



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND
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SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE



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Department of Modern South Asian History

Colloquium

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Tuesdays, 4pm, CET, on zoom

Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86795299661>

Please register at history@sai.uni-heidelberg.de

“One fifth of the World’s Boyhood”: American ‘Boyology’ and the YMCA’s work with early adolescents in India’

by

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The largely US-led and financed Indian YMCA (or ‘Y’) launched a separate Boys’ Department in 1901. The Y’s boys’ work scheme, designed to channel the energy of Indian Youth into healthy directions, reached the peak of its influence during the two decades preceding the independence in 1947. In this talk, I will reconstruct the wider transnational trends that led to the new attention to boys. The focus is on the medico-sociological American discourse of ‘boyology’, which can be discerned in contemporary manuals designed for social workers and educators as well as in their practical programs. This quasi-scientific approach was seen as superior British colonial schemes, because it allegedly fostered the boys’ capacity for ‘self-government’ and democracy.

The close analysis of Indo-US entanglements in the field of ‘informal education’ undertaken in this case study, allows to assess how both global currents in the perception of ‘boyhood’ and adolescence as well as transnationally circulating models character building, habit formation and citizenship training played out in the Indian subcontinent, leaving many traces in the postcolonial societies of the region.