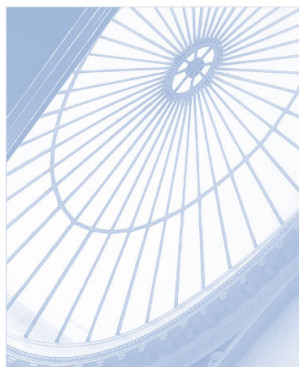


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BAIJAYANTI ROY, *The Nazi Study of India and Indian Anti-Colonialism: Knowledge Providers and Propagandists in the 'Third Reich'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 240 pp. ISBN 978 0 192 88754 2. £84.00

Baijayanti Roy's monograph explores the topic of academic, ideological, and military entanglements between Nazi Germany and India by focusing on a number of German, and German-affiliated Indian, academic experts on Indian history, religions, culture, and languages. These experts occupied politically charged spaces in the humanities in Nazi Germany, effortlessly bridging academic disciplines, research, propaganda, and increasingly radical National Socialist political ideology. They found ways to harness their work and expertise for the regime and often gained professional prestige in doing so. Roy seeks to explore the trajectories of these individuals, the topics which connected them, and their entanglements with National Socialism.

In her introduction, Roy introduces the reader to the research gaps which have existed to date; namely, scholarly attention on the humanities in the Third Reich has largely focused on specific disciplines and not on 'niche subjects' which cross disciplinary borders, such as Indology (p. 1). At the same time, Roy also highlights the long-standing dominance of Eurocentric perspectives within historical research and hopes that, alongside her book, more non-European scholars will be able to contribute to writing European history. This is an important point in terms of both the book's subject and wider debates, particularly in Germany, about dismantling influences of the colonial past on present-day knowledge systems and promoting more varied approaches to national memory and greater diversity in academia.

Roy focuses on four case studies, which are individually examined in chapters one to four. Chapter one concentrates on the India Institute of the German Academy (Deutsche Akademie, DA), which endeavoured to spread German political culture and later National Socialist propaganda in India via religious groups such as Hindu revivalists. The institute's tactics included inviting Indian professors to Germany for lectures to promote the study of India, supporting Indian students by providing scholarships, and collaborating with

Indian universities and institutions to promote German culture. At the same time, German academics also actively worked on and promoted the topic of India, for example through a twelve-part lecture series organized by the institute and the University of Munich in 1933. It was attended by 500 people and topics included 'The Geopolitical Significance of India' (p. 41). In 1939, one of the institute's German academics, Walther Wüst, personally appealed to Heinrich Himmler for financial assistance to send an Indian DA scholarship holder to India to conduct propaganda and espionage. The suggested candidate was Pandit Koodavuru Anantrama Bhatta, an expert on the Sanskrit language. Bhatta regularly gave lectures in German promoting National Socialist ideals for the Strength Through Joy (*Kraft durch Freude*) organization, and he accessed details on India during the war, passing them to another DA academic, Jakob Wilhelm Hauer. Hauer worked for the SS foreign intelligence service and wrote secret reports with this information.

Chapter two deals with the Special Department India (*Sonderreferat Indien*) within the German Foreign Ministry, which was formed at the request of the Indian anti-colonial activist Subhas Chandra Bose in 1941. The department was established to assist in the development of German policy concerning India. It produced fortnightly reports on the contemporary situation in India for the Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, as well as a series of German-language books published for propaganda purposes and to provide practical information for policymakers and the press. While the department utilized anti-colonial and anti-British propaganda, it likewise used empirical data to criticize British policy towards the Indian population, including the Bengali famine of 1943. Interestingly, the department's book series, which included publications by German and Indian authors, was not subject to Nazi Germany's compulsory censorship process, thus demonstrating the importance of the topic of India, as well as the power of the department. One of the main academic driving forces behind the department was the Indologist Ludwig Alsdorf, author of the 1940 German-language book *Indien*, which made it to a fourth edition. The book dealt with the history and impact of the British colonization of India, as well as Aryan race theory, and was allegedly praised directly by Adolf Hitler.

The third chapter explores a number of organizations and scholars affiliated with the Friedrich Wilhelm University (today's Humboldt University) in Berlin. These were concerned with knowledge of India's political landscape and included the Seminar for Oriental Studies. Hermann Beythan, an ex-missionary from Thuringia who had been based in south India, was recruited to a teaching position at the Seminar in 1933. Beythan is best known for his book in Tamil titled *Who is Adolf Hitler? Victory of Strength*, which was published in India in 1936 with financial assistance from the German Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Propaganda. In the book, Beythan praised Hitler as the Mahatma, or 'great soul,' who intended to re-establish Germany's independence but did not aim for personal gain or wealth (p. 112). The Seminar was renamed the Ausland-Hochschule in 1936 and incorporated into the university's Institute for the Study of Foreign Countries (Auslandswissenschaftliches Institut) in 1940. This institute had a counterpart at the same university named the German Institute for the Study of Foreign Countries (Deutsches Auslandswissenschaftliches Institut, DAWI). Roy highlights how the increased political importance of India after the outbreak of the war led to increased scholarly collaboration between the National Socialist state and scholars teaching on Indian subjects. For example, a lecture course titled 'India: Race, People, and Space', taught by Devendra Nath Bannerjea, an Indian scholar from Punjab who claimed that he had a degree from Oxford University and had been a professor in Calcutta, covered topics such as 'The basic features of the Indo-Aryan Society' (p. 124). Meanwhile, the DAWI largely conducted research on foreign countries, including India, and published the results in a monthly journal, yearbooks, and other book series. The publications on India strongly pushed an anti-British narrative, emphasizing British oppression and the Indian struggle for independence, as well as Aryan history.

Chapter four moves away from academic institutions to cover the creation of the 950th Infantry Regiment or 'Indian Legion' of the *Wehrmacht* and the involvement of scholarly experts in its operations. The suggestion to form an Indian Legion came from the aforementioned Indian scholar Subhas Chandra Bose, who highlighted to Ribbentrop how such a unit would inspire Indian soldiers to revolt against the British. The voluntary recruitment of Indian POWs who had fought

for the British Imperial Army in Africa began in 1941, and in May 1943 the Indian Legion was deployed in the Netherlands. In 1942 it was transferred to the south of France. The Legion reached a size of approximately 3,500 volunteers by 1943. To assist in the running of the Legion, so-called 'India experts' were hired as interpreters—a necessary step given that the Indian Legion's language of command was Hindustani and not English, as was the case in the British Imperial Army. These interpreters acted as cultural mediators between the Indian soldiers and the German military. Additionally, they took on practical tasks such as censoring the soldiers' letters and producing the Legion's magazine *Bhaiband* ('Brotherhood') which aimed to boost the morale of the Indian troops, oppose enemy propaganda, and spread political ideology. The magazine included positive (but often partially fabricated) reports on military developments and the German war effort, articles, jokes, songs, and poems supposedly written by the soldiers. The 'experts' utilized Indian religious traditions, culture, and political sentiments to promote unity and loyalty amongst the troops, as well as glorifying Hitler and expressing anti-Bolshevik ideology.

Roy's book highlights several interesting threads running through the different case studies, which include the German promotion of Indian nationalism, as well as anti-colonial and anti-British sentiment. At the same time, Roy points to how German scholars used orientalist stereotypes in their work, even in *Bhaiband's* articles on India's history, culture, and religions, which were aimed at the soldiers of the Indian Legion. While Roy sufficiently covers the topics of anti-colonialism and anti-British propaganda within the Indian context, she saves much of the analysis for the conclusion. However, it would have been helpful to provide more in-depth engagement with these topics and with current historiography within the chapters themselves. Other interesting examples are available that show how anti-colonial sentiment and historical tensions with the British were weaponized in National Socialist propaganda, such as German films on Ireland and the Boers in South Africa.¹ The inclusion of such

¹ See e.g. the 1940 German propaganda film *Der Fuchs von Glenarvon* (Director: Max W. Kimmich); also Paul Moore, "And What Concentration Camps Those Were!": Foreign Concentration Camps in Nazi Propaganda, 1933–9, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45/3 (2010), 649–74.

cases, even by means of a short historiographical discussion, would provide an interesting and wider context to Nazi Germany's anti-colonial and anti-British propaganda. Similarly, Roy leaves deeper analysis of scholarly discussions about the humanities and the role of academics during the Third Reich to the end of the book. Again, by engaging with this historiography within the chapters, Roy could have better placed her findings within these discussions and further underlined their importance.

Nevertheless, Roy's book offers significant insights into a number of underexplored areas, such as the trajectories of the different experts, both German and Indian, whose career paths spanned several organizations and often intersected. Roy's study greatly benefits from her use of archives in Germany, Britain, and Poland. In particular, the inclusion of secret British surveillance sources allows for a different perspective on Indian scholars and their activities. Though Roy remarks that she does not situate her book within transnational history, it certainly contributes to the trend of researching Nazi Germany through such a lens. It demonstrates how the National Socialist regime attracted foreign academics with international experience, recruited and attempted to politically influence Indian soldiers who actively participated in the German war effort in the Netherlands and France, manipulated knowledge of India and the Indian desire for independence for its own purposes, and promoted resistance to the British Empire. It likewise contributes to debates on the variety of roles that colonialism played within Nazi Germany. Roy's analysis of Nazi Germany's institutional and ministerial support for research on India thus highlights an often overlooked aspect of colonial entanglements. Rather than focusing on National Socialist colonial ambitions or potential links between the eastern expansion and colonial or imperial examples, as many scholars have done, Roy shifts attention to more indirect forms of engagement which include the instrumentalization of anti-colonialism.

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