

Panel 4: Public Death and the State in South Asia

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Abstract: This panel raises questions about the role of public death and the state in South Asia. How have public deaths, from assassinations and executions to satis, hunger strikes and sensational murders, been mourned, remembered, discussed and theorised? This comparative and interdisciplinary panel calls for papers from anthropologists, historians, political scientists and sociologists that provide insight into the public staging and memorialisation of death. Since their independence, South Asian states have been deeply involved with public deaths. States have organised elaborate funeral arrangements and built impressive museums for assassinated leaders, and often they encouraged the public and ritual expression of grief and melancholia for the war dead. States have also stood in conflict with those who have used the threat of death as a tool for political resistance. Among the questions to be asked are: how does the state use death to project its power? Is public death experienced, imagined and remembered differently across the subcontinent? How is public death used as a weapon against the state? The panel welcomes papers that examine how the state has been involved in shaping the reaction to and memory of public death, and proposes to offer papers based on case studies from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

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