

# Archives & Cold War

The book contains, among other subjects, erudite essays on the Sino-Soviet alliance and Gorbachev's East Asia policy during 1985-1991. BY A.G. NOORANI

INDIAN writers on international affairs have been remiss in their neglect of the stupendous achievements of the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP). Established by the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington, DC, in 1991, it actively supports "the full and prompt release of historical materials by governments" on all sides of the Cold War. It is unlikely to receive the slightest help in this noble enterprise from India, easily the most illiberal state in the entire democratic world in its archives policy. It is abetted by historians who do not wage a campaign for its reversal but content themselves with brave, high-sounding resolutions at the annual History Congress.

The CWIHP publishes a *CWIHP Bulletin* and *Working Papers*, all based on archival disclosures in the United States, Russia, China and a few other countries. It is directed by Dr Christian F. Ostermann. Anyone who reads its publications will be struck by the light they throw on China's relations with India, including its Soviet

dimension, and the course of the Cold War. That, of course, is a subject in which we are not interested, self-obsessed as we are. Indian writing and thinking view international relations through the prism of perceived Indian interests, exclusively.

The CWIHP organises conferences at which papers based on solid research are read. This volume is the outcome of three conferences and contains erudite essays on the Sino-Soviet alliance; the foreign policies of China, Japan and the two Koreas; Mikhail Gorbachev's East Asia policy during 1985-1991, and much else. Much conventional wisdom lies battered on the wayside. The editor, Dr Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, writes an introductory overview of East Asia, which he aptly



## BOOK FACTS

**The Cold War in East Asia 1945-1991** edited by Tsuyoshi Hasegawa; Woodrow Wilson Centre Press and Stanford University Press; pages 340.

calls "the Second Significant Front of the Cold War". This new intellectual discipline, if one may call it so with some exaggeration, has thrown up scholars of note whose writings one reads avidly; to name a few: Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Lorenz Luthi, Ilya V. Gaiduk and Vladislav Zubok besides Ostermann and Hasegawa.

American scholars teamed with scholars in Russia and other countries to produce studies that opened new vistas. One essay in this instructive volume deserves particular mention. It is Zubok's contribution on Gorbachev's East Asia policy. He led the country towards a rapprochement with China. The palm goes to leaders who lead, not to the ones who drift along in the comfort of an impasse. □



MIKHAIL GORBACHEV, AND wife Raisa, with Deng Xiaoping in Beijing in May 1989.

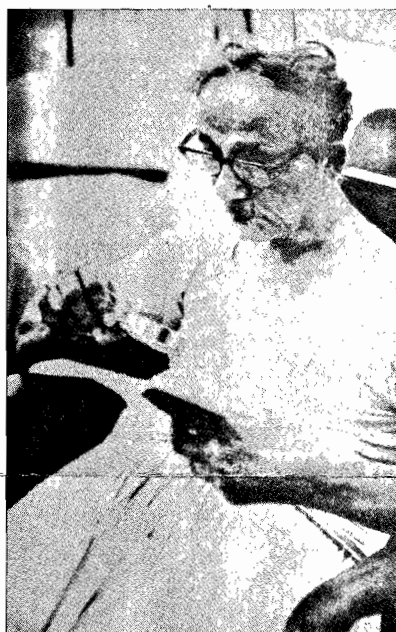
rir Mukti Kon Pathe, or Which is the Road to Women's Emancipation?). This is at a time when Gandhi developed a re-engineered patriarchy, with women to enter the national movement but not as independent actors; they would come in the role of Sita ("it is your image we worship in the temples," he said). The communists' new ideas of social interaction made them both beloved for their eccentricities and for their social generosity but also victims of gossip for their unusual or questionable lifestyles.

# WRITING ABOUT COMMUNISM

Suchetana Chattopadhyay's history of the early years of Muzaffar Ahmad's career, therefore, becomes as much a history of the early years of the communist movement. It could not be otherwise. Gramsci alerts us, in his *Prison Notebooks*, that "the history of any given party can only emerge from the complex portrayal of the totality of society and state (often with international ramifications too). Hence it may be said that to write the history of a party means nothing less than to write the general history of a country from a monographic viewpoint, in order to highlight a particular aspect of it."

The author's task is not to write the history of the emergence of the Communist Party, but that is precisely what she has done, and she has located it in all of Gramsci's methodological particulars, attending to the dynamic between the people and the political economy, aware of the political formations that stood just outside the optic of the early communists, immersed in the complex battle between Muzaffar's circle, the granite block that opposed anti-colonialism and the nationalists. What we have here is adherence to the Marxist protocol of plotting the dialectical relationship between events and political economy, but written with an enviable elegance.

Indian history-writing has typically ignored the activities of the communists. The rise of Hindutva since the 1980s created a flurry of research activity to understand the social roots of Hindu revivalism and then of the way



MUZAFFAR AHMAD in the late 1960s.

the formations of the Hindu Right prepared the terrain for their electoral explosion in the 1980s. It has been assumed in the first two decades after 1947 that the Hindu Right had been caged, and so history-writing tended to minimise its importance. Much has changed since then, and there is now an overwhelming corpus of work on the Hindu Right and its intellectual life (we have all read M.S. Golwalkar, whereas he would not have been read in his own day, largely because his writing is tedious and his logic is miserable).

There is, however, silence on the role of the communists in Indian history. Apart from too few memoirs of communist leaders and a few collections of their writings, as well as the collections of communist public documents, little is written about the parties and their impact. There are, of course, Cold War variety books, and a few books that do their very best to explore the work of the communists but cannot help but be repelled by their own prior prejudices.

The impact of the Subaltern Studies Group, one would have thought, might have revived the interest in the

Indian Left, but it had the opposite effect: all the fragments of the Indian polity make their appearance, but the analytical fragment of "class" is almost seen as alien to the project as does the institutional formation of the Left. Muzaffar tackled this view in 1926, in an essay called Sreni Sangram (Class Struggle), where he pointed out that class is not a foreign idea, since "class struggle exists in society because classes exist".

Trade union activity and communist organising is barely referred to in this scholarship – a gap that is all the more stunning if one knows the immense contribution made by ordinary trade unionists and communists in the lives of the vast majority of the population (into the shadow of history will go people such as Vidya Munshi and M. Singaravelan, B. Srinivasa Rao and Feroz-ud-din Mansur, as well as the remarkable Dada Amir Haidar Khan).

Muzaffar's party-building activities were disrupted in 1929 by state repression (he and 30 others were arrested and taken to Meerut for a trial that ran until 1933). Suchetana Chattopadhyay gives us a full sense of the massive intervention by the state into the lives of the radicals – with their mail searched, their friends harassed, informers on their tail, and jail as a constant theme.

The Meerut arrests effectively picked up most of the leadership and many of the main organisers. But this did little to stop the commitment of people like Muzaffar and Abdul Halim, one within jail and the other outside. Their relentlessness prepared the terrain for the transference of the allegiance of the peasantry from the agrarian populists and of the working class from the Congress-led unions to the Communist Party and its mass affiliates. That was to come in the period that sits outside this book.

Suchetana Chattopadhyay has the historical imagination capable of tackling the crucial period that follows, when the activities of the communists become more central to the life of Bengal, and of course India. I am waiting for that volume. □