Feeling Modern: The History of Emotions in Urban South Asia

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Introduction



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With some 20 per cent of the world's current population, South Asia's rapidly-expanding urban centres are playing an increasingly important role in the lives of a significant proportion of the world's population. South Asia's urban population grew by 130 million between 2001 and 2013, and according to recent World Bank estimates it is forecast to grow by a further 250 million by 2030. In this context, policy makers are exercised not just about how the region's cities can be transformed to drive economic growth and poverty reduction, but also how they might become "better places" in which to live. Indeed, it is precisely "the often severe stresses brought about by growing urban populations on infrastructure, basic city services, land use, housing, and the environment" and "the inability to adequately address these stresses" that provide "the root cause of messy and hidden urbanisation". Equally, it is "these same congestion forces that are constraining the region's ability to realize the vision of prosperous and livable [sic] cities".[1]

The urgency of historicising South Asia's emotional urban landscapes underpins the rationale for this Special Issue which brings together two important fields of current historical interest, namely urban history and the history of the emotions. Since the cultural 'turn' of the 1980s, urban history's earlier quantitative emphasis has increasingly made way for historical explorations that "recognise that urban space [has been] both moulded by and moulded the behaviour and actions [and perhaps emotional responses?] of urban inhabitants".[2] The historical study of the emotions represents a rather more recent historiographical development, albeit linked closely to the same late twentieth-century rise of cultural history.[3] Over the last three decades, this 'emotional turn' has argued that the exploration of society's sentiments—indispensable categories of analysis—can unlock enhanced, more nuanced understandings of the past. Thanks to its 'multidisciplinary intellectual architecture', historians of the emotions now engage in cross-disciplinary conversations about how far

[1]Peter Ellis and Mark Roberts, *Leveraging Urbanization in South Asia: Managing Spatial Transformation for Prosperity and Livability* (World Bank, 2016).

[2]Rosemary Sweet, 'Urban history', http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/urban_history.html (accessed 10 June 2017).

[3]N. Eustace *et al.*, "AHR Conversation: The Historical Study of Emotions", *American Historical Review* 117 (2012), pp. 1487–1531.

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emotions and their expressions are universal, or whether they should be studied as a plurality of different experiences and expressions.[4]

Feeling Modern: The History of Emotions in Urban South Asia emerged out of conversations that began in the Urban South Asia Conference held at the University of Oxford in October 2014, and which then continued in a dedicated workshop for contributors there in 2016 before making their way onto the pages of this Special Issue. By focusing on the ways in which Indians situated themselves in the South Asian city and responded to it in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the seven articles presented here focus on the hundred years between 1850 and 1950, collectively throwing new light on how far colonial and early post-colonial South Asia embodied norms of civility in increasingly urbanised spaces.

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[4]Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2015).

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