

Call for Papers:

Informal and Everyday Markets: Modern Histories of Indian Business and Entrepreneurship since the Nineteenth Century

Conveners: Ingo Köhler (Economic and Social History, University of Göttingen), Christina Lubinski (GHI Washington/Copenhagen Business School), Sebastian Schwecke (Center for Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen), Douglas Haynes (Dartmouth College)

Date / Place: University of Göttingen, Germany / June 18-20, 2014

Deadline for Abstracts: 15 February 2014

Business history has become an established field in the academic discourse of Europe, the United States, and Japan. In contrast, our knowledge of the history of markets and (especially informal) business in India is fragmentary at best. Despite the excellent pioneering work by B. R. Tomlinson, Dwijendra Tripathi and other “first movers”, there is a significant disconnect between the great interest in India’s contemporary economy and the ignorance towards its historical roots.

The workshop sets out to explore histories of Indian markets, business and entrepreneurship in the global as well as local context. It focuses on the informal and everyday markets – including labor and credit markets – during the nineteenth and twentieth century which are so crucial for Indian business history but are seldom made a focal point of analysis. By inviting scholars to pay special attention to the informality of economic transactions and on the inter-personal characteristics of markets instead of their abstract nature, we hope to shed some light on markets that too often are left as conceptual black boxes and taken for granted. Markets are often described by their institutional set-ups and formal regulations alone, leaving their underpinnings on informal cultural values, social embedment, informal exchanges, traditional everyday interactions, and in some cases even illegal activities unaddressed.

While business history and the history of markets in India are emerging fields, they can build on a body of scholarly work from regional studies and colonial and imperial history. One of the major themes so far was the structure and development of the “colonial economy.” The relationship between the colonial power Great Britain and its crown colony has been scrutinized focusing primarily on the institutionalized colonial exploitation and its political context (Cain/Hopkins 2001). Where the functioning of

markets has been discussed, the emphasis has by and large remained on the shifting legal structures which shaped these markets (Birla 2011), rather than going into the often informal patterns of interaction which actually created them. Studies also exist on foreign, mostly British-based, multinationals in India that take advantage of the accessibility, infrastructure and legal context of this market (Cox 2000; Godley 2006). Yet, there also remain huge gaps in knowledge most importantly with regards to the relationship between foreign and native economic agents, the market transactions and actors “on the ground”, and the embedment of goods and people in the cultural context of India. Here, informality and trust building may be seen as part of a special variety of capitalism, based on the theoretical framework by Hall and Soskice or on the ideas of inclusive and extracting institutions as suggested by Acemoglu and Robinson. These theoretical concepts have so far almost exclusively been applied to Western countries and Japan. By discussing their strengths and weaknesses for the Indian context we hope to advance both the study of Indian business and theory development. Similarly, markets, entrepreneurship and business in post-colonial India as well as their links to the colonial era have largely been neglected by historians, especially regarding everyday market interactions. We like to explore the social history of markets and lay our focus on both Indian and foreign economic actors which determine to a significant extent how capitalism in India functions ‘on the ground.’

We invite scholars to look at informal markets in past and present conceptualizing markets as bundles of practices and material arrangements that are constantly debated and renegotiated between agents with sets of multiple interests and ideas. We invite contributions dealing with the understanding of informal markets, the relationship of the state to informal economic transactions, the flows of information and knowledge, self-regulating forces as well as networks of actors – legally or illegally – utilizing informal markets.

We encourage case studies and comparative approaches and are open to contributions from different disciplines and by emerging as well as established scholars. Travel costs will be covered. Childcare facilities can be arranged for the duration of the workshop on prior notification (preferably included in the application). Applicants should send an abstract of 300 - 500 words and a short CV to Susanne Bunte (sbunte@uni-goettingen.de) by 15 February 2014. Invitations will be sent out by 28 February 2014. Papers need to be submitted by 15 May 2014. For questions please contact Christina Lubinski (lubinski@ghi-dc.org) or Sebastian Schwecke (sebastian.schwecke@cemis.uni-goettingen.de).