



China Factor in India-America Relations (1942-62)

Speaker: Dr. Atul Bharadwaj

Chair: Prof. Alka Acharya

Venue: Seminar Room, ICS

The event began with Prof. Alka Acharya's introductory remarks. Welcoming the speaker, the Chair explained her great interest in Atul Bharadwaj's academic works. The Chair directed audience's attention to some of the puzzling questions put forward by the speaker in his recently published book titled *India-America Relations (1942-62): Rooted in the Liberal International Order*.

In the introductory remarks, Prof Acharya argued that it is the United States which brought the Cold War to the Indian subcontinent. She reminded that India was trying to keep itself away from the Cold War rivalry by opting for the policy of non-alignment.

Discussing the India-China relations, the Chair argued that though there were many other factors creating tension between India and China during that period, the Cold War was not a significant factor in the Sino-India relations. The Chair concluded the introductory remarks by placing a question to the speaker that "whether India was actually concerned about the kind of role China would eventually come to play in the region and therefore it was hedging its bets by establishing a kind of an opening with the United States? Or whether the Americans actually did manage to persuade Indians agreed to have this deeper understanding with the United States?" She also asked the speaker to reveal the sources/data that he uses to corroborate either of this explanation.

Dr. Bharadwaj began his presentation by thanking Prof. Acharya and the Institute of Chinese Studies for some remarkable help he received from both the ends to develop his academic career. He mentioned that it is from ICS, during various interactions, much of his knowledge about China took shape. He introduced his recent book to the audience and explained how he developed the idea for such a work.

The speaker observed, his interactions with various academic experts in the past revealed that Indian academia is not much aware of the fact that India was an American military base during the Second World War. He explained, over two lakh American soldiers with an entire military intelligence paraphernalia were present in Delhi, Kolkata, Karachi and Assam from 1942 to

1946. They established China-Burma-India Theater during that period with the primary aim of training the Chinese soldiers to fight against the Japanese. Therefore, besides American soldiers, there were over one lakh Chinese soldiers in India by the end of 1944. Adding to these American and Chinese soldiers, many thousands of British military personnel were also present in India during the period of Second World War. The speaker said, India was having a kind of *Military Mela* during the Second World War. He also reminded that, during this period, most of the Indian leaders were in jail due to their struggle against the British.

The speaker argued that the presence of such a huge number of young soldiers in the country had a great deal of impact on India's food supply. He is almost certain that the Bengal famine of 1943 was somehow linked with this large presence of foreign military personnel in the country.

Bringing a new narrative of the US-India relationship, Dr. Bharadwaj asserted that the United States was closely monitoring the process of power transfer in the subcontinent and many American leaders extended their support to Indian leaders on various occasions during the later years of India's freedom struggle. He insisted, though the US government was not openly critical of the British policies in India, the American civil societies were actively demanding India's independence. He explained how various Chinese leaders also contributed to India's independence campaign in the United States. Joining with the Indian Americans, the Chinese Americans also campaigned for India's freedom and sharply criticized British policies and actions in the subcontinent. He noted that many Chinese Americans were also part of India-League of America in 1940s and they provided immense help to Indian leaders during their freedom struggle.

Assessing the American support Indian leaders had received in the later years of India's freedom struggle, the speaker argued that the transfer of power in the subcontinent in 1940s was not a bilateral affair between the British and the dominant political classes in India. In his view, the United States was an active third party presence in the subcontinent during this process. He asserted that, for some reasons, the historians have overlooked the physical presence of powerful American military in India during this period. He said, his recently published book aimed to portray the United States as the chief ideological mentor of independent India. He questioned the dominant view that consider the Soviet Union as India's chief ideological mentor. He insisted that it is from the United States that India borrowed the idea of mixed economy, its village development scheme, community development scheme, five-year planning, family planning etc...He even went on to say that there was an American advisor to Nehru, especially in planning related issues. The speaker argued that the Americans played a big role in India's education sector through various philanthropic foundations. He mentioned the role of Ford foundation, Rockefeller foundation during the 1950s, and argued that the help of such philanthropic foundations helped the United States to build in India an epistemic community that is willing to be partner the American Cold War strategy in Asia-Pacific.

The speaker stated that the mediatory role played by Nehru in international politics was not exclusively his design. It was the need of the Cold War international politics and largely supported by the Western interests. He placed Anglo-American interest in Nehru's interlocutory role during the Korean War as an example. In his opinion, in the early phase of the Korean War, American's rejected Nehru's attempt of playing a mediatory role between the United States and the Soviet Union. But, later, when they wanted a third party mediation, they encouraged Nehru's intervention. Extending this view, he argued that much of India's policies towards China in the 1950s were largely shaped by the Anglo-American need to have a credible and trusted mediator that could talk to China on their behalf. He added, Nehru rejected American offer for India's membership in UN Security Council as he was aware that the offer is nothing more than an American move to persuade China. With this rejection, the speaker said, Nehru proved that he is really a neutral party in the Cold War bipolar politics.

The talk essentially tried to provide a different view of India-US relations and problematized the dominant understanding that the Soviet Union was India's ideological mentor since the early years of its independence. The speaker concluded the presentation by arguing that the United States played a great role in shaping India-China relations in 1940s and 1950s.