

**CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, CALCUTTA,
R-1 BAISHNABGHATA PATULI,
KOLKATA 700094**

GENERAL SEMINAR

Shekhar Krishnan
Post-Doctoral Fellow, Asia Research Institute, NUS

will give a talk titled:

**"Plotting and Scheming: Land Acquisition &
Market Values in Colonial Bombay City"**

In the late 1890s, an epidemic of bubonic plague swept through the ports of the British Empire in Asia, dramatising the vulnerability of imperial power in its urban centres of command and control. Colonial cities like Singapore and Bombay served as gateways to regional and global flows of people, money and machines, centralised and accelerated by networks of steam, rail and electricity. Freedom to trade and the rule of law underpinned both business and politics. Within these urban centres, power was shared and contested between colonial rulers, Indian elites and urban populations. In 1898, the British colonial state established the Bombay Improvement Trust (BIT) to “clean up” the city, equipped with draconian powers of compulsory acquisition and land clearance to demolish slums, erect new buildings and build broad boulevards. Within a decade, the BIT emerged as the single largest land-owner in colonial Bombay by seizing and plotting vast tracts into new planning “schemes” – though not without costly legal and technical challenges to its eminent domain from landlords and tenants, temples and mosques, and owners of shops, theatres and quarries. Arbitrated through Victorian ideas of “market value” and techniques of measurement and valuation in colonial courts, urban environments once valued through overlapping chains of title and use were now awarded hypothetical cash values, driving speculation and generalising a new logic and political economy in colonial Bombay. The talk will examine this transformation in the urban land market through tribunals and court cases fought against the BIT by Indian claimants, appeals against acquisition and for higher compensation which often dragged on for years. These lengthy arguments and novel interpretations of Anglo-Indian land and property law continue to shape urbanisation in the cities of post-colonial South Asia.

Date: Friday, 3rd March, 2017, 3 – 5 pm
Venue: CSSSC’s Seminar Room, Patuli Campus

Trina Nileena Banerjee
(Convener, Seminar Committee)

All are welcome to attend.