Abstract

The 1940s in Indian history have usually been studied in terms of three frameworks: the transfer of power by the British government; the achievement of independence by Indian nationalists; and the partition of the territory into the new nation-states of India and Pakistan. By analyzing these years in India in terms of state expansion, I develop a fresh perspective on a period hitherto depicted in different terms. Looking at the state’s personnel, policies, social reach, coercive apparatus, resources, equipment and ambition, reveals that the Second World War initiated a transformation which was multifaceted and enduring. Our framework of state expansion allows us to connect colonial and postcolonial history. If stretched beyond a narrow time frame to the whole of the twentieth century, the framework also allows us to assemble aspects of Indian history, politics, economic planning, sociology and public administration, under a single conceptual roof.

About the Speaker

Indivar Kamtekar is Associate Professor of modern history in the Centre for Historical Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University. He has served on the faculty of JNU since 1991. He has also taught at the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta; the National University of Singapore; the University of Göttingen; the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, and Heidelberg University. Prof. Kamtekar has co-authored, with the photographer Aditya Arya, a book titled History in the Making: The Visual Archives of Kulwant Roy. He is the modern history editor of the journal Studies in History. He has been a member of the Indian Historical Records Commission, and of the editorial board of the journal Modern Asian Studies. His reinterpretation of the history of the 1940s, as a time of widening class and regional divisions within India, and the differential impact of the Second World War both nationally and internationally, was published in the fiftieth anniversary special issue the journal Past and Present. Prof. Kamtekar holds a B.Sc. in Physics from Delhi University, an M.A. from Jawaharlal Nehru University, and a Ph.D. from Cambridge.

A Fourth Framework:
Reinterpreting the 1940s in India

a talk by

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