

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

GENERAL SEMINAR

Anand Vivek Taneja
Assistant Professor of Religion, Vanderbilt University.

will give a talk titled:

“Muslim Saints and Hindu Daughters: Unusual Intimacies and Ethical Life in the Medieval Ruins of Delhi”

Abstract:

Firoz Shah Kotla is a ruined medieval palace which has become a prominent dargah, or Muslim saint shrine in contemporary Delhi. Firoz Shah Kotla is frequented by both Hindus and Muslims, and the saints venerated at this dargah are not human, by most accounts, but spirits known as jinn. In this talk, I focus on the unusual intimacies that are formed at Firoz Shah Kotla—between jinn-saints and devotees, between Hindus and Muslims, between unrelated men and women, and between humans and animals—and the ways in which these non-normative intimacies play a vital role in the ethical lives of those who come here. These intimacies allow for the redefinitions of families and selves, especially for women, at a time when the laws and practices of post-colonial India are committed to reinforcing patriarchal family norms. They lead to the forming of abiding friendships across sectarian and caste divides in a city with a long—and continuing—history of religious violence and caste discrimination. They create the potential for renewed encounters between humans and animals in a city that is increasingly “human, all too human”: and hence, hold open the potential for ecological thought in a place and time of great ecological devastation. All of which perhaps leads to the question: given usual assumptions about religion (and Islam in particular) how can a place that is identified as a Muslim saint shrine be so, well, cool? I have a two part answer to that question, which I hope to elaborate in this talk. One, in the north Indian context, we need to rethink Islam as an ethical inheritance, open to Muslims and non-Muslims, and not just a religious identity. And two, we need to rethink religion itself as not just prescriptive of normative morality—but as the ground for critical thought, reflection, and innovation—especially in the context of post-colonial urban life.

Date: Monday, 12th February, 2018

Time: 3 – 5 pm.

Venue: CSSSC’s Seminar Room, Patuli Campus

Trina Nileena Banerjee
(Convener, Seminar Committee)
All are welcome to attend.