Intersections

Socio-Cultural Trends in Maharashtra

edited by
Meera Kosambi

Orient Longman

ORIENT LONGMAN LIMITED

Registered Office
3-6-272 Himayatnagar, Hyderabad 500 029 (A.P.), INDIA

Other Offices
Bangalore, Bhopal, Bhubaneshwar, Calcutta, Chandigarh,
Chennai, Ernakulam, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Lucknow,
Mumbai, New Delhi, Patna

© Orient Longman Limited, 2000
First published 2000

ISBN 81 250 1878 6

Typeset by
Scribe Consultants
New Delhi

Printed in India at
Baba Barkha Nath Printers
New Delhi

Published by
Orient Longman Limited
1/24 Asaf Ali Road
New Delhi 110 002

To the S.N.D.T. Women's University
and its ideology of
women's empowerment through education

Contents

Introduction

MEERA KOSAMBI

The abiding image of India as a land of contrasts is anchored, both in the scholarly and the popular mind, largely to the visible and recurrent presence of the old and the new in multiple combinations: sometimes the past lives on into the present, sometimes it is transmuted, and sometimes disrupted and recreated. While the socio-cultural continuities and discontinuities resonating through all of India form a common theme, its specific echoes in Maharashtra are explored in this volume.

The rationale for regional studies in a subcontinent like India is too obvious and well-established by now to need justification, or arouse fears of parochialism and local chauvinism. Maharashtra has been particularly fortunate in possessing a lively tradition of scholarship. Woven out of both local and international strands, it has spanned diverse issues of intellectual enquiry. These issues range from the mainstream religious tradition and the divergent sects of folk religion, to the moulding of religious identities in confrontation with the British colonial rule and the post-Independence political tensions; from the upsurge of Maratha power and the assertion of the Maratha identity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the nineteenth century social and political reform efforts and the twentieth century political protest movements; they also span creative artistic expressions in different media. Some of these themes, emerging out of a combination of regional specificities, wield a powerful influence on the Maharashtrian psyche and consciously or unconsciously mould current and future socio-cultural developments which find a reflection also in research concerns. Many articles in this volume cover more than one of

Gandhi, M.P. 1937. *The Indian Cotton Textile Industry*. Bombay: M.P. Gandhi.
(*GOB*) Government of Bombay. Home/Special Branch File No. 543(13) B(4) of 1941–43.
—. Letter from Special Branch to Symington, 30 January 1943. Goverment of Bombay. Concilation Commission Report.
(*GOI*) Government of India: Home/Political File No. 7/2/1934. Letter from Brabourne to Samuel Hoare. 28 June, 1934. Letter from Hoare to Brabourne. 20 July, 1934.
—. Home/Political File No. 94/24/1941.
—. Home/Political File No. 44/61/42 Poll (I).
—. Agricultural Legislation in India. Vol. III: Agricultural Production and Development. 1952.
India in 1934–35. 1985. Delhi: Anmol Publications.
Kulkarni, Wamanrao. 1989. *Vedya Mana Talamalashi*. Pune: Shri Vidya Prakashan.
Moon, Vasant, ed. 1982 *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*. Vol. 2. Bombay: Government of Maharashtra.
Nehru, Jawaharlal. 1962. *An Autobiography*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
Phadke, Y.K. 1989. *Annasaheb Latthe*. Pune: Shri Vidya Prakashan.
—. 1990. *Ambedkari Chalval*. Pune: Shri Vidya Prakashan.
—. 1991. *Visavya Shatakatil Maharashtra*. Vol. 3 (1921–29). Pune: Shri Vidya Prakashan.
—. 1993. *Visavya Shatakatil Maharashtra*. Vol. 4 (1930–39). Pune: Shri Vidya Prakashan.
—. 1997. *Visavya Shatakatil Maharashtra*. Vol. 5 (1940–47). Pune: Shri Vidya Prakashan.
Philips, C.P. and Wainwright, Mary D., eds. *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives: 1935–1947*. 1970.
Singh, Baljit. 1944. *Our Economic Condition*. Mussoorie: The Economic Research Committee.
Young India. 23 January, 1930.

Bombay Time

JIM MASSELOS

Oh dear! Oh dear! I'm a sad old year,
My form is bent, and I'm grey and sear,
My time of departure's drawing near,
Yet they rob me of half an hour.
My life and my name so soon to cease,
Couldn't they let me die in peace!
Why must they shorten my earthly lease,
Why rob me of half an hour?

('L.R.C.' 1881:2)

When I was studying in Bombay in the early sixties I was often late for appointments and so frequently that my friends noted how easily I had adjusted to Bombay time. I gathered it was a feature of Bombay life to be always half an hour late and I was no exception to the rule; like my friends, I learned to joke about being late and about Bombay standards of punctuality. Looking back I now realise my friends were using a common city idiom about time, a terminology that was an instinctive part of their vocabulary. I suppose I read it then as reflecting something about the character of the city and its people, an attitude towards time ostensibly different from that of my friends in Sydney, even though they were probably equally as often late for appointments.

Had I been perceptive, in the way I should have been as an historian, I would have realised there was nothing in the character of the city itself—or any deep-seated cultural attitude to time—that promoted the idea of lateness, of being behind by half an hour. Rather, what I should have understood was that I

had encountered the verbal fossilisation of one of the city's great controversies, the linguistic survival within a 1960s contemporary urban idiom of a great debate that had begun in the decades around the end of the nineteenth century. The joking references to Bombay Time as the only explanation needed for lateness was no explanation at all why I or my friends were late—but what it was, though I did not then realise it, was a link with the city's past, to ideas about time and attempts to change the specific organisation of time. Our references were, in addition, a means of making the city special, distinct from the rest of India in that we also talked about Bombay Time being different from Indian Standard Time or Indian Time without really understanding just what the distinction involved. Such talk separated Bombay from the rest of India but it likewise was a linguistic link with some of the issues that had been thrown up in the nineteenth century debate over time in Bombay. Perhaps in Bombay of the 1960s and later the explanation for the custom which had informed and maintained the vocabulary of separate time may have been lost to the collective memory, but the terminology, however it was later used and whatever it was made to signify in my experience, did derive from significant past events.

The background to the emergence of the idiom lay in world-wide changes in the way time, daily time, the time by which people lived, was perceived and calculated during the nineteenth century.[1] Until then, time in each town or city was calculated from the rising or setting of the sun, or from the sun at high noon, so that the time kept in Bombay differed slightly from that in Poona and even more from Karachi or Madras, just as London time differed from Manchester time. During the nineteenth century in Europe and North America, the spread of railways and telegraphs dramatised the variability of time in different places and exposed the difficulties that resulted from the lack of a shared or common time. What quickly became apparent was the need to establish a single time between different parts of a country. It was obviously inconvenient for railways to use multiple local times in their timetables or in their organisation of train schedules just as it was equally inconvenient for telegraphs not to operate on a standard time, given the instantaneous nature of their communication. The

tendency therefore in Europe and America was to bring together a multitude of local times and coalesce them into a single time observed throughout the one country as happened in Britain, or into a series of time zones as happened in America. What was happening was that the idea of a local time being the product of time and place, i.e. of distance and separation, and therefore being unique to each location, was being superseded by an idea of time as being simultaneous—all places sharing a common time (Shridharani n.d.: 1–4). The joint impact of railways and telegraphs thus altered not only ideas of time but also a concept of the nature of the neighbourhood since places were being linked together and assigned a time commonality in a way that had not been so before.

The situation was no different in India but the move to standardisation was slower than in the West and the consequences less sharp. The Telegraphs administration initially handled the problem of different local times, something that affected commercial, shipping and banking interests, by determining in 1862, in response to a Madras Chamber of Commerce complaint, that the local time at the stations where messages were despatched or received should be inserted free in each message, thus obviating some of the transactional difficulties that flowed from time variability.[2] By 1870 the Telegraphs were observing a uniform time in their operations throughout India. It came from Madras, where the country's only Government Observatory and the only one able to establish a precise time, was located.

There was a similar development in regard to the railways which had been expanding outward from the main Indian cities, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, over the decade. The time observed in the rail schedules was that of the hub town and the system worked reasonably well until the main trunk routes began to link up late in the 60s. As they moved closer, it was sometimes unclear as to which city's time was being observed by a particular station, and especially so within interior parts of the country. The situation was liable to cause considerable confusion, even to the Government of India.[3]

Early in 1870 when the trunk lines moving out from Calcutta and Bombay finally joined, the Bombay Government proposed that a common time, that of Madras, be used on the linked

railway, since it was the time observed by the Telegraphs and was regulated by the Madras Observatory.[4] The Government of India agreed with the suggestion since the Telegraphs Department would be able to wire true time to wherever it had a station. There were additional factors that influenced the decision. The Bombay-Madras system was due to link up a few months later and it would be convenient to observe Madras Time on it also. In addition, the Eastern Railway system followed (Jabalpur) time which was 34 minutes and 6 seconds behind Calcutta while Madras Time was 32 minutes and 49 seconds behind. Practically the alteration of what was effectively only a minute or so would not affect North India's railway system.[5] Thus a common railway time was established in the area covered between Bombay, Lahore, Calcutta and Madras, a time that was about half way between Calcutta and Bombay, each of which continued to observe their own local times within their limits. Hence trains thereafter left Bombay at a time different from the local time but in conformity with Madras Time.[6]

In the following decade, Bombay managed quite easily to operate with two concurrent times. Travellers merely had to remember to leave half an hour early by Bombay Time to catch a train by Railway Time. The differences were noted in railway timetables and travel guides and observed by travellers apparently without much difficulty.

However in 1881, Bombay's headstrong Tory Governor, Sir James Fergusson, considered otherwise. In October his government asked the Bombay Chamber of Commerce for its opinion on whether the time kept by the Railway Post and Telegraph Offices on the one hand and the offices of the Provincial Government and the general public on the other should be brought into line. Throughout the Presidency a variety of practices operated: Bombay and Poona each kept their own local times which differed by about seven minutes while Ahmedabad used Madras Time. It would be more convenient if a single time was observed throughout the Presidency and he wanted to know what the Chamber thought as the representative of the mercantile public. The Chamber agreed it would be advantageous to adopt a uniform time throughout India but it doubted that the adoption of Madras Time merely in the offices of the Bombay Government would lead to its general use. If it

did not, then the 'present confusion would only be increased and extended' (*BCC* 1904:168–170).[7] The advice was somewhat ambiguous and in any case Fergusson went his own way. In November his administration announced that Madras Time would be adopted as Official time in all Bombay government offices from 1 December. The resolution concluded with the invitation to the public to use Madras Time generally and ensure uniformity.[8]

Bombay's public was largely unwilling to accept the invitation and reacted strongly against the change. While the *Rast Goftar*, a Parsi Gujarati newspaper, initially approved of the change on the grounds of commercial convenience, (*Rast Goftar*, 20 Nov. 1881 in *RNP*, 26 Nov. 1881:7), another daily Gujarati paper, the *Bombay Samachar*, for instance, urged acceptance of the change, while at the same time considering it 'useless' and of 'great inconvenience' to a large number of people (*Bombay Samachar*, 2 Dec. 1881 in *RNP*, 3 Dec. 1881:7). Thereafter, opposition grew rapidly—and strongly. Partly the response was a reaction against the Governor himself who had already made himself unpopular over his handling of other issues. There were complaints that he had not consulted anyone—and the Chamber of Commerce did not immediately publicise the fact that it had been privately consulted, though it later did so (*BCC* 1880/81:cvii).[9] The press claimed the announcement had come suddenly and without notice and that there was no adequate explanation for the move, no necessity for it and no practical advantage to be gained from it (*BG*, 17 Nov. 1881:2). It showed, as did other measures,

> that our Presidency affairs are managed in a haphazard way, that there is no feeling of responsibility, or else no ability to appreciate it. The continual blunders of our local rulers are bringing discredit on the whole administration of Local Governments (*BG*, 17 Nov. 1881:2)

The attacks against the Governor also took the form of interpreting his action as motivated only by his personal convenience: it was noted that he had twice missed trains because he had been unable to remember the difference between Bombay and Railway Time (*BG*, 21 Nov. 1881:2). Over the next eighteen months the attacks became stronger and more satiric, both from Indians as well as Europeans in the city. Fergusson's

style of government was questioned: his stand against the opposition that had developed showed his 'obstinacy' and he had,

> no right whatever, because he happens to hold the appointment of the head of the government here, to go directly against the expressed wishes of the community of Bombay ('Nemo' 1883:4).

Despite the attack upon the Government and the nature of Government power, the critical issue in the Opposition was not about the nature of public liberty or the powers of the Governor but about the inconvenience caused and what that inconvenience represented.

The immediate response showed that most people in Bombay were quite happy to continue with the existing situation and handle the anomaly much as they had done in the past. But with Madras Time now in force in Government offices, the problem was that the half hour difference had been inserted into the functioning life of the city in a way it had not been when Railway Time operated only on its peripheries. Fergusson could have minimised the impact by opening government offices a half hour later by Madras Time, i.e. at 10.30 a.m., and thus kept office timings in the same relationships to sunrise as the previous opening time of 10 a.m. by Bombay Time. (Bombay Time of 10 a.m. of course approximately equalled 10.30 a.m. Madras Time). This was not done and the full effect of the transition was therefore felt throughout the city.

The change affected the daily rhythms of city life as they had evolved over the past century and also touched traditional uses of time. Although it was not then obvious, what Fergusson's change represented was the establishment of one of those critical intersections where radically different underlying concepts and paradigms, were being juxtaposed.

The juxtaposition hinged on the relationship of city routines with the rising of the sun. The situation in Bombay did not parallel that which exists in temperate zones nowadays with the introduction of daylight saving when the hours of sunlight increase in spring and summer. In such places the relationship to sunrise in winter is largely retained by moving clocks forward an hour in summer. In Bombay the hours of daylight hardly vary

at all from summer to winter. As one participant in the controversy pointed out, the variation in daylight over the seasons was at the most extreme only a quarter of an hour in the morning (Gostling 1882:3). Hence Fergusson's decision did not merely involve moving the clock forward half an hour and adjusting living routines accordingly and easily, as happens with daylight saving. Rather, moving the clocks forward changed the nature of people's early morning patterns of rising, preparing for work, and working. It reduced the time by half an hour between sunrise and beginning work and in doing so affected almost everybody in the city except the mill-hands who were then working from sunrise to sunset.

Much of the argument was hence directed towards highlighting the effect upon working routines of a change which, as the *Indu Prakash* pointed out on the initial announcement, is 'not simply nominal, and will work more or less to the prejudice of the native employees of Government'. They would effectively have to start work half an hour earlier (reprinted in *BG*, 16 Nov. 1881:3; see also *Bombay Guardian* item reprinted in *BG*, 21 Nov. 1881:31). After the introduction of the new time, the *Indu Prakash* noted that clerks 'after hurrying through their breakfast or dinner, [had to] run post-haste to their work'. Nor did they have the advantage of an extra half hour's sunlight at the end of the day since many offices would not allow them to leave 'until it is sunset and dark, even though 5 p.m. be past' (reprinted in *BG*, 7 Dec. 1881:3).

There were other practical considerations reflecting the way the city had grown in size and in the spread of its housing: many clerical workers, and not only those in Government employ, lived in the suburbs and already found it difficult to get to work on time, and found it even more so under the new time regime. But what was at issue was the nature of the morning routine, from rising through washing and on to eating a major meal of the day before the commencement of work—all of these were affected by the change in time, since it reduced the space between sunrise and work. Despite clocks and urban patterns of movement and work timetables, what became clear from the debate on Madras Time was that much of the city still regulated its activities on the basis of the movements of the sun, of its rise and setting. In this aspect city inhabitants still followed much the

same daily rhythm of work routine as their rural counterparts—urbanisation had not changed the underlying structural relationship to sunrise and sunset nor had office work, nor mill labour, nor that of retail, banking or commercial activity or any of those other occupations that constituted the other parts of the city's economic structure. The *Indu Prakash* again put the point effectively in regard to one specific sector:

> the native merchants, with whom the European firms in Bombay have so much to do, will not be tempted to go in for the change. In fact they have not yet understood its philosophy, and do not care much to know what it means. They are the slaves of habit, and no government order will succeed in making a bunnia leave his house at Mandvie or Kalbadavie to visit the Fort at 9.30 a.m. instead of 10 a.m. (reprinted in *BG*, 7 Dec. 1881:3).

Another aspect of the argument centred around religion and ritual. A European letter writer argued the change would affect religion since

> The religious Parsees and Mussulmans will henceforth be ignorant of the rising and setting sun, and accordingly, will neglect to perform their daily devotions ('Kismet' 1881:2).

But this argument was difficult to sustain under attack. As a supporter of the new time retorted, it made no difference what the time was by the clock since few Parsis or Muslims had watches; in any case their observances were determined by the sun not by a clock—as was also the case in Hindu ritual ('W', 1881b:2; see also *BG* 13 Dec. 1881:2 and 23 March 1882:2).

The point here was about the reduction of available time between awakening at sunrise and going to work and about a view that the morning had a life of its own which was not merely that of preparing in a rush to go to work.

A similar consideration was put forward even in the case of the city's Europeans. Government officers, for instance, would 'lose half an hour out of every morning, the best time—in this country—for work, study or exercise' (*BG*, 17 Nov. 1881:2).

Moreover, the change, once it had come into effect and since it was not widely adopted, created considerable confusion in their social life:

> An appointment—dinner party for instance—meant to be kept according to Bombay time and understood Madras time, or vice versa, can put many people to great convenience. One's coachmen or cook misunderstands one's order, and there, one may have to wait for 35 minutes... Suppose I submit and keep Madras time, how am I to know that Jones and Smith do the same? So to avoid misunderstanding you have now to put to every thing you say or write 'Madras' time or 'Bombay' time ('Anti-Despotic' 1881:2).

In the European clubs the situation was quite clear: all of them observed Bombay Time (*BG*, 23 March 1882:2).

There was, however, some support for the change among those who followed the Governor politically, notably the *Pioneer's* Bombay correspondent and the President of the Chamber of Commerce. A handful of people with a scientific bent saw the change as linking with attempts initiated in Canada and pursued in the United States and on the Continent to establish a standard world time system (*Times* 1881:2 and 'W' 1881a:3). They put their cases with considerable persuasive force and much scientific terminology in the press but won little additional support for Fergusson. It was to be another two decades, as will be seen later, before similar arguments were used effectively to justify major changes in the ordering of time. Conversely, some opponents used similar scientific arguments to question the way in which the time issue had been resolved even on the railway system. Their point was that it would have been better had there been two time zones, one for the east and the other for the west of India. The model that India should have followed and which was now by implication causing so much debate in Bombay was not that of Britain where there was hardly any difference in local time and therefore no real inconvenience in adopting London time as standard for the country, but the United States which had similar problems of spread as India and had therefore adopted different time zones (*BG*, 17 Nov. 1881:2).

Arguments apart, it was the inconvenience of the multiple times that operated in the city that kept the issue on the boil. The way in which the multiplicity was most apparent was which time was observed by the city's various institutions and which time was signalled by the city's clocks and other time-keeping

devices. A battle for control of time measurement ensued, a battle of the clocks.

Quickest into the fray was the Port Trust, an autonomous government agency which perforce had to follow government directives. It did so but subverted Madras Time by opening its offices at 10.30 a.m., and retarding all other appointments by half an hour, thus maintaining the same relationship with the sun as had existed under Bombay Time (Port Trust December meeting report in *BG*, 17 Dec. 1881:1). The High Court judges were more forthright in their opposition: they refused to follow Madras Time, arguing they were not subject to government directives, i.e. to pronouncements from the Governor in Council, but only to legislation passed by the Legislative Council (*Indu Prakash*, reprinted in *BG*, 7 Dec. 1881:3). The worthy principle of judicial independence from the administration thus affirmed, the judges continued on their own way as they had always done—and on Bombay Time. The city's Municipal Corporation was equally unwilling to accept the change—either for its employees or the clocks it controlled. Here its opposition took the form of delaying consideration of a motion to introduce Madras Time. In the end its mover was absent when the moment finally came for it to be considered—and the motion lapsed. The result was that the corporation remained on the old time (*BG*, 23 March 1882:2,3). So too did the clocks it controlled such as the Bomanjee Hormasjee Wadia Clock Tower and the Arthur Crawford Market clock.

Elsewhere, the results of the confrontation were ambiguous. The Cathedral clock showed the new time but the peals of its bells summoned the faithful to prayer on Sundays according to the old time ('The One O'clock Gun', 1882:3 and *BG*, 7 Dec. 1881:3). The time ball which established a precise time for ships in the harbour, and also incidentally for the city, was under Port Trust control and went over to Madras Time. So too did the Esplanade time gun which was under direct Government control: it was now fired at 12.30 p.m. Bombay Time but uncertainty existed as to whether the early morning gun was fired at official daybreak or not ('The One O'clock Gun', 1882:3 and *Indu Prakash*, reprinted in *BG*, 7 Dec. 1881:3).[10] The perverse logic of the situation was the object of much fun at the Government's expense:

> Most people have more or less experience of officialism; official forms on official paper, official envelopes, and official red-tape, the last having been hitherto the principal heart-burner; but to have an official sun really out-red-tapes red-tape ('The One O'clock Gun', 1882:3).

The most intense battle, however, was fought over the University clock tower. Funded by a donation from Premchund Roychund, the structure had been complete since 1878. But it remained clockless and empty until the clock works arrived from England in 1882 (*BG*, 2 Jan. 1882:3). Before the machinery was installed, the University Syndicate announced it could not afford to pay for the lighting of the four clock faces at night. Inevitably the search for funds brought in other city institutions. The Town Council of the Corporation agreed to pay half the cost if the Government bore the remainder (*BG*, 24 June 1883:3). When the matter came up for ratification at the July meeting of the Corporation, it was decided to add a proviso that the Clock should keep Bombay Time as did the University anyway. As V.N. Mandlik pointed out: 'If we spend Municipal moneys, they ought not to be spent towards our own confusion.' (*BG*, 18 July 1882:3). Fergusson had a contrary view and 'churlishly' (*BG*, 12 May 1883:4, editorial) refused to sanction funds for a clock face that announced Bombay Time; however, he was prepared to bear the full cost of the lighting if it told Madras Time (Bombay Correspondent of the *Pioneer*, 1883:3). Battle was drawn between the Governor and the people of Bombay and the city wits went to town over the confrontation. The Editor of the *Bombay Gazette* saw the conflict as being between the 'heavy metal' of the local government and

> the inhabitants of Bombay, the large majority of whom have no daily need to go away by train. It was true, they granted, that the sun evinced a preference for rising first on Madras, and it was even admitted that this should qualify the Stygian adjective sometimes applied to that Presidency. But like the people in the virgilian Hades, the people of Bombay also knew a sun of their own, or believed they did, and intended to keep on knowing it too; and would only condescend to meet the arguments against them by saying that if they were half an hour behind the rest of India every day, they gained

half a century on the rest of India every year (*BG*, 12 March 1883:2).

At stake of course was the town clock par excellence, the clock that would regulate all of Bombay's actions through its grandeur, its height and visibility. Who controlled the clock controlled time in Bombay. The city's banks, shipping and mercantile interests through the Chamber of Commerce in consequence called upon the University Syndicate to observe Bombay Time and sent a list of those members who supported Bombay as against Madras Time. Forty-three favoured and six opposed Bombay Time (see Chamber-University correspondence reprinted in *BG*, 7 April 1883:2). The Syndicate thereupon laid the matter before the University Senate for a decision; there V.N. Mandlik moved a resolution that the University Clock keep Bombay Time. The motion was carried by a majority of thirty-four to six votes. Opposed had been 5 Europeans and one Parsi, while the thirty-four supporters included most of the city's leading Indian politicians and public men, people like Badruddin Tyabji, R.K. Cama, Nowrozjee Furdoonjee, K.T. Telang, B.M. Wagle, twenty-four in all; the other ten were European opponents of the Governor (*BG*, 21 April 1883:4). As for Fergusson, he retired in ill grace and decided that the Government would not fund the Tower in any way whatsoever (*BG*, 27 April 1883:4). It was even rumoured that the Government planned to take over the clock tower and impose its own time (*Indu Prakash* item reprinted in *BG*, 19 April 1883:4).

The confrontation between the bureaucracy and the civil society of the city seemed total. At this point the Chamber of Commerce again stepped in with a respectful address to the Governor to withdraw Madras Time from Bombay since it was unacceptable to the community and the cause of 'much irritating inconvenience'.[11] By this stage thinking within the higher ranks of the bureaucracy had decided not that Madras Time was wrong but that it was inconvenient to continue with it while two times operated within the city. It was therefore 'most politic' to withdraw the resolution until the public would be happy to accept a single time for Bombay and all of India. The Chamber's 'civil letter' gave an opportunity of doing so 'with an advantage of position'.[12] The government capitulated and announced on 29

May 1883 the restoration of local time on 1 June in all Government offices.[13] But there was a sting in the tail of the resolution: outside Bombay City and Island, Indian Mean Time, which, it was claimed had given satisfaction, was retained throughout the Presidency. The reasoning of the bureaucracy that was not revealed to the public was motivated by other considerations: the Commander-in-Chief wanted to maintain Madras Time since it was 'convenient for military arrangements' as similarly did the PMG for post offices. The subsequent 'discord' to be expected between mofussil and Bombay Time, 'will be entirely chargeable to the obstinacy of Bombay' according to Peile, an important member of the Governor's Council.[14] Significantly, the nomenclature in the mofussil had been changed from Madras Time to Indian Mean Time, a change also inspired by Peile who thought

> it would perhaps be well to speak of 'Indian Mean Time' instead of Madras. Foolish people who write to the papers vent most of their spleen on the adoption of the timing of the 'benighted Presidency'.[15]

Bombay had won and Fergusson's capitulation was complete when in June it was announced that the Government would bear the cost of maintaining and illuminating the University Clock Tower (*BG*, 13 June 1883:2). As far as Bombay was concerned the matter rested for another twenty years and the issue was left in the air even as to whether there should be for India as a whole a single railway time rather than two time zones. And the naming of time according to a theory of time standards or to the whim of a governor could not withstand the imperatives of setting time according to the routines of people's ordinary lives since 'people obey the orb whose function it is to mark the hour' (*BG*, 30 May 1883:2). Changing the hours had proved to be not merely a change in nomenclature but had a direct effect on behaviour patterns and had highlighted different ideas of time usage which had proven not then amenable to modification according to administrative fiat.

But outside Bombay, north from Bandra, the Presidency in theory observed Madras Time, a decision which provided another of the many features which increasingly distinguished and separated the city from its hinterland. There was some

dissatisfaction with Fergusson's decision to continue Madras Time throughout the Presidency and the district local press in the ensuing months demanded a similar settlement to Bombay's. Only in regard to Karachi where Madras Time was fifty-two minutes ahead of solar time and therefore caused double the inconvenience it had provoked in Bombay did the Government reconsider the matter. And even then it was only after submissions had been received from the Sind Sabha and the Karachi Chamber of Commerce that the Government finally in August 1884 allowed Karachi to keep local time as official time (*BG*, 30 May 1883:2, 7 June 1883:3, 11 June 1883:2, 19 June 1884:2, 8 August 1884:2 and 25 August 1884:5).

II

A similar battle was fought two decades later over the introduction of standard time in Bombay. Much of the same ground as had been covered in the 1880s was repeated in the first decade of the twentieth century though the circumstances in which it took place were different as was in consequence the outcome. Over the two decades there had been a significant change in the nature of scientific thinking about the organisation of time zones, and in the willingness of countries around the world to accept time standardisation. Concurrently, within India itself the intensifying of Indian nationalist opposition had of necessity been reflected in a polarisation between the people and the Government and its European associates. Each of these had their impact on the city's view of the time which it considered appropriate and of whether the city should maintain its exclusive role as expressed through a time differential.

Almost concurrent with Fergusson's capitulation over the imposition of Madras Time a conference was being held in Washington. There, in 1884, scientists and administrators from the world's dominant powers were establishing criteria for standardising time around the world. The conference decided to accept Greenwich as the prime meridian from which all world time was to be measured and also accepted a concept of universal time which involved a band of zones around the world each an hour apart. In the following decades the system was

widely adopted in almost every 'civilised country' except for India where Railway Time continued to hold sway. In 1899 the Viceroy considered proposals from the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and the Royal Geographical Society of London to introduce Standard Time in India but decided that no change was then necessary. In 1902 the Observatories Committee of the Royal Society again raised the matter. Curzon and his Council decided that an hourly zone system in India was not necessary but that there would not be much inconvenience in moving over from Madras Time to a meridian time as Standard Time that would be five and a half hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time and nine minutes in advance of Madras Time. It was to be introduced at midnight on 30 June 1905. It was to apply only to the railways and telegraph but should centres like Calcutta, Bombay and Karachi indicate a desire to adopt the new standard, the Government of India was prepared to support the change and order its adoption in Government institutions in those cities.[16]

An earlier circular to various local governments seeking their responses to the proposal had evoked from the Bombay Government the results of its enquiries from the Bombay and Karachi Chambers of Commerce and the Port Trustees. The Bombay Government saw little difficulty in the railways and telegraphs moving to a standard time but saw problems in having the time adopted in the city. Once the change was adopted on the railways, however, it was likely to create difficulties in the city since the difference of thirty-eight minutes and fifty seconds between Standard Time and Bombay Time could not be as easily taken into account as the existing difference of half an hour between railways and local time.[17]

The inevitable battle followed. The Chamber of Commerce in Bombay met in June and decided to retain local time (seventeen representatives voting for Standard Time and twenty-two for Bombay Time).[18] But it met again to reconsider the issue on 30 August when after a lengthy debate the previous decision was reversed and the Chamber decided by a majority of 51:16 that it favoured the adoption of Standard Time in the city. Other institutions similarly supported a change: the Bombay Presidency Trades Association on 29 June; the Bombay Port Trust in September; as also did the Bombay Association of Fire

Insurance Agents, the Native Share Brokers' Association and the Mill Owners' Association. In October the Municipal Corporation voted by a narrow majority of 26:21 to accept Standard Time (*BG*, 6 Oct. 1905:5). Opposed to the introduction of Standard Time were the Bombay Native Piece Goods Merchants' Association, the Cotton Exchange, and the Grain Merchants' Association.

By this stage the debate had begun to heat up: some invective was directed at the 'thoughtless selfishness' ('A Correspondent', 1905:4) of the railways for wanting a single, standard time, rather than a zone time whereby India would have had two zones an hour apart, each approximately at the solar times in force in Bombay and Calcutta. Others wondered why Bombay should change for the convenience of a few railway travellers and re-asserted, as opponents to change in the eighties had earlier done, the interference with religion which the new pattern involved (Amurchand 1905:5).

Nevertheless support for Standard Time was encouraging enough for the Bombay Government to decide to adopt it and requested the Government of India to order its observance in all its offices in the city. Significantly, the local government expected the new time would initially be adopted by business offices outside the 'native town', by mills and factories, clubs and private residences but had no doubt it would soon be accepted by Indians throughout the city. After an interchange of correspondence the transition was set to take place on 1 January, 1906.[19]

The larger employing bodies in the city made their preparations for the change by ordering an alteration in working hours: the Port Trust moved all its working hours forward half an hour so that its offices which previously opened from 10 to 5 were under Standard Time to open from 10.30 to 5.30; dock workers were to start at 7.30 rather than 7 a.m.; work on the *bunders*, however, was not affected by the changes and was to continue from sunrise to sunset as before. The timings of the Time Ball in the Victoria and Prince's Docks were changed from 7-51-15-7 (i.e. 7.51 a.m. and 15.7 seconds) Bombay time to 8.30 Indian Standard Time and the Time Ball at Bombay Castle was to drop at 2 p.m. Standard Time rather than 1 p.m. Bombay time as previously (Bombay Port Trust Resolution in *BG*, 22 Dec. 1905:5). Such measures meant that the relationship between

sunrise and the starting of work remained the same under the new dispensation. The Bombay Presidency Trades Association and the Associated Exchange Banks acted similarly as did numerous other offices and shops so that working hours in these sectors would thus begin at 10.30 rather than 10 a.m. (*BG*, 30 Dec. 1905:4, editorial).

Changing the timings was not to everyone's satisfaction. The mill-hands had been unhappy with the move to Standard Time. On 5 January when the 4,500 hands of the Jacob Sassoon Mill in Parel went to work, they found they no longer started at 5.30 a.m. (Bombay Time) but 6.10 a.m. (Standard Time) and finished at 6.10 p.m. (ST) and not at 5.30 p.m. (BT). Though the times were the same in relation to the sun, the workers objected to the change and went on strike until Bombay Time was restored. The owners gave in and the workers went in to work (*BG*, 6 Jan. 1906 and *Indu Prakash* reprinted in *BG*, 15 Jan. 1906:7). And the city's mills thereafter operated on Bombay Time.

The city's Indian middle class groups were equally unhappy with the change. Shortly before it was to be implemented, a large and crowded meeting was held at Madhav Baug in the centre of the Indian section of the city to protest against what was about to happen. Over 15,000 accepted that the change would cause great confusion in the commercial sectors of the city and was also 'highly prejudicial to the interests of religious communities'. Continuing, the petition adopted for submission to the Governor explained,

> They offer prayers and perform religious ceremonies at particular times which indicate position of the sun in heaven. Thus for instance 12.30 p.m. is the time of the 'Azan' of the second prayer of the Mohamedans, which if Local time be standardised would be 11.51 a.m. when the sun would never be overhead. Thus the adoption of Standard Time would cause a great confusion and inconvenience among the Mohamedans. It would also interfere especially with certain daily religious rites, prayers and so forth which every Hindu, Mohamedan and Jew has to perform in consonance with his religious belief (Petition reprinted in *BG*, 30 Dec. 1905:5).

Despite the strong indication of representative public opinion from the city's middle groups and its working classes, the

Governor considered there was 'no sufficient reason' for change and that the initial inconvenience would soon disappear as had been the case with the 'multitudes living outside Bombay'.[20] His conviction was not reflected in the reality of the position in the city early in January after the change was implemented. Most of the Indian population and merchants continued to use geographical time as did the mills; in all, probably at least nine-tenths of the city retained the old usage according to a newspaper estimate of the time (*BG*, 11 Jan. 1906:4).

The Municipal Corporation, however, at a meeting on 22 January, voted again by the very narrow majority of 31:30 to set its clocks by Standard Time (*BG*, 23 Jan. 1906:6). Another extremely large public meeting at Madhav Baug towards the end of the following month protested at the decision and the general move towards Standard Time and petitioned both the Corporation and the local government accordingly.[21] The Government merely recorded the letter. In April, the Corporation considered the resolutions of the meeting and at a highly charged meeting, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta moved that it was the opinion of the Corporation that Bombay Time be reverted to and that Municipal Clocks show Bombay Time. The resolution was carried by 31:22 votes (*BG*, 24 April 1906:3).

By this stage division within the city over the issue had become polarised in a way that had not been the case in the earlier 1880s debate. Whereas then there had been a unity of opposition between leading Indian and English opponents, in 1906 the issue had polarised along racial lines. Behind it lay the increased intensity of Congress political activity and also, of course, the increasing division between Mehta's party and the 'new' party of Congress politicians led by Tilak. Mehta's role as spokesperson for the city was demonstrated by his advocacy of Bombay Time while the stand taken by local government in not making concessions was part of the process of confrontation and polarisation which was characteristic of the times. When the Government of India wrote asking what it proposed to do about the Municipal Corporation resolution, the Bombay Government replied that the mercantile community was unlikely to revert to local time because of the Corporation resolution and that the Government proposed no action.[22] Nor did it change its attitude when the Grain Merchants' Association, a body of Indian

merchants, in June also requested reconsideration of the matter.[23] The local government was quite happy to maintain Standard Time so long as the European merchants (and those involved with them) retained it. It had little concern for Indian business opinion or even the views of the wider Indian community of the city.

Thereafter the city continued with two times, duly noted in the daily list of engagements in the daily papers where some functions carried the initials BT and others ST to indicate their leanings. While Calcutta, the seat of British imperial power, continued with its local time, Bombay was lumbered with Standard Time in official and European activities and with Bombay Time in most other activities. Signalling the division were the city's clocks. Those at Bori Bunder made the point cogently: the clock crowning Victoria Terminus gave Standard Time while opposite the square, the municipal clocks in the Corporation building followed Bombay Time (*BG*, 25 June 1908:6, editorial). The Indian language press of the city favoured Bombay Time, even those which otherwise were conservative and loyalist to the raj—papers like the Parsi *Jame Jamshed*, the Muslim *Akhbar-i-Islam*, the *Khabardar* and *Sultan-e-Akhbar*, the Gujarati *Bombay Samachar* as well as the Hindu press—all wanted Bombay Time (Cama 1908:8). In terms of group adherence, virtually all the religious communities found it more convenient to follow Bombay Time in their religious observances: among Muslims, for instance, Boras and Sunnis used the local time in their mosques for prayer five times in a day and only the Khojas observed Standard Time (Harrison 1908:5).

Protest meetings continued to be held against Standard Time including another important and influential one at Madhav Baug (*BG*, 29 June 1908:5). Occurring around the time of Tilak's arrest and trial, the meeting was restrained, but the polarisation between the European and Indian representatives was clearly apparent. Again Mehta put his position with his usual forcefulness even though not with perhaps the same fire as on previous occasions. In his speech he did, however, put his finger on the critical issue while at the same time managing to present an image of himself as a progressive person. He challenged the scientific basis of the change to Standard Time on the grounds that in no country had Standard Time been introduced 'in such large areas as was done in India... The idea was not only

unscientific but monstrous that the whole continent of India should be reduced to adopt Standard Time' (*BG*, 7 July 1908:5).

But he also put his finger on the nature of the patterns affected by the change in Bombay—the clash of ideas about time and its usage; in consequence the Indians of the city were still resisting the change two years after it had been forced on them. He argued:

> However logically one might dissect these things, one must know that when the sentiments and prejudices were concerned, the people did not look to the logic or to the historical origin of those things, but they were guided by the present state of things... Why should they [i.e. the government] pin-prick the people when they did not want this change? (*BG*, 7 July 1908:5).

It was a good question and one that was not answered. Perhaps had an answer been given it would have had to involve a statement about the nature of imperial rule and the basis of its imposition over India. But the answer would have had to go beyond the matter of power and the expression of that power in policy implementation; it would also have had to include a discussion of the nature of the view of the supremacy of science in determining behaviour and the view that those who spoke in the name of science inevitably were correct in the answers for which they claimed scientific certitude. Science became an excuse for stubbornness and an excuse for wielding power even when contrary decisions could be obtained from the same evidence and the same premises. The imposition of a Standard Time was then merely the pawn through which the language of power was expressed by those particular individuals located in the seat of power and by others who considered themselves associated with the enterprise of government. Opposition to the standardisation moves hence represented opposition to the situation of power and to those who wielded that power or chose to associate with it. But it was also much more than a moment of frozen polarity, of opposition and resistance, it was a moment of self-affirmation and of the retention of what was critical to self-identity. Time was about individuals in their society, of how they expressed themselves through the use of time and in the passing of time. That was what undercut the debate as it developed, the nature of the individual within the social context.

Notes

1. Much of the research for this paper was undertaken in London on Special Studies Overseas Programme leave from the University of Sydney in 1992. Additional research was funded under an ARC Small Grants Award in 1992. I am particularly grateful to Meg Miller for her research assistance on this project.
2. See W. Grey, Sec. to Govt. of India, to Sec. to Bengal Chamber of Commerce, No. 360 of 15 Jan. 1862 in India Office Records [hereafter IOR], Telegraph Letters from India, 1860–1866 in L/PWD/3/114.
3. Cf. for example, the Govt. of India's enquiry on 17 June 1869 to the Commissioner for the Central Provinces as to which standard of time was in force on the GIP Railway there, in IOR, Govt. of India [hereafter GI] PWD (Railway) 97B June 1869 Proceedings, P/435/7.
4. Telegram from Colonel Kennedy, Govt. of Bombay [hereafter GB], to GI, 28 March 1870, in IOR, GI, PWD Railway Proceedings 1870, P/435/18. No. 136A of April 1870.
5. PWD Resolution, 604-13R of 5 April 1870 in IOR, GI, PWD Railway, P/435/18, No. 137A of April 1870.
6. Bombay Railway Dept. Resolution No. 558, 14 April 1870, in IOR, Bombay Railway Dept. Proceedings of April 1870, P/442/7, pp. 17–18.
7. Letter from General Dept., GB, to Bombay Chamber of Commerce, No. 3404 of 12 October 1881 and the Chamber's reply dated 12 October 1881. The correspondence is reprinted in full in the *Bombay Chamber of Commerce Report for 1904*, pp. 168–170.
8. Notification No. 3724 of 8 November 1881 in ibid., p. 170. It also appears in IOR, Bombay General Proceedings 1881, P/1781, SN 795, p. 365 and in the *Bombay Government Gazette*, Part I, 10 November 1881, p. 688.
9. Cf. the proceedings of the Chamber's Annual General Meeting on 20 December 1881. While the Chairman favoured the change in time, the clock at the meeting showed Bombay, not Madras, time. *Bombay Chamber of Commerce Report for 1880/1881*, p. cvii.
10. A year later the noon time gun was being fired according to Madras Time while the nine o'clock gun was fired according to local time; cf. letter of 'W.H.' to editor, *Bombay Gazette*, 5 May, 1883, p. 4.
11. Bombay Chamber of Commerce letter, 16 May 1883 in IOR, Bombay General Proceedings 1883, P/2167, p. 105: *Bombay Gazette*, 26 May 1883, p. 4.

12. Letter of J.B. Peile to Fergusson, 21 May [1883] in IOR, Fergusson Collection, Eur Mss E214/13, f. 24.
13. GB Resolution, no. 1820 of 29 May 1883 in IOR, Bombay General Proceedings 1883, P/2167, p. 105.
14. Letter of J.B. Peile to Fergusson, 21 May [1883] in IOR, Fergusson Collection, Eur Mss E214/13, f. 24a.
15. Ibid.
16. Despatch of Curzon in Council, No. 12 of 1905, 27 April 1905, Dept. of Revenue and Agriculture (Revenue). Meterology, S.N. 19 and GI to GB, 27 May 1905, Dept. of Revenue and Agriculture (Revenue). Meterology, S.N. 22 in IOR P/7073 August 1904 Proceedings No. 6-34.
17. Acting Sec. to GB, General Dept. to GI, No. 7148, 29 December 1904, in IOR P/7073 June 1904 Proceedings No. 13.
18. Letter of Bombay Chamber of Commerce, 14 June 1905 to GB in IOR Bombay General Dept. Proceedings, P/7073 June 1905 B-43 Procs, p. 46.
19. See a summary of correspondence on the issue in Bombay in General Dept. Resolution No. 6360 of 15 November 1905 in IOR P/7187 March 1905 Proceedings SN 235. p. 849.
20. General Dept., GB letter No. 407 of 19 January 1906 to Ahmedbhoy Habibbhoy, in IOR Bombay General Dept. Proceedings 1906, P/7457 January 1906 Proceedings SN 10, p. 37 and published also in *Bombay Gazette*, 20 January 1906, p. 5.
21. *Bombay Gazette*, 22 February 1906, p. 3; letter of Sir Bhalchandra Krishna forwarding resolutions of the meeting to GB, 26 February 1906 in IOR Bombay General Dept. Proceedings 1906, P/7457, March 1906 B-21, p. 37.
22. Letter of Revenue Dept. GI, No. 959, 5 May 1906 to GB and GB Telegram to GI, 34-M, 19 May 1906 in IOR Bombay General Dept. Proceedings 1906. P/7457, May 1906 B-33, p. 39–40.
23. Letters of Grain Merchants' Association, 14 June and 23 October 1906 to GB and GB reply, No. 6541 of 7 November 1906 in IOR Bombay General Dept. Proceedings 1906. P/7457, July 1906 B-3, p. 55 and November 1906 B-18, p. 88.

REFERENCES

Abbreviations

BCC: *Bombay Chamber of Commerce Annual Report*
BG: *Bombay Gazette*

IOR: India Office Records in the British Library Oriental and India Office Collections
RNP: Reports on Native Papers for the Presidency of Bombay

'A Correspondent'. 1905. 'Standard or Zone Time, which is it to be?' in *Bombay Gazette*, 7 September.
Amurchand, Callianjee. 1905. 'Standard Time' in *Bombay Gazette*. 2 August.
'Anti-Despotic'. 1881. Letter to editor in *Bombay Gazette*. 9 December.
Bombay Chamber of Commerce. *Annual Reports*. 1880/1 and 1904.
Bombay Correspondent of the *Pioneer*. 1883. 'The Story of the Clocks', reprinted in *Bombay Gazette*. 21 May 1883, p. 3.
Bombay Gazette. 1881–1908.
Bombay Government Gazette. 1881. Part 1. 10 November.
Cama, Rustam K. 1908. Letter to editor in *Bombay Gazette*. 15 July.
Fergusson Collection in *IOR*, Eur Mss E214/13.
Gostling, D. 1882. 'Sun's Time', *Bombay Gazette*, 19 December.
Harrison, F.C. 1908. Speech at Bombay Municipal Corporation, in *Bombay Gazette*. 7 July.
Indian Office Records: Telegraph Letters from India, 1860–1866; PWD (Railway) Proceedings; Bombay General Dept. Proceedings; Dept. of Revenue and Agriculture (Revenue); Meteorology.
'Kismet'. 1881. Letter to editor in *Bombay Gazette*. 12 December.
'L.R.C.' 1881. 'The Dying Wail of 1881. Addressed to Sir James Fergusson' in *Bombay Gazette*. 31 December.
'Nemo'. 1883. 'Bombay vs. Madras' in *Bombay Gazette*. 30 April.
Reports on Native Papers for the Presidency of Bombay. 1881. Govt. of Bombay.
'The One O'Clock Gun'. 1882. Letter to editor in *Bombay Gazette*. 17 May.
Shridharani, Krishnalal. n.d. [c. 1953]. *Story of the Indian Telegraphs*. New Delhi: Posts and Telegraphs Dept.
The Times. 1881. 'A common time and first meridian'. Reprinted in *Bombay Gazette*. 23 November.
'W'. 1881a. Letter to editor in *Bombay Gazette*. 1 December 1881.
—. 1881b. Letter to editor in *Bombay Gazette*. 13 December 181.
'WH'. 1883. Letter to editor in *Bombay Gazette*. 5 May.