Abstract
As India rises, there is growing interest in understanding what it considers the nature and purpose of international politics to be. Previously, this question was answered by referring to the renunciatory morals articulated by the figures such as Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru who led India to independence in 1947. However, with India now bidding for greater power and influence, these ideals do not seem as germane today. So where has India’s ambition emerged from? The paucity of historical evidence has led observers to conclude that it constitutes a radical departure from the past. This view is mistaken, however. Drawing on extensive archival research, this talk brings to light a wealth of documents, including essays, letters, and pamphlets that are transforming our understanding of modern India. These materials reveal that the contest between pragmatism and idealism is not a new development. India’s tentative forays into traditional great power politics can be traced back to the nineteenth century when a divide appeared between those who urged India to emulate the great powers, and those who, having grown disenchanted with avarice and violence, urged India to turn inwards. A clearer sense of this history will help observers better grasp the sources of India’s international conduct today.

About the Speaker
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