The arrival of print in the early 19th century triggered the standardization of Marathi, bringing about major changes in its grammar, the scripts used to write it, and practices of reading & writing. This talk examines the wider world of handwriting transformed by the arrival of print — the handwritten 'underbelly' of the history of print that unfolded in offices, courts, & sites of police surveillance. Tracing ideas about literacy, legibility and efficiency in these unexpected sites of linguistic development uncovers a unique story of South Asian modernization.