

## Invitation Friday Scholars' Meet

Topic of the Lecture :

**"Everybody's servant, but nobody's child': Village *chaukidars* (watchmen) and the other face of security labour in colonial Bengal"**

Date and Time:

**15 September 2017 at 4 pm**

Venue:

Centre for Contemporary Theory  
 C-304, Siddhi Vinayak Complex  
 Behind Baroda Railway Station (Alkapuri Side)  
 Faramji Road, Baroda-390007

### A Summary of the Lecture

In colonial rural Bengal, a large workforce of village watchmen called *chaukidars* aided the regular police establishments in the effective policing of the vast countryside. They were never made part of the regular police, and in the late nineteenth century most were paid wages out of a tax raised from within the village community for this purpose. In this presentation, I will discuss how colonial rule transformed the security labour market around the pre-colonial landed estates of the region to produce, what appeared by the late nineteenth century, a 'traditional' workforce of *chaukidars*. These watchmen were mostly men of lower caste backgrounds, whose work constituted a stark contrast to that of police constables. Unlike constables, who were seen as representatives of colonial state power, *chaukidars* worked primarily as 'village servants'. The colonial police valued the intelligence village watchmen could garner as menial servants in rural settlements. This shaped the divergent trajectories of constables and *chaukidars* in the early 1920s when both threatened to strike for a wage hike amidst the Non-Co-operation and Khilafat movements. For while nationalists lured upper-caste police constables as allies in nationalist campaigns, they agitated against the payment of *chaukidari*-tax that paid the salaries of lower caste *chaukidars*, and used the traditional power of the village communities to coerce *chaukidars* to resign. *Chaukidars* were the other face of colonial security labour that was premised on the vulnerability of its workers as lower caste menial servants, a vulnerability that nationalist movements did not hesitate to use for itself.

### About the Speaker

*Partha Pratim Shil* did a B.A. with Political Science Major at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. He went on to do an M.A. in Political Studies and an M. Phil. in Modern Indian History at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has recently finished his Ph.D. at Faculty of History, University of Cambridge. He teaches Political Science at Hindu College, University of Delhi. He is shortly about to start as a Junior Research Fellow for research in History at Trinity College, Cambridge.

