



# BENGAL HISTORY WEEK

18-26 October 2014



Brick Lane Circle's Annual Bengal History week programme is designed to help generate and expand interest in learning Bengal's history and introduce historians and scholars to new audiences in non-academic settings.

## THE EAST INDIA COMPANY: COMMODITIES, CONQUEST AND CORRUPTION

*By Nick Robins*

**Saturday 18 October 2014, 2.30-4.30pm**  
**Hamlets Local History Library & Archives**  
**277 Bancroft Road, London E1 4DQ**

"The East India Company was founded in 1600 to trade with Asia - and grew to use its commercial muscle and private army to conquer Bengal, winning control at the battles of Plassey (June 1757) and Buxar (October 1764). In the process, the Company reversed the historic flow of wealth from Europe to Asia - using Bengal as the bridgehead for the conquest of India and the forced opening of China, using opium grown in Bihar as its lever. Nick Robins, author of the *The Corporation that Changed the World*, will present an illustrated lecture on the Company's rise and fall, its social and economic impacts and the lessons for international relations today."

## HISTORY, THEORY AND PRACTICE: CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN SCHOLARSHIP ON BENGAL, AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIA MORE BROADLY

*By John Stevens*

**Monday 20 October 2014, 6.30-8.30pm, Lab 1a, Idea Store**  
**Whitechapel, 321 Whitechapel Rd, E1 1BU**

The main focus of his research is historical, utilising source materials in Bengali and English in order to promote an understanding of the histories of India and Britain which places them in regional, imperial and global contexts. His PhD focused on the ideas and activities of the Bengali Brahma religious and social reformer Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884), and his interaction with a range of British intellectual, political and cultural figures.

John Stevens is a Leverhulme Postdoctoral Fellow. He gained his PhD in History from UCL in 2011. He is currently working on two books: the first is a study of political theology in India and Britain in the nineteenth century; the second is a biography of Keshab Chandra Sen. His research interests include: the interconnected histories of modern West Bengal, Bangladesh and Britain; comparative religion and political theology in India and Britain; postcolonial theory; the historical construction of gender, race, class and nation; social, cultural and transnational history. He is a regular visitor to India and Bangladesh for research purposes.

## THE JOURNEY OF ETHNICITY AND RELIGIOSITY AMONGST THE EAST END BANGLADESHIS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN TWO GENERATIONS

*By Fatima Rajina*

**Tuesday 21 October 2014, 6.30-8.30pm, Conference Room,**  
**Idea Store Whitechapel, 321 Whitechapel Rd, E1 1BU**

This study undertakes a critical analysis of the concept and the process of identity construction within the British Bangladeshi Muslim community in East London. Here in Britain, it was the events of 7 July 2005 (7/7) that gave rise to the attention given to the British Muslims because the attacks were perpetrated by home grown British Muslims as opposed to al-Qaeda operatives from abroad. Fatima aims to explore how two very different generations of British Bangladeshis deal with their identity - whether it is religious and/or ethnic identity - and to what extent they impact the integration, especially of the young Muslims, into the wider British society. She is hoping to look at factors that help structure an ethno-religious identity - e.g. language, dress, cuisine, and more - and how the British Bangladeshi community has developed this identity over time, considering the fact that the Bangladeshi community has been settled in East London since the late 1950s. This study also takes other issues into consideration to help identify boundaries created by the community in terms of sameness and otherness within the British society.

Fatima is currently a Nohoudh PhD Candidate at SOAS and is a German and Spanish teacher. She has an innate appreciation for the diversity of human nature, as evidenced in her choice of degree and in her desire to constantly engage with the complex and challenging facets of our global society. She speaks Bengali, German, Spanish and conversational Urdu. She is currently studying Arabic as part of her PhD. Fatima is an active member in her local community and a radio show host at Betar Bangla 1503AM in London. Fatima was awarded the Princess Diana Memorial Award for her work in promoting diversity and social cohesion in a multi-cultural society.

## UNTOLD STORIES: THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF LASCARS

*By Heloise Finch-Boyer (Curator) and Tracey Weller*

*(Archive Learning Officer), National Maritime Museum*

**Wednesday 22 October 2014, 6.30-8.30pm, Conference**  
**Room, Idea Store Whitechapel, 321 Whitechapel Rd, E1 1BU**

The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich holds a diverse collection of artefacts relating to the British maritime world. Of great importance to this world is the role of the lascars sailors of the Indian subcontinent who served on British ships and contributed to Britain's economic success. Despite the important role played by these sailors it is not always easy to find their stories amongst the museum's collections.

Heloise Finch-Boyer and Tracey Weller will describe how they unearthed previously unknown archival items and historic photographs relating to lascars. The objects will feature in a new community history and digital project opening at the end of 2015 that requires the help of the Bangladeshi community to help interpret the artefacts and contribute to an exhibition.

**Come and find out more about the project and how you can become involved.**

## **NEVER ALONE, THE MUGHALS, THE MARATHAS & THE EAST INDIA COMPANY IN 1764**

**By Dr Jon Wilson**

Thursday 23 October 2014, 6.30-8.30pm, Lab 1a, Idea Store Whitechapel, 321 Whitechapel Rd, E1 1BU

The stories which imperial soldiers told in the 18th century suggested that India was conquered as a result of British heroism and valour. In fact, British action was shaped by Indian politics. The Mughals were symbolically still important; the Marathas were a powerful force which the Company was constantly afraid of. This talk will explain how Battle of Buxar led Indians to recognise the India Company as a major power throughout India for the first time. But it will also show that it didn't lead to the effective British domination of Indian land.

Dr Jon Wilson is Senior Lecturer in History at King's College London. His book on the beginnings of colonial rule in Bengal, *The Domination of Strangers*, was published in 2008. He is currently writing a general history of British rule in India, *India Conquered. Britain's Raj and the Chaos of Empire* to be published by Simon and Schuster in 2016.

## **POPULAR EAST INDIA COMPANY DOCKSIDE WALK**

**By Dr Georgie Wemyss**

Saturday 25 October 2014, 11am-1pm. Places are free but advance booking only. Meeting place will be provided to those who are booked on the walk

Dr Georgie Wemyss is the author of *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), and Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Research on Migration, Refugees and Belonging at UEL.

## **CINEMA IN BENGAL AND THE SUBJECT OF "FOLK" PERFORMANCES: 1940 -1980**

**By Priyanka Basu**

Saturday 25 October 2014, 2.30-4.30pm. Venue 2, Rich Mix Centre, 35-47 Bethnal Green Rd, E1 6LA

The subject of "folk" performances in Bengali cinema has remained somewhat unexplored in terms of analytical engagement as well as theoretical understandings. But cinema itself seen in the earlier bio-scope) is indebted to the "folk" performance genres from which it has borrowed profusely with respect to music, dance, sound and even structure. This talk will focus on some of the films produced in between 1940 and 1980 to underscore a historical understanding of Bengali cinema's handling of the subject of "folk" genres and the shifts, transformations and stereotyping that are foregrounded in the process. On a broader reference frame, she situates these films within the political changes and crises in Bengal (like Partition) and the affect it had upon the industry and the viewership.

Priyanka Basu is a performer (in Odissi dance) and her research interests include Bengali theatre, music, and films, Marxist cultural movements, living ethnographies, and gender histories. She is in the process of finishing her PhD at SOAS, London on the Felix Scholarship and has an MA and MPhil in English Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her current research addresses the song-theatre genre of *Kobigaan* within different sites, contexts and politics in West Bengal & Bangladesh.

## **HISTORICAL FILM SHOW**

**Details to be confirmed**

Saturday 25 October 2014, 5.00-6.30pm. Venue 2, Rich Mix Centre, 35-47 Bethnal Green Rd, E1 6LA.

Due to unforeseen circumstances it will not be possible to stage the reading play of *Silent Cries* as previously advertised. Instead there will be a film show based on history.

## **STAND-UP COMEDY**

**By Mixt Nutz**

Saturday 25 October 2014, 7.00pm. Venue 2, Rich Mix Centre, 35-47 Bethnal Green Rd, E1 6LA

**Comedy hour hosted by:**

**MC Sejeela Kershi**

**and featuring:**

**Inder Manocha**

**Prince Abdi**

**Jasmine Choudhury and others**

## **THE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S SEIZURE OF BENGAL AND HOW THIS LED TO THE GREAT BENGAL FAMINE OF 1770**

**By Roy Moxham**

Sunday 26 October 2014, 2.30-4.30pm, Lab 1a, Idea Store Whitechapel, 321 Whitechapel Rd, E1 1BU

He recently retired from the University of London. His most well-known book is *The Great Hedge of India*, part-travelogue, part-historical treatise on the author's quest to find a 1500-mile long customs hedge built by the British in India to prevent smuggling of salt and opium. His second book, *Tea: Addiction, Exploitation and Empire* focuses on the effect of British tea addiction on British policies in Asia and Africa, and includes the author's own experience as a tea plantation manager in Africa. His third book is called *Outlaw*, the extraordinary and true story of Phoolan Devi, India's famous 'Bandit Queen', and of a friendship that transcended borders, religion and language.

## **CONTEMPORARY GROWTH CHALLENGES IN BANGLADESH: THE CHALLENGE OF BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY**

**By Professor Mushtaq Khan**

Thursday 20 November 2014, 6.30-8.30pm, Conference Room, Idea Store Whitechapel, 321 Whitechapel Rd, E1 1BU

He is Professor of economics at SOAS, who completed his PhD in Economics at Cambridge. Previously he taught at the universities of both Oxford and Cambridge. Information on his research interests are available on <http://www.soas.ac.uk/staff/staff31246.php>

**ALL WELCOME!**

**Free entrance. Free street parking. If you have any questions, please contact us on email [bricklanecircle@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bricklanecircle@yahoo.co.uk)**