Abstracts

Chitra Joshi

Writing the everyday into the lives of Indian Labour: limits and possibilities

The 1980s are often associated with a turn to the 'everyday life', as a time when *Altagsgeschichte* acquired significance. It is true that 'everyday life' acquired significance as a conceptual category, particularly through the writings of Alf Lüdtke, Michel de Certeau and others in the 1980s, but the study of quotidian worlds of the labouring poor had a longer tradition going back to the 1960s. So, it is important to look at this lineage, even as we acknowledge the specific shifts that take place in the post 1980s.

In my presentation I will examine how the idea of the everyday acquired meaning in my own work on labour: from a focus on actions of workers — within the factory and outside — to an exploration of questions of culture and community, and finally a more self-conscious move towards the 'everyday' in the lives and experiences of workers. Each of these phases are not quite separate: there is a flow back and forth between them; but personally, for me, a more self-conscious engagement with the 'everyday' happens over the 1990s.

In the discussion I will (i) look at how the idea of 'everyday life' has appeared in the writing of history in many different forms, (ii) track the way I have engaged with the notion in my own research over the years, (iii) explore how the notion is useful to understanding cultures of work/non-work around the factory and in spaces beyond the factory, (iv) examine how the everyday itself is mediated by wider histories: how did gendered ways of being and hierarchies of race and caste, for instance, inflect everyday practice? Or how does a turn to histories of affect and emotion in recent decades deepen our understanding of everyday lives?
While addressing these questions, I will reflect on the usefulness of Lüdtke's notion of *Eigensinn* to understanding the everyday lives of labour.

Amanda Lanzillo

Change and adaption in labouring religious cultures: Lessons from Chitra Joshi for studying Muslim artisans' quotidian histories

In *Lost Worlds: Indian Labor and its Forgotten Histories*, Chitra Joshi cautioned that "culturalist" readings of labour have 'underlin[ed] the power of culture in organizing society… [but] often denied to culture a history of change' (Joshi, 2003, p. 237). Building on this critique, I examine the ways that Indian labourers have adapted religious cultures and practices to negotiate shifting industrial regimes and forms of economic authority. My comments will examine histories of Muslim labourers in nineteenth and early twentieth-century north Indian cities and towns. I draw on books and verses that circulated within Muslim artisan labouring communities to explore how changes in sites and forms of work informed the adaption of religious ideals and claims on Muslim practice.

Equally, I engage these histories of cultural change to reflect upon the divergent uses of the "everyday" as an analytic in labour history and religious studies. Both faith and labour contribute to quotidian social identity, shape family strategies and claims on community, and inform one's routine material engagements. And yet, the degree to which labour and religion intersected in workers' historical experiences of the everyday remains underexplored. My comments centre histories of Muslim blacksmiths and stonemasons in colonial India to draw our attention to potential sites of integration, in which workers' everyday religious and labouring practices conditioned or even overlaid each other. I argue, moreover, that it is possible to study quotidian religious cultures within labouring practices without reifying these intersections or romanticizing work that was physically challenging or subject to economic deprivation. I conclude by reflecting on how Joshi's framing of the contested spaces of work, culture, and religious practice provides a basis for efforts to integrate approaches to the everyday that have emerged from varied disciplinary perspectives.

Arun Kumar
Everyday Histories of Worker-Students

My talk will focus on quotidian resistance and everyday learning of worker-students at the Lucknow Industrial School (established in 1892) which taught crafts for the Lucknow railway workshop. It examines how the concept of everydayness allows us to grasp the monumental shifts

in institutions and lives of labour in late colonial India. Focussing on the silent rebellions and everyday struggles between literary learning and workshop training at the Lucknow Industrial School, my talk will elaborate the concept of everyday life of labour. It will also highlight methodological reflections on the challenges of doing everyday histories of labour in the South Asian context as archives provide state perspectives than a view of social history. The Lucknow Industrial School underwent serious conflicts among students, teachers, and parents in the late nineteenth century due to competing visions of industrial and technical education. While the school focussed on manual learning and training, students desired literary learning with an aim to move out of the fold of manual labour. Everyday conflicts intensified to the point that the school was closed down in 1900-1901 as industrial school. It was later restarted as Technical Institute with a focus on mechanical trades.

Nitin Varma

The Making of Asymmetrical Dependencies: Subaltern Lives in South Asia

In this presentation, I aim to demonstrate an approach (simultaneously analytical and methodological) for reconstructing subaltern life histories, or more precisely, life trajectories of subjects of asymmetrical dependencies. An earlier interest in subaltern histories in South Asia had produced a rich body of scholarship which drew upon the Gramscian notion of subaltern and British tradition of "history from below". It marked a shift from the prevailing Marxist social and economic history of the 1960s and 1970s. Their creative reading of the colonial archives (reading against the grain) and exploration of power and resistance broke new ground in understanding South Asian pasts and found resonance in other historiographical settings. Yet certain tendencies seemed to dominate and plague these early endeavours. Apart from a marked shift towards postcolonial identity politics in the later iterations, the original project remained predominantly obsessed with the category of peasant/tribal, which was essentially imagined as adult, male, and potentially rebellious. This further meant that they rarely engaged with how social orders were created, sustained, and reproduced. This brings back a renewed interest in subaltern history writing by avoiding an exclusive focus on the peasant/tribal male rebel and making it more sensitive to the spatial methodology of global history and the epistemological perspective of microhistory through a reconstruction of subaltern life trajectories.

Notwithstanding the inherent challenges in any attempt to reconstruct the life trajectories of subalterns, it has the potential to move beyond the normative and formulaic portrayal of

institutions. Here, I propose to focus on those instances in the historical material (exceptional normal) that are appropriate for reconstructing life trajectories. Several insights from the microhistory and histories of everyday life are pertinent in further developing this approach. For instance, the reconstruction of life trajectories will depend on and demonstrate how the specificity of places (in these subaltern lives) emerges from its linkages with other locations. Such a simultaneous recognition of connectedness and singularity of any place helps overcome the local/global trap evident in historiography. A commitment to "following the traces" in the unfolding of these lives and further establishing these "connected singularities" helps to overcome the constraints of nationalist histories and the scalar assumptions inherent in specific influential versions of global history and microhistory. A careful reconstruction of "life trajectory" would hopefully demonstrate the value of not prioritising scale as an analytical concept but instead emerging from the practices of subjects of asymmetrical dependencies through their "scaling strategies".