



The Cast(e) of the Colonial Police: Constables and Chaukidars in Colonial Bengal



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This presentation explores two workforces at the bottom of the coercive apparatus of the colonial state in Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These are police constables, and village watchmen, also called chaukidars. The two workforces presented a stark contrast. The colonial constabulary was always a thin presence in Indian society, while a much larger workforce of chaukidars existed throughout the countryside. However, chaukidars were never absorbed as direct employees of the government in the way the constables were. While constables were paid salaries out of the budget of the provincial government, chaukidars were paid salaries out of a locally raised chaukidari tax. Constables had a substantial number of upper caste workers in their ranks. All chaukidars were lower caste workers. In this presentation, I will explore how this segmentation of security work emerged in the apparatus of colonial policing and what it reveals about the nature of the colonial police.

Partha Pratim Shil is a Junior Research Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge. He is interested in labour history and state formation in South Asia.

All are welcome

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