



Hakenkreuz, Swastika and Crescent: The Religious Factor in Nazi Cultural Politics Regarding India

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the 1990s, when transnational history emerged as a methodological tool that transcended nation-centric history writing, the study of Nazism and Fascism has also shifted beyond nation states. Historians continue to provide accounts of the links and flows of political ideas and agendas pertaining to the Nazi and/or Fascist ideological repertoire through the movement of people, knowledge as well as financial capital and products across borders (Alcade 2020: 243–252). However, scholars have turned relatively recently to investigate the phenomenon of propaganda or influencing public opinion, which was an important element in such transnational exchanges.

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The roots of Nazi propaganda aimed at foreign countries belong to the sphere of external “cultural politics” (*Kulturpolitik*) pursued by Germany after the First World War (Michels 2005: 18). Cultural politics in this case refers to the dissemination, through friendly overtures, of “cultural assets” like language, art, and scientific advancements in foreign countries. Such “soft power” was intended to compensate for the loss of Germany’s political influence in the world after the First World War (Roy 2021).

In the initial years of its rule, the Nazi regime did not have any coherent direction as far as external cultural politics was concerned. However, it understood the importance of such politics from the very beginning. Thus, the Department of Culture at the Foreign Ministry was renamed the Cultural Political Department (*Kulturpolitische Abteilung*) in 1933. Often, the Nazi government made use of the “cultural political projects” that had started during the Weimar period. Also, many pre-existing institutions began to feel the need or the compulsion to conduct cultural politics on behalf of the Nazi state in the hope of receiving the regime’s approval and resources (Gesche 2006: 73–78).

The factor that became common to most organizations conducting cultural politics after 1933 was the influence of Nazi ideology, which they tried to propagate in different countries. This entailed emphasizing the purported glories of the new “Reich” and conveying the impression that the latter was a friendly state, contrary to the inimical impression it generated. Another aspect of external cultural politics during the Nazi period was that the German diasporas around the world were expected to contribute to such propaganda (Gesche 2006: 73–78). Here, the term “cultural politics” has been used instead of the more widely accepted “cultural policy” since, to my mind, the word “policy” does not express the full range and scope of the Nazi *Kulturpolitik*.

This chapter attempts to examine one strand of Nazi cultural politics conducted in the Indian subcontinent, namely the use of different religions in trying to spread Nazi propaganda between 1933 and 1939. However, this chapter does not claim to provide a complete study of the deployment of religion in Nazi propaganda in India. It will take up some of the issues mentioned in Eugene D’Souza’s essay on Nazi propaganda in India (D’Souza 2000: 77–90) and throw light on other little-known aspects of the use of religion in spreading such propaganda. This chapter will limit itself to a few case studies pertaining to three religions practised in the Indian subcontinent: Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

The chapter is based primarily on underutilized archival materials from the India Office Records as well as the National Archives of India, New Delhi. The choice of archival materials is dictated as much by the availability of colonial surveillance records as by the near absence of the voices of most of the propagandists and their audiences. This implies that the narrative and analyses offered in this chapter are refracted through the prism of the colonial gaze that vilified every expression of self-reliance by Indians and saw in every non-commercial contact between the Germans and the Indians a threat to the British Empire.

On the other hand, the surveillance conducted by the colonial government, though by no means unbiased, maintained a certain level of detachment from the process of propaganda and reception. Also, the surveillance officials, enjoying the power and resources of the state, were in a position to delve deep to collect information, which of course may not have been always and completely trustworthy. Therefore, attempts have been made wherever possible to supplement the findings from the colonial archives with records from German archives as well as secondary literature.

THE NAZI NETWORK IN INDIA

Incentives or, in some cases, political pressure for conducting Nazi propaganda in India came from Germany. Propaganda literature, mostly emanating from Germany, was distributed through a cobweb-like Nazi network that evolved in India after 1933. This network included the different units of the Nazi party that existed in the Indian subcontinent, German commercial firms operating in India, German consulates and last but not the least, a number of German as well as Indian intermediaries.

The evolution of a Nazi network was tied to Germany's commercial interests in India. German business engagements in India date back to the nineteenth century (Lubinski et al. 2021: 72–97). However, all commercial activities undertaken by Germany in India were suspended from 1914 to about 1925 due to the First World War and its immediate aftermath. The British were wary of German presence in the Indian subcontinent after the war, since the German Foreign Ministry had encouraged Indian anti-colonialists in Berlin to pursue anti-British propaganda and activities during the period of conflict (Barooah 2004; Liebau 2019a).

Germany officially resumed diplomatic relations with India in 1922. In that year, a German consulate was opened in Calcutta, followed by the

ones in Bombay and Madras. The primary interest of the German diplomats was to revive the earlier business practices (Barooah 2018: 2–3).

Following the reopening of the Consulates, a number of German firms began to conduct business in India. The employees of such firms became the founding members of an offshoot of the Nazi party (*Stützpunkt*) in India, which was established in July 1932. The “headquarters” of the party was in Bombay with “branches” in different cities. Most members of the newly set-up Nazi party belonged to Haverlo, which was officially a Dutch concern but actually a disguised subsidiary of the German conglomerate IG Farben. Haverlo had its head office in Bombay and branch offices in various other cities (Schnabel 1968: 14–15).

Following the *Gleichschaltung* (synchronization) of the German state and the Nazi party, the official representatives of the German state, that is, the diplomatic missions were increasingly filled with Nazi party loyalists (Koop 2009: 39). Not only were the diplomatic personnel expected to pay their respects to National Socialism, they were also to make sure that every expatriate German did so as well. The Nazi party units in foreign countries also began to indulge in propagating the “achievements” of Nazi Germany and spying on their guest countries (Koop 2009: 51). Nazi groups in India thus began to include German diplomats in addition to the employees of commercial firms.

CULTURAL POLITICS AS NAZI PROPAGANDA: *DEUTSCHE* *AKADEMIE'S* INDIA INSTITUTE

An organization dating from the 1920s which emerged as a leading propagandist of Nazism in India was the supposedly non-political concern, the Munich-based *Deutsche Akademie* or DA.

The DA, established in 1925, ascribed to itself the role of a cultural mediator between Germany and other countries through committees set up for particular nations (*Länderausschüsse*). The *Indischer Ausschuss* or India Institute was the first of such committees. It came into existence in 1928, through the efforts of the Indian nationalist Taraknath Das (1884–1958) and Karl Haushofer (1869–1946), a professor of Geography at the University of Munich. Das was a formerly militant anti-colonialist who had participated in anti-British activities under the India Independence Committee in Berlin during the First World War (Liebau 2019a).

Haushofer was a conservative German nationalist who had developed an antipathy towards the British (Roy 2021).

The India Institute was therefore connected to Indian anti-colonialism since its inception. This was also the time when German Foreign Ministry developed some sympathy for the Indian anti-colonial movement (Barooah 2018: 54). During this time, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which was a front for the scholarship program of the Foreign Ministry, started collaborating with the DA to jointly provide scholarships to Indians, with the aim of attracting sympathy for Germany. The ideal candidates were elite, moderately nationalist Indians who were acceptable to the British colonial establishment. The India Institute also honoured Indian icons from different fields. The Institute realized that these pre-eminent Indians were likely to be the best conduits for propagating Germany's views and interests in India (Roy 2021).

The advent of the Nazi government in January 1933 added other dimensions to this brand of cultural politics. The DA (and the India Institute) reacted to the new regime through *Selbstgleichschaltung* (voluntary synchronization with Nazi politics) in the hope of securing some much-needed funds (Michels 2005: 105). One of the "tasks" that the India Institute took upon itself after 1933 was to defend the Nazi regime against allegations about the rising racism in Germany, which adversely affected the Indians living there. The Nazi ruling elite did not have much respect either for Indians or for their nationalist aspirations. Hitler (1889–1945) was openly dismissive about the Indian anti-colonial movement. He admired the British Empire, which he hoped to emulate in "the Russian area" (Kuhlmann 2003: 38–40). Hitler, as well as the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, derided the Indians as a fallen race, the product of miscegenation between the racially superior, white Aryan invaders and the inferior dark-skinned original inhabitants of India (Kuhlmann 2003: 44–45). The derogatory attitude of the Nazi political elite allegedly led to increased assaults on Indians in Germany as well as anti-Indian propaganda in the German media. Such incidents were reported in the Indian press, leading to widespread protests (Framke 2013: 122–123).

Among the measures adopted by the India Institute to deal with the bad press in India, one was to spread the virtues of Nazi Germany to different groups of Indians. Religion, particularly Hinduism, figured prominently in these approaches.

NAZISM, HINDU REVIVALISM AND ARYANISM

The India Institute set out to influence the Hindus, the majority community of India, through analogies based on Aryanism. The idea of Aryanism in India, as the chapter by Julia Hauser in this volume shows, exerted great influence on some individuals and groups in Germany who dreamt of a regeneration of the German nation through the “Aryan Orient.”

Aryanism formed an overarching subject of scholarly interest among some of the German scholars connected to the India Institute.¹ After 1933, a few of them, like Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (1881–1962) and Walther Wüst (1901–1993) used their knowledge of “Aryan India” to provide scholarly legitimacy to certain racialized notions favoured by the Nazis (Junginger 2017a: 274–279, 2017b: 925–933). The chapter by Tilman Hannemann in this volume points to some of the ways in which Wüst invoked the discourse of “Indo-Aryanism” to promote Nazi tenets like glorification of martial qualities as well as the “will to conquer.”

Scholars like Wüst rightly inferred that Aryanism would appeal to educated Hindus since they also regarded themselves as descended from Aryans. The notion of “Aryan origin,” which reached educated Indians through the works of European Indologists like Max Muller in the nineteenth century, had significantly influenced various Hindu revivalist groups (Roy 2016). A common goal shared by these otherwise disparate groups was to revitalize Hinduism by taking it back to its supposedly glorious Vedic Aryan roots (Roy 2021).

The India Institute was partial to different sects connected to Hindu revivalism even before 1933. Taraknath Das, one of the founders of the India Institute, as well as a number of scholars belonging to its committee were drawn to a Hindu revivalist sect that developed around the Bengali mystic Ramakrishna (1836–1886) and his internationally famous disciple Vivekananda (1863–1902). Das, as well as some of these German academics wrote articles for the journal *Prabuddha Bharata* (Awakened India), the mouthpiece of the Ramakrishna Mission founded by Vivekananda.²

¹ Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BayHstA) Munich: MK 40443\1120. Records of a meeting of the Institute in February 1932 show that India Institute included a number of Indologists in its administration.

² BayHstA: MK 40446: In an issue of *Prabuddha Bharata*, published in December 1932, Walther Wüst wrote on Buddhism and Christianity in ancient western India and Taraknath Das wrote on Asian origin of Mayan civilization.

From 1933, the India Institute increasingly offered propaganda platforms and scholarships to individuals associated with different Hindu revivalist sects which glorified Aryanism. The intention of the institute was to use these individuals as agents for spreading Nazi propaganda among Hindus.

THE GAUDIYA ORDER: KRISHNA WORSHIP AND NAZI PROPAGANDA

A Hindu revivalist guru favoured by the Institute was the monk Bhakti Hriday Bon, born a Bengali called Narendra Nath Mukherjee (1901–1982). The India Institute invited him to Munich in December 1934. Karl Haushofer, the then head of the Institute, personally welcomed the monk belonging to the revivalist *Gaudiya* order. This neo-Hindu sect tried to “Aryanize” and “modernize,” which in this case implies infusing a kind of spirituality that would also speak to a western audience, a medieval strand of popular, non-Vedic cult of Krishna worship (cf. Sardella 2013).

In Munich, Bon spoke in English on “The Aryan Indian’s path to god.” The lecture was very well attended and enthusiastically applauded.³ The monk, who also toured Berlin and a few other German cities, admired the “new Germany of Adolf Hitler” and thought that “the German people were the most suited of all western peoples for an understanding of the Indo-Aryan religion” (Poewe 2006: 73).

The Nazi authorities in Berlin were however not particularly enthusiastic about Bon’s growing popularity which, in the paranoid totalitarian mindset of the ruling elite, seemed to threaten the messianic appeal of the “Führer.” Bon’s worldview also contradicted the racial politics of the Nazis. In 1936, the *Völkischer Beobachter* (*The People’s Observer*), the newspaper of the Nazi party, proclaimed in an article that the universalist *Gaudiya* order, which saw all human beings as spiritual parts of Krishna, had no place in the “Third Reich” since the latter believed in racial hierarchy (Sardella 2019: 81). This difference in attitude between the authorities in Berlin and the institute in Munich indicates that the Nazi regime did not yet have a coherent approach to propaganda as far as India was concerned.

Nevertheless, the connections between Nazi Germany and the *Gaudiya* order continued through the person of Ernst Georg Schulze (1908–1977),

³ *Mitteilungen* (the journal of the DA), March 1935. First issue, p. 157.

a German disciple of Bon. Schulze was fascinated by Bon's lecture in Berlin and decided to follow him to India in 1935. He had already converted to Hinduism in 1934, assuming the name Sadananda Das Brahmachari.⁴

Colonial surveillance records suggest that Schulze alias Sadananda functioned as a link between the *Gaudiya* Mission and the Nazi network in India. Schulze travelled widely in the Indian subcontinent, ostensibly to preach the cult of Krishna among English-educated Indians. The colonial security apparatus however suspected that under cover of his religious engagements, Schulze was networking with the Nazi party and the German consulates in India to propagate Nazism among Indians.⁵

In April 1939, surveillance agents intercepted a packet sent to Schulze from Germany. It contained issues of the *Völkischer Beobachter* and some cuttings from the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.⁶ The censoring officer reported a number of photos of Hitler and other pro-Nazi materials in these papers.⁷ The packet was addressed to Schulze, care of Emile Dubey, the principal of a women's college in Lucknow. In August 1939, surveillance officials got hold of a letter written by the said Emily Dubey to Schulze, expressing her satisfaction that he wanted to return to Germany and offering to pay his fare. She asked him to meet Hitler, in order to congratulate him for his great achievements for his country and to give him the message that he had some admirers in India, too.

On 26 August 1939, surveillance officials recorded that one E. Schulze withdrew the sum of 482 Florin (Netherlandish currency) and transferred it to Amsterdam.⁸ It is probable that Schulze bought a ticket to Europe, but before he could embark on his journey, he was arrested in September 1939 as an "enemy alien," like all Austrian and German males in the Indian subcontinent.

During the search of Schulze's belongings that followed his arrest, an account book was found that included references to his subscription to a German newspaper as well as his "own German money." These references contradicted Schulze's claims of having renounced his inheritance and having severed all connections to Germany except for occasional

⁴ National Archives of India (NAI) New Delhi: Home Pol. ZW 1939 NA-f-21-165.

⁵ NAI: Home Pol. ZW 1939 NA-f-21-165. Note dated 22.7.1945.

⁶ West Bengal State Archives (WBSA) Kolkata. Sl. No.244. File No. 234/39 (1). Potentially hostile foreigners who are objects of particular suspicion, p. 131.

⁷ NAI: Home Pol. ZW 1939 NA-f-21. Confidential note. 13.3.1940, p. 165.

⁸ NAI: Home Pol. ZW 1939 NA-f-21, p. 160-161.

correspondence with his mother. Schulze's address book also contained contact details of several Germans in India who were known to be prominent Nazis, for which Schulze could not offer any satisfactory explanation.⁹

In the multiple interrogations that followed his arrest, Schulze tried to project himself as a travelling mendicant who had no interests in worldly affairs. However, his statements make it clear that he was in touch with the two German lecturers sent to India by the DA: Horst Pohle and Alfred Würfel (1911–2011), who taught German in Calcutta and Banaras, respectively. Both were known to the colonial surveillance as Nazi propagandists.¹⁰

Schulze admitted to receiving *Der Deutsche in Indien* (The German in India) the journal published by the Nazi party in India from 1936 to 1938.¹¹ He also confessed to knowing Dr. Hans Sommer who worked for the German insurance company, Allianz and Stuttgarter. Sommer reportedly visited the *Gaudiya* Mission temple in Delhi.¹² Allianz and Stuttgarter was in the black book of colonial surveillance since it allegedly financed various Nazi ventures in India, including an organization called the Indo-German News Exchange which engaged in Nazi propaganda and espionage. Dr. Sommer supposedly controlled this organization from the background.¹³ Schulze also divulged that he had met G. L. Leszczynski, the commercial head of the Nazi party in India and a leading Nazi propagandist, at Sommer's house.¹⁴

Another example of Schulze's role in connecting the *Gaudiya* Mission and the Nazi network was the presence of the German Consul of Calcutta, Eduard von Selzam (1897–1980), who was known for promoting Nazi views, at a gathering arranged by the *Gaudiya* Mission at its temple in Calcutta in 1935.¹⁵ The *Gaudiya* Mission temples in different parts of India seemed to have functioned as meeting points for the Nazi network.

⁹NAI: Home Pol. ZW 1939 NA-f-21, p. 160.

¹⁰About Pohle: WBSA: Sl. No.244. File 234/39 (1). Hostile foreigners. Pohle is described as a 'silent and active worker' who carries on Nazi propaganda among students. Alfred Würfel's propaganda activities: Bundesarchiv Berlin (BA Berlin) R51\10128.

¹¹NAI: Home Pol. ZW 1939 NA-f-21, p. 165.

¹²NAI: Home Pol. ZW 1939 NA-f-21, p. 164.

¹³India Office Records (IOR) British Library, London: IOR/L/PJ/12/505. Survey of the activities of Germans, 18.2.1939, p. 2.

¹⁴NAI: Home Pol. ZW 1939 NA-f-21, p. 165.

¹⁵NAI: Home Pol. ZW 1939 NA-f-21. Schulze's statement, p. 164. About the German consul in Calcutta: IOR/L/PJ/12/505: Report by DIB, May 1939, p. 6.

Schulze was also acquainted with Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966), the foremost ideologue of Hindutva or political Hinduism. Hindutva represents a majoritarian, anti-minority and Hindu supremacist ideology which emphasized on the “racial inheritance of Hindu blood” (Bhatt 2001: 95). Savarkar was a leading member of the Hindu *Mahasabha*, a Hindu nationalist party formed in 1921 “to protect and promote Hindu interests” (Bhatt 2001: 60). Savarkar remains infamous for publicly endorsing the racial politics of the Nazis and their idea of a homogeneous national community (Casolari 2000: 222–225; Bhatt 2001: 105–108; Framke 2013: 131–134). Savarkar tried to reinterpret the Aryan race theory propagated by European scholars who claimed that the Vedic civilization was founded by white-skinned (European) Aryans. Savarkar maintained that the consanguinity of Aryan and non-Aryan blood in India gave rise to the Vedic Hindu civilization. For Savarkar, “it was the infusion of the Aryan blood, ideas and culture that provided the basis of Hindu nationhood” (Bhatt 2001: 88).

Surveillance records note that Schulze took “a keen interest in Hindu Mahasabha affairs.”¹⁶

Apart from admiring Aryanism and its connections with Nazism, the Hindu Mahasabha and the *Gaudiya* Mission shared a disavowal of the secular and pluralist anti-colonialism promoted by the Indian National Congress (INC). Schulze maintained that he tried his best to be loyal to the British government.¹⁷ If this claim had any truth in it, then this was also a trait that he shared with the Hindu nationalists who stayed away from the anti-colonial movement (Bhatt 2001: 104–105). One of the surveillance records perceptively summed up Schulze’s role in India, claiming: “Schulze is genuine in his religion but has not entirely renounced his interest in politics.”¹⁸

PLAYING THE ARYAN CARD: THE *ARYA SAMAJ*

A prominent Hindu revivalist organization that had ties to the Nazi regime was the *Arya Samaj* (“The society of Aryans”). It was founded by the philosopher and social reformer Dayanand Saraswati (1824–1883) in

¹⁶ Ibid. P.133.

¹⁷ NAI: Home Pol. ZW 1939 NA-f-21, p. 165. Schulze’s statement to the colonial authorities, 22.7.1945.

¹⁸ NAI: Home Pol. ZW 1939 NA-f-21, p. 165. Undated note.

Bombay in 1875 and in Lahore in 1877. The *Arya Samaj* believed in the supremacy of the ancient Vedic Aryans and considered modern-day Hindus to be their degenerate successors. The *Samaj* envisioned bringing the Hindus back to the “true faith” of Vedic monotheism (Bhatt 2001: 16–17). The racially charged “Aryan content,” along with the majoritarian and authoritarian character of this movement made the *Arya Samaj* compatible with certain racist and disciplinarian aspects of Nazism, including an eugenicist dimension (Gould 2004: 157–158).

The *Arya Samaj* also stressed on patriotism, which made it attractive to upper-caste, middle-class Indians (Bhatt 2001: 20). The *Samaj* catered to the educational needs and aspirations of these groups of Indians through the establishment of “Dayanand Anglo Vedic” (DAV) schools and colleges. As the name suggests, the institutions aimed to combine “modern knowledge” with Vedic traditions, an amalgamation that appealed to the tastes and ambitions of the emerging middle classes (Fischer-Tiné 2013: 390–391).

The colonial authorities kept a tab on the activities of *Arya Samaj* since it was evident that the latter was training a generation of elites who could eventually challenge the British colonizers (Fischer-Tiné 2013: 390–391). The kind of young men trained in the DAV institutions were of interest to the India Institute, which astutely foresaw that many of them would be susceptible to propaganda combining Aryanism, subtle anti-British sentiments and Nazism.

Apart from the young minds trained by *Samajist* schools, some members and leaders of *Arya Samaj* proved to be highly receptive to Nazi propaganda. A surveillance record claims that on 20 August 1935, at a meeting that took place in the Himalayan foothills of Kumaon, Swami Satya Dev or Satya Deva (1879–1961) a *pracharak* (preacher) of the *Arya Samaj*, made a speech full of references to Hitler. One of his contentions was that “the Führer” had saved Germany from the debilitating war indemnity. In November 1935, the preachers Jaimani Mehta and Brahmanand publicly claimed that the Germans were descended from Aryan *brahmins* and this was proved by the “Om” sign on their uniforms (Gould 2004: 158). Most probably, the *Hakenkreuz* was verbally construed, deliberately or otherwise, as the Hindu holy sign, *Om*. The aforementioned Mehta was known for his support for eugenicist thinking (Gould 2004: 157). He allegedly had good contacts with the journal

Milap, a mouthpiece of the *Arya Samaj* that articulated pro-Nazi views before the war.¹⁹

During their meetings in the north Indian city of Lucknow in July, 1939, *Arya Samajists* reportedly used the example of Hitler's Germany to demand the introduction of military education in India (Gould 2004: 158).

The entanglements between the *Arya Samaj* and the Nazis had different dimensions. In March 1939, the preacher Satya Dev or Satya Deva visited Berlin. He requested the German Foreign Ministry to provide him materials on the principles of race (*Rassenlehre*), which he could disseminate in India. He also offered to give lectures on "Aryan religion." He was greeted well by the Foreign Ministry, which expressed satisfaction at the monk's promotion of "the new Germany for years." Bernhard Breloer (1894–1947), professor of Indology at the University of Berlin, was asked to arrange for such lectures.²⁰ Breloer was a high-ranking SS officer and a fanatic Nazi (Framke 2014: 89–128). The positive reception of Satya Deva by the Nazi establishment in Berlin demonstrates that the regime now felt secure enough to welcome Hindu mendicants who could be used as emissaries for propagating Nazism.

Surveillance reports further claim that during his visit to Germany, Satya Deva broadcasted pro-Nazi messages in Hindustani in German radio's propagandistic programmes aimed at India, which began from January 1939. After returning to India, he addressed a meeting of the Hindu Mahasabha in Allahabad where he supposedly spoke more about Hitler and Germany than on the Hindu Mahasabha.²¹ Satya Deva remained loyal to the Nazis till at least May 1940, when he publicly praised the Nazis and advocated their emulation by Hindus.²² Interestingly, another surveillance report from November 1939 stated that Hiralal Gandhi, son of Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), had addressed two meetings of the *Arya Samaj* in Bihar on 4 and 5 November, and in course of one meeting, he had claimed that Hitler supported the *Arya Samaj*.²³

The DA, which had become thoroughly Nazified by the mid-1930s, also promoted the *Arya Samaj* in various ways. In 1937, Walther Wüst, then-professor of "Aryan culture and Linguistics" at the University of

¹⁹ IOR/L/PJ/12/506. Survey 15, 1939.

²⁰ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PA-AA): R10477. Auszeichnung, 7.3.1939. Unsigned.

²¹ IOR/L/PJ/12/506. Survey number 9, 1939, p. 6.

²² IOR/L/PJ/12/507. Report for the week ending May 18, 1940.

²³ IOR/L/PJ/12/506, p. 169. Report for week ending on 25.11.1939.

Munich, became the head of the India Institute (Roy 2021). He was not only a member of the Nazi party but also the SS. In 1937, Wüst became the president of the *SS-Abnenerbe*, Heinrich Himmler's organization for pseudoscientific "ancestral research" (Junginger 2008: 9).

As already mentioned, Wüst tried to use his knowledge of "Aryan India" to legitimize Nazism. He also attempted to link the India Institute of the DA, the *Arya Samaj* and the University of Munich. In 1936, he established a position of a lector of Indian languages at his department, to be occupied only by a scholarship holder of the India Institute. The two occupants of this position were Dharendra Kumar Mehta and Aryendra Sharma (1910–), respectively.²⁴ Both had received scholarships, which were jointly provided by the India Institute and the Humboldt Foundation, to write their dissertations under Wüst. Dharendra Kumar Mehta was from the Gurukul University, established by the *Arya Samaj*. Through his thesis, Mehta tried to provide academic validity to the religious education provided by the *Arya Samaj* in the schools that it controlled.²⁵ Aryendra Sharma completed his PhD on Vedic lexicography in 1940.²⁶ In the same year, he published a laudatory article on "The *Arya Samaj* and its founder" in the journal of the DA.²⁷

Wüst also tried to integrate India Institute into the network of the SS and the *Abnenerbe*. In 1938, under Wüst's leadership, *Abnenerbe* collaborated with India Institute in organizing an essay competition for post graduates of Indian Universities on "Symbols and signs in India: Meaning, Development and Life." Wüst announced at a meeting of the India Institute in 1938 that this subject was chosen "to take the Indians back to their roots."²⁸ In March 1939, another essay competition was advertised in the Indian newspapers, on the more unabashedly propagandistic title of

²⁴ Journal of the DA, *Mitteilungen*, July 1936, p. 330 mentions Mehta's occupying the position. *Mitteilungen*, April 1940 mentions Sharma as a lector, p. 147.

²⁵ *Mitteilungen*, July, 1936, p. 330. The title of Mehta's dissertation: *Methoden und Richtungen der religionspsychologischen Forschung der Gegenwart und ihre Bedeutung für das indische Bildungswesen (Methods and directions of contemporary research on religious psychology and its significance in the Indian education system)*.

²⁶ DA's journal *Deutsche Kultur im Leben der Völker* (DKLV), successor to *Mitteilungen*, April, 1940, p. 147. The title of Aryendra Sharma's dissertation: *Beiträge zur vedischen Lexikographie: Neue Wörter in Bloomfelds Vedic concordance (Contributions to Vedic lexicography: New words in Bloomfeld's Vedic concordance)*.

²⁷ DKLV, April, 1940. Aryendra Sharma: *Der Arya Samaja und sein Gründer*, p. 228–235.

²⁸ Leibnitz Institut für Zeitgeschichte, München. MA1190. Meeting of the India Institute on 27.10.1938.

“Aryan origin of the Swastika and its common usage in India and Germany” (Framke 2013: 74).

A surveillance report from September 1939 claimed that the German consulate in Calcutta worked closely with the DA in collecting nominations for a scholarship in Philology in Germany. Candidates who were members of the *Arya Samaj* or approved of its “Aryan world view” were preferred. Such candidates, the Consul General reportedly claimed, would later be of advantage to German Indian relations.²⁹ Horst Pohle, the German lector sent by the DA to Calcutta, seemed to have been the link between the *Arya Samaj* and the German Consulate in Calcutta.³⁰

Occasionally, faculty members in science subjects also wrote to the DA to plead for scholarships for their students and attesting to the candidates’ closeness to *Arya Samaj*. For example, S.N.Mukherjee, a lecturer of Physical Chemistry at the University of Calcutta, wrote to the DA on 25 August 1938, recommending his student Anil Bhusan Nandy Majumdar. The latter was a researcher in Chemistry and a “bona fide member of the *Arya Samaj*,” a criterion that was confirmed by Lakshmi Prasad, General Secretary of the *Arya Samaj* in Calcutta.³¹

A surveillance record from October 1939 quoted Vidyand Vedalkar, the secretary of *Arya Samaj* as having admitted to his connections to the German Consul in Calcutta through Horst Pohle, who allegedly instructed the *Arya Samaj* “to penetrate student and youth organizations,” presumably with the agenda of promoting Nazism.³²

The surveillance records also state that the other lector sent by the DA to Banaras, Alfred Würfel, had a close relationship with the *Arya Samaj* there.³³

HINDU MAHASABHA AND NAZISM

The surveillance records indicate that the Nazis attached more significance to the *Arya Samaj* as an instrument to propagate Nazism among the Hindus than the Hindu *Mahasabha*.³⁴ Nevertheless, the records repeatedly note that the Nazi propagandist G.L. Leszczynski was in touch with

²⁹ IOR\L\PJ\12\506. Survey number 7 of 1939.

³⁰ IOR\L\PJ\12\506. Survey number 20, 23.9.1939.

³¹ WBSA: IB File 583/39. SL. No.350, p. 3031.

³² IOR\L\PJ\12\506. Undated, October 1939.

³³ IOR\L\PJ\12\506. Survey number 7, 1939, p. 14.

³⁴ IOR\L\PJ\12\506. Survey Number 15, p. 3.

Savarkar. Leszczynski supposedly took “considerable interest in forwarding the Nazi approach to Hindus,” presumably through the *Mahasabha*.³⁵ He was also instrumental in transmitting Hindu nationalist views to the Nazi ruling elite, probably to give the Hindu *Mahasabha* a feeling of being taken seriously by the “Third Reich.” Thus, Leszczynski not only cabled a note on Roosevelt written by Savarkar to a German news agency but he also sent a copy of it to Hitler.³⁶ The Nazi propagandist was also instrumental in getting a pro-Nazi speech by Savarkar published in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on 30 November, 1938 (Casolari 2000: 223).

Hindu *Mahasabha*'s connection with the Nazis was not limited to the person of Savarkar. A letter from Indra Prakash, secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha to Leszczynski, unearthed by the colonial police after the latter's arrest in 1939, hinted at a close relationship between the two and a belief in their “common cause.”³⁷ Prakash also requested Leszczynski to send him “interesting materials” for the papers *Daily Hindu* and *Hindu Outlook*. The latter, edited by Prakash, was known for publishing pro-Nazi views.³⁸

Nazi propaganda evidently had a great effect on Padmaraj Jain, Honorary General Secretary of the Hindu *Mahasabha*, who wrote a glowing statement about Nazi Germany to the German consulate in Calcutta in March 1939. He claimed that Nazi Germany's revival of the Aryan culture, its glorification of the Swastika, its patronage of Vedic learning and championing of Indo-Germanic civilization have been welcomed by the Hindus.³⁹ The facets mentioned by Jain were in all probability the propaganda tropes used by the Nazis in their attempts at influencing the Hindus.

BUDDHIST ANTI-COLONIALISM, ARYANISM AND THE NAZIS

It is relatively little known that the Nazis tried to influence the Buddhists who were (and still are) a politically insignificant minority in India. However, Buddhism was widespread and consequently a politically relevant force in neighbouring Burma (present-day Myanmar) and Ceylon

³⁵ IOR/L/PJ/12/509. Survey dated 4.11.1939.

³⁶ WBSA: File No. 234–39 (1): Hostile foreigners who are objects of particular suspicion, p. 131.

³⁷ IOR/L/PJ/12/506. Survey Number 7, 1939, p. 7.

³⁸ IOR/L/PJ/12/506. Survey Number 10, 1939, p. 3.

³⁹ PA-AA: R10477. Report dated 25.3.1939.

(Sri Lanka) where the German consulates and Nazi party units had an entangled presence. The intermediary allegedly chosen to approach the Buddhists was the German intellectual and artist Ernst Lothar Hoffmann (1898–1985), who had assumed the name Angarika Govinda after converting to Buddhism (Fig. 11.1).

Hoffmann was born in Waldheim in Saxony.⁴⁰ He became passionately interested in Buddhist philosophy and art while studying archaeology in Italy in his early youth. In 1928, he embarked on a journey to Sri Lanka, arriving in the island in 1929. Subsequently, he met the Buddhist scholar and monk Nyanatiloka, originally a German named Anton Gueth (1878–1957). The latter would become his abbot (Winkler 1990: 13–15).

In the next few years, Hoffmann wandered extensively in the Himalayas. In the course of his travels, he met the Tibetan monk Tomo Gesche Rimpoche (1866–1936), under whose influence he founded the Buddhist order, *Arya Maitreya Mandala* in 1933 (Hecker 1995: 86–87). Meanwhile, in 1931, Hoffmann had joined the teaching faculty of *Vishwa Bharati*, the university founded by the Indian poet laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) at Shantiniketan near Calcutta.⁴¹ Hoffmann taught European languages and Buddhist philosophy at this university. He

Fig. 11.1 Lama Govinda in an internment camp in India during the Second World War. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lama_Govinda_in_an_internment_camp_during_World_War_II.jpg, marked as public domain, more details on Wikimedia. Unknown author Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Template:PD-India>)



⁴⁰NAI: Home Political-EW-1941 -10-103.

⁴¹NAI: Home Political EW-1939-NA-F-155.

continued his travels in the Indian subcontinent, including a trip to Sri Lanka with Tagore (Winkler 1990: 39–41). Hoffmann claimed in a letter to Nyanatiloka that during this trip, he lectured on Buddhism at different venues in order to raise funds for establishing a Buddhist University at Sarnath in north India, a project which was doomed to be unsuccessful due to inadequate financial backing (Hecker 1995: 170–171).

The role of Hoffmann as Nazi propagandist seemed to entail encouraging Buddhist nationalists with pronounced anti-British leanings to think that they had the support of Germany. The police in Calcutta claimed that during his visit to Sri Lanka in April 1934, Hoffmann had in all likelihood met several “agitators,” which was the colonizers’ epithet for radical anti-colonial activists. In August of the same year, Hoffmann travelled to Banaras where he allegedly associated with a Buddhist monk named Bhikshu Saranankara, who had been expelled from Bengal after being detained under the infamous Bengal Suppression of Terrorist Act of 1932.⁴² This law was frequently used by the British to clamp down on militant anti-colonial activists (cf. Ghosh 2017).

The verdict of the Calcutta Police on Hoffmann was that the monk was “a political firebrand, clever and scheming.” Hoffmann apparently had connections with the Indian anti-colonial movement as well. Surveillance records stated that he visited the Indian National Congress committee in Lucknow on one occasion. The colonial authorities suspected that the monk was on friendly terms with Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) and his family since Nehru’s daughter Indira (1917–1984) was his student at Vishwa Bharati University.⁴³

A particularly serious allegation of the colonial authorities against Hoffmann was his “strenuous attempts to obtain passport facilities” for sending U. Okhtama, “the well-known Burmese revolutionary” to Germany.⁴⁴ Okhtama was probably the same as U. Ottama (1879–1939), also known as Uttama, a politicized Buddhist monk who urged the common people of Myanmar to oppose the British government for its adverse treatment of the Buddhist monks and the ordinary people who supported Buddhism. He emerged as the leader of the GCSS (General Council of *Sangha Sameggi*), an association of monks that became a major political

⁴²NAI: Home Political EW-1939-NA-F-155.

⁴³NAI: Home Political EW-1939-NA-F-155.

⁴⁴NAI: Home Political EW-1941-NA-F-10-103.

force in Myanmar. Uttama was imprisoned several times by the colonial authorities (Taylor 2009: 183–184).

Notably, Uttama was close to the Hindu *Mahasabha*. This is not surprising since an influential circle within this party, including Savarkar, envisioned Asia as a “Hindu-Buddhist continent” from which other religious groups were to be excluded (Framke 2013: 291). Uttama was elected President of the Kanpur session of the All India Hindu Mahasabha in 1935. In his Presidential address, Uttama claimed that Buddhism was an offshoot of Hinduism (Prakash 1966: 53). This was also the view propounded by Savarkar, who considered Buddhism to be integral to Hinduism since it had originated in India. However, he considered Buddhism to be a weak and emasculated form of the masculine Aryan Hinduism (Bhatt 2001: 89).

Another aspect that Buddhism in Sri Lanka and the Hindu *Mahasabha* had in common was the trope of Aryanism. In Sri Lanka, Aryanism was often used to reverse colonial stereotype by claiming that Buddhists were superior Aryans, while Europeans (especially the British) were *mlechha*, the Sanskrit pejorative for “non-believers,” that is, barbarians (cf Anningson 2021). Thus Aryanism formed a bridge between Hindu and Buddhist nationalisms, which Nazi propaganda was keen to exploit. However, despite Hoffmann’s efforts, the colonial government of Myanmar steadfastly refused to grant Uttama a passport.⁴⁵

Hoffmann also had ties with the Nazi network in India. In 1935, he became involved in negotiations with Horst Pohle as well as Franz Thierfelder (1896–1963), the General Secretary of the DA. Pohle and Thierfelder were considering Hoffmann for the position of a teacher of German in the prospective Buddhist University at Sarnath. Hoffmann allegedly tried to use Pohle’s connections to retrieve his money, a significant sum of 10,000 Reichsmark, from a bank in Dresden. Hoffmann promised to donate 5000 Reichsmark to the DA if he received the full amount. The issue reached the Consul-General of Calcutta, who asked Pohle to write to the bank at Dresden to send the money to Hoffmann, claiming that the latter’s work was important for the DA, which, by then, had emerged as a major organ of Nazi cultural politics. Hoffmann did receive some initial payments before the war intervened.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ NAI: Home Political EW-1941-NA-F-10-103.

⁴⁶ NAI: Home Political EW-1941-NA-F-10-103. Secret Note: File 10/103/41.

After his internment in October 1940, Hoffmann concealed his negotiations with the DA since the colonial authorities considered it to be the most important vehicle for Nazi propaganda in India. The Buddhist monk also downplayed his close association with the two agents of the DA, Horst Pohle and Alfred Würfel, both of whom corroborated Hoffmann's statement that he was anti-Nazi. However, one of the surveillance records, which maintained that the three men were close associates, claimed: "If Pohle and Würfel, out and out Nazis, really thought that Govinda was anti-Nazi, they would not have taken the trouble to try and shield him as they did."⁴⁷

This statement is not without its merits. Though membership of the Nazi party was not officially required for the lecturers of the DA in the early days of Nazi rule, it was nevertheless expected that these young men should be sympathetic towards the politics of the German state (Michels 2005: 95–96). Thierfelder informally advised potential candidates to join the NSDAP, or at least National Socialist Teachers' Association (*NS Lehrerbund* or NSLB) (Scholten 2001: 98). Pohle was a member of the NSDAP and Würfel had joined the NSLB in 1934, just before coming to India.⁴⁸ It is unlikely that Hoffmann alias Govinda would have been considered for the position of a German lecturer of the DA if he was known to be in any way opposed to Nazism.

Hoffmann's links to the Nazi network are beyond doubt, even though material concerns probably played a greater role than ideological motivation on his part. In August 1939, surveillance intercepted the Nazi propaganda magazine *News in Brief* being sent to Hoffmann in Banaras from the German Consulate in Calcutta.⁴⁹

An exhibition related to Buddhist religion, arranged by Hoffmann in Delhi in 1939, was co-organized by a certain Mrs. Siddiqi who was on friendly terms with both Leszczynski and Sommer, two active members of the Nazi network.⁵⁰ According to the surveillance record, her husband was Abdul Rahman Siddiqi, who could have been identical with Abdur

⁴⁷NAI: Home Political EW-1939-NA-F-155.

⁴⁸Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv or BA) Berlin: R51\144. Pohle's correspondence shows that he was a part of the Nazi network in India. BA Berlin: R51\10128: Würfel's biographical note submitted to the Ministry of National Education, Saxony. 19.2.1939.

⁴⁹NAI: Home Political EW-1939-NA-F-155. The 'News in Brief' was supposedly the mouthpiece of the Nazified *Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst*, as stated in IOR/L/PJ/12/506. Survey 11, 1939, p. 3.

⁵⁰NAI: Home Political EW-1941-NA-F-10-103.Secret note: File 10/103/41.

Rahman Siddiqi (1887–1953), one of the founding members of the All India Muslim League. This seems probable since the record in question mentions that Siddiqi was a member of the working committee of the All India Muslim League, which demanded a separate homeland for the Indian Muslims. The record states that Siddiqi received regular visits from Horst Pohle, pointing to the Nazi outreach towards Indian Muslims, an aspect we will discuss soon.⁵¹

Hoffmann, who had become a naturalized British citizen in 1938, was nevertheless detained in the internment camp for Germans throughout the war, since the colonial authorities believed that he “possessed excellent opportunities for cloaking any activity on behalf of the enemy with his religion.”⁵² Interestingly, Hoffmann had not renounced his German citizenship even after becoming a naturalized British citizen.⁵³

The episodes concerning Ernst Schulze and Ernst Hoffmann make it clear that Hindu and Buddhist religions could be used in different ways by Nazi propagandists in India. One could, as a wandering Hindu *sannyasi* or a Buddhist *Bhikshu*, travel the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent and meet Indians from all social classes without arousing too much suspicion. A mendicant or a monk enjoyed special respect among wide sections of Indians, with which the colonial establishment did not want to interfere.

For an European convert, there was an added aura of power, since in colonial India Europeans, were perceived by both the colonial authorities as well as by the indigenous people to be a part of the ruling elite, a view that the European community strove to reinforce (Framke 2021: 103–135). Thus, as holy men and Europeans, Schulze and Hoffmann had excellent opportunities to function as mediators between the German core of the Nazi network and the indigenous elites whom Nazi propaganda aimed to reach.

NAZI PROPAGANDA AND ISLAMIC NATIONALISM

Eugene D’Souza has pointed out that while the Nazis tried to appeal to Hindus on the basis of a supposedly shared Aryan element and the Swastika, they reached out to the Muslims in India by offering praise for

⁵¹ IOR/L/PJ/ 12/506. Survey 9, 1939, p. 6.

⁵² NAI: Home Political EW-1941-NA-F-10-103.

⁵³ NAI: Home Political EW-1939-NA-F-155.

their presumed martial tendencies and by raising the issue of Palestine and the Jews. The common elements in Nazi propaganda towards all religious communities were the anti-British, anti-communist and anti-democratic sentiments (D'Souza 2000: 81–82).

Colonial surveillance records claimed that Nazi propaganda was more positively received by “Muslims” than by the “Congress.”⁵⁴ By “Muslims,” the colonial apparatus probably meant those affiliated to the All India Muslim League, which called for a division of the Indian sub-continent in order to establish a homeland for the Indian Muslims. This separatist agenda led the Muslim League to engage in a deepening conflict with the Indian National Congress, which professed to envision an undivided, secular and pluralist India.

THE “GERMAN SOCIETY” OF THE ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY

One group which seems to have been particularly susceptible to Nazi propaganda based on Islamism was a circle of Muslim academics at the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in north India. This group called itself the “German Society.” Its declared aim was to spread German language and culture. Colonial surveillance however referred to it as a “Nazi cell.”⁵⁵

The German Society was founded in 1932 by Otto Spies (1901–1981), a German scholar of “Islamic” (Arabic, Turkish and Persian) languages who joined the Arabic department of the AMU in October 1932, and Sattar Kheiri (1885–1945), the German lector at this university. Sattar and his brother Jabbar had spent a considerable length of time in Germany and Europe, in course of which they transitioned from Indian anti-colonialists and pan-Islamists into proponents of an “Indian Muslim nation” (Liebau 2019b: 358).

An idea of the activities of the newly formed German Society can be found in a letter written by Otto Spies in 1933 to the University of Bonn, which had given him a lien to join the AMU. In the letter, Spies claimed that since he belonged to “the movement” from around 1930, he saw it as his task to form a “German Society” together with Kheiri. The aim of the society, according to Spies, was to espouse the “New Germany” and

⁵⁴ IOR/L/PJ/ 12/505. Note on the Nazi Auslandsorganisation in India. 24.4.38, p. 6.

⁵⁵ NAI Home Political NA-F-111-40. ‘Nazi cell’ in Aligarh Muslim University.

counter all the “slander” that the British were allegedly fabricating in India about the Nazi regime.⁵⁶

After Spies returned to Germany in 1936, Kheiri emerged as the undisputed leader of the German Society. Surveillance records mention three other prominent members of the German Society, all professors at the AMU: Babur Mirza, Zafar Ul Hasan and Abid Ahmed Ali. All four of them had studied in Germany and three of them (except Abid Ahmed Ali) had German wives.⁵⁷

Through popular lectures and through its journals, the society projected Germany to be sympathetic to the Islamic separatism advocated by the Muslim League. This propaganda trope was presumably approved by the Nazi regime since, as we have noted, Horst Pohle was also making overtures to the Muslim League. In 1939–40, the German Society also openly engaged in anti-British propaganda and activities, for which Kheiri was arrested in July 1940. His arrest signified the formal end of the German Society.⁵⁸

By mid-1930s, the German Society attracted attention from the colonial administration for its propagation of Nazism. In 1937, the Calcutta-based British newspaper, *The Statesman* reported a “Nazi activity” organized by the German Society: Sattar Kheiri led a parade of “brown shirts” in the AMU to celebrate the birthday of the prophet Mohammad.⁵⁹ “Brown shirts” referred to the SA (*Sturmabteilung*), the notorious paramilitary unit of the Nazi party, who wore brown shirts as their uniform.

Incidentally, the German Society was not the only channel that Kheiri used to promote Nazism. Kheiri was the president of the All India Muslim League at the university and used this influential position to assert that the Germans were better disposed towards the Muslims than the British. The Muslim League of the AMU also published a pro-Nazi lecture delivered by Babar Mirza in March 1939. The title of the text was “Modern Germany: A lesson to India.”⁶⁰ Several surveillance records state that Kheiri received financial support from the German Consulate in Calcutta, indicating that he was considered by the Nazi regime to be an intermediary

⁵⁶ Archive of the University of Bonn: 1033\PFPA: Letter of Spies to the curator of the University, 19.9.33.

⁵⁷ NAI Home Political NA-F-111-40. ‘Nazi cell’ in Aligarh Muslim University, p. 52.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ NAI: Home Political NA 1939-F21-65-39. Consideration of the steps to be taken to combat the Nazi activities in the Aligarh Muslim University, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

between the Nazi network and the Islamic separatists in India.⁶¹ Kheiri was also associated with the DA, particularly towards the end of the 1930s.⁶²

Notably, one of the members of German Society, Niaz Ahmad Khan, had received his PhD in Engineering from the Technical University of Munich in 1933 with help from Franz Thierfelder of the DA. Thierfelder justified this help to Karl Kapp (1889–1947), then German Consul General in Bombay, by claiming that Ahmad would turn out to be a useful intermediary between the DA and the Indian Muslims.⁶³ Niaz Ahmed seemed to have fulfilled this expectation, since a surveillance record described him as a “pro-Nazi propagandist.”⁶⁴

Apart from financial assistance, Kheiri also received books from Germany through the German consulate in Calcutta. The library of the AMU contained a large number of books about the ideological premises of Nazism, which Kheiri allegedly distributed among his students so that he could impress upon them that Nazism and Islam were compatible.⁶⁵

The combination of Islamic nationalism and Nazi propaganda, as articulated by the German Society, was best illustrated through the journals it published. These were *The Journal of the German Society*, which appeared from 1934 to 1936, and its successor, the *Spirit of the Time*, which was published in 1938–1939.

The objectives of the German Society, including the political aspect, were stated in the editorial of the first issue of journal, published in December 1934. The editorial claimed that the society aimed at the study and furtherance of the German language and culture, and it aspired to “enlighten the readers about the great forces which are now at work in changing the world-outlook in Germany.”⁶⁶

Outright propaganda of Nazi Germany began from the second issue (January 1935) through articles such as “What is Hitler Youth” and “Germany’s ‘Labour Service.’”⁶⁷ Most of the articles were written by

⁶¹ NAI Home Political NA-F-111-40, p. 55. Also, PA-AA: R64198. Kheiri’s acknowledge of the receipt of 300 Reichsmark from the German Consulate in Calcutta.

⁶² NAI Home Political NA-F-111-40, p. 55–56.

⁶³ BA Berlin. R51\16. Notice on Niaz Ahmed Khan’s PhD. Dated 16.8.1933. Thierfelder’s letter to Consul General Kapp, 19.8.1933.

⁶⁴ NAI Home Political NA-F-111-40, p. 94.

⁶⁵ NAI Home Political NA-F-111-40, p. 57.

⁶⁶ Journal of German Society, Vol.1, No.1. December 1934, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Journal of German Society, Vol. 1, No.2. January 1935. What is Hitler Youth? p. 5–6. ‘Germany’s ‘Labour Service’ and ‘House of Comradeship’.’ p. 7–8.

Kheiri. He not only attempted to establish parallels between Nazism and Islam but also tried to relate the concerns of the Indian Muslims to those of the “New Germany.”

Every subsequent issue of the journal was replete with articles glorifying National Socialism. Many of these texts were written by Kheiri. Articles by German authors, evidently adapted and translated from German publications, also appeared regularly. The German texts received by Kheiri came from the German Consulate of Calcutta and sometimes directly from various agencies in Germany. Such literature included the Nazified magazine, *Geist der Zeit* to which the successor to the journal, *Spirit of the Time* probably owed its name (Fig. 11.2).⁶⁸

It is not clear why the successor to *Journal of the German Society*, appearing after a hiatus of two years, was called the *Spirit of the Time*. Fatma Khanem, the German wife of Sattar Kheiri who had converted to Islam, was officially the editor of the *Spirit of the Time*. Using her name was probably an eyewash to avoid unfavourable attention from the colonial authorities.⁶⁹

Unlike its predecessor, the *Spirit of the Time* focussed more on Islamic nationalism as it played out in India. The journal was quite pronouncedly anti-democratic and anti-Communist. It was not directly anti-British till about the middle of 1939, when it started to critique the British Empire not only in respect to India but in the spirit of pan-Islamism. Such critique included the Nazi propaganda that the British were inflicting “the pest of the Jews” on Palestine.⁷⁰

The *Spirit of the Time* also openly championed the Muslim League’s political agenda. Incidentally, in 1936, the Muslim League had passed a resolution on Palestine, expressing its solidarity for the Arabs and criticizing the British for their policy (Roland 1998: 199). This resolution was not made under the influence of the Nazis, but it played in the hands of the Nazis who made good use of it in the propaganda aimed at Muslims in India.⁷¹

The connection of the Nazi network in India with the German Society is evident from the advertisements published in the magazines. All the

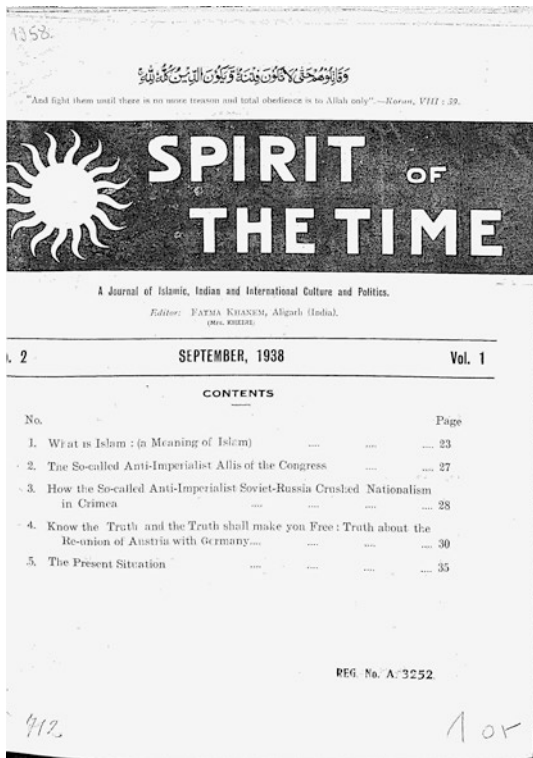
⁶⁸ NAI Home Political NA-F-111-40, p. 54.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁷⁰ Spirit of the time. No. 9, Vol.1. April, 1939. ‘Thou Hypocrite!’ p. 141–142, here: p. 141.

⁷¹ NAI: External Affairs Dept (EAD). F.No. 665-X\38. Note by DIB on an examination of the activities of the Auslandsorganisation of the NSDAP generally and in India, p. 13.

Fig. 11.2 *Spirit of the Time*, September 1938
(https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schwarze_Sonne)



advertisements were from German firms operating in India, like Allianz and Stuttgarter, AEG and Siemens. Considering that the subscription of these magazines was restricted to a very limited circle of Muslims and Germans in India and abroad, the colonial authorities assumed that these commercial organizations were under political pressure to spend on this particular vehicle of propaganda.⁷² It is also possible these firms supported the mouthpiece of the German Society out of ideological conviction since many of their employees were Nazi party members. However, commercial rationale soon triumphed over politics. The German firms refused to invest

⁷²NAI Home Political NA-F-111-40, p. 2; In November 1938, only 250 copies of the magazine were circulated. The same record explains the investment of the firms in this paper by pointing to 'political pressure,' p. 59.

in the *Spirit of the time* from July 1939, since they were apprehensive of the imminent war. This led to an end of the publication.⁷³

DECLINE OF RELIGION BASED PROPAGANDA

It is evident that except in the case of Buddhist nationalists, religion-based Nazi propaganda emphasized more on the virtues of Nazism than on anti-colonialism. This began to change from 1939, when German radio broadcasts from Berlin started calling for Hindu-Muslim unity and urged both communities to fight the British colonialists together. From September 1939, German broadcasts began to denounce the Muslim League's call for a separate homeland—Pakistan, calling it a ploy of the British to divide the Hindus and Muslims. By then, the Muslim League had officially condemned the “aggressive campaigns” of Germany.⁷⁴

This change in German policy resulted from a conscious redirection of German propaganda under the foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop (1893–1946), who assumed office in 1938. Under his influence, German propaganda began to express its strategic support for the Indian anti-colonial movement led by Gandhi and the Indian National Congress (Kuhlmann 2003: 69–70). This was ironical, since in March 1939, the INC officially declared its opposition to imperialism and fascism alike (Framke and Tschurenev 2018: 74). This open rejection was ignored by the German propaganda.

Nazi Germany's change of policy was partially due to Ribbentrop's anti-British predilections but mainly due to political pragmatism. The INC, led by Gandhi, was in a unique position to arouse mass-based political disturbances, which could impede the British Empire's war efforts against Germany. Nevertheless, at least during the initial years of the war, religion-based propaganda sporadically entered different areas of India, often in the form of posters and pamphlets. In 1940, posters displaying Nazi Swastika or *Hakenkreuz* and urging the people to join the INC appeared in different areas of Bombay. Surveillance records claim that they were printed in Germany and posted from Greece.⁷⁵ Also in 1940, bulletins dispatched from Greece to the editors of various newspapers in

⁷³ NAI Home Political NA-F-111-40, p. 55.

⁷⁴ IOR/L/PJ/12/507. Survey No. 6, 1940.

⁷⁵ IOR/L/PJ/12/507. Report ending on 27.1.1940.

Myanmar described how Lawrence of Arabia and the Muslim world were let down by England during the last war.⁷⁶

Occasional pamphlets containing Nazi propaganda based on Islam kept entering India for a longer time during the war than the propaganda aimed at other religious groups. Such propaganda in print was actually not meant for India. They were spin-offs from the Nazi propaganda based on Islam, which was intended primarily for countries in the Middle East and North Africa (Motadel 2014: 49).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to provide some glimpses into how religion-based approaches figured in Nazi propaganda in India from 1933 to 1939, after which the deployment of religious tropes was no longer considered politically rewarding by the Nazi authorities. The variety in the propaganda tropes used to attract diverse religious communities is not surprising, since it is well known that Nazi propaganda could transform itself, chameleon like, to suit its target audience.

The chapter has pointed to several uses of Hindu and Buddhist religions by Nazi propaganda in India. One is the role of Aryanism, which was used by Nazi propagandists to appeal to various Hindu groups as well as Buddhist nationalists. This strategy had some effect among the more militant, right-wing elements in the *Arya Samaj* and the Hindu *Mahasabha*, who belonged to the extreme right of an Indian political spectrum dominated by the INC. For historians, the significance of such propaganda lies not in their effectiveness but in their crafty association of Aryanism, Hindu revivalism, political Hinduism and Buddhist nationalism for promoting Nazi Germany.

Another, apparently less successful strategy of the Nazi network was to use religion to disguise political propaganda among Indians and Sri Lankans. The efforts to include educated Hindus in the Nazi network through the *Gaudiya* Mission did not appear to be very productive. The purported endeavours of Hoffmann to spread Germany's influence among the nationalist-minded Buddhist monks of Sri Lanka were rendered unsuccessful by the colonial government.

Nazi propaganda resonated well with the German Society of the Aligarh Muslim University. However, though the society tried—and to some extent succeeded—to connect Nazi propaganda with the politics of

⁷⁶IOR/L/PJ/12/507. Survey number 3, 1940, p. 3.

Muslim separatism in the Indian subcontinent, this success did not last long, as we have noted.

This chapter thus points to the complex entanglements—voluntary or otherwise—of ideological and material concerns on the part of the Nazi network and its associates in embarking on a brand of cultural politics that made use of different religions in the Indian subcontinent. This brand of cultural politics, as the chapter shows, was fully dependent on the priorities set by the Nazi regime.

Finally, it is imperative to remember that most Indians rejected the Nazi propaganda overtures, irrespective of the religious or secular garbs in which they were presented. It is a significant and proud heritage that today's India would do well to call to mind.

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