

## Passage of Time

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Belonging to the 1983 batch that graduated from IITM I represent the silver jubilee alumni.

Of the several discussions we as students has in the hostel corridors, the one that could be frozen in time literally, are the ones regarding the passage of time. Here are some snippets, viewpoints, counterpoints and punch-lines.

The inference that one draws from the adage "Time and tide wait for no man" is that Time is an 'object' that flows unchecked by human intervention. The conclusion that gleans from the aphorism "Procrastination is the thief of time" is that moments of glory are frittered away by the act of postponement. Hence the tendency to divide time into chunks, spelling out separate characteristics of human conduct for different durations can be termed as 'Time Management'. The ability to systematically trace the behavior of an individual, chart out the responses of his vital organs, record his movements while he ekes out a living and listen to the cogs of his mental process and prowess is an extrapolation of 'therblig'- the set of fundamental motionsrequired of a worker to perform a particular task. The word 'therblig' is a reversal of the wordGilbreth, with 'th' treated as one letter.

It was the creation of Frank Bunker Gilbreth and Lillian Moller Gilbreth, the American industrial psychologists who invented the field of time and motion study. Hence the idea that time and motion are two sides of the same coin that are inseparable, conjoined and dovetailed is not an abstract one. Even in the Bible, slothfulness or laziness is deemed to be one of the seven vices and a cardinal sin, to stress the importance of action and reaction.

This brings us to the question of Einsteinian quantum mechanics oftime travel- both forward and reverse (see picture). The notion that we have to travel outward in space in order to see backward in time was one that was waxed eloquent by Carl Sagan in his 'Cosmos' series. We see events in the speed of light that is 300,000 km per sec. Some galaxies like our own Milky Way are so far away that it takes – aeons, years, eras for the light to reach the denizens of planet earth. The astronomical distances are measured not in kilometers but in light-years – unit ofwhich is the distance travelled by light in one year. The bridge between space and time can be

achieved this way. So, if an occurrence of an exploding supernova is spotted by the Hubble telescope, it can be safely be assumed that the occurrence happened prior to a certain passage of time. This is the extent of time-travel and the observation of events in the 18th century by strapping oneself in a time machine exists only in the realm of Hollywood and fiction that is a figment of one's fertile imagination. The agenda of one's future, of course, is well within one's control given the reams and megabytes of historical data amassed over centuries and man's aptitude to learn from his mistakes. Nevertheless, the judgment call to be made about when to take action, take the plunge, rock the boat, make a wave, cut the cord and snap one's ties is best reserved for one's instincts. Here prescience , clairvoyance and telepathy take precedence over talent, memory and intelligence.

The time to take action can be differentiated as that which is proactive, or before a catastrophe and retroactive, or after an event. The supernatural skill of knowing when the effect will happen for a given cause - certain sense of foreboding will determine when the action should be proactive or retroactive. This begs the question of the signs of the zodiac, the horoscopes, the planetary motion and the daily, monthly and annual forecasts. The escape route used by pundits is that these are not science to be predicted by equations but an art that is evoked by human spirit, convulsion and predilection. One's character is shaped by events, human interaction and any skill that one may have and what the astrologer predicts if proved correct can only be self-fulfilling prophecy since it drives one to believe that an event can happen over a passage of time.

Today in this digital age, expressions such as sands of time, clock is ticking and the pendulum has swung have been rendered anachronistic. Sometimes, history is made not by decisions taken after hour-long deliberations but by impromptu ones made in a split-second.

An old lady addresses a young man as,  
*“Dear Grandfather”*



The youth has been traveling close to  $c$  for many years.  
*Time Dilation!*