

Calamities and Countermeasures in Pre-modern South Asia

Workshop at the Department South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies,
University of Vienna, Autumn 2024

Context

Calamities such as natural disasters, famines, epidemics, and wars with all their corollaries are repeatedly addressed in pre-modern South-Asian literature. They appear as consequences of population growth, urbanisation, or ecological imbalance; as a threat to rulers and political stability; as causing religious transformations; as an expression of divine wrath or failure; as a punishment for adharmic behaviour; as a subject of divination and astrology; as a challenge for physicians; as a stimulus for philosophical breakthroughs; as a theme in poetry; as an apocalypse; as a stress test to communities; as a trigger for social change.

Workshop

In this workshop we will bring together experts from various fields who deal with aspects of all kinds of calamities that hit South Asia in pre-modern times. Contributions will address diverse topics, including, but not limited to: notions, concepts, and theories about the causation of calamities; divination (astrological or other) of pernicious events; preventive and reactive countermeasures; social, political, medical, religious and philosophical responses; as well as modern theories on the emergence and historicity of pre-modern catastrophic events, based on epigraphic, archaeological, or other evidence.

To ensure informed discussions, the presentations will be based on pre-circulated papers. For ecological reasons and to facilitate participation, the workshop will be held in a hybrid format, online and in-person in Vienna.

Aims

The overarching question for the workshop will be: “How were calamities perceived in pre-modern South Asia, and which countermeasures were developed and executed?” We will aim to establish a better understanding of perceptions of and reactions to critical events in pre-modern South Asia. The results of these examinations will be disseminated in the form of a collected volume based on the papers presented at the workshop.

Proceedings

The proceedings of the workshop will be published in an open-access, peer-reviewed volume. A well-structured time frame and the pre-circulated papers shall ensure a swift and smooth publication process. Additionally, the preparation of circulated papers will enable the contributors to find connections between their articles and other sections in the volume and thus allow for comprehensive and precise cross-referencing.

Basics

Format: hybrid two-day workshop with pre-circulated papers.

Date: to be determined, on a weekend between September and November 2024.

Location: Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, University of Vienna.

Convenor: Vitus Angermeier (orcid.org/0000-0001-5424-7824), leader of the research project *Epidemics and Crisis Management in Pre-modern South Asia*. epidemics.univie.ac.at.

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