From fears of an imminent environmental crisis to pervasive concerns about security, we seem to be living in an age in which anxiety has permeated public discourse on an unprecedented scale. While the intensity and scope of many contemporary fears might be new, recent scholarship has shown that anxiety—broadly understood as fear without a definite object—has been a longstanding feature of political life. No longer regarded as a purely private experience, anxiety has come to be recognized as an affective state that has shaped not only state policies but political subjectivities themselves. Through their focus on anxiety, recent studies in disciplines across the humanities and social sciences have revealed the inadequacy of accounts that have viewed politics and the state purely through the prism of reason and rationality. In the context of South Asia, such studies have shown the extent to which the rule of the colonial and post-colonial states has been marked by apprehensions emanating from epistemic and ontological uncertainties that have contributed to frequent slippages between the ordinary and extraordinary powers of the state. At a time when a politics of anxiety appears to have led to a surge in populism across the world, this conference invites applicants to probe anxiety as a public phenomenon in South Asia in both historical and contemporary contexts.

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