

**POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN INDIA AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

# **CORDIAL COLD WAR**

**Cultural Actors  
in India and the  
German Democratic  
Republic**

Edited by

**ANANDITA BAJPAI**

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**CORDIAL  
COLD WAR**

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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AIR	All India Radio
AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
BArch	Bundesarchiv, Berlin and Akoblenz (Federal Archives)
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union of Germany)
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
DEFA	Deutsche Film AG
DEUSASIG	Deutsch-Südostasiatische Gesellschaft (German Southeast Asia Society)
DHfK	Deutsche Hochschule für Körperkultur (German College of Physical Education)
DOK	Leipzig-Leipzig Documentary Festival
DRA	Deutsches Rundfunk Archiv, Potsdam
DW	Deutsche Welle
FD	Films Division
FDGB	Freier Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IFFK	International Film Festival of Kerala
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
INC	Indian National Congress
INGFA	Indo-GDR Friendship Association

IPTA	Indian People's Theatre Association
LTG	Little Theatre Group
NAM	Non-aligned Movement
NEIF	National Education and Information Films
NSD	National School of Drama
PAAA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office)
RBI	Radio Berlin International
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
STC	Indian State Trading Corporation
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VGB	Volkseigener Betrieb (Publically Owned Enterprise)
VOA	Voice of America
YAWA	You Ask, We Answer

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This edited volume is the result of an interdisciplinary dialogue among scholars based in India and Germany. Some of us combine academic lives with interwoven trajectories in film-making, theatre acting and direction, translation and journalism and the visual arts. In more ways than one, all of us have engaged in our research with the ‘Cultural Cold War’. It is our mutual interest in a relatively underexplored chapter of Cold War entanglements, vibrant exchanges among actors from India and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) that has brought the present contributions under the same conceptual roof.

In our efforts to foreground these Cold War pasts, we have all encountered ‘issues’ which have something larger to say about Cold War historiography in general. Bringing the two names—India and the GDR—immediately confronts one with two such issues: first, the writing of pasts of a country which ceased to officially exist in 1989 (as its last two generations live on in a re-unified Germany) and reflecting on how its memory is institutionalized today, among others, through academic production, and second, writing globality into these Cold War pasts by shifting the focus away from its ‘bloc-based’ (and therein blocking!) epicentres to sites, actors and their practices outside the geographical ambits of Euro-America and the Soviet Union. In addressing both these issues, we hope to make an intervention in Cold War studies. A larger aim has been to shed light on microhistories of engagement in the field of cultural production, which were charged with the vibrancy of everyday lives, practices and local perspectives. Such entanglements have often not made it to panoramic overviews of interstate relations. In bringing together voices from theatre, film and newsreel networks, radio listening communities, artists’ collectives, diplomatic cliques,



travel literature writing and cartography, we are optimistic to open future research avenues within Cold War studies, in general, and in the field of India–GDR relations, specifically, albeit with a new focus on actors and their specific life trajectories.

The first concerted effort towards this volume can be traced back to ‘The Politics of “Doing” Culture: Entangled India and the German Democratic Republic’ Workshop organized at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in December 2018. The workshop was organized within the framework of the Modern India in German Archives, 1706–1989 (MIDA) project, funded by the German Research Council. Since the project’s inception in 2014, I have actively learnt, discussed and collaborated with members of the three teams based at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin, and the Centre for Modern Indian Studies (CeMIS), Georg-August Universität, Göttingen. As one of the researchers within the project (2014–2020), I thank the three principal investigators—Ravi Ahuja, Heike Liebau and Michael Mann—for their ongoing engagement with my research on India and the GDR.

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**Anandita Bajpai**  
**Berlin, 2021**



# INTRODUCTION— CORDIAL COLD WAR

Actors, Sites and Practices of  
Cultural Entanglement

**Anandita Bajpai**

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*The Cold War was cold only in its name. It had a heat  
and also a warmth to it.*

*Cold warriors weren't just Cold warriors, they were all  
heated up—hot warriors.*

*Each one picked their camp at the time.*

*I picked the side where there was a warmth—a warmth  
of relationships.*

—A. Srivastava, Founder of the Lenin Club,  
Madhepura, India<sup>1</sup>

This volume examines entanglements, in all their varieties, between two distant yet interconnected sites of the Cold War—India and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Both nations present us with numerous spaces where loyalties were forged, affinities assembled, animosities profited from and the 'warmth' of the Cold War, as described in the opening lines, tapped into by local actors. Rather than postulating either of the nations as a passive object of interest, the playfield or site of representation of the other, the volume delves into the reciprocities and everyday lives of cultural engagement. At its centre stage are actors, practices and sites of entanglement.

Etymologically rooted in the Latin *cor*, *cordis* meaning 'heart', *cordiality* is commonly understood as the emotional quality of a relationship being 'warm', 'pleasant' and 'friendly' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). While individual actors may very well perceive the ties that bind them as cordial, 'cordial ties' also exist in international relations to signal the intentions of friendliness and conviviality among states. The concept of *cordiality*, thus, enables us to integrate both formal intentionality and informal lived reality during the Cold War years.

The locales of entanglement this volume draws attention to are multiple and varied—from ministries where diplomatic agreements were signed to the streets where local solidarity marches were staged. Rather than emphasizing the compulsions, constraints and coercions of the Cold War as a presumed framework of action, *Cordial Cold War* uncovers the actual spaces of interaction where creative energies were galvanized in spite of, and within, the ambits of control. The aim is to achieve a fine-grained understanding that can help prevent romanticizing trans-societal entanglements as all too glamorous. At the same time, the volume abstains from being yet another study into surveillance states where entanglements can only exist as state propaganda. Instead, we endeavour to grasp the complexities of interconnection in their heterogenous and transitional character. We, thus, make an intervention in the field of Cold War studies by pointing to a spectrum of 'homefronts' (Major and Mitter 2004), sites of everyday practices, where entanglements were forged by myriad actors.

In spite of the GDR being officially recognized as a sovereign state by India as late as 1972, cordiality, as several chapters in the volume demonstrate, was an active and vibrant component of relationships among actors from both the countries, already in the decades before formal recognition. It is these zones of creativity, initiatives, friendships, mutual interest and envisioned solidarities (both before and after recognition) and actors' underlying motivations and aspirations in materializing the same, that we zoom into.

Recent historiography has made an important intervention in emphasizing that as a war of competing ideological affinities, the Cold War was all about 'winning hearts and minds' (Osgood 2002; Risso 2013, 147). The term 'cultural Cold War' is often used to denote a wide spectrum of sites and practices that utilized cultural

diplomacy as a tool for generating both affinities and animosities.<sup>2</sup> Whereas this is a welcome shift, the term often inadvertently reifies the assumption that cultural activity necessarily occurs only within neat spatial borders encapsulated by nations. It is this almost unquestioned overlap between nation-states and the sphere of cultural production, often treated as ‘national’ cultures, that has triggered our scrutiny and which we call for being problematized.

By shifting the focus to practices, the chapters in the volume tune in with developments in new cultural history to reflexively enquire into both the understanding and scope of cultural production (Biersack and Hunt 1989; Burke 2004; Calaresu, Rubies, and de Vivo 2010). We understand cultural production as constitutive of a wide spectrum of practices ranging from *Kulturpolitik* (Fuchs 2007, Klein 2009) and cultural diplomacy, as exercises driven by governmental policy, to the eclectic field of everyday localized practices commonly dubbed as ‘popular culture’. Exploring the Cold War from the vantage point of diverse Indian and East German actors and sites can provide for an alternative reading of the entangled Cold War. The chapters show how Cold War realities provided local actors with alternative reference points beyond the binaries of colonial-colonized, imperial-subaltern, superpower-satellite, from which to identify and engage with each other. Rather than viewing interlocutors primarily through the lens of ministerial documents in state archives, we call attention to their active everyday involvement in crafting entanglements. A deeper look into the micro-histories of these exchanges expands the range of actors and their respective sites, which were on the frontline of these engagements. These were individuals who did not just inhabit diplomatic circles but also actively generated sites of cultural production as diverse as local radio listening communities, theatre circuits, film and documentary making, travelogue writing, geography and art. The chapters are, thus, in tune with Major and Mitter’s (2004, 2) call for a de-centring of Cold War histories ‘away from government and diplomacy, towards [the inclusion of] society and culture as autonomous spheres of historical interest....’

In his research on the *longue durée* of intellectual entanglements between Germany and India, Kris Manjapra (2014, 6) asks for an emphasis on how actors design ‘...trans-societal interactions and linkages to satisfy their own specific local political interests?’<sup>3</sup>

It is this spirit that informs the entanglements described in the chapters of this volume. How did Indian and East German actors tap into the potential of exchanges for interests which were at once both trans-societal and local? Even when funded by states, entanglements often acquired their own local textures and trajectories which were not always predictable or controllable by governments. Entanglements in the field of cultural production, thus, not only point to the celebratory state-directed ‘festivals’ of friendship (Hariharan, this volume), where the repertoire of anti-imperialism, anti-fascism and anti-colonialism ran deep into the logic of photographed formal events, but they also take readers to those pockets of performance where actors mobilized these opportunities towards highly localized agendas of forging alternate public spheres or devising successful strategies for winning individual recognition (Dutt, Bajpai, this volume). Such spaces open creative avenues to engage with the combinable energies of high politics from above and the everyday efforts from below. They help unpack how interlocutors can internalize both the rhetoric of states and yet maintain their own authoritative agency, therein forging the political in the everyday.

The volume engages with four intersecting debates. First, it emphasizes the significance of translocality as a lens to explore how local actors and their practices contributed in the making of the Cold War as a moment of historical entanglement. Second, it calls for a focus on cultural production, therein going beyond diplomatic and international histories, which primarily rely on state archives. In doing so, the chapters demonstrate the surplus of engaging with sources from other kinds of archives, private collections and oral history. Third, the volume makes an intervention in historiography on the GDR by shifting the gaze to sites outside the socialist world. At the same time, it opens a new chapter in writing histories of India–GDR entanglements. Fourth, and in a related strand, it contributes to Cold War studies by diverting our attention away from the two power blocs. What can we learn from exploring histories of a ‘non-aligned’ Cold War?

## **TRANSLOCAL CULTURAL ENTANGLEMENTS**

As mentioned, all chapters in the volume foreground actors, practices and sites of entanglement. Translocality as a descriptive tool

offers tremendous heuristic potential to explore the histories of such entanglement (Bromber 2013; Freitag and van Oppen 2010). In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai (1996) first suggested translocality as an instructive term to describe de-territorialized sites of mobility, connectedness and exchange resulting from transitions in a globalizing world. Translocality offers a creative perspective for exploring processes of local place-making, whereby the local is not presupposed to be a normative spatial container. It also avoids postulating ‘a historical meta-narrative of “global” developments’ (Freitag and van Oppen 2010, 2). It differs from transnationalism where nation-states are the solitary unit of reference (Stephan-Emmrich and Schröder 2018). Locality here is viewed more as relational rather than territorially bounded. By foregrounding actors and sites of entanglement, a translocal perspective enables a move beyond the assumption that presumed structural containers precondition human action. Instead, it allows us to see how these containers are actively and relationally produced. It can, thus, contribute to uncovering how nations, or blocs, are, in fact, produced and stabilized via everyday practices of local actors. In a similar vein to translocality, Entangled History calls for surpassing the rigidity of nationalist historiographies, which reduce trans-societal interconnectedness solely to the analytical container of the nation-state (Conrad and Randeria 2002; Manjapra 2014; Randeria 2002, 2006). Actors from the ‘South’ are often presented in Cold War histories as passive receivers and ‘satellites’ of bloc politics with its Euro-American epicentres. Shifting the focus away from presumed structural forces, all contributions in the volume show how local actors were at the centre stage of the entangled Cold War. We contend that translocality can be a helpful lens, a toolkit for exploring the history of India–GDR entanglements as it emphasizes the agency of local actors. Once we have done away with categories like ‘the Eastern bloc’, ‘superpower’ or ‘the postcolony’, one quickly realizes that local interlocutors in India were anything but silent. Just as their counterparts from across the subcontinent in the GDR, they were active, mutual co-shapers of the sites of Cold War and an authoritative voice in styling entanglements.

Recent Cold War scholarship also demonstrates that not all trans-societal engagements have operated from within the logic of national borders (Classen 2013; Hochscherf, Laucht, and Plowman



2010; Major and Mitter 2004; Vowinckel, Payk and Lindenberger 2012; Poiger 2000; Romijn et al. 2012a; Vowinckel 2012). During the Cold War, people, goods and especially ideas crossed all kinds of boundaries. Mass media (particularly radio shortwaves and television) and technological innovations often transgressed the 'Iron Curtain' (Badenoch 2013; Beutelschmidt and Oehmig 2014; Boel 2019; Bösch 2018; Bösch and Classen 2018; Dittmar 2010; Henrich-Franke 2013; Kind-Kovács 2013; Kuschel 2016; Major 2013; Oliver 2019; Vowinckel 2019). The term is itself problematic as a descriptive or analytical category, given it belongs to a particularistic vocabulary that was politically instructed and used during the Cold War to describe the socialist countries. There is ample evidence that East–West binaries were not as static, exclusive and unchanging as they are often made out to be and that the rigidity of the so-called 'Iron Curtain' was often disrupted by actors collaborating across the geopolitical divides of a Cold War torn world (Hixson 1998; Major and Mitter 2004; Romijn et al. 2012a). Heuristically, translocality enables us to deconstruct this rigidity. In a way, it equips us with a conceptual tool to dig a tunnel beneath the 'Iron Curtain'.

A translocal focus on actors, sites and everyday practices also alerts us to voices of opposition and complexities *within* territorial borders, which are often silenced or subsumed under homogenizing statist discourses. Thus, for example, Bishnupriya Dutt's contribution shows how theatre became a site for locally staging anti-American solidarity with Vietnam (in places as distant as Calcutta and Rostock) at a time when the Indian dramaturge in question was heavily opposed to the Indian state and even prohibited from travelling to the GDR (Dutt, this volume). A translocal perspective consciously prioritizes local effects of entanglement and helps 'transcend the elitist focus of much of global history' therein contributing to 'a social history from below' (Freitag and van Oppen 2010, 5). State-orchestrated cultural exchanges, for instance, came to acquire their own everyday lives in very localized contexts. Here, neither the framework of the nation-state, or more precisely the surveillance-state, nor that of the local as a self-contained unit suffices to grasp the realities on the ground. Thus, as shown in the chapter on Radio Berlin International (RBI) and its listeners' clubs in India, more than becoming an organ of the radio station, Hindi-speaking listeners across rural and semi-urban India

creatively utilized their engagement with the station's presenters both as a means to locally generate a feeling of belonging to a wider cosmopolitan world and as a resource for the localized production of difference and distinction (Bajpai, this volume). Translocality also offers a vantage point to study entanglements as materially mediated (Stephan-Emmrich and Schröder 2018). Thus, as almost all contributions in this volume demonstrate, mobile and immobile material objects—such as maps, photographs, film rolls, technologies, sculptures or paintings, souvenirs/gifts and travelogues—all enabled unique local trajectories of entanglements.

A translocal perspective reveals, nations are, in fact, a product of localized processes of space-making. 'India', for instance, was actively produced and maintained for the local consumption of GDR actors through a variety of media such as travel literature, newsreels, documentaries and cartography. Thus, instead of taking the category of the nation for granted, our focus on translocal entanglements can help to unpack symbolic processes of nation-making. Actors such as travelogue writers, cartographers, and film and documentary makers rendered 'India' a visible entity for people in the GDR (Gokhale, Bernhardt, Haque, this volume). Localized entanglements informed and helped materialize imaginations. Such practices of translocal nation-making (of 'India' in the 'GDR' and vice versa) inadvertently contributed towards sharpening the self-image of one's own nation. A translocal perspective, thus, enables a reflexive engagement with the practices and processes that render entities such as the nation real.

## **EXPANDING THE COLD WAR ARCHIVE**

Prioritizing practices of cultural production, the chapters of the volume expand the archival base of Cold War research. Historiography on both the Cold War, which has only recently witnessed the rise of a 'new wave' (Major and Mitter 2004; Mikkonen and Koivunen 2015; Mikkonen and Suutari 2016), and India–GDR entanglements has been dominated by a focus on international/diplomatic history. This propensity towards diplomatic histories can be explained in view of the recent availability of hitherto inaccessible sources from the former GDR state archives (or those of other socialist countries). Such histories primarily rely on official

narratives in state records which are housed in foreign office and federal archives.<sup>4</sup> While such contributions have been a necessary first step in documenting interstate relations, they also call for further research based on other sources beyond the foreign ministry holdings of both Indian and German state archives, particularly so for everyday entanglements in the expansive field of cultural production.

As we illustrate, exchanges which may loosely be categorized as ‘cultural’ were charged with the vibrancy of everyday affairs, the details of which were not necessarily documented in ministerial reports. Thus, the micro-histories of collaborations, such as those between GDR and Indian theatre directors (Abnave, this volume) only appear as brief interludes of ‘interstate cultural relations’ in official records. Here, they are signposted as ‘Indo-GDR Cultural Agreements’ (*Kulturabkommen*) and then often neatly categorized into archival sub-holdings under ‘cultural politics’ (*Kulturpolitik*) and ‘cultural relations with foreign countries’ (*kulturelle Beziehungen mit dem Ausland*),<sup>5</sup> which does not reveal much about the intersectional potential of politics and culture. The chapters gathered in *Cordial Cold War* question, unpack and reshuffle such archival architectures, which often separate ‘political relations’ and ‘cultural relations’ as distinct statist categories.<sup>6</sup> The micro-histories covered by the contributions elucidate how ‘culture’ was a matter of politics proper and certainly not limited to state control, how Cold War campaigning and competition permeated the public sphere on an everyday basis and how popular culture became an instrument of staging solidarity, crafting cordialities or performing political protest (Bajpai, Dev, Dutt, this volume).

The chapters engage with various archives, private collections and oral testimonies, therein expanding the source base of Cold War research. Such sources can become a productive means to go beyond state archives and event histories. We, thus, bring readers to hitherto untapped sources in media and broadcasting service archives (Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Potsdam), film archives (Kinemathek and Progress Archives, Berlin), theatre archives (Utpal Dutt Foundation Archives, Kolkata), scientific collections (Collections at the Leibniz-Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner) as well as private collections and oral testimonies.

Additionally, the contributions actively engage with audio-visual material (films, newsreels), maps, sound recordings, photographs and objects, each of which makes its own unique contribution in expanding interdisciplinary endeavours to uncover and understand entanglements.

## **GDR BEYOND THE GDR**

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the ensuing Unification Treaty of 1990 and *Wende* (literally meaning the turn or turnaround), a term often used to describe the period of change in East Germany after 1989–90, the GDR continues to occupy a contested space in history and public memory alike (Saunders 2018). For citizens of the now ‘former GDR’, reunification came with a drastic transformation of political and economic structures, a new currency and even the renaming of several cities and streets. Triggering off debates on official and popular memory, and ‘a struggle over symbols’ (Koshar 2000, 3), reunification was accompanied by the simultaneous making of authoritative discourses on how the GDR was to be remembered and how this memory was to be institutionalized for future generations. In lingering popular images, the GDR has largely come to be depicted in extreme dichotomies, which either celebrate collectivity and social security enjoyed by citizens of the country or unequivocally dismiss it as a society under a repressive surveillance state (Jampol 2012; Saunders 2018). These polarizing discourses are usually not made to dialogue with each other (Saunders 2018). Enduring narratives continue to employ adjectives such as *Unrechtsstaat* (unjust state), *Diktatur* (dictatorship), *totalitärer/autoritärer Staat* (totalitarian/authoritarian state) and comparisons also abound with the National Socialist regime of Nazi Germany (Jampol 2012; Saunders 2018). A consequence of these ongoing memory struggles has been that more often than not the everyday lives of GDR citizens are depicted on the dichotomous grid of West versus East, of liberal democracy versus totalitarianism, of the practitioners of freedom versus the victims of dictatorship.

The Enquete Commissions of 1992 (*Enquete-Kommission Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur*) and 1995 (*Enquete-Kommission Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit*) set guidelines for cultural

institutions on how the GDR was to be officially remembered, also bearing consequences for future federal funding of memory-related research projects. The *Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* (Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands [SED] Dictatorship), which funds exhibitions, research, events on the GDR, was a direct result of the same. An expert commission headed by historian Martin Sabrow (commonly called the Sabrow Commission) was appointed under the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD; Social Democratic Party of Germany)–Green coalition government (1998–2005) in order to make recommendations for coordinating and networking the several institutes dealing with memory production on the GDR in a decentralized body (*Geschichtsverbund*). The Commission’s report (2006) pointed to the need for pluralizing perspectives on the everyday workings of the state in the GDR, a greater emphasis on citizens’ everyday life (*Alltag*) and how conformity and resistance both informed citizens’ self-perceptions (Jampol 2012, 211; Jones 2015, 200; Sabrow et al. 2007; Saunders 2018, 11). Initially, such attempts at overcoming dichotomizing narratives on the GDR were criticized by several voices in the Federal Republic. While some of the critical voices saw the report as too lenient towards state violence and oppression, others saw the recommendations of the commission as a means to promulgate state-mandated *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East).<sup>7</sup> These tendencies are a clear result of particular political contexts, which have played an important role in the making of both institutionalized and popular memory.

Scholarship has only recently begun to add new perspectives to the historiography of the GDR, with works focusing on material legacy, (Jampol 2004, 203), memorialization and monuments (Saunders 2018), memory (Sabrow 2009; Saunders and Pinfold 2013), consumption (Crew 2003; Kaminsky 2001; Merkel 1998, 1999; Merkel and Mühlberg 1996; Rubin 2009; Vari 2014; Zatlin 2007), *Ostalgie* and the social life of everyday things (Berdahl 1999), *Alltagsgeschichte* (everyday history) and social history of the GDR (Bauerkämper 2005; Betts and Pence 2008; Kaelble, Kocka, and Zwahr 1994; Mertens 2003).<sup>8</sup> Similarly, recent research has complicated the terminological lens through descriptions like ‘welfare dictatorship’ (Jaraus 1999; Lindenberger 2008) or ‘participatory dictatorship’ (Fullbrook 2005).<sup>9</sup>

With regards to the memory of the GDR outside of Germany, research has traced GDR's relations with socialist countries outside Central Europe, the ruling party SED's self-portrayals as an active contributor to 'world socialism' and its usage of registers of 'world peace and solidarity' as part of the state's repertoire of self-legitimation (Slobodian 2015). Scholars have engaged with entanglements with socialist countries in Africa and Asia such as Tanzania (Burton 2019a), Angola, Mozambique (Schenck 2016; Kim and Schenck 2018; Schenck 2018, 2019, 2020; Schuch 2013; Van der Heyden 2019), Zanzibar (Burton 2019b),<sup>10</sup> Vietnam (Grossheim 2019; Freytag 1998; Schwenkel 2014, 2015, 2016, 2020), North Korea (Hong 2008, 2015) and China (Krüger 2002; Tong 2018; Wobst 2004), particularly focusing on the themes of migration and race in the GDR (Pugach 2015; Slobodian 2015), therein adding another chapter in exploring hitherto understudied sites, practices and actors of the Cold War. Such research has assisted in discarding the one-sided lens of viewing the GDR solely as a society of deprivation and backwardness (Jampol 2012, 2015). Entanglements with countries outside the socialist 'bloc', however, particularly in the Global South, have been relatively under-researched.<sup>11</sup> Sites and actors in India present us with a unique vantage point for exploring such Cold War entanglements.

The chapters in the volume also add or rather return, albeit with new perspectives, to existing historiography on India–GDR entanglements. This strand of research, only beginning to be explored primarily by Indologists/South Asianists based at several GDR universities, at a time when the country still existed (among others see Freitag 1998; Gupta and Weidemann 1980; Heidrich 1998a, 1998b; Misra 1978, 1986; Oesterheld 1985; Rüstau 1998; Weidemann 1989) seems to have come to an abrupt standstill with the fall of the Berlin Wall and a reconfiguration of East German universities and their respective South Asian Studies and Indology departments. In a newly calibrated academic environment, scholars of South Asia/India from the GDR have continued to produce rich research on a variety of themes in Indian history, politics, culture and economy. Nonetheless, research on India took new forms after 1989–90 at German academic institutes (see Framke, Lötze, and Strauch 2014) and it seems as if the subject of India–GDR entanglements truly became a thing of the past, metaphorically buried

beneath the debris of the Wall. Within Indian academic institutions (as also those in Europe and North America), on the other hand, these entangled pasts have continued to figure prominently in research coming from several disciplinary fields such as theatre studies, film studies, arts and aesthetics and German Studies.<sup>12</sup> This volume is a concerted, interdisciplinary outcome of bringing such research, scattered across disciplines, under one conceptual roof. It, thus, places scholarship on India–GDR entangled histories back on the academic map, albeit in a new perspective.<sup>13</sup>

Presented in the GDR as a recently independent nation (1947), which was ‘capitalistically’ inclined (though with a socialist economic planning) and an important actor in world politics, Non-aligned India provided for numerous localized sites that shared the internationalist register of anti-imperialism, anti-fascism, anti-colonialism, world peace and solidarity. This was particularly so in Indian federal states which were a stronghold of the Communist Parties (Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M))) and where numerous local actors saw a natural affinity towards the Soviet Union and the GDR. Exploring such entanglements can widen our gaze to include hitherto unexplored sites, objects and oral testimonies, thereby assisting in unpacking the nuances of everyday life of local actors in the GDR, which may reveal zones of creativity and initiatives as well as friendships and mutual interest across the continent, yet not evade the exploration of zones of dissent, negotiations, restrictions and even suppression. We engage with the histories of these entanglements, especially in times of the crisis of the Left in Indian politics (Dutt, Abnave, this volume). While being alert of, and attentive to, the constraints produced by the Cold War, we aim to accord due attention to *cordiality* as a defining characteristic of entanglements, as envisaged by actors.

## **NON-ALIGNED COLD WAR: HISTORICAL CONTEXTS**

As a leading voice in the Bandung Conference of 1955, which called for Afro-Asian unity and co-operation, and eventually as one of the founding member states of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), the Indian state formally maintained a policy of equidistance and neutrality from Cold War bloc politics. This was a means, advocated

largely for a newly decolonized world, to avoid becoming satellites of either of the two 'power blocs'. Not only did NAM stand for Afro-Asian solidarity against imperialism and neocolonialism, its multi-racial character brought together a 'coloured solidarity' (Mišković 2014, 5). With Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Yugoslavian President Josip Broz Tito, Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah and Indonesian President Sukarno as its founding figures, the consortium inadvertently pointed to the hitherto predominant race and racial thinking that shaped international institutions, networks, worldviews and the 'complexion of the international system' (Abraham 2014, 76). Formally, it thus served as a resource not only to participate in a politics of distance from the superpowers but also as a means of transcending the inherently racialized composition and leadership of international institutions.

Whereas a larger international environment of bloc politics and the need to be officially recognized as a sovereign state informed the East German state's activities in the Indian sub-continent, the NAM became a crucial hallmark of the Indian state's international self-positioning. Though in realpolitik, Indian non-alignment exhibited an obvious tilt towards the Eastern 'bloc', and in spite of manifold state-directed exchanges with the GDR, several reasons accounted for the absence of the formal recognition of the GDR by the Indian state until as late as 1972. Officially, Prime Minister Nehru maintained that recognizing the GDR would imply negating the possibility of German reunification in the future. This in turn would insinuate that the Indian government supported the division of Germany (Das Gupta 2012, 307). At the same time, the GDR with its SED-led government was often presented in Nehru's rhetoric as a satellite of the Soviet Union. However, it was also real financial pressures that were exercised by the successive governments of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) that further influenced this position. FRG's Konrad Adenauer led government had also embarked on a foreign policy based on the Hallstein doctrine (1955–1969), according to which the recognition of the GDR and the establishment of diplomatic relations with it by 'third countries' would be regarded as an 'unfriendly act'.<sup>14</sup> Though not announced officially, the consequence of such an 'unfriendly' act would be the abolition of diplomatic relations with the FRG and



the discontinuation of financial assistance, incorporating economic sanctions.

In such an internationally charged atmosphere governed by Cold War competition, affinities and animosities, the Indian state nonetheless profited from financial and technical aid from all sides of the 'Iron Curtain'. This can be fathomed from the establishment of the several dam projects, steel plants and Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) across the country, with each receiving funding from the Soviet Union, the USA or FRG. Nehru (1948) had publicly declared that '[i]t is not a wise policy to put all our eggs in one basket'. GDR's assistance flowed in the shape of relief funds, medical aid and tractors (examples being the relief brought in the advent of the flood in northern India for the federal states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in 1954, or economic aid in the form of deliveries of sugar during India's sugar shortage in 1954; Voigt 2008, 678). Though the GDR played a minimal role in these projects, solidarity existed in the vibrant transnational vocabulary of 'anti-imperialism', 'anti-colonialism', 'anti-fascism' and 'world peace'. This vocabulary, which informed the basis of GDR's foreign policy and international rhetoric provided the creative space for both GDR officials and numerous actors from within India to produce an ideological common ground, zones of cordial ties, between the two countries in order to project them as natural allies.

The chapters in the volume offer an exploration of the 'Non-aligned' Cold War beyond the solitary role of the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the USA. Similarly, they go beyond existing historiography on South Asia during this period, which has extensively focused on the India–China and India–Pakistan territorial conflicts of 1962, 1965 and 1971, respectively. We contend that there is more to uncover and recover as South Asian Cold War pasts. As two nations with a divided history (of Partition and territorial division), both the GDR and India offer multiple local sites where registers of international solidarity and individual recognition were performed at the same time.

The neoliberalization of the Indian economy (commencing in the late 1980s and formally officialized via the neoliberal economic reforms of 1991) marked a turning point in the economic, political and cultural history of the country, and stood in sharp contrast

to the previous 'Nehruvian era' of economic import-substitution. While the ensuing new alignments and directions, particularly traceable in the trajectories of India's economy, party-politics and media have been (and rightly so) the subject of extensive research, we argue that there are greater complexities to unravel for the Cold War period. The NAM has been the subject of extensive interest in scholarship on Cold War and the 'Third World', with India featuring prominently in this strand of contributions.<sup>15</sup> However, as mentioned, scholarship on India and the GDR remains scanty and primarily based on diplomatic or international histories written through the lens of bureaucratic and state records. The contributions in this volume shed light upon more microscopic encounters that have not made it yet to such panoramic perspectives. What did Cold War affinities in the postcolony, beyond the institutional framework of NAM, look like? How were bonds of 'friendship' and 'solidarity' crafted locally among actors, especially before GDR's formal recognition in 1972? What were the motivations behind attempts to craft cordiality and what did the everyday lives of such entanglements look like? In other words, how did Indian actors materialize entanglements with one of the two 'blocs', even profiteer from them, while maintaining the larger rhetoric of being non-aligned? *Cordial Cold War* aims to explore micro histories of such engagements, which relied on both the formal intentionality of the two states and the informal lived realities that fashioned these ties during the Cold War.

## CHAPTERS

Focusing on theatre as a site of cultural entanglements, Bishnupriya Dutt tells the story of a play on the liberation war in Vietnam (*Invincible Vietnam*), written by the Indian dramaturge Utpal Dutt, which was staged in the midst of political dissent in Kolkata in 1966 and at the Volkstheater Rostock in 1967. Aligning himself with the anti-state and anti-Congress Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist, and therein also away from other Left parties in India, Dutt the playwright faced bans, arrest and attacks for his seditious theatrical practice. The chapter expands the scope of entanglements in the field of cultural production to go beyond institutionalized exchanges which were funded by governments

through the example of a more flexible exchange between actors from the GDR theatrical circuits and an amateur theatre group in India. Such collaborations that emerged in an atmosphere of discord (with the Indian government) make for entangled histories that are more heterogenous and which do not silence zones of dissent within nation-states.

Anandita Bajpai introduces us to the world of transnational radio broadcasting through the example of the East Berlin based RBI and its Hindi Division. She traces the trajectory of the GDR foreign broadcaster from the perspective of those behind the microphone—the presenters/journalists—as well as those glued to the radio set, the listeners’ clubs, active in numerous rural and semi-urban sites in India. The author expands the archival base of historiography on India–GDR entanglements by relying on sound sources, photographic material, trajectories of mobile objects as well as oral history. She shows how for the journalists, most of whom were from the GDR, the radio station was a medium of exchanging with people from a country that they had never been to but whose language they had learnt in the GDR. For the listeners, it became a means of inserting oneself into the wider politically charged Cold War world, through letters and listener club activities, as well as an instrument for performing local difference and distinction. The chapter calls for giving importance to the everyday local lives of entanglements.

Anushka Gokhale sheds light on travel writing, which was one of the most widely consumed forms of literature in the GDR. Travel writing, she argues, can be seen both as a compensation for the lack of freedom of movement and as a tool to ‘demystify [...the Other], so as to contain the desire to travel’. The chapter focuses on the depictions of India, more so the lives of Indians, in the writings of three authors—Inge von Wangenheim, Willi Meinck and Richard Christ. Gokhale shows how as ‘cultural diplomats’, travel writers presented consumers of their books in the GDR with contrasting images of India and Indians to reassert their own national and ideological self-positioning. Elucidating the development of the genre from an ideological rigidity in the 1960s to a more liberal worldview of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the chapter invites us to question the post reunification reduction and

straightjacketing of GDR literature as only being an ideological tool of a dictatorial state.

Christoph Bernhardt's chapter focuses on GDR cartography on India, particularly on the collections of Lehmann and Weiße published in 1958. Drawing our attention to the larger political and diplomatic contexts of their production, the chapter explores the eventual diplomatic conflict that arose between the two states (India and GDR) over the cartographic representation of the Indo-Chinese border in the 1960s. Placing India quite literally on the world map for experts from a plethora of spheres, maps had a large outreach within the GDR. They were published in thousands of copies and were reproduced in school atlases, thus materializing India as a graphic reality for a larger GDR audience. By focusing on the diplomatic and political tensions that the cartographic depiction of the India–China border entailed, Bernhardt shows how cartography became a space for political negotiation, and how GDR cartographers played an important role in this endeavour. In return, this had effects on the practice of cartography in the GDR.

Zooming in on depictions of India in GDR-made newsreels, Reyazul Haque uncovers yet another hitherto unexplored dimension of India–GDR entanglements. The newsreel series *Der Augenzeuge* (The Eyewitness), produced by the state-owned film studio DEFA, comprised of short films that were screened during the interludes of main feature films in cinemas. They consisted of reports on social, political and cultural life not only in the GDR and the Soviet Union but also in other countries around the world, where the GDR had strategic interests. Analysing the symbolic depiction, and hence production, of India in GDR newsreels, the chapter shows how GDR-based newsreel makers used audio-visual trends to generate a sense of proximity between their local German audience and a projected India to strengthen and legitimize GDR's identity and political existence in a turmoiled Cold War period.

Vaibhav Abnave's contribution explores theatrical collaborations between Fritz Bennewitz, a GDR director, and Vijaya Mehta, a director from Maharashtra, as an important moment in the dispersion of Bertolt Brecht's works and ideas on Marathi stage. The chapter contests reading such theatrical entanglements as 'inter-cultural' which would reify the category of culture (prescribed

to nation-states). Instead, through a close reading of Bennewitz's recently published writings and editorial commentary on it, the chapter investigates how 'culture' was discursively constituted vis-à-vis 'politics' in the context of the Cold War. Closely following the collaboration between the two directors, Abnave's emphasis is on the actors, their theatrical practice and the sites where their work was staged. The chapter points to frictions that underlie any homogenizing readings of culture, art or entanglements.

While the two chapters on theatrical encounters invite readers to go beyond celebratory institutionalized exchanges, Veena Hariharan's contribution turns our gaze to precisely one such state-funded event as a site of dialogue among actors. The author shows how the Leipzig Documentary Festival (DOK-Leipzig) became a charged venue for East–West relations amid Cold War geopolitics, providing film-makers with an opportunity to interact with each other from both sides of the 'Iron Curtain', as well as with film-makers from the Global South. The Festival held a special retrospective of Indian documentaries in 1988. Following the traces of these entanglements in several film archives in reunified Germany and India, the chapter explores the Leipzig festival as a productive site of enquiry into entanglements in cultural production.

Rahul Dev's chapter engages with two Indian art collectives—the Realists and the Radical Painters and Sculptors Association, which were influenced by German Expressionism in their art practice. Most of the artists of the respective art collectives were inspired by the artistic models of the GDR and the Soviet countries, which echoed in their artistic choices and strategies as many of them were disposed to Left politics. However, the members of both the art collectives were not precisely informed about the distinctions and ambivalences imbued in the politics of art in a divided Germany. The chapter shows how quite far from both the Germany(s), a number of Indian artists, who were not all strictly aware of the polarized hostilities between the two divergent political systems, were interested in utilizing the vocabularies of 'Expressionism' for their own localized political commitments, primarily for staging protest in their specific local contexts.

Joachim Oesterheld's contribution is a detailed glossary of the who's who and when of India–GDR state entanglements before

the formal recognition of the GDR by the Indian government in 1972. This is an important chapter to add to existing historiography, that has primarily focused on the period after formal recognition from 1972 to 1990, providing readers an extensive account of dates/places/persons and formalized exchanges in the fields of political, economic, trade and cultural relations. Some of the secondary literature that the chapter refers to directs us to primary sources from German archives, which have hitherto not been presented systematically in the English language, and only became accessible after reunification. By showing the sheer intensity of high-level diplomatic meetings, agreements and cultural festivals organized by the two states and the mobility these entailed for the travelling actors, despite the absence of formal diplomatic ties before recognition, the chapter brings to light an active, vibrant field of entanglements which have not come to systematic notice in larger narratives.

## NOTES

1. Interview, Patna (India), 1 September 2018.
2. Research on the ‘cultural Cold War’ is extensive. In line with the ‘new wave’ in Cold War studies, the term ‘cultural Cold War’ has been utilized to emphasize the spheres of exchange that go beyond diplomats and nation-states to also include non-state actors. Mikkonen and Koivunen (2015, 4) summarize this as an approach with roots in diplomatic/international history which concentrates on ‘...activities that are closely related to states’ pursuits but are not equal to foreign policy or foreign relations’. Some contributions in this direction include Krabbendam and Scott-Smith (2003); Lerg and Scott-Smith (2017); Mikkonen and Suutari (2016); Mikkonen, Scott-Smith, and Parkkinen (2019); Osgood (2002); Pike (1989); Poiger (2002); Romijn, Scott-Smith, and Segal (2012b); in particular, see the chapters by Abrams (2012), Langenkamp (2012) and Siefert (2012). Saunders (2000); Yale (2003). For a comprehensive overview on the cultural Cold War, see Johnston (2010). Specifically, on the role of media in the Cold War, as an arena and an actor, see Bastiansen (2019) and Classen (2019).
3. Manjapra’s book ends where this volume begins. The last chapter ‘A New Order’ ends with a brief history of intellectual entanglements across India and the GDR (see Manjapra 2014).
4. In the case of the two Germanys, these are The Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office (*Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen*

- Amts*, Berlin; PAAA) and the Federal Archives (*Bundesarchiv*, Berlin and Koblenz; BAArch).
5. See holding DR1 (*Ministerium für Kultur*), BAArch, Berlin.
  6. Such a separation in archival architecture exists, for example, in the Federal Archives (BAArch) which have an enormous source base on India–GDR entanglements. Under the main holding that enlists sources related to the GDR in the archive (titled *Deutsche Demokratische Republik mit sowjetischer Besatzungszone (1945–1990)*), the sub-holding titled *Ministerium für Kultur* (Ministry of Culture—DR1) is clearly separated from the sub-holding *Auswärtiges und Internationale Beziehungen* (Foreign and International Relations—DD1, DD2, DD100, DD101). Entanglements with actors from India appear in both the sub-holdings.
  7. *Ostalgie* is a combination of *Ost* or East, with the term *nostalgie*, or nostalgia, which is commonly used to denote nostalgia for East Germany. It is revealing that the Sabrow Commission came into existence when a larger shift was about to take place in German politics. Originally set up under the Green–SPD coalition government (1998–2005), its report was released at a time when a new *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* (CDU; Christian Democratic Union of Germany)–SPD coalition had come to power. Bernd Neumann of the CDU, who replaced Christina Weiss as the Federal Representative for Culture and Media, maintained a distance from the commission’s recommendations (Saunders 2018, 11).
  8. A noteworthy mention here are the several completed and ongoing research projects on the social history of the GDR at the Leibniz-Centre for Contemporary History (Leibniz-Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung), Potsdam; see <https://zzf-potsdam.de/en/forschung/department-i-communism-and-society>
  9. For a brief, instructive overview of shifts towards social history and everyday history within historiography on the GDR, see Scott Moranda’s (2010) review essay.
  10. For a comprehensive overview of African student organizations in the GDR, see Pugach (2019).
  11. The few works dealing with the theme tend to club nations from the South into the category of the ‘Non-communist countries’ or the ‘Third World’, with India sometimes making an appearance. See for example: Kupper (1970), Wentker (2007).
  12. Some of the recent publications on diverse aspects of entanglements between India and the GDR, published in the 2000s and coming from scholars based at Indian, European as well as North American universities include: Bajpai (2018); Esleben (2017); Esleben, Rohmer, and John (2016); Esleben (2014); Esleben (2011); Framke, Lötze, and Strauch (2014); Mazumdar (2008); Prateek (2018, 2020); Rüstau (2018); Voigt (2008). A. Benatar’s *Kalter Krieg*

*auf dem indischen Subkontinent: Die deutsch-deutsche Diplomatie im Bangladeschkrieg 1971* is a diplomatic history dealing with the role of both the German states and the states of India and Pakistan in the Bangladesh War of 1971 (Benatar 2020). There is thus a discernible gap in research on India–GDR entanglements in the aftermath of the Fall of the Berlin Wall, accompanying the reconstitution of East German Universities, that is, between 1989 and the 2000s. This list, however, is quantitatively not comparable to the extensive scholarship on FRG–India entanglements. To give some examples (not an exhaustive list): Das Gupta (2004); Das Gupta (2012); Das Gupta (2014); Franke (2017); Franke (2018); Frey (2010); Goel (2019); Hein (2006); Van Laak (2010); Rothermund (2010a); Rothermund (2010b); Tetzlaff (2018); Unger (2008); Unger (2010); Unger (2015); Watt (2011).

13. It is also worth highlighting here that five out of the nine contributing authors are scholars based in India, whether as independent researchers or as faculty members at Indian universities.
14. For the Indian context specifically, see Das (2004).
15. Research on the NAM is extensive and ongoing. It is not our intention to reference this vast body of literature here. For a good overview, however, see Mišković, Fischer-Tiné, and Boškowska (2014). Particularly, from the perspective of this volume, see the introduction by Nataša Mišković (pp. 1–18) and the chapters by Rothermund (2014), Lüthi (2014) and Das Gupta (2014). For an insight into Bandung politics, non-alignment and Afro-Asian student activism in the two Germanys, see Slobodian (2013).

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# COLLABORATIVE DIALOGUES ACROSS THEATRICAL PUBLIC SPHERES

*Invincible Vietnam* in Calcutta  
and Rostock, 1966–1967

***Bishnupriya Dutt***

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Focusing on a particular exchange, of a theatre-text and its productions on the liberation war in Vietnam, staged amid political dissent and an agonistic atmosphere in India in 1966 and subsequently in Rostock-Volkstheater in 1967, this chapter intends to revisit certain sites of historical-cultural exchanges. As the overall theme of the book suggests, these could be referred to as Indo-GDR entanglements but were different from the celebratory festivals and institutional exchanges mostly organized and funded by the Indian state and the erstwhile German Democratic Republic (GDR). Such cultural histories of entanglement focus on an ideological affinity that does not necessarily fit into larger interstate narratives and are, therefore, rarely cited, marginalized in the archives and subsequently also in scholarship. Like all micro-events, they cannot bring about paradigm shifts but can at least challenge some of the macro-categories, which are often passed off in the name of histories of entanglement between the socialist countries and India.

In this context, the chapter tries to explore alternate critical methodologies, particularly taking into its scope various modes of theatrical collaborations: text, content, historical documents, dialogue among theatre personalities and public realms. This is a departure from prevalent standard ways of looking at entanglements, which often focus on individuals, institutions and various establishments. As will be shown, the Brecht Society of India set up in 1964, which facilitated this collaboration and is the focus of this chapter, was a more flexible cultural organization that promoted the sharing of resources around theatre and did not have the character of state institutions. Inherent to this chapter is, thus, a tacit desire to explore alternate frameworks and counter examples to the ones which solely refer to institutions and from which macro-histories are devised. The premise of this particular collaboration was based on very different principles and reinstates the view that cultural histories are always more heterogeneous than it seems.

The alternate methodological framework to approach such histories, I propose, comes from the increasing interest in looking at the public sphere as the backdrop for theatrical manifestations. A conceptualization of the theatrical public sphere as an extension of, but also as agonistic to, what is often referred to as the larger public sphere, is apt in this context for recovering and framing such histories. This, I argue, allows one to offer alternate methods to write theatre histories not through individuals but rather the political contexts and debates which were ensuing in the public domains of the time. The particular exchange that I draw our attention to is a significant moment in the chronology of cultural entanglements, at a time when the public spheres both in the GDR and India, borrowing from Balibar, were not 'phantomized'. The theatrical public sphere, particularly juxtaposed to the public sphere, then functions as a key means of exploring criticality which, in terms of theatrical abstraction, seeks to express its agonistic positions to the new Indian or the GDR state's didactic agendas around the nations' cultural manifestation. It invariably focuses attention on theatre as an institution between the shifting borders of private and public, reasoned debate and agonistic intervention (Balme 2014, 8) and has the potential to lapse into an uneasy relationship with the actual public sphere. The theatrical public sphere is also relevant in this context as going against the

grain of larger historical forces of hegemonic dominance, particularly in the GDR but also India.

In the context of the GDR, I try to read this particular exchange as an example of inclusive internationalism which allowed, albeit temporarily, a heterogeneous cultural practice, different from the understanding of theatre exchanges of the ex-socialist countries. A report of the exchange points out how the general schedule of the Volkstheater Rostock was interrupted due to the need of the hour for staging a play in support of Vietnam by an Indian playwright (DDR Review 1967). Both the GDR and India were in the nascent state of reformulating themselves and the 1960s were a vital decade.

Vietnam offered an impulse to rethink a socialist or Left imagination in the mode of internationalism, in terms of revolution, independent struggles and the Non-aligned Movement. It also provided for other means of reaching out to people in order to create international communities across geographical expanses but with historical affinities, sharing experiences of war, suffering and pain with a gesture towards a different world—a world where the socialist vision was a possibility, while facing the contemporary ones of capitalist or state socialism, with all their anomalies and contradictions. This chapter, therefore, intends to look through the lens of the play, *Invincible Vietnam*, not shying away from the contexts and the contents of the play as presenting possibilities of a collaboration based on the spirit of internationalism. In the process, through this unique cultural exchange, the performance of *Invincible Vietnam* in Calcutta in 1966 and subsequently its adaptation and performance in Rostock-Volkstheater on World Theatre Day in 1967,<sup>1</sup> this essay will revisit the play's history and will raise methodological questions around writing theatre and cultural histories of entanglement. This particularly so when recent writings on the Cold War see all such practices as nothing more than the manifestation of a political, economic and cultural policy of the Eastern Bloc in a bipolar division of the world and consequently celebrate its decimation and dissolution.

Two recent collections edited by Patryk Babiracki and Austin Jersild (2016) and another by Christopher Balme and Berenika Szymanski-Dull (2017) frame cultural practices across

genres and times according to the state cultural policy paradigm. They even read it in a cynical tone as a statist internationalism, initiated through the USSR's new policy shift in the post-Stalin era and as working through state networks and alliances. For Babiracki and Jersild, India is one common and popular reference point in an otherwise Eurocentric scope (Babiracki and Jersild 2016). The normative model of 1952 thus framed, according to them and their contributors, determines all interpretations of collaborations, particularly between the GDR and India, as mediated and controlled by the USSR. Exchanges and collaborations among actors from both the sides are expected to fit naturally into this larger framework with no scope for deviations or being challenged through its own micro histories. That international events of enormous magnitude such as the Youth Festival, inaugurated in Moscow in 1957, were organized and held, with India having the largest number of participants (Koivunen 2016; Wisdon, 2016) are some of the examples to prove their point. When discussions around internationalism arise, they are very clearly seen within such state-level policies, which could be a foreign policy initiative, as the overarching frame within which all collaborations of different kinds occur. My aim of writing a history around this exchange is exactly the opposite, one which disturbs such assumptions and is borne out of marginalized archival sources.

I propose to ask, throughout the chapter, the vital question, in the vein of Rebecca Schneider, on the disappearance of certain performance practices from archives and histories. The Indian archives have a police file on Utpal Dutt and his activities during this period, but the state cultural archives, as expected, have no reference to the exchange. The Berlin-based Academy of Arts (*Akademie der Künste*) archive holds sources on the playwright, specifically, the German text of the play by the translator Kurt Barthel and some personal correspondence between Barthel and Dutt,<sup>2</sup> clarifying some points in the text but mostly pointing to the beginning of a personal friendship. The Federal Archives in Berlin (*Bundesarchiv*) also have a file on Dutt during this time.<sup>3</sup> I, however, read these presences as two instances of marginalization; once within the GDR archives in the aftermath of the 1960s and subsequently in the aftermath of the German reunification, whereby GDR activities themselves are often ignored. Schneider,

in a different context, attributes disappearances (or in this case marginalization) to the 'meantime', a theatrical disruption to any linear cultural history narratives and argues that they disappear for a particular reason which is deliberate and deals with power machinations (Schneider 2011, 97–100). Balibar argues in the context of the ex-socialist states that these states were reorganized post-Second World War as nation-states with communist ideologies and, hence, like all nation-states (India as well), perpetuated homogenous national cultures whereby all heterogeneous cultural practices were erased and invisibilized in the process of recording histories.

The dialogue with the playwright, director and actor, Utpal Dutt, in 1966 was not mediated by the Indian state for sure. Samik Bandopadhyay (1989, 9) introduces Dutt in a preface to an interview as follows:

Thrown out of the IPTA once on the charge that he was a Trotskyite, Dutt has shifted his political positions more than once, but never outside the left. He takes positive pride in identifying himself as a political playwright, director, but takes care to give his politics a wide and humane enough dimension, offering his audiences classics both Bengali ... and European (Shakespeare, Gorki, Ibsen), reconstruction of revolutionary history, both Indian and European, street plays on more immediate and local topics and even existential studies of performance itself.

By the mid-1960s, the Little Theatre Group and Dutt established what would be the first post-colonial political theatre, taking strong positions against the state and the Congress Party which was in political power in India. From the 1960s, Dutt had hired the Minerva Theatre, staging plays on historical rebellions during the colonial rule and eulogizing the subaltern anti-colonial nationalism vis-à-vis elite nationalism of the ruling Congress Party. According to Dutt and many belonging to the Left, the ruling Congress Party had made many compromises with the colonial government while negotiating independence and, more importantly, its blatant subversion of democratic principles, which only focused on universal adult franchise at the cost of abandoning the much-needed priorities of social justice and social citizenship, which could have allowed



a more participatory democratic practice and civil society. The new theatre, while highlighting the compromises and the retreat of the ruling elites, urged for a more socialist vision and what Tony Fischer would say was a 'theatre's job politically speaking to oppose the current state of consensus by provoking disagreements of various sorts and disrupt the consensus around "good political regimes"' (Fischer and Katsouraki 2017, 5).

The Vietnam War was an integral symbol of a collective imagination around socialist revolutions and here the paradox of the GDR system, which never had a socialist revolution or any anxieties of an ever-widening gap between ideals of the revolution and its transformation into state socialism, could have a different resonance.<sup>4</sup> In the growing atmosphere of increasing state control, it was perhaps an attempt to take 'refuge in the high ideals or in the temporality of utopia'—that of the liberation struggle which Vietnam came to symbolize. Theatre is capable of staging in public sites the Brechtian Gestus to open up the 'fields of vision to a dialectical order' and manoeuvre towards 'no final closer of the signifier' and here were signifiers indicating towards a liberation war of freedom with a socialist collective vision. The triadic relationship between a post-colonial nation seeking social justice (India), a socialist state seeking civic liberty (GDR) and a liberation struggle (Vietnam) was internationalism, which when realized on stage could then, in Fischer and Katsouraki's terms, 'suspend meaning in disrupting the very space of representation through the introduction of various techniques of syntactical disturbance' and incite spectators to 'wishful' thinking that maybe, just maybe, the gap between ideals and reality will close, rather than widen (Fischer and Katsouraki 2017, 16–17).

## **INVINCIBLE VIETNAM: THE TEXT, THE PERFORMANCES AND THE CULTURAL MILIEU**

Originally written in Bengali, and premiered on 31 August 1966 at the Minerva Theatre, *Invincible Vietnam* is a play based on a contemporary international event, the war in Vietnam, focusing on one strategic battle in South Vietnam, between the US Army and the Viet Cong. According to the holding on Kurt Barthel in the *Akademie der Künste* archives, the text was translated into

English by Dutt and sent to Rostock for Hanns Anselm Perten and Kurt Barthel to read if this could be staged for the East German audience. The Brecht Society of India, which had until now brought a number of Brecht and other German scripts, along with *Handbücher* and other materials such as posters and photographs to India, thus, tried to initiate a reverse flow, whereby the Indian text was sent to the GDR. Kurt Barthel (1914–1967), known popularly as Kuba was a playwright, lyricist and dramaturge, while Perten (1917–1985) was an actor, director and theatre intendant (administrative director) of the Volkstheater Rostock Theatre from 1952 to 1985. Perten was known for commissioning pieces at the Rostock Theatre which were not allowed to be played anywhere else in the GDR. The decision to collaborate on *Invincible Vietnam* must have been a collective call from all these personalities. Barthel and Perten were members of the SED and well-known theatre personalities as was Dutt and had the cultural capital and power to negotiate such a collaboration which may not have fitted into the larger cultural policy visions.

The play, *Invincible Vietnam*, revolves around an incident in the Van Troi district and the first scene in the office of the American general, Fitz Coulton, introduces the audience to Vietnam through a map which drops down on the stage. The territories under the Viet Cong are marked in red on the map and introduced to audiences on the pretext of the general briefing his staff on the forthcoming operation, the location, its physical terrain and political situation. There is an abundance of red to show how the Viet Cong has advanced to push the American troops into only a few isolated locations. A desperate American general explains a crucial strategic attack, which he believes could perhaps change the tide of the war. The intent is to free a stretch of road, which connects the two highways—1 and 15—and which links Saigon to Ku-chi and Ben Sukh. The strategic plans are complex and lie at the crux of the play's narrative. The stretch of road is controlled by the Castro battalion, led by two infallible guerrilla leaders, Truc and Duyeth. The American plan, explained on the map, is while one brigade under Colonel Finney would proceed from Ku-chi to subjugate and arrest the leaders of the battalion, another brigade under Colonel Wheeler would lay siege on the Ho-bo village. The Americans would be led into the forests to Truc and Duyeth by Madame Lin, the daughter

of an ex-landowner of the district who is out to revenge her father's murder by the Viet Cong. In supplement to the maps on stage, there are a number of charts with data and photographs of the unknown faces of the guerrilla leaders projected on the stage. One such data chart provides a list of the means of torture the US Army can inflict on the Vietnamese people. Intertwined with war strategies, it also exposes White racism and how the USA perceives the Asian population, whom they want to subjugate and control as a superpower in the new Cold War scenario.

The subsequent two acts are located in the Ho-bo village; the first depicting a typical Vietnamese village and its people, who while leading rural, agriculturally productive lives are also fighting the liberation battle and second, the village under siege. The villages in Vietnam provided the lifeline of the struggle and, in the process, were moving, as we see, towards a nascent socialist society in terms of labour, productivity, social and political relations. The struggle is depicted as a grassroots mobilization not only for the cause of the revolutionary war but also for a vivid picture of what is to follow once the liberation has been achieved. At the centre of Ho-bo, and prominent on the stage, a makeshift hospital set up by Dr Vinh and his colleagues is located, tending to wounded villagers who are suffering the effects of American use of Napalm bombs and poisonous gases in addition to actual military bombing and shooting. The general has earlier given a picture of the village and its people as follows:

They have distributed 2,000,000 hectares of land to the peasants, paid off all debts, appointed one doctor per village, opened medical colleges, schools—it is difficult to find the illiterate Asian peasants. Every village has a cultural troupe, one film association, thirty newspapers and twenty newsreels have been produced till date. There are forty dailies, seventeen weeklies, forty monthly papers and journals. Liberation radio broadcasts in five languages. (Dutt 1995, 164)

The villagers are established as characters and everyone is involved in the liberation struggle, either fighting in the battalions or providing support in one form or the other. They come to the hospital with festering wounds, children and relatives dying or in pain, but steadfast to fight till the bitter end. Beyond the misery of the war

lies the vision of a society offering a better life, based on egalitarianism, abolition of private property, social justice and all that is associated with what socialism meant in terms of ideals but not devoid of practice. It is in this transformative moment that love and passion prosper and nurse Mao and Duyeth develop a relationship. We are introduced to Thuwan, who comes with his daughter on the verge of death due to poisonous gas; we get to know Tran Duot and Thiyen who are eager to outbid each other to prove who is the better fighter for the cause, Tham, who is burnt and scarred and instead of rest wants to go back to the battle grounds, and the women who are all brave and courageous and can outdo men in all matters regarding war. A socialist society and the revolutionary process leading to it are symbolized by the equality between men and women and we meet Kim, the 75-year-old veteran, who can shoot any target, cycles everywhere and looks after her granddaughter Pooh-Poo, whose mother died in the war and father is still away fighting the US Army; we meet Bo, the school teacher who wants to preserve the library books when the local school is bombed and brings it to the shelter.

To the great angst of Dr Vin, a meeting has been called on the hospital premises by Duyeth whereby, amid camaraderie and trust of deep comradeship, he explains the war strategy from the point of view of the guerrillas. The strategy is for Ho-bo to surrender to the US Army and not resist the siege, so that the Castro battalion can first fight Col Finney's brigade with all its strength, before coming to liberate the village from Col Wheeler's siege. With stoicism, the villagers get ready to face the trauma that awaits them, far worse than what they have experienced till now.

The third act starts by laying out the extent of violence of the occupation. Col Wheeler's men have occupied the village and unleashed terror and once again the hospital space becomes their temporary chambers. Dr Vinh still tries to conduct his work in the department of medicine in this tense atmosphere and holds audacious conversations with the Americans on the use of advanced scientific knowledge for mass destruction. Col Wheeler is keen to discover some clue in the hospital or in the homes of the villagers in order to prove their links with the Viet Cong. While inflicting his sexual desires on nurse Mao and raping her as a routine mode of torture and humiliation, he finds his much-awaited proof. A paper,

which lists American soldier strengths and had been given to her by Dr Vinh for safekeeping after the meeting with Duyeth, fall off from her bosoms. The complicity of the villagers with the guerrillas is established, Col Wheeler is now ready to punish and shower retribution in various forms: Mao is subjected to electric shock till she is killed, the other women are paraded naked among the American soldiers, Dr Vinh is blinded, the men are handcuffed and made to look at the massacre helplessly. The blinded Pooh-Poo is snatched away from her grandmother and is shot dead. For a moment, the grandmother loses her revolutionary resolution and begs for mercy but she soon realizes the futility of it all and once again transforms her personal tragedy to reinforce her revolutionary convictions.

The scene predominantly deals with physical torture and the body being subjected to inhuman violence. An effective dramatic devise, it is also used to show the American state and its army in the light of the oppressor, who aims to replace older colonialists with their own means of dominance. I argue that such vivid depictions are also a post-colonial theatrical strategy to evoke memories of colonial suppression and the marks it leaves on bodies. They are also, as can be seen in Dutt's other works, a critique of Gandhian non-violence. Dutt had interpreted in various plays that the non-violent struggle was but a hoax, formulated by Gandhi and the Congress Party to not allow the people to engage in any armed revolution in order to consolidate the powers of the Indian bourgeoisie. In Dutt's envisaging of a socialist society, a post-colonial future through an armed struggle was also a reflection of the compromises Indian post-colonial nation was making in the present. The Left in India interpreted Gandhian strategies as a means used by the middle class to monopolize power and create a rule of capital where inequalities would continue and social citizenship would be compromised to create a tokenism of universal adult franchise.

The theatrical strategy of torture allows for embodied performative moments of expressing pain and endurance to the point of transgressions as revolutionaries are never victims in the way they face torture—silently, courageously and seeing it as a mark of honour and commitment. In the process, the tortured bodies are visually transformed into empowered ones, leading to moments where affect comes with strong visceral responses.

When it comes to women, torture acquires various modes of inflicting sexual violence and is a trope of raping the nation and leaving it broken. The revolutionary women do not exhibit their bodies as victims of sexual violation. Kim, in the play, refuses to experience shame when made to walk naked among American soldiers. For her, it is like any other wound inflicted by the enemy and is the mark of a revolutionary. This challenges many of the premises on which anti-colonial nationalism created its symbolic imagination of the nation, embodied by a mother figure. The play effectively plays on various registers of womanhood and the relation between women's body and sexual violation is merely one devise of torture inflicted by the enemy and not a matter of moralistic social ethics.

Col Wheeler derives pleasure from such physical and sexual torture and waits eagerly for the climax to play out as he awaits news of the decimation of the Castro battalion and the arrest of Truc and Duyeth. When all seems lost for the revolutionaries, the US battalion under Col Finney disappears from the radar of the radio communication. Wheeler, anticipating a catastrophe, tries to send urgent messages to the headquarters as the villagers damage the radio. A replacement radio is to be brought from their store and reinstated when Madame Lin, in a nonchalant moment walks in announcing that the mission is completed and Wheeler regains his hope for a moment. The climax of the play is when she is asked to bring in the arrested Truc and Duyeth to the Colonel, but she turns around to declare that she herself is Truc, the young guerrilla leader who had masterminded the strategy. Behind her is the Castro battalion, now with their first mission accomplished, intent to liberate Ho-bo. The villagers on stage are freed and the Americans placed under arrests. The coward Col Wheeler comes down on his knees to plead for mercy. The villagers remember their losses but prepare to ready themselves for further battles and renew their oath to liberation and the struggle. Normal camaraderie returns and the goal of the future is re-established. Bo retrieves her broken globe and tries to put it back—the map of conquests of the first act, which ended with the shadows of the American general pouring over it, is now countered by the picture of the globe where other networks of solidarity are being set up; solidarity with those who are fighting

for the cause of a socialist future—egalitarianism, social justice, one pregnant with hope and possibilities.

The German translation was almost verbatim and is in the Barthel archive at *Akademie der Künste* in Berlin. Visuals and scribbling in the manuscripts show that the performance followed the textual impulse and whatever changes we see are due to the different stage sizes and architectural spatiality. The Minerva Theatre was an old colonial theatre with a long dark depth and a short width, which made scenography seem real and meld into infinity. The Rostock Theatre was a modern structure with a wide opening and a functional proscenium. Both replicated the backdrop of Vietnam and made an extensive use of the maps. The GDR production made the use of an ensemble and the presence of a large number of people, which was also reminiscent of socialist realism where no one takes centre stage in the older star modes of acting. Dutt was one of the important post-colonial directors, who introduced what was known as total theatre, where text, music, scenography, acting and ensemble acting were controlled to create a holistic experience. The GDR was already into a similar production mode and there is no evidence to show that there were too many artistic and aesthetic differences between the two productions. The acting style would largely follow a mode of realism with Brechtian techniques being formulated and introduced in various aspects to break the mode of realism and I would argue that the tortured bodies would be a key Brechtian Gestus strategy. The soundscape is particularly interesting as the sound stimulus is constantly disbalanced with sounds of bombs, glass shattering and structures collapsing. These are intercepted by the music playing on Saigon Radio, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin along with other Asian genres, unappreciated by the American general and his warped sense of the world, but an inspiration for the Vietnamese.<sup>5</sup>

Dutt made his overarching message clear in the play: while Americans were conquering and unleashing terror, the Socialist Bloc stood resolute in their support. Vietnam had created another event in the narrative of the Cold War with a world divided by capitalism and socialism, where the preference of Asian countries was quite obvious.

## **INVINCIBLE VIETNAM AMID CONTROVERSIES, DEBATES AND AN AGONISTIC PUBLIC REALM, CALCUTTA 1967**

By 1966, when *Invincible Vietnam* was written and staged, Dutt had been moving more towards a radical Left politics. His play *Teer* (The Arrow), coming a year later, was a documentary drama around the shooting of peasants at Naxalbari and the Left radical movement which grew in West Bengal, inspired by the Chinese revolution demanding an armed revolution.<sup>6</sup> With his theatre implicated in the new subversive, seditious political agenda of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)—CPI (ML)—which split from the legitimate communist parties, Dutt faced bans, arrest and attacks on his theatre. While *Invincible Vietnam* still drew his loyal audience, *Teer* was shut down and subsequently Dutt lost his theatre audience and ultimately the theatre<sup>7</sup> which was unable to sustain his foray from cultural spaces into actual political activism. Subversion and underground radical activities failed to balance the economic necessities of the theatre in the public domain with secret clandestine engagements. Dutt (2009, 106) writes, 'My suicidal line had alienated the theatre from every Leftist party in the country, from class struggle, from every contact with the masses. I was practicing private revolutionary theatre, a bizarre contradiction, which if not tragic, would have been laughable'.

*Invincible Vietnam*, as a historical documentary drama set in Vietnam, in this agonistic atmosphere could be looked as part of Left international solidarity. Though not any direct danger to arousing the masses against the state, it would also not, by any imagination, be part of the new cultural projects to promote the national Indian identity. Throughout the play, there are strong references to and critique of the Indian government's reluctance to exert pressure on the USA at the state level or to show unconditional support for the Vietnamese liberation struggle. This was the reality of the political situation and we would see a direct defiance of public opinion on Vietnam, when the then prime minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi, invited Robert McNamara<sup>8</sup> to India, including a visit to Calcutta to recommend an overhauling of the sewage system and sanction loans from the World Bank.



If the public sphere is the space where these debates and opposition to the state are played out, such theatrical performances, dramatizing a revolution in the process with strong affective impulses which only theatre can construct, were an important strategy and interacted directly with people on the streets. This was also a period of increased public demonstrations and antagonism which were configuring new modes of protests and creatively aligning the real with the symbolic in the city of Calcutta. The success of *Invincible Vietnam* in terms of audiences is a proof of that. Debesh Chakrabarty (2005, 434), one of the actors in the play, writes about how LTG was apprehensive of the reception of *Invincible Vietnam*, particularly in terms of box office and being able to sustain Minerva Theatre with a play on Vietnam, and their excitement and joy when they realized that the shows were sold out. The audience out in the streets was also eager to experience the revolution in Vietnam.

My mention of the phrase ‘audience or people out in the streets’ is based on reports from newspaper coverage in the Left papers—*Deshhitaishi* and *People’s Democracy*.<sup>9</sup> Other than covering the crisis that the communist parties were facing in their electoral politics, where the central government was constantly using various mischievous devices to overthrow the democratically elected government of the state assembly, the papers ran elaborate coverage on histories and stories of international socialist movements, where Vietnam was the most current event. Protests gathered momentum against the undemocratic overthrow of the state government leading to frequent and large rallies, protest meetings, trade unionism and other congregations. Calcutta and Bengal were being politically mobilized under the CPI (M), of which Dutt was still a supporter. The *Deshhitaishi*, in addition, carried long stories of the October Revolution, particularly on its golden jubilee, discussing Lenin’s (and a number of other leaders’) life and political trajectories, Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese Revolution, with Vietnam being the topic of the day. In 1967–1968, there are close to 50 double spreads with descriptions of the war in Vietnam, with sketches from a number of Indian artists and a day-to-day reportage. There is no issue that did not carry the story of the revolution.

The mainstream newspapers covered the protests with their own bourgeois suspicion regarding communists and chaos,

but sometimes referring to a mild statement by the prime minister and other dignitaries on Vietnam that the time had come to end colonialism in all its forms. Things came to a headway with the visit of Robert McNamara. Hundreds of people gathered at the airport to protest against his arrival where the mounted police, in trying to disperse the crowd, opened fire and injured the protesters. The next day McNamara was met with an even larger number of protesters in front of the United States Information Centre. Once again, the police and the protesters engaged in a tussle leading to deaths and injuries. All the newspapers, those affiliated to the Left as well as the mainstream ones, carried headlines and details of the clashes. The double game the Indian state was playing by not condemning the USA on Vietnam and to host the ex-secretary of state, Robert McNamara, was proof to show that the state had compromised heavily on its non-alignment solidarity which Vietnam, that was fighting an extension of anti-colonial wars, deserved. It became an apt moment to establish a Left international solidarity, with the Left parties and their wide-scale popular support taking a position against what they had already denounced as the bourgeois state's stand for the USA and as an international hypocrisy. Coming out of such a charged public sphere, *Invincible Vietnam* was the topic of the day and represented a genre of Indian political theatre, which does not draw analogies of one post-colonial nation with the other through depictions of its liberation struggle but offers solidarity and support to movements which hold out promises of egalitarianism. In these circumstances, it represented a triadic relationship between theatre in India, the experience of Vietnam and GDR's decision to support and import the performance.

## **GDR AND THE PUBLIC DOMAIN**

The notion of the theatrical public sphere is more complex in the context of the GDR, foremost because of the socialist system and its dialectical relationship to a civil society. The situations in India and the GDR, in the context of the citizen, are dissimilar. In India, what was seen as an active and visible public sphere, covering a large range of political, social and economic issues, with Left mobilization and the socialist imagination foregrounded, was, as Nirja Gopal Jayal (2013, 7) would argue, a public display of angst

and anger for not fulfilling promises of social citizenship. A notion of social citizenship and justice was only possible through an equitable distribution of material wealth and extensive social welfare, which could make Indian democratic practices a reality. Protection of private property and prioritizing interests of the middle class, post-Independence India systematically eroded the principles of social justice and social citizenship, particularly in compromising on positions which were related to inequalities, widely referred to discriminating on the basis of class, caste, religion and gender. The socialist countries, particularly the GDR, were seen as being able to fulfil notions of social citizenship by offering housing, jobs, education, health and all other benefits socialism could offer though, as Jayal (2013, 15) points out, that came at the cost of civil citizenship.

In the context of the public realm and the actual physical spaces in the cityscape, which were regarded as sites of congregations, there are some significant methodological perspectives from the scholars writing in the publications I have cited earlier. Alfred Rider, in the final concluding essay (Babiracki and Jersild 2016), refers to the cityscape, particularly the ornamental city centres, of the ex-socialist countries to illustrate metaphorically what Balibar would read as the phantom public sphere. The destruction and subsequent post-war reconstruction, he argues, tried to re-envisage a cityscape according to socialist realism to memorialize and consecrate the liberation of these countries by the Red Army. For the GDR, the historical anomaly of liberation also meant a liberation from its own armies. In the same vein, as Richter's (2016) references to the city landmarks show, it also implied building memorials of dead soldiers, statues of Left icons with even army generals being consecrated in town squares, streets and public spaces. These, according to Richter, were now replanned to host celebrations of anniversaries of national liberation and socialist revolutions by showcasing military might and curated ensembles of dance and pageantry. Babiracki (2016, 87–96), writing on Warsaw between 1957 and 1964, reads the city as a Bakhtinian chronotope but dystopic and describes how public congregations, dialogues and conversations were moving from public sites into youth clubs.

In relation to the GDR and its cities—Berlin, Leipzig or Rostock—there were similarities but also discordant notes in the cityscape so reminiscent of the socialist world, as Richter lays out

without making local or specific distinctions. Rostock particularly being a maritime city is dominated by its sea line. The sea-facing facade remains as a replica of the city's medieval and early modern history though the theatre building is a relatively modern architecture. In the analysis of the public domain and its characteristics, I argue that the theatre played a similar role to the clubs, but in a more public fashion and all actual efforts to reduce it into a 'party-minded socialist' institution could never be completely realized as no normative formula could be constructed and, more importantly, implemented in actuality. What has been suggested as a party or state-controlled theatre is always defied by the difficulties to contain theatrical signifiers, theatre institutions and its people both from inside and outside.

Since theatre in the GDR or socialist countries could not indulge in sheer formalism or inane entertainment, devoid of relevant content in relation to socialism, it became the most important cultural manifestation to explore tensions between ideals and reality. Kyrill Kunakhovic (2016, 2017) describes the career trajectory of Karl Kayser, very similar to Perten, as the long-term intendant of Leipzig Theatre and a committed communist party member, as a comparable micro-history. Through his example we are made aware of the hybrid nature of theatre and how it often deviated from official lines to stay relevant and effective. Kunakhovic describes how Kayser resisted socialist realism and imports from the USSR and continued to adopt European drama and those like Arthur Miller. He was also influenced by Polish theatre and the smaller spaces of more experimental drama to open the cellar theatre in Leipzig. He adopted agit prop from the USSR and when the criticality of the 1980s came upon the socialist world, introduced Mikhail Shatrov, Chinghiz Aitmatova and Mikhail Roshchin into the GDR theatre with an advocacy of aesthetic openness but political criticality. Kunakhovic (2016, 150, quoting Kayser from 'Gute Leistungsarbeit', 7–8) sees in such work the seeds of a self-reflexive criticality that would, as put by Kayser, 'abandon all whitewashing, half-truths and empty decorations and instead illuminate the contradictory process of our lives'. It is this self-criticality which he then argues,

In Leipzig as in Moscow, such works unleashed a flood of open political debates that proved impossible to rein in. Above all,

the small intimate venues that Kayser developed at the ST, provided space for public gathering and conversation, becoming 'niches' of civil society in the GDR. (Kunakhovic 2016, 152)

Stories of the GDR theatre are replete with such histories which challenged, resisted, asserted and negotiated to make theatre a vibrant space of debate and discussions. Barthel and Perten were both known for their commitment and engagement to find new texts and new idioms and were shrewd administrators. Perten, as the director of the Rostock theatre at that time, was known to be an ardent advocator of international collaborations and adapted a number of Latin American plays in the GDR, in addition to Peter Weiss, Rolf Hochhuth and others. The preoccupation with Europe, which dominates scholarship on the socialist countries, leaves out these important connections with the non-aligned world or the Global South and efforts to form alternate networks of community, maybe even challenging its transnational entities.

What is significant in the early 1960s is the guiding impulse for dialogues, which were based on socialist ideological grounds and their efficacy among the audiences. The GDR theatre had a large public acceptance with almost 16 million as an audience attending theatres out of a population of 17 million (Nagy, Phillippe, and Rubin 2008, 348). The reviewer in the *Theater der Zeit* wrote:

Seldom have I attended a theatre performance where all members of the cast devoted their talents with such strength of feeling and determination to a play as happened at the premiere of the documentary drama 'Invincible Vietnam' at the Volkstheater. Small wonder that the flame of solidarity with the heroic people of Vietnam, sparked off on the stage, spread to the whole of the audience. What reaches us in the daily reports and information on the war and the sufferings in that 'distant land', becomes in this production, with this play, living reality. The dramatic means of the theatre are employed here to stir people's feelings and to present them from possibly accept things; the spectator is made to face a decision which he cannot escape. This is not a comfortable evening, no run-of the mill theatrical event. The production provokes hatred and a feeling of sympathy. It leaves the spectator with the conviction: Vietnam concerns us all. (Gebhardt 1967)

The collaboration then was expected to initiate complex mediations to explore the potentials of connecting people to people.

Hans-Martin Künz, in his monograph *Schaubühnen der Öffentlichkeit*, while writing on Dutt's work with the yatra, the popular theatre of West Bengal and his political theatre, also devotes a short section to *Invincible Vietnam* and, in particular, three German newspaper reviews. Despite the absence of free press in the GDR, the reviews were contrary to each other. *Neues Deutschland* (1967, quoted in Künz 2017, 82–83) in a complementary vein reported the play as 'a flaming appeal for peace and humanism, as a morally destructive indictment against misanthropic US imperialism and as a song of praise for the heroism of the Vietnamese people'. The *Ostsee Zeitung* was rather dismissive about the play text not being up to German standards and attributed it to the inexperience of the playwright. The West German newspaper, *Der Spiegel*, highlighted the anti-US stance, and in the Cold War environment, a critical focal point, shedding light on what was deemed as significant in the play's perspective. (Künz 2017, 82–83).

In the Utpal Dutt Foundation archive in Kolkata, I unearthed the DDR Review (1967, No. 10) reporting on the collaboration and making two pertinent points: first, the intention behind inviting *Invincible Vietnam* was to understand the liberation war in Vietnam from perspectives other than as an American tragedy, as was the dominant narrative in the West, and as an event that an Asian director would know better; and second, to create public consciousness about Vietnam. The article mentions that before starting rehearsals, they were in touch with the mission of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam in the GDR. Photos and newspaper reportage of the event, on which the play was based, were collected and read to help the sceneries and costumes. Documentaries were shown to the cast and a student, Trans Duc Hiep,<sup>10</sup> was consulted and the trade unions were invited to watch the dress rehearsal. The article makes the further claim that while the programme was on, the monthly donation to the Vietnam Solidarity Fund increased fourfold (DDR Review 1967, No. 10).

This line of cultural exchange stopped around the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, there was no overture from the GDR to Dutt. The 1970s (like the 1960s) in India were turbulent times

leading to open antagonism, with theatre taking on a very strong oppositional stance to the Emergency of 1975–1977. Dutt's plays were banned and censored but he continued to play a significant role against the state's hegemony. Meanwhile acting in the film industry, Dutt had also attained a nationwide popularity and stardom. The next encounter with the GDR would only come in the mid-1980s when he travelled with his troupe and a play on the Indian rebellion of 1857 to the theatre festival in the GDR.

## **REVIVING THE IMAGINATION OF INTERNATIONALISM IN THE 'PERMANENT REVOLUTION' IN VIETNAM**

In the 1960s, the term 'internationalism' and what it entailed still reverberated in cultural practices though deprioritized from the larger political and economic debates. With socialism established and consecrated as one-state socialism extending to one-region socialism (Eastern Europe) and its ensuing containment policies, the principles of internationalism had been marginalized to a large extent and the gap between imagination and reality were widening. It is not mere idealism, however, to attribute theatrical imagination of internationalism inherent in socialism, in the collaboration and particularly in the play and the performance of a revolution in Vietnam, depicting the heroism of the peasants and the proletariat.

The play and the collaborative process in many ways fall back on the vision of internationalism, which opposes imagining the socialist country as a mere nation or, as it would subsequently become, claustrophobic spaces of nation creating frontiers. The period under discussion was, therefore, when new possibilities of a 're-unification of European socialism was indeed possible as was perhaps a revival of Marxism in its original vision (and a return to the thesis of the Communist Manifesto), whereby 'the Communists do not form a separate party ... (they are) the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country'. Instead, laments Balibar, it 'brought about their irreversible antagonism, their instrumentalization by the politics of the blocs, and the radical impossibility of combining the idea of European unification with a politics of class even a simple social politics' (Balibar 2004, 91). To Balibar's argument regarding Europe, I would bring in the world at large. In 1967,

the year of the production, the world was moving into the protests of 1968, which Balibar again reads as a moment of lost possibility and the inability of the Eastern European nations to reach out for an international dialogue. I read into this lost possibility, which could have marked the idealism of internationalism, the coming together of the symbolic and the real through the staging of Vietnam, which lies at the centre of the collaboration, and maybe also a lost moment when dialogues mediated by theatre could bring back the much-needed conversations among the workers and peasants of the world.

The story set in Vietnam, however, is also not contained within Vietnam as a nation-state but incorporated as reaching out to the socialist world *per se*. We learn of the unconditional support given to Vietnam by all the socialist states in the world and a solidarity which is based on a deep comradeship. These are not exhibited through aid or help in any militaristic sense but depicted with food and medical provisions, not forgetting the little luxuries of life such as coffee and cigar from Cuba or cigarettes from the USSR.

The pulse of internationalism is, however, more apparent in the unique and recurrent reference to the people, workers and peasants of the USA. While suffering the terrible attacks and tortures, there is always the redemption for the poor and the common people of the USA and the constant reminder that this is the war against the state and government of the USA and not its people. Amongst the American soldiers there is a radio operator of Afro-American origin, who silently watches the oppression, incited by rabid racism, which is being inflicted on the Vietnamese people. His job is to operate the radio and maintain communication with other battalions. He sits at the back and as a duty-bound soldier, observes all silently but continues to do his job. The radio message to be sent for fresh military provisions could destroy the guerrilla strategy, but it does not deter him from continuing to help the US Army. His instrumentalization in the circumstances is paradoxical as he is also subjected to racist abuse by his superiors. At the end, when the American soldiers are being led out as prisoners, he turns around to Truc and pays his respect: 'You are incomparable. There is no defeat for Vietnam' (Dutt 1995, 213).

The more dramatic and poetic expressions of international solidarity are in the tributes which Dr Vinh pays during his torture



to Walt Whitman. In his audacious efforts to thwart the Americans, he opens with Whitman's tribute to Asia. The poem becomes the background to his torture when he admits to be in collision with the revolutionaries, thus inviting retribution and use of poisonous gas blinding him while he continues reciting lines from Whitman to keep the morale up and build on the drama. Intercepting his own recitation, he pays tribute to the American citizens who were coming out in large numbers to convey support for Vietnam and demanding the withdrawal of the US Army, particularly Norman R. Morrison, who immolated himself in Washington. Before collapsing from the pain and agony, in a robust gesture, Dr Vinh moves candidly from Whitman to Hu, the Vietnamese poet.

'My Vietnam, a strange country—

Children are fighters—heroes

Flowers and Fruits are war weapons.' (Dutt 1995, 202)

The underlying principles of internationalism, both in the text of the play and the nature of the interaction, resonate more with the idealism of socialism, focusing on workers and peasants across three countries, mediated by theatrical labour engaging artists, audience and many others involved in the process beyond the state apparatus. Vietnam in reality and the dramatic imagination is representative of the Asian peasantry as a whole—disciplined, strategic, visionaries, commonsensical and in no way unequal to its European counterpart. Unlike a number of Marxist thinkers, who spoke on internationalism including its original formulator, Trotsky, internationalism is not only conversation and solidarity amongst the proletariat of the advanced nations but also the Global South which was attaining independence from colonial rule. For the Indian and other post-colonial nations, the dangers of the nation and state ideologies were as dangerous as for the socialist countries and internationalist dialogue was the need of the hour.

In this hour of dual needs, both for the socialist and post-colonial worlds, emerged an imagination of internationalism, which included the very critical category of race and if the decolonized nations were to be included in the vision, this was something which could no longer be omitted. Here the post-colonial nations,

be it Vietnam or India, had something critical to contribute. Silsby, albeit dismissively, refers to the Soviet version of 'Black Belt theory' of internationalism, which linked 'African-American experiences to the suffering of Soviet 'national minorities' under the Tsarist regimes (Silsby 2017, 47). Literally borrowing from Lenin's article in *Pravda*, he explains: 'A history of extended physical and psychic pain that extended beyond mere economics and that was systematically exerted on the Russian serf and American slave, became a means of transferring the memory of enslavement' (Silsby 2017, 48). What is worth looking at is the focus on experiencing a common embodied suffering and pain, which points at an ongoing dialogue and actual performative relations through visceral feelings of pain bringing different people together. In the 1960s, for a world recovering from both Nazi and colonial racial discrimination, this was an important starting point of communication and dialogue which could in many ways reach out to people all over the world with empathy and the mutual experience of pain. In such a paradigm, the contributions from the Indian text and the theme of Vietnam had a lot to contribute. Performing pain is an important discourse in the discipline of theatre and performance studies, which draws people together by the mediation of the phenomenological bodies. The Vietnamese revolutionaries were performed by Indian and German actors and the audiences in both these countries were anticipated to experience the visceral feeling which circulates and reaches out to the one who suffers.

## **SEEKING COLLABORATIONS ON IDEOLOGICAL GROUNDS**

The collaboration and debates around the play text, as I have tried to argue, are contrary to the macro-historical narratives of recent scholarship on Cold War which views the 'First' and the 'Second World' cultural practice from an exclusive Eurocentric perspective. Such scholarship regards all performance practices in the socialist countries as a derivative manifestation of political, economic and cultural state policies, further designed, controlled and dominated by the USSR with no autonomy of their own. Defining their scope as such restricts any reference to non-aligned countries of the Global South like India and possibilities of exchanges which are

outside such restrictive frameworks. The collection of essays edited by Balme and Szymanski-Dull (2017) and Babiracki and Jersild (2016), which I have mentioned earlier, emerging out of sponsored academic projects play into the binaries of socialism and democracy and are premised on the fact that the end of socialist state powers reflects the triumph of capitalism. The histories such scholarship depicts through case studies illustrate an already framed critique of ‘dominance without hegemony’,<sup>11</sup> a term I borrow from the subaltern studies historians, and the performance practices are nothing more than its manifestation. Some of the tensions in such control-dominant models are sometimes pointed out to show the heroism of the individual artists. Actual performance histories and the practices they engage with are far more complicated and the contradictions, however rare, need to be highlighted, and *Invincible Vietnam* may easily be read as an apt example to represent the alternatives.

Balme and Szymanski-Dull (2017), particularly in contextualizing theatre or performance practices, prioritize ‘transnationalism’ rather than seeing them as being global in their scope. The chosen term ‘transnationalism’, quoted from Kiran Klaus Patel, is defined as ‘transnational constellations, where the nation continues to play an essential role’ (Balme and Szymanski-Dull 2017, 3). Unlike the USA and examples from Western democracies where the nation is an apt entry point, for the socialist countries, as pointed out by Balibar, the nation-state framework was their greatest weakness and anomaly. According to Balibar, it moulded post-revolution countries into the nation-state framework, which remained a contradiction in terms (Balibar 2004). If the nation-state framework was not the obvious premises for a socialist-cultural imagination, then the inherent coercion would show signs of the struggle and still carry some residuals of the revolution and its memory, which questions and also challenges the very nation-state compromise and reveals it as a contradiction in terms.

In macro-historical terms, the period under consideration here, 1966–1967, would be attributed to Nikita Khrushchev and his attempts to open up relations between the USSR and the world, as a departure from Stalin’s containment visions which lay at the root of debates between socialism in one state/region (or Great Leap) vis-à-vis a permanent revolution. This phase, starting off with Khrushchev and Bulganin’s visit to India in 1955, not only

ensured a long-term friendship between India and the USSR, and in extension the other socialist countries, but it also enabled the shift towards state-level exchanges. Cultural products coming out of state-level exchanges are usually through artistes who comply with the state and showcase the essentialist national character amid celebration and pageantry. The carnivalism of such sites is suspect, as Baz Kershaw tells us, following the ritualistic and cathartic manifestations where the political is submerged and no creative configuration emerges between the symbolic and the real in the performance (Kershaw 1999, 107).

Political creativity with its agonistic potential in theatre or the theatrical public sphere was matched in occasional repertoires such as *Invincible Vietnam*. This particularly so, as I would like to argue, in the absence of an active civil sphere, as a powerful institution creating its own theatrical public sphere, which gave theatre in the socialist countries its vibrancy and self-criticality. Micro theatre events rarely follow state cultural policy dictates except in a nominal form and assert plurality in cultural practices. Balme and Szymanski-Dull's histories dwell on some of these occasional examples of tensions and defiance by the artists and hard negotiations, which are often a two-way process, for example, Helene Weigel's negotiation with the SED (Barnett 2017) and Sokorski's with the Polish authorities (Szymanski-Dull 2017) or Paul Robeson's third visit to the USSR, where he makes a critical allusion to the state as compared to his earlier euphoria (Silsby 2017). What is totally missing is Balme's own former formulations of the theatrical public sphere which, I have argued, played a role agonistic to the larger public sphere, critiquing autocratic dominance and various efforts to 'phantomize' it. Given that particularly in the GDR there was a large theatre-going public and audience, the passivity or invisibilized presence attributed to them is suspect and anomalous.

The theatrical dialogue enabled by *Invincible Vietnam* and many others reveal these contradictions and anomalies at various moments in Indian and GDR histories, where the political is equal to realizing the potentials of the socialist imagination and its ideological foundations vis-à-vis the reality of the nation-state's dominance. This is what kept the GDR and Indian political theatre vibrant and charged up.

Scholars like Balibar read in the national–internationalism dichotomy one of the reasons for the downfall of state socialism and lost possibilities. He poses the pertinent question of how internationalism could have penetrated through the constrictions of the nation-state structures, making a reference to Antonio Gramsci, ‘Gramsci without allowing himself to be deceived by the Marxist ideology of the “end of state” diagnosed this weakness by showing that the type of state constructed by the Bolsheviks were incapable of hegemonising “civil society” that is stimulating to its self-organization’ (Balibar 2004, 81). On another occasion, he also points out that recent scholarship is based on the premise that state socialism had no civil society. If it did, and that is what I have tried to argue through theatre in the public realm, then engaging with civil society opens up ways for writing performance histories which in turn allow us to address critical debates between nationalism and internationalism, and direct one to rethink critically of the gaps between ideals and reality. In the absence of a substantial archive, it is therefore more urgent to research, reconstruct and write on such micro-events, particularly as Balibar points out that the downfall of state socialisms could not create a unified Europe. Instead, it actually created a historical continuity from the Cold War eulogization of nation-states to the recent xenophobia and an aggressive nationalism based on racism, closing of borders and populism not only in Western Europe but also in the rest of the world (Balibar 2004, 98–100). The genre of performance cultures and histories, which believed in an inclusive world of dialogue and communication, is the need of the hour, not only for cultural memories but also for continuing with that genre of performance practices in a world where state-sponsored populist cultures are being propagated by conservative despotic regimes across the world.

## CONCLUSION

The case study of *Invincible Vietnam* and the entanglement between India and the GDR, against the backdrop of the Cold War or transnational constellations of cultural practices, is an aim to explore exceptions and does not fit into the overarching macro-cultural histories. It may have been then, and also now, ‘ineffacious’ (Fischer and Katsouraki 2017, 18) in the larger scheme of themes, but as I

have tried to argue, critical and significant because it challenges the uncritical adoption of nation-state frameworks to study Cold War cultures. The very fact that the performances happened substantiates Balibar's reference to possible lost alternatives to nation-state framings. Theatrical events or theatrical public spheres operate within the larger public sphere and manifest tensions and anxieties inherent in them. In this context, I have also tried in this chapter to read internationalism as inclusive of the Global South, the newly emerging post-colonial nations, which were working out their own priorities in terms of democratic practices, socialist principles and civic and social citizenship, whereby solidarities with socialist countries strengthened oppositional voices. The fragmented archival material recovered for this purpose, particularly around the play and its staging, has allowed for realizing the abstraction of internationalism into lived material conditions of theatre history. To ignore this history, as I argue, is actually to deny the very concept of entanglements of its complexities. By drawing our attention to a dialogue across continents on themes of a revolutionary war in Vietnam, this chapter has tried to unravel exactly these complexities which offer the potential of engaging with theatrical imagination outside the simplifying ambits of nation-state frameworks.

## NOTES

1. While numerous German texts were imported into India in the post-independence phase, there were very few and rare Indian contemporary texts which were adopted and performed in the GDR. Germany, of course, has a long history of interest in ancient Indian texts, particularly in the German discourse around Orientalism.
2. Organized under the title *KuBa (Kurt Barthel)-Archiv* (under the holding *Literaturarchiv*) of the ADK Archives, Berlin. For files related to *Invincible Vietnam* specifically, see files KuBa 389, KuBa 577 and KuBa 579.
3. *Entsendung einer Delegation der ‚Kleinen Theatergruppe Kalkutta‘ unter Leitung von Utpal Dutt in die DDR, 1965–1968*, DR 1/18785, BArch, Berlin.
4. In another essay on the centenary of the October Revolution, I have tried to argue that there always remains the gap between the imagination of the revolution and the reorganization of the state under the dictatorship of the proletariat, particularly in terms of the USSR (Dutt 2019).

5. Dutt's works from the early 1960s were influenced by the GDR and USSR theatre aesthetics. His earlier production *Kallol*, which ran for four years, bore strong similarities with the Soviet production of *Optimistic Tragedy*, which he had seen in a previous trip to the USSR. He had also seen a number of plays in the GDR and always remained enthusiastic of experiments in the theatre there.
6. The Naxalbari revolt refers to an armed peasant revolt in 1967, in West Bengal, India. It was led by local tribal and radical Communist leaders and led to the split between the CPI (ML) and other legitimate left parties in 1969. The leaders' ideologues were inspired by the Chinese revolution (1949) and the Vietnam War.
7. Dutt and his theatre group, the *Little Theatre Group*, had taken lease of the Minerva Theatre in Calcutta, Beadon Street. The political controversies and losses incurred huge debts, and they abandoned the theatre in 1969.
8. Robert MacNamara served as the United States Secretary of Defense between 1961 and 1968 and played a major role in escalating the US involvement in Vietnam. In the face of losses in Vietnam and growing pressure from the public at home, he resigned to become the president of the World Bank. He was visiting Calcutta in his capacity as the president of the World Bank.
9. The *Deshitaishi* (weekly) and *People's Democracy* (weekly) were newspapers of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). After the split in 1968, the CPI (ML) published their own organ, *Deshabrati* (weekly).
10. Tran-Dec Hiep was a Vietnamese student, living in Vietnam, who was called in to advise and consult during the rehearsal process. Subsequently, GDR also took the initiative to host Vietnamese students and workers for education and training.
11. 'Dominance without hegemony' according to the subaltern historians, particularly Ranajit Guha, is a paradox, which marks the difference between the ex-colonial states and the metropolitan bourgeois states, which could claim to dominate with hegemony, where persuasion outweighed coercion. It could also be applied to the socialist states to a certain extent.

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# WARM WAVELENGTHS

Radio Berlin International during  
the Cold War in India\*

*Anandita Bajpai*

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### INTRODUCTION

Radio Berlin International (RBI), also called the ‘voice of the German Democratic Republic (GDR)’, began its journey as an international broadcasting station on 20 May 1959. Until the last broadcast aired on 2 October 1990, after which the station was merged into Deutsche Welle (DW) as the sole German foreign broadcaster of a reunified Germany, it had been on air for over 31 years (Odermann 2003, 9). The station was an important medium for presencing the GDR in five continents across the world. Its South East Asian Department aired shows in English, whereas the Hindi Division, established as a part of the department in 1967, particularly targeted Hindi-speaking audiences in India. The story of the radio station’s Hindi Division will unfold in two directions in this chapter: first, from the perspective of those behind the microphone—the presenters, translators and journalists of the Hindi Division—and second, from the perspective of those glued to the radio set—the listeners’ clubs of the station in India. The rich written, visual, oral and aural sources which inform this truly entangled history of India–GDR relations have hitherto not been the subject of any systematic research endeavours. These sources uncover entangled pasts that spatially span across an urban European setting of Berlin as the broadcasting capital of the GDR and vast stretches of suburban and rural India.

The main points that I wish to draw home in presenting this entangled history are: (a) that these are pasts shaped and styled mutually by actors on both the sides of the spectrum. Indian listeners are not just passive receivers of Cold War ‘propaganda’ stemming from the socialist countries but active co-shapers of a truly intertwined making of the medium and its content; (b) that a holistic history of the station’s trajectory in India necessitates unpacking archival written and sound sources, housed at the archives in Potsdam,<sup>1</sup> as well as giving due cognizance to what lies beyond the official archive, whereby private collections and oral history become essential in filling gaps left looming large by archival silences. Thus, my intervention will illustrate how to write a history of these exchanges, the archives extend into the domain of memory. Individual actors are the carriers of an oral repertoire through their narratives. Photographic and material sources (objects) add an important tactile dimension to such histories; (c) to explore how the station became a site of lived local internationalisms for actors on both the sides, the journalists as well as the listeners. For the presenters, most of whom were citizens of the GDR and speakers of Hindi, the radio station was a medium of exchanging with a country they were studying and learning of and from, but which most had never been to.<sup>2</sup> For the listeners, it became a means of inserting oneself into the wider world, a politically charged one, through letters, listeners’ clubs and literature.

## RADIO BERLIN INTERNATIONAL

The station, located at the Funkhaus on Nalepastrasse 18–50, 1160 Berlin, GDR, began broadcasts in 1959. Overall, the departments were divided into two large blocks—*Kapitalistische Länder* (capitalist countries) and *National Befreite Staaten* (national liberated states). Within the latter, departments aired programmes in Kiswahili, Portuguese and French (for countries in Africa); Spanish and Portuguese (Latin America); Arabic (for the *Arabische Welt* or Arab world); English and Hindi (for countries in Southeast Asia and South Asia). Within the South East Asia Department, two programmes catered simultaneously to Indian ears—the English Division, which found listeners primarily in English-speaking urban, suburban India and several South Indian federal states and

the Hindi Division, whose popularity stretched more over semi-urban towns and villages in the Hindi-speaking states of India. This distinction in listenership becomes clear if one maps the places from where listeners wrote to the station. The information that I could collect, based on fan mail sent to the English Department and systematically archived in the radio station's holding at the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv in Potsdam and from photographic evidence from private collections of one of the Hindi Division journalists (where listeners give elaborate details of their spatial coordinates on the backside of the photographs) as well as a list from the database of the station's only computer, reveal a vast stretch of locations spread across India.<sup>3</sup> That the Hindi Division's outreach extended to towns and villages also feeds into how an active performance of local internationalism(s) became the prime motivation for listeners to remain loyal to the station, an argument that I develop later in the chapter.

## Hindi Programme

The Hindi shows were usually aired at 1230 hrs, 1430 hrs, 1600 hrs (Indian Standard Time) and again on the following morning at 0830 hrs during the 1970s. From 1989 onwards, this changed to shows aired at 1300 hrs, 1500 hrs, 1600 hrs, and 0700 hrs and 0830 hrs<sup>4</sup> on the following morning. All shows were a repetition of the first show aired each afternoon, but the news section (*Nachrichten/Tageskommentar* or TAKO) was constantly updated and renewed. The contents of the show were of a highly diverse nature. These included, among others, certain centrally produced features which were the same for each department of the station, like TAKO, *Aktuell* and *Presseschau* (news overview and current affairs). *Hörerpost* or the listeners' post features incorporated mail-bag programmes such as *Thank You for Writing*, *YAWA—You Ask, We Answer* and *Question of the Month (Frage des Monats)* for the English Division and *Aapki Chitthi Mili* (we have received your mail) and *Aapne Poocha Hai* (you have asked us) for the Hindi Division. A special weekly feature on sport was titled *Khel-kud Ke Samachar* (sports news). An important constituent of the content was informing Indian audiences of 'Life in the GDR', a phrase that is repetitively employed in not just RBI's vocabulary but finds

resonance in all cultural diplomacy related publications of the GDR.<sup>5</sup> Features that would introduce Indians to the GDR, in East German voices, included *GDR Darshan* (a view into the GDR) and *Wah Desh Jisme Hum Rehte Hain* (*Das Land in dem wir leben*, the country in which we live). A regular feature was done on India–GDR relations every week. ‘World peace’, ‘anti-fascism’ and ‘anti-imperialism’ were an important element of GDR’s foreign policy and resonated in its international rhetoric. It is, thus, no surprise that another regular feature of the show was the *Friedenssendung* or the Peace Reportage titled *Kadam Badhao Aman Ki Khatir* (take a step forward towards peace). Given the high (and ever increasing) frequency of listeners from India, from 1983 onwards, a special feature titled *Naye Mitron Ke Patr* (letters from our new friends) was started to especially address new listeners’ clubs of the Hindi Division. The DX Programme<sup>6</sup> was another platform of direct exchange through letters and reports between the presenters and the listeners. Two new features that were added after 1989 included the *Berlin Tagebuch* (Berlin Diary) and *Leseprobe* (Hindi renditions of the works of Müller, Heine, Goethe and Brecht). Thus, immense importance was accorded to enabling direct conversations with people in India.

## Sources

The RBI holding of the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv located in Babelsberg, Potsdam (RBI Asienredaktion 1970–1990 [4lfm]) gives an overview of bureaucratic everyday procedures of the Hindi and English departments (1980–1990), assessment reports whereby department heads gauge the popularity of programmes and record the increase/decrease in the frequency and statistics of fan mails for each individual department (*Hörerpostauswertung* 1972–1976, *Entwicklungstendenzen* from the 1970s), detailed transcripts of two shows aired in English where Indian listeners figure prominently (*YAWA* and *Thank You for Writing*; from the 1970s onwards and 1988–1990), transcripts of the short feature *Question of the Month* (*Frage des Monats*, *Kurzantwort* 1987–1990) and release permits (*Freigabebescheinigung*) which give a detailed list of programmes aired everyday along with the names of the moderators (1970–1990). Another holding consists of ca. 200 recorded magnetic tapes of the

shows aired between 1988 and 1990. Besides these written and oral archival sources, in-depth interviews<sup>7</sup> have been conducted with several journalists of the station. A view into the world of the individual listeners and the listeners' clubs has been obtained through in-depth interviews conducted in India, via recollections of the journalists visiting their fans in India (both before and after the shutdown of the station), readings from the personal diary of one of the presenters upon her visit to India in 2000, photographic material sent by the listeners to the radio station and souvenirs and material objects gifted by the station to the listeners.

## **RESEARCHING RADIO**

Radio broadcasting has helped reconfigure spaces and people across the globe since its very inception in the 1920s. In India, radio has long been a powerful instrument for projecting the Indian nation. The British colonial regime was aware of the powers of radio broadcasting as both a '[a] magical device to reach past the nationalist movement to a more malleable rural population' (Lelyveld 1994, 113) and as a political instrument that could be deployed against the Raj. In independent India, radio broadcasting became a centralized state tool for consolidating and integrating national identification and was placed under the control of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. On a more international level, the Cold War ushered a renewed worldwide emphasis on radio broadcasting as a channel for public diplomacy and soft power. With the transistor radio enabling a wider reception of international wavelengths from the 1960s onwards, new contact zones emerged for local Indian listening communities. While the state-run All India Radio (AIR) was considered one of the crucial 'vehicles of nation building' (Pinkerton 2016, 57) in the newly independent nation-state's five-year plans, international broadcasting services also paved their way to Indian ears during the Cold War.

Thus, since the early Cold War years, non-aligned India became a battlefield for acoustic competition and sonic affiliation. Some of the most popular voices with a listener base during the Cold War years were Radio Moscow, Voice of America (VOA), Radio Ceylon, Radio Beijing, Radio Tashkent, Radio Budapest, NHS Japan and BBC World's Hindi Service, besides DW and RBI. Scholarship

on radio in South Asia has attracted historical attention in several contexts. Research on the origins of radio broadcasting in colonial India (Lelyveld 1994; Pinkerton 2008b); on community radio and its presence in people's everyday life, especially when referring to rural and 'remote' India; radio and nation-building projects in post-colonial India (Jayaprakash 2000; Nirmala 2015); radio as a producer of national culture; the nationalization of Indian classical music through radio (Duggal 2018; Hughes 2002; Lelyveld 1994); the popularity of songs and music in AIR; the intersecting trajectories of AIR and Bombay Cinema (Punathambekar 2010)—these are themes which have been well explored. Within the domain of international broadcasting, however, especially during the Cold War years, research has primarily been limited to systematic studies of BBC (Pinkerton 2008a; Pinkerton and Dodds 2009) and its ban in 1970.

Internationally, research on radio and the penetration of the 'Iron Curtain' by broadcasters are also topics that have been explored more recently (Johnson and Parta 2012; Kind-Kovács 2103; Puddington 2000; Risso 2013; Stahl 2010). Within Europe, Western broadcasters such as Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty targeted the East European and socialist countries more generally (Cummings 2009, 2010; Johnson 2010), whereas BBC's German service and Radio in the American Sector specially turned to procuring audiences in the GDR (see Major 2013). Berlin was a divided city resonating with ether vibrations and became a projection field of the cultural Cold War. The GDR was thus both a site of, and a contributor to, sonic competition. Scholarship has focused on domestic broadcasters such as the Berliner Rundfunk, Deutschlandsender, Radio DDR 1, Radio DDR 2 and DT 64 as well as on Western broadcasters and their reception in the GDR (Classen 2013; Oliver 2019) underscoring research on the Cold War politics of the stations. This essay contributes to existing scholarship by tracing the trajectory of GDR's foreign broadcasting station in India as an important chapter in the history of Indo-GDR entanglements specifically and Cold War history more generally.

Like its contemporaries, RBI also employed active radio-phonetic registers to increase its followership and popularity in India. The case study can be a rich addition to existing sonic histories.

These were political, transcultural and affective entanglements between broadcasting services and listeners which cannot be relegated to the colonial-colonized binary (as would be the case for BBC). Nor did the broadcaster stem from one of the two main power bloc countries, that is, the USA and the USSR (as would be the case for stations like VOA or Radio Moscow, respectively). Yet, as this chapter will show, both the GDR and India were active sites for enacting as well as co-shaping acoustic registers of Cold War international affinities and local internationalisms. Tracing the history of the radio station can, thus, offer a vibrant field of entangled interventions from the ground. Similarly, the topic offers the possibility to explore the rich potential of German archives on international radio broadcasting, hitherto not the subject of any systematic research.<sup>8</sup>

The question of control of content is inevitable when discussing RBI as GDR's state broadcasting service abroad. Scholarship on propaganda and the Cold War, the role of media in cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, and particularly radio as a tool of controlling or channelling Cold War affinities, is abundant (Campling and Salimen 1999; Cull 2008, 2010; Cull and Mazumdar 2016; Hixson 1998). Similarly, research exists on radio and television as party tools of state propaganda in the GDR (Classen 2013) or on the political control of media in the GDR more generally. As the extensive scholarship shows, however, the word 'propaganda' is increasingly also associated with broadcasters from Western countries. Given that the cultural Cold War had 'as much to do with "winning hearts and minds" as it did with arms race' (Risso 2013, 147), it is no wonder that radiophonic activities on both the sides of the so-called Iron Curtain attempted to promote their respective political causes and viewpoints (Classen 2019; Schlosser 2015; Stahl 2010). Classen (2013, 244) states, 'Of course, we should not forget that the idea of using public-service radio as a vehicle of popular education and the formation of good taste was not uncommon in West Germany for a long time after the war'. He tellingly points out that '...the media's first responsibility [from the German Empire to the early Federal Republic] was to obey the reason of the state (or party) in such a way as to submit all other functions related to the commercial or entertainment sector to the primacy of politics'. Both the cases of National Socialism and Western Europe 'seemed



to confirm the theory of the fundamental manipulability of audiences, and most Western European states staunchly defended their control in this area. This even goes for Great Britain, where commercial radio was finally allowed in the mid-1950s after a hard struggle...’ (Classen 2013, 240). It is also established that in spite of these overarching control mechanisms meant to cater to state agendas, audiences on both the sides of the ideological divide did attempt, and often successfully so, to engage with broadcasts from the other side. The problem with most scholarship on the subject, with some noteworthy exceptions (Classen 2013), is that the term propaganda is oftentimes used as a critically unreflected, given category to describe the cultural Cold War. Given that recent research has well established that forging ideological affinities as well as animosities was an ambition of actors on both sides of the ideological divide, this leads one to question the surplus of presenting the station’s history solely through the lens of propaganda. At the same time, this chapter poses the question, how can following the highly localized trajectories of the radio station and the exchange of mobile objects it enabled across a continent in Indian towns and villages add important nuances to histories of radio and affective listening during the Cold War.

Rather than writing an event history which would duly attest the truths and non-truths of the broadcasting station’s control mechanisms, this chapter asks which registers of entanglement may be explored by relying on oral history and objects as instruments for narrating the past. Here, I do not wish to propose that control mechanisms were non-existent at the radio station, but that it can be more fruitful to engage with oral narratives and the politics of time beyond the limited or limiting vocabulary of ‘propaganda politics’ and radio as an instrument for staging the Cold War, both at home and abroad. A surplus of oral history is that it can help unravel affective ties between journalists and audiences that have not made it to archival holdings, a history of entanglements from below. The chapter will show how the Hindi Division produced affective spaces (Reckwitz 2012), that is, lived, material and aesthetically charged spaces, where engagements and exchanges were not just those between two countries but felt at the level of the individual and the local listening community.

## FROM BEHIND THE MICROPHONE: VOICES THAT PRESENCE 'THE VOICE OF THE GDR'

### East German Voices in Hindi

Presenters/journalists for the station were mainly from the GDR, with the exception of a few Indians (two of whom would later also continue working for DW in 1990 and 1994, respectively, and figure prominently in my research).<sup>9</sup> Most of the journalists received their training in Hindi at the Department of South Asian Studies at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, with the station being an attractive destination for internships. The Hindi Division, thus, became an avenue for coming in contact with a world they had been studying, examining and learning about and one of whose languages they were speaking, but which most of them never had, and perhaps never would, experience physically. Not all GDR citizens could travel freely to different parts of the world. For the GDR presenters at the department, who were students of Hindi, any trips to India were state sanctioned and state controlled.<sup>10</sup> In fact, as one of them put it, 'Sandmann was the only GDR citizen who could travel without any state controls!'<sup>11</sup> The station, thus, became a means to 'use the learnt language Hindi',<sup>12</sup> as one of them recounted to me, to insert oneself in another geographically distant world. It became a channel for establishing deep bonds with thousands of Indian listeners through letters, photographs and short-wave transmissions. 'It was like travelling a different universe', 'undertaking a journey',<sup>13</sup> said one, while another presenter confirmed by saying:

Already as a child I liked India very much, I must confess. I was a collector of fairy tales. I had some 300 books and Indian fairy tales excited me as a child. I liked them very much. They brought me closer to another world. Working for the station was like living the fairy tale and later when I met my fans in India, then the tales had come true.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, Schlender, who headed the Division and was one of the first East German voices to go on air at the Division's beginning in 1967, when recounting his initial interest in India, said, 'For us, the world was very small. And the smaller one's world is, the greater is the longing for the larger world'.<sup>15</sup> This interest in another world,

which was also true for the listeners, was perhaps even enhanced through structures of control. It gave way to curiosities that were addressed through the medium of short waves and letters, enabling an enduring exchange between listeners and presenters that, in some cases, lasted over two decades. Whereas the main motive of the radio station was to bring the GDR and 'life in the GDR' closer to the people of India, for the journalists, it simultaneously opened a window to knowing and understanding India and Indian life at closer quarters.

We had to show the GDR to the listeners. Of course, there were ideological leanings. This was obvious. But I ask myself who would even talk about the GDR if not us, citizens of the GDR. So, unlike many who think there was an aggressive politics of ideologically brainwashing the world, I see it as the only possibility that a small country had available in order to talk about itself, in its own voice.<sup>16</sup>

The motivations behind working at the Division were not only limited to practising Hindi. A sustained aspiration for some of the presenters was to establish deep personal bonds with listeners. For one of the moderators, it was both surprising and inspiring to see 'that listeners had such a positive curiosity about and interest in the GDR, life in the GDR'.<sup>17</sup>

This is what impressed and excited me about my job from the very start—that they told us about their activities, their everyday lives, their problems, their achievements, that they asked so many questions. In spite of poor reception—it fluctuated!—they continued listening to us over the years. They told us about their political activism—that they sometimes organized protest marches and that they sent us pictures of all they did. So if a club had built a new street in their village, they sent a proud picture of the new street with themselves standing on it with RBI banners that we had sent to them [*smiles*].<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned to me by all interlocutors, work at the Hindi Division was relatively free of hierarchies. As a newcomer (usually during the internship), one began with reading, sorting, organizing and responding to listeners' mails. Within a short period of time,

however, one was reading news before the microphone, translating centrally coordinated news and sports features, finding interesting topics for reporting and conducting research on the same, writing features in Hindi, editing the texts written by others, conducting interviews for special features or of state visitors from India, translating special features to German and often moderating the programme on air. This marks an important difference from RBI's West German counterpart DW, where only South Asian voices went behind the microphone as presenters, whereas the background work was often done by an entire team of Germans and Indians.

Regarding East German voices on air, one of the presenters, Hoffmann, said, 'it was more convincing',<sup>19</sup> whereas Bhattacharya emphasized, 'to hear about a country in Europe in the voice of the people of that country and, to top that, in your own language Hindi—can you imagine the power of that. Listeners were amazed and convinced more with their voice than by mine as an Indian, I am sure'.<sup>20</sup> Jha, who joined the station in 1984, also mentioned, 'fans liked East German voices in Hindi. This system did not exist anywhere else (VOA or BBC) where only Indians worked behind the mic. This was only the case for socialist countries where locals also worked behind the microphone. Fans liked it a lot'.<sup>21</sup> According to Schlender, it was this unique mix of both East German and Indian voices before the microphone that gave RBI its widespread popularity in India.<sup>22</sup> Awards were given to honour work that was appreciated by the station like *Aktivist* or the *Kollektiv der sozialistischen Arbeit*, whereas special prizes were given to female winners of a competition held on the International Women's Day.

## Love as Strategy

Detailed information about each individual listener or listener club that wrote to the programme was stored in the database (Ebase 2) of the only computer of the department, as well as manually on index or record cards (see Figure 2.1).<sup>23</sup> On the cards, employees painstakingly chronicled the name, address, occupation, year of birth, interests/hobbies, political engagements, activities, name of the corresponding RBI Club or DX Club of each listener who wrote to the Division. Besides, a detailed account of the letters (year, number, arrival date) and specifics



recurrently appear in the letters of the listeners and are mentioned in the assessment reports discussing the station's popularity in India do not seem to result merely from a spontaneous bond of intimacy struck between the station and the listeners. As can be gauged from these detailed index cards, much time was invested in *showing* listeners that the station took deep interest in their lives and curiosities therein making *love* a consciously used strategy for winning loyalty.

## After Wende<sup>25</sup>

'It was a wonderfully anarchistic time.'<sup>26</sup>

The 200 magnetic tapes in the archives offer a detailed sonic insight into the content of the programme after November 1989. As in the GDR, winds of change could also be sensed in the Hindi programme's features. The listeners were writing with a force like never before to know what was about to happen to the GDR and to RBI particularly, with letters repetitively posing the question 'What will the future of a reunited Germany look like?'<sup>27</sup> One can sense a mood of uncertainty in both the lines of the listeners and the voice of the presenters. While no concrete answers were available, most such uncertainties and queries were nonetheless addressed on the show.

One of the new features after 1989, called the *Berlin Diary*, was a seven-minute intervention on how East Berlin was fast changing since the fall of the Wall. From the colour of leaves on the lime trees at Unter den Linden street to the re-writing of 'German' history in the former Historical Museum of the GDR, the hike in the prices of property on the street and the substantial decrease in the membership of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED, GDR's ruling party) and the state-loyal Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*) organization, the disappearance of Lenin from book store showcases and the arrival of new businesses which were flourishing by selling tiny pieces of the wall, soviet army attire, GDR medals and flags with Cola, Fanta, sausages and cigarettes—Berlin was fast transitioning.<sup>28</sup> The programme graphically chronicled the mood of these transitions.

At the same time, 1989–1990 was a year when journalists at the Division began addressing issues which had hitherto not been spoken about on the station. Topics now discussed on the programme included, among others, unemployment in the GDR, elections in the near future, the adoption of the West German mark and the economic crisis in East Germany, new schools with new textbooks. While the presenters did not hesitate in talking about the new liberties that people were generally experiencing in this new environment, reports were also sensitive to the sense of loss felt by many in the GDR. Features captured an increasing sense of disappointment after an initial euphoria of the fall of the Wall. Attacks on foreign nationals, a subject never touched before this period, also became a topic of discussion. In one such feature, the presenters do a nuanced analysis of the economic and social position of foreign nationals in both the GDR and FRG, therein presenting a balanced account of the conditions and contexts in which foreigners lived in both the countries instead of instinctively conforming to the view that racism was rampant only in the GDR.<sup>29</sup> In one of the shows after *Wende*, a part of the international mailbag programme is translated in the Hindi feature. The disappointment of one of the listeners from France, who wrote, ‘Up to now I was sympathetic with the GDR. Especially because of the country’s anti-fascist and peace-loving policies. I used to praise the sportspersons from the GDR. But the recent events sadden me. Why was your station silent?’<sup>30</sup> was announced in the show. In response, the presenters stated:

You can perhaps understand, dear listeners, that such a letter makes us very sad. This is because we take your criticism of our programme. It is true that until now we have reported on many issues but not pointed out to several problems in the GDR. We did this because we only presented a good image of our country and did not show the weaknesses. Now some examples.... We the workers at RBI wish to give you the assurance, dear listeners, that we will present a real picture of the changing face of socialism before you.<sup>31</sup>

The feature is replete with illustrations of problems and weaknesses that were never addressed on the show before. But this journalistic liberty did not imply an unreflected celebration of all

that was new. Features of the time are indicative of responsible, complex and sensitive journalism.

Just as for the country they were reporting about, much changed for the employees of the Hindi Division, or the radio station more generally, after *Wende*. On 25 September 1990, Wolfgang Schäuble, the Minister for Inner Affairs (Home Minister), FRG, announced the official shutdown of RBI after 2 October 1990 (Odermann 2003, 241). DW would become the sole foreign broadcaster of a reunified Germany, with approximately 21 out of a total of 250 employees at RBI being rehired and the rest losing their means of employment overnight.<sup>32</sup> Three from the Hindi team continued with new jobs at DW.

An emotionally charged last show made it to an audio-tape copy for the 10 voices that co-presented it, with each bidding adieu to their listeners. The feature reiterates that for the presenters, bonds of friendship with the listeners were at the heart of vibrant exchanges with India. This deep attachment to the listeners is well captured in the diary notes of one of the presenters, which describe her meeting with some of her ardent listeners years later in India:

‘They [listeners] said that we were like a family for them, and I said it was the same for me. They asked if I had joined RBI as a hobby and I told them that RBI was everything for me.’<sup>33</sup>

## **FROM BEHIND THE RADIO SET: LISTENERS’ CLUBS AND FANS OF RBI**

This section will shed light into the world of the listeners and their interactions and exchanges with the Hindi Division. A view into the same has been acquired through: (a) letters that were written to the English programme, transcripts of which can be accessed in the archives; (b) photographs which listeners sent to the station and are part of the private collections of one of the presenters today; (c) questions posed by listeners, which were addressed on the Hindi programme and are accessible in the sound files in the archives (1988–1990); (d) recollections of some of the presenters who personally met their fans in India and (e) conversations I had with some of the listeners of the Hindi Division from Madhepura, Bihar. It will become evident how letters, photographs and other material objects



become necessary devices to recount or reconstitute the telling of pasts. In all the parts that follow, the history of vibrant day-to-day exchanges among actors is intertwined with the presence of letters, photos, souvenirs and gifts that are woven into oral narratives.

## Engaging Curiosities

At that time, madam ji, the costs of sending posts were very high. As a listener, I wanted to be very close to the radio station, so I had to write to them at least three times a week. I used to send the letters without any stamps straight to the embassy and they took good care that these reach Berlin.<sup>34</sup>

Like Srivastava (cited above), founder of the RBI Listeners' Club (called the Lenin Club) in Madhepura, Bihar, most listeners regularly wrote lengthy letters to the station, often accompanied by photographs. After the GDR's diplomatic recognition in 1972, these were sent directly to the embassy at Nyaya Marg in New Delhi to avoid postal costs. This was confirmed by two of the presenters who actively worked for the mailbag programmes and responded regularly to listeners' letters on behalf of the Division. Each month a *dicker sack* (thick bag) of letters was sent to the radio station by the embassy and the station knew that 'the Indians had written to us again! [smiles]'.<sup>35</sup>

One of the presenters who was nicknamed *Postkönigin* (queen of posts),<sup>36</sup> because of her special role in corresponding with listeners, recounted, 'from babies to grandmothers—they all wrote to us. Some were, of course, doing it for the postcards also and were very competitive about getting the QSL cards. Fan mails were a phenomenon with the Hindi Division. We were famous for getting maximum posts'.<sup>37</sup> The letters sent by listeners open a world of curiosities, opinions and political affinities. The transcripts of programmes like *YAWA*, *Aapne Poocha Hai* (you have asked us) or *Question of the Month* (*Frage des Monats*) were dedicated solely to these queries. Whereas some listeners wanted to know more about relations between parents and children, everyday family life in the GDR, others posed questions on love and marriage. So one finds queries like 'Are marriages in the GDR love matches or arranged?'<sup>38</sup> 'What does a wedding ceremony in the GDR look like

and how much is the dowry, in case there is one?<sup>39</sup> ‘What task has a father in a GDR family in the household?’<sup>40</sup> ‘Are newlyweds in this country in a material position to furnish their own flat?’<sup>41</sup> ‘What about divorces in the GDR?’<sup>42</sup> ‘Can young men and women freely contact each other?’<sup>43</sup> ‘Can young men and women go and freely dance somewhere and do clubs also provide rooms for afterwards?’<sup>44</sup> Several questions relate to understanding the welfare state better. For example, ‘How many universities are there in the GDR?’<sup>45</sup> ‘What happens if you have become invalid following a serious illness and are no longer able to work?’<sup>46</sup> ‘How is unemployment handled in the GDR?’<sup>47</sup> ‘What is the health system like in the GDR?’<sup>48</sup> ‘What is healthcare like on the countryside?’<sup>49</sup> ‘How can young people get to university or college?’<sup>50</sup> ‘What does the government do to support gifted children?’<sup>51</sup> Questions also related to gender relations and the role of women in GDR’s society: ‘Is there equality for women in the GDR?’<sup>52</sup> ‘What is the percentage of women in the GDR *Volkskammer* (parliament)?’<sup>53</sup> ‘How many female doctors are there in the GDR?’<sup>54</sup> ‘Do women also do sport?’<sup>55</sup> ‘How many female athletes are there in the GDR?’<sup>56</sup>

Some of the general questions pertaining to the GDR, among others, are ‘What about average income in the GDR?’<sup>57</sup> ‘Are there special radio programmes for youth?’<sup>58</sup> ‘Who is the most favourite pop singer in the GDR?’<sup>59</sup> ‘How many five-star hotels does the GDR have?’<sup>60</sup> ‘Which train station is the most attractive in the GDR?’<sup>61</sup> ‘Are flying balloons popular in the GDR?’<sup>62</sup> ‘Why is the symbol of the city of Berlin a bear? We in India have a peacock, a tiger or even a lion as symbols—why the bear?’<sup>63</sup> ‘Which is the youth’s favourite sport in the GDR?’<sup>64</sup> ‘What about the situation of drugs in the GDR?’<sup>65</sup> ‘How does the legal system in the GDR work?’<sup>66</sup> In some questions one senses sarcasm as well, for example, questions like ‘Is there an opposition in the GDR Parliament?’<sup>67</sup> or ‘Last week you interviewed a crime detective novelist and we found it very exciting. But according to what we have heard so far, there is no crime in socialist countries, so why do you need a crime detective novelist?’<sup>68</sup>

Listeners’ letters were not just curious about everyday life in the GDR but also showed active interest in world politics. Whereas quite some listeners supported the station for reporting against the apartheid regime in South Africa, others were overtly critical of

the Pinochet regime in Chile and American aggression in Vietnam. Terms such as anti-fascism, peace and solidarity recurrently appear in the letters of listeners. While some listeners posed questions like 'How are anti-fascist traditions reflected in the GDR's political life?'<sup>69</sup> 'How is the GDR contributing to the struggle for peace and social progress throughout the world, to security and international cooperation?'<sup>70</sup> others expressed interest and solidarity in their words. For example, the latter question was answered on the show with the words of another listener.

The support the GDR has rendered to developing countries was also underlined by Mr S. Gautham Raj in Madras, India, in his entry to RBI's competition on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the GDR.

Speaking of GDR's efforts to help the young national states in building up their own independent economy, he says:

In the spirit of this policy the GDR has erected in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America among others over 500 complete production installations, equipment and other objects and the last several years over 3000 citizens of these countries have had the opportunity to undergo further training in the GDR free of charge. In the spirit of this successful cooperation the GDR will in future, too, consider the universal development of relations with the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America as an essential component of its foreign policy.<sup>71</sup>

Several listeners also informed the station about new clubs that they opened, whereas all regularly reported on club activities. For example, in 1974, Mr Nilotpal Das from Margram in Birbhum District of West Bengal wrote to the Department stating that he had founded a new club consisting of workers, peasants and students and that 'they all support the GDR's stand against all kinds of neocolonialism and imperialist exploitation as well as the GDR's solidarity with all peace-loving and progressive forces'.<sup>72</sup> The mailbag programme transcript quotes Das's letter, 'Although I have no experience with club work and no material in my hand, I think a radio set and a group of young progressive minded people is enough to start a club'.<sup>73</sup>

Letters addressed on the show repetitively describe activities organized by listeners. Anniversaries were a special occasion for the clubs to stage the GDR in their local surroundings and perform solidarity. For example, on the 25th anniversary of the GDR in 1974, clubs organized cultural and sports events (Panpara Club, listeners' club in Goalpara; Nadia Club, listeners' club in Liluah), a play performance of Brecht, a musical recital in Beruhat, West Bengal, or a tea party in Rohtak. Almost all clubs reported about organizing exhibitions, public discussions and debates 'dealing with the GDR's development within the 25 years of its existence, with its foreign policy and its contribution to world peace'.<sup>74</sup> Thus, as can be sensed, the letters were not just attempts to get to know another part of the world better, overflowing with curiosities, but also a way to actively inform oneself about issues in international politics through the medium of short waves, to form opinions, position oneself and express solidarity. In that sense, they indicate a means of inserting oneself in the wider world, of performing an internationalism from locales in rural and suburban India. Though one could say that the features on the programme selected questions that suited their agenda, it nevertheless shows that audiences' interests and curiosities played an important role in shaping the content of the medium.

### **Mirroring Recognition: Feeling Friendship**

The photographs sent by listeners, accounts narrated by them as well as the reunion that three of the presenters of the Hindi Division had with their most ardent fans, all point to a vocabulary of love and friendship. In this common register, RBI was popular because as a listener one felt heard on an international platform, 'one had the feeling of being taken seriously',<sup>75</sup> as Srivastava says. When asked what he means by love here, he responded with a poem he had written some years ago:

In love,  
Many wrote letters in their blood,  
Many wrote poems;  
When in love,

I rode a bicycle in an open field,  
And took several rounds,  
Without my hands on the handles. (Srivastava 2012)

Such 'loving without hands on the handles', or without any control, is in fact the gist of Srivastava's loyalty to the station even today. This unbridled love demanded careful honing and investment. The interactive format of the programme's features enabled a form of mirrored recognition, an alternating and simultaneous form of listening and being heard, seeing and being seen. Registers of friendship were facilitated by simultaneous acknowledgement. A sensory marker of feeling warmth, affection, friendship and love (*garmahat, sneh, maitreyi, prem*) was hearing one's name announced regularly on the Hindi programme. On the one hand, this implied acknowledgement (by the station) and on the other, it brought recognition in one's local listening community.

In the non-television, non-internet decade of the 1970s and the early 1980s, radio was still the only means of connecting with a wider world. In his research on Indian public spheres, Rajagopal (2009) extensively describes how the epic television series *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat*, aired on the national television channel Doordarshan in 1988–1990, played an instrumental role in forging a specific kind of Hindu and Hindi-speaking public sphere. Its outreach is best captured in his description of the silence on the streets of most North Indian cities, towns and villages on Sunday mornings and collective viewership of the series in neighbourhoods. Community radio finds its origins, in a similar vein, in collective listening, in a time prior to the onset of television. Especially in suburban and rural India, where radios were a luxury even in the 1980s, collective listening was common and played an instrumental role in the formation of listeners' clubs. Thus, when one heard her name on the radio, one did not hear it in isolation but in company. One was simultaneously recognized on air and in local collective presence. The Hindi Division assisted and even enabled this recognition by informing listeners in advance (through letters) when exactly their name would be announced on the show. In fact, for some clubs like the Lenin Club, this was a means to get new members.

I had been asking my cousin to join the Lenin Club for so long but she would never listen. Then I played a trick. She was about to get married and I sent her wedding invitation card to the radio station. Of course, I knew that they would not come to attend the wedding! [*laughs*]. But then they sent me a letter that they would announce their response in the show on such and such date. I slyly made sure that my sister listens to RBI that day and there it was! Schlender himself congratulating her on her wedding! She could not believe her ears and that day the club got a new member. Ha ha!<sup>76</sup>

Thus, whereas it was important for the radio station that they be heard by listeners in India, particularly because the programme had a larger ambition of presenting the ‘voice of the GDR’ among the people of India, the acknowledgement that the station had *heard* the listeners’ voice (through their letters) was equally important for those behind the radio sets.

While voices and letters enabled listening and being heard on both the sides, material gifts and photographs became a means to see and be seen. Listeners regularly sent photographic evidence of their loyalty to the radio station and the station responded through material objects such as information material, souvenirs, QSL cards and gifts. Such photographs are not to be found in the archives. They result from exploring other sources. In my conversations with one of the presenters, recounting the past also implied surfing through photographs. Part of her private collections today, they became ‘autobiographical objects’, a ‘story-telling device’ (Hoskins 1998), a means to recollect and retell her intensive work for the mailbag programmes and describe her close connection with the listeners through letters. Photographs are not just testimony to what was, that is, preservers of time in the sense that they freeze their content in a frame and render it static for future access. They are also material objects with highly mobile trajectories. The photographs sent by RBI listeners to the radio station evidence that photos can preserve moments, but they can also distribute histories and render them mobile. Whereas at the time they enabled RBI listeners to be seen by their presenters, years later they enable a presenter to re-narrate her past.

Some listeners sent portfolio photographs which were probably used for bureaucratic procedures in India. These photographs of everyday necessity, which one needed for all kinds of purposes ranging from a driver's licence, voter ID to a ration card, were made exclusive for the Hindi Division by writing one's name, geographical coordinates and any information about one's RBI listeners' club on the backside of the picture. For instance, passport-sized photos sent by Mr Chitranjan,<sup>77</sup> who announces himself as the president of the RBI Listeners' Club in Mughal Sarai, or Mr Jagdeep, president of the Youth Radio Listeners' Club in Pali, Rajasthan.<sup>78</sup>

Other photographs in the presenter's collection show listeners carefully posing before the camera, dressed probably in their best attire, with a staged background that confirms their loyalty to RBI. Thus, we see RBI posters or GDR flags in the background of the frame. For instance, a photograph of Mr Ajmal from Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, which shows him posing in a suit with a watch and a GDR flag, a certificate from RBI and a paper board with the title of his listeners' club in the background. Another common category of photographs is one where clubs or individual listeners proudly posed next to their radio sets. Thus, we find photographs such as those where a Mr Sukhbeer, president of the RBI Listeners' Club in Talwandi Fattu, Punjab, poses with other club members and a radio set is placed at the centre of the picture or one with Mr Bharat from Sahibganj District in Bihar posing next to his radio set with a poster of the then Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi and an RBI calendar in the background.

The private collections also include pictures such as those with Mr Sukhdev, Chairman of the Sapna Radio TV Shrota Sangh, proudly posing the turning of the radio set's tuning knob, with the title of the picture reading 'I Listen to Radio Berlin International. Indo-DDR Friendship Live Long [*sic*]' (see Figure 2.2) or one with Mrs Pandey from Bhopal, a housewife, 35 years of age, sitting next to a radio set, with the description titled as 'Would You Like an Indian Listeners' [*sic*]?'<sup>79</sup> It becomes clear that for the listeners, sending photographs to the Division was a way of evidencing that they heard RBI. Listeners wished for the station to acknowledge that it had *seen* them.

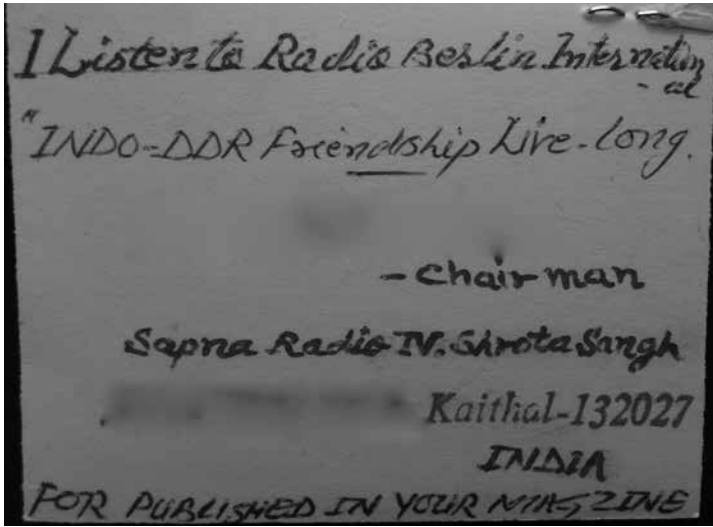


Figure 2.2 Backside of Photograph 'I Listen to Radio Berlin International'

Source: Private Collections, S. Imhof.

Note: Name and address of listener blurred to protect the identity of the listener. For accessing the image/photograph in colour, see <https://micamp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch2>

Photographs represent the listeners' engagement with the radio station and their will to prove their loyalty to the programme. They also indicate their relationship to time and waiting. It is important to mention that up to the late 1980s, the camera, just like the radio set, was a rare luxury and photographs were often taken either in small-scale photo studios or with borrowed cameras. The presence of intermediaries like photo studios becomes obvious on the backside of several photographs sent by the listeners, where a stamp of the studio marks that they were clicked or developed there. On other pictures, one finds that clubs/listeners developed their own stamps which were duly used on the backside. Negatives often needed to be developed in neighbouring big cities and the act of sending a photograph implied excitedly waiting for the developed rolls to arrive, sending the photograph to the radio station (via the embassy in New Delhi) and then patiently awaiting the radio's response.<sup>80</sup>



It is worth asking what it means to excavate such a private collection, which expands the archive, in the present context. It is clear that photographs need to be studied in their overarching contexts and not as objects existing in social isolation. Morton and Newbury (2015, 7) aptly raise the question ‘...can the visual be analytically separated from a consideration of photography’s involvement with the other senses?’ Similarly, Edwards points that ‘sensory modes beyond the merely visual are integral to the constitution of photographic meaning and usage’. For her, ‘...it is the fusion and performative interaction of image and materiality that gives a sensory and embodied access to photographs’ (Edwards 2006, 27). In the above case, these were travelling photographs, which came to the radio station in East Berlin in the 1970s–1980s and made it to the collections of a presenter upon the dissolution of the radio station in 1990. The country they were sent to no longer exists. Showing me the photographs and flipping through their pile, added new layers to the presenter’s narrative as they became ‘objects in the telling of history’ (Edwards 2006, 27). Similarly, in the case of listeners such as Srivastava in Madhepura, engaging with his club photographs from 1985, which travelled back digitally to him 35 years later (through me as the researcher who had brought copies from Berlin), the photographs became mobile autobiographical objects. These were a device used to retell, but also to recompose or reconstitute his narrative of the past. The photograph was not simply an image that ‘stood for’ or ‘represented’ a fragment of the past but an affective object that also demanded engaging other sensory faculties (speech and touch), which became even necessary for re-narrating such sonic histories.

## **Sending Solidarity**

The Cold War was cold only in its name. It had a heat and also a warmth to it. Cold warriors weren’t just Cold warriors, they were heated up—hot warriors. Each one picked their camp at the time. I picked that side where things weren’t just hot but where there was a warmth—a warmth of relationships.<sup>81</sup>

The ‘warmth’ describing Srivastava’s affinity to RBI, which also inspires the title of this chapter and the opening lines of this

volume, was reciprocated by expressing solidarity with the ideological ambitions of the GDR and sending material proof of the same through letters and photographs. Loyalty to the radio station was performed on a daily basis by clubs and individual members and staged carefully for photographic evidence. Thus, we find photographs that showed a protest march for world peace and nuclear disarmament by the Lenin Club (see Figures 2.3 and 2.4) or those sent by the Pahalwan Club which show how the club organized a seminar on Indo-GDR friendship.

On some occasions, listeners wrote about how they contributed to community work in the spirit of the message of the radio station, such as by reconstructing a street in their village or cleaning a part of their neighbourhood. One listener, Mr Jaiswal from Basti, Uttar Pradesh, sent a photograph with the backside reading that his hobby was ‘to hold discussions on how to maintain world peace and inquire about the same’.<sup>82</sup> A Mr Chadha sent



Figure 2.3 Protest March in Madhepura, Bihar, by the Lenin Club

Source: Private Collections, S. Imhof.

Note: All faces except for Mr Srivastava's (president of the club) have been blurred to protect the identity of the participants.

For accessing the image/photograph in colour, see <https://micasmp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch2>



Figure 2.4 Protest March in Madhepura, Bihar, by the Lenin Club

Source: Private Collections, S. Imhof.

Note: All faces except for Mr Srivastava's (president of the club) have been blurred to protect the identity of the participants.

For accessing the image/photograph in colour, see <https://micasmp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch2>

photographs of celebrations organized by his club on Berlin's 750th anniversary as 'The City of Peace'.<sup>83</sup> Solidarity was also *shown* by informing the station that one had named one's listener club the RBI Peace Radio Listeners' Club,<sup>84</sup> that one had won a heavy weightlifting competition!<sup>85</sup> or by publishing a journal on the message of world peace, such as the newsletter titled *Aman Ki Aawaaz: Antarrashtriya Shanti Mitra Ko Samarpit* (The Voice of Peace: Dedicated to International Peace and Friendship), named after one of the features of the Hindi programme.<sup>86</sup> As indicated in the section above, part of staging solidarity with the radio station, and in turn with the GDR, was to show solidarity on international events. This had the dual purpose of being recognized as a 'friend' of the radio station and of inserting oneself in international politics, perhaps particularly important for those living away from big cities. One

graphic example of ‘sending solidarity’ can be read in the following lines announced on both the Hindi and the English programmes of the South East Asia Department. The moderator states:

What impressed me most of the report of the RBI Club of Jamshedpur was their discussion on Chile. The members write ‘Everyone was interested and expressed his views. Of course, opinions differed. We played extracts from RBI programmes dealing with Chile. We also read out passages from the book “The GDR’s fervent solidarity with the courageous Chilean people.” We understood during the course of the discussion that most of the audience were ill-informed or relied on false news supplied by imperialist radio stations. We corrected them and made them realise their faults and follies.’ In their report friends continued ‘We hammered home the point that the coup was financed by the imperialist forces, particularly the CIA. At the end, after 20 fascinating minutes we had convinced the people of the role the vicious imperialist forces played in Chile. We told them about the untold troubles faced by the working class. We all voiced our determination to stand by our Chilean brothers as countless millions all over the world are doing. And at the end of the discussion we decided to send a protest letter to the Chilean Embassy, to do our utmost to mobilize public opinion in our town against the imperialist regime in Chile and to tell the people the truth about Chile.’<sup>87</sup>

As evident in the excerpt above, solidarity with the radio station and the GDR, often also implied voicing against ‘vicious imperialist forces’, or even ‘imperialist radio stations’. Though all interlocutors have confirmed that the station was strictly instructed to not comment on inter-German relations. It is obvious, however, that listeners did address the elephant in the room—the West German counterpart, DW. Several listeners confirmed listening to DW as well as RBI in spite of the two clearly belonging to two different ideological camps.<sup>88</sup> Some, however, picked their loyalties or, at least, expressed them as such. Srivastava was open in telling me that he listened to a whole array of foreign broadcasters but that

There was a coldness in Deutsche Welle. They didn’t even answer my letters that regularly. The only thing that was attractive about Deutsche Welle was their calendar. Once I had it, it was over. Love only happened with RBI.<sup>89</sup>

## Exhibiting Friendship

The friends decorated the terrace of the club secretary's house with flags, posters and coloured pictures depicting life in the GDR, and they report that a modest crowd of teenagers, club-members, well-wishers, elderly people and a lot of curious onlookers had gathered there. The meeting started with a welcome-speech by the club secretary, Mr. Roy. Then they discussed and talked about the GDR in order to familiarize those in the audience who had only limited knowledge about our state. They discussed the progress made by the GDR in the fields of industry, agriculture, science and technology and in the social welfare of the people. And they also wrote how they did it: 'We gathered our material from magazines like Kontakt, GDR Review, FDGB Review and various others, we also did a bit of research work in our school library'.<sup>90</sup>

Locally organized exhibitions, as the one described in the excerpt above, were an important way of staging solidarity with the GDR. Interesting to note is how 'material' such as magazines and journals were used to inform oneself. Rarely ever is the expression of friendship and solidarity unaccompanied by tactile objects that attest its material presence in the accounts of the listeners. Thus, whether in the accounts of Swarnkar and Lakhotia in Bikaner, Gupta and Maheshwari in Fatehpur Shekhawati, Sidhu in Sri Ganganagar or Srivastava in Madhepura, when speaking to the presenters in person or to me, gifts from the station were an important coordinate for 'feeling' love as well as being recognized in that love of friendship. Although most interviewed journalists told me how the station did not have sufficient funds to sponsor presents and souvenirs for the thousands of listeners (one tellingly said about DW, 'they had presents and money, we had love'<sup>91</sup> [*Die hatten Geschenke und Geld, wir hatten Liebe*]), the station did in fact send a plethora of items that were a valuable possession for receiving listeners. These gifts and mementoes included, among others, QSL cards, photo albums, posters, pennants, magazines (such as *GDR Review*, *GDR Report*, *Women in the GDR*, *RBI Bulletin*, *RBI Journal*), books on the GDR and its authors, miniature pocket-books for a quick introduction to the GDR/Marxism and Leninism, medals and coins, view cards or postcards with scenery and images of the GDR, peak caps made of cloth, peak caps without a peak (with a simple string and a plastic

front side, which Srivastava describes as great for collective viewing of local cricket matches),<sup>92</sup> cassettes with music from the GDR, alarm clocks with RBI imprinted on them, badges, I love RBI stickers, and DX Club listeners' diplomas and certificates.

The objects became a means of presenting the GDR in the Indian living room, making it a visible and known entity on the field through listener clubs' activities. The photographs from private collections materially prove how GDR and RBI entered the living room and became tools for exhibiting friendship. Club meetings in rooms loaded with East German material presence were frequently captured through the camera and sent to the station. In the photographs, we thus see literature that was sent to listeners from East Berlin carefully displayed like show pieces on tables. Besides books and journals, we see curtains with the GDR flag, lamps, pamphlets, posters, miniature books, souvenirs and pennants all adorning the walls and tables of the rooms in which the listeners proudly stage how they consume and are consumed by life in the GDR (see Figures 2.5 and 2.6).



Figure 2.5 A Club Room 'Exhibiting the GDR'

Source: Private Collections, S. Imhof.

For accessing the image/photograph in colour, see <https://micamp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch2>



Figure 2.6 A Club Room 'Exhibiting the GDR'

Source: Private Collections, S. Imhof.

For accessing the image/photograph in colour, see <https://micasp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch2>

Staged photographs with members of clubs 'reading the GDR literature', or keenly watching the walls of a room covered with posters on the GDR were sent to the station as a proof of club activities. One such set of three photographs sent by a Mr Khanna came with brief notes stuck to the photos with handwritten captions such as 'RBI Listeners' Club members with their leader Shri P. Khanna in the center' and 'Mr. P. Khanna is demonstrating GDR photographs to the club members', a handwritten tagline of the 1970s which guides the viewers<sup>93</sup> eyes to a certain direction when looking at the photograph, in a manner comparable to an Instagram tagline today.

That there was a huge demand for these material objects can be fathomed from the repetitive requests in the letters of listeners' clubs that ask for 'material' or internal evaluation reports of the Division. For instance, in one such report by the chief editor of the Hindi Division in 1973, one finds the person concerned requesting for 'purchasing better advertising material'<sup>94</sup> (*besseres Werbematerial einkaufen*) to be sent to listeners, 'cheap articles with great efficacy'<sup>95</sup> (*billige Artikel mit großer Wirksamkeit*). Just like

hearing one's name announced on the programme, receiving such material tokens of friendship implied recognition and became a means to perform distinction within the local community. In their new context, these objects were precious and welcome outsiders, like the very voice of the East German Hindi speakers, and had a prestigious presence. To give one example, RBI peak caps were sometimes used by club members to perform in-groupism when collectively watching a local cricket match or listening to the commentary of a match with the Indian cricket team playing on the radio set. In a picture dating back to the 1980s, for example, Srivastava can be seen proudly wearing the RBI pennant on his shirt pocket, like a badge, as his family members and he pose around a radio set.<sup>96</sup>

One of the moderators of the programme recounted, 'They were not valuables. Tiny things that one would get here on the street as advertising material. They were not treasures but were sent as little treasures to India'.<sup>97</sup> Years later upon her visit to one of the homes of a listener, she would be shown the same objects which had carefully been preserved over the years.

It is interesting how these things were stored carefully. In one of the homes I visited, I saw a pennant that had been hanging for years on the wall. The rest of the wall had become lighter in colour and the shape of the pennant clearer over the years. It was later taken off from the wall to protect it from fading.<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, Srivastava recounted and personally showed me how these souvenirs, presents and mementoes have been preserved by him for over 35 years in a tiny storage room in his house's attic. These were transferred up there at the time to prevent them from getting damaged from the flood in the region in 2012.

These objects in the numerous towns of suburban and rural India help understand how the station made the GDR as well as itself a material presence in Indian households at the time. Their presence today in these homesteads, however, also helps shed light on how these objects become narrational tools, memory equipment used for recounting the past. At the same time, following their social lives can help shed further light on the material legacy of the GDR (Jampol 2013) outside its own geographical borders.



## Desires and Fantasies

Love for the radio station and its presenters also rapidly translated into desires and fantasies. The hundreds of portfolio pictures sent to the station, taken carefully in studios where the listener has probably worn his favourite attire, were a regular feature of the fan mail. Photographs were not only a means to stay in touch with the presenters but also a means to solicit desire in a country far away. The carefully styled clothes and messages written on the backside of the photographs indicate that the exchange of letters became a platform for numerous energetic young men to profile themselves for potential partners in the GDR. For instance, a 24-year-old Mr Iqbal from Phulwari Sharif, Patna, unhesitatingly writes behind his portfolio photograph that his hobbies are 'reading and immigrating' and 'I want to marry a girl but necessary somewhat Hindi/Urdu speaking knowledge [*sic*]' (see Figure 2.7).

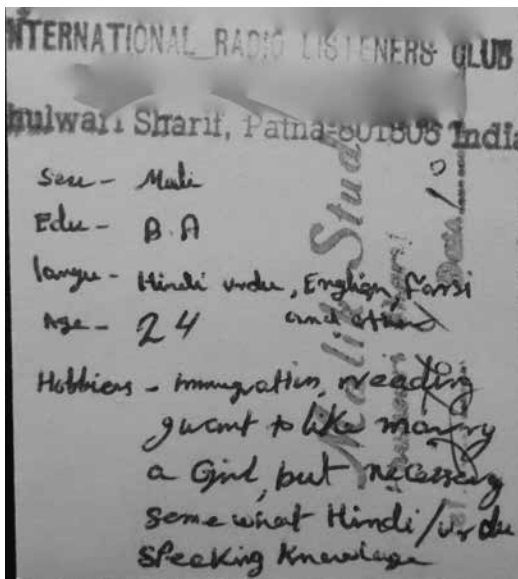


Figure 2.7 Backside of Photograph with Hobbies Listed for RBI

Source: Private Collections, S. Imhof.

Note: Name and address of listener blurred to protect the identity of the listener. For accessing the image/photograph in colour, see <https://micamp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch2>

In most cases, the charisma of the voice on the show, particularly the East German female voices; the fantastic image of the 'White woman', acquired through magazines that pictorially depicted the life of women in the GDR or those like *Soviet Nari* (Soviet Woman) which were often sent to listeners by the station; the accent of the female presenters on the Hindi show; or the regular exchange of letters with individual presenters from the programme, all accounted for dedicated listening and the will to profile oneself as a male listener. Expressions of love can be gauged from several minute episodes, such as the following excerpt from a letter that Mr Srinivas from Bikaner, who could not hear anymore from his right ear due to excessive short-wave radio listening, wrote to one of the interlocutors after her visit to India in 2000, 10 years after the programme had shut down:

And tell me, how was your remaining India trip? What kind of people did you meet? Did you meet another 'handsome hero' like me? No, right? Of course, God took retirement after creating me. So, whom and how would you meet someone? Hah. You are probably laughing. 'Hey Sabine' ... I wanted to say so much to you which I could not. So now I will say it all via letters. Some joking, some arguments, some...you know that something that happens? ... Well...

'Now a song which I wrote only to remembering you [*sic*']

She left behind some memories,

She left behind some memories;

She stole my heart from me.

A beauty came to my homestead,

From seven oceans across;

She looked like a goddess to me,

Or a fairy from the dreams;

She brought waves of love,

In the ocean of my heart; ...<sup>99</sup>

That letters and photographs as mobile objects became a means to solicit desire and love, and to 'arrange' companionship or find a

partner, was confirmed by one of the female presenters who said that each one of us (female) from the staff had at least one ardent male fan, who really wanted to meet us in person and come to the GDR or that we visit him.<sup>100</sup>

These photographs are different from those taken in groups with club members or those evidencing activities of clubs or even the portfolio pictures which resemble passport photos or driving licence photographs. In several profile pictures from the private collections, the gaze of the photographed person makes it clear that he tries to seduce the onlooker with a slight smile, a tilt of the head, or a side-angle view, with gaping eyes looking into abstraction. All these gestures would not be allowed for a regular passport-sized photograph taken for everyday bureaucratic documentation. There are also several portfolio pictures where young men pose in front of the Taj Mahal, considered a symbol of love, in posh suits and with large thick-framed sunglasses, in fashion during the 1970s and the 1980s. The station, thus, also became a platform for several young men to come in touch with a 'foreign' world and profile themselves as suitors waiting to find partners.

## **CONCLUSION**

The case of RBI's Hindi programme, hitherto an un-researched chapter in the history of India–GDR entanglements, illustrates how translocal registers of friendship among actors from both the countries were developed and performed through the medium of short-wave broadcasting. The first section of the chapter has delved into the world of those behind the microphone in East Berlin, the capital city of GDR. The Hindi programme enabled presenters to come in proximity with people in India, to engage with them in their everyday contexts, despite the geographical limitation on both sides to not experience each other in person. Thus, even if they could not freely travel to India, it became possible to 'use' their Hindi language skills and develop connections with people through personal interactions. The programme's highly interactional features maintained a regular exchange with listeners. Letters were read, queries addressed and index cards with listeners' details and interests were maintained (and actively utilized for interactions) to strike an intimacy with listeners. It was perhaps this personal engagement

that made for the immense popularity of the Division, as is visible from the fact that listeners' clubs were several in numbers and spread across rural, semi-urban and urban India. Listeners could recognize presenters through their voice. This is probably a general feature of radio listening but what made RBI Hindi unique was the presence of East German voices that spoke in Hindi and were immensely appreciated by listeners. The station continued to exist for almost a year after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and this period is interspersed with programmes that describe the changing landscape of Germany, in general, and Berlin, in particular. The chapter has traced some of the transitions in the nature of reporting during this period.

The second part of the chapter has traced the narrative from the perspective of the listeners in India, who become visible through letters and photographs. I have shown how the Hindi programme's interactive features enabled a mutual mirroring of recognition—for listeners to listen to the 'voice of the GDR' and, at the same time, be heard and seen by the radio station. Being heard and seen implied being acknowledged by the station personally and proving recognition that enabled the performance of difference and distinction in one's local community. The station also became a means for listeners to insert themselves in wider world of charged Cold War international politics and therein perform local internationalisms. Being seen was performed through the medium of photographs. The chapter has shown how these also become mobile autobiographical objects, a means to narrate one's past for actors on both the sides. Finally, the chapter has shown how objects play a key role in both presencing the GDR in the Indian living room and in performing solidarity through exhibitions and listeners' club activities. The Hindi programme also became a platform for some young male listeners to solicit love and desire.

The chapter has illustrated how RBI's Hindi programme was a platform where sonic affinities were staged on an everyday basis and Indian listeners were anything but passive receivers of Cold War 'propaganda'. It has made a call for expanding the archive. Besides the written sources available in archives, oral narratives can help unpack complex pasts, such as those of the GDR, which have often been written in dichotomizing categories (Jampol

2013). At the same time, they help understand narratives in transition in their changing contextual realities. Photographs and other material objects become tactile devices which are utilized and even necessary for recounting or reconstituting the telling of pasts.

## NOTES

\* I am deeply grateful to all the presenters and listeners of RBI, both in Germany and India, who have patiently shared their valuable experiences and life trajectories with me in ongoing interviews since early 2018. I especially thank Arvind Srivastava, Arif Naqvi, Friedemann Schlander, Mahesh Jha, Marita Hoffmann, Sabine Imhof and Ujjwal Bhattacharya for all our conversations. This research would not have been possible without their inputs and willingness to narrate. At Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Potsdam, I thank Dr Jörg-Uwe Fischer and Karin Pfundstein for their help and readiness in making RBI holdings available for access. Different versions of the chapter were presented at colloquia at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development (Centre for the History of Emotions, Berlin) and the Centre for Modern Indian Studies, Göttingen, in 2019. Thank you, Margrit Pernau and Ravi Ahuja for organizing the same and the engaged audiences for their valuable input. The chapter was also presented at the Centre for Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies, Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden, in 2019, and at a workshop organized by the Emmy Nöther Research Group, *Reaching the People: New Histories of Communication*, Centre for Global History, Freie Universität, Berlin, in 2021. I thank Amrita Ghosh, Valeska Huber and Lea Börgerding for the opportunity to present and the insightful comments. The names of interlocutors (presenters and listeners) cited in this chapter are pseudonyms, except when it was explicitly expressed by individuals that their original names are retained in the text. Translations of interviews conducted in German and Hindi were done by the author.

1. Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Standort Potsdam-Babelsberg, Marlene-Dietrich-Allee 20, 14482 Potsdam.
2. Some of the presenters from the GDR would eventually travel to India while working for RBI (as translators for official GDR delegations to India or in their private capacity as the partner of a person of Indian origin), whereas some, like Sabine Imhof, travelled to India only after 1990, long after the radio station had shut down.
3. An elaborate list, which is in no way complete, indicates registered RBI Hindi Division's Listeners' Clubs and individual listeners in Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Moradabad, Katra, Barabanki,

Mubarakpur, Kanpur, Ballia, Hasanpur, Dehradun, Walidpur, Etah, Mughal Sarai, Rampur, Muradnagar, Basti, Jhansi, Maniar, Ghaziabad, Bindki, Phaphund (in Uttar Pradesh); Madhepura, Ranchi, Samastipur, Virpur, Saharsa, Patna, Bardaha, Gaya, Chapra, Lohardaga, Munger, Durgaganj, Katihar, Darbhanga, Gopalganj, Forbesganj, Purnia, Sahibganj, Jharia, Kaithwan, Dhanbad (in Bihar); Kaithal, Narnaul, Sirsa, Hisar, Shyamgarh, Karna, Panipat, Mandi (in Haryana); Patiala, Talwandi Fattu, Pathankot, Jullundar, Naya Nangal (in Punjab); Bhopal, Seoni, Indore, Bilaspur, Raipur, Raigarh, Bhilai (in Madhya Pradesh); Sri Ganganagar, Sewari, Pali, Chunawadh, Nagaur, Jaswanthgarh, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bharatpur, Bikaner, Sri Karanpur, Raisinghnagar, Fatehpur Shekhawati (in Rajasthan). Besides a major following in these Hindi/Hidustani-speaking regions, there were also registered listeners' clubs in regions where other languages are predominant such as Durgapur, Murshidabad, Balurghat and Purulia in West Bengal; Kheda, Amreli, Bharuch, Narsanda and Kutch in Gujarat; Bakaina Dara and Khawrang in Assam; Chandel in Manipur; Nagpur and Bombay in Maharashtra; Cuttack in Orissa; Kangra in Himachal Pradesh; Mysore in Karnataka; Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu; Hyderabad and Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh; as well as locations outside of India such as Bheri in Nepal and Muzaffargarh, Punjab, in Pakistan. Please note that I have followed older political divisions of federal states given that the listeners wrote at a time when the federal states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh had not been politically divided into the new federal states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh and Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, respectively.

4. The timing, frequency and duration of the show changed over the decades (the programme began in 1967 with a 20-minute-long show, which was aired four times a week. This later became a 30-minute-long programme that was aired daily and several times (4–5 times) up to the following morning.
5. The phrase 'Life in the GDR' is often evoked in informational literature that was published in and on the GDR for Indian audiences, in publications like the *RBI Journal* or the *GDR Review*, as well as in publications such as the newsletters and magazines of Indo-GDR Friendship Societies. One prominent example of the same is the monthly journal called *Recognition*, which was published at the New India Press, New Delhi, by the All India Indo-GDR Friendship Society (I have undertaken a detailed analysis of the same elsewhere, see Kleinschmidt and Ziegler 2018, 211–230).
6. An international phenomenon since the 1920s, DXing refers to the hobby of amateur listeners that includes identifying and receiving distant radio or television signals or making two-way contact with

distant stations. DX comes from the telegraphic shorthand for distance or distant. Radio stations would await reception reports from listeners where they inform the station about the quality of the transmission and to attest the legitimacy of the report, listeners were needed to write a detailed description of the contents of the aired show. The five-technique code to be followed was termed SINPO (signal strength, interference, noise and propagation). In acknowledgement of the receipt of such a report, the station would send back a written verification of reception, which was called a QSL. What a listener received was a QSL card. RBI had several dedicated DXers and DX clubs, as can be heard very often on the magnetic tape recordings of the show in Hindi. Listeners who had collected several QSLs and successfully submitted a number of reception reports were awarded diplomas for their achievements titled H50, H100, H250, H500, H1000 and so on. The charm of the diploma was the certificate one received from the station and to see one's name published in the *DX Bulletin* and the *RBI journal*, several copies of which can still be accessed in the archives.

7. Names of interlocutors (presenters and listeners) cited in this chapter are pseudonyms, except when it was explicitly expressed by individuals that their original names are retained in the text. Translations of interviews conducted in German and Hindi were done by the author.
8. The two exceptions which deal with RBI and DW, respectively, are: Heinz Odermann's *Wellen mit tausend Klängen: Geschichten rund um den Erdball in Sendungen des Auslandsrundfunks der DDR Radio Berlin International* (2003), and Elena Koch's *Radiohörerklubs in Indien: Organisierte Medienrezeption im kulturellen Kontext* (2005). The former gives previews into RBI's trajectory in five continents from the perspective of one of its employees, the latter is a media analysis centred study of DW and VOA listeners' clubs in selected cities in northern India. A study that brings together the trajectories of both Western and Eastern stations as synchronous Cold War actors in India, and simultaneously prioritizes the listeners, by engaging with a systematic historical as well as ethnographic analysis of archival and oral historical sources is hitherto missing, though necessary.
9. This has been unanimously communicated to me by all interlocutors, former employees of RBI, whom I have interviewed since March 2018.
10. However, once approved, a trip was also funded by the state.
11. Sandmann is a fairy-tale figure, whose animated puppet form became highly popular through the GDR television series titled *Unser Sandmännchen* (Our Little Sandmann), meant for children and aired from 1959 onwards. At the end of the show, the

character would sprinkle sand over the TV screen to make children fall asleep (see Classen 2019). Unlike most GDR citizens, Sandmann could travel to several parts of the world. He also has an encounter with India, as can be seen in one of the videos archived in DRA Potsdam, titled *Fliegender Teppich/Indien*, whereby Sandmann is on a flying carpet that lands in India and is welcomed with a cup of tea.

12. Interview, Berlin, 18 July 2018.
13. Interview, Berlin, 31 July 2018.
14. Interview, Berlin, 18 July 2018.
15. Interview, Berlin, 21 February 2020.
16. Interview, Berlin, 18 July 2018.
17. Interview, Berlin, 31 July 2018.
18. Interview, Berlin, 31 July 2018.
19. Interview, Berlin, 18 July 2018.
20. Interview, New Delhi, 18 March 2018.
21. Interview, Berlin, 19 August 2020.
22. Interview, Berlin, 6 March 2020.
23. These cards make for invaluable material for the Department, giving the coordinates of listeners from across India. It is not clear if they have made it to the archives but, if so, they would perhaps become available to historians by 2021 according to the 30-year rule.
24. *Aufmerksamkeitsgaben* would literally be translated as 'gifts of attention'. This implies gifts that the station sent to the listeners in recognition of or as a sign of noticing or acknowledging their presence.
25. The term *Wende*, literally meaning the turn or turnaround, is used to refer to the period of change in East Germany after 1989–1990.
26. Interview, Rös Rath, 14 July 2018 (speaker talks about journalistic freedom and his time at RBI after *Wende*).
27. Band Nr. 020309, 2 September 1990, Sound files DRA, Potsdam.
28. Band Nr. 293009, 29 September 1990, Sound files DRA, Potsdam.
29. Band Nr. 293008, 29 August 1990, Sound files DRA, Potsdam.
30. Band Nr. 050611, 5 November 1989, Sound files DRA, Potsdam.
31. Band Nr. 050611, 5 November 1989, Sound files DRA, Potsdam.
32. This total number of employed personnel at the time that the station was dissolved in 1990 is approximate as there are no official statistics to be found in the station's holding at the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Potsdam. The total strength of the station's working staff is estimated at 250 personnel by Heinz Odermann (2003, 244). The count of staff members who continued to work at DW (employed in both editorial/journalistic and administrative or technical capacity) differs in the accounts of the interviewed journalists between 19 and 21. This needs to be attested.



33. Interview, Berlin, 31 July 2018.
34. Interview, Patna, 2 September 2018.
35. Interview, Berlin, 3 March 2020.
36. Statement by Hans Herzberg, former chefredakteur, RBI; Fischer, Klaus, *Zur Erinnerung an unsere gemeinsame Veranstaltung anlässlich des 30. Jahrestages von Radio Berlin International*, May 1989, from private collections, Sabine Imhof.
37. Interview, Berlin, 31 July 2018.
38. *You Ask, We Answer*, letters from P. G. K. Rajukakinada, V. Neelakandan, Mettur, 3 August 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
39. *You Ask, We Answer*, letters from Ravichandran and Siddharth Bhattacharjee, 3 August 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
40. *You Ask, We Answer*, Letter from S. Sayee Jayaram, Salem, 3 August 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
41. *Frage des Monats, Kurzwantwort*, letter from Tarak Nath Ghosh, Howrah, month unknown, 1990, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
42. *Frage des Monats, Kurzwantwort*, Letter from P. S. Sayee Jayaram, Salem, month unknown, 1990, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
43. *You Ask, We Answer*, 21 February 1973, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
44. Question posed by a Hindi programme listener to a presenter upon his visit to the listeners' club in Hasanpur, Uttar Pradesh, exact date of visit unknown; interview, Berlin, 6 March 2020.
45. *You Ask, We Answer*, 21 February 1973, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
46. *You Ask, We Answer*, letter from Shahid Akhtar, Hyderabad and Pramod Muni, Jaipur, 13 January 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
47. *Thank You for Writing*, 8 July 1990, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
48. *You Ask, We Answer*, letter from Dougal Listeners' Club, Naya Nangal and Badri Prasad, Gorakhpur, 24 February 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
49. *Frage des Monats, Kurzwantwort*, letter from Krishnan Murari Singh 'Kisan', Bermo, 24 June 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
50. *You Ask, We Answer*, letter from S. Arunkumar, Bangalore; Golam Mostafa, Gopalganj; S. Sundar Pudukottai; Venkatta Reddy, Nutakki, 20 April 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.

51. *Erziehung und Bildung, Rahmen u. Zentrale Sendung*, 24 March 1973, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
52. *You Ask, We Answer*, letter from Rina Paul, Bethuadahari, 31 August 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
53. *You Ask, We Answer*, letter from Shakuntala Verma, Gorakhpur, 17 August 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
54. *You Ask, We Answer*, sender unknown, 7 March 1973, and *Rahmen u. Zentrales Jugendprogram*, 20 March 1973, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
55. *You Ask, We Answer*, sender unknown, 7 March 1973, and *Rahmen u. Zentrales Jugendprogram*, 20 March 1973, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
56. *You Ask, We Answer*, sender unknown, 7 March 1973, and *Rahmen u. Zentrales Jugendprogram*, 20 March 1973, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
57. *You Ask, We Answer*, sender unknown, 19 January 1973, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
58. *You Ask, We Answer*, interview with Marianne Höbel, Intendant DT64, 14 September 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
59. *Thank You for Writing*, letter from Mrs Anandani, Jhansi, 9 January 1977, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
60. *You Ask, We Answer*, letter from Monen Fernandez, Bardez Quo, 24 July 1990, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
61. *Frage des Monats, Kurzantwort*, letter from Umesh Kumar, Narnaul, 10 July 1990, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
62. *Frage des Monats, Kurzantwort*, letter from Pavai, Blampooranan Kumbakonam, 17 April 1990, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
63. *Frage des Monats, Kurzantwort*, letter from Biswajit Kalita, Guwahati, 2 March 1990, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
64. *You Ask, We Answer*, 21 February 1973, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
65. *You Ask, We Answer*, letter from Subhasis Barman, Nadia; Sanjoy Biswas, Belakoba, 3 April 1990, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
66. *You Ask, We Answer*, letter from Buddhadeb Banerjee, Noapara; G. V. Ramaswamy, Kongunagar; Murali Mohan, Salem, 27 July 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.

67. *You Ask, We Answer*, letter from Kushal Chand Lakhotia, Bikaner, 17 August 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
68. *Thank You for Writing*, 103/1805, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
69. *You Ask, We Answer*, letter from S. Sankar Kumbakonam, 21 September 1988, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
70. *Thank You for Writing*, letter from N. Subramanian, Tirupur, 8 September 1974, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
71. *Thank you for Writing*, letter from S. Gautham Raj, Madras, 8 September 1974, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
72. *Thank you for Writing*, letter from Nilotpal Das, Margram, Birbhumi, 1 September 1974, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
73. *Thank you for Writing*, letter from Nilotpal Das, Margram, Birbhumi, 1 September 1974, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
74. *Thank you for Writing*, letter from Nilotpal Das, Margram, Birbhumi, 1 September 1974, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
75. Interview, Patna, 2 September 2018.
76. Interview, Madhepura, 25 March 2019.
77. All names of the listeners who sent photographs have been changed to preserve the identities of the listeners. These remain unchanged in cases where the author has personally been able to locate a listener and met them in person and whereby the listener concerned would like their real name to appear in the author's research.
78. These photographs were shared with the author by one of the presenters, Sabine Imhof, from her private collections. Given that finding these listeners (many of whom would still be alive) in different parts of India and establishing contact with them is an ongoing process, and part of the author's ongoing fieldwork, these photographs have not been reproduced here with readers in case faces/profiles or exact names of listeners appear on the photographs. In order to protect their identities, the photographs have only been described in this chapter. It is, however, planned to seek permissions for these photographs from listeners as the research advances.
79. Private collections, S. Imhof.
80. Srivastava in his commentary on some of his old photographs sent to the radio station recounted to me how in order to capture the

activities of the Lenin Club, he would borrow a camera and that the rolls were developed in a photo studio in the closest big city. This calls for further ethnographic research on how photograph production right up to the 1980s in rural, suburban India can help unveil intricate networks with photographs, their negatives and cameras as biographical and transactional objects. Interview, Madhepura, 25 March 2019.

81. Interview, Patna, 2 September 2018.
82. Private collections, S. Imhof.
83. Private collections, S. Imhof.
84. Private collections, S. Imhof.
85. Private collections, S. Imhof.
86. *Aman Ki Aawaaz: Antarrashtriya Shanti Mittra Ko Samarpit* (The Voice of Peace: Dedicated to International Peace and Friendship; private collections, A. Srivastava).
87. *Thank You for Writing*, letter from Jamshedpur RBI Listeners' Club secretary, Mr Roy, 1 September 1974, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
88. The sonic competition between the two German foreign broadcasters, RBI and DW, for Cold War affinities in newly independent countries from the 1950s onwards, and particularly in non-aligned countries like India, is a topic that is beyond the scope of the present chapter but certainly demands special scholarly focus in a separate text.
89. Interview, Madhepura, 25 March 2019.
90. *Thank You for Writing*, letter from Jamshedpur RBI Listeners' Club secretary, Mr Roy, 1 September 1974, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
91. Interview, Berlin, 31 July 2018.
92. Interview, Madhepura, 26 March 2019.
93. Private collections, S. Imhof.
94. Südostasienredaktion/Hörerpost, *Gedanken zur Weiterführung der Arbeit mit den Hörerklubs nach der Anerkennung*, 1973, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
95. Südostasienredaktion/Hörerpost, *Gedanken zur Weiterführung der Arbeit mit den Hörerklubs nach der Anerkennung*, 1973, Bestand Radio Berlin International, DRA, Potsdam.
96. Private collections, A. Srivastava.
97. Interview, Berlin, 3 March 2020.
98. Interview, Berlin, 3 March 2020.
99. Letter sent to Imhof by a fan from Bikaner, 25 May 2000; private collections, Sabine Imhof.
100. Interview, Berlin, 3 March 2020.

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  - c. *You Ask, We Answer*, März 1987–Januar 1989; 103/3744
  - d. *You Ask, We Answer*, Oktober 1988–1990; 103/3745
  - e. *Thank You for Writing*, April 1989–1990; 103/3747
  - f. *Frage des Monats, Kurzantwort*, August 1987–1990; 103/3748
  - g. *Freigabebescheine Englisch/Hindi*, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1988, 1990; 103/1808
  - h. Festival des politischen Liedes; 103/3741
  - i. Indien, Berichte/Informationen, 1970–1983, 1987–1988  
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200 magnetic tapes  
RBI Südostasien/Hindi
2. Private collections, Arvind Srivastava, Madhepura, Bihar, India
3. Private collections, Sabine Imhof, Berlin, Germany
4. Cited interviews
  - a. Arvind Srivastava, Patna, 2 September 2018, and Madhepura, 25–29 March 2019
  - b. Friedemann Schlender, Berlin-Biesdorf, 21 February 2020 and 6 March 2020
  - c. Mahesh Jha, Rösrath, 14 July 2018, and Berlin, 19 August 2020
  - d. Marita Hoffmann, Berlin, 18 July 2018
  - e. Sabine Imhof, Berlin, 31 July 2018, 3 March 2020 and 6 March 2020
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# GDR TRAVEL WRITING ON INDIA

*Anushka Gokhale*

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## INTRODUCTION

From its beginnings in the 1950s to its diplomatic recognition in 1972, the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) foreign policy towards India was strongly influenced by the relationship of its adversary, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), to India. The travelogues on India by the GDR authors—Inge von Wangenheim, Willi Meinck and Richard Christ, who undertook trips to India in the 1960s and the 1970s—are today not only to be understood as documents of the time but also as an active component of the political processes, namely the foreign and cultural policies of the GDR.

Until 1953, that is, in the first four years of its existence, India was not taken seriously in the foreign policy of the GDR, as at this stage the 'ideology of Stalinist Marxism-Leninism' (Voigt 2008, 2) was still prevalent, according to which India was basically a *capitalistically* oriented country. Only after the friendly and stable relationship of the Soviet Union with India since 1955, and the growing presence of the FRG in India, did it become a focus of foreign policy in the GDR. The competition between the GDR and the FRG on Indian soil was so great that it could be called 'a small German–German Cold War within the framework of the big one' (Voigt 2008, 4).

In the eyes of the Indian state, the FRG and the GDR did not have the same status. Immediately after the allied powers, India was the first country to have diplomatically recognized the FRG. By not establishing diplomatic ties with the GDR, India refuted the two-state theory. So only West Germany's claim to represent the German nation was legitimate. Although the GDR had acknowledged the role of India, a leader of the Non-aligned Movement, in the struggle for its own survival, it could not provide India with the same developmental aid as the FRG. The GDR, therefore, attempted to access India via other ways and gradually tried to gain official recognition as a sovereign state. Cultural politics was supposed to compensate for what was not achievable through trade alone. It was supposed to 'draw India's attention to the GDR even without diplomatic recognition and arrange interactions with the political representatives of India without great complications' (Voigt 2008, 219). The task of the East German cultural 'workers' in India was to 'reveal the true character of West German politics towards India to the widest circles in India, to expose the imperialist and colonial aspirations of West Germany' at least till the early 1970s (Voigt 2008, 227).

Unlike the West German author, Günter Grass, who had assumed the position of the *conscience* of the FRG for himself, the GDR instituted in the wake of the Bitterfeld conferences the writer as a worker, tasked with reporting about the workers in the factory, and encouraged the workers 'to take up the pen' and narrate their lives (Emmerich 2016, 23). Thus, the binary between high culture and ordinary life, 'manual and intellectual labour', was supposed to be collapsed (Voigt 2008, 23). This also meant that social and private lives were entangled and losing a job amounted to losing the social network. Literature in this entangled social network often served as what Emmerich calls a 'substitute public sphere', in which authors assumed the role of 'active educators' and 'social pedagogues' (Voigt 2008, 26).

Travel writing was the most widely consumed form of literature in the GDR (Blaschke, Dunker, and Hofmann 2016, 8). The obvious reason for its popularity was the lack of mobility and travel in the GDR. Travel writing opened up virtual access to a world which was never available for a direct encounter. It

also guarded from the perilous nature of a direct encounter. The popularity of the genre seems to have been brought into play both by the state and the writers, who had the privilege to travel as cultural diplomats for the state, in various ways. It was a site where through the contrasting images of a foreign country, the contours of the identity of the GDR were to be highlighted. The most defining aspect of GDR's identity was the moral high ground it claimed for itself vis-à-vis its adversary, West Germany, alleged to be the successor state of Nazi Germany. It considered itself as a genuine alternative to the capitalist system, which was understood as the source of fascism. The GDR traveller's intermediate position between the East–West and the North–South axis often created a tension, which became particularly evident in writings on the 'Third World' (Hofmann 2016). The underlying paradox in the cultural imaginary of the GDR was that, on the one hand, the legacy of the Communist/Third International between 1919 and 1943 gave the GDR an ideological orientation for concrete action at the level of foreign policy. On the other hand, the GDR was primarily a European state and had inherited the *orientalist* worldview, which was diametrically opposite to the principle of solidarity cultivated by the Communist International. Although the GDR travellers are critical of Western imperialism and the colonization of India, they believed in the notion of a linear progression of time and the idea that different nations were at different stages of development on this linear scale, the very tenet of enlightenment thinking, which was the source and justification of colonial subjugation.

Revolving around these contentions about the role of the travel writer as a cultural diplomat in the international arena and as an agent of GDR's cultural and political identity, this chapter examines travel accounts<sup>1</sup> by Inge von Wangenheim, Willi Meinck and Richard Christ. All the three texts were immensely popular with at least three editions every few years. For the analysis, the focus is narrowed down to understanding how GDR's identity is negotiated against the background of India, which aspects of reality become available to the travel writer's imagination and how certain tropes and narratives about life in India get highlighted accordingly.

## INGE VON WANGENHEIM: KALKUTTA LIEGT NICHT AM GANGES<sup>2</sup>

Inge von Wangenheim, a former member of Communist Party of Germany, lived from 1933 to 1945 with her husband, Gustav von Wangenheim, in Soviet exile. She was involved there in the 'Free Germany' movement. Wangenheim, who probably lived upon her return as a privileged East German citizen, was allowed to travel to India in 1967 with a merchant ship from the GDR. *Kalkutta liegt nicht am Ganges*, first published in 1970, is a memoir of this journey and follows an interesting itinerary along the port cities on the Western and Eastern coasts. In 1967, the GDR had not yet received any diplomatic recognition from India and was seeking attention from the Indian side. But there were already well-established trade relations between India and the GDR.

Throughout *Kalkutta liegt nicht am Ganges*, Wangenheim presents herself as a dutiful, system-compliant citizen of the GDR. The title of her travelogue 'Calcutta Is Not (Located) on the Ganges' sets the tone, which will be characteristic of her text, namely an instructive and sermonizing tone. In order to experience India, she says, 'one does not have to travel to India' (Wangenheim 1970, 5) because the reference book can replace one's own visual experience and self-awareness and safeguard it from a subjective falsification of reality. The text and not the subjective experience should be the right form of understanding reality. She can 'not promise exciting stories and adventures from the land of the maharajahs and elephants' (Wangenheim 1970, 14) and exposes those stories as prejudices and fantasy while claiming that in contrast to these stories, her representations are truthful and historically correct descriptions of the Indian reality.

She demystifies India and does not cater to the orientalist desires of readers on the grounds that 'for one hundred years the half-educated people have cultivated the habit to associate India with the yogi and nirvana, to marvel at the magicians and fakirs, the beggars and the snake charmer' (Wangenheim 1970, 7). She warns her readers that they should be aware of and attentive to the power of these exoticizing tendencies because romanticism, 'the last self-murderous undertaking on a grand scale ... emerged from the German soil and was indeed a prerequisite for mass

frenzy' (Wangenheim 1970, 8). She, thus, purifies the discursive identity of Europe, whose integral part has been the perception of the romantic discourse on India. She rejects any such tendency that exoticizes the Other. Instead, she presents to the reader her 'self-conquered piece of reality', 'so that he may judge for himself what things are worth discovering and which discoveries are new to him' (Wangenheim 1970, 14). But she claims that objectivity and impartiality can only be achieved if one can extract, 'the real out of reality' (Wangenheim 1970, 7), or to put it in other words, if one has the socialist-realist gaze to identify 'the various dimensions of the human world' (Wangenheim 1970, 7). Wangenheim believes that as a traveller, one needs a sense of the structures and stages of human history, and only then one can recognize these laws even in an unknown environment. She rearranges the desires of her reader by turning the process through which one recognizes the underlying laws that govern the 'Other' into an object of fascination rather than relying on tropes which are already available, like the romantic or utopic images of India.

Ironically, in her urgency to repudiate the romantic discourse and to counter the tendency of exoticizing India, she resorts to the orientalist or racist binary between the White man and the non-White people:

The white man of yesteryears also has his set of archaic delusion, and you won't believe how many rudimentary fossils from long lost epochs, the elementary folly of the 20th Century, the anti-communism, is capable of accommodating in a single dignified pinhead even in our latitudes (Wangenheim 1970, 8).

Although Wangenheim has an acute sense for the political and economic complicity of the Cold War era, she ends up reproducing the colonialist Eurocentric denial of coevalness to the 'amorphous society' of India due to her allegiance to the ideological tenets of the socialist state (Wangenheim 1970, 8). For instance, on the one hand, she can draw parallels across sociopolitical, geographical and historical differences between the USA, which steadily encumbers India with alms of development aid and does not act 'in the spirit of international friendship', the 'stagnated' English society, which still cultivates club life stemming from prehistoric times of slavery and

the Indian monopoly bourgeoisie, for whom the hour has already struck, because socialism is knocking at the door of Indian history (Wangenheim 1970, 10). But, on the other hand, she assures her readers that they are not in that frightening situation, like a 'half-billion Indians ... who have not managed to keep up with the pace of human progress through ages' (Wangenheim 1970, 10) and have not managed to evolve to the stage of socialism. Through this kind of an orientalist stance, Wangenheim can not only conform to the political rhetoric of the socialist GDR state but also create a positive self-image of the GDR in the wake of the Cold War cultural rivalry for claiming the right to represent Western civilization, whose superiority remains unchallenged despite aberrations like the romantic discourse. For Wangenheim, Gandhi's intellectual legacy belongs to the pre-socialist period of world history, because his 'behavioural theory' of 'passive resistance' only moved the Indians to turn the 'crown colony, the pearl of the Empire into today's India' but did not help them to arrive in the current phase of world history (Wangenheim 1970, 196). This is particularly interesting because Gandhi has the status of a popular icon in the West, including the FRG, and the memory of his non-violent resistance is invoked at various junctures during the popular struggles of the 1960s in the West.

She must relativize her own bleak portrayal of the Indian society, that it resembles a museum, because one sees there 'a structurally underdeveloped, structurally deformed and therefore amorphous society' (Wangenheim 1970, 8) and report about an emerging proletarian class in India, so as to reassure her readers that India is on the historical path towards socialism as well as to reinforce GDR's self-image as a progressive socialist state, which has already achieved that ideal. The most obvious sign by which this emergent proletariat is to be recognized is its characteristic non-Indianness, which one can see in the following description of a fish-meal trader

He is neither bourgeois nor exotic, he does not display any peculiar attitude in his interaction with us, and nothing about him works in the usual sense of the word 'Indian'. His gesture, posture, clothing, language—the ensemble of his personality could easily resemble a foreman, for example, from the

Berlin light bulb factory. He is used to doing sports, wears a chequered shirt, has a good sense of humour, moreover has a critical view of things, can't be fooled easily, is up to date, is optimistic about life, has faith in his ability. In a word, a highly qualified worker with the postal address Berlin O 17 could be sitting there in front of me. (Wangenheim 1970, 99)

and an agricultural worker

The overseer of the farm, an elderly, resolute, good-natured, chubby person who could also be Mrs. Müller of the Agricultural Production Cooperative called 'LPG-Vorwärts', as she indeed is the most efficient servant of a cucumber and cabbage processing factory with an unspeakable name. ...She lives on coconuts, cabbage and cucumbers. Her face is smart, one could easily entrust her with the post of LPG chairperson or mayor of a council. ...Everything seems to hint at the fact that this woman is happy with her post, which she needs to protect herself from starvation. The tragedy, of which she is not aware, is that her talent, her most outstanding talent, remains unused to India.... (Wangenheim 1970, 88)

Both of them do not seem to possess any exotic, culturally peculiar qualities or features and can easily fit according to her into the typology of the GDR worker even though they do not possess the 'class consciousness'.

Interestingly, in the above descriptions of the Indian workers, being a highly skilled worker with the address Berlin O 17 or in charge of the Agricultural Production Cooperative 'Forwards' is supposed to be a respectable position and so glamorous that even in faraway India, it is a yardstick by which the social position or success of a non-GDR citizen is to be assessed. Furthermore, what she seems to suggest is that only the system to which she belongs can do justice to the workers' individual talents as they remain unused in India.

When Wangenheim sees the *Indianness* of the worker, his unique cultural characteristics as a hindrance in the path to realize the socialist ideal, she is rejecting the Herderian notion of cultural relativism, but she seems to uphold the binary between culture and civilization, which is peculiar to German thought since the 19th century and which also guided the GDR's cultural policy.



*Culture* in its German inflection representing the high culture of Germany, its religious, literary and philosophical accomplishments, was posited against the French *civilization*, which was considered as a degeneration. In the GDR, *culture* played a central role, as Stephen Brockmann (2016, 42) argues,

for leaders for a number of reasons. For tactical political reasons an emphasis on culture was well suited for the creation of broad constituencies that would include not just communists but other Germans as well. Not all Germans were in agreement on the need for a dictatorship of the proletariat, but most Germans could agree on respect and esteem for the accomplishments of German culture, and in the assessment that Germany at the end of the Second World War had reached a historical and cultural nadir.

Moreover, GDR's intellectual class thought that it is its prerogative to resurrect German *culture*

from all the reactionary detritus of its history, revealed in its crassest form in Hitler, and to bring to the German people, out of its own history and out of the histories of other nations, all the positive energies that make it capable of surviving and that will prevent it from once again falling prey to imperialist adventures. (Brockmann 2016, 42)

The role of its intellectuals was to re-educate the people. The impetus of re-education of the people guided by conservative cultural values, which were to be reinstated, is characteristic of Wangenheim's travelogue on India. In fact, the framework of a travelogue yields itself to the task of educating her readers, as it offers a contrasting background against which the values of the GDR society can be foregrounded. Quite often, she addresses her young readers directly in the text, probably assuming that they outweigh the others. In one such sermon, she expresses her frustration about young women who are 'so wrapped up in the thrill of the exotic young Indian man ... and despite the moral guidance of' the principals, the Free German Youth, the Party, the State Department, do not deter from following this 'exquisite and unique young man to his homeland once and for all' (Wangenheim 1970, 170) from falling prey to an 'utterly superfluous and useless kind of misfortune'

(Wangenheim 1970, 172). Here the task of cultural diplomacy, of reporting about the *dawn* of socialism in India, becomes an alibi for entering into a dialogue with the readers. In fact, the latter seems to be Wangenheim's primary preoccupation in the text.

Through the encounter with India as a non-aligned state, she tries to show her readers that the GDR actually meets with friendly congeniality in the world, which in turn should justify the existence of the GDR. The gesture of educating her readers and demystifying the encounter with the capitalist Other, in general, and India, in particular, often inadvertently undermines the task of creating a positive image of the GDR through her memoir, particularly when she is agonized by the difficulties she and other members of the delegation have to face upon their arrival, as they are stranded on the ship in the docks or when she is vilifying the unruly and rebellious youth in the English harbour towns of the mid-1960s, where her ship docks on the way to India. Youth will be a recurring theme in the travel writings of the other two travellers as well.

### **WILLI MEINCK: DIE GEFANGENE SONNE<sup>3</sup>**

The GDR author Willi Meinck, born in 1919, primarily wrote children's and adolescent's literature. He spent the initial years of his life in hardship, first in exile before the outbreak of the Second World War and later under American captivity during the War. After the War, he first worked as a *Neulehrer*, whose job was to ensure that German schools did not employ any teacher with a national-socialist past and that the pupils received a democratic education, and later as an employee of a school-book publisher in the GDR. He had the privilege of making several trips to India since the 1960s. He travelled to India the same year as Inge von Wangenheim, that is, before the GDR was diplomatically recognized by India. His travel through India was not restricted to the port cities, but he was able to freely travel across the land from Rajasthan to Calcutta and Banaras to Goa. *Die gefangene Sonne* was first published in 1971 and the seventh edition came out in 1983.

Meinck was particularly known for his ideological commitment and for toeing the party line in the GDR. He enjoyed more

freedom of movement in India as compared to Wangenheim, who was confined to her ship and to the trade delegation, with which she was travelling. Even Meinck prioritizes ideological framework over real experience, as one must, like him, hold the 'strings in one's hand', 'possess imagination to grasp the context of the reality [one] is observing, even if it sometimes means, that [one] has to go back millennia' for drawing the inferences (Meinck 1975, 258). The allegiance to socialist ideology translates even in his writing into the disavowal of the German Romantic discourse, through which India was imagined as an exotic land. In his opinion, such an exoticized image of India could arise because the censorship in the former Indian princely states, on the one hand, and the bourgeois press in Great Britain, on the other, did not allow everything to leak out. Meinck subversively uses the setting of a palace in Rajasthan, representative of the quintessentially orientalist imagination of India, for staging of history and its progress through time. He condemns both the Indian feudal lords and the British colonial rulers as the exploiters of India. It is not India's achievement of independence but his arrival in the palace of the Maharana of Chittorgarh which marks the beginning of a new era. He and the citizens of GDR are declared as the *victors of history*. In front of him lies a devastated landscape full of ruins. The palace, which was symbolic of the prince's power, is robbed of the sovereign. Instead of the Maharaja, Meinck is allowed to stay as a guest in this palace, which has been transformed into a hotel. One can see similar aesthetics like Wangenheim's at play in Meinck's text, which is premediated by the socialist-realist gaze. By contrasting the bygone feudal era with the present, in which the doorman is dressed like a maharaja, the job of a doorman gets respectability. He insists that India, which has freed itself from the yoke of feudalism and colonial rule, is also progressing towards socialism and for him, the signs of this are the fact that now the porter in front of the Lake Palace is dressed like a maharaja and he, the citizen of a socialist state, gets 'maharaja' service in the Indian aeroplane.

Like Wangenheim, even Meinck's primary preoccupation seems to be to counsel the youth through his conversations and observations of the Western hippies. Unlike Wangenheim, who writes in a moralizing tone about the Western youth and, thus, upholds the bourgeois value system, Meinck does not seem very pedantic at first sight. He even admits to using the expression of a

hippie girl as the title for his travelogue. He observes them through the ethnographic gaze.

I had come to the beach of Calangute because it was a unique opportunity to see so many hippies together in one place, the cream of the world's hippies, so to speak, young, pungent-smelling co-travellers who had come over dusty roads and over oceans from the countries of the West to Goa, surrounded by the gloriole of hashish and LSD consuming young people, recognizing no authority and 'desiring nothing but nothingness'. (Meinck 1975, 150)

The observation is accompanied with a photograph of the hippies on the Mandovi shore. By employing the ethnographic gaze while describing the hippies, he is trying to distance his readers culturally from them. He gradually *dissects* the hippie scene in Goa and at the same time introduces his readers to the hippie vocabulary. Like Wangenheim, Meinck designs this encounter with the hippies as an enlightening exercise on Western youth cultures for his readers. His main concern is to show that despite the claim advanced by the magazines from Los Angeles to West Berlin interested in criticism of bourgeoisie or aristocratic art that the hippies are the 'underground', the 'subculture', 'the Freudian proletariat', the hippies are in reality nothing else than 'an outgrowth of late capitalist society' (Meinck 1975, 158). Meinck carefully draws the ideological fault lines, when he senses the possibility of solidarity on the part of his readers with the hippies, generated through his own reporting. He points out to his readers that they do not share a common enemy with the Western hippies, although their 'accusation ... is directed at the criminal system of their society', the capitalist system (Meinck 1975, 158). He argues that the hippies' rebellion does not hurt the powerful, but on the contrary, helps to turn the underground into a profitable business. Here Meinck's critique of alternative youth cultures in the West seems to point to what historians in recent years are arguing about the 1960s, namely that 'youth' emerges in this period as a consumer category in the West (Sandbrook 2009). Industries like entertainment, fashion or motorcycle manufacturing are dependent on the teenage patronage. In the cultural rivalry during the Cold War, the Socialist Bloc could rely upon its youth organizations such as World Federation for

Democratic Youth and International Union of Students, which were formed since the 1920s as front organizations and in which the West perceived infiltrationist threat. For example, Konrad Adenauer, the first chancellor of the FRG got the GDR youth organization, Freie Deutsche Jugend, banned in 1951 (Kotek 2003, 142). In the West, funds were provided to youth organizations through secret financial channels by the CIA (Kotek 2003, 139). Moreover, the East, for example, the GDR, was not only worried about the trends in the Western youth culture spilling over into the East but also had its own emerging alternative youth culture (Fenemore 2007) and the state tried to contain this burgeoning threat of youth rebellion through various means, even at times, through moral policing and an enforced conformity with the bourgeoisie norms.

Furthermore, Meinck (1975, 158) claims that the hippies are an anachronistic phenomenon and their worldview is outdated.

The millennia-old religions of the East exerted a magical power on the hippies. So they walked, dreaming and without the joy of life, through the countries of the earth and immersed in the mythology of Buddhism or Hinduism they tried to escape the world, while the Indians began to shed the shackles of the old faith and turned with all their senses to this world.

Meinck does not assume an authoritative tone like Wangenheim but is trying to hegemonically gain the trust of his readers through the trope of the GDR as culturally superior. He is, therefore, allowed the risk of reporting on the hippie culture in India and tread the thin line between demonizing hippie culture and involuntarily creating a longing for it. At another point in the text, he lets the critique of the GDR be voiced through one of his Indian interlocuters, but only to be shadowed by the narrative of the singular revolutionary event, called the GDR. When asked by the Indian journalist, Ramesh, 'whether the citizens of the GDR, in whose lives the state's policies interfere so deeply, are happy', he begins to describe 'the emergence of the first socialist state on German soil' (Meinck 1975, 27).

## **RICHARD CHRIST: MEIN INDIEN<sup>4</sup>**

Richard Christ, a travel writer, had been to India several times since 1972, that is, after the establishment of diplomatic relations

between the GDR and India. He could cover almost the entire area of independent India during his travels. His travelogue first published in 1983, consisting of 610 pages, is of encyclopaedic proportion and attempts to be a substitute for the actual travel itself. On his travels, he was occasionally accompanied by a painter whose 31 lithographs have been included in Christ's travelogue, and also by a well-known Indologist from the GDR, Heinz Mode. The writer Christ distances himself from the reality of the journey by creating a fictional traveller, who is referred to as 'Mr Richard' in the text. Like his predecessors, even Christ's travelogue was evidently popular, as its fourth edition was published in 1990.

To start with, Christ's travelogue can be categorized into the larger narrative and discursive tradition on India in the GDR. Even in the 1970s, the thematization of the world of 'work' is the focus of Christ's travelogue. The 31 lithographs by Karl Erich Müller almost always represent working people. For example, the chapter called 'The Capital' is divided into the stonemason, the writer, the astrologer, the businessman, the engineer, the politician, the potter and the tourist. Christ does not try to fit his observations into the strict framework of the socialist realism as prescribed by the Bitterfeld conferences. By the time Christ publishes his travelogue, the faith in the utopian project seems to have been shaken to the extent that he cannot project it on the Indian society. Rather, one sees a shift towards *liberal* concerns in his observations. Mr Richard's thoughts on his encounter with the rickshaw puller in Benaras are reflective of this. At first, Mr Richard refuses to avail his service, for 'Marx's spirit' forbids him from 'adopting the habits of the exploiters' (Christ 1983, 472). He realizes that the rickshaw is 'his only capital' and 'saves him from begging'. He must confess: 'If he [rickshaw puller] meets customers like ... Mr. Richard [i.e.] socialist clients, he would soon slip below the poverty line. So ... even the most honourable ideological objections are of absolutely no use to him' (Christ 1983, 472). Eventually, in defiance of his socialist ideology, Mr Richard decides to ride with the rickshaw puller. Christ's use of the form of autofiction gives his text a fictional character and an ironic undertone. Christ, the GDR citizen, can safely distance himself from the fictional Mr Richard, his alter ego, who is reflecting upon the limits of the socialist worldview. For Wangenheim and Meinck, such an auto-fictional split in the writer's self was impossible, because they

were interested in projecting India on the same path as the GDR, that is, on the path towards becoming a socialist state. For them, all that seemed culturally, politically or economically specific to India would eventually be rendered immaterial.

Although Christ is reaching out to ideological and intellectual allies in India like his predecessors, interestingly, his relationship with his readers is different compared to the latter. In the 1970s, the argument that the GDR is ideologically on the right side of history and the GDR citizens should take pride in its anti-fascist socialist utopian project, for which resonances can be found as far as in India, a non-aligned country, does not seem tenable anymore for Christ. One can get a glimpse of this when Mr Richard is discussing the problems of slum dwellers with an Indian journalist called Charlotte. He suggests that a booklet on housing for the slum dwellers may help them in solving the problems, to which Charlotte retorts by saying, 'Oh, you Europeans! Let people live only after they can read? But even if they could spell your booklet—reading alone does not educate you so quickly, you should know it best' (Christ 1983, 128) and forces him to think

of the torn upholstery in the Berlin S-Bahn trains, demolished telephone boxes, the torn-up trees in new neighbourhoods, also of the painful dialectic of rundown front gardens and impeccable garage facilities, and of the myriad articles, including [his], all of which had absolutely no effect, maybe because they were not read, in spite of 100% literacy in our country, or because they were only read by those who already knew what one is not supposed to do in socialism and what one's duties are, and what is worth reading and what is not. (Christ 1983, 128)

One can see a tension between Christ and his readers, who in his opinion are not equally committed to the socialist project. Undoubtedly, Christ must have been close to the regime, as he travelled to several parts of the world as a travel writer, but the hardcore rhetoric of the earlier period is not used by him, particularly the trope of the fascist West. He introduces his readers to the elections and multi-party system in India without judging either. He expresses his concern about the run-down state of infrastructure in the GDR. There is a sense of solidarity with his Indian

counterparts. He confesses that all is not well at home and that the idea of the socialist society has remained a utopia.

Unlike Wangenheim, who always tries to tether her readers ideologically, one can observe a shift away from socialist-realist aesthetics and ideological conformism in Christ. Christ does not seem to employ the socialist-realist perspective for creating a positive self-image of the GDR. It is quite apparent that Christ is responding to a certain system weariness and replaces the ideological conformism with a discussion of the very ideas of *commune*, *communism* or *socialism* at various points in the travelogue. While describing his visit to Kanyakumari, he cites the reformist Hindu thinker Swami Vivekananda's opinion on socialism.

I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread. The other system has been tried and found wanting. Let this one be tried – if for nothing else, for the novelty of the thing. (Christ 1983, 259)

Interestingly, Christ makes his readers acquainted with a perspective that does not absolutize socialism and can at the same time distance himself from it because it is not his own, but that of the Indian thinker. This kind of an apologetic tone would have perhaps been unimaginable for the earlier generation of authors of the so-called *Aufbauliteratur* (construction literature) and *Ankunftsliteratur* (literarily means arrival literature but was the socialist-realist reinterpretation of the Bildungsroman) such as Wangenheim and Meinck, for whom a socialist state was the only alternative and there was no turning back. For Christ, who was almost entirely socialized in the GDR, being a committed GDR citizen is not necessarily tied to reiterating the earlier rhetoric of GDR as the embodiment of the anti-fascist state, but, as was also evident in the dialogue with Charlotte, contributing towards maintaining governance and a certain standard of living. This can be illustrated through his reflections on the hippies or Europeans living in Auroville, the marginals of the capitalist West.

Christ terms the commune *Auroville* as 'Utopia'.

There should be a place somewhere on earth that no nation could claim as its property, a place where all benevolent



people, sincere in their aspiration, live freely as citizens of the world and follow one authority, the highest truth, [where] individual virtue would have a much greater significance than material wealth and social status. ...In short, it would be a place where the relationships between people, which are usually governed by a sense of competition and clash over material growth, would be replaced by relationships of competition for reform, cooperation and true brotherhood. (Christ 1983, 371)

Declarations of this kind, which the author might have come across in a brochure of the commune and which are certainly not new to the GDR readers, are used by the author as an anonymous quote. Mr Richard and his companion, a painter from the GDR, set out in search of this place in the blazing Indian heat. When they finally find that much-promised land, it is desolate. There is no man or animal. Instead, a sign says, 'Auroville—the free international city. No army, no police, instead a guard of helpers, consisting of athletes and gymnasts' (Christ 1983, 373). At first sight, Christ seems to mock the narrative behind the commune *Auroville*, which 'wants to realize a vision of [the ideal] man', as an illusion (Christ 1983, 373). But he does not condemn the project, whose occupants seem to be mainly the Americans and the French, as an outgrowth of late capitalism like his predecessors. Christ is using it to engage with the core idea underlying the commune, namely the notion of 'utopia'. His approach to the notion of utopia appears particularly conspicuous, to be precise, demystifying, when compared to that of the major GDR writers who have been criticized for 'confining the epochal illusion of true socialism in the shrine of utopia' (Emmerich 1991, 239). Mr Richard openly talks about the financial and social problems of the municipality of *Auroville*, which exist despite the underlying utopian vision and theoretical solidarity among the various national groups there. Mr Richard is told by a British resident of the commune *Auroville* that it is 'the only manifestation of true communism' (Christ 1983, 375). In the eyes of Christ, the Englishman is not a 'propagandist', but one 'who had vowed to expiate the millionfold offenses of his homeland against the Indians' (Christ 1983, 375). Here, the Englishman becomes the bearer of hope, who despite many difficulties, 'toils every day under the merciless scorching sun till all his strength has been consumed' (Christ 1983, 375). Christ wants to take a critical stand against a

naive utopian thinking in the GDR itself. While other GDR authors present the alternative youth movements as a negative manifestation of the Western civilization, Christ uses the confrontation with these communities in India to differentiate between different strands of socialism within the GDR.

In Christ's writing, there is a departure from the so-called anti-fascist foundational myth of the GDR and the critique of utopian thinking such that he is only left with bourgeois values accompanied by liberal pragmatic concerns. Compared to Meinck's approach of historical materialism, which does not believe in the 'theory of remote corners of the earth' and allows for 'discovering the context, even though [one] sometimes has to go back millennia' (Christ 1983, 258), Mr Richard's trip to India creates lasting visceral memories that remind him of the unique experience of a different space and time. India as the 'other' thus becomes an object of fascination for Christ (Christ 1983, 621). Upon his return, Mr Richard 'finds himself meditating on life between the Indus and the Ganges' (Christ 1983, 622). In Goa, he experiences a sense of empathy for the dreams of the hippies and acknowledges their desire for freedom and the right of every youth to go in search of a paradise. He has a feel for the hippie's wish to become 'untraceable', the 'seductive poison of slinking away', and wishes to be carried away by the boat 'without reaching a destination' (Christ 1983, 191). Thus, he occasionally sheds a romanticizing light on India but always keeps it in perspective. While praising their aversion towards material, worldly concerns, he cannot overlook the problems associated with their way of life because after all, a job at the 'main post office of Frankfurt is better than ending up as destitute in Goa ... stranded under the palm trees' (Christ 1983, 379). Most strikingly, socialism is never referred to as a possible alternative to the nihilism of the hippies, who curse the parents for 'gambling away their future' (Christ 1983, 217). A law-abiding citizen, who unlike the hippies respects the host's rules, like the prohibition of nudism on the beach in Goa, is the role model Christ offers to the readers.

## **CONCLUSION**

GDR writers were ambassadors of the state, who were supposed to report about the political attitudes of Indians, and that the

latter were favourable towards the Communist Bloc. They enjoyed proximity to the state functionaries, insofar as they could travel outside the GDR. Their task seems to have been twofold and paradoxical in nature. They had to portray how they, as citizens of an 'anti-fascist' and communist state, were welcomed and respected by Indians, who sought solidarity with them as important partners in the fight against the common enemy, the capitalist West. But on the other hand, they had to contain the desire for experiencing this real India on the part of their readers. This desire was triggered both by colonial fantasies of India and the solidarity in the fight against the capitalist West. For this they had to invent a new way of seeing Indian reality, which would fit the ideological framework. One can argue that in the GDR, there is an epistemological shift in the genre of travel narrative, as it gains back its original purpose, namely to inform about faraway lands, which it had to gradually give up since the Enlightenment period to make way for other forms of scientific writing, like ethnographic or anthropological accounts. The socialist realism on the lines of the cultural-political proclamations made at the conference at Bitterfeld in 1959 and termed generally as 'The Bitterfelder Weg' certainly seems to have an impact on the new way of seeing India and what aspects of life in India became available to the travellers' imagination. Thus, the world of work and the workers are the primary concern of all the three authors.

Despite the shift from ideological rigidity of the 1960s to a liberal worldview of the late 1970s and the early 1980s, all the three GDR authors are primarily assigned with shaping the discourse on India, the GDR and the capitalist West, represented through the self-exiled youth on the margins of society. Most strikingly, the representation of the Western youth culture, albeit ideologically shaped, is certainly at the cost of creating fascination for it and antithetical to the didactic thrust of the travelogues but is not censored by the state. Both, the shift to the liberal worldview and images of a world different from the GDR, unsettle a simplistic memorialization of the GDR as a dictatorial state and straightjacketing of the authors, who had the privilege to travel, as contributors to an unjust regime and its smooth functioning. The anti-romantic progressive impulse in Wangenheim's writing although limited

by her Eurocentrism with occasional racist undertones, Meinck's assessment of the susceptibility of the alternative Western youth cultures to capitalist appropriation, which particularly seems insightful in hindsight and Christ, who critiques socialism from a liberal perspective and acknowledges his European biases, certainly seem to complicate the post-1990s reduction of GDR literature to ideological indoctrination mediated through censorship mechanism.

## NOTES

1. All translations of the original German texts were done by the author.
2. The title is to be translated as *Kolkata Is Not Located on the Ganges*.
3. The title is to be translated as *The Captive Sun*.
4. The title is to be translated as *My India*.

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# ENTANGLEMENTS IN CARTOGRAPHY AND ARCHITECTURE BETWEEN SOCIALIST GERMANY AND INDIA, 1949–1989

*Christoph Bernhardt*

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## INTRODUCTION

The years after the Second World War represent a period of fundamental political change on a global scale. The end of traditional colonialism in most parts of the world and the turn towards socialism in many East European states marked a re-arrangement of the global political order and the beginning of the Cold War period. The independence of India from the British Empire in 1947 and the founding of the new socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the Eastern part of Germany in 1949 established two new states which in some regards represented role models within the Socialist Bloc and the movement of the so-called ‘non-aligned’ states.

This chapter explores a key work of East German socialist cartography on India, which was published in 1958 (Lehmann and Weiße 1958a), from two perspectives. On the one hand, the analysis of the work will be embedded in the more general framework of

diplomatic and economic relations between India and the GDR to better understand the cultural context of cartographic production and the serious diplomatic conflict that arose between the two states on cartographic issues in the 1960s. On the other hand, an analysis of the biography of geographer and chief editor Edgar Lehmann and his institutional context, as well as a close reading of some of the maps will provide insights into the traditions and new orientations of East German cartography between socialist and post-colonial thinking.

## **TWO COUNTRIES IN SEARCH OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION**

From a general political point of view, from the very beginning, relations between India and the GDR showed specific patterns of cooperation between a young socialist and a recently decolonized post-colonial country. This cooperation reflected both countries' struggle for economic growth and that of the GDR, in particular, for its international diplomatic recognition which the East German state only achieved in the early 1970s. Until then, economic exchange between the two countries was only growing slowly as was the commercial exchange between India and the socialist hemisphere in general. Around 1965, India's trade with the socialist transnational economic association 'Comecon' represented no more than 10 per cent of the total Indian foreign trade. In contrast, for the GDR, India along with Egypt and Brazil represented one of the closest economic partners amongst the emerging countries (Lamm and Kupper 1976, 170). Around 1965, about one-fifth (19.6%) of GDR's total trade with emerging countries was run with India. The Indian subcontinent primarily imported fertilizers, potash, machinery for agriculture, steel, photographic material, chemicals, ships and printing machines from the GDR. India, in return, exported not only oilcake, jute, skins, cashew, tea, coffee, tobacco and iron ore but also printing and textile machines and cotton to the GDR (Gutfeld 1957; Lamm and Kupper 1976, 172–176). As we will show below, in the East German regional cluster of cartography, large publishing houses and major press manufacturers around the Saxon city of Leipzig played a considerable role in this economic cooperation.

The East German state, thus, imported primary resources in large quantities from India as part of a long-term cooperation and

offered expertise for the health and educational systems (Anand 1984; Lamm and Kupper 1976, 170, 199). GDR–India relations also included cultural and technological exchange. Thus, during the 1960s and the 1970s, Indian film-makers often used films produced by the GDR enterprise ORWO, while GDR publishing houses such as Aufbau Verlag and Lotos Verlag brought out German translations and studies of leading Indian writers such as Nirmal Verma and Dilip Chitre (Tatke 2017).

Around 1971, the changing political situation in India which brought Indira Gandhi to power incidentally coincided with the growing international diplomatic recognition of the GDR and a regime shift from socialist leader Walter Ulbricht to his successor Erich Honecker. Finally, in October 1972, India officially recognized the GDR and took up full diplomatic relations (Benatar 2016). GDR's state publisher (Staatsverlag) celebrated the event along with the 25th anniversary of the Indian Republic by launching a guide and overview of modern India (*Indien in der Welt von heute*, Krüger 1972). From that time on, India intensified its relations with the USSR and the transnational socialist economic organization, Comecon, and on 17 October 1973, a major treaty on economic and scientific cooperation was also signed with the GDR (Kammer 1972).

## **LEIPZIG AS A HUB OF GDR: INDIAN COOPERATION**

The Saxon region around the city of Leipzig played a key role in the relations between India and the GDR. This was especially true for the role of the international Leipzig fair, which was the main event for economic import and export in the GDR. As early as 1961, a major 'general agreement on technical cooperation' was made at the Leipzig fair between the East German Agency for foreign trade LIMEX and the major Indian public enterprise for tool factories in Bangalore, 'Hindustan Machine Tools Ltd'. According to this treaty, Indian experts could choose their favourite goods from all the GDR tool machine producing enterprises and get licences and instructions for production and the education of staff in the GDR. In the context of this cooperation, the major press manufacturer, VEB Polygraph Leipzig, exported printing machines to enterprises in Faridabad and Mumbai (Lamm and Kupper 1976, 180–184),



which reflects Leipzig's role as the leading East German regional cluster in this sector.

The treaty of 1961 was accompanied by several GDR–India scientific initiatives of cooperation, like a GDR Week at Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh, in 1961, or the opening of a department for German Studies at the Hyderabad Institute for English and Foreign Languages in 1973. Leipzig was also in a more general sense a hub of sociocultural entanglements between the two countries. Every foreign student coming to the GDR had to pass a one-year preparation course at the Herder-Institute of the University of Leipzig, where mainly language courses and natural sciences were taught. Moreover, the Institute offered summer courses in German for foreign teachers (Lamm and Kupper 1976, 227–229).

## **HISTORISCH-GEOGRAPHISCHES KARTENWERK INDIEN**

It was not by accident that the key work of GDR cartography on India, *Historisch-geographisches Kartenwerk Indien* (Historical-geographical Map Series India), was also published in Leipzig (Lehmann and Weiße 1958a). The edition was a joint venture of the two major publishers, 'Leipzig Enzyklopädie' and 'VEB Hermann Haack', which continued the strong intellectual and economic tradition of geography and cartography in the region from pre-socialist times. Both enterprises had taken over the stock of former capitalist companies and had been reorganized according to socialist legislation and ideology after the Second World War.

The collection comprised of 16 sheets with a total of 85 maps (Lehmann and Weiße 1958b, 1–2). The themes covered a wide range of socio-economic, historical and cultural issues and represented a work of basic research which, at an initial glance, did not seem to show evident socialist ideology. Most of the maps visualized data from the time periods around 1901, 1931 and 1951 and reflected the modern history of India in the first half of the 20th century until independence in 1947. Most of the data shown in the maps was drawn from the famous Census of India, mainly from the years 1871, 1901, 1931 and 1951 (Lehmann 1958, 8). Some maps went back to the pre-history of India and the Mogul period (Lehmann and Weiße 1958b, 1–2). In contrast, the final sheet, No. 16, addressed

patterns of land use, industry and trade routes around 1950, highlighting the connections between India and the USSR and trying to give an overview of the economic structure of the country (Lehmann and Weiße 1958a, Sheet 16).

With regard to the fact that the edition was made for a wider audience, one might say that this was an outstanding work which due to its rich and detailed information by far exceeded any other cartographic representation of India in both the German states at the time. In similar German atlases that shared their historical perspective with the work of Lehmann and Weiße, like those from Putzger, Westermann or publisher Hermann Haack (Putzger 1954; Stier 1956; Zentralinstitut 1982), India was usually presented in a much more superficial way and in extremely small scales. West German contemporary observers regarded the Lehmann and Weiße collection as being of superior quality, far above any other similar cartographic compendium on emerging countries of the time (Wendorff 1984, 26).

## The Concept of the Edition

The edition, which was issued by the publishing houses, 'Enzyklopädie' and 'VEB Hermann Haack', Leipzig, was, to a large extent, based on the work of cartographer Hildegard Weiße who, under the direction of Chief Editor Edgar Lehmann, profited from information given by the embassies of India and Pakistan and from a large network of professors (Lehmann 1958, 3). In terms of its conceptual approach, Lehmann placed the project in the long-term tradition of German regional historical research and cartography. But he had to admit that the much larger spatial extension of India forced the geographers and cartographers to partly abandon established German concepts, change the scale, reduce historical complexity and concentrate on visual information in a different way than for European or German regions. As a result, instead of a complex synthesis, a type of dense serial visual presentations had to be elaborated, as Lehmann (1958, 4) put it.

The concept of the edition to focus on socio-economic issues placed the project at the crossroads of long-term German cartographic traditions and contemporary interests of the East German socialist state. Editor Lehmann underlined in his introduction that it had only been in the 1920s that mainstream cartography

in Germany like the famous 'Putzger' atlas had widened its focus beyond political history and had taken up economic issues. At the same time, regional associations like the Society for Rhineland Regional Studies (*Gesellschaft für rheinische Landeskunde*) had developed new concepts of cultural and economic geography which the edition tried to transfer to the Indian case (Lehmann 1958, 5).

## Biographic and Institutional Context

The biography of Editor Lehmann shows a similar mixture of long-term German cartographic traditions and scientific culture in a socialist context as did the map series on India. It was not by accident that he worked all his life in the city of Leipzig which was a centre of geography and cartography in Germany since the 19th century. After having studied geography, history and philosophy in the mid-20s, he became director of the Department of Cartography in the renowned Bibliographic Institute in Leipzig in 1932. While in this position, he had directed famous German cartographic milestones such as *Der Große Weltatlas* (1933) and *Meyers Handatlas* (1933, 1935; Koch 2010). After the Second World War, his Institute became part of the major GDR socialist enterprise for the printing of maps, 'VEB Deutsche Buch-und Landkartendruckerei'. In the following years, he became the director of two geographic research units and chair at the University of Leipzig. It should be mentioned that Lehmann did not join the socialist party, which indicates that the regime was willing to integrate leading scholars and intellectuals from outside the party in order to stabilize the young socialist system (Koch 2010).

In Lehmann's professional functions, the role of a specific Leipzig intellectual cluster becomes visible in which geographic and cartographic sciences worked with major publishing and printing enterprises. High-ranked products like the maps of the edition on India were copied into hundreds and thousands of popular atlases and schoolbooks. This was also true for potential errors which could cause serious conflicts, as we will see below in the case of the cartographical representation of India in the 1960s. In the strategy of the publisher, the collection was meant to serve as a link between the 'Global Atlas' on the 'states of the world and their economy' (*Weltatlas: Die Staaten der Erde und ihre Wirtschaft*) that Editor Lehmann had published just a year ago (Lehmann 1957) and a

series of atlases on nation-states and their economies that would follow. The mission was to show the added value of geo-economic history, as visualized by cartography, through the pioneering case of India. The publisher announced more atlases on Great Britain, France, Northern Africa, etc., to be published in the following years and indeed in 1960, Edgar Lehmann edited the next collection of maps on the British Islands, France and the BENELUX states (Lehmann 1960; Verlag 1958).

### **Cartographic Narratives on Indian History**

In fact, Editor Lehmann's comments on the maps reflect a specific narrative on modern Indian history from its beginnings. Amongst other statements, he strongly criticized the serious consequences of the British colonization of India's traditional industries (Lehmann 1958, 6–7). Unfortunately, we do not know from which strand of literature or intellectual traditions these and other statements were drawn as no references are given in his introduction. Lehmann probably may have referred to traditional anti-British attitudes in German political sciences and geography as well as to anti-capitalist or anti-imperialist critiques from a socialist point of view. In his comment, Lehmann specifically struggled with the role of nature in India, especially that of the monsoons. On the one hand, he could not deny the impact of monsoons on the social and economic situation in India, on the other, owing to socialist ideology, he had to subordinate natural conditions and prioritize sociopolitical factors. Other detailed comments that he dealt with were the multitude of languages in India and rapidly growing urbanization (Lehmann 1958, 8–11).

Lehmann also gave a very critical presentation of industrial development, under the dictate of British and Indian capitalists, and of rapid urbanization that according to him was marked by extreme poverty. This position, in fact, took up key arguments of socialist ideology as developed by communist founding father, Friedrich Engels, with regard to the 19th-century Manchester (Engels 1845). Lehmann also underlined the specific relations between cities and villages in India, especially in the case of migrant workers and, at the end of his introduction, highlighted the role of Indian land reform of the early 1950s. This was an argument

which implicitly referred to the socialist land reform in the GDR, which was realized in the same period (Lehmann 1958, 11–12).

## A Closer Look on Some of the Maps

It was not by accident that, as a kind of preface, the first two maps dealt with land use and industry in the 20th-century India (Map 1b). This meant that the chronological order from prehistoric times onwards only started with the third map. A closer look on Map 1b (see Figure 4.1) reveals that on a scale of 1:20 million, only a very rough overview could be given on the state of the Indian economy in 1931. Four main categories of industries: large modern industries (like steelworks, in red), food industries (like tea or sugar, in brown), textile industries (like cotton, in blue) and building industries (like wood, brick) were shown, which were subdivided into several sub-categories. Moreover, big cities, major roads and the quality of land for cultivation were presented (fertile land in brown, less fertile land in yellow; for map in colour, see <https://micamp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch4>). So, for example, a contemporary GDR reader was informed about the role of Bombay—to take only one illustration—as a centre of large modern industry, textile industries and building industry.

In general, the maps predominantly provided information on Indian economy. As a consequence, in some cases, cultural and political complexity was extremely reduced, as can be seen in the map on ‘cultural and economic development’ in the period of the famous Mughal emperor, Akbar (1556–1605; Map 2e, see Figure 4.2). Besides the places of birth, coronation and death of the emperor, none of the major milestones of his outstanding cultural policy were mentioned. Instead, a general idea of the political expansion of Akbar’s empire and an extremely detailed survey on the import and export of a large number of goods, like wheat or tobacco, doves and carpets was given.

The maps on the territorial development of India from the 1760s to 1951 indicate that the editor and his leading collaborator, Hildegard Weiße, also took over and reworked maps from well-known Western cartographers like the British publisher, John George Bartholomew (1860–1920), who had published a large atlas on imperial India (Map 3d) in 1909 (Bartholomew 1909). Here,



Figure 4.1 India 1931

Source: Lehmann and Weiße (1958a, Map 1b).

For accessing the map in colour, see <https://micasmp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccmedia-ch4>

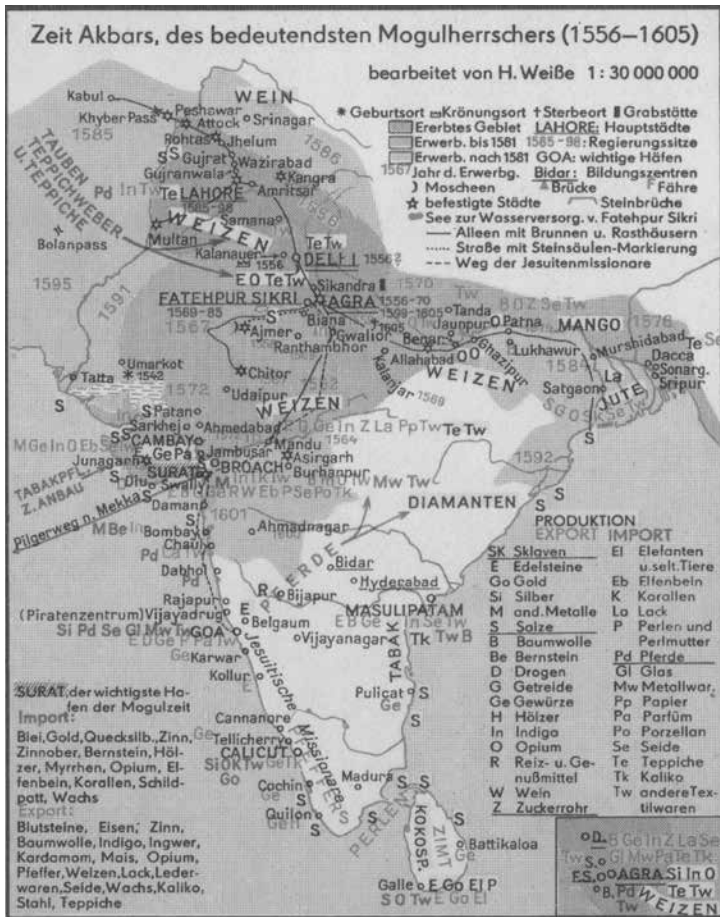


Figure 4.2 The Time of Mughal Emperor Akbar (1555–1609)

Source: Lehmann and Weiße (1958a, Map 2b).

For accessing the map in colour, see <https://micasmp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-cddmedia-ch4>

apart from the difference of imperial and feudal areas and the relocation of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1912, only little additional information was given.

In contrast, the maps on regional economy show more details and a sophisticated design (Map 5f, Figure 4.3) which obviously profited from traditions of German cartography in presenting the industrial region of Ruhr valley and other areas from the 1920s

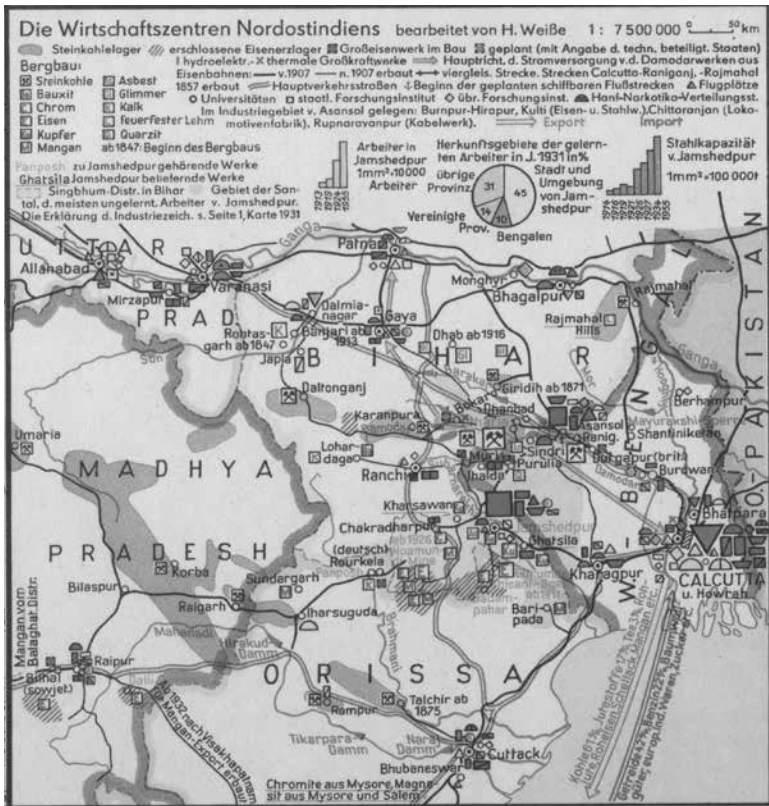


Figure 4.3 The Economic Centres in Northeast India

Source: Lehmann and Weiße (1958a, Map 5f).

For accessing the map in colour, see <https://micasmp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-cdmedia-ch4>

onwards (Stier 1956, 142). Map 5f shows the north-eastern region around Kolkata with detailed information on natural resources such as iron ore, power plants, research institutes and even the large industrial plant of Rourkela. The Rourkela iron works project had been developed by the capitalist West German regime but was simply declared ‘German’ (deutsch) in the map.

The role of India in the world economy as shown in Map 15a (see Figure 4.4) reflects a typical socialist perspective and, at the same time, shows the influence of Lehmann’s former publication on the global economy. It must be said that it follows a very large-scale



# INDIEN IN DER WELTPRODUKTION UND SOZIALE PROBLEME DER INDISCHEN LANDWIRTSCHAFT

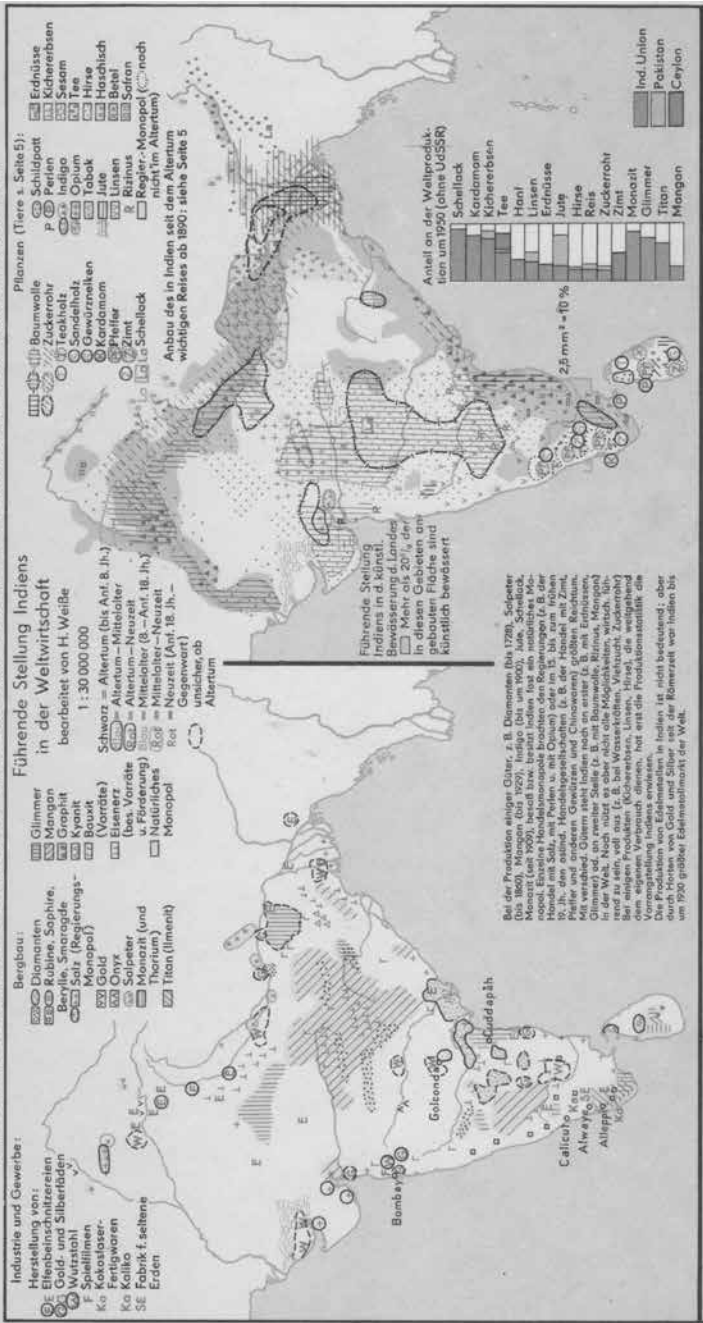


Figure 4.4 India's Position in World Economy and Problems of Agriculture  
 Source: Lehmann and Weiße (1958a, Map 15a).

For accessing the map in colour, see <https://micamp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-cdmedia-ch4>

perspective, highlighting the leading role of India in some global markets, such as gold and silver, and in the field of agricultural irrigation. Here, the strong socialist belief in the determining role of economy and productivity is visually represented.

Several sheets show a strong engagement with classical Marxist issues like work force and social problems. Some maps, like Map 6d on education are dedicated to the role of unskilled workers in different economic regions and sectors, like large-scale industry, textile industry or agriculture. A majority of the sheets on social problems show limited information, like the one on Scheduled Castes in 1931 (Map 7e) which only presents the representation of castes in different regions as percentages of the entire population.

Some of the several maps which deal with social problems and urbanization reflect a view which, in fact, mixes colonial and socialist ideas. The map on housing problems in some industrial areas in 1942 (Map 10f) confirms this observation: the housing problem is measured by the portion of the population which is living in flats with only one room, which is an old category of socialist critique of workers' housing in European capitalist cities. In order to underline the difficult situation in cities like Bombay, a comparison is made with British cities, such as London and Edinburgh.

## **FROM TRADITIONAL TO SOCIALIST CARTOGRAPHY**

The short overview of Lehmann and Weiße's edition on India based on a limited number of maps which was given here could only present some snapshots. A large number of maps on other issues like migration, refugees, religious issues or rural settlements and lifestyles could not be addressed. From a more general point of view there is no doubt that in a long-term perspective, the map series marked a late masterpiece of traditional German cartography which had only just begun to be transformed towards socialist concepts. The fundamental shift from Lehmann and Weiße's thinking and vocabulary, as reflected in their atlas on India which mirrored classical economic geography as developed since around 1900, to the new socialist ideology can be studied along GDR's cartographic publications from later periods. One prominent illustration is the atlas on history (*Atlas zur*

*Geschichte*) which was published by the same publisher, VEB Hermann Haack, in 1982, in collaboration with the Academy of Sciences (Zentralinstitut 1982). Here, political struggles of communist parties all over the world (Map 92/1) dominated the collection and economic information on India was mainly given in terms of capital investment by the 'West German Imperialism' in the Indian subcontinent (Map 92/1).

Obviously, in the early days of the GDR in which Lehmann and Weiße published their collection, publishers had more room for manoeuvre than in the following decades. Institutionally, cartography in socialist GDR was organized in three branches. Two of them represented governmental cartography which was supervised either by the Ministry of Interior Affairs or, in the case of military cartography, by the Ministry for National Defence. The third section was the so-called 'publishers' cartography' (Verlagskartographie) which was supervised by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (Bundesarchiv 2006; Neupert and Theile 2002, 27). The production of topographical maps was jointly administered between the Ministries of Interior Affairs and National Defence and executed by specialized sectoral organizations for geology, hydrology, urbanism, etc. The Lehmann and Weiße atlas on India was clearly placed in the third branch of 'Verlagsgeographie' which was less controlled at the time than in the following decades.

## **CONFLICTING CARTOGRAPHIES**

Only two years after Lehmann and Weiße had published their collection, cartographic issues caused a serious political conflict between India and the GDR. The struggle was raised by the observation of Indian officials that GDR maps and globes did not correctly show the Chinese-Indian border in the northeast of the country. Within a few years, a serious conflict between India and China culminated in the Indo-Chinese War of 1962. Indian officials regarded the errors of the GDR cartographers, which the East German bureaucracy had not discovered in time, as an implicit vote for the Chinese position. So in July 1960, the representative of the Trade Representation of the GDR in Delhi was called to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. The dispute on the cartographic presentation of the area became such a high-ranked

political issue that the East German Politburo, as the highest body of the socialist party, discussed the problem several times and reflected in detail on the colour and type of lines in which the borders in the region should be shown in GDR atlases (Voigt 2008, 302, 306).

The Indian Government kept criticizing the false borderlines which again publisher 'Hermann Haack, Geographisch-Kartographische Anstalt' showed in different versions and editions of their atlases. In 1962, S. Sinha, Director of the China Department in the Indian External Affairs Ministry, once more strongly protested before the GDR representative in Delhi, arguing that the 4th and 5th editions of the Global Atlas (*Weltatlas*) of Hermann Haack Publishers had maintained the contested version despite all Indian interventions (Voigt 2008, 307). It was most probably exactly Lehmann's publication of 1957 which caused this struggle. In their internal communication, the GDR authorities supposed that the Federal Republic of Germany embassy in Delhi might have informed Indian authorities about the atlas. The GDR representative in return complained that the borders of the GDR, some of which were also highly contested, had been incorrectly presented in Indian maps on Europe (Voigt 2008, 307).

Even if Indian Prime Minister Nehru and GDR's President Grotewohl tried to calm down the conflict, Indian Member of Parliament Jaswant Singh and others accused the GDR of supporting the Chinese position. For both governments, the cartographic conflict was of eminent importance. In 1962, high-ranked GDR state officials noticed that a treaty for economic exchange, which comprised the construction of cement and chemical works, depended on this issue so that the German commission 'according to an Indian demand' put the correction of the maps on their agenda (Bundesarchiv DY\_30). Nonetheless, in 1964, even the leading GDR socialist party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* was accused of showing a false map. Some years later, the problem was once more controversially discussed over an illuminated globe that the GDR had presented in 1965 at an event on '15 years of GDR' in Bombay. However, even in the early 1970s and until full diplomatic recognition of the GDR by India in October 1972, the issue remained controversial (Benatar 2016; Voigt 2008, 303, 308, 312).

## COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

In a wider cross-disciplinary perspective, geographers can be regarded as being a part of an intellectual cluster that generated concepts and practices of mapping and the planning of spaces. Within this cluster, territorial planning and urban design in the GDR were closely connected to geography in several regards. Architects and urban designers were trained in universities like the Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen in Weimar to analyse and use geographical maps in planning projects (Welch Guerra, 2012), and geographers at Leipzig Universität or the Deutsches Institut für Länderkunde documented human settlements and urban spaces that were created by architects and planners. Even if the core disciplines of geography, urban design and planning were organized in separate departments of universities and institutes, they partly institutionally converged between the 1950s and the 1970s. In this period, in the context of new approaches to urban design and landscape planning, architects and planners increasingly integrated economic and socio-spatial analysis into their work, while geographers adopted spatial planning as a part of applied geography (Wardenga et al. 2011).

In the context of India–GDR building projects, a lot of maps, plans, sketches and blueprints were produced, which represent another large body of visual documents. In this chapter, it is only possible to briefly highlight the importance of this field of research which is still to be explored. We know that with the help of East German socialist actors, like enterprises or planners, a number of major projects were planned and realized. In the early 1960s, GDR experts undertook research on the chances to build an iron ore works in Madras. In 1966, in Karukutty (Kerala), a cable works was opened which had been developed with the help of engineers from GDR socialist enterprises in Berlin and Magdeburg. In 1963 and 1964, two major oxygen plants developed in bilateral cooperation were opened in Bombay and Faridabad where a glass factory had also been started in 1960 (Lamm and Kupper 1976, 240–241). It is difficult to find the related maps and other graphic sources in the archives, except for some of the sketches and blueprints like the

one of a dairy plant designed by the GDR planner, Egon Mankopf, for the export building enterprise, Ipro Berlin.

In the field of architecture and planning, as in other sectors, the meetings of international organizations worked as a strong trigger of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Hence, in 1982, the Building Academy of the GDR sent its employee Gottfried Wagner to a 10-day journey to the UNO Center 'HABITAT' meeting in Delhi. At this event, experts from 15 countries discussed concepts for the regeneration of old inner-urban quarters and other issues. The Building Academy instructed its employee to check, according to Building Academy's guidelines on 'policies for export', the chances to deliver planning and research results and make useful contacts (IRS Erkner 198, A\_2\_2, 150). The strategy to act as a private enterprise and compete for projects and profits on a globalized market increasingly determined the interests and modes of action of GDR actors as well as GDR-India relations more generally.

When around 1986, the Government of India set up a commission to examine the problems of urbanization and 'suggest a suitable direction to carry out future urbanization programmes and determine appropriate strategies in India', the Embassy of India in the GDR asked the East German Ministry for Foreign Affairs for consultancy. In its answer, the state-run Building Academy, which was the central public agency in this field, offered to organize a two-week seminar for Indian urbanists at Bauhaus University Weimar for an amount of \$150 per day and capita (IRS Erkner 1986, A\_2\_2, 36). Other offers confirm that the Building Academy acted like a private enterprise which offered to organize urban and regional planning on the basis of detailed cost calculation that had been tested in projects realized in Yemen, Algeria and Ghana (IRS Erkner 1985, A\_2\_2, 150). Declared as activities for 'Initiating' and 'Offering' and coordinated by the LIMEX foreign affairs office in Berlin, several enterprises sent their experts to Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta in the course of the year 1985 to prepare contracts on a variety of projects ranging from tool machines to urban planning (IRS Erkner 1985, A\_2\_2, 150). These projects were based on a bilateral convention signed on 4 February 1985 for the development of scientific-technological and economic cooperation with India (IRS Erkner 1985, A\_2\_2, 150). The emergence of a global

market for architecture and planning, which included the socialist states and enterprises, and which produced an enormous number of graphic materials of great socio-economic impact, had strongly developed long before the falling of the wall and the collapse of the socialist system.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the complex relations between India and socialist GDR by focusing on the field of cartographic entanglements. It becomes clear that the two states, which had only been founded in the immediate post-Second World War period, faced major challenges in fields such as economic development and exchange, as well as in developing diplomatic relations during the early Cold War years. In this context, East German geographer Edgar Lehmann and cartographer Hildegard Weiße, with their atlas on India, published in 1958, set a milestone of transnational cartographic entanglement between Europe and India. The chapter has demonstrated the rich heuristic potential that this and other series of maps and geographic information had for perceptions of India in socialist GDR. Along with related sources, like documents on the intellectual, political and social contexts of these atlases, and primary sources in national archives and in architectural history archives, they provide insights in a highly relevant field of contemporary transnational history.

The work of Lehmann and Weiße mainly reflected long-term traditions of German cartography developed in pre-socialist times which the editor was able to continue with until the 1960s. This would not have been possible without the support of the Leipzig regional cluster of scholarly geography and cartography along with the knowledge and economic power of strong scientific institutions and large publishing houses. As a result, a large collection of maps on India was created, which presented a survey on a multitude of issues with a focus on socio-economic and historical themes. In some way, the edition marked the end of detailed 'positivist' cartography under socialist conditions, which was replaced by increasingly rigid socialist ideological concepts in the following decades.

Consequently, it was not by accident that strong diplomatic conflicts arose on specific cartographic details in the GDR maps of India during the 1960s. In a long-term perspective, the diplomatic recognition of the GDR by India in 1972 and the turn in socialist policies in the fields of architecture and planning to quasi-capitalist commercial calculation in the 1980s indicate the fundamental changes in political relations and sociocultural contexts of cartography and the production of related graphic media in the course of the four decades between 1949 and 1989.

The chapter has pointed to the significant role of cartography amongst different contemporary media, like newspapers, travel literature, radio or friendship societies, in transferring information about India for socialist GDR. Cartography's importance in furthering knowledge on India can be summarized in three ways: first, some of the maps were printed in hundreds and thousands of copies and played a pivotal role in informing every school-going child's imagination of India in the GDR so that one may conclude that cartography as a medium probably reached a larger part of the population than any other. Second, cartography also provided, in a very dense, yet simple and suggestive way, key information about one of the largest countries worldwide to all kinds of experts of trade and culture, politicians, intellectuals and the socialist middle classes. Third, this information summarized the key features of national geography, economy, society and administration of India, and therein claimed to, in fact, formally present the country and the state to a foreign audience. This made cartography a highly sensitive field of communication, especially at a time when both—the country presented in the maps and the one where this information was circulated—were two newly founded nation-states, which were negotiating their position in a Cold War driven world.

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# A WITNESS TO HISTORY

## Production of Images of India in GDR Newsreels

*Reyazul Haque*

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In post-war East Germany and later in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), India features prominently in newsreel film productions. These films were screened in cinema houses during interludes of main feature films and, as suggested in their title *Der Augenzeuge* (the eyewitness), they claimed authenticity in being an eyewitness of international events. This chapter looks at newsreel production in the GDR as a strategic cinema device that bore deep influences of Cold War politics. It engages with how India was represented in these newsreels and contextualizes how the emerging developments of the Cold War brought India closer to the cultural and political requirements of the GDR in its efforts to find its own identity as a nation-state and legitimize its political existence in a troubled period of the last century. I see the extensive use of visual images of India in the newsreels as a case of entangled cinematic collaboration, given that they represent intertwined gazes from India and the GDR that co-shaped this cinema culture, and as a medium that offers the possibility to enquire into transnational as well as translocal entanglements among individual actors from both the countries.

### **NEWSREELS: IN AND AS ARCHIVE**

Newsreels face us today in the form of an archive. An archive, not only because they represent historical objects that have exhausted

their immediate intended use and purpose and are available mainly for those who are interested in the study of the past but also in the sense that they constitute the very past that they were produced in. As Tara Allison Hottman (2018, 2) reminds us, ‘images are constitutive of historical experience rather than simply representative of it’. As a form of discourse and as facilitators of a discourse, newsreel films invested themselves in constructing identities, but they also played the role of, what Sigrun Lehnert would call, an ‘agent of history’ in which they function on three levels:

1. As a story, whereby they represent a piece of a nation’s history.
2. As a form of storytelling, wherein they claim to reproduce history.
3. As an institution, that is, a production house, where they act as initiators and mediators of historical narratives (Lehnert 2018, 4).

In newsreels, we find news reports that narrate the social and political life of a nation and reports about other nations which were mainly told through the cultural and political lens of the nation where they were produced. In this way, they represent fragments of a nation’s history, revealing how actors within a nation imagined and actively produced it by constructing images of the other. By constructing the identity of another nation and seeking to provide evidences of this making, newsreels form the core of what Samuel Sieber (2016, 25) calls the ‘visual regime’ of a nation.

This visual regime largely functions through the production and reproduction of visual images (still or moving), often accompanied by audio and textual supplements to produce a storytelling device that serves, as Paul Virilio outlines in his study of the history of cinema and modern wars, a nation’s geo-strategic interests. In this form of storytelling, newsreels tell us volumes about the history that they themselves helped in creating.

What makes newsreels a significant and layered source of history making is that it is saturated with what Bill Nichols would call a ‘surplus of meanings’ (Alter 2002, 17). While proposing methods to study the meaning of documentary films, Nichols describes how images and bodies of the subjects of documentary films create

meanings that are in 'excess of those immediately intended by the referential' (Alter 2002, 17). Newsreels, due to their specific requirements of being brief, interesting and entertaining, mostly rely on stereotypes, though occasionally they also try to go beyond them because of emerging sociopolitical situations. This use of stereotypes and the film-maker's negotiation with ensuing tensions provides another layer of meaning constituted by such films.

This makes newsreels an interesting form of archive, as they are not only archival material but archives in their own right. As a technology, they determine the 'very institution of the archivable event' as Derrida (1998, cited in Sieber 2016, 27) would say. The way in which a certain image and a specific description emerge within a certain sequence, with a particular duration and repetition, reveals the ideological framework of the production. As Sieber puts it in his study of newsreels as an archive, newsreels do not have an inherent absolute or real truth that they try to inform the people about. Rather, if taken as archives, they reveal how newsreels deal with and depict the reality in which they work, that is, how they were produced and received. They mark the coming together of 'predominant discourses and visual regimes' that give them their power to influence mass perceptions (Sieber 2016, 25). Thus, they are also crucial indicators of the making of the aesthetic memory and repertoire of the very medium they constitute.

As a powerful entertainment device meant to influence public perception, since their inception, newsreels were often used for state propaganda and in contemporary times, as archival material, they pose, as Imesch and others have put it, a dilemma that a scholar has to deal with: on the one hand, they are considered 'a product of national propaganda', while on the other, they are praised as a 'cultural asset' that has considerable value for a nation's history and culture (Sieber 2016, 24–25).

## **'BIOPICS OF NATION?' OF WAR, STATE AND IDENTITY MAKING**

This dilemma is best reflected in the general and scholarly perception of newsreels as 'biopics of the nation' (cited in Imesch, Schade, and Sieber 2016, 11–12). They are 'biopics' but they unescapably tell the story of the formation of a political community or a nation.

As Knut Hickethier puts it, ‘visual metaphors have a community-forming and culture-creating effect’ because they are ‘based on the images that are part of the basic components of a cultural group or nation’ (Hickethier 2016, 51).

This delicate yet closely found relation might have its origin in the fact, as Imesch and others point out, that as a medium, newsreels were ‘controlled by national governments’, although such an orientation towards national framing can even be seen in productions that were the work of private, commercial production houses, given that conventionally, political, social and cultural news was seen through the prism and within the boundaries of the nation-state. This is, however, not the only reason why newsreels would be anchored in national frameworks. As various studies have pointed out, newsreel audiences identified with reports being shown primarily through the categories of what is national and what is foreign. Since newsreels were very short in length, they usually evoked ‘mythical subjects (e.g., a nation)’ to provide a structure to the plot and to enable ‘subjective and collective identification’. This ‘rhetoric in the newsreels’ swayed audiences to imagine, identify with and situate themselves within the discourse that was being projected in the medium (Imesch et al. 2016, 9). Therefore, by its very design, a newsreel invents and invokes the identity and consciousness of a nation as it constructs a community of political and cultural subjects.

This is evident from the history of newsreels, in general, and its use in Germany, in particular. When newsreels were first produced around 1910 in France, they soon became popular in Germany, not the least due to propaganda requirements of the First World War, when newsreels were used to inform audiences about military achievements on the front and to mobilize them for the state’s interests. Once the significance of newsreels in presenting military achievements had been established, their production continued in the Weimar Republic. During the Nazi rule, with the use of threat to violence against cinema houses, the production and screening of newsreels acquired a new format. Screening and watching newsreels were made mandatory and the doors of cinema houses were closed during their screening to stop people who would try to avoid them from leaving (Imesch et al. 2016, 43). In the post-war

period, in divided Germany, both parts established their own setups of newsreel production. Apart from the newsreels introduced by the Allies, the Federal Republic of Germany government established its own production house for its *Neue Deutsche Wochenschau*. On the other hand, in the GDR, newsreels called *Der Augenzeuge*—a title that was significant in the context of Cold War politics as we will see later—were produced by the state-controlled Deutsche Film AG (DEFA). This was when the two German administered states, even before they were constituted as countries, started producing newsreels that projected them as a nation, which was segmented yet had the desire to be politically constituted and identified as one. Thus, in a post-war fragmented nation, even before the actualization of the two separate countries, it was newsreels that were used among other media to construct the image of the respective country from the visual repertoire of memories from a former nation.<sup>1</sup>

In their study of post-war European newsreels, Imesch, Schade, and Sieber analyse the function and significance of newsreels in the construction of cultural identities, focusing on how memorized and repetitive moving images of what was considered the national (self) and foreign nations were employed to invent a cultural identity in war-torn Europe. These scholars assert that newsreels contributed to the construction of cultural identities ‘as part of national discourse, political processes, and economic strategies in European countries after 1945’ (Imesch et al. 2016, 7). Identity here is not seen as a static marker, but as ‘as a construct in perpetual progress through historical, medial, imaginative and imaginary practices of identification, intertwining collectives and individuals, and thereby producing reality’ (Imesch et al. 2016, 8). The making of this identity was performed by constantly including and excluding references and elements from the cinematic ‘dispositif’,<sup>2</sup> that navigated the gaze to address the ‘optical unconscious’<sup>3</sup> of the spectator towards the process of identification, in which the self and other were divided along with what was supposed to be ‘national’ and what was ‘foreign’. Though newsreel films do not necessarily constitute the core of national cinema, they nonetheless illustrate what Andrew Higson describes as ‘product of a tension between “home” and “away,” between the identification of the homely and the assumption that it is quite distinct from what happens elsewhere’ (Higson 2000, 60).



Newsreels operated within a cultural, political and aesthetic complex, which Derrida would call a 'fictional fashioning' in which the 'actuality' is 'produced, sifted, invested and performatively interpreted by numerous apparatuses which are factitious or artificial, hierarchizing and selectable, always in the service of forces and interests' (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 3). The use and movements of camera, angles of shots, cuts, their sequences, music, voice over, other sounds, selection of sequences and repetition, their overall placement within the complete newsreel package and many other elements and devices of film production mediate this depicted 'actuality' and, therefore, every newsreel carried an image of the world of which accuracy was constructed as per the ideological and commercial requirements of the production houses or producing nations.<sup>4</sup>

In this way, newsreels became an effective tool to communicate and educate larger audiences while at the same time making them imagine themselves as being part of a single unit (Lehnert 2018, 4). However, as a medium of discourse of any kind, newsreels would not have succeeded had they not been established as, as Sieber puts it, 'an articulable and visible medium', in other words, the newsreel had to make 'itself part of a discourse' (Sieber 2016, 33).

Thus, as we see, newsreels, as a medium that claims to articulate actuality, place themselves in the discourse of being authentic before everything else.

## **THE STRATEGY OF PRODUCING AUTHENTIC IMAGES**

This authenticity, which was the fundamental logic of newsreels, used the unique ability of cinema in, what Abel Gance defined as, 'cancelling time and space' (cited in Virilio 1989, 34). This refers to how newsreels created their own time and space in the presence of viewers that interfered with their own passing of time and seemed to cancel it. Bill Nichols (1980, 279) has pointed out the characteristics of the newsreel films in which due to the fact that the 'diegetic plane is located externally to the film', it becomes natural to them that they are often equated with the reality itself.

As a film genre and a technological instrument to educate people and create certain perspectives among the viewing masses,

newsreels began in an era when a new way of perception was emerging with the coming of aviation and the movie camera. It did not only free the human eye, or the function of seeing, from the limits of the physical human body but also opened a new way of looking at things in which a 'viewpoint can be mobile, can get away from the static focus and share the speed of moving objects' (Virilio 1989, 21). With the added assistance of an aircraft, this viewpoint could be aerial, which was unimaginable until now. Therefore, during and after the Second World War, 'aerial vision became a widespread phenomenon with a large public' (Virilio 1989, 25). Both of these developments not only created a new possibility for perceiving reality, but they also intervened in the ways human beings have been perceiving and experiencing the flow of time and accessing distance. Now, with cinema and aviation, distances were redefined and so was time, which had its own flow within the duration of a cinematic creation.

In this context, what was considered 'real' was not limited to the immediate surroundings of a viewer, it was extended to the viewing field of a movie camera that could record the passage of time in a certain space and, thus, could produce such moving visuals that could represent the 'real' in the greatest possible accuracy. Even after recognizing the limitations posed by the medium, and subjective and selective interventions of the creators of the visuals, it was considered the most accurate imitation of what was real, and, hence, it could claim to be authentic.

This technological discovery went hand in hand with the military strategic requirements of initially the First World War and then the Second World War when war activities and achievements were presented to the viewers at home as proof of national power and, hence, created an audience essentially based on national identity.<sup>5</sup> This, in turn, helped the newsreels get established as what Sieber would call an 'articulable and visible medium' (2016, 33). With the ability to use the discourse of authenticity in order to project certain constructed visuals as 'reality', newsreels became an essential medium for states in the post-Hiroshima world torn by the Cold War, when after the explosion of the nuclear bomb, the so-called 'deterrence principle' redefined political and military strategy, which now depended upon *revealing* the strength of the

nation, rather than using it in real battles. This strength was no doubt primarily based on material objects (especially weapons of war and nuclear bombs), but it was staged and articulated mainly through audiovisual media. Thus, the Cold War became, in Virilio's words, a war of publicizing the material and ideological strength of nation-states. A camera alone had the capacity to record and produce images of reality, which could also be manipulated according to needs, and was considered an 'eyewitness' to what was real in different geographical spaces and historical times.

Generally, as the above-mentioned studies have shown, creating an identity and addressing the urgent strategic requirements of Cold War largely relied upon processes of self-image production of the country concerned. However, the study of the use of images of other nations in ascertaining one's own image has not been given that much significance. In the following section, with the analysis of GDR newsreels produced by DEFA during the Cold War, I will show how using images of India helped the GDR state at two levels—to define and legitimize itself as a country, on the one hand, and to articulate its strength in a fragmented and beleaguered international situation, on the other.

## **AN EYEWITNESS TO HISTORY: THE CASE OF GDR NEWSREELS**

Established in May 1946 as state-owned production enterprise with the mandate of 'de-Nazification and political re-education in Germany' (Allan 2015, 52), DEFA began the production of its weekly newsreel series *Der Augenzeuge* with the main function to educate audiences about 'socialist working, learning, and living' for which the natural model was the USSR (Lehnert 2018, 5). To maintain their ideological conformity, newsreels were assessed by a Soviet advisor and a committee of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED) members. Each DEFA newsreel usually contained 8–15 reports and was 10–12 minutes in length. The newsreels consisted of reports mostly on the social, political and cultural life of the GDR and the USSR and some on countries around the world, where strategic interests of the GDR could be mapped.

*Der Augenzeuge* translates into English as 'eyewitness'. With this title, the producers of the reports seemed not only to

suggest that they (or their camerapersons) had been an eyewitness to what they were producing but also that they possessed what used to be called a 'world view', which was a theory of socialism, that can see and make sense of affairs of the human world. By watching these reports, audiences witnessed not only the constructed reports of the actual events but also the convergence of the above two claims. The title *Augenzeuge* not only attributed newsreels the status of being an eyewitness to history that was in the making but also served as a proof of changing realities.<sup>6</sup> As Kurt Maetzig, one of the founders and the first director of *Der Augenzeuge*, conceptualized it, the newsreel was 'a person'. In his words,

It is the personification of the spectator himself, who now is represented in the newsreel's name. The spectator, who himself views what is on the screen as an eye witness, must keep in mind that his own critique and judgment must be employed to understand the purpose behind the pictures seen on the screen. (Quoted in Jordan 1993, 66)

The connotation of being an eyewitness and using the film as an eyewitness prioritizes the camera in relation to the eye where the record of what the eye of the camera has seen is presented to the eyes of the viewers. It also prioritizes the past over the present, in which the images and narratives from the past are used to explain and define what is being perceived in the present. In order to make sense of the present in a certain way, or to create a meaning situated in the present, that can also include revisiting the past, it authenticates the present and gives it a certain kind of urgency. Since the past is presented here through images, only to negotiate with and navigate through the present, there are always aspects of relevance and constructed immediacy that underline the newsreel films. In this way, they become facts, shown as immediately related to the present. In this dynamic between the past and the present, a newsreel film that claims to be an eyewitness (to a different time and space) creates a new temporal unity between perception and experience in the everyday life of a viewer, in which they negotiate between what they see as a present with what they live in.

We see here how GDR newsreels, by virtue of their name, place themselves in a discourse of authenticity, involving not only

a technical machine, which supposedly does not have a subjective view in itself, but also the audiences, who are invited to become an eyewitness to what is worth witnessing in the world. The journalists or camerapersons who created the reports remain invisible and anonymous, and by removing the presence of an 'author' from the news reports, and adding a voiceover of a distanced commentator, the newsreels become more 'objective' as the viewer encounters the audiovisual reports as 'truths that he alone knows' (Virilio 1989, 47). News reports that are deliberately isolated from any index to reality other than visuals increase the effect of being authentic: moving images are deprived of colour and sounds, and often it is difficult to precisely identify their actual time and space. But by adding music, commentary and a constructed duration, they guide the viewer towards the narrative and, thus, present themselves as an interpreter of reality, which assists in understanding the view and the motion of the camera and unfold the meaning of the report.

## INDIA IN THE NEWSREELS

India features in the newsreels since the beginning of their production in 1946, but it becomes prominent with the formation of the GDR. During the period from 1946 up to 1980, when the production of newsreels was stopped, India occurs in 153 reportages, in which it is often presented with prominence and with palpable fraternity. Though there can be other ways to categorize the reports on India, not the least because representing India in films changed through time, I would like to categorize them under three thematic rubrics in this chapter.

1. *India's struggle for democracy and strength*: Under this category are newsreels that deal with the issue of defining contemporary India from an East German perspective. Films that represented the political, economic and social issues facing India as a recently independent nation and, thereafter, the establishment of democratic institutions in the country belong to this category.
2. *India and its networks of solidarity*: Under this category are newsreel reports that try to position India on the map of international solidarity among the still-colonized nations, the recent post-colonies, the GDR and the broader Socialist Bloc.

3. *India as a land of the past and the future*: This category brings together newsreels that depict images of everyday life in India. They produce representations of India that rely on older familiar images of the country for East German viewers while simultaneously capturing a society that was seen as rapidly changing.

I follow this categorization with the awareness that putting the vast repertoire of newsreels in schematic categories has its own dangers and problems which could include limiting their scope and creating certain biases and pre-conceived notions about them. Nonetheless, it ought to be kept in mind that newsreels are not and cannot be divided neatly in such rubrics. They often fall under more than one category and scenes and narratives intermingle with each other to create a definite impression.

### **India's Struggle for Democracy and Strength**

Soon after the formation of the GDR in October 1949, a newsreel of *Der Augenzeuge*<sup>7</sup> was aired in cinema houses with eight different reports, mostly about various political-cultural affairs of the GDR, the ruling SED party and the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup> The fourth report in this collection was on *Unruhen in Indien* (riots in India). Placed within the newsreel after a report on the French Communist Marcel Cachin's 80th anniversary, and separated by a cut, the opening shot of this report presents a view of a street with flags of Pakistan. This eye-level shot is interrupted by low-angle shots of similar flags in balconies and on strings in the air. Having set the existence of a new national entity, the report opens to a scene of parliamentary proceedings in which the camera pans over the members seated on chairs in semi-circular arrangements, appearing to be discussing the affairs related to Pakistan. Then we see British India's last Viceroy Mountbatten descending from the dais and Muhammad Ali Jinnah taking the place, the action separated by a cutaway transition showing members witnessing this historical event. Thus, the event of Pakistan's formation is established, which is conclusively demonstrated by a Pakistani flag being waved in the Parliament. Underscored by a low, melodramatic music, the voiceover tells us about this rupture by reminding the audience about the role of Britain that 'prevented the unification of the Indian people and

created two states—Pakistan and India’.<sup>9</sup> In the following scenes, we encounter the images of death and destruction during Partition, as indicated in the title of the report. The report focuses on the process of the formation of the state of Pakistan and the violence that resulted in large-scale migration and displacement, destruction and unimaginable human suffering. After showing burning and demolished houses, the camera pans over Muslim refugee camps, a caravan of Muslim migrants and comes to the conclusive shot of mass graves and corpses lying around and being carried on stretchers. On the whole, the images of legislative proceedings of British India’s Partition and the visuals of riots contribute to solemnly and sadly remind viewers of what was construed as a consequence of British colonial rule in the South Asian region.

This is a classic moment in a newsreel where, as Sieber says, the ‘unsaid and the unseen resonate and reappear’ (Sieber 2016, 25). Given the newsreel’s convention and its aesthetic logic which demanded the spectacular, cheerful, entertaining scenes to encourage the audience to watch the newsreels and not put them off with too many serious and disturbing images, this was an unusual report consisting of shots of riots, corpses, mass graves and caravans of refugees. However, it ought to be remembered that this was a film produced in a post-war German country, the GDR, and hence echoes of the memory of a divided Germany withered by war can also be found in this report.

The carefully crafted language of the voiceover provides a glimpse of the reason why such a report might have been produced two years after the Partition: the events of the Partition echoed how the GDR also visualized and perceived itself when it came to memories of war as well as the division of Germany. The newsreel seems to point to similar historical dynamics at work in both the historical moments, that is, imperialism. As Seán Allan puts it, after the foundation of the GDR and increasing Soviet influence on the ruling Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), the state now explicitly began mythologizing its ‘allegedly antifascist origins’ in which it was the ‘Other’ of fascism (Allan 2015, 54). Following Georgi Dimitrov’s doctrine of 1935, fascism was considered as an ‘essentially economic phenomenon’ rooted in the ‘most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital’

(Allan 2015, 54), and GDR's rejection of capitalism bolstered its own founding logic of anti-fascism. Now in a GDR newsreel based on the founding moment of the Indian nation, the plight of Indian masses and the pain of Partition are represented by reminding audiences of the role of an 'imperialist' country (Britain) in this great suffering and loss. It is interesting that the report does not argue to hold Britain accountable for this destruction, but rather just mentions this, informing audiences of the same simply as a matter of fact. However, the report also does more than that: by producing the image of a divided and troubled India that was a victim of capitalist colonialism and imperialism, this newsreel intensely invokes GDR's memories of a German self and, at the same time, orients the audience towards an explicit socialist perspective regarding the complex cultural and political questions of the German nation and identity.<sup>10</sup>

Britain appears in another report related to India, and this time it is not charged of any crime as such. This report, titled *Aus London kommend, besuchen indische Soldaten Berlin* (Coming from London, Indian Soldiers Visit Berlin) and produced and released in East Germany sometime after mid-1946, shows soldiers of the British Indian Army during their visit to Berlin (as part of a Europe trip).<sup>11</sup> They are depicted as returning after spending time in London and in one sequence after another, seen walking through and seeing places in Berlin, which are still in ruins. The soldiers move from one place to another, walk, parade, carried by vehicles and in the backdrop, we see a destroyed New Reich Chancellery, ruins of the Ministry of propaganda and the Seat of the National Council of the National Front of Democratic Germany. After this comes the sequence where they are seen marching in a military parade in the shadow of British flags and the flag of British India.

In 1946, both India and the GDR were yet to be founded as independent sovereign countries and memories of an alliance against the defeat of Nazism in Germany were still fresh. Thus, in the newsreel with soldiers of the British Indian Army, we see smiling Indian soldiers in close-ups, they are happy, and their friendly faces unmarked by colonial rule and subjugation. That they are part of the same military machinery which subjugated people in India remained unimportant, as in Berlin, they were part of the



Allied forces that liberated Germany from the Nazi rule. Their presence is used here to provide the visuals of the completeness of the destruction of Nazism: backdrops of ruined Nazi sites of power are highlights of the report. It also seems to give the army its due credit—the actors and the results of their actions are brought in one frame, and they march past under the flags of the very country that was ‘imperialist’. This report does not hint at the possibility of any conflict between the East German state and the Allied forces that might have been present when this newsreel was made; rather, it chooses to highlight the fact that the presence of such an alliance was important for post-war Germany.

Images of India changed through time—from being a colonized country to an independent nation that moved ahead to become a modern country with possibilities of industrialization and sustainability. India was, thus, projected as a country initially impeded by problems such as the Partition, refugee crisis, military conflict and public unrest in Kashmir. But with time, reports on the constitution-making process, elections in the 1950s and later, constructions of dams, an expanding education system and agrarian reforms were discussed in various reports over the following decades, which show how the GDR tried to portray India’s progress and development. This category of newsreels, thus, covers a transition that was taking place in India: from being a newly independent nation, whose state faced enormous challenges in institutionalizing democracy in the country, to becoming a maturing democracy that witnessed successful elections in the successive decades.

## India and Its Circuits Networks of Solidarity

In a post-war scenario and the Cold War context, international relations between India, the GDR and the USSR became significant for the newsreels. Therefore, long audiovisual dispatches from India were placed in the reports on the visits of officials or political leaders. In one such report of *Der Augenzeuge* from 1959,<sup>12</sup> the scene opens with a shot of a flying airplane which then cuts into the shot from a cockpit where Indian pilots are operating the plane carrying a delegation of the *Volkskammer* (People’s Chamber) to New Delhi. In the plane, top office-bearers of the chamber and CDU leaders can be seen confidently and happily involved in a

conversation. The next scene is from Delhi where shots of a temple, a scene showing the management of traffic, ox carts and markets are assembled together to create an image of the destination that supposedly has a strong cultural heritage and is successful in keeping order in place in spite of all odds. Interestingly, this image draws upon repertoires of a perceived 'orient', underscored by the music accompanying these scenes which is clearly influenced by Egyptian-Arabic musical traditions. After these long sequences, delegates return to the screen where members of the Indian Parliament welcome them at the airport. Thereafter, guests visit Rajghat, the famous memorial commemorating Gandhi, where a cutaway shot emphasizes how they respect local conventions by removing their shoes at the entrance. After offering a wreath at the memorial, in which once again a lingering shot emphasizes the message of Indo-GDR friendship, they move onto their actual workspace, where they meet Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Official, state-level interactions among political actors and cultural delegations from India, the GDR and the USSR are a recurring theme under this category.

There is a long report from 1955 about the Bandung Conference, titled *Conference of the Nations of Asia and Africa (AAPSO)*, in which Indian Prime Minister Nehru features prominently. In this report, the 'end of colonialism, rule of oppression and exploitation' is celebrated and how India and other Asian and African countries were coming together in international solidarity to make a 'common basis for independence, understanding and peace' is emphasized. In the next few weeks, India is discussed again in further reports about the Bandung Conference and in those covering Nehru's visit to Moscow. In the report, Nehru is shown visiting mausoleums in Moscow and visiting Kremlin. The report ends with the assertion on close friendship between the people of the USSR and India.

Such reports work in two ways: first, they approve and celebrate what is happening in countries like India, and second, by making the presence of countries like India important in the contemporary world, their participation in, and acknowledgement of, GDR's international and national interests is projected as something very significant.

## India as a Land of the Past and the Future

The newsreels frequently depicted everyday social and cultural life in India,<sup>13</sup> and when doing so, they hinted at a curious tension between the ways in which India was conventionally seen and the new perspectives that were emerging, owing to the changing realities within India and due to the newly emerging perspectives on post-colonial societies in general. Therefore, on the one hand, in the reports, India remained a place that confirmed the conventional, somewhat exotic, homogenizing imagery of the South Asian region with its temples and animal fights, on the other hand, it was also presented as a place that was trying to go beyond this image and transforming itself into what was supposed to be a modern nation.

For example, a news report from 1961 shows a big buffalo fight in an Indian village under the title *Über den Kampf des Jahres in Indien* (Fight of the Year in India).<sup>14</sup> Gathered around the belligerent buffalos, a large part of the audience is watching the animals chasing one another, while a few individuals try to keep going. But at a certain point, the animals take the wrong direction and go out of the game's area and before the scene ends in chaos, it blends into the next section to show usual sports scenes.

With the animal fight, the villagers gathered around and watching the game, and the overall chaos, these scenes individually and collectively composed an image of a place marked as a preindustrial one, where modern modes of entertainment were not available and where the boundaries between order and chaos were fluid. However, *Der Augenzeuge* did not stop at this image. Newsreels tried to investigate the modes of change that were occurring in Indian society. Therefore, we find reports about what was portrayed as a modernizing drive. For example, a 1965 report titled *Indien—Land zwischen Gestern und Morgen* (India—Land between Yesterday and Tomorrow) describes the modern developments in the city of Chandigarh.<sup>15</sup> A modern building is being constructed under the supervision of the French architect Le Corbusier and we see shots of workers and their animals involved in the construction process. The report also shows a shift from animals to the bicycle as a personal mode of transportation. Here, India is portrayed as developing, the usual markers of progress—roads, transportation,

faster modes of production, modern buildings—all emerge one after another in the reports to evidence the image of an India that is making its space within the imagination of the new.

The dialogue between the ‘old’/‘traditional’ and the ‘new’ India serves another purpose. On the one hand, it conforms to the argument that the ‘old’ could be seen as a consequence of exploitative imperialist rule and the ‘new’ as the result of freedom and democracy. On the other hand, it also feeds into resolving the problem of how newsreel viewers ‘knew’ of India. The ‘old’ India, the land of temples and animals, is what informed several viewers’ perceptions of India, as they knew it from other sources such as literature, visuals and stories. While this image is at first confirmed by the reports to produce a sense of familiarity among the audiences, it is then abolished by the second kind of reports on a rapidly changing India.

## **CONTEXTUALIZING THE REPORTS ON INDIA**

In her study on the use of images of the Vietnam War in the non-fiction films of the GDR, Nora Alter has argued that showing the problems of transformation in Vietnam, from being a capitalist economy and colonized country to becoming a communist one, demonstrated ‘both clear and unstated’ parallels to the GDR (Alter 2002, 41). In a similar vein, the case of the newsreels shows that film-making practice at DEFA was a means to negotiate GDR’s identity as a sovereign country in the world and therein deal with issues of political recognition.

Changes in the images of India through time suggested the emerging needs and expectations of GDR’s state in its self-identification. After the initial pressure to define itself as an anti-fascist state, it required international recognition as a sovereign country. It is in this overarching context that the Indian state, which was at the helm of the Non-Aligned Movement, became important for the GDR. Official recognition by the ‘Third World’ became the cornerstone of GDR state’s foreign policy in order to gain political legitimacy in the new world order. Therefore, India became a significant nation, which was projected as progressing politically and economically after its independence despite the problems it was facing.

Reports in the newsreels on India's standing in world politics are explicit. They not only deal with official expectations of, and efforts towards, gaining political recognition in the world but also show the influence of socialist ideology on newly decolonized nations. Indo-GDR relations were of significance in the political-cultural context of the Cold War when former colonies became important for both the power blocs. India was of significant interest for the GDR and its foreign politics. Hence, newsreel reports often combined formal aspects of interstate affairs with shots from the sidelines of these activities and locations and employed background music to put emphasis on the warmth of interstate relations, even if official recognition of the GDR by the Indian state only happened as late as 1972. Cultural activities and landmarks played a crucial role in these constructions and perpetuated stereotypes. Such reports are full of images depicting the movement of figures, people and personalities, within and between places that are counterpoised by historical landmarks that provide an anchoring meaning to these movements. Sometimes, they are meant to function as a metaphor of change and on others, as a symbol of stability of relations.

To complete the authenticity of the image of India, news on everyday life and culture is presented throughout the Cold War. It was an aesthetic requirement of this genre that demanded elements of entertainment in order to sustain the interest of audiences. However, this was also because, as Imesch et al. (2016, 8) remind us, 'newsreel reports on making art and culture-related events played a politically motivated role' within the processes and strategies of authenticity and identification. For this purpose, a mixture of stereotypes, dynamic and spectacular images of India were used repeatedly to create a sense of everyday life in the country. India was a land of spectacles and paradoxes. Thus, on the one hand, there was a record temperature of 50 degrees in Calcutta, and on the other, in a different report, couples danced waltz and skated on a frozen lake in the northern part of the country. On one of the rare occasions, a newsreel opens with sports news in which scenes from a hockey match between the national teams of India and the GDR are shown. Here, India is constructed as a country that is advancing, not only in politics and economy but also in culture and sport too.

Such a controlled, selected and hierarchized variety and multitude of images of India in newsreels demonstrate its strategic significance for the GDR. Creating an image of an 'Other' is also making it a part of one's own system of knowledge. Images of India produced through newsreels constituted perceptions of India and, thus, contributed in the making of a particular vision of the world at a time when the world was divided by the Cold War. These were times when conventional battlegrounds of the frontlines were gone and, as Virilio (1989, 83) puts it, a 'global civil war' was being fought with cameras in the streets that had become 'permanent film-sets'. These 'cameras' were the cinematic reinforcement of this new war through which the deployment of forces was organized and frontlines conquered. Given that India was a significant part of that world, a cinematic mapping of its political and social life was a prerogative for major actors, including the GDR, to remain in control in this cultural Cold War.

Thus, India represented a reflective mirror in which the GDR conjured its own historical identity as a country. The newsreels' visuals and narratives consisted of optical instruments through which the GDR tried to consolidate its own position in the Cold War. This was part of institutional efforts to create what Virilio (1989, 2) calls a 'global vision', in which, with the help of cinematic devices, a view of the world is developed to identify, visualize and deploy one's own ideological and material resources.

## **EXPLORING LIVED ENTANGLEMENTS IN NEWSREEL PRODUCTION: FUTURE POSSIBILITIES**

*Der Augenzeuge* newsreels were produced at DEFA studios in Babelsberg near Berlin but film shots from around the world were collected through various sources. One of the main sources for these were DEFA's own camerapersons who were commissioned with specific tasks by editors. Another source for the films, however, were third-party organizations like Soviet agencies and the International Newsreel Association with which DEFA made an agreement in 1954 for using their material. In this transnational set-up, filming on the ground for the travelling or foreign camerapersons most certainly must have been a difficult task without local assistance and collaborations, though we do not get information about this in the

films' credits.<sup>16</sup> This needs to be substantiated via further archival evidence. It, however, certainly opens the possibility to consider the question of entanglements beyond national containers, which would incorporate networks of transnational actors and objects and would emphasize individual life trajectories that cannot solely be relegated to categories such as the nation-state.

## CONCLUSION

With regards to the formation of a community or a nation, newsreels offer a layered case study of how a country projects a series of images of the social and political life of another nation while trying to create itself as a political community, with defined geographical and cultural borders. The prowess of cinema, as Alain Badiou (2005, 78) puts it, lies in it being a visual trace of a perpetual past. What appears on the screen affirms the pre-existence of a certain past (time/space) which it refers to and institutes at the same time. In this way, the images created through newsreels enable a country to map and envision the Other via its own image making. Newsreels also underscore entangled gazes in the making of a single visual regime of discourses. Therefore, while newsreels are archival sources that enable particular historical understandings of the Cold War, transnational anxieties as well as entanglements, they also urge us to look beyond their institutional materiality.

For more than three decades, India was described in *Der Augenzeuge* through different themes that ranged from Independence and Partition to it becoming an emerging economy and modern cultural entity. These newsreels brought together visuals of people from the streets and farms, from theatre houses and sports stadiums, as well as from business and the political circles to create the image of India as a country that had been stunted by colonial exploitation in the past and one that was now progressing and increasingly playing a crucial role in international politics. Thematically, these depictions can be categorized under three rubrics. The first theme comprises reports that engage with India's struggle for democracy, that is, the challenges facing the new state in institutionalizing democracy in the country, specifically in the years following Independence, when its social and cultural fabric was torn by communal violence. Over time, the

reports of the newsreels covered India's transition into a maturing democracy, which was evidenced by showing a successful electoral process over the successive elections. Under the second theme, India was portrayed as a country that envisioned international peace and anti-colonial solidarity among the still-colonized and recently decolonized nations. Over the years, we find that India was projected as close to the GDR, particularly in terms of political relations and business interactions during the 1960s–1970s. Newsreels utilized official visits of political and business delegations from the GDR, the USSR and India to each other's countries as a marker of the successful relationships that were being built among the three respective nations. The third category consists of depictions of everyday sociocultural life in India, which tried to create the image of India as a land that was old (yesterday) but increasingly trying to become new (tomorrow)<sup>17</sup>. A new way of life was being promoted and adopted, while older forms still persisted in various ways.

While these images show a lot about India, as we navigate through them, it becomes clear that they tell us as much about the GDR. As has been argued in the chapter, the India that we find in the GDR newsreels is an India constructed by DEFA to emphasize GDR's self-perceptions as a country that was founded after one of the most troubled periods in modern history. When formed, the GDR stood on the ruins of an empire and on the ruins of Germany's National socialist past, a country emerging from a fragmented land, people and memories.

While this chapter has relied on newsreels as a primary source, it aims to initiate the possibilities of researching a hitherto unstudied aspect of lived, everyday entanglements among actors from the two countries. Studies that closely follow the trajectories of the camerapersons on the ground, the journalists and editors in the production house, and the officials in the international film footage agencies can help enrich and cast a new gaze on entangled transnational and translocal histories of the Cold War.

## NOTES

1. It is interesting to notice that the visual memories that newsreels invoke are more related to experiences of the recent war against



the Nazi regime, the traces of its destruction and the cultural and literary heritage of an undivided Germany. So, for example, in the early newsreels, there are praises for joint activities of the Allied forces and their leaders, endorsements of common texts, etc. Over time, both the states deployed different selective registers of remembering the national socialist past, whereby ‘...each side could regard itself as morally superior and view the other half as a continuation of National Socialism’ (Saunders 2018, 5). As will be discussed further, with time, the emphasis on an anti-Nazi identity and anti-fascism became very crucial in the rhetoric of the state in the GDR. Here, we can see a similarity in methods with Eisenstein’s cinema that, as Carrol and Banes (2000, 123) argue, was ‘not primarily concerned with assimilating the past to the present, but rather the present to the future’.

2. Sieber (2016, 285) argues in favour of using the term ‘dispositif’ for media technologies or apparatus of archives to highlight their dynamic character.
3. With ‘optical unconscious’, I am borrowing the dynamics of gaze and identification from Walter Benjamin, in which he makes an analogy that the eye of camera makes it possible to perceive the unconscious of movements of material work with the mental world (see Krauss 1996, 178). ‘It was in 1931, in his “Small History of Photography,” that Walter Benjamin first used the term “optical unconscious.” With the photographs of Muybridge or Marey undoubtedly in mind, he speaks of how the naked eye cannot penetrate movements of even the most ordinary kind. “We have no idea at all,” he says, “what happens during the fraction of a second when a person steps out.” But photography, he exults, “with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals the secret.” It is through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis.’
4. Newsreels are an interesting source to see how the relationship between ‘the commercial’ and the ‘national’ was not construed on binary terms of ‘with’ or ‘against’. There seems to be a multi-faceted negotiation between what were deemed to be the commercial requirements of the production house and what was deemed to be a national framework in which the newsreels were imbedded. For example, in the case of *Der Augenzeuge* productions, while the East German state administration was trying to create the narrative of the GDR as a socialist country, DEFA simultaneously arranged with American, British and French companies for acquiring and sharing international footages to produce ‘a complete overview of world affairs’ (Jordan 1993, 65). The ambitions of the two were not necessarily opposed to each other.

5. The scales of 'national' and 'transnational' were complicated in the making of newsreel films. During production, often the footages from different sources were pooled together to construct a report, and sometimes the same footages were used for opposing purposes by different nations or states (see Lehnert 2018). For a study of how nations used each other's newsreels selectively to undermine each other or cast each other in a poor light or poor military capacity and outcomes, see Jay Leyda's *Film Begets Film* (1964). I am thankful to the anonymous reviewer of this chapter for this insightful suggestion.
6. 'Sie sehen selbst. Sie hören selbst. Urteilen Sie selbst' (you see for yourself, you hear for yourself, you judge for yourself) was the official motto for *Der Augenzeuge* between 1946 and 1949.
7. *Der Augenzeuge* and other documentaries produced in the GDR are available at <http://www.progress-film.de>, the web archive of Progress Filmverleih in Berlin.
8. *Der Augenzeuge* 1949/39, 1949, available at <http://www.progress-film.de/der-augenzeuge-1949-39.html> (accessed on 29 February 2020).
9. Transcription of the selected voiceover is provided in German on the website along with the video. The translation was done by the author.
10. This illustrates my point about the return of the unsaid and the unseen. By focusing on the Partition of British India, two years after the events had unfolded, the newsreel also makes a displaced reference to the trauma of the division of Germany. However, there is another possible unsaid and unseen in the mentioned newsreel. It specifically shows Muslim refugees and victims, though without explicitly mentioning that they are Muslims (usually signalled by their dress, shots with them reciting the *namaaz*, etc.). The refugee camp that is shown seems closer to a structure that looks like a Muslim shrine or a cemetery. The visuals of camps and caravans of migrants are accompanied by a commentary describing the plight of Muslims during Partition: '10 million Muslims had to emigrate and riot in their new homeland. 500,000 died on the way. The death of these people is a terrible charge against the imperialist colonial system.' The footage and its accompanying commentary clearly hold 'the imperialist colonialist system' responsible for the plight of Muslim migrants.
11. *Der Augenzeuge* 1946/12, 1946, available at <https://progress.film/record/329> (accessed on 29 February 2020).
12. *Der Augenzeuge* 1959/B 34, available at <https://progress.film/record/5116> (accessed on 29 February 2020).
13. We see a similar and inverted case of depictions of everyday life in the GDR in varied projections of the GDR for worldwide audiences. As also shown in the chapter on Radio Berlin International and its

presence in India (see Chapter 2, Bajpai, this volume), 'Life in the GDR' was a commonly used phrase in radio features and publications on the GDR that were meant for international audiences and produced by actors from the GDR. The primary aim behind such efforts was to acquaint audiences of what it meant to live in the GDR. Thus, in a vein similar to depictions of 'Life in the GDR', we find that newsreels had reports, meant for East German viewers, which aimed at depicting everyday life in India.

14. *Der Augenzeuge* 1961/44, 1961, available at <https://progress.film/record/5300> (accessed on 26 January 2021).
15. *Der Augenzeuge* 1965/23, available at <https://progress.film/record/5485> (accessed on 26 January 2021).
16. Documentary film-maker and author from the GDR, Guenter Nehrlich, 93, told the author about the presence of the GDR team working on newsreels in (or on?) India, though he himself, while visiting the country and making documentary films (funded either by the GDR or the Indian state), never contributed to *Der Augenzeuge*. He recalls that there were Indians who worked with *Der Augenzeuge* team and with his own team. Author's interview with Guenter Nehrlich, 3 May 2019, Berlin.
17. From *Der Augenzeuge* 1965/23, available at <https://progress.film/record/5485> (accessed on 26 January 2021).

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# BRECHT *BETWEEN* THE GDR AND MARATHI STAGE

A Conjunctural Reading of Bennewitz–Mehta  
Collaboration

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Let me begin by recounting three strange responses to Bertolt Brecht's productions of the 1960s–1970s from three different settings of the Cold War milieu. The first response is noted by the veteran theatre director–actress from India, Vijaya Mehta, in 1974. Mehta remembered receiving this response first-hand in Zurich in that same year after the first European performance of *Ajab Nyaya Vartulacha*, a Marathi adaptation of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, which she had co-directed with Fritz Bennewitz, then theatre director at the German National Theatre in Weimar, as a part of 'cultural exchange agreement' between the erstwhile German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Republic of India. After receiving an 'electrifying response' to the performance, recalls Mehta (1974), 'theatre enthusiasts came to tell us that we had helped to rid them of *Brecht-weariness*' (emphasis added). Even if this strange word, *Brecht-weariness*, was not the exact one uttered by those theatre enthusiasts at Zurich and instead was Mehta's paraphrasing, I would suggest that it still vividly captured an emergent and elusive feeling towards Brecht's works within the divided Europe.

One could object to such a suggestion saying this Brecht-weariness might just be symptomatic of ‘the capitalist West’, for Switzerland, despite its ‘strict neutrality’ between the two blocs, was considered to be a part of the West in economic, political and cultural terms. But, interestingly, in the same tour when Mehta’s troupe performed *Ajab* in Weimar, on the other side of the Berlin wall, ‘the heart-warming’ response given by ‘audiences and theatre people’ was according to Mehta attributable to ‘something’ which ‘they said *had got lost* somewhere on the way in their own theatre and more so in their lives’, which they finally found in *Ajab* (emphasis added). The audiences at Weimar without having uttered that strange word, Brecht-weariness, still somewhere resonated with that elusive feeling of something ‘having been lost’ in the way Brecht was performed in the GDR.

Yet both these Brecht-weary audiences, from either side of the Berlin Wall, were all praise for an Indian production of Brecht. From these two responses, one may be tempted to infer that the vitality of Brecht’s productions in India was not only untouched by this *Brecht-weariness* but was in fact counteracting it by giving a new lease of afterlife to Brecht outside of Europe. But the third response I am going to recount could halt such a quick inference.

This response, which uncannily resonated with the first two, is noted by veteran Indian playwright, Marxist intellectual and sinologist, G. P. Deshpande (2009, 24–37), while critically reflecting upon what he calls ‘Indian Brecht’ or ‘the Brechtian season in Indian theatre’, an enthusiastic wave of Brecht’s adaptations across India during the 1960s–1970s, particularly in Bangla, Marathi and Hindi. Arguing how Brecht had become ‘a very pleasant, nationalist experience’, ‘a playwright of the new elite (who) ... retrieved the ‘traditional’ for them’, Deshpande urges: ‘[o]ne feels like saying in utter despair that there is a need of *anti-Brecht* in much the same manner as *anti-Duehring*’ (emphasis original). It is quite clear that Deshpande is expressing his own Brecht-weariness, and perhaps, unlike his European counterparts, he had nowhere to turn. That explains his despairing search for *anti-Brecht*.

How do we make sense of this uncannily *shared* ‘Brecht-weariness’, albeit of different kinds and emanating from three different worlds constituting the Cold War imaginary? In other words,

how do we make sense of that which was *historically common* in each of these 'Brecht-weariness', which cut across national, cultural and ideological boundaries? The hypothesis I would like to propose is as follows: this shared 'Brecht-weariness' was symptomatic of a *global conjuncture marked by intertwined saturation of the party-state modality of communist politics and didactic conception of art*. I would like to test this hypothesis by reading Bennewitz–Mehta collaboration on *Ajab* through a conjunctural lens, that is, by situating it on a shared historical plane. Previously, Bennewitz's theatre collaborations in India are read through 'intercultural' lens (Esleben 2016), celebrating Bennewitz as 'the pioneer of intercultural theatre', whose 'flexible and context-sensitive method' emphasized 'the reciprocal nature of the encounter between Brecht's text and Indian folk theatre traditions', where both 'enriched' each other and worked towards 'non-hierarchical syncretism' (16–18). This reading has two shortcomings. First, it treats 'intercultural' encounter as negotiation of 'essentialized' identity/difference and hierarchy without locating this encounter on a shared historical plane, which could otherwise throw light upon *subjectively* distinct responses to a conjuncture constituted by intertwined saturation of the party-state modality of communist politics and didactic conception of art. Second, it looks at only Bennewitz's writings to interpret a collaborative process, where the perspective of the other principal collaborator (in this case, Mehta) remains absent. Yet this reading provides an unprecedented access to English translations of Bennewitz's own writings (letters, notes, reports) which I would read anew and juxtapose with Mehta's account (memoir, interviews) to reconstruct their *subjectively* distinct responses to a common conjunctural ground.

To begin with, I would briefly flesh out the contours of the global conjuncture under discussion to trace 'Brecht-weariness' and to situate Bennewitz's arrival in India. In the next section, I would closely read Bennewitz's reflections on his early theatre collaborations in India (1969–1973), especially with Mehta, to elaborate his subjective commitment towards the party-state and didactic theatre, despite their saturation. In the last section, I would reconstruct Mehta's encounter with Brecht and Bennewitz, which, I suggest, was shaped by her romanticist scepticism of didactic theatre and subjective bias against communist politics.



## CONTOURS OF THE CONJUNCTURE: SITUATING BENNEWITZ'S ARRIVAL IN INDIA

As mentioned before, the global conjuncture under discussion was constituted by an intertwined saturation of the party-state modality of communist politics and didactic conception of art. Let us begin our discussion with what we precisely mean by saturation, a category we use after contemporary French philosopher, Alain Badiou. Before we discuss saturation, it would be important to note that for Badiou (2005b), politics is neither the pursuit of state power (sovereignty) nor the rational preservation of existing order (management), but an infinite and subjective process of actualizing the truth of just and egalitarian collective coexistence (communism). Saturation, for Badiou, means *termination of a finite sequence* (such as the party-state modality) of this infinite truth process (communist politics). Badiou introduces saturation as 'a countercategory against the reactionary category of failure which always tends swiftly to condemn communist politics as simple criminal wrongdoing' (Ruda 2015, 302). Through the category of saturation, Badiou seeks 'to avoid any external evaluation of a sequence of emancipatory political actions' (303) from a supposedly objective and neutral perspective. Instead, taking off from his fellow thinker, Sylvain Lazarus, Badiou develops the category of saturation 'as part of an immanent analysis', that is, an analysis of a political sequence 'from an interior perspective' (302), to understand *from within* the logic of its 'dis-activation', to explain from the subjective position of fidelity (to the truth process) the weakening of its historical 'effectivity' (304). Though truth (as an infinite, generic process) 'can never be lost forever', saturation implies that its actual effectiveness in a situation or its 'generic reality' (as a sequence) could 'disappear or disintegrate' (304), which could be only analysed by *remaining true* to the generic process (and not to a sequence). Through saturation, Badiou attempts to conceive an end of "“something” which, at least potentially, needs have no end' (303). A sequence saturates without there being any internal necessity, built-in flaw or organic finitude. Paradoxical as it may seem, saturation helps one grasp how politics as an infinite truth process historically unfolds *only* through contingent and finite political sequences, where 'every sequence ends with saturation, which is what makes it a sequence' (304). Yet this 'end'

neither signifies definitive failure nor confirms conclusive defeat of communist politics as such. Rather, it signifies the saturated sequence's *unfaithfulness* towards the very principles—'abolition of private property, dismantling of specialised and hierarchical division of labour, end of national and other identitarian enclosures and dissolution of the centralised state'—orienting communist politics (Badiou and Lancelin 2019, 15).

The concept of saturation can be further elaborated through a brief discussion of two sequences of communist politics (Ruda 2015, 305–306) leading up to the global conjuncture under discussion. The first sequence (from the French Revolution of 1792 to the Paris Commune of 1871) sought to fuse 'the idea of overthrowing the state and taking power' by masses 'under the label of "communist" mass movements'. Though the Paris Commune could actualize 'the strictly immanent limitations of this sequence' (that of capturing power), it could not 'sustain' its advances 'against counter-revolutionary tendencies', which swiftly crushed the emancipatory possibilities made thinkable by the commune. The second sequence (from the Russian Revolution through to the Cultural Revolution in China, up to 1976) sought to find practical solution to the central problem (of organization) raised by the previous sequence by constructing 'the revolutionary class-party to organise the newly gained power'. Yet it was 'unable to resolve the impasse' that emerged as a result of 'its own construction' (the party-state) because the communist party could not take the next step of 'organising the transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat' through the dissolution of the party-state. Instead, the party-state turned 'both authoritarian and terrorist' (Stalinism, repression of the worker's uprising in the GDR) and, thus, abandoned 'the idea of the state's withering away'.

The saturation of the party-state modality of communist politics was intertwined with the saturation of didactic conception of art, whose exemplary thinker–practitioner was Brecht. One could trace this intertwinement to the interwar Soviet aporia between 'restorative' and 'revolutionary' conceptions of culture, where the former (socialist realism) meant to affirm the post-revolutionary regime (the party-state), while the latter sought to continue the work of revolutionary transformation artistically (for instance, the

Proletkult Movement), without adhering to the party-state line. For Lenin, 'proletarian reworking of cultural heritage' meant a certain 'lawful continuation', an organic passage from peasant to bourgeoisie to revolutionary culture, under the diktat of the party-state. While for Brecht, 'past was material to be reutilised in the remaking of the present' (Bathrick 1980, 94–95) without there being any lawful continuation between the two. In fact, Brecht sought to invent artistic rupture (like V-effect), disrupting the supposedly lawlike, organicist progression from peasant, bourgeoisie to proletariat culture. He reactivated past (not as objective history but as fable) for intervening in the present. Yet despite practising and defending artistic experimentation (expressionism) contra the party-state line and Lukácsian allegation of 'formalism' (Brecht 1980, 68–85), Brecht remained committed to 'didactic' conception of art (theatre) as pedagogic instrument for transmitting 'a truth' named 'dialectical materialism' (Badiou 2005a, 5). Dialectical materialism for Brecht was 'a general, scientific' and 'essentially a philosophical truth' which was 'extrinsic' (and not immanent) to art (5). Therefore, adhering to 'a Stalinist' line in this regard, Brecht believed that art needed to be put under 'philosophical surveillance' to meet 'educational ends', which were essentially 'Platonist', that is, 'alienating the semblance from itself' in order 'to *show*, in the gap thus formed, the extrinsic objectivity of the true' (5–6; emphasis original). Brecht's 'Stalinized Platonism' (6) needs to be simultaneously situated as internal to the interwar Marxist aporia between 'restorative' and 'revolutionary' conceptions of culture and as the 20th-century exemplar of 'the didactic schema', one of the three transtemporal schematizations of the link between art, philosophy and truth, as suggested by Badiou (2005a, 2–6). It is important for us to note that Brecht's 'Stalinized Platonism' shaped Bennewitz's commitment to didactic theatre during his early collaborations in India.

The link between Brecht's 'Stalinized Platonism' and the theatre practice in the GDR becomes apparent when one sees how the interwar Soviet aporia between 'restorative' and 'revolutionary' conceptions of culture resurfaced through the 'conservative cultural policy' pursued by the GDR in the early 1950s, which aimed 'to promote the heritage of German classicism' and 'to use traditional literary and artistic forms' in support of 'a radically new social and

economic structure' (Brockmann 2015, 43). Though this disjunction between 'political modernism' and 'artistic conservatism' was difficult for someone like Brecht to live with, he nonetheless chose to live and negotiate with it. Brecht's 'Stalinized Platonism' since the interwar years coupled with his 'compromised' commitment to the GDR, particularly his 'public silence' over the suppression of the popular workers uprising in 1953 by the GDR authorities (Clark 2006), contributed towards progressively splitting the post-humous legacy of Brecht in the GDR into two contrasting streams: *canonical* Brecht (upheld by the GDR party-state) and *radical* Brecht (represented by playwright-director Heiner Müller's critical departure from the canonical Brecht as well as the party-state line, see Fehrevary 1976, Case 1983). The 'canonical' Brecht's 'approval' of the suppression of the worker's insurrection in 1953 was made 'public', while the 'critical' Brecht 'raised burdensome questions about the crushing of a worker's revolt by the 'workers' and the 'farmers' state', but those questions were made to remain 'private' (Badiou 2007, 43–44). This split between 'canonical' and 'critical' Brecht signified the intertwined saturation of the party-state and the didactic conception of art. As Badiou reminds us, the party-state claimed to *embody* the truth of communist politics (Stalinism), while art was considered to be a didactic *tool* to transmit that truth effectively, to educate people under the surveillance of the party-state (Stalinized Platonism). But when the actual effectivity of the truth of communist politics disintegrated, didacticism too lost its power to transmit that truth effectively, despite artistic innovations such as Brecht's. To use Badiou's (2005a, 7) words, didacticism was 'saturated *by* the state-bound and historical exercise of art in the service of the people' (emphasis added). One could possibly trace 'Brecht-weariness', which permeated the global conjuncture under discussion, to this intertwined saturation of the party-state and didactic art.

Yet when one looks at Bennewitz's commitment to the didactic theatre, as we shall in the next section, he seems rather untouched by 'Brecht-weariness'. Bennewitz's identification with 'the basic tenets of the GDR cultural diplomacy' implied that he stood on the side of the canonical Brecht. This explains why Bennewitz 'had strong backing from the Ministry of Culture and the GDR chapter of the International Theatre Institute (ITI)' (Esleben

2016, 4). Bennewitz was ‘the logical candidate’ to be sent to India in 1970, because he had not only ‘made a name for himself’ within the GDR for ‘his direction of Brecht plays and application of Brechtian acting methods’ but also had ‘successfully transferred his expertise to *international* work’ after directing the Romanian premiere of Brecht’s *Life of Galileo* in 1968 (25; emphasis added).

Bennewitz’s arrival in India needs to be situated on the backdrop of the pedagogic instrumentalization of socialist art to further *the national interest* (read: the party-state interest) of the GDR in *the international* (read: interstate) arena animated by ideological rivalry and developmental competition between the two geopolitical blocs, the West and the East. Seen from this interstate axis, one could understand the exact timing of Bennewitz’s arrival in India in 1970: more than a decade and half after the establishment of trade relations between India and the GDR (in 1954); four years after the first national convention of All India Indo-GDR Friendship Association, an umbrella organization spearheading ‘growing public support and pressure’ for the official recognition of the GDR (in 1966), yet two years before India’s actual recognition of the GDR (in 1972) and, most importantly, almost coinciding with the arrival of Carl Weber, who was considered by the GDR authorities to be a part of the ‘massive cultural demagoguery’ by the West German embassy ‘to usurp Brecht as a part of an “all-German-Culture”’ and who was going to direct Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* at the National School of Drama (NSD) in New Delhi in 1969 (Esleben 2016, 23–25). So as a ‘reaction’ to Weber’s Brecht production at the NSD, ‘it seemed all the more urgent’ for the GDR authorities ‘to impart a politically more exact idea of Brecht’ to both the NSD students and audiences in New Delhi (25). Thus, ‘armed with these orders’ when Bennewitz arrived in 1970 to direct Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera* at the NSD, he as an artist, ideologically committed to socialism, was also simultaneously a representative of the interests of the GDR abroad and these interests—economic, cultural, political, ideological—were not only transitive to each other but also cumulatively constituted the national (the party-state) interest as such (26).

In the next section, while closely reading Bennewitz’s notes, it would become clear that he saw himself not as a representative

of an alien culture (European/Western) in an identitarian sense but as an artist simultaneously trying to *work with* and *traverse through* cultural resources (languages, legends, songs, gestures) for creating didactic art in the present. He was *not translating* Brecht into Indian cultures but rather through Brecht, he was trying to *intervene* into this contested cultural field to *unsettle* the boundaries between immemorial and historical, local and universal, folk and modern, popular and contemporary. His notes exhibit awareness that Brecht's interwar artistic inventions were already acts of distantiation from both the restorative conception of culture sanctioned by the Soviet party-state and the heritage of German classicism upheld by the GDR. His notes exemplify a vision which saw Brecht's didactic theatre not as a set of formulae but as a set of hypotheses to be tested across cultures in concrete historical situations. Yet his notes also reflect how his thinking of didactic art was at once shaped (and constrained too) by Brecht's 'Stalinized Platonism', state-socialist canonisation of Brecht in the GDR and the interstate competition between the West and the East playing out in 'the Third World'. In short, my reading of Bennewitz's notes suggest that his early 'inter-governmental' collaborations in India were shaped by complex conjunctural forces. I would extract and elaborate upon what I consider to be the single most important governing concern from his notes to demonstrate this suggestion. This core concern could also be formulated as a problem: *how to achieve unity of enlightenment and entertainment.*

## **BENNEWITZ'S FIDELITY TO DIDACTIC THEATRE: FUSING ENLIGHTENMENT WITH ENTERTAINMENT**

Bennewitz arrived at the precise formulation of this core problematic while traversing through a series of thematics, the most important among them being 'consciousness of history', or to be precise the lack of it. For Bennewitz, the most important challenge before him was *how* to work with what he called 'inadequately developed consciousness of history' among Indian people (Esleben 2016, 35, 49–50). If one were to read through the apparent orientalist assumptions underlying this characterization, one could clearly see that for Bennewitz, 'inadequately developed consciousness of history' was not a judgement on Indian people as such but an

articulation of a serious challenge before any practitioner of didactic art. What mattered to Bennewitz was to find out *how* to work with and through this ‘inadequacy’, which is to say, how to find practical ways of transforming *culture* (as predicative raw material) into *consciousness* (as subjective movement) through didactic art.

For instance, early in his notes, while describing performances of local legends, Bennewitz noted his impression that ‘the audiences witness legends rather than experience history’ (35). One may think that the governing contrast for Bennewitz would be between legend and history. But after reading further, it becomes clear that the contrast that mattered to him was between *witnessing* and *experiencing*. After exposing himself to the harsh social realities of India for some time, he noted, ‘[i]t is as if I dissolved and reconstituted myself in a new way. I am even starting to *experience* local history and legends here like my very own memories’ (40; emphasis added). Yet when Bennewitz noted that he began to experience local history and legends ‘like my own’, he did not mean that he suddenly started considering himself as ‘an insider’ in any authentic sense. Rather, he noted, ‘...yet I am an “other” and not at home, but at home I am an “other,” too. Surely, I have both in me: the desire for a home and the inability to ever be completely at home anywhere’ (40). One could speculate that for Bennewitz, this ‘inability to ever be completely at home anywhere’ was not a mere lack and, even if it were, it was the very condition of *experiencing* that which was alien/other as one’s own and also of *experiencing* one’s own as alien/other. One could perhaps suggest that for Bennewitz, historical consciousness meant nothing else but a possibility of such double movement—of identification and alienation—generated through artistic experience. Similarly, one could say that for Brecht, this double movement made a new generic human collective (commune)—beyond hierarchical filiations and property relations—*thinkable* through theatre. Otherwise, in the absence of this movement, one would be a mere witness to the passing of history.

As one further engages with the contrast formulated by Bennewitz between *witnessing* and *experiencing*, it becomes clear that his concern was to test artistic recreatability of such experience while working with raw material—legends, histories,

shared memories—from across cultures. One could argue that for Bennewitz, *experiencing* a cultural material also meant a twofold process of—*sensing* that which was immediate and alive (present), and *in the light* of that immediacy and vitality, *making sense* of that which seemed inapparent yet was silently unfolding (history). In other words, *experiencing* for Bennewitz meant sensing (sensible) and making sense (intelligible) of the dialectic between individual and collective, another name for that double movement—of identification and alienation—which Bennewitz called ‘historical consciousness’. And one could say that immediacy and vitality of artistic experience were that *force* which could activate this double movement of displacing oneself to reactivate the desire of remaking the world one lived in. Therefore, immediacy and vitality of artistic experience mattered to him and not authenticity of the cultural material he worked with (40–41). Without immediacy and vitality, he realized his reach would remain limited to the very few who had ‘imbibed European ways of thinking’ (44) without necessarily experiencing the force of displacement it could bring about, within themselves and the world they inhabited. After his initial collaboration at the NSD, it became clear to him that in order to reach out beyond ‘educated public’, whom he found ‘not very interested in thoughts that could change them or their status quo’, he needed to search for possible openings from within his desired audience who could be interested in reflecting upon the world they lived in order to change it (44). He formalized this intuition into two elegant maxims, almost as a reminder to himself: ‘[t]he measure of how to do things must be drawn from the audience itself’ and ‘[a]n audience interested in stories has to be told the stories in its own way’ (44).

Soon after he decided to collaborate with Vijaya Mehta in Mumbai, he started discovering the possibility of such immediate connect with wider audiences in the ‘folk’ forms than ‘classical’ (mainly Sanskritic) ones (40–41). While being passed on ‘from mouth to mouth’, these folk stories, he thought, ‘never became classics’, which is to say they could resist ‘intimidation by the classics’ and ‘remained alive’ in the process (40). While reflecting upon ‘the highly differentiated traditions of folk forms and theatre’ he encountered in India, he spotted certain ‘common’ traits cutting across ‘their wealth of differing means of expression’, such as: ‘open undecorated form; direct contact between stage and audience;



epic orientation and structure; unbroken unity of instruction and entertainment; the actors' highly developed art of free improvisation; and the direct existential understanding of the actors' (36). These common traits confirmed his intuitions that only folk forms could be useful to create immediate connect with wider audiences. But along with the 'advantages' of these forms, he was noticing their 'dangers too' (47). He was beginning to see that establishing immediate connect was not going to be sufficient in itself. Such connect could provide a necessary opening, but it could not be an end in itself.

Once he started working with *Tamasha* (a popular 'folk' form in Maharashtra) actors, he realized that they preferred 'to paraphrase', 'to improvise' than staying close to Brecht's text (47). These free-flowing improvisations could establish immediate connect, something he thought the European actors doing Brecht could learn from. But to orient these improvisations beyond mere 'fun', towards actualizing 'a literary text' like Brecht's, it would need refinement. Or to use his exact words, it would need 'a bit more substance', 'depth' and 'discipline' (41). Therefore, while rehearsing, he thought it was essential to maintain certain vigilance to ensure that 'the Tamasha style's inherent tendency towards farce' (its strength as well as its limitation) would continue to 'find its way back into the depth of the characters and situations' in Brecht's text, which in turn meant extracting 'style' from actors' everyday 'habits', introducing 'the large and small WHY into their actions' which could provide them 'a sense of spatial relations' (41). In short, he felt the need to make 'art out of it all' (41), giving a form to that which was in-form, but not as 'a stylistic uniformity', instead he was aiming for, what he would call, 'a new unity' or 'the dialectic unity of contradictions' (57), which would fuse elements from Dasavtar, Shakespearean clown and Tamasha to create Brechtian theatre (a new unity).

Yet the unresolved question before Bennewitz was how to actualize this 'new unity' at the experiential level, first with actors (rehearsal) and then with actors and audiences together (performance). This unity could be actualized, intuited Bennewitz, only if one could invoke a certain desire among the actors, 'the desire to make fun the vehicle of wisdom' (47). At that moment, he could

see an inherent 'tendency' among his actors towards 'fun' (47), where fun meant 'mere entertainment' to them, but to transmute this supposedly 'natural' tendency into 'subjective' desire, to make fun into an instrument of wisdom, would require an interruption, a decision, a judgement on 'fun' itself: is it an end or a means? So an actor would need to act, be in the moment, have fun, while at once 'deciding' to distance from that fun, to differentiate between fun as an end (mere entertainment) and fun as an instrument (of wisdom). But what did he mean by 'wisdom'? And how could fun be an instrument of 'wisdom'? 'Wisdom', for Bennewitz, was not a state but an act of 'arriving at one's own judgement' (43). For Bennewitz, this act was itself a source of joy and pleasure. He would call it 'the dialectic joy of arriving at one's own judgement' (43). But were only the actors supposed to perform this act of 'wisdom', or in other words, was 'wisdom' reserved only for the actors? Bennewitz would say, absolutely not. In fact, if one needed to invoke certain desire among the actors to make fun the vehicle of wisdom, then, at the same time, for that desire to sustain, one needed to activate certain 'pleasure' among the audiences, 'a pleasure of using one's own reason' (44). But again, this 'pleasure' would not be an instant gratification. It would surely involve arriving at a judgement on the audience's part, but that judgement would have to be different than 'the immediacy of the judgement and the noisy approval with which children respond to the puppet theatre' (43). Because though such judgement and approval would have something 'nice and fresh' about it, it would be 'still completely undifferentiated'. Interestingly, 'immediacy', which for Bennewitz was an essential quality of an artistic experience to connect with wider audiences, became a hindrance when it comes to 'arriving at one's own judgement'. Because, for him, 'the immediacy of judgement' meant a judgement instantly arrived at, like 'the noisy approval', not by an individual as singularity but by 'still completely undifferentiated' masses as totality.

This distinction between an immediate judgement by 'still completely undifferentiated' masses and 'arriving at one's own judgement' *together* by differentiated individuals would help us understand two contrasting ideas of 'popular' discussed by Bennewitz: one, status quoist and other, Brechtian. While discussing the Brechtian idea of 'popular', Bennewitz noted:

Brecht does not simply continue popular traditions (which do not exist in that sense at all), but rather bases his way of thinking on *a thoroughly grounded relationship to the people* in the present and the past, and this *universally and not limited to Europe*. Thoroughly grounded here means: *grounded in reasons*, from the ground up, at the root. His theatre is *popular theatre in the sense of theatre for the people*—not in the state of ‘still being naïve’, but rather of ‘already being naïve’, for his naïveté is a high state of civilization which has sublated the old naïveté, in the Hegelian sense. (45; emphases added.)

It is clear from Bennewitz’s notes that he saw Brechtian popular not as a ‘simple continuation’ or ‘natural’, ‘organic’ progression of existing ‘popular traditions’. Not only because there were none available to him but also because Brecht’s popular theatre, despite its irruption in *a* concrete European situation, could not have been autochthonous to *a* cultural tradition in identitarian sense. If there was any grounding to Brecht’s popular theatre, then it was grounded in *a* people, *any* people whatsoever, as long as they would *subject* themselves to *a* universal, rational Idea (communism), to *a* truth (dialectical materialism), in order to change themselves and the world they lived in. In short, Brecht’s popular theatre was not grounded in *a* culture but in *a* process of becoming (subjectivation) which was at once rational and universal. This process could possibly *happen* in any culture (chance encounter), yet that *happening* was not cultural but artistic (didactic), which could transform *any* people (German or Indian) into *a* universal, rational people. The Marxist name for *a* universal, rational people (or collective subject) was ‘proletariat’. When Bennewitz said that Brecht’s theatre was popular ‘in the sense of theatre *for* the people’ (45), he perhaps meant it to be theatre *for* subjective transformation of ‘still undifferentiated’ masses into *a* universal, rational people (proletariat) under the sign of an idea (communism). Therefore, Brecht’s theatre was not popular in the old (traditional) sense, appealing to masses who were ‘still being naïve’, but it was a new popular theatre *for* a people who were ‘already being naïve’ or to be precise it was a theatre which attempted to transform masses who were ‘still being naïve’ (or still completely undifferentiated masses) into *a* people who were ‘already being naïve’, that is, already being undifferentiated/indiscernible, as a new universal, rational people—proletariat (45).

If one were to ask, what was the precise difference between these two states—‘still being naïve’ and ‘already being naïve’, one would realize that, for Bennewitz, it was nothing else but the difference between two ways in which joy (entertainment) could be conjoined (unity) with wisdom (enlightenment). In the traditional conception of ‘popular’ too, maintained Bennewitz, there existed a certain unity of entertainment and enlightenment. For Bennewitz, *Dasavtar* (a traditional popular form from Maharashtra) had greater ‘potential’ than Tamasha for ‘passing moral values through legends’ and of ‘educating through entertainment’ (47). Yet ‘the unbroken unity of instruction and entertainment’ (36) in traditional forms like *Dasavtar* implied that entertainment (joy) consisted in celebrating a tradition as an insider and thereby preserving an entangled web of ‘habituations’, including ‘mystical’, ‘irrational’ elements within it (44–45). Whereas according to a modern (Brechtian) popular, enlightenment (wisdom) meant rational investigation and reconfiguration of *any* cultural tradition (European or Indian) under the sign of a political, not anthropological, universal (the communist idea) and entertainment meant ‘joy of arriving at one’s own judgement’ guided by a truth (dialectical materialism). Though this new popular or this new ‘unity of enlightenment and entertainment’ was ‘perfected in Brechtian theatre’, Bennewitz believed that a ‘potential’ for this unity ‘was surely present at least in a vague way but definitely as an ideal possibility’ in Indian ‘folk forms’ (44), as evidenced from his observations on *Dasavtar*. Building upon his intuitions, Bennewitz attempted to invent a new (Brechtian) popular in India by introducing the ‘necessary amount of innovation in the guise of audience’s own customs, so that the customs do not turn into habituations that prevent new insights’ (44). But in the course of his practice, he felt that this ‘balance was not easy to achieve’, mainly because Indian audiences, according to Bennewitz, were ‘not yet used to the pleasure of making discoveries’ and would ‘react more to the new effects (such as colourful light) than to new ways of thinking’ (44). Having observed, what he considered Indian audience’s ‘unfamiliarity with the pleasure of using one’s own reason’, Bennewitz felt a need to adopt ‘a very careful and patient approach to the process of *education*’ (45; emphasis added). For Bennewitz, as discussed earlier, this ‘process of education’ had two dimensions: invoking certain ‘desire’ among actors (to make fun the vehicle

of wisdom) and cultivating certain ‘pleasure’ among audience (to arrive at one’s own judgement). These two dimensions, inseparable like two sides of a coin, together would constitute a new popular, a new unity of enlightenment and entertainment. The inseparability of these two dimensions would affirm this new popular (theatre) to be a joyous process of *thinking together*, by actors and audiences alike, to change themselves and the world they inhabited.

But in reality, even after his second collaboration in India (*Ajab Nyaya Vartulacha*), which received ‘heart-warming’ response in the GDR (Mehta 1974) and was considered ‘a major success’, ‘a milestone in the introduction of modern Indian theatre in Germany’ (Esleben 2016, 59), Bennewitz did not consider it to be a success as far as attainment of ‘the new unity of enlightenment and entertainment’ was concerned. Rather, his reflections post the second collaboration tell us that he thought even the first steps towards this new unity were yet to be taken. He continued to feel that:

...difficulties remain in the reception of the play and certainly as far as a deeper understanding on the part of all actors is concerned as well: the juxtaposition of GOOD and EVIL is still static like that between Rama and Ravana, not dynamic and dialectical, just like *historical consciousness is static rather than dynamic and dialectical; there is no thinking and experiencing of historical processes.* (59; emphases added)

One need not consider these two contrasting assessments of *Ajab*—‘a major success’ and a failure as didactic art—as contradicting each other. In fact, together they exemplify a conjuncture in which inter-governmental celebration of canonical Brecht went hand in hand with the actual saturation of didactic Brechtian project, symptomized by that peculiar term, ‘Brecht-weariness’. If Bennewitz’s reflections exemplify subjective commitment towards the didactic conception of theatre, despite its saturation, resulting in subjective denial of ‘Brecht-weariness’, then Mehta’s memoir suggests romanticist scepticism of didactic theatre, resulting in subjective disengagement from ‘Brecht-weariness’. Outlining Mehta’s (2012, 223)<sup>1</sup> account of her collaboration with Bennewitz could help us understand what made her celebrate *Ajab* to be ‘a living exemplar of the cultural exchange’ between the GDR and India, while Bennewitz saw it as a failure of didactic art.

## MEHTA'S ROMANTICIST SCEPTICISM OF DIDACTIC THEATRE: FUSING 'BRECHT AS POET' WITH FOLK

Before we begin to sketch this outline, let us briefly discuss G. P. Deshpande's (2006, 93) insistence to 'historicize the Brecht phenomena' in India, which he described as 'trans-political celebration of Brecht' across theatres of India, taking place 'nearly a decade and half after the German playwright's death' (Deshpande 2009, 35–36). Critically commenting upon this pan-Indian celebration of Brecht, in general, and 'Brecht-reception' in Maharashtra, in particular, Deshpande (2006, 68, 93) observes that 'the dominant cultural class in the urban centres', coming from the upper-caste beneficiaries of the first three economic plans, '[s]uddenly found itself searching ... for its 'roots', while 'some of them discovered that the search for roots would acquire an international veneer through Brecht'. Out of 'their socio-historical need', argues Deshpande (2006, 68, 94), this 'well-to-do and alienated urban elite', belonging to 'brahminical middle classes', 'depoliticized Brecht' by turning him into 'the vehicle of the cultural nationalism'. But, 'national' framing of Deshpande's historicization clearly misses how metropolitan elites' appropriation of Brecht as 'a neo-nationalist instrument' (68) was conjunctural to the GDR party-state's appropriation of 'canonical' Brecht as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. Also, the implicit 'post-colonial' framing of Deshpande's analysis, which brackets the question of 'authenticity' along the East–West axis, presumes that an encounter with the West induced a search for authenticity (or 'return to roots') *only* in the East/post-colony. A combined effect of 'national-post-colonial' framing allows Deshpande (2009, 35) to stage 'neo-nationalist' appropriation of Brecht by urban elites as *an integral part* of their search for authentic 'Indianness'. Whereas a conjunctural view tells us that the question of authenticity emerged not only on the post-colonial East–West axis but also animated the competing claims of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the GDR over authentic 'Germanness'. Thus, at the time of Brecht's arrival in India, not only the metropolitan elites were searching for 'authentic Indianness' split between 'modern' and 'traditional', 'urban' and 'rural', 'elite' and 'folk', but the cultural diplomats from the FRG and the GDR were also competing over 'authentic Germanness', split between 'all-German' and 'socialist'

Brecht. While in the GDR itself, as discussed so far, the authenticity of 'socialist' Brecht was already split between 'canonical' and 'radical' Brecht, on the Marathi stage, as we shall discuss later, the authenticity of 'canonical' Brecht was further split between 'Brecht as poet' and 'Brecht as instrument of communist propaganda'. A closer look at the lead up to the Bennewitz–Mehta collaboration could help us to disentangle how the question of authenticity, split between identitarian, political and artistic notions of authenticity, was cutting *across* the GDR and Marathi stage, while taking a different form in each case.

Before collaborating with Bennewitz, Mehta had already 'stumbled upon Brecht' as a consequence of an international theatre workshop she attended at Oxford in the late 1960s (Mehta 2012, 198). Even though from the early 1960s, Mehta's theatre group *Rangayan* was 'introducing a foreign classic each year' to its enrolled members in Mumbai/Pune, which included Marathi adaptation of Ionesco's *Chairs*, it was only after the workshop at Oxford that Mehta was drawn towards Brecht. In this workshop, 'where Americans and Africans found their own ways of producing Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*', Mehta thought, 'let me try tamasha' (2014). After presenting a scene from *Ubu Roi* in 'tamasha style', a folk theatre form typical of Maharashtra, Mehta continued to ponder over a question: 'what can 'urban' theatre learn from various forms of folk theatre?' (198). Since then, she harboured 'a desire to understand the raw energy and working methods of folk-arts' so that she 'could utilise these resources to mount a new play on urban stage' (2014, 198–199). While searching 'an appropriate script' which could serve as 'a modern vehicle for folk conventions', Mehta 'found Brecht' and immediately felt that two of his plays, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, would 'perfectly fit Indian milieu' (198). Here, one could observe a parallel between the practice of *Rangayan* 'to introduce a foreign classic' to its urban audiences and Mehta's desire to use 'raw energy' of folk theatre to create a new play on urban stage. Like European classics, Mehta saw 'raw energy' of folk theatre as somewhat 'foreign' to urban Marathi stage, even though 'urbanised tamasha' (like *Gadhvacha Lagna*) was already an established phenomenon on popular Marathi stage. One could say with Vyankatesh Madgulagar's Marathi adaptation of *The Good Woman*, titled *Devajine Karuna Keli*, Mehta found an ideal

blend of 'a foreign classic' to be introduced to *Rangayan's* members and 'a modern vehicle for folk conventions' she was searching for.

Yet after staging *Devajine*, which 'earned a shower of praise for *Rangayan*' and was considered 'a unique and memorable theatre experiment', Mehta was not satisfied with the outcome. She felt, even if the performance turned out to be 'a festive celebration', 'in that whole enthusiasm and joy, poor Brecht was lost somewhere' and soon she would want 'to correct that flaw with the help of an expert (199). Interestingly, Mehta did not consider taking help from 'an expert' after she and her co-actor Madhav Watve had openly confessed before the members of *Rangayan* that 'we tried, but we failed' to handle Ionesco's *Chairs* (146). It was only with Brecht that the question of expertise, someone with an 'authentic' knowledge of doing Brecht, emerged. Arun Naik (1972, 6) in his review of *Devajine*, while referring to an English production of *The Good Woman* by Amal Allana, which had recently toured Mumbai, suggested that Allana's 'production techniques should be taken as authentic', because 'she had taken her training from Brecht's Berliner Ensemble'. After studying Brecht's Epic theatre 'in the light of (Allana's) production as the ideal one' (6), Naik concluded that Mehta misunderstood 'Epic theatre being the same as our folk forms' (10), which made her privilege 'pure entertainment' over 'the main purpose' of Brechtian drama, namely 'preaching and involvement in thinking' (9). Also, for Naik, it was a 'misconception' of Mehta 'to apply Stanislavskian system to a Brechtian play' (10), because a correct Brechtian conception would consider them to be 'diametrically opposed' to each other (8). But in case if *Rangayan's* non-mention of *Devajine* as an adaptation of *The Good Woman* 'in its advertisement' were to imply that it did 'not want to introduce Brecht to the Marathi theatre', then according to Naik, 'all academic importance of this play was lost' (11). Here, one could read 'academic importance' as that which Naik sought to derive by postulating *the* model of authentic Brechtian theatre (like Allana's) against which a play like *Devajine* could be evaluated, else 'as an independent play ... most of its flaws' could be said to be 'justified' (12). Unlike G. P. Deshpande (2006, 93), who would later make an ironic remark that 'the Marathi adaptations of Brecht have to be looked at as independent plays', Naik's review of *Devajine*, belonging to an initial moment of Brechtian sequence



on the Marathi stage, seemed unwilling to let go of the notion of authentic Brechtian theatre to measure as well as rectify the flaws of 'Marathi Brecht'. Though Naik and Mehta would have broadly agreed upon what counted as 'flaws' of *Devajine*, Mehta (unlike Naik) still considered authenticity of Marathi folk theatre reconcilable with authenticity of Brecht, provided she could get 'necessary' help from a Brecht expert.

Within few months at the first Asian theatre conference in Mumbai (November 1972), Mehta got an opportunity to see Bennewitz's, an 'official' Brecht expert's, *Threepenny Opera*, which he had done with the NSD students. But surprisingly, Mehta 'did not quite like' it (Mehta 2012, 214). Though 'everything was in its place'—costumes, music, movements—Mehta found 'that entire thing lifeless'; to her, 'the play seemed unreal like a showroom filled with chiselled and well-dressed mannequins' (214). She felt the way her own attempt of doing Brecht in *Rangayan* had failed, 'similarly, but for very different reasons', through the NSD production 'neither Brecht nor alive theatrical moments could reach me' (214). To use Mehta's imagery, if in *Devajine* Brecht got 'lost somewhere' amid 'festive celebration', then in *Threepenny*, Brecht got imprisoned inside a well-orchestrated yet 'lifeless' spectacle of 'well-dressed mannequins' (214). While Mehta sensed lack of vitality and concomitant absence of Brecht in Bennewitz's production, Bennewitz himself considered 'the results' of the NSD production as being 'limited' (Esleben 2016, 33). Despite successfully 'raising curiosity about Brecht' and 'imparting (Brechtian) methods' to audiences across Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad and Bangalore, Bennewitz still thought the impact of the NSD production remained limited, because 'it had been created from our European traditions and acting conventions' (32) and, thus, seemed more of 'a product imported to the Indian stage, not developed from the traditions of that stage' (283). One could say Bennewitz was experiencing limits of 'authentic' Brecht as well as his own 'expertise' of it. Yet when Mehta voiced her 'opinion' about *Threepenny Opera* during the conference, 'a European gentleman' (whom she did not know then) immediately questioned her 'in slightly harsh tone', 'have you read Brecht? Have you done his plays?' (Mehta 2012, 214). One could clearly discern the tone of expertise underlying this question, even if the questioner was soon going to admit its limits. At that moment,

Ibrahim Alkazi, the director of the NSD and Mehta's mentor, whispered in her ears, 'he is professor Fritz Bennewitz from the GDR. He was the director of yesterday's *Three Penny Opera*. He has worked a lot with Brecht himself' (214).

If Naik's notion of authentic Brecht expert could reach only up to someone from India with a training at Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, then Mehta had met an even more authentic Brecht expert, someone from Germany who had worked directly with Brecht. Mehta was elated to meet this 'Brecht follower' coming straight from the GDR, whom she felt had come to her 'as if descended from the skies' (198). After the conference when Mehta told Bennewitz how she considered *Devajine* to be 'a failed experiment' and showed him production photos of it on his request, Bennewitz instantly responded, '[y]our actors look very good. Even in the photographs one can sense their energy' (215). Bennewitz's quick response not only reaffirmed Mehta's 'romanticist' preoccupation with 'raw energy' of folk theatre but it also reflected his own 'hegemonic' (the party-state) concern which propelled him to approach Brechtian theatre from outside of 'European traditions', so that it would not remain confined to the educated few in the Indian metros and with the mass appeal of folk theatre, Brecht could find 'a grass-roots base for the first time outside of Bengal' (Esleben 2016, 36). By then, Bennewitz was almost convinced that 'our (European) experiences benefit theatre in India most when they are closely tied to the experiences of the Indian theatre' (33). In the same meeting, Bennewitz spontaneously proposed to Mehta, 'shall we work on a Brecht play together?' (215). The logic of Bennewitz's proposal for collaboration was plain and simple, since he would 'want to understand Indian theatre' and Mehta would 'want to learn Brechtian method of thinking' and if they could 'work together, then the production could be enriched from all sides' (215). Bennewitz told her that 'as a part of the cultural exchange between India and the GDR', he was coming back after nine months and if she agreed, then they could work in Mumbai. Needless to say, Mehta accepted his proposal and coincidentally the play Bennewitz suggested, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, she had already thought to be 'a perfect fit for Indian milieu'. The chance encounter between Mehta and Bennewitz was soon going to result into 'the first art project in India to be mounted according to an

international cultural agreement and with the help of an embassy of a foreign country' (215).

The lucidity of Bennewitz's proposal for collaboration brought the split between the two notions of authenticity onto the surface, even though it was already at work since the 'failure' of *Devajine*. To schematize, one could say it was a split between *authenticity as force* (raw energy) and *authenticity as knowledge* (expertise). These two notions of authenticity required two distinct operations. 'Authenticity as force' required *activation* by an actor/performer, while 'authenticity as knowledge' required *authentication* by an expert. In the light of this schema, one could read Bennewitz's proposal to collaborate as proposal to reconcile these two notions of authenticity, 'authenticity as force' (Indian theatre) and 'authenticity as knowledge' (Brechtian method of acting). Since the split between these two notions of authenticity was only symptomatic of the intertwined saturation of communist politics and didactic conception of art, the proposal to reconcile them on an inter-governmental plane evaded conjunctural emergence of this split. Building upon what we discussed in the first section, we could say, the intertwined saturation of communist politics and didactic conception of art found a concrete manifestation in the disintegration of an *effective unity* of Brechtian theatre. Till then, this 'effective unity' of *thought* and *practice* existed only as in-separate (separate yet together) or dialectical *movement* and not as abstract, theoretical *totality*. The disintegration of this effective unity resulted in historical (not essential) splitting of *thinking* (enlightenment) and *affect* (entertainment) as two separate entities. Through this splitting, *thinking* became 'authoritative knowledge' (expertise), to be authenticated by the agents of the party-state, while *affect* was reduced to 'pure force' (raw energy), to be celebrated as 'organic' trait of 'authentic folks' bracketed into identitarian cultural blocs. Once this split came onto the surface through Bennewitz's proposal to Mehta for collaboration, it kept resurfacing and even splitting further during the production process, despite their attempts to reconcile it.

It began with Mehta's decision to seek C. T. Khanolkar's help to adapt *The Caucasian*. Though he was a playwright, Mehta thought of turning to Khanolkar because he was essentially a

poet. And in Mehta's opinion, *The Caucasian's* 'theme was communist', but Brecht's 'original temperament was of a poet' than of a propagandist (216). In her estimation, Brecht was 'first and foremost a poet and an experimental playwright' and 'the label of being a communist writer was attached to him later' (222). In her understanding, it was 'the communist regime of the GDR' which 'appointed Brecht as a 'court playwright' thinking that his writing would be useful for the regime, but when the regime realized that Brecht's creative poetic writing was not particularly helpful to propagate communist ideology, he was asked to leave the GDR' (222). As a theatre practitioner, she believed theatre could neither 'be reduced to a political platform' nor could 'lead to revolution' (223). Therefore, while asking Khanolkar to adapt *The Caucasian*, Mehta's 'expectation' was clear, 'since Brecht was poet at heart, it should appeal to a poetic mind like Khanolkar's' (216). Later, Pushpa Bhave (1973, 30), a renowned theatre critic, in her otherwise critical review of *Ajab*, seemed to echo Mehta's expectation, when she commented, 'considering poeticness of Brecht's play, anyone else (than Khanolkar) adapting the play would have found it difficult to translate' his poetry, and Bhave further speculated that 'being a poet and lyricist himself', Aartiprabhu (Khanolkar's pen name as poet) 'would have experienced a pure joy of having met his fellow while adapting *Ajab*'. Reading Khanolkar's initial drafts, Mehta found that her initial expectation was proving to be correct as far as Brecht's poetry was concerned. Since Khanolkar 'did not know how to read English' and had to rely on audio recordings of Mehta's rough 'oral Marathi translation' as his reference point, she found his prose scenes to be 'venturing in all possible directions', at times, even 'deviating from the original text', but 'whenever there were Brecht's poems', she felt, Khanolkar's rendering of 'those parts would be miraculously beautiful' (216). Mehta's initial amazement at the 'deep poetic bond' (221) between Brecht and Khanolkar continued even after *Ajab* was staged. During *Ajab's* tour of the GDR, when Mehta was told by Arvind Dev, then Indian ambassador to the GDR, that the poetic metres used by Brecht in *The Caucasian* 'almost matched' with the metres Khanolkar used in *Ajab*, she was awestruck and kept wondering, 'how could a poet from Konkan, who could not understand a single letter of German or English poetry, accomplish this? How could this miracle happen?' The only possible

explanation Mehta could give to herself was that it was one of those 'inexplicable things' which 'happen' in the field of art (229).

One could read Mehta's splitting of 'canonical Brecht' into 'Brecht as poet' and 'Brecht as instrument of communist propaganda', as a conjunctural effect of the intertwined saturation of communist politics and didactic conception of art, upon someone who evaluated the failure of communist politics and the disintegration of Brechtian didactic theatre from *outside* than from within. One could speculate that in Mehta's case, this *outside* was perhaps marked by a certain 'anti-communist' bias, since she spent her formative years with a popular socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan (Ramnarayan 2011) who, after converting to Gandhism, started perceiving communism as 'a violent movement' and who not only declared a 'final break with Marxism' but also started sincerely believing that only Gandhians, with their 'morality', 'balanced view of life' and 'disciplining of their appetites' could 'enable socialism to merge into *Sarvodaya* (the uplift of all)' (Zachariah 2004, 196). And since the middle of the 1950s, this 'anti-communist' bias was widely shared among Gandhian socialists, who were trying to find how socialism, 'which had once been declared foreign by Gandhi', could be 'indigenised by the introduction of Gandhism' while 'shifting the pressure of foreignness onto the communists, cast as agents of a foreign power' (196). Therefore, it is likely that for someone like Mehta, who was exposed to Gandhian socialism early in her life and probably saw the Stalinist capture of communism through an anti-communist lens, not only did the name communism appear to be synonymous with violent authoritarianism but also didactic art seemed to be a euphemism for statist indoctrination. In her disdain for didactic art, a consequence of her belief that didactic meant nothing but brute instrumentalization of art by the communist regime, one could locate Mehta's 'romanticist' urge to split 'authenticity' of art itself as 'creative', 'poetic' and 'miraculous' *force* cutting across linguistic and cultural barriers. One could say that a combination of anti-communist, romanticist bias propelled Mehta to recover 'authentic' Brecht (Brecht as poet) from his supposed *inauthentication* by the communist regime, whose attempt to reduce Brecht into 'an instrument of communist propaganda' eventually failed. Till then, the question of authenticity was split only between

‘authenticity as force’ (‘raw energy’ of folk theatre) and ‘authenticity of knowledge’ (an expertise of Brechtian theatre). With Mehta’s recovery of ‘authentic’ Brecht, ‘poetic force’ of Brecht was counterposed against Bennewitz’s ‘expertise’ of Brechtian theatre, thereby splitting the question of authenticity even further. Yet during the rehearsals, both Mehta and Bennewitz in their own ways remained committed to reconcile these irreconcilable splits, which intensified them even further.

At the very beginning of the rehearsals, when Bennewitz returned from Germany with ‘drawings of huge set design’, Mehta expressed her disagreement saying, ‘in traditional Indian theatre there are no sets. There is only an empty stage’ (218). Bennewitz, after becoming ‘restless for a while’, suspended his ‘expertise’ for the moment saying, ‘now, I am your student. It is your responsibility to convince me how a scene is to be constructed on an empty stage’ (229). Interestingly, Pushpa Bhawe in her review of *Ajab* seemed to endorse Mehta’s logic that ‘since this production adopted tamasha style, there was no question of sets’, while mentioning that another production of the same play by Ebrahim Alkazi and Carl Weber had used ‘realistic sets’ (1973, 33). Whereas Rajiv Naik (2012), a renowned Marathi playwright and theatre scholar, who has also translated Brecht’s *Life of Galileo*, argues that it is ‘a prevalent misconception’ among Marathi theatre practitioners that Brecht is to be performed on an empty stage like Tamasha and perhaps one could trace this ‘misconception’ back to Bennewitz’s momentary suspension of his ‘expertise’ before Mehta (125).

During the rehearsals, Mehta could find more cracks in Bennewitz’s ‘expertise’, as ‘most of the actors’ (except Bhakti Barve who played *Grusha/Hansa*) ‘wouldn’t understand what Fritz would say’ and it ‘benefitted’ Mehta a lot, who conducted the rehearsals and mediated between Bennewitz and the actors (Mehta 2012, 218). Mehta not only thought that Bennewitz’s and her ‘methods of conducting the rehearsals were very different’ but also felt that ‘Fritz wasted a lot of time doing microscopic analysis of each and every scene’, that ‘he would be unnecessarily pedantic’ (221). Whereas Mehta preferred to brief the actors and then leave them to ‘actualise most of it spontaneously through their acting’, Fritz would not approve of ‘her method of instructing every actor according to her in-built capacity’ (222). Within the first week of

rehearsals, Bennewitz raised his reservations over a renowned actor from urbanized tamasha, Dadu Indurikar's 'method of free and spontaneous improvisation without taking a single line from the written text' (219). While Mehta encouraged the actors to act 'spontaneously', Bennewitz expected them to 'bring out the gist of each and every line through their performance' (219).

We have already discussed this tension between 'spontaneity' and 'reflexivity' in the previous section while reading Bennewitz's production notes, whose singular concern was how to attain 'unity of enlightenment and entertainment'. Reading Mehta's memoir along with those notes one realizes that despite dialectical understanding of this unity at theoretical level, Bennewitz's actual working method reflected 'dogmatic' adherence to 'canonical Brecht' because of which his interventions appeared 'pedantic' and gradually the 'authenticity' of his 'ideological expertise' was silently undermined by Mehta's romanticist (and anti-communist) inclination towards 'authenticity of force'. Even though Dadu Indurikar was instantly replaced by Suhas Bhalerao as *Azda*, Mehta soon found 'a way out of this impasse' between the two notions of authenticity, which was pulling *Ajab* in two opposite directions (Mehta 2012, 221). Intermittently, Mehta started sending Bennewitz away 'to Goa, Aurangabad or Jaipur for tourism' and during that window of 2–3 days, she would work with the actors 'according to her method to achieve the effect intended by Bennewitz' (221). In Mehta's terms, 'the important difference' between them was that she was an 'actress-director', while Bennewitz was a 'professor-director' (221) and clearly, the 'authentic force' of the former was taking over the 'authentic knowledge' of the latter. Possibly, having sensed this turnaround, Bennewitz seemed to have made peace with it. In Mehta's words, whenever Bennewitz 'would come back from his tour', he 'would feel delighted after watching the rehearsal' (221). Mehta too, after having taken charge of the rehearsal process, eventually felt confident enough to acknowledge that she 'learnt a lot from Fritz' and, 'most importantly, it cleared many misconceptions' in her mind regarding 'the Brechtian method of acting', namely 'alienation method implied an analytical acting devoid of emotions' (219). On the contrary, Bennewitz, while correcting Bhakti Barve's 'bad habits of misplaced Stanislavskian method with its tendency towards the sentimental' (Esleben 2016, 52),

clarified to Mehta that ‘in Brecht’s view, acting should be an intense explosion of emotions and not a feeble sentimentality’ (Mehta 2012, 219). An expert’s clarification that explosive force of emotions too has a legitimate space in ‘authentic’ Brecht brought a great relief to Mehta, who was not only ‘convinced’ by this clarification but also felt ‘a great joy that it opened a different chamber of acting’ to her (220). It could be said that for Mehta, who was otherwise known as ‘an ardent advocate of Stanislavsky system of acting’ (Naik 1972, 9), and for Bennewitz, who was initially ‘trained in Stanislavskian tradition’ (Esleben 2016, 282), possibly during ‘the Brecht–Stanislavsky reconciliation process in East Germany’ in the early 1960s (Klöck 2017, 251), this authoritative clarification concerning ‘official’ compatibility between intense explosion of emotions (force) and Brechtian alienation (knowledge) seemed to have offered the only common ground of conciliation, given the two irreconcilable notions of authenticity they stood for. Despite these irreconcilable notions, *Ajab*, to use Mehta’s words, became ‘the first Indian play performed in an Indian language to travel abroad’ (Mehta 2012, 224), received ‘a fifteen minute curtain call’ and ‘thumping ovation’ at the National Theatre in Weimar (227–228) and became ‘a living exemplar of the cultural exchange’ between the GDR and India (223).

## CONCLUSION

A juxtaposition of the accounts of Bennewitz and Mehta of their collaboration on *Ajab* bring out two *subjectively* distinct responses to certain uncannily shared ‘Brecht-weariness’, symptomatic of the global conjuncture constituted by intertwined saturation of the party-state modality of communist politics and didactic conception of art. A conjunctural reading of Bennewitz–Mehta collaboration suggests that an ‘intercultural’ encounter needs to be *historically* located to understand a contested common ground upon which identity/difference and hierarchies are negotiated. It also suggests that instead of taking any geo-cultural ensemble (like the West/Europe/the GDR and Asia/India/Maharashtra) as a stable marker of identity and difference and thereby framing artistic encounters as *always already* intercultural, one needs to focus on the subjective dimension of such encounters. Since the true locus of any real



emancipatory transformation is subjective, it cannot be captured within the positivist grid of identity and difference. Thus, mutually transformative encounters between *people*, such as artistic encounters, need to be seen as *subjective* and *singular* encounters than intercultural (in representative sense) ones. Finally, it suggests that culture needs to be seen not as what it *is* but as what it *does*, which is to say that culture needs to be seen as an instrument, albeit an ambiguous and contested instrument, of domination as well as emancipation. This ambiguity complicates the emancipatory task of transforming culture from an attribute and a possession of a particular people into an intensity, a living force, a consciousness *in the present* which cuts across boundaries.

## NOTE

1. Marathi excerpts cited here and elsewhere are translated by the author himself.

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# COLD WAR ENTANGLEMENTS

India at the Leipzig Documentary  
Film Festival

***Veena Hariharan***

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*We could call film festivals the symbolic agoras of a new democracy—repositories and virtual archives of the revolutions that have failed to take place in Europe over the past 50–60 years, but whose possibilities and potential they keep alive merely by the constituencies ... they are able to gather together, each time, each year, in each place.*

—Elsaesser (2005, 103–104)

The recent ‘cultural turn’ in Cold War historiography has made it possible to look beyond a world flattened by the so-called ‘grand game’ between the two self-appointed superpowers in Washington and Moscow to an ever-expanding playing field—from Stasi spies to Bond girls, from Michael Verhoeven in Berlin to Jane Fonda in Leipzig—to understand the complex dynamics of the war. Further, the declassification of CIA documents in the USA and the opening up of the East German archives post détente have also made it possible to revisit the Cold War through its whistle-blowers and non-conformists, its apparatchiks and compradors, to see how people,

in fact, lived in totalitarian societies or dictatorships, and how they resisted the seemingly 'all-encompassing regime' via the subjective and the everyday. Totalitarian regimes themselves can no longer be viewed as monoliths, rather as networks of entanglements—of state and non-state actors, of regional blocs and transnational solidarities, of doers, dreamers and deserters.

If the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was at the heart of the Cold War, then India was at its periphery—'a playing field', a 'prized diplomatic possession'; India's geopolitical strategic position in the 'Cold War calculus' made it a much-wooed state that, in turn, played both the Truman and Kremlin administrations (McMahon 1996, 11). On its part, the GDR projected India and the non-aligned nations as a natural ally, based on Nehru's avowed ideological tilt towards Soviet socialism and anti-US imperialism, while the Communist Party of India (CPI) via its cultural wing, the Indian People's Theatre Association, was the conduit of GDR socialism in the country (more on the nature of Indo-GDR entanglements later).

Film festival networks and the Leipzig Documentary Festival (DOK-Leipzig), in particular, provide us a unique vantage point to study the Cold War years from as they shift between 'history, memory and oblivion', as Catherine Moine (2018, 315) points out in her detailed study of the festival. If early film festivals were split along Axis–Allies' battle lines (Venice versus Cannes), then post-Second World War festivals were divided by the Manichean logic of the Cold War: Berlinale (founded, 1951) and the Leipzig Documentary Festival (founded, 1955, in the same year as the Bandung Conference) emerged in this cosmology as doppelgangers. If the Berlinale was the 'showcase and agency' for the NATO West, meant to show the East how oppressed they were, then Leipzig was the GDR counter meant to expose West Berlin's 'decadent film façade' (Wong 2011, 167, 43). If the Berlinale was dedicated to fictional programming which later evolved to include the experimental, avant-garde shorts and documentaries, Leipzig was entirely dedicated to the documentary. Additionally, the Oberhausen and Mannheim festivals also dedicated to the documentary developed in the working class and industrial West German cities of Ruhr and Mannheim, while the festival at Karlovy Vary in the Czech spa city attempted to be a smooth bridge (though it quickly embraced the

party line of the communist East), between the East and West as they 'glared at each other from opposite sides of the iron curtain' (Wong 2011, 2).

One of the ways in which we can track the transnational flows in the context of film festivals is through the ways in which the category of 'world cinema' is constituted and this has been done thoroughly by Thomas Elsaesser (2005), for whom the politically charged encounter with the Third-World cinema by the European film festivals (Cannes, Berlinale, etc.) is what gets curated in an international film festival logic or network as 'world cinema'. Inversely, 'world cinema' for regional film festival audiences, as Ratheesh Radhakrishnan (2016, 210) observes in his work on the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK), was for the longest time 'in the guise of the cinema of Eastern Europe'. He nuances the 'subject of the region', produced in the particular context of the IFFK, as a 'performative' one that accesses, what Radhakrishnan in an evocative phrase calls, the 'multiple horizons of universality' (Radhakrishnan 2016). Where does Indian cinema then figure in the world imaginary of the Eastern Bloc and the GDR? This is one of the nodes that I explore below via the Leipzig Festival Network.

'Unannounced screenings at midnight ... films smuggled over the border in a suitcase ... hotel rooms bugged by the Stasi', this is how Andreas Kötzing (2017) recalls the mythography that surrounded the Leipzig Film Festival in the festival's self-documentation. Since its establishment in 1955, the Leipzig Documentary Film Festival (now known as DOK Leipzig) has been one of the vital international film festival networks dedicated exclusively to the 'politically engaged documentary and short film' and continues to be a prestigious 'event' (if an event maybe defined by its 'disjunctive singularity') for documentarians the world over to this day (Derrida 1984; Kötzing 2017). Significantly, it has also been a charged venue for East–West relations amid Cold War geopolitics, providing film-makers and journalists with an opportunity to interact with each other from both sides of the Iron Curtain as well as with film-makers from the Global South, at least during the week of the festival, even as travel to and from the GDR was heavily regimented/policed rest of the year. In 1962, Picasso authorized his *Dove of Peace* to be the festival's emblem (reproduced on its awards

by the East German mint) with the motto, 'Films for the World—for Peace in the World' (Kötzing 2017; Moine 2018).

The Leipzig Festival was the monopoly of the state apparatus. Yet as Moine demonstrates (2018, 8, 11), it is the 'diplomatic and non-diplomatic, official and unofficial actors', transnational players, 'intellectuals anxious to resist cultural isolation' and subterfuge that ended up making the festival what it is.

Meant as a 'cultural showcase' to prove to the world and its own youth 'GDR's international openness', the festival, however, 'wavered between provincialism and international dialogue' (Moine 2018, 2). Kötzing (2017) details the internal tussles to contain the festival's internationalism and liberalism and what the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands officials saw as the pandering to foreign guests. As international film-makers and professionals (always part of the festival jury and programming) were brought from all over the world to Leipzig at great expense and treated with hospitality (an infrastructure that was alive and thriving owing to the Leipzig trade fair), the Stasi kept a watchful eye on them (carbon copies of all visa applications were filed at the Stasi headquarters). A close control of the programming was also maintained: Polish solidarity movement films (Andrej Wajda and others) were considered high-risk, while Latin American films (from Santiago Álvarez to Patricio Guzmán) critical of the 'US imperialist aggressors' were very welcome. Anti-Vietnam War films were regularly featured (Jane Fonda was a celebrity guest at Leipzig with her film *Introduction to the Enemy* [Haskell Wexler, 1974], Michael Verhoeven's *o.k.* (1970) that nearly shut down the Berlinale was feted at Leipzig. Similarly, there was a preference shown for socialist realism, even though the festival programmers smuggled in the more experimental documentary films that were in global circulation.

Even if film festivals have for the longest time been in the 'blind spot' of historical research on cinema, the emergent scholarship on film festivals in recent years is too vast and various to summarize here (De Valck 2007, 20). I invoke here, however, Marijke de Valck's now oft-cited proposition that film festivals be viewed as Latourian networks that bring together various actants or 'circulating entities'—cinephiles; film professionals; state officials;

business execs; press; programmers; paparazzi and stars; social, business and political agendas; funding agencies; hospitality and red-carpet couture—to explore the theme of ‘entanglements’ (De Valck 2007, 34; Latour 2007).

‘Entanglements’—a productive metaphor with multiple genealogies—is put to work in Kris Manjapra’s (2014, 4, 290) pioneering study, *The Age of Entanglement*, where the affinities and ‘transnational feedback loops’ that defied the ‘spatial logic of empire’ are used to study Indo-German entanglements during the period 1880 until 1945. If Manjapra’s work gave us a detailed mapping of the historic entanglements of adventurers, traders, missionaries, theologians, linguists, artists and film-makers, then the later entanglements of the Cold War era remain to be studied in detail. Indeed, the seams of Indo-GDR folded-ness are only just showing up as the archives unfold.

This post-Wende archival revolution enabled a deluge of information to be available in the public domain. Sifting through this material is not the least of the challenges, added to it is reading through both the ‘doublespeak’ of the GDR administration or the tendency towards ‘over-simplification’ of data as merely GDR propaganda (Bajpai 2018). The material also defies easy narrativization as the breaks and ruptures in the festival’s history do not seamlessly coincide with either GDR’s political history or its entanglements with India (Bajpai, Theresa, and Johannes 2016, 304). Giving a clue as to how to decode the archives’ classificatory logic and navigate this new ‘archival landscape’, Bajpai et al. (2016, 291, 303) urge the question of ‘what constitutes the “political”’ in the absence of official or diplomatic (consular) relations. Indeed, what is the politics of cultural memory? And are there ways to read these entanglements?

Until 1972 (the year of the creation of Bangladesh, discussed below), in place of the consular office, what the GDR had in India were the Indo-GDR friendship societies, scientific missions, solidarity committees and trade representations. In the field of culture, this translated as theatre (such as the Brecht Society of India) and art exchanges, the Radio Berlin International (that did Hindi broadcasts), etc. The Babelsberg film academy and Solidarity School trained journalists and media representatives from the Third World and offered them an international platform at the festival.



The so-called ‘donor campaign’ enabled, in exchange for materials such as raw film stock and equipment, a positive image of the GDR abroad. A bargain, whose value film-makers of the South were quick to note (Moine 2018, 161). However, as Moine (2018, 163) writes, ‘India and a few African nations [were] particularly receptive to the GDR’s diplomatic outreach, [this] hardly translated to the sphere of documentary film’. And it was not until 1988 that a full-fledged retrospective of Indian films was held at the festival.

Following the traces of India in the GDR and vice versa in the holdings of the Deutsche Kinemathek, Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv (BArch-FArch) as well as the DokArchiv (digital archive of the Leipzig Festival), the Films Division Archives, Mumbai, and National Film Archive of India, Pune, I hope to add to scholarship on India–GDR entanglements, hitherto a relatively under-researched area of study. The significant instances of Indo-GDR entanglements (a few of which I detail below) are the presence of: documentary film-maker S. Sukhdev; Goverdhandas Aggarwal of the National Education and Information Films (NEIF); high-profile visitors such as popular actors Leela Naidu and Sunil Dutt (en route from the USSR to promote *Reshma Aur Shera* [1971], the feature film that he co-directed with Sukhdev), B. K. Karanjia (founder of *Filmfare*), Jean Bhowmagary (director of Films Division, 1965–1967), the legendary archivist and director of the National Film Archive, Pune, P. K. Nair, etc (Karanjia 1970). Additionally, G. K. Gokhale’s film *Chaos* (a Films Division animation film about population control that resonated with GDR’s own family planning propaganda at the time) won the Silver Dove at Leipzig in 1969; a retrospective of 53 films from the Films Division, spanning 4 decades of its inception, was held in 1988, along with a German language brochure/supplement (*der Nachtrag*) on the Indian documentary, *Dokumentar-Film in Indien* (with articles by Jag Mohan, B. D. Garga, Jean Bhowmagary, P. K. Nair, Sukhdev and others).

**Goverdhandas Aggarwal** of NEIF, an organization that was set up in 1949, its focus was on importing and making educational films, shares his place among the line-up of international documentary film-makers that include such renowned figures as Joris Ivens, Santiago Álvarez and Chris Marker in a festival photograph

from 1964 (Bundesarchiv, DR 140/Bild, 1964/Alfred Paszkowiak). Jag Mohan's account suggests that he was there as a jury member (Mohan 1990, 88). He is also listed in the 1963 and 1964 Leipzig Festival files as an international jury member. Aggarwal was a founder member of various documentary organizations and was a member of the executive board of the Film Federation of India and Audio Visual Education. He was also the vice-president of the Indian Documentary Film Producers Association and the president of the Educational Film Producers Association (bio note, international jury of 1964, Leipzig Festival Files, 1964). Reporting on the recently concluded seminar on the 'Role of Film as a Medium of Education and Communication in India', with a 'special emphasis on the future of the documentary and short films in terms of cinema and television', organized by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Aggarwal wrote a piece in the *Filmfare*, 1972, titled 'Coffee, Batata Vadas and Cockroach', where he referred to the seminar session as one of the jovial get togethers of coffee and *batata vadas*, rather than any productive planning outcomes, and quoted Kanthilal Rathod's 'unforgettable' reference to the independent documentary film producer as a 'cockroach'. He wrote: 'The independent "cockroach" was continuously exposed to the Establishment's ever-stronger "pesticides" but managed to survive anyway, ironically enough for the Establishment that seemed determined to eradicate him' (Aggarwal 1972).

**G. K. Gokhale's** *Chaos* is described as 'a factual film [that] vividly explains the difficulties in obtaining the bare necessities of life, in a society where there has been no population control'. An animation film by the Cartoon Film Unit of India, the film reimagines Adam and Eve as a fast-proliferating Indian couple that projected India into a chaotic future of overcrowded hospitals and insufficient housing, a cautionary tale about what could happen if family planning measures were not heeded seriously. A survey on the impact of these films among a focus group of villagers in Thane, Maharashtra, notes: 'one third of villagers and one fifth of urban dwellers disliked the commentary of *Chaos*, 67 percent of the urban and just 40 percent of the rural audiences comprehended the key messages of the animation' (Operations Research Group Report 1982, No. 4, 29, 40 on the impact of FD documentaries on family

planning on small town and village communities). It is not clear if the film was awarded for its animation quality (which was hardly remarkable) or because of its pedagogical intent that chimed with GDR's own pursuit of heterosexual family planning along with the mummy policy (*muttipolitik*) through its Deutsche Film AG films and propaganda (Frackman and Stewart 2018). Clearly, both are a product of their times and reflect the overarching presence of the state—whether India with the family planning campaign history or the GDR with its state-driven particularistic ideas of the ideal family model. In fact, a newspaper report by Kobita Sorcar, dated 12 April 1970, notes, 'In recognition of the fact that population control is one of the major and urgent themes facing the country, the Films Division has made nearly forty films with different filmic technique, and slightly varying approaches thematically to the subject' (Sorcar 1970). The report goes on to suggest that 'prudery' and fear of 'offending good taste' and of possible censorship rendered these films rather ineffective as urgent calls to action against the endemic population problem in the country.

## 1988 RETROSPECTIVE

In 1988, a special retrospective of Indian films—53 films in all from the Films Division covering a span of 4 decades—was held at the Leipzig Festival. If the retrospective is the mark of ultimate canonization and confirmation of status of an auteur or national cinema, then this retrospective can be seen as the cultural legitimization of a documentary corpus of the Film Division, largely ignored both within India and outside (Elsaesser 2005, 89). The selection included films from *Freedom Marches On* (1948) to *Weavers of Golden Thread* (1986) including, among a diverse representation, the experimental documentaries of the 1960s.

The year 1988 is significant for several reasons, not least being that it was the eve of the Cold War *détente*, the peaceful Monday demonstrations in Leipzig would spread throughout the GDR, leading finally to the fall of the wall and the historic reunification. At the Leipzig Festival, director Hans-Joachim Seidowsky's call for an 'ideological retrenchment' was outweighed by documentary film-makers and programmers wanting more openness in the aftermath of Soviet reforms (*glasnost* and *perestroika* [1987] of the

previous year; Moine 2018, 259). Stasi kept a strict watch over the festival as the spectre of 1983 hung and they were particularly looking out for ‘hints of public sphere activities’—discussions, groups, demonstrators—as international diplomats and journalists huddled in conversation with East Germans and were keen to mingle with Leipzig’s alternative art scene (Moine 2018, 259). Talking of the Leipzig Programme in 1988, Moine says, ‘Faced with the regimes’ rigidity, east German documentary film proved to be so dynamic and in the midst of such evolution that it succeeded in piercing the lead box in which the authorities were seeking to contain it. The program at the 1988 edition of the Leipzig Festival was the culmination of this process’ and the inclusion of the Indian retrospective this year is symptomatic of the changes afoot. The 1988 retrospective also featured a homage to S. Sukhdev, the *Gedächtnis-Program Singh Sukhdev*.

## **S. SUKHDEV (1933–1979)**

Finally, I present here one such trace in detail that is of film-maker Sukhdev, the proverbial ‘cockroach’ referred to in Aggarwal’s statement about independent producers (see above). Following Sukhdev’s dramatic career and entanglements with the Leipzig Documentary Festival, I also read the possibilities and limitations of transnational flows in the period. Peter Sutoris describes S. Sukhdev, Comrade Sukh, among ‘Films Division’s Transient Outliers, 1965–c.1973’. Certainly the most dynamic phase in the life of the Films Division, during this period, we see a flowering under Jean Bhowmagary, S. N. S. Sastry, Pramod Pathy, Sukhdev and others. New experimental visual storytelling, non-linear editing, stop motion animation, self-reflexivity and on-camera interviews mark this phase of FD, in tune with the global wave of experimentation that was also registered in the Leipzig Festival programming (Sutoris 2016). Not only are there, in this phase, new subjects of development, there is a critique of the state and its projects, as well as a questioning of the entire Nehruvian socialist-development philosophy on which the edifice rested.

The Leipzig Film Bulletin of 1988 describes Sukhdev as ‘the most exciting film master since the rise of Satyajit Ray’. Ray, in turn, admired Sukhdev’s work but

not for its broad and percussive contrasts of poverty and affluence, beauty and squalor, modernity and primitivity—however well shot and cut they might be but for its details—for the black beetle that crawls on the hot sand, for the street dog that pees on the parked bicycle, for the bead of perspiration that dangles on the nose tip of the begrimed musician. (Mohan 1984, 51)

Sukhdev won the Silver Doves in 1972 for *Nine Months to Freedom: A Bangladesh Story* (1972) and *Khilonewala* (1971). He was at the Leipzig Festival in 1973 and shows up on the guest list several times after that (Leipzig Festival Files). ‘I have come to Leipzig (Festival) many times’, he says, ‘and would like to emphasize once again that this festival in the GDR is probably the most progressive and revolutionary festival for documentary films’ (Leipzig Festival Files). He said of the festival programming: ‘the Leipzig films indicate the changes in the world and [that] those who narrate and report about political changes are no outsiders but direct participants’ (Leipzig Festival Files).

As noted above, the 1988 Indian retrospective included a homage to S. Sukhdev and featured 10 of his films under various programming modules that included his early and award-winning films, his controversial anti-establishment ones as well as his so-called emergency films. Sukhdev’s controversial films, *India 67* (a playful collection of random images, loosely stitched together with tongue-in-cheek humour, his own ‘discovery of India’) and *Miles to Go*, a didactic film of ‘dissonant juxtapositions’ (that were part of his signature style) of inequalities that abounded in the country, were both aesthetic experiments in documentary film-making and were critical of the state (Keefe 2014). However, the films that won him the Silver Doves at Leipzig were altogether of a different disposition. *Khilonewala* (toy seller), a narrative short, is an intense enactment of an innocent toy seller (played by mime artist Irshad Panjatan) beloved by children who is attacked in a mob frenzy of communal violence led by the fanatic, played by Hindi screen’s popular villain Amrish Puri. Reflecting the communal turn of the times and a prophecy of the Bangladesh Liberation War in the following year, the short film ends with the gruesome death of the toy seller tied to his blood-soaked balloons in broad daylight, as

the onlookers abandon him to his fate, and a booming voice-over asks the dead toy seller: 'are you Hindu or are you Muslim?'

*Nine Months to Freedom: The Bangladesh Story* (1972) marks a departure for Sukhdev both aesthetically and politically as the film moves away from the quirky experimentation of his earlier films to a more direct documentary style with the staples of testimony, evidential footage, still photographs, newspaper clippings and voice-overs. Politically too, he moves away from the oblique and tongue-in-cheek critiques of the state to a more direct indictment of the enemy (in this case, Pakistan) and a rationalization of India's participation in the Bangladesh Liberation War. There are many aspects of the film that could have struck a chord with the Leipzig programmers and jury including the fact that there are references and haunting recollections of Nazi propaganda films while shots of terror, torture and bloody aftermath (most famously that of the dog eating a corpse) invoked a repertoire of holocaust imagery. But that might not be all, that the geopolitical formation of Bangladesh itself was a Cold War turning point is not a mere coincidence in the story. As Alexander Benatar (2017) points out in his study, the year 1971 that marks the rumblings and the genesis of Bangladesh, the following year marks the 'Cold War's halftime'. As such, the years 1971–1973 witnessed a recalibration of the Cold War calculus, as Chancellor Willy Brandt's 'Ostpolitik' and new openness to 'the phenomenon in the East' (as GDR and the Eastern Bloc were referred to until then) led up to GDR's official recognition and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi bought into the quid pro quo—GDR's recognition of Bangladesh and legitimization of India's role in the Indo-Pak War in return for international recognition of the GDR as an independent state, making India one of the first countries to do so. That a film on the Bangladesh Liberation War should win a prize at GDR's prestigious documentary festival at Leipzig that year seems then to be telling of its political entanglements.

Sukhdev's proximity to Indira Gandhi won him the Padma Shri in 1969, some enviable funding and autonomy to experiment with form and sometimes, even content. However, and much to everyone's surprise, Sukhdev the film-maker who once said that documentary must 'probe contemporary reality as a scalpel' (Benatar 2017, 5) did a volte-face and became a ventriloquist for the state.

His 1972 film, *Nine Months to Freedom: The Bangladesh Story*, is part realistic portrayal of the horrors of the 1971 Bangladesh War, part apologia to the international community and part valorisation of Indira Gandhi. During the Emergency that followed in a few years (1975–1977), Sukhdev had become a vocal supporter like his allies in the CPI (whose transnational solidarity with the GDR has already been noted) and under the aegis of his organization, *Film 20* (extolling the benefits of Indira Gandhi's twenty-point programme), he made his Emergency era films, *Thunder of Freedom* (1976) and *Voice of the People* (1974) on the 1974 railway strike, that featured multiple voices, critiquing what was perhaps the largest labour agitation of post-colonial India (that brought the celebrated politician George Fernandes to the fore). According to the 'White Paper on the Misuse of Mass Media during the Internal Emergency', he made these films using the resources of the FD but bypassed usual protocol.

In an interview with Neil Perera at the Leipzig Festival venue (1977), he said: 'The films from the Socialist world sometimes show a tendency towards uniformity. I have the impression as if many things are seen in a too undifferentiated manner. I think we need self-critical films about Socialist everyday life'—a sentiment that echoed with the more progressive programmers of the festival, even as his own films regressed into propaganda (Mohan 1984, 143). Was this perhaps a paradoxical inhabitation of a statist film-maker whose allegiance to the state and the sovereign at home was constantly on trial? Even if his earlier anti-establishment films passed the censors only with the benevolent hand of the sovereign permitting him in some sense to make that occasional 'boo to the establishment', his overtly propagandist films that propped up the Emergency seem too much of a Faustian bargain, yet something that perhaps, like his contemporaries (most famously S. N. S. Sastry), he had misgivings about and that he expressed elsewhere, at the Leipzig Festival, itself a site of contradictions and entanglements.

Thus, what I have tracked above is an alternative transnational film circuit via the Leipzig documentary festival network that challenges the classic binary framework of the Cold War within which film festivals of the time have been studied so far.

By including hitherto understudied players such as the GDR and India, I have introduced new vectors by which these global flows may be understood. Archival traces of India, in the GDR and the Leipzig Festival, reveal a few recurring names such as the ones I have underlined above, prominent among whom, is filmmaker Sukhdev. Tracking Sukhdev's controversial career and presence at the festival, I showed how the state, the CPI, the GDR and the Leipzig Festival programming ideology were prominent actors and mediators in this exchange. Even as the festival itself was heavily bureaucratized and governed by the dictates of the socialist regime and the logic of the Cold War, I have outlined above how it created a line of 'positive disturbance' (the tagline of the festival trailer, 2018) that allows us, in turn, to think about the many ways in which politics may be entangled with aesthetics.

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## Filmography

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*Miles to Go* (S. Sukhdev, 1965)  
*Chaos* (G. K. Gokhale, 1969)  
*Khilonewala* (S. Sukhdev, 1971)  
*Nine Months to Freedom: The Bangladesh Story* (S. Sukhdev, 1972)  
*Voice of the People* (1974)  
*Thunder of Freedom* (1976)  
DOK-Leipzig Festival Trailer (2018)



# 'EXPRESSIVITY' IN THE ART COLLECTIVES OF INDIA

The Realists and the Radical Painters' and  
Sculptors' Association

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### INTRODUCTION

There is a long trajectory of sociocultural entanglements and diplomatic cooperation between India and Germany (both pre-war and post-war). In his detailed research on Indo-German entanglements,<sup>1</sup> Kris Manjappa considers that the Federal Republic of Germany was seemingly more engaged with India in terms of creating a huge infrastructure such as steel plants and mining industries, transfer of science and technology and developmental and technical aid, whereas the German Democratic Republic (GDR) looked upon India as an important partner to strengthen its transnational discourse of decolonization and anti-fascism in conjunction with ideas of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Third World Marxist school.

This chapter seeks to explore how two Indian art collectives—the Realists and the Radical Painters and Sculptors Association—which existed almost simultaneous to each other, were influenced by German Expressionism in their art practice. Hypothetically speaking, most of the artists of the respective art

collectives were inspired by the artistic models of the GDR and the Soviet countries, which echoed in their artistic choices and strategies as many of them were disposed to Left politics. However, the members of both of the art collectives were not precisely informed about the distinctions and ambivalences imbued in the politics of art in a divided Germany. To an extent, they were more familiar with the wider imageries of 'Expressionism', but the term 'Expressivity' is likely to be more appropriate for renderings of the images which were produced by these art collectives as a reaction to a certain kind of politics in India and the world.

## **WHAT IS EXPRESSIVITY?**

Ulrike Goeschen (2009), a Berlin-based art historian uses the notion of 'Expressivity' in the context of the GDR, particularly in the 1960s. She sheds light upon the nature and problems of historical Expressionism and how it was widely discussed amongst the art critics and art historians of the GDR. The GDR officials viewed Expressionism as a mystical, irrational cult of genius and the Party rejected it as the expression of subjective emotionality. Referring to the high point of Stalinist persecution and the Expressionist debate of 1937–1938, the Party asserted rigid Soviet views and saw art as analogous to science. Party line views, therefore, interpreted Expressionism as an inhuman vandalizing of the human image.

However, the problem of historical Expressionism was solved by taking up the idea of 'Expressivity' as a legitimate means, a creative form for art in the GDR and an official style of socialist realism. Expressivity was used for the Party and their projection of socialist art of protest. For instance, Ulrich Kuhirt, an art historian from the GDR, pronounced 'Expressivity in Realism' to be fundamentally legitimate (cited by Goeschen 2009, 50). When they were used for the right ideological reasons—this was also a result of the traditional line of anti-fascist art constructed in the 1950s—then the methods of modern art could be used by socialist art. By the late 1980s, at the Congress of the Artists' Association of the GDR, the term 'socialist realism' was officially replaced by the wording 'art in socialism'. Goeschen (2009, 47) argues that by doing so the Congress tried not only to do justice to a variety of art but also bid farewell to 'socialist realism'.

As a result, the characteristics of Expressionism were recontextualized in terms of Expressivity as a response to a certain emotion by designating it as 'Expressionist staging.' So it is not at all to be called expressionist, rather it is only a 'staging' of an art that is employed for a projection of a certain kind of politics while conveying the imageries of protest and resistance.

In a similar vein, the works of 'the Realists' group and 'the Radical Artists' group explore emotions by drawing upon Expressionist impulses which are dubbed as 'Expressivity' or 'Expressionist staging' (Goeschen 2009, 50–51). It is so because Goeschen claims that emotions shaped by various social conditions are ingredients of 'Expressivity'. Further, she adds, every kind of Expressionism can have its own version of Expressivity. Expressivity is the language that allows artists to capture the centrality of emotion and impacts which shaped their art.

## **PART I: THE REALISTS, SANTINIKETAN (1985–2001)**

In the decade of the 1980s, the Realists collective consisted of like-minded artists whose art activities were based in Santiniketan and many among them were trained in Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan. The Realists comprised of Sukanya Das, Sumantra Sengupta, Debarata Gupta, Rati Basu, Suranjan Basu, Sushanta Guha, Pulak Dutta, Ramprasad Bhattacharya, Pinaki Barua, Nirmalendu Das, Prabir Biswas, Alok Som, etc.

The collective was conceived by Amit Mukhopadhyay, who is a Calcutta-based Marxist art critic and art historian. He brought together artists who were working on intersecting ideological frames, interests and passions. Since most of them studied in Santiniketan, the school started by Rabindranath Tagore, Tagorean cultural and intellectual legacy had a deep impact on the social awareness of the Realists. The Realists locate the figure of Rabindranath Tagore as a progressive social thinker, and they measured his oeuvres to be the beginning of Realism in Indian art. Their approach is quite similar to the view of the intellectuals from the Soviet Union and several socialist countries, particularly the GDR, who saw Rabindranath as a radical thinker, unlike in West Germany, where he was mainly viewed as a 'spiritual sage' (Kämpchen 1930). Tagore was also one of the founding members

and the president of the *League against Fascism and War* which finds a mention in the journal of Indo-GDR Friendship Society, Calcutta (1960).

The Realists approached the period of the 1980s and the early 1990s with great political vigour, given that the period witnessed crucial world events like the fall of Soviet Union, the Gulf War, the crisis in Eastern Europe as well as new trends in India such as the communalization of Indian politics, the rise of media, information technology and the advertising industry, in other words, the fetishization of a new economy.

They criticized the dominance of groups such as the *Society of Contemporary Artists* and *Calcutta Painters* who solely professed the value of skill. Mukhopadyay also gave a sense of political context within which art was being practised in West Bengal. According to him, the political debate had stagnated within the state since the Left front had been the ruling party in West Bengal since 1977.<sup>2</sup> The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) formed a cultural front called *Santras Birodhi Lekhak-Shilpi-Kalakushali Sammelan* (Forum of Writers, Artists and Technicians against Terror) in 1972. This cultural front helped the CPI (M) in its endeavour to extend its stronghold among artists and writers.<sup>3</sup> The artists, who enjoyed the patronage of the CPI (M), according to Mukhopadyay, did not venture beyond propaganda-based art and showed no interest in art history.<sup>4</sup> Mukhopadyay was also critical of the hegemony of Delhi-based institutions and art academies such as *Lalit Kala Akademi* and the *National Gallery of Modern Art*.<sup>5</sup> This decade also experienced an exhaustion of the art of the Tantric group and the Neo-narrative School of Baroda artists.<sup>6</sup> Deriving canons from art in the Soviet Union and socialist countries, he opines as follows:

The Realists attempt to make a monumental work out of the material of daily life. The preference of the ugly, the banal and the trivial needed to be depicted in an undistorted and unromanticized way, hence the aesthetics of Realism focussed on both the objects represented and the manner of representation.... No fancy, no dream, no flight from the facts and personages. The frenzy of the real raised the genre scene. (Mukhopadyay 1990)

The formation of the Realists group was a response to the 'meaningless' art practice which was pervading the various art movements. They decided to study various art forms from Western countries, especially during the period of 1920s–1960s. This study involved the documentation and research on works from the 'Soviet Union, Mexico, Cuba, Germany, France, China, Italy and other Latin American countries' to get a vivid idea of how artists had protested, fought and struggled against sociopolitical problems, including fascism.<sup>7</sup> They wanted to grasp the various languages of art to express their protest and inform themselves of the effectiveness of such languages. They also documented and studied the activities of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) and artists of socialist leanings—Chittaprosad, Somnath Hore, Zainul Abedin, Debrata Mukherjee, etc.<sup>8</sup> The Realists were very conscious of the intellectual heritage of Rabindranath Tagore and many West Bengal based progressive artists.

The Realists group does not find any significant mention in established art historiography. They find mention only in regional Bengali art criticism (Ray 1990). The Realists employed Expressionist tendencies for cultural protest, and it provided vigour to their artistic expression in articulating the issues of the common man, labour, peasants, the destitute and women from lower strata—all that would be encompassed in the category of *sarvahara* (proletariat).

The art practice of the Realists is the synthesis of two stylistic languages of art: the first one is Realism and the second is Expressionism. Both are historically different to each other, but they intersect in historical debates of art. The Realists appropriated both the languages to explicate the social reality of Bengal, especially when their works were concerned with issues of poverty among the lower classes—labour, workers, peasants, women, etc.<sup>9</sup>

The cultural fronts organized by the Communist movement in the 1930s and 1940s outwardly expressed their political intent. IPTA and the Progressive Writers' Association underlined this dimension. In her seminal book, *When Was Modernism*, Geeta Kapur asserts that Left-wing intervention is one of the most significant aspects in the process of defining Indian modernity (Kapur 2000).



Geeta Kapur recognizes the trends that emerge from the Left movement, aligning them in equal magnitude with the avant-garde in India. For her, the distinction in Western art history between avant-garde and Realism collapses and creates the exceptional Indian modernism which draws upon seemingly contradictory languages and applies them within the modernist perspective as Realism. This perspective is critical in contextualizing Expressionism and its relation with Realism. These two terms are entangled with each other, and a number of Expressionist and New Objectivity artists are conflated by the Realists.<sup>10</sup>

The status of Realism within the discourse around Indian modernism is critically reflected by Geeta Kapur (1979–1980) in an article titled ‘Realism and Modernism’, whereby she alludes to the debate between Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukacs when contextualizing the Expressionist debate in Indian art. This text reflects critical views on the positioning of the Left in defence of Realism. Aligning with Ernst Bloch’s view, Kapur lays emphasis on the difference between literature and visual art which is overlooked in the Lukacsian analysis even as he kept on disapproving modernism and Expressionism. This Lukacs and Bloch debate or Lukacs versus Frankfurt School debate was very pertinent in the GDR, in which Lukacs’s central thesis heavily argues that modernism and the avant-garde must be seen as a phase of artistic decline when compared to the 19th-century realism and 20th-century socialist realism in the Soviet Union.

The Realists were inspired by the epithet of Social Realism, but it is Expressionist tendencies which they have rendered in their works. The Realists staged Expressivity in a similar way, by which, the Expressionists realized the potential of strong and bold artistic language to appeal to the *volk* (masses) that comprised of industrial workers, peasants, labourers and proletariat from all walks of life. The similarities are noticeable even in the prints of the Realists, especially in the works of Suranjan Basu. Suranjan’s approach to the theme of humanity is reminiscent of Käthe Kollwitz and Ernst Barlach’s works.<sup>11</sup> For instance, works such as *Beggar Family* and *Winter* are quite close to the themes of humanitarian Expressionists (Figures 8.1 and 8.2).



Figure 8.1 Suranjan Basu, *Beggar Family*, Colour Woodcut (46" × 50"), 1984

Source: Rati Basu, Santiniketan.

For accessing the image/photograph in colour, see <https://micasmp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch8>



Figure 8.2 Suranjan Basu, *Winter*, Terracotta, 1990 (8" Height)

Source: Rati Basu, Santiniketan.

For accessing the image/photograph in colour, see <https://micasmp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch8>

There is a certain kind of Expressivity evoked by Suranjan Basu in the sculpture called *Winter* which is reminiscent of Ernst Barlach's *Shivering Crone*. Barlach and Käthe Kollwitz were quite central to the Expressionist debate of the Soviet Bloc and their art was officially accepted in the GDR. Dealing with the idea of poverty and despair among the street dwellers, the writings of Bertolt Brecht addressed the specific features of Barlach's sculptures.

Often the eerie image of state terror and state repression has been invoked in the works of the Realists. A painting such as *The Disappointment of War* (late 1980s) by Probir Biswas is quite apparently rendered in Expressionist style. The painting echoes the use of Expressionist vocabularies which are very similar to Otto Dix's work called the *Self-portrait of Soldier* (Figure 8.3). It seems that the image of the soldier is recontextualized in Biswas' work. In fact, the Indian nation-state experienced the ramifications of war in the period of the 1970s in the form of a number of upheavals such as the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 concurring with the Naxalite insurgency. The reaction as well as contempt for war

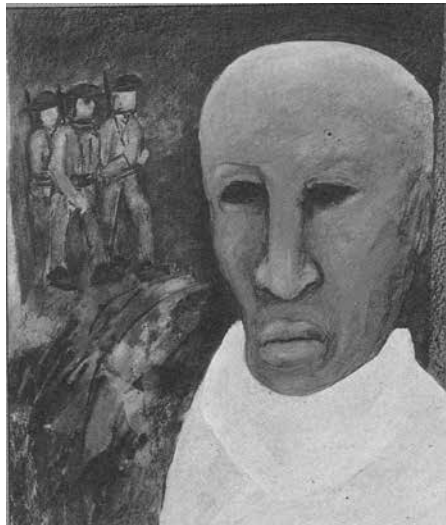


Figure 8.3 Probir Biswas, *The Disappointment of War*, Mix Media, 1980s

Source: Probir Biswas, Santiniketan.

For accessing the image/photograph in colour, see <https://micasmp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch8>

and violence was very strong among the intellectuals who pursued the tenets of Third-World Marxism and the Non-Aligned Movement in order to restore egalitarian values (Smith 1984). There was an active voice against militarization that struck the artists whether through the Bangladesh Liberation War (1971) or the Vietnam War (1955–1975). The reality of wars generated political views and contestations which resulted in a proliferation of images through various media, particularly newspapers and magazines.

## **PART II: RADICAL PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS ASSOCIATION, KERALA (1985–1989)**

The emergence of the Radical Painters and Sculptors Association or the Kerala Radicals (1985–1989) coincides with that of the Realists. Despite being regionally distinct, both the art collectives adhered to Marxist ideology and shared an agenda to take their art to the common people that, by and large, articulated for voiceless.

This informal group of artists included K. P. Krishnakumar, N. N. Rimzon, Alex Mathew, Prabhakaran, K. M. Madhusudhanan (aka Madhu) and Akkitham Vasudevan. All of them were students of College of Fine Arts, Trivandrum, except K. P. Krishnakumar (1958–1989). Subsequently, the artists such as V. N. Jyothi Basu, K. Hareendran, C. Pradeep, C. K. Rajan, E. H. Pushkin, K. Raghunathan, K. R. Karunakaran and Anita Dube as an art critic were included in the Radical group. The movement was considered to be an extension of the anti-caste, anti-feudalism and anti-establishment movements that erupted in the post-Emergency period in the southern state of Kerala (Santhosh 2012).

The Radicals attacked the Indian artists by categorizing, if not necessarily all, most of them as part of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. According to Anita Dube (the only female member of the group, 2010), Indian artists have embraced democratic institutions and the myth of progress and freedom, but their struggles do not radically challenge the status of the art world.

### **The Impact of Expressionism on the Radicals**

Unlike the artists from the Realists group, the Radicals openly asserted their affinity with German Expressionism. For instance,

K. M. Madhusudhanan, the founding member of the Radical Group, responds to the question of how the generation of the 1980s was influenced by German Expressionism<sup>12</sup> and says:

German Expressionism has had a hugely significant influence over a majority of artists from the third world. This might be because this movement arose in the context of war. In countries that haven't seen war, perhaps, German Expressionism would not be remembered. During my college days, I have very closely studied the paintings of Beckmann, Kirchner, among many others. Not just paintings ... Brecht's plays and poetry have also influenced me deeply. Even today I carry those memories. (Madhusudhanan 2006–2007)

Further, he acknowledges:

We (me, Alex and Krishnakumar) used to study together when we were going to start our group. As a result we started discussing about a lot of images of German Expressionism and mostly we found such images in *Studio International art magazine*. At that time it was the most popular magazine in our art college (Trivandrum). The images of Expressionism carry the stories about World War, thus I can say that the political situation of Kerala was not less than any war like situation. Therefore the images of Expressionist movement were very vital to understand/comprehend our own political scenario ridden by unprecedented violence, state terror, poverty, etc.<sup>13</sup>

In the course of time, Madhusudhanan gave up his art practice and became a film-maker. His much-acclaimed and numerous award-winning film *Bioscope* (2008) corresponds to a real story. The story reflects how rural masses (villagers) of Kerala in the 20th century encountered the imagery of war through the bioscope and most of the war imageries were brought up from the archives of German cinema.<sup>14</sup>

Madhusudhanan pointed to the Marxist genealogy of the term 'radical'.<sup>15</sup> This term adopted by the informal members of the group such as K. M. Madhusudhanan, Alex Mathew and K. P. Krishnakumar draws its meaning from Marxist theory:

To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But, for man, the root is man himself. The evident proof of the *radicalism* of German theory, and hence of its practical energy, is that

is proceeds from a resolute positive abolition of religion.  
(Emphasis mine)

The Radical artists witnessed the political mood of the Emergency period (1975–1977), when revolutionary cultural activities did not take root in Kerala. The response was to start the *Janakiya Samskarika Vedi* (1980–1982) that brought new debates of art, aesthetics and culture. The activities of the *Vedi* started in 1977 and its main agenda was to reflect upon how cultural production can be properly utilized for the activities of the far Left (or New Left).<sup>16</sup> This period witnessed the proliferation of cultural activities—poetry, theatre, mass actions that challenged all kinds of authoritarianism following new strategies. One of the cultural activists N. N. Pillai, a noted dramatist, made a statement: ‘there is only one solution, and that is revolution’ (Sreejith 2005).

Expressionist staging and attributes of Expressivity are quite evident in the works of the Radical artists such as Alex Mathew, Krishnakumar and V. N. Jyothi Basu. They are considered to be the product of the highly charged sociopolitical climate of Kerala in the late 1970s and the 1980s. Marxist governments had been elected periodically through the process of parliamentary democracy. But it assumed a complexity, especially after the split of the Communist Party of India in 1964, when the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) CPI (ML) was formed. Most of the Kerala Radical artists were drawn to the Naxalite Movement. In the period of the 1970s and the 1980s, a large faction of youth became very critical of conservative official Marxism in the period influenced by far-Left positions of the CPI (ML) and Naxalite groups, says Anita Dube (2010).

In addition, heroic interventions became very significant in the post-Emergency Kerala that recorded a number of deaths including custodial deaths (*Economic & Political Weekly* 1985). These figures are usually considered as ‘Martyrs’—both in the sense of martyrs whose lives were taken away by the regime and the greater number of living martyrs who suffered under the repressive state apparatus (Parameswaran 2008).

The Naxalite Movement in Kerala, with its thrust on immediacy and ‘direct-action’, had never concentrated on a mass

movement or trade union, even though it operated under immense state terror. The CPI (M) kept the organizational structure of the old Soviet Communist Party intact, completely upholding the Party's aesthetic ideals such as socialist realism and theory of reflection. They took the path of trade unionism and combined a strange constellation of complicity, parliamentary democracy, nationalist rhetoric and dogmatism (Parameswaran 2008).

Ashish Rajadhyaksha (1997), a cultural theorist who was closely associated with the Radicals and their art, articulates that several of the Kerala artists invoked a variety of German Expressionist movements.<sup>17</sup> This invocation suggests that there are two variants of Expressionism: historical Expressionism and Neo-expressionism. It is possible that the Radicals may have looked at the works of German Neo-expressionists, particularly the works of Georg Baselitz (b. 1936) and Eugen Schönebeck (b. 1936) who were the early proponents of German Neo-expressionism.<sup>18</sup>

Some works of Krishnakumar are quite similar to the works of Georg Baselitz and Eugen Schönebeck, if not necessarily in terms of styles, but more in terms of using tremendous energies and their radical attitude. If we analyse Krishnakumar's sculpture *Young Man* (Figure 8.4) with the Baselitz (1962) painting, *The Big Night down the Drain*, and to some extent, Schönebeck, one can see a number of striking parallels. On a conceptual level, Krishnakumar's three-dimensional work is quite similar to Baselitz's painting. The image of 'artist as rebel' is likely to be derived from the works of Baselitz. Baselitz's painting triggered a scandal in 1963 and was consequently confiscated. This work had depicted a figure with a huge penis, which to some viewers suggested a male masturbation scene. This kind of work created a sensation in Europe's art market and helped Baselitz to establish an image of 'an unfaltering rebel' who moved from East Germany to West Germany in the search of artistic freedom (Landsberg 2018).

The Radicals were experiencing a similar situation in which they were striving for artistic freedom and facing a huge crisis of representation in the regimented system. The Radicals were effacing a social distress in which the official Left Party was instructing the institutions and dictating the models of political art unequivocally as framed in a Socialist Realist manner. Therefore, artists



Figure 8.4 K. P. Krishnakumar, *Young Man*, Painted Polyester, Resin Fibreglass, 1989

Source: Artist's family.

For accessing the image/photograph in colour, see <https://micamp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch8>



such as Baselitz and Schönebeck could emerge as exemplary role models for some of the Radical artists, because the survival of their art is considered to be a testimony of power struggles. Both these German artists have produced provocative works in which the heroism of the male body is often parodied and censured and most of their works exemplify the traumatic experiences of the Second World War. After the divide between the two Germanys, both the artists escaped from East Germany in quest of artistic freedom. Moreover, they found that the purpose of socialist realism was only to create 'heroes' for society.

At another level, their artworks distorted the images of a stigmatized 'heroic past' that belonged to brutal fascist apparatuses of mass murders and pogroms. Therefore, the works of German painters are anti-heroic, whose figurative portrayal of characters in a provocative, erotic and sensual manner sought to challenge the history of the German past without upholding the Stalinist propaganda.

In a similar vein, Krishnakumar crafted his sculpture in a very provocative manner, and many would find it obscene. Works of Krishnakumar like *Young Man*, and in a similar style of modelling, *The Thief* (1985), are anti-heroic in their attempt, which often symbolically questioned the past of upper-caste Brahmins and dominant practices of art and problematized the hegemony of the national modern created by the Neo-narrative. In the Malayalam language, the specific word for thief is *Kallan*. The word has a playful connotation. On the one hand, it is applied to an anti-social male character and on the other hand, its usage has greater resonance since migration to Gulf determined the social role of masculinity in Kerala (Osella and Osella 2000). *The Thief* is not at all a passive sculpture; it is one of the most expressive works of Krishnakumar that articulates populist rancour against cultural elitism.<sup>19</sup> This can be a voice speaking from the margins which challenged the discursive hegemony at the centre in North India. The challenge was raised along with the politics of North–South axis and it placed class struggle at the fulcrum of reading the cultural history of India. A variety of Expressionist impulses was rendered by the Radicals to challenge the visual history of Indian art.



Figure 8.5 Krishnakumar, *Preliminary Drawing*, 1980s, Pen and Ink on Paper

Source: K. M. Madhusudhahan.

For accessing the image/photograph in colour, see <https://micasmp.hypotheses.org/bajpai-ccdmedia-ch8>

The Neo-expressionist influence can be found in the work titled *Preliminary Drawing (Self)* by Krishnakumar (Figure 8.5). This particular work is the marker of a painting convention that Baselitz developed in order to play out conflicts that were prevalent in a changing German society and, therefore, the tensions played out on the level of the concepts and techniques underlying pictorial representation. Paradoxically, however, as Baselitz's work demonstrates,<sup>20</sup> it appears that an enforced attachment to the figure at this point in history could be achieved only by subjecting figurative painting to a simultaneous regime of disfiguration, fragmentation or grotesque distortions.<sup>21</sup> *Preliminary Drawing* by Krishnakumar is rendered in a manner of 'disfiguring figuration', which is extremely distorted and depleted more than its normal scale and size.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the expressive qualities of this figure achieve a degree of anomalous depth to show the physiologically abnormal caricature of the 'artist's self' (as written in the upper-left corner of it).

## CONCLUSION

'German art', in general, has continued to reverberate and influence the discourses of modern and contemporary art practices across the world (Barron and Eckmann 2009; Gillen 1997; Rogoff 1991). So is the case for art from the GDR, based on its strength and constraints that translated into transcultural points of view. What can we borrow and what can we repudiate from these perspectives? Keeping this question in mind, I perceive two kinds of models which are being discussed through the reception of 'Expressivity' or 'Expressionist staging' in the works of two art collectives in India, both art collectives encountered the consequences of having communist governments in West Bengal and Kerala, respectively.

Though 'German Expressionism' is a typical German style and its trajectory is quite profound, it somehow created discomfort in its usage and appropriation by the successive art practitioners in both sides of Germany. Theoretically, this problem is often regarded as 'disjuncture' or 'discontinuity' by cultural theorists, in which 'the artists of the GDR were much more vehement in associating with German Expressionism than were their colleagues in the west' and many artists were not able to exhibit outside (Herding 1991). David Elliott disputes the absence of art of the GDR, which was probably not invited to exhibit in the Cold War period in various parts of the world, either based on its quality or as being deliberately political (Elliott 1991, 24–49).

On this predicament, he charts out a picture of art in the GDR based on two seminal catalogues, *Revolution und Realismus: Revolutionäre Kunst in Deutschland 1917 bis 1933* (1933) and *Weggefährten Zeitgenossen* (1979). He says, 'Although art theory in the GDR still finds its forebearers in the grisly rhetoric of the Stalinist 1930s and 1940s, artists have, from the mid-1950s, consciously taken a separate path and have vigorously asserted their place within a continuing tradition of European art' (Elliott 1991, 25). By taking a distinct path, the GDR artists were working in marked contrasts to the recognized avant-garde in West Germany, who were dominated by the ideals of international modernism (Elliott 1991, 25–26). He mentions the Socialist Realist practices that coalesced with new local ideas in the art policies that surfaced after the 1960s throughout the socialist countries, particularly in

the GDR. So in the GDR, artists were drawn to the Leftists' political orientation, which they were exploring in the German artists of the past, who divested of all Leftists or formalist tendencies in favour of safer and non-controversial realism. And in doing so, the GDR artists were looking at the works of German Expressionists who joined the *Novembergruppe* (1919) and members of *Neue Sachlichkeit* who wrestled against the capitalist system and war, as its by-product, such as Georg Grosz and Otto Dix (Elliott 1991, 26–29). According to Stephanie Barron (2009, 17), Stalin's death in 1953 led to the exploration of the idea of 'critical realism'; she says, 'in the GDR that acknowledged the possibility of examination of the past and commenting on the present and selective stylistic invoking of the modern masters such as Beckmann, Picasso, and Léger'.

Geographically quite far from both Germany(s), a number of Indian artists have been discussed in this chapter, who were not all strictly aware of the polarized hostilities between the two divergent political systems, which characterized the positions and polarities in the practice of art itself. Rather, they were interested in seeking to exploit or employ the vocabularies of 'Expressionism' for their own political commitments, largely related to mount-up protest in their own system.

Parallels could be drawn between the German artists of the GDR and Indian artists such as the Realists and the Radicals. In both the systems, artists were trying to extract a language and a vocabulary for their art. For the Realists, true realism could only be found in people's location and condition in a stratified society, similar to the path of Social Realism where 'Expressivity' could be rehearsed to the 'Art of Socialism', strongly underlined by art historians of the GDR as discussed above. Each artist of this group explored distinct subjects and facets of poverty, war, protection of human rights, unemployment and peace. One way or another, they were vaguely converging the style of Social Realism, which they upheld, with the state-sanctioned socialist realism to disseminate the political tendencies of socialism and anti-fascism.

There is another, a so-called repressive model, represented in the discourse of divided Germanys, precisely of the GDR. In 1961, Georg Baselitz and Eugene Schoenebeck mounted a joint exhibition after leaving West Berlin. Although initially they were exposed to

socialist realism, they later problematized the sanctioned forms of art. They skewed the figuration of socialist realism, favouring a type of figuration that may appear to look 'degenerate' to the viewers to invoke the notion of the abject, guilt, tortured, aggressive, sexual, decay, etc. (Barron 2009, 22). This experiment was named as Neo-expressionism in art historical canons.

In India, the art of the Radial artists draws us to think of how Expressive tendencies or 'Expressivity' were used to uphold the voice of dissent while embracing the Neo-expressionist tendencies. Thus, it can be argued that this model may be suited to the Kerala Radicals to oust the hegemony of the North Indian art world while, at another level, it was also meant to challenge the functioning of the Left government, its state apparatus and the dominance of the art market. In fact, this attitude is quite apparent in their art and art writings. The idea of 'Expressionist staging' also pushes us to think about a gap between ideological proposition and experienced reality, which compelled many artists to flee elsewhere in search of artistic freedom and 'utopian hope', as in the case of Neo-expressionists.

## NOTES

1. Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Intellectuals across Empire* (2014). The ideas in this book are centred on three specific phases of German-Indian relationships: 1815–1880; 1880–1945; and beyond 1945. In the first phase, German institutions, scholarship and intellectuals helped the British Empire build colonies and strengthen colonialism. The second phase saw campaigns against the Anglocentrism of the world by Germans and against colonialism by Indians. The third phase was a period of delinking, shaped by the politics of Cold War and theoretical delineation of the 'Third World'. However, Manjapra explores mainly entanglements, two-way flows, exchanges of peoples, knowledge systems and materials that developed between 1880 and 1945.
2. Amit Mukhopadhyay interviewed by Rahul Dev, critic's residence at Narendrapur, Kolkata, November 2012.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. The Realists have mentioned names of the countries where the values of socialism were manifested in art and creative fields, and

those recurred in their catalogues, brochures and other documents (see Mukhopadhyay 1990). Pulak Dutta, one of the active members of the Realists group, asserts that in being a Realist the whole world and art are open as long as you stick to your ideology. In the process, you derive elements from Expressionism and then you derive elements from Mexican Mural and some other sources. No doubt we looked at lots of Beckmann, Grosz and Kollwitz, all important expressionists. We were also looking at Realist tradition and trying to learn Realism by looking and documenting the art of socialist countries, that is, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Cuba, China because of the valorisation of the realist aesthetic in the practices of art of artists of such countries. Pulak Dutta interviewed by Rahul Dev, Shyambati, Santiniketan, November 2012.

8. I have explored how German Expressionism was encountered by Indian artists and art teachers with the arrival of Bauhaus Paintings in the first international exhibition held in Calcutta in 1922, elsewhere. The exhibition was organized with the help of the Tagore family and the involvement of Stella Kramrisch, an Austrian art teacher based in Santiniketan. Partha Mitter, an eminent art historian comments, 'an ambitious exhibition of the works of Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky and other Bauhaus artists held in Calcutta in 1922 marks the beginning of avant-garde in India'. This moment of initiation into Expressionism saw the culmination of correspondences and acquaintances over a certain period of time. This was also the beginning of several developments which further pushed the boundaries of this exchange and exposure to other major provinces and their respective art circuits (Dev 2008).
9. The term 'Bengal' has been consistently used by the artists of the Realists group. By doing this, they were positioning vis-à-vis redefining themselves in line with the radical artists and painters of the 'undivided' Bengal such as Chittaprosad, Somnath Hore, Zainul Abedin, Debrata Mukherjee and Nandalal Bose.
10. Linda Nochlin has widely discussed the trajectory of this term 'Realism' in her article. See Nochlin (1981).
11. Barlach developed several war memorials. In 1921, he commissioned the first war memorial in Nikolai Church, Kiel. He called it *Mother of Sorrows*, depicting a woman in cloak alone, with her hand clasped in front of her face and the inscription written in the local German dialect reading as follows: 'My heart bleeds with grief but you give me strength'. She is local woman in the guise of the Virgin Mary, she is everyone's mother aggrieved in loss of her son. It has been noted that there is no heroism, no glorification of death and war in his works. These works are pacifist, controversial, unpatriotic and only focus on grief. By the mid-1920s, Barlach was a renowned sculptor, known for his anti-war views. Later,

in 1926, he created the war memorial at Güstrow church called *Hovering Angel*, an evocation of a mother looking with grief and pain towards the west side of the battlefield (Flanders). The face of this particular female sculpture is quite similar to the features of another anti-war artist Käthe Kollwitz (question: Is the face similar to that of Kollwitz [the person herself] or that of one of Kollwitz's works? Not clear!), a close friend of Barlach, who lost her son Peter on the Western Front in 1914. Barlach's pacifism echoes her ideas and they developed a close artistic bond and spiritual solidarity. The Nazis loathed Barlach's works and removed them from war memorials, including the one in the Güstrow church. It was destroyed by them but its cast survived and later a copy was made and shifted to the Antonite church in Cologne. The Güstrow Church work was in East Germany, so it was given to another church due to disagreements within the communist leadership about the legitimacy and meaning of Barlach's art and its message. In spite of the barriers and Cold War conflicts which led to the division of the two Germanys, a copy of Cologne *Hovering Angel's* cast was made and installed again at Güstrow Church in 1953. Thirty years after the Angel returned back to East Germany, West German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt visited East Germany in 1981 and requested his counterpart Chancellor Erich Honecker to visit the Güstrow Church, where both stood together beneath Barlach's Angel. It was seen as an impressive gesture to normalize the relationship between the two nations. For details, see MacGregor (2014, 528–542). Thus, one may conclude that Barlach was controversial but equally accepted and celebrated in both parts of Germany for evoking humanitarian themes.

12. The question was asked in a published conversation between M. L. Johny and K. M. Madhusudhanan. See Madhusudhanan (2006–2007).
13. 'So far as I am concerned, 90s was a burning period. A period that brought about significant changes in my artistic life. A period that brought the activities of the Radical group to close, of which I was part too ... the death of Krishnakumar, who had deep relationship with my work and my life ... the fall of communist centres like the Soviet Union ... all these influenced me to take a critical view of my life and art. It is also this period that built a deep relationship with cinema.' Cited in Madhusudhanan (2006–2007, 36).
14. Madhusudhanan has collected a substantial body of archival material on German Cinema, both East German films (DEFA) and German Expressionist silent films which he procured for making of his Marx Archives, as he named it. He also procured his archival materials from National Film Archive of India, Pune, and other resources from his visit to Germany. K. M. Madhusudhanan interviewed by Rahul Dev, Bay Pride Mall, Kochi, 14 January 2013.

15. Ibid.
16. Menon and Nigam spell out the progression of various Left groups and their roles in Indian society, beginning from the official position of the Left, as the Communist Party of India, to the emergence of a 'New Left' after the 1970s in India. They argue that there have been many Left-wing groups and parties have resisted the conventional Marxist paths and ideas, which they refer to as the 'New Left'. They use this term for convincing readers to manifest the new Left-wing articulations that are taking shape as what 'Marx termed as "real movement"—it has no banners, no blueprints, no charismatic populist or demagogic leaders but arises out of the long and sustained struggles in different sections of Indian society'. Further, they chalked another phase, which got prominence in the wake of the Far Left and Naxalbari Movement from the 1980s onwards (deriving its name from Naxalbari region of West Bengal where it began as a revolt in 1967). This movement was 'inspired largely by the romance of the Maoist peasant revolution in China and the anti-authoritarian and anti-bureaucratic appeal of the Cultural Revolution'. See Menon and Nigam (2007, 114–118) and Ray (2011).
17. 'Expressionism' is indeed a loaded term which has an art historical bearing as well as political undertones, as it began before the First World War and progressed further, generation after generation, as a typical German art in vogue. Therefore, it was even redefined in a divided Germany. On the contrary, Indian artists or Left leaning critics may not be aware of the different variants of German Expressionist trends. Rather, they were interested and fascinated with German Expressionism because it had been associated broadly with anti-war and anti-fascist methods, which they eventually employed as the language of protest. When art critics like Ashish Rajadhyaksha use terms such as 'a variety of German Expressionist movements', I posit that they could not point to the distinctions that were embedded in the trajectory of German Expressionism and its successive or related practices in post-war Germany, such as Neo-expressionism, Trans-Avantgarde, Neue Wilden, Neo Rauch, etc.
18. Neo-expressionist artists are considered to be the prisoners of historical time. On the one hand, they were affected by the mayhem and destruction during the domination of the National Socialist (Nazis) in Germany and many other parts of Europe. However, the rapid post-war recovery of West Germany, which quickly came to be dominated by consumer culture, also had profound influences on the artists. On the other hand, when they began their artistic career, they found constraints and censorship imposed by the Soviet Regime. This affected the art of the GDR where freedom and creativity was determined by the ruling party.



19. The term populist is more strongly used in political discourse, not with a great precision, but nearly always with negative connotations, usually hinting at the mobilization of political majorities around a set of simple and disingenuous slogans, perhaps appealing to the lowest common denominator. However, an elementary deconstruction of populism would identify its binary opposite, which is, of course, 'elitist'. The term populist is also appropriated in the study of culture. See McGuigan (1992).
20. For example, see Georg Baselitz's, *Rebel*, 1965. Oil on canvas in the TATE online collections.
21. '1963: After publishing two manifestos with the painter Eugen Schönebeck, Georg Baselitz exhibit *Die Grosse Nacht im Eimer* (Great Night down the Drain) in Berlin', in Foster et al. (2004).
22. Ibid.

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# GDR–INDIA ENCOUNTERS BEFORE DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION

A Chronological Overview

*Joachim Oesterheld*

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The relations between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and India were, from the very beginning, influenced by and embedded in international developments. They were particularly defined by the impact of East–West Cold War confrontations and their overriding consequences, both for the relationship between the two German states and for their respective foreign policies in a global context.

In the past, several publications have dealt with various aspects of this overarching context and its implications for the nature and content of the relations that both the German states developed with the Republic of India from 1949 onwards (Das Gupta 2004; Fischer 1984, 1996; Heidrich 1998a, 1998b; Voigt 2008; Weidemann and Gupta 1980). This contribution will not add to this narrative nor reflect on these entanglements. Instead, the intention of this chapter is to provide an overview of the spectrum and range of contacts and relations that developed between the states of the GDR and India and the citizens of both the countries from the early 1950s onwards until the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972.

Covering the fields of trade and commerce, politics, culture, science and civil society and being aware of their interrelationship, interdependence and relevance for establishing contacts and unfolding bilateral relations in this period, the chapter deals with them independently and in a chronological order.

The contribution will illustrate GDR–India encounters with facts so far available and accessible for constructing a panoramic overview of their bilateral framework.<sup>1</sup> Enlisting the details of these interactions can assist in retracing how mutually advantageous and friendly relations were actively developed among varied actors from both the countries. The pre-recognition years (i.e., before 1972) are an important chapter in the history of GDR–India entanglements, which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who was actively involved in shaping these relations, later on recalled by stating:

Over the years the friendship between the German Democratic Republic and India has been steadily increasing. We have developed a tradition of mutual understanding and constructive co-operation on bilateral and international problems, political and economic, *long before our two nations formally exchanged embassies* and you became a member of the United Nations. (Author's emphasis; Gandhi 1984, 770)

## **TRADE AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES<sup>2</sup>**

The official beginning of economic relations was made in 1954, when a trade delegation from the GDR arrived in September 1954 in New Delhi. In bilateral talks between representatives of both the governments, an Agreement on Trade and Payments was concluded on 16 October 1954, the first one between the two countries. This implied that from then onwards, the exchange of goods between the countries would no longer be carried out through English firms and banks. The agreement also included that a trade representation of the GDR would be established in Bombay with a branch office in Calcutta.

### **From Contracts to Agreements**

The head of the newly established Trade Representation arrived in Bombay in September 1955. A month later, the GDR participated

in the first International Industrial Fair organized by the Indian government from 27 October to 5 November 1955 in New Delhi. The GDR pavilion provided a glimpse of the country's industrial development and the technical standard of the GDR products, among which a planetarium and 'The Man of Glass' attracted the interest of Indian visitors, in particular. Both were presented as a gift to India. The pavilion was visited by President Rajendra Prasad, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and ministers of the Indian government. Contracts were signed with an overall amount of ₹20 million, with ₹12 million allocated for machine tools, as well as electro-technical and optical precision goods.

On the occasion of the exhibition, a government delegation headed by Heinrich Rau, minister for foreign and inner German trade, visited India for talks with the government as well as business and trade representatives on economic cooperation to create the basis for extending and deepening bilateral commercial and trade relations. It became the first encounter at the ministerial level between the countries when Minister Rau not only met his Indian counterpart but also the Indian ministers in charge of foreign affairs, defence, industry and health. Questions of technical and economic support for India's industrial development were discussed and it was agreed upon to shift the GDR Trade Representation from Bombay to Delhi with an increased staff. Minister Rau stayed in India as a guest of the Indian government. He was received by Prime Minister Nehru at his residence, where questions of economic and cultural cooperation figured in the conversation and the host acquainted him with current problems of India's domestic development (Rau 1956, 8–22; Voigt 2008, 101–106).

The GDR Trade Representation in New Delhi became operational on 12 February 1956 along with the two Trade Representations in Bombay and Calcutta and a showroom of the GDR products was opened in Bombay (Mohan 1974, 65). Fact-finding missions visited both countries. A group of GDR specialists came to India, familiarizing itself with possibilities of cooperation in the field of lignite production and the preconditions for establishing a film factory. Another group had talks with Indian government officials regarding GDR's participation in establishing iron mills. Whereas Indian specialists in these fields enquired on the



occasion about GDR's potential in the corresponding field (Voigt 2008, 171–176).

Consultations on increasing trade and future scientific-technological cooperation took place in the GDR as well. The Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Supply, H. V. R. Iyengar met Gerhard Weiss, the Deputy Minister for Foreign and Inner German Trade in July 1956 in Berlin and was received by Foreign Minister Lothar Bolz. He went to the city of Wolfen for getting an impression of the reputed film fabric there.

India officially participated with an eight-membered delegation in March 1956 in the Leipzig Fair. The leader of the delegation, P. K. Pannikar was received by President Wilhelm Pieck (Voigt 2008, 146–147). For the first time, the GDR citizens learned at the fair about independent India's achievements in industry, agriculture, health and education. From then onwards, India became a regular exhibitor both at the at the Leipzig Spring and the Autumn fair. When the 800th anniversary of the fair was celebrated in 1965, it was for the first time that an Indian government delegation headed by B. P. Patel, Chairman of the Indian State Trading Corporation (STC) came to Leipzig. In 1969, the Indian minister for development, K. V. Raghunatha Reddy, officially paid a visit to the Leipzig Autumn Fair. With an increasing number of Indian participants, and with the floor area of its pavilion extended, over the years the rise in business transactions at the Leipzig Fair was remarkable, making India the largest exhibitor among the developing countries.

The GDR participated in fairs and exhibitions in India presenting its products, for example, in the Indian Industries Fair in New Delhi, 1955 and 1967, in the World Agriculture Fair in New Delhi, 1959, in the International Printing Machinery Exhibition in Madras, 1955, in the Indian Science Congress Exhibition of Scientific Instruments in 1960 in New Delhi, on office machinery in April 1965 and in another one on electro-medical equipment and laboratory instruments in January 1967. An exhibition of electro-technical instruments was opened in April 1967 in Calcutta. Since the late 1950s, the GDR had its own pavilion at the 'Pragati Maidan' (Freitag 1998, 92).<sup>3</sup> In autumn 1956, a GDR delegation led by Minister Rau's Deputy Weiss concluded a long-term trade

agreement in New Delhi and discussed current and future projects. It was signed on 8 October 1956 for a duration of three years and included the opening of a Trade Representation's branch office in Madras. An additional agreement was signed on 16 July 1957, which stipulated that the GDR offered India a credit amounting to US\$2.5 million for the delivery of textile machinery. On 3 November 1958 in Berlin, an additional agreement prolonged the existing trade agreement until 31 December 1959 and changed the payment agreement from October 1954 by opening a clearing account permitting the use of Indian rupees for the import of Indian goods.

December 1959 witnessed events of particular importance to the bilateral trade relations. On 11 December 1959, a government delegation headed by the State Secretary Skodowsky opened the GDR pavilion at the World Agricultural Fair in New Delhi. On 14 December 1959, the Indian minister for industry and labour, R. Venkataraman, arrived in Berlin for visiting enterprises and various institutions. He was received by Minister Rau on 15 December. A landmark in the economic relations between the countries was 18 December 1959, when they not only concluded their third Trade and Payment Agreement lasting for another three years but also agreed upon carrying out all payments of commercial and non-commercial kind in non-convertible Indian rupees in the future. The rupee payment mechanism was of equal advantage to both countries with the non-involvement of any other foreign currency and with no constraints to their foreign exchange resources.

In February 1960, Minister Rau arrived with a delegation for negotiations on trade and bilateral cooperation. He was invited by Minister Deshmukh, who was in-charge of agriculture, for attending the First World Agricultural Exhibition.<sup>4</sup> In April 1961, Deputy Minister Weiss stayed in New Delhi for talks with the deputy ministers for trade and industry and the director general in the Ministry of External Trade. An agreement on trade arbitration was concluded on 3 June 1961. In preparation for concluding the 1964 Agreement on Trade and Payment and exploring possibilities for extending economic relations, keeping India's fourth Five-year Plan requirements in mind, GDR special envoy, Ernst Scholz, had talks in New Delhi on 19–21 November 1963 with the ministers for planning, foreign trade, external affairs and with the speaker

of the Lok Sabha. An agreement of organizing a joint regular shipping line was signed on 23 November 1963.<sup>5</sup> The shipping service between GDR and India was finally opened on 23 December 1968 in Bombay, formalized on 1 January 1969 with an agreement on merchant shipping between both the countries (Freitag 1998, 96).

In February 1964, Bruno Leuschner, the deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, headed a GDR delegation to India. He conveyed a letter by Walter Ulbricht, chairman of the GDR State Council, to Prime Minister Nehru. The GDR would submit a huge government long-term credit to be repaid by India with her traditional goods and products. In a letter addressed to Prime Minister Nehru, the leader of the delegation specified the range of products offered by the GDR, with a detailed consideration for India's particular requirements.<sup>6</sup> Nehru's successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, replied to this letter in June 1964.

The credit offer was renewed when Grete Wittkowski, deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, paid a visit to India in September 1964. She presented a letter by Walter Ulbricht to President S. Radhakrishnan and that renewed GDR's offer for a long-term credit in talks with Swaran Singh, minister of external affairs, and Indira Gandhi, the then minister for information and broadcasting.<sup>7</sup> The Trade and Payment Agreement for the years 1965–1967 was signed on 12 September 1964. Visits in both directions continued, with P. C. Mahalanobis, adviser for planning and statistics to the Government of India, travelling to Berlin in December 1965, and a GDR delegation with Minister Wittkowski going to India in March 1966.

Events and developments in both countries during the 1960s—the erection of the Berlin Wall, the Indo-Chinese conflict, Nehru's death, the second Indo-Pakistan War, the devaluation of the rupee, alterations in the GDR economic system and other developments—also had implications for further developing bilateral economic relations. India took a step forward when in 1965, for the first time, on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the Leipzig Fair, an Indian government delegation headed by STC Chairman, B. P. Patel, came for consultations on opening an STC bureau along with a representation of the Minerals and Metals Trading Corporation. The official opening of an STC bureau took

place on 16 February 1967 in Berlin. The STC Chairman, B. P. Patel, came again in June 1967 for talks with GDR officials to Berlin (Voigt 2008, 490–492). For further balancing the scope and areas of GDR's economic interests with the targets of socio-economic developments in India, Minister Wittkowski stayed in New Delhi in November 1968 for negotiations with Deputy Prime Minister Morarji Desai and Minister of Trade Dinesh Singh.

23 January 1969 is a particular date in the history of trade relations between the two countries as their first long-term trade and payment agreement was signed in New Delhi and on 4 October 1969, the STC bureau in Berlin was turned into the office of the Trade Representation of the Republic of India in the GDR. Minister Reddy visited the Leipzig Autumn Fair again in 1969.

In February 1971, Horst Sölle, Minister for Foreign Trade, had talks in New Delhi for preparing a new long-term Trade and Payment Agreement, which was concluded on 11 November 1971 for the years 1971–1975. During his stay, Minister Sölle, on 2 February 1971, signed a long-term agreement on scientific-technological cooperation between the two countries and was received by President V. V. Giri. Further steps were taken in this direction like creation of a GDR–India Trade Group in Leipzig on 10 September 1971, preceded by the formation of its counterpart one year earlier on 27 October 1970 in Bombay. The first joint board session of both trade groups took place on 16 March 1972 in Leipzig. On 20 June 1972, C. Subramaniam, minister for planning, science and technology, signed a protocol in Berlin in addition to the existing agreement on scientific-technological cooperation that had been concluded in New Delhi by Minister Sölle in 1971.

### **From Exchanging Goods to Technical Cooperation<sup>8</sup>**

Within the relatively brief period of two decades, the volume of the two-way trade increased from ₹1.2 million in 1952–1953 to ₹382.6 million in 1971–1972.<sup>9</sup> Such a remarkable growth in the development of bilateral economic relations was facilitated by the long-term Trade and Payment Agreement and the rupee payment arrangement concluded during this period.

From the very beginning, the GDR imported agricultural products such as tea, pepper and other spices, coffee and tobacco,

along with leather and leather products, oilseed cake, jute manufactures, bones and mica. India's major imports from the GDR during these two decades were machinery, iron and steel, manufactured fertilizer, professional scientific instruments, chemical elements and compounds, electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances. A long-term contract on the supply of potash, a natural fertilizer, of which India had no resources at all, was signed on 6 February 1968.

Among the GDR export items were a large variety of machinery, including all kinds of printing machinery to be found in school-book printing presses and likewise in newspaper houses. Cargo vessels built at the Rostock shipyards were ordered first in 1968 by the public sector Shipping Corporation of India and the private sector Scindia Steam Navigation Co. and delivered from 1970 onwards (Fischer 1984, 59f; Freitag 1998, 85f). Jena delivered to planetaria like the Birla Planetarium in Calcutta. From Wolfen came X-ray films for medical institutions as well as cine films used by the Film Division of the Government of India. There were thousands of electronic calculating, accounting and invoicing machines, which accountants and statisticians relied on, that came from the GDR. Not to forget is the cable factory that was established with the support of the GDR in Kerala and was inaugurated by Gulzarilal Nanda, minister for Home Affairs, on 9 July 1966, and finally, the harvester combines running on the fields of Punjabi peasants since the early 1970s.

Licences granted by the GDR played an important role in extending the bilateral trade from the supply of goods and products to the sphere of scientific-technological cooperation, therein enabling the diversification of Indian industries and contributing to India's industrialization (Freitag 1998, 94). India was the first country to which the GDR offered contracts on the licensed production of the GDR products. For conveying national know-how to trade partners in developing countries, the LIMEX GmbH came into existence in 1960 as GDR's foreign trade organization. The licences included the provision of scientific documentations and information as well as the dispatch of experts to India and the training of Indian experts in the GDR. Licences were acquired by Indian partners both in the state and in the private sector.

An early example of a successful GDR–India licence collaboration was the Hindi typewriter manufactured by Godrej in India and approved as excellent for use in government departments. For

the implementation of India's First Five-year Plan, the development of her own engineering-works industry and a state sector was of particular importance. A cooperation in this field started already in 1961 with a LIMEX delegation visiting Hindustan Machine Tools and another state-owned machine tool factory. A long-term licence contract on the construction of machine tools was concluded and later on extended.<sup>10</sup>

The cooperation between the GDR and India in the supply and production of machine tools is just one example that illustrates the problems involved and the hurdles that had to be overcome on both the sides in striving for fulfilling mutual complementarity in their commercial activities. Despite backlashes, there was a slow but steady progress made over the years by expanding and deepening economic relations between the two countries which were so different from each other in so many regards. In 1971, trade with India had achieved the share of one-fifth of GDR's overall trade with developing countries, with India as GDR's largest trade partner among them. When a substantial increase and diversification in the GDR–India economic relations began after 1972, a tendency that became visible was that India's exports to the GDR began to change from traditional items to non-traditional items such as engineering goods and tools.

## **DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELD OF POLITICS**

The development of trade and commercial activities between the GDR and India was from the very beginning and, for an entire decade, linked to the active involvement of Prime Minister Nehru receiving GDR ministers, special envoys and official trade representatives. The political significance of these meetings and talks, though primarily embedded in a commercial context, should not be underestimated for the development of political relations between the two countries.

### **Encounters at the Ministerial Level and by Special Emissaries**

A first high-level meeting took place on 7 October 1952, when President Pieck received India's ambassador to the Soviet Union in Berlin (Das Gupta 2004, 70–71; Lemke 1993; Voigt 2008, 12–15).

In addition to high-level meetings of GDR representatives in India during the 1950s, encounters at the ministerial level with Indian representatives in the GDR began in July 1956, with Lothar Bolz, minister of external affairs, receiving State Secretary Iyengar and on 13 November 1956, Balkrishna Vishwanath Keskar, minister for information and broadcasting. Minister Keskar also had talks with the Deputy Minister of Culture, Alexander Abusch, and the Chairman of the State Broadcasting Committee, Hermann Ley (Voigt 2008, 235).

From 12–17 January 1959, GDR Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl paid a visit to India along with Minister Bolz, meeting President Prasad and Vice-president Radhakrishnan. Extensive talks were held with Prime Minister Nehru. Looking back at the relations between both the countries, within less than a decade, Prime Minister Grotewohl confirmed the development of bilateral relations in the economic, cultural and scientific spheres and said that he hoped for their further strengthening in the future in an official statement made on 16 January 1959.<sup>11</sup> An exchange of letters between Grotewohl and Nehru continued from June to December 1959.

On 3 March 1961, the weekly, *Link*, published an interview with Minister Bolz. A declaration was made by the Ministry of External Affairs on measures of the Indian government regarding the liberation of Goa on 15 December 1961. In a cable on 20 December 1961, Prime Minister Grotewohl felicitated Prime Minister Nehru on the liberation of Goa, Daman and Diu. In the second half of the 1960s, official visits from the GDR to India and vice versa continued. The Chairman of the Press and Information Department, Government of India, L. M. Bhardwaj, came, from 2 to 8 November 1966, for talks on mutual cooperation with his counterpart, Kurt Blecha.

From 10 to 20 October 1967, Max Sefrin, the deputy chairman of the GDR Council of Ministers and President of the Deutsch-Südostasiatische Gesellschaft (German South East Asia Society; DEUSASIG) stayed in New Delhi on the invitation of the All India Indo-GDR Friendship Association (INGFA). He met ministers, Jagjivan Ram (food and agriculture), Chandrasekhar (health and family planning) and Y. B. Chavan (home; Voigt 2008, 580–584). Minister Bolz visited India on 11–13 March 1968 and had a meeting

with Prime Minister Gandhi. DEUSASIG President Sefrin stayed for talks with several ministers from 11 to 19 October 1968 in New Delhi. During his stay from 12 to 18 September 1969, he participated in a conference of the Indo-GDR Friendship Societies in New Delhi (Voigt 2008, 602–603) and was received by Prime Minister Gandhi.

The level of the overall relations between both countries achieved so far did find its expression when their Trade Representations in New Delhi and Berlin received the status of Consulate General on 3 August 1970. The existing GDR branch offices in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras received the status of consulates and three Indian consulates were to be established in the GDR. Minister Winzer paid an official visit to India from 9 to 14 January 1972.

Besides bilateral encounters on the ministerial level, special emissaries were received in both countries. A personal message by Walter Ulbricht, chairman of the GDR State Council, was handed over to Prime Minister Nehru on 18 August 1961 by special emissary, Kurt Hager, candidate of the Politbureau of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED). He was accompanied by Paul Wandel, deputy minister for external affairs, with both meeting President Radhakrishnan and the secretary general of the Ministry of External Affairs, M. J. Desai (Voigt 2008, 318–326).

Albert Norden, a member of the SED Politbureau stayed from 14 to 20 October 1970 in India as a special emissary presenting a personal message of Chairman Ulbricht to President Giri and meeting with Prime Minister Gandhi as well as Foreign Minister Singh. SED Politbureau member Norden was again received by Prime Minister Gandhi on 12 October 1971 (Voigt 2008, 642–643).

As special emissary of Prime Minister Gandhi and Karan Singh, the minister for tourism and civil aviation, came to Berlin from 22 to 26 June 1971 with a letter for Prime Minister Stoph, meeting also with Minister Winzer (Voigt 2008, 644–646). There was an exchange of letters between Prime Ministers Gandhi and Stoph from 15 to 18 December 1971 (Voigt 2008, 651).



## Active Contribution by Parliamentarians

On 30 January 1958, Joseph Schwab, the deputy minister for external affairs received M. G. Reddy, vice-president of the Rajya Sabha and member of the Executive Committee of the Indian National Congress (Voigt 2008, 195–197). From 10 to 18 April 1959, a delegation of the GDR People's Chamber, headed by its President Johannes Dieckmann and its Deputy Hermann Matern, had talks with Vice-president Radhakrishnan, Prime Minister Nehru and meetings with ministers and parliamentarians both in New Delhi and in some of the union states (Fischer 1984, 34–36).<sup>12</sup> Violet Alva, deputy chairman of the Rajya Sabha, visited Berlin from 6 to 9 November 1959 (Voigt 2008, 299). S. L. Saxena, Lok Sabha member and president of the Indian Sugar Workers' Union, arrived on 27 September 1960 at the invitation of President Dieckmann. At the invitation of the GDR Inter-parliamentarian Group, Lok Sabha member Tariq arrived on 10 October 1961. During his visit to India from 11 to 13 March 1968, Minister Bolz met with the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, R. K. Khadilkar.

A. D. Mani, member of the Rajya Sabha, visited the GDR from 19 to 25 January 1962. The Inter-parliamentarian Group of the GDR invited a deputation of Indian parliamentarians which stayed in the GDR from 7 to 16 July 1965. Members of the group were the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, K. Chandra, and the Rajya Sabha members, R. P. Sinha and B. K. P. Sinha, representing the Indian National Congress (INC). The Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the GDR Parliament, Peter Florin, was received by Prime Minister Gandhi on 5 December 1966 in New Delhi. Prime Minister Stoph received the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, N. S. Reddy, on 5 July 1968. A representative delegation of Indian parliamentarians visited the GDR from 31 August to 20 September 1968, headed by S. N. Mishra, deputy chairman of the INC Parliamentary Party in the Rajya Sabha.

On 18 December 1968, a committee of 60 parliamentarians representing politically diverse parties in the Indian Parliament was formed in New Delhi aiming at promoting relations with the GDR (Voigt 2008, 598–599). The Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha, R. K. Khadilkar, visited the GDR from 19 to 25 June 1969 at the

invitation of President Dieckmann and was received by Prime Minister Stoph on 20 June (Voigt 2008, 601). From 6 to 11 October 1969, the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Violet Alva, had talks with Chairman Ulbricht and Prime Minister Stoph.

A delegation of Indian parliamentarians paid a visit to the GDR from 8 to 18 June 1970, headed by R. K. Sinha, secretary general of the INC Parliamentary Party. The Chairman of the Inter-parliamentarian group, Rolf Sieber, took a delegation of GDR parliamentarians from 13 to 23 August 1971 to India. They were received by Prime Minister Gandhi, Lok Sabha Speaker G. S. Dhillon, Rajya Sabha Chairman G. S. Pathak and the ministers—Singh (external affairs), Raj Bahadur (parliamentary affairs), R. K. Khadilkar (labour) and Karan Singh.

On 9 September 1971, GDR's then acting Foreign Minister, Florin, received the deputy chairman of the Rajya Sabha, B. D. Kobragade. At the invitation of the GDR Parliament, an official delegation of the Indian Parliament with G. G. Swell, the deputy speaker of the Lok Sabha visited the GDR from 3 to 10 October 1971. On 22 December 1971, Prime Minister Gandhi received an INGFA delegation which submitted an appeal for the official diplomatic recognition of the GDR by the Republic of India, which was signed by 447 members of both the houses of the Indian Parliament.

## **Involvement of Political Parties**

On 11 August 1956, Deputy Minister for External Affairs, Joseph Schwab, met S. A. Dange, the chairman of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and President of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC; Voigt 2008, 185, 206). On 14 December 1962, talks were held between chairman Ulbricht and S. A. Dange in Berlin (Voigt 2008, 357). The INC President, S. E. K. Kamaraj, visited the GDR between 31 July and 2 August 1966 at the invitation of Erich Correns, who was the president of the National Council of the GDR's National Front (Fischer 1984, 54; Fischer 1998, 38–39; Narasimhan 1967, 130–131).<sup>13</sup>

Between late August and mid-September 1966, a three-member INC deputation acquainted itself with GDR's agriculture and cooperative movement (Voigt 2008, 597). The leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal party, Sant Fateh Singh, arrived in Berlin

on 13 October 1966, at the invitation of the League for Friendship among Peoples and was received by Chairman Ulbricht. A high-level CPI delegation with S. A. Dange and the Central Committee members, Z. A. Ahmed and S. G. Sardesai, had talks with Chairman Ulbricht and members of the SED Politbureau between 9 and 13 October 1967 (Voigt 2008, 563ff). During his stay, from 10 to 20 October 1967 in New Delhi, Minister Sefrin met INC President Kamaraj. A delegation of journalists sent by the CPI sojourned the GDR between 30 September and 21 October 1968 (Voigt 2008, 512).

Henry Austin, the secretary general of INC, visited the GDR upon the invitation of the National Council of the National Front from 25 to 29 October 1971 and was received by SED Politbureau member, Norden. Norden addressed the IX CPI Party Congress in Cochin on 5 October 1971 (Voigt 2008, 621). An SED delegation visited India between 29 November and 10 December 1971 and signed an agreement on cooperation with the CPI for the years 1972 and 1973 (Voigt 2008, 626).

### **Encounters among Representatives of Civic Society**

Indian students joined the third World Festival of Youth and Students in 1951 in Berlin. The President of the Gossner Church in India, Joel Lakra, participated at the Evangelical Church Day held in Berlin in 1951.<sup>14</sup> The economist, J. C. Kumarappa, participated from 3 to 5 July 1952 at an extraordinary World Peace Council meeting in Berlin. He visited the GDR for another World Peace Council meeting from 21 to 29 May 1954 (Kumarappa 1956, 4–5, 47–52). In November 1957, a GDR delegation participated in an international Red Cross conference in New Delhi (Das Gupta 2004, 216). Prime Minister Nehru gave Georg Krausz, special correspondent of the newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, an interview on 29 January 1958 (Voigt 2008, 208 ff). A Free German Trade Union (*Freier Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund*, FDGB) delegation, headed by Wolfgang Beyreuther, visited India in January 1961. At the invitation of the All India Peace Council, a GDR delegation toured India for three weeks in 1961 and participated at the World Peace Council meeting in New Delhi (Scheer 1964, 7–104).

In Berlin, the German South East Asia Society (DEUSASIG) was formed on 1 December 1961 within the League for Friendship

among Peoples (Kasper and Köcher 2000, 87). A delegation of the Berlin Municipal Council with the permanent Deputy of Lord Mayor, Waldemar Schmidt, stayed from 5 to 13 March 1962 in New Delhi. On 11 August 1962, the All India INGFA came into existence in New Delhi.

A delegation of the All India Peace Council, with Lok Sabha member and INGFA President, Subhadra Joshi, visited the GDR upon the invitation of the GDR Peace Council from 15 to 17 June 1963 and attended a meeting with President Dieckmann (Voigt 2008, 572–573). A delegation of the German Gymnastics and Sports Federation (*Deutscher Turn und Sportbund*) travelled for the first time to India. In 1963, Indian scholars at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin commemorated Swami Vivekananda's birth centenary with a conference.

The Indian newspaper, *Blitz*, published an interview with Chairman Ulbricht on 9 September 1964 (Voigt 2008, 413). On 21 October 1964, the President of GDR's League for Friendship among Peoples, Paul Wandel, arrived in New Delhi. A drug donation of the GDR Red Cross was handed over to the Minister of Health, Sushila Nayar, on 15 January 1965. The Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Gandhi, and the Minister for Education, M. C. Chagla, were received by a delegation of GDR's youth organization, Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*) on 6 March 1965. The editors of the leading newspapers—the *National Herald*, Ch. Rao, and R. K. Karanjia of *Blitz*—visited the GDR in October 1965. On 15 October 1966, *Blitz* published an interview with Prime Minister Stoph (Voigt 2008, 514–515). Touring India in 1967, the GDR national hockey team faced the host team on several occasions.

During his stay in India from 10 to 20 October 1967, the DEUSASIG President, Max Sefrin, and Minister A. S. R. Chari (on behalf of INGFA) signed a Friendship Treaty (Voigt 2008, 581–582). A joint delegation of the GDR Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee and of the GDR Peace Council participated at the All India Congress for Solidarity and World Peace held in Hyderabad in April 1968. A DEUSASIG delegation led by its vice-president, Heinrich Meier, attended the Second National INGFA conference from 4 to 5 May 1968 (Voigt 2008, 584–586). A bust of Jawaharlal Nehru donated by the Society of Public Welfare was unveiled on 14 November 1968 at

the Technische Hochschule Dresden (Voigt 2008, 384). On 28 March 1969, a Friendship Committee of GDR and India was formed within DEUSASIG (Kasper and Köcher 2000, 91).<sup>15</sup>

On the occasion of GDR's 20th anniversary, DEUSASIG's President, Max Sefrin, participated in a conference on *Friends of the GDR* held in New Delhi on 13 September 1969 (Voigt 2008, 602).

Mahatma Gandhi's birth centenary was commemorated at the GDR Academy of Sciences with a conference and an exhibition in 1969. A Free German Trade Union (FDGB) delegation attended the 28th AITUC Congress from 24 to 28 January 1970. Berlin's Lord Mayor, Herbert Fechner, arrived with a delegation of Berlin town counsellors in New Delhi on 31 March 1970 and signed an agreement on twin cities with Delhi's Mayor Hansraj Gupta.

On 21–22 November 1970, State Secretary Dieter Heinze participated with a delegation representing various GDR institutions at the third INGFA National Conference in New Delhi (Voigt 2008, 605–607). A special GDR aircraft carrier landed in Calcutta in June 1971 with emergency goods for refugees from East Pakistan. A group of gymnasts from the GDR Olympic team performed in the Delhi National Stadium in 1972. Relations between the Association of Mutual Peasant Assistance and the All India Kisan Sabha and between the FDGB and the Indian National Trade Union Congress were also fast developing.

## **CULTURE, HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENCE: GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER**

### **The Long Way to Official State Relations**

The GDR secretary of state for higher education and member of the Council of Ministers, Wilhelm Girnus, arrived as leader of a delegation during 10–14 March 1960 in New Delhi, upon the invitation of Humayun Kabir, minister for scientific research and cultural affairs, for talks with N. R. Pillai, secretary general of the Ministry of External Affairs. Girnus was received by Prime Minister Nehru (Voigt 2008, 247–249). In 1963, a general understanding was achieved on bilateral cultural exchanges between the GDR Trade Representation and the Ministry of External Affairs and on 20 February 1964, an Agreement on Cultural Exchange was

signed. This was followed by an agreement on scientific cooperation between the GDR Academy of Sciences and the Indian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research on 14 March 1964.

An Agreement on Cultural and Scientific Cooperation for 1969–1970 and 1970–1971 was signed for the first time at the governmental level on 14 October 1969 by the deputy minister for higher education, Gregor Schirmer, and the leader of the Indian delegation, Jahanara Jaipal Singh. Both the sides agreed to a mutual exchange of lecturers, experts and young scholars for postgraduate studies. The GDR expressed a readiness to send German language teachers to Indian universities. In accordance with a contract signed between LIMEX and the Indian Ministry of Education and Social Welfare on 20 May 1970, three German language lecturers started working in New Delhi, Calcutta and Patiala (Voigt 2008, 543–544). The visit of the first official delegation of the Ministry of Culture headed by Secretary of State Dieter Heinze took place in November 1970 in India. The first comprehensive agreement on cultural exchange for the years 1971–1973 was signed on 8 September 1971 in Berlin between Heinze and T. B. Singh, secretary of the State Ministry of Education, Social Welfare and Culture. On 25 October 1971, both the countries agreed upon regulations on sending experts and receiving trainees within the framework of scientific cooperation. An agreement on cooperation in the field of veterinary medicine and a protocol on cooperation between the GDR State Broadcasting Committee and All India Radio were signed on 1 and 24 November 1971, respectively.

## **Writers and Books**

The German Academy of Sciences invited an Indian writers' delegation to visit the GDR between 17 May and June 1957. They had meetings with Arnold Zweig, president of the German Academy of Arts, and with Bodo Uhse, chairman of the GDR Writers' Association, and were received by Chairman Ulbricht (Voigt 2008, 241).<sup>16</sup> The authors, Stefan Heym and Bruno Apitz, went to India in February–March 1957 for participating at a PEN Club conference. They visited the All India Literature Academy and were received by Minister Humayun Kabir. Indian writers reciprocated the visit in May 1959 and Mulk Raj Anand had a talk with Chairman Ulbricht

on 29 May 1959 (Voigt 2008, 231–232). Maximilian Scheer, Bodo Uhse and Stephan Hermlin went in the 1950s to India and so did the artist and National Prize winner, Karl Erich Müller, in the 1960s. He was received by President Zakir Husain. A Tagore Committee was in charge of all GDR activities commemorating the poet's birth centenary throughout the GDR in 1961. A street was also named after Tagore (Rabindranath Tagore Strasse) in Berlin. Writers Willi Meinck and Inge von Wangenheim published their impressions of India in the 1970s (Gokhale, this volume).

While translations of books by contemporary Indian writers and those of traditional texts were published in the GDR, translations of GDR authors' work in English appeared from the early 1960s onwards in India and were done by the Leipzig-based publishing house called *Seven Seas Publishers*. In some cases, translations were also done in some of the other Indian languages. Bruno Apitz's book *Naked among Wolves* was issued in Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam and Punjabi with the support of Indian writers and members of INGFA (Huber 1980, 96).<sup>17</sup> Among others, books by Anna Seghers, F. C. Weißkopf and Stefan Heym were translated into some of the Indian languages as well.

In all, 148 books on India were published in the GDR between 1952 and 1972. There were 59 books on ancient India, consisting of those on literature, art, history, religion and philosophy, text editions and languages. Forty-one books dealt with contemporary India in the fields of literature, history and politics, social sciences, ethnology and modern Indian languages. Finally, 48 books broadly dealt with Indian culture and traditions, including travelogues, picture books, novels and books for children and youth.<sup>18</sup>

Special GDR book exhibitions were held in India on children's books (1963), on zoological gardens, on children's books and children's toys, on books of art and music in the GDR (1967) and on sculptural folk art activities (1971). The GDR participated in book exhibitions in India, like the *International Book Exhibition for Humanism, against War* in 1966 and the *International Exhibition of Books of Art* (Huber 1980, 93). In 1971, India was awarded a silver medal for her contribution to the *International Book Art Exhibition* in Leipzig. From 1972 onwards, GDR books were exhibited at the *World Book Fair* in New Delhi. For several years, India participated

at the book exhibitions titled *The Most Beautiful Books of the World* and at the *International Book Art Exhibition* in Leipzig.

## Theatre and Film

The first Indian play to be staged in the GDR was Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* in 1957, at the theatre Städtische Bühnen in Karl Marx Stadt, performed on the occasion of the Kalidasa Year (Huber 1980, 80). The adaptation of the drama *Vasantasena* by Lion Feuchtwanger premiered at the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin in 1960 and was later staged in Güstrow. The GDR participated at the International Theatre Architecture Exhibition in New Delhi and Bombay with *Theatre Construction and Theatre Technique in the GDR*.

In 1961, Prasamo Rao gave performances in the GDR with a classical *Schattenspieltheater*. In 1967, the Volkstheater Rostock performed the Indian play *Invincible Vietnam* by Utpal Dutt (see also the contribution by Bishnupriya Dutt in this volume). In 1968, the National School of Drama's (NSD) director Ebrahim Alkazi and his interpreter Ashok Sen participated as members of the international Brecht dialogue organized in Berlin. The Elle Puppeteer's Theatre from Karl Marx Stadt staged several performances in various Indian cities during 1970. Some of their plays were broadcasted by Indian television and were appreciated for their high didactical standards. Amal Alkazi staged Tagore's *Post Office* at the Nationaltheater Weimar in 1970. Acknowledged as a good production, it was included in the programme of the 1971 Berliner Festtage.

From the early 1960s onwards, prominent Indian theatre experts and directors such as Habib Tanvir, Sova Sen, Ebrahim Alkazi, Balwant Gargi and Shambu Mitra visited the GDR. They were attracted by Brecht's theatre and wanted to acquaint themselves with the contemporary theatre scene in the GDR. An exhibition on *Brecht on the Stage of the Berlin Ensemble* was opened by NSD director Alkazi in New Delhi in 1967 and handed over to this institution. GDR theatre experts participated at the East–West Theatre Festival in New Delhi in 1966.

In spring 1970, director Fritz Bennewitz produced Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* in Hindi/Urdu at the NSD. A year later, he went



with the ensemble to Bombay, Pune, Hyderabad and Bangalore in 1972. Bennewitz participated at the First Asian Theatre Conference in Bombay and, with the support of the ministries of culture of both the countries, began a Marathi adaptation of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in cooperation with director Vijay Mehta (see also the contribution by Vaibhav Abnave in this volume; Esleben 2014, 204–205; Huber 1980, 82–84).

In January 1960, the first *GDR Film Days* were organized in Cochin and Bangalore. From the very beginning, the GDR became a participant in International Film Festival in New Delhi. In 1961, director Konrad Wolf was awarded with the Silver Lotus of this festival by Prime Minister Nehru for his film *Professor Mamlock*. GDR Film Festivals were held in India in the presence of several directors and actors in 1965 and in 1970 (Huber 1980, 93–94). Since 1962, the GDR participated in the International Festival of Children's Films held in Calcutta. Whereas Indian films were screened with a good response in the GDR. From the 1950s onwards, India regularly contributed to the Leipzig International Documentary and Short Film Week.

## Music and Dance

In 1961, the Berlin Chamber Quartet enjoyed concert goers as an audience in India, with 24 concerts and lectures organized at music colleges and universities. Musicologist Ernst Hermann Meyer contributed to the East–West Music Conference held in New Delhi in 1964.

Recitals by GDR musicians were given in India by the organist Andreas Buschnakowski in 1966, the Duo Wikarsky in 1969, the singer Lin Jaldati with the pianist Eberhard Rebling and by the Berlin Octet, both in 1970. In 1971, Vera Oelschlegel came to India with the ensemble 66 as well as the Leipzig Bach Orchestra. In 1972, the Berlin Chamber Orchestra gave recitals in various Indian cities, while in the GDR, the sitar concerts by Subroto Roy Chowdhury were especially enjoyed by a young audience and so was the performance of Bhupen Hazarika, who participated in the Third Festival of Political Songs (Heidrich 1998b, 20; Huber 1980, 88–89).

In 1955, the Little Theatre Group (LTG) from Calcutta performed in the GDR. From 10 December 1955 to 31 March 1956, a

GDR group of musicians and a dancer visited Bombay, New Delhi and Calcutta on behalf of the Ministry of Culture (Voigt 2008, 220–221). As the GDR Folk Art Ensemble, it once again went to India in 1959. The dancers Roshan Vajifdar (1959), Rita Devi (1962 and 1966) and the Bharat Natyam Ensemble under Kumari Kamala (1964) also performed in the GDR (Huber 1980, 88). The GDR State Village Ensemble and soloists of the State Opera House Berlin performed in various Indian cities in 1970. In 1972, the State Ensemble for Sorbian Folk Culture toured India and an Indian song and dance ensemble familiarized audiences in Berlin and six other cities with Kathakali and Manipuri recitals.

### **Painters, Paintings and Graphic Art**

Paintings of Bimal Das Gupta were exhibited at the Staatliche Museen in Berlin in 1961 while, at the same time, reproductions of paintings from GDR museums toured India at *Treasures of World Culture* and on *Old Masters*. The GDR participated for the first time in 1961 at the International Exhibition of Contemporary Art in New Delhi with works of Otto Nagel, Bert Heller and Max Lingner. India joined the first International Exhibition of Graphic Art in Leipzig. In 1962, followed exhibitions in India on *Master Pieces of Renaissance* and on *Contemporary Painting*. Collections of the graphic art by National Prize Winners Fritz Cremer, Arno Mohr and Rudolf Bergander were presented to the Indian public in 1961, 1962 and paintings of Willi Neubert in New Delhi, Jaipur and Chandigarh in 1963 (Huber 1980, 91–92). In Berlin, an exhibition titled *India—Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, held in November–December 1964, attracted a very large number of visitors.

The Staatliche Museen zu Berlin familiarized GDR citizens with *Indian Miniatures* in 1966, and in India, reproductions from Dresden's *Galerie Alter Meister* were exhibited in New Delhi and Chandigarh. India participated at the *Intergrafik* in Leipzig in 1967. K. K. Hebbar, corresponding member of the GDR Academy of Fine Arts, presented his work at the Neue Berliner Galerie and at the Leipzig Museum of Fine Arts in 1967. Graphic art from GDR artists titled *The Art of Humanism* was also exhibited in 1967, followed by the exhibition of the works of Käthe Kollwitz in 1969 and of graphic art titled *Women in the GDR*.

A selection of the comprehensive work of Karl Erich Müller on India in the form of paintings, drawings and graphic art was first exhibited in New Delhi in 1969 and in the following year as *Impressions from India*. From 1971 onwards, the GDR became a regular participant at the International Triennale of Contemporary Art, organized by the Lalit Kala Akademi. Exhibitions with reproductions of paintings in GDR museums went to India titled as *Albrecht Dürer, His World Outlook, His Art* (1971), *Cranach Exhibition* and *Reproduction of Master-pieces from GDR Museums* (1972). Exhibitions of National Prize Winners Willi Sitte's and Werner Klemke's works of art were presented to Indian art lovers, and simultaneously the exhibition *Indian Contemporary Painting* was presented to a GDR audience in 1972.

For several years, GDR pupils participated successfully at the International Shankar Pillai Children's Drawing Competition, winning gold and silver medals (Fischer 1984, 55). Handicraft products found appreciation among a broader public in both the countries, with exhibitions such as *Exhibition of Ceramic Art of the GDR* (1962), *Handicraft from India* (1971) and *Handicraft Exhibition of the GDR* (1972).

### **Scholars, Students and Trainees**

The sociologist Ramkrishna Mukherjee joined the Institute of Indology at the Humboldt University, Berlin, as a guest professor in 1952. His wife, Prabhati Mukherjee, taught Bengali language and literature (Ruben and Rüstau 1980, 127). Professors Walter Ruben (Humboldt University, Berlin) and Paul Görlich (Carl Zeiss, Jena) participated in the 44th Session of the Indian Science Congress in 1957. The Indian historian Horst Krüger acted as a cultural adviser at the GDR Trade Representation between 1958 and 1960 (Hafner 2008, 262–263; Voigt 2008, 243–245). In 1960–1962, the Indian historian K. M. Ashraf stayed at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin's Institute of Indology as a guest professor. Young GDR Indologists Joachim Heidrich, Hiltrud Rüstau and Margot Gatzlaff went to India between 1960 and 1964. Apart from their research work, they participated in the Vivekananda centenary in Calcutta, 1963–1964, upon the invitation of the Ramakrishna Mission and joined the delegation of GDR scholars to the XXVI Congress of

Orientalists in New Delhi in 1964 (Gatzlaff 1998, 133; Heidrich 1998b, 21; Rüstau 1998, 153).

In the early 1950s and the 1960s, well-known scholars such as economist Jürgen Kuczynski, zoologist Wolfgang Ullrich, pharmacologist Jung and others went for guest lectures to India or worked as experts of vocational training and polytechnic education. Their activities often brought about a future cooperation with Indian universities. Senior and junior scholars of universities and the Academy of Sciences researched in Indian archives, studying original source material and started cooperation with Indian colleagues.

The very first official delegation from India to the GDR was sent by the University Grants Commission to visit institutions of higher learning in May 1965 (Hasan 1980, 71). In the mid-1950s, there were about 100 Indians who were interested in going to the GDR for studies, training and research work. There were about 150 Indians at GDR universities and enterprises in 1963 and until 1967, about 250 Indians completed higher education and training courses in the GDR (Voigt 2008, 253, 609, 620). More joined in the following years based on government agreements, via invitations by organizations, parties and the DEUSASIG. They graduated as Dr.-Ing. from the Technische Hochschule Dresden, studied in large numbers at the Technical College of Polygraphy in Leipzig, worked as research scholars at the College of Economics in Berlin or passed courses at the International Cooperative College in Dresden as delegates of the National Cooperative Union of India. Others joined as managers, civil engineers or research scholars for further qualification and gathering experience in metallurgy, house building or in German studies. Several joined the German College of Physical Education (Deutsche Hochschule für Körperkultur; DHfK) in Leipzig as games and sports instructors and returned as coaches to the National Institute of Sports in Patiala.<sup>19</sup>

Local Indian associations were formed in Leipzig and Dresden in 1959 and in Berlin in 1961. A Coordination Committee of the Indian Citizens in the GDR started working from 1962 onwards and a delegation was received by the then acting Prime Minister Stoph in 1963. At a conference in Dresden, a new constitution was adopted and the name changed to the Indian Association in

the GDR. After returning home, these former students formed the GDR Returnees Clubs in New Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, Lucknow, Bangalore and Coimbatore as well as the Indo-GDR Sports Clubs.<sup>20</sup>

The two countries established official diplomatic relations on 8 October 1972 (Fischer 1984, 73–79). On the basis of what had been achieved so far within two decades, the states of the GDR and India extended and diversified the spectre and the range of their activities. Due to changed political circumstances in the international field, which also had consequences for the relationship between the two German states and for GDR's domestic and foreign policy, this relationship came to a more or less abrupt end after 40 years with the disappearance of the GDR in 1990 (Grabowski 1998, 1999). During this period of four decades of GDR's existence, however, a brief, but particular and special chapter was added to the century-old German-Indian encounters.

## NOTES

1. Except noted references, all data and events listed in the text are derived to a very large extent from two unpublished manuscripts: (a) Rehmer (1992) and (b) *Zu den kulturellen und wissenschaftlichen Beziehungen DDR-Indien*, 28. MS (b) is a compilation of facts and figures by former cultural attaches in India and by officials of the Ministry of Culture and the League for Friendship among Peoples in charge of the India desk. Archiv Oesterheld. The 'Zeittafel' in Heidrich (1998a, 276–292) coincides to a large extent with the data in (a). All three sources cover the period from 1949 to 1990 and operate with data for days and months with the exception of (b) where only years are indicated.
2. See Freitag (1998), Katti (1998); Mishra (1980) for an analysis and overview of GDR–India economic cooperation during four decades.
3. From 1960 onwards and within the framework for the following long-term Trade and Payment Agreements (1964, 1969 and 1971), the list of goods to be exchanged was agreed upon between both partners in bilateral annual trade protocols.
4. The delegation had talks with Prime Minister Nehru and the ministers for defence industry, agriculture, trade, education and the deputy minister and state secretary for external affairs (Heidrich 1998a, 277).
5. For details of the Scholz visit, see Voigt (2008, 392–396).
6. For the Leuschner visit, see Voigt (2008, 398–407).
7. For details of the Wittkowski visit, see Voigt (2008, 412–418).

8. A brief overview of economic activities in Mohan (1974, 60–68) and Mishra (1980, 109–116).
9. See Mohan (1974, 69–71) for statistics of the bilateral trade pattern.
10. For selling GDR machine tools in India and the problems involved in concluding and implementing licence contracts, in general, and for producing machine tools in cooperation with India, in particular, see Baumgarten (n.d.). He counts all together 62 implemented licence contracts with Indian partners until 1972 (p. 25), a number differing slightly from 85 contracts with Freitag (1998, 94).
11. Statement in Mohan (1974, 79f). Details of the visit in Voigt (2008, 270–291) and from a participant's point of view Fischer (1984, 29–34, 37) and Fischer (1998, 33–35). Members of the delegation were the Deputy Ministers Sepp Schwab and Gerhard Weiss as well as the nuclear physicist, Manfred von Ardenne. A pictorial view of the visit and Grotewohl's statement in German in Republik Indien. (1959).
12. For details of the composition of the delegation and the itinerary in India, see Matern (1959, 7–16).
13. DEUSASIG President, Max Sefrin, was meeting Kamaranj during his India visit in October 1967.
14. For the relations between the Evangelical churches in the GDR and in India, see Schottstädt (1998) and Roeber (1998).
15. For activities of the Friendship Committee and the role of its partner INGFA in contributing to mutual understanding and cooperation between both countries, see Günther (1980) and Fischer (1998, 35–37).
16. Mulk Raj Anand and Sajjad Zaheer participated in Weimar at an international seminar on literature (Heidrich 1998b, 20).
17. Huber: 96. 'Ole Bienkopp' by Erich Strittmatter and 'Der geteilte Himmel' by Christa Wolf were published in Tamil in 1967 (Heidrich 1998b, 21).
18. In all, 273 books on India were published by 29 publishing houses in book form between 1952 and 1986 under the title *Books on India Published in the German Democratic Republic 1952–1986*. They were compiled and edited by R. Beer and published by the Ministerium für Kultur, H. V. Verlage und Buchhandel and the Börsenverein der deutschen Buchhändler zu Leipzig as brochure in German and English, 80 (Archiv Oesterheld). Not included in the compilation are magazines, articles in scientific journals, catalogues of exhibitions or museum guides. Therefore, journals like *The Buddhist Yearly* published by the Buddhist Centre Halle from 1966 onwards, the special issues of *Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft* 8 (1966): 2 on Indian music or of *Sinn und Form* 21 (1969): 4 on literature from India are not listed.

19. Four NIS coaches were awarded DHfK scholarships in 1972. On behalf of the Indian government, NIS director, R. L. Anand, attended the International Summer Course for leaders of sport from Afro-Asian countries in August 1971 (Ali 1987, 89, 93).
20. For a brief account of this organization and its members, see the brochures 'Indian Association in the GDR. Silver Jubilee Souvenir', p. 29 and Dresden. 1967. 'Indians in the GDR', 32 (Archiv Oesterheld), as well as Chatterjee (1998) and Verma (1998).

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