

## HS4.108 Making of Contemporary India

### Assignment 1

Q:

"The modernization and the unification of time is the most important contribution of the British rule in India" - With the help of the reading material, elaborate on why you agree or disagree in about 1500 words.

#### **Reading Material:**

From Vanessa Ogle's *The Global Transformation of Time*, read the following chapters

- Chapter 3: From National to Uniform Time Around the Globe.
- Chapter 4: A Battle of Colonial Times
- Chapter 7: One Calendar for All.

#### **Optional Reading:**

- The rest of the chapters are from Vanessa Ogle's *The Global Transformation of Time*.
- Chapter 3: The Electric Worldmap from Peter Galison's *Einstein's Clocks Poincare's Maps*

Ans:

For about 200 years, The British ruled India, and colonial India saw various changes in this reign that still have imprints over India's socio-economic, political and cultural life. However, the motives of British rule behind the political, administrative, economic, social, intellectual and cultural development that India saw for two centuries are still debatable. Some believe it was a philanthropic agenda because the British were carrying the white man's burden, and the larger population believes it was just planning to keep a longer and stronger hold over India for the interests of their own country.

There were many such changes that India saw in that period. India achieved political unification under the British. Before colonialization, India was divided into several states, and there was no unity among different states and a constant fight to establish supremacy over others. The political unity in India can be credited to the British. Montague Chelmsford Act introduced the principle of direct election for democracy in India. British introduced India with institutions such as the legislative assembly and abolished various practices such as Child Marriage and Sati. Railways started by the British and the print culture are an integral part of India today. And one of their most important contributions is the modernization and unification of time.

Earlier in India, every ruling state used to have its own local time based on the Hindu calendar or Muslim calendar. In 1802, John Goldingham, the first astronomer of Madras Laboratory, set up Madras time and other leading cities such as Bombay, Calcutta, and Rangoon developed their own time soon.

With so many time zones, new problems arise. For example, Railways and Telegraph systems used to follow the Madras time. If a local from Calcutta have to visit someone in Bombay, he needs to do calculations of Calcutta Time into Madras time and the same for Bombay time to catch the train and reach on definite time. Various time zones created confusion among traders who used the sea route to travel from parts of the world to different cities in India. Connecting people, towns, cities, ports, railways, and colonies with metropolitan centres was a hectic task and confusing. But too many local times were not a problem for Indians only. It was a global issue back then. As late as the 20th century, there was no universal system of time worldwide to follow. But with globalization, the meantime became a necessity.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the worldwide adoption of a single time zone was proposed. Greenwich time selection allows administrative services to be coordinated with increased efficiency for international trade, allowing the imperial state to integrate its overseas subsidiaries more effectively. Thus, the official deployment of GMT in 1884 is considered the inception of a new era of global timekeeping with a single space-time matrix.

Initially, Europe and North America accepted the idea of the meantime, and then efforts were made to make the system globally accepted. Neighbouring countries also take the same step after the meantime attracted their attention. Scientific associations such as the Seismological Investigation Committee of the British Association for the Advancement of Science And the Royal Scottish Geographical Society played a significant role in propagating a standardized time system idea for a better spread of scientific knowledge.

Initially, the British recommended that its colonies implement a meantime for better trade opportunities. However, with time, The British imperial empire eventually forced the colonies to implement a meantime to develop better communication for their business, and these meantimes passed through the major cities of the respective colony. In 1900, the Federation of Malay states adopted the local time of Kuala Lumpur as the meantime for the whole country. In Africa, many colonies instated meantimes in 1890s by choosing a major city's time to be deployed throughout the territory. Many countries, such as Germany, who initially opposed the meantime, also eventually accepted the idea. After World War 1, many countries greeted the idea and had a meantime for the state coordinated with UTC(Coordinated Universal Time).

However, the journey to accept a meantime was never a cakewalk in India. By 1900, India became an important colony of the British Empire economically, financially, and militarily. The British surplus amount with India offset the growing deficits of the British empire with the USA and Germany. Also, the Indian surplus became elementary to free up resources in the City of London to invest elsewhere, making the London monetary system a gold standard and significant on the world map. This was the primary reason for the British to have a coordinated time system with Indian territory and reduce miscommunication for better trade.

Bombay, a city on the western coast, became the intellectual and commercial hub of the Indian subcontinent in the 19th century. In the second half, Bombay undergo a profound transformation. For example, the Bombay textile industry, whose first cotton mill was set up in 1854, ensured cotton exports to the US during the US Civil War (1861-1865). Moreover, with the opening of the Suez Canal, the travel distance between Bombay and London was reduced by 40%, and capital exchange increased exponentially. The inflow of capital made Bombay an essential territory of colonial India with a diverse population. Talking about the time in the Bombay Presidency, Bombay had a local time of its own, Poona too had its own local time, whereas Ahmedabad followed Madras time. Madras time was the official time for railways and the telegraph system. However, in 1881, the British governor of Bombay, James Fergusson, who had to travel outside Bombay for official work, didn't calculate the train time according to Bombay time. He eventually missed his train due to a misunderstanding.

After realizing the havoc created by various local time systems, Fergusson ordered all the government offices to follow the Madras time from December 1, 1881, where the Telegraphic and railway systems were already following the same. He encouraged the locals to follow the Madras time, about 40 mins ahead of Bombay time. Some people started to follow the Madras time, but many private offices and nationalists who believed the Bombay time parallels their "Indian" identity refused to accept it. It affected citizens' daily lives as the working class had to show up half an hour earlier to work. Public meetings were often cancelled because of confusion between Bombay and Madras Times. All the public clocks became useless without knowing what time they were following. After seeing such a situation and numerous debates, the Bombay Chamber of Commerce ordered for return of Bombay Time in 1883.

In the following years, many states like Punjab, Baluchistan, Sindh, and United Provinces gave up local time. They started following Madras time along with Madras Presidency, and others followed their own time. And in 1898, the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (RSGS) again ushered the country's adaption of a single time zone and its importance for developing the Indian subcontinent. RSGS explained the meridian five hours and 30 minutes ahead of Greenwich that neatly divided India into two parts and should be the meantime. Simultaneously, Madras time was officially adopted for railways and telegraphs in India, but the train schedules and the official telegraph guide continued to print time differences between local and meantime.

In 1902, it was concluded that India should switch from several local times to a single meantime UTC+5:30, which would help India to line with civilized countries of the world doing the same. In 1904, the Govt of India issued a circular to adopt "Indian Standard Time" (IST) from January 1905 and asked for suggestions from ordinary citizens. It stated that for better universal international transactions, and rapid and extended communications, especially instantaneous telegraphy, every country is concerned with the time of every other. Furthermore, the circular stated that ships worldwide set their clocks to Greenwich time, and it is an intolerable nuisance to calculate the local time of the port they intend to.

However, this time unlike the total opposition of the 1880s, various mills associations, fire insurance agents associations, ports associations, and trade associations accepted the IST. But, many prominent local leaders,

such as Pherozshah Mehta, a Parsi known as the "Lion of Bombay," introduced the proposal to return to local Bombay time and stated it was unfair for 5% of people of Bombay to decide for the rest 95% and apply an "artificial" and "unnatural" time on Bombay. Public activist Ahmedbhai Habibbhai also demanded the revocation of the IST. Moreover, various newspapers such as The Bombay Gazette, Kaiser-i-Hind and Indu Prakash openly critiqued local time change. And various signature petitions were initiated.

And miles away, in Calcutta, which was already against the partition of Bengal in 1905, the change in local time agitated the fire among the ordinary person. And the nationalist leaders continued to oppose the system for years as a mark of protest against the British. In 1927, a proposition came before BMC to universalize standard time in all offices, but all went in vain. But the tables turned after India gained independence. The League of Nations discussed calendar and time reforms in the 1920s and 1930s. Following World War 2, after India gained independence, the attitude towards the calendar reforms and time reforms became a symbol of modernization and integral for the nation. And the country worked for uniformity of time and calendar. This invisible battle continued until India decided to opt for IST in 1950 as an independent state.

The other aspect of irregularities in time was the calendar India followed. Every religion had its calendar. For example, the Hindu day starts with sunrise, whereas the Muslim day starts with sunset. But the British never looked at this aspect and never tried to bring reforms in the calendar system after seeing the protest against time reforms. After independence and accepting IST, the Jawahar Lal Nehru government worked to unify the Indian calendar, as following any particular religion's calendar was not a good idea in a secular state. And the same was achieved even in the first decade of independence. We can see that India's time and calendar unification came after independence. But the British played an important role and made countless attempts for a centralized time for India that we follow today.

#### Bibliography:

- a. Vanessa Ogle - The Global Transformation of Time, 1870-1950-Harvard University Press (2015)
- b. Peter Galison - Einstein's Clocks and Poincaré's Maps Empires of Time-W W Norton and Company (2004)