



Call for Proposals – ‘Timely Histories’ Conference organised by ZMO and CSDS New Delhi, 12–14 October, 2022 (Tentative)

This conference, that is part of the 5-year ERC project [‘Timely Histories: A Social History of Time in South Asia’](#) (hosted at [ZMO](#), Berlin), invites contributions on the history of temporality in early modern and modern South Asia. We are interested in going beyond the conception of time as a homogeneous substratum of all being and re-conceiving it more as a dynamic object and medium of historical processes, practically entangled with varying modes of time reckoning and temporal cultures, techniques and epistemes.

The historical and the everyday

Scholarly works on the relationship between South Asian subjects and temporal orders have often concentrated on the problem of historical time. We encourage applicants to relate ‘macrotemporal’ orders of epic, millenarian, ‘modern’ but also utopian or dystopian modes of considering historical embeddedness to more quotidian ways of making time a part of the lives and livelihoods of ordinary people. Quotidian temporal existence could follow from the use of chronometric instruments like the water clock, the almanac, mechanical clocks, the more ‘modern’ pocket-watches, clock towers and calendars. They could also follow from knowledges of astronomy and astrology and from interactions between courtly, fiscal and/or bureaucratic temporal regimes and popular modes of living. This could include the mapping of temporal orderings at spaces such as factory, school, and barracks, or through aspects of governmentality and time-discipline. Important here is to also reflect on the histories of certain knowledgeable actors—astrologers, almanac readers, diviners, but also inspectors, teachers, technicians and the like—who mediated between ‘time’ and ‘society’.

Agrarian time

We welcome papers that look at the temporal(re-)configuration of agrarian systems and practices across South Asia in tandem with property and tenancy regimes, connected markets, moving populations and ecological rhythms and their technological remaking. We are also interested in understanding how the agrarian order functioned through combinations of social practices of faith-based prognostication, expanding credit relations, ritual participation in festivals, marriages amongst other things. This might help bring new

attention to the question of temporality in agrarian histories of South Asia that remain largely focussed on the reorganisation of space, territoriality and commodity production.

Technology and Standardization

In the nineteenth century both rural and urban regions of South Asia came under the ambit of a set of new technologies and systems of transportation and communication like the railways, the telegraphs and the colonial postal system. How did such connecting technologies serve to standardize(?)/braid together/disaggregate various strands of temporal existence within the life-cycles of colonial and/or postcolonial subjects? Given that the railways or the telegraphs in colonial India hardly operated on a blank slate, how did the specific temporalities of technological 'innovation' relate to existing modes of transport and communication? Did the coming of 'speed' also regenerate a new experience of 'delay'? What are the ways in which we can think of doing social histories of key time-centric terms such as punctuality and unpunctuality, waiting and arrival? Further, did the temporal recasting of both travel and labouring lives amount to particular kinds of social (caste and religion-wise) and gendered division/hierarchisation?

Working time/legal time/futuristic time

The factory, the mine or the plantation presumably reinforced specific temporal settings and expectations of work both on the basis of new clock technology as well as by recruitment practices mediated through necessary intermediaries negotiating the variable cycles of migration from the countryside. But what also played a crucial role in making such coordination possible was the legal formatting of relations of work, business, credit, which broadly impinged upon everyday social life. Legal formats had their own temporal standards to offer, not only for industry but also in a range of service work. By the twentieth century, the colonial order inaugurated minimal protective instruments by way of work-time regulation, pensions and insurance. We remain interested in exploring such standards and instruments and more generally the work of law and regulation in the re-crafting of lives of working subjects, their expectations from the state and also increasingly from a possibly new dimension of the future. We also invite contributions that chart the state of the home as a unit of temporal reorganization vis-à-vis changes wrought in the workplace. Further, how did the growing use of money-instruments (life insurance and pension for instance) alter the meaning of family and kinship and social life? How did they shape the emergence of a new idea of future and perceptions of the past, if it so happened?

Mediatic/Infrastructural time

We are also interested in how new mediatic and infrastructural forms introduced since the mid-nineteenth century inflected the understanding and practice of time. The wide-scale use of print and photographic technology in South Asia pushes us towards asking what mechanical reproduction could do to the temporalities of dissemination and comprehension of ideas and images. For example, how were extant temporal imaginaries like that of religious epics rearticulated through the moving (cinematic) image? We also invite contributions that will attempt to analyse how the consumption of new media (radio,

cinema, theatre) was retrofitted into particular temporal slots of communal and familial life. Similar attention could also be paid to newer energy forms like that of electricity. How did this 'new light' change social and economic practices? The histories of night, darkness and lighting are part of social histories of time, which needs close empirical investigation. New infrastructural forms like electrical networks also speak to other kinds of temporalities, like that of futuristic nationalist planning.

Alongside such concerns, we list here some additional suggested themes (by no means exhaustive):

- The politics of chronometry
- Time experts and their social power
- Time and its monetary entanglements
- The time of commerce/merchants' time
- Capitalist temporalities in South Asia
- The distinction of time-orientation and task-orientation in South Asia
- Contract and time/credit and time
- The migrants' time
- The caste of time/the time of caste
- The stakes of temporal 'primitivisms'
- Gender and its temporal reconfigurations
- Environmental temporalities
- Seasons and South Asian lives
- Property, weather and ritual in agriculture
- Infrastructure and time
- Religious temporalities
- The time of planning regimes/The time of governmentality
- Insurance, social protection and time
- South Asian futurisms
- Literary temporalities as social practices
- Revolutionary temporalities

We are inviting abstracts not longer than a page including a bio note of 2-3 lines. All conditions permitting, the conference will be held in person in New Delhi at CSDS (12–14 October, 2022). We will offer support towards travel and accommodation expenses of selected participants.

The deadline for receiving the abstract is **15 May, 2022**. Please mail your abstract to timely.histories@gmail.com with the subject line “**ZMO-CSDS Time Conference abstract**”. The longer final paper will be requested closer to the conference dates for circulation amongst participants and discussants.

