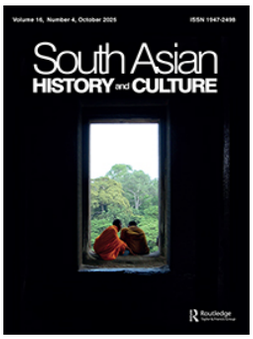

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Introduction: time, temporalities, and social practices in South Asia

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces a Special Issue that brings together interdisciplinary studies—historical, anthropological, sociological, and literary—to examine time and temporality in South Asia. It advances the argument that time, as a foundational dimension of human experience, and temporality, as its lived expression, are best understood as socially constituted, and embedded in everyday relationships and practices. Individually, the essays examine macro-orderings of time shaped by natural, economic, and political structures, while elucidating how individuals and collectives engage with and reconstitute these temporal regimes in socially situated ways. Not stopping at narrating the plurality of temporal experiences, the Issue offers critical insight into time's relationship with power, value, affect, and the like. The Issue also departs from two dominant approaches to time in South Asian studies. First, it moves beyond an exclusive focus on canonical time-determining devices such as the clocks and the railways, and instead highlights how they and other material objects performed time-keeping functions in a socially contested manner. Second, it distinguishes temporality from an overemphasis on historicity that has characterised thinking around time in South Asian writing. This Issue recentres temporality through themes of work-time, ecology, governance, religiosity, and agrarian processes as lived practices of social life.

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I. Time and temporality as human phenomena

This Special Issue (to be published in two parts in this journal) brings together a range of studies from the vantage points of multiple disciplines and methodologies – historical, anthropological, literary – to examine the social constitution of time and temporality in India. The period which these articles collectively cover range from the early nineteenth century to the postcolonial period, and down to the contemporary. The thematic focus, encompassing case studies on industrial and agrarian, ecological and bureaucratic, and cultural and religious settings, has deliberately been kept wide to offer a new perspective on studying time as a component of varied social and historical processes beyond, say, a narrow focus in which the journey of time is often

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explored through investigation of technology or at a few chosen sites such as the factory.

The contributors approach this social constitution of time first as oriented around broader economic and political orders of the state, capital, institutions, and community in the subcontinent. The second and more significant point of departure for these contributions, and our larger objective as editors, is to bring to light, on a more granular terrain, how actual actors as individuals, subjects, and collectives engage and/or reconstitute their macro-ordering with time through their quotidian practices. Our argument is that such an analytic allows us to grasp how both time, as something of a foundational dimension of human and planetary existence, as well as temporality, as the more contingent texturing of this dimension embedded in the realm of social relationships and lived experiences, are better understood through actual empirical exploration in/of the domain of worldly existence.[1] Through such explorations, the contributors to this Issue point not simply to what time and temporality mean by themselves, but also open up myriad human phenomena related to affect, power, value, ideology, ecology, religiosity, everyday life and the like for critical scrutiny.

The temporalization of modern lives in South Asia is not entirely understudied. A few insightful contributions have centred on the problem of work for instance, in offices, factories, and homes of colonial India to show the variegated engagement between employers and workers around the issues of clock-time, employment, customary practices, recruitment, etc.[2] Another significant field of intervention has been about time-standardization through the introduction of railways. Once again, this has yielded rich insights on plural outcomes of these processes in social lives of South Asians.[3] There has also been a new interest in thinking through the ways of conceptualizing political time as revolutionary future in South Asia.[4]

These works have indicated a rich possibility of addressing the problematic of time and temporality in relation to everyday life in South Asia. But arguably, there is little by way of connecting this problem across the disparate periods of colonial rule, decolonization, and the contemporary to yield a more synthetic picture. There is also arguably a tendency in some of this literature to take as an explicit point of departure, the role of exemplary or canonical devices or technologies like mechanical clocks and railways, for instance. We posit here that this particular kind of device-centrism can possibly constrain the wide field of the possibility of investigating temporal regimes and cultures.

II. Beyond device-centrism

Three points can be registered here to articulate our urge to go beyond device-centrism. Firstly, when a device, especially canonical ones like the mechanical clock, Gregorian calendar, or railways, is privileged as the main optic to study time, particularly in a colonial society, then the risk of reducing that society's history either to narratives of absence or failure on the one hand (especially as an index of modernization) or presence or success of the device on the other, looms large. On a second and more philosophical note, a broader manifestation through technics, following Bernard Stiegler, could indeed be at the root of both becoming human (hominization) as well as the genesis of

temporality.[5] Yet this should actually push us to explore various kinds of material manifestations by which time becomes relevant as human phenomena, not limited to typical metrological (and institutional) technics associated obviously with time-keeping and standardization. Clock or calendrical time, or industrial discipline thus jostles for scope with floods, emotions, pilgrimage, ego-documents (and other allied technics) in this Issue. On a third count, once the presence, functioning, usage, and effects of the device is placed within the existing temporal practices of a society, a more-rounded history of time and temporality becomes possible. However, in doing so if our focus still remains strictly on devices, institutions, technologies, and histories of measurement and discipline, we would still miss the granular history of time as constituting various social, cultural, and economic practices.[6]

Much ink has already been spilt on evaluating either the oppressive or the liberatory aspects of clock time. We deliberately shy away from making such *a priori* assumptions and rather attempt to draw conclusions from the working out of time in social practices. To formalize the ways in which this may proceed we offer here an alternate route. One of the editors of this Special Issue has recently made a methodological proposition to think beyond devices to do the social history of time via the more capacious rubrics of 'temporal regimes' and 'temporal cultures.'[7] 'temporal regimes' refers to structures and institutions (in the broadest sense) that mediate life, livelihood, and power, and 'temporal cultures' in turn refer to practices and meanings that give flesh to how a temporal regime is experienced. The two formulations do not pre-suppose the primacy of one over the other and how they relate in particular contexts can itself be a fruitful enquiry for studies of time and temporality (as many articles in this Issue elucidate).

The study of temporal regimes and cultures might reveal some kinds of multiplicity of human engagement with time. But, while acknowledging the multiple registers within which people *lived with and in time*, we do not champion the view that time is plural in its innate form or that it is a neutral category. Time is a power-laden category and its manifestation as a historical entity was produced within a highly contested vortex of social relations. Temporal sensibility is embedded in various social practices and relationships. But a study of time is more than a compendium of this multiplicity. A social history of time, through a study of temporal regimes and cultures, we propose, tells us how societies have organized work and work-ethics; their day and night; and how new ideas of the future were created and why. It tells us how systems of time-notation, time-discipline, and time-experience changed when changes were made in law and technology, in matters of governance and discipline, and through seasons, weather, and circulation of commodities, money, and people. Such changes are contestatory and conflictual. In these moments and spaces of contestations, conflicts, and adaptations, time potentially emerges as a social entity that becomes amenable for historicization.

Time is of course notated through devices such as clocks and calendars, but is also materialized in every aspect of social and economic life – not only as an abstract idea or as an intimate element of self-reflection or location – but as a site, resource, and constituent of social and economic relationships in which it is imposed and contested, valued and wasted, saved and invested. It is not by any accident that only one paper in this collection directly deals with the calendar, that is, a technology of time-keeping. In some of the others, clock-time is present but through the larger working of say, labour disciplining, infrastructural politics, and natural-ecological conditions. In posing an analytical track

beyond device-centrism, this Special Issue brings together a set of articles across disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences that focus on the structures and practices that render time an object of human experience and as a site of control and politics over a long period of almost two hundred years in South Asia. Its presence, working, and effects are traced in varied socio-political, economic, and ecological casts of Indian lives, especially as they are implicated in the warp and weft of historical becoming. These articles then present accounts of temporality not just unto itself, but as a medium of reproducing and reconfiguring other fundamental aspects of human existence.

III. Temporality *contra* historicity?

Taken together, the contributions to our Special Issue mark a new way for treating the temporalization of everyday life by not embedding the meaning of temporality within the logic of historical periodization alone. The mainstream understanding of the term temporality, and quite correctly so, is the way historical periodization is understood through the categories of the past, the present, and the future, and ways people relate to these units. Margrit Pernau, for example, defines temporality 'as the experience and interpretation of the relations between the past, the present, and the future.'[8] Zoltan B. Simon and Marek Tamm present a more nuanced understanding of the terms temporality and historicity. According to them, temporality 'indicates various modes of being in time' and historicity refers to various modes in which individuals and groups conceived of transitions across time.[9]

Our understanding builds upon these insightful works but also put forth the view that temporality need not be approached only to explain the registers of periodization and their blurred, shifting boundaries, but should be firmly located in material contexts of social experience and relationship. Concrete material realities (including 'natural' phenomena like rains and floods) such as those consisting of law and technology, work and livelihood, bureaucratic requirements and religious obligations, money and infrastructure – to name a few – create overlapping but distinct temporalities. Rather than using temporality to mark the shifts, abrupt or otherwise, in the classification of time itself, we suggest that a broader take on the dynamic nature of temporal regimes and temporal cultures, developed over periods of intense socio-economic and political transformations, will enable us to identify the processes of continuous change and changed continuity.

The Issue does not offer a story of transition, from cyclical to linear, and from concrete to abstract nature of time. The cultures of marking, imagining, imposing, and resisting time and its disciplinary value through work, devices, bureaucratic practices, and print and archiving strategies – to name a few covered in different contributions – exhibit a nested formation of multiple kinds of time-engagement. A close perusal of some of these themes highlight how time becomes a resource in enforcing social domination as well as how it becomes an entity interlaced with other social and political aspects of everyday life to create patterns within which matters of life and livelihood take shape. Here we caution against immediately presuming time's abstract domination as a universal compulsion of modern life. The contributors instead elucidate this abstract domination in specific terms. Alongside, we pose temporality – the subjective and social

experience of time – as the lively medium through which the transaction of meaning and power can be fruitfully explored in various realms of thought and action.

Among existing studies of South Asia that do think through the questions of time and temporality, a usual trajectory has been to cast this problem purely as a meditation on historical time. In an ex-colonial society like that of India, the question of political and social power becomes significant because time itself was used to justify the colonial rule.[10] It was an agent of discipline, a mode of imposing authority, and an entity to be adapted and resisted by the natives. Working as a proxy to the idea of the 'modern', invested with the then prevalent notions of development and progress, time itself became the civilizational unit of cultural divide between the west and the rest. The latter was timeless and thus had no history.

It is no surprise that historical time, in South Asia, is also deeply politicized. The nationalist response to colonial epistemic abuses were deeply temporal. Within the colonial logic of periodization of Indian past into Hindu ancient period, Muslim medieval period, and British modern period, the glory of the ancient past as the golden age of Indian civilization was a modern temporal mode of opposition.[11] This characterization of historical time, which is a mix of historical and mythical realities of the past, has a deep attachment at a popular level and is taken to be concrete historical reality. Of course, what appears to be socio-mythic formations in popular strands of historical consciousness, can be seen to be driven by political ends.[12] Arguably, this genealogy of constitution of historical time is more contestatory and politicized in South Asia in comparison to other world regions.

On the terrain of historical research, to counter the claim of colonial positivism and the denial of historicity to South Asian modes of relating the past to the present, scholars have used time to show the presence of historical consciousness in the recording the past. The question of historical time has prompted investigations of the meaning of historical consciousness and its recording in past periods of South Asia. The major thrust of the studies done on time, and mostly they are on ancient or medieval periods, has been on the use of time as a *metaphor* for history.[13] The scholars of pre-modernity have demonstrated that in 'early India' or through periods of Mughal rule, South Asians possessed a finite 'sense' of history in terms of developing chronologies and other techniques of recording of events, even if cyclical conceptions of time continued to prevail. Linear time, which was thought of as the prerogative of western modern world, as these scholars have shown, was very much part of Indian philosophical thought and political action. The recent interventions encouraged by this approach have gone into the direction of study of 'genres' and 'narratives' to address the issue of temporality and historical consciousness and what constituted a 'real' historical text.[14] Reflecting on what it means to experience time historically through its 'textures', a signal contribution has established a very distinct 'early modern' historical consciousness as manifesting in a new style of composing accounts of the past by officials at courts of pre-colonial regimes in South India.[15]

In a nutshell, engagement with time has broadly remained at the level of response to colonial knowledge and its epistemic schema and has remained limited to the realm of historical consciousness and periodization on the one hand and excavation of that consciousness through readings of genres and narratives on the other. More recently, Shonaleeka Kaul has compiled a volume of writings on pre-modern temporalities in

South Asia, to present a bolder summation that urges us to go beyond the problem of historicity as such and attend instead to the multiplicity of pre-modern thinking on time and the varying ethics that they imputed to temporal notions.[16]

Post-colonialist correctives on the other hand have offered to recover historical consciousness for South Asian subjects by bringing into view other ways, such as memory and myth, of engaging with the past, posing this against the violence of colonial historicism and its broader influence on modern historiography.[17] Prathama Banerjee's monograph stands out in this corpus as having uniquely demonstrated the role of historicist modes of imposing temporal alterity onto the internal other, the 'primitive', that sustained the Bengali quest for historical synchronization.[18] Margrit Pernau has also dealt with modes of historical thinking in colonial North India to argue that instead of positing deep caesura between the past, present and future, such thinking superimposed these temporalities on each other, while articulating distinct emotional values attached to the possible transitions between them.[19]

There is much to be gained from this formidable body of scholarship that fuses the question of time with existing meta-discourses on historical consciousness to advocate for the multiplicity of the trajectories of historical becoming beyond a predetermined, evolutionary, and progressivist path. However, it gives us an often-used framework: on the one hand, we premise our investigation on binaries such as colonial-national, premodern-modern, lived-empty, western-non-western, and concrete-abstract characterizations of time; on the other hand, we end up arguing for the plurality of time-engagements as we realize that the binaries fail to capture the lived experiences of people.

Yet, having restored a more general chronological agency to South Asian subjects – exhibiting historical consciousness which is read as possessing time-awareness – by highlighting the twin dimension of imperial epistemic violence and plurality of historical and social times, we are still quite unsure about how their lives became implicated in matters of duration, momentariness, rhythms, speed, delay, accuracy, ritual performance, and similar experiences and indices that temporalized quotidian realities of people. The temporalization of time (its politics of classification in past, present, and future, and people's consciousness towards it) has been addressed in some of the works cited here; the temporalization of life through social practices has been much less accounted for in the existing literature in South Asian history/studies.

Let us go back to Simon and Tamm's differentiation mentioned above. For them, if temporality describes 'various modes of being in time', historicity indicates ways in which individuals and groups conceive of transitions across time. They further explain that 'due to the temporal transition characterizing conceptions of historicity – all historicities imply temporalities, but not all temporalities imply historicities.'[20] This allows us to make a case for an analytical pursuit of the temporalization of life or simply, temporalities, as discrete from the ardent focus on historicity in South Asian studies.

However, we also qualify our understanding in relation to Simon and Tamm in two ways. Firstly, it is important to emphasize here that especially because of reasons of colonial epistemic dominance as described above, the historical record, but also ethnographic evidence from South Asia, often (but not always) throws up considerations of temporality that invariably reference the question of transition across time.[21] This is evident in some of the contributions to this Issue and urges us to continue to keep open the possibility of the deeply political intersections between temporality and historicity in

studies of time in South Asia. Secondly, Simon and Tamm marshal their understanding of temporality as well as historicity towards an assertion of the plurality of both. As might be obvious by now, our contributors mostly show that studying temporalization in/of everyday life leads to more than a simple reiteration of plurality. It unravels specific modes of socio-political organization and power, self-making, value-formation, and meaningful cultural production. Plural or multiple intermeshed temporalities work within and against a universal, irreversible fabric of time. Multiple temporalities are not the atomized realities of life but point to a constant and dynamic process of synchronization as a manifestation of deeper relationship between the universal and foundational entity called time and of multiple forms of engagement with and in time.[22]

IV. A preface to the contributions

A set of specific thematic foci emerge from the multi-disciplinary contributions to this Special Issue. To stay with the theme of temporality and historicity, two contributors directly attend to the complex social and political contexts where more immediate distinctions and transitions between the past, present, and future became/become the object of structural and practical (re-)configuration, without necessarily resorting to a definitive epochal consciousness (of modernity, for instance). In the study of the use of corruption in the rethinking of economic modes of government in India, Tanmay Misra elucidates three kinds of temporal logics to locate the critique of corruption across a wide range of thought worlds that served as the proxy for advocating market-oriented liberalization. In thinking through the appropriate role of the government vis-à-vis the market, Misra shows how the posing of temporality and historicity intersect firstly, by marking corruption and associated inefficiencies with ideals of speed that state bureaucracies seem to fall short of; in turn, this powerful common sense intersects with idioms of modernization that finds such shortcomings in correlation with distinctions between the 'modern' and the 'pre-modern'. Corruption allows us to see the pervasive discourse on state practice, as it began to emerge in postcolonial India mainly from the 1980s but more intensely after the liberalization of economy in 1991, through the lens of temporality – speed and delay based upon values of governance encapsulated in terms of efficiency and inefficiency – while at the same time this discourse resurrected the standard regimes of historicity based upon binaries of feudal and modern, or state bureaucracy and market. On a third count the temporality of inadequate speed harks back to the release sought from shackles of an ancient or colonial past. By the late 1990s, the License Raj increasingly came to be viewed as a relic of premodern state practice under the heft of liberal economic thought. Corruption produced a past and a dominant way to view and label that past. As an aside, it would be pertinent to remark here that a work of this nature also opens up future possibilities in direction of studying various types of state institutions and, in particular, the space of the office as a network of power and authority, where the factor of time becomes very crucial. For example, the passage of time would emerge crucially linked to the movement of papers and documents.

Kunal Joshi in his contribution examines the relation between temporality and historicity on a more distinct terrain of community formation beyond ascriptive registers of state processes. He studies the enrolment of Hindu pilgrims to an order of Puranic historical continuum in relation to everyday interactions that emerge around genealogies

maintained by Brahmin priests in hand-written ledgers called *bahis*. In his ethnography conducted in Allahabad, Joshi shows how only nominal connection to Puranic cyclical time is established in these conversations. Instead, *bahis* mediate the re-narrating of the social and inter-generational lives of pilgrims as more of a performative repertoire (instead of simply archival inscriptions), whereby logics of ancestry and community are established in an ironic conjunction with elision of Puranic historicity, that then is rendered 'timeless'. The question of cyclical and linear time has animated a lot of debate in Indian historical writing on time. Joshi too weighs in on this matter but in a different manner. First, he approaches these questions through the methodologies of ethnographic observation rather than textual reading. And second, the accent is on practice of time rather than its textual representation. Through practice, a 'timeless tradition' is constantly being activated and performed between the pilgrims and their *pandas*. And yet, this timelessness is a product of annual visits, crafted conversations, return visits by the *pandas* to the pilgrims' villages and towns, and retelling of Puranic stories to suit the immediate context of religious service and transaction.

Another definite focus that emerges in our Special Issue is about the social, political, and institutional constitution of work-time across the colonial and postcolonial conjuncture and the impact it had on the broader reconstitution of the lives of colonial and postcolonial subjects/citizens. The articles dealing with this theme emphatically skirt the presumption of abstract time-discipline and reveal instead both contestatory and adaptive dealings of workers and others with efforts to establish such discipline, especially in the wake of the coming of globally emergent managerial and rationalization techniques to work sites in the subcontinent.

In his exploration of working time in coal mines in eastern India, Dhiraj Kumar Nite discusses how the work situation in these mines could be understood in relation to the broader historical thesis about the 'industrious revolution' emerging in western countries since the late eighteenth century and continuing after the 1950s, interspersed by movement of shorter hours since the late nineteenth century. Contrary to the colonial conception of Indian workers as insufficiently committed to industrial work, Nite shows how it is difficult to assert the lack of industriousness for mine workers in any way between the late nineteenth and the middle of twentieth centuries, even as shorter hours movement gained currency following global trends overseen by the ILO and the Washington Convention since the 1920s. Earlier mine workers had laboured for longer hours, albeit in flexible shifts that corresponded to the demands on their social life both around working sites as well as in terms of requirements of returning to village life seasonally. Shorter hours legislations came with pressing violence and industrial discipline from mine owners and supervisors. There was an ironic outcome of the campaign for short working hours carried on between the 1930s and the 1950s. The working hours shortened but the working year became longer. Workers resisted these impositions. In some cases, shorter hour shifts became the index of differentiating between settled workers and migratory labouring populations and also mapped onto skilled workers and their less skilled counterparts. Yet the intensity of work by most categories of workers remained crucial to enhancements in coal production over the mid-twentieth century. This continuing industriousness was not a survival strategy against precarity. Nite argues that this was geared towards job security, just treatment, as well as time for socio-cultural obligations, recuperation of workers' energy, and for recreational demands.

In his essay on the coming of Taylorist managerial principles of structuring working time in the railway workshops at Parel in western India, Lukas Rosenberg poses this configuration as a new mode of instituting abstract time for Indian labour. He argues that this attempt to assert the dominance of abstract time was not necessarily a logical culmination of capitalist essence but was also a response to greater worker militancy reflected in the growing number of strikes and trade unionism post-First World War. Time had become a direct issue of conflict when management attempted to increase working hours from eight to nine a day. Subsequently, from the mid-1920s, control of labour time and alterations in production process through new technologies were seen as measures to address the question of labour problem, which otherwise was approached in cultural terms of Indians lacking in efficiency. The coming of mechanization and 'reorganization' in the Parel workshops separated workers from the planning of work to enlist them in a sequence of time-coded tasks from the 1920s, that in turn affected wages. This made the increased surveillance of labour-time within the working day necessary. Yet collective impulses of workers in terms of working models and contestations of the same persisted with the consequence that reorganization increasingly moved towards retrenchment in actual terms, eventually leading to tactical differentiation of the workforce.

Catharina Charlotte Haensel's contribution is also a study of managerial experimentation in the Calico textile mill in Ahmedabad explicitly aimed at reorganizing time over simply the reorganization of work. She shows how such 'workload studies', as associated with the experiment conducted by experts from the Tavistock Institute, London, became imminent with automation and legislation meant for shortening work hours in Indian factories. This shortening was, however, accompanied by intensification of working hours during work as well as demarcation of work and non-work time. Through Haensel, we learn that the question of work-time was not only related to its other, that is to leisure, but also to the intrinsic nature of work-time. Did work-time intensify? Did it lead to erasure of 'leisure' during the time of work? She argues that time spent at work affected leisure time due to the intensification of work. The experiment concerned also led to labour differentiation following from skill and incentive-based reorganization and eventual threats of labour retrenchment. While largely failing to have sustained impact on 'humanizing' workplaces, Haensel shows how workload studies nonetheless became a benchmark of labour management and the necessary medium of negotiating between labour unions and factory management in the subsequent decades after this experimentation in the 1950s.

Collectively these three papers covering the time-span from the late nineteenth century to the period of the 1950s demonstrate the disciplining machineries around the theme of work-time adopted in regulating and establishing an industrial temporality. In spite of the presence of the robust field of labour history in South Asian history writing, industrial temporality, or the work-time relationship, remains an understudied area. As these essays demonstrate, this work-time relationship is made up of various constituents such as the nature of workforce (managerial, clerical, and shopfloor workers), nature of payment (piece-rate and time-rate), nature of employment (seasonally hired or regular), and at the level of skill. It is also made up of factors such as provisions for pension and leave, holiday and absenteeism, and rituals and shopfloor breaks. The techniques of

controlling work-time relationship could lead to humanize the workplace but it could simultaneously contribute to an increase in self-discipline and possibility of self-exploitation of working groups.

A third thematic cluster around which three other essays in this Issue can be grouped is that of issues of temporality emerging in the domains of environment, ecology, and agriculture. Often the engagement of modes of life and livelihood relating to such domains can be seen as examples of the 'other' of modern time regimes, especially since they are allegedly more 'task-oriented' than 'time-oriented'.[23] It was essential for us to trace the functioning of the modern time not only at the site of the institutions of the modern state or modern work-sites such as the factory, as the three essays discussed above elucidate, but extend the inquiry into the agrarian and ecological settings as well. In doing so, our contributors question the rigid boundary imagined between task-orientation and time-discipline. They go beyond this foregone conclusion framed around the binary to engage with these domains through close empirical observation, through historical, literary, and ethnographic methods to reveal distinctive time consciousness, temporal practices, and critical modes of time politics that is associated with them.

In his article, Idrees Kanth takes up a unique object of study, the diary of a Kashmiri peasant (who was also a school teacher) in postcolonial India, to look through a microhistorical lens at what it might mean to think of a peasant's time through the textual form of the diary. Besides providing a very detailed account of different approaches to peasant time in the existing studies that locate it in production processes, task-orientation, and natural and cyclical rhythms of work and season, Kanth innovatively merges the empirical question of what constituted peasant time in his region and period of study with reflections on the uniqueness of the medium where time was notated (in his case, a diary), thus also making a foray to understand peasant-textual time. Diary, in itself, is a medium reflecting abstract, linear, and sequential organization and flow of time whereas the peasant time is believed to be loopy. He does excavate elements of seasonality that cast the peasant as bound to natural fixities as determining his temporal orientation of work. Yet the diary also reveals several other instantiations of calendrical and social time, indexed to technological and political events of the era. For Kanth these serve as more than the inscription of time. They are also a symbolic resource to understand the multifarious implications of peasant life. Here textuality serves to evince the cast of peasant life beyond simple seasonal orientations. Kanth does not deny 'task-orientation', but also demonstrates time discipline and linearity as a complementary condition of such orientation. Time encapsulates and exhibits itself in the movement from one task to another, and in the interface between work and weather and the natural and the social.

Paulami Guha Biswas studies the early nineteenth-century history of colonial attempts to construct a road in Bengal country, that eventually was never made, as a kind of failure to deal with the ecological particularities of a riverine landscape. Colonial government set strange standards of speed by reinterpreting the pace of *dak* runners and made arrangements to outsource the effect of speed to externally contracted labour. Yet such standards were repeatedly remade against the seeming obstacles of marshy geographies. Guha Biswas argues that in spite of this infrastructural failure, these designs for the phantom road, meant to facilitate better transport and postal communication, came to dominate the idea and ideals of speed within the bureaucratic set-up of the colonial state. Often,

speed and acceleration, as fundamental attributes of modernity, are studied in association with mechanical devices such as the telegraph and the railways. In dwelling upon the pre-railway period of road construction, Guha Biswas provides a rich insightful account of the emergence of the idea of standard speed which had a non-mechanical genesis. She presents evidences of the use of the mechanical clock in the postal department, but this idea of speed, which was premised upon delay in postal communication that took place by making use of human labour called the *dak* runners, was measured in a comparative manner. The notion of speed and delay emerged from the comparison of speed charts. Maximum speed became the standard speed. This method of construction of the idea of speed was less effective for functional ends and more significant for the othering of social and ecological conditions of the landscape that was to be the object of the temporal conquest of space. Textual inscriptions (speed charts), human labour, state infrastructural demands, and limits posed by ecological conditions came together to create a notion of speed and delay, which Guha Biswas convincingly demonstrates through her painstaking archival research.

Sampurna Das' article makes an ethnographic foray into understanding the temporal politics of flooding in the *chars* (rive islands) of Assam in Northeast India amongst the minority community of *Miya* (Bengali) Muslims. Das shows how much of the practices and meanings around flooding could be seen as a contestation between two modes of registering the temporality of this natural phenomenon. Firstly, floods seen through a relational framework appears as an adaptive everyday process of social engagement of *char* inhabitants with the cycles of inundation, erosion, and accretion. Through this epistemic approach towards flood as a long-drawn process, Das argues that local communities have come to better sync their activities with the rhythms of the nature. Secondly, and in contrast to the first one, there is an episodic understanding of flood that casts this as a sudden process in need for very specific technological and social intervention, in tune with the needs of state involvement in the ecological and economic life in the region. Das also points out that studying the variegated engagement with these respective frameworks is a useful way to understand key aspects of socio-economic power and inequality amongst her respondents.

Finally, two other articles in this Issue take us back to thinking with time-notating devices and technics, but with due consideration of the social and political phenomena that they get entangled with. In a significant manner, they are studies of new time-sensibilities and time-orientations developing in dialogue with colonial modernity. They capture the crises and anxieties felt by Indians as new colonialism-inflected norms of time-discipline (mechanical clock-based discipline and punctuality) and reinvigorated older methods of time-reckoning (almanacs whose production surged due to print technology) began to take ground in social and cultural practices. The remoulding of practices or techniques does not need to be seen in any binary of colonial imposition versus native response. True, the impulse and genesis of such anxieties might have emerged through the process of colonial contact but many of the attributes of temporal restructuring belonged to the shared modern ideas of efficiency, accuracy, and not least, punctuality.

Subhadipa Dutta's study of the reorganization of sports as a temporalized activity in colonial Bengal deals with an under-studied aspect of the coming of clock-time oriented disciplines and their impact on the lives of children, specifically in terms of how their play and sports came to be restructured. She shows how an earlier social dimension of

unstructured play (*krira*), not marked out from everyday life as a separate domain of bringing up children, increasingly came under attack from colonial and native proponents of time discipline. Dutta argues that under new figures of patriarchal authority like the school teacher, and recurrent demands of employment under the changing colonial economy, these attempts to restructure sports was not simply an ingress of time-discipline into children's worlds. It was more importantly a way of entirely repositioning play as the other of work in colonial lives, both juvenile and adult.

Shubhneet Kaushik's study of the remaking of the *panchanga* or almanac in colonial India marks another study of a time-notating device in this Issue. Kaushik, however, does not give us a usual story of (global) standardization and/or its ironic companionship with pluritemporality.[24] In studying the native traditional calendar/almanac and a set of continuous debates in terms of their formalization, he indexes differing views on the *panchanga* to intensifying social and political organization of Indian lives. Insightful is his demonstration of the new politics of Hindu pasts combined with commercialization of the almanac, that competes successfully with the claims to scientific reform of the Indian calendar through Nehruvian state efforts. Calendars were not just texts and systems of time notation but in Kaushik's analysis, they become a host of complex relationships between timekeeping, state power, and cultural identity of modern India. Here the global story of calendrical reform is punctuated effectively with a new archive emphasizing social and political reformulations of community identity.

These contributions taken together allow us to reiterate a claim made in this Introduction, but more importantly to invite future scholarship, that social practices and their material contexts together with accompanying ideas and concepts on time and temporality – through the register of interactive and contestable temporal regimes and temporal cultures – could yield novel insights into various aspects of South Asian history and society. Moving beyond solely discursive formations, the contributions look at material realities and contexts that shaped peoples' engagement with time and led to the creation of certain specific temporal regimes and temporal cultures, which are dynamic, shifting, and contested. They show how people made and used these regimes; how social groups and political orders intervened along different registers of work, rituals, devices, bureaucratic practices, and not the least, natural rhythms, to create and impute meanings to them.

Notes

1. The distinction between time and temporality is heuristic in nature and follows after Champion, "The History of Temporalities," 254; where he poses a history of temporalities beyond the history (simply) of time as a "performance of time across various media." We are suggesting that time and temporality are best treated within a single frame of reference for empirical analysis.
2. Sarkar, "Colonial Times: Clocks and Kaliyuga"; Yildiz, "The Politics Time Colonial Bombay"; John, "Regulating the 'half-timer' in Colonial India"; and Sengupta, "Keeping the Master Cool, Every Day, All Day."
3. Prasad, "'Time-Sense': Railways Temporality Colonial India"; and Mukhopadhyay, *Imperial Technology and "Native" Agency*.
4. Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts*
5. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1*.
6. Frumer, *Making Time*; and Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca*.
7. Sinha, *Against the Fetishisation of Plural Time*, 68–75.

8. Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*, 4.
9. Simon and Tamm, *The Fabric of Historical Time*, 23.
10. Trautman, "Does India Have History?"
11. Thapar, "Interpretations of Ancient Indian History."
12. Chatterjee and Ghosh, *History and the Present*.
13. Thapar, *Time as a Metaphor of History*; and Mukhia, "Time, Chronology and History."
14. Ali, "Temporality, Narration and the Problem of History."
15. Rao et al. *Textures of Time*.
16. Kaul, *Retelling Time*.
17. Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe*; and Nandy, "History's Forgotten Doubles."
18. Banerjee, *Politics of Time*.
19. Pernau, "Fluid Temporalities: Saiyid Ahmad Khan"; and Pernau, *Entions and Temporalities*.
20. Simon and Tamm, *The Fabric of Historical Time*, 24.
21. Sumit Sarkar's pathbreaking work on the conjunction of consciousness of the descent into the Hindu epochal notion of *Kaliyuga* with the arrival of clock-time regimes in colonial Bengal is the best example of this intersection between temporality and historicity. Sarkar, "Colonial Times: Clocks and Kaliyuga."
22. For more on this see Sinha, *Against the Fetishisation of Plural Time*.
23. Thompson, E. P. "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 56–97.
24. Ogle "Whose time is it? Pluralization Time"; and Conrad, "'Nothing the Way Should be'."

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