



A POETICS OF DECOLONIZATION

LITERARY ENTANGLEMENTS, TEXTUAL SOLIDARITIES, AND THE PROGRESSIVE WRITERS' MOVEMENT, SOUTH-ASIA, C. 1934-1989

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Description

On the evening of November 23, 1934, a group of Indian students met in the backroom of the Nanking restaurant in London to lay the foundations for a Progressive Writers' Association (PWA). Critically reflecting on their shared experience as colonized subjects in the metropole, they sought to outline the role that writers and artists would play in the struggle to free the Indian subcontinent from British rule. While born out of the political agitations for Indian independence, the PWA aligned themselves to a global movement against imperialism and fascism. Active from the 1930s to the 1980s, its members published journals and newspapers; brought into their fold poets, painters, and performers through different forums; and built networks of Third World solidarity with other Asian and African artists across territorial borders.

My project seeks to chart the political, personal, and transnational journeys of the PWA, its members, and affiliated collectives. Tracing these histories allows us to grasp how writers, artists, and performers crafted visions for a decolonial world free from colonial domination, imperial rule, and fascist repression. Methodologically, my project weaves together public, print, and personal archives to examine a vibrant body of textual material including surveillance reports, manifestoes, bulletins, private correspondences, conference proceedings, newspapers, and journals.

Doing so, my dissertation aims to reveal new lines of affiliations, associations, and collaborations that arose and spread across interwar London, decolonizing South-Asia, and postcolonial Afro-Asia. In looking back at the worldly, relational, and transnational aspirations of the PWA, my dissertation will recover the rich imaginations of postcolonial belonging, freedom, and subjectivity that decolonization spanned beyond the realm of state-relations and narratives of anticolonial nationalisms.

