

BENGAL HISTORY WEEK

17-26 OCTOBER 2015

Brick Lane Circle's is organising its Sixth Annual Bengal History Week during 17-26 October 2015, which aims to help generate greater levels of interest on the learning of the history of Bengal.

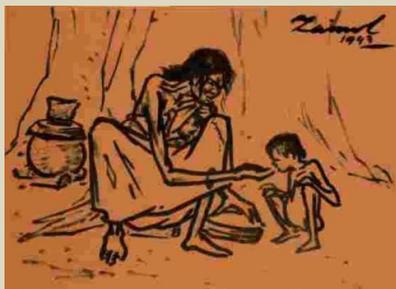


**FREE ENTRY!
ALL WELCOME!**

**Saturday, 17 October 2015,
2.30-8pm.** Brady Arts Centre 196
Hanbury St, London E1 5HU

**A HALF DAY CONFERENCE
ON MAJOR EVENTS, ISSUES
AND STRUGGLES**

**2.45 pm - Changing Meanings
of Rice - Famine, Food
Campaign and Cultural
Response to Politics of
Poverty: Bengal 1945-59**



*An image of the Bengal Famine by
Zainul Abedin*

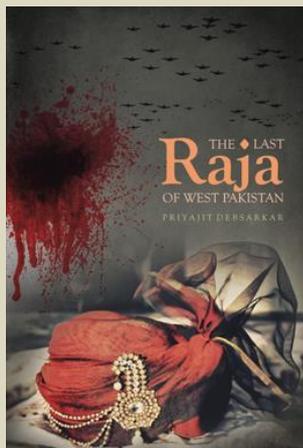
By Shanjukta Ghosh.

This paper is concerned with the material life of rural and urban Bengal focusing on the production and consumption of rice, crisis in the systems of exchange and distribution, knowledge and meaning that link these together during the most distressing period of Bengal famine and the Second World War experiences. The famine of 1943 was the last major historical event of horrific deaths resulting from starvation and hunger-related diseases that

affected an estimated 1.5 to 3 million people in every part of undivided Bengal, with far-reaching effects on the neighbouring areas.

Shanjukta is an early career researcher in agrarian history with an interest in colonial and contemporary history of South Asia. She completed her doctoral thesis on 'agricultural knowledge transfers' from SOAS, with a fellowship from the Association of Commonwealth Universities.

**4.15pm - The Last Raja of
West Pakistan**



By Priyajit Debsarkar

The Last Raja of West Pakistan is primarily about the role, policies, politics and decisions of Raja Tridiv Roy, the monarch of the Chakma tribe of Chittagong area, now located in Bangladesh. Covering the period beginning with his coronation as king in 1953 up to the independence of Bangladesh in 1971-72 this book evaluates his decision to stay loyal to Pakistan till the end and contextualizes the political relationship between East and West Pakistan at that time.

Priyajit Debsarkar is a political analyst with special interest in the geo-political history of Bangladesh. He studied at the University of London and currently works and lives in London.

**5.45pm - Contested Histories
and Nationalisms: The Crisis
of Contemporary Bangladesh**

By Professor Mushtaq Khan

The political economy of developing countries is characterized by the clientelist organization of politics. This perspective gives us a theoretical model of a clientelist political settlement as a framework for analysing the interaction between politics and economics in developing countries.

This paper looks at the emergence of Bangladesh out of two violent partitions in 1947 and 1971 through this lens to address a number of puzzles. Why emerge when they did when there was no prior history of Bengali Muslim nationalism in this area before the 1930s? Why did the achievement of the most religiously and ethnically homogenous state in South Asia not result in stability in 1971? And what is the source of the persistent failure of modern Bangladeshi political parties to achieve credible elections?

Professor Mushtaq Khan teaches economics at SOAS, who completed his undergraduate studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the University of Oxford and then studied 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>.

Sunday 18 October 2015,
2.30-4.30pm. Lab 5,
Idea Store Whitechapel, 321
Whitechapel Rd, London E1 1BU

Michael Madhusudan Dutt: The people's playwright



By Sharmeen Haque

Michael Madhusudan Dutta was a popular 19th-century Bengali poet and dramatist. He was born in Sagordari on the bank of Kopotaksho River, a village in Keshabpur Upazila, Jessore (now in Bangladesh).

The paper will explore Michael's two farces (*Buro saliker ghare ron* and *Eki ki bole Sabhatya*) and how these farces, unlike his better known works, for example, *Meghnad Bodh*, are very much works about everyday people - farmers, prostitutes, porters, servants.

Sharmeen will also relate this to how Dutt was in many ways a very contemporary figure with his mixed religious backgrounds and two foreign wives.

Sharmeen Haque is currently working on a Masters Dissertation on one of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's farces (*Buro saliker ghare ron*), at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

Monday 19 October 2015,
6.30-8.30pm. Lab 2&3,
Idea Store Whitechapel, 321
Whitechapel Rd, London E1 1BU.

The Rise and Fall of the Portuguese in Mughal Bengal



The Holy Rosary Church, Dhaka, built by the Portuguese in 1677.

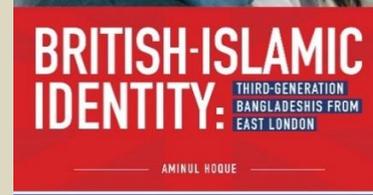
By Robert Ivermee

Almost 500 years have passed since the first Portuguese voyage to the Bay to Bengal. In this seminar, historian Robert Ivermee uncovers the lost history of the Portuguese presence in Bengal during the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan on the Mughal throne, tracing the foundation, flourishing and decline of the Portuguese settlement of Hugli on the river of the same name. He explores the experiences of Portuguese merchants and missionaries – among the earliest Europeans to encounter Bengal – and considers how the Portuguese set a precedent for later Dutch, English and French colonialism in the province.

Dr Robert Ivermee is a global intellectual historian with a particular interest in British imperialism and modern South Asia from the eighteenth century to the present day. Major focuses of his research include secularism, ideologies of empire; and the interconnected histories of Britain and its former colonies. His first book traced a history of the concept of secularism in nineteenth century India through debates on Muslim education. He is currently working on a history of Portuguese, Mughal, Dutch, French and English colonialisms in Bengal. He works at SOAS, University of London.

Tuesday 20 October 2015,
6.30-8.30pm. Lab 1A,
Idea Store Whitechapel, 321
Whitechapel Rd, London E1 1BU.

British-Islamic Identity: Third- Generation Bangladeshis from East London



By Dr Aminul Hoque

How does it feel to be constructed as the violent, terrorist, un-British 'other'? To be a minority in a majority situation, to have no sense of belonging, to be voiceless, marginalised and invisible?

This seminar examines these complex issues through an ethnographic account of the lives and multifaceted identities of six British-born third-generation Bangladeshis from East London. Do they see themselves as Bangladeshi, British, Muslim, Londoners, none of these or a fusion of them all? Their stories are powerful, clear and unsettling, charting their journeys from invisibility to visibility and from the periphery to the core of British social life.

Dr Aminul Hoque MBE is a lecturer in the Educational Studies Department, Goldsmiths, University of London, and a visiting lecturer at London Metropolitan University. He gained his doctorate from Goldsmiths in 2011, and his in-depth ethnographic research for it forms the basis of his book *British-Islamic Identity: Third-Generation Bangladeshis from East London*, published by IOE Press, Trentham Books (2015). You can follow Aminul on Twitter @BrIslam2015.

Wednesday 21 October 2015,
6.30-8.30pm. Lab 1A,
Idea Store Whitechapel, 321
Whitechapel Rd, London E1 1BU

Gandhi and Bengal



Gandhi in Noakhali, 1946



Tagore hosts Gandhi and wife Kasturba at Santiniketan in 1940

By William Rhind

In 1946 the Noakhali region of current day Bangladesh experienced serious communal riots. Mohandas Gandhi camped in Noakhali for four months and toured the district in a mission to restore peace and communal harmony

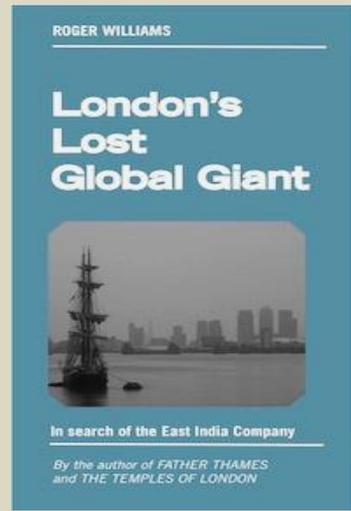
William has been Outreach Worker at the Gandhi Foundation (www.gandhifoundation.org) since December 2013 and prior to that was on their executive committee for five years. He has degrees in History and Law from the universities of Glasgow and London.

It was through his father being born in India that he developed an interest in that country and therefore Gandhi.

Having a part Catholic, part Anglican and part Presbyterian heritage he grew up with an interest in ecumenism that led into interfaith matters.

Thursday 22 October 2015,
6.30-8.30pm. Lab 6,
Idea Store Whitechapel, 321
Whitechapel Rd, London E1 1BU

Whatever Happened to the East India Company?



By Roger Williams

London's Lost Global Giant: In Search of the East India Company has just been published. It is a small book about the Company's legacy in London — where to see it, and what material and cultural effects it has had on the city.

LONDON'S LOST GLOBAL GIANT: In Search of the East India Company is the final part of THE LONDON TRILOGY, which he has been researching and photographing since returning to London after two decades in the wilderness of the Weald.

The author raises a fascinating question: how could a leviathan such as the East India Company - at its height handling more than half the world's shipping, with its own 200,000-strong army - have disappeared, as it seems, without trace? Well, it didn't, of course, and in a quest that takes him around the capital and beyond, Williams brings together scattered jigsaw pieces to build a fascinating picture of this 'lost giant'.

Friday 23 October 2015, 6.30-8.30pm. Venue to be confirmed

The Guardian & Times coverage of the late President Ziaur Rahman's life (1971-1981)



President Ziaur Rahman & Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat, Gazipur (1981)

By Ehtasham Haque

The late President Ziaur Rahman Ziaur Rahman (1936 – 1981) is best known for his role in declaring the independence of Bangladesh, and for his service as the president of Bangladesh from 1977 to 1981. As the founder of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which dominates the politics of Bangladesh along with the Awami League, his legacy remains hugely relevant to the recent history of Bangladesh and as well as today's politics. This presentation will strive to understand Ziaur Rahman's life through Bangladesh's national life from 1971 to 1981 in the light of the coverage by British newspapers The Guardian and The Times.

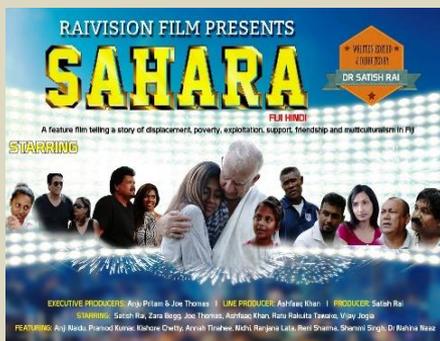
Ehtasham holds an MA in Management from Westminster Business School; Post Graduate Diploma in Law and Community leadership from SOAS, University of London and a BA Honours in International Relations from London Metropolitan University. A freelance researcher with interest on Islam & the West, Social Contract Theory, Bangladeshi politics, British Bangladeshi politics, democracy, governance and transnationalism.

**Saturday 24 October 2015,
2.30-9pm.** Venue 2, The Rich Mix
Centre, 35-47 Bethnal Green Rd,
E1 6L

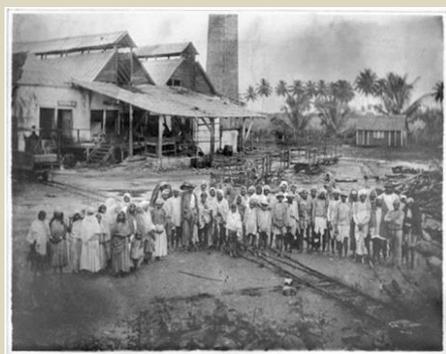
OUR SPECIAL EVENT

**The British Empire in Fiji and
its Legacy: Indian Indentured
Labourers, Exile and Modern
Day Multiculturalism**

**Film Screening (Sahara),
lecture (A life in exile) and an
exhibition (Empire, Exile and
Sugar Plantations - the
journey and experiences of
Indian indentured labourers in
Fiji)**



The film explores current social
issues and multiculturalism in the
Island of Fiji and includes both
native and Indian characters.
Before the film show there will be a
lecture by the Director of Sahara Dr
Satis Rai on 'A Life in Exile'.



An exhibition will run concurrently
from 2.30pm onward during the
day, covering the story and
experiences of Indian indentured
labourers taken to Fiji by the British
Empire to work on sugar plantation
and their interactions with native
Fijians. In addition we aim to put on
show some Indigenous Fijian
cultural performance.

**Saturday 24 October 2015,
2.45-4.15pm.** Venue 2, The Rich
Mix Centre, 35-47 Bethnal Green
Rd, E1 6L

The Bengali contribution to the World Wars



By Shahida Rahman

Shahida Rahman is an author,
publisher and freelance writer. She
writes historical fiction, non-fiction
and short stories including the
'Lascar' (Indigo Dreams Publishing
2012) is a work of historical fiction
inspired by a paternal ancestor, a
lascar (seaman). The highly
acclaimed novel revives the story of
these unsung heroes and draws
attention to their plight, educating
people through the use of fictional
characters. 'Lascar' was shortlisted
for the Muslim Writers Awards,
Unpublished Novel Awards (2008).

**Sunday 25 October 2015,
11am-1pm.**

POPULAR EAST INDIA COMPANY DOCKSIDE WALK



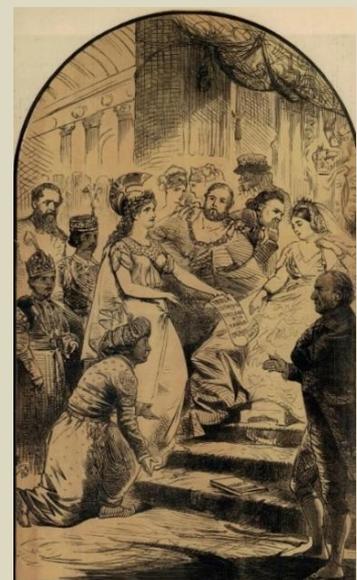
By Dr Georgie Wemyss

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.

**Sunday 25 October 2015,
2.30-4.30pm.** Lab 1A,
Idea Store Whitechapel, 321
Whitechapel Rd, London E1 1BU

The Nawab of Bengal: Collaboration and Resistance



'Injustice': Sketch from *Vanity Fair*
relating to Nawab of Bengal's petition to
Parliament for recompense, 1871

By Lyn Innes

An English descendent of Mir Jafar
of the Battle of Plassey betrayal
(1757). (Emeritus Professor of
Postcolonial Literatures, University
of Kent, Canterbury)

The presentation will deal with the
British government's attempt to
mould and control the last Nawab
Nazim of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa,
Syed Mansur Ali Khan. Born in
1829, Mansur Ali Khan succeeded
to the title at the age of nine, and
was forced to abdicate in 1880, at
the age of 50. He was the eleventh
Nawab to succeed Mir Jafar as
Nawab Nazim of Bengal, Bihar and
Orissa.

**Monday 26 October 2015,
6.30-8.30pm. Venue to be
confirmed**

***Calcutta Botanic Garden:
Knowledge Formation and
the Expectations of Botany
in a Colonial Context, 1833-
1914 (including Botanic
Garden's role in introducing
tea cultivation to Bengal)***



By Adrian Thomas

In 1787 the East India Company authorised Colonel Robert Kyd to take over 310 acres on the west bank of the River Hugli near Calcutta, in order to lay out a botanic garden. He engaged workers to “embank and ditch” the land, and then began to experiment with crops he hoped to introduce to Bengal. For the following 160 years of the colonial period this was the premier botanic garden in India.

Laying out a garden is never a neutral act, and Calcutta Botanic Garden was organised to achieve numerous scientific and practical purposes. It served both as a European base for collecting and classifying South Asia's plant life, and as a site for experimenting with many economic and medicinal crops.

However, aesthetic choices also had to be made as priorities changed and the layout of the Garden was altered. New designs often reflected broader changes in the history and policies of the British raj, but also the difficulties

of operating in an unfamiliar environment. The Garden is thus an example not only of how colonial institutions tried to mould the Indian landscape, but also the many constraints they came up against in doing so.

Adrian Thomas had a long overseas career with the British Council, including four years in Kolkata. He has also worked for the Royal Asiatic Society and the Linnean Society in London. He is currently completing a PhD on the history of Calcutta Botanic Garden between 1833 and 1914.

BRICK LANE CIRCLE (BLC)

BLC is a voluntary organisation (company limited by guarantee, founded in 2006) set up to help transform the intellectual landscape of the Bangladeshi community in the UK and take it to a new level of confidence and critical engagement with everything relevant for the community's progress and development.

The organisation hopes to achieve this by developing and facilitating better connections between people who are engaged in research and intellectual pursuits involving Bangladesh or Bangladeshis abroad; encouraging more people to get involved in objective knowledge seeking and creating opportunities for debates and intellectual exchanges.

The Circle believes that one important element necessary for making breakthroughs and solving long standing problems in our community, or any community, is to bring people from different backgrounds and political divides to talk to each other, discuss rival perspectives and debate over different narratives and ideas. The result is likely to be greater levels of empathy between people; better understanding of the problems and issues faced by Bangladesh

and Bangladeshis at home and abroad; and an increased ability for finding better quality solutions.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Organise seminars, exhibitions, events and activities in the UK to encourage and facilitate research and knowledge generation / dissemination with respect to Bangladesh and Bangladeshis abroad
2. Consider, learn lessons and explore the potentials of the long historical links between Bangladesh and Britain
3. Explore and develop innovative ways of promoting better understanding between the UK Bangladeshi community and the wider diverse multi-faith / multi-cultural communities in Britain
4. Encourage and facilitate better connections between Bangladesh and the UK with respect to education, economics, social, culture and tourism
5. Engage young people in the UK from diverse backgrounds and generate interest among them to learn more about Bangladesh and Bangladeshis abroad and undertake innovative and exciting projects / activities for mutual benefits
6. Help develop deeper and shared common roots among the UK's diverse population through research, knowledge sharing and learning about each other's history, country of origin and experiences in the UK.

**For details please email
bricklanecircle@yahoo.co.uk
or phone 07914119282
www.bricklanecircle.org**

