

Communist Youth Politics in India: The All Indian Youth Federation and the Global Cold War, 1965-1975

Abstract

This presentation will examine the rise of the All Indian Youth Federation (AIYF) during the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this period, this youth wing of the Communist Party of India (CPI) launched a series of far reaching struggles against the central government in India because of its alleged connection with US imperialism. As historians have increasingly turned their attention to postcolonial India in the last decade, scholars have examined the formation of powerful youth movements in the 1960s and 1970s. These studies have focused on Hindutva youth movements (especially the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and also on the divergent youth mobilizations triggered by the split in the governing party of India, the Indian National Congress, in 1969. The history of India's communist youth movements, however, remains entirely unexplored.

It was during the 1960s that the All Indian Youth Federation emerged after a decade where the communist youth movement had been rendered obsolete at the national level. This paper will explore three interrelated cycles of left-wing youth activism to reveal the far-reaching mobilizations of youth in the context of South Asia's Cold War. These include activism in support of the i) Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 ii) the state persecution of students in East Pakistan and iii) protests against the governing Indian National Congress and for the left-wing agenda of Indira Gandhi's breakaway party. All these interrelated struggles involved Indian youths confronting the dominant narrative with one about the "common enemy" of Pakistan, US imperialism, and the alleged bourgeoisie "congress system". I will argue the All Indian Youth Federation confronted the dominant political forces in postcolonial India during the period at hand. These left-wing youth agitations did not always align directly with the adult actors within the Communist Party of India or with the left leaning youth movements in other countries. The struggles of these young Indian communists during 1960s had a life of their own. Throughout this presentation, I will explore the role of youth agitation and protest and counterculture in the 1960s.

This history of the AIYF gives novel historiographical insights into the global history of the Cold War. Cold War historians have examined the importance of youth-specific communist organisation, their internationalism and Moscow's influence within them (Cornell 1965; Cornell 1982; Cross, Laporte and Morgan et al. 2012). The youth communist movement in India has been overlooked by these historians. The CPI's successful efforts to take control of The All Indian Youth Federation and its relationship with the global network of communist movements in India remains entirely unexplored. For these papers, I have used sources from the Communist Party of India's HQ in New Delhi that have never been accessed before. The principal source of materials for this paper has come from the student organisation's official documents, pamphlets and their highly insightful weekly journal *The New Generation*.