

## SEMINAR SCHEDULE FOR THE SEMESTER, January –April 2018

**Please note that all talks are on Wednesdays at 3: 30 in Committee Room I, Ground Floor, Social Sciences Building unless otherwise specified.**

### January

10 Professor Robert P Goldman, University of California Berkeley

#### **Murderous Rage, Collective Punishment and Ultraviolence in Vyasa's Mahabharata**

**Abstract:** The dark thematic of the Mahābhārata set in a world helplessly caught up in the momentum of its own self-destruction and in a civilization tottering toward the brink of the age of chaos is one of the most striking and disturbing aspects of the monumental poem. For the epic's central tale is that of God, acting as the inexorable force of Time (kāla) carefully stage managing a brutal internecine war of destruction whose purpose is the slaughter of virtually all the warriors of the last heroic age. It is, in fact, a veritable Indian Götterdämmerung. But the great, eighteen-day slaughter on the killing fields of Kurukṣetra is merely the centerpiece of a vast web of tales of violence, vengeance and genocidal retribution that frames the core of the poem. From the very framing of the work's recitation to its bitter end, its grim mood and narrative is deeply embedded in a network of savage reprisals, collective punishment and attempted genocide, perhaps best symbolized by the phrase in the repeated tales of the murderous rampages of the brahman warrior, Rāma Jāmadagnya, ā garbhāt, slaughter of a group, class, or species "down to the embryos in the womb." This persistent concern with the destruction of the fetuses of a hated group resurfaces in a number of other episodes both in the framing narratives of the epic poem and the central story itself.

12 Dr. Ryosuke Furui, Associate Professor at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia at the University of Tokyo

#### **Changing Structure of Political Powers in South Asia: Bengal from the Fifth to Thirteenth Century**

17 Uma Chakravarti,

#### **Screening of documentary "Ek Inquilaab Aur Aaya", followed by a discussion**

### February

7: Dr Anish Vanaik, Jindal Global University.

#### **Lineages of the Housing Question in Colonial Delhi, 1911-47**

**Abstract:** The shift of the Imperial capital to Delhi in 1911 led to a rapid rise in the value of house property and rent. In turn, these escalations led to calls for the provision of housing through mechanisms that curbed the excesses of the market. Unlike in industrial cities, however, neither from below (as a consolidated political constituency that struggled for rights) nor from above (as an administrative problem) was the working class placed at the heart of Delhi's housing question. This paper tracks the more variegated 'lineages' of the housing question in caste struggles, Gandhian ideals, rent control, state employment and sanitation discourse.

23: *Kitabhkhana* book discussion: Shalin Jain, *Identity, Community and State: The Jains under the Mughals*, Primus 2017.

Interlocutors: 1) Manisha Sethi, Centre for Comparative Religions and Civilizations, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi; 2) Chandraneev Das, MA Final, Medieval History, Delhi University.

28 Professor P.K. Dutta, JNU.

#### **The Distinctiveness of Tagore's idea of the Global**

**Abstract:** In this paper I will place Tagore's ideas in the context of modern Hindu thought in turn-of-century Bengal. I will take off from two key elements: the changing location of distinctiveness in a constantly reworked Hinduism and secondly, in multiple attempts to produce a counter-universal to that of colonial universalism. Defining universalist Hindu thought in Tagore by the contrasting instance of Swami Vivekananda, I will explore

developments in Tagore's concepts regarding the following: the critique of the Nation, the immanent turn in religious thought and the experiments with global habitation. Briefly my argument runs thus: that the development of the universal in Tagore through which he seeks to found a new vision of the global, is one that is derived from his own conception of Hindu "theology" that, over time, is steadily attenuated of its thick embeddedness in Hindu traditions. The consequence is a new idea of the universal and a corresponding attempt to embed its practice in Viswabharati.

## **March**

### **14 Research Students Conference AND Dr.Azees Tharuvana's talk and documentary screening: 'Adivasi Ramayanas'**

21 Dr Devesh Vijay, CSDS – 3:30 pm

#### **From Colonial Rule to Panchayati Raj: Changing Materialities in a North Indian Village circa, 1914-2014.**

**Abstract:** The preceding century witnessed multiple mutations that altered old hierarchies in rural India even as poverty and discrimination remain widespread. While the anti-colonial mass upsurge, limited land reforms and moves towards panchayati-raj along with evolving technologies, dalit assertions and 'deepening democracy' dented the traditional order and fanned aspirations in an increasingly literate population, persisting hierarchies and poverties, shrinking fields and a failed welfare machine belied the hopes of a notable transformation in the countryside. Veiled women chatting through cell phones or accessing entertainment and news while cooking on mud *chulhas*, is an apt symbol of this half-way transition that needs to be understood from close quarters today. As a contribution, this paper describes the alterations in various sectors of the economy as well as class relations in a village called Dhantala (in Meerut district, western Uttar Pradesh) since the eruption of mass-nationalism after the First World War. The paper is based on a multi-method, long term engagement with the said village including detailed surveys conducted in 1988, 2005 and 2014. It draws upon local records as well as oral history tools and life sketches besides focus group discussions specially with village elders to chart elements of continuity and change in referred structures over a century. The paper closes with some methodological reflections and pointers for further research in the field.

28 Maya Jasanoff, Coolidge Professor of History at Harvard University

#### **When History Meets Literature: Tracing the Life and Times of Joseph Conrad**

**Abstract:** In this talk Professor Jasanoff will speak about her new book tracing the life and times of Joseph Conrad. Born Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski in 1857, to Polish parents in the Russian Empire, Conrad traveled the world for twenty years as a sailor settling permanently in London as an author—writing in English, his third language. As an immigrant from Poland to England, and in travels from Malaysia to the Congo to the Caribbean, Conrad navigated an interconnected world, and captured it in a literary oeuvre of extraordinary depth. Jasanoff will reflect on the methodological issues at stake in using a novelist as a guide into a history of globalization.

## **April**

3 Ravi Ahuja, head of the research group 'Modern Indian History' at the Centre for Modern Indian Studies (CeMIS) of Georg-August-University Göttingen.

#### **The 'Natives' of the S. S. 'Egypt': Writing about steamship labour and racial management in the British Empire**

**Abstract:** This talk introduces some of the issues I seek to address in an ongoing, as yet unfinished book project. Returning to early twentieth-century South Asian ship workers, known as 'lascars' in colonial English, I am writing the micro-history of an incident, the sinking of the P & O mail steamer S.S. 'Egypt' in May 1922. Of the passengers and of the predominantly Indian crew 87 men and women died in this shipping disaster, which was widely debated across the British Empire and beyond leading to an in depth judicial inquiry. By dissecting the voluminous documentation this minor event has left in several archives, I take issue with tendencies that have emerged, in my view, in the recent and otherwise

extremely rich genre of 'lascar histories'. While diverging greatly in their interpretations several of these studies concur, I contend, on an approach that celebrates 'subaltern agency' while relativizing the 'agency' of capital. More particularly, I explore how entrepreneurial strategies of 'racial management'—a concept I borrow from David Roediger—entered work relations and the organisation of work processes on board ship, conditioned communication processes and reproduced fault lines for racial conflict.

4 *Kitabhana* book discussion: Anirudh Deshpande, *Hope and Despair: Mutiny, Rebellion and Death in India*, 1946

Interlocutors: 1) Amar Farooqui, Department of History, Delhi University. 2) Kriti Tripathi, MA Final, Modern Indian History, Delhi University

11 Anand Taneja