

# SEMINAR

## Comparison and Contrast in European Colonial Cities on the Coromandel Coast

### Speaker

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**23 January 2023**

**Monday**

**3:30 p.m.**

### Adiseshiah Auditorium

Madras Institute of Development Studies,  
#79, 2nd Main Road, Gandhi Nagar  
Adyar, Chennai 600020

### Abstract

While historical texts have long been subject to critical analysis, the formal and historical problems posed by graphic representations of time have largely been absent from scholarly attention. Urban spatial form has the perceptual basis of a notion of time, that we literally cannot 'tell time' without the mediation of urban space. We will argue that temporal language in the mapping of colonial cities is "contaminated" by spatial figures. We will address 'long' and 'short' times, of 'spaces between' (literally, 'intervals'), of 'before' and 'after'—all implicit metaphors which depend upon a mental picture of time as a linear continuum. This lecture opens a generic plea for the deconstruction of historical notions of time in colonial urbanism in India through the analysis of maps of the former Danish colonial cities of Tranquebar (today's Tharangambadi, Tamilnadu, India) and Serampore (West Bengal, India). In many ways, we will reflect on lines—straight and curved, branching and crossing, simple and embellished, technical and artistic—which are the components of historical maps. Our claim is that the line is a much more complex and colourful figure depicting time than is usually thought. We will engage with the historical entanglements of time in colonial policies and indigenous practices in colonial cities. Further, we will analyse, contrast and compare intellectual, cultural, social, and political histories in colonial cities rooted in race, ethnicity, caste, and gendered ideologies. Finally, we will understand how these histories reshaped ideas about land, political imagination, governance, ownership and dispossession, social relations, and ultimately, the public and the private in Tranquebar and Serampore.