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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi
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FRIDAY, 14TH OCTOBER 2022 AT 3:00 PM
SRINIVAS SEMINAR ROOM, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

**POORVA
RAJARAM**



‘BAD LIVES’:

A POST OFFICE INSURANCE SCHEME IN COLONIAL INDIA

Abstract:

This presentation investigates the first life insurance scheme in India, established by the colonial Indian Post Office in 1883 for its own employees. It looks at the procedural complexities of this pioneering attempt to acquaint subordinate Indian employees with the future-oriented world of life insurance. Yet, low subscriber numbers, a pervasive fear of medical examinations, lapsed subscriptions and lack of reliable mortality data resulted in an especially risk-averse scheme that was seen as a precarious experiment. I pay particular attention to so-called 'bad lives', a common category in insurance circles in the 19th century meant to describe those bodies considered unworthy of insurance. I ask the question, were all Indian lives 'bad'? Lastly, I hope to put Foucauldian perspectives on the governmentalization of life and risk in dialogue with the particularities of colonial India.

The Speaker:

Poorva Rajaram has a PhD in modern history from the Centre for Historical Studies, JNU. Her research has focused on the world of pensions and life insurance in colonial India. She came to academics from journalism, and was the co-founder of *The Ladies Finger*, a women's web magazine. She was a correspondent for *Tehelka*, and has written for *Caravan*, *Yahoo Originals* and *The Hindu*.