Dear all,

The History Department Seminar Committee, University of Delhi, expresses its gratitude to you for being part of its Department Seminar Series. Over the past semester, our 'Kharif Season' between August and December 2019, we hosted ten seminars and one baithak; please see the attachment for details on speakers, titles and abstracts. Do visit our Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/seminars.fss/) to view photographs from our seminars and to receive notifications about future events.

With this email we bring a formal closure to the seminar series for this season. We are grateful for your support, and look forward to your participation in our forthcoming 'Rabi season' of seminars.

We will send you periodic details about our talks and other events as in the past. Please note that our seminars commence on 8th January 2019, with a talk by the distinguished scholar Prof. Purushottam Agrawal: "The Age of Marriage Debate in a 17th century Text".

Abstract: Janagopal's Dadu Janamlila (1620 CE)—a ‘biography’ of Dadu Dayal a leading figure in bhakti movement— is an extremely important text for exploring the dynamics of ‘deshaj’ modernity in north India. Janagopal -- a merchant by vocation and a poet by temperament -- became Dadu’s disciple in 1585, and closely followed him till his last i.e. 1603. This close contact with the ‘subject’ makes his work uniquely significant. Also, unlike other such works, Janagopal gives specific year references for events and names of individuals involved; and even while remaining within the dominant idiom of miraculous, he is quite realistic, at places even sceptical in his descriptions. His text is recognised as the ‘authentic’ account of Dadu’s life by the Dadupanthis. ‘Dadu Janamlila’ has been edited and translated into English, but Janagopal was a remarkable poet as well, his poetic talents remaining completely neglected. David Lorenzen and I are putting together some of his poems along with other materials, and hope to publish our work soon.

Dadu generally lived in Amer, 1585 to 1593, and it was towards the end of his stay there that, according to Janagopal, he had an important encounter with Mansingh—king of Amer. As soon as Mansingh took charge he received complaints about Dadu’s heretic ideas; more importantly about his daughters remaining unwed having passed the prescribed age for quite some time. Janagopal makes Dadu respond forcefully to the charge of bringing ‘sin’ to the king and his kingdom by not marrying off his daughters. His Dadu describes the prevalent practice of child-marriage itself as ‘sinful’; he does so without invoking the authority of Vedas and smritis, as was done in the nineteenth century critiques of such practices. Dadu puts forward a rational argument, pointing out the disastrous consequences of child marriage. He reminds the king not what the great ancients did, but the physical and emotional havoc such marriages cause to children.

Please drop us a line if you wish to be included in our email list.

Best wishes,
The History Department Seminar Committee
History Department Seminar Series
Kharif season: Aug-December 2019

Date: 2nd August 2019
Speaker: Prof. Patrick Olivelle, University of Texas
Title: “Ascetics (pravrajita) and Householders (gr̥hastha): New Insights into the Origin of Dharmaśāstra”
Abstract: This is an exploration of what I call "the voices of silence". When things that one expects to find are absent in texts, that silence is as important for historical reconstruction as what texts openly tells us. This paper explores the term gr̥hastha, especially its absence in early Sanskrit texts, its presence in the Aśokan inscriptions, its intimate linguistic and conceptual connection to pravrajita, the "gone-forth" ascetic, and what all this says about the history of the Indian legal treatises, the Dharmaśāstras—about their origin, their articulation of a Brahmanical dharma and a newly conceptualized "Brahmanism," and their relationship to the ancient Vedic world.

Date: 14th August 2019
Speaker: Prof. Nivedita Menon, Jawaharlal Nehru University
Title: “Feminist Debates Around Sexuality and the Law”
Abstract: The talk will explore some of the key issues that have arisen at the intersection of sexuality and the law, for feminist thought and practice.

Date: 4th September 2019
Speaker: Prof. Janaki Nair, Jawaharlal Nehru University
Title: “The ‘Monarchical Modern’ in the Making of Mysore City “
Abstract: The city of Mysore, as I have elsewhere described it, acquired the ‘depth of historical distance’ only in the 20th century, when it became the site of an experiment in ornamentalism. Its unique status arose from the fact that it was divested of all administrative functions save that of the palace establishment, since the army moved from Srirangapatna to Bangalore in 1809, and the government of Mysore State from Mysore city. In short, the pursuit of ornamentalism as a legitimate Palace rationale could be more freely pursued, though less through the exertion of sovereign authority and more through an assemblage of diverse forces, techniques, and devices more properly associated with, or at least resembling, ‘governmentality’. It was therefore, among the first cities in India to have a City Improvement Trust (in 1903, a few years after the Bombay Improvement Trust was set up in 1898), predating even Bangalore by several decades (Bangalore’s CIT was established in 1935). An investigation of the work of the Mysore City Improvement Trust in its negotiations with the municipality on the one hand and the Palace establishment on the other could yield a third model from those
proposed by either Patrick Joyce (for cities in England) or Partha Chatterjee (for colonial Indian cities). It will foreground the ‘monarchical’ as a specific form of power which was deployed in the invention of the modern ‘royal’ city. What, in short, were the specific forms of material and temporal ‘ordering’ that came to distinguish Mysore city from its counterparts?

Date: 11th September  
Speaker: Prof. Whitney Cox, University of Chicago  
Title: “Insurgent Brahmanism: Yamunacharya as social theorist of Cholamandalam”  
Abstract: In this presentation, I will offer a reading of the major surviving work by Yamunacharya, the eleventh century Vaishnava philosopher who was the teachers’ teacher of the great Ramanuja, the Agamapramanya (“On the Validity of Revelation”). Yamuna lived and wrote on the northern edge of the Kaveri delta during the transformative expansion of the region’s prosperity, its political organization, and especially its temple culture, under the aegis of the imperial Cola kings. In my intellectual-historical reconstruction of his project, Yāmuna sought to expand the domain of who counted as a Brahman in this world, asserting a place for himself and his Bhāgavata co-religionists against arguments for their inferior caste status as temple functionaries. His insurgent variation on Brahmanism, I will demonstrate, deeply influences the style and method of the Agamaprāmāṇyam, both in the details of its argument and its celebrated rhetorical fireworks. The result is a text that is as much about the position of its author in his social field as it is about religious hermeneutics and the philosophy of language. This can be profitably compared to other documented cases of the politics of recognition and social mobility in medieval Cholamandalam. Seen in this light, Yāmuna’s great work may be understood as a specimen of social and political theory.

Date: 18th September  
Author and Speaker: Prof. Philippe Buc, University of Vienna  
Title: Baithak with Philippe Buc  
Articles to be discussed:  
1) Philippe Buc, "Religions and Warfare: Prolegomena to a Comparative Study" Quaestiones Mede Aevi Novae (2016): 9-26;  
3) Philippe Buc, "What is Order? In the aftermath of the 'Feudal Transformations' debate" Francia vol. 46 (2019), pp. 289-300

Date: 16th October  
Speaker: Prof. Ania Loomba, University of Pennsylvania  
Title: “Revolutionary Desires: Women in Radical Politics”
Abstract: My talk draws upon my book, ‘Revolutionary Desires’, which examines the lives and subjectivities of revolutionary and communist women of different classes in India from the late 1920s, shortly after the communist movement took root in India, to the 1960s, when it fractured. It traces how these women shaped a new female—and in some cases feminist—political subject in India, in collaboration and contestation with Indian nationalist, liberal-feminist, and European left-wing models of womanhood. In my talk I focus upon a particularly explosive incident that rocked Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad’s Hindustan Socialist Revolutionary Army. I trace how the event and its afterlives aroused debates about the proper place and attributes of political women, and about the proper meaning of revolutionary change itself.

Date: 23rd October
Speaker: Prof. Charu Gupta, University of Delhi
Title: “Vernacular Sexology from the Margins”

Abstract: My talk will centre on the Hindi sexology writings of Santram BA, a shudra, and Yashoda Devi, a woman. In the context of an efflorescence of vernacular sexology literature in early twentieth century north India, I will explicate how their writings moved on different registers, whereby they envisaged a heterosexual ethics that relied on utopian and dystopian descriptions of modernity. Sexology in Hindi, particularly when construed from the margins, reified, constructed, destabilised and questioned sexual norms. I argue that while largely operating within reformist sexology frames, their writings at times punctured dominant upper-caste, male-centric authority, and create frictions in normative equations. Together, their writings contribute significantly in creating a vernacular archive of sexual sciences in India.

Date: 30th October
Speaker: Dr. Yogesh Snehi, Ambedkar University
Title: “Father, Son and the Making of Early Sikh Tradition”

Abstract: This talk will be based on my reading of a four-day long field immersion trip I recently concluded with my students and colleagues. The trip was titled ‘Walking with Nanak’ and explored modes of commemorations, celebrations, and visualisation of Guru Nanak’s life around 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak. I want to understand how and where our dominant understanding of the first Sikh Guru intersects with the popular memory of his elder son Sri Chand. Is there a possibility of understanding the early Sikh tenets through Sri Chand’s choice of asceticism? Through a critical reading of dominant Sikh historiography and popular Sikh shrines in Sultanpur Lodhi and Amritsar, the presentation attempts to humanise the early Sikh tradition through a reading of the relationship between the father and the son.

Date: 6th November
Speaker: Dr. Haimanti Roy, University of Dayton
**Title:** “Paper Lives: Mobility, Citizenship and Belonging in Post-colonial India”

**Abstract:** In the era of globalization and increased mobility, government issued documents such as passports, driver’s licenses, PAN cards, Aadhar cards are ubiquitous travel companions. Documentary identification not only verify and prove identity but seek to guarantee ‘safety’ and allow only those deemed ‘legal’ entry within a state’s borders. However, such travel documents have, I suggest, become significant artifacts that advance claims of citizenship, and promise inclusion to their possessors. In this paper I examine the post-colonial afterlife of the Indian Passport and other travel documents and unpack the long history of documentary belonging. I suggest that this history was neither linear, nor absolute top down process and it developed as a consequence of contestations and negotiations from mobile citizens within and outside territorial India.

**Date:** 13th November

**Speaker:** Prof. Radhika Singha, Jawaharlal Nehru University

**Title:** “How Hoarding Rupees Helps the Germans: War finance and War propaganda 1917-19”

**Abstract:** This paper examines the intensification from 1916 of the pressure exerted upon India to contribute to Britain’s war expenses. The argument was that India was a sink of gold and silver which had to be monetised for the sake of an empire at war. The pressure increased with the set-backs of the Mesopotamian campaign, leading in March 1917 to the offer of a “gift” of a 100 million pounds to Britain. Two Indian War Loans were launched, one in 1917 and another in 1918, to meet an unspecified portion of this sum. The even more ubiquitous reminder of the colonial regime’s war-time relationship of debt to its subjects was the increased volume of paper currency in circulation, representing as it did a claim on faltering specie reserves. The essay explores the propaganda strategies which the government of India used to negotiate its new visibility as debtor to a subject population over which it also had to maintain its standing. To expand the circle of subscribers to the war loan, it combined older more hierarchical modes of communication with new forms of media and publicity. However it was always apprehensive that too strident a form of propaganda would be ‘misread’ as a sign that Britain was bankrupt and losing the war. Empire’s need had to be recast as India’s opportunity. The war loans it was said, would raise India’s standing in empire and stimulate industry and commerce. It would monetise ‘infructuous’ specie hoards and expand the domestic loan market, thereby strengthening India’s ability to embark upon infrastructural and agricultural reconstruction after the war. In India, as in many of the belligerent countries, larger players and institutional investors accounted for the bulk of contributions to the war loan. Nevertheless propaganda around the figure of the ‘small investor’ invited the Indian middle-classes to link their financial feature with the stability of the Raj. In the process, it also created a new discursive ground for the demand for political rights. While a lot of the literature on World War one has concentrated on India’s manpower contribution to empire, it is her material and fiscal contribution which brought the everyday of the war into the lives of millions of Indians.
Date: 20th November

Speaker: Dr. Nitin Sinha, Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient

Title: “Master-servant regulations in colonial India, 1760s–1810s”

Abstract: In standard accounts of Indian labour history, with few exceptions, Regulation VII of 1819 of Bengal presidency is taken as the first formal colonial attempt to regulate domestic servants. This presentation, by looking at the ‘pre-history’ of this regulation, underscores the active and anxious engagement of the colonial state vis-à-vis domestic servants since the 1750s. This pre-history also reveals the shifting concerns of legal constructions of master-servant relationship. The attempts at regulating domestic servants from such an early period show that they were not thought of as a pool of informal labour just because their site of work was the household. In fact, they were at the core of how the state conceptualised the category of labour, as a ‘problem’ in the context of urban expansion, wage regulation, crime, and ‘white sociability’. Based on some hitherto unused materials of lower courts, the presentation will also explore the nature of the ‘everyday use of law’ by masters and servants. Encountering some interesting absences in the sources, it will propose to understand the working of the different constituents of the master-servant regulations in the colony in an interlinked way that would betray the history of the strategic use of law on the part of servants.