

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

**GENERAL SEMINAR**

Anandaroop Sen  
Researcher, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University,

will give a talk titled:

**The Travels and Performances of Law: Trials at the North-Eastern Frontier of  
British India c. 1872-1896**

The function of exceptional laws in democracies has generated a complex field of scholarship. Martial law in colonial cultures, particularly at the cusp of conquest violence, helps one trace a genealogy of this problematic. My paper looks at certain performances and travels of such laws at the north-eastern colonial frontier of British India and Burma in the late nineteenth century. Specifically it tells the story of ‘ad hoc’ trials held in this hill frontier at a time when punitive colonial expeditions were rife.

How did law travel with the expeditions? In lands which were yet to congeal in a language of British law, hanging between the violence of conquest and the ‘promise’ of settlement within the British Empire these trials stand as a metonym of governance at a time of conflict. Different elements of customary practices, extractive plantation labour, punitive cultures, gender, substantive and procedural practices of law were held together and found meaning in these theatres of adjudication. By focusing on one such fascinating trial the paper draws out the links between violence, law, labour, performance, and ideas of exception. Moreover by highlighting the governing practices at the frontier that were later congealed in a normative body of law it seeks to question the autonomous insularity of law that positivist legal studies take as axiomatic. Instead of considering law as a static, transferrable set of codes constituted at the metropole and transplanted to different colonial geographies the paper introduces an alternative account of travels and performances of law.

Date: Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2015    Time: 3 – 5 pm.

Venue: CSSSC’s Seminar Room, Patuli Campus.

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