

**CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, CALCUTTA,
R-1 BAISHNABGHATA PATULI,
KOLKATA 700094**

GENERAL SEMINAR

Prof. Sudipta Sen

Professor of History and Director of the Middle East/South Asia Studies Program, University of California,
Davis

will give a talk titled:

“ON SPOLIA AND THE PRACTICE OF INDIAN HISTORY”

Abstract

This talk focuses on the idea of spolia, which has a long genealogy beginning with the display of objects seized in war—not only as a stark exercise of power, but as the harvest of talismans from the defeated as symbolic appropriation of the strength of one’s enemies. Rome set a precedent, with imperial and private collections of weapons of fallen combatants, the sack of temples and capture of idols. Architectural historians define spolia also as the incorporation of the ruins of older structures within new ones as both a mark of conquest and (grudging) tribute. New work emerging in India shows that similar practices were widespread, including the looting of cities such as Kanauj—seized and pillaged at least thirteen times between the seventh and the thirteenth centuries CE. This is also an exploration of the spoliation and seizure of objects as emblems of sovereignty in India, including desecration of temples and looting of idols, as suggestive points of departure for a history of the taking and borrowing of texts and objects as acknowledgement of past or defeated regimes. This talk also dwells on how such acts have been interpreted, casting long shadows on popular histories of the advent of Islam and the depredations of overseas Europeans and colonial governments.

Date: Monday, 17 September, 2018; Time: 3 – 5 pm

Venue: CSSSC’s Seminar Room, Patuli Campus

Debdatta Chowdhury
(Convener, Seminar Committee)
All are welcome to attend.