

2006-2007

Artists and Scholars

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF  
**CULTURE & SOCIETY**  
PRESENTS

# Sridevi Menon

**Monday, November 6, 2006**

**3:00 p.m.**

Mylander Room (207)

Bowen-Thompson Student Union



## Of Mimicry and Happy Lives: the Transnational Stories of Brunei Indians

**How do Brunei Indians remember their lives in Seria?**

**What histories do their stories narrate? How do their memories intersect with colonial and postcolonial realities?**

During the late 1940s and 1950s, the British Malayan Petroleum Company recruited Indian workers to staff their offices in the oil town of Seria in Brunei, a British protectorate in northwest Borneo. As citizens of a newly independent India, these Indians claimed an intimacy with British colonialism that enabled them to negotiate the racial and ethnic hierarchies that regulated their lives in Seria. Deeply conscious of the Company's racist policies that determined the work they performed and the social spaces they occupied, Indians acknowledged their colonial subjectivity. However, they also saw themselves as agents of modernity and history who transformed the "jungle" into the modern state of Brunei. Drawing on the oral histories of these Indians who retired to homes in India in the 1970s and 1980s and forged a Brunei-Indian diaspora in India, Professor Menon explores the ironic narratives in Brunei Indians' memories of a "happy" life in Brunei.

Sridevi Menon is Assistant Professor of Ethnic Studies at BGSU. Her research interests focus on diaspora and cultural studies, discourses of empire and nation, and ethnic/racial identity formation. Her essays have been published in *Social Text*, *the Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, and *Alternatives*. Currently a fellow at ICS, she is working on an ethnographic study of Indians who migrated to Brunei in the 1940s and 1950s to work for the British Malayan Petroleum Company.

Special Thanks to the Office of the Vice Provost for Research and to the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences for their support of this work. All events are free and open to the public. For more information, call (419) 372-0585