travelled to Japan under the guise of P. N. Tagore, posing as Tagore's nephew with the cover of sailing well ahead of the poet himself to prearrange the latter's talks and accommodation in Japan.[168] He landed in Kobe and proceeded to Tokyo, where he organized a fiercely anti-British meeting with Pan-Asianist writer and Indologist Shumei Okawa. Lala Lajpat Rai and Heramba Lal Gupta of the Ghadr Party in the United States also attended. The meeting was cause for the British to press for the deportation of all Indian revolutionaries from Japan under the terms of the Indo-Japanese alliance.[169] The Japanese authorities complied, but Japanese civil society did not: the next morning, Toyama Mitsuru, a Pan-Asianist and right-wing politician from an old Samurai family active in the reactionary Black Dragon Society, provided shelter to Bose and Gupta.[170] Lajpat Rai, by this time, had already left for the United States,[171] and Gupta soon followed. Bose, however, after a prolonged period of hiding got

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[165] A. M. Sahay, *India* (Tokyo: Modern Nippon Sha, 1939), 102.

[166] Among others, J. G. Oshawa, *The Two Great Indians in Japan: Shri Rash Behari Bose and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose* (Calcutta: Kusa Publications, 1954), 1–4.

[167] 'Daus Dekkar' in Indian sources. Van der Veur, *The Lion and the Gadfly*, 314–53; Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, 135–44.

[168] WBSA, 185/1925; file 108/25 Printing articles relating to the reminiscences of revolutionists which have appeared in the press. Article from *Bangabani* (Calcutta).

[169] Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, 149.

[170] The Black Dragon Society, among other things, ran an espionage school and pressured the Japanese government for a strong Pan-Asianist foreign policy. They supported foreign Asianist activists such as Sun Yat-sen and Rashbehari Bose financially. The society's already shadowy image has since deteriorated through an appearance as the villains in the James Bond film *You Only Live Twice.*

[171] Oshawa, *The Two Great Indians in Japan*, 6.

married to Tosiko Soma, the daughter of Kokkoh Soma, author of *Awakening of Asia.* Bose had met the Somas through Toyama, and he became a naturalized Japanese in 1923.[172] Much indebted to Toyama, Bose's Pan-Asian activities expanded. He became involved with the *Zen Ajia Kyokai* (Pan-Asiatic Society, sometimes referred to as the All-Asia Society), which organized the 1926 Pan-Asiatic Conference in Nagasaki.

There is much confusion in the historiography of this conference and about its importance. Sven Saaler gives three conferences organized under the auspices of the Pan-Asiatic Society in the 1920s: Nagasaki (1926), Shanghai (1927) and Kabul (1928). The Kabul conference, however, never took place, as has been mentioned in section 4.2.[173] The importance of these conferences to India has likewise been overstated. For instance, it is mentioned that the Nagasaki conference sent letters of 'commendation' to individuals who had demonstrated their dedication to the cause of Asia, including Nehru and Gandhi.[174] However, the individuals in question had been contacted beforehand but declined to attend. Gandhi replied:

> Whilst doing whatever I can to promote brotherly feelings amongst all the different nations, I am chary of belonging to any association which I do not know intimately. An Asiatic Federation will be a federation of one physically strong race and other physically weak races. Much though there is to admire in the Japanese progress, you will pardon me for saying that I am not enamoured of it. I am engaged in demonstrating that it is possible to overcome the excesses of physical strength by matching against it, if such a conjunction of ideas is permissible, spiritual strength. You will, therefore, excuse me for not joining your movement.[175]

However, the Nagasaki conference was important in other ways. Firstly, it helped cement Indian expatriate revolutionaries' connections to their Asian counterparts among the approximately 100 attendees. The Indians represented the third largest group: of the thirty-five official delegates, seven were Indian—or eight, if one includes Mahendra Pratap as an 'Afghan' delegate.[176] Apart from Anand Mohan Sahay and Rashbehari Bose, the two most important Indian participants were Kesho Ram Sabarwal and Vidya Dari Bhakshi.[177] Both were connected to Bose and the Black Dragon Society, and both contributed to *The Asian Review*, a journal connected with the Society.[178] Sabarwal had experience in circulating Asianist propaganda; as a Ghadrite he had set up a press for revolutionary literature.[179] He

[172] Ibid., 21.

[173] S. Saaler, 'The Pan-Asiatic Society and the "Conference of Asian Peoples" in Nagasaki, 1926', in *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History*, edited by Saaler and Szpilman, 2:97–105; 97.

[174] Saaler, 'The Pan-Asiatic Society', 99.

[175] 'Letter to the Pan-Asiatic Society, Peking', *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 31 (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Publications Division, 1969), 223–4.

[176] Who, however, did not manage to attend the conference, as has been mentioned in section 4.2.

[177] With thanks to Torsten Weber, who alerted me to a 'Bikushi' in Japanese sources with regard to the Nagasaki conference.

[178] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/157 Indians in Japan: memorandum regarding Japanese co-operation with Indian revolutionary agitators: G. Eliot of British Embassy Tokyo to Foreign Office, 1 February 1923.

[179] NAI, Home Department, DIB, The Ghadr Directory, Government of India 1934.

later created his own Asianist momentum as an editor for the *Japan Times*, publishing articles on Asianism as well as articles on India.[180]

The conference also marked an important phase in Pan-Asianism in East Asia: it was held in open defiance of the government's official policy, which was to refrain from Pan-Asian projects for fear of antagonizing its allies. This is significant, for it reflects a growing support base among Japanese civil society for a future Pan-Asian alliance. Several well-known Pan-Asian societies sent delegates to the conference. Although at Nagasaki 'Asian solidarity' was the watchword, this helped lay the groundwork for the shift from Japanese *solidarity* with Asia to Japanese *leadership* of Asia. In this sense, the conference must be regarded as a stepping stone towards the militarist Pan-Asianism of the 1930s.[181]

But outwardly, the conference was fully committed to bringing about an Asian renaissance, marked by Asian solidarity and cooperation. The ambitious plans that emerged from the conference reflect the unbridled optimism of interwar international associational life. Among the conference's resolutions were the formation of an Asian League, an Asian university, and the desirability of an Asian language.[182] All three would resurface at the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 described below in chapter 5. Rashbehari Bose's own speech was a testament to these sentiments:

> For thousands of years, the Easterners were a very superior people in civilization, spiritually and materially. … The Union we are now going to establish is to shape a new form of our Eastern civilization. Its basis is on the pure faith and love for Asia. Let us unite and do our best to establish this union at all cost and let us make a big contribution to the happiness of all humanity.[183]

The history of Rashbehari Bose's Pan-Asianist activities in Japan after 1933 remains to be written. The existing literature jumps from the 1920s to his involvement in the Indian National Army in the Second World War.[184] However, Bose remained active in Asianist circles throughout the 1930s. As Çemil Aydin has demonstrated, the liberal and conservative camps in Japan were not as divided on the issue of Pan-Asianism as is often thought—only their motives were different.[185] The fact that Pan-Asianism had become mainstream in the Japanese public sphere by 1933 meant that Bose could count on increased support from the Indian community resident in Tokyo.

In 1933, Bose started an Asia Lodge for Indian students in Japan, which the British suspected was heavily subsidized by Japanese authorities. Students could live there practically rent-free, and several students chose to do so. One of them was Dhyaneshwar Deshpande,

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[180] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/480 Indians in Japan: memorandum on the attitude of Indians and Japanese in Kobe Consular District, 1934.

[181] Even at the time of the conference, scepticism as to Japan's intentions did exist, especially among Korean and Chinese delegates. For a breakdown of the negative critiques, see Saaler and Szpilman, *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History*, 1:101–2.

[182] Saaler and Szpilman, *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History*, 1:199.

[183] Oshawa, *The Two Great Indians in Japan*, 27–8.

[184] With the exception of E. Hotta, 'Rash Behari Bose and his Japanese Supporters', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 8:1 (2006): 116–32: 120–1.

[185] Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism*, 161–5.

who had moved to Japan to study jiu-jitsu. After staying at the Asia Lodge, he found a job as an editor at *The Japan Advertiser* and decided to stay.[186] Perhaps the Lodge's most remarkable resident was A. M. Appan, an ardent internationalist who had intended to bicycle around the world before retiring his bicycle and settling in Tokyo.[187]

In the meantime, Bose lectured throughout Japan, much as Anand Mohan Sahay and Mahendra Pratap had. However, they were not the only ones. Lesser known figures such as A. M. Nair, another Indian student in Tokyo, were paid by the Japanese authorities to do the same. Yet another, K. B. Sinha, established an Indian Information Bureau spreading propaganda on the importance of Indian independence for a free Asia.[188] As Bose formulated this in one of his lectures:

> The sufferings and sacrifices of the people of India have a deep and poignant significance for the peoples of Asia. We wish Asia to be healthy and whole, and to have no diseased spots on her fair body where white parasites may gather. Asia should be healthy and free; every European and American colony in Asia is a leprous spot. She must awake, gather help and strength and so be fit to press forward in the building up of her own beautiful civilization. That is the meaning of the Indian revolution for India, and that is the meaning of the Indian revolution for Asia as well![189]

Bose wrote prolifically, starting a periodical by the name of *New Asia*, 'for the complete independence of India, Asia and Humanity', which, at a subscription rate of one yen per year, was intended to appeal specifically to students.[190] This was reason for the Government of India to interdict any 'matter published, written or composed' by Rashbehari Bose in July 1933.[191] In 1934, he became one of the directors of the Pan-Asiatic League. It is interesting, given the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the establishment of Manchukuo in early 1932, that the constitution of this League is still phrased in the idiom of Asian solidarity and cooperation. Although no documentation survives on who wrote it, it is likely that Bose was responsible for its references to India. The constitution cautioned that 'Japan must not make the mistake of the Europeans and exploit Asia, with the results seen in India today'. Instead, Japan should 'put morality and culture first. Without this, a League of Asiatic Peoples is impossible'.[192]

However much Rashbehari Bose may have attempted to influence the new expansionist turn in Japanese foreign policy, his position became untenable as the Second World War drew near and the Indian Independence League and Indian National Army (INA)

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[186] NAI, Home Political 1935 file 1/6 Indian Community in Tokyo: Enclosure to Tokyo dispatch, 19 March 1935.

[187] APAC, IOR, P&J/12/480 Indians in Japan, 1934. Memorandum on the attitude of Indians and Japanese in Kobe Consular District, 1934.

[188] APAC, IOR, P&J/12/366: INC in Japan 1928–1935. Dispatch British Embassy, Tokyo, 18 January 1933.

[189] APAC, IOR, P&J/12/163 Rashbehari Bose. Summary of lecture given by Bose on 6 June 1932.

[190] APAC, IOR, P&J/12/163 Rashbehari Bose. British Embassy Tokyo, 31 May 1933.

[191] NAI, Central Board of Revenue, Customs Duties Branch, 1938 file no 536/cus. I/38. Proscribed publications—Publication entitled 'New Asia' by Rashbehari Bose.

[192] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/158 Far Eastern Department: Japan, the Pan-Asiatic Movement: Great Asiatic Society and the policy of Pan-Asianism, 22 February 1934.

became a reality. The history of the short-lived INA, the subsequent INA trials in New Delhi, and their influence on India's attainment of independence have been thoroughly described elsewhere and need not be reiterated here.[193] It itself, the INA was devoted to India's liberation from the British, and is not viewed as a Pan-Asian project here. However, what deserves more recognition than has so far been the case is the extent to which the INA was indebted to the Asian networks forged by Indian expatriate revolutionaries in the interwar period. There is more to this than the continuity of INA leadership in the form of Anand Mohan Sahay and Rashbehari Bose. When the active recruiting for the INA began in Singapore, Thailand, Malaya, and Burma, the Indians at these sites were already connected. Early on, they had read the same literature when Baba Osman Khan distributed Ghadar pamphlets throughout China, Japan, Java, Sumatra, Burma, and Malaya.[194] Bangkok, the site of the Indian Independence League Conference, had been the nucleus of a revolutionary network through the Bharat Culture Lodge started by Satyananda Puri, a student of Rabindranath Tagore.[195] Such networks were maintained and enlarged by events such as the Nagasaki Conference, and the travels and activities of Sahay and others in Southeast Asia.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with the activities of itinerant Asianists who were active in, and travelled between, key sites in Asia. Two revolutionary routes, which represent different Asianist agendas and concerns, have been examined. In Central Asia, the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution had provided opportunities for anti-imperialism in an Asian inflection. Revolutionaries such as Barkatullah, M. P. T. Acharya, Abani Mukherjee and Abdur Rab, were instrumental in formulating a revolutionary idiom that drew on both communism and Pan-Islamism, which could count on a considerable audience. Their numbers were augmented by the arrival of the muhajirs, many of whom remained in Central Asia when their attempts to reach Turkey were thwarted. The Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku and the *Indusky Kurs* in Tashkent were key sites where this particular formulation of Asianist solidarity was developed further. Both routes eventually led to Moscow, where the University of the Toilers of the East provided both revolutionary training and a meeting ground for Asian anti-imperialist activists.

A very different Asianist trajectory was presented by commercial shipping routes, which provided opportunities for both texts and people to travel between the cosmopolitan port cities of Asia. There, the Asianist message could also count on a receptive audience. The Indian communities in the port areas of Kobe and Tokyo were catalysts in Pan-Asianist projects which spread outwards to the ports of Singapore and Bangkok. These projects were

[193] Most recently: S. Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); S. Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); W. F. Kuracina, 'Sentiments and Patriotism: The Indian National Army, General Elections and the Congress' Appropriation of the INA Legacy', *Modern Asian Studies* 44: 4 (2010): 817–56.

[194] K. Singh Giani, *Indian Independence Movement in East Asia: The Most Authentic Account of the INA and the Azad Hind Government compiled from the original office records* (Lahore: Singh Brothers, 1947), 16.

[195] K. Singh Giani, *Indian Independence Movement in East Asia*, 16.

focused on the opportunities created by Pan-Asianism as it developed in Japan, although their relationship with Japanese Pan-Asianism was fraught. These two circuits were connected by revolutionaries who travelled between these Asianist sites by land and by sea. It is important to note in this regard, that lascars not only acted as transmitters of information, but also engaged in anti-imperialist activism themselves. The itinerant lives of Asianists such as Mahendra Pratap, finally, demonstrate the versatility of Asianism as a rallying point for anti-imperialist groups of different ideological and religious persuasions.

Pratap, Anand Mohan Sahay, Rashbehari Bose, and their Indian colleagues continued to cooperate with Japan even after Indian public opinion had turned against Japan as an example of Asian modernity, and against Japanese formulations of Pan-Asianism in particular. Nevertheless, after independence, many exiled revolutionaries were welcomed back as anti-imperialists who had contributed to the struggle for independence in their own way. Although far removed, both physically and mentally, from the Gandhian moment in India, as the case of Pratap demonstrates their Asianist activism found a place in public memory.

Pratap stayed in Japan throughout the war, and was briefly at the notorious Sugamo prison during the American occupation of Japan as a consequence. He was later allowed to return to India, where he was received with all the enthusiasm due a true patriot.[196] This was part of a larger context in which exiled revolutionaries were welcomed back—regardless of their politics—in recognition of their personal sacrifices and as 'forgotten men' of the struggle for independence.[197] This was most evident at the All-India Old Revolutionaries' Conference, held in New Delhi on 13 and 14 December 1958, in which three hundred revolutionaries took part. Bhupendranath Dutta, the younger brother of Swami Vivekananda and president of the Old Revolutionaries' Conference, proposed in his opening speech that the revolutionaries had extended the struggle to foreign countries and that therein lay their contribution.[198] India's President Rajendra Prasad was a little less generous, but still sent a message to the Old Revolutionaries' Conference that though the nation was wedded to nonviolence, 'the contribution of the revolutionaries to the movement for independence was no less valuable'.[199] Prime Minister Nehru, finally, entertained all the delegates at tea. But there were dissenting voices. Some of the delegates were still quite vocal in their dislike of Gandhian thought, even to the press; and Pratap, who took an active part in the proceedings, made a public speech in front of the Jama Masjid criticizing the Nehruvian government and reiterating once more his plans for world federation. If the world had changed, Pratap had not. Dismissing 'pious sermons of nationalism' and democracy, as well as Nehru's Afro-Asian regionalism, he called upon the government and the people to finally realize a federated

[196] Petitions to allow Pratap to return to India had been made as early as 1938 by his supporters, notably members of the All-India Jat Mahasabha. NAI, Home Political, 59/38 (1938), Representations for the Grant of Permission to Mahendra Pratap to Return to India.

[197] Editorial, *Sunday Statesman*, 14 December 1958, 3.

[198] ZMO, Horst Krüger Nachlass, Box 34 file 256–1. Booklet, *All-India Old Revolutionaries Conference Address, by Dr Bhupendranath Dutta* (1958).

[199] *The Sunday Standard*, 14 December 1958, 1.

'Aryan' as a province of Asia in a federated world.[200]

Pratap served as a member of parliament from 1957 to 1962. Having survived years of travel, prison cells, armed skirmishes, fevers, and even typhoid, he finally died at home in India at the ripe age of ninety-three. He had developed a spiritually charged conception of Asian unity in which a federated Asia would in time become part of a federated world. His thought may be regarded as an intricate patchwork of internationalist ideas circulating in the interwar period, some of which were so contradictory that within the space of fifteen years he was both nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize and interned on charges of war crimes.[201] However quixotic his plans may have been, the alliances he forged to execute them were very real. He tailored his propaganda to fit Islamists in Kabul and communists in Moscow. He certainly lived his idea of a Pan-Asia through his travels, demonstrating the connectedness of the continent by showing that no part of Asia was so remote that it could not be reached by train, camel, motorcar, or donkey. His exploration of the relationship between the local, the regional, and the global, was one of the myriad ways in which the legitimacy of the world order was challenged in the interwar period.

[200] ZMO, Horst Krüger Nachlass, Box 34 file 256–1. Booklet, *Challenge by Raja Mahendra Pratap M. P. Aryan Peshwa* (1958). See also points 14–16 of the pamphlet *Federal Party* of the same year. The vernacular *Hindi Hindustan* was the only newspaper to still respond somewhat positively to Pratap's federationalist programme in their 28 June 1958 issue.

[201] Pratap was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize by N. A. Nilsson, a Swedish board member of the International Peace Bureau, in 1932. The nomination mentions his mission to the Dalai Lama.

5. Post-war Asianism

5.1 The Asian Relations Conference in the post-war world
5.2 Asian development
5.3 Asian cultural unity
5.4 Towards an Asian federation?
5.5 The road to Bandung
5.6 Conclusion

5.1 The Asian Relations Conference in the post-war world

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the only remaining certainty was that everything would change.[1] With some Asian nations on the brink of independence and others nursing their war wounds, locked in civil war, or occupied by a foreign power, the post-war map of Asia was not at all self-evident. And as India's trajectory towards independence became clearer towards the latter half of 1945, the view that the era of colonialism was drawing to a close was widely if not universally shared in Asia. Nehru voiced the thoughts of many in a long article in the *New York Times Magazine* in early 1946, with the unambiguous title 'Colonialism Must Go'.

> It is evident that the dependent peoples of the colonial empires are in a rebellious mood and cannot be suppressed for long, and every attempt to suppress them is a drain on the ruling country which weakens it. It is even more evident that the old-style empires are decadent as empires and show signs of cracking up. In some instances, indeed, they have cracked up and the attempts that are being made to pin together the broken pieces show a lack of wisdom and statesmanship which is amazing. One decadent empire tries to help another still more ramshackle empire and speeds up the process of its own dissolution.[2]

Viewing colonialism as the source of conflict and war, Nehru contended that the matter of Asia's future was both complicated and simple; complicated, because 'it is not an easy matter to refashion the destiny of hundreds of millions of people'—but simple, for the obvious start was 'a clear renunciation of colonialism and imperialism, and recognition of the national independence of the dependent countries within the larger framework of the emerging world order'.[3] The latter remark referred to the San Francisco Conference at which the United Nations was established, and to which India had been invited to send a delegation, led by Nehru's sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit.[4] The 'emerging world order' also referred to the

[1] C. A. Bayly and T. N. Harper, *Forgotten Wars: Freedom and Revolution in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), introduction.
[2] J. Nehru, 'Colonialism Must Go', in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, edited by M. Chalapathi Rau, H. Y. Sharada Prasad, B. R. Nanda, and Sarvepalli Gopal, 15 vols. (New Delhi: Orient Longman 1982), 15:509.
[3] Nehru, 'Colonialism Must Go', 15:510.
[4] The other Asian countries at San Francisco were China, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, the Philippines, Syria, and Turkey.

increasing distrust between the two superpowers. And thus, to the American press, Nehru explained that an independent Asia would always side with world peace. The new Asian nations had to focus on their progress, on making up for lost time, and war would be disastrous. However, he warned, 'if freedom is delayed … they will side with this or that power as suits their convenience and advantage. They will add to the confusion and chaos of a distracted world'.[5]

However, Nehru had words of comfort as well. He stressed that decolonization would not create a patchwork of new states each intent on their isolated independence. Instead, he invoked the decolonized future that had been the ideal of many interwar internationalists, from C. R. Das to Mahendra Pratap: Asia as a group of states that would be part of a future world federation, 'that one world of which wise statesmen have dreamed and which seems to be the inevitable and only outcome of our present troubles, if we survive disaster'.[6] Nehru's first step towards the achievement of that goal was also a continuation of interwar discourse: the organization of a conference of Asian representatives. But in spite of claims to the contrary by Nehru's biographers, the initial idea for the Asian Relations Conference of 1947 was not his.[7]

The Indian press, which had kept abreast of international Asianist movements throughout the interwar years, saw the San Francisco conference as a chance for Asia to influence the making of the post-war world.[8] And as soon as Vijayalakshmi Pandit had arrived in the US, she appeared on national radio to say: 'Asia will be the testing ground of all the theories advanced by the United Nations but the continuation of colonial empires will be a constant danger to world peace and the progress of humanity'.[9] Within a week, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* continued: 'India belongs naturally to other Asiatic countries rather than western [ones]. Her ties with Britain are more artificial than her ties with China. The domination of the white man over the rest of the world since the sixteenth century is coming to an end. It will not go any more. Asia is awake. … The era of white domination won't last and cannot be revived'.[10] But by far the most telling message again arrived from the United States:

> The voice of some six hundred million enslaved people of Asia may not be officially heard at this Conference and those who have usurped their birthright of freedom may cynically claim to speak for them, but there will be no real peace in this earth so long as they are denied justice. These words, instinct with truth and representing the verdict of all the enslaved peoples of the world, should be inscribed on the gates of the Conference.[11]

[5] Nehru, 'Colonialism Must Go', 15:513.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Among others M. Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); J. Brown, *Nehru: A Biography* (London: Longman, 1999); S. Tharoor, *Nehru: The Invention of India* (New York: Arcade, 2003).
[8] 'Send Indian Leaders to San Francisco Conference', *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 2 March 1945, 5.
[9] 'Are Colonial Empires a Threat to World Peace?' *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 4 March 1945, 4.
[10] 'Independence by Definite Date', *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 10 March 1945, 4.
[11] 'India's Ambassador', *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 7 May 1945, 4.

The message was clear: Asia was no longer content to be a bystander in international affairs that concerned them. As reports of the conference started to come in, statements in the Indian press grew increasingly aggressive, stating that recent years should have taught France to respect the freedom of others; that India's ties with Britain were more artificial than those with China; and that India now had more claim to great power status than France did.[12] The events of the Second World War had temporarily revived Asianism in other respects as well: it had not taken long for Japan to regain its pre-Manchuria status as an integral part of any Asianist project, at least in the eyes of the Indian press. This is evidenced from publications that claimed Japan's people had never wanted the war and placed the blame instead on the machinations of the Black Dragon Society.[13]

It was to the background of these aspirations that the Asian delegations met at San Francisco. And according to B. Shiva Rao, the idea for an Asian Relations Conference was first raised by the Asian delegates present there, and then pitched to Vijayalakshmi Pandit.[14] Most of the delegates were well aware of the failings of the UN's predecessor, the League of Nations. They had also been eyewitnesses to Asia's longstanding frustrations with the League as a western-dominated institution. Would the UN 'trusteeship' system turn out to be the same as the mandate system? Would the vetoes held by the Security Council prove to be the same weakness that had paralyzed the League? Reports stated that the San Francisco conference 'over-represented' the West, and that the East suffered neglect'.[15] It is not surprising that when the Asian Relations Conference was convened, Nehru emphasized that 'the idea of such a conference arose simultaneously in many minds and in many countries of Asia'.[16]

B. Shiva Rao returned to India, and he and Nehru started discussing the idea of an Asian conference in December. Nehru advocated a Federation of Asian States if the UN should prove ineffective. The Asian Relations Conference was to be the prelude to such a form of Asian cooperation. Less than four weeks after this conversation, the conference is mentioned concretely in a message from Nehru to the Central News Agency of China: 'A time is coming when representatives should meet together to draw up common policies. … I trust that a fully representative Asian conference will be able to meet before very long. Probably India will be the best place for such a conference to meet'.[17] And in his March *New York Times Magazine* article, Nehru was confident enough to note that although a conference was not immediately feasible due to travel restrictions, it would be held 'as soon as conditions permit'.[18] In May, Nehru he wrote to Aung San of Burma that the conference was intended to be fully representative of Asia and that it intended to lay the foundations of 'some kind of an Asian organization'.[19] By July, having received favourable reactions from Syria, Indonesia,

[12] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 2 April 1945, 4; 6 April 1945, 4; 22 April 1945, 4.
[13] 'Japan's Black Dragon Society', *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 15 April 1945, 10.
[14] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 41. B. Shiva Rao was a member of the Indian delegation at San Francisco, and he was to become a member of the organizing committee of the Asian Relations Conference.
[15] ARC, *Proceedings*, 75.
[16] Ibid., 1.
[17] J. Nehru, 'Common Policies for Asia', in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 14:470–1.
[18] Nehru, 'Colonialism Must Go', 15:513.
[19] Nehru to Aung San, 25 May 1946, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 15:539.

Burma, and Ceylon, Nehru was sending around letters to raise funds to host the conference in Delhi.[20] The actual preparations did not start until the end of August, due to the chaos erupting in India over the Cabinet Mission Plan,[21] but the official invitations were sent in September.

As the responses started coming in and the conference appeared to be drawing between twenty and thirty different Asian delegations, the world outside Asia started to get nervous, fearing 'an attempt to organize an Asian bloc'.[22] In response, Nehru strongly and publicly affirmed that the conference would not 'be opposed in any way to America or the Soviet Union or any other power or group of powers'.[23] The juxtaposition of the US and the USSR is significant here, for it demonstrates an intent to remain aloof from this rivalry early on—long before Bandung or the non-aligned conference at Belgrade were ever thought of.

This feeds into a series of trends in the historiography of the Cold War. The old notion of an Asian vacuum waiting to be filled by one of the superpowers has been thoroughly challenged in recent years. New scholarship of the Cold War in Asia has highlighted a number of characteristics that set it apart from events elsewhere.[24] Two historiographical developments in particular are relevant to the present argument. The first is that the global ideological struggle interacted with (rather than impacted) the rise of Asian nationalisms. Tuong Vu in a recent publication puts this even more strongly: 'Indigenous processes in Asia … had critical *reverse* impact on the Cold War'.[25] The second argument is that the Cold War should not be viewed as divorced from the larger global processes of the twentieth century.[26] And indeed, a contextualization of the proceedings of the Asian Relations Conference (ARC) will prove any such separation untenable: 'Asia' at the ARC had an internal dynamic all its own.

This internal dynamic had everything to do with the antecedents of the conference. If indeed, as Michael Szonyi and Hong Liu argue, we view the events in Asia less as the playground of the two superpowers and more as a set of on-going processes that played their own part in the shaping of those constellations, it should be recognized that those processes did not start at the end of the Second World War. Much is to be gained from a longer perspective that includes the internationalist momentum of the interwar years and the commitment to a world of greater justice and equality that informed many of the earlier conferences and federationalist projects. This was evident, among other things, from the fact

[20] Nehru, Request for Financial Support for Inter-Asian Relations Conference. To several people, all sent 30 July 1946, in *Selected Works*, 15:522.

[21] The Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 had envisaged a united India, but consensus could not be reached over 'balancing' Hindu and Muslim majority provinces at the central legislature.

[22] Nehru mentions having received inquiries from 'several governments' to that effect. Nehru to V.K. Krishna Menon, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 15:586.

[23] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-alignment*, 43.

[24] Among others, C. E. Goscha and C. Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia (1945–1962)* (Chicago: Stanford University Press, 2009); O. A. Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[25] T. Vu, 'Cold War Studies and the Cultural Cold War in Asia', in *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture*, edited by T. Vu and W. Wongsurawat (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 3.

[26] M. Szonyi and H. Liu, 'New Approaches to the Study of the Cold War in Asia', in *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, edited by Z. Yangwen, H. Liu, and H. Szonyi (Leiden & Boston: Brill 2010), 6.

that the ideological boundaries that determined later conferences, even Bandung, had not yet been drawn. Invitations to the ARC were issued to the republics of Soviet Central Asia, which were taken as models of development that might be emulated, as will be shown below. Much as in the interwar period, Asia was presented here as a continent with common present problems and future trajectories. Suggesting that the delegates that assembled in Delhi were faced with a choice between one of two ready-made sets of ideas would be rather reductive: the appropriation and adaptation of ideas to fit the 'Asian' context was felt to be fully justified, and the ARC's proceedings reflect this.

Convening the ARC

The conference had been called to review the position of Asia in the post-war world; to exchange ideas on the problems shared by all Asian countries; and to study ways and means of promoting closer contacts between them.[27] The organizing body was not the Provisional Government of India, which was in place by September 1946, but the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), a body established only three years earlier as a non-political, non-official institute for the study of international affairs. This meant that the Asian Relations Conference would be a non-official gathering, composed of delegates from academic, cultural, and other organizations, and many of the papers and speeches presented reflect this. The conference was emphatically presented as a non-political gathering to the outside world, to allay any fears that an attempt was being made to organize a political bloc.

However, two things detracted from the ARC's credibility as a non-political conference. Firstly, it was largely the brainchild of soon-to-be Prime Minister Nehru, and partly the fruit of his and other Indian anti-imperialists' longstanding efforts towards Asian cooperation. Indeed, Nehru linked his attendance at the 1927 League Against Imperialism conference to the ARC in an article:

> Twenty years ago, I attended a conference in Brussels, at which many Asian and European countries were represented. Then those who came from Asia met together, and we talked about developing some kind of contacts so that we could meet occasionally, somewhere in Asia, and develop political, economic and other relations, and, at any rate, get to know each other better. But though everybody agreed … an odd fact emerged: that this conference or meeting that we might have, of representatives of Asia, could not meet anywhere in Asia! It was easier to meet in Paris, Berlin, or Brussels or London than anywhere in Asia, partly because of political restrictions and partly because of travel difficulties. … It might interest you to know that some of the friends I made twenty years ago at the conference are running the Indonesian Republic today.[28]

The conference participation was a reflection of the interwar networks examined in the previous chapters, which included activists and anti-imperialists from all corners of Asia

[27] Indian Council of World Affairs, *Asia: A Souvenir Book issued by the Indian Council of World Affairs on the occasion of the Asian Relations Conference New Delhi March 23 – 2 April 1947* (New Delhi: ICWA 1947), 78.
[28] J. Nehru, 'Inter-Asian Relations', *India Quarterly* 11 (1946): 323–6; 323.

(more on which below). At Nehru's instigation, the ICWA had left the door open for political participation despite its non-political nature; every delegation was free to include 'government observers'—and the list of participants included thirty-nine people with this status.[29] The invitations went to organizations similar to the ICWA (Burma, for instance, had a BCWA), and in the absence of such an organization, to cultural and academic institutions. But Nehru told the ICWA to be flexible and keep its definitions broad: 'It may even be that Governments might be unofficially represented'.[30]

The second—related—issue undermining the conference's claim to being non-political was that with several Asian nations on the brink of independence and the widespread sense that decolonization was just around the corner, the conference committed itself to a strong anti-imperialist stance. Despite incessant affirmations of the ancient bonds between Asian lands that had existed in pre-colonial times and positive definitions of Asia, the real common denominator at the ARC was the experience of European domination and corresponding struggle for independence, and anti-colonialism became a major part of the conference proceedings. This was reinforced by uncertainty about the way the newly established United Nations would develop, and the role non-Western powers were to play therein; uncertainty over the constellation of the post-war world; and the first apprehensions of new forms of domination, made poignant by the US and Soviet occupation of the Korean Peninsula.

Having decided which organizations were to be invited, it had to be decided which countries were to be considered as 'Asian'. In the end, the ARC defined Asia in its broadest possible sense, including both the Middle East and the Soviet Republics of Central Asia.[31] Egypt was welcome as a Middle Eastern country, for being so close in 'culture and general economic and political development'.[32] US-occupied Japan was also invited, but General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan, had banned overseas travel for the Japanese. This resulted in a strong press offensive in India geared towards pressuring the United States to allow a Japanese delegation to travel to New Delhi. This proved so strong in fact, that an American observer at the conference was reported to have cabled both President Truman and General MacArthur to fly a Japanese delegation to New Delhi 'because the absence of Japanese is badly affecting Asian-United States Relations'.[33] The problems of whom to invite were exacerbated by the various Ongoing struggles in Asia. In the case of China, for instance, it was decided to welcome delegations from both the Kuomintang and the Communists, while invitations were issued to both a Jewish and an Arab delegation from Palestine. Finally, Tibet was invited separately, which was to be Tibet's last international event.[34]

After the invitations had been sent, it was a feat of Herculean proportions to actually get the delegates together. First of all, responses were slow to arrive, leaving the organizers in Delhi somewhat at a loss as to how many people they would be hosting. It reaffirmed Nehru's

[29] ARC, *Proceedings*, 8.

[30] Nehru, 'Inter-Asian Relations', 325.

[31] ARC communications in this period do speak of the Middle East rather than West Asia.

[32] D. Gopal, ed., *Asian Relations* [reprint of the original proceedings] (New Delhi: Authorspress 2003), 5.

[33] 'Fly Jap Delegation to Delhi!' *Bombay Chronicle*, 27 March 1947, 1.

[34] S. Saran, *50 years after the Asian Relations Conference* (New Delhi: Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Centre 1997), 17.

view that it was easier to communicate with Europe than with neighbouring Asian countries.[35] But if that was true for the postal services—the invitations to Tibet and Bhutan were delivered by ponies—it was arguably even harder for the actual delegates. Some travelled for over three weeks to reach New Delhi, using every means of transport known to man. A few did not make it in time; delegates from Korea and Mongolia arrived several days into the proceedings, whereas the delegates from Kirghizia and Turkmenistan did not arrive until a day after the conference ended.

In the end, however, there were 244 delegates representing 28 countries of Asia.[36] In terms of the final participants, there were some notable continuities from the interwar years, echoing a variety of networks that far transcended those forged by Nehru personally. The international contacts of the All-India Women's Congress (AIWC), whose All Asia Women's Conference (AAWC) of 1931 has been treated in chapter 1, were represented by a fair number of former Asia Committee members on the delegation rolls. Among them were formidable names: long-time AIWC president Lakshmibai Rajwade; Lady Ram Rao, who had represented the Asian Women's Conference at Geneva; Sarojini Naidu, Hansa Mehta, who would go on to contribute to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a year later; and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya.[37] The large number of female delegates from other countries, too, notably Indonesia and Ceylon, was remarkable.[38] Women's organizations represented were, among others, the All Ceylon Women's Conference Association, the Egyptian Feminist Union, the All-Indonesian Women's Congress, the Korea Women's Bureau, and the Women's Association of Iran. This was no coincidence: one of the five subject groups was exclusively devoted to the problems facing Asian women, and Nehru's invitation stated explicitly: 'I hope it will be possible to send at least one woman delegate from your country who will be able to assist the Conference by presenting the women's point of view on the various matters before the conference and, in particular, in the discussing of the status of women and women's movements in Asia which is one of the main topics suggested for the agenda'.[39] Other familiar Asianist veterans, apart from Nehru himself, included the likes of N. M. Joshi and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, as well as a strong representation of the Santiniketan network: Tai Chi-Tao was present as an official delegate; Tan Yun-Shan,

[35] Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 8.

[36] Reports on the exact number of countries represented at the ARC differ, because several of the delegations represented states that were not yet independent. There is also confusion as to the number of attendees—Indian scholars who had prepared discussion papers, for instance, were not included in the delegations but did take part in the proceedings. The same holds true for other Asian scholars already present in India. Finally, the numbers given by Saran differ from those in the proceedings because Saran does not include the Tajik delegation. See Saran, *50 Years After the Asian Relations Conference*, 10–1; Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 8–9.

[37] Delegation list in Gopal, *Asian Relations*, Appendix C, 307–309; cross-checked against the archives of the All Asia Women's Conference. NMML, All-Asia Women's Conference, microfilm 2278: Minutes of the meeting of the Permanent Committee of the All Asian Women's Conference, Karachi 2 January 1935. Sarojini Naidu could not attend because she was in prison for civil disobedience at the time, but was elected conference president because of it.

[38] The second All Asia Women's Conference was to take place on Java, but the logistical challenges proved too great. The invitation was taken over by Japan, but the Sino-Japanese war broke out before it could be held.

[39] NAI External Affairs Department File no. 14(19)-cc/46 1:1. Invitation to the Inter-Asian relations conference, 7 September 1946.

resident in India, attended the conference; and Kalidas Nag reported extensively on the ARC.[40]

Performing Asia in Delhi

On 23 March 1947, five short months before India's independence, over ten thousand people streamed into the Purana Qila (Old Fort) of New Delhi. Open to the public for a small fee the opening and closing sessions drew massive crowds. All had come to stand, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, at the end of an era and on the threshold of a new period in history'.[41] Given the chaos of communal violence that had already erupted in several places around India, the overwhelming attention the ARC received from the public and in the national press would seem extraordinary. In the aftermath of Partition only months later, the very site of the conference, one of the most imposing historical Mughal forts of Delhi, had to be converted into a refugee camp. Even the day before the conference was to begin, a riot broke out in Delhi and the police had to implement a curfew without warning. This made it harder for people to get to the Purana Qila, but it did not deter them from coming.[42]

Perhaps it was precisely the hope of a new period in history that drew people into the Purana Qila. If we regard the ten days of the conference less as a gathering of leaders discussing the post-war future, and more as an attempt to present India from its most attractive side to a decolonizing Asia, a different picture emerges. To the theatrical backdrop of the Indo-Persian Purana Qila, the participants performed their own interpretation of Asia, and of India within it.[43] And the welcoming of Asia into India was a very public effort indeed. New Delhi was still ill-equipped to house such distinguished guests for lack of passable hotels, and the wives of the members of the organizing committee stepped in to house the majority of the delegates in their own homes. It was such details, perhaps, that led journalist G. H. Jansen to characterize the atmosphere at the conference as one of 'innocent enthusiasm'.[44]

The performance aspect of the conference stretched to other areas as well. The unity of an Asian culture and history was articulated in exhibitions of, respectively, art and archaeology. The art exhibition in particular, a joint venture of the ICWA and the All-India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, was a massive undertaking. The committee had three months to organize it and transport through Asia was still very difficult. However, art from Iran, Ceylon, Burma, Tibet, Nepal, China, Bali, and India was exhibited. At the official opening of the 'Inter-Asian' exhibition for the delegates on the second day of the conference, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad declared that this display would indeed reveal a layer of Asian identity that the conference itself could not: 'This exhibition of arts is as significant as the conference itself, for whereas at the Conference the voice of the Asian nations is heard, here the very embodiment, the innermost experiences and the deepest sensibilities are put on record through

[40] K. Nag, *New Asia* (Calcutta: Prajna Bharati, 1947).

[41] Jawaharlal Nehru, Inaugural Address. Asian Relations Organization, *Proceedings*, 21.

[42] NMML, B. Shiva Rao Papers, Correspondence: to Tej Bahadur Sapru (nos. 384–406): 24 March 1947.

[43] For a further theorization of the performance aspect of international conferences, see N. Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as Theatre: Recasting the Bandung Conference of 1955 as Cultural History', *ARI Working Paper Series* No.164 (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2011), 1–19.

[44] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-alignment*, 53.

their artists'.[45] Indian reviews of the art exhibition, however, were somewhat carping and oftentimes explicitly orientalist. The Balinese paintings were declared to have 'a delightful feeling for form' but 'a complete lack of sophistication'. Iran 'seemed content to follow the traditional decorative style', while Burma and Ceylon worked in 'Western' technique.[46]

The aim of the archaeological exhibition, fittingly organized at the Central Asian Antiquities Museum, was to demonstrate the historical ties that had bound India to the Asian continent for millennia, and to show the reciprocal influences between Asian countries and cultures.[47] This exhibition received less attention in the press, but is interesting because it staged a light-hearted version of the Greater India idea in which other Asian museums seem to have happily implicated themselves. The Kabul Museum, for instance, brought along carved Indian ivories from Bagram, a statue of Surya from the excavated solar temple at Khair Khaneh, and painted copies of the Buddha statues of the Bamian valley. The review of the museum's Afghanistan room celebrated Afghanistan, in true Greater India style, as 'for many centuries a cultural province of India'.[48] However, it was also noted that Afghanistan itself had played a role in the development of Buddhist art, through which it regained some agency as a cultural actor in its own right. Room 3 was devoted to Southeast Asia, which was declared to have been for several centuries within 'the orbit of India's cultural empire'. Any thought of reciprocity was abandoned here. Instead, it was considered 'a suitable monument to the glory … of the early Indian navigators'.[49]

If the exhibitions were organized mainly with the help of the countries represented, India itself was lavishly performed by performances by various regional dance troupes at the Regal Theatre. Chitrangada (written by Tagore) was staged, South Indian Kathakali and Bharatanatyam were performed, and Nehru entertained all delegates to a reception with a Chhau performance. The most controversial, however, was the decision by Mrs Shiva Rao, wife of B. Shiva Rao, to stage a ballet of Nehru's massive tome *Discovery of India.* This sparked a series of angry letters both in support of and against this venture. A distraught S. Venkatraman wrote:

> They have set about trying to make a travesty out of Pandit Nehru's monumental contribution to Indian thought. … The reported attempt to translate this great work into visual virtuosic form is foredoomed to failure. The reasons are obvious. Assuming that this abstract work of imagination of a first-class mind contains elements that lend themselves for representation … the amateurish dilettantes whom Mrs Shiva Rao is looking for are scarcely the sort of artists who have in them the power and gift to interpret a truly Olympian theme like Nehru's.[50]

[45] Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 335.

[46] Review by Anil Roy Chaudhury, published in Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 335. The exhibition further received interest in the *Bombay Chronicle*, 15 March 1947, 2; and 25 March 1947, 5.

[47] Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 339.

[48] V. S. Agrawala, in Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 346.

[49] Ibid., 347.

[50] Letter to the editor, S. Venkatraman, *Bombay Chronicle*, 18 March 1947, 4.

One reader who replied to this criticism that the ballet was a wonderful idea and that all the delegates should see it was eventually proven right: not only was the ballet staged, it was performed on the closing night of the conference.[51] Further participation by Indian civil society organizations included a reception at Lady Irwin College for all the female delegates, hosted by the All-India Women's Congress, a reception by the Archaeological Survey of India, and most important, a massive effort by research institutions across India to prepare memoranda with available statistics and other information about Asian countries. Ninety-four such memoranda were submitted, often numbering in the hundreds of pages. While cultural and historical issues were popular, the memoranda dealt extensively with the Asian lag in development, labour issues, and social services, and how this was best to be remedied.[52] Others dealt with Asian racial issues, demonstrating the historical intermingling of Asian peoples through anything from craniology to migration patterns to cultural anthropology to deliver further proof of Asia's unity.[53] These were intended to facilitate the programming of the conference—many were eventually made into papers for the conference itself and presented at the group discussions.

However, other issues detracted from the demonstrable desire to showcase the unity of Asia and underplay its divisions. One of these was the problem of language. Interpreters had to be engaged for Arabic, Russian, French, Persian, and Chinese. Those who commanded none of those languages had to solve the problem within their delegation with those who did, which led to considerable difficulties. For many issues, no more than a short summary was conveyed to those in need of translation. And when Piug Peang Youk Anthor, a Cambodian princess, addressed the gathering in rapid French, the interpreter failed to convey the gist of her words.[54] The princess, who spoke some English, noticed her words were being twisted and refused to continue. Fortunately Nehru, a perennial Francophile, saved the situation by stepping in and interpreting personally. This impediment to in-depth conversation was lamented at various stages of the conference and addressed in the session on cultural problems with a discussion on the desirability of choosing an Asian language for communication rather than imperialist tongues such as English and French. This too harked back to visions of Asia from the interwar period, for this same issue had been addressed by Asianists ranging from Tagore to Pratap. The next sections will therefore explore three Asianist themes from the group discussion that demonstrated particular continuity from the Asianist momentum in the interwar years described in the parts of this dissertation: Asian development and social issues; Asian culture and education; and Asian federation and cooperation.

5.2 Asian development

Asian development and 'social issues', which according to the memoranda included a spectrum varying from public health issues to labour rights, figured prominently in the proceedings. Of the five roundtable groups, the third dealt exclusively with agricultural reconstruction, industrial development, labour problems, and the 'transition from colonial to

[51] Asian Relations Conference Supplementary Programme. in Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 360.
[52] NMML, Asian Relations Memoranda, Typescript. Agricultural Reconstruction and Industrial Development.
[53] NMML, Asian Relations Memoranda, Typescript. Racial Problems in Asia.
[54] Nag, *New Asia*, 45–6.

national economy', issues of concern for all the nations represented. Moreover, the participants believed themselves to be on shared trajectories of modernization. These issues were also a direct continuation of an activism that had started in the interwar period. The lag in development due to imperialist exploitation, the western bias of the world economic system, and the peculiarity vis-à-vis Asian issues of labour and trade unionism had all figured prominently in Asian activism at the International Labour Organization, the Asiatic Labour Congress as well as the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat and have been described in chapter 2. The search for models of development to emulate, from the industrial and economic advances of pre-war fascist Italy to the accelerated industrialization of the Soviet republics, has been noted in chapters 3 and 4 respectively. The next two sections will therefore be concerned with the continuation of these two themes at the Asian Relations Conference. The similarities to the internationalist rhetoric of the interwar years will be treated, but also the ways in which these same subjects resounded differently in a post-war context.

Asian issues of labour

By far the most continuity was evident in the discussion on labour problems, if only because trade union veteran N. M. Joshi was one of the chairs. The issues on the table, too, harked back to the agendas of both the All-India Trade Union Congress and the Asiatic Labour Congress in the 1920s and 1930s. Employment conditions, trade unionism, and industrial relations, and the gap between Asia and the West were all listed. The first of the topics, which was the transition from a colonial to a national economy, echoed familiar anti-imperialist rhetoric. First, it was lamented that Asian countries had no knowledge whatsoever of worker's conditions in neighbouring lands. They had been cut off from their Asian fellow workers by imperial borders. This was a fairly close paraphrasing of the Asian resolution at the League Against Imperialism Congress at Brussels. Second, the imperialist countries had exploited Asia's resources and its workers, leaving the continent far less developed than the West, an issue that figured prominently in the Asiatic Labour Congress session at Colombo. This was declared to be the case even in fully independent areas, for 'they may share in some respects the characteristics of a colonial economy because of their inability to shape independent economic policies in regard to tariffs, foreign investments and of the large part played by foreigners in important sectors of the country's economic life'.[55] In view of that, it was observed that it would be a 'waste of economic incentive' if each country in Asia tried to achieve self-sufficiency. Rather, 'it would be conducive to greater confidence and security in Asia if a regional economic balance could be evolved'.[56] The very fact that most Asian countries were borrowing from the metropolitan countries made intra-Asian collaboration all the more necessary.

N. M. Joshi gave these observations new direction when he stated in the third session that without international cooperation, the improvement of labour conditions would always be limited.[57] This took the discussion into a realm with which he was familiar. Joshi still

[55] ARC, *Proceedings*, 121.
[56] Ibid., 120.
[57] Ibid., 161.

considered the ILO as the principal body in which the Asian voice should be heard, but to make it effective, more Asian nations should be allowed into the ILO. The end of the Second World War had brought the inclusion of the Philippines, but Japan had not yet re-joined and Asian representation as it stood was still unbalanced. At the ARC, Joshi received an eager hearing for what he had so vocally advocated at the ILO in Geneva since the early 1920s: That the ILO should expand to included countries such as Malaya, Ceylon, and Vietnam. Joshi hoped that all these countries would make use of the existing ILO to address labour problems, rather than create another body. The fact that the long-desired ILO Asian Regional Conferences was finally scheduled in October 1947 in New Delhi was considered a good sign.[58]

There were objections to Joshi's message. The first were raised by the Malayan delegation, who—as long as the conference was addressing labour in a regional context—begged India to halt labour migration to Malaya, as the circumstances of Indian workers there were dismal, and their low wages undercut others, cancelling out any advances made to the living standards of workers.[59] It was also noted that local hostilities against Indian labourers, a familiar occurrence in interwar Asia from Burma to Ceylon and Malaya, had not ceased.[60] Second, the problem was raised once more with regard to the agricultural base of most Asian economies. Given that about 85 per cent of the economy was generally based on agriculture, or, as the Mongolian delegate hastened to add, nomadic cattle breeding and grazing, was the ILO the way forward?[61] How much could realistically be gained from discussing labour legislation in an industrial context? Joshi argued that the difference was limited, especially in the case of plantation workers, if not of petty landholders, and that in any case, the two problems were interconnected.[62] However, the majority of the delegates did not accept this, and the final session report recognized the need for action in the field of agricultural workers' rights which had no place in the ILO. However, there was consensus in another respect: post-war Asia had to find a place in the world economic system from a starting point of great disparity. On this everyone agreed.

> With a few honourable exceptions, the economic conditions of workers in most Asian countries are greatly backward compared to those in Great Britain and other industrial countries of the West. The disparity is not only indefensible from the point of view of human dignity, but also constitutes a danger to the peace of the world, as there can be no peace without social justice within and between countries. In the case of Asian countries, this means that the pace of progress must be more rapid than in the more advanced countries. … It will of course take time for Asian countries to attain equality with the more advanced countries, but the two facts … demand greater efforts on the

[58] Ibid., 174.
[59] Ibid., 158.
[60] On anti-Indian riots in Southeast Asia, see S. R. Sudhamani, 'Indians in Southeast Asia: an approach paper,' in *Indians in Southeast Asia*, edited by I. J. Bahadur Singh, 8–22 (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1982); M. M. Kaul, 'Indians in Southeast Asia: the colonial period and its impact,' *Idem*, 23–33.
[61] ARC, *Proceedings*, 167.
[62] Ibid., 160.

> part of the Asian people. … Regional and international efforts are necessary for the solution of the problem.[63]

Among others, these solutions were to take the form of the organization of training centres for trade union officers; the formulation of a charter of human rights embodying minimum standards; and the collection and exchange of statistics and information on labour matters in different Asian countries. Joshi was pleased that the group had considered labour problems in their regional setting, and referred to the 'Asian Trade Union Conferences' in Colombo and Tokyo in the interwar years, stating that these had first promoted contact between trade unionists of different Asian countries.[64] The proceedings had thus come full circle: the struggle for the achievement of workers' rights in the interwar years, which had mainly been an indictment of imperial arrangements, could now be applied to a successful implementation of these discussions in an Asia that consisted of independent countries.

The Central Asian Soviet Republics as a developmental model

As noted in chapter 4, admiration for the Soviet model as a potential avenue for accelerated development had a pedigree which dated back to the early 1920s. Nehru himself had made his first visit to the Soviet Union in 1927 and was 'profoundly impressed' with what he saw there.[65] In the run-up to the ARC, the wider public, too, was exposed to the achievements of especially the Central Asian parts of the Soviet Union through publicized travel reports and newspaper articles. Although the place of the Soviet Central Asian republics in most cartographies of Asia was tenuous, they were held up by the Indian media as examples of 'backward' regions of Asia that had made great progress thanks to the great reforms of socialism: 'In Soviet Central Asia, peoples, backward, oppressed, nomadic a bare thirty years ago, are forging ahead to new miracles of Socialist reconstruction'.[66]

It is important to note that the dichotomy of communism versus other systems was rarely if ever raised. Just as in the interwar years, the concern was mainly with examples of fast modernization, which, if properly adapted to Asian circumstances, might assist in closing the developmental gap between Asia and the West faster than would otherwise be the case. The contributions from the Central Asian Republics reflect this: in an attempt to demonstrate that they had succeeded in maintaining their identity even as they underwent industrialization and modernization, they presented themselves as Asian above all. By and large, their audience accepted their statements, particularly the Indian delegation. Socialism—if the definition was left vague enough—could mean many things to many different people. And it did. There was a mixing of liberal, illiberal, and socialist idioms in thinking about 'development' in India—

[63] Session report, in *Proceedings*, 169–71.

[64] Ibid., 173.

[65] As remembered by his daughter Indira Gandhi in, 'Foreword', *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: NMML, 1984), i.

[66] 'For Unity in the Battle for Asia's Freedom and Against Imperialism', *Peoples' Age*, 23 March 1947, 3; 'Soviet Asia Speeds Forward Under New Five Year Plan, *Peoples' Age*, 14 July 1946, 11.

aspects of which were later to be rationalized and dignified as 'non-alignment' and the 'third path'—under the umbrella term of 'socialism''.[67]

Unsurprisingly, the roundtables on development were the sessions in which the Soviet delegations—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—were most outspoken. All emphasized their national independence and culture, while praising their advances, which included universities, women's rights, and literacy. The opening message from Azerbaijan is quite revealing: 'Before the Socialist Revolution [Azerbaijan] was one of the most backward corners of Asia. … The people of Azerbaijan have now received all those opportunities for the further development and enrichment of culture which progressive humanity has ever created. More than sixty scientific research institutions … using their own national language are now functioning in Azerbaijan, where before Soviet power there existed not a single [one]'.[68]

The ARC was a unique propaganda opportunity and the delegates made sure that not a moment was wasted. That this was more obvious to some observers than others is evident from different reports from attendees. The two observers from the Institute of Pacific Relations in the United States, Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, reported after the conference that they had noted the Soviet propaganda but did not think it had been very effective: '[They] assumed no aggressive part in any of the discussion groups. Upon request they gladly told of the achievements of their respective governments but their complacency precluded any admission of even the existence of such problems as were plaguing other countries of Asia. … General disappointment over the Soviet's aloofness and patterned, generalized answers to all questions under discussion was apparent'.[69] Gerald Packer, one of the conference's two Australian observers, simply remarked: 'The members of the various Soviet Republics obviously marked time on the Moscow line'.[70] G. H. Jansen, finally, described the delegates from the Asian Soviet Republics as plain annoying and remarked wryly: 'The Soviet Central Asians [had their say] with such well-drilled unanimity that it is not surprising that they were never again invited'.[71] But he did think that they succeeded in leaving their mark on the proceedings: 'This axiom is even more obvious in the discussions on "Labour Problems and Social Services". At this point the imaginary gap between the Asian republics and the rest of Asia proved wide: the delegates of the former gave a wholly laudatory picture of their conditions, while the latter, more honestly, were concerned as to how the prevailing unsatisfactory state of affairs could be improved. In consequence, the report is full of flattering references to the Soviet republics'.[72]

It is import to note that the group discussions on Asian trajectories of development do reflect an admiration of the achievements of the Asian Soviet Republics whenever they were voiced, but that both the need for Western loans and the possible gains from the Soviet model

[67] B. Zachariah, *Developing India: an Intellectual and Social History, c.1930–1950* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2005), 299.
[68] ARC, *Proceedings*, 35.
[69] V. Thompson and R. Adloff, 'Asian Unity: Force or Façade?' *Far Eastern Survey* 16:9 (May 1947): 97–9: 98.
[70] G. Packer, 'The Asian Relations Conference: The Group Discussions', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 1:2 (1947): 4.
[71] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 69.
[72] Ibid., 64.

of planned development—and the balance they hoped to strike between the two—were overshadowed by the conference's anti-imperialist stance. First, there was a general determination not to let foreign loans serve as an opening wedge for a revival of economic imperialism under a new guise. The need for American financial aid was acknowledged but its policies in Asia condemned. Packer also noted an undercurrent of anti-Russian feeling, but interestingly, he reports that 'any public expression of this sentiment was adroitly sidetracked by the Indian delegates'.[73] However, the explicit remark in the proceedings that cultivation and ownership of land should be in the same hands speaks volumes of the discussion on agricultural reconstruction: The Soviet Central Asians spoke at length about the need for land reform.[74] But when one (unidentified) speaker replied that the Asian peasants wanted land for themselves and not state tenancy or collective farms, the delegate of Soviet Azerbaijan, beating a hasty retreat, agreed.[75]

5.3 Asian cultural unity

In order for the Asian Relations Conference to be successful in establishing more permanent contacts among the various Asian nations, it had to be established that 'Asia' indeed existed as a space with shared characteristics. As noted in chapter 3, the debate as to what those characteristics were, what united Asians, and what set them apart collectively from other parts of the world, was the oldest Asianist debate in existence. It had started in the late nineteenth century with notions of a spirituality that all Asians shared—regardless of their respective religious backgrounds—vis-à-vis a more materialist West. This debate had intensified in the interwar years, promoted especially by the Tagore salon, and found a more cultural-imperialist incarnation in the Greater India circle. At the ARC, both themes co-existed and permeated the proceedings, especially in the plenary sessions. Even Gandhi, who otherwise considered the conference a waste of energy that should have been devoted to nation-building, made a speech in which he viewed Asia as a space with a shared culture of spirituality and nonviolence:

> What I want you to understand is the message of Asia. It is not to be learnt through the Western spectacles or by imitating the atom bomb … In this age of democracy, in this age of awakening of the poorest of the poor, you can redeliver this message with the greatest emphasis. … If all of you put your hearts together—not merely heads—to understand the secret of the message these wise men of the East have left to us, and if we really become worthy of that great message, the conquest of the West will be completed. This conquest will be loved by the West itself.[76]

In many ways, the quest for Asian cultural identity at the ARC was a safe one. It was hard for delegates indeed to object to the positive traits ascribed to the 'Asia' to which they all belonged. Unlike the discussions on development and industrialization, in which Asia was

[73] Packer, 'The Asian Relations Conference', 3.
[74] ARC, *Proceedings*, 150.
[75] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 64.
[76] As published by *Harijan*, 20 April 1947, 117.

perceived to share the negative characteristic of being behind the West, the thousands of years of Asian cultural and religious history was something all delegates partook in and could be proud of. It was to be the cement of the ARC—provided the disproportionate Indian presence at the conference did not tip the scales towards Greater India and other jingoistic rhetoric.

This balance was preserved with great care during the plenary sessions. While Sri Ram, head of the reception committee, referred to the Pandyas' and Cholas' contacts with Southeast Asia in the very first speech of the conference, it was to wish that the renewal of such networks would 'enable us to learn from the experience and knowledge of each other, and to appreciate and enjoy each other's literature, arts and so forth'.[77] Nehru, too, who officially inaugurated the conference, emphasized the reciprocity of historical influences, considering these the very basis of what Asians shared together: 'We all changed in the process and in India today all of us are mixed products of these various influences. An Indian, wherever he may go in Asia, feels a sense of kinship with the land he visits and the people he meets'.[78] It was this precisely this kinship that needed to be revived:

> There is a new vitality and powerful creative impulse in all the peoples of Asia. The masses are awake and demand their heritage. Strong winds are blowing all over Asia. Let us not be afraid of them but rather welcome them for only with their help we can build the new Asia of our dreams. … Let us have faith in the human spirit which Asia has symbolized for all these long ages past.[79]

Sarojini Naidu, who had been elected conference president and spoke in that capacity, lived up to her fame both as an Edwardian poet and as a veteran of interwar internationalist projects.[80] She asked: 'And what will Asia do with her renaissance? Will she arm herself for battles to conquer, to annex and exploit, or rather, will she forge new weapons and re-fashion her armoury in accordance with ancient ideals, as soldiers of peace and missionaries of love?'[81] However, though reactions to her particular speech have gone largely unreported, the latter half of her speech may have raised some eyebrows for its unabashed references to Greater India:

> Today if India, my India, has issued an invitation and summoned the people of the east and west of Asia to come to this great gathering, has she—who has been the custodian of our own culture as well as yours … not the right to do so? Did we not in our own turn send to southeast Asia the great treasure of ours in India, Gautama Buddha—the teaching of peace? Did we not send to China, to Japan, to Ceylon, to Burma, the influence, philosophy, and wisdom of India?[82]

[77] Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 20.
[78] Ibid., 27.
[79] Ibid., 30.
[80] See, respectively, M. R. Paranjape, *Sarojini Naidu: Selected Poetry and Prose* (New Delhi: Indus, 1993); S. R. Bakshi, *Sarojini Naidu: Struggle for Swaraj* (New Delhi: Anmol 1991).
[81] Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 32.
[82] Ibid., 34.

The proceedings from the roundtables on cultural issues do reflect uneasiness on the part of many delegates from Southeast Asia.[83] One reason for this may have been the strong presence of former Greater India Society scholars such as Kalidas Nag, R. C. Majumdar and their academic legacy: their depiction of India as 'bringer of civilization' to the rest of Asia, and as a country that had once had 'cultural colonies' in Southeast Asia, was cause for concern. As one Burmese delegate said, voicing his apprehensions rather explicitly: 'It was terrible to be ruled by a Western power, but it would be even more so to be ruled by an Asian power'.[84] Though full of brotherly affirmations of Asian cultural and civilizational unity, the roundtable section on cultural problems was one of the best attended but least successful parts of the conference: intra-Asian hegemonies were feared at least as much as outside ones.

The fourth of the five roundtable groups dealt with 'Asian education' and 'Asian culture,' and what collaboration along those lines could contribute to a unified Asia. The following discussion considers these topics in the context of an imagined Asian future consisting of regionally collaborating independent nations.

Asian education

Much like the discussion on development, the question of education in Asia was intimately tied to the issue of closing the gap between Asia and the West. In the opening discussion, a delegate from India remarked that Asia should relinquish the idea that a man did not become competent until he had studied in Europe or America.[85] The expense was colossal, and the benefit not always clear. It is a testament to the general atmosphere prevailing at the ARC that he hastened to add that though he stood by his comments, he was still 'no less an internationalist than any other'.[86] Another delegate remarked that Asia's first order of business was the application of science to social and economic problems. No matter how important fundamental research was, raising the standard of living had to be tackled first.

Second, the global domination of Western models of education was discussed. Delegates from Egypt and Afghanistan, among others, remarked that Asia needed to reorient its educational models to fit a more Asian mould. Asia was the source of religious philosophies and spiritualism, culture and religion were everywhere inextricably entwined.[87] Education in Asia should reflect this. As noted in chapter 3, this had been the foremost ground on which Viśva Bharati had been established in 1921. The university was referred to several times over the course of the proceeding by delegates from various countries, as was the educational contribution of Rabindranath Tagore.[88] And much like Tagore, who had sought to establish in the heart of Asia a centre that would blend the best of both East and West, a delegate from Georgia emphasized that the best potential model would be a combination of

[83] On Southeast Asian apprehensions to Indian hegemony, see also T. A. Keenleyside, 'Nationalist Indian Attitudes Towards Asia: A Troublesome Legacy for Post-Independence Indian Foreign Policy', *Pacific Affairs* 55:2 (1982): 210–30.

[84] Quoted in W. Henderson, 'The Development of Regionalism in Southeast Asia', *International Organization* 9: 4 (1955): 463–76: 466.

[85] Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 212.

[86] Ibid., 214.

[87] Ibid., 218–9.

[88] Nag, *New Asia*, 21.

the two. It would be wrong to reject the advances of the West in the field of science, but the 'great material and spiritual wealth of Asia' should be harnessed to create a model more suited to advance Asia as a continent.[89] Perhaps it was for this reason that in his report Kalidas Nag congratulated Nehru for laying 'the foundation of a superb shrine of creative unity which immortal Tagore wished to see realized years ago'.[90]

Third, the internationalist atmosphere of the conference caused narrow nationalism to be condemned as harmful in the field of education too. A delegate from Nepal remarked that 'exultation of its own greatness by a country in the teaching of history' could only be harmful and cause disunity among nations.[91] Instead, a cooperative effort was needed to change school curricula so that they would emphasize the unity of cultures rather than what set them apart. As one paper circulated in the roundtable posed: students should 'realize the unreality of frontiers'.[92]

How was this all to be accomplished? Several solutions were offered, some of which carried. Several of the smaller countries, especially Burma, emphasized that given their size, it would be hard for them to take great leaps unassisted.[93] There was both a lack of qualified teachers and of equipment. A delegate from Palestine proposed that at the very least, an inter-Asian exchange for books and journals should be set up, which would also translate journals into the various languages of the exchanging countries.[94] Preferably, the larger countries should send professors to the smaller ones, with the expenses born in part by the sending countries. A second proposal was for a uniform standard for the recognition of degrees among Asian universities, to increase mobility.[95] A third proposal entailed the establishment of scholarships for students to be trained elsewhere in Asia. This would also serve to intensify bonds between the various Asian nations and promote mutual understanding. On the spot, the National Council of Education in Bengal offered a scholarship for a student from each of the participating countries in the ARC to study at the Jamalpur College of engineering.[96]

Finally, the proposal was made to organize inter-Asian student conferences, for students to meet and exchange ideas. This too, was not a new idea. Student participation in the interwar conferences noted in chapters 1 to 4 had always been high, from the League Against Imperialism Conference at Brussels in 1927 to the Pan-Asiatic Conference in Rome in 1933. The Pan-Asiatic Conference at Nagasaki (1926) had even had a separate student conference attached to it, held after the official conference. At the ARC too, this suggestion was received favourably. It carried to the list of resolutions, and was realized, among others, in 1955, when the Bandung conference was accompanied by a student conference after the official state-

[89] Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 217.
[90] Nag, *New Asia*, 19.
[91] Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 219.
[92] LoC, Asian Relations Conference, South Asian Ephemera Collection, I-CLR-765: Joel de Croze, 'Implications of the Cultural Position of India'.
[93] Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 213.
[94] Ibid., 214.
[95] Ibid., 218.
[96] Ibid., 224.

oriented proceedings.[97] But while these proposals were all hard to disagree with, the discussion also generated more far-reaching proposals that did not find favour with all delegates at the ARC.

Cementing Asian educational cooperation—federative solutions

The two proposals that called for true Pan-Asian cooperation in the field of education and science were the establishment of one Asian language, in which all Asian nations might publish and exchange ideas, and the establishment of a Pan-Asian university. Many of the papers presented at the roundtable reflected on the language question in some way. The failings as well as the merits of the Esperanto movement in Europe were discussed in detail. But perhaps the most striking contributions were delivered by linguists Baburam Saxena and J. F. Bulsara. Saxena advocated an 'Inter-Asian [sic] language', because 'the Biblical myth of the Tower of Babal [sic] imparts one important lesson: that the diversity of speech is a great factor of disintegration of peoples and that unity of language is a great cementing force'.[98] His rejection of English—incidentally the primary medium of communication at the ARC—was strongly reminiscent of Tagore's educational vision that English was detrimental to the formation of Asian minds. In an elegant plea for the rejection of English as an imposed language, which 'both sentiment and reason would induce us to discard,'[99] he managed, through a series of logical fallacies, to arrive at Hindi as the best option. At this point, the Soviet delegations naturally pressed the Conference to look at how Russia tackled the problem, for 'after the Revolution, the Government made it compulsory for people to learn their own language and Russian'.[100] This had worked for all the Asian Soviet Republics and was suggested as worthy of emulation. At this, the discussion stalled.

Bulsara had framed his paper in the context of concrete proposals for the ARC.[101] Mindful of the fact that most Asian nations would not accept the language of one Asian country to become the language in all others, a notion which carried with it connotations of the imperialism the conference sought to discard, he suggested an Asian 'auxiliary' language which might be used for external communication. He assumed that the ARC was merely the start of close contacts in the fields of politics, economics, science, and education, and European languages simply did not 'express the idiom of the mother tongues of these representatives or their peoples'.[102] Rather than chose Arabic, Chinese, or Hindustani, the international auxiliary language should be artificially constructed. Of course, a world language was preferable—but failing that, the movement could restart in Asia first. His paper closed with the remark that even if the West had failed to construct such a language successfully, the rest of the world would soon have to decide what sort of inter-language they would use at their gatherings. The ARC should appoint a committee of experts of the various

[97] Arguably a much more Asianist conference than Bandung's intergovernmental meeting. See P. Sabharwal, *Little Bandung: A Report on Asian-African Students Conference (May-June 1956)* (New Delhi: University Press 1956).

[98] LoC, *Asian Relations Conference;* B. Saxena, 'Inter-Asian Language', fiche 10, 1.

[99] Saxena, 'Inter-Asian Language', 5.

[100] ARC, *Proceedings*, 195.

[101] NMML typescript, J.F. Bulsara, 'International Auxiliary Language', Group D/VII.

[102] Ibid., 24.

existing languages, and fashion out of them a new language. This 'need not take longer than two years', even if his requirements were stiff—the language should have minimal grammar; it should be easy to pronounce; its vocabulary should be precise and analytical; and it should possess a 'rational alphabet' with a limited number of vowels and consonants. And also, even the busiest man should be able to master it within three to six months on half an hour of study a day.[103]

Bulsara's proposal, though discussed at length, was rejected primarily on the grounds of language not counting as one of the 'immediate or urgent' problems of Asia—the very point his paper had tried to make. Furthermore, there 'was no reason to allow considerations of continental prestige to preclude the use of an available and practical medium'.[104] In a surprising turn of events, the use of English—lamented throughout the conference as an imperial relic—was suddenly re-appreciated as a language in which Asians could communicate with each other *and* with the West. The final session report mentions the subsequent compromise that there was a 'need' for a neutral language (aimed directly at the suggestions for Russian and Hindi, both of which were vocally opposed by Malaya); and that 'for the moment' English would be the best choice.[105] And rather than try to modify existing languages, Asian nations should devote more effort to learn the languages of their neighbours. The discussion had turned full circle to the earlier exchange proposals: Asian nations should send language teachers abroad for that purpose.

Most of the conference papers on education also proposed Asian institutions of learning in various forms. To some, these would serve as instruments for the revival of pre-colonial historical, intellectual, and cultural contacts between Asian nations. The emphasis put on the reinstating such contacts had long been a powerful rhetorical tool in Asianist discourse, especially among the Calcutta circle of intellectuals. Though other delegates also speculated upon these pre-existing ties, the same group of people who had reinvented this discourse in the interwar years were primarily responsible for framing the discussion in this way. Kalidas Nag had prepared a detailed piece on the historical literary, artistic, and cultural collaboration of the Asian nations for the conference.[106] Tan Yun-Shan, in 1947 still director of Viśva Bharati's Cheena Bhavana (China House) likewise wrote on 'Inter-Asian Cultural Cooperation'.[107] Tan Yun-Shan proposed in his paper to found 'All Asia Institutions for Asian Studies' [sic] in each Asian country, and to found All-Asia Libraries and Museums.[108] The other papers prepared by this group reflect a similar desire to bring out Asia's cultural interconnectedness with titles such as 'Aesthetic Traditions of the East 'and 'Chinese and Indian Culture: a Plea for Understanding', while R. C. Majumdar, formerly active in the Greater India Society, wrote 'Cultural Problems of India and Indonesia'. Almost every paper advocated the establishment of one or more Asian Studies Institutes, Asian UNESCOs, or Asian cultural exhibitions.

[103] Ibid., 26.
[104] Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 231.
[105] ARC, *Proceedings*, 204–205.
[106] See also Kalidas Nag's own report of the ARC: *New Asia* (Calcutta: Prajna Bharati 1947).
[107] LoC, *Asian Relations Conference*, Tan Yun-Shan, 'Inter-Asian Cultural Co-operation,' fiche 10, 1.
[108] Ibid., fiche 10, 3.

What the delegations could not agree on, however, was the form such Pan-Asian institutions should take. Was it to be based in one location? That would benefit one country more than others. But if it were be rotated between Asian nations on a yearly basis, this would be costly and render it ineffective. One group of delegates, from India, Ceylon, China, Palestine, Egypt, Siam, and Afghanistan, finally suggested a set of regional inter-university organizations and a 'central university of the federative type'.[109] This proposal found favour also with the more practically-minded delegates: existing institutions such as the Academy in China and the Royal Institute of Siam could serve as 'inter-university' organizations with a regional function. Both the Arab representative and the Georgian delegation made it known that they, too, would cooperate with such an initiative.

But one question remained unanswered: Where was the central institution to be located? After much discussion, it was announced that the ARC's steering committee had appointed a subcommittee for the establishment of a central institute, and that it would be useless at this stage to discuss it further. The delegates were also reminded that the ARC was an exploratory conference rather than an attempt at Asian federation, and a delegate from Afghanistan put the discussion into perspective by adding that, while it was all very interesting, his country at present found it difficult enough to import paper and stationary, let alone anything else.[110]

Surprisingly enough, it turned out that the question of Asian cooperation in the sphere of politics was almost easier than culture or education. As noted above, the overriding unifier at the ARC was a universal condemnation of imperialism in any shape or form. India was still some months shy of attaining independence; Korea was occupied; Indonesia and Vietnam were fighting the Dutch and French, respectively; China was locked in civil war; and Malaysia's independence was not yet in sight. The post-war world was slowly taking shape, but international institutions did not yet reflect that world. It was in the discussion on what Asia as a whole could do to influence the global political environment that the most powerful continental solidarities emerged.

5.4 Towards an Asian Federation?

One Asia, One World

The idea of Asia speaking with one voice, possibly through an intergovernmental institution or even an Asian federation had also found its origins in the interwar years. As discussed in the introduction, the possible foundation of such a federation had been raised at the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress as early as 1921.[111] Congress President Chittaranjan Das was convinced that 'such a bond of friendship and love, of sympathy and cooperation, between India and the rest of Asia … is destined to bring about world peace'.[112] Federationalist ideas would resurface with great frequency throughout the interwar years, often with an Asian federation as a precursor to a world federation. Sarat Bose had even

[109] Gopal, *Asian Relations*, 216.
[110] Ibid., 216.
[111] M. Krása, 'The Idea of Pan-Asianism and the Nationalist Movement in India', *Archiv Orientální* 40 (1972): 246.
[112] N. C. Banerji, *Asianism and Other Essays* (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House 1930).

claimed that any world federation *had* to be preceded by an Asian one as Asia was, among other things, the most populous continent on earth.[113] And Gandhi, who otherwise did not consider himself an internationalist, had accused militarist Japan in the Second World War of destroying the world's chances at federation by dismembering Asia.[114] The third Aga Khan, imagining a different cartography of the Asian continent, had proposed the creation of a South- and West-Asian Union.[115]

This continued at the ARC, where Sutan Shariar called the conference 'a mutual endeavour on the part of all Asians for a better world in which the granting of political, social and economic justice to all will lead to a "One Asia" which will in time expand into a "One World"'.[116] Another, unnamed, delegate, likewise noted that the peace of Asia could not be separated from world peace.[117]

One of Nehru's intentions in convening the ARC had certainly been to take the first step towards an Asian federation. His inaugural address to the conference revealed a sense of mission. He referred directly to Asia's political future in the post-war international constellation, albeit framed in the familiar rhetoric of the interwar years:

> In this work there are no leaders and no followers. All countries of Asia have to meet together on an equal basis in a common task and endeavour. … In this atomic age Asia will have to function effectively in the maintenance of peace. Indeed there can be no peace unless Asia plays her part. … The whole spirit and outlook of Asia are peaceful, and the emergence of Asia in world affairs will be a powerful influence for world peace.[118]

The proceedings show that the conference's participants were themselves aware of the internationalist environment of the early decades of the twentieth century. The first roundtable report refers to the inspiration that nationalist movements across Asia took from the Japanese victory over the Russians in 1905 as well as the cry of 'Asia for the Asiatics'—although raised by Japan 'for its own motives'.[119] It was also noted that since Japan's militarist exploits leading up to and during the Second World War, the concept of an Asian bloc had been condemned.[120] However, the concept should be revived and melded into a just and peaceful form. The conference proceedings reveal two possible forms that such Asian cooperation might take: an Asian Relations Organization as a permanent body to convene conferences that would allow Asia to speak with one voice in the international theatre; or a neutrality bloc, that through force of sheer numbers would allow Asia to stay out of superpower conflicts.

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[113] Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia*, 204.
[114] Ibid., 163.
[115] Keenleyside, 'Nationalist Indian Attitudes Towards Asia, 217. As Çemil Aydin has recently demonstrated, this was one of several attempts in this period to combine Pan-Islamism and Pan-Asianism. Aydin, *Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*. See also S. Esenbel, 'Japan's Global Claim to Asia and the World of Islam: Transnational Nationalism and World Power, 1900–1945', *American Historical Review* 109:4 (2004): 1140–70.
[116] ARC, *Proceedings*, 241.
[117] Ibid., 86.
[118] J. Nehru, Inaugural Address, in ARC, *Proceedings*, 23–5.
[119] ARC, *Proceedings*, 80.
[120] Ibid., 86.

Asian Relations Organization

The first, an Asian Relations Organization (ARO), raised sharp differences of opinion. India, Ceylon, Burma, and Iran were in favour; China, Afghanistan, and the Philippines were opposed. Here, the ARC was impeded by its status as an academic and cultural conference. The point was raised that most of the delegates were not political leaders, or in some cases—such as China's Kuomintang delegates—not fully representative of their country as a whole. With the discussion in deadlock, Nehru made sure that Gandhi, who addressed the conference on its closing day, referred to the plan.[121] Gandhi's words carried much weight, and an uneasy compromise was reached: an Asian Relations Organization was indeed established with Delhi as its temporary headquarters. It is indicative of the rising Indo-Chinese competition for the leadership of Asia that China hastened to invite the conference to convene in China next time anyway, and this invitation was accepted. This new body was to be non-governmental, but far less academic than its Indian counterpart, the ICWA; it had as its objectives 'to foster friendly relations and co-operation' and look after the well-being of the countries of Asia.[122]

The Asian Relations Organization, much coveted in the interwar period, was set up in New Delhi and provided with a provisional general council before the conference had ended. At the suggestion of Wen Yuan-ning from China, the council had thirty members from all over Asia and consisted of politicians, academics, and public figures alike.[123] The organization soon saw the establishment of six national units: Burma, Ceylon, India, Israel, Malaya, and Nepal. But it led a halting existence. The invitation to hold the next conference in China was moot, as it had been issued by Kuomintang representatives who were ousted from China before any conference could be organized. The Chinese Communist Party had not attended the ARC, and did not take the KMT's place. After the Communist takeover, the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs in Peking did suggest closer affiliations to the ARO, but this was limited to the exchange of publications.[124] As the India branch dwindled to an office with three rooms and as many full-time staff, the only further conference it organized was on the position of women in South Asia.[125] Finally, the Asian Relations Organization was completely eclipsed by the Bandung Conference, which was not held under its auspices. Its end was ignominious: it was quietly disbanded by the very person who had dreamt it into being. Nehru wrote to the Organization's secretary:

> I think it is better to wind up the organization because in the present political climate nothing much can be done. As you know, almost from the start of this organization, there have been conflicts among member-states and in such a situation I don't think

[121] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 70. Original voice recording LoC, Audio-visual department, EMI 7EPE.3005.
[122] ARC, *Proceedings*, 255.
[123] Ibid., 256.
[124] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 72–3.
[125] Ibid., 72.

> any work can be done. … You have my authority to put a note in the file to say that the Organization is to be wound up with immediate effect.[126]

Neutrality bloc

Perhaps the most lasting achievement of the Asian Relations Conference was to sow the seeds of neutrality and non-alignment, even if both ideas were somewhat ridiculed at the ARC itself. While an Asian bloc was alluded to early in the Conference in the opening addresses of various delegations, it was brought up in earnest by a Malay delegate of Indian origin, John Thivy.[127] According to him, it was to take the form of refusal of assistance of raw materials, arms, or dockyards in the event of war. If Asia would 'demobilize', world wars could be prevented. Moreover, this would protect the smaller countries of Asia such as Malaya itself, which had no air force, army, or navy. Finally, other Asian countries could thus support independence movements by not lending their facilities to imperialist forces.[128] This suggestion, though applauded by some of the smaller countries of Southeast Asia, found little support. So little, in fact, that Thivy's lengthy speech on the possible gains from a demobilized Asia received no more than a single sentence in the final report.

Criticism varied—the idea was perceived by some to be insufficient; others considered it too wild. Indonesia suggested a more tangible contribution to the fights going on there and in Vietnam. A Burmese delegate put it simply: 'if we are attacked, we will fight'.[129] The objection was raised that with the establishment of the United Nations, neutrality would be impossible due to countries' obligations to that body. K. Santhanam, for India, said that they could not be spectators in such an event. Thivy replied that it was not only up to the UN to declare war; countries should always be free to choose peace.[130] At this, it was claimed that a neutrality bloc would not be enough to reach the goal of independence for all of Asia.[131] And, finally, Vijayalakshmi Pandit proclaimed the idea 'rather vague'.[132]

The last pronouncement is possibly why the concept of non-alignment would become the subject of much confusion later, even after Belgrade.[133] As is reflected in the verbatim reports of the conference, Thivy's idea encompassed a set of concepts that each delegation interpreted differently. The bones of contention were 'neutrality' and 'neutralism'; the conflation of both concepts with nonviolence; and the concept of 'demobilization'. Thivy had claimed his neutrality bloc as a 'dynamic force:' the active and conscious refusal of ports, airfields, and supplies to alien powers. He opposed any interpretation that equated this kind of neutralism with inertia. However, Pandit relegated the concept to precisely that when she

[126] A. Appadorai, 'The Asian Relations Conference in Perspective', *International Studies* 18:3 (1979): 275–85: 283.
[127] John Thivy was an Indian lawyer who had settled in Singapore.
[128] The full quotation is published in Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 58.
[129] Ibid., 58–9.
[130] Ibid., 59.
[131] In the opinion of the Vietnamese delegation.
[132] Interestingly, Sarojini Naidu was among the latter group.
[133] See, among others, M. B. Alam, 'The Concept of Non-Alignment: A Critical Analysis,' *World Affairs* 140:2 (1977): 166–85.

called it 'a nice gesture', but not one that would ever stop a war. Burmese delegate Mr Rachid went further, stating simply that 'some of us here' do not believe in nonviolence.[134]

This confusion of terms is reminiscent of Gandhi's long struggle with explaining to the world *satyagraha* as an active rather than a passive form of resistance, and his frustrations with people consistently interpreting it as the latter.[135] In that light, it is somewhat surprising that the idea was misunderstood to this degree, especially by the Indian delegates. Nevertheless, while the proposal did not carry in the ARC, the discussion was not without the desired effect: a year later, several of the ARC countries denied transit rights to Dutch ships and airplanes during the Indonesian crisis.[136]

What the delegations did agree on, was a notion much more similar to neutralism than was perhaps realized at the time: that it was not in the interest of Asia, or its individual countries, to become embroiled in the power struggles of others. Nehru had already framed this in an Asian context when he said:

> We stand on the edge of a precipice and there are various forces which pull us on one side in favour of cooperation and peace, and on the other, push us towards the precipice of war and disintegration. I am not enough of a prophet to know what will happen, but I do know that those who desire peace must deprecate separate blocs which necessarily become hostile to other blocs. Therefore, India, in so far as it has a foreign policy, has declared that it wants to remain independent and free of all of these blocs and that it wants to cooperate on equal terms with all countries.[137]

At the ARC, this non-involvement was framed at first in the context of the colonial experience. Domination by another power would just be imperialism in a new guise, as the delegation from Korea was experiencing first-hand. The roundtable report included the unanimous wish that the occupation of Korea would end shortly and that Korea would receive full independence. It is here, rather than at Bandung, that the first glimpses of the non-aligned movement must be located. As the concept of 'dynamic neutrality' moved to 'positive neutralism', it came to hold the connotation that an uncommitted course signified the freedom to judge each situation on its own merit, which finally became non-alignment.

Much has been said about the successes and failures of non-alignment, which needs not be reiterated here.[138] It is important to recognize, however, that the movement grew out of a drive for Asian cooperation on the one hand, and an unequivocal rejection of imperialism on the other, and that both had played a significant part in the public imagination since the end of the First World War. The concept of non-alignment did not start at Belgrade—it did not even start at Bandung. In 1963, Michael Brecher wrote that at Bandung, the primacy of anti-

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[134] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 60.

[135] M. K. Gandhi, letter to unknown addressee, 25 January 1920, in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 19:350.

[136] Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Ceylon, India, and Burma. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 84.

[137] J. Nehru, 'We wish for Peace,' in *India's Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946–April 1961* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1961), 11.

[138] N. Miskovic and H. Fischer-Tine, eds., *The Cold War and the Postcolonial Moment: Prehistory, Aims and Achievements of the Non-Alignment Movement 50 Years after Belgrade* (forthcoming London: Routledge, 2014).

colonialism and regional autonomy had been declared, and therefore Asia's non-involvement in the bipolar struggle for power between the Soviet Union and United States.[139] It is argued here that anti-colonialism and regional autonomy were already strongly present in the proceedings of the ARC. As a concept posited, contested, and debated in an Asian setting, the Asian Relations Conference was its first venue.

But if the ARC was the start of something, it was the end of something else. Amitav Acharya has rightly noted that the Asian multilateral conferences of the 1940s and 1950s contributed to Asian regionalism by embedding the Westphalian norms of independence, reciprocity, equality, and non-interference within regional diplomatic and security practice.[140] What they had in common with their European counterparts is that they were consequently instrumental in preserving the status quo rather than creating a brave new world of interregional cooperation. The very fact that after the ARC these conferences were convened by independent Asian states that had lost the common denominator of desiring to oust European imperialism from their continent meant that the desire for Asian unity was ebbing fast. In its unanimous exaltations of Asian brotherhood and unity, and in its attempt to convene 'Asia' in the widest definition possible, the ARC was very much the last of the interwar conferences rather than the first of the post-war ones.

The ARC plucked the fruit of more than two decades of Asian cooperation, both in terms of the pre-existing networks that determined its participants, and in terms of the Asianist rhetoric that permeated the proceedings. As such, it was an outcome of the Asianist enthusiasm of the interwar period much more than a product of the emerging Cold War. Convening the conference had been made more urgent by the prospect of decolonization and the establishment of the United Nations. The presence of several Central Asian Soviet Republics was a telling feature. This too was a continuation of earlier nationalist contacts, and though the conference did not lean significantly to the left, there was little criticism of the policies of the Soviet Union, or of the role played by Communists in the internal politics of any of the countries represented. This overture—on both sides—was never to be repeated. The ARC marked a crucial transitional period and should not be too lightly discarded for its lack of long-term tangible results.

5.5 The road to Bandung

Asia unites for Indonesia: January 1949

Though organized and dominated by India, the ARC had been a product of the cooperation of several Asian nations and had been conceived in that context. The first explicitly *inter-governmental* Asian conference after the war, however, was an Indian initiative.[141] After frustration over the inaction of the Security Council in the Dutch offensive on Indonesia, Indian planes had started night flights to break the air and sea blockade imposed upon the

[139] M. Brecher, 'International Relations and Asian Studies: The Subordinate State System of Southern Asia', *World Politics* 15:2 (1963): 224.

[140] A. Acharya, 'Will Asia's Past be its Future?' *International Security* 28:3 (2003): 159.

[141] Though reportedly suggested to Nehru by Prime Minister Thakin Nu of Burma. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 88.

republic with material and financial support, Nehru called for a second Asian conference in Delhi.

The list of invitations was different from that for the ARC, and demonstrates that the Cold War had made its mark on Asia. Neither the Soviet Republics nor Communist Vietnam were invited. Turkey, which had been courted in every Asianist initiative since the early nineteenth century, was invited but refused to attend because 'it was a European nation'.[142] These absences changed the cartography of what constituted 'Asia' at this conference, and created a new demarcation along the political lines of the Cold War. This was a geography of Asia hitherto unknown: the 'communist north' had been excluded, and the invitation to China had again been extended to the KMT. But this was an exclusion on both sides: as noted in chapter 4, during Stalin's time in power, Asian communism was not well-disposed to what it perceived as Asian nationalism. The Middle East, however, was almost fully represented, in opposition to the ARC, where it had been represented by a single observer on behalf of the Arab states. A possible explanation is that their hopes of international cooperation had been directed eastwards because of Palestine; Jansen has suggested that the issue of Indonesia, as the most populous Muslim country in the world, also held special significance to the Arab states.[143] Finally, the map of Asia had, for the first and only time, come to incorporate Australia and New Zealand. However, this had more to do with the location of Indonesia and recognition of the Australian contribution to the Indonesian struggle rather than with Australia's position vis-à-vis Asia. However, the fact that Australia decided to attend with a full delegation—in spite of opposition both at home and in the United Kingdom—is an indicator that the Australian government was acutely aware of its physical location in a rapidly decolonizing world.

It is not just for the peculiarities of its Asian cartographies, however, that this conference deserves more attention than it has previously received. First of all, it was a daring feat to organize an international political conference critiquing the United Nations in 1949. It was perceived as such, too, both by the Western press—which viewed it with apprehension—and by the Indian press—which viewed it with pride. But most important, the Delhi conference on Indonesia marks a moment when a concrete political expression of Asian unity was still the most favoured outcome in the Indian public sphere and the main focus of the press. And although the venue for the conference was less public than the grounds of the Purana Qila had been, the public was no less present: All India Radio made special arrangements to report on the proceedings and published the time and frequencies in all major newspapers.[144] On the opening day of the conference, the *Bombay Chronicle* wrote in an editorial:

> Today is another historic day in the history of Asia. For the Asian Conference, meeting in New Delhi, represents a notice to the Western World that Asia is determined to be mistress of her own fate and destiny, freed, every inch of her, from the imperialist domination of any European country. … The West has got to

[142] Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*, 200.
[143] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 84.
[144] 'Asian Conference Proceedings on AIR', *The Bombay Chronicle*, 19 January 1949, 9.

> understand that it cannot—the time is past—argue in respect of any Asian country as if that country was in any sense any part of it.[145]

As the conference opened and the customary welcome messages were read, all participants hastened to emphasize that the conference did not intend to form a hostile bloc; nor was it meant to impose sanctions on any other regime. Rather, the conference wanted to create the political momentum for the cessation of hostilities in Indonesia and the restoration of authority to the Indonesian republic. Mohammed Zafrullah Khan, the representative for Pakistan, restored the conference to the sphere of the UN when he remarked, that it had convened seventeen full members of the UN and one soon to be admitted, which meant that thirty per cent of the UN was represented at Delhi.[146]

After the first day, it turned out that the various proposals for ending the hostilities in Indonesia largely overlapped. These included a ceasefire, the immediate release of jailed Indonesian leaders, an end to the blockade, and the interim government's control over the armed forces. The only dissent was as to the order in which these four steps should take place. This unanimity was not lost on the Indian press. The *Bombay Chronicle* reported the proceedings on its front page, sure that the solidarity of this conference would lead to something bigger:

> Never before a conference with such potentialities for good opened in the whole of Asia as it was in New Delhi this morning. If the sentiments expressed by the delegates were really implemented, the conference will become Parliament of Asian people, hostile to none, yet a bulwark of their power, safeguarding their interest particularly at the international organization.[147]

This was fully endorsed by another journalist, who even saw the place such an 'Asian Parliament' was to occupy in the international theatre:

> Is it not natural that the free countries of Asia should begin to think of some more permanent arrangement than this conference for effective mutual consultation and concerted effort in the pursuit of common aims, not in a spirit of selfishness or hostility to any other nation or group of nations, but in order to strengthen and bring nearer fulfilment the aims and ideals of the Charter of the United Nations?[148]

The conference was indeed both efficient and effective. Two days later, a drafting committee had already formulated a resolution on the Indonesian situation, which was cabled to the UN Security Council that very night. The most bellicose proposals, such as immediate cessation of all Marshall Aid to the Netherlands, had disappeared, but all demands for a fast transfer of power to the Indonesian Republic had been kept. The Security Council was also pressed to take action 'under the wide powers conferred upon it by the Charter' in case of non-

[145] Editorial, *The Bombay Chronicle,* 20 January 1949, 6.
[146] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 89.
[147] 'Nehru Leads Asia Against Foreign Aggression,' *The Bombay Chronicle,* 21 January 1949, 1.
[148] 'Asia for the Asians', *The Bombay Chronicle,* 21 January 1949, 9.

compliance with the Council's final resolution, which, it was noted, the UN member states gathered at Delhi supported fully.

At the ARC, Nehru as well as many of the delegates had been determined to create a permanent institution, that would further cement Asian unity. The history of the Asian Relations Organization's failure was already clear by the time the Indonesia Conference was held in 1949. Nevertheless, the success of the Indonesia conference reawakened a dormant parliamentary Pan-Asianism in both the delegates and the public that harked back to the early interwar years. After the drafting committee had commenced its work on the Indonesian resolution, the conference moved to the question of further cooperation. The Philippines advocated a 'permanent organization of Asian states functioning as a regional body' and Yemen envisioned 'a Union of Asiatic States to make a machinery for consultation'.[149] Both were careful not to call it a 'bloc'. But Nehru was hesitant this time; there was already one half-defunct Asian organization in Delhi; why have another? But his counter-proposal for a consultative committee drawn from Asia's ambassadors in Delhi was considered insufficient. It is ironic that at the ARC, several delegates declared at the first roundtable that they would not have come if they had known it would be a political conference. Now delegates said their governments would not have sent them 'if they had thought it was not going to lead to future cooperation on all matters'.[150]

The Indian press, for one, was sure that things would not end with this conference, and saw the gathering as a promise: 'The Asian Conference is a promise that both political domination and economic exploitation will no more be tolerated and that the forces of Asian Nationalism will unite to throw off all aggression'.[151] Besides, now that there was agreement on Indonesia, the public could hardly expect their governments to let the matter rest with the sending of a telegram to the Security Council: 'Since the conference was convened to discuss a specific issue, namely, Indonesia, the setting up of a body like a "Standing Committee" of the participating countries to continue dealing with the problem till it is successfully solved is taken for granted'.[152] For good measure, the *Bombay Chronicle* decided to drive home the point that the political clout for closer cooperation existed by publishing all messages the conference had received since it had opened. These ranged from Emir Abdul Karim in Cairo ('It is my prayer and belief that the conference will reach unanimous positive decision on this grave matter which the Arabs and people of Asia can no longer tolerate') to the National Student Conference of the Philippines, who 'urge[d] the formation of an Asian Federation to support Indonesian Independence and safeguard freedom, and promote the welfare of the Asiatic people as a step towards the maintenance of world peace'.[153]

Like its predecessors, this conference would fail to achieve a federated Asia, but viewed from New Delhi, the conference had achieved what it had set out to do: six days later, the Security Council resolved its deadlock over the Indonesian crisis. A United Nations

[149] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 93.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Editorial, *Bombay Chronicle*, 21 January 1949, 6.
[152] 'Rapid Progress of Asian Conference—General Agreement on Draft Resolution on Indonesia', *Bombay Chronicle*, 22 January 1949, 1.
[153] 'Rapid Progress of Asian Conference,' 1.

Mediation Commission was set up and the release of political prisoners was demanded.[154] They remained in prison three months later, when a majority of the participating countries reconvened in Delhi and this time decided to ask the Security Council for economic sanctions against the Dutch, as well as a denial of all land, sea, and air facilities. They also they decided to start delivering aid to Indonesia themselves.[155] When the resolution from this meeting was released on April 13, negotiations between the Netherlands and Indonesia resumed. Although the conference may have played only a small role in helping Indonesia achieve independence, the Indian public held it up as a demonstration of what a united Asia could achieve.

Increasing competition: 1950–4

In the intervening years between the Delhi conference on Indonesia in 1949 and the Bandung Conference in 1955, Asia would come to be more sharply divided along the lines of the Cold War. As will be shown below, bloc formation on the continent would play a large role in the failures of the latter conference, despite the enduring legend of the 'Bandung spirit'. Under varying degrees of political pressure, Iran, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines 'chose' alignment to the United States. China, North Korea, and North Vietnam aligned with the Soviet Union. Due to the American forces present in Japan and South Korea, neither could be considered unaligned. Turkey became a member of NATO and moved further away from Asia. Iraq conferred with India in 1954 prior to joining the Baghdad Pact. Hesitant about aligning itself to either bloc, it first sought a defensive alliance with India and wanted a guarantee of military assistance in the event of an invasion. When this did not result in a bilateral agreement, the Baghdad Pact was concluded.[156] In the case of Pakistan, too, its inclusion in the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization or SEATO, was a direct result of failed negotiations with India, in this case of a different nature: it joined SEATO primarily for fear of further deterioration of its relations with that country. From mid-1954 to mid-1955, intra-Asian competition increased sharply.

Other than India, several countries were explicitly unaligned in this period, albeit for very different reasons. Laos and Cambodia had their non-alignment codified through the Geneva agreement on Indo-China of 1954. For Ceylon, non-alignment was a matter of economics, as its two main export products, tea and rubber, were exported almost exclusively to each respective bloc: tea to the West, and rubber to the Soviet Union.[157] Indonesia reported that its primary consideration for choosing non-alignment was internal reconstruction.[158] A survey of these underlying motives for non-alignment reveals that the concept was far from doctrinaire for many, and that it might prove a shaky foundation for further regional cooperation.

It was under these circumstances that two smaller conferences were convened in 1954, first at Colombo and then at Bogor, south of Jakarta. Burma, India, Indonesia, Ceylon, and Pakistan (as the only aligned power) used these meetings to discuss closer cooperation. The proposal to organize another Asian conference was on the table, with Indonesia eager to host.

[154] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 92.
[155] Ibid., 97.
[156] Ibid., 134.
[157] Ibid., 123.
[158] Ibid., 122.

The conference was decided upon in Colombo; the Bogor meeting was intended to hammer out the details. The decisions about whom to invite signal the death of Asianism at the inter-governmental level. Not because Bandung was to become an Afro-Asian conference, with a second continent entering the equation, but because Asianist geographical imaginings were abandoned in favour of a very different cartography: that of the Cold War.

First of all, inviting the Soviet Union's Asian republics was no longer a consideration. In fact, by 1954 Soviet Central Asia had lost its Asian identity altogether in the eyes of the Colombo powers. U Nu said that 'it is time the Asians told them to stop interfering in our affairs'.[159] The Colombo powers were 'us'; Central Asia had become 'them'. This was an interesting decision insofar as the same did not apply to China, which was said to be Asian first, and communist second.[160] Mongolia, on the other hand, was firmly within the Soviet orbit and therefore not invited. The continental principle of Bandung would be partly salvaged by the presence of several non-self-governing territories. However, the emphasis on the aligned and non-aligned would spell the end of Asianism.

Enthusiasm for Asian federation was waning among Asia's governments, and it became increasingly clear that the configurations of the Cold War had rendered the concept of continental solidarity vis-à-vis the West moot. The forces that had driven it—the pooling of efforts to realize a leap in development, education, and science that had marked the ARC, and the support for the fight against colonialism that had spurred the Indonesia conference—were now largely sought in other areas. However, Asianism was well and truly alive among both the political opposition and the general public, who still considered both development and imperialism vital concerns that should be addressed in an Asian context.

The 1940s and early 1950s saw a variety of Asian conferences in this context, among which were an Asian Writer's Conference, an Asian History Conference, and not least the Asian regional conference of the ILO (see chapter 2). Out of the last, a new initiative had arisen that would come to the fore during the very time that Asia's governments were becoming increasingly divided: an Asian socialist movement. The ILO conference at Delhi had once more thrown into sharp relief the Asian lag in development and its impact on both industrial and agricultural workers. A group of representatives from Asia's socialist parties—at first consisting of India, Burma, and Indonesia, felt that this lag was best addressed by social-democratic means. This time, Burma took the initiative, and preliminary meetings were held in Rangoon in March 1952. It was here, rather than at the intergovernmental meetings of Colombo and Bogor, that the internationalist spirit of the interwar years was kept alive. The group's main concerns were 'to strengthen relations between the Asian socialist parties' to 'champion the cause of all colonial and oppressed peoples and guide the freedom movements towards the establishment of democratic national independence',' and to cooperate 'for the maintenance of world peace'.[161] When they looked back on the incipient stages of the movement in 1956, they saw themselves as the real torch bearers of international socialism in the context of the imperial exploitation of Asia:

[159] Ibid., 158.
[160] Ibid., 207.
[161] NMML, *Three Years of Asian Socialist Conference*—Preparatory committee Second Congress of the Asian Socialist Conference, Bombay, November 1956, i.

> The rise of Asian nationalism was one of the most significant features of the post-war world situation. But what was still more significant was the emergence of strong and well organized Socialist parties, firmly rooted in the patriotic upheavals of their respective lands, following the guidance from the teachings of Marx and Engels, holding a fervent belief in the innate importance of the individual as a man, and consequently, in the human values of the Socialist revolution, wedded to social change and democracy. Conscious of their strength and historic role, devoting full attention and study to the peculiar problems and needs of the over-populated and underdeveloped countries of Asia, with confidence and self-assurance, they refused to become slaves to either totalitarian communism or capitalist democracies of the West.[162]

In January 1953, 177 delegates and observers convened in Rangoon. The invited political parties were all moderate socialist parties whose views were roughly in line with the Socialist International. They also fitted with the geography of Asia as it had been constructed by the ILO regional conference. Professed communist states had been left out. Represented were Indonesia, India, Burma, Malaya, Pakistan, Lebanon, Egypt, Israel, and Japan. The conference had a choice of parties to invite from the last two. For Israel, the centrist Mapai party attended, rather than the more leftist Mapam. In the case of Japan, both the right and left wings had indicated their interest, and both had been involved in the preparatory process, so they were both invited. Syrian and Iraqi delegations had been invited, but declined to attend. An Egyptian delegation attended, but staged a walkout early in the conference over a disagreement with the Israeli delegation, and Lebanon followed suit.[163]

The conferences were strongly committed to combatting imperialism, and the resulting partner organizations and their projects reflected this. A permanent bureau was set up with Burma, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Lebanon, Malaya, Pakistan, and Vietnam. The administrative headquarters was Rangoon. This time, there was a marked move to lessen Indian influence on the movement; only one Indian was invited to take up a position in the permanent bureau: Praja Socialist Party member Madhav Gokhale. Over the course of the first conference and the subsequent meetings of the bureau in Hyderabad (August 1953), Kalaw (Burma, May 1954), and Tokyo (August 1954) a set of initiatives emerged. These echoed the internationalist spirit of the interwar years in three different ways. First, they sought to unite the socialist parties of Asia in order to cooperate with larger international bodies including the International Union of Socialist Youth, the Movement for Colonial Freedom, the Socialist Alliance of Yugoslavia, and the Popular Socialist Movements in Latin America.[164] Second, they were committed to world peace as a phenomenon that would emerge if their initiatives were successful:

> World peace and the possibilities of democratic socialist development of Asia are inseparably tied up and mutually conditioned. World peace is threatened by three main

[162] Ibid., 2.
[163] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 265.
[164] NMML, *Three years of Asian Socialist Conference*, 6.

> factors, namely colonialism, economic disequilibrium and the politics of spheres of influence. The association of Asian Socialists with the freedom struggle in the world constitutes an important element in the role which Asia can and should play in the maintenance of world peace.[165]

Finally, they sought to engage their alliance to obtain freedom for areas still under colonial rule, with an emphasis on a free Asia supporting an un-free Africa.

The latter was not limited to wordy resolutions professing Asian-African solidarity, although these occurred too. On the initiative of the Asian Socialist Conference, its member parties and partner leagues observed a yearly 'Dependent Peoples Freedom Day' on 30 October. This was meant to 'encourage dependent peoples in their fight for independence and against poverty. It should strengthen the fraternal bonds between the fighters for freedom throughout the world, in the countries behind the Iron Curtain as well as those under imperialist rule'.[166] The question that would come to plague Bandung—whether Soviet domination could be equated with imperialism, and whether it was an imperialism equal to or perhaps worse than 'European' imperialism—was not seen as an issue here. From the outset, the conference rejected both the capitalist and communist routes in favour of a social-democratic path of development. Two more tangible initiatives emerged as well: the conference arranged for a scholarship programme for African students to learn about cooperative movements, farming, and political organization.[167] It also set up an Anti-Colonial Bureau in Rangoon, which gathered information on colonial struggles and distributed them through a monthly newsletter. One of their further tasks was pressing the international theatre for universal membership of the United Nations.

In the run-up to the second Asian Socialist Conference held in Bombay, the question of non-alignment, which was well on its way to becoming Asia's most pressing political issue, could not be evaded. But whereas at Bandung non-alignment would replace the idea of 'Asia' with the divisions of the Cold War, the Asian Socialist Conference utilized the concept of non-alignment for an explicitly Asianist agenda, stating that 'the independent position of the Asian countries and their freedom of movement with regard to the problems of world peace do not mean ideological neutralism or the policy of sacrificing the liberty of other peoples or nations to one's own selfish interests'.[168] Instead, they should commit themselves to democratic government and concentrate specifically on Asian problems such as bettering the lot of agricultural workers along the line of the ILO convention on minimum standards (1952).[169] Equating foreign imperialism with domestic feudalism, the two should be combated in tandem: 'the Asian upheaval … is inseparably tied up with Asia's rejection of the yoke of imperialism and feudalism, and with her search for those forms of social organization which will ensure a higher level of production'.[170]

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[165] Ibid., 25.
[166] NMML, *Three years of Asian Socialist Conference*, 7.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid., 27.
[169] Ibid., 34.
[170] Ibid., 24.

The Asian Socialist Conference, which would fade into the background towards the late 1950s, gradually breaking into smaller-scale initiatives, kept Asianist internationalism alive beyond the Bandung years. It would also be instrumental in influencing a new set of initiatives in the later 1950s, which will be examined in the next section. One of very few authors to write on the Asian Socialist Conference, G. H. Jansen concluded that 'the apologetic mumblings of the Socialists produced no more practical results than had meetings of the Afro-Asian governments'.[171] He termed the Asian Socialist Conference no more than an 'echo' of the 'real' Afro-Asian movement.[172] Given the short lifespan of the conference, and seen from the perspective of inter-governmental Afro-Asianism, this is a fair assessment. However, the movement is evaluated differently here for two reasons. First, if one is to take Asianism not as an exclusively political instrument, but as a vision of a fair and just world order that penetrated much deeper layers of society, the Asian Socialist Conference convened an Asia that sought to carve out a place for itself on that basis. Second, it did so not as a marginal movement, but as an alliance of parties whose delegates to the conference were well-known figures such as Sutan Shahrir and Ram Manohar Lohia.[173]

The Bandung myth

It was in this context of waxing post-war Asianist solidarity at the non-governmental level, and waning Asianism at the governmental level, that the Bandung Conference was finally convened. Held in April 1955, the Bandung Conference is still widely recognized as the most successful Asian-African conference as well as *the* conference that created a sense of Asian-African solidarity and condemned colonialism in all its manifestations. In fact, it was neither. The famous resolution on colonialism was in fact the result of the biggest struggle at the conference, which divided the participants between those who considered the resolution to include Soviet imperialism, and those who did not. The careful wording of the resolution was a compromise that left it open to be interpreted either way. The press too, had its doubts even before the conference began. On April 12, the *Bombay Chronicle* wrote:

> There was a time when the region covering the Middle and Near East and the Indian Subcontinent had a noticeable and welcome unity in the midst of diversities. It all began to change not so long ago. … The area is no longer compact in the one important sense which counts today. There are conflicts between Turkey and the Arab countries, between Pakistan and most of the Arab countries, and between Pakistan and Afghanistan, to say nothing of the post-partition issues still bedevilling Indo-Pakistani relations. … No other region is suffering such unfortunate dissensions, and therefore if for no other reason there is an urgent need to restore some common understanding and friendliness. The prospects are not exactly promising.[174]

[171] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 267.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Sutan Shahrir was Prime Minister of Indonesia from 1945 to 1947 and founder of the social democratic PSI in 1948. This party participated in the Asian Socialist Conference but was banned by Sukarno in 1960. Ram Manohar Lohia had helped to found the Congress Socialist Party in India in 1934 and served as an MP after Independence.
[174] Editorial, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 12 April 1955, 4.

G. H. Jansen has dubbed the 'Bandung Spirit' the 'Bandung Myth', for the region never put in practice the solidarity the conference is said to have created. It was a myth indeed—but not necessarily for the reasons Jansen proposes. The abandonment of Asianism in favour of Afro-Asianism was not the issue. Quite the contrary; the Indian press, still eager to promote Asian unity, largely ignored the African presence at Bandung and framed it as an Asian conference. However, despite Bandung's precursors and the rousing speeches of Nehru and Sukarno, who tried to keep the Asian internationalist moment alive, neither Asianism nor Afro-Asianism were the driving force of the gathering. The decline of older Asianist principles had set in with the Indonesia conference of 1949, and deteriorated further with the compromises of the Colombo and Bogor meetings. The fate of Asianism was sealed by the fact that even the rallying point of anti-imperialism, which had driven the internationalist moment for decades, could no longer produce agreement. The most definitive outcome of Bandung was the demonstration that Asianism, or indeed Afro-Asianism, did not work on an intergovernmental level. To find continuity in the internationalist moment, we should look not towards intergovernmental cooperation, but towards the non-state level, for it was here that Asianism had flourished throughout the interwar years, and it was here that it continued.

5.6 Conclusion

The Asian Relations Conference was the first in a series of Asian comparable gatherings in the post-war period. It was convened on the wings of Asianism and visions of Asian unity that had held various elements of Indian civil society in its grip since the early 1920s. The ARC at Delhi was unique in several ways. It was a gathering of academic and cultural organizations representing the nations of Asia and all issues pertaining to Asia, were discussed in a non-political manner, from the emerging Cold War to decolonization and Asian representation at the UN. It was the only conference to invite all of Asia, including not only Soviet Russia and the Central Asian Soviet Republics, but also US-occupied Japan. This inclusive Asianist atmosphere spoke strongly to the internationalist moment of the interwar years, much more so than to the emerging constellations of decolonized nations in the Cold War. This was due in no small part to the strong continuity of individuals and groups represented at the ARC. Nevertheless, the emerging shape of the post-war constellation was not without impact on the proceedings.

The ARC was not successful in building a lasting Asian organization. At the governmental gatherings of Bogor and Colombo, which were precursors to the Bandung Conference, it became clear that the internationalist moment could not be continued successfully at the inter-governmental level. However, it has been argued here that the internationalist moment was not buried at Bandung. Rather, Asianism continued where it had always been strongest: at the non-state level. The Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Movement (AAPSM) was one venue where anti-imperialist solidarities in a regionalist inflection continued.

Much like the Asian Socialist Conference, the AAPSM was strongly wedded to the ideal of world peace. It originated at the Stockholm meeting of the World Peace Council in June 1954, where 'Asia' was represented by India, China, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Syria,

Lebanon, and the Soviet Union, who was in this case included once more as 'Asia'. The separate gathering of Asian delegates there had been an Indian initiative. Rameshwari Nehru reported of that meeting, that 'a spirit of kinship tied the Asian delegates with one another. A general desire for a get-together was felt'.[175] Together, they decided to start a popular movement, unencumbered by the considerations of the *Realpolitik* that seemed to plague the Colombo powers during the same months. As such, the cornerstone of the movement had little to do with prospects of actual federation, and everything to do with the ideals of Afro-Asian brotherhood and solidarity. The organization of their first manifestation was put in the hands of an Indian committee headed by Rameshwari Nehru,[176] and was to be held in Delhi. To the dismay of both Nehru and Sukarno, it was to be held only eleven days prior to the Bandung Conference. Nehru explicitly distanced himself from the initiative in order not to offend Sukarno.[177] And there were other reasons for doing so: for one, the Soviet Union, which was explicitly not invited to Bandung, sent a delegation to the Delhi meeting. Moreover, the AAPSM never distanced itself from either communism in general or the Soviet bloc in particular.

On April 11, a hundred and eighty-eight delegates from a further thirteen Asian countries convened in Delhi. The Indian government, which was not supportive of the initiative, underestimated the popular appeal that Asianism still possessed in the mid-1950s, both in India and across Asia. Unlike Bandung, a conference that could be followed only through journalistic reports, the AAPSM was held in the open air and was attended by several thousands of people. In this sense, the manifestation of Asian brotherhood and solidarity was perhaps more like the ARC than any other conference held since. It has often been remarked, not least by Jansen, that the ARC was marked by a sense of innocence, perhaps even naiveté, towards the shaping of post-war Asia. If that was indeed the case, then the AAPSM was an explicit attempt to recapture that innocence. In a large field, banners had been erected in Hindi and English with cries such as 'Long live friendship of the Asian countries and the peace of the world'.[178]

The delegates and participants rallied around anti-colonialism and nuclear non-proliferation, all in the cause of world peace. By the closing session, the audience was estimated to have grown to a staggering twenty-five thousand participants. As Rameshwari Nehru later reported: 'All sat in pin-drop silence giving cheers of welcome to the delegates'. Three Chinese girls sang a song in Hindi to the words *Hindi Cheeni bhai bhai*—Indians and Chinese are brothers'.[179] Significantly, while the Bandung Conference would wither away as a strongly divided voting bloc in the United Nations, it was the AAPSM that would continue to celebrate the Bandung Spirit. Claiming Bandung's production of international solidarity as its own, the AAPSM's next meeting would, in the words of its convener, Egypt's Anwar Sadat,[180] 'meet partly in honour of the spirit of Bandung and as a reminder of the principles

[175] NMML, RNPP, File 27: Asian Solidarity, 1954-8: Circular.
[176] NMML, RNPP, File 27: Asian Solidarity, 1954-8: Preparatory Committee, Conference of Asian Countries.
[177] NMML, RNPP, File 27: Asian Solidarity, 1954-8: Jawaharlal Nehru to Rameshwari Nehru, 11 March 1955.
[178] NMML, RNPP, File 29: Afro-Asian Solidarity, 1955-8. Speech, 7 April 1955.
[179] Asians Resolve to End Colonial Rule, *Bombay Chronicle*, 11 April 1955, 1.
[180] A close collaborator of Nasser, who would become one of the three pivotal figures in the organization of the Belgrade conference and the later non-aligned Movement.

and ideals it stands for, and partly to push it a step forward'.[181] By this time, the AAPSM had become an Afro-Asianist initiative, and with it, the committee had moved to Cairo in 1956. This decision had been taken at the Asian Writer's Conference at New Delhi. This is indicative of the nature of the AAPSM: like the Asianist initiatives described in the previous chapters, it was driven by intellectuals and (self-proclaimed) revolutionaries. The AAPSM became a project of journalists and writers. The initiative for the second manifestation came from Anup Singh, an Indian left-wing socialist; Yang Shou, a Chinese novelist; Anatoly Sofranov, a Russian author; and Masaharu Hatanaka, a Japanese journalist.

The Cairo gathering, held in December 1957, was perhaps the largest Afro-Asian conference ever held, with five hundred delegates representing forty-five countries and colonial territories. Over the next four years, it would evolve into a left-wing international nucleus that drew together the Afro-Asian Youth Movement (1959, Cairo), the Afro-Asian Writers' Movement (Tashkent, 1958), and the Afro-Asian Women's Movement (Cairo, 1961). Together with these organizations, manifestations of international solidarity continued to be held on issues such as Laos, Vietnam, and Mongolia. Jansen complains that the movement never gained 'respectability'.[182] However, the AAPSM never sought any 'official' status on the international stage. It sought an international voice—and this the AAPSM accomplished by becoming the famed Bandung Spirit that Bandung itself had never had. However, if it did not seek to affect international politics directly, international politics directly affected it—the collapse of the movement was augured in by war between the two biggest countries of the movement, representing almost a third of the world's population: the AAPSM would not survive the Sino-Indian Border War.

[181] NMML, RNPP, File 28 File 28 Afro-Asian Solidarity Correspondence relating to 1954-64: Cairo Conference December 1957–January 1958.
[182] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 263.

Conclusion

> Peoples in the East need not wait for guidance or initiative from the outside world. The Orient has to act irrespective of what others think of doing. It is as necessary for the regeneration of Asia as for the peace and progress of the world at large. We must realise that the East has a mission to fulfil in this world full of miseries and madness. Although the materialist civilisation of the West has given the world many useful and beneficial things, it has failed miserably to make the world happy and peaceful. . . . The Orient will have to give birth to a new Culture suitable for the present world, based on the high ideals of the East.[1]

This dissertation has examined different expressions of Asianism in the interwar period. It has asked how these appeals to 'Asia' functioned, and to what translocal solidarities and affinities they spoke. These invocations of Asia took place along a continuum ranging from artists, intellectuals, and feminists, to religious revivalists, trade unionists, and federationalists. Under the banner of Asia, they wrote texts, started movements, professed solidarities, built networks, crossed borders, and organized conferences. In doing so, they framed their thoughts and actions not on a local or national, but on a continental scale. In order to appeal to Asia, one first had to establish that Asia was a relatively homogenous space. What the Asianist projects analysed in this dissertation had in common, therefore, was the projection onto Asia of collective identities, experiences, and historical trajectories. They also shared visions of a decolonized Asia in a future world order, even if those visions themselves differed.

This dissertation views this narrative of Asianist enthusiasm as part of the larger narrative of interwar internationalism. This 'internationalist moment' is understood as the emergence and proliferation, in multiple centres around the world, of analogous practices of association and claim-making in the interwar years. The proliferation of Indian contributions to international activism and associational life in an Asian inflection should be viewed in this context. The three key events that marked the interwar period—the end of the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the establishment of the League of Nations—also drove the Asianist moment in India. From the trade union leaders who advocated for Asia in the halls of Geneva to the revolutionaries who set up printing presses in isolated Kashgar, the activities of Indian Asianists were driven by the new world that emerged from the Great War.

This does not mean that the interwar period was itself a homogenous moment. The 1920s were marked by a mixing of ideologies which resulted in sets of ideas that were, or at least appear so today, far from internally consistent. The projects of many interwar groups shared a patchwork internationalist grammar that drew on a variety of texts, theories, and ideas. For instance, Asianist labour leaders in the Indian trade union movement used idioms now associated with communism, without necessarily considering themselves communist. The statements made in the defence of the trade unionists who stood trial in the Meerut Conspiracy Case demonstrate this. They affirmed their ties to Asianist platforms such as the League Against Imperialism and the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, stating that they

[1] A. M. Sahay and T. Muto, *India* (Tokyo: Modern Nippon Sha, 1939), 100–2.

were ‘revolutionaries’ in an anti-imperialist sense, but not communists. Their competitors, who worked to convene the Asiatic Labour Congress, availed themselves of a similar rhetoric but sought inclusion in the Geneva system. In this sense, the appeal of the egalitarian message of socialism cannot be viewed too strictly, for it spoke to the lived realities of both reformist and revolutionary trade union leaders.

The 1930s, by contrast, saw a ‘closing of ideologies’ that made it more difficult for anti-imperialist groups to draw from a variety of movements and ideas, or to seek broad-based support for their agenda. Internationally, this hardening of ideological lines was influenced by the global financial crisis, the Soviet Third Period, and increasing militarism in Japan, all of which shaped the regional and global alignments of Indian Asianists. From the early 1930s onwards, these developments made the initial dream of postwar international peace and decolonization increasingly less plausible. But to Indian internationalists far removed from either continental European or Japanese politics, the 1930s still held possibilities. Until the mid-1930s, for instance, Italy, Japan, and Germany were still widely perceived as holding important lessons for colonial territories that sought to modernise quickly. The membership of the Asian Students Congress in Rome in 1933 and the resulting Oriental Students Association, which operated from Italy until 1935, confirms this. In sum, the opportunities for international association that arose after the First World War and drew to a close (if temporarily) with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, constitute an ‘interwar moment’ of unprecedented internationalist activity.

Viewed from a European perspective, the internationalist moment is bounded on either side by the conclusion of the Paris Peace Treaty in 1919 and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. However, Indian Asianism, at least in its revolutionary inflection, was strongly influenced by the Russian Revolution of 1917. From an Asian perspective, the establishment of the Soviet Union, with its professed anti-imperialist principles, provided a powerful alternative to the ‘Wilsonian Moment’ proposed by Erez Manela. Lenin’s repudiation of secret treaties spoke more forcefully to anti-imperialist sentiments than Wilson’s doctrine of self-determination. Equally important, the interwar period, as well as the internationalist moment, ended in Asia with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937. The analytical framework of interwar internationalism is thus not intended to cast the narrative of Indian Asianism in a Eurocentric historiographical mould. Rather, it shows how the activities of Indian Asianists were linked to a larger internationalist moment, and how they harnessed its opportunities to shape a regionalism tailored to their specific concerns.

Finally, most Asianist movements were interrupted when the Sino-Japanese War shattered their members’ hopes of Asian unity and solidarity. It must be noted, however, that while 1937 brought many Asianist projects to a sudden halt, few Asianist visions ended definitively. After the further interruption of the Second World War, they resurfaced with strong continuities of themes and participants. In this sense, the Second World War marks an interruption, rather than a rupture. So does the attainment of independence in 1947. To many Asianists, the shaping of a new Asian future became more important at decolonization, not less so. For this reason, this dissertation also describes the afterlives of interwar Asianist ideas and projects in the 1940s and 1950s.

The interwar internationalist moment as an analytical frame is to be preferred over the conceptual tools offered by the historiography of Pan-Asianism. First, the movements and

people in the case studies examined above had stronger ties to the internationalist sprit of the interwar years, than to the changing regionalist tendencies emerging in East Asia. Second, as may be expected, the historiography of Pan-Asianism is strongly East Asia-centric: if Indian actors are represented at all, they figure as recipients of ideologies that originated in places far removed from India and Indian concerns. They are presented as receivers and transmitters, as historical nonfigures whose ideas were derivative of Asianist concepts circulating at various moments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Ottoman Empire and Japan. This leaves no room for Asianist visions that originated on the subcontinent itself and were driven by locally-shaped agendas, and it overlooks visions of Asia that did not focus either on East Asia or on a Muslim world that was conflated with Asia. One motive for writing this dissertation has been to widen this narrow understanding of Asian regionalism, and to demonstrate the existence of an 'Indian Asianism' with its own proponents, centres, agendas, and worldviews. The lens of interwar internationalism renders visible these wider networks of solidarity and affinity.

It is important to note that the movements and people in the case studies detailed in the five chapters above did stand in conversation with organizations, individuals, and events in East Asia. Indian Asianists strongly felt the impact of events such as the demise of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, the expulsion of communists from the Kuomintang, the Manchuria crisis, and—most important—the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. The intent of this dissertation was emphatically not to exclude East Asia from the narrative of Indian Asianism. Rather, it provides a fuller overview of Indian Asianism, locating activities with and in East Asia as part of a larger set of Asianist engagements. Moreover, the activities of Indian Asianists in Japan were intimately linked to Asianist projects elsewhere in Asia. The travels of Mahendra Pratap, for instance, joined projects in Central Asia and China to those in Japan. And Anand Mohan Sahay tied his activities in Japan to Indian diasporic groups in Southeast Asia.

The interwar years were marked by a celebration of the interconnectedness of the world and the proliferation of international associational life. However, it was also a period that has been dubbed the 'high noon' of nationalism, especially in the colonial world. The chosen case studies have demonstrated that Asianism did transcend, but did not necessarily subvert, the nation-state. There were many transterritorial aspects to the 'nation in formation', even if these have sometimes been less visible in narratives of the struggle for independence. To the majority of Indian Asianists, nationalism and internationalism were not contradictory, and certainly not mutually exclusive. Many anticolonial internationalists had visions of a new Asian order in which independent India would occupy an important place, just as many Indian nationalists had visions of independence which also included visions of a new Asian order, or saw their struggle explicitly in the context of an 'Asian Renaissance.' The question of scale, and whether Indian Asianist projects linked back to local, communal, and national concerns, therefore needs to be answered in the affirmative. To federationalists, for example, Asian cooperation was a prerequisite for decolonization, and would therefore lead to India's independence. To revolutionaries in places such as Tashkent, Baku, and Kashgar, an Asia-wide overthrow of existing orders would lead to a free India of greater justice and equality.

This also meant that one did not need to be exiled, travelling, or otherwise mobile to participate in this Asianist moment. Tagore's Viśva Bharati University in West Bengal, for instance, was arguably one of the best places to be an Asianist. Also, it was not necessary to

be part of a small educated and moneyed elite. The muhajirs who crossed the Pamirs on foot to help restore the caliphate, or the lascars who trafficked in Asianist literature throughout Asia on commercial shipping lines, were neither educated nor moneyed. By the early 1920s, it was abundantly clear that Asianism, especially in the context of Asian anti-imperialist solidarity, had the potential to become a broad-based movement. This caused the Government of India to consider 'Pan-Asiatic sentiments' as a threat to political stability, similar to 'Bolshevik conspiracy' and 'Pan-Islamism'. In addition, there was some misunderstanding among British intelligence services as to how to understand Pan-Asianism, and what it sought to achieve:

> For some months there have been indications that, in furtherance of the pan-Asiatic movement, Japanese official authorities have decided, that they must insinuate themselves into the good graces of Muhammedans in Asia. To this end, it is understood they are employing Chinese, Russian and Indian Muhammedans who are being sent to Chinese and Russian Turkestan, to Afghanistan and also to Northern India. . . . While the activities of these and similar itinerant propagandists are not likely to produce very much immediate effect, a more dangerous means of penetration which the Japanese have under contemplation, is their entry into the Far East pilgrim trade with Jeddah. The attractions resulting from heavily subsidised Japanese pilgrim ships are very obvious, and there is every possibility that a successful prosecution of this project may give Japan a monopoly in the pilgrim traffic, a powerful weapon whereby to assert herself as the champion of Asiatic countries.[2]

As has been demonstrated in chapter 4, Indian revolutionaries were indeed active in Russian and Chinese Turkestan, but their projects there were a far cry from spreading Japanese propaganda. And while Japan did try to appeal to Muslim Asia, as the work of Çemil Aydin and Selçuk Esenbel shows, they also appealed to Buddhists and Hindus. Periodicals such as *Young East* formulated a Buddhism for the 'modern age' which targeted all of Asia, and Rashbehari Bose sought to harness his Japanese network to construct Hindu temples in Japan. In this context, it is important to note that it was not so much Indians in Japanese pay, as Indians petitioning the Japanese with their projects, that stand out in the archival record today. However, this intelligence assessment does demonstrate how hard it could be to separate different Asianist groups and initiatives. This ties back to the ideological flexibility noted above, which treated political thought as an intellectual buffet from which different ideas could be sampled, as long as they served the resurgence of Asia.

To colonial surveillance, this presented a problem. Intelligence officers such as David Petrie and Cecil Kaye were specifically tasked with assessing the threat posed by international contacts, groups, and movements. But they could only do so by attaching labels to them to which many of the Asianists themselves would have strongly objected. The overlaps between the ideas and rhetoric of revolutionary and reformist trade unionists has already been noted above, but this fluidity of categories applied to many of the Asianists examined in the

[2] APAC, IOR, L/P&J/12/480 Indians in Japan, 1934: Extract from Weekly Report Intelligence Director: Aspect of the Pan-Asiatic Movement, 15/12/1934.

preceding chapters. They formulated programs which they themselves did not see as contradictory, as they considered their goal—a new Asian order through Asian solidarity and cooperation—to be abundantly clear. Barkatullah's combination of Pan-Islamism and communism, or Mahendra Pratap's combination of Buddhist pacifism and an Asian Army, are cases in point.

Once an individual, group, or movement had been assessed as a threat, another question entirely was where to find the Asianists in question. Asianist networks were fluid and their constituent parts often highly mobile. As has been shown in chapter 4, governments attempted to control the movement of people and literature but were often unsuccessful. One avenue was to refuse the passport applications of suspected individuals, or refuse travel to sites where a gathering of significance was planned. The refusal of passports to K. N. Joglekar and D. R. Thengdi, for example, was explicitly intended to prevent them from attending the League Against Imperialism conference and the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat's gathering in Hankou. However, this did not prevent activists who were already abroad for different reasons, such as university studies, to attend such events. The large student participation of the Brussels conference in 1927 and the Rome conference in 1933 clearly demonstrate this.

A second avenue, then, was to prevent communications between activists at home and abroad. Letters, telegrams, and wired funds could be intercepted. The Sea Customs Act served as a legal basis to confiscate proscribed literature, and the DIBs created lists of organizations and individuals whose communications were to be monitored. However, this could only be achieved after formulating a clear picture of the networks, friendships, and associations in question. The difficulties this represented to the DIB in Calcutta, for instance, show that this was almost impossible. For who was to judge the personal politics of incoming academics? Giuseppe Tucci came to study and to teach at Santiniketan, but his encounters there would later build the Oriental Students Congress. Makiko Hoshi came to teach tea ceremony and flower arrangement, but was also Rashbehari Bose's sister-in-law, and used her stay to attend the All-Asia Women's Congress in Lahore.

A third avenue was to physically monitor incoming ships by checking cargo and interviewing travellers. But as noted in chapter 4, the travel certificates of lascars were virtually interchangeable, which made their identities hard to confirm. New sailors were often enlisted at the last minute, and the chaos in the harbours enabled even individuals already under suspicion to disembark without being apprehended. Literature and pamphlets were equally hard to intercept: much literature made its way into India simply by providing it with inconspicuous covers. The most famous example is the Paris edition of Veer Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence—1857*, which reached India inside the covers of the *Pickwick Papers* and *Don Quixote*. Texts carried by lascars, moreover, did not appear on cargo lists at all. Land routes presented an even bigger problem, as demonstrated by the number of muhajirs who crossed the Pamirs into Afghanistan, and from there travelled onwards to sites outside British control, such as Baku, Tashkent, and Moscow.

The travels and sojourns of Indian Asianists further demonstrate the necessity to broaden our understanding of the main internationalist sites of the interwar period. Centres in Europe and the United States, such as London, Berlin, Paris, San Francisco, and New York have been well-documented by, among others, Kris Manjapra, Benjamin Zachariah, Brent

Hayes Edwards, Mrinalini Sinha, and Maia Ramnath. Interwar internationalism in its specific Asian inflection, however, had its own nodal points where different groups converged. As demonstrated in chapters 1 to 4, the networks of Indian Asianists linked activities in the United States and Europe to Asian sites. The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat operated from Hankou, and later from Vladivostok. In Moscow, the University of the Toilers of the East linked Asianists from many different countries, and attracted visits from itinerant Asianists such as Abdur Rab, Barkatullah, and Pratap. Through them, links were created to Tashkent and Kabul. Sea routes linked yet other Asianist centres, as between Singapore, Bangkok, and the port cities of Japan.

To a large extent, these sites were connected through the traffic of texts and individuals. Networks of affinity, based on personal friendships but also on family ties, further ensured the overlapping of different Asianists and the groups to which they belonged. Jawaharlal Nehru, for example, linked platforms such as the League Against Imperialism to Asianists in the Indian National Congress such as Chittaranjan Das. But Nehru's friendship with Virendranath Chattopadhyay also ensured that he was kept abreast of developments in Berlin, and through the Berlin circle, of the activities of communist revolutionaries in Central Asia. Itinerant career Asianists such as Abani Mukherjee were even more embedded in different internationalist circles. Muherjee had worked with Rashbehari Bose as early as the First World War, and had travelled through Japan, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies. Travelling through the latter, he met Dutch communist Sebald Rutgers, then a director of public works in Medan, who put him in touch with the Communist International. Through the mediation of Rutgers, Mukherjee attended the Baku Congress in 1920, and through Baku he became part of the Indian revolutionary networks in Soviet Asia.

Such networks of affinity also ensured that the activities of itinerant Asianists circled back to India. Rashbehari Bose, for instance, corresponded intensively with Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan, opening up channels of travel for Indian students to Japan. But Bose was also in touch with Savarkar, which ensured the exchange of ideas between Japanese visions of Pan-Asianism and the Hindu Mahasabha's communal perspective of Asia as an inherently Hindu-Buddhist space. Likewise, people like Amiyanath Sarkar linked the Oriental Students Association in Rome to the academic circles of Calcutta, but he also wrote prolifically for Indian newspapers on Italy's sponsorship of anti-imperialist movements.

The interconnections that emerge from these narratives prove that these Asianisms not only existed across a wide political and religious spectrum, but that different Asianist domains also overlapped significantly. Trade unionists in India were in touch with Indian revolutionaries in Central Asia. Academics in India were in touch with exiled revolutionaries in Europe and Japan. After independence, it was these pre-existing networks that shaped the participation of the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi. As demonstrated in chapter 5, it was not only the content of the ARC that answered to the interwar internationalist spirit, but also the continuities that its participants represented. At the ARC, trade union veterans such as N. M. Joshi participated alongside international women's rights activists such as Sarojini Naidu and Hansa Mehta, as well as Calcutta academics such as Kalidas Nag and Tan Yun-Shan.

This shows that many Asianist circuits were open-ended, and that individuals could be members of multiple Asianist groups or move from one to the other. But the question remains,

whether these networks were self-referential in the sense that they remained the purview of a small cosmopolitan elite. To an extent, this question needs to be answered in the affirmative. Studying abroad, the financial demands of travel, and the linguistic abilities necessary to participate in the internationalist centres of Europe and the United States, were the domain of a small group individuals from privileged backgrounds. However, too strong a focus on the mobile lives and prolific writings of individuals such as Benoy Kumar Sarkar, Taraknath Das, and Rashbehari Bose, belies other Asian solidarities and projects in the interwar period.

First, the question of how an independent India would situate itself in a decolonizing Asia, and how and by whom this new 'Asia' was to be shaped, was discussed in a much larger environment than the writings of a few isolated intellectuals. Asianist projects were hotly debated in the larger public sphere. This conversation took place in widely read dailies such as the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Times of India*, and the *Bombay Chronicle*. Editorial articles, op-ed pieces, and letters to the editor demonstrate the engagement with Asian cooperation and solidarity among a larger group of journalists and public figures, and also the general readership. This interest decreases at the level of vernacular newspapers, although it is not absent there either: this is demonstrated by the number of articles on the exploits of Mahendra Pratap in Hindi newspapers such as the Agra-based सैनिक (Sainik) and the Varanasi-based आज (Āj). Sainik even published a regular feature called राजा महेंद्र प्रताप के पत्र (letter from Raja Mahendra Pratap), in which his plans for Pan-Asia and world federation were explained. This larger public engagement is also evident in the engagement of individual trade unions with Asian issues even in the face of local strikes, and the large crowds drawn by the ARC and the Delhi Conference of Asian countries in 1955.

Second, two groups deserve attention as non-elites that actively responded to appeals to translocal solidarity cast in an Asianist mould. First, approximately two hundred muhajirs responded to the call for *hijrat* after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Disillusion over unkept British promises with regard to the caliphate and the holy places of Islam had sparked their journey across the Pamir mountain range. These muhajirs were on their way to Anatolia, but ended up in Central Asia in the revolutionary schools of Tashkent and Moscow, and several of them ended up at the Baku Congress in 1920. Second, lascars were not only transmitters of Asianist texts, or mediators who helped Asianists to travel under the radar; they could also be activists themselves. The Indian boycott of Dutch shipping during the Indonesian revolution demonstrates this. Australian, Indonesian, and Indian unionists worked together to forcibly free a crew of lascars who were made to load Dutch ammunition bound for Indonesia onto a ship in the North Sydney docks. And several hundred Indian sailors adopted a strategy of non-cooperation, refusing to work with materials bound for the Netherlands Indies.

The reception of revolutionaries who returned after independence is a further indication of Indian interest in internationalist and Asianist activism. On the surface, they represented a group that had kept aloof from the nationalist mainstream. In fact, many of them had been explicitly anti-Gandhian and had explicitly rejected non-violent methods in their writings. It is interesting to note, therefore, that in the 1950s, these revolutionaries were celebrated. They were incorporated into a new narrative of the struggle of independence that honoured their contribution to anti-imperialism regardless of their ideological leanings or political alliances. Three hundred former revolutionaries gathered at the first Old Revolutionaries' Conference, among them Mahendra Pratap and Bhupendranath Dutta.

Although many communist Asianists, most notably Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, had perished in the Great Purges, their legacy was not forgotten. Their contribution was commemorated, and the conference reports in the press show that their rhetoric of an egalitarian Asian order was very much alive. In particular, the conference participants were critical of the new Nehruvian government. Citing their credentials in the revolutionary movement, they stated that *Swaraj* had not yet arrived for ordinary people, and that further work was urgently needed. It is interesting to note that the revolutionaries' Asianism was as alive as ever, and that, in hindsight their disparate Asianist projects could be moulded into a single narrative of activism for the anti-imperialist cause:

> The young student revolutionaries living abroad made foreign connections. They brought Indian Politics in the International arena. Sun Yat-sen helped the revolutionaries. Leon Trotsky . . . took up their cause. The extremist socialists of Germany and elsewhere held up their hands in horror that the Asian nationalists had worked with the central powers. . . . [They] did not realize that the Asian peoples were fighting for independence.[3]

The Asian Relations Conference further demonstrates that this afterlife of the interwar Asianist moment was not confined to old revolutionary exiles. The continuity of participants has already been noted. But the ARC also answered to the Asianist moment in the sense that it was widely seen as a new opportunity to remake the future of Asia. It harked back to the non-state Asianism of the interwar years in several ways. It was a gathering of academic and cultural organizations, rather than of government representatives. It also was the only postwar conference to invite all of Asia, including not only Soviet Russia and the Central Asian Soviet Republics, but also US-occupied Japan. This inclusive Asianist atmosphere spoke to the internationalist moment rather than to the political constellation at the time.

It is at this non-state level that we must look for continuities in the post-war period. Much historiography moves seamlessly from the League Against Imperialism to Bandung.[4] However, it is more productive to look for the afterlife of the internationalist moment where it originated: in the public sphere. Seen in this light, new continuities of participants and people emerge, from the Asian Socialist Conference, to the Asian Women's Conference, and the Conference of Asian Countries, which gave birth to the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Movement.

Finally, the historical trajectories from 'Baku' to 'Bandung', or from 'the Oppressed Peoples of the East' to 'Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity', raise interesting questions about the lasting consequences of the internationalist moment from the late colonial to the postcolonial period. More specifically, it compels us to consider the extent to which the geographies of Asian anti-imperialism in the period 1917–37 continued to shape Indian state and society during decolonization. In what ways did conceptions of regionalism and anti-imperialism change when decolonization took place, but the visions of a decolonized Asia, carefully

[3] ZMO, Horst Krüger Nachlass, Box 34 file 256-1: Old Revolutionaries Conference, by Bhupendranath Dutta.
[4] See, for example, Prasad, *The Darker Nations*, 16–50.

grafted in interwar years, failed to materialize? These questions warrant further scholarly research that far exceeds the scope of this project on interwar Asianism in India.

The histories of the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Movement, the Afro-Asian Youth Movement, the Afro-Asian Writers' Movement, and the Afro-Asian Women's Movement, all suggest a strong continuity of themes from the internationalist moment of the interwar years. They also suggest that for many people and groups, their concerns about future regional and world order had not changed along with the new political constellations. World federation, peace, solidarity, and equality were considered no less important than before the war. In some cases, they were considered even more important. The outcomes of the research conducted for this dissertation suggest that the regional impact of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, and of India's independence in 1947, should be regarded less as 'ruptures' than as 'interruptions', in a longer narrative of internationalism in an Asian inflection.

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Summary in Dutch / Nederlandse samenvatting

> De volkeren in het Oosten behoeven niet te wachten op leiding of initiatieven van de buitenwereld. De Oriënt moet handelen ongeacht de plannen van anderen. Dit is evenzeer nodig voor de regeneratie van Azië, als voor vrede en vooruitgang in de rest van de wereld. We moeten ons realiseren dat het Oosten een opdracht te vervullen heeft in deze wereld vol ellende en waanzin. Hoewel de materialistische beschaving van het Westen de wereld veel nuttige en voordelige dingen heeft gebracht, heeft zij jammerlijk gefaald om de wereld vredig en gelukkig te maken… De Oriënt zal een nieuwe Cultuur ter wereld moeten brengen, geschikt voor het huidige tijdsgewricht en gebaseerd op de hoge idealen van het Oosten.[1]

Het onderwerp van deze studie is Aziatisch regionalisme in India in het interbellum. De jaren tussen 1917 en 1937, enerzijds gemarkeerd door de Russische Revolutie en anderzijds door het uitbreken van de Chinees-Japanse oorlog, waren een bloeitijd voor internationalistische bewegingen en individuen. Dit is opmerkelijk, omdat de jaren twintig en dertig van de twintigste eeuw te boek staan als de hoogtijdagen van het Indiase nationalisme. Deze studie wijst echter uit dat nationalisme en internationalisme elkaar niet uitsluiten. In veel gevallen blijkt juist dat er een belangrijke wisselwerking tussen de twee bestaat.

De specifieke vorm van internationalisme die in deze studie wordt onderzocht, is het (Pan-)Azianisme. Onder Pan-Azianisme worden ideeën en ideologieën verstaan die eenwording van Azië tot doel hebben. Dit kan variëren van politieke unificatie, bijvoorbeeld in een federatie van Aziatische staten, tot de vereniging van Azië rond een bepaald thema of probleem. Bij het laatste kan men bijvoorbeeld denken aan het Aziatisch Arbeiderscongres, dat tot doel had met één stem te spreken in de Internationale Arbeidersorganisatie (IAO) in Genève. Onder Azianisme worden ideeën verstaan die van Azië een eenheid maken door het continent en haar bevolking bepaalde culturele of religieuze eigenschappen toe te dichten, of het bestaan van een Aziatische identiteit te claimen. Azianisme gaat daarbij altijd vooraf aan Pan-Azianisme.

Zoals in hoofdstuk 3 uiteen wordt gezet, begint Azianisme in India reeds in de jaren tachtig van de negentiende eeuw. Om drie redenen nam het echter juist in het interbellum een hoge vlucht. Ten eerste leidden de gruwelen van de Eerste Wereldoorlog, vooral op het Europese toneel, in India tot ernstige twijfel over de vermeende superioriteit van de westerse beschaving. Het idee van ‘de’ beschaving als een universeel gegeven boette aan kracht in, ten gunste van een hernieuwde interesse in de eigen geschiedenis en cultuur, en in een Aziatische beschaving in het bijzonder. De Russische Revolutie was een tweede inspiratiebron, waarbij het afzien van Tsaristische aanspraken op Aziatische gebieden door Lenin een belangrijke factor was. In tegenstelling tot de Volkerenbond, wiens mandaatsysteem in India al snel werd gezien als een nieuwe gedaante van het bekende kolonialisme, gaf Lenins verklaring vertrouwen aan vele Indiase anti-imperialisten. De oprichting van de Volkerenbond was echter niet zonder belang. Als erkenning voor de oorlogsbijdrage kreeg India een eigen zetel,

[1] A. M. Sahay and T. Muto, *India* (Tokyo: Modern Nippon Sha, 1939), 100-2.

wat de mogelijkheid bood om binnen de internationale gemeenschap te worden gehoord. Het is des te opmerkelijker dat Indiase afgevaardigden die mogelijkheid benutten om de aandacht van de wereld vooral op Azië te vestigen, meer dan op India specifiek.

Er is nog niet eerder een studie verschenen van het (Pan-)Azianisme in India. De huidige historiografie met betrekking tot regionalisme in Azië beperkt zich doorgaans tot studies van – veelal Ottomaans – Pan-Islamisme, of Japans Pan-Azianisme. Als Indiase actoren al worden genoemd in deze studies, dan is dat slechts als de ontvangers van ideeën die zijn ontwikkeld in Istanbul of Tokyo. Met het bestaan van (Pan-)Aziatische projecten van Indiase origine, gebaseerd op Indiase agenda's en Indiase visies van een toekomstige postkoloniale wereldorde, wordt geen rekening gehouden. Deze studie is bedoeld als een aanzet om die leemte te vullen. Hierbij wordt niet gestreefd naar volledigheid. Het voert te ver om een volledige inventarisatie te bieden van alle individuen en groepen op het subcontinent. De bedoeling is hier slechts om aan te tonen,

1) dat (Pan-)Azianisme een factor van belang was in India tijdens het interbellum, niet alleen onder een selecte groep intellectuelen, maar ook in de bredere publieke sfeer;
2) dat verscheidene vormen van (Pan-)Azianisme bestonden, die ieder hun oorsprong hadden op het Indiase subcontinent en gedreven werden door specifiek Indiase belangen;
3) dat (Pan-)Azianisme in India zich niet beperkte tot één bepaalde ideologische of religieuze oriëntatie, maar zijn invloed deed gelden in een spectrum dat varieerde van feminisme tot spiritualisme, en van communisme tot hindoe-nationalisme.

Deze studie begint met de noodzakelijke vraag welk gebied 'Azië' geografisch beslaat. Er blijken grote verschillen te bestaan in de cartografische verbeelding van 'Azië', naar gelang de religieuze of politieke gezindte waartoe proponenten behoren. Dit wordt aan de hand van vier voorbeelden geïllustreerd. Mahendra Pratap, een Indiase revolutionair die de politieke unificatie van postkoloniaal Azië nastreefde, concentreerde zich sterk op Centraal-Azië. Rameshwari Nehru, een bekende feministe, richtte zich op het noorden en beschouwde de Sovjet-Unie als een onlosmakelijk deel van Azië. De derde Aga Khan, de religieuze leider van de Ishmaili moslims, keek vooral naar West-Azië en betrok het Midden-Oosten expliciet in zijn Azië-beeld. De hindoe-nationalist Veer Savarkar, tot slot, definieerde Azië als een hindoe-boeddhistisch continent, en oriënteerde zich aldus op Oost- en Zuidoost Azië. Deze voorbeelden illustreren dat Azië, bezien vanuit India, vele gedaanten kon aannemen.

Het vervolg van deze studie bestaat uit vier thematische delen, die ieder een facet van het Indiase (Pan-)Azianisme behandelen. In hoofdstuk twee komt de vakbondsbeweging aan bod. Vertegenwoordigers van deze stroming meenden dat alle delen van Azië specifieke sociaaleconomische problemen gemeenschappelijk hadden. Hoewel er grote politieke verschillen bestonden tussen de vele Indiase vakbonden, en tussen hun leiders, waren zij allen van mening dat deze problemen collectief – dat wil zeggen, in Aziatisch verband – moesten worden aangepakt. Vakbondsleiders die hervormingen langs democratische weg voorstonden probeerden Azië op de agenda te krijgen bij de IAO, en richtten daarom het eerdergenoemde Aziatisch Arbeiderscongres op. Meer radicale vakbondsleiders, die juist het bestaande

internationale systeem omver wilden werpen, waren actief in het communistische Pan-Pacifische Vakbondssecretariaat. De Anti-imperialistische Liga, opgericht in Brussel in 1927, was een ander forum waarin vertegenwoordigers van vakbonden aansluiting zochten bij gelijkgestemde bewegingen uit andere delen van Azië. Vooral de concurrentie tussen de twee eerstgenoemde Pan-Aziatische organisaties had grote gevolgen voor de eenheid van het Indiase vakbondscongres.

Het derde hoofdstuk behandelt het Azianisme van enige Indiase intellectuelen, en onderzoekt een aantal academische netwerken dat als verbinding fungeerde tussen Azianistische denkers uit heel Azië, maar ook uit Europa. De Viśva Bharati universiteit, opgericht door de Nobelprijswinnaar en Azianist Rabindranath Tagore, had als hoofddoel om onderwijs te bieden dat geschoeid was op een specifiek Aziatische leest, en niet op het onderwijssysteem zoals dat was geïntroduceerd door de Britten. Het uitgangspunt was daarbij de vermeende eenheid van het 'Aziatische leven en gedachtengoed'. Niet ver van Viśva Bharati werd in 1926 in Calcutta de *Greater India Society* opgericht, een vereniging die zich bezighield met het onderzoeken van Indiaas erfgoed elders in Azië. Mede hierdoor groeide Calcutta uit tot een belangrijk kruispunt van internationaal opererende academici die zich bezighielden met het blootleggen van grote Aziatische historische verbanden. Uit beide netwerken werden Indiase deelnemers geworven voor een groot Aziatisch Studentencongres, gehouden in Rome in 1933 met actieve steun van het Italiaanse fascistische regime. Dit congres wilde een bijdrage leveren aan het Aziatische anti-imperialisme op de grondslag van een Aziatische identiteit, zoals die conceptueel in kaart was gebracht in de academische kringen in en rond Calcutta.

Het vierde hoofdstuk betreft het Azianisme in ballingschap, en onderzoekt Indiase (Pan-)Aziatische revolutionairen die India vrijwillig of onvrijwillig verlieten om buiten het zicht van de Britten hun politieke doelen na te streven. Veel van deze revolutionairen wisten arrestatiebevelen tegen zich uitgevaardigd, maar waren toch gedwongen om regelmatig Brits grondgebied te doorkruisen. In dit deel speelt daarom de koloniale surveillance een belangrijke rol en wordt er aandacht besteed aan de routes en knooppunten van deze vorm van Pan-Aziatisch activisme. Het verschil tussen land- en zeeverkeer was hierbij aanzienlijk. Ten tijde van de Khilafat-beweging dreef de *hijrat* veel jonge moslims over het Pamir-gebergte. Zij kwamen terecht in Pan-Aziatische initiatieven variërend van het Congres voor de Volkeren van het Oosten in Baku tot de Universiteit voor de Arbeiders van het Oosten in Tasjkent. De zeeroutes daarentegen verbonden kosmopolitische havensteden zoals Singapore, Bangkok, Shanghai en Kobe. Door havencontroles was het echter niet altijd mogelijk om met eigen papieren te reizen. Hier verschenen de *lascars* (Indiase zeelieden) ten tonele. Deze groep was uit de aard der zaak mobiel, en bewoog zich onder de radar van paspoort- en andere controles. Het was voor revolutionairen daarom aantrekkelijk om zich als een lascar voor te doen, of hen subversieve literatuur te laten vervoeren. Deze studie wijst echter ook uit dat de lascars meer waren dan passieve deelnemers aan het Pan-Aziatische activisme. Er zijn diverse voorbeelden aan te wijzen van internationalistische lascar-activisten.

Ieder van de hier in kaart gebrachte (Pan-)Aziatische netwerken werd geïnterrumpeerd door het uitbreken van de Chinees-Japanse oorlog in 1937. De Japanse inval bracht ook het Indiase Pan-Azianisme een klap toe die sommige bewegingen niet te boven kwamen. Iedere hoop op Aziatische eenheid of eenwording vervloog. Maar toen na de Tweede Wereldoorlog

de eerste tekenen van dekolonisatie zich aandienden, werd de vraag hoe ‘Azië’ er in een nieuwe wereldorde zou kunnen uitzien weer onverminderd relevant. Dit ‘naoorlogs Pan-Azianisme’ vormt het onderwerp van het laatste deel van deze studie. In maart 1947, nog vóór de Indiase onafhankelijkheid in augustus van dat jaar, kwamen meer dan tweehonderd afgevaardigden uit heel Azië samen in Delhi, voor een publiek van duizenden toeschouwers. Op dit congres keerden alle Pan-Aziatische thema’s uit het interbellum terug. Zowel de samenstelling van de deelnemers als het internationalistische discours vertoonden een grote continuïteit. Het gedroomde ‘Azië’ van dit congres komt in hoofdstuk vijf uitgebreid aan de orde.

Tot slot verdient het opmerking dat de bestaande historiografie hier een sprong in de tijd maakt. Zij trekt een directe lijn van dit congres in Delhi, naar de Bandung- en Belgrado-conferenties in 1955 en 1961 respectievelijk. Deze laatste twee conferenties resulteerden in de beweging van niet-gebonden landen tijdens de Koude Oorlog. Deze historiografische salto mortale is onverdedigbaar. De Delhi-conferentie van 1947 was de laatste van de Pan-Aziatische conferenties uit het interbellum – misschien niet in tijd, maar zeker in thematiek. De deelnemers bestonden bovendien uit de vertegenwoordigers van civiele organisaties, en niet uit staatsmannen- en vrouwen. Dit is een belangrijk punt. Pan-Azianisme werd nadien als een interstatelijk project gekenmerkt door andere argumenten, andere doelen en andere vertegenwoordigers dan voorheen. Het heeft bovendien tijdens de Koude Oorlog weinig succes gehad. De werkelijke continuïteit van het Aziatische engagement ligt daar waar zij altijd lag: in de niet-statelijke sfeer.

Curriculum vitae

Carolien Stolte werd geboren in Groningen in 1983. Vanaf 2002 studeerde zij Geschiedenis (cum laude) en Talen en Culturen van Zuid- en Centraal Azië aan de Universiteit Leiden. Na studieverblijven in Parijs en Genève keerde zij naar Leiden terug als AiO in het Toptalent-programma van NWO. Sinds september 2012 is Carolien als universitair docent verbonden aan het Instituut voor Geschiedenis van de Universiteit Leiden. Zij is tevens coördinator van *Cosmopolis* en managing editor van het tijdschrift *Itinerario*.