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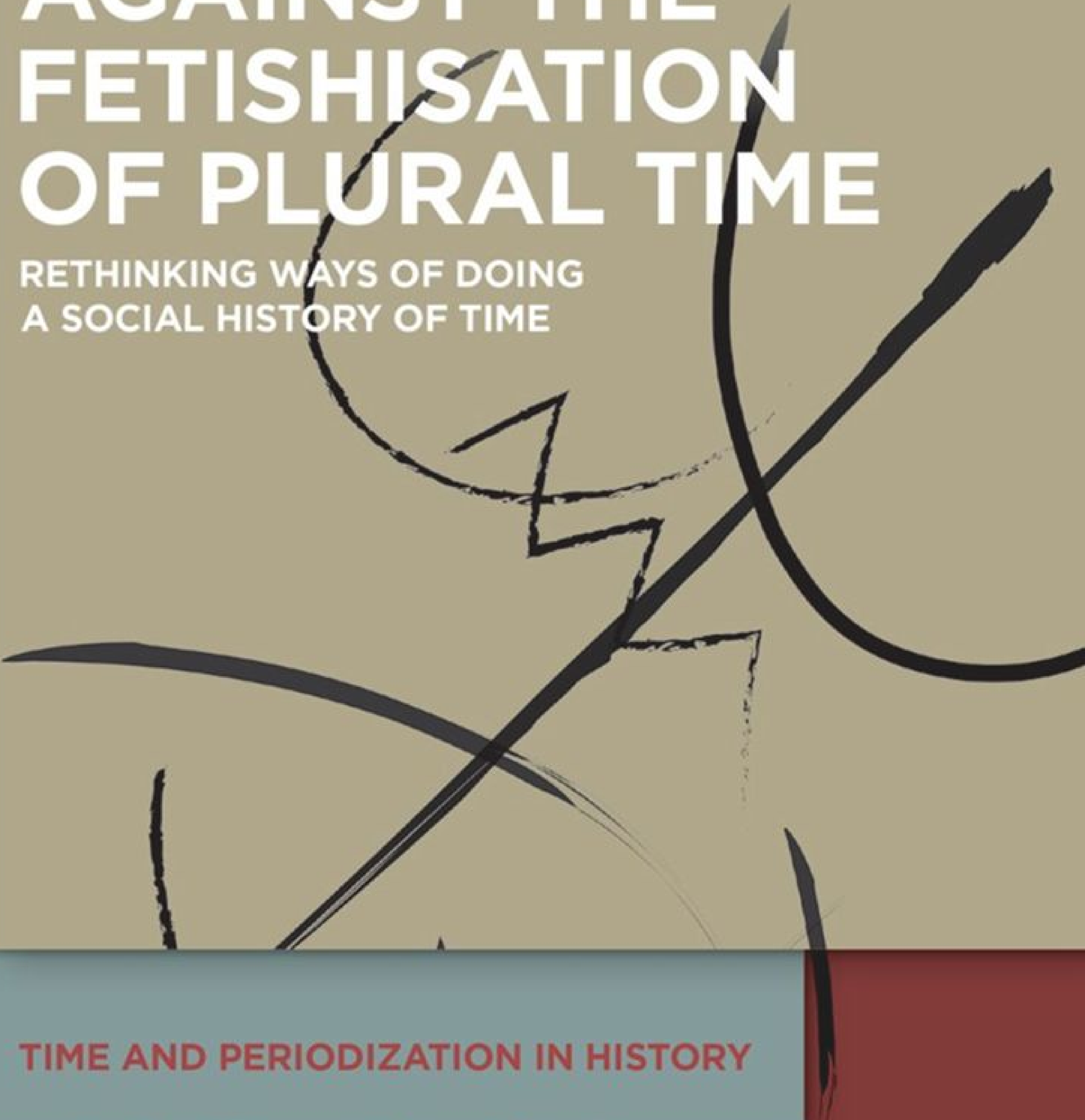
Nitin Sinha

AGAINST THE FETISHISATION OF PLURAL TIME

RETHINKING WAYS OF DOING A SOCIAL HISTORY OF TIME



TIME AND PERIODIZATION IN HISTORY

Nitin Sinha

Against the Fetishisation of Plural Time

Time and Periodization in History

Edited by
Marcus Colla, Anna Gutgarts
and Oded Steinberg

Volume 3

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Preface

Some published works, if not the ideas behind them, are accidental in their provenance. This monograph is one such example. Making sense of time and temporality is inherently a formidable task, but more daunting, or perhaps embarrassingly audacious, is the attempt to write something meaningful on these themes and aspire for it to be novel and relevant. It was this perpetual tussle between critical reading of the existing scholarship and the rickety conviction in the necessity of questioning the one dominant trend in this scholarship that explains how this book came into being: it was first thought of as a 'fun' and provocative piece for the project's blog; then developed as a peer-reviewed article manuscript; and finally wrapped up in the length of a monograph.

This book has been written under the aegis of a European Research Consolidator Grant, ERC-2019-COG, funded project, 'Timely Histories: A Social History of Time in South Asia' (grant no. 866421), hosted at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin. I am thankful to all the past and current members of the project – Samuel Wright, Ritam Sengupta, Minerwa Tahir, Sagnik Kar, Amrita Chattopadhyay, and Nitin Varma – for their comments at various stages of this work. In particular, I am thankful to Sam and Ritam for their detailed feedback. I am also thankful to Prathama Banerjee, Ulrike Freitag, Samuli Schilke, and Prabhat Kumar for reading very short, short, and long versions of this text and offering their inputs. Discussions with Vidhya Raveendranathan over a few issues in the final stages of wrapping up this work proved both useful and reassuring.

The broader questions of time and its historiography discussed in detail, before this book was even conceived, with the members of the advisory board of the project – Tanika Sarkar, Avner Wishnitzer, and Pankaj Jha – must have left an indelible trail of thoughts with me. Undoubtedly, some of those thoughts have found their way into the book. Similarly, a close interaction with Heike Libeau, Katrin Bromber, and Ravi Ahuja during the supervisory sessions of the project's doctoral candidates enriched my own thoughts on this theme. I am thankful to Katrin for giving me a 'crash course' on Reinhart Koselleck years ago when I was still fiddling with the idea of doing something on time. A small part of this work was presented at the European Conference of South Asian Studies held in Turin in July 2023. I am thankful to those present in the audience who gave inputs through questions and comments. Another part was presented at a workshop titled 'South Asian Futures' organised under our project's programme at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient in October 2023. My earnest thanks go to all the participants for their valuable comments and criticisms. My heartfelt thanks also go to Ruth Mas for providing support with language editing. I am grateful to Sophie Wilkse, Elisa Nobel-Dilaty, and Mona

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Conrad for being wonderful student assistants and coordinators of the project so far. I am thankful to Flavia Gerner for preparing the bibliography of this book.

Finally, I am immensely grateful for the process of anonymous reviewing conducted by De Gruyter, for which I thank Rabea Rittgerodt-Burke. The first anonymous in-house review by (one of) the series editors, followed by two set of reviews by external readers, greatly helped me in clarifying certain points, incorporating new suggestions, engaging with new texts, and not least, generally improving the structure of the arguments presented here. The combined critical but highly encouraging assessment by all three of them convinced me that pursuing an embarrassingly simple idea that the plurality framework in time studies has gone a little 'over the top' and thus it runs the risk of becoming counterproductive was, after all, not such a crazy idea. Of course, I don't implicate them for any lack this work carries and criticisms it will receive.

I dedicate this book to my mother Neena Sinha who frequently reminds me, despite my shortcomings, of the value of getting things done on time. We siblings often joke that, contrary to the usual feature that time reigns supreme over people, our mother's rigid rhythm of domestic chores has 'enslaved' time. I also present this book to my nephews Anvay and Anvit who, perhaps, one day will feel a little more curious of knowing what their *chota mama* did in Germany than just cutely asking, when they were even smaller, 'what time is it there in Germany'. I hope that without necessarily aspiring to become historians they will one day make sense of this book.

Writing is also an endeavour to gain clarity for oneself. Explaining my research on time to both academic and non-academic audiences has proven to be immensely challenging. I remain uncertain if this book enables me to overcome this problem, but I hope it will in some way plug-in that awkward silence of mine, which persists whenever I am asked, 'what precisely are you researching about time!'

Nitin Sinha,
Berlin

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Introduction

This book raises three interlinked questions: first, how to do a social history of time; second, what are the ways in which it can be done without succumbing to the usual, and at times inevitable, pull of some of the useful binaries in which most of the historical accounts of time have been written; and third, how, as a result of overcoming some of these binaries, do we go beyond simply stating the 'fact' that time and/or temporality is plural and multiple when it is approached as a socially-constituted entity. In raising these questions, the book problematises the relationship between time and temporality and marks out the limitations in the current historiography that deal with the making of the modern time. It argues for not using time and temporality interchangeably, which is not a novel point in itself, but given the fact that the slippage between the two unwittingly persists even in some of the highly useful recent works, it becomes necessary to reiterate the difference. Rather than defining what time is, which is a philosophical and a physicist question, the book casts that inquiry into the historical mould to explore how time, as a contestatory resource, becomes part of social relationships and what it does to them when scripts of power align themselves with the control of time.[1] Nitzan Lebovic has put it elegantly: 'When one sets out to write about time, one soon discovers it is a stubborn creature rejecting all forms of characterisation. In fact, it is impossible to say what time really is: time cannot be grasped through its affirmation (what time *is*) or its negation (what time is *not*). Rather, it is more productive to think about time through its reception, its functions, its field of operations . . .'.[2] Similar is the contention of another volume which explains time as a function of coordination and rhythm but which also involves material, emotional, moral, and political dimensions.[3] It is both punctuated by extraordinary events like birth and death and ordinary routines of the everyday life.

There will hardly be any dispute with these formulations but the methodological challenges when encountering the stubborn character of time, as Lebovic puts it, find a quick resolution, in a number of recent studies, in dissolving the

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[1] For a very useful account of twentieth century study of time, influenced by physics, and reincarnating itself into different guises in humanities and social science disciplines, see Penelope J. Corfield, 'Time and the Historians in the Age of Relativity', *Geschicte und Gesellschaft*, 25, 2015, pp. 71–91. Also, Adrian Bardon, *A Brief History of the Philosophy of Time*, New York, 2013.

[2] Nitzan Lebovic, 'The Sovereignty of Modern Times: Different Concepts of Time and the Modernist Perspective', *History and Theory*, 49 (May), 2010, pp. 281–82.

[3] Elizabeth Shove, Frank Trentmann, and Richard Wilk, eds., *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life: Practice, Materiality and Culture*, Oxford/New York, 2009, p. 2.

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problematic of time into the framework of multiplicity and plurality of time and temporalities. Time is relocated into the domain of the social or the historical; that the social is a non-uniform, hierarchical, and uneven formation goes without saying, and so is the historical which is regionally and ethnically differently constituted. Thus, based upon varying loci of plural social formation or multiple historical trajectories, both time and temporality emerge as plural and multiple entities. To continue with the words of the editors of the volume referred above: 'Rather than viewing time in terms of minutes, hours or years and instead of treating it as a resource that can be stored, released and used up like a rechargeable battery, the contributions to this book emphasize the creative production, reproduction and consumption of *multiple* temporalities.'[4]

In distinction to such views, the core of this monograph is based upon the idea that time has a strong, irrefutable character of its 'given-ness'. The main component of that character is irreversibility. The book takes social history as a foundational framework to approach the history of time in which the framework of plurality is put under rigorous interrogation and is not taken as an unquestionable article of faith. It may sound a little ironical at this stage that while adopting a social history approach, the book offers to treat time as a non-plural entity, but as different chapters will try to demonstrate, at least, for the sake of doing a social history of time, the time's given-ness character should be taken seriously if one aims to deeply historicise the relationship between time and society. This is so because the book draws a distinction between two approaches: one, of doing a history of social-time, and two, of doing a social history of time. It agrees in parts with the idea that if time is approached as an entity which is inherently constituted through social practices, then it is bound to appear plural. However, this inevitability of plurality also poses dangers emerging out of extreme forms of relativism and does not serve the purposes of writing histories of hierarchies, differentiations, and contestations which are some of the core themes of social history. Therefore, the book favours the approach of doing a social history of time rather than narrativizing the plurality of social-time, which is already a plural entity.

This mode of conceptualising a social history framework for history of time also necessitates maintaining a distinction between time and temporality. Time can be a stubborn creature; temporality is not. If time is an elusive entity, then temporality is both a regime of periodisation through which we understand and classify the passage of time as well as it is a historically constituted formation of materialities and ideas that interfaces the relationship between time and society. However, in a manner of talking as well as at the level of argumentation, often the distinction between time and temporality is blurred. The expression that ‘time is plural’ and the framework of ‘pluritemporality’ are used interchangeably. Against the prevailing strong currents in the multidisciplinary studies on time which take it as a plural entity or lapses into the interchangeable use of time and temporality, in this book, time has been approached as a linear, universal fabric and temporal as the dynamic social formation which is a result of people’s practices in and with time.

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[4] Ibid., p. 3.

A word on the relationship between practices and time is perhaps required. Elizabeth Shove’s account of linking practices with production and consumption of time is very enriching except that I find a fundamental conceptual anomaly in the way she presents this relationship.[5] For her, practices make time. But then she goes on to use an array of expressions to explain this relationship which conflicts the claim that time is a product of practices alone. Through her own statements, one can perceive that time precedes practices. To read her in her own words: ‘practices intersect in time and in space’; ‘uses of time . . . represent the detectable remains or traces of practice’; and finally: ‘Since people have to make time or find time in which to do – i.e. to perform practices –, it is reasonable to suppose that if new practices are to take hold, time has to be made for them at the expense of others which are no longer performed, or not performed as frequently as before.’ If her contention is simply that because time is a limited resource in which new practices require displacing the older, which then semantically gets expressed as ‘making time’, then there is no disagreement. However, if the purchase of her argument is that it is inconceivable to think of time beyond practices, as the latter *make* the former, then her own stream of arguments shows that time exists prior to practices, exists as an independent entity and exists as a limited resource which forces people to make a choice or selection of practices.

The primary focus of this book is on the making of what we refer to as ‘modern time’ and what kinds of histories of this modern time are plausible and desirable. However, in order to counter a strong tendency prevalent in the existing studies that approaches, in a circular fashion, the making of the modern time from the vantage point of the modern itself, the book emphasises the historicising of the relationship between time, peoples’ practices, and power in a longue-durée fashion as one of the most important ways of doing a social history of time. Privileging the methodological entry point of social history, the book attempts to show that the research questions emerging out of this concern overlap, but also significantly vary, from the perspectives used for studying social-time and historical-time. In other words, a history of social-time or a history of historiography and historicity is not the subject matter of this monograph; time becoming a constituent of social relationship and power hierarchy, is. Therefore, a brief clarification on how this book uses the term social history, whose journey in the last six decades has itself been quite eventful, will not be out of place.

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[5] Shove, ‘Everyday Practice and the Production and Consumption of Time’, in ibid., p. 18.

Charting the thematic diversity within the field of social history, in 1971 E. J. Hobsbawm quipped that the term social history was difficult to define.[6] However, a lot has changed since the time he optimistically pronounced that the coming years would be a good time to be a social historian to the early 2000s, when Jürgen Kocha shared the widespread impression that it was not a good moment to be a social historian.[7] In very general terms, the field of social history, as it is understood now, is not just limited to recovering working class experiences, writing accounts of 'class struggle without class', and histories of the poor and socialist movements.[8] It has also moved away from the application of strict social science quantification methodologies (to the extent that Hobsbawm bantered that historians with bad maths began to call themselves social historians) and in fact has absorbed, while being deeply threatened by them, newer sensibilities of archival readings; the importance of treating identities as unstable, relational, and intersectional; and the benefits of exploring constructed-ness of meanings around practices, which were generated by the literary turn of the 1980s. However, as tracing the development of social history is not the subject of this book, it can only be mentioned in passing that social history also informed and flourished through the opening of new lines of inquiry such as gender and race histories under the 'cultural turn'. Although the weight of 'cultural history' seemed to have made social history marginal, Christoph Conrad points out that, '[T]he very meaning of the term 'social' was itself reconceived; it lost its direct association with

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[6] E. J. Hobsbawm, 'From Social History to the History of Society', *Daedalus*, 100, 1, 1971, pp. 20–45. On the meaning of the term social in social history and what role 'class' played in the conceptualisation of social history, see Patrick Joyce, 'The End of Social History', *Social History*, 95, 20, 1, 1995, pp. 73–91.

[7] Juergen Kocha, 'Losses, Gains and Opportunities: Social History Today', *Journal of Social History*, 37, 1, 2003, pp. 21–28.

[8] Rudi Batzell, Sven Beckert, Andrew Gordon, and Gabriel Winant, 'E. P. Thompson, Politics and History: Writing Social History Fifty Years after *The Making of the English Working Class*', *Journal of Social History*, 48, 4, 2015, pp. 753–58. The latter reference is to E. P. Thompson's essay, 'Eighteenth Century English Society: Class-Struggle without Class?', *Social History*, May 1978. On this also see Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, Delhi, 1997, Ch. 2.

'socialist' movements or 'social policy' and embraced, instead, the whole abundance of the life-world'.[9]

In the last three decades or so in the case of South Asia as well, social history – which was mainly confined to workers and peasant histories and to their organised movements – underwent a decline as 'colonial discourse analysis' took precedence over investigation of dialectical structural asymmetries and contradictions constituted through economic and social factors.[10] As Sumit Sarkar has marvellously summed up, 'Colonial discourse analysis abstracts itself, except in the most general terms, from histories of production and social relationships.'[11] This involved the mutation of the figure of the subaltern constituted in the first three volumes of *Subaltern Studies* in a dialectic realm of production process and cultural practice to a socially-flattened subject(ivity) produced through colonial disciplining in the latter volumes of the same series. However, in the last few years, new horizons of research on social classes, castes, and everyday practices have also flourished which can broadly be incorporated under the term of social history. In this renewal, the underlying fidelity is towards understanding structures, processes, and agency together with experiences, perceptions, and meanings. The focus is on explaining social inequality, and formation of Dalit political identity through the lived experiences of alienation and humiliation. The social, the domestic, and the political are closely intertwined, lending credit to the observation that a new social history needs to be more dialogical with political and cultural identity formation. It also needs to be keenly vigilant of power and politics in the domestic sphere that animates social life in the public.[12] The implication of this new modality of doing social history for a history of time is tremendous. For instance, the domestic or say, the home, which is unfortunately a neglected space in time's historiography, is as much an important site for studying the making of the modern time as are the public institutions such as the office and the school.

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[9] Christoph Conrad, 'Social History', *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 22 (2nd edn.), 2015, p. 309.

[10] On disappearance of economic questions from Indian social history, see Prasannan Parthasarathi, 'The State of Indian Social History', *Journal of Social History*, 37, 1, 2003, pp. 47–54.

[11] Sarkar, Writing Social History, p. 4. Also see Vinay Lal, 'Subaltern Studies and its Critics: Debates over Indian History', *History and Theory*, 40 (February), 2001, pp. 135–48.

[12] For insightful, though limited, leads on the burgeoning field of Dalit Studies, see review essays by Ramnarayan S. Rawat, 'Occupation, Dignity, and Space: The Rise of Dalit Studies', *History Compass*, 11/12, 2013, pp. 1059–1067; Shailaja Paik, 'The Rise of *New* Dalit Women in Indian Historiography', *History Compass*, 16/10, 2018, pp. 1–14. On the connected worlds of labour and culture, and domestic and political spheres, see Nitin Sinha, Nitin Varma, and Pankaj Jha, eds., *Servants' Pasts: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century South Asia, Vol. 1*, New Delhi, 2019; Nitin Sinha and Nitin Varma, *Servants' Pasts: Late-Eighteenth to Twentieth Century South Asia, Vol. 2*, New Delhi, 2019.

In laying out the meaning of social history as used in this book, I turn to Sumit Sarkar, who undoubtedly is the most ardent, self-confessed, and in his own words 'unregenerate' Thompsonian in South Asian history writing. In a lecture given at Goldsmiths, University of London, he says: 'Social is the term that attracts me because I think it coveys, best of all, a sense of totality, an effort to link many aspects of human life to emphasise the interconnections between them and in the process of emphasising interconnections also highlight the contradictions. Both are very important.'[13] Interconnections and contradictions between various facets of life, to paraphrase Sarkar's elaboration of Thompsonian methodology elsewhere, mean that neither culture is abstracted from material conditions, or from relationships of power, nor are power and resistance detached from each other.[14] While Thompsonian social history's scope has rightfully been found inadequate on grounds of (non)engagement with gender, imperial, and race histories, its meticulous reconstruction of the past along the dialectical processes of agency and structure, this book shows, is worth retaining. More broadly, social history allows us to see the unevenness of interconnected world without 'splitting' the world using the axe of postcolonialism.[15]

It is this ambitious vision of the social, with a non-hierarchical and non-causal relationship between facets of everyday life, informed by methodology of deep historical contextualisation of events and processes rather than proffering of easy generalisations, and one which emboldens one to 'dig deeper where one stands' to excavate the constitution of power – both materially and linguistically – at the micro-possible level of social behaviour and practice that animates the sense of 'doing social history' in this book. As Patrick Joyce emphasises in a more recent essay, the history of power and of the political is now intrinsic to an adequate understanding of the social which is processual rather than structural.[16] However, the social of the colonial, as he tries to convey through his example, cannot be simply written by following the bureaucratic practices of the British East India Company or the Raj. The new social history ought to maintain people and their relationship with other species at the centre of our historical narratives (there is more later on the Anthropocene's contribution to the thinking of social history beyond human), not as the template of perfectibility of reason and progress but as indeterminate ordinary subjects preserving and exercising their agency with the realisation that it is ultimately a limited entity because of more-than-human constraints generated through ecological conditions and cohabitation with other species; not as an insularly structured being but as a contingent and hierarchised collective. Methodologically, this book clings to the tools of microhistory and the history of the everyday rather than to the current, deservingly fading, wave of global history. They, that is the cluster of microhistory and everyday histories, as David Sabean has remarked, do two things: one, they call to attention 'important aspects of human reality not captured by "master" narratives' and two, they reconfigure 'these narratives rather than reproducing them'.[17]

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[13] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wr31d_fDJEg&t=3s (last accessed 15.05.2024).

[14] Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, pp. 54, 60.

[15] On two traditions of 'one-worldism lumpers' and 'postcolonial splitters', see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, Chicago, 2021, pp. 16–18.

[16] Patrick Joyce, 'What is the Social in Social History?', *Past and Present*, 206, 2010, pp. 213–48.

It is equally important to state that beyond using the approach of social history that is driven to questioning the master narratives of power, a social history of time should also question the master-temporal binary established between the day and the night. Exploring the everyday is a well-established methodological approach. In contrast, the everynight is a very scantly explored area of research which ought to be pursued rigorously under the rubric of a social history of time. In the context of eighteenth-century Ottoman empire, Avner Wishnitzer writes, 'While the Ottoman everyday was shaped by political, economic, and religious institutions, the everynight was shaped by their retreat.'[18] Night was not merely the extension nor simply an oppositional entity of the day. It was a habitus that had specific relations to individual and collective aspirations, practices of social stigma and subversive transgressions, invisibilisation of work, and not least predicaments of law. The everynight, to put it in conversation with the everyday, possibly has a distinctive implication though.[19] The category of the everyday as a research methodology does not indicate any direct relationship to the temporal category of the day. This may be the function of a rather unreflected generalisation of the day subsuming the temporality of the night as well. After all, the everyday histories do claim to include histories of non-work and sleep. But in its core, the everyday is a methodological gateway to explore the boring, the banal, and the mundane of the social lives, particularly of ordinary men and women. The everynight, in distinction to it, has an obvious temporal bearing of studying darkness and night as a temporal habitus of social lives. Unlike the everyday, the everynight must highlight the temporal values of night and nocturnality not only as a neutral host of social activities but as an active agent in shaping those activities. While the studies on the everyday are not necessarily the studies on time, the exploration of the everynight should remain anchored in doing a social history of time. Works on night and nocturnality may not necessarily be considered as works on time. But if we foreground night through the conceptual category of the everynight as a temporal host or habitus, with its own dynamic set of regimes and cultures, we can use it as a connecting bridge between night and time. We may use the everynight as an analytical and a methodological prism to not only produce empirically-drawn rich accounts of night and darkness but also to show its utility to other types of history writing. The histories of crime, law, state, and technology are the most obvious ones, but it can potentially enrich other histories such as of emotion, gender, labour, and history of ideas wherein a focus on the everynight will bring out the temporally distinctive texture of social relationships that otherwise may appear undifferentiated if seen only under the light of the 'everyday'.

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[17] David Warren Sabean made these observations only in relation to microhistory. I extend them also to benefits of 'everyday history'. 'Reflections on Microhistory', in Gunilla Budde, Sebastian Conrad, and Oliver Janz, eds., *Transnationale Geschichte*, Goettingen, 2005, pp. 275–89. For the detailed exposition of the everyday, see Alf Lüdkte, 'Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who are Its Practitioners?' in Lüdkte, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, New Jersey, 1995 (English translation, William Templer), pp. 3–30.

[18] See Avner Wishnitzer, 'In the Dark: Power, Light, and Nocturnal Life in 18th-Century Istanbul', *International Journal of Middle east Studies*, 46, 2014, p. 513. Also see, Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 2011; Avner Wishnitzer, *As Night Falls: Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Cities after Dark*, New York, 2021.

[19] This strand of thinking is work-in-progress and much of it is a result of conversations with Amrita Chattopadhyay, Sagnik Kar, and Nitin Varma. The citations to published works on night has deliberately been kept to minimum because the purpose is to accentuate the need to think through 'the everynight'. For a very helpful review of existing works, see Amrita Chattopadhyay, 'Night and Nocturnality – A Historiographical Overview' (unpublished paper).

The methodology of the everyday history will of course be useful in sculpting the same for the everynight, but the latter may demand some uniqueness of its own. This may include a more rigorous reading of the archive together with the necessity of approaching diverse types of archives to discern a fairly obtuse relationship between power and night. Night should not be approached as a unit of 'natural time', that is, merely as a fabric on which scripts of power unfold. If power wants to control darkness, say through law, then darkness also holds the potential to let power, through the exercise of law, go rogue.[20] But the conceptual framing of the everynight should also attempt to go beyond labelling night only as a socially constructed entity. That indeed is the rightful basic assumption. The everynight should not become a mere assemblage of diverse nocturnal activities related to crime, social transgressions, policing, lighting, and so on. It should be the mode of explaining social practices and historical changes as and when constituted through darkness in relation to power. Thinking of the nature of state-centric archives, the night is either poorly or formulaically documented mostly in relation to crime on the one hand and light/electricity on the other. The distinctive sociabilities of the night, the altered mechanism and the nature of power that controls or attempts to control it, and its invisibilised presence in the archives as well as in our history writing, need to be thought together in order to craft a new methodological approach of the everynight.

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[20] Nitin Sinha, 'Night and Law: A Tumultuous History', *The Wire*, 27 October 2024, https://thewire.in/law/night-and-law-a-tumultuous-history (last accessed 19.11.2024).

In the age of the Anthropocene, when the scale of our investigation has moved to the level of the planetary, holding the ropes of microhistory and everyday and everynight histories may appear odd. However, as this monograph intends to show, even for a universal concept and entity such as time, a historical study of it will benefit from adopting a micro scale of investigation. The term micro does not stand for a village in early sixteenth or seventeenth century Europe or Asia or for the inability to produce generalisations. It stands for the perspective in which historical research is ambitiously geared towards capturing every oddity, mundaneness, and uniqueness of people's practices and yet also simultaneously equipped to explore the force of the structures that shape social relationships.[21]

The history of time and temporality is a nascent field of inquiry in South Asia, whose contours are heavily marked by patchy studies on technology on the one hand and conflation of time and periodisation through literary-textual representations on the other. However, this book is not regional in its scope. In the third chapter, I do draw empirical substantiations from fields of colonial Indian history which I am a little better versed with,[22] but the aim is not to write only on ways of doing social history of time in South Asia. The book ambitiously tends to introduce new frameworks through which time and its role in human history and society can be explored. Aiming to use the methodology of social history to investigate the dynamic and uneven relationship amongst people as constituted through multivalent power, varied forms of subjectivation (at the collective rather than the individual level), and everyday practices of life and livelihood, the book proposes two analytical frameworks of 'temporal regime' and 'temporal culture' of which the primary emphasis is on interrogating what people did with, and in, time. Meanings, narratives, and perceptions in themselves are not the agents of change without people and their practices in relation to ideas and objects (that is, human and non-human). The meaning of the material is no longer restricted to the economic sphere of production alone but incorporates urban, technological, and infrastructural aspects as well. This is the one of the core extensions of social history which this work attempts to put across.

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[21] For an insightful review of both these strands, see Brad S. Gregory, '*Is* Small Beautiful? Microhistory and the History of Everyday Life', *History and Theory*, 38, 1, 2002, pp. 100–10. For microhistory's commitment to exploring 'exception typical' see, Matti Peltonen, 'Clues, Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research', *History and Theory*, 40, 2001, pp. 347–59. The last decade has seen an interesting debate emerging on 'global microhistory' but because the exploration of microhistory and its variants is not the theme of direct concern here, I am leaving that discussion out for the sake of brevity.

[22] In general, I am using the term 'South Asia' when indicating a broader historiographical trend of the region, and 'India' or specifically 'colonial India' when empirically referring to the time period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

When dealing with people and time the question of plural engagements is bound to emerge. People is a socially segregated and varied entity and hence, as the argument follows, how could time not remain plural? In the current existing repertoire of work, there is a strong tendency to regard time as a plural entity. The monograph argues that despite the plural ways in which people engaged with time, the plurality of time can become an impeding framework if one wants to write a social history of time. The latter is a framework distinct from studies on 'historical time' and 'social time'. The ontological plural configuration of time, pluritemporal dimensions of lives and objects, and multiple times through acts of memory, remembrance, and retelling via the presence of the past (or pasts) in the present (or presents) that is impregnated with the idea of the future (or futures), when analysed from the viewpoint of the modest ambitions of the approach of a social history of time, do not take us far in exploring the interconnected histories of institutional, structural, and experiential asymmetries which constitute the core of the relationship between time, power, and society. The hyper relativised understanding of time and temporality contributing to its plurality runs against the danger of such ambitions of theoretical valence of history writing – social history – which profess to put inequalities into the centre of our society's understanding.

Methodologically, pluralism as a framework reiterates the juxtaposition or interconnections of independent formations in their essentialist manner, thus foreclosing the option of exploring the dialectical process of production of 'differentiated unity' through internal movements of contradictions.[23] Further, as shown later in the book, the framework of pluralism is inadequate to explain the inequalities if the point of termination of any analysis is to simply highlight the presence of interconnections leading to existence of plural times or temporalities.[24] To partly capture this critique, and by foregrounding people and their practices to the forefront of our research, I wish to push the idea that a social history of time can be imagined in terms of investigating what people do with and in time. People interact with time to turn it into a resource to exercise power or to turn it into a resource of power; people do things with time and thus create possibilities of multiple forms of engagement with time. They slot it, document it, catalogue it, and conquer it. In contrast, people act in time because time retains its pre-given character which exerts its own authority in how social groups attain and resist that power. People do things with time and in the course of doing so give meaning to it; but people are also constrained by the universality of time such as bodily degradation or planetary movements causing day and night which they may socially explain in a varied manner but may not control, reverse, or collapse it in any absolute sense. Therefore, they are forced to act in time which is independent of human action while they simultaneously interact with time to make it their own. Practices shape meanings of time, but they also happen within the matrix of time which is not often mutable. Multiple forms of engagement with time do not make time itself multiple or plural. I propose to locate the stuff of social history as resolutely perched between this constant traffic of practices with and in time.

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[23] The phrase taken from Jason W. Moore, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene & the Flight from World History: Dialectical Universalism & the Geographies of Class Power in the Capitalist World Ecology, 1492–2022', *Nordia Geographical Publications*, 51, 2, 2022, pp. 123–46.

[24] An example of this approach is Bernadette Bensaude-Vicent, 'Rethinking Time in Response to the Anthropocene: From Timescales to Timescapes', *Anthropocene Review*, 2021.

The first two chapters of this book are of the nature of historiographical review in which different frameworks used in the study of time and temporality across disciplines have been critically analysed. The first chapter takes up the literature on the making of the modern time and questions the binaries that were created through that process between modern and primitive times/societies. While this has been substantially questioned in the new wave of writings on time which draws inspiration from postcolonial and global frameworks, this book nonetheless outlines the problems lying with the latter two frameworks as well. The second chapter engages more directly with the two most important clusters of themes: social-time and historical-time. It charts out the debates that constructed the binary between social and natural times on the one hand and that of using time as a proxy for historical periodisation that delineates its function more as a unit of classification than as an entity or resource shaping social relationships on the other. In this critical engagement, the aim is not to attain an unfailing comprehensiveness of the existing literature but to engage with those frameworks which have remained central to the writing of time. The third chapter introduces the frameworks of temporal regime and temporal culture and offers, by way of empirical examples, a more practical illustration of how these two frameworks can help us surpass some of the dead ends in which the studies of time and temporality have got wedged. The conclusion returns to the question of plural time and undergirds its limits when it comes to writing historical pasts through the lens of social history.

Chapter 1
Transition and simultaneity

A Periodisation: Modern, Premodern

The historical studies on time have an overbearing presence of historical periodisation which uses the idea of transition. That this periodisation is itself a function of the emergence of modern disciplines or modernity, which has allowed us to look back at the past and connect with the future in a certain way and through certain categories (chiefly the stage-based idea of progress), should not go amiss.[25] In Reinhart Koselleck's words, 'The uncovering or discovery of such subjective historical time is itself a product of modernity.'[26] Kathleen Davis has powerfully argued for the role of politics and ideas of sovereignty as regulating principles that emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Europe, which were co-terminus with the colonial slave trade of the time, that necessitated retroactively creating a temporal divide to cast the European past of slavery and subjugation in terms of feudal order/feudalism/medievalism. Simultaneously, this divide was extended to temporally equate the European past with the then colonial present while effacing Europe's own involvement in the ongoing enslavement and economic oppression. The natural-ness of historical periodisation based upon historical consciousness and economic models of periodisation between medieval and modern was therefore a function of the underlying political order based upon sovereignty and claims to secularisation.[27] Periodisation is not just a mere back-description that divides history into segments, she argues, but a fundamental political technique to moderate, divide, and regulate that serves its purposes to now, that is, to the present moment in which periodisation is scripted.[28]

In History, time has also been understood as a function of the rupturous design of the 'modern time regime' that redefined our relationship with the past

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[25] See Fraçois Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, New York, 2015 (English translation, Saskia Brown); Margrit Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*, Cambridge, 2021; Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage, eds., *Breaking up Time: Negotiating the Borders Between Present, Past and Future*, Göttingen, 2013; Allegra Fryxell, Anna Gutgarts, and Oded Y. Steinberg, 'Lost in Time: Periodization and Temporality in Abnormal Times', *Global Intellectual History*, 8, 5, 2023, pp. 549–83.

[26] Quoted in, Lebovic, 'The Sovereignty of Modern Times', p. 282.

[27] Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time*, Philadelphia, 2008. Also see Constantin Fasolt, 'Scholarship and Periodization', *History and Theory*, 50, 3, 2011, pp. 414–24.

[28] Ibid., p. 5.

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https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111697215-002

and the future.[29] Usually the cut-off period is traced to the eighteenth century although the word modern, as *moderne*, meaning ‘just now’ and ‘at the present’, was first used in the fourteenth century and began to be popularly used in the seventeenth century in opposition to the term ancient.[30] This was also the period when the term medieval, in contrast to modern, was invented as the container of all negative attributes that from the sixteenth century onwards accompanied the temporal and cultural colonisation of the past as well as of non-European territories.[31] Nonetheless, generally in any such study on modern time (through devices, patterns of global convergence or movement of techniques, or as a marker of historical periodisation), the meaning ascribed to time is closely aligned with the function of historical periodisation. The categorisation of the past is either through the primacy given to the modes of production (feudalism, commercialism, capitalism) or to the modes of (alleged forms of) governance (barbaric, despotic, revolutionary, democratic) or even through major political breakpoints (formal colonialism under the Crown, the French revolution, the Meiji reforms, the early twentieth century reforms in Turkey, the transfer of power in the Indian subcontinent leading to a ‘tryst with destiny’). This categorisation then plays a crucial role in understanding the social and political transitions in temporal values, which are encapsulated in terms such as feudal and revolutionary, glorious and decadent, antiquity and futuristic, colonial and national, and, ancient, medieval, and modern. If temporality is understood as a function of categorising the past, the present, and the future, which are based upon experiences and conceptions of time,[32] then time and temporality are often presented as intertwined entities. We will return to the problems of their interchangeable use but let us continue with our mapping of the prevalence of this aspect of periodisation and categorisation that uses the ideas of transition and simultaneity in the existing scholarship.

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[29] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, New York, 2004 (English translation with an Introduction, Keith Tribe); Aleida Assmann, ‘Transformations of the Modern Time Regime’ in Lorenz and Bevernage, eds., *Breaking up Time*; Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History*, Budapest, 2008; Aleida Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime*, Ithaca and London, 2020 (English translation, Sarah Clift).

[30] Hunt, *Measuring Time*, pp. 48–9.

[31] Meena Bhargava and Pratyay Nath, ‘Introduction’, in Bhargava and Nath, eds., *The early Modern in South Asia: Querying Modernity, Periodization, and History*, New Delhi, 2022, pp. 4–5.

[32] Allegra Fryxell defines it like that in, ‘Time and the Modern: Current Trends in the History of Modern Temporalities’, *Past and Present*, 243, 2019, p. 286. Margrit Pernau defines temporality ‘as the experience and interpretation of relations between the past, the present, and the future’. Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*, p. 4.

This feature is most prominent in two sets of studies: the first in western writings on the philosophy of history and (historical) time, which have become prominent since the 1970s; and second in the postcolonialism-inflected studies that gained prominence from the 1980s on. In the former, time becomes evident only through its rendition under a rupturous regime of modernity that segregates human conceptualisation of time into rigid boundaries of the past, present, and future.[33] Time is approached as segments of classification – past, present, and future – acquiring new meanings about historicity and historical consciousness due to changing political or social contexts.[34] In the latter, that is, in the set of postcolonial studies, time is used to deconstruct imperial claims, which either relegated non-European societies to 'the waiting room of history' or enabled nation's elites to discover their own 'primitives' and 'foreign bodies'. Time was used as a marker of the hierarchical spatialisation of history.

Time, in this sense, appears to emphasise the logic of colonial 'deferral', to expose the colonialist's construct of the colony, to deconstruct the discourse of the 'timelessness' of colonized societies and to highlight the semantic upsurge of the native elite that undergirded the temporal dimension of the making of the nation-state.[35] In multiple strands of this scholarship, the temporalisation of the past through history is used to reflect back on time itself, and to label it as modern, premodern, abstract, plural, linear and so on. The temporalisation of the past (in terms of categories such as modern or premodern) and the characteristics ascribed to time (plural or abstract) thus fuse together, often pairing up in binaries. Although postcolonial scholarship can be accredited for rupturing this binary construction through the framework of relativism, as Stefan Helgesson has insightfully shown, it suffers from a fundamental contradiction that disallows it to completely break through this binary. On the one hand, this scholarship has denounced the way in which the others of the west are placed in another time and yet this distinction, though criticised, is also upheld through the logic of the discreteness of homogenised units of western and non-western habitations or temporalities.[36] Strictly in relation to time, postcolonial scholarship also uses time metaphorically and as a substitute for history rather than as a social component of historical processes.

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[33] For the leading studies of this variant, see Koselleck, *Futures Past*; Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*; Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint?* A very accessible exposition of this framework is in Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*; Helge Jordheim, 'Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization', *History and Theory*, 53, 4, 2014, pp. 498–518; Hunt, *Measuring Time.*

[34] Marcus Colla, 'The Politics of Time and State Identity in the German Democratic Republic', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 29, 2019, pp. 223–51.

[35] See Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labour Servitude in Colonial India*, Cambridge, 1990; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, NJ, 2008; Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*, New York, 1999; Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From the Colonial Economy to National Space*, Chicago, 2004; Prathama Banerjee, *Politics of Time: 'Primitives' and History-writing in a Colonial Society*, New York, 2006; On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt*, Berkeley, 2013 (e-book version used).

Under this impulse, in varying guises, it has been remarked that time in the premodern era was elastic, fluid, and non-linear in contrast to what it became in the modern period: abstract, linear, and fixed. This is one prime example of how scholarship fuses, invents, and combines the characteristics of temporal (premodern) with time (fluid). Peter Burke summarises a set of important studies in the following words: time in traditional societies is qualitative, concrete, local, and imprecise in contrast to modern societies in which it becomes quantitative, abstract, uniform, and exact.[37] At the risk of some generalisation, this can be said to be the feature of a variety of studies, ranging from E. P. Thompson's to that of David Landes'.[38] One crucial element in this postulation is the society's temporal relationship with nature. Arguably, the role of seasonality in premodern societies was of a higher intensity and significance. Nigel Thrift, who otherwise criticised Thompson's overdetermination of a new time-discipline through the use of the mechanical clock, did argue that, broadly, before 1550 in England, a sea of timelessness existed in which the basic idea of time was rhythmic rather than measured.[39] In the case of eighteenth century north India, it has been recently argued that the making of the colonial state was premised upon abstracting time out of the social and ecological conditions in which agrarian production took place. In other words, the monsoon was tamed by the exigencies of the emerging fiscal state.[40] This meant two things: one, practices of time-notation in those allegedly traditional societies were flexible. The counting of the passage of time was dependent upon seasons and other constituents of nature (sunrise and sunset being the most important markers in various cultures, but also the phases of the moon which, in fact, created a temporal chaos in colonial Natal), which made time itself a variable entity.[41] Two, the passage of time was socially understood as not abstract but marked by a set of lived practices. Time was not an independent variable; it arguably became so in the modern period.

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[36] Stefan Helgesson, 'Radicalizing Temporal Difference: Anthropology, Postcolonial Theory, and Literary Time', *History and Theory*, 53, 2014, pp. 545–62.

[37] Peter Burke, 'Reflections on the Cultural History of Time', 2004, pp. 617–26. Also see, Roger Neustader, 'Beat the Clock: The mid-20th Century Protest against the Reification of Time', *Time and Society*, 1, 3, 1992, pp. 379–98.

[38] E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past & Present*, 38, 1967, pp. 56–97; L. Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, New York 1934; Davis S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*, Cambridge, Mass, 1983; S. Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan*, Princeton, NJ, 2004. For a sustained critique of this approach, see Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, *Shaping the Day: A History of Timekeeping in England and Wales, 1300–1800*, Oxford, 2009.

[39] Nigel Thrift, 'The Making of a Capitalism Time Consciousness', in John Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, New York, 1990, pp. 107–09.

Reiterating a popular and widespread view, Stefan Tanaka claims that 'Prior to the modern period, and in places not dominated by abstract time, time is episodic, local, uneven, and irregular.'[42] In order to prove this, he gives the example that some days are more favourable than others. Reading this as a remnant of 'non modern times', Tanaka, who otherwise is keen to rescue time from the flattening force of modernity's abstraction, seems to be upholding the binary of modern and nonmodern times. In many modern societies operating fully under the abstract sense of time and timing, some days are still more favourable than others (depending on the nature of political, religious, or social action). Furthermore, in his own account various ancient and medieval societies were keenly invested in designing sophisticated calendars. However, this does not deter Tanaka from arguing that time in nonmodern societies was uneven and irregular, that it lacked abstraction.[43] Is it just because the definition of abstraction has changed under our modern times that premodern time, in spite of using techniques to regularise and categorise time, appears non-abstract to us? If abstract is meant as a form of articulation in which an entity acquires an independent status bereft of its inner qualities or intrinsic properties, then writings on ancient India show not only the interlaced presence of cyclical and linear time but also the presence of abstract time, abstracted through the use of a cosmological uneven cycle of ages, mathematics, time's agency in cosmology's creation and destruction, time stretching itself to the limit of timelessness, time manifesting itself as a process of repeated creation and dissolution, time as *chakra*, a turning wheel whose spokes constantly revolve downward and upward symbolising it as a permanent and eternal entity without any intervening destruction, and *dharma*.[44]

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[40] Hayden Bellenoit, 'Taming the Monsoon Economy: Taxes and Mastering Time in India, 1760–1860', in Burghart Schmidt, Mathew John Kokkatand, Anu Pande, eds., *Time and Temporality in the Asian and European Modernity*, Drebber, 2023, pp. 103–14.

[41] On seasonality, see G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: Views on Time from Prehistory to the Present Day*, Oxford, 2004; G. Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, Chicago, 1996; for Tokugawa Japan, Y. Frumer, 'Translating Time: Habits of Western-Style Timekeeping in Late Edo Japan', *Technology and Culture*, 55, 4, 2014, pp. 785–820; Y. Frumer, *Making Time: Astronomical Time Measurement in Tokugawa Japan*, Chicago, 2018; for labour conflicts in Natal over time-use, K. E. Atkins, "Kafir Time': Preindustrial Temporal Concepts and Labour Discipline in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Natal', *The Journal of African History*, 29, 2, 1988, pp. 229–244; K. E. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give us our Money!: The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900*, Portsmouth, 1993. The recent studies on England have further established the mixed ways in which people used both nature and the clock to tell time. They question the Thompsonian watershed of industrial time-discipline by showing two developments: one, clock-consciousness and regular work rhythms were not the inventions of the factory; two, accurate time keeping was still a preserve of a few until the late nineteenth century, meaning that Thompson engaged in 'retrospective thinking'. Mark Hailwood, 'Time and Work in Rural England, 1500–1700', *Past and Present*, 248, 2020, pp. 87–121; Hannah Gay, 'Clock Synchrony, Time Distribution and Electrical Time Keeping in Britain, 1880–1925', *Past and Present*, 181, 2003, pp. 107–140. Also see Michael Sauter, 'Clockwatchers and Stargazers: Time Discipline in Early Modern Berlin', *The American Historical Review*, 112, 3, 2007, pp. 685–709.

[42] Tanaka, *History Without Chronology*, 2019 (open access, Lever Press), p. 24.

The binary that has been sketched between modern and premodern times invokes many other forms of transition: from predominantly agrarian modes of production to industrial ones; from the precapitalist organisation of work and labour to a value-oriented capitalist system of production and exchange; from larger time-units to minute classification of time with greater precision, in hours and minutes; and not least, from the unequal divisions of the day and night to the equally divided and fixed units of durations.[45] Arguably, all these shifts freed time from being located in social practices and events and allowed it to become an entity of its own. In simpler words, if in the premodern period, tasks, rituals, events, and episodic moments were the ways of marking and understanding time and through which time itself was mapped, then in the modern period, all these things happened in time which acquired a continuous, linear dimension. Particularly, with the dominance of the mechanical clock-time in association with the capitalist mode of production, time is said to have become an independent entity external to human activities.[46] It flowed in a continuous manner with activities happening within it rather than defining it. Building upon Moishe Postone, Andrew Liu summarises, 'Concrete time was a 'function of events' and referred to

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[43] Ibid., pp. 27–8.

[44] Romila Thapar, 'Cyclical and Linear Time in Early India', *Museum International*, 57, 3, 2005, pp. 19–31; Thapar, *Time as a Metaphor of History: Early India*, New Delhi, 1996. On the limitations of any binary conceptualisation of time between cyclical and linear, see Anindita Niyogi Balslev, 'Time and the Hindu Experience', in Balslev and J. N. Mohanty, eds., *Religion and Time*, Leiden, 1993, pp. 163–81; Ludo Rocher, 'Concepts of Time in Classical India', in Ralph M. Rosen, *Time and Temporality in the Ancient World*, Philadelphia, 2004, pp. 91–110.

[45] One of the most comprehensive accounts can be found in Rossum, *History of the Hour*.

[46] See Jonathan Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation: A Socio-Historical Inquiry into the Making of Modern Time*, Leiden and Boston, 2015.

‘particular tasks or processes’. Abstract time, by contrast, was ‘independent of events’.’[47] In the words of Barbara Adam, ‘Clock-time, which was developed in Europe during the 14th century, no longer tracks and synthesizes time of the natural and the social environment but produces instead a time that is independent of those processes: clock-time is applicable anywhere, any time.’[48] Jacques Le Goff in his highly insightful study quipped, ‘[h]enceforth the clock was to be the measure of all things’.[49] A long history of the rationalisation of time, through the middle ages culminating into the ethics of capitalism in the nineteenth century, is thus argued for in a set of studies, which for a long became the defining criteria of distinguishing between time in premodern societies and that of in the modern societies. This in a way symbolises the coming of a full circle. If, following Davis, we learn that historical periodisation was the product of a changing political order, then the now naturalised temporal units of classification – modern and premodern – became the ground for drawing distinctions between societies, and creating another hierarchical order of social and political formation.

B First Empty, Now Plural: Modern Time(s)

There are three analytical entry points which historians and social scientists have broadly used to argue for the making of modern time as empty, homogenous, and linear. Although scholars are aware that the processes were protracted and contradictory, these frameworks uphold the view of a transitionary movement from the premodern to the modern time.

One, the capitalist order which is based upon the alienation and reification of social relations into things; two, the ‘temporal revolution’ of the nineteenth century which was based upon technologically-driven attempts at synchronicity and standardisation of everyday practices for which the railways, steamships, the telegraph, and mechanical clocks are the most accounted; and three, the nexus of imperialism and consequent ‘national/imperial’ reforms in various world regions through which time itself was colonised but also, quite simultaneously, equipped to spread out globally.[50] Not so ironically, imperialism, nationalism, and globalisation came together to make time modern. From the late nineteenth century, in a gradual but progressive manner, the mechanical clock-based notation of time slowly became the defining method of a global system of measuring and maintaining time, whose accuracy was further perfected by the new technology of the quartz clock.[51]

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[47] Andrew Liu, ‘Incense and Industry: Labour and Capital in the Tea Districts of Huizhou China’, *Past and Present*, 230, 2016, p. 186.

[48] Barbara Adam, ‘Time’, *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 23, 2–3, 2006, p. 123.

[49] Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, Chicago, 1980, p. 52 (English translation, Arthur Goldhammer).

[50] Besides works mentioned above, some of the prominent works covering these areas are of Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation*; Vanessa Ogle, *The global Transformation of Time:*

Unlike works mentioned above, a newer variant of studies has emerged in the last decade or so which insists on the fluidity of modern time as well.[52] For instance, Sebastian Conrad notes that the temporal revolution of the nineteenth century did not go uncontested; the hegemony of the modern time regime was never absolute.[53] Margrit Pernau talks about the embroiled state of the past, the present, and the future in which they are no longer distinguishable.[54] 'Multiple times' and 'pluritemporality' are the cornerstone of the plethora of recent writings on time.[55]

This fluidity has been argued for not only historical time, but also when time is seen as a social entity, that is, more in its material form than as a product of historical temporalisation. This appears to follow the perceptive dictum of Ernst Bloch and Mark Ritter which signifies the existence of the non-simultaneous with the simultaneous (paralleling Reinhart Koselleck's idea of 'sediments of time', which expounds the view that the location of a social process in time is often

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1870–1950, Cambridge/London, 2015; G. Nanni, *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire*, Manchester, 2012; Sebastian Conrad, 'Nothing is the way it should be: Global Transformations of the Time Regime in the Nineteenth Century', *Modern Intellectual History*, 15, 3, 2018, pp. 821–848; Ritika Prasad, "'Time-Sense': Railways and Temporality in Colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47, 4, 2012, pp. 1252–1282; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*, Berkeley/ Los Angeles, 1986; Barak, *On Time*; Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Chicago and London, 2015.

[51] Shaul Katzir, 'Time Standards for the Twentieth Century', *The Journal of Modern History*, 89, 1, 2017, pp. 119–50; Gay, 'Clock Synchrony, Time Distribution and Electrical Time Keeping'. The atomic clock has replaced the quartz clock 'which, after about an hour, become inaccurate by a billionth of a second'. Sarit Kattan Gribetz and Lynn Kaye, *Time: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, Oldenburg, 2023, p. 35.

[52] For a useful summary of these works, see Fryxell, 'Time and the Modern'. Also see Jordheim, 'Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization'.

[53] Conrad, 'Nothing is the way it should be'.

[54] Pernu, *Emotions and Temporalities*.

[55] Helgesson, 'Radicalizing Temporal Difference'; Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier, eds., *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism*, London, 2019 (e-book version used).

marked by the co-existence of seemingly disparate and contradictory practices, beliefs, etc. rather than moments of absolute transition).[56] In a perceptive introduction to the First World War genealogy of this thought, Tamm and Olivier have traced this to the writings of Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin.[57] However, Koselleck's main contribution is in explaining how modern time, or a new temporalisation of *Neuzeit*, emerged in the late eighteenth century. His expression, which has become the most famous by now, was of the separation between a horizon of experience and the space of expectation. In the pre-revolutionary period, expectation was not outside the realm of social or eschatological experience. The future was conceived from within the precincts of past experience. Thus, for him, there was a clear break in the emergence of time-sensibility in the eighteenth century.[58]

This reading has been challenged by Helge Jordheim who interprets in Koselleck's *Zeitschichten* an avowal of the existence of 'multiple temporalities'. Koselleck did speak of not one historical time 'but rather of many forms of time superimposed one upon the other'.[59] Nonetheless, my understanding of Koselleck concurs with that of Pernau's. She argues that to depict the contemporaneity of the past, Koselleck borrowed the imagery of the rock from the discipline of geology, meaning, 'the past may be there but it will remain hidden'. She therefore summarises that in Koselleck's theory of historical times, 'the past, the present, and the future remain clearly distinguishable from each other and follow in a given, unsubvertible order'.[60]

However, revisiting Koselleck, it has been argued that modern time, marked by the primacy of the mechanical clock whose precision is defined by minute calculation, is still beset with plurality.[61] Here, plurality itself has acquired a new meaning over the course of fifty years or so. Amongst historians, Fernand Braudel might have been the first one to divide time according to its pace of flow, thus rendering it plural, into three types: fast event-centred, intermediate structure-centred, and an extremely slow-moving time based upon environment and geography.[62] In his own words, ‘Each “current reality” is the conjoining of movements with different origins and rhythms. The time of today is composed simultaneously of the time of yesterday, of the day before yesterday, and of bygone days.’[63] He treated history not as a simple descent down the slopes of time but as a ‘series of descents, following the multiple and innumerable rivers of time’.[64] This has led scholars to argue that Braudel tried to develop a theory of multiple times.[65]

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[56] Ernst Bloch and M. Ritter, 'Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to its Dialectics', *New German Critique*, 11, 1977, pp. 22–38; Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, California, 2018 (translated and edited, Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwif Hoffman).

[57] Tamm and Olivier, 'Introduction', in Tamm and Oliver, eds., *Rethinking Historical Time*.

[58] Recently, Zoltán Boldizsár Simon has distinguished between the future newly envisioned in the eighteenth century in the context of the Enlightenment and one that is formed in the postwar period of 'unprecedented change' marked by nuclear warfare, anthropogenic climate change, and artificial intelligence. However, his point is not of the erasure of the future due to the regime of presentism but it getting reconceived along technological and ecological factors. *History in Times of Unprecedented Change: A Theory for the 21st Century*, London, 2019.

[59] Koselleck, *Futures Past*, p. 2. Helge Jordheim, 'Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities', *History and Theory*, 51, 2, 2012, pp. 151–71.

[60] Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*, p. 6. Also see Stephen Hanß, 'The Fetish of Accuracy: Perspectives on Early Modern Time(s)', *Past and Present*, 243, 2019, pp. 267–84.

[61] For other criticisms, including eurocentrism in Koselleck's works, see Vanessa Ogle, 'Time, Temporality and the History of Capitalism', *Past and Present*, 243, 2019, pp. 312–27.

However, Braudel’s conceptualisation of multiple time was not based upon fractured time; time remained a continuous entity – ‘imperious because irreversible’ – for him.[66] His idea of historical time was deeply opposed to sociological ‘social-time’.[67] He found Sociology’s emphasis on event or short-term time on the one hand, and its penchant for discovering timeless structures on the other, deeply problematic.[68] For him, history was a way of explaining the social in all its reality, and the unity between the past and the present. He found the idea of ‘an instantaneous moment of time, in which all temporalities are suspended’ a ‘virtual absurdity’.[69] For him, to think through the plurality of time and temporality was a methodological option – ‘the creation of our mind’ – to resist the use of a single and uniform explanatory model rather than an index of postulating time’s own unique attribute of being innately plural.[70] He did not characterise time itself as plural but argued that in order to understand the course of human civilisation – whose all possible past, present, and future is studied by history – one needs to look at the almost immobile changes happening at the geographical levels and the suddenness of a change, say, through a political event, and at every other pace of duration in-between these two simultaneously. By emphasising the value of longue durée, he was questioning ‘traditional historiographical temporality’ (as he said, in his times there was an obsession with an event-centric focus) rather than conceptually pluralising time.[71]

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[62] Olivia Harris, ‘Braudel: Historical Time and the Horror of Discontinuity’, *History Workshop Journal*, 57, 2004, pp. 161–174.

[63] Fernand Braudel, ‘History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée’, *Review (Fernand Braudel Center),* 32, 2, 2009, p. 181 (translation, Immanuel Wallerstein).

[64] Ibid., pp. 187–88.

[65] Helge Jordheim, ‘Stratigraphies of Time and History: Beyond the Outrages upon Humanity’s Self-Love’, in Anders Ekström and Staffan Bergwik, eds., *Times of History, Times of Nature: Temporalization and the Limits of Modern Knowledge*, New York, 2022, esp. pp. 31–35.

[66] Braudel, ‘History and the Social Sciences’, p. 198.

[67] Jordheim, ‘Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization’, pp. 502–03.

[68] Braudel, ‘History and the Social Sciences’, pp. 183–85.

[69] Ibid., p. 187.

[70] Ibid., p. 198.

On the other hand, Georges Gurvitch, the sociologist, emphasised the difference between social-time as studied by Sociology and that of studying History in terms of the dialectical ambiguity of historical time, in which, broadly speaking, the discipline’s necessity of History for finding passages and transitions creates a picture of continuous time in spite of the recognition of the discontinuous time in which past societies lived. History privileged continuous time; Sociology gave preference to the discontinuity of time.[72] Jordheim reaffirms that, for Braudel, the three temporal rhythms of the event, the structure, and the landscape belonged to the same time, to the same temporal standard; ‘they all are measurements on the same scale’.[73] To Gurvitch, on the other, multiple times led to a complete disintegration of any unity and continuity.[74] We will return to discussing the features of social-time as received through the disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology in the second chapter, but it can be remarked that the plurality of time in our current historical writing is closer to the erstwhile sociological understanding of time than it is to the Braudelian framework. Running against this, this book is more amenable to Braudelian framework of treating plurality as a historiographical and methodological choice, if necessary, rather than as the intrinsic quality of time itself.

The new plurality of historical time does not share the Braudelian time-unity. Now, time is not only not empty and homogenous;[75] it is also non-unidirectional.[76] This view has resulted from a weakened faith in the teleologically-driven idea of progress and futurity on the one hand, and a growing lament about the extended presence of the ‘monstrous present’ on the other.[77] In the modern regime of things beginning the eighteenth century, as argued by Koselleck, history ceased to be the guide to the future. The future instead was supposed to enlighten the present.[78] This new future 'did not simply contain the possibility of progress, but [it] was synonymous with it'.[79] With the widening of the gap between experience and expectation, the crisis of the present deepened. As Hartog explains, with the demise of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the present has become 'its own self-enclosed horizon' subsuming both the past and the future.[80] These are definitely very useful ways in thinking about how western society or societies have intellectually explained their relationship with time and its perception (in terms of how the relationship between past, present, and future have come to be organised and reorganised in the last two hundred years), the questioning of the modernisation framework, postcolonialism's relativism, and global history's sensitisation to move beyond Eurocentrism has made modern time – once thought abstract and singular – plural. The singularity of historical time derived through the trajectory of European history, imbued with enforceable ideas of the future and progress, and mindful of effacing the violence underlying its own claims, was, so to say, called out. It had to be replaced by a more accommodative framework of plurality. The narratives of transition made room for investiture of synchronicity.

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[71] Ibid., pp. 176, 183–87.

[72] Georges Gurvitch, ‘Varieties of Social-Time’, in Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, pp. 72–76.

[73] Braudel, ‘History and the Social Sciences’, p. 198.

[74] Jordheim, ‘Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization’, p. 503.

[75] Fryxell, ‘Time and the Modern’; Ogle, ‘Time, Temporality and the History of Capitalism’.

[76] Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*.

[77] Jordheim, ‘Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization’; Lorenz and Bevernage, eds., *Breaking up Time.* On the extended presence of the present, see Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*; on the demise of the future and the simultaneous resurrection of the past in the twentieth century as the new form of ‘modern time regime’, see Assman, *Is Time Out of Joint?*

The more pronounced the claim for plurality of the modern time becomes, the more vociferous the tone of scholarly jest to make room for the non-western premodern 'many faces and functions of time' also becomes. Ironically, the latter is based upon hammering down the point that in western understanding, time is unquestionably linear and uniform.[81] Time is thus not only the site for scripting a Eurocentric vision of progress and modernisation, and now generating its critique, but also a site for resurrecting alternative non-European narratives. Inadvertently, these approaches have created more binaries than have dissolved them.

As in the previous set of scholarship there existed multiple avenues through which time's emptiness was argued for, now, in the new approaches also, the plurality of time is underscored in various ways. First, it is usually read through people's activities and embeddedness in conceptions or imaginations of different times and lives. Fryxell argues, 'In modern life [a plurality of social times] may include the time of seasons, governments, school timetables, churches, clocks, instant messaging, pop concerts, political referendums, holidays, veterinary visits, reproduction and birthdays.'[82] Further, she elaborates, the person acting out their life according to the hours and minutes of their wristwatch might also be believing 'in reincarnation and attend seances to communicate with departed loved ones'.[83] So, one argument for plurality is made on the basis of multiple social activities and the possibility that even a modern person can simultaneously inhabit different temporalities. Based upon personal and social forms of engagement, time is divided into different units: there is biological time, psychological time, generational time, living time, historical time, 'arrested time' in myths and rituals and so on. According to Barbara Adam, 'time is not just conceived as a linear linking of past to future but a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that involves *biographical time*, which covers that lifespan from birth to death, *generational time*, which provides links and attachments across generations of kinship relations, and *historical time*, which locates individual and family lives in the wider frames of external events, environments and political landscapes.'[84] She uses the category of timescapes to capture the multiplicity of temporalities or multiple social times.[85] She sets out also to explain the variety of times in her writings.[86] Not so dissimilar is May and Thrift's emphasis on 'multiplicity of times' moving at different speeds and in different directions, which are interrelated at various levels constituted through the use of technologies such as of transport and communication but also of light and energy, and knowledge systems based upon physics, biology, and geology.[87]

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[78] See Christophe Bouton for raising the question of if ever the model of *historia magistra* dissolved in the modern times. Bouton, 'Hartog's Account of Historical Times and the Rise of Presentism', *History*, 2019, pp. 309–30.

[79] Terence Holden, 'Hartog, Koselleck, and Ricoeur: Historical Anthropology and the Crisis of the Present', *History and Theory*, 58, 3, 2019, p. 386.

[80] Ibid., p. 388.

[81] Shonaleeka Kaul, 'Temporality and its Discontents or *Why Time needs to be Retold*', in Kaul, ed., *Retelling Time: Alternative Temporalties from Premodern South Asia,* London and New York, 2022.

C The Encounter Narratives: Colonial and Global

The second way to map the plurality of modern time is by showing the messy journey of the late nineteenth and twentieth century history of the globalisation of time. This process of transformation was uneven and conflictual, which in various instances led to diverse sorts of arrangements, even to showing multiple local times on a single clock tower. There were pluralities emerging from within the time-notation system of the mechanical clock-time itself; in India, for instance, it was debated whether the astronomically determined master clock-time observed in Madras or the local time determined by the sunrise would be followed in the province of Bombay.[88] The adoption of Greenwich Mean Time added a new layer to these debates.[89] For the most part of the period between the fourteenth and the mid-nineteenth century, the mechanical clock-time was dependent on solar time, which meant that the mechanical clock-time was also local until the railways exposed the problems of temporal synchronisation.[90] Gradually, Greenwich Mean Time, which is the mean solar time observed in Greenwich, was adopted as the world standard time by the early twentieth century.[91] If time were plural, it would not only be on account of the binary between the fixity of the mechanical clock-time and the cultural/intellectual cognition of the passage of time which arguably collapsed or fused the neat differences between the past, the present, and the future. The history of the unification of time is not only a product of the tussle between natural time and the clock time but of multiple clock times as well, both in Europe and in the colonies. One has to remember here that clock times were also diverse, and their history of unification and standardisation has been recently accounted for under the framework of 'global history' or broadly through histories of connection, diffusion, and adaptation.[92]

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[82] Fryxell, 'Time and the Modern', p. 290.

[83] Ibid., p. 290.

[84] Barbara Adam, 'Researching Lives Through Time: Time, Generation and Life Stories', Timescapes Working Paper Series no. 1, https://timescapes-archive.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/47/2020/07/WP1-Researching-Lives-Through-Time-June-2008.pdf (last accessed, 5 December 2023).

[85] See Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation*, pp. 43–46 for an extensive discussion of her works, in which he argues that Adam's emphasis on multiplicity of times overshadows the logic of power and struggle within a given timescape.

[86] Barbara Adam, *Time and Social Theory*, Cambridge, 1990.

[87] Jon May and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, London and New York, 2001, pp. 11–12.

Global times, used in plural, do help in countering the Eurocentric bias of the 'convergence-model' of time in which the default time-keeping practice is taken to be European, with which other regions and practices accordingly 'converge'.[93] The new global accounts of time argue that global uniformity produced more of a variety of local times. For Ogle, the point of emergence of local contestations was located in the attempt to establish global uniformity.[94] For Barak, the speed of standardisation that was based upon the notion of western punctuality created the more frequent breakdowns or 'countertempos' leading to Egyptian slowness. This slowness was at odds with the value of mechanical clock-time and created disdain for European standards of efficiency, linearity, and punctuality.[95] Using technology to study time, Barak emphasises a central role of western encounter in the making of Egyptian 'substandard' temporal culture. The centrality of encounter is best reflected in these words: 'the development of Egyptian time overlapped an initial, optimistic embrace of the instrumentalist language of reform, followed by a growing disillusionment with technoscientific enlightenment and disenchantment with technology's alienating temporal regimes'.[96] Western and Egyptian times co-emerged, as antithesis, in which the former appeared masterly but was unstable and the latter appeared derivative but was creative. Not dissimilar is Ogle's take, only that in her case, this co-production happened at the global-local axis: 'The circulation of ideas and globalization of time *produced* a "nationally" interpreted, civilizational Arab and Islamic time.'[97] For Ranajit Guha, due to British colonialism, Calcutta got slotted into official and indigenous time, the former symbolising the time of the office and the latter the time of the festivity.[98] In each of these, the metropolitan or the global appears to be the source of both standardisation and diversification: a sort of two scripts but one history. The history is premised upon the centrality of encounter.

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[88] For a 'time battle' in Bombay, see Shekhar Krishnan, 'Empire's Metropolis. Money Time & Space in Colonial Bombay, 1870–1930', Ph.D. thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013; Jim Masselos, 'Bombay Time', in M. Kosambi, ed., *Intersections: Socio-Cultural Trends in Maharashtra*, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 161–183.

[89] Prasad, 'Time-Sense'.

[90] Leofranch Holford-Strevens, *The History of Time: A Very Short Introduction*, New York, 2005, pp. 11–12.

[91] Ogle, *The global Transformation of Time*; Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation*; Ritika Prasad, *Tracks of Change: Railways and Everyday Life in Colonial India*, Cambridge, 2015; Rossum, *History of the Hour*.

[92] Ogle, *The global Transformation of Time*; Barak, *On Time*.

[93] See Wilhem van Schendel and H. Schulte Nordholt, eds., *Time Matters: Global and Local Time in Asian Societies*, Amsterdam, 2000.

D Problems with Above Frameworks

The argument for the plurality of time, based upon the multiplicity of daily activities, appears weak when we think of the possibility of time itself as the plural entity. For ages, human societies have indulged in performing multiple activities. A psycho-subjective critique of standardised time-regimes takes us into a journey of personal, emotional, and inner registers of time or 'felt time'.[99] In doing so, they reveal the individual agency at work, but their subjectivist orientation obliterates any structural explanation. It fails to relate various kinds of temporal orientations to one another as a way of explaining social structural phenomena. It therefore does not become clear why time is the object of study at all as any and every dimension of human life can be fragmented into plural forms. The use of time in explaining social structural change was essential in Thompson's writing in which he used examples from anthropological works to set a contrast between task-orientation and time-discipline.[100] The performance of activities and the concomitant conceptualisation of time in the precapitalist world were task-based, which in the capitalist system, ushered through by industrialisation, changed to a mechanical clock-time based disciplining. It is difficult for me to postulate how, for instance, Fryxell's example of multiple activities in modern times relates to this shift from task-orientation to time-discipline or what other shifts would they relate to, or indicate to, which would analytically denote a change in the characteristic of time itself. In other words, scholars like Thompson embedded the logic of transition in the political-economic formation of the period; their explanatory model was structural in nature. In contrast, the 'multiplicity of tasks' approach, it appears, privileges subjectivity to argue for the existence of a pluritemporal condition without providing any structural anchorage to that subjectivity. Based upon either multiplicity of tasks or varied subjective forms of relating to its passage, can we say that time was less plural in previous centuries (and in which centuries if so) or, alternatively, did it become more plural in association with modernity or postmodernity? In other words, how do we understand the relationship of multiplicity of tasks with the changing nature of time? Is it under the new structure of modernity that, while it created a relatively singular dimension of time, the everyday and social times kept on multiplying? But then the question arises if time is ever plural as a static formation, does it even need historicisation?

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[94] Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time*.

[95] Barak, *On Time*, p. 32.

[96] Ibid., p. 63.

[97] Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time*, pp. 121–22 (emphasis added).

[98] Ranajit Guha, 'A Colonial City and its Time(s)', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, 3, 2008, pp. 329–51.

[99] See Neustadter, 'Beat the Clock'; Michael G. Flaherty, *The Textures of Time: Agency and Temporal Experience*, Philadelphia, 2010.

The temporal experiences in carrying out each of the everyday activities as mentioned above will surely vary but the plural framework still leaves open the question of if differential time-orientations do not presuppose a singularity of time. Each of the tasks, say, bringing the child to the school, the pet to the veterinary, and finding the best flights and hotels for an impending holiday, is required to be finished on time. Eviatar Zerubavel reminds us of the point that modern numerous daily activities and commitments require a lot of regulation and coordination. Schedules, which temporally organise our daily life, are part of a rigid structure maintaining a temporal regularity.[101] The pressure of an empty clock-time ticking its time away and exerting a force to finish tasks on time undergirds many of the activities of our everyday life. The co-inhabited worlds of different time-flows (for instance, life and after-life), life and life-forms (for instance, body and soul), experience and memory, reality and desire, and the organisation of life according to different calendars is still more relevant to think about how people engage with time in plural ways. And yet, it should not be forgotten that ageing and death do reveal the basic irreversible characteristic of time. Thapar brings out the complexity in the Hindu beliefs around rebirth very well.[102] Implicit in the idea of rebirth is 'the inevitability of death with which time comes to an end' but rebirth is also tied to the concepts of *karma* and *samskara*, meaning present action could determine the future. This thought therefore conveys the idea that past, present, and future are linked from the viewpoint of human action and conduct. But there is an inevitable and irreversible destruction of certain entities – primarily the body – which is caused by time. There is a deep fundamental ethos of linearity embedded in what appears to be cyclic. Further, the concept of *moksha*, that is, freeing the soul from the cycle of rebirth, and a strong philosophical as well as moral emphasis which is put on achieving it through good conduct, can once again be read as a preference to the end of cyclicity of birth and death. Moksha is the termination of that cycle, which is the highest desired form of life-value. We will return to this point of linearity and reversibility when we reflect on the question of whether multiple forms of engagements *with* and *in* time make time itself plural, or if can we draw a line between time as a universal entity on the one hand, and forms of engagement with it as a web of social time relationships on the other.

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[100] Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism'.

[101] Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life*, Berkeley, 1981, p. 52; also, in general, see Ch. 2.

Similarly, while insightful in decoding the power of western discourses on time and historicizing the creative reconstitution of modernity in non-western world regions, the global or colonial encounter-based studies on time exhibit two limitations: one, the history of standardisation emerges from the very temporal point in which the standardisation of time was attempted and gradually achieved. A west-centric colonial-global order formulated the project of time standardisation via railways, clocks, and calendar. As a result, these accounts are heavily concentrated on the period of the second half of the nineteenth century.[103] The prehistory of 'non-standardised' time appears only instrumentally to explain the history of standardisation and its limitations. We do not need to study non-western or premodern practices of slowness, delay, and waiting only in the mirror of their opposite: the western and modern sense of speed, punctuality, and acceleration. But the encounter framework may unwittingly force us to adopt such an approach. For example, the prefixes 'counter' and 'alternative' which work as more than mere descriptions of empirical accounts, as used by Barak and Kaul in two different contexts, reveal the limitations of such an approach.[104]

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[102] Thapar, *Time as a Metaphor of History*, p. 24.

[103] Stephen Kern exhibits the same problem, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983.

Second, because of the primacy given to standardisation, these accounts prioritise 'temporal encounter' over temporal orders, regimes, and cultures as the main framework of studying time. For studying colonised societies in particular, within this framework, time appears only in moments of encounter between the coloniser and the colonised, mostly as an agent of colonisation for the former and as an adaptive tool of resistance for the latter.[105] The framework of global transformation questions the Eurocentrism embedded in narrating this encounter but 'encounter', as the moment of transformation (in spite of its unevenness), itself is left relatively unquestioned. The encounter is used to explain the ensuing changes in society (in terms of imposition, adaptation, or reform) but the moment of encounter is not adequately situated and contextualised by what existed prior to it. As a result, the subsequent temporal practices become derivative of this encounter rather than being seen as part of the larger dynamic formation of temporal regimes and cultures in which certain elements could have carried on from earlier practices. By privileging the moment of encounter, either through colonial or global modes of analysis, the long history of temporal regimes and cultures escapes scholarly analysis. The moment of encounter opens only a small window into the world of the social. Therefore, the suggestion here is not to discard or dismiss the impact of encounter, particularly in studies on colonial societies, but to not let it become the only optic to approach the social conditions in which time functions and temporalities get formed.

Further, synchronisation and standardisation should not be confused with linearity. If, say, time was local in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, what this means is that every place had its own local (solar) time. Consequently, it indicates two things: one, the measurement of time across spaces was non-uniform; and two, time was dependent on natural conditions and therefore was non-fixed even in one location (the duration of measurement of day and night would have varied according to seasons even in one place). But independently of both these conditions, people might still have felt the linearity of time – its fixed passage from morning to evening at the quotidian level; its linear move-

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104 Barak, *On Time*; Kaul, ed., *Retelling Time*.

105 Nanni, *The Colonisation of Time*; M. M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South*, Chapel Hill, 1997; Barak, *On Time*.

ment from birth to death at the biological, social, and cultural levels; and, its feature as a finite resource not to be wasted away at the ontological and philosophical levels.[106] Further, as clocks emerged as an important measuring device in Europe in medieval and early modern periods, other societies also had different precision devices for measuring time.[107] In the fourteenth century, a water clock adorned the top of the royal palace in Delhi, and, according to the contemporary observers, served various purposes: it enhanced the prestige of the sultan, gave correct hours for prayers, and oriented residents to the beginning and end of the fasts during night time or when the skies were overcast because the water clock was considered to be a more reliable and precise instrument than the sundial.[108] This again means that premodern time was not necessarily infused with concrete or lived senses of time alone. It also had a time-sense based upon calculative repetitive mechanism, not only at the level of memory, belief-systems, and epochs but also through quotidian devices and instruments. The water-clock was a popular device in India until the beginning of the early twentieth century.[109] The terms of measurement such as *prahar* and *ghadi* associated with this device still pervade time-sensibilities in large parts of South Asia.

The encounter-centric narratives of history of time reinforce certain binaries while at the same time, in their global capacity, partly undo the excessive focus on Europe in time studies. They make spaces dynamic but freeze temporal divisions. They resuscitate the chasm between premodern and modern, between western and non-western. Thematically, they remain close to exploring histories related to standardisation, synchronisation, techniques and technologies, and devices and instruments.

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[106] Some of the essays in Kaul, ed., *Retelling Time* trace these features existing across various religious and intellectual traditions in South Asia.

[107] On Europe, Glennie and Thrift, *Shaping the Day*; Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*; Hanss, 'The Fetish of Accuracy'; on the prevalence of the water-clock in South Asia, A. J. Qaiser, *The Indian Response to European Technology and Culture (A.D. 1498–1707)*, Delhi, 1982; S. Sarma, *The Archaic and the Exotic: Studies in the History of Indian Astronomical Instruments*, Delhi, 2008; S. R. Sarma and Ishrat Alam, 'Announcing Time: The Unique Method at Hayatnagar, 1676', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 52, 1991, pp. 426–431; Takao Hayashi, 'The Units of Time in Ancient and Medieval India', *History of Science in South Asia*, 5, 1, 2017, pp. 1–116; Samuel Wright, 'The Moment of Marriage: Toward a History of Temporality in South Asia, 1650–1820' (forthcoming, *Modern Asian Studies*).

[108] Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, 'Science and Scientific Instruments in the Sultanate of Delhi', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 54, 1993, pp. 143–44.

[109] For its presence registered around this period, see 'The History of Time', *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News*, Saturday, June 25 1892; 'Timepieces', *The Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald*, Saturday, November 15 1902. On the presence of *Yamas* and *Ghatikas*, the time-units based on ancient system of measurement, Kalidasu Sankaraiah, 'A Hindu Astronomical Clock', *Current Science*, 16, 6, 1947, p. 190.

Finally, in many of these works, particularly those that are concerned with the making of modern time, there is an anomalous circularity in the way the research question has been framed. The straightening of time, that is, the arrival of the modern, is a function as well as a result of the marking of the fundamental historical changes based upon key transformational moments. The rise of the Enlightenment thinking, the global spread of the mechanical clock, the massive pace of industrialisation fuelling commodity production from the mid-eighteenth century, the new labour discipline based upon management and internalisation of a new time discipline which had industrial roots but also a deep slavery-based plantation antecedents, and not least, the technology-driven imposition of standard methods of time-reckoning are some of the widely studied moments.

In this postulation, time has changed its characteristic together with the shift in the gear of historical periodisation. This is a classic case of a generalised understanding of time – and the anomaly in the approach towards studying the making of modern time mentioned above – that is based upon privileging the factor of temporalisation. The making of modern time is often traced through the histories of those institutions and technologies, and at those sites and locations, which in their genesis are already marked by the ascriptive values of modernity. Mechanical clock, factory, industry, railway, tramways, telegraph, telephone, school, office, and army are some of the usual suspects.[110] These sites and locations then yield the results that historians expect of them: either to confirm their overwhelming contribution to the making of the modern time, or to discover the mix of conflictual processes of the co-existence of various tempos (reflecting the worlds of modern and premodern times, for instance).

I wish to call this feature of our research an illustration of the linear mode of methodological thinking. While modern time may now be readily regarded as plural, the organisation of research behind it is quite linear in its thinking. We can, with some certainty, predict which sites and locations will be chosen for investigating the making of the modern time. The so-called premodern fluid temporality is often investigated at the site of nature (seasons and monsoons); modern plurality is usually explored around the themes of uneven technological (railways, calendrical, and mechanical clocks) standardisation, the emergence of new social or disciplinarian institutions (army, school, office), the ‘incomplete’ transition to a capitalist mode of production (factory), and not least, through memory and regimes of historicity which encompasses themes as varied as the significance of political movements to those of the presence of ghosts. In our research, we go to places where we already expect what we will find.

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[110] Two very insightful studies, adopting diverge methodological entry points, do nevertheless limit themselves to the select sites of modernity: Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks*; Barak, *On Time*.

While it is required of historians to seriously take into account the categories with which people explained their experiences (and most of the times it was with regard to places such as the factory, the school, and the office, and around new networks of communication that time-related enchantment, anxiety, and other sensibilities were usually expressed, or around rupturous political, social, or epidemiological events creating a distinct register of explaining the engagement with time),[111] it is equally true that seldom are histories of the modern time traced to the site of the agrarian field and farm, through devices of irrigation, for instance.[112] Or very rarely are the histories of the standardisation of work traced through the functionality of law, regulation, and punishment (and not the mechanical clock) in which the site is not the factory but a riverine tract which belonged to the realm of ecological temporality upon which the legal temporality functioned in the domain of labour management. Very little by way of a thick description study exists which conceptually elevates the home to the same level as the factory to investigate whether modern time produced a sense of alienation or affect in the performance of household chores. A narrow focus on a few select areas in our research is one concern which directly emanates from the ways in which the lived-abstract or the plural-homogenous dichotomous nature of the debate on the history of time has so far been conducted.

E Recap

Broadly speaking, there are two levels at which the history of time has usually been explored: one at the level of temporality and periodisation in which the prime urgency is to unravel the ways through which society created the meta-distinctions of time into the past, the present, and the future, and when and why it happened; and two, at the level of socio-economic and political changes which are based upon a historically inflecting set of ideas and practices that included industrialisation, political revolution, imperialism, mechanisation, acceleration, commodification, law, and technological synchronisation and standardisation. Perhaps, the former has arisen due to the qualitative shifts brought about by the latter, which has led to time itself being perceived in newer ways. The period from the mid-eighteenth century is taken to be the breakpoint for thinking about the rise of modern time. Primarily due to one dominant view about the rise of the capitalist mode of production from this period in which time is said to have become abstract and empty, a glance back at the previous eras usually presents time as concrete and lived. However, what was regarded as empty and homogenous, is also now increasingly seen as plural and multiple.

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[111] On crisis and their experiences leading to changed modes of peoples' engagement with past, present, and future, see Alexandra Paulin-Booth and Matthew Kerry, 'Introduction – 'Activist Times: Temporality and Political Action in Twentieth-Century Europe', *European Review of History*, 28, 4, 2021, pp. 475–83.

[112] An exception in Indian case is Shahid Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur: An Inquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India*, Delhi, 1984.

In terms of transition and simultaneity, there is no denying that in the last hundred years or so the dominance of one mode of time-notation (the mechanical clock-based 24-hour system of the division of time) has globally superseded other forms of time measurement existing in different regions of the world even if those other forms do continue to influence and organise certain areas of life in different cultures. As a result, there indeed is simultaneity in the use of multiple ways of organising time. Particularly, the role of the calendar is worth mentioning as in many world regions people do inhabit and organise their everyday time according to more than one calendar. However, transitions or changes are also part of this journey; another instance of time-related change through the late nineteenth century is people paying attention to ever smaller fractions of time.[113]

Wading through this matrix of transition and simultaneity, one possible way of doing a social history of time could follow this pattern of mixing the ascriptive values of time arising out of temporalities in which societies classified themselves (and were classified by others) with the forces of socio-economic and political changes which will mainly be structural in scope. Temporalities here mean the relationship established between the past, the present, and the future together with modes of classifying that relationship. However, this approach will potentially have a problem with being circular in nature: the narrative will move forward only when it holds its own tail. The making of modern social time will require us to select, in a pre-given manner, the sites and processes which are often already imbued with the notion of being modern or are popularly seen as contributing to the making of the modern. It may also make use of the encounter framework as modern time regimes emerged being coterminous to processes of colonisation, modernisation, and globalisation.

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[113] May and Thrift, eds., *Timespace*, p. 8.

Sumit Sarkar's classic essay on clock and *chakri* both reproduces this problem but also presents a possibility to break through it.[114] By prioritising the presence of the mechanical clock in the lives of nineteenth century Calcutta clerks, and how it instigated a renewed social discussion on the age of the epochal, apocalyptical notion of *Kaliyug*, he interlaced the materiality of the nineteenth century (generated through the use of the mechanical clock and its impact on reconstituting clerical work as servile) with the discursive formation of the same period, which manifested itself in the fear and anxiety of the return of the cyclically-conceptualised decadent age from the Hindu system of the division of time (the Kaliyug).[115] In other words, he intertwined the mechanical and the epochal, the linear and the cyclical in order to provide a history of the new felt crisis and sensibility towards time in nineteenth century Bengal.[116] His is a classic exposition of social history which prioritised time itself as one of the most important vectors through which colonial power-knowledge influenced the idea of history.[117] The limitation is that Sarkar's foray into the social meaning of modern time is heavily dependent upon two modern entities: the mechanical clock and the office. We do know what the nexus of the clock and the office produced; we don't know what this nexus replaced.

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114 Sumit Sarkar, 'Kaliyug, 'Chakri' and 'Bhakti': Ramkrishna and his Times', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27, 29, 1992, pp. 1543–1559, 1561–1566.

115 On classical Hindu system, see Thapar, 'Cyclic and Linear Time in Early India'; ibid., *Time as a Metaphor of History*.

116 Analytically, this can also be seen as an example of 'time-border' which Fryxell and others have elaborated upon as a framework in which multiple temporalities, or cyclical and linear times, are 'intrinsically interconnected and interdependent in understandings of historicity and temporality'. Fryxell et al., 'Lost in Time', p. 570.

117 With qualification, but he emphatically argues that 'British rule brought with it clocks and a notion of time as linear, abstract, measurable in entirely non-qualitative units, an independent framework within which events happened.' Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, p. 8, also see pp. 6–16.

Chapter 2

Social-time and Natural-time: Towards Intermeshed Histories

Much of the recent literature on time in the discipline of History builds upon how other disciplines (mainly Sociology and Anthropology) defined the meaning of social-time.[118] This chapter takes stock of some of the leading writings on social-time, traces the development of debates around the theme, and ends with a meditation rather than an argument about what social-time could mean, or should possibly mean, for a historian.

Social-time is one of the bedrocks upon which rests the idea of plural time and pluritemporality because 'social time is recognized as multiple and heterogenous'.[119] There is, in fact, a recurrent call to take the variation of social-time even more zealously. By asking us to more seriously integrate the unevenness of spatial variation into the temporal understanding of social practices than done so far, May and Thrift argue for bringing more plurality into our thinking of multiplicity of space-times; indeed, they ask us to think through the inseparable compound 'TimeSpace'. Writing at a time when the sub-field of 'Sociology of time' did not even allegedly exist, Eviatar Zerubavel drew distinction between physiotemporal and bioptemporal orders on the one hand and the sociotemporal order on the other. The former were natural and hence prone to 'emphasise the objective qualities of time', the latter 'is essentially a socially constructed artifact which rests upon rather arbitrary social conventions'.[120] He elaborates, 'much of our social life is temporally structured in accordance with "mechanical time," which is quite independent of the "rhythm of man's organic impulses and needs"' that are, according to him, 'dictated by nature'.[121] Drawing a distinction between natural time and social time, Zerubavel reiterates that modern life, particularly in the western world, is governed by various rhythms of temporal organisation which are based upon social conventions, have artificial basis, and very often possess qualities of mechanical rigidity. The temporal duration of modern life is based

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[118] A central point also made in May and Thrift, eds., *Timespace.*

[119] Ibid., p. 2.

[120] Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms*, p. xii. On a critical understanding of the discipline's neglect of time, see Werner Bergmann, 'The Problem of Time in Sociology: An Overview of the Literature on the State of Theory and Research on the 'Sociology of Time', 1900–82', *Time and Society*, 1, 1, 1992, pp. 81–134.

[121] Ibid., p. 11.

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https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111697215-003

upon time governed through clocks, calendars, and schedules which has created 'social facts' of time.[122]

Radicalizing our notion of plurality of time to make it even further representative of fractured and uneven social reality (read, variegated social-time) is not the purpose of this chapter or of the monograph. Rather, a running thread in the different sections of this chapter is a critical engagement with the framework of plurality as based upon the framework of social-time. The idea of social-time was postulated against the concept of natural-time. The idea of the latter itself has undergone significant transformation, arguably starting as a mere reflection of the physical attributes of the nature and the movement of celestial bodies to that of the carving of a new geological period, the Anthropocene. The engagement provided in this chapter with the growing literature on the Anthropocene is far from exhaustive. The main purpose of sifting through this literature is to acknowledge the fact that no account of 'natural and social time' could afford to not engage with the new crisis of historicity and temporality (the reorganisation of the relationship between the past and the future) as well as the new kinds of politics and demands for justice which are time-centric in their nature. This new turn also demands that the remit of the social history framework should be expanded to encompass such issues that emerge through studies on the inter-species relationship. Foregrounding practice and power, the chapter outlines the basic framework of 'social history of time' in distinction to 'history of social-time', which lays ground for the argument pursued in Chapter 3 and the Conclusion that the plurality framework is not helpful beyond a point when we do a social history of time.

F The Logic Behind the Binary: Social-time and Natural-time

When we raise the question of time and temporality, the historicist approach takes us into the direction of understanding the meaning of social-time (I purposefully hyphenate this phrase to indicate its objective presence in scholarship). We begin by inquiring into the relationship between time and society, and how it changed over a period of time. After all, many historians – and sociologists before them – have argued that time, either notated through a clock or perceived through a system of reading celestial bodies, is eternally social.[123] The three main natural movements used for calculating time in terms of day, night, month, and year are the earth's rotation on its axis, the moon's revolution round the earth, and the earth's revolution round the sun. However, all these three, when put into a system of measurement, require arbitrary adjustments, which are based upon social conventions.[124] The need for social collaboration and the presence of social differentiations and interactions are at the root of the emergence of the social systems of time.[125] In this conceptualisation, the systems of time-reckoning emerge out of socially collective acts, perpetuated because of social necessities, are determined by the routine of religious activities or occupational orders of the day, and are products of social interaction.[126] The proposition that time is inherently a social entity can be explored at multiple levels and in different combinations of various approaches including: philosophical ideas on time and being; social ascriptions through rituals and rites of passages (marriage, birth, death); qualitative expressions around time embedded in phrases such as bad or good times, auspicious or inauspicious times; biological time; time experienced; and cultural and discursive classifications leading to othered spaces of time that are labelled as civilised, primordial, golden, barbaric, risky, uncertain, better, and, not least, promising.

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[122] Ibid., pp. 61–9. Amongst other criticisms, it can be mentioned that Zerubavel does not adequately locate the role of resistance, protest, agency, and dissent in the making of these rigid rhythms. Social conventions, he does point out, are exclusionary, but what then is the actual process of constant reconstitution of rhythms through an interactive space of resistance and cooption is not clearly marked out in his analysis.

However, as noticed earlier, even if time is taken to be constitutively social, there is a significant presence of the concept of natural-time in our understanding of time. Alfred Gell puts this in the most straightforward manner: '. . . seasons may be conventionally indicated by means of religious feasts rather than by reference to natural phenomena . . . but why are these feasts and fasts held in the particular seasons they are? . . . it has to be said that the sources of socially salient periodicities are not themselves pure inventions of the human mind, but *adaptations to the physical ambience within which social life has to take place*'.[127]

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[123] Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation*.

[124] Strevens, *The History of Time*.

[125] Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, pp. xi–xii; Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms*.

[126] Pitirim Sorokin and Robert Merton, 'Social-time: A Methodological and Functional Analysis', in Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, p. 60. My understanding of sociological and anthropological literature is largely based on Gell, *The Anthropology of Time: Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images*, Oxford, 1992; Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms*, and Nancy Munn, 'The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 21, 1992, pp. 93–123.

[127] Gell, *The Anthropology of Time*, p. 12 (emphasis mine). To this, one can add that the act of charting the physical markers of time on to the spaces of calendars, however, requires adjustments through calculations, which arguably brings back the cultural and the social into the picture, as those calculations are socially constructed and contextual in every society. Gribetz and Kaye, *Time: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, Ch. 2.

It is rather surprising that for Zerubavel, the sociotemporal order or rhythm has to be completely distinct from the bio-natural order, which has resulted in him perceptibly noticing many of the mundane everyday practices from music to the prevailing customs of serving food but not accounting for, say, season, monsoon, circular migration, and other such rhythmic constituents when talking of rhythms of social life.[128]

The creation of social-time is based upon ecological and natural conditions, but then in its conceptual logic, social-time becomes an abstracted reference point of its own through social conventions. Thus argued Evans-Pritchard in his study of Nuer people in Sudan, if 'herd camps are established in the month of *Kur*, then the rationale is that, 'when one is doing these things it must be Kur or thereabouts''.[129] The social rhythm of a certain act – in this case laying the herd camps – and not the natural time of the Kur month – becomes the delineating feature of time. Sorokin and Merton give examples to further clarify this function: when we say that 'I will meet you after the concert', the indicating point of time is social and not astronomical. According to them, therefore, 'Social-time thus expresses the change or movement of social phenomena in terms of other social phenomena taken as points of reference.'[130] This way of defining social-time was pitched against the idea of quantitative and measurable astronomical time. A binary between social and astronomical, and, qualitative and quantitative time was at the heart of this formulation. Sorokin and Merton explicitly said, 'Quantitatively equal periods of time are rendered socially unequal and unequal periods are socially equalised.'[131]

This kind of binary pervaded historical studies as well, particularly those that dealt with the newness of a device or with the process of transition from the premodern to the modern period. Le Goff says that like the peasant, the merchant was also subjected 'to the dominion of meteorological time, to the cycle of seasons and the unpredictability of storms and natural cataclysms. He long had no choice but to submit to the natural order and no means to act other than prayer and superstitious practice.' It was only with the expansion of the commercial network from the fourteenth century onwards together with the mechanical clock that 'time became an object of measurement.'[132] Sauter convincingly demonstrates how a majority of historians have misread the main characteristic of the process of time becoming modern. He argues that most historians take it to mean a move away from the sun to the clock, which is wrong. In the eighteenth century, astronomers reckoned the exact time by measuring the earth's rotation with respect to a star (not necessarily the sun) thus showing that time was no less natural.[133] Particularly, when thinking of concrete, lived, and processual ascriptions of time (which usually gets relegated to the premodern period), the elements of season and celestial reckoning of time become important. As an aside, there is an additional point to ponder over. While the principles of standardisation and measurement remain the same, the current daylight-saving technique followed in many parts of the world does reveal a peculiar relationship between abstract, empty time on the one hand and natural, seasonal time on the other. Can we say that time has completely freed itself from its anchoring in nature even if we agree that the act of accessing nature is socially mediated?

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[128] Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms*.

[129] Quoted in Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, p. 7.

[130] Sorokin and Merton, 'Social-time: A Methodological and Functional Analysis', p. 58.

[131] Ibid., p. 61.

[132] Le Goff, *Time Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, pp. 34–35.

G Social History and the Anthropocene

More so, through researches on human interaction with the earth that has sprung a new temporal framework of the Anthropocene – 'considering the present in terms of the deep past' with some scholars asking to view it as an 'unprecedented change' necessitating a new mode of historical thinking – one can argue that the nature's time is now not only located in seasons and celestial bodies alone.[134] Dipesh Chakrabarty remarks that the 'now' of human history and the 'now' of geological and biological timescales have become entangled in a way that has never happened before in the history of humanity.[135] Nature's time, which is conceptualised at a much broader and larger scale (earth's land surface, oceans, rivers, atmosphere, flora, and fauna), has been shaped by humans who are now seen as biogeological agents.[136] In other words, natural time can be seen, at least for the last two hundred years or so with 'the great acceleration' taking place mid-twentieth century, as deeply shaped by social and economic practices derived from human agency.[137] The term Anthropocene recognises 'that humankind has become a powerful force in Earth evolution.'[138] The vastness of the nature's time and the intense action of the 'modern human' have come face to face which have been so far broadly scripted under the names of colonisation, progress, and modernisation. In the last two hundred and fifty years or so, this vastness of nature and natural time nevertheless formed a 'slow and a repetitive background' to the human activity that constituted the making of the human time and historical events.[139] The synchronous temporalisation of natural history and that of the human history, beginning the eighteenth century, parted ways in which the latter became 'a history of humans, and humans only.'[140]

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[133] Sauter, 'Clockwatchers', p. 706.

[134] Jan Zalasiewicz, et al., 'Introduction: The Anthropocene: A New Epoch of Geological Time', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 369, 2011, p. 840. On the wider meaning of the Anthropocene not just as a set of human impacts on the planet but as 'systemic transformations in the condition of the Earth viewed as a system of interacting subsystems', see Zoltán Boldizsár Simon, 'The Role of History in the Anthropocenic Knowledge Regime', *Public History Weekly*, 9, 2021.

[135] Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History*, p. 7.

[136] Lucy E. Edwards, 'What is Anthropocene', *Eos Transactions American Geophysical Union*, November 2015 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285385795_What_Is_the_Anthropocene (last accessed 20 May 2024).

The new scale of 'natural time' questions the nineteenth century division between 'human' and 'nature'. While inserting the human as the central agent in fostering a decaying nature of this relationship (between human and nature), it casts the future in a more pessimistic mould of life (at the inter-species level) than what was imagined until a few decades ago. Perhaps, it is the first time that the pace of collective human agency is found wanting in comparison to the nature's accelerated march towards uncertainty, decline, and pessimism. The question of human agency, and its recasting in geological terms, is therefore at the heart of the debates on the Anthropocene, which is also a shared concern with the premises of social history though therein the question of agency is explored more in conjunction with ideas of domination and injustice. Chakrabarty argues that often in thinking through class, capital, race, and other such social constituents, scholars dislodge 'the problem of the Anthropocene from the realm of geological time to the time of human or world history'.[141] The Anthropocene has an inevitable moral and political locus in terms of the impact created by humankind (and which kinds of the humankind) on the earth system but the Anthropocene as a geological time, Chakrabarty argues, is a question of stratigraphic classification based on the impact per se (and not who has done it).[142] It is interesting to note that while the Anthropocene literature has questioned the erstwhile separation of nature and culture, or of natural and social time by highlighting their entanglements, Chakrabarty insists upon a distinctive order of geological time whose registers of affect are not to be found in human-centric making of historical time. The Anthropocene has become a popular unit of geological time precisely because of the identification of excessive destructive sway of varied human power over the earth (*Anthropos*): the power that has simultaneously affected the earth system as well as created conditions of depravity for other human beings. In other words, it is only through the working of 'human/historical time' that the distinctiveness of a new geological time-unit has come into being. Anthropocenic nature and geological time is highly computational which 'in many respects require human science and technology (instruments, monitoring) to become perceivable.'[143] If the geological epoch would have been caused by any other force than the human species, would the debate on the altered relationship of climate, time, and humanity as a moral and political question been conducted with the same fervour? The answer, to me, appears uncertain; most likely, no.

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[137] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', *Critical Inquiry*, 35, 2, 2009, pp. 197–222; on the great acceleration, see Will Steffen et al., 'The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration', *The Anthropocene Review*, 2, 1, 2015, pp. 81–98. On the question of agency, also see the insightful review of Chakrabarty's works, Zoltán Boldizsár Simon, 'Review Essay: The Anthropocene and the Planet', *History and Theory*, 62, 2, 2023, pp. 320–33.

[138] David Archer quoted in Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History*, p. 157.

[139] Anders Ekström and Staffan Bergwik, eds., *Times of History, Times of Nature: Temporalization and the Limits of Modern Knowledge*, New York, 2022, p. 2.

[140] Jordheim, 'Stratigraphies of Time and History', p. 24.

[141] Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History*, p. 159.

[142] Ibid., pp. 166–70.

David Kuchenbuch has pointed to an interesting political paradox on the question of agency in the Anthropocene: 'The very existence of this term [agency] adds to the evidence that people are becoming more conscious of the extent of the changes to the earth which "their" actions have set in motion. But at the same time, the term redefines humanity as a blind force, thus evoking the workings of an abstract Anthropos (and naturalizing the destruction of the environment) instead of historical explanation and the search for political solutions and political accountability.'[144] Chakrabarty distinguishes between agency of the social history variety which was imbued with aspects of autonomy and consciousness, and that of its geological propensity, which he describes as 'impersonal and unconscious geophysical force, the consequence of collective human activity'.[145] His characterisation of the unstratified human collective has been criticised and defended.

In this intermingling of the earth and the world, the temporalities of historical time and geological time have intermeshed. As Bonneuil and Fressoz have argued, 'In the Anthropocene, it is impossible to hide the fact that 'social' relations are full of biophysical processes, and that the various flows of matter and energy that run through the Earth system at different levels are polarized by socially structured human activities.'[146] Thus, the Zerubavelian distinct sociotemporal order based upon abstract modern time and its various devices and rhythms is unimaginable now. In the Anthropocene, the abstract modern time is even further limited at two levels: one, at the level of the earth system and its deep past; and two, at the level of inter-species' temporalities with which human beings are inseparably intertwined. But more importantly, in this relationship between the human and the nature, the former is also a product of social and cultural institutions, ideologies, and actions. 'The human species' geological action is the product of cultural, social and historical processes.'[147] In the new social histories of time spurted around the Anthropocene – and not the time's histories which are, as currently, only focussed on the role of the Anthropocene in realtering our naturalised sense of historical periodisation – social institutions, materialities of inter-species temporalities, and not least, the hierarchical implications of climate justice – ought to take centre stage. I draw inspiration from Jordheim's observation that 'as long as human history is measured by a clock or by the standard of civilization and progress [and if one can add, even if it was measured so in the past but if the historian continues to do so in the present], nature will continue to be shut out, as by necessity'.[148] In order to broaden the scope of the social history framework, 'human-centred time needs to be expanded not only horizontally, but vertically, and be reconnected with the times of nature'.[149] My only reservation to Jordheim's methodology of reconnecting the nature to human time is to not take time, a universal entity, as inherently plural or multiple while well recognising the fact that there are multiple forms of engaging with it in any given cultural or temporal formation. In fact, if new histories have to be written of a 'new time' in which humans' time is just a tiny section of the vast planetary time but the most detrimental one in terms of fundamentally altering the earth system, then maintaining time as a linear and singular entity will become necessary. We can write immediate histories of the nature-human relationship or human-nonhuman species' entanglements using multiple temporalities; a history of those histories at the level of the planet will nevertheless require a universal temporal fabric.

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[143] Sverker Sörlin, 'Environmental Times: Synchronizing Human-Earth Temporalities from Annales to Anthropocene, 1920s–2020s', in Ekström and Bergwik, eds., *Times of History, Times of Nature*, p. 73.

[144] David Kuchenbuch, 'Histories in and of the Anthropocene: Commentary', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 46, 4, 2020, p. 738.

[145] Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History*, p. 3.

For our purposes, it will also be interesting to juxtapose the Anthropocenic temporality to the older framework described above which treats the same bandwidth of less than three hundred years starting at 1750 as one marked by abstraction of time, which, in other words, can also be seen as creating separation of nature and social or one which is increasingly marked by lesser reliance of the latter on the former. In contrast, the Anthropocene's temporality is primarily based upon intense exploitative interaction than separation. It is also based upon a sense of disastrous acceleration of 'natural time' which otherwise, in Braudelian conception, was taken to be a crucial yet slow-moving aspect of human-nature relationship.[150] One of the important offshoots of this 'ecological over-reach of humans' or the 'climatological understanding of time' is to think of inter-species interaction more seriously and to posit the question of injustice outside of the intra-human to the inter-species level as well.[151] This of course has also brought the idea of plurality into the picture: to write histories in a further widened sense of interaction of plural temporalities between different species.[152]

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[146] Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, English translation David Fernbach, London, 2016, p. 33.

[147] Ibid., p. 66.

[148] Jordheim, 'Stratigraphies of Time and History', p. 37.

[149] Ibid., p. 38.

One basic lesson that can be learnt from the growing literature on the Anthropocene and time is to factor in the interactive agency of myriad non-human agents in our thinking of social history. Second, as the call for climate justice has now become a global cry which has an inherent temporal feature of either engineering a better future or at least arresting the pace of the worsening doomed present, the Anthropocene's time has become part of the scripts of social injustice and change. The idea of the future – either looked upon through the forms of intergenerational justice or search for inter-species stability (lesser acceleration of extinction of species, for instance) – stays as a crucial link between the new enlarged understanding of nature's time and the social history inflected mode of historical writing that puts centre stage the issues of power, inequalities, and cultural practices.[153] While Chakrabarty retains postcolonialism's propensity to question any form of universalism, he simultaneously proposes the species-level universality, with all caveats and qualifications included, in exhorting the whole of human species (without classes and other social differences) to be responsible for exercising their geological agentic power.[154] On the other hand, while raising the question of how human beings fit into the larger web of life, Jason W. Moore has fastened that question along the centrality of the human being: 'How have various human organizations and processes – states and empires, world markets, urbanization, and much beyond – reshaped planetary life?'[155]

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[150] Stephen W. Sawyer, 'Time after Time: Narratives of the Longue Durée in the Anthropocene', *Transatlantica*, 1, 2015, https://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/7344 (last accessed 21.05.2024). Questioning the nature's time as forming a slow and repetitive background to historical events, it has been pointed out in a recent study that the Anthropocene's notions of human history are significantly different from Braudel's. Ekström and Bergwik, eds., *Times of History, Times of Nature*, p. 2. On Braudel's treatment of 'an equilibrium-oriented natural world characterized by relative stability', see Sörlin, 'Environmental Times' p. 72.

[151] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Whose Anthropocene? A Response', *RCC Perspectives*, 2, 2016, pp. 101–114; the second phrase quoted from, Adeline Johns-Putra, 'Climate and History in the Anthropocene: Realist Narrative and the Framing of Time', 2019 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334794465_Climate_and_History_in_the_Anthropocene_Realist_Narrative_and_the_Framing_of_Time (last accessed, 22.05.2024).

[152] Bensaude-Vicent, 'Rethinking Time in Response to the Anthropocene'.

[153] Chakrabarty raises an important point on also revisiting the notion of justice which 'cannot any longer be about humans alone, but we don't yet know how to extend these concerns to the universe of nonhumans (i.e., not just a few species).' Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History*, p. 178.

Steering clear of the debate whether this mode of human agency is best captured by the term Anthropocene or Capitalocene, a simple takeaway from this rich ongoing debate is that as long as the questions of power and agency remain relevant for historical thinking, the social will also ever remain a site and mode for structuring such a thinking. The Anthropocenic crisis has renewed the necessity to overcome the 'nature' and 'society' dualism at a much larger scale. If human agency, even theorised at the planetary level, is violently reshaping the earth, then that agency has social moorings and divisions, is an outcome of social processes, is formed through varied concepts designed historically by human groups, is a product of structural privileges and challenges, and is an outcome of wider interaction with nature including the inanimate objects. The 'geographies of class power' cannot be easily occluded under either a new scale of historical writing (planetary) or a new regime of historicity ('unprecedented change').[156] As Eduardo Mendieta has argued, while the Anthropocene is crafting a new temporality of historical thinking around inter-species interaction and human-nature relationship, it is also 'intricately entwined with conquest, colonialism, slavery, imperialism, and war – all indispensable conditions of possibility for the rise of capitalism'.[157]

This book does not purport to enter the fine details of the implication of the Anthropocene research on ways of doing social history. This still requires a deeper probe into the ideological frameworks as well as varied empirical researches to ascertain, say in South Asia where there is a paucity of work, of how the relationships between the past, the present, and the future were changing from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. What are the key moments of shifts in temporalisations that reconstituted the relationship between deep time and historical time? This brief reflection is simply an acknowledgment of the widening scope of nature's time engendered by this new research, to cursorily highlight the importance of the questions of justice and agency as two shared concepts between social history and the Anthropocene research, and also to ruminate for the persisting relevance of the social history framework – by keeping the making and the effects of social differentiations under the spotlight in any frame of analysis – in its revised and enlarged avatar.

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[154] Dan Boscov-Ellen, 'Whose Universalism? Dipesh Chakrabarty and the Anthropocene', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 31, 1, 2018, pp. 70–83.

[155] Jason W. Moore, ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, 2016, Oakland, p. 2.

[156] Jason W. Moore, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene & the Flight from World History: Dialectical Universalism & the Geographies of Class Power in the Capitalist World Ecology, 1492–2022', *Nordia Geographical Publications*, 51, 2, 2022, pp. 123–46.

[157] Eduardo Mendieta, 'Anthropocenic Temporalities', *Environmental Philosophy*, 17, 1, 2020, p. 134.

H Social-time: Basic Contour and Problems

Natural time, or time existing in the nature as opposed to social time, presents the dilemma of a binary. Norbert Elias' understanding of social time helps us navigate through this.[158] The social time is not the idiosyncratic psychological time but, as Elias points out, a temporal habitus created by factors of choice and restraint between the individual and the society which shapes that habitus. In Elias' view, one can only speak of time if, in addition to individual experiences and observations as well as the processes of nature which take place independently of people, the third level is also considered: the level at which people 'use a socially standardized sequence in order to compare sequences that are not directly comparable'.[159] The category of time results from the social activity of 'timing'.

The classical sociological approaches to social-time can be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century when thinkers such as Durkheim, Mauss, Sorokin, and Gurvitch referred to time as the rhythm of social life. 'Social Time' was seen as the product of collective activity and thought of and reflected in a culture's collective consciousness and representations. In Émile Durkheim's thinking, time was located in society's collective rhythms (for him mainly in religion) but one which was neither natural nor individual.[160] It was socially derived. Bergmann points out that by accepting society as an independent set of social facts, he had to postulate social time also as a social construct beyond the individual's nature or consciousness.[161]

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[158] Norbert Elias, *Time: An Essay*, Oxford/Cambridge, Mass., 1992.

[159] Ibid., p. 2.

[160] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Paris, 1912 (English translation, Karen E. Fields, New York, 1995), pp. 1–18.

[161] Bergmann, 'The Problem of Time', p. 83.

For Durkheim, time is a social construct but, more importantly, through the collective plotting of events, time also became abstract. Although social-time is conceptualised in opposition to abstract, quantitative, and mathematical time, a certain sense of abstraction does filter in because of it being dependent on the recurrence of social acts and lives. As noted earlier, it becomes a reference point of its own and thus gains abstraction within a society. This collective organisation of time, shared by the members of one civilisation, makes it appear abstract. The events which are plotted on the duration of time flow are taken from social lives – from rites and rituals. So, the making and the organisation of time is distinctly social (and not individual) but the framework in which it is understood by any society is abstract and impersonal. It is so because collective representation of time both derives from and dictates to society. According to Durkheim, the idea of time constructed through social elements does not mean that it is stripped of all objective value.[162]

Durkheim's idea of social-time was heavily based upon sacred time. Nonetheless, his ideas also informed the latter-day conceptual thinking about the qualitative, subjective, plural, and heterogeneous nature of time in the writings of anthropologists which, in the words of Alfred Gell, are 'relativist interpretations of social time which can be shown to be incoherent and misleading'.[163] However, for many early twentieth century anthropologists, collective representation was not merely a passive act of time-reckoning but one of creating time. Social-time was presented as encapsulating the dual process of a) micro-social times that were characteristic of individuals and groups in which time appeared flexible and multiple; and b), of the macro-social times of cultural systems and institutions in which time appeared unified and hierarchically ordered at the level of social structure.[164] Further differentiation existed within the latter. The institutional time (at schools, factories, etc.) is linear while the cultural time-structures (days, weeks, seasons) are cyclical.[165] This mode of thinking brought time into the heart of social activity, ranging from quotidian to generational, from specific tasks to kinship structures. The scope of the social also enlarged: unlike the sociological approaches which focussed on sacred time, early anthropological writings of people such as Malinowski, or Evans Pritchard's study of the cattle clock in Sudanese pastoral societies, made the measurement of time synonymous with the quotidian activities of societies. In other words, the sense of time was measured through, and embedded in, collective everyday activities, and its passage was registered through a regular sequence of productive tasks which did not necessarily pertain to the domain of the sacred or the religious.

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[162] Ibid; Gell, *The Anthropology of Time*, Ch. 1.

[163] Gell, *The Anthropology of Time*, p. 5.

[164] Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, pp. 4–5.

[165] J. David Lewis and Andrew J. Weigart, 'The Structures and Meanings of Social-Time', in Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, pp. 83–4.

However, in doing so, they also laid the foundation for the theory of the differential quality of time as experienced in traditional and modern societies. Time was elevated as a marker of societal differences. Time in traditional societies was regarded as local, imprecise, and natural while in modern societies it was quantifiable, uniform, and abstract. Eighteenth century European Enlightenment played a key role in this construction because travel through space (to other world regions and societies) was described as travel in time, equating the non-European regions with the European past.[166] Bergmann rightly observed that 'the unacceptable assumption of a specific primitive concept of time in archaic cultures [has been] theorized in sharp contrast to modern western thought'.[167] As a result, there has not been an adequate intercultural comparison done. As a result, social-time became analytically distinct from mechanical time or from any external objectivity. Social-time was conceptualised in antithesis to clock-time and natural time. It became an independent entity in itself, operating at various levels such as the interpersonal subjective conceptualisation of time, the performance of myths, rituals, and magic, and by initially being co-terminus with natural timings or ecological settings parting ways to acquire a self-referential power and system of its own. Gurvitch regarded time as a plurality of movements, possessing a qualitative element which is 'not always measurable and even more not always quantifiable'.[168] Bourdieu's Kabyle peasants were 'generally incapable of envisaging a remote future' because they lived under the attitude of complete submission to the present time.[169] In a number of such studies, the argument came forth that 'aborigines are extremely present-oriented in their daily life, but they do not interpret this present as a temporal contrast to the past and future, but as a state in contrast to holiness'.[170] In various such examples from these studies, we can glean a deep belief in the difference between primitive and modern, and, traditional and advanced societies. Reference points to social events that marked duration, or the passage of time, were considered to be prevalent amongst 'primitive' peoples.

It is no surprise that Thompson turned to these writings to create a distinction between time understood through task-orientation in non-industrial societies

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166 See Tyson Retz, *Progress and the Scales of History*, Cambridge, 2022, pp. 21–24.

167 Bergmann, 'The Problem of Time', p. 93.

168 Georges Gurvitch, 'The Problem of Time', in Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, p. 36.

169 Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, pp. xvi–xvii.

170 Bergmann, The Problem of Time', p. 94.

and the mechanical clock-time regime in industrial ones.[171] Historically, this has been challenged. Yulia Frumer's work on Tokugawa Japan offers some interesting counterpoints: one, 'natural' time, which in Japan created a temporal system of variable hours, required more regulation than the temporal organisation based upon equal hours. As a result, the synchronised public timing and assignment of an entire country to one time zone already existed in Tokugawa Japan, much before the 1873 reform. Second, as a result of this finding, Frumer argues that 'Contrary to narratives of modern abstract time, . . . *every* conception of time is task-oriented. While in use, the concept of time—or any concept for that matter—is never "abstract," but rather rooted in a series of "concretes."'[172] Such concreteness, one finds, existed in the use of a millennia-old device, the incense stick, to organise labour productivity in the modern capitalist industry of tea in China.[173] A combination of task-orientation and clock-time existed in modern factories not only as an expression of workers' limitation in understanding the demands and working of a new time discipline, but also as a result of the choice of employers to retain flexibility.[174]

But the binary model expounded by the framework of social-time became the foundational thought that made distinctions amongst the nature of societies. The characteristic of time acquired a structural force to explain societies. Evans-Pritchard, for example, argued that social-time as reflected in social organisation at the level of long-durée is not a continuum but a structure; that is, he gave this aspect of social-time a fixity. He created a binary between static structural time and oecological daily-life-activity time.[175] On this, Gell commented that it was his and not the Nuer society's idea of time. Generations have been changing in that society. Time does not remain fixed and motionless.[176]

Unlike Durkheim who stressed the sacred construction of time and the early twentieth century anthropologists who found in time a principle parameter to explain social formation and differentiations, Elias examined the relationship between the individual and collective experiences of time, especially the manner in which personal time gets reorganised and becomes subject to the constrains of social and natural time.[177] Elias tracked the different temporal norms, values, and meanings of time that governed societies. For Elias, the social construction of time refers to the human ability to experience and confer meanings on change. While his ideas of social time are more favourable from a historian's viewpoint than the early anthropological writings which created a strict binary, his ideas on the relationship between time and the hierarchy of ordered societies/civilisations is still problematic. According to Elias, the shift from the collective rhythm of society to the more advanced industrial set up was accompanied by the change in which time became abstract. He characterised this change as a 'civilizing process'. In this movement from a natural one to one which is abstract, time itself is construed so as to acquire a civilisational value. Elias seems to argue for the linearity of the civilising mission and hence also of the growing time synthesis and time regulation from lesser to higher ordered societies. For instance, he associated notions, such as punctuality, with the rising order of the society – the greater the internalisation of this value, the higher the order of the society. Thus, he denies the role of other coordinates of social life and social authority which might be constituting such a temporal habitus without falling into the trap of high or low ordered societies. As it happened in the Ottoman empire, and most likely in much of Mughal and colonial India, for instance, arriving late, or keeping someone waiting, was a feature of a display of authority rather than the essentialised internalisation of time behaviour or lack of time regulation. It continues to happen so even today in many parts of the world. Making someone wait is the way to exert authority and power over the other.[178]

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[171] Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism'.

[172] Frumer, *Making Time*, p. 11.

[173] Liu, 'Incense and Industry'.

[174] Hatice Yildiz, 'The Politics of Time in Colonial Bombay: Labor Patterns and Protest in Cotton Mills', *Journal of Social History*, 54, 1, 2020, pp. 260–85.

[175] Munn, 'The Cultural Anthropology of Time'.

[176] Gell, *The Anthropology of Time*, pp. 20–22.

[177] Elias, *Time: An Essay*.

The reverberations of this hierarchical mode of analysis are found in many other anthropological works, which have been critiqued by Johannes Fabian.[179] The anthropological othering of non-western societies is premised, according to Fabian, on the distinguishing element of time itself through the denial of temporal coeval-ness. The 'primitive' has been temporally othered as not only belonging to a different space but to a different time. Propelled by Enlightenment philosophy, History created a universal temporal order of development and of human civilisation right from the beginning of the eighteenth century which, due to colonialism, affected the temporal understandings of the past and the future as imagined by different communities.[180] This temporal otherness was constructed not only along the axis of west and non-west through disciplines such as Anthropology or through discourses of improvement and progress but also within the boundaries of the ‘nation-state’, by ascribing primitivism to ‘tribal’ and hilly peoples.[181] With time becoming the factor of social classification along the ideas of improvement, progress, and, civilisation, we once again enter into the terrain of the idiomatic usages of time, which is the point of departure for conceptualising a social history of time, and not thinking of ways of doing a history of social-time.

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[178] In contrast, in ancient Rome emperor Augustus used to stamp his correspondence not only with the date but also with the hour, which shows a different power relationship with time vis-à-vis his subordinates. Gribetz and Kaye, *Time: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, p. 30.

[179] J. Fabian, *Time and its Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, New York, 1983.

[180] For a discussion on South Asian Muslims, see Margrit Pernau, 'The Time of the Prophet and the Future of the Community: Temporalities in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Muslim India', *Time and Society*, 30, 4, 2021, pp. 477–93.

I Social Time for a Historian: Rhythms and Practices

As a historian, the way I think of ‘social time’ is not to be confused with ‘psycho-subjective’ time. Perception and the narrativisation of time at the personal and experiential levels are part of historical investigation. But still, for me, social time is inherently historically constituted and is public in nature even if reconstituted at the site of the private and experienced at the level of the self. I approach social time as constituted through the politics of control and subversion, whose making is filtered through concrete histories of law, technology, power, capital, divinity, and ecology, and how people’s everyday and everynight practices shaped them. Thus, the element of subjective experience is present, but as one which is part of a collective interactive process and not atomised at the level of experience. Amir Khusro, a thirteenth century poet, held the view that the movement of the earth was linked with time, ‘hence the day and night, the seasons of Spring and Autumn’. More interestingly though, he paralleled this observation of the creation of time with the social observance of power: ‘people moved around the man in authority as the earth moves around the sun’[182] (and, hence, one can link the relationship between making someone wait and exercise of authority as pointed above). A historian’s social time clearly has the accent on practice and power, which lay at the intersection of the everyday, the everynight, the cultural, the institutional, and the structural. This intersection reveals the nature of a temporal regime together with its faultlines. It exhibits the ways in which temporal cultures were formed at any given point in time. We will return to regimes and cultures in the third chapter.

Conceptualised in this manner, social time is neither fully in the domain of the natural-celestial phenomena nor only immersed in the subjective consciousness of an individual. It connects the two and shapes them as well. Expressed in other words, and borrowing from Henri Lefebvre, it is the tension, the interference, and the interaction between cyclical repetition which originates in the nature and the linear repetitive which comes from human activity (social practice) that constitutes the measure of time.[183] The social, as used in the historical sense of practices across spaces and peoples, thus interrogates the processes that make time a social component of order and power, of livelihood and relationships. It also examines those factors that constantly act upon such practices which question and subvert them, and open new pathways of temporal sociability which leads to shifts in temporal regimes and temporal cultures.

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[181] Banerjee, *Politics of Time*.

[182] Quoted in Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, ‘Science and Scientific Instruments in the Sultanate of Delhi’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 54, 1993, p. 139.

The key emphasis therefore is to break down the binaries and to historicise their intermeshing by bringing peoples' activities and limitations thrust upon them due to natural and environmental factors to the forefront.[184] So, for instance, social and natural times need not be approached as two distinct entities, nor should capitalism-accelerated time and peasant time be seen as unconnected worlds of thought and action. By studying production in an agrarian field, which is linked to ecological rhythms as well as the rhythms of international shipping, the idea is precisely to bring the natural into the fold of the social. Nature's time, which manifested ecologically in rainfall and other factors of seasonality, affected not only the agrarian world but also shaped working conditions for various types of urban workers such as boatmen, domestic servants, post runners, and palanquin bearers.[185] Rather than seeing a rupture between seasonal and commercial rhythms, seasonality itself could be taken as a commercialised entity which is susceptible to historical investigation.[186] The life and work of boatmen, for example, were shaped by both the currents of the water body and the employment contract enforceable by law, custom, and violence. Internal to both these factors – ecological and legal – were further complex patterns that were temporally dynamic. Ecological uncertainties and their long-distance nature of work necessitated the practice of advance payment while the latter gave rise to specific legal clauses in the regulation of work. More broadly, seasonality is a sort of rhythm that can be used for analysing temporal conditions of production, work, and livelihood which nonetheless is not static because the repetitions of rhythms themselves include and produce differences.[187] Time can be seen as a measure of those differences embedded within an otherwise apparent timeless structures of cyclic repetition.

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[183] Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, Paris, 2002 (English translation, Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore, London 2004), p. 8.

[184] I find Sverker Sörlin's idea that time is the core element of the environment useful. He argues that temporalities and nature are welded together in the concept of environment. Sörlin, 'Environmental Times', pp. 66–68.

[185] For some preliminary remarks on nature's interaction with work of the boatmen, see Nitin Sinha, 'Contract, Work and Resistance: Boatmen in Early Colonial Eastern India, 1760s–1850s', *International Review of Social History*, 59, S22, 2014, pp. 11–43; for post runners, see Chitra Joshi, 'Dak Roads, Dak Runners, and the Reordering of Communication Networks', *International Review of Social History*, 57, 2012, pp. 169–89.

[186] Marina Moskowitz, 'Calendars and Clocks: Cycles of Horticulture Commerce in Nineteenth-Century America', in Shove, Trentmann, and Wilk, eds., *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life*.

Beyond seasonality, temporal practices of a vast majority of working groups were also governed by other cycles of social and economic conditions such as the nature of employment, the structures and patterns of migration, the effects of the law, the predicaments of the contract, and the cycles of wage and debt. A majority of the workforce in eighteenth and nineteenth century India inhabited both the agrarian as well as the modern world of work constituted through contract and wage, in which the system of capital advances and punitive legal disciplining, as well as other forces related to state or capital power, were inseparably tied with agrarian cycles of reproduction, contractual labour, and life course shifts. The nineteenth century Indian peasant did not live in peasant time governed only through the rhythms of nature. Similarly, the nineteenth century Bombay or Calcutta factory worker did not live only under the capitalism engendered mode of time-discipline. Their temporal habitus was constituted of various layers, some of which were structurally imposed upon them, and some of which they devised and strategized as a way of resistance or opportunity.[188] One crucial methodological point to remind ourselves of is that the historicisation of those layers should not lead us to calling certain aspects of temporal engagements necessarily or essentially premodern as opposed to the new set of practices that we can clearly identify as part of the 'modern' changes. In other words, for example, for understanding the work-related temporality of a nineteenth century industrial-urban centre, seasonality should not be by default bracketed with a residual value continuing from the premodern past but rather interrogated as interlaced with new practices.

The simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, or to put it more concretely, the co-existence of two entities immediately indicating an association to two different time-periods (such as steam engines and bullock carts), often leads to the argument that such a co-existence points to plurality of time or intermeshing of different temporalities. There is one merit in this approach. Although it readily leads to upholding the plurality framework, it potentially widens our research perspective by bringing into ambit other histories which might have remained buried under the force of transition framework in which the making of the modern time is only

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187 Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, p. 7. Also see Dawn Lyon, *What is Rhythmanalysis?*, London, 2019.

188 See Yildiz, 'The Politics of Time'.

or primarily investigated through sites that are historically ascribed with the meaning of the term modern, as explained in the first Chapter.

In practical terms, it means that a history of railways must be aware of the fact, as it happened in colonial India, that the proliferation of steam engines can lead to an increase in the use of bullock carts. Or the increasing use of newer technologies of communication intensified, quite literally, the leg-work of postal runners who dispatched mail on feet.[189] This was not only specific to colonial modernity but the simultaneous existence of the non-simultaneous, which indeed were connected to each other, happened in the western world as well.[190] The perspective of intermeshed temporalities can help transcend the problem of cyclicity encountered in the studies on the making of the modern time as outlined in the first Chapter. This can further be strengthened by moving away from the bunch of usual suspects of themes, sites, and locations identified above. For instance, instead of primarily or exclusively focussing on the factory, we can privilege the agrarian farm; instead of interrogating the office we can turn to home and practices of domesticity; instead of the mechanical clock we can shift to other sets of disciplinary mechanisms such as the law and the role of money and divinity. Partly, this is a call for a historiographical change in which we need to expand our focus beyond a few devices and a handful of select social spaces because, generally put, the accounts of the rise of modern time are limited to a study of a few sites alone. A social history of time thus needs to historicize temporalities embedded in factors that constitute power relationships as well as historize the relationship between those temporalities itself as they operate within a larger matrix of time.

J Othered Spaces of Modern Time and Intermeshed Temporalities

Modern time has produced ‘othered’ spaces. They remain neglected in our historical examination on time and temporality. These are not the residual sites of premodern time. They are integral to the making of modern time. We need to reach out to these othered spaces through a diligent and structured approach to the archives in which, for instance, we begin by looking at documents related to revenue and farming, manuals related to home-keeping, judicial archives that are related to the functioning of the law and law-consciousness, and at materials related to the weather and seasonality, and examine their relationship with time. Of course, the list is indicative and not exhaustive.

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[189] Chitra Joshi, ‘Life and Labour on the Road: Mail Runners and Palanquin Bearers in Nineteenth-Century India’, in Josef Ehmer and Carola Lentz, eds., *Life Course, Work, and Labour in Global History*, Oldenburg, 2023, pp. 339–57.

[190] Jean-Michel Johnston, *Networks of Modernity: Germany in the Age of the Telegraph, 1830–1880*, Oxford, 2021.

Time is present in the archives in two ways: one, in its own accounts of systems of measurement and standardisation; and two, in accounts of other social practices in which time is relatively obscure (and also becomes obtuse for a researcher). Thus, time is quite evident when approached through histories of devices, technologies, and time-keeping institutions such as observatories, public clock towers, and so on. On the other hand, it is relatively invisible when searched for in farming, domestic practices, and other social practices (for instance, marriage, crime) in which time is embedded in the apportioning of social power and control in an indirect manner. Spaces such as factories and schools which relied on time measurement and time discipline thus become more prone to our detailed investigation because the archive around them also makes it a little more feasible.[191] For the latter themes where time is present indirectly, it has to be excavated by closely looking at practices, discourses, and structures, together with regimes of control, adaptation, and resistance at the chosen sites of our study. The fundamental hypothesis or argument here is that rather than thinking through transitions, it is historically more relevant to understand time through the interlocked and overlapping practices of what people did with time, how they made sense of it, regulated it, contested it, and created various rhythms of it.

When even subaltern Indian witnesses in colonial courtrooms recounted events in prahar and ghadi, the units derived through the use of water clocks, along with *angrezi* (English) hour and minutes; when the colonial state punished international seamen, workers, and 'lower' groups of city residents for gallivanting after ten in the night while they themselves frequently returned late after their social soirees which required a number of service providers to escort them; when travellers labelled 'contracted' boatmen 'mutinous' who refused to row under unfavourable natural/ seasonal conditions; when printed almanacs carried information on ritual days in solar and lunar calendars and listed occasions of importance in all religions; and when a cross-section of society ranging from unlettered subalterns to those of salaried middle-class and monied businessmen visited diviners, sought pension, and bought life insurances to secure their future, then we are forced to recognise the multiplicity of temporal engagements.

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[191] For a genealogical approach to the factory becoming the site of progress and improvement (and not only a site of modern time discipline), see Kevin Hetherington, 'Moderns as Ancients: Time, Space and the Discourse of improvement', in May and Thrift, eds., *Timespace*, pp. 49–72.

This is a point of departure from Elias' extremely insightful take on situating the study of time within the nature-social complex. In his framework, there is a definite place of linearity or transition. As argued above, according to him, the movement to an advanced industrial set-up entails not only the abstraction of time but also the creation of a civilising process. Our contention is to question this transitional ascription of time, which somehow reverberates with other dichotomies of social, spatial, and economic categorisation: simple-advanced, premodern-modern, agrarian-industrial, and western-non-western. The story is indeed one of transition as we do know that the mechanical clock-time is now the hegemonic form of time measurement all over the world but ascribing a civilisational value to time when most of its history has been written following the trajectory of European philosophy or the Europe-based development of feudalism, mercantile organisations, agrarian commercialism, and finally industrial capitalism, reeks of Eurocentrism. Besides, the question needs to be raised also on the interpretation of this transition. Is it a transition of time itself: that is, did time change from being more defined by nature in the earlier periods to now being absolutely abstract? Or is it a story of how people have shifted their form of engagement with time in which one grid of temporal practice, comprising both abstract and lived aspects, made way for another? In other words, do we necessarily need to postulate the change in the characteristic of time as lived/concrete to abstract, or we can also plot time's journey, using social practices and intellectual traditions, as a movement from one grid of abstraction to another?

Time can both be concrete and abstract in any period of human history. In ancient India, time was seen as the ultimate creator, as an imperishable deity through whom everything that has life dies, as a cause between heaven and earth weaving the past, present, and future, and not least as an entity that regulates universe. And yet, while standing as an abstract external entity, time was also an embodied entity, measured through the blink of the god (*kshana*), the pulse of a human being (*naadi*), the death of a person (Buddhist reckoning of time) and the beginning of a dynasty (the making of different eras and calendars).[192] By the fifteenth century, the water clock had spread across the Islamicate world and had become 'the instrument of choice' for the time keepers. The interest generated by its use that gave more accurate time promoted a new discipline of learning: *ilm-i-*

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[192] See Thapar, 'Cyclical and Linear Time'; essays in Kaul, ed., *Retelling Time*; Natraja Sarma, 'Measures of Time in Ancient India', *Endeavour: New Series*, 15, 4, 1991, pp. 185–88; Balslev, 'Time and the Hindu Experience'; Anindita Niyogi Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, 1983 (second edn.), Delhi, 1999.

muwaqqit (science of fixed times).[193] The historicisation of time, therefore, lies in understanding the shifting nature and shape of that mix rather than in mapping the trajectory of absolute change. The multiplicity of temporal engagements changes over a period of time. A social history of time can tell us why and how such changes took place.

The second important thing of the approach to treating time as constitutive of intermeshed layers is to calibrate the privileging of othered sites by deeply historicizing the role of apparent binaries. How did the histories of capital, profit, and money interact with peoples' practices related to divinity, astrology, and other celestially-dependent forms of time reckoning? How did the rhythms of urban life, increasingly manifest in the presence of the new institutions of the nineteenth century such as the school and the office, interact with the space of the home and the rhythms of household chores? How did the mechanical clock co-exist with the water clock and other devices and systems of time-notations? How did the Gregorian calendar make its way into a culture that had multiple calendars already in practice? How did trams and bullock carts, and steam engines and elephants both interact to determine the temporal rhythm of a journey?[194] Here, the lure is definitely to see a progressive infiltration of social life with new devices and technologies and eventually to write a history either in terms of transfer of technology and/or the eventual capitulation of the premodern systems to the hegemonizing influence of the modern devices. Even if that be the case, this realisation that no history of the railways, for instance, would be complete without looking at boats, bullock carts, and various other means of animal transport during the very peak of the steam communication revolution of the nineteenth century could yield a rich social history of time and temporality which will not adopt a single device-centric approach. It will also enlarge the scope of social history by incorporating non-human actors such as plants and animals.

When social-time is approached through intermeshed layers of various constituents which seemingly are of contradictory ascriptions or values (in relation to speed, precision, accuracy, etc. – the bullock carts and the railways inhabit two temporal values), then a rich social history of modern time can be produced by mapping the changing matrix of these constituents over a period of time. However, to an extent, such histories will perhaps remain ever captive to twin analytical modes of analysis: one it may inevitably produce historical accounts based upon the transfer-diffusion-circulation framework, particularly in the case of colonial societies, even if the scope of the framework is articulated in a highly sophisticated manner; and two, the account may present a narrative of incremental progressive intrusion and the adaption of new devices such as the mechanical clock, railways, or the telegraph and practices associated to them, either leading to uneven uniformity or to the creation of counter-tempos.[195] A third problem is that the intermeshing of various tempos created by different constituents or the unevenness created by the spread and dislocation of even one technology by another leads to the argument of multiple times. Thus argues Johnston that the modern concepts of time and space are not merely multiple but that their fragmentation is a product of the development of new means of communication.[196]

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[193] Stephen P. Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam: Calendar, Ceremony, and Chronology in the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman Empires*, New York, 2013, p. 6.

[194] For details on various means of transport coexisting segmentally rather than displacing each other in nineteenth century India, see Nitin Sinha, *Communication and Colonialism in Eastern India, Bihar: 1760s–1800s*, London, 2012; Nitin Sinha, 'Engines Vs. Elephants: Train Tales of India's Modernity', *Interdisziplinäre Zeitung für Südasienforschung*, 1, 2016, pp. 112–130; Nitin Sinha, 'Infrastructural Governance and Social History: Roads in Colonial and Postcolonial India', *History Compass*, 15, 9, 2017, Nitin Sinha, 'Questioning 'railway-Centrism': Infrastructural Governance and Cultures of Colonial Transport System, 1760s–1900s', in Harald Fischer Tiné and Maria Framke, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Colonialism in South Asia*, London, 2021.

Irrespective of the problems associated with the approach of intermeshed temporalities, a social history of time based upon deep historicisation of apparent binaries and a commitment to explore those sites that have been othered by the histories of modern time will potentially enrich our historiography significantly. We do need to be resistant in our research to adopting absolute transitional linearity based upon the distinction between the new and the old, particularly when that linearity presupposes moral values of progress and civilisation, leading to the othering of peoples and societies. It can then yield insights into minor, localised practices of intermeshing that may be buried under the force of transition to modern times. We might be able to hear the gong of the bell and the chirping of the bird in our sources that worked together with the mechanical clock in shaping the temporality of day and night. We might be able to appreciate the adaptive skill of *ghadiyals* (water-clock time keepers) in calibrating time according to two notations and devices. Interesting here would be to present a little detail related to this device and their menders (see Fig. 1).

Reporting generously on the English progress made in the north Indian town of Allahabad where the traces of British life permeated even the streets filled with the ‘smell of garlic’, the Prince of Wales’ entourage was struck by the presence of the ‘primitive contrivance’ of a water clock in 1876.[197] Almost forty years

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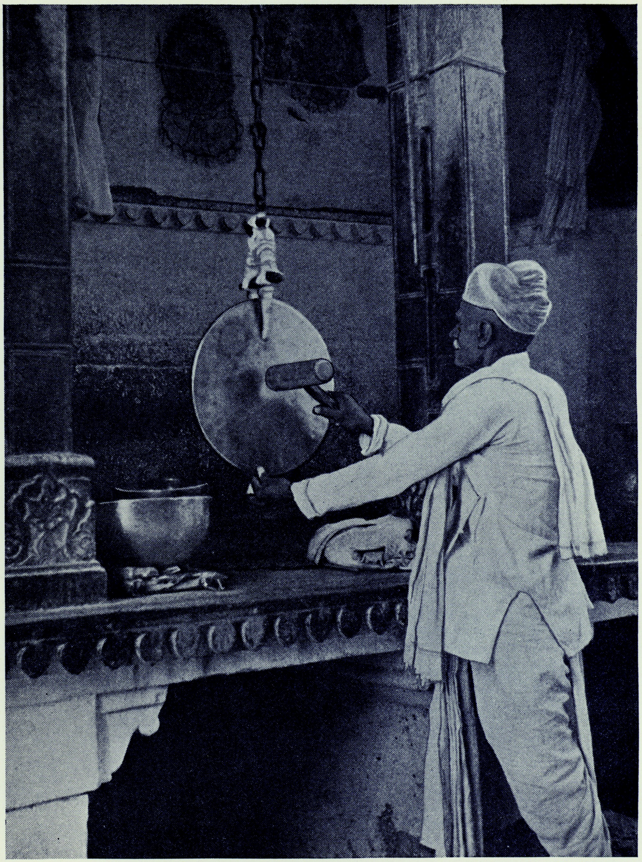
[195] In addition to Barak, *On Time*, see Johnston, *Networks of Modernity*.

[196] Johnston, *Networks of Modernity*, pp. 12–13.

[197] *Sheffied and Rotherham Independent*, 23 March 1876.



[Paul Popper

AN ANCIENT WATER-CLOCK OF RAJPUTANA.

At the palace of Bundi time is measured by the 24 minutes it takes for a small pierced bowl to sink to the bottom of a larger one, full of water. There are 60 " hours " of 24 minutes, and they are recorded by striking a gong and moving beads along a string stretched between two pillars.

Fig. 1: Water clock © Look and Learn / Bridgeman Images.

earlier, living in the same region, a European lady who had married an Indian reported in her letters on the pervasive presence of water clocks and its use for dividing the day and night into prahars and ghadis.[198] Mrs. Hassan Ali mentioned that this clock had a common presence in notable households for which special time-keepers, *ghadiyals*, were appointed. In the 1870s, when the British reporter had come to Allahabad, modern European clocks had also acquired a public presence. Both clocks measured time but differently. According to the water clock, 24 hours were divided into eight prahars, one prahar had 6–8 ghadis (roughly about three hours) and a ghadi had 24 minutes (22.5 minutes when made commensurate with a prahar). A day therefore had 60 ghadis (the number also varied due to the season but in mathematical calculations it did not vary), quite opposite to the modern clock that measured time in 24 hours and 60 minutes.[199] At the passing of each ghadi, the time-keepers would announce the hour by the gong of the bell. Often characterised as sleepy-heads, ghadiyals also represent another instance of an active engagement with the clocks. The deficiency in time-keeping due to their delay in replacing the sinking bowl in the water basin was met with by consulting a 'modern clock'. This means that some people, most likely the same dozing time-keepers, had understood how to synchronise the old and new systems of time-reckoning at a time when contemporary observers and subsequent commentators were busy attributing one with an empty, abstract, modern, and universal character, and another with a 'primitive', traditional, simple, and natural one.

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[198] Mrs Meer Hasan Ali, *Observations on the Mussulmauns of India*, London, 1832.

Similarly, thinking through the intermeshed presence of different systems of time notation, we might be able to historicise the new meanings of delay and waiting that emerged as the new sensibility of speed invaded social lives through the use of the telegraph, the post, and the railways.[200] Since most of the technologies of the nineteenth century 'were typically associated with improved capacity to overcome physical barriers of time and space', the discussions around them 'indicate how time and space were socially valued.'[201] And yet, at the same time, we will be able to appreciate how the steam engine was habituated into the existing cosmos of time and temporality by it being presented as the vehicle of Hindu gods.[202]

By remaining vigilant – almost with an ethnographic eye – while reading our historical source-materials, we can create a methodological resistance to transitional linearity without lapsing into a simple explanation by way of celebrating plurality. Intermeshed temporalities will of course make use of the framework of pluritemporality but the latter should serve as an entry point to explore the social and not become the end harvest to demarcate the social. This entails stopping the treating of the practices of the past either as residues or as resistant expressions of essentialised cultural baggage. There is nothing inevitable about modern time. It is a product of historical tension and conflict, and the locale of conflicting forces within the practices of the social needs to be historically established without invoking the frameworks of nativity or indigeneity. In our example above, the proliferation of bullock carts due to the increase in the use of steam engines is not a reflection of the continuation of tradition but an equally modern simultaneous instantiation of demand caused by the changing matrix of communication. In terms of temporality, they did exhibit different registers of speed but they both operated, and slowly synced as well, in one time frame.

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[199] I am thankful to Samuel Wright for clarifying time-notation system of the water clock.

[200] Amelia Bonea, *The News of Empire: Telegraphy, Journalism, and the Politics of Reporting in Colonial India, c. 1830–1900*, New Delhi, 2016.

[201] Jeremy Stein, 'Reflections on Time, Time-Space Compression and Technology in the Nineteenth Century', in May and Thrift, eds., *Timespace*, p. 112.

[202] For similar nineteenth century tales of sufi practitioners, see Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915,* Cambridge, 2011.

K Recap

This chapter has stepped outside the strict domain of History and ventured into considering some of the main frameworks of studies on time, coming from other disciplines of humanities such as Sociology and Anthropology. It has also attempted to engage with the burgeoning multi-disciplinary research on the Anthropocene, particularly to understand the expansive nature of 'natural time' as well as its promises in expanding the domain of social history. The cumulative understanding offered here is supportive of questioning the binary between natural and social time while the chapter also proposes to enlarge the scope of social history to include the interspecies relationship. This will inevitably require us to bring in multiple constituents that shape social practices into conversation with each other. These constituents will come in with their own temporalities. For example, for the agrarian landscape, the temporalities of production will at least comprise of human-centric conditions, natural and environmental conditions, as well as temporalities of plants themselves. The intermeshing of different temporalities understandably encourages us to think in terms of 'multiple or plural temporalities'. Our researches will seek to present rich accounts of intermeshing of different temporalities and their limitations. But the framework of intermeshing has also created an easy generalisation about plurality of time itself. This chapter has argued that intermeshing does not necessarily need to mean that time itself is an inherently plural entity. Plurality of social-time is poised to enrich our understanding particularly if we deliberately move away from some of the well-researched sites of the making of the modern time to include othered spaces of modern time, but it may also hit the cul-de-sac of predictability. That is, the historicisation of intermeshed layers of temporalities may often lead us to argue in terms of diffusion and replacements, transitions and their incompleteness, and not least, conflictual but inevitable presence of multiplicity. Multiple forms of temporal engagements can also indicate the presence of a hierarchical, differentiated, and interconnected order of the relationship between time and power which nonetheless are not discretely arranged in relation to each other. Multiplicity or plurality does not obviate the presence of singularity or universality of time. In fact, the plural forms of engagement with time require a singular analytical texture of time. Our next chapter begins with the meditation on the possibility of avoiding this predictability by asking if doing a social history of time rather than a history of social-time may serve the purpose better.

Chapter 3
Temporal Regimes and Cultures: A Social History of Time

I A Social History of Time or a History of Social-time?

In the Introduction of this book, I hinted about ways that can overcome some of the problems associated with the use of binary models in our understanding of time through the use of two frameworks called 'temporal regime' and 'temporal culture'. However, before we come to elaborate upon these two terms, it will be pertinent to locate the discussion about plural times within the arch of our research question. This can be done by asking what exactly are we trying to investigate that has led to a wide consensus around the idea of plural time?

We concluded the previous chapter by arguing that a social history of time could begin by deeply historicizing the apparent contradictory forces of socio-economic and cultural lives, which are temporally constituted. But then the question arises: what do we do when, after deep historicisation, the knotted pattern of intermeshed temporalities or the co-existence of multiple systems of time-notation, plural time-experiences, and multiple habitations of and in time have been discovered and explained? Usually, it has led to the argument that time is plural or multiple. We talk in plural, modern times, rather than saying, for instance, modern time.[203] We talk of pluritemporality, plural times, and a plurality of historicities for both those who lived in the past and those who live in the present.[204] We talk of global temporal pluralism initiated and shaped by the interaction between local and global ideas and practices.[205] The architect of the 'regime of presentism' reminds us that there is no one presentism – that redefined the relationship between past, present, and future in the twentieth century – but 'several presentisms'.[206] We talk of the

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[203] Reading temporal reflections on past and future from the vantage point of the nineteenth and twentieth century present, Pernau summarizes that the 'time of the Prophet' looked so different in two different set of reflections that it warrants to use the plural expression: 'times of the Prophet'. Pernau, 'The Time of the Prophet and the Future of the Community', p. 490. For plurality in a different context of early colonial mercantile life, see Mark R. F. Williams, 'Experiencing Time in the Early English East India Company', *The Historical Journal*, 65, 2022, pp. 1175–1196.

[204] Zoltán Boldizsár Simon, 'Introduction: Historical Understanding Today', in Zoltán Boldizsár Simon and Lars Deile, eds., *Historical Understanding: Past, Present, and Future*, 2022, pp. 7–8.

[205] See Ogle, *The global Transformation of Time*.

[206] Fraçois Hartog, 'The Texture of the Present', in Simon and Deile, eds., *Historical Understanding*, p. 19.

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blurred distinctions between the past, the present, and the future. In other words, the value of plurality is not only limited to characterising what modern historical-time or social-time is, but more conceptually to what time is. The question here is: does our multiple and plural forms of engagement with time make time itself plural? Do our reflections, creations, and narratives which link the past to the present, and further links them to the future in order to create a fuzziness of the passage of time (or of its co-existence), necessarily indicate that there are 'varieties of time'?[207] If experiences of time differ on the basis of age, generation, sociality, gender, race, caste, and class, then is time itself multiple? Furthermore, should this be the question of primary concern for the discipline of History? It seems to me that revealing plurality does not fulfil the objectives of doing a social history of time.

I believe the above question of multiplicity of time is inseparably connected to how we frame our research approach. Are we doing a history of social time or a social history of time? The former entails that time is inherently social. The social is the inevitable mediation between what we perceive as time and us. In fact, more than mediation or representation, the social creates time. Hartog reminds us of the value of this insight: 'And there is no reason', he says, 'for historians to forfeit the wealth of insights afforded by the discovery of the multiplicity of social times: the many-layered, overlapping, and desynchronized times, each with its own rhythm'.[208]

There is no denial that social-time by default will always be plural. If social-time is a product of hierarchically organised conflictual sets of practices in which people inhabit and exist in multiple notations of time (an intermeshed use of the mechanical clock time and the religious almanac time, for instance), then it is bound to remain plural; in some societies it will be more plural than others. It will also be plural on account of the use of language in depicting, lamenting, accounting for (also in a comparative manner but not always necessarily so) the current social or political state of a community.[209] The ascriptive identities such as race, gender, and caste also make time plural. The idea of ritual pollution and purity, say in brahmanic Hindu norms and practices, mark certain bodies due to gender and caste rules differently; these bodies are then pushed into observing a different time-cycle of purity and pollution at specific events or throughout the life course. The confluence of biological and ritual times, under the force of intellectual iterations of social discrimination, exclusion, and stigma, do make time plural. And not least, the ideological constructions of time do lead to the mixing of epochal, mythical, and chronometric indexes of time. The time remembered and the time anticipated has layered components of the past, the present, and the future. Through all this, time comes to be seen as plural because if it is a product of social construction and regulation, then the meanings are bound to vary. Time seems to inhabit different temporalities in each of its moments of getting registered, accounted, and explained, in moments of being felt, experienced, and remembered, and further depending on who felt, experienced, and remembered it. If plurality is an axiomatic truth, then should our intellectual labour be restricted only to establishing the extent, degree, and scope of plurality through the act of historicisation?

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[207] Ogle, *The global Transformation of Time*, p. 122.

[208] Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, p. 16.

[209] See Margrit Pernau, 'Fluid Temporalities: Saiyid Ahmad Khan and the Concept of Modernity', *History and Theory*, 57, 2019, pp. 107–131.

The power of History lies in explaining the process. So, showing how a society reached and continues to engage temporally in a multiple fashion in itself will be of great significance in historical researches. This way of exploring time's plurality is geared towards two methodologies: one is discursive and textual, in which time is taken as a proxy to consciousness towards the historical periodisation of the past, the present, and the future (that is, the temporality). It confounds the categories of time and temporality because the ideational, the ideological, and the experiential merge to create a fluid passage of time along the temporal fuzzy boundaries of the past, the present, and the future. Time acquires an idiomatic meaning, standing at times as an alibi for the politics of modernity, for the linearity of progress, and, not least, for the sequentiality of chronology. Time therefore has to be cast into a plural mould in order to overcome the problems associated with modernity (Eurocentrism), progress (civilisational hierarchy and production of sameness), and chronology (new is better than the old). Most of the discursively explored areas of intellectual rumination on time's meaning, in which time is a metaphoric index of historical consciousness and periodisation, and a register of emotive ascriptions about the past and the future, can be said to be falling under this rubric of research (a history of social- or historical-time). The second methodology is much less discursive and is actually partly rooted in social history traditions or sociological studies which takes the plurality of social-time as the point of entry but compartmentalises time into various blocks of social groupings, experiences, and activities. There are then multiple times in any society as part of timescapes.[210] A recent book has succinctly put forth this view: 'time is culturally constructed, historically contingent, socially differentiated, and disciplinary specific'.[211] Its perception and experience, therefore, is bound to be divergent.

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[210] Adam, *Time and Social Theory*.

[211] Gribetz and Kaye, *Time: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, p. 5.

The book therefore makes a pertinent point that social differentiation of time across class, race, gender, etc., means that different groups and populations have different access to time. They experience time differently and have it valued (or is valued by others) also differently.[212] So far so good. But the logical follow-up of delineating the basics of the perception of time which creates differentiation leads to characterising the nature of time itself. The authors further say, ‘Characterizing time as culturally, historically specific, and socially differentiated – as opposed to natural, universal, or absolute – might stem, disciplinarily, from a humanistic impulse. But appreciating the *multiplicity of time* is essential to any individual study of time, whether in the arts, sciences, or humanities.’[213] From multiple experiences of time we reach the conclusion of multiplicity of time.

In contrast to these, let us ponder what it would mean to do a social history of time instead of a history of social-time. While unpacking this question, it appears to me that one can argue that time potentially can be treated as a universal entity, at least for developing a research hypothesis. Its rendition as a social entity then is related not to what time is, but what people did with it and in it. The meta philosophical question of ‘what time is’ does not need to be our research question when time is treated as a social entity and its making is traced in a historical manner. Its making as a social entity is through the inscription of power over it. Here, I draw upon insights from a recent study on the relationship between time and power. The editors say, ‘*Power and Time* probes legal, cultural, and sovereign authority and asks: How has it been shaped by conceptions of time? How have various regimes worked to reshape and restructure time itself?’[214] However, while keeping the relationship between time and power in the centre as they do, I wish to emphasise to think of time as a linear universal entity purely as a thought-aid to help us do social history beyond reinventing the wheel of plurality and multiplicity of time. This does not mean that if time is conceptualised as a linear universal entity, it is naturally laden with ideas of it becoming gradually progressivist or developmentalist. Linearity does not necessarily need to be thought of in terms of a progressive unitary mode of movement of humankind in one direction (akin to the idea of progress). Linearity could simply mean the non-reversibility of time. The reversibility of time and recurrence of events do not mean the same thing. That is, events when recurring or appearing to recur do not necessarily mean that the time has reversed. Insights from Lefevbre’s rhythm analysis can be helpful here in remind-ing ourselves that there is no absolute repetition and that every repetition includes and produces differences, which, one can add, can be seen as a function of time-stamp.[215] In fact, the event is also not the same in any of their repetitions.[216] If one is allowed to jest with semantic usages here, when scholars vouching for multiple or plural times note that pasts exist in the present, they also inadvertently accept that something (a life, an action, an event) has indeed become a past. It is in the realm of expression and experience that people talk of reversibility of time. But, as Thapar says, because time is irreversible, the events of the past cannot be altered.[217] Something is fundamentally irreversible even if its traces remain present in the present.[218] As Adam neatly puts, 'As practice, events are fundamentally contextual, directional, and irreversible.'[219]

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[212] Ibid., p. 49.

[213] Ibid., p. 21 (emphasis added).

[214] Dan Edelstein, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Natasha Wheatley, eds., *Power and Time: Temporalities in Conflict and the Making of History*, Chicago and London, 2020, p. 4.

People did things in and with time and in doing so gave meaning to it through notation, tabulation, and categorisation which would domesticate and control time. They used time as a resource to forge social relationships, to establish and proclaim power.[220] Kingly proclamations establishing new regnal calendars is an example of this kind. To explain the mushrooming of various calendars in ancient India, Thapar claims, 'The creation and abandoning of eras became an act of political choice.'[221] The history of Julian and Gregorian calendars shows deep religious bearings and fractious powerplay and the latter's acceptance in the eighteenth century in turn demonstrates the concurrence to the 'age of Enlightenment'.[222] In the early modern Islamic world, the lunar calendar was intercalated in all three major empires – Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman – to manage the agrarian fiscal system.[223] A social history of time will be more preoccupied with unearthing minute social practices and contestations over them through which time became an element of a social, ecological, and political relationship. It will pay attention to the mechanisms and the implications of control over time of others by the state, ruling elites, and other dominant groups. It will strive to find time in hidden scripts of the resistance and agency of those who felt dominated. It will look for concrete histories of instruments such as a time measuring device; of inscriptions of power, regularity, and authority inscribed in texts such as the calendar and the almanac; of constellations of technology altering the perception of the passage of time; of law which establishes temporal regimes of control over wider sections of society; of cycles of monsoon, exchange, trade, interest, credit, and debt that create conditions of dearth, prosperity, and planning, and many such concrete instances and entities in and through which time became a factor for forging and perpetuating unequal social relationships. It will explain how historically night was conquered, stigmatised, and romanticised while the day was normalised. It will look at social theorisation over time through categories in which time-bound sensibilities emerged. The 'fetish' of accuracy, the exercise of power in making someone wait, the enchantment with speed, and the disappointment with delay will tell us about society's changing relationship with time, not only at the theoretical plane of say the relationship between acceleration and modernity but at the social level of how these terms became important through certain practices in the society.

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[215] Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*.

[216] Adam, *Time in Social Theory*, pp. 28–29.

[217] Thapar, *Time as a Metaphor of History*, p. 8.

[218] Scholars such as Giddens have emphasised the reversibility of time due to repetition of routine actions in daily life. For its discussion and critique, see Adam, *Time in Social Theory*, pp. 25–27.

[219] Ibid., p. 27.

[220] Adam's articulation is helpful here: 'time as resource, as ordering principle and as becoming of the possible, or between any combination of these'. Adam, *Time in Social Theory*, p. 13.

[221] Thapar, 'Cyclical and Linear Time in Early India', p. 26.

[222] Jennifer Powell McNutt, 'Hesitant Steps: Acceptance of the Gregorian Calendar in Eighteenth-Century Geneva', *Church History*, 75, 3, 2006, pp. 544–64.

[223] Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam*.

In this approach we don't start with the premise which ironically also becomes the conclusion, that time is plural. Usually, either looked through the globalisation framework or the methodological territorial framework of 'modernity' (western, Egyptian, Ottoman, South Asian, and so on), the trajectory of argument following these approaches is the same: in the pre-nineteenth century, because of being a lived and concrete entity, time was plural; from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, due to the accelerating and globalising changes in time-measurement and technological assemblage, a uniformity developed but this uniformity also simultaneously led to many variations of temporal modernity inflected by local practices in different world regions. Time was plural; time remained plural. Earlier it was so because of nature and season and now it is so because of modernity's own journey, creating multi-territorial and -temporal modernities. Added to this then is the crisis of modernity and scepticism of the future which has rendered time plural at the level of regimes through which time was emplotted with events and chronology. It has also become plural due to the Anthropocenic sensibilities in which inter-species interactions are by default pluri-temporal. Yet, the Anthropocenic future also forces us to think, more when thought through Chakrabarty's unified planetary terms, 'in universal terms about the place and prospects of humans on the planet'.[224]

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[224] Simon, 'Introduction: Historical Understanding Today', p. 3.

Divergent from all this is the social history of time approach that starts with the premise that time can be treated as a singular resource which, when it becomes part of social life, creates ground for differentiation. In this view, the history of time is not the outcome of the intellectual labour behind the effort to historicize time; time is not its own object of research. Histories of people and their practices, preferably at the inter-species level in which time is interlaced as a resource of historical action, are. A social history of time is neither limited to the history of time nor to the history of historicity. More than worrying about time's inherent characteristic, a social history of time approach clearly accentuates practices. It will then seek to unravel the power behind the plurality of practices. While practices may appear autonomous or their inter-connections as uneven which may render time appear plural, the necessity of understanding the mechanism of power requires that the temporal fabric in which they unfold and create synergies and divisions along social groups is taken to be unitary. A singular/universal notion of time is imperative to the prospect of investigating the dynamics of social relationships. If seen in this way, the work of historical intellectual labour will be geared more towards charting the processes through which the temporalisation of social relationships occurred in any period of study rather than the temporalisation of time itself. Citing Bruno Latour, May and Thrift point out that time is not in itself a prime determinant of change; its passage (or not) depends on the alignment of other entities.[225] We can do this by asking ourselves what the temporal regime and temporal culture of a society in any given period of time is, and what are those other entities that make them.

M Temporal Regime and Temporal Culture

The two frameworks of 'temporal regime' and 'temporal culture' can help us answer the question with which we started this section: what will happen once an intermeshed temporality has been discovered and explained. Together they can lead us to historicize multiple entities of intermeshed temporality and yet prevent us from predictably concluding that time is plural. However, before that, a brief discussion of key cognate frameworks advanced in some of the recent studies is needed.

In his influential and inspiring study, Avner Wishnitzer has defined temporal culture and outlined how it changes (or changed in his region of study) in the following manner:

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[225] May and Thrift, eds., *Timespace*, p. 28.

> The term “temporal culture” is here used to denote a historically created system of time-related practices, conventions, values, and emotions that structures the temporal dimension of social life and fills it with meaning. The way the Ottomans used clocks conformed to the inner logic of their temporal culture and did not disturb its coherence. However, this fabric of practice and meaning, which until the late eighteenth century served to stabilize the sociopolitical order, began to change rather dramatically during the nineteenth century, as the Ottoman Empire was increasingly assimilated into the European-dominated global economy and the project of modern state-building began to gather momentum. In their attempt to attain better surveillance capabilities and higher levels of regularity and efficiency, various organs of the reforming Ottoman state developed elaborate temporal constructs in which clocks played an increasingly important role.[226]

Wishnitzer adds a caveat by stating that the accelerated change of the nineteenth century did not lead to the imposition of empty, homogenous western time in the Ottoman empire, and the changes at the receiving end were not simply a reflection of state-based reforms. More importantly, he elaborates that the assemblage called ‘temporal culture’ is not a ‘mere reflection of processes that unfolded in other fields’. In fact, it was ‘*in itself a major arena* in which social groups competed for legitimacy, delineated their identities, and put forward their ideologies; it was a medium through which the very concept of modernity was defined, and alternative visions of modernization were expressed and challenged’.[227]

Reading Yulia Frumer’s work on Tokugawa Japan through the lens of Wishnitzer’s ‘temporal culture’ reveals that for Frumer, norms, assumptions, and practices of time-keeping constituted the arena of temporal culture or, what she at times mentions, a temporal system.[228] It was an arena in itself because for more than two hundred years the European style mechanical clock was not only dismissed but adapted to suit the temporal culture of Japan in such a way that sometimes European timepieces lost their identity and purpose. One can see the sovereignty of this temporal culture in the following words of Frumer:

> Foreign technologies and foreign methods were thus accepted or rejected not because they more or less adequately addressed practical needs, but on the basis of how well they fit a prevailing set of norms and assumptions. In order to adapt foreign timekeeping technology to their needs, Japanese users first needed to integrate it into their web of associations related to practices of time measurement—either by modifying the technology to better suit those associations or by changing the associations to fit the technology.[229]

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[226] Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks*, p. 7.

[227] Ibid., p. 7 (emphasis mine).

[228] Frumer, *Making Time*.

[229] Frumer, *Making Time*, p. 3.

Primarily, for Frumer, the temporal system is based upon a time-reckoning system. Measurement is a key theme in her framework to understand the wider implication of a temporal system but so are the 'prevailing set of norms and assumptions'. Wishnitzer is more encompassing as he talks about temporal culture which has practices, conventions, values, and emotions involved in its making. Both stress how clocks, instead of reforming, get adapted into the existing temporal cultures of time-division and social and religious practices.[230] Yet, in both cases a significant transformation occured in the late nineteenth century which bent the existing temporal culture into the mould of Europe-dominated notion of modernity and modernisation. State-led reforms, technological innovations, changes in clocks and calendars, and the ensuing elite power-struggle changed the landscape of time, which was initiated or accelerated through a crisis produced by the imperial or colonial encounter. While Frumer restricts herself to the history of the device through the lens of technology, further illuminating Japan's 'voluntary' adoption of western practices in the late nineteenth century, Wishnitzer betrays (in spite of his claims) a preference for understanding the impulses of a highly centralised state to bureaucratise time, thus relapsing into the well-rehearsed framework of the transformation of time under western hegemony. While the former produces a nuanced but still device-centric narrative, the latter restricts himself to urban, state-led reforms, and to the institutions of the modern state such as the office, the army, and the school. Barak follows the trail albeit by not looking at the clock's history but by visiting the predictable sites of the late nineteenth century techniques and technologies that had in-built claims to changing the existing temporal order.[231]

Partly building upon these insights but also questioning their narrow focus, I wish to propose undertaking research of a social history of time through two frameworks of temporal regime and temporal culture. A temporal regime can be understood as a web of interlocked structures and institutions which shape peoples' relationship with time. The meaning of regime in this sense, and as expounded below, is not akin to Hartog's usage. Hartog uses the word regime in relation to modes of historical consciousness. According to him, the ways of living, thinking, and exploiting that consciousness, or the ways in which societies articulate past, present, and future, are what constitute the regime.[232] In the words of Assman, by the term regime Hartog 'means the different ways in which societies position themselves in time and engage with their past'.[233] This is a regime of historicity and not, as Hartog

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230 For similar arguments in the case of China, see C. Pagani, *Eastern Magnificence and European Ingenuity: Clocks of Late Imperial China*, Ann Arbor, 2001.

231 Barak, *On Time*.

232 Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, p. 25.

233 Assman, *Is Time Out of Joint*, p. 9.

stresses, of temporality because the former is a construction (of historians and observers of societies we study) whereas the latter 'has the disadvantage of referring to an external standard of time'.[234] Thus, as Torres summarises Hartog's approach, the 'regime of historicity is a tool that seeks to understand 'moments of crisis', i.e., when the connections between past, present and future stop seeming obvious.'[235] Assman's notion of 'cultural time regime' builds upon Hartog's by extending it from the domain of historicisation to the varied cultural investments made in shaping time. According to her, 'all time regimes provide a ground work for unspoken values, interpretations of history, and meaningful activity'.[236] She uses regime in a wider sense to incorporate the unconscious realm of human emotions, actions, and desires which lead to the 'acculturation of time'.[237] In another recent volume, the scope of regime as a 'nexus concept' has been even further widened to include orderings of time and its experiences, experiences of temporalities, records of prophecies and prognostication, memory, and other things that refract social, political, and aesthetic structures, intimacy, and illness.[238]

Hartog's notion of regime has come in for criticism because of the lack of plurality in it. Summing up a set of observations made against his idea of temporal regime, Simon and Tamm raise the question, 'would it [not] be more adequate to consider that for most periods in history, several temporal regimes coexisted side by side?'[239] Bouton also makes a similar critical remark: 'Why not say that modernity is invested with several experiences of time, gives rise to several competing regimes of historicity, some of which remain at odds with others?'[240] The multiplicity of temporal regimes have been noted by some other scholars as well, something to which we will return in the Conclusion. Yet for Hartog, Assman, and all those who approach the meaning of the term, even when referring to a plural and internally 'conflictual formation' of modern temporality, the core of the understanding of the term regime stands in relation to temporalisation: divisions between the past, the present, and the future and the human ways of relating to them.[241] According to Hartog, we live in the regime of presentism, in which the lure of the present is much higher than the pull of the past. Both past and future

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[234] Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, pp. xv–xvii.

[235] Felipe Torres, *Temporal Regimes: Materiality, Politics, Technology*, Oxon, 2022, p. 33.

[236] Assman, *Is Time Out of Joint*, p. 9.

[237] Ibid., p. 9.

[238] Edelstein et al. *Power and Time*, p. 7.

[239] Zoltán Boldizsár Simon and Marek Tamm, *The Fabric of Historical Time*, Cambridge, 2023, p. 26.

[240] Bouton, 'Hartog's Account', p. 329.

[241] Aleida Assman, *Is Time Out of Joint*, pp. 9–10. Jordheim, 'Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization', p. 510. Edelstein et al., *Power and Time*.

'become nothing more than extensions of now'.[242] Assman refines this position by arguing that the hold of the future is weakening, and the past is making a comeback, thus requiring a new regime to understand historicity and time.

In the idiomatic usages of time for history, the term regime therefore has a specific meaning of ways to relate with the construct of periodisation while expounding on the values behind such constructs. My attempt on the contrary is to decouple 'regime' from historicity, and to place it in the realm of material elements that shape the everyday and the everynight lives. Here, I broadly concur with Torres who says that 'temporal regimes are a tool to grasp . . . material uses and practices of time'.[243] Precisely for the reason that Hartog avoids tagging regime to temporality because it would refer to time as an external factor or order in social life, I wish to highlight that feature of time within the discipline of social history. I elaborate this point further in the next section through concrete examples but to mention the crux of the argument here, temporal regime, I argue, needs to be seen as constituted through social practices and material realities and not viewed only as a product of the historian's construct. In this proposal, one can also notice some resonance with Edelstein and others. They nevertheless cast the scale of the term very widely, ranging from geological to sacred to that of the intimate and to illness.[244] In contrast, I wish to keep the scope of a regime limited to structures and institutions. For me, a temporal regime is constituted by how people dealt with technique and technologies, with law and authority, with seasons, nature, and the flow of money, with science, divinity, and other animate and inanimate beings and objects – that is, with the structures of livelihood and power in which life/lives was/were situated. On this point, I diverge from Torres' scope of the term under which he regards progress, utopia, waiting, and acceleration also as temporal regimes. For me they are part of temporal cultures – another conceptual term introduced later – which interact with the constituents of regime but acquire a wider social resonance of their own.

Precisely for same reason that Simon and Tamm do not want to use it because it conveys the connotation of order and enforcement, I wish to retain the use of the term regime because the constellation of order is important for any powerful entity (state, dominant social groups, capital, diviners) in establishing control. Regime can be seen as a dynamic entity which is imposed from the top and resisted from the bottom; an entity whose enforcement and malleability can be historically measured and analysed in concrete material sense. It does not presuppose, as Simon and Tamm do, the existence of an originary nonorderly state of things on which a new temporal regime is enforced.[245] As Torres has formulated, regime is ‘related to particular repetitive and stable conditions that constitute a unity that envelops a homogeneity within regular patterns in which time is involved’.[246] In my understanding, temporal regime is a little fuzzier and less homogenous and unified than what Torres suggests, who otherwise rightfully describes them as dynamic and not static. It is so not only on account of multiple co-existing regimes, for instance acceleration and slowness, as he outlines, but also because the constituents of a regime might not be stable and unitary. However, he also advances, as attempted in this text as well, to underline the argument that a temporal regime or temporality cannot only be considered in terms of past, present, and future. Their overlapping, in his term, with material socio-historical processes taking place inside them is warranted.[247]

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[242] For a useful critical engagement with the regime of 'presentism', see Marcus Colla, 'The Spectre of the Present: Time, Presentism and the Writing of Contemporary History', *Contemporary European History*, 30, 1, 2021, pp. 124–35.

[243] Torres, *Temporal Regimes*, p. 30.

[244] Edelstein et al., *Power and Time*, pp. 25–26.

As an example of how sources can be read in a pragmatic manner to reconstruct a temporal regime in any given period of time and region, my understanding of temporal regimes is akin to what Michael Sauter has described as the ‘temporal infrastructure’ for eighteenth century Berlin. It was made up of public turret clocks, the critical clock-watcher public, the religious buildings (churches), and the growing talk about time in print.[248] Slowly, science and state became part of this infrastructure, which introduced new elements of difference between true (local) and mean time, which led to discussions on accuracy. The temporal regime underwent a shift as the power to define the mean time moved in the hands of astronomers, moved away from the church’s clock to that of the Academy’s master clock, and carried the weight of the state’s ratification. Thus, a temporal regime was constituted through practices of religious institutions and the engaged public, interventions by science and print, and the sanctions of credible knowledge and state patronage, which were not static or uniform, which were constituted at multiple sites ranging from the church to science, but which had one dominant strand at any given point in time. And yet the dynamic force – in this case the clock-watcher public – within a regime also paved ways for its shifts and realignments.

In contrast to, and complementing, the institutional and structural scope of a temporal regime, a temporal culture on the other hand can be a substantive way of studying society’s engagement with time through those features and characteristics in which time-oriented actions get defined. It can encompass studies of rhythms and the reckonings of time. Accuracy, speed, punctuality, leisure, delay, waiting, boredom, and other such terms through which the passage of time and peoples' actions in it are recorded and registered, and judged and valued would comprise one part of it. In a loose manner, temporal culture can be the set of practices that indicate how temporal regime was experienced. It does not presuppose any hierarchical relationship between regime and culture, the former being of primary nature and the latter being derivative of it. Nor does focussing on experience purblind us to the role of structures. Alf Lüdtke perceptively writes, 'a coffee break in a factory or in the relaxing comfort of a café always contain a referential component: it is inseparable from the conditions of production and the experience of the coffee planters in Columbia or East Africa. In other words: experiences emerge, but these are never in isolation.'[249]

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[245] Simon and Tamm, *The Fabric of Historical Time*, p. 7.

[246] Torres, *Temporal Regimes*, p. 3.

[247] Ibid., pp. 31–33.

[248] Sauter, ‘Clockwatchers’. Also, my ideas reverberate with those presented in a recent volume, with some differences which are outlined below. See Edelstein et al., *Power and Time*, pp. 26–27.

Crucial here is to remind ourselves, and in distinction to the insightful studies discussed above, that a social history of time should neither fold into device-centrism nor become a handmaid of elucidating modernity's trajectory. Sauter evocatively says that clocks exerted control over individual subjects at the request of the subjects themselves.[250] Temporal culture and regime must be kept expansive in their scope to allow us to wander off to varied, othered, and neglected sites of investigation. They should not be narrowed down in a formulaic manner to focus only on bureaucratic reform, technological moments of cultural encounter, or globalising conduits of diffusion and deviation. Together, temporal culture and temporal regime could include, though not exclusively or restrictively, three key components: 1. the intermeshed histories of time-notations defined through multiple use of devices (and inner classifications and types within each of them) such as clocks, calendars, and other instruments and mechanisms including the body; 2. time discipline which emerges through the logic of money, law, and market but also through faith, nature, morality, and religion; and 3. time experience, which means how people and groups felt time and what they did with it – as a collective social practice, experiencing it through units in which the passage of time or its intensity or stillness was felt.

In this conceptualisation, the way to study temporal regimes and cultures would be different than what is suggested in other studies. A social history of time is very likely to be accessible only through other histories in which time in its various forms – measurement, orientation, discipline, control, resistance – are embedded but not readily visible from within the archival logic of the classification of source-materials. It is in this regard, and in distinction to Wishnitzer's formulation, perhaps it is desirable to conceptualise temporal culture not as a self-contained entity – with its inner logic and coherence – but as a matrix of activities spawned across various sites and activities wherein time becomes a component of structural and experiential notions of power, authority, and subordination. A brief elaboration follows before we move to the Conclusion and return to the question of plurality. In the following section, I draw upon examples and themes I am a little better familiar with due to my own research trajectory. They are, in no way, meant to be prescriptive or definitive.

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[249] Alf Lüdtke, 'Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who are Its Practitioners?' in Lüdtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, New Jersey, 1995, p. 18.

[250] Sauter, 'Clockwatchers', p. 706.

N Some Examples of Studying Temporal Regimes and Temporal Cultures

Depending on our thematic preference, the central constituent of any temporal regime and temporal culture will vary. Let us begin by thinking of work and time relationship, or more specifically about the possible ways of christening the contours of a 'temporal regime of work'. If approached broadly through the perspective of factory-, plantation- or service-based labour, then the process of production, circulation, and the mechanisms of control governed through law, technology, ecologies and environment, policing, wage, contract, and managerial discipline may appear as the most important elements in the creation of a temporal regime of work. For instance, the role of the five-year contract in the indenture system of tea plantation in Assam, which gave planters the right to private arrest, was crucial in shaping work and resistance at plantations. Tying and flogging of coolies by managers upon non fulfilment of daily tasks was the quotidian feature of the plantation system.[251] The regime of law aided the intensification of work-time. The temporal regime of work in turn was shaped through a concentric arrangement of material, disciplinary, and discursive strategies that, in the case of Assam, included discourses of spatial exceptionalism; problems in labour recruitment and high rate of desertion; legal frameworks for enforcing coercive work practices; legal validity to 'private' forms of punishment to coolies; and the everyday regime of work defined by garden time, flexible mix of time- and task-oriented modes of wage payment and intensification of work, contested extension of work on Sundays, other modes of intensification of tasks such as new and increased demand for plucking leaves, and not least workers' own strategies to mix plantation and agrarian sources of livelihood.

The temporal regime, in this case, should explore the interlaced rhythms at various levels: the rhythm of international shipping, distributing tea across oceanic waters; the rhythm of labour-hiring and procurement within India and Assam; the role of seasonality in the demand of this particular commodity and its production cycle; and the work-specific strategies that led to implementing better control over working time of coolies and their means to challenge such strategies. Further, it is through the materiality of certain constituents of this temporal regime that we can also begin to approach the more expansive notion of temporal regime used in terms of periodisation and historicity. For instance, the instrument of contract both defined the immediate regime of work as well as produced a discursive temporality of the future. The same contract was touted as an instrument which would help progressively realise the regime of 'free labour' in which, eventually, Assam plantation would not be legally envisioned as 'exceptional' and therefore would not require special protective mechanisms against labour desertion. On the obverse side, the contract remained an instrument of perpetuating a stalled temporality in workers' lives as it became a key force in immobilising them.

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[251] Nitin Varma, *Coolies of Capitalism: Assam Tea and the Making of Coolie Labour*, Oldenburg, 2017.

On top of all this, the regime of work was significantly influenced by the plant's own temporality: the intensification of work (and its limitation) depended not only on the demands of the market but crucially on the plant's temporality and its environment. When 'more than eight species of plant bugs and pests parasitically fed on the tea micro-climate and ravaged crop yields, flavor, and profits' then it is pertinent to bring plant, ecology, and plantation together in writing histories of temporal regimes of work.[252] Plant's temporality, however, does not reflect an autonomous working of natural time. As it happened in the case of Assam, the bugs arrived as a result of the structures of the tea industry.[253] The tea plant acted as a conducive host to some of these bugs. While removal of bugs provided some of the workers an opportunity to earn extra pennies, in general it meant fluctuating or demanding working hours as well as a periodic increase in cost and loss in production.[254] The strategies of labour management – in this case, allowing workers to grow paddy alongside their housing areas to provide for a cheap source of food – also resulted in spread of malarial mosquitoes that in turn affected workers' health and productivity. The temporal regime of work was thus susceptible to production strategies that brought nature and capital together in the form of diseases for both plants and human beings. Around the changing centrality of law and its active and elongated shadow of surveillance, practices of recruitment, and regulation of work established at Assam plantations, Varma's account provides numerous insights for explicating various constituents of temporal regime of work in a plantation setting. Dey's foray into the same setting that brings law, labour, capital, and ecology within the same fold of analysis reminds us that for purposes of understanding time-work relationship, the scope of inquiry has to be cast in its widest possible manner, including other species and diseases.

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[252] Arnab Dey, *Tea Environments and Plantation Culture: Imperial Disarray in Eastern India*, Cambridge, 2018 (direct quote from p. 6).

[253] Ibid., p. 80.

[254] Ibid., Ch. 3.

The centrality of the product, commodity, or object that created its own temporal rhythm is also applicable in other contexts. In the tanning industry, the physical characteristics of hides and skins prone to rotting rapidly in the hot climate of southern India added a different level of urgency to get work done, which in turn provided some leverage to workers to bargain for better conditions. Similarly, their timing of strikes was also linked to the material and its production process' temporality. They often struck work after soaking the hides in lime.[255] The product's temporality embedded in the production process could define the protest's timing. Marina Moskowitz shows that in the nineteenth century, the commodification of seeds did take up the natural life cycle of plants and adapted it to new scales of time and space, but humans could not get too far away from plant's life cycle.[256]

In the making of such a regime, the social structures such as caste and gender, which defined the contours of work in terms of stigma, purity, hierarchy, reproduction, and value are equally important constituents. In manual scavenging and waste cleaning, the relationship between caste and stigma is in particular deep-seated, to the extent that a technological change in the organisation of work does not necessarily replace stigma or change caste order but simply 'enhances the proficiency of the work'.[257] However, as much as certain discourses try to equate dirt and caste in a timeless manner through the ageless social practice of untouchability, the history of reconfigurations of stigma through caste practices as well as labour processes is very granular and temporal.[258] On the one hand it is tied to the functioning of the law affecting the labour process of work and on the other to the colonial slow accretion of changes in the organisation of work.[259] The existing works, nonetheless, seems to have inadequately explored the aspect of time and temporality in the relationship between caste, work, and stigma. What happens, for example, to this relationship when temporal location of work shifts from the night to the day?[260] How does the social reception of and resistance to stigma change when the temporal locus causes change in the visibility of work and working bodies? In the tanning industry, the stigma associated with work created double-edged condition for workers: it allowed them to 'bring employers to their knees' but also because of belonging to the lowest of the low caste status, the stigma exposed workers to social and economic subordination.[261]

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[255] See Shahana Bhattacharya, 'Rotting Hides and Runaway Labour: Labour Control and Workers' Resistance in the Indian Leather Industry, c. 1860–1960', in Ravi Ahuja, ed., *Working Lives and Worker Militancy: The Politics of Labour in Colonial India*, new Delhi, 2013, p. 68.

[256] Moskowitz, 'Calendars and Clocks', pp. 116–17.

[257] Shireen Mirza, 'Figure of the Halalkhore: Caste and Stigmatised Labour in Colonial Bombay', *Economic and Political Weekly*, LIII 31, 4 August 2018, p. 84.

[258] See Vidhya Raveendranathan, 'Scavenger and the Raj: State, Caste, and Labour in Colonial Madras', in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Rana P. Behal, eds., *The Vernacularisation of Labour Politics*, New Delhi, 2016.

[259] See Vijay Prashad, *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community*, New Delhi, 2000.

In other contexts, the conditions of work shaped by migration and mobility (its pattern based on seasonality and therefore people's linkages between urban and rural, industrial and agrarian modes of livelihood and reproduction) contributed to temporally shape the regime of work.[262] Absenteeism from factories to take care of work during agrarian cycles was a common feature. In the case of jute cultivation in eastern India, the combination of market demand and credit supply seems to have played a major role in the shifting regimes of work between the 1870s and the 1920s.[263] In the beginning, the cultivation of jute expanded along the cultivation of paddy leading to the increased workload on the peasant household, but this was also the period when these households enjoyed relative prosperity. However, from the 1890s, when double cropping begun to exhaust the productivity of the soil, and peasants further expanded the cultivation of jute at the expense of paddy, the risk of hunger increased. Further during the World War I, a majority of jute growing peasantry were thrown into destitution. Their control on production-time significantly weakened. Unlike in the 1870s, now they could not abandon their crops in the field and instead sold the produce at unfavourable prices while maximising the exploitation of the household labour. Due to increased risk of hunger, they entered into a cycle of debt-trap.

In all these examples, the meaning of regime is akin to structural formation: it can refer to a set of regulations, their execution, their languages of articulation, and their practices of adaption or rejection, in which a definite time-bound notion of work emerged. It can refer to social structures weaved in with the logic of the capital, market, and credit to create certain specific conditions of work. It can denote the structural nature of hiring, recruitment, advance payment, and wage disbursal that shaped workers' temporal engagement with tasks. In thinking about temporal regime of work as the analytical framework, the key idea is to investigate such forces which have acquired a relatively stable and structural value in defining or producing a role of time in the performance and (punitive) supervision of work and task. Temporal regime of work, combining different elements of control, would often be established through state and employers from above. The specific nature of the industry and the product would exert pressure on this regime of work; they could be used as justification for establishing stringent control over workers. For instance, in the tanning industry, the employers insisted on defining work as 'continuous' and hence for keeping tanneries outside the formal regulative apparatus of fixed working hours. The employers sought exemption from existing clauses that restricted work to eleven hours a day, sixty hours a week, and on Sundays. To quote employers' logic from Bhattacharya's detailed research on this theme, the exemption – symbolising a change for the desired temporal organisation of work to maximise profit – was sought on the basis of specific production process related to hides:

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[260] For a promising preliminary foray, see Maria-Daniela Pomohaci, 'Silent Bearers of the City's Filth: The "Unseen" Conservancy Labor of Colonial Calcutta', *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies*, 8, 2024, pp. 83–103.

[261] Bhattacharya, 'Rotting Hides and Runaway Labour', pp. 76–81.

[262] Samita Sen, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial Calcutta: The Bengal Jute Industry*, Cambridge, 1999; Arjan de Haan, *Unsettled Settlers: Migrant Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Calcutta*, Larensweg, 1994; Arjan de Haan, 'Migration and Livelihoods in Historical Perspective: A Case Study of Bihar, India', *The Journal of Development Studies*, 38, 5, 2002, pp. 115–42.

[263] Tariq Omar Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital: Jute & Peasant Life in Bengal Delta*, Princeton, 2018.

> The manufacture of leather is a continuous process and the operations involved demand constant attention of the staff. Work cannot be stopped at stated hours for any great length of time, for if it is, the hides under process become damaged. For the same reason work cannot be entirely discontinued on Sundays . . . some work must proceed, though of course the minimum amount of labour necessary will be employed on such days.[264]

In reading our archives around work and labour and their temporal dimension, we can be guided by a central question here: which factors of control bring in, or are based upon, time as a crucial component in the employer-employee relationship to regulate the overall nature of employment? For instance, we can begin by asking how law defined the time of work.[265] We can inquire the technological shift that created new work rhythm; in 1894, the jute mills in Bengal had increased the weekly hours of work from seventy-two to ninety after installing electric light.[266] Anna Sailer's more insightful contribution has been to make a return to the workplace – the shopfloor – to tease out the relationship between time and work practices. In colonial descriptions, Indian industries suffered from a so-called time-clash: as she rightly puts it, the workers' practices were seen as premodern but the time of the mill or the machine was modern. Its reconciliation, so to say, was built upon the use of various managerial and capitalist strategies. Sailer prises open the practice of substitution or excess labour which allowed workers to take informal breaks between tasks while the rhythm of mills' engines worked uninterruptedly. A change in that system from the 1920s spilt changes widely in everyday practices. In her own words:

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[264] Bhattacharya, 'Rotting Hides and Runaway Labour', p. 70.

[265] Douglas Hay, 'Working Time, Dinner Time, Serving Time: Labour and Law in Industrialization', *Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History*, 164, Oxford, 2018.

[266] Anna Sailer, *Workplace Relations in Colonial Bengal: The Jute Industry and Indian Labour, 1870s–1930s*, London, 2022, p. 1.

> The abolition of gang work in the 1920s also implied that the working day was regularized, as workers were required to remain at the shop-floor throughout their shift. This, in turn, implied restrictions for Bengali workers who had to walk several miles to the factory; it had implications for Muslim weavers who wanted to leave the workplace early during *Ramadan*; and it had an impact on the everyday rhythms of women at the shop-floor who had to look after children in the course of the day. The transformations of work in jute mills, in other words, spelt out interventions in the *social formation* of labour that had impacts both at the shop-floor and beyond.[267]

Thompson's study is a classic example of how a new temporal regime of work emerged out of the nexus between capitalism and the mechanical clock-time. There could be other variants such as law, the nature of employment, migration, mobility, technology, patterns of commute etc. involved in the making of any temporal regime of work. Rather than pitching the change along the shift from task-oriented work regime to time-oriented work regime, it is also possible to postulate a scenario of intense temporalisation of the task itself which could result in accelerating production by utilising the maximum working time of the workers.

For an agrarian scape, to sketch out the nature of temporal regime of work very briefly, investigating elements other than those pointed above will be more fruitful. Depending upon the nature of crops and their production cycle, the temporalities embedded in fiscal calendars, seasonality, markets, money, transport, energy-use, and resources (for instance, water or the availability of cattle) would become prominent elements of agrarian temporal regime.[268] Farming will perhaps make the best site to start off the investigation, albeit with the admission that it not only refers to a set of activities carried on-farm but also includes off-farm and non-farm activities performed by farming households.[269] The type of farming combined with the nature of soil, for instance, determines the duration for which the land needs to be left fallow.[270] Many other practices related to tilling, hoeing, transplanting, etc. together with material, social, and political conditions create, as Francesca Bray has called, 'cropscape' in which timing of agricultural activities as well as plurality of temporalities related to life cycles of crops, variations in season, competing labour demands, fluctuating supplies of livestock, and changes in market prices play a crucial role.[271] Farming also includes some activities by non-farmers which affect farming. They may be related to irrigation, transport, taxation, and other relevant activities for agriculture in general. And most importantly, farming is related to specific tasks performed at various stages of crop production in which timing is extremely critical. Labour, resources, energy, and other inputs are as much contingent on social power as on the appropriate time-bound mobilisation of those inputs. Agrarian temporal regime can foremost be explored by minutely looking at time-bound practices of farming and by questioning who, how, when, where, and through which means controlled time and through it the other resources (or vice versa) make farming possible.

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[267] Ibid., p. 15.

[268] See Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur*.

[269] David Ludden, *An Agrarian History of South Asia*, Cambridge, 1999, p. 31. For various other insights which I use from this text, see Ch. 1.

However, in spite of the growing role of technologies, not all constituents, such as the rainfall, can be adequately under social control. For purposes of simplification, it may therefore be offered here to also think of embarking on the exploration of the agrarian temporal regime at the intersection of nature and state (as already highlighted above in the case of tea). In other words, variations in seasonality and other ecological conditions on the one hand and processes of revenue administration (ranging from creation of contract, assessment, social relations, legal obligations, calendrical changes) on the other can yield a rich insight into how a particular agrarian temporal regime came to be established in any period of time. They, in turn, will also tell us about the constitution of power and authority established through controlling time-related aspects of agrarian production, taxation, and consumption. For instance, a change in the number of times and seasons the state collected the revenue from peasants, thus altering fiscal temporality, might lead to deeper changes in agrarian social relationships related to power and debt between landlords and peasants.[272] The political power often demanded forced labour or military work from peasants which affected their relationship to farming and with the agrarian world in general.[273] The agrarian temporal regime can be relatively more volatile due to dependence on seasonality in comparison to other work-sector regimes.

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[270] Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri, *The Adaptable Peasant: Agrarian Society in Western Sri Lanka under Dutch Rule, 1740–1800*, Leiden, 2008, p. 63.

[271] Francesca Bray, 'The Craft of Mud-Making: Cropscapes, Time, and History', *Technology and Culture*, 61, 2, 2020, pp. 645–661.

[272] Ranajit Guha, 'The Advent of Punctuality', in Guha, *The Small Voice of History: Collected Essays*, Delhi, 2002.

[273] See, Dewasiri, *The Adaptable Peasant*.

However, state intervention or market entanglements significantly alter the nature of temporal regime. Driven by the needs of an expanding Company trade, which required a faster collection of land revenues, the British East India Company instituted a regime which tied the traditional agrarian work rhythms to a fiscal calendar guided by the international trade. So, while they continued with the fiscal calendar devised by Akbar, the Mughal ruler, for revenue collection, known as the *Fasli* year, the revenue collection was simultaneously interpolated with demands of Gregorian calendar based upon trade cycle. There were codices prepared to translate Fasli time to Gregorian months.[274] Prior to the colonial rule in India, the *qist* or the instalment of the total amount officially due for collection was paid in four or six phases. To finance the ever-expanding trade of the British East India Company, the payment cycles in some places were increased to twelve. This upset the traditional agrarian time which welded seasonal vagaries and celestial movements, which was more attuned to even out the discrepancies between the production-time and the actual working-time. Usually, there was a crucial waiting time between the two which was basically the extension of the agrarian work-time relationship into the larger field of social power and dependency created through credit, debt, advance, and other similar mechanisms.[275] The colonial state's fiscal arrangement therefore retained the Mughal calendar but imposed a new temporality by aligning property with fiscality and legality, which formed the basis of the 1793 law called the Permanent settlement. In the case of jute cultivation in deltaic Bengal, the global market played an important role in affecting not only production processes but also rhythms of work and leisure, domesticity, sociality, and political choices of local peasant households.[276]

The agrarian temporality was based upon crop production time, ecological uncertainties, legal interventions, calendrical mix (lunisolar, Fasli, Gregorian), intensification of capitalist ventures, and not least, cycles of debt, bondage, and legal protraction. It was marked by cycles of harvest and seasons of rituals, by debts for marriage and intensity of international trade. The wider span of time worked in tandem with more precisely defined demands based upon time. The lunar asterisms' prediction of rain that would fall within a range of days met the fixed date of payment of revenue to the state. The agrarian was not the other of the 'capital'. Sugata Bose elegantly sums it up: 'the rhythms and fluctuations of a supra-regional capitalist economy were quite as much a part of the moving constellation of nakshatras influencing the peasant world as the annual monsoons'.[277]

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[274] Hayden J. Bellenoit, *The Formation of the Colonial State in India: Scribes, Paper and Taxes, 1760–1860*, Oxon, 2017, pp. 92–93.

[275] Shahid Amin, 'Small Peasant Commodity Production and Rural Indebtedness: The Culture of Sugarcane in Eastern U.P., c. 1880–1920', in Sugata Bose ed., *Credits, Markets and the Agrarian Economy of Colonial India*, Delhi, 1994, pp. 80–135.

[276] Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital.*

In addition to farming and state-centric interventions in constituting agrarian temporality, seasonality can become a key framework in understanding agrarian temporal regime, but, as David Ludden reminds us, it ought to be not treated as an ahistoricist structure of analysis.

> Seasonal time seems to be cyclical, because ideas about seasons are modelled on patterns of natural repetition. But seasonality is also historical, because its cultural construction also moves back to the future, as people predict and gamble based on their remembered experience. The understanding of seasonal patterns comes from observation and past predictions, apprehensions of the future; it encodes memory and evidence from past events.[278]

Choices of investment creating a linear effect of prosperity and dearth, he further elaborates, are made upon seasonal time. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century region of Awadh, the state gave a discount on future and current assessments to those who paid taxes in advance.[279] Revenue administration was linked to the rhythms of the monsoon, but administrative and fiscal requirements constantly shaped that relationship.

Seasons connect farming time to natural time but in doing so render both into practices of social, political, and cultural ascriptions. The apparent repetitive cycles of seasons and the unpredictable variations embedded therein is significantly linked to rather linear, quotidian, and structural changes of livelihood, accumulation, and state formation. In the case of Awadh, the vagaries of the monsoon were balanced off by averaging the revenue demand on a five- or ten-year basis.[280] Such changes affect the power relation between state and farming communities and between different stakeholders of the agrarian world. One important realm of organising agrarian power has been tenurial rights. Tenurial rights potentially address the question of agrarian temporality at two levels: one, with complexities and contradictions, as a theory of tenure in which a unilinear temporal movement in charting the rise of the modern individual property from shares to possession, from collective to individual, is possible.[281] Locating the shifts in the rise of the property regime in the agrarian field can allow us to also evaluate the historicist-temporal construct of time in a cultural comparativist manner, as was done in the nineteenth century. The second possibility is at the level of the legal construct of that tenurial theory which defined the gradation of rights based upon a certain number of years a peasant had tilled the land. One might say, this represented one modality of the linear time of agrarian tenurial-legal complex in which the accruement of rights was premised upon a well-defined legally constructed measured unit of time. Yet another axis which shaped agrarian temporality – constituted of revenue demands and tenurial rights – was through ecological conditions of accretion and diluviation in riverine areas in which the idea of revenue permanency based upon ideologies and practices of measurement was often rendered ineffective due to constant shift in the river channels.[282] For example, the shifts in the river courses affected the cropping patterns as well as demographic spread in the 'new' and 'old' alluvium regions of Bengal, which affected production strategies.

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[277] 'Introduction', in Bose ed., *Credits, Markets and the Agrarian Economy*.

[278] Ludden, *An Agrarian History of South Asia*, p. 20.

[279] Bellenoit, *The Formation of the Colonial State*, pp. 20–21.

[280] Ibid., p. 21.

[281] Peter Robb, *Ancient Rights and Future Comfort: Bihar, the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, and British Rule in India*, Surrey, 1997; Neeladri Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest: The Colonial Reshaping of a Rural World*, New York, 2019.

The role of credit, an important constituent of agrarian temporal regime, cannot be understood without understanding agrarian production temporalities. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the expansion of credit in agrarian production and its fallouts have been variously described as leading to impoverishment of small-holding peasants, siphoning of profit by a credit-savvy group of money lenders, and not least the creation of inter-generational debt-relations in rural parts of colonial India, but the question of how and why credit came to occupy an increasing role in agrarian production can only be better understood if various facets of agrarian production and its temporalities are mapped together. In the production process of certain crops such as indigo, sugar, and cotton, the timing of advances mattered. In the case of indigo, the peasants hardly made any profit, but the system and timing of advance dovetailed them into a generational cycle of debt.[283] Credit was not only required for production purposes but social reproduction as well. The lag between the working time and the longer production time explains the role of credit, which in turn can become a very vivid window into the everyday social life of the peasant and their household, a theme best approached under the rubric of temporal culture as explained below.

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[282] For Bengal, see Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770*, Cambridge, 1993, Ch. 1. For Bihar, see Nitin Sinha, 'Fluvial Landscape and the State: Property and the Gangetic Diaras in Colonial India, 1790s–1890s', *Environment and History*, 20, 2014, pp. 209–37; Nitin Sinha, 'Law, Agro-ecology, and Colonialism in mid-Gangetic India, 1770s–1910s', in Gunnel Cederlöf and Sanjukta Dasgupta, eds., *Subjects, Citizens and Law: Colonial and Independent India*, London, 2017, pp. 163–90.

[283] Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*, pp. 45–48.

The above discussion is obviously a sketch of how to conceptualise the framework of temporal regime of work and to make it empirically feasible. But behind providing these concrete examples is also the purpose of highlighting a glaring gap in South Asian labour and social history that directly deals with themes of work and time. Factory and factory-like settings (plantation can be read as a proto-factory set up) have dominated the writings of labour history at the expense of non-factory-based work milieus which were not necessarily agrarian in nature. Once we shift our analytical gaze from factory to ecology or to other non-factory based sites of work such as the household and the street, and also shift our focus from clock-time to time embedded in the instrument of law, nature, systems of payment, use of multiple calendars, and patterns of migration, we are better equipped to not only explain the agro-ecological world of work but also the vast world of urban informal labour. Barring a few works on migratory and mobile labour, much of the focus in South Asian labour history still remains on formal settings of mines and factories (and plantations). Temporally speaking, this means that a majority of studies are concentrated on the period beginning the mid-nineteenth century. In India, factories developed only after the 1840s. Prior to that, urban labouring groups with agrarian connections were the dominant form of labour with diverse occupational profile (masons, carpenters, bricklayers, transport workers, servants, coolies, ayahs, to name some of them). The earlier period of at least hundred to hundred and fifty years (1700s–1850s), which saw the dynamic growth in commerce, urban centres, migration, and waged labour, has barely been approached from the viewpoint of temporal organisation of work and labour. In order to do histories of work-time relationship for this period (say, 1600s–1850s), we need to overcome the bias of narrowly thinking through factories alone. We also need to remind ourselves that the pre-industrial formation of labour does not by default mean the world of agrarian relationships. A range of labouring groups such as boatmen, palanquin bearers, domestic servants, and various skilled workers such as masons and carpenters, worked in a regimented temporal frame defined less by clock and more by the legal apparatus that specified contract and its breach. What the mechanical clock, together with industrialisation, did for England in terms of instituting a new temporal regime of work, the same could be said to have been done by the master and servant laws in early colonial India. By defining wage, work, and forms of punishment, law worked as a proxy to clock in a period (until the late nineteenth century) when the spread of mechanical timepieces in India was still limited but work-time relationship was nonetheless intensely policed. While more research is required in this direction and on this period together with the role of mechanical and water clocks in labour management (if any), it should not surprise us to speculate that timing embedded in natural factors such as season, wind, rainfall, and topography; time-notations arrived at through marking sunrise, sunset, and the use of gunshot; and the newly emerging frameworks of legal regulation around contract of work, advance payment, and criminalisation of breach of contract were far more important in determining the relationship between work and time than the disciplinary mode of clock-time. Colonialism used law as industrialisation used the mechanical clock.[284]

For some reasons, temporal histories of work and labour is an under-developed field in South Asian history writing. This becomes evident reading even some of the most elegant and comprehensive accounts of the trajectories of 'resurgent' Indian labour historiography.[285] Themes ranging from law, gender, caste, community, stigma, migration, mobility, and varied sites of work are discussed together with the shifting meanings of analytical categories such as the formal and informal. But time and temporality as independent axes for approaching labour history are conspicuous by absence. This is true for both agrarian and non-agrarian fields. While I have insightfully drawn upon Ludden, Bhattacharya, and other scholars' work on agrarian histories, it is rueful to remark that except for Amin's cited works in this book, time and temporality do not get the same privileged treatment as space and territoriality in the recent agrarian histories of India. For instance, in Bhattacharya's work, bits and pieces on time are of course there, but in contrast to his incessant emphasis on the necessity of 'unpacking' the categories, it is disappointing to note that time and temporality do not emerge as central categories that he found worthy to unpack.[286] Similarly, while littered with very keen observations on the role of seasonality, Ludden is undisputedly more concerned to think through a wide-encompassing phenomenon of the formation of agrarian territoriality rather than agrarian temporality. In these accounts, spatiality is better accounted for than temporality. Mapping and cartographic categories of power that classified the agrarian world trumps over the temporal concrete mundaneness of managing production and consumption. To illustrate this with an example: Ludden writes, '*Social power* in agriculture is by definition distributed unequally, not only in amount but in quality, because it is constituted by effective decisions which direct the movement of the elements that are combined productively in the farming'.[287] 'Movement of the elements' is the giveaway remark to understand Ludden's preoccupation with the frameworks of spatiality and territoriality. It can be added here that timing involved in mobilising different elements for managing farming is as crucial as the direction of mobilisation. Social power accrues to those who control the timing of the elements as much as their movement.

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[284] On the operation of master servant laws in India in this period see Ravi Ahuja, 'The Origins of Colonial Labour Policy in Late `eighteenth-Century Madras', *International Review of Social History*, 44, 1999, pp. 159–95; Nitin Sinha, 'Domestic Servants and Master-Servant Regulations in Colonial Calcutta, 1750s–1810s', *Past and Present*, 255, 1, 2022, pp. 141–88.

[285] See Chitra Joshi, 'Contemporary Perspectives on Labor History in India', *Asian History*, May 2019, https://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-37?d=%2F10.1093%2Facrefore%2F9780190277727.001.0001%2Facrefore-9780190277727-e-37&p=emailAqgikDm4Ep%2FwE#acrefore-9780190277727-e-37-note-34 (last accessed 12.12.2024).

[286] Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest*.

To sum up, and as a practical aid for navigating through the archives, we can think of moulding an account of temporal regime in a sectorial manner: industrial- or service-work temporal regime, agrarian temporal regime, domestic temporal regime, infrastructural temporal regime, and so on. Temporal regimes here mean structured time-centric practices of people as they developed in different spheres and in relation to various constituents of those structures, institutions, and activities (work, home, infrastructure, mobility, and so on). Although the accent is on practices, the contours of a regime are constituted through institutions (legal, monetary, and infrastructural, for instance) material aspects (devices, technologies, and print, for example), non-human species (bugs, insects and, plants, for example), and ecologies (season, natural agents such as water, wind, etc). The exploration of a regime would require a close interrogation of the functioning of these aspects that shaped, and in turn, got shaped by peoples' actions.

If the making of a regime is relatively more accessible by looking at the instruments of the state and capital, temporal culture, on the other hand, could be treated as a more diffused entity formed and constantly reformed at the cusp of the relationship existing, and constantly mutating, between people and state, between institutions of power on the one hand and practices of society on the other. It will go beyond, for example, the immediate remit of work and worksite into varied spaces of social relationships and institutions that have imprints of other social and economic processes but will remain in ties with changes occurring in the constituents of the temporal regime. Temporal culture can be, sort of, independent but not autonomous of the structural and institutional weight of temporal regime.

Cultures are very likely to be ascertained in two moments or in two ways: first, for any piece of time under historical inquiry we can create a general (and not a universal) picture of a pattern of things (such as practices and techniques of time-keeping, intellectual and cultural articulations of time-sense, concrete temporal organisation of everyday activity of a group through work, leisure, and other such markers) which will tell us of time-related conceptualisations and practices prevailing in the society. This can be done using the contemporary source-materials of that period. If state archival materials can form the primary basis of knowing temporal regime, then literature, including visuals, can be of great help in exploring the diffused nature of temporal culture.[288] The second way in which we can map the generality of a cultural formation is by taking recourse of hindsight to ascertain the degree of change from the previous existing formation (so the premodern temporal culture might become sharply evident only when looked at through the practices of the modern times or vice versa). However, more than a reflection of periodisation, temporal culture is a product of minute practices around material aspects. An example of the latter case would be the study of the travelling temporal cultures that makes a comparison, say, between the one in which the palanquin and the boat were the most important modes of communication and the other in which railways became the principal mode. However, before we explore this new thematic example in some detail to make the point clear, let us return to some of the same themes which we have discussed for describing temporal regime to make our explanation commensurate.

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[287] Ludden, *An Agrarian History*, p. 41 (emphasis original).

As noticed above, nineteenth century agrarian temporal regimes brought markets and agrarian households into close proximity to each other due to factors such as migration, commodity crop production, and, not least, increased dependence on advance and credit.[289] While regimes are more attuned to give us a finer picture of the role of time in various interlinked production processes, the everyday offshoots of slow changes that accrue in the lives of the peasants, their social and kin relationships, and in other important institutions such as marriage and domesticity are better approached when thought of in terms of temporal culture. These are the everyday practices that are linked to work and production but unfurl on a wider social field. They are not causally but definitely linked to changes in the constituents of the regime; they develop in the shadow of those changes while remaining flexible to incorporate elements from previous constellations of temporal regime.

If the agrarian farm could be the preferred site for initiating our investigation into temporal regime, the peasant household could be the foremost for understanding agrarian temporal cultures. A focus on the household can also show how time-centric elements of culture were linked to time-centric changes in the regime of work. It is possible to do so because the exploitation of the household labour by keeping its subsistence to bare minimum was the primary strategy of colonial capital in a range of commodity crops' production.[290] 'Capitalist develop-

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288 I am thankful to Prabhat Kumar for discussing this point at length.

289 Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*, Ch. 2.

290 Ibid., Ch. 3.

ment under colonialism rested heavily on the forcing up of labour intensity within family units actually tilling the land.'[291] This intensification manifested itself in changes accruing to social relations along gender and generational lines. Such changes, which take time to become evident, take on various cultural guises from incorporating elements of popular culture to inventing new cultural practices as they become interlaced with the existing and give birth to new social practices. The slow cultural non-causal, non-predetermined, and even unexpected manifestations of material shifts are part of temporal culture.

In regions of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), the late nineteenth century rural domesticity seems to have undergone significant changes due to men migrating to cities in search of work.[292] Wage labour was a necessary component to augment rural household income. While rooted to the immediate structures of colonial political economy of the late nineteenth century, the temporal milieu of the effect of this process of migration for livelihood took a turn, at the discursive level, to the epochal cyclical trope of twelve years of exile (borrowed from religious texts such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharta) to express the pangs of separation felt by women who were left behind in the villages. New anxieties related to work, time, and domesticity were expressed in older genres of affect that were popular at least since the sixteenth century, even earlier. *Barahmasas* (songs of twelve months) and their variants became a popular mode of expressing everyday life in north India in the nineteenth century although 'they have been written in the languages of North India for almost eight centuries'.[293]

The form may appear timeless, but the content indicates change. The addition of new elements and commodities such as the bicycle and the wristwatch help us temporalize these songs.[294] At the material level, migration of men meant intensification of women's work in the rural economy and of care work at the household. Agrarian surplus also dwindled, which meant that 'small and marginal peasant families began to depend more heavily on household tasks geared to subsistence and social production' which were undertaken by women.[295] But new notions of respectability around women's seclusion also meant that these subsistence tasks were becoming highly invisible and seen as unproductive. As a result, 'many more

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291 Ibid., p. 98.

292 See Nitin Sinha, 'The Idea of Home in a World of Circulation: Steam, Women and Migration through Bhojpuri Folksongs', *International Review of social History*, 63, 2018, pp. 203–37.

293 Francesca Orsini, 'Clouds, Cuckoos and an Empty Bed: Emotions in Hindi-Urdu *Barahmasas*', in Imke Rajamani, Margrit Pernau, and Katherine Butler Schofield, eds., *Monsoon Feelings: A History of Emotions in the Rain*, New Delhi, 2018, pp. 97–136.

294 See Sinha, 'The Idea of Home in a World of Circulation'.

295 Sen, *Women and Labour*, p. 55; in general, see Ch. 2.

women worked much harder at a wider range of occupations, but on the whole they received poorer material rewards and less recognition of their productive contribution'.[296] And yet the pattern of migration of men and that of the agrarian production cycle show that most men who returned to villages in the months of May and June did not come to engage in heavy agrarian work (as these two months were quite lean in terms of agrarian work). Partly, that burden also fell on the women force of the village while on a more routine basis they were involved in tasks of husking, weeding, and transplanting.

The majority of researches on these issues highlight the role of movement, migration, ideologies of work and capital, and overlapping boundaries between formal and informal work. The question of time and temporality still needs more empirical investigation as well as better conceptualisation. How did the everyday work-time relationship change for these women who felt an increased workload, either seasonally, based upon agrarian cycles, or at the quotidian level due to household chores? This requires us to innovatively use source-materials beyond state archival repositories. Women's work songs such as *jatsaar* (songs sung while grinding grains and spices using millstone) is one such corpus which, while reflecting the everyday rhythmic grind of work, also became a vehicle of dissemination of new ideologies and worldviews.[297] Working with sources such as folksongs may put us in danger of treating time as rhythmic, cyclic, and suspended because of the routinised nature of tasks associated with these songs but it will help us to remind ourselves that tasks done with and along these songs go through phases of intensification. The repetitive, cyclical rhythm of the text and of the task have changes from within, ranging from addition of new referents to the song texts to that of the politics of their performativity along the existing caste-contexts. Such changes can be mapped at the everyday as well as the political levels.

From the second half of the nineteenth century, the temporal structure of migration begun to define the temporal and social set up of the household. The circular nature of migration caused slow mutations in kinship relationships, prescriptions of morality for women, and led to reconfigurations in the notion of work which was seen divided between productive and unproductive. It also affected cash availability which was now possible to these households. Men from U.P. and Bihar working in jute mills of Bengal sent monthly remittance to their families to tide over indebtedness.[298] What did this regular cash remittance into rural households mean in terms of temporal reorganisation of tasks and familial relationships? Folksongs from these regions suggest that often the migrant's wife was jealously looked upon by other members of the family for possessing small trinkets. But more importantly, remittances helped in payment of agrarian rent, a marriage of a girl-child or sister, and for making small material improvements in the household. Keeping the household in the centre, an inquiry into temporal culture can bring our gaze to various aspects which will begin to appear interconnected with an element of time embedded into it. The nature of circular migration will tell us something about the changing nature of domesticity and conjugality and the structure of employment may point out the pattern of remittance and what it meant for the household in very concrete material terms.

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[296] Ibid., pp. 55–56.

[297] Smita Tewari Jassal, *Unearthing Gender: Folksongs of North India*, Durham and London, 2012, Ch. 1.

[298] Sen, *Women and Labour*, p. 69.

Timepieces were part of the material corpus of modernity that entered the rural world through migration, and otherwise, and became part of 'pleasurable consumption'.[299] In one of the Bhojpuri folksongs, the woman protagonist teasingly proclaims that she would happily swap the man who comes from Calcutta holding a walking stick (*chadhi*), but would find it difficult to do so if he flaunts a wristwatch (*ghadi*). In the phase of profit, the jute growers of Bengal consumed various types of market-oriented goods for their bodies and homes. Umbrellas, brass utensils, kerosene lamp, and Swedish safety matches were a few of them. And yet, as Ali surmises, even as peasant household was 'constructed out of the consumption of global commodities, the peasant habitation of modernity was resolutely agrarian and local'.[300] The possession of more and less-torn saris due to consumption of imported clothes and better and finer jewelleries by women in the jute growing districts of Bengal did not mean that their clothes enabled them to appear in public. One may be tempted to question the characterisation of the peasant household as resolutely agrarian or local, but the larger point is that the material changes introduced in the household due to profits made in the production of jute may have taken longer to induce changes in cultural practices. The aspirational temporal regime of modernity, the concrete practices of migration and livelihood, and the small, everyday consumerism together explain the making of this temporal culture in which the devices themselves became part of that culture rather than its primary agent of change. This culture is far from static; it is dynamic, constituted of material changes, and linked to economic processes. For example, it was in the harvest season of jute that the consumption of sweetmeats, soda water, and luxury fish used to spike.[301]

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[299] See Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital*, Ch. 2.

[300] Ibid., p. 46.

[301] Ibid., pp. 54–55.

The nexus of modern developments – factory, railways, and postal money remittance – tied the world of the urban and the rural in which the framework of temporal culture allows us to go deeper into the world of the everyday (and the everynight) in which the structures of domesticity, gendered notions of conjugality, and interlaced lifecycles of migrant men and non-migrant women were significantly recast. After all, wages in factories were deliberately kept low which forced the migrant male worker, who felt the harshness of the city life and the demanding mill working conditions, to periodically visit the village to 'recuperate'.[302] The threat of men keeping a second wife in the city and of women indulging in love affairs back in the village, the emotional overflow of love and jealousy at the time of departure, the desires of new objects and commodities brought from the city – they all are part of temporal histories of work. In fact, the social archive of songs depicting this emotional register is itself based upon a strong relationship between time and emotion in which every season evokes a particular type of emotion. Seasonality is thus not only relevant for understanding temporal regime of agrarian work but is also a vital register of temporal culture. For instance, a song in the *chaumasa* (*chau* means four, and masa means month) subgenre of the *barahmasa* (*barah* is twelve) genre depicts the mood of separation expressed by the wife in the following way:[303]

> My friend, the rains have set in,
> Nights are dark and my heart is perturbed,
> My beloved is in *pardes* (foreign lands),
> He has not sent any word.

Or consider another one, referring to the month of *sawan*, the rainy season:

> Hey friend, the month of sawan has arrived,
> I long for my beloved as the rain pours in,
> All my friends are enjoying the swings,
> But my beloved has completely forgotten me.

The immediate constellation of temporal regime can initiate a porous reformulation of cultural practices drawing upon resources of mythic and historical times and events. The circular mobility of men was recast into twelve years trope of exile. This also resonates well with what Sarkar has offered in his study of time discipline amongst middle-class Bengalis.[304] If the immediate tyranny of the mechanical clock points to a new regime of time that restructured the relationship of employment as well as the household, then the refuge of this class in the epochal temporality of the kaliyug to make sense of their new, modern habitation points to the making of a new temporal culture in Bengal. In that culture, while undergoing the oppression of it, the mechanical clock-time could also be bent. After all, in the real world of belief, mysticism, and enchantment, trains and ships could be stopped at the whims of saints and *pirs*.

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[302] Arjan De Haan, 'The Badli System in Industrial Labour Recruitment: Managers' and Workers' Strategies in Calcutta's Jute Industry', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 33, 1–2, 1999, p. 282.
[303] These songs are discussed in length in Sinha, 'The Idea of Home in a World of Circulation'. Also see, Jassal, *Unearthing Gender*.

Railways brought in a new regime of time, quite globally through standardisation, and ushered in a new claim to punctuality. In India, it did, more so, as a part of the colonial civilising project in which it was ascribed with the role of stirring the 'lethargic easterner' out of sleep and teaching them to 'acquire virtues of punctuality'.[305] True to the skills, the lethargic and charlatan eastern, very much like Krishna who had disguised the flow of time on the battlefield of the Mahabharta, became adept, in literary and cinematic representations, to bend time or delay the train to bring down mechanical punctuality at the feet of oriental mysticism.[306]

In general, a new technology of movement driven by the power of steam was bound to bring in a new experience of speed and sensation (see Fig. 2). This was indeed backed up by the sway of aggressive advertisement in which the race between the horse on the one hand and the railway engine exemplifying the time on the other was dubbed as 'doubtful' for the former.[307] The older means would have appeared, or were shown, to be slow when looked at through this new sensibility.[308] They were doomed to be dislodged.

But did the eighteenth-century travellers, who frequently used palanquins, horses, and boats, necessarily define their travel as slow? The source-materials do

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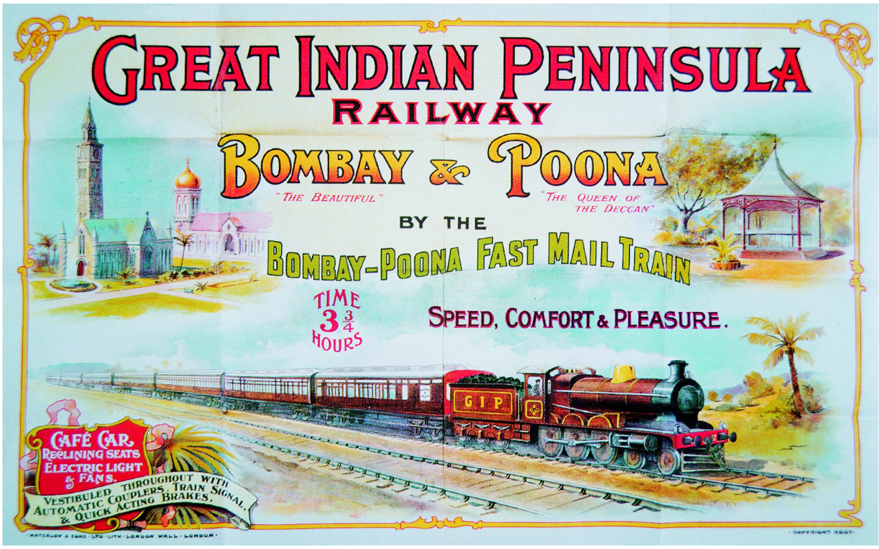
[304] Sarkar, 'Kaliyug, 'Chakri' and 'Bhakti''.

[305] Phrases taken from a long quote of G. W. MacGeorge, quoted in Aparajita Mukhopadhyay, *Imperial Technology and 'Native' Agency: A Social History of Railways in Colonial India, 1850–1920*, London, 2018, p. 1.

[306] This instance, shown in one of the Satyajit Ray's films, is discussed in Mukhopadhyay, *Imperial Technology and 'Native' Agency*, p. 20.

[307] See John Leech, engraver, 'Not a Doubtful Race' https://www.mediastorehouse.com/fine-art-finder/artists/english-school/doubtful-race-engraving-23230992.html (last accessed 13.12.24).

[308] Wolfgang Schivelbusch's study is still the classic to understand the contestations over the slow adaptability of the railways in social life. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialisation of Time and Space in the 19th Century*, Berkely, 1986. For India, the two defining works are of Prasad, *Tracks of Modernity*; Mukhopadhyay, *Imperial Technology and 'Native' Agency*. For a similar argument of a new sense of railway generated speed rendering other forms of transportation appear slower than they had once appeared, see May and Thrift, eds., *Timespace*, p. 19.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VESTIBULED THROUGHOUT WITH AUTOMATIC COUPLERS, TRAIN SIGNAL, & QUICK ACTING BRAKES.
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Fig. 2: Railway advertisement, Peter Newark Pictures / Bridgeman Images.

not suggest so. This is a question that reflects our 'fetish of [modern] accuracy' more than our historical actors' relationship with time.[309] In this example, it's the fetish of speed with a dualistic relationship between modern and speed that is at work. As newer means of acceleration came to define what modernity itself could be, the modern was simultaneously defined by the intensity and enchantment of speed.

How did the temporal aspect of a travelling culture, which redefined itself through the lens of speed and acceleration as we entered into the age of steam technology of transport from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, look like before this redefinition took place? How was time perceived and defined from behind the closed door of a palanquin or from the deck of a moving boat? Emily Eden's rue about the loss of the picturesque beauty while travelling from Calcutta to north India gives us an interesting insight.[310] If steam established a firm relationship between time and travel through the idea of speed, this was surely not the case when the steam technology was in its infancy and people related to the act of travel not only through speed. It was instead mediated through the ideology and functionality of the travelling gaze, by its propensity to reproduce the consumption of landscape and its representation in various sketches and paintings. ‘While traversing Patna, Eden accepted that ‘there never was anything so provokingly picturesque’ but lamented that ‘the steamer goes boring on without the slightest regard for our love of sketching’.’[311]

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[309] Hanß, 'Fetish of Accuracy'.

[310] This point is discussed in detail in Sinha, *Communication and Colonialism*, pp. 50–52.

The study of a temporal culture of travel of the pre-railway period needs to resist imposing categories that either emerged newly or acquired new meanings with the coming of the new technology. Alternatively, the same technology which supposedly brought in the compression of time and space could also possibly have yielded to the vastness of time through a sense of elongation in which a host of new technologies speeded up the performance of task only to feel the prolonged burden of time more acutely. Finally, when seen from the vantage point of the mid- and late-nineteenth century, it would be tempting to make an argument in favour of the plurality framework and say two times existed: one of the railways and the other of the ‘traditional’ means of communication. But rather than explaining this co-existence as a symptom of plural time, one could also argue that the temporal culture of travel underwent dynamic changes as newer modes of communication became available. Thus, the accent here is on understanding the uneven compositeness of the temporal culture of travel rather than discretely using instances from within the configuration of temporal culture to pronounce time as quintessentially plural. The newer technologies using new methods of time notation were liable to create new time experiences but in social practices it is the complementary, segmented, and hierarchical co-existence of various modes of travel that revealed people’s propensity to recreate and adjust to new temporal demands while keeping up with the older ones. These demands could have been felt in a pressing manner suggesting that lying above the layers of co-existing temporalities, say of the railways and the bullock cart, was the unifying force of a singular, linear notion of time. The individual constituents of means of communication which possibly came with their own temporalities of movement were equally forced, or done so by people, to synchronize their functioning along a universal fabric of time. Their multiplicity would make sense only when looked at in a combined comparativist but unified manner. If a journey whose first stretch was made by the bullock cart required it to be finished using the railways, then a synchronous pressure of time would be inevitably at work even if its passage, by the sheer logic of speed, comfort, and pleasure, might have been felt differently. Could it be argued that it was rather the singularity of time that propelled people to deal with it in multiple ways rather than taking plurality as the point of beginning in unearthing the making of social time?

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[311] Ibid., p. 51.

Speed is only one component of the temporal culture of travel. The latter would entail other things as well: it would include notions of safety and punctuality along the axis of day and night, notions of distance and practices of time-reckoning, notions of auspicious and inauspicious moments in relation to days and directions of the journey, and not least, ideas of comfort and display of authority.[312] How did men and women experience safety and danger during night travelling, both in pre-railway and railway days? Often, Europeans travelling by the palanquin in the early nineteenth century expressed danger lurking from the landscape in terms of rough terrain and attack by wild animals.[313] The human fear was of immediate nature; the fear of being abandoned by the palanquin bearers in the middle of nowhere in the dark was so acute that it became an exceptional legal ground in Macaulay's draft Indian Penal Code which otherwise called for abolishing the practice of criminal prosecution of workers. How did this culture of fear, based upon the temporal encounter with darkness, change when the means of communication changed to the railways? Did darkness instil the same kind of fear when the means of communication changed?

My preliminary answer would be that the locus of fear was earlier located in the physical terrain and wild animals, that is, in physical landscape habited by non-humans, which shifted towards people, towards co-travellers (committing theft, assault, or the sheer racial practice of distinction) as well as strangers when railways became a more popular mode of transport. The railways, in reality as well as within the grammar of representation of crooked modernity of a colonial space, did remain in interaction with non-humans. The engine was occasionally charged by a herd of elephants, or a pointsman obliviously discovered a tiger swiftly charging their way, but in general the condition of travel that could instil fear was less situated in the physical landscape than in the social and political settings of which railways became a part. It ranged from stealing, which created a new category of the criminal called the 'railway thieves', to that of the nightly danger of the train journey which included assault on women of both white and brown skin tones.[314] Not least, railways became the object of political resistance of which the most iconic instance was the Kakori train robbery involving the defiant freedom fighter, Bhagat Singh.

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[312] On a perceptive reading of 'eclipse' as an inauspicious time/moment/duration leading to suspension of a variety of everyday activities, see Ranajit Guha, 'The Career of an Anti-God in Heaven and on Earth', in Sugata Bose, ed., *Credits, Markets and the Agrarian Economy of Colonial India*, Delhi, 1994, pp. 301–28. For a long tradition of astrologers being consulted for ascertaining auspicious moments in the everyday life, see Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam*, pp. 59–62.

[313] Joshi, 'Dak Travellers'.

[314] For the use of ancient texts to understand the making of the modern community of 'railway thieves' that further used the categories of tribe and caste, see M. Pauparao Naidu, *The History of Railway Thieves: With Illustrations & Hints on Detection*, Madras, 1915.

What is temporal in and about this shift from the landscape-driven context of the palanquin to the people-driven setting of the railways? One plausible answer is the temporality of the new technology itself. The new sensation of speed not only created new avenues of danger but qualitatively changed the nature of fear and danger. The boundary between the stranger and the proximate blurred in a railway compartment, generating greater demands for seclusion. Gender, race, and caste became important markers of the compartmentalised journey.[315] Some would argue that this seclusion worked temporally as well. Time must have registered itself differently on those who travelled in overcrowded third-class compartments, about which Gandhi was also forced to complain, in comparison to those who travelled with a set of servants who polished boots and fixed their masters' hookahs inside the railway compartment.[316] And yet, this experiential plurality was tied to the singularity of the railway time, which played a global role in the present system of time synchronisation. When looked at from the viewpoint of comfort as part of temporal culture, time may appear variegated depending on who sat where within the mechanical ensemble called the railways. But, when seen from the angle of temporal regime of railway transport, including the notions of timing that determined the arrival, departure, and speed of that ensemble, then time was unitary for all the passengers on that train. As a new travelling regime was consolidating, albeit patchily around the railways and feeder roads, indicating a regime transformation, changes were also accruing in the temporal cultures of travel.[317]

My hypothesis here is that the changes in the field of temporal regimes can be much quicker than in the zone of temporal cultures. It is here that I wish to emphasise, in distinction to Barak, that temporal culture in its entirety should not be seen as a novel sphere which in turn is only a product of a masked intimate connection to mechanical time.[318] Railway-generated speed must have created a new experience and sociability around railway-generated delay.[319] But the meaning of delay also needs to be charted from the pre-railway times in concrete terms of social practices and not simply be assumed to be either absent or encoded in imprecise literary expressions, which Barak offers. Similarly, the new experience of speed must have created a new experience of delay and waiting but a perceptive approach towards a social history of time would start with the premise that people do not simply wait while waiting.[320] There are hidden scripts of other temporal engagements happening within a particular macro-form of temporal engagement. Delay and wait tend to symbolise a stalled time; but they do not necessarily mean so. The newness of the constituents of any temporal culture needs to be explored in the long-arch of meanings that such terms carried. Temporal regimes and cultures cannot simply be understood through ideological frameworks of abstraction but must be explored through practices of both who wielded power to change and regulate those practices and those who resisted and added new meanings to them.

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[315] Prasad, *Tracks of Modernity*; Mukhopadhyay, *Imperial Technology and 'Native' Agency*; Prabhat Kumar, 'Sociotechnical Imaginations and Railway Experience', CSDS Digipapers, 2021, https://www.csds.in/uploads/custom_files/1620295631_DigiPaper%2004%20Prabaht%20Kumar.pdf (last accessed 12.6.2024).

[316] 'Railway Travelling', https://www.lookandlearn.com/history-images/M063069/Railway-Travelling?t=1&q=railway+india&n=19 (last accessed 13.12.24).

[317] On the slow change brought about by the steam technology of travel, see Sinha, *Communication and Colonialism*; Clive Dewey, *Steamboats on the Indus: The Limits of Western Technological Superiority in South Asia*, New Delhi, 2014.

[318] Barak, *On Time*, p. 416.

[319] Mukhopadhyay, *Imperial Technology and 'Native' Agency*.

Further, if the railways introduced a new idea of speed, then did they also bring in a new idea of comfort? The reason comfort should be part of the investigation of any temporal travelling culture is because the duration of travel remarkably created all sorts of emotions ranging from monotony to boredom, to excitement and swiftness, each of which are linked to the relationship between experience and the passage of time. Railway journeys also created extreme physical hardships, for example to coolies who were packed like animals in unhygienic wagons or to third-class passengers travelling without proper ventilation and toilet arrangements. It is very likely that while the railways and other new modes of communication such as the telegraph, and the practices associated with them such as money remittance by a single urban male earner through the post office to his family in the village, familiarised the society with a new sensibility for speed and expectation, leading to a change in the meaning of duration, but the idea of comfort and the display of power continued to be drawn upon older notions, modes, and meanings.[321] The railways did not suddenly replace the royalty of power attached to the majestic slowness of the elephant.[322]

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[320] Literature in Sociology points to treating waiting as a ritualised expression of asymmetric social connections linked to the distribution of power. However, waiting is not always boring and demeaning. It is also strategic and can be valued and socially rewarded in the future. See, Bergmann, 'The Problem of Time in Sociology', p. 110.

[321] In fact, the new modes added to the proliferation of cultural practices in other ways as well. While waiting for remittances, in north Bihar, a new cult of 'Daak Maa', a postal deity, emerged in the late nineteenth century. Told by Mrinalini Sinha, oral communication, North Carolina, 2019.

[322] Sinha, 'Engines Vs Elephants'.

Temporal cultures did not fold automatically into scripts of standardisation and time reform, at least for certain classes and groups, even if the temporal regime's core had shifted towards them. When and how did one temporal culture shift, mutate, or separate from the other? Is transition the best way to understand this shift? Of course, the element of the new and the old will co-exist for some time, until the new assimilates the old or the old secures a place within the new practices, not as leftovers of the past but as strategic choices made by people in their contemporary present. But new elements, new devices, new sensibilities, and new meanings will constantly keep relocating themselves in the existing assemblage of temporal culture. The miracles by saints and sufis of holding the clock and disrupting the bend of time are part of the cultural scripts of time standardisation of the nineteenth century.[323] In the making of this culture, celestial and mechanical, divine and technological, quotidian and calendrical, diurnal and nocturnal: they all need to be simultaneously explored.

O Recap

Navigating through the recent discussions on temporal regime, which is often used for indicating the mode of historicity, and does so by remaining limited to historical sensibilities of the Western European past and present, this chapter has proposed to glue the implication of this term to the material, institutional, and structural processes that are either directly time-centric or wherein time is crucial to the constituents of which a particular temporal regime could be made of. The unearthing of this regime is of course dependent on the nature of source-materials to be found and creatively read in the archives, but part of this exercise is simply based upon informed imagination of how, within the parameters of feasibility, can one design the scope of temporal regime, say related to work, travel, labour, domesticity, and so on. The chapter has also offered discussion on another category, that of temporal culture, which is mainly a shorthand reference to encourage peering our gaze to those sites of social relationships which can be directly linked to the operations of the institutional elements of the corresponding temporal regime but are equally malleable or independent enough to also acquire and assimilate wider cultural references to their practices. Temporal cultures are the modes in which the force of a temporal regime can be experienced and explained by the society. They are expansive and slow-changing in nature.

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[323] Green, *Bombay Islam.*

This mode of exploration – through regime and culture – does not follow the usually asked question of what happens when homogenous time interacts with non-linear time (the answer is it leads to the plurality of time). This question presupposes an existing formation of opposites and directs the historical gaze only to encapsulate temporal culture in the cracks of the encounter between these two formations. Perhaps for purposes of open-ended research strategy, a better guiding question would be: which social practices tend to make time appear abstract and homogenous while it simultaneously continues to remain present as a concrete, lived entity? How and why does one constellation of temporal regime and temporal culture shift – as located in and radiating out of peoples' practices – to make it appear that time's own characteristic has changed? The combination of temporal regime and temporal culture as a way to highlight how people interacted with time, in also those areas of social lives in which time's own script of becoming modern is less pronounced, can yield a rich social history of time.

Conclusions: A Critical Appraisal of Plural Time

In a recent essay, Matthew Champion has suggested that history of time is mainly about clocks and calendars, that is, it is a study of the techniques of time measurement and their relationship with human perception, experiences, and expectations. The claim made is that 'time cannot be considered as an object separate from human configurations, perceptions and measurements', that 'time is always and everywhere a condition of life in the world, and therefore an essential category of historical analysis'.[324] Many years ago, in Sociology, a similar claim was made: 'While time is definitely one of the most central dimensions of the social world, it has so far been relatively neglected by sociologists, who have dealt with it – if at all – only as an aspect of other phenomena, such as social change or leisure, and hardly ever as a topic in its own right.'[325] Zerubavel's main concern was to explore the socio-temporal order in distinction to physiotemporal or biotemporal orders, which for him constituted the natural side of time in comparison to the social which he wished to investigate. According to Champion, the domain of blurred state – between object (time) and subject (the society but also the historians who work on time), of 'mingled pasts, presents, and futures, of rhythms and tempi, of old and new, young and old' – is the content of 'temporality'. He expounds the idea that the history of time should make way for the history of temporalities.

Champion's scope of temporality, as described above, and also the one proposed in *Power and Time* under the term regime, is all encompassing: it includes the study of mingled historical periodisation; of languages, technologies, and techniques of time measurement; the performance of time in various media; time's embeddedness in space; and not least, its functionality in doubling up as a history of power, economies, and the everyday, particularly as a tool to give voice to the voiceless.[326] Nobody will disagree with the noble intentions of this pitch. The problem is that even those historians who think through temporalities slip into the interchangeable use of time and temporality. Champion claims, 'There are *diverse forms of time*, but with differentiations and distinctions that allow us to see change and continuity, flux and stability, in dialogue.'[327] In one instance, Simon and Tamm talk of 'a coexistence of multiple times' and in another of 'multiple temporalities [that] are integral

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324 Matthew Champion, 'The History of Temporalities: An Introduction', *Past and Present*, 243, 2019, pp. 247–54.

325 Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms.* See 'Introduction', the direct quote is from p. ix.

326 Champion, 'The History of Temporalities', p. 254 (emphasis mine); Edelstein et al., *Power and Time*.

327 Ibid., p. 250.

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to historical time'.[328] But unlike other historians who use temporality to indicate the way people related to the past, present, and future, I find Simon and Tamm's distinction between temporality and historicity very useful; the former indicates 'various modes of being in time' and the latter various modes in which individuals and groups conceived of transitions across time.[329] Still, while attempting to find a way to reconcile plurality with synchronisation, they end up talking of the 'plurality of times' together with plural temporalities.[330]

Between time and temporality, I find it comforting to think through the meso-level conceptualisation of temporal regime and temporal culture, which taken together could be seen as creating a temporal grid. While time encapsulates the vastness of physicist and philosophical worlds, in the existing literature in History and Humanities, temporality is too closely related to modes and regimes of classifying the past around certain 'universal' events (the French revolution) or triumphant technologies (the mechanical clock and the railways) or determining the trajectory of the future. As a result, the social seems to be sieved out of these two dominant modes of articulation. On the one end it is lost in the meta-question of time's physical character (absolute or relative), on the other it is reduced to being a functional representative of social and economic conditions. Modernity first made us believe that time has straightened (has become absolute and linear as under the force of capitalism), and then subsequently the unevenness of modernisation and capitalism forced us to revisit this conceptualisation by discovering plurality of time as it was realised that social and economic contexts are non-homogenous.

In distinction to this mode of analysis, the book has offered to think through the combined weight of temporal regime and temporal culture to investigate the relationship between time and society. Every period under historical investigation will possibly have a predominant temporal grid in which society functioned. We can think of temporal regime and temporal culture constituting this grid. The constituents of this grid will have their own temporalities. We may begin to think, thus, of technological temporality, legal temporality, money temporality, fiscal temporality, communication temporality, work temporality, and so on. Each of them is inherently part of a wider temporal regime and culture (of the grid) and each of them host a set of faultlines (produced through practices of people) that would change their nature and character over a period of time. The macro-level underpinning of temporality in reference to historical periodisation confines us to think of transitions and relations between the past, the present, and the future in which time itself becomes the object of scrutiny and intellectual judgement. In contrast, if we think of temporalities embedded in the design and practice of various constituents that produce a temporal grid, then we might be able to free ourselves from the weight of making any absolute argument about time itself. Rather than starting with the question of whether time is cyclical or linear, plural or homogenous, or, abstract or concrete, we can first identify the primary and complementary constituents of the temporal grid of any period and region and then map the changes and continuities through the histories of those constituents. Keeping the temporal grid that shaped human actions which in turn spun time into a resource of conflict at the forefront of our research, we will perhaps be better placed to chart the journey of social change through the logic of the changing grid of temporalities, which is produced by a combination of temporal regimes and cultures. To repeat, here the meaning of the term temporality is not in terms of historicity or relations to periodisation but in terms of constituents such as law, technology, money, seasonality, and so on, with which people interact materially. Thus, we will be able to argue that accuracy, precision, standardisation, abstraction, etc. did not necessarily emerge in modern times, but they were present in every period of our historical past. Most likely, in different periods they manifested themselves and were conceptualised differently. What changed therefore was the temporal regime and culture, which led new meanings to emerge around these terms.

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[328] Simon and Tamm, *The Fabric of Time*, p. 23.

[329] Ibid., p. 24.

[330] Ibid., p. 46.

It may well be argued that ideas of precision or accuracy, as we understand them as part of the modern technological lexicon, did not exist at all in the earlier times. But something akin must have subsisted in the society which needs to be explored in its own context. Early modern empires would not have survived without having some fundamental determinants of speed and delay, for instance, for relaying information. The newness in prioritising temporal grid as the subject of our research would entail that the journey of the temporalisation of social relations can be pursued without presuming abstraction to be the preserve of modernity alone.

Early modern societies had their own set of abstractions around time either through chronometry or in an eschatological sense. For instance, early modern South Asia was not a *temporal rasa*.[331] It had a system of clocks and calendars, and ideas and techniques about accountability and demarcation. The philosophical discussions on various units of time – *kshana*, *kala*, *samay*, etc – show that time was perceived in both finite, irretrievable, and bound manner on the one hand, exerting urgency on human action, and on the other as expansive, eternal, unmeasurable, and repetitive series of cycles. The idea that time is abstract, as an eternal independent entity, ‘as the autonomous creator and destroyer of beings and creation’ was prevalent in ancient and medieval Hindu religious texts along with the idea that time is intimately tied to the divine.[332] The late nineteenth century emergence of modern time has to be contextualised in what existed from before, and it is important to remember that what existed was not necessarily only cyclical, natural, concrete, and the unchanging traditional. The shifts in the nature, constituents, and meaning of the temporal grid over a longer period of time will better reveal the nexus between time and social power, which the approach of doing a social history of time aspires to furnish. Rather than locating social power along a clash between abstract and concrete time, one can imagine that two sets of abstractions – with concreteness of tasks and actions interlaced – conflicted with each other while social relations formed around the set of the previous period found newer forms of articulation under the new set of abstractions. Every period would reveal a changing matrix of the relationship between concrete and abstract sense of time.

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[331] See various essays in Kaul, ed., *Retelling Time*.

Finally, thinking through the conjoined histories of temporal regime and temporal culture might also save us from now making a slightly too axiomatic conclusion about the inevitable existence of plurality of time. If temporality is a product of the relationship between people’s experience and action in and with time, then it is bound to remain plural to the extent that there is no gain in repeating *ad infinitum* that time or temporality is always plural. It indeed is. The question is, where do we go from the point of the ‘fetishisation of plurality’ that has ironically put time before the analysis of social practices rather than into it.

In this regard, one can notice a growing uneasiness of scholars with simply stopping at identifying or mentioning the existence of plural time or temporality. Jordheim argues that the discussion on multiple temporalities should not content us with ‘describing pluralities or multitudes but move on to discover the contrasts, oppositions, conflicts, and struggles involved in restructuring, regulating, and synchronizing time’.[333] To be fair, he talks of plurality mainly in terms of historical-time but also occasionally about time per se. Similarly, Edelstein and his co-editors offer a way to conceptualise multiple temporal regimes ‘that moves beyond the description of their multiplicity to study their mutual interaction and competition’. They argue that power and time interface amid intense competition, and politics and time are subtly bound in a mutually co-constitutive relationship.[334]

Echoing the same type of concerns, other scholars have tried to find a way to reconcile two divergent strands of time studies: one of standardisation and another of differentiation.[335] In all these approaches, however, one thing which is common is that the plurality of time is an unquestioned article of faith. There is a genuine conundrum here. Most of the scholars do concur that between the fourteenth and the nineteenth century, the nature of time fundamentally changed at various levels. It changed in the system of notation and measurement, it changed in its spatial expansion and uniformity, it changed in ways it was divided and narrated, and not least, it changed in how it was felt and remembered. All these changes point to a larger context of time becoming abstract. But at the same time, there are various cultures where multiple notations co-exist, and various social factors such as gender and caste abound that render experiential time multiple, and not least, various ways of relating to the past and the future are practised. The history of production of abstraction and the engendering of plural time co-exists.

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[332] McComas Taylor, ‘Time is Born of His Eyelashes: Puranic Measurement and Conceptions of Time’, in Kaul, ed. *Retelling Time*.

[333] Jordheim, ‘Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization’, p. 510.

[334] Edelstein et al., *Power and Time*.

It appears that while arguing for the case of pluritemporal modern time(s), historians have confounded two things: one is the various individual, cultural, and social meanings ascribed to time, and two, time's own feature, which, according to their views, is plural by its very constitution. This leads us to raise a few questions: does a particular system of time-notation coming into conflict with other systems render time itself plural? Is the difference in the technique of time measurement (which potentially can also occur when the same device is used) equivalent to saying time is plural? To what extent is the subjective felt experience of time and, through that, the fact of inhabiting different strands of time-sensibilities a pointer of time itself being a plural entity? Can it be argued that individuals and groups blurring the trajectory of the passage of time through memory to the extent that figuratively speaking people live simultaneously in the past, the present, and the future, reveal their relationship with time rather than time revealing its own peculiarities? Multiplicity and plurality are constituted in the field of social relations (including with non-humans). The latter, to me, is the object of historical research.

The history of conflict among systems of time-notation and the messy imposition of one system upon others does not necessarily mean that time is plural. It indeed was measured and lived differently in different societies and continues to be done so even in our times. What this multiplicity does point to is the unevenness of power. It invites historical investigation to mechanisms through which one system prevailed upon the other. Exploration of power brings us directly into the domain of the social, which is where the practice-based historicisation of time belongs.

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[335] Simon and Tamm, *The Historical Fabric of Time*; Torres, *Temporal Regimes*.

Contrary to Lorenz and Bevernage's charge that most historians still take time to be homogenous, discrete, directional, linear, and absolute, historians studying the modern period have taken an easy recourse to champion plurality either through the history of imposition, conflict, and resistance to a particular system of time-notation or by privileging the deep subjective position in which, quite rightly, a person thinks and lives in multiple times.[336] Both, the instruments that are utilised for measuring and ordering time and the regimes in which time gets slotted, are used to argue for plurality. This has led to some awkward historiographical slippages and inconsistencies. The questions of nature and seasonality, for instance, which are extremely significant for understanding time and temporal conceptualisations of the premodern period, are seldom addressed when thinking of the plurality of modern time. Going through time's historiography on the issues of transition and synchronicity through the early modern to the modern period suddenly presents a rupturous node. It is akin to watching a game while realising that mid-way the rules have been changed. For talking about plurality, different yardsticks are adopted for each of these periods. Arguably, if the premodern period was marked by plurality because of the intermeshed sense of time derived from nature, season, tasks, clocks (or any other time-measuring device), and calendars in which the measuring device such as the last two were themselves dependent on nature, then the plurality of modern time does not require looking at these aspects but mainly at the unevenness of the global transformation around a cluster of technologies, the subjective perception of the passage of time, and historicity and its regimes. When talking of plural modern times, why are there so few histories of season and seasonality?

The romance with plurality is also partly political in nature. Fasolt rightly reminds us of scholarship itself being a political activity.[337] For a long time, it was believed (and is still so) that modernity has straightened time, hence the premodern period must appear to us plural. Further, when the Eurocentric basis behind the logic of the straightened time began to be questioned, the global convergence was unpacked to reinsert plurality into time. So goes the argument: yes, there was western hegemony and imposition, but it was neither absolute nor entirely subsuming of other practices.[338] These other practices resisted and forced the unitary European model to adapt itself. Global forces gave birth to local conditions but the local also forced the global to retreat and re-form. Hence, we see plurality. And currently, as Retz points out, when progress has been replaced by a sense of crisis through which historical time is to be made sense of, time itself has expanded and diversified, 'challenging the traditional notions of historical time and in particular the linear past, present, and future order of historical sense-making'.[339]

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[336] Berber Bevernage and Chris Lorenz, 'Introduction', in Lorenz and Bevernage, eds., *Breaking up Time*, p. 17.

[337] Fasolt, 'Scholarship and periodization', p. 422.

[338] Hunt, *Measuring Time*; Conrad, 'Nothing is the way it should be'.

The problem is that plurality is not only a recourse of the resistant and the marginal but has also remained a point of justification for the powerful in the past. In other words, power also creates or at least discursively organises time in plural ways. How are we then to account for such plural temporal pasts? Colonial history is replete with such examples. Colonialists argued that Indians lived in a different temporal order, shaped by slowness and superstition, which is why the full-fledged 'western civility' of law or technology was not suitable for them. On what basis can we call their use of pluritemporality (advanced West vs. timeless Orient) fake and ridden with power and ours (as a framework to write about that past) as loaded with the possibility of a radical re-reading of the past? They argued that natives were a slumbering lot before the whistle of the railways awakened or forced them to value time. We surely cannot take this plural temporal representation undergirded by political and cultural power of imperialism at its face value. Colonisers lived in the temporality of acceleration; the colonised were wrapped in the oasis of stasis. The colonised were consigned to the waiting room of history precisely because the colonisers found time and its plurality to be a significant order of justification. It is evident that colonial plurality was designed to perpetuate hierarchies whereas the new scholarly plurality is for radical equality. However, the latter also, in a discomforting manner, propagates the idea of discrete, autonomous, and fragmented units or formations of temporality, which potentially relativises and automizes time. Allegedly, two cultures, two societies lived or live in two times. Is it actually the case though? Besides raising the point that the colonisers and the colonised were not homogenous categories, questioning this dimension of plural time allows us to argue that plurality itself could be the product of encounters, engagements, and adaptations taking place within a single socio-political fabric of time.

Let us return to Hartog's concrete example of multiple presentisms. Of many he says, two definitely exists. One, is of the chosen one, that is, of those who are the 'winners of globalisation', who are connected, mobile, and agile; and two, of the suffering ones, best characterised in the figure of the migrant who 'is locked in the endless present of migration'.[340] In their self-perception, the winners and the losers may feel they are inhabiting two presentisms but are these worlds really disjointed? For Hartog, even if they share one present they live in two times: 'When contemporaries share the same present while simultaneously being in another time, the gap, if it grows too great, can feed movements of withdrawal, refusal, and anger.'[341] To me, this mode of analysis actually does disservice to any form of political action (aided by intellectual understanding) by relativising and breaking time into autonomous units. Even simply discussed at the level of intellectual argumentation, Hartog's proposition may appear fallacious. The time of the winners and the losers are presented here as two separate times. This begs the question: what is causing the endless 'present of migration' for the migrant? Can we really set aside the time of the precarious migrant from the time of the rapacious corporations? To put it rhetorically, the hyper-accelerated temporality of placing orders through apps on the mobile phone for food delivery (in a city like Berlin) is inseparable, dependent, and exploitative of the speed of the migrant, the precarious migrant youthful lot, who paddle away the delivery boxes on the bike using the same technology of the mobile phone for getting directions and keeping to time. The app owners, the app users, and the delivery bicycle riders inhabit one single presentism, and one time, structured of unaccountable capitalism, comfort consumerism, and precarious gig work. The function of 'estimated time' and complaints based upon 'delay' in receiving delivery is grounded upon one unitary notion of time. To better understand the operationalisation of social and economic power which creates conditions of winnability for some and precarity for the majority as part of a unitary and connected field of activity, the fabric of time, therefore, must appear singular.

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[339] Retz, *Progress and the Scales of History*, p. 47.

[340] Hartog, 'The Texture of the Present', p. 20.

Plurality can be a fellow traveller of the mechanisms of power. In its immediate context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries histories of imperialism, globalisation, and colonisation, it was the plural construction of time that buttressed domination. In other periods of historical pasts, the context of such interaction between linearity and plurality would differ. But the larger point is that time and its plurality, if any, therefore, should not be seen as a natural given but as a product of the historical process. Their romanticisation and valorisation can obfuscate the power dynamics behind them.

One recent example of a plural time framework has advanced the idea of doing history without chronology.[342] It rightly pinpoints certain problematic features of chronological time, which according to the author, takes us away from people and experience, which linearises the past, fixes the things that had remained relational, and creates the idea of progress. One cannot agree more with him when Tanaka says that 'neither absolute time nor its application to society is neutral'.[343] While these are definitely the attributes of modern time, which need to be given up in order to write a more egalitarian history of the past, and to give time itself a more egalitarian treatment, Tanaka also makes another related case which needs a brief discussion. He argues that chronological time perpetuates the idea of change and motion by replacing stability based upon recurrence of events. Chronological time, he explains, uses the hierarchical order of Newtonian time to prioritise change and movement over stability. Chronology, he thus proclaims, prioritises competition, 'a race or even war'.[344] This is where the political danger begins to lurk within the mammoth structure of plural time that is currently fetishised in academic writing. Why should History not be concerned with change and movement? How else would the histories of the voiceless and the subalterns be written if stability through the relativism of time and temporality becomes the objective of history writing? Did the powerful in the past not fight for maintaining status-quoism under the name of stability? If chronological time reordered the understanding of the past along the ideas of change, then did this also not empower people to identify structural discrepancies which favoured a few against the majority of the people?

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[341] Ibid.

[342] Tanaka, *History Without Chronology*. For a critique see Helge Jordheim, 'Return to Chronology', in Tamm and Oliver, eds., *Rethinking Historical Time*.

[343] Tanaka, *History Without Chronology*, p. 38.

Let me pluck another example from a recent work to explain this. Through multiple examples, Gribetz and Kaye insightfully propose that time is diverse because it is socially differentiated. They argue, 'Different people do not have the same access to time and attention, for many reasons, including race and speech disabilities.'[345] Obviously, using time in a strict uniform manner will, in these situations, create further differentiations and exclusions. Another aspect of this differentiation is gender for which they use the example of Kamala Harris' vice-presidential debate with Mike Pence in which she was constantly interrupted. At a certain point when Pence had exceeded his time limit, Harris remarked, 'I would like equal time.'[346] In this claim of Harris lies the foundational tension between plurality and singularity of time. If Pence's constant interruptions reflected the social conditioning around time of regarding women's time as less significant and hence susceptible to be usurped (and therefore the idea that time is differential according to social and cultural practices) then her claim to have the equal time is equally premised on time being a uniform equaliser that could potentially neutralise these differentiations. This instance is as much a reflection of social differentiation of time, as the authors argue, as it is of time's universal measurable value. The conceptualisation behind plural or multiple time is inherently based upon a foundational tension between plurality and singularity which often goes unrecognised in the celebration of plurality.

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[344] Ibid., p. 38.

[345] Gribetz and Kaye, *Time: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, p. 44.

[346] Ibid., p. 44.

To return to Tanaka, it is true, as he explains, that the history of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries is of war and competition based upon the idea of chronology but chronologies have also yielded to comparison to discern how power has accrued to some and has kept the rest deprivileged. Chronological time helps identify those who were left dispossessed and why. It would help us do histories of race and caste discrimination, to name just two, in a better manner if we are able to account for the structures that led to the accruement of power with the whites and the upper castes. This requires that the temporal scale of comparison ought to be linear and unitary in order to write the histories of dispossession and how time as a social constituent helped in creating this divide. There is obviously a need to divest time of any ethno-centric values that create orders and hierarchies amongst peoples and cultures in any intrinsic manner (that time itself is a conduit and victim of hierarchy) but in order to decouple time from the idea of linear progress we do not need to relativise time, and through its idiomatic use fetishise the past in turn, to the extent that the social unevenness of the past begins to take refuge in the plural formation of time. Time must remain in our conceptualisation an anchor and a host of change and transformation.

This book is not an attempt to delineate where and when historical-time or social-time (assumed to be plural even when written in singular) exists.[347] The historicisation of historical-time often begins at the doorstep of modernity, which a social history of time approach does not need to adhere to or confirm. The studies on historical-time and its regimes, and its blurred, plural morphology, does not help doing a social history of time beyond a point. The ideas introduced in this book are also distinct from a history of social time approach in which pluritemporality is an inescapable conclusion. Social time is bound to remain plural but the social is also a host of changing temporal regimes and cultures. The latter can only be accessed through a deep historicisation of practices chosen for our study. Multiple forms of engagement with time will bring forth the unevenness of social relationships. In doing a social history of time, the urge to pronounce time as plural will be much reduced. The emphasis will be more on inserting and discovering the role of time in the making of social power, which in turn allowed or forced people to engage with time in multiple forms. A social history of time needs to be rescued from the burden of historicity confounded with our dominant notion of temporality (plural, mingled, porous). At the same time, it will benefit from making use of the meaning embedded in the term – plurality of temporality – not simply for showing how intellectuals and collectivities connected (to) the past, the present, and the future in plural ways but for exploring conflicting time-ridden, time-centric, and time-indicating elements in peoples' practices that constituted temporal regimes and temporal cultures.

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[347] Simon and Tamm, *The Fabric of Historical Time*. They do raise questions on the current pessimism on the modern historical time but remain committed to the notion of plural time.

There has been some growing concern with the multiplicity framework, inviting attention to explore conflicts and instabilities, but the impulse is to understand better the ever-expanding multiplicity of time and its experiences.[348] On the contrary, for doing a social history of time, in which the relationship between time and power is a crucial arena of investigation, time can be taken as a universal, linear entity – a continuous but non-teleological fabric – on which the historical scripts of the asymmetry of power and the rupturous consequences of events, destabilising the constellation of power, can be traced. A heavy culturalisation and relativisation of time in current studies is limiting in its scope. Multiple perceptions, plural engagements, and the intermeshing of various types and methods of time-notation and time-experience can still (and must) be mapped while assuming time to be non-plural. In following Edelstein et al., I do regard that temporal regimes and cultures are perpetually conflictual but for purposes of writing a social history of time I tend to remain cautious in presupposing time itself as a plural entity. Otherwise, the framework of plurality might lead us to relativise and atomise time and power to such an extent that the ensuing temporal regimes and cultures will always appear as fractured sovereign entities incommensurable for historians to firmly locate the interconnected processes of changed continuities and continuous changes. They will appear well-secured in their respective domains of the exercise of power without being dominant or hegemonic over each other. What shall the independent, itemised plural time(s) be measured to, and against? To make power commensurable, accountable, historical, and comparable between individuals, cultures, societies, and practices – as a mode of history writing – time should be treated as non-teleological but a non-plural entity while always questioning the location and impulse through which the multiple forms of engagement with it continuously unfold. Given the current planetary and social crises of which the global warming and global authoritarianism are the two most pressing ones, treating time, at least, as a universal 'place holder' is not that outrageous an ask. Plurality in time is an outcome of practices and their historicisation; plurality of time can become a significant but empty statement.

One final thing which needs to be emphasised is not to treat time and temporality as interchangeable entities or concepts. Filtered through the objectives of social history, the task to pronounce what time is would appear less urgent than the necessity of finding out how time gets interlaced into social relationships. I have proposed here to trace this interlacing through a study of temporal regimes and temporal cultures. Both are heuristic analytical phrases and are not meant to clearly delineate peoples' practices and actions into strict compartments. That is, it is not suggested that one set of practices constitute temporal regime and another temporal culture. If pushed further, one can argue, though, that a temporal regime involves a close exploration of institutional power which exerts influence over society together with the constituents of the institutional and material set up which needs to be historicised, and a temporal culture seeks to understand the diffused, comparatively slower process of adaptation, mutation, and change in which social activities come together to give new meanings to time-centric categories or activities. The power that constitutes uneven and asymmetrical temporal formations may at least heuristically require us to treat time as a stable non-plural fabric. A history of social time must devote to understanding the conflictual relationship between multiple temporalities in the background of a non-plural passage of time.

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[348] Edelstein et al., *Power and Time*, p. 27; Helgossen, 'Radicalizing Temporal difference'.

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