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Asiatic Orientations of Early Soviet Socialism: A Perspective on the Life and Times of Maulana Azad

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Abstract

The international projection of Soviet socialism and responses to it were a major aspect of the political life of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. In Asia, including India, this was noticeable from the time of the early work of the Comintern (1919). The Maulana Azad lecture for 2014 discussed this theme. The lecture presented the political background to what took place—tracing the Comintern initiative in Asia following the Congress of the Workers of the East in Baku in 1920. The rest of the lecture was divided into three sections. The first section dealt with the way in which awareness of Soviet socialism increased in Asian countries. This came to take shape as Oriental Studies in Soviet Russia took on a new form which included teaching and involvement of foreign revolutionaries at the Communist University of the Workers of the East and the operations of the All Russian Association for Oriental Studies. The technologies of the 1920s were put to work—among them photography and radio. The limits of the initiatives were a part of the nature of the institutions and the techniques employed. The second section focused firmly on India and dealt with reception in India of Soviet socialism, drawing in information of the importance of communications difficulties as well as the problems posed by British authorities. The final section pointed out that despite the positive response of many of his friends to Soviet socialism, Maulana Azad refused to engage with the phenomenon – most likely in view of his own sense that what it meant was not quite clear since limited information was available in India.

Keywords

Comintern, KUTV, CPI, VNAV, Maulana Azad

Introduction

This lecture addresses a subject, whose significance was known in the life and times of Maulana Azad, and that exercised a powerful and deep influence over the thinking and politics of that era. It deals with the arrival of a ‘socialist challenge’ on a global scale in the interwar period of the last century—the consequence of the emergence of

Soviet Russia as a force in world politics and its sponsorship of socialist initiatives. The lecture examines the links between early Soviet socialism and the colonial world, and India in particular in the period associated with Maulana Azad's participation in the 'heroic' phase of the India Freedom Struggle (linked to Civil Disobedience and Non-Cooperation movements).

Soviet socialism post-1945, its global reach and crisis, is not at issue here. Developments post-1945 were directly associated with the rise of the USSR as a super-power, the country's links with a larger 'bloc' and endowments of a different scale from those it had in the pre-war period. I must also point out that in dealing with 'early Soviet socialism', even while I shall touch on the well-known story of the international relations of Bolshevik 'Communism', it is the follow up in the colonial context—the shaping of narratives, affinities and identities in the colonial world—that is equally, if not more substantially, my concern, albeit my focus will be substantially institutional. Here, the upshot of the 'rise' of Soviet socialism is to be located in the growing intellectual critique of capitalism and modernity in general in European intellectual circles from the eighteenth century, through European socialist party formation in the nineteenth–twentieth centuries, given a new dimension by the Soviet state. The consequences had implications in the centres of empire, and, through them, in the colonial world in view of the 'connectedness' of these times. But equally, the development of a rhetorical tone in history and the social sciences, and a critical approach to habits and everyday action had a specificity in the West, even as it had a different edge in the colonial world—further linked to a range of ideas concerning an ideal socialist worldview, an ideal socialist life and an ideal socialist state. Even in this (colonial) world, the ultimate impact of ideas and perspectives varied—depending on the location and political dispensation, as well as community network and literacy. Iran and China lay at one end of the spectrum; European colonies of sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa) at another end. India occupied a position somewhere in between.

Maulana Azad's distance from the socialist initiatives of his time—despite the concern with such initiatives of those closest to him—forms a part of this presentation. That distance is linked to the limits of the socialist challenge globally as much as an intellectual choice, framed within the ambit of national politics—an instance that illustrates the fissures in the Bolshevik challenge and its range, that reflects on the character of such phenomena.

Today, at a time of the retreat of socialism in the world, this record of socialism's arrival and authority as the search for communism requires some attention—if only for a proper understanding of the making of illusionary objectives and the power they may command. As such, it has lessons for the historian of the modern world and modernity in a broader sense. It raises questions concerning how ideas and images that challenge a particular course in modernity can assume transnational significance, beyond social spaces determined by language and practice. The phenomenon bears comparison with other features of more recent times (post-Soviet socialism, Islamic fundamentalism, etc.).

It may be noted that the subject of Bolshevik socialism in a colonial context is seldom a cause for fundamental academic concern, except to scholars of the history of

international relations, the colonial 'left' and the genealogy of socialism—a niche set, albeit an active one. Following from this, such history forms the matter of histories of the colonial world, which accommodate the socialist challenge in accounts of nationalism and movements for independence. At another level, early Soviet socialism figures in pre-histories of the Cold War. India has not been lacking in the list of countries where this record has been noted at different levels, and left wing historians—as well as their antagonists—have been at pains to draw out the contours of what happened.

However, just as the pre-history of the Cold War has remained a pre-history that attracts limited attention, the role of early Soviet socialism in a colonial ambience rarely occupies centre-stage in the history of the colonial world; nor does it provide more than a blip in emerging fields of global and world history. The story of the early years of the Left, in almost all cases of the countries of Asia, has become a national story—a fact as true of the Communist movements in India as those that gathered in China in the inter-war period, and of Vietnam, Burma and Malaysia of the 1930s and 1940s.

Where the subject attracts attention, the main deficiencies of these movements have been put down to their associations with a distant source of authority—the power of the Soviet state. When this authority has been examined, it has been connected to the behaviour and directives of the most powerful socialist forum of the time—the Communist International or Comintern—a forum substantially led by the USSR in which all Communist parties participated and whose resolutions were binding on these members.

In this presentation, I wish to review the gathering authority of early Soviet socialism globally in the 1920s—capable of not only exercising political authority but also of purveying both ideology and perspective. I wish to point to how Bolshevik domination in the territories of the former Russian Empire led into deep links with colonial liberation movements elsewhere. This, I will argue, was not only the result of a tight network of organisation and direction, based on political considerations, but also through a strategy of inclusiveness that took on board religion and culture. The way in which this occurred is significant: an unusual overlap of intellectual engagement and the structuring of response through appropriate cultural strategies (producing sympathetic 'affect').

Transformations in much of this forms the story of the 1930s, when the force of 'national bolshevism' coincided with the persistence of inclusive manoeuvres, ensuring the persistence of the significance of Soviet socialism in the forums that had earlier emerged in the colonial world—but distinctly altering its range and scope.

Against such a background, I provide an evaluation of the position in India, placing this within a broader context, to show the authority as well as the limitations of this endeavour to promote a new sensibility as well as a new intellectual awareness. I shall briefly attempt to place Maulana Azad in such a frame, where figures such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Minoo Masani and leading members of the cultural world, Rabindranath Tagore and Rahul Sanskritayan had all come to occupy roles in the story of the interaction between Soviet socialism and India. Here, Azad

provides an important point of reference. A figure who avoided an engagement with socialism, despite his interests in labour politics and the close associations of his colleagues with debates involving socialism, Azad is an instance of an illustrative exception whose choice requires elaboration.

I shall draw heavily, for the purposes of this lecture, not only from the recent contributions of international scholarship on the Soviet state and Soviet socialism, but also from the findings of the Calcutta Soviet Archives Project on Indo-Russian relations, associated at different times with the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, and the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies.¹ In drawing attention to this project, I shall refer substantially to a report on the subject that I have prepared for a larger audience.

Asiatic Orientations of Early Soviet Socialism: General Perspectives

Let me mention a few basic facts concerning the international reach of Bolshevik socialism and the Comintern by way of background.

The October Revolution of 1917 in Russia established the Bolshevik state in a political context where socialism had an intellectual influence and institutional presence in Europe through socialist parties ranging from the Labour Party in Britain to the Social Democratic Parties of France, Germany and Austria. Unlike other socialist parties, however, which had never run governments and had regularly been forced to operate within 'liberal' or 'conservative' dispensations, the Bolshevik party acquired state power. In turn, it inducted into the business of governance and international political discourse the terminology of socialist analysis, and the debates of the First and Second Internationals concerning class conflict and imperialism and the necessity to deal with the oppression of capitalism.

The enunciation of Bolshevik ideas outside the territories of the Russian Empire took shape in a piecemeal manner. In the aftermath of the First World War, the consolidation of Bolshevik power made progress in lurches during the Civil War in Russia. The Soviet state not only had no formal presence in international forums for half a decade, but its various initiatives to support revolutionary movements was impaired by its military pre-occupations and in shaping institutions in territory in which it had direct presence.

In Asia in the meanwhile, unrest came to take shape in a diffused manner in the colonial possessions of the two main empires—the British and the French—substantially unconnected with the immediate consequences of the rise of Bolshevism. Demobilisation, post-war economic depression and problems specific to each territory led to diverse movements in India, Burma and Indo-China. These coincided with great uncertainty concerning the political future in the territories of the former Ottoman Empire in West Asia, and the growth of claimants to authority who based their position on diverse factors and were supported by a variety of parties and groups. 'Revolutionary' and 'nationalist' groups were associated with these movements.

¹ For a resume of the project see Roy et al., *Indo-Russian Relations* (hereafter *Inventory*).

From the earliest, Bolshevik power, guided by positions critical of imperialism, took a practical interest in these events. Since many of the developments occurred on the fringes of the former Russian Empire, where 'interventionist' forces instigated, supplied and often directed opposition to Bolshevik power, the Bolshevik state itself organised special bodies to act as countervailing influences. Most prominent among these in Asia was the Council for Propaganda and Action. In dealing with British action in the Azeri country, and opposition to the Soviet agencies that had formed in Central Asia, linguistic skills as well as ethnic expertise were mobilised from among those who had little to do with the Bolshevik government, often residents of Afghanistan, Iran and India.

In Moscow, the centre of Soviet power from March 1918, the Bolshevik government set up new institutions in the Kremlin and also set in process the formation of institutions for the study of the Central Asian neighbourhood, where, from 1920, the Civil War came to be focused. The old buildings of the Lazyrev Institute for modern Asian languages now housed Bolshevik officials who had little experience in the 'Oriental Studies' of the past—a genre that, under Tsarist rule, had laid firm stress on the study of Sanskrit and Pali texts in the case of India, and many other languages that led into the histories of other regions of Asia (Chinese, Japanese, Persian, Arabic, etc).

The Revolution found support among the mixed population of the Russian Empire in the core of its limited industrial zone (much of it Slavic and Orthodox Christian), in a belt from Petrograd to Moscow to the towns of the Urals and south to the steel and coal towns of the Ukraine. Along the middle Volga, in districts stretching from Kazan to Orenburg, and eastwards towards Ufa, Muslim educationists associated with the 'jadid' movement of the Volga Tatars and their Bashkir and Kazakh neighbours, and hitherto a marginalised group in the Russian Empire, supported Bolshevik military detachments, and were integrated into the institutions that were formed by the People's Kommissariat of Nationalities (Narkomnats) of the Bolshevik government. These 'jadid' were firmly modern in their approach to science and pedagogic practice—but they were also firmly Muslim in customs, law and belief. Many were to be found in the Muslim Revolutionary Committee of Kazan, linked to Sultan Galiev,² and the Waisi movement of Islamic socialists. Similar support came to the Bolsheviks from Buddhists in the Kalmyk and Buriat country.

Much of this accommodation of Muslims, Buddhists and frontier peoples on the Russian Empire's Caucasus and Central Asian borders was guided by a broad pronouncement in favour of 'self determination' by Joseph Stalin, Kommissar of the Narkomnats. It was with an eye to the needs and problems of these groups, but also with an overwhelming sense that a social revolution would occur in the West that the revolution internationalised itself. Hence, at the founding meeting of the Communist International in March 1919, when the Bolshevik government rallied its international allies in the 'Third International', European parties predominated and

² Mirsaid Sultan Galiev (1892–1940), Muslim reformer and teacher who sided with the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War and after. Expelled from the Party in 1923 for his pan-Islamic and pan-Turk ideas, but continued to live and work in the USSR, despite repeated arrests. Finally arrested and executed in 1939–40.

the only representative of Asian groups was Sen Katayama of Japan. When M.N. Roy appeared at the Second Congress in July–August 1920, he came as a representative of the Communist Party of Mexico.

An acknowledgement of the increasing importance to the Bolshevik state of the support of groups from Soviet and non-Soviet Asia, was revealed in September 1920, when the Congress of the Peoples of the East met at Baku. Significantly, though—and a clear indication that the Congress was mainly to rally Asian ethnol of the Russian Empire—was that of the 36 ‘peoples’ represented, only ‘Arabs’, ‘Indians’, ‘Chinese’ and ‘Persians’ were distinctly from outside the territories of the former Empire. Meanwhile, within the Comintern, an Eastern Department (*Vostochnyi Otdel*) had been established in December 1919 which indicated the same preoccupations. This was made up of the Council for Propaganda and Action, the Near East Section (*Otdel Blizhnego Vostoka*) and a Turkestan Buro.

Technically, from 1925, with the evolution of the Stalin–Bukharin formulation of ‘socialism in one country’ the burden on developing and working with movements in the colonial world and elsewhere moved to the Comintern. The USSR worked to build a model workers’ state while the making of Communism globally was handled by the Comintern, whose policies were determined by its Executive Council (ECCI), where Soviet Russia had only one voice.

But since the Comintern was almost wholly funded by Soviet Russia, had no international recognition except by fellow Communist parties and the Soviet state (unlike the League of Nations or the United Nations), since its offices were in Moscow with no branches elsewhere, and most Communist Parties of the time were formed in discussions with the Soviet Communists, the Comintern came to be associated directly with Soviet Russia.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Communist parties under the aegis of the Comintern were formed throughout Asia. In the 1920s, these took shape in India and China. The Communist Party of Japan held its constituent congress on 15 July 1922 in Tokyo. Most prominent leaders were S. Katayama, S. Ichikawa, K. Tokuda, M. Watanabe and G. Kokuryo. The Communist Party of Turkey was founded in September 1920 from Communist organisations in Istanbul, and in various parts of Anatolia, as well as a number of émigré bodies. Communist parties were established in Southeast Asia and West Asia. The Communist Party of Malaysia was founded on 30 April 1930. The Party’s first Congress was held in 1935, and it existed in an atmosphere of considerable hostility and surveillance. The Communist Party of the Philippines was founded on 7 November 1930. It was banned in 1932, but continued to function illegally and joined the Comintern in 1935. The Communist Party of Thailand was founded in 1942, illegally, and continued as an underground organisation for a prolonged period of time. In West Asia, the Communist party of Syria and Libya was formed in 1931. The Communist Party of Iraq was founded in 1934.

A degree of independence in strategy was exercised by all these parties. But the directives of the Comintern, substantially guided by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union determined decisions. In the colonial world, a doctrinal framework formed

within which Comintern injunctions were debated, albeit with variations and objections. Traditions of debate over left ideologies however were weak—for movements such as anarcho-syndicalism were limited to limited groups with little influence.

Spreading the Word: Establishing the Authority of Early Soviet Socialism in Asia

Let us now turn in detail to how early Soviet socialism came to be projected in these circumstances.

Putting Soviet Resources to Work for the Revolution

As far as was possible, as the counter-revolutionary literature of imperial agencies indicates, the Soviet Union funded and trained anti-colonial revolutionaries using the Comintern as the intermediary from the very inception of the body. The emerging Planned Economy in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), fully functional in the 1930s, enabled a channelling of resources directly to such goals more firmly. Soviet citizens with appropriate linguistic and cultural advantages were drawn into revolutionary work in specific countries. The networks available in metropolitan countries were utilised for participation in revolutionary activity through members of the Comintern.

Specifically, directives were conveyed through links between Communist parties in Asia, the Comintern and the USSR. The structures of the Comintern were duly adjusted.³ These links were maintained through visits to Moscow by activists from the colonies, through the regular dispatch of emissaries and the training of foreign communists in Soviet Russia. Agencies such as the Pan-Pacific Union were used as a means for money transfers. In West Asia, minorities played a role in establishing revolutionary groups and parties—Armenians and Jews being the case in point. Two major metropolitan Communist Parties exercised a special influence in the colonial world—the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the Parti Communiste Français (PCF, the French Communist Party).

Setting a Disciplined Tone: Democratic Centralism in the Comintern

Support from the Comintern required adherence to the resolutions of its Executive Council. Discussions regarding these resolutions clearly took place within the organisation. But once made, resolutions were expected to be followed if the Comintern was to

³ The Eastern Department was reorganised into the Eastern Sektor of ECCI by the autumn of 1922. From this time it was required to oversee not only the departments mentioned above, but also to supervise the work of the Department for the Near and Middle East and Northern Africa, established in August 1921. Further reorganisations followed in 1923 and 1926, leading to the situation in 1927 when an 'Eastern Landsekretariat' did much of this work. In 1928, this was divided into three sections: the Far Eastern Section (China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, the Philippines), the Middle Eastern Section (India, Indo-China and Indonesia); and the Near Eastern Section (Turkey, Palestine, Syria, Persia, Francophone colonies). This remained unchanged until 1935. Other organisations also dealt with South West Asian and South Asian revolutionaries in the 1917–28 period. The Trade Union International (Profintern), the Pan-Pacific Labour Union, and the Peasant International (Krestinern) dovetailed with these arrangements.

support a party. These resolutions in general are associated with various policy phases. From 1919 to 1923, a time when notions of a 'united front' with 'fellow travelers' was encouraged; during 1923–27, when stress fell on going it alone as far as Communist Parties were concerned, but without detriment to collaborative work when it was possible; during 1928–34, when socialists who failed to work with the Parties were considered on par with class enemies; and from 1935, when a positive approach to popular front formations was considered acceptable. During the war and before the disbanding of the Comintern, the Comintern stressed a general hostility to all imperialisms during the first phase of conflict, while thereafter it positioned itself against fascism.

In the case of colonies in Asia and Japan and China, there were variations in these approaches, since the potential for Communist movements was seldom considered significant given the poorly developed nature of the working class. From the time of the Second Congress (1920), accommodation of nationalist movements was underlined, but some stress also fell on the importance of providing strong support for peasant movements and ensuring a distinction between forces that set national liberation as their goal and those that thought more broadly of social emancipation.

Spreading the Word: Establishing the Authority of Soviet Socialism in Asia through the Propagation of a New Imagination

Party work, discipline and funding were not the only way in which a new sense of purpose was cultivated. Distinctive about the efforts of the Comintern's efforts was that the limited technological resources inherited by the Soviet state from Imperial Russia were not only rapidly built on but improved and utilised for communication of Soviet socialist ideals. New directions were given to the Oriental Studies' apparatus of Tsarist times in order to build up contemporary knowledge on Asia and competence in modern Asian languages. Initiatives also included the use of photography and film, the use of radio and of various organisations for cultural projection of the Soviet state and standard news gathering and news dissemination agencies.

Spreading the Word: The Significance of Soviet Oriental Studies

Much of the information that went into all these organisations (Comintern and non-Comintern) came from the heir in the Narkomindel (the Komissariat of External Affairs) to the Asiatic Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Imperial Russian government. But the range covered by the diplomat was narrow and could not run into extensive reading, material gathering, and large scale pattern building. Research, the preparation of a fabric of narratives on contemporary matters, and the careful distinction of material into propaganda and information uses required a more subtle initiative that was partly statist in nature but must also come from the development of a research apparatus of size.

In the case of the countries of Asia, the work of Kulagina and Kuznetsova,⁴ on Soviet Oriental Studies (including the study of India) has pointed to the concentration

⁴ Kuznetsova and Kulagina, *Iz istorii sovetskogo*.

of such study, previous to the October Revolution, in departments in various faculties at different universities as well as specific research-oriented institutions. The latter included the Asiatic Museum, St. Petersburg, with some limited presence for research in a language school that existed in Moscow and in the work of the Imperial Society for Archaeology. By 1917, the Asiatic Museum was primarily a repository of manuscript material that encouraged and stimulated research. As such it continued to be part of the Academy of Sciences as it survived into the period of Communist rule.

With time, however, the Museum came to form a part of the Academy's new Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences—formed from the Asiatic Museum, the Collegium of Orientalists of the Academy, and the Turkological Cabinet or Research Group. This developed its Moscow wing—a relatively small unit when compared with the elaborate institution that existed in Petrograd (later Leningrad). Both bodies were required to work with agenda that involved an interest in contemporary spoken language and with subjects of contemporary history, and they developed a young scholarly tradition accordingly.

As part of a new architecture of knowledge making and knowledge gathering, though, two other institutions stand out. These were the All Russian Scientific Association for Oriental Studies and the Communist University for the Workers of the East (KUTV).⁵ Both institutions packaged the experience of Asia in terms that breathed Soviet preference, taking these to the level of individuals and local parties. They created a cross-fertilisation between the perspectives being evolved for the USSR and those recommended for the colonial world. The networks they created for teaching and research provided (especially in the case of the KUTV) an ambience for close interaction with the Soviet experiment and the establishment of national profiles and histories that were in keeping with Soviet perspectives.

All Union Scientific Association for Oriental Studies (VNAV)

The structure, organisation and determination that VNAV expressed has been drawn to attention in a Report on Oriental Studies in the USSR that I have published elsewhere.⁶ I shall draw on this in brief here.

VNAV emerged in 1922 in Moscow under M. Pavlovich Veltman.⁷ The Association drew in existing Asia specialists into gatherings it organised, established the journal, *Novyi Vostok*, with reviews, articles and information of importance to the profession of

⁵ Both are mentioned in Eran, *Mezhdunarodniki*.

⁶ Vasudevan, 'The Soviet Study of India 1917–1947'.

⁷ Pavlovich's complex background is worth the mention. Volontaire Mikhail Pavlovich was the pseudonym of Mikhail Lazerevich Vel'tman (b. Odessa 1871, d. Moscow 1927). He was a revolutionary who came from the family of a clerk. Vel'tman joined the RSDRP in Odessa and was arrested and exiled. He worked with Iskra in Paris from 1901 and joined the Mensheviks. He was present in St. Petersburg during the 1905 Revolution, working with the RSDRP, and went into emigration, which he spent mainly in France (1907–17) and where he took an interest in the study of Asia. After 1917, he worked with the Kommissariat for External Affairs, joined the Bolsheviks, worked with the Main Committee of Armaments and was sent to the southern front and participated in the organisation of the Baku Conference for the Peoples of the East. During 1921–23, he was with the Kommissariat for Nationalities, during which time he formed the VNAV. See *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, 'Pavlovich'.

Oriental Studies. The Association also encouraged the large-scale purchase of books (including government reports and statistical compilations), to develop the weak information base in Soviet Russia concerning the contemporary state of the countries studied. The Association also created networks to obtain material from Europe and Asia and brought visitors to Moscow for seminars and discussions.

Veltman evolved into an academic impresario who knew many involved in post-war revolutionary politics globally and the National Movement in India. He was acquainted with the network of Indian revolutionaries and migrant workers that operated outside the British Indian Empire, associated as he was with the Profintern and the Krestintern as well as the Comintern. While the members of the Academy of Sciences in Petrograd found it difficult to set new problems and themes for study that concerned the modern world, Veltman brought informants and sources together and gave vitality and excitement to work on class struggle. He was energetic, travelled extensively and brought into research reviews and information seldom used by academics. Reports of evolutionary organisation work were published in *Novyi Vostok*, while Veltman took pains to meet many. The venture gave the academic study of modern Asia a new standing and range.

Veltman's activities and his links with the powers that be gave VNAV a different standing from the Academy of Sciences. The new organisation challenged the significance and influence of Petrograd institutions, even if these were in the throes of reform. Most important, through links and connections, unlike these academic institutions, VNAV reached out to a non-Russian revolutionary clientele that it included in its activities and references.

True, *Novyi Vostok* was no bestseller, but its perspectives dovetailed with policy and VNAV became a centre of sorts to make up the needs of policy makers. A greater international status was foreclosed, not the least by language. References to the scope of the journal and institution do indicate a large readership and, at least by its presence in the cosmopolitan ambience of Moscow and the surroundings of the Hotel Lux, where Comintern activists stayed, and clearly the journal gained a following.

The Communist University for the Workers of the East (KUTV)⁸

Structure and status

The Communist University for the Workers of the East and its research apparatus provided inputs into Comintern and Soviet bodies dealing with Asia and the reach of the University was broad.

It came with the highest credentials the Bolshevik state could provide. Founded in 1921, it worked under the Komissariat for Nationalities until 1924, under the Central Committee of the CPSU during 1924–29, and, during 1929–36 under the Scientific Association for National and Colonial Problems (Nauchno-Issledovatel'skii Institut

⁸ See Timofeeva, 'Kommunisticheskii Universitet Trudiashchikhsia Vostoka {KUTV} 1921–25'; and Timofeeva, 'Kommunisticheskii Universitet Trudiashchikhsia Vostoka {KUTV} 1926–1938'. This contains information on the various research institutes, but the bulk of the material in this lecture is drawn from the archives of the State Archive of the Russian Federation and the Russian State Archive for Social and Political History. For the range of papers that make up some of this description see *Inventory*, pp. 113–14, 88 ff.

Natsional'nykh i Kolonial'nykh Problem or NIINKP), a registered social body close to the Comintern and the Komissariat for Foreign Affairs (Narkomindel) and finally, from 1936, the Central Committee of the CPSU. It was closed in 1939. The Scientific Institute for National and Colonial Problems took over the training of foreign Communists after 1936. There were KUTV outposts in Tashkent, Baku and Irkutsk.

KUTV's major functionaries were men of distinction. The first Rector was G.I. Broido a Red Army man who had served in Siberia and Central Asia. He was a member of Bolshevik committees on Central Asia and vice-Commissar of Nationalities (1921–23) (he was Rector and Vice Komissar for two years). He proceeded to a senior position in the Communist Party of Tadjikistan and later the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic's (RSFSR's) Komissariat for Education after he left in 1926. His successor was B.Z. Shumiatskii, former Ambassador in Persia and head of the Far Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern.

The University was a special institution that was a source of training for party workers. It clearly stood above the ordinary rank of institutions which were set up to improve higher education in 'Soviet Asia' in that it was to produce the Communists who would man the Bolshevik apparatus. Other bodies existed that would do the work of education. In the years immediately following the October Revolution and Civil War, as a gesture to the development of the capacity of local ethnics in the former Russian Empire, institutions were either upgraded into universities or new universities were founded in relatively far-flung areas of the RSFSR. Among bodies that already existed that were given new strength were those in Siberia (the Tomsk State University, founded in 1878), Bashkir country (the Bashkir State University, founded 1904) and the Russian Far East (the Far East National University founded 1899). Special attention was also given to teacher training establishments (Tomsk, Gori, etc.). New universities were formed in Omsk (the Omsk State Agrarian University, founded in 1918), Irkutsk (Irkutsk State University founded in 1918) and the various universities of the Caucasus (founded in Tblisi, Baku and Erevan in 1918–19). In early 1918, a People's University was formed in Tashkent, with the assistance of a number of research oriented institutions of the town. KUTV was to go beyond the standard work of such bodies in education. It was to produce the party's overseers—who understood ideology and its implementation.

Unlike other educational bodies, KUTV had a 'foreign' contingent that would be the core of party work abroad. The University was associated directly with the name of Joseph Stalin and its students prided themselves on this. The intake normally was put through a three-year course after a preparatory year, involving both ideological and general educational input, where foreign students took a two-year course. The general educational input came through special courses in the Natural Sciences, Linguistics, and Military studies to give students a broader range. Both Soviet and foreign students attended lectures on (a) Marxism–Leninism and the history and tactics of the Communist Party; (b) Economics; (c) History; (d) the East outside the USSR; and (e) Historical Materialism. Foreign students dealt with the evolution of Imperialism/Capitalism and the Liberation Movement in their own countries.

Teaching at KUTV's 'foreign sector' was through lectures in foreign languages or translated into the relevant language of the student group. Russian was used in senior classes. Special groups were formed, organised translations and seminars and acted as monitors and teachers for new entrants, and the Soviet 'sector' provided help to other universities, organising courses for such teacher training and drew in others from bodies like the Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow.

Research

The broad connections of the university and its connections with research outside it are clear from examples. Among teachers, V. Ya Vasileva prepared reports on Liberation Movements for the Comintern's Executive (ECCI) and later joined the South-East Asia Sector of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow. L.I. Madiar, Mazut, B. Friar and M. Pevsner from the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern gave lectures. A.A. Guber, G.N. Voytinskii, the India specialist A.M. D'iakov, and members of the Institute of Red Professors spoke at the University. V.E. Gorev, who headed the Military Unit had advised the Soviet army in China and written on the army in China.

Operating in circumstances where a large experienced group was present, a turn to research, using these skills, with the natural orientation towards party questions came as an easy corollary. In 1922 a research group on social sciences, attached to the All Russian Scientific Association for Oriental Studies (NIANKP), was established. This was finally transformed into a research group on Oriental Studies and Colonial Politics with a library and document centre, and, later, a Science-History Group in 1925. These activities were the forerunners of the formation in 1929 of the Scientific Research Association for the Study of National and Colonial Problems (NIANKP), in 1929. With the death of Veltman and the closure of VNAV, this association took over much of its work and produced the journal *Revoliutsionnyi Vostok* (The Revolutionary East), and taught subjects associated with the liberation movements of different countries. The NIANKP spearheaded the reorganization of KUTV. Teaching and research were de-linked, as were sections dealing with foreign students and those dealing with students from the Soviet territories. This led to the division of KUTV in 1937, when foreigners were brought under a different rubric.

During its existence, KUTV excited considerable loyalty. For both Soviet citizens and 'foreigners', it provided a memorable experience that came to be mentioned in memoirs, such as Ho Chih Minh's. The way this targeted the creation of a socialist mentality is indicated not only in the subjects mentioned in the syllabi, but also in the alumnus literature that still remains in the archives. The highly complex system of teaching, described above, as well as the nature of the teachers—themselves learners—generated an open system of pedagogy, especially useful for the mature student. The same should be said for research and reports, where the old 'on high' methods of the Tsarist era now gave way to an openness to experience and a range of exchanges with revolutionaries from the colonial world. The links of University personnel—which are clear from biographies—also provided the University with a resonance not usual in standard institutions of research and learning.

Spreading the Word: The Baku Congress and the Visual Projection of Asian Peoples

Significantly, pedagogy and the formation of a research literature with its own categories was not the sole means for the dissemination of Soviet ideas and images. The mobilisation of the instruments that created mass culture played an important role in what took place.

The use of the photograph and the poster, for instance, were an important part of the promotion of the Soviet initiative and drew from the firm interest in photography in Imperial Russia. When applied to Asian locales, this interest in photography had traditionally focused on ethnic studies of scenes that were unknown in metropolitan Russia. Such a focus continued in the early Soviet state, as witnessed by series of special studies of Buriat lamassaries and Central Asian mosques.

But photography was put to a different purpose too. As the series prepared at the Baku Congress indicates, it could be used to indicate an Asia that was ready to stand up to the Soviet clarion call, as sent out by the Comintern. The photographs not only projected the leadership of the Comintern, duly shown on an 'eastern stage' (Figure 1), but also provided a sense of mass support, coming from a wide range of nationality backgrounds (Figure 2). Women especially were singled out for special attention (Figure 3)—again with different ethnic communities drawn in to indicate the range of supporters.



Figure 1. Baku Conference, Main Podium

Source: Russian State Archive for Social and Political History, Fond 544.

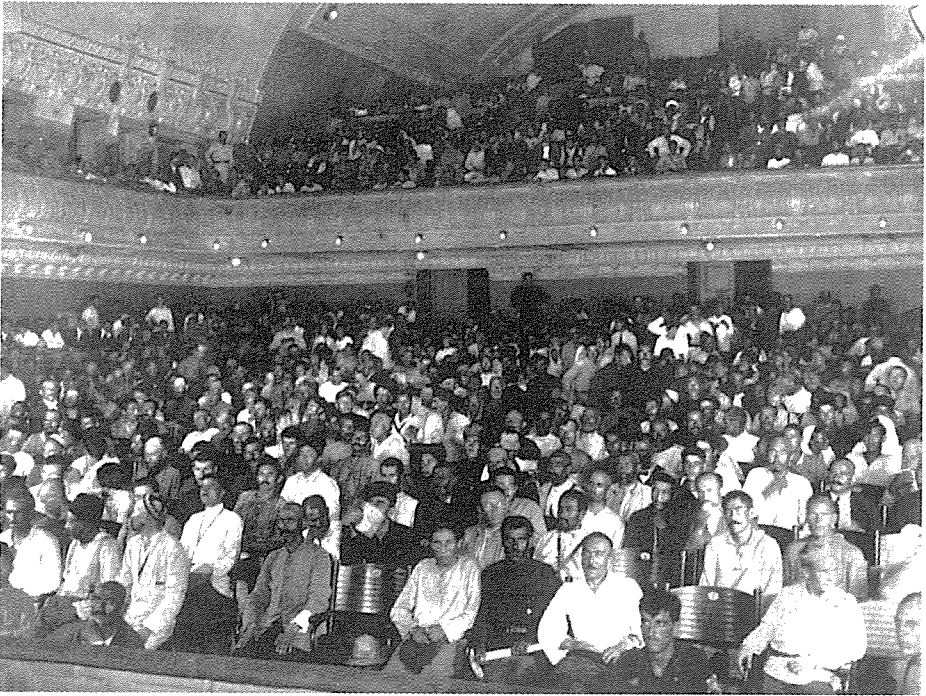


Figure 2. Baku Conference, Audience View

Source: Russian State Archive for Social and Political History, Fond 544.

Spreading the Word: The Use of Radio

Mention should also be made of the projection of the USSR through radio.⁹

While use of the radio was established by the time of the First World War within the Russian Empire, broadcasts came to be used for public purposes within the country, as a supplement to mass education and mass information under Soviet rule. Moscow itself began news programs in November 1924 (through Radio Moscow), and regular broadcasts were made of events in the Soviet Union and the Soviet point of view. The projection of Soviet ideas and images to areas that could affect European and Asian neighbours of the Soviet state also came to take shape during the 1920s, with the formation of Radio Comintern in 1922—with broadcasts from 1927 from a radio transmitter in Moscow (near Mo. Shabolovskaia) considered the most powerful in Europe. In the 1930s, radio services were used for strong criticism of Romania from Bessarabia. Radio Moscow itself was broadcasting in Arabic and Indonesian languages by 1939.

In 1926, radio broadcasts began from Baku in Soviet Azerbaijan. These touched on a range of subjects that were communicated both in Azeri as well as Farsi, finding a

⁹ Much of the basic literature is available in the *Bol'shaia Sovietskaiia Entsiklopediia* of the inter-war period and in the Russian Wikipedia. For the scholarly literature, most recently Iu. B. Kostiukova is thorough. See Kostiukova, *Stanovlenie i razvitie sistemy massovogo*.



Figure 3. Baku Conference, Woman Delegate

Source: Russian State Archive for Social and Political History, Fond 544.

fair audience in Iran. There were not only news programs but also a range of cultural programs. Elsewhere, it was in 1913 that radio came to Tashkent, and was used primarily at the time for limited purposes. But it was reinforced by other stations in the region and could be heard in Eastern Turkestan and in Afghan and Persian country during the 1920s and after. Direct broadcasts in Chinese from Radio Moscow came in 1940.

In the neighbourhood of the Soviet state, figures such as S.B. Levitan (for news) and Rashid Beybutov (for singing) became household names.

Spreading the Word: The Press Agency Abroad (ITAR-TASS) and the International Cultural Organisation (VOKS)

The USSR further dispatched information concerning Soviet matters through its Information and Telegraph service, which had a monopoly of all foreign news information dissemination. This agency opened in a number of countries by the time of the outbreak of the Second World War. From 1925, finally, the All Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) was formed in order to dispatch books, journals and cultural and scientific delegations as well as to organise the visits of distinguished intellectuals and cultural figures to Russia.

Where it was possible, these organisations operated through a local presence. As was the case in India during the inter-war years, though, where Soviet representation

was kept to a minimum, agencies such as the Trade Representative and the diplomatic representation in Afghanistan, as well as that in Iran, were used to supply information and disseminate it. In the case of China, areas that were the standard stamping ground of Soviet officials, such as Xinjiang, and the clandestine movements of Comintern agents were used as a ground network, in conjunction with institutions such as the Pan Pacific Trade Union.

Spreading the Word: The Limits of a Project

As is clear from the description of initiatives to project Soviet socialism, despite a great stress on discipline and an attempt to relate this to resources, the local monitoring agencies of the Comintern outside the USSR were thin at best, especially in the countries of Asia where established colonial powers or (as in China), local circumstances militated against a local Comintern presence.

In the case of attempts to bypass some of these problems using technical means, some of what was undertaken that required a particular technical range that was available in the USSR (as in the case of radio) had its technical limitations also. Techniques such as jamming were as well developed by colonial authorities for instance, as in the USSR itself, and there is every indication that both the Deuxieme Bureau as well as British intelligence agencies were aware that they were to be used. Certainly, such agencies ensured that local presence of Soviet agents was limited. The distribution of periodical literature was also strictly monitored and limited.

Such problems were to be of less significance in Iran and other countries of the Middle East, where colonial authority hostile to the Soviet state was less well developed. But here, much of the activity of the USSR was carried on through minorities that had their own limitations, since these minorities themselves generated cliques and subcliques in the areas in which they operated.¹⁰ It also came across the opposition of entrenched projections of Arab nationalism and also an Iran renaissance of sorts that was being undertaken by the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty.

Most significant, from the 1930s, there was a tendency to submit revolutionaries trained in the USSR to close surveillance and prevent their interactions in the USSR itself—which further limited their interactions abroad. The atmosphere of suspicion and its consequences in arrest and execution further affected the ranks of those involved in the projection of Soviet socialism. The records of the Communist University are a pointer to this deep suspicion and surveillance and provide a gruelling record of establishing ‘mistakes’ and how these may be remedied. The somewhat confused bonhomie of an earlier era gradually fell away.

The 1930s were also the period when the flexible approach to the programs associated with Soviet socialism, and the space given to religion in these were pruned. This, as in the case of the Tatar intellectual Sultan Galiev had already been part of the Soviet record of the 1920s; but the harsh treatment of the later decade was not to be seen at this early time. In general, the 1930s, increasingly associated with ‘national bolshevism’ was less open to accommodations of different national traditions in the

¹⁰ Ter Minassian, *Les Colporteurs du Komintern*.

definitions of what socialism meant, rendering the Soviet product less digestible to a series of groups outside the country.

Taken together, these factors indicate that the projection of Soviet socialism, just as the development of Soviet socialism in the USSR,¹¹ cannot be seen independent of the processes that formed it, which gave it a particular tone and value where ideology was only one component. The very development of ideas, for instance, was deeply affected by the heavy dependence on persons with practical experience, for instance, in the case of the formation of Oriental Studies, and these persons were shaped by political trends. Technology was a growing field, especially when it was applied to mass media, and the generation of personnel and skills led to limitations and often ineffective or over-routinised activity. The politics of the Communist Party, generally, and the demands of the Planned Economy determined the vicissitudes of socialist projections.

Equally important to what transpired was the situation in the countries where the projection of Soviet socialism took place and the way this response affected Soviet projection itself. Some countries had traditions of socialist thought well before 1917, for instance, as in the case of China and Japan, where Anarcho-Syndicalism of a certain type had a niche following. In the case of the period post 1917, in China where there was a large variety of Soviet influence across the country, and where local Communists took their own course in the 1930s, adjustments of various types had to be made with warlordism and religion (in Xinjiang and Mongolia).

Asiatic Orientations of Early Soviet Socialism: The Case of India

These diverse cross-currents are to be seen in the fate of the projection of early Soviet socialism in India.

India and the Projection of Soviet Socialism in the Sub-continent

Traditionally, the projection of socialist ideas of this era in India is associated with the operations of the Comintern and the Communist Party of India and its many allies. This in turn is connected with the activities of a number of revolutionaries of the Berlin Group (most well known of whom was Virendranath Chattopadhyay) of the period of the First World War, sundry others based in Afghanistan at this time (Mahendra Pratap and Professor Barkatullah being well known) and many recruited from the ranks of those inspired to travel through the north west to support Turkey in the time of the Khilafat movement in India. Within the Comintern, the initial links and connections were the province of M.N. Roy.¹²

¹¹ The recent literature on this aspect of Soviet socialism and the social history of the era has taken its lead from the work of Stephen Kotkin: especially his writing on Magnitogorsk. Personal dimensions of this and the way they may be treated have attracted the attention of Choi Chatterjee in a major article on the subject.

¹² This is noticeable in the mid-1920s where Indian affairs came under the Secretariat for England, Holland, Australia and South Africa, where there was a 'sub-group' for British India, under M.N. Roy. From 1927, affairs of India came under the British-American Landerssekretariat. From 1928, India matters again became part of the 'Eastern Landsekretariat'. This position continued unchanged until 1935.

The way in which the Comintern interacted with India has been detailed by Sobhanlal Datta Gupta,¹³ who takes into consideration the implications of recent work on the Comintern archives in this regard. The interactions between the Communist Party of India (founded in Kanpur in 1925) and the Comintern are dealt with effectively here—in a treatment that establishes the role of emissaries, direct correspondence and the Communist Party of Great Britain. Datta Gupta also indicates the nature of the Workers and Peasants Parties that were crucial to the local operations of Communists and the problems these organizations posed to the implementation of the line issued by the ECCI of the Comintern. His work also touches on the fate of Indian revolutionaries in Moscow during the 1930s, citing the reports that have appeared in the Russian literature on the subject in the recent past.

Taking the work of Datta Gupta further, Suchetana Chattopadhyay has dealt with the Communist culture that developed in India in the 1920s, centring her work on Muzaffar Ahmad and the groups that formed in Calcutta.¹⁴ This excellent monograph points to the rival spheres of nationalist and Communist culture at this time. Chattopadhyay makes the telling point that much of the transmission of perspectives on the left was developed within a framework of international travel and through the dissemination of literature concerning socialism through an international network.

This substantial monograph, however, does not comment on the projection of Soviet socialism in India through means other than the Communist Party of India and its allies and the Comintern. For this, we must return to the initiatives taken in Soviet Russia and those whom they involved.

Teachers and Researchers in Leningrad

As pointed out earlier, Indological research existed in St. Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad that originated in the Russian Empire. Associated with the early work of Bopp and Minaev, its main spokesmen under Soviet rule were S.F. Oldenburg and the Buddhologist Sherbatskoi. Following considerable negotiations with the Council of People's Kommissars (Sovnarkom), this research (centred now on the Academy of Sciences' Institute of Oriental Studies) continued to receive support from the USSR. It was required to modify its interests in classical Sanskrit studies and related areas to draw in modern languages of the sub-continent and the field of modern history. Most of the research here, however, changed slowly and could not be significant to the formation of a socialist imagination in India.

Teachers and Researchers at the Communist University

More important were the researchers based in the Communist University in Moscow. My Report alluded to earlier takes this up in some detail—but I would like to draw attention to a few points here.

The range of backgrounds of teachers and researchers was important, producing a flexible mix that would have been difficult to find in a standard academic community. The teachers who handled Indian students indicate this variety of experience and background. This is clear from a quick examination of the teaching cohort in

¹³ Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny*.

¹⁴ Suchetana Chattopadhyay, *An Early Communist*.

1934. The rank and file teachers were I.I. Kozlov, S.M. Mel'man, K.A. Mikhailov and F.D. Stalina. Of these, Kozlov (b. 1902) graduated from of the Leningrad University's Institute of Oriental Studies, but had been a political worker in 1918, a volunteer of the Red Army during 1919–22, and a teacher in Barnaul and Saratov at a *rabfak* (workers' educational unit) in 1922–25 before he took up higher studies (1926–33). Mel'man (b. 1903) had been a medical student who rose to senior rank in the Red Army during 1919–20 in Groznyi, had been involved in educational work there and had taught at the Tolmachev Military–Political Academy (1922–26) before being demobbed and attached to KUTV. Mikhailov (b.1904) had been a Komsomol worker (1921–23), before attachment to Komsomol cadres in Kazakhstan, working later with youth papers in Orenburg and Moscow (1925–26), before completing higher studies at the Institute of Oriental studies (Moscow) (1926–31) and receiving attachment to KUTV in 1929. Stalina (b. 1904) had been a Komsomol worker in Poltava and worked in Novgorod with party propaganda (both in a factory and at an instructor level) before joining KUTV in 1929.

Significantly, V.V. Balabushevich (1900–1970) and A.M. Diakov (1896–1974), who later became the foremost specialists on India in the mid-twentieth century, were closely involved with the research program and also indicate the diversity that has been mentioned. Balabushevich's father appears to have belonged to the rural clergy (Korbinsk region, Brest), and he was trained at the Institute of Oriental Studies (Moscow) from 1921, under A.N. Snesarev, who had considerable experience in border country in Central Asia. Balabushevich completed his early research at the Indo-Afghan Unit of the Economy and Foreign Affairs Department of the Middle Eastern Faculty, and then worked for the Profintern. A.M. Diakov came from the intelligentsia of Tver' (from a family associated with that of Mikhail Bakunin), graduated as a doctor from Moscow State University in 1921 and moved to Central Asia, where he served as a military doctor, and, later (1924–26) as Kommissar for Health in Tadjikistan. He then specialised on India at the Institute of Red Professors (1932), and joined KUTV late (1936). Diakov, who was popular picked up jokes in Punjabi from his students.

Such diversity of experience showed itself in teaching—making conversations easier from those of diverse backgrounds who came from India. Meanwhile, the experience and the involvement of students in the active life of teaching and research showed itself in the research and the range that it could appeal to. Not only were official reports integrated into the work, but, addressing party questions which had a contemporary urgency, research addressed problems such as strikes, the agrarian situation in Bengal, the United Provinces and other parts of India and the financial policies of the British government of India. This formed nothing short of a contemporary history of India, albeit in surveys and studies. Collections of the Indian Press were made—translations being undertaken by the staff, the students prepared and the Soviet representative in Afghanistan.¹⁵

A range of coordination took place with students in India and there existed a special concern with the translation of regional material. Reports of Indian newspapers highlighted the work of students trained in KUTV. Steps were taken to keep in touch with students and obtain on hand information from them

¹⁵ See Vasudevan, 'The Soviet Study of India', op. cit. *Inventory*, pp. 92 ff.

Indian Students at the Communist University and at the NIINKP

Information about Indian students at the university is limited for the 1920s in the archives of the university. Hence, the archive is not helpful for information on the formative stage of the Communist Party of India and the operations of the Peasants' and Workers' Party during the 1920s. The impress of the University in India, though, is beyond doubt. It was well known to the party activist, Muzaffar Ahmad, commented on it in length, mentioning the memory Indian students had of its Rector, Broido. He also noted that:

It is not only students from the Eastern republics of the present Soviet Union who have learned the rudiments of Communism in the Communist University of the Toiling East, students from many countries outside the Union have also had their lessons in Communism there.¹⁶

The Gadr Movement and the Soviet Union

A number of documents in the archive of the university refer to Gadr Party activists who were trained in the Soviet Union, some of whom joined the Kirti Kisan Party and some joined the Communist Party in the Punjab. Again, I have drawn attention to this in the Report on KUTV mentioned earlier.

Training of Gadr movement members was initiated in 1920–21, after Gadr leaders in the USA showed themselves amenable Santokh Singh and Rattan Singh visited Moscow in 1923. With US Communist party assistance, in 1926 a number of Gadrites were sent: Pritam Singh, Karam Singh Dhoot, Harjap Singh, Santa Singh. Prem Singh Gill joined them later and they were all admitted to the Communist University for the Workers of the East (KUTV). Between 1926 and 1935; others followed from Gadr centres in Argentina, Panama and elsewhere. Five groups went from Rosario in Argentina. Four groups went from the USA. Those coming from the USA at this later time included Achhar Singh Chhima, Jaswant Singh Kairon, Nidhan Singh Mahesari and Sodhi Harminder Singh. Groups of four went from Panama and Nairobi and one went from Canada. Teja Singh Swatantra went alone. In total 76 activists are known to have received training in Moscow during this period, and the bulk of them returned to India. There was one case of rejection. Hazara Singh Hamdam was sent back to the Punjab, possibly on the grounds that his family owned sufficient land (30 acres) in the Punjab for him to be considered 'kulak'.

From interviews conducted later by the CPI leader, Sohan Singh Josh, it is clear that some of these 'students' were hardly literate, but found adequate response from teachers in Moscow. Their ultimate contribution to activities in India is beyond doubt, as is their regular interaction with the Comintern. Of the students, Rattan Singh Gholia Kalan and Sardara Singh attended the Seventh Congress of the Comintern (1935). Most students were fed back into India by diverse routes. Some were imprisoned (as in the case of Bachan Singh Gholia Khurd and Harbans Singh Bundala): but they were seldom permanently out of circulation. They added to debates in the Punjab—between the Communist Party, the Kirti Kisan Party and the Naujawan Bharat Sabha who were at odds with each other.

¹⁶ Ahmad, *Myself and the Communist Party*, p. 71.

It was in this background that the Moscow students formed the Kirti Communist Group in 1935. It was led by Teja Singh Swatantar and did not acknowledge the authority of the Communist Party of India and also refused to work with the Congress. Swatantar attempted to make an all-India organisation of the Kirti Communist Group, with links in Jamshedpur and Kharagpur. Swatantar was arrested in 1936, but the organisation continued as an independent group. Some unity was forthcoming with the CPI by 1942, but this did not prevent Teja Singh from manoeuvres to establish a Communist Party of Pakistan in 1947.

More broadly, I have noted the following of the education received at the university and the research that is important to bear in mind if 'influence' is at issue.

The archives of KUTV indicate the problems of a Communist education, the approach of teachers and the lives of students. These fix the doubts expressed by the teachers and the reluctant acceptance by students of what was taught. From the picture, a degree of clarity may be established that this was not indoctrination straight and simple, but a disputed process of education, where the links between the USSR and the students was maintained not always through the university or by commitment but by a process of networking that followed. The profile established by research, therefore, did not form the basis of a thorough and profound making of a Comintern man (there were no women). Rather, there was a two-way process of research accumulation where the ultimate research product and its significance was the product of interaction, chance and Comintern policy (both doctrinal and political).¹⁷

Limits of the Indo-Soviet Connection

The issues cited in the general discussion of the limits of the projection of Soviet socialism in Asia apply in the Indian case. The encounters in the university setting also indicate the problems of the encounter between Soviet agencies and Indians.

In addition to such factors and the influence of the security and intelligence apparatus of the colonial state, note should also be taken of the difficulties of the terrain that had to be crossed to make contact with India in a clandestine manner. An important interview of a figure who made the crossing, cited by the Bengal Communist Muzaffar Ahmed, indicates some of the physical problems of travel.

When we started from Osh we were given a leather cloak to wear. The cold in Pamir was unbearable... Many horses died of strain before we reached Murgab. As the quantity of provisions decreased with the journey there was room on camelback, and thus we sometimes rode on camels. The horses could stick it no longer and were just dying off... [As we proceeded] the clothes we had worn before were no longer serviceable. We had to dress ourselves as the local people did... If one goes from Pamir to the Chitral areas in India, one has to cross a short stretch of Afghan territory. On the map it looks a tiny strip. But it is difficult to express in words its inaccessibility... At dead of night we rode on camel's back to cross the river to Afghan territory. Now our trials and tribulations began anew. We had crossed the Hindu Kush and even the high tableland of the Pamirs. But everything paled before the dangers and difficulties of the path that we now encountered. Once inside the Afghan border, we had to

¹⁷ Vasudevan, 'The Soviet Study of India', p. 50.

climb very steep hills which were an extension of the Hindu-Kush, crowned at the top by perennial snow.—Meanwhile, snowfall had begun heavily, and to escape its tortures we spent the next night in a cave...¹⁸

Such problems were complicated further by the continuous presence in this area of insurgents hostile to the Soviet state (the *basmachi*), who posed a threat to anyone crossing over from Soviet territory.

Better known than these impediments, as far as the literature on the limits on the influence of Soviet socialism and communism in India is concerned, is the considerable authority, from the time of non-cooperation of popular movements. These followed a distinctly different position from Soviet socialism and were associated with M.K. Gandhi and his supporters in the Indian National Congress. This literature has stressed the social significance of these movements and the limited impact of Indian Communism within a framework in which this significance grew and developed.¹⁹

To this point may be added the considerable growth of a teaching and research apparatus in India that worked from nationalist premises and predilections, and that evolved perspectives concerning the economic and social state of India outside any engagement with Soviet socialism. The phenomenon has been highlighted by Bhabatosh Datta in an earlier generation and, more recently, by Benjamin Zachariah (for development studies), Pradip Bose (for sociology) and Dipesh Chakravarty (for history). This, together with the scattered nature of the Soviet understanding of India, ensured the existence of a powerful counterweight to Communist perspectives based on Soviet socialism in India. Based in a growing Indian university culture and inputs from European universities, the literature based on Indian resources and located in India had a considerable social and cultural presence in the country.

What fails to find adequate space in the literature on the stand-off between Gandhian socialism and the work on national intellectual self consciousness, though, is the kind of development that has been evident in Kirti Communism and the intensely personal engagement with Communist ideas and Communist culture to be seen in Suchetana Chattopadhyay's work on Muzaffar Ahmed. This indicates that despite the range covered by the Gandhian movements and Congress politics, and the authority they came to exercise, a significant space remained that various Left-wing movements existed (and, for that matter, so did Right-wing movements, regional movements and caste movements) that could achieve a hierarchy and synchrony among themselves independent of the Congress. The activities of the Congress Socialist Party in the 1930s are an indication of these trends.

But to say this is not to state a putative case for the hegemony of Soviet socialism in such an arena. It merely indicates alternative trends on the political canvas—alternatives where the tones of Soviet socialism cannot be excluded, especially following the experience of the Second World War, when the USSR came to find a special following, and interest in India.

¹⁸ Ahmed, *The Communist Party of India*, 'The Story of Rafiq Ahmad's Travels'.

¹⁹ See Joshi, *Struggle for Hegemony in India*, Volume 1; and Joshi, *Struggle for Hegemony in India*, Volume 2.

Post-1945, now a world power, the USSR threw a different shadow as far as a newly-independent state was concerned. Soviet socialism left the ambit of perspective, knowledge, image and the politics of labour. It now embodied the pronouncements of a growing superpower. Its supporters and opponents the world over would adjust their approach to it appropriately.

Endnote—Early Soviet Socialism and Indian Nationalism: A Perspective on Maulana Azad

Before such a change in the state of affairs, both in terms of the power of the Soviet state and the independence of their own countries, among national leaders in parts of the colonial world, some found in the Soviet socialist challenge an exciting point of reference and yet were uncomfortable with ideas and priorities it was associated with. Yet others found it wholly unacceptable as a perspective and as a program.

This was certainly true of India where Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad stood at different parts of this spectrum.²⁰

Maulana Azad occupies an unusual place in this background. For, despite his associations with each of the figures mentioned, his close links with the labour movement in Calcutta in his early life as a revolutionary leader, and the affiliation of at least one of his close associates—Kutubuddin Ahmad—with ‘Communism’, Azad steadfastly refused to comment on Soviet socialism.

This cannot be ascribed merely to Azad’s rootedness in India. Born to a mother whose family was of the Hijaz—and an Indian father who spent much of his early life in the Hijaz, Azad lived in Calcutta from the end of the 1890s but had a broad sense of the Islamic world ranging from Turkey to Indonesia, travelling within large sections of it. His journeys and reading took him well beyond India, leading him to contribute to international debates in the Muslim world—which, in his time included the Muslim dominated regions of the Russian Empire and the Soviet state. He was only too well aware of the importance of world politics and mentions letters to Roosevelt in his correspondence from Ahmednagar post-1942—as well as a range of reading that was broad and deep, couched in a variety of languages, where encounters with the work of figures such as Tolstoy was not unusual.²¹

Undoubtedly awareness of the challenges emanating from the Soviet Union, and the way the Muslim world itself was involved in these must lead to speculation concerning the miss he gives to the Soviet socialist challenge. Is this ‘absence’ in his writing to be explained solely by the nature of his involvement in nationalist matters—both Muslim and non-Muslim—and the narrow politics of the Congress? Or is it to be linked to the sectarian problems of Communism in India, which diverted attention from the greater project elsewhere?

²⁰ Standard classics that indicate this interest are Nehru’s essay on Soviet Russia, and Tagore’s letters from Russia. Nehru’s *Discovery of India* also has major references to Russia.

²¹ Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *Sallies of the Mind*.

The presentation here of the influence of Soviet socialism suggests a different dimension. Variations in approach and perspective in the projection of Soviet socialism—especially its relationship with religion—as well as the relatively weak projection of such ideas in the colonial world, limited the extent of individual engagement. Popular literature, often lacking in detail and hagiographic in nature dominated the available matter on the subject,²² with imports of literature a limited stock under the strict surveillance of colonial rule.

It may be suggested that, in the circumstances, and given his other preoccupations, Azad gave serious engagement with Soviet socialism a wide berth—considering it to be an uncertain feature of the political landscape. He knew of it, recognised aspects of it, but did not choose to engage with it. Such a conclusion flows naturally from the limitations of this transnational phenomenon in the inter-war period, often linked with young men and women and marginal groups and, in the USSR itself, a series of vicissitudes derived from politics and funds.

The conclusion also flows from Azad's own personal make up as he chose to describe it in his letters from Ahmednagar. A person who was deeply immersed in the idiom and literature of Islam and the Muslim world, he chose to take up issues that clearly coincided with his own questions and ideas, where the corpus of material was available to him in significant amounts—a habit that came from a profoundly intellectual training described at length in the Ahmednagar letters. The socialist debates of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were outside this compass and the global project of Soviet socialism had failed to improve such a situation in India. Undoubtedly a revolutionary at heart, the goal of the revolution that was being projected by votaries of Soviet socialism is likely to have been unclear in Azad's mind; and, as such, it was probably considered that the aim was better achieved through specific initiatives concerning toleration and measures geared to welfare within a nationalist framework rather than as a broad goal of social revolution of a hazy nature.

Like many faced with great global projects that may appear to mean more than they say, Azad, when confronted by the phenomenon of Soviet socialism might have considered caution to be the better part of valour. Without making too fine a point of the matter, it may be suggested that his approach to one of the great phenomena of his day might be fit counsel for our own times.

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²² Instances are in English, Bhargava, *Lenin*; Krishna Rao, *Nikolai Lenin*; in Hindi, Avasthi, *Russian Revolution*; *Lenin, His Life and His Thoughts*; *The Red Revolution*; Dev Vrat, *Russia Today*; Jijja, *The Great Change in Russia*; Vidyalkar, *The Soviet State of Russia*. There were also a series of travel accounts in Indian languages including Urdu that did the rounds. The character of the literature has been discussed by Vaidyanath, in *Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* (Canadian Slavonic Papers), 1969.

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