

# *A Voluntary Gleichschaltung?*

## *Perspectives from India towards a non-Eurocentric Understanding of Fascism*

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### **Introduction**

Using historical material from India, this essay is part of a larger attempt to rethink the Eurocentrism, explicit or implicit, which marks our understanding of fascism; and also to rethink Indian fascism using (often Eurocentric) theories of fascism.<sup>1</sup> This essay conceives of fascism as a family of ideas, with common—though often disavowed—roots, intellectual underpinnings, styles and organisations of movements, and sometimes even a strong overlap of personnel. The phenomenon of fascism in India has not been adequately explored, in part because of a prejudice that fascisms in general are strictly European phenomena and that non-Europeans only produced inadequately understood imitations. When and if it is addressed at all, fascism in India is usually attributed (correctly) to the Hindu right, collectively known as the *Sangh Parivar*,<sup>2</sup> but often (incorrectly) only to the Hindu right<sup>3</sup>; however, its history in India is a much longer and broader one.

The argument hinges on the contention that the emergence of a fascist imaginary and a fascist set of political organisations in the 1920s and 1930s depended to a large extent on what I call a “voluntary *Gleichschaltung*” of ideas, movements, and institutions, which saw themselves as belonging to

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1 I would like to thank Jeffrey Vernon, Stefanie von Schnurbein, Sudipta Kaviraj, Britta Ohm, Mana Kia, Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, Bhaskar Chakraborty, Oyndrila Sarkar, and three anonymous referees for their comments on this article.

2 For example, Sumit Sarkar, “The Fascism of the Sangh Parivar,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 5 (January 1993): 163–167; Marzia Casolari, “Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s. Archival Evidence,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 22 (January 2002): 218–228; Tobias Delfs, *Hindu-Nationalismus und europäischer Faschismus: Vergleich, Transfer- und Beziehungsgeschichte* (Hamburg: EB-Verlag, 2008); and Jairus Banaji, ed., *Fascism: Essays on Europe and India* (Delhi: Three Essays Press, 2013).

3 A Hindu *völkisch* tendency approvingly cited Italian Fascist and German National Socialist ideas as worthy of emulation, or clearly drew upon them. See, for instance, V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1928); M.S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1939).

the same family but adopted the characteristics of a more successful sibling.<sup>4</sup> A number of these ideas, in which race and *Volk* were operative categories, existed in earlier versions from the previous century. They lent themselves to a fascist repertoire<sup>5</sup> that found its conjuncture between the world wars—a repertoire that was drawn upon by a number of movements entitled to use of the adjective “fascist.” Indian intellectuals were aware of, and participated in, fascist and Nazi organisations and (as the material presented in this essay will demonstrate) in the institutionalisation or attempted institutionalisation of Nazism in Germany and in India.

The longer history of engaging with ideas of race and *Volk* in India and the world, which was part of the same history rather than a separate one, dating from the mid- to late nineteenth century, was drawn on by both Germany and India. And the coalescing of ideological frameworks that were recognisably fascist or Nazi took place in a context whereby the lesser strains in a worldwide framework of thinking clustered around the more successful strains, borrowing and adapting from them and thereby “working towards the Nazis”<sup>6</sup>—and the Italian Fascists before them—in a voluntary *Gleichschaltung*. But this adaptation did not altogether abandon its right to manoeuvre, to select from a “fascist repertoire”—and later to remould it to create new languages of legitimation.

*Gleichschaltung* is, of course, an idea that carries very specific normative overtones that are associated with the Nazi state in particular; it is a process of appropriation from above by means of special legislation and through the use of state power. A “voluntary *Gleichschaltung*,” in this respect, might seem like a contradiction in terms; but the use of the oxymoron indicates that an international recognition of the affinities and possibilities of working together

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4 The term “voluntary *Gleichschaltung*” is mine, but the literature on how Italian Fascism began to resemble German Nazism after the Axis starts to form (in particular with regard to anti-Semitism) has been useful in this regard. See for instance M.A. Ledeon, “The Evolution of Italian Fascist Antisemitism,” *Jewish Social Studies* 37, no. 1 (Winter, 1975): 3–17.

5 I use the term “fascist repertoire” in the manner of Federico Finchelstein’s use of the phrase “fascist catalogue of ideas”: Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 6. See my review in *Social History* 36, no. 2 (May 2011): 215–216, for an account of why this is useful.

6 This is a reference to Ian Kershaw’s idea of “working towards the Führer,” in which he says that ordinary Germans, ordinary bureaucrats, and other Nazis, anticipated what they thought were the Führer’s wishes, and sought to carry them out, which is what made an ordinarily weak dictatorship function. See Ian Kershaw, “Working Towards the Führer’: Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship,” *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 2 (July 1993): 103–118. The idea of the “weak dictatorship” he attributes to Hans Mommsen, *Beamtentum im Dritten Reich* (1966); see Ian Kershaw, “Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (2004): 239–254; 243. This theory can be modified to accommodate an idea of persons working towards the successful ideology.

predated the existence of fascist states. Possible alternatives such as “fascist *Zeitgeist*”—or indeed “fascist syncretism”—privilege structure over agency and do not do justice to the work of the ideologues who sought to connect discrete strands and movements to one another.

The transfer of fascist ideas across borders, times, and political contexts has been a sensitive subject for historians. It is never possible to entirely avoid the enquiry being overdetermined by presentist concerns: in other words, the “bitch that bore him is in heat again”<sup>7</sup> argument (vicarious apologies for the sexism of the translation are due here)<sup>8</sup> is never very far away. Indeed, if there is any need at all for a generic theory of fascism, or for any theorising on fascism at all, it is the fact that this theorising has a politically activist dimension: it is surely of mere academic importance whether one classifies a movement or a set of ideas as “fascist” or merely “proto-fascist,” reserving the former for the “real thing”. There is a recognisable continuum from right-wing nationalisms toward Fascisms, and though the exact point at which one draws the line may be interesting in retrospect, by the time a movement achieves its goals and becomes Fascism “proper,” recognizing it is too late.<sup>9</sup>

A related point needs to be made here: the distinction between a (fascist?) movement in search of (state) power and one that has already achieved a fascist state is crucial to any comparative analysis, because after a successful *Machtergreifung* the (leading) fascist party has access to the state’s mechanisms of control and violence, and often merges its own apparatus of violence with that of the state. We should agree a priori, I think, that fascist movements and fascist states are different, as are movements and states more generally. Any comparison that fails to make this distinction will risk being misleading.

For reasons of thematic coherence, I shall concentrate here on Indian engagements with Nazism, which I treat as a form of fascism. This approach is justified by the fact that contemporaneous theorising on fascism, in contrast with retrospective analyses, was based on Nazism as the second major example of fascism, and by the knowledge that a single instance does not make for good

7 Bertolt Brecht, epilogue to *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui: A Gangster Spectacle*, adapt. George Tabori (New York: Samuel French Inc., 1972), 128; last line: “The bitch that bore him is in heat again.”

8 In the original: Bertolt Brecht, *Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui* (1941; repr., Berlin: Edition Suhrkamp, 1965) 124: “Der Schoß ist fruchtbar noch, aus dem das kroch.”

9 Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Michael Mann, *The Dark-Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) explores the connections between what he calls “fascism” in a more limited sense, and “Fascism!” with a capital F and an exclamation mark in a wider sense, classifying the latter work as belonging to the latter category.

theorising (the Spanish Civil War sharpened the debates and the polarisation of opinion). The recent literature on generic fascism tends to disagree about whether the starting point for comparison should be Italian Fascism, which after all gave the movement or tendency its name,<sup>10</sup> or German Nazism, which others have argued is so different that it does not fit into generalisations about fascism at all.<sup>11</sup> There is, however, no obvious reason why the paradigmatic example should be an “original,” or the most successful, version; nor, indeed, why a paradigmatic example is needed at all where there are many examples to draw upon that make a comparative approach more fruitful.

This essay concentrates on ideas or ideological tendencies and frameworks—while passing over actual movements of (proto-)fascist, paramilitary organisations and their political parent bodies, as also of the question of fascist aesthetics. The old adage that fascist movements are not original, not ideologically consistent, are clearer about who or what they are against than what they are for, and are willing to improvise or to borrow popular (and populist) elements from other movements, might be seen as a difficulty,<sup>12</sup> but I suggest that analysis has to be carried out at various levels. An analysis at the level of movements, the mobilisation of the alleged organic nation in the form of paramilitary organisations, must also be carried out without sidestepping the question of fascism itself; however, this is a topic I shall defer to a later piece. A certain type of populism does indeed lie at the empty core of fascisms, where the purificatory power of violence and the identification of the enemy within operate at an important level beyond ideology. It is possible to work with a “style” argument and suggest that aspirations to military or paramilitary mobilization dating to before the First World War were universal in the India of the 1920s and 1930s, but also that they represent a worldwide tendency. One view might be that using the term “fascism” to describe all these strands is absurd.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, not to see a fascist example and engagement in all of these is to miss an important part of the story. Perhaps it is easier to acknowledge this important presence if fascism is not seen as a specific European import that comes readymade and relatively clearly formed or, to put it another way, as a

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10 R.J.B. Bosworth ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) uses this as a starting point.

11 Ian Kershaw, “Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (2004): 239–254.

12 Juan J. Linz, “Some Notes towards a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective,” in *Fascism: A Reader’s Guide, Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography*, ed. Walter Laqueur (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977), 29–31.

13 Franziska Roy, “Youth, National Discipline and Paramilitary Organisations,” (PhD diss., Warwick University), 2013.

“fascist repertoire” rather than as a “fascist minimum,”<sup>14</sup> and moreover, as a repertoire in which India(ns) contributed independently rather than imitatively.<sup>15</sup> To attempt a preliminary clarification of this distinction, it might be important to note that the “fascist minimum” argument relies on an agreed-upon set of attributes without which a political movement is not yet, or not quite, considered fascism, whereas a “fascist repertoire” argument is less concerned with a checklist of elements that have to be present in order for the movement to meet the minimum qualification deemed properly fascist. Instead, it enables us to see a wider repertoire from which ideologues have the agency to choose. The repertoire tends to include an organic and primordial nationalism involving a controlling statism that disciplines the members of the organic nation to act as, for, and in the organic (or *völkisch*) nation that must be purified and preserved. It is in the service of preserving this organic nation that a paramilitarist tendency towards national discipline is invoked. The coherence of the repertoire is maintained by inciting a sense of continuous crisis and alarm about the potential decay of the organic nation if discipline and purity is not preserved.<sup>16</sup>

The scholarly literatures on fascism and on India do not, at present, speak to each other adequately.<sup>17</sup> If for a start, we are allowed to note that ideas usually associated with fascism were far more widespread in India than has been previously assumed, the enquiry might defer the definitional question somewhat in order to begin legitimately. There is much anecdotal and autobiographical evidence to indicate the influence of fascism, generically and therefore with a small “f,” on intellectual and political circles in India, and yet this has never been systematically studied.<sup>18</sup>

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14 Roger Griffin ed., general introduction to *Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1–12, lists ten major elements of fascism, and the possibility of identifying a “fascist minimum” in terms of a “common mythic core,” following his own argument in Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991).

15 Why must Indians simply be reduced to the role of perpetual consumers of modernity and not its producers (to borrow an argument from elsewhere)? See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3–13.

16 Mann, *Fascists*, ix, sees a “family resemblance,” in terms of “organic nationalism, radical statism and paramilitarism,” between fascism and many tendencies not quite fascist as yet: in other words, he proposes a distinction that does not quite hold.

17 To a large extent my engagements with a fascist imaginary began with its connection with models of development from the 1930s onwards. Benjamin Zachariah, “Beyond Economics: Ideas of Developing India, c. 1930–1950,” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1999) published in a revised and shorter version as Benjamin Zachariah, *Developing India: an Intellectual and Social History, c. 1930–1950* (2005; repr., Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

18 A predecessor essay to this one is Benjamin Zachariah, “Rethinking (the Absence of) Fascism in India,” in *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*, ed. Sugata Bose and Kris Manjappa (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 178–209. The present essay is more programmatic than the last named.

The aims of this paper, therefore, are two-fold. The first is to attempt to delineate the use of the term “fascism” so that it can serve as an analytical category rather than merely as a term of political abuse (while acknowledging that it is not necessarily desirable that the latter aspect is altogether dispensed with—a reminder of the dictum that political vocabulary is always both normative and descriptive, but with the corollary that the normative aspect can overpower the descriptive, leaving the latter hollowed out).<sup>19</sup> This is in part a problem of retrospectivism: fascism is, today, a word that has a very strong normative significance, ironically dominated by visions of Nazi Germany that were in large part constructed after 1945. A reading of fascism that partakes of the post-1945 normative significance of the term is impossible to avoid altogether. In some ways, therefore, the problem is one that is not particular to the historiography of India: Fascism (the Italian “original”) was read in 1922 quite differently from generic fascism during the Spanish Civil War, or in Germany in 1933 or 1945. In part, this is also a problem of terminology: inconveniently, not all fascist movements called themselves “Fascist.”

The second aspect is to attempt an understanding of the importance of fascism in India in its heyday. Was there a serious fascist presence in India during the 1920s and 30s? Were Indians seriously engaged with questions of fascism between the wars? How mainstream were views of, for instance, national belonging as related to race (Aryanness), of the nation as a body, of the use of eugenics and norms of physical fitness? How many of these ideas are now, retrospectively, seen specifically in terms of Nazism through they were very much part of the *Zeitgeist*?<sup>20</sup> This is also, therefore, an exercise in disaggregation: a number of the elements now associated with fascism in one way or another—militarism, national discipline and mass mobilisation,

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19 On the normative as well as descriptive content of a political term, see Quentin Skinner, “Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action,” *Political Theory* 2, no. 3 (Aug. 1974): 277–303; especially 294–295.

20 Not all *Zeitgeist* arguments are equal, however; see Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism* (1963; repr., New York: Signet, 1969), 21–25, for a version of this argument, now perhaps considered somewhat compromised after his contribution to the *Historikerstreit*, the big debate among historians in the middle of the 1980s in which he was understood to be reading Nazism merely as a response to Bolshevism, and therefore relativising Nazism; see Ernst Nolte, “Zwischen Geschichtslegende und Revisionismus? Das Dritte Reich im Blickwinkel des Jahres 1980,” in “*Historikerstreit*”: *Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*, ed. Rudolf Augstein, (Munich: Piper, 1987), 13–35. For a different *Zeitgeist* argument, which is, however, restricted to “Western modernity,” see Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), in which he sees the fascist quest as one for an alternative modernity. See also Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). This is not the place to reprise the debates about modernity and modernism in relation to Indian fascism. I shall defer this to a later paper.

eugenics, Aryanism, the excitement of “modernity”—have older and more divergent histories that cannot be subsumed merely within a history of “fascism.” At the same time, there were those who supported fascist regimes in Europe and saw aspects of fascism that were worth emulating in India, with necessary changes (a religiously-tinged rather than a secular ideology here, a replacement of Jews with Muslims there). This essay is an attempt to pay attention to the contexts in which fascist ideas, or ideas similar to fascist ideas, or ideas that have been retrospectively identified as fascist but were part of a broader context of debate at the time, were expressed. It requires that attention be paid to ideas and contexts,<sup>21</sup> to terminology as well as meanings (the two are far from always congruent),<sup>22</sup> and to ideologues and their constituencies.

### **Institutionalisation and Organisations: Nazi-Indian Connections**

It might seem strange that in retrospect, Indian engagements with Nazism or fascism are so often recast in terms of misunderstandings or of “incomplete readings” of the “real thing,” and that a sort of “impact-response” approach creeps into work on the subject.<sup>23</sup> This section demonstrates that there were explicit organisational and ideological links between Nazi ideologues and Indian activists based on cooperation and mutual understanding—an early and sustained mutual interest between fascists/ism and India(ns). A great deal more can be written about these organisational and institutional connections, but this section provides what I hope will be enough of a summary to sustain the argument.

Two books by Bengalis about Germany published around 1933 provide an entry point for our debate, as do two contrasting perspectives on the advent of the Third Reich. The educationist, pioneering sociologist, economist, historian, and Swadeshi activist Benoy Kumar Sarkar welcomed the elevation of Hitler to power, describing him as “Vivekananda multiplied by Bismarck.”<sup>24</sup>

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21 For a summary of these debates, see James Tully ed., *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

22 A problem with *Begriffsgeschichte*, it should be noted, is that it means both “terminological history” and “conceptual history,” the latter being the normalized English translation. However, the different terms are often used for the same concept, and differing concepts can be described in shorthand by the same term. “Socialism,” in this context, is a notorious example.

23 Maria Framke, *Delhi-Rom-Berlin: die indische Wahrnehmung von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus 1922–1939* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2013). She seems, however, aware of the problem. See her recent review article, Maria Framke, “Encounters with Fascism and National Socialism in non-European Regions,” *Südasiens-Chronik—South Asia Chronicle* 2 (2012): 350–374.

24 Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *The Hitler State: A Landmark in the Political, Economic and Social Remaking of the German People* (Calcutta: Insurance and Finance Review, 1933), 13.



(Vivekananda was the first international god–man produced by India, who famously presented “Hinduism” to an international audience at the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago.) Saumyendranath Tagore, who spent the late 1920s up to 1933 moving in and out of Berlin, and was a nephew of the poet Rabindranath, wrote about the brutality of the Nazi regime and, for the benefit of his Indian audience, commented that Indians were too easily taken in by the Nazis’ apparent respect for “Aryan” culture and the Aryan race, to which Indians claim to belong. They did not know, he wryly commented, that the Nazis saw Indians as degenerate Aryans due to many generations of miscegenation, and were therefore willing to leave Indians to their fate under British rule.<sup>25</sup>

Benoy Sarkar’s views were unembarrassed and clear: “Hitler is the greatest of Germany’s teachers and inspirers since Fichte.”<sup>26</sup> “What Young Germany needed badly was the moral idealism of a Vivekananda multiplied by the iron strenuousness of a Bismarck. And that has been furnished by Hitler, armed as he is with two among other spiritual slogans, namely, self-sacrifice and fatherland.”<sup>27</sup> Sarkar saw the Jewish question as a *Kulturkampf* similar to the Catholic confrontation with the Bismarck state, (which no one hears of any more today). In a similar manner, he declared, “The Jewish question... [will] be liquidated in Nazi Germany in a few years.”<sup>28</sup> (Although there is no obvious indication here that Sarkar had anything like the “*Endlösung*” in mind.) The need for Nazi action against Jews was allegedly the “over-Judaisation of the public institutions in Berlin as well as in other cities,” which made it necessary to “purge the public institutions of the Jews and ordain for them a legitimate proportion of the services not exceeding the demographic percentage.”<sup>29</sup>

Saumyendranath Tagore’s *Hitlerism: The Aryan Rule in Germany* is based on articles written between April and December 1933. It relentlessly documents Nazi brutalities including news of concentration camps (very early on, and as an outsider of sorts, he quickly recognised what many Germans later claimed to have known nothing about). “World famous men like Professor Einstein, the musician Bruno Walter, the painter Max Liebermann, have no place in the National Germany of Hitler.”<sup>30</sup> “In the Concentration Camps Communists have been murdered by S.A. mercenaries on the plea that the prisoners

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25 Soumyendranath Tagore, *Hitlerism: the Aryan Rule in Germany* (Calcutta: Ganashakti, 1934), 42–43.

26 Sarkar, *The Hitler State*, 4.

27 Sarkar, *The Hitler State*, 13.

28 Sarkar, *The Hitler State*, 31.

29 Sarkar, *The Hitler State*, 31.

30 Tagore, *Hitlerism*, 18.



attempted to escape.”<sup>31</sup> Tagore also exposes the “end of unemployment” scam by doing the sums and revealing the Nazis’ sleight of hand: paying women to stay home saves large amounts of money on wage bills. He characterizes the Nazi state’s attitude by pointing out that they “will bring back women to their proper sphere—the home.”<sup>32</sup>

These two views express the divergences and realignments into various political tendencies among the group of Indian exiles who were responsible for working closely with the German government to attempt to bring down the British Empire during the First World War.<sup>33</sup> A central element was composed of communist sympathisers such as Virendranath Chattopadhyay (“Chatto”), who was one of the main organisers, along with Willi Münzenberg, of the Conference of Oppressed Peoples and Nationalities in Brussels in 1927. (This is the better-known tale of Indians in Germany between the two world wars, the one which survives in literary and historical treatment.)<sup>34</sup> Chatto drew on his friendship with Jawaharlal Nehru to set up an Indian Information Bureau in Berlin that was funded in part by the Indian National Congress. Run for the most part by A.C.N. Nambiar, Chatto’s brother-in-law, and by Nambiar’s lover, Eva Geissler, who had been a typist in the German Communist Party (KPD) office in Berlin, the Bureau was ostensibly an organisation created to facilitate study for Indian students in Germany. In fact, it was a front for the political recruitment of Indians in Germany, and was also linked to anti-fascist political networks in Berlin.<sup>35</sup>

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31 Tagore, *Hitlerism*, 21.

32 Tagore, *Hitlerism*, 26.

33 For histories and pre-histories of this episode that are not entirely satisfactory, see Nirode K. Barooah, *India and the Official Germany 1886–1914* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1977); Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004); Tilak Raj Sareen, *Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad, 1905–1920* (Delhi: Sterling, 1979); and possibly the most systematic work, based on German archives, Frank Oesterheld, “Der Feind meines Feindes”: Zur Tätigkeit des Indian Independence Committee (IC) während des Ersten Weltkrieges in Berlin” (master’s thesis, Humboldt University Berlin, 2004). The approaches of all these studies tend to sideline considerations of ideology.

34 Barooah, *Chatto: Sareen, Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad*; Arun Coomarr Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, 1905–1922, in the Background of International Developments* (Patna: Bharati Bhavan, 1971); Kris K. Manjappa, “The Mirrored World: Cosmopolitan Encounter between Indian Anti-Colonial Intellectuals and German Radicals, 1905–1939” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2009); Syed Mujtaba Ali, *Chacha Kahini* (in Bengali) (1952; repr., Calcutta: New Age Publishers, 1417 b.s. 2010). For an overview, see Benjamin Zachariah, “Indian Political Activities in Germany, 1914–1945,” in *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander, and Douglas T McGetchin (New York: Routledge, 2014), 141–154.

35 All-India Congress Committee (AICC) Files, 1929, FD 20 (KW 1), FD 20 (ii), Nehru Memorial Library (NML), New Delhi.

But there was also a right-wing engagement of and with exile groups. Nazi attempts to organise Indians and other “Orientals” in supporting the regime is a subject that has been little studied hitherto. And yet, as early as 1923 the “Bavarian extremist leader Hitler,” as British intelligence put it, was attempting to mobilise the support of various maverick intellectuals from Turkey, Egypt, and India.<sup>36</sup> Although these early attempts were not particularly successful, with Mussolini’s Italian Fascists winning more recruits amongst Indians, both ideological and organisational Indo-German Nazi connections were formed reasonably early.

In 1928 an “Indischer Ausschuss” of the Deutsche Akademie was founded; the parent organisation had been established in 1925, and is the forerunner of today’s Goethe Institut, which started off as the language-teaching branch of the Deutsche Akademie: there really is no institutional *Stunde Null* in German history.<sup>37</sup> The co-founders of the “Indische Ausschuss” were Dr Karl Haushofer, a specialist in “geopolitics” and one of the popularisers of the theory of *Lebensraum* so beloved of the National Socialists, and the Bengali nationalist Tarak Nath Das.<sup>38</sup> Tarak Nath Das was, along with Benoy Kumar Sarkar, part of the National Council of Education in Bengal, which debated a “Swadeshi” curriculum for Indian education free from the domination of colonial models of education and acculturation that they believed provided the ideological underpinnings for colonial domination. Das had moved to the United States as a fugitive from British “justice” in connection with the Swadeshi Movement. There he became associated with organising Indian immigrant labour in the United States and Canada and with the beginnings of the notorious Ghadar Party, which had mobilized Indian immigrant labour during the First World War and attempted to send bands of immigrants back home to foment rebellion in India.<sup>39</sup> He acquired his US citizenship as early as 1913, was a member of the wartime Independence for India Committee in Germany, and had spent a number of years in Fascist Italy before returning to Germany.<sup>40</sup> His letters to Lala Lajpat Rai, organiser-in-chief of a “Hindu” parochial tendency in the Indian National Congress, suggest that he was a very early supporter of a *völkisch* view of national belonging; the model of education propounded here was a Hindu version of the Jesuit order.<sup>41</sup>

36 India Office Records, British Library, London [IOR]: L/PJ/ 12/102, 1923, f. 2.

37 Bundesarchiv, Berlin: R51/1–16 & 144.

38 This is acknowledged in the official history of the institute, which can be found on the web, in *Indien-Institut e.V. München*, <http://www.indien-institut.de/en/chronicle> [Accessed 20. April 2013]. Note the sudden jump for the Nazi period: nothing is mentioned for the time between 1932 and 1946.

39 The best scholarly account of this is still Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation and Strategy* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983).

40 IOR: L/PJ/12/166.

41 Tarak Nath Das to Lajpat Rai, Geneva, 11 January 1926, “not for publication,” file acc. no. 512, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi [NML].

The Deutsche Akademie's India Institute awarded scholarships to about 100 Indian students between 1929 and 1938. From 1937 it was headed by the Indologist and member of the SS, Professor Walther Wüst,<sup>42</sup> who replaced Dr Franz Thierfelder, who had also switched allegiance to the Nazis in 1933, signing his letters “mit deutschem Gruß und Heil Hitler.”<sup>43</sup> The Institute also became active in pro-German propaganda during the Nazi period, was incorporated into the NSDAP Auslands-Organisation (NSDAP-AO), and was instrumental in starting Nazi cells in various firms in Calcutta that were under German control. It also funded German *Lektors* who taught German to Indian students who wanted to come to Germany. One of these taught German at the Calcutta YMCA; and Horst Pohle, the Nazi agent who was the German *Lektor* at Calcutta University, was said to be very close to the Arya Samaj, whose members were singled out as desirable students for the Munich-based India Institute.<sup>44</sup> Among the other Indians closely associated with the Institute were the above-mentioned Benoy Kumar Sarkar, later a convinced supporter of National Socialism, and Ashok Bose, the nephew of Subhas Chandra Bose, a future collaborator with Nazism.<sup>45</sup>

In 1933 the left-leaning and Congress-recognised representative organisation of Indian interests in Germany, the Indian Information Bureau, was—quite literally—broken up by the Nazis: its office at Friedrichstrasse 24 in Berlin was smashed to pieces and its documents and equipment strewn about. The Gestapo arrested ACN Nambiar, who was also beaten up by the Hitler-Jugend for good measure. He was then released, thanks to the intervention of Subhas Chandra Bose in Vienna, who

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42 See Anna Sailer, “Der Indologe Walther Wüst und das NS-Regime, 1933–1945,” (master’s thesis, Humboldt University Berlin, 2008).

43 Bundesarchiv, Berlin, R51/16, R51/8. Thierfelder was responsible for the document written in 1945 that claimed that the Deutsche Akademie was a non-Nazi institution, and he cited Tarak Nath Das’s membership of the Indische Ausschuss as grounds for its non-Nazi nature; all of its Nazi activities he seeks to blame on Wüst. See Bundesarchiv, Berlin, R51/8, ff. 0203054–0203067, written in 1945. Thierfelder was back in charge of the institute by 1946, alongside Tarak Nath Das, <http://www.indien-institut.de/en/chronicle> [Accessed 20. April 2013].

44 IOR: Indian Political Intelligence (IPI) file L/PJ/12/505, ff. 80–81. From printed report: “Strictly Secret: An Examination of the Activities of the Auslands Organization of the National Socialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei [sic], Part II: In India.”

45 Publicity materials for the India Institute, Munich, distributed on the occasion of its 75th anniversary in 2003, do not mention the names of Ashok Bose and Benoy Kumar Sarkar. An earlier version of the Indien-Institut’s website listed their names. <http://www.indien-institut.de> [Accessed 20. May 2010]; this has been replaced by the version cited above. Leonard Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj: A Biography of Indian Nationalists Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 256–257, mentions Ashok Bose’s presence in Munich after 1931 as a student of applied chemistry. Benoy Sarkar was also a regular contributor to Karl Haushofer’s journal, *Geopolitik*.

was apparently able to call in favours from persons who had contacts with the Nazis. The Nazis paid Nambiar a compensation of 2000 marks, and he agreed to file a complaint about the Hitler-Jugend rather than the Gestapo.<sup>46</sup> He then went with Eva Geissler, up to that point the secretary of the Indian Information Bureau, to Prague. He was in Prague in 1938 as a correspondent for Nehru's paper, the *National Herald*, which was formed in the same year. Nehru himself came to Prague around the time of the Munich Pact when France and Britain effectively handed Czechoslovakia over to Hitler's Germany.<sup>47</sup>

Germany soon began to lose its leftist (Indian and non-Indian) political activists to other countries: Saumyendranath Tagore, after imprisonment for his alleged role in an attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler (he said later that he had had no such intention, but that it would have been worth a try had he been in a position to do so), found his way to Paris amongst various German and other exiles from the Nazi regime, and into the Anti-Fascist League of Henri Barbusse and the French Popular Front.<sup>48</sup> Virendranath Chattopadhyay made his way to the Soviet Union, where he vanished in one of Stalin's purges around 1937.<sup>49</sup>

To the right of the political spectrum, Tarak Nath Das and Benoy Kumar Sarkar continued to be associated with an extended circle of Nazis in the new Reich, not least through the Deutsche Akademie.<sup>50</sup> A stream of Indian students continued to pass through German universities and polytechnics throughout the 1930s, many of whom were, to a greater or lesser extent, impressed by the Nazis; the Indische Ausschuss of the Deutsche Akademie continued to fund a number of these, and to provide support.<sup>51</sup> Although not all of these students acquired a long-standing fascination with German Nazism, some returned to home universities where there was a tradition of support for National Socialism, including Calcutta University, where Benoy Kumar Sarkar was the leading light of its "German Club."<sup>52</sup> In Aligarh, Dr Spies, the

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46 IOR: L/PJ/12/73.

47 IOR: L/PJ/12/74.

48 Intelligence Bureau file on Soumendranath Tagore, IB Sl. No. 106/26, File No. 166/26 HS Folder Part II, West Bengal State Archives [WBSA], Calcutta.

49 Horst Krüger papers, Zentrum Moderner Orient [ZMO], Berlin, Box 68, No. 457,1.

50 "Akademie zur wissenschaftliche Erforschung und zur Pflege des Deutschtums." Bundesarchiv, Berlin, R51/1, rules of the association, 1925, end of file, no page numbers.

51 Bundesarchiv, Berlin, R51/16. Records of students are few and far between, and it is unclear as to whether they were destroyed by the vicissitudes of war or deliberately.

52 Maharashtra State Archives, Bombay (MSA), Home Department (Special), files 830A, 1939 and 830(i), 1939. See also Eugene D'Souza, "Nazi Propaganda in India," *Social Scientist* 28, no. 5/6 (May–June 2000): 77–90, based on the above two files but lacking a context for them.

professor of German, ran the Aligarh University Nazi cell from 1935 along with Professor Abdur Sattar Kheiri, who was formerly associated with the First World War Berlin India Committee. In 1937 Kheiri led a Brown Shirt march at his university in honour of the Prophet's birthday.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Kheiri's German wife was in charge of publishing and circulating the Nazi journal, *Spirit of the Times*, the English version of *Geist der Zeit*, which was the official Nazi paper abroad.<sup>54</sup>

The fascination with fascism developed by some practicing Muslims is something that warrants further attention, as it cannot be explained simply by a reading of the concept of "Aryan." A case in point is the Kheiri brothers, Abdur Sattar Kheiri and his brother Abdul Jabbar Kheiri. Also referred to early in their careers as the "Beirut brothers," they were Boy Scout masters in Lebanon, language teachers in Istanbul, pan-Islamists in Berlin, travellers to the USSR, and as returnees to India, propagandists for the National Socialists.<sup>55</sup> Both brothers pleaded to be allowed to return to India long before they were actually permitted to do so. Their argument was that as believing Muslims they had had no choice but to act against the British Empire during the First World War because the empire had been at war with the Khilafat.<sup>56</sup> Some version of an organicist unity of state and people seemed to provide the initial resonances for these engagements; but lest it be said that "Islam" and "fascism" have affinities, as several propagandists would like to suggest today,<sup>57</sup> it might be worth pointing out that several people also believed that communism, barring the explicitly atheist parts, was compatible with Islam and capable of being expressed in Islamicate language.

As the crisis of 1938 developed, Jawaharlal Nehru was in Europe and reported for his paper, the *National Herald*, on the surrender to Hitler at Munich that saw the dismemberment and eventual absorption of Czechoslovakia by Nazi

53 National Archives of India, New Delhi [NAI]: Home Department, Government of India, File No. 21/65/39 Poll. (Int.). "Consideration of steps to be taken to combat Nazi activity in the Aligarh University," 1-7. Copy in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Archives on Contemporary History (ACH), PC Joshi Archive, File 11-1939.

54 NAI: Home Department, Government of India, File No. 21/65/39 Poll. (Int.). "Consideration of steps to be taken to combat Nazi activity in the Aligarh University," 1-7. Copy in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Archives on Contemporary History (ACH), PC Joshi Archive, File 11-1939.

55 Majid Hayat Siddiqui, "Bluff, Doubt and Fear: The Kheiri Brothers and the Colonial State 1904-45," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 24, no. 3 (1987): 233-263.

56 NAI: Home (Political), file 30/5/30, copy in JNU, ACH, PC Joshi Archive, File 74/1930: "Question of the grant of an assurance of immunity from prosecution to Abdul Jabbar Kheiri in the event of his return to India."

57 See, for instance, Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009).

Germany. Horst Pohle, the Nazi *Lektor* appointed and paid by the Deutsche Akademie, wrote to his superiors in Munich that Nehru's European trip and his journalistic despatches were not doing the Nazi cause in India much good; in fact, a great deal of goodwill towards the Nazis had been lost due to Nehru's powerful writing.<sup>58</sup>

When Nehru stopped in Munich in the same year for a secret meeting with the Nazi leadership, British intelligence reports following his movements were sure that his anti-fascist credentials were strong enough for him to be completely trusted, although they never found out what the discussions were about.<sup>59</sup> Nehru was also trying to recruit Jewish technical experts to work in India where their skills were required. He also believed that this would ease the impending humanitarian catastrophe that he saw unfolding before him as Jews were progressively stripped of their rights in Germany and Austria.<sup>60</sup> In 1938 Subhas Chandra Bose, the President of the Indian National Congress, advised Nehru strongly against interfering in the matter of Jews, which, Bose believed, was none of their business. This, Nehru later noted in his private correspondence with Bose, was to drive a wedge between the two former friends and comrades: "You will remember that just previously there had been a terrible pogrom in Germany against the Jews and the world was full of this. I felt that we must express our opinion in regard to it. You say that you were 'astounded when I produced a resolution... seeking to make India an asylum for the Jews.'"<sup>61</sup> Nehru nonetheless managed to place a few Jews in jobs in India.<sup>62</sup>

When the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed in August 1939, disrupting the last hope of "collective security" against the Nazi threat, a general world war became only a matter of time. September 1939 was in many ways anticlimactic for Indians who had been watching international affairs with interest. Two years into the war, Subhas Chandra Bose escaped dramatically from India, turning up in Nazi Berlin where he was joined by his family and by associates from his Vienna days.<sup>63</sup> This is the best-known episode in the Indo-German

58 Bundesarchiv, Berlin, R/51/144, Horst Pohle's report from Calcutta, 1938.

59 Report dated August 29, 1938, IOR: L/PJ/12/293, f. 136.

60 All India Congress Committee [AICC] Papers, NML, File No. 12/1938 and File No. FD 42/1938.

61 Jawaharlal Nehru Papers [JNP], NML, Vol. IX, ff. 193–197 (ff. 291–223), Jawaharlal Nehru to Subhas Chandra Bose, Allahabad, April 3, 1939: quote from f. 195 (f. 221). He is probably referring here to the *Reichskristallnacht* pogroms, judging by the date, late in 1938.

62 Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (London: Routledge, 2004), 97.

63 Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj*, 441–490.

relations of the period; we need not belabour the point here except to say that although Bose was a willing collaborator with the Nazis, he was less than impressed by their tentative commitment to Indian independence.<sup>64</sup> Another unexpected returnee to Berlin was ACN Nambiar; he was recruited by the Nazis from his location in occupied France, returned to Berlin, and became Subhas Bose's right-hand man while the latter tried to wring a guarantee of Indian independence out of the Nazi leadership. When Bose left Germany to go to Japan, Nambiar stayed on as head of the Indian Legion and of Bose's Free India Centre, which he joined in January 1942. Imprisoned after the war as a collaborator, Nambiar managed to slip into Switzerland and was given a passport by Jawaharlal Nehru's Interim Government, to the great annoyance of the British, though they had also considered trying to recruit him as a spy after the war, given his experiences both in Nazi Germany and as a former communist who had had access to the Soviet Union.<sup>65</sup> Nambiar made his way back to Germany in 1951 as the first Indian Ambassador to the Federal Republic.<sup>66</sup>

All of this is indicative of a widespread and well-networked organisational infrastructure as well as a strong set of informed engagements with Nazi organisations and ideology that belies the argument that Indian (or other non-European) collaborators with the Nazis did not know what they were doing.<sup>67</sup> Despite the vagueness of some appropriations of fascism amongst Indian ruling-class aspirants, it cannot be said that fascism was unknown in India or by Indians. Conduits of information could be found easily amongst the Indian exiles in Italy and Germany, both pro- and anti-fascist, as well as amongst occasional travellers through Europe.<sup>68</sup>

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64 IOR: L/PJ/12/73.

65 Decipher of D.I.B. [Director, Intelligence Bureau] private telegram No. 347, sent 11.12.1945, received 12.12.1945, in recently released file (2014), National Archives (UK), KV-2 3904, 41.

66 IOR: L/PJ/12/74.

67 A recent biographer of Subhas Chandra Bose, a relative who hopes to use a renewal of nationalist hagiography around this figure to launch his own career in politics, either deliberately suppresses material in his possession, or cannot be bothered to look at them, for this material must yield at least as much evidence as I have been able to present in this paper. Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011). See my review of the book in *American Historical Review* 117, no. 2 (April 2012): 509–510.

68 For Indian, and in particular Bengali, engagements with Italy under Fascism, see Mario Prayer, "Self, Other and *alter idem*: Bengali Internationalism and Fascist Italy in the 1920s and 30s," *Calcutta Historical Journal* 26, no. 1 (January–June 2006): 1–32.



### Antecedents and contexts: fascism and India

When we speak of “fascism,” we are deliberately mixing what the late Michel Foucault called “regimes of truth”:<sup>69</sup> on the one hand we are, indeed, aware that to describe a trend as “fascist” must be to discredit it, politically speaking. The word “fascist” is, in a Barthesian sense, one with a surplus meaning that evokes much more than it describes<sup>70</sup> and is far more normative than it is descriptive. In other words, one is using a teleology of anticipation that is politically intended to show closeness to fascism: how close is close enough? On the other hand, we are aware that the term “fascism” cannot be used too loosely without diluting its meaning; it is important, therefore, to distinguish between “Fascist!” as a term of abuse and “fascist” as an analytically useful category.<sup>71</sup> The tension between the two must be acknowledged, not disavowed; but I do not think it is possible to make a choice.

Chronologically, I think it is necessary to make a crucial distinction between engagements with fascism generically, or with Italian Fascism and German Nazism in particular. In the latter case a further distinction should be made between the period before around 1938 and after 1938, when a world war seemed inevitable to everyone, not just to forward-thinking alarmists or leftist intellectuals. After 1938 a more opportunist engagement with Italy or Germany, based on the cliché of the enemy’s enemy being a friend, might have played a more prominent role than previously. A key question for me at each stage was, “what did those who engaged with fascism and found positive elements in it know?” The answer, as I think has been established above, is: quite a lot. A good many people were very well informed, and their continued engagement with fascism was more than the misguided misreadings of an ignorant and distant group. Right through the period under discussion, there were Indian political exiles in Europe who were reporting back to selected informants at home through private letters and articles for newspapers. In this correspondence with India they argued ideological positions, reported on Nazi-led pogroms in Germany and Europe, and on daily life in Nazi Germany.<sup>72</sup> These émigrés were well connected and well informed across the political spectrum. There was also a regular movement of people to and from Europe, some as students, some as professionals, and some as political activists.

69 Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Harvester, 1980).

70 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (1957; repr., London: Paladin, 1972).

71 This distinction is proposed tongue-in-cheek in Mann, *Fascists*, x. Mann sees a “family resemblance,” in terms of “organic nationalism, radical statism and paramilitarism,” between fascism and many tendencies more loosely called Fascist! See Mann, *Fascists*, ix.

72 For an anti-fascist view from the period, see Tagore, *Hitlerism*.

Another important point is the question of who engaged with fascism. The answer is that almost everyone did; the problem, of course, is how. Fascism was one of the major world ideologies in the interwar period; it would have been astonishing had Indian intellectuals not engaged with it. Mohandas K. Gandhi, for instance, wrote to Romain Rolland in 1931:

Mussolini is a riddle to me. Many of his reforms attract me. He seems to have done much for the peasant class. I admit an iron hand is there. But as violence is the basis of Western society, Mussolini's reforms deserve an impartial study. His care of the poor, his opposition to super-urbanization, his efforts to bring about co-ordination between capital and labour, seem to me to demand special attention. I would like you to enlighten me on these matters. My own fundamental objection is that these reforms are compulsory. But it is the same in all democratic institutions. What strikes me is that behind Mussolini's implacability is a desire to serve his people.<sup>73</sup>

M.K. Gandhi, who is not usually associated with fascism (although the communist and then ex-communist M.N. Roy used the term "fascist" with reference to his leadership),<sup>74</sup> had a style of charismatic leadership that might have been seen as similar to fascism in some respects (minus the violence); he certainly believed in disciplining the masses he mobilised, he emphasised loyalty to the collective, the reliance upon the judgement of those of greater moral virtue (himself), and he was not a particular fan of parliamentary institutions.<sup>75</sup>

A point that might be useful here is that references to fascism outside Europe tend to reproduce essentialist national categories in their discussions. I find it difficult to understand historians who talk about the various voices

73 M.K. Gandhi to Romain Rolland, 20 December 1931, in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 54, 297. [www.gandhiserv.org](http://www.gandhiserv.org) [Accessed on 15. February 2009].

74 M.N. Roy, *Fascism: Its Philosophy, Professions and Practice* (1938; repr., Calcutta: Jijnasa, 1973), 31–32.

75 I have made similar points elsewhere: see Benjamin Zachariah, "In Search of the Indigenus: JC Kumarappa and the Philosophy of 'Gandhian Economics,'" in *Colonialism as Civilising Mission: The Case of British India*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné, Michael Mann (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 248–269; Zachariah, "Development: Possible Nations," chap. 4 in *Developing India*. See also Ranajit Guha, "Discipline and Mobilise," in *Subaltern Studies 7: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 69–120; on Gandhi's distaste for parliaments see Mohandas K. Gandhi, "Hind Swaraj [1909]," in *Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); on his wish to be "dictator" of the Non-Cooperation Movement (albeit before Mussolini's march on Rome and thus before "dictator" had acquired its Fascist connotations), see Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London: Bodley Head, 1936), 46f.

that denounced fascism as evidence that “the Arabs” or “Indians” were not fascists without recognising that it is precisely these denunciations that show that there was something to denounce.<sup>76</sup> (It is of course a fallacy of nation-centric thinking that we believe that the categories “Arabs” or “Indians” had any relevance to actual life.) Were various intellectuals, in India or in Egypt, simply making their positions on European politics clear? This seems unlikely. In fact, socialists in India keenly debated how seriously to take a fascist threat in India, and they concluded that there was danger of a discontented lower middle class (especially in the face of the Great Depression) being seduced by the myth of a strong leader and a strong state.<sup>77</sup>

There is also the question of languages of legitimacy or of legitimation: what could one say about fascism in public? What did one say about fascism in private correspondence? In India, by the beginning of the 1930s, the hegemonic language of nationalism (and I think we can agree that fascism is a form of nationalism) was either a form of bland Gandhian rhetoric about moral self-strengthening and non-violence (to be distinguished from Gandhi’s own ideas, which as noted here, have been seen to have some affinities with fascism), or a much stronger leftist position on the need to overcome capitalism and achieve socialism, albeit after the interim goal of national independence had been achieved. The point to be made here is that there was a strong identification, both formally and informally, with a leftist, and a non-racial, non-sectarian understanding of the future of India and the making of a future “nation.” This made many explicitly fascist ideas unacceptable as public arguments, and therefore many of these discussions took place in private, or at any rate in less public fora.<sup>78</sup>

There is an assumption that fascism in general, or Italian Fascism in particular, was only attractive to some Indians before they properly understood its imperialist intentions: in the case of Italian Fascism, the turning-point for this period of fascination should have been the Abyssinian war in 1935–36.

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76 See, for example, Israel Gershoni, “Egyptian Liberalism in an Age of ‘Crisis of Orientation.’ Al-Risāla’s Reaction to Fascism and Nazism, 1933–39,” in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999): 551–576. For a useful discussion on the presentist problems of discussing the relationship between National Socialism and the “Arab world,” see Sophie Wagenhofer, “*Rassischer*” Feind – *Politischer Freund*? *Inszenerung und Instrumentalisierung des Araberbildes im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2010), 9–17.

77 There were several articles in the *Congress Socialist*, for instance, from 1934 to 1938 (when the journal folded for lack of funds) that reiterated these points.

78 Benjamin Zachariah, *Developing India*; Benjamin Zachariah, “Interlude—Envisioning the New India,” in *Nehru* (London: Routledge, 2004), 139–168; Benjamin Zachariah, *Playing the Nation Game* (Delhi: Yoda Press, 2011).

Although this episode did lose Mussolini's fascists some of its Indian support it did not lose the fascists their more committed support, judging by articles in the Indian press. There was a tendency amongst some intellectuals to claim that as a great nation that had had colonies in the past and should have them in the future, India obviated this.<sup>79</sup> Privately, this group of thinkers was not disturbed by fascism's imperialist tendencies, though some of them might have denounced the Abyssinian invasion in public.

This brings us to another related point: ideas that are close to or related to fascism, versus the terms themselves. Fascism or Nazism were not necessarily terms that were used by people whose ideas were close to or even directly borrowed from fascism or Nazism. We might take the easy way out and avoid the term "fascism" entirely, especially as it was not, in the period described, one of the central political categories in Indian politics.<sup>80</sup> (Then again, nor was "fascism" the internally used term in, say, Spain, Romania, or Hungary: we are in danger of confusing the term with the thing itself.) If the argument is about identifying a *Zeitgeist*, one needs to look at the ideas themselves and their similarities to other ideas; "fascist," in this context, is less awkward than an attempt to avoid the term. The question of a necessary claim to originality (common to all nationalist ideologues since each nation supposedly has a unique character and genius) must be raised here. Even when the contents of ideologies are blatantly similar, the claim to difference is essential. An attempt at straightforward imitation could not possibly be legitimate; instead, the borrowings had to be underplayed or mediated by statements of alleged assimilation and domestication.

So, the question remains: to what extent were there ideas within the Indian political context that made it possible to identify with fascist trends, and how far back do we want to go in search of them? Aryanism and related mysticisms

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79 The Greater India Society, whose members included the historian Romesh Chandra Majumdar and the linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, was influential in pushing the idea of an Indian cultural sphere that extended into East and Southeast Asia. See Susan Bayly, "'Imagining 'Greater India': French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode," in *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2004): 703–744.

80 I have in mind here something in the nature of a *Begriffsgeschichte* approach; see Reinhard Koselleck, "Richtlinien für das Lexikon politisch-sozialer Begriffe der Neuzeit," in *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 11 (1967): 81–99. The contention is that one cannot understand the political life of a state (we could say here, an area we have identified for our purposes as a unit of political discourse) without understanding the central historical-political categories (*geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*) which inform that unit. However, it is harder to identify these categories in the process of formation, and especially as they operate across linguistic, "national" or cultural contexts. In this connection, see Melvin Richter, "Begriffsgeschichte and the History of Ideas," in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48, no. 2 (1987): 247–263; also Zachariah, *Developing India*, 13–17, for a formulation of this problem in connection with India in the context of the Skinner debate.

were certainly important in India from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, as they were in Britain and in the rest of the world, but perhaps that is taking the argument a little too far back, even for teleology; but certainly, the Aryanism theme was influential.<sup>81</sup>

Another influential idea was that of a disciplined nationalism that subordinated a backward population to the directing will of an enlightened and superior leadership. In his autobiographical book *The Indian Struggle*, Subhas Chandra Bose called for a synthesis between communism and fascism.<sup>82</sup> He later told Rajani Palme Dutt in an interview that he had misunderstood fascism, seeing it merely as “an aggressive form of nationalism,” which he and many other Indians saw as desirable at the time.<sup>83</sup> The quote from *The Indian Struggle* is often presented in truncated form, and its appearance in the relatively larger context of a recent review article is to be welcomed. Palme Dutt’s interview, preparing the ground for Bose’s attempt to lead a Popular Front campaign supported by the communists and compatible with the Dimitrov Line, was intended, of course, to downplay the connection with fascism. Bose wrote:

Considering everything, one is inclined to hold that the next phase in world-history will produce a synthesis between communism and fascism. And will it be a surprise if that synthesis is produced in India? In spite of the antithesis between communism and fascism, there are certain traits common to both. Both communism and fascism believe in the supremacy of the state over the individual. Both denounce parliamentary democracy. Both believe in party rule. Both believe in dictatorship of the party and in the ruthless suppression of all dissenting minorities. Both believe in a planned industrial reorganisation of the country. These common traits will form the basis of the new synthesis. That synthesis is called

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81 See, for instance, Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science* (2004; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); and for an earlier and uncritical acceptance of Aryanism, E.B. Havell, *The History of Aryan Rule in India* (London: George G. Harrap & Company Ltd, 1918). For discussion of an extreme version of Aryanism that actually invoked the Nazis, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler’s Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

82 Subhas Chandra Bose, “The Indian Struggle, 1920–1934,” in *The Indian Struggle, 1920–1942* (Calcutta: Asia Publishing House, 1964).

83 Subhas Chandra Bose, “Report of an Interview with R. Palme Dutt, Published in the *Daily Worker*, London, January 24, 1938,” in *Netaji Collected Works, Volume 9: Congress President: Speeches, Articles and Letters, January 1938–May 1939*, eds. Sisir Kumar Bose and Sugata Bose (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2.

“Samyavada”—an Indian word, which means literally “the doctrine of synthesis or equality.” It will be India’s task to work out this synthesis.<sup>84</sup>

This set of confluences also enables us to understand that an Indian word for “socialism,” in an aim to “nationalise” the term, contributes to the ambiguities in how the word was being used at the time. A “national socialism” is hardly an unusual resolution of the problem of collectivism with authenticity: Beyond the obvious polemic that the Nazis had the same idea, there was also a long-standing tendency in Indian nationalist political thinking to reject “the West” as individualistic and materialistic and to tend towards forms of collectivity.

While an emergent and self-defined left embraced the materialistic, another tendency sought to hold on to the alleged spiritual core of “Indian” civilisation (Benoy Sarkar’s *Vive-kananda*), to amplify its anti-individualism, and to develop its *völkisch* elements—without necessarily asserting that Indian civilization was otherworldly and spiritual. The idea was that the renewal and strengthening of a “nation” otherwise liable to decay ought to come from the “folk-element”: this notion had long been understood and actively promoted in India. “In the reconstruction of Indian history, modern scholarship has to be devoted more and more to the exposition of the influence that the masses of the country have ever exerted in the making of its civilization” Benoy Sarkar programmatically declared.<sup>85</sup> To understand this folk element, one must undergo an “initiation amongst the folk.”<sup>86</sup> He further declared, more or less as a corollary to the “Greater India” arguments made by some of his colleagues, that across Asia culturally, a continuity of folk forms of religion could be discerned such that the Buddhist, Saiva, and Vaisnava distinctions did not hold.<sup>87</sup> A sort of spiritual *Lebensraum* was thus opened up for Greater India.

Similarly influential was the organicist idea of a nation, combined with a militarist understanding of mass mobilisation in the period leading up to and after the First World War.<sup>88</sup> This was connected with responses to British insults

84 Framke, “Encounters with Fascism and National Socialism in non-European Regions,” 365.

85 Benoy Kumar Sarkar, preface in *The Folk-Element in Hindu Culture: A Contribution to Socio-Religious Studies in Hindu Folk-Institutions* (London: Longman’s, Green & Co., 1917), vii.

86 Sarkar, preface in *The Folk-Element in Hindu Culture*, ix, quoting Professor R.R. Marrett’s paper on “Folklore and Psychology” read before the London Folklore Society.

87 Sarkar, preface in *The Folk-Element in Hindu Culture*, xvi. Also, Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *Chinese Religion Through Hindu Eyes: A Study in the Tendencies of Asiatic Mentality* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1916), from which he quotes at length in the preface to *The Folk-Element in Hindu Culture*.

88 Roy, “Youth, Paramilitary Organisations and National Discipline.”

about the effeminacy of Indians, and of Bengalis in particular.<sup>89</sup> An older interest in reviving “Arya Dharm,” or the “Hindu race,” and linking it with European—and theosophical—understandings of the Aryan “race” as the most evolved of the historically great races, and Indian attempts to link up with these discussions as resources of legitimation, played a long-term role in mobilising potential recruits to a notion of Aryanism that the Nazis also mobilized to good effect.<sup>90</sup> The Aryanism of the Theosophists was, of course, of interest and importance to early Nazi formations in Germany and Austria.<sup>91</sup> Benoy Sarkar’s insistence that India could provide or had provided the world with great and worthwhile intellectual products can also be seen in his reminder to readers that Nietzsche, whose notion of “will to power” he greatly admired, had learned his philosophy from the *Manusmriti* and his politics from the *Arthashastra*.<sup>92</sup>

While it would take more space than we can allow here to outline the affinities of ideology, or the ideas that had longer, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, pre-fascist histories, it is necessary to note their existence. Nor is it obvious in which directions the ideas “flowed”: though some Nazi mysticism had “Indian” roots, and ideas of Aryan civilization or supremacy transcended the barriers of “West” and “East,” this was to be expected, as the public arenas of “West” and “East” were not sealed off from one another nor separated in any way but polemically. The exact relationships between *völkisch*, organicist, and fascist ideas need to be examined in more detail than can be done here; but as a starting point one might say that the former sets of ideas definitely formed a part of the fascist repertoire, even if they were not the only elements of a fascist repertoire.

### Criteria, definitions

Having had the benefit of looking at some Indian material, we can now revisit the question of standards and definitions of fascism. From a strictly material-conditions-based approach, fascism was never a serious threat in the India of the

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89 Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); John Rosselli, “The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal,” in *Past & Present* 86 (February 1980): 121–148.

90 For the larger argument behind this, see Benjamin Zachariah, “The Invention of Hinduism for National Use,” in *Playing the Nation Game*, 153–204.

91 See for instance Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); Eric Kurlander, “The Orientalist Roots of National Socialism? Nazism, Occultism, and South Asian Spirituality, 1919–1945,” in *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India*, 155–169.

92 Benoy Kumar Sarkar, “The Influence of India on Western Civilisation,” in *Journal of Race Development* 9 (1918–1919): 91–104; 101–2. Originally an address given at Columbia University, New York, April 1918.



1920s, 30s, and 40s.<sup>93</sup> If, on the other hand, ideological borrowings and attempts to incorporate fascist or “proto-fascist” ideas into future statist projects are important, then we must raise questions about the influence of fascist ideas in India also among people who did not fully identify themselves ideologically as fascists.<sup>94</sup> A number of innovations as to what powers a state could acceptably appropriate do form some of the main fascist contributions to statecraft; but does this suggest that if fascism does not capture or use state power there is no point in studying it?<sup>95</sup> To study it then is (once again) too late, politically speaking. An ideological framework that seeks to reorganize a society completely, to found a centralised state, and to create an organic unity between *Volk* and government, must be able to draw upon a longer and broader history in order to establish these links.

We can now reject the set of arguments that considers fascism as primarily a European phenomenon,<sup>96</sup> both in terms of a history of ideas (and their origins in Europe) and in terms of the desire and ability of groups to create movements of controlled mass participation and organised violence that were seen as merely “available for piracy” elsewhere.<sup>97</sup> Why a set of borrowed ideas “ain’t

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93 Georgi Dimitrov, “The Working Class against Fascism,” in *Marxists in the Face of Fascism*, ed. David Beetham (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1984), 179–186.

94 Zeev Sternhell has recently pointed out that the core of ideas that he is willing to call fascist were already in place before the First World War, and were concerned with a conscious rejection of universalist ideas that were a part of what he calls the eighteenth century inheritance—for instance in the writings of Charles Maurras. This is missed by a purely “material conditions” approach. He also points out that the need to identify fascist trends in political thinking is connected with the related political risks of such a rejection; see Zeev Sternhell, “How to Think about Fascism and Its Ideology,” in *Constellations* 15.3 (2008): 280–290. Of course, the rejection of “post-Enlightenment rationality” is not peculiar to full-fledged fascism (some post-colonial thinkers do the same, with different implications). But the similarities and differences, and the routes of divergence will be crucial to a properly contextualised study of any political ideology.

95 This view is in consonance with Robert O. Paxton, in which approach fascism is what it does rather than what it says, as it has no major or consistent theorist; see Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), esp. 16. At which point, as Sternhell points out in response, huge bodies of opinion, massive amounts of printed material in circulation, etc. must simply be discounted as unimportant, and there is no real ground for a generic category “fascism”; see Sternhell, “How to Think About Fascism,” 282f. Attempts to study fascism out of power include Linz, “Some Notes towards a Comparative Study of Fascism.”

96 For a notable set of enquiries that begins to question, though inadequately (by still holding on to a “diffusionist” model), the Eurocentric framework, see Stein Ugelvik Larsen, ed., *Fascism outside Europe: The European Impulse against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism* (Boulder, Colo.: Social Science Monographs, 2001). For a more recent and more successful attempt to analyse the coming together of domestic and international considerations and the process of mutual recognition (a term that the book does not use, but could well have done) of different kinds of fascism, see Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism*.

97 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), for the piracy idea, though not in the context of fascism.

nothing like the real thing,” to paraphrase Coca-Cola’s borrowed line from the popular song, is unclear when there is no consensus on what “the real thing” really is. So far the literature struggles with what I might call an “original” and “copy” problem: the original is in Europe and the outside world copies it, either properly and correctly, in which case it is fascist (in our case), or imperfectly (in which case it is not fascist, though it might have similarities). By the standards of having to conform to fixed elements of an ideology, most Fascists or Nazis were not fascists (with a small “f”) or indeed Nazis. This is a problematic conclusion at which to arrive. Fascism, according to this view, is to be taken as a whole. Either you swallow it completely or you are not a fascist. This is an ideal-typical model of an “ideology” and the question of “deviation”—in fact, a rather Stalinist view of ideology.<sup>98</sup> A simplistic “impact-response” approach to the study of a “Western” influence on a “non-Western” context has long been considered unviable.<sup>99</sup> European fascisms influenced one another. Although it is true that there is a hierarchy of fascisms in analyses of European fascisms as well, British or Hungarian fascisms are still considered closer to “the real thing” than Indian or Latin American ones.<sup>100</sup>

Marxists saw fascism as an outgrowth of capitalism in crisis, with the main camp followers being the lower middle classes and the regime allied with large capitalists, whose response to the crisis was to dispense with the paraphernalia of liberal democracy.<sup>101</sup> This was based largely on Germany and did not work even for Italy, where Antonio Gramsci was already lamenting the communists’ short-sightedness at not having enough knowledge of the lives and aspirations of the Italian peasantry to wean them away from the fascists.<sup>102</sup> For others, fascism’s driving forces were the displaced pre-industrial elites struggling for a

98 Benjamin Zachariah, “In Pursuit of Moving Ideas: Notes on the Chase,” in *Knowledge, Space and Locality: Transcultural Reconfigurations between Asia and Europe*, ed. Joachim Kurtz and Martin Hofmann (forthcoming).

99 For a strong critique of this approach, now more than two decades old, see Paul A. Cohen, “The Problem with ‘China’s Response to the West,’” in *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 9–55.

100 See Griffin, ed., *Fascism*. The debates on fascism and Nazism in Latin America are, however, far more subtle than those on Asia or the Arab world. See, for instance, Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism*; Ronald C. Newton, “Nazi Menace” in *Argentina, 1931–1947* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Jürgen Müller, ed., *Nationalsozialismus in Lateinamerika: Die Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP in Argentinien, Brasilien, Chile und Mexiko, 1931–1945* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1997). These deal in a differentiated way with questions of propaganda, affinities of ideas, and reception. I can claim no systematic acquaintance with the literature, and must thank Dr Silke Nagel for bringing some of this material to my attention, without, of course, implicating her in the inadequacies of my treatment of it.

101 Dimitrov, “The Working Class against Fascism.”

102 Antonio Gramsci, “Notes on Italian History,” in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 1–48.

return to power. Both views held that fascism was a conservative phenomenon and consequently provided a top-down perspective, as Gramsci and other Marxist thinkers recognised.<sup>103</sup> This they have in common with some theorists of “totalitarianism,” who were often less interested in the specificities of fascism than in comparing fascist regimes with that of the USSR, in large measure to use the negative connotations of the former to discredit the latter.<sup>104</sup> “Totalitarian” as a term was usually seen as positive by fascists themselves,<sup>105</sup> and some critics insisted that the totalitarian state control of all aspects of life was integral to fascist ideologies as it never was to Marxism of any variety, which was, at least in theory, not fond of increases in state power.<sup>106</sup> (Lenin’s great polemical struggle to distinguish Engels’ approach to the state from that of the anarchists—not altogether successfully—might be mentioned in this context).<sup>107</sup>

Later approaches emphasised the structures of ideas and symbols as marking out fascism from other regimes. Contrary to the “conservative” approach, they stressed the socio-revolutionary character of fascism: between communism and conservatism, a “holistic-national radical Third Way,”<sup>108</sup> definitely modern rather than backward looking and making its appearance as a populist ultra-nationalism carried by a new elite. Its organisational form was that of a mass party, its revolutionary element lay in the quest for power that sought to overhaul established institutions and order rather than to restore them, and it was marked by an attempted permanent mobilisation of the populace in order to resurrect the nation and a mythical golden age.<sup>109</sup> This requires a

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103 For the question of the class basis of other fascisms, or for other Marxists recognising that a top-down approach was inadequate, see, notably, Clara Zetkin, August Thalheimer, and Wilhelm Reich; and see F. L. Carsten, “Interpretations of Fascism,” in *Fascism: A Reader’s Guide*, 459–487.

104 On the Cold War-imposed nature of the “totalitarianism” concept, see Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, eds., preface in *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xi. The lumping together of different regimes under the label “totalitarian” makes sense only as a reference to state capacity, and does not allow for comparative study of groups who might have desired state power but did not have it, or indeed, those who had state power but a weak state.

105 See Bruno Bongiovanni, “Totalitarianism: The Word and the Thing,” in *Journal of Modern European History* 3 (2005): 5–17.

106 Zeev Sternhell, “Fascist Ideology,” 325–406, quote from 379; he writes specifically about Italian Fascism, but also mentions the Spanish version.

107 Vladimir I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (1918; Marxists Internet Archive, 1999), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/> [Accessed 19. November 2010].

108 Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (1995; repr., London: Vintage, 1996), xxiv.

109 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*. See also Roger Griffin, “The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies,” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 1 (2002): 21–43.

fascism to be more than just a particularly nasty, violent, racist, and militant nationalism, reliant on paramilitary groups intimidating the *Volksfeind*, the “enemy of the people.”

For those to whom a comparative approach is still relevant, fascism remains largely a European phenomenon. In the great tradition of an Arendt, an Adorno, and a Horkheimer, who represented fascism as a pathology of the European intellectual tradition of Western man,<sup>110</sup> recent historical work that sees fascism as a pathology of a highly technologised civilisation or of modernity itself seems to apply itself self-consciously to the European world. We might wish to deploy centre-periphery models, in which the periphery is very much connected with the centre and not separate from it, against these approaches, but so far the argument has not yet begun. Frantz Fanon’s stray remarks about the dehumanisation of non-Europeans in the colonies as connected to the dehumanisation of other Europeans accomplished by European fascists come to mind,<sup>111</sup> but the agents of fascism here are still Europeans, whose actions abroad (imperialism) are connected with their actions at home (fascism), in a version of the Communist Party of India’s position on the Dimitrov Line.<sup>112</sup> Fanon even suggests an exceptionalist argument: the persecution of Jews in Europe constitutes “little family quarrels” in comparison with the position of the black man in Europe.<sup>113</sup>

A set of approaches that present fascism as not merely a European but a potentially wider problem, are those from psychoanalytic perspectives. They have the advantage of not being focused on particular regimes in power, but interested instead in tendencies that enable fascist ideas to take hold in a society. I have in mind Reich and Fromm particularly, whose ideas, respectively, of the “authoritarian” personality formation, which is prone to surrender power to a superior authority after long training in self-repression, and of an “escape from freedom,” might produce a wider set of questions on why appeals to *völkisch* solidarities, surrenders to paramilitary training, and militant nationalisms, actually work.<sup>114</sup> Nonetheless, both in terms of the available sources and the notorious difficulties of reading the reception of ideas on a wider scale, this set of questions remains exactly that.

110 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951); Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1944/1947).

111 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 79–81; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; repr., New York: Grove Press, 1968), 115f.

112 See below.

113 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 115; see in particular 115–122 on the “Negro and the Jew.”

114 Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933, revised 1942; repr., New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux); Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2001). Originally published as Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941).

In some of the recent literature, there is a tendency to look at fascism as a style of politics rather than as a movement with a degree of coherence.<sup>115</sup> One must, using this approach, avoid running the risk of dismissing ideological currents merely as window-dressing for the “real” politics, say, of communist- or Jew-bashing, in other words, of separating fascism as a set of ideas too completely from fascisms as movements. It might be useful, keeping such an approach in mind, to think in terms of continuity in assertive nationalism, right-wing populism, and fascism, and not to insist on any special status for “fascism” as a normative category; this is particularly useful when looking at its blurry edges.

Although the connections of proponents of a militant Hindu nationalism (now simply referred to as the *Sangh Parivar* or *Hindutvabadi*) as a *völkisch* nationalism with Fascism and Nazism, not to mention with its leaders, are well worked out,<sup>116</sup> it remains unclear how much the appeal of the Hindu ideologues M.S. Golwalkar, K.B. Hegdewar, or V.D. Savarkar actually depended upon the borrowings of their ideas from fascists, rather than the similarities that they recognised and perhaps reformulated in the language of fascism. The *Sangh Parivar*, and especially those who organised its paramilitary wings and wrote its ideological treatises, were familiar with European fascism, particularly its most successful Italian and German variants, and found them good, worthwhile, and useful models to emulate. This is not to suggest, however, that all of their ideas were merely imitations. It is not clear whether the fascist connection garnered any further support for the Hindutva brigade amongst their following, or whether the family resemblances of the ideologies brought them closer together. Another example can be seen in a “Muslim” group: Inayatullah Khan al-Mashriqi, the founder and leader of the Khaksar movement, which was also called fascist in its own time, claimed to have met Hitler in 1926; later he even claimed that Hitler had learned from him.<sup>117</sup>

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115 One volume, Kevin Passmore, ed., *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe, 1919–45* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), uses “fascism” in its title, but (perhaps usefully) extends its analysis to far right movements more broadly, and includes studies of Italy, Germany, Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Yugoslavia (as a whole), Latvia, Poland, France, Spain, Britain, and Europe more generally. There is a certain slippage that is in fact inadvertently productive: from fascism to far-right movements to ultra-nationalist movements.

116 For instance, Casolari, “Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-Up.” By contrast, Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925 to the 1990s: Strategies of Identity-Building, Implantation and Mobilisation* (London: Hurst, 1996), specifically avoids the fascism question.

117 See Markus Daechsel, “Scientism and Its Discontents: The Indo-Muslim ‘Fascism’ of Inayatullah Khan al-Mashriqi,” in *Modern Intellectual History* 3, no. 3 (2006): 443–472, esp. 453 on Mashriqi’s account of his meeting with Hitler.

That the greater power of Germany or Italy to enforce the “national” will and to purify the national body of outsiders was appealing is evident from this often-quoted passage from 1939:

To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races—the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by.<sup>118</sup>

And what of those who were heavily influenced by aspects of fascist or Nazi ideology (that is, not ideology called fascist or Nazi retrospectively and/or used as terms of delegitimation, but things called fascist or Nazi at the time) but did not appear to be entirely fascist or Nazi in all their aspects and fell short of a “fascist minimum,”<sup>119</sup> or indeed exceeded it but mixed it up with various eclectic elements that were at first glance quite incompatible with one another? Figures like Benoy Kumar Sarkar, hero and ideologue of the Bengal Swadeshi Movement might fall into this category. His “indigenous” forms of sociology made him a desirable intellectual; at the same time his open support for Nazi ideas of social engineering survived well into the Second World War.<sup>120</sup> To what extent did ideas that clearly belonged to the cluster that made up fascism logically lead to fascism? We can enumerate common elements that have in some instances been associated with fascism. In no particular order: aggressive nationalism, conflation of race and nation, disciplining the body, eugenics, populism, controlling and civilising the masses—and it is logical to suggest that all of this is part of the discontents of “modernity”—another category for which the goalposts have shifted and continue to shift.<sup>121</sup>

Instead, as I have suggested in this essay, we might want to consider a model of ideas that gravitate towards each other; that is, the Indian recognition in European fascisms of elements considered desirable and that were already to

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118 Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*.

119 Griffin noted in 1995 that there was no consensus on what constituted a “fascist minimum,” and that there were very few historians who were willing to engage with generic fascism; see Griffin, *Fascism*, 1.

120 See Manjapra, “The Mirrored World,” 295–362, on Benoy Kumar Sarkar. I disagree with Manjapra that the eclecticism of Sarkar’s ideological influences indicates merely “affinities” with fascism but not fascism proper—what, then, is fascism proper? This is especially so since Sarkar’s is not a case of a distant and superficial engagement with a set of ideas, but one of first-hand acquaintance.

121 See, for instance, Griffin, *Modernism*. Also Mann, *Fascists*, where the use of the category “modernity” is somewhat superficial: it is European, and has a “dark side”; fascism and communism are “alternative, if failed, visions of modernity” (p. 17).

some extent sought to be realised in India, in other words, not necessarily ideas simply to be copied. This approaches a version of the *Zeitgeist* argument put forward by Zeev Sternhell, among others, that the core of fascist ideas were already in place well before the First World War.<sup>122</sup> It also retains, if used subtly, the dangers of teleology—Kevin Passmore’s argument that many ideas that went into fascism also went into other ideologies is important here.<sup>123</sup> Let us consider instead a worldwide *fin-de-siècle* and post-Great-War set of phenomena that finds their ideological expression and geographical focal point in Italian Fascism and then in Nazi Germany, both of which provide successful models for others. Once a successful version provides a language to legitimate what other versions are also attempting, the versions gravitate towards the successful variants, not through a top-down *Gleichschaltung* imposed by a state, as in the case of Nazi Germany, or indeed of occupied Europe under Nazi rule, but in a relatively consensual process, where the individual variants retain the ability—and indeed demand the right—to insist on variations.<sup>124</sup>

### A fascist imaginary?

To summarise what I have said so far about the concept “fascism”: on the one hand, there are contemporaneous usages; if we are used to “fascism” being shorthand for the Holocaust, Auschwitz, and genocide then we are speaking from a post-1945 perspective. On the other hand, retrospectively we are forced to identify necessary elements that we are willing to call “fascism,” while recognising at the same time that they were part of a continuum of ideas and practices at the time. Contemporaries saw various forms of fascism—in terms of the use of the concept itself—from 1922 onwards, as part of several interrelated trends in world history. We also need to distinguish between fascism as an attractive and emulable, if flexible, set of ideas, and fascism in power, at which point we are looking at states. In the present case we are looking at structural situations in which the possibility of fascism coming to power was real, and at people—agents, if you will—who wished to link their ideas and movements with fascism in order to come to power. We are also looking at fascist trends within wider movements, such as anti-colonial nationalisms or nationalisms in general.

Let me try and provide here a sense of the range of engagements with fascism, and some more specific examples. In an earlier essay I explored a set of incoherent fascinations with fascist ideas as well as more concrete

122 Sternhell, “How to Think About Fascism.”

123 Kevin Passmore, “The Ideological Origins of Fascism before 1914,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, 11–31.

124 For such an approach, see Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism*.



appreciations of fascism: a strong nationalism; the body and the body politic; eugenics (that there was nothing particularly fascist or Nazi about an engagement with eugenics is now reasonably well known),<sup>125</sup> the organic and disciplined nation; the developmental imagination.<sup>126</sup>

It is instructive to look at contemporary anti-fascist assessments of fascism as a presence in India. The interpretation of the 1935 Dimitrov Line of the Comintern (that at the time stood for a united front of all popular and democratic forces against fascism) by the Communist Party of India (CPI) was that fascism was not a serious danger in India, and that as a result the line had to be interpreted as a popular front against imperialism rather than fascism, because fascism was the form taken by capitalism in crisis at home while imperialism was the overseas manifestation of capitalism. This became received wisdom, and was to a certain extent the line taken by the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) within which the CPI worked after it was banned in 1934. The CSP was founded in 1934 as a group within the Indian National Congress before the Dimitrov Line was proclaimed (though after Dimitrov developed his view of fascism in December 1933),<sup>127</sup> and it was intended to work with the Congress towards a preliminary goal of national independence with a larger goal of raising awareness of socialism and of achieving socialism after independence. As a result, the CSP could with some justification claim to have anticipated the Dimitrov Line.<sup>128</sup> Many members of the CSP were Marxists outside the Communist Party. They also seemed relatively sceptical about the claims of nationalism, although they could see the need for an alliance with nationalism themselves:

[...] in fighting its own battle the bourgeoisie also fights the battle of the masses, in so far as bourgeois democracy consists in releasing the forces of production from the strangle-hold of feudalism. But the

125 For a recent, and provocative, comparative perspective that reads Nazi Germany as “socialist” rather than as “fascist,” see Alberto Spektorowski, “The Eugenic Temptation in Socialism: Sweden, Germany, and the Soviet Union,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 1 (2004): 84–106. See the recent *Oxford Handbook of the History Eugenics*, eds. Philippa Levine and Alison Bashford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

126 Zachariah, “Rethinking (the Absence of) Fascism in India.”

127 See Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Arnold, 2000), 28.

128 Jayaprakash Narayan’s claim in *Why Socialism?* (Benares: All India Congress Socialist Party, 1936). Some of the writing in the first issue of the Congress Socialist, equating social democracy with Fascism, echoed the Comintern line of the time; see Ashit Mukerjea, “Social Democracy = Fascism,” *Congress Socialist* (29.09.1934): 10f. The similarity is illustrated by the “crossovers” of Oswald Mosley, and earlier Benito Mussolini; also by the Cripps tendency in the British Labour Party. Mukerjea speaks of “Social Democratic betrayal and treachery, particularly from 1914 onwards,” and calls it “the pathmaker for the advance of Fascism and Imperialist War.”

united front of the bourgeoisie and the masses, whom it exploits, is largely held together by national idealism, whose function it is to hide the naked reality of class struggle under the cover of the unities of race, language, culture, tradition, historical memory, government etc.<sup>129</sup>

The CSP differed from “orthodox communists” in wanting to mobilise the petite-bourgeoisie in unison with the proletariat: due to large-scale unemployment during the Depression, the petite-bourgeoisie were a disillusioned class; some sections suffered like the working class and “They become revolutionary, and according to the leadership offered to them, they are capable of being either on the side of Fascism or of Socialism.”

In short, we have here a large influential, because politically-minded, class, vehemently critical of present capitalism, in part at least socialistic in its attitude. Today this class is not Fascist [...] But it is potentially revolutionary and is yearning for a more intelligent economic system. It is easily misled by Fascism’s all-embracing appeal [...]<sup>130</sup>

The dangers of fascism were stressed; the Depression had “persuaded the Indian bourgeoisie to think of economic planning, which must take on a fascist or semi-fascist character, so long as private property in the means of production is not abolished.”<sup>131</sup> It was noted with distaste that some Indians were attracted to fascism; at the London School of Economics Students’ Union election “a wealthy Indian student stood on the Fascist ticket [...] Of course he was trounced by the United Front candidate—but the fact that he stood on the ticket is significant and we must not miss its import.”<sup>132</sup>

This set of engagements was close to official Comintern positions, but at the same time cautious about ideological affinities that could, in alliance with international contexts, lead to a fascist movement in India; and indeed, considerable space in the *Congress Socialist* was given over to refuting fascist arguments: an adequate indication that the voice being countered was a significant one. Despite a broad acceptance of the Communist Party of India’s reading of the Dimitrov Line, the CSP maintained that fascism was a significant danger in India.

129 Amarendra Prasad Mitra, “The Communal Problem and the National Movement,” in *Congress Socialist* (29.09.1934): 6. He characterised the Congress as a “Hindu bourgeois party”; such unities as were stressed by Congress and did not exist as common between Hindus and Muslims, alienating the Muslim bourgeoisie, and leading to “Muslim national idealism,” see 6f.

130 “Letter to the Editor from Asit Mukerjea,” Calcutta, 04 October 1934, in *Congress Socialist* (06.10.1934): 16.

131 Mitra, “The Communal Problem,” in *Congress Socialist* (29.09.1934): 7.

132 *Congress Socialist* (10.03.1935): 10.

Among the prominent voices promoting pro-fascist arguments was that of the engineer-technocrat, and former Dewan of the Princely State of Mysore, Sir Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, whose pro-business regime in that state had made it a model for a developmentally active state policy that capitalists aspired to in the rest of India. Visvesvaraya stressed the need to “improve the working efficiency of the villager” through a system of “home discipline to train the body, the mind and the character of the villager and to educate him in practices of self-reliance and self-help.”<sup>133</sup> The idea of “citizenship training” runs through his work, the need for it arising from the basic fact that “India is inhabited by people in all stages of civilisation from the primitive to the most advanced.”<sup>134</sup> Special efforts were required “to raise every class of people in the scale of economic civilisation,” otherwise “national progress as a whole is bound to be retarded.”<sup>135</sup> Economic progress, in Visvesvaraya’s view, would lead the process of national progress as a whole; though the latter included “political, social and cultural” progress as well. “The public should be induced<sup>136</sup> and trained to make up their mind to work harder, more methodically and in clear cooperation with their neighbours.”<sup>137</sup> By 1934, he stressed the need for military training and conscription “to introduce the much-needed elements of regularity, method, and discipline into the daily life of the Indian population.” He quoted Roosevelt on the need for moving “as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline,”<sup>138</sup> and a Fascist manifesto, noting the establishment in Italy of “leisure time” institutions, which “promote the better enjoyment of the free time of workers of all classes with the object of raising their intellectual, moral, physical and social status in accordance with a policy of enhancing national values.”<sup>139</sup> He added,

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133 Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, *Rural Reconstruction in India: An Outline of a Scheme* (Bangalore City: Bangalore Press, 1931), 15.

134 Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, “Citizenship Training,” chap. 6 in *Nation Building: A Five-Year Plan for the Provinces* (Bangalore City: Bangalore Press, 1937), 38f.

135 Visvesvaraya, *Nation-Building*, 39. The process of such training was also laid out: the “ordinary citizen” was to be “advised” by the “leaders of the country” (who must first “come to a proper understanding among themselves”) to “adopt a standard dress, a uniform language, besides certain well-recognised international habits and practices in matters pertaining to business, society, travel and self-defence”; see Visvesvaraya, *Nation-Building*, 42.

136 Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, *District Development Scheme: Economic Progress by Forced Marches* (Bangalore City: Bangalore Press, 1939), 60. In this vein, caste distinctions, “communalism” and untouchability could be dealt with through economic progress. This was an idea which Visvesvaraya first advanced in his *Reconstructing India* (London: P. S. King, 1920), especially 8, 13–15.

137 Visvesvaraya, *District Development Scheme*, 12.

138 Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, *Planned Economy for India* (Bangalore City: Bangalore Press, 1934), 263.

139 Tomaso Sillani, ed., *What is Fascism and Why?* (Lo Stato Mussoliniano), trans. C. Grove Heines, Helen Rossetti Angeli et al. (London: Ernest Benn, 1931), as cited in Visvesvaraya, *Planned Economy*, 260.

What has gone wrong with the Indian population is that their collective will power is feeble [...] In countries like Germany and Japan and generally in most European states, a determined effort is made by the Governments concerned to promote the physical and economic efficiency of their citizens [...]<sup>140</sup>

In 1930, Dr Manoranjan Ukil had the misfortune of confiding in a friend who turned out to be a police informant.<sup>141</sup> Ukil was then Director of the Tuberculosis Enquiry, which was conducted by the Indian Research Fund Association, and he was deputed by Calcutta University to travel extensively for tuberculosis research. He was also a Bengali who had been abroad more than once. Ukil gave an account of Indian students abroad, and the state of world politics:

He was full of praise of the new spirit in Germany [...] that notwithstanding the international pressure to stifle her growth Germany was today becoming a virile and most powerful entity. [...] by a system of gymnasium and physical exercise the youth of Germany was today becoming sturdy and in that way a new race was coming to the fore. Ukil stated that it was his intention to write a series of books on student life abroad and on the adoption of a system of physical regeneration by the Indian people. [...] In Germany, there was genuine sympathy for Indian leftwing aspirations. [...] at Munich a book called Gandhi Revolution was selling like hotcakes [sic]. Interest in Indian matters had been recently roused to a great extent.<sup>142</sup>

The larger statement in which these remarks are embedded contains a mixture of support for a Gandhian movement, an endorsement of violence, and an implicitly eugenicist argument that, in some readings, could be seen as an endorsement of the rising National Socialist movement in Germany, though that is not necessarily clear from the references to race and physical fitness that cut across such political divides at the time.

140 Visvesvaraya, *Planned Economy*, 203, 205, 263. He also produced a set of “Rules for Citizen Efficiency,” Visvesvaraya, *Planned Economy*, 264f.

141 W. R. John, office of Dy Insp-Gen of Police, Rys & CID, Madras, June 17, 1930 to Cowgil, Personal Asst to DIB Simla, copy to Bengal IB DIG, with enclosure of a report on one Prof. Ukil, who travelled with one E. R. Mahajani [information not on file] and left India via Dhanushkodi on July 23, 1929, f.173. Enclosure, “Copy of a report from a source, regarding Prof. Doctor Ukil, and Manoranjan Gupta.” Intelligence Bureau files, IB SI No. 44/1928, File No. 53/28, ff.172–171, West Bengal State Archives [WBSA], Calcutta.

142 IB SI No. 44/1928, File No. 53/28, ff.172–171, WBSA, Calcutta. Fritz Diettrich, ed., *Die Gandhi Revolution* (Dresden: W. Jess, 1930).

If we regard the strange mixture of ideas that the *Zeitgeist* made available as the context of the times, we will be engaged in a history of ideas that is not as rarefied as that which studies the well-worked-out academically-respectable and properly-footnoted ideas of traditional intellectual history; however, in both cases, the question of social impact needs to be posed. Who came into contact with these ideas? And what difference did it make? By asking this are we instrumentalising ideas? Or are we, instead, asking what forms of action are enabled by the acceptability or unacceptability of certain political ideas? An often unselfconsciously held set of eugenicist assumptions enabled a form of thinking about “development” that could instrumentalise the “masses” even as “development” was to be conducted in their name and for their alleged future prosperity.<sup>143</sup>

### **The missing Duce and the reluctant Führer?**

It is clear, then, that many Indians saw the merits of fascism as a strong and self-reliant form of nationalism. They also saw the need for someone to direct that strong self-reliance adequately, and they sought out the required charismatic leadership. One colleague wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru in 1936:

[...] on your Socialism, there is one question I should like to ask you: why do you stop with it, why don't you go on to the next step, Fascism, and be done with it. Of course, Fascism is a reaction against Socialism, just as Socialism is a reaction against Capitalism. I shall put it in Hegelian terms: Capitalism is the thesis, Socialism is the antithesis and Fascism is the synthesis. That is how the world movement is working itself out: here in India, the word will be Nationalism, the only difference I can see [...] you will end up as Mussolini or Hitler, not as Lenin: and on the whole I prefer you to be Mussolini, though I do not hide myself from the fear that it may be a Hitler.<sup>144</sup>

This is strikingly similar to Subhas Chandra Bose's understanding of the march of world forces in a remoulding of Hegelianism, and it is indicative that Bose was not particularly original or radical in his thinking, though of course Bose anticipated a slightly different synthesis that would not be called fascism but “*samyavada*.” Nehru replied aggressively, and with a rather elitist tone:

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143 Zachariah, *Developing India*.

144 George Joseph to Jawaharlal Nehru, July 18, 1936, JNP, NML, vol. 37, ff. 57–8.

Have you gone so far astray as to think in terms of Fascism? [...] I agree that Lenin is much beyond reach but why this fall to Mussolini or Hitler? Politics apart, I dislike the vulgarity of Mussolini as well as the Fascism in Germany. Why does Fascism breed such crude types, or is it the crude types that beget Fascism?<sup>145</sup>

Crucially, one of Nehru's first reactions against fascism was—rather in the manner of British conservatives who were willing to profess a grudgingly admiration for fascists from a distance but not join those who made the jump to actively support them at home or abroad—a distaste for its “crude” nature, its “vulgarity.”<sup>146</sup> Nehru was, of course, also well versed in a socialist tradition that understood the dangers of fascism, which made him a premature anti-fascist.

But the question that had been put to Nehru was, of course, one of leadership, and could not be evaded. This leadership was something that remained ambiguous in the search for a strong direction for a national movement, one that, every now and then, would involve disciplining the “masses.” In a passage notable for its ability to both reject a conception of the strong leader and reinstate it at the same time, Nehru wrote to one of his correspondents:

The so-called modern view is to lay greater stress on the social group and its organisation, hoping that a better environment will produce a better individual. Of course [...] the individual and the social group act and re-act on each other. It is a question of stress. Always the method of securing wise and unselfish legislatures has been a vital problem. Plato as you know wanted philosophers to be rulers. The difficulty has been to find a method of picking out these supermen and placing them in seats of power. Much will depend on the objective that one aims at. Even apart from this it is an extraordinarily difficult thing to get the right man at the top [...] Ultimately, one can only rely on a sufficiently enlightened wide-awake public opinion.<sup>147</sup>

145 Nehru to George Joseph, August 7, 1936, JNP, NML, vol 37, f. 59.

146 One exception is Lord Londonderry, an example documented by Ian Kershaw, *Making Friends with Hitler: Lord Londonderry, the Nazis and the Road to War* (London: Penguin, 2004). Kershaw's willingness to treat this exceptional case as more exceptional than it really was is based on studies of documents produced within the constraints of what was acceptable in polite circles in England; a study of the correspondence of colonial officials would yield another view. See, for instance, the correspondence in the papers of P.J. Grigg, then Finance Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, Churchill College Archive Centre, University of Cambridge, especially Grigg's correspondence with Montagu Norman, Governor of the Bank of England.

147 Nehru to Babu Bhagavandas, (23.09.1933), JNP, NML, vol. 7, ff. 263–5. Emphasis mine.

All one had to do was to educate public opinion to recognise the right leaders; yet it is the leaders themselves who educate public opinion. This is, of course, a circular argument: leaders enlighten masses in order for the masses to better recognise leaders and to better praise and anoint them. Nehru did not reject the idea of Plato's philosopher-ruler outright—if only they could be properly selected. The implications seem to have been lost on the intellectual elite who naturally cast themselves as enlightened leaders. This was also very far from an ideal of popular participation in government, which Nehru and other socialists constantly proclaimed as their aim.<sup>148</sup>

But Nehru was aware of, and clearly uncomfortable with, the tendency towards a fascist cult of leadership, even when directed at himself. Nehru conducted his own character assassination anonymously in his destruction of the cult of leadership surrounding him when he wrote of himself in the *Modern Review* as “Rashtapati,” custodian of the state.<sup>149</sup> The article warned readers of a growing tendency to see Nehru as a saviour of some sort, even a *Führer*, and suggested that it might even appeal to Jawaharlal's not inconsiderable vanity to see himself as a Napoleon or a Caesar but made it clear that such thinking was detrimental to the democratic principles for which an Indian national movement ought to stand.

Let me be clear on this point, I am very far from suggesting that Nehru was at any point seriously close to fascism. And yet he was forced to engage with what was very much the language of the times, and in the language of the times. This need to protest is in itself an indication that there was something to protest against. Indeed, it is in refutations and denials that the importance of that which is being denied becomes evident: one of the easiest ways for historians to deny the importance of fascism in any given context is to amplify the anti-fascist voices—whose existence, when looked at more closely, is indicative that there was most probably a fascism to oppose.<sup>150</sup>

148 It might be added that this was also quite far from what many, both at the time and retrospectively, would be willing to call a “Marxist view” of history, unless it be seen as a rather caricatured simplification of the idea of the Bolshevik “vanguard,” as expressed in Stalin's leadership cult.

149 Written by Nehru under the pseudonym “Chanakya”; see *Modern Review* (November 1937), copy in JNP, NML, Part II, SI No 54 and Nehru's letter to Krishna Kripalani at Vishwa Bharati University, (02.06.1938) JNP, NML, vol. 41, ff. 5–6, in which he confirms he wrote it himself.

150 One of the major deficiencies in the literature on fascism in the Arab world is that it concentrates on saying that there wasn't any, wasn't much, or that its existence was invented in retrospect by Zionist propagandists to justify Israel. I have refrained here from analysing this in much detail, but see, for instance, various levels of apologia in Gerhard Höpp, Peter Wien, and Rene Wildangel, eds., *Blind für die Geschichte? Arabische Begegnungen mit dem Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2004). The counter-position, from Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, is equally flat, and appears to rely upon the idea of “the Arab” as an undifferentiated entity (as at times, however, does the position he opposes).



## Towards some conclusions

The brief vignettes provided here serve to indicate that the argument that not much was known about fascism in India, which is often used for more amorphous and “popular” engagements with fascism and is often made with regard to fascism as movement rather than as ideological tendency, does not hold. As many of the intelligence documents recording the careers and travels of itinerant intellectuals note, it is precisely because they sought to propagate the ideas they travelled with that these intellectuals were considered dangerous; and as the same documents record, despite various attempts at halting the movements of the people or the ideas they propagated, the ideas still moved.<sup>151</sup>

Despite the diversity and unpredictability of the directions taken by fascist ideas—in part because of the tendency noted above of ideas gravitating towards one another due to their intrinsic similarities and then taking on a common language and set of expressions—we cannot say that the “original” or “originals,” insofar as it makes sense to use that expression at all, was or were not known in India. Nonetheless, it is important to see fascism as a phenomenon that was much more widespread than the borders of Europe, both between the wars and after (on which subject there is and will be much more to say: this essay does not follow the resilience, partial eclipse, and revival of fascist ideas in India into the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries). Much of the (still meagre) material on “global” fascism “outside Europe” still sees Europe as the natural homeland of fascism; it is not clear why this is the case.

The story after 1938 is of greater interest to some, as it relates more directly to event-history and to histories of the Second World War.<sup>152</sup> And in some cases there is much more to discuss, as it is only after 1938 that imperial surveillance mechanisms took account of fascists, rather than simply chasing

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151 See Benjamin Zachariah, “Internationalisms in the Interwar Years: The Travelling of Ideas,” in *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds and World Views, 1917–1939*, eds. Ali Raza, Franziska Roy, and Benjamin Zachariah (Delhi: Sage, 2014), 1–21.

152 See, for instance, Johannes Voigt, *Indien im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Deutsche-Verlags-Anstalt, 1978); Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981); Romain Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany: Politics, Intelligence, and Propaganda, 1941–43* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Jan Kuhlmann, *Subhas Chandra Bose und die Indienpolitik der Achsenmächte* (Berlin: Schiler Verlag, 2003); Hans-Bernd Zöllner, *Der Feind meines Feindes ist mein Freund: Subhas Chandra Bose und das zeitgenössische Deutschland unter dem Nationalsozialismus, 1933–1943* (Münster: Lit, 2000), and the “Netaji”-focused list could be greatly multiplied, with contemporary accounts, memoirs of allies, associates and admirers, and so on.

communists, anarchists, or “communal” sectarian troublemakers of a lesser order. But that, as I have indicated before, is a longer story for another time. After 1938 an opportunistic attachment to fascist causes is harder to separate from longer-term and more ideological political engagements. It is also, of course, the period during which the imperatives towards a voluntary *Gleichschaltung* were far stronger: in order for an alliance to be successful, it was important to appear to speak from the same position in public. After 1938, it becomes more difficult to distinguish those whose ideological affinities enabled the transformation from those who jumped before they were pushed. What someone “actually believed” could be unreadable both at the time and in retrospect.

Exploring the presence of recognisably fascist ideas in India in a classical fascist period between the two world wars—and outside the circles of the Hindu right wing that now claims the succession—is important to destabilise the historiographical assumption that fascism was and could only be European. It is also a helpful corrective to the tendency that sees fascism only in the Hindu right in India, when it is willing to see fascism in India at all. There were other fascists in the game at the time, other fascist groups and parties. They could recombine in various ways, in an internal voluntary *Gleichschaltung* of similar movements; or they could come into conflict with one another. And they could also provide the context of ideological and social support for a larger movement, which would then have a “tradition” to draw upon.