

Wed 27 MAY

16.00 CET

Tails from Colonial North India: The Lives and Companions of Show and Street Dogs

Andrew Halladay, London School of Economics



The first decades of the twentieth century saw the rise of a distinct dog-show culture in colonial India. Strongly influenced by trends in the metropole, this phenomenon was largely limited to elite classes and developed alongside other forms of animal-based entertainment. But even as dog shows reflected a trend in Britain, they also intersected with longstanding human-canine interactions in India. Notable in this regard are Indian street dogs, who had long been woven into the fabric of human society and have recently been the topic of some exciting scholarship. Indian street dogs naturally existed in a very different domain than did their show dog counterparts, but this paper contends that these worlds were nevertheless intertwined. First, the rising popularity of dog shows in Britain correlated with a professed concern for street dogs outside Britain, expressed most vociferously in the British public's aversion to the culling of Constantinople street dogs in 1910. Indian kennel clubs echoed this ethos by including 'native' Indian breeds within their contests. Second, the human labour necessary to train and care for the dogs of the human elite appears to have relied on Indian communities familiar with non-elite dogs. By considering these divergent spaces together, this paper argues that dog and human societies were inexorably linked; it proposes, further, that dogs in early twentieth-century India emerged as a commodity through which humans – whether British or Indian, elite or subaltern – often defined their social status.

