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History of Science and Technology

King's College London

Born in India

Studied History of Science and Technology at Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Politics of Asia and Africa at the University of London, and Indian Studies at the University of Bombay

FELLOWSHIP
EURIAS-Fellow

FOCUS

PROJECT

Statistics, State and Society in India

The creation and stabilisation of authority, also of territorial states, by mobilising scientific knowledge, is an important question in the history of science, and we stand to gain a new perspective on these processes by studying India. Theodore Porter, a historian of statistics (and Fellow of this year), has argued that the rise of quantification in social and economic investigation is not necessarily because of its success in the study of nature. On the contrary, he argues, quantification grows from "attempts to develop a strategy of impersonality in response to pressures from outside". Taking Porter's argument as a point of departure, I would like to map the "pressures" that contributed to creating the space, specifically for statistics, and more generally for objectivity and quantification, as obvious strategies to understand and explain the subcontinent.

Recommended Reading

Phalkey, Jahnavi. "Introduction: Science, History and Modern India." *Isis* 104 (June 2013).

-. "Not only Smashing Atoms: Nuclear Physics at the University Science College, Calcutta, 1938-1948." In *Science and Modern India: An Institutional History c. 1784-1947*, edited by Uma Dasgupta. New Delhi: Pearson Education, 2010.

Political Arithmetic, Progress, and Productivity in India

The creation and stabilisation of authority, also of territorial states, by mobilising scientific knowledge is an important question in the history of science. Theodore Porter, a historian of statistics (and a Fellow of this year), has argued that the rise of quantification in social and economic investigation is not necessarily because of its success in the study of nature. On the contrary, he argues, quantification grows from "attempts to develop a strategy of impersonality in response to pressures from outside". Taking Porter's argument as a point of departure, I would like to map the processes that contributed to creating the space specifically for statistics, and more generally for objectivity and quantification as obvious strategies to understand and explain the subcontinent.

I study national income accounting on the Indian subcontinent through three key episodes beginning in the late nineteenth century and ending in the middle of the twentieth century. One aspect of these episodes is their ability to narrate a global history of empire, nation, and sovereign where they intersect with the histories of quantification. The other important aspect of these episodes is their collective entanglement with the history of liberalism and its decline on the subcontinent.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Phalkey, Jahnavi (Cambridge, 2016)

Science of giants : China and India in the twentieth century

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<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=898409438>

Phalkey, Jahnavi (New Delhi, 2015)

Key concepts in modern Indian studies

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Phalkey, Jahnavi (2013)

How may we study science and the state in postcolonial India?

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Phalkey, Jahnavi (Ranikhet, 2013)

Atomic state : big science in twentieth-century India

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The Indian century

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=76965424X>

Phalkey, Jahnavi (Delhi, 2011)

Not only smashing atoms : nuclear physics and the University Science College, Calcutta, 1938-1948

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=827941099>