

Conversations on society since 1960

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi
<http://sociology.du.ac.in/sociological-research-colloquium/>

FRIDAY, 28TH JANUARY 2022 AT 3:00 PM

Click [here](#) for online meeting link.

NAYANIKA
MATHUR



BEASTLY IDENTIFICATION:

THE GOVERNMENT OF BIG CATS IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Abstract:

How does an individual big cat in India come to be identified as the one who is guilty of actively preying on humans? Conservationist law stipulates that the big cat must be “ID-ed” before she is hunted down. I demonstrate ethnographically that there is no possible means of establishing the correct identity of a big cat anterior to her killing. Through an account of the impossibility of beastly identification, I argue that in the government of big cats we see in stark relief the limits of both bureaucratic action and conservation. What operates, instead, is a form of knowing the nonhuman other that is localised, personalised, affective, and momentary. The Anthropocene calls for the centring of such forms of knowledges and living-besides. An analytic potential of the Anthropocene lies in rendering untenable the continual disciplinary sequestering off of the nonhuman and environmental from the political, bureaucratic, and legal.

The Speaker:

Nayanika Mathur is Associate Professor in Anthropology, Fellow of Wolfson College, and Director of the South Asian Studies Programme at the University of Oxford. She is the author of *Paper Tiger: Law, Bureaucracy, and the Developmental State in Himalayan India* (Cambridge, 2016) and, more recently, of *Crooked Cats: Beastly Encounters in the Anthropocene* (Chicago, 2021). *Crooked Cats* retells the story of big cats that make prey of humans in light of the climate crisis.