

The long way to Indo-Soviet friendship:

Overcoming anti-communism in the Indian Foreign Service 1946-1962

From the hindsight, the axis between Moscow and Delhi appears as a basic element of the Cold War. Actually, it took more than one-and-half decades from 1947 until India had recalibrated its stand in international politics away from a clearly pro-Western position. Although Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his advisor V.K. Krishna Menon were keen to establish close relations even before independence, it was not only Stalin's hostile attitude that came in the way. The core of the newly established India Foreign Service was recruited from the British trained and staunchly anti-communist Indian Civil Service. The talk is going to investigate how the initial anti-communist attitude of India's ambassadors softened up in the course of the years. Whereas Nehru's sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit refused to see Stalin and kept to Western diplomats, her somewhat eccentric successor Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan won the interest of the Secretary General. Only with the appointment of K.P.S. Menon – together with a turn in Soviet foreign policy – India opened up towards the USSR, the new ambassador functioning as a sort of interpreter between two political worlds. When with Subimal Dutt a well-known anti-communist was sent to Moscow in 1961, Khrushchev feared that the warming of bilateral relations would come to an end, only to learn that India over the years had developed a rather emotional than rational bond with Moscow.