



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND
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SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE



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Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86795299661>

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The 'enigma' of registration: Domestic servants in colonial and postcolonial India

by

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In contemporary India, the lack of protective legal mechanism for domestic servants goes hand in hand with a well-entrenched system of 'police verification'. What is the genealogy of the presence of the police in regulating the master-servant relationship? Through a study of two waves of registration – first between the 1760s and the 1800s (Phase I), and second between the 1860s and 1900s (Phase II), this paper underscores the linkages as well as distinctions between these colonial attempts on the one hand and one that follows in the present-day on the other. While not arguing for any unchanging 'continuity', it attempts to unpack the ideological caging in which the idea of registration kept emerging in different time periods. It tentatively suggests that the persistent presence of policing, either as a reality or a perceived threat used by the masters in the lives of the servants, is a making of the colonial legal legacy.