

FRIDAY

# RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM

*Conversations on society since 1960*

## DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi

<http://sociology.du.ac.in/sociological-research-colloquium/>

FRIDAY, 4<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2022 AT 3:00 PM

M.N. Srinivas Seminar Room (We are back "offline"!)

## AMISHI PANWAR



## AMULETS AS PERSONALISED MEDICINE ?

UNDERSTANDING CORD BLOOD STORAGE IN CHENNAI

### **Abstract:**

Pregnant mothers in Tamil Nadu are encouraged to store dried cord tissue in amulets, which are believed to protect the child from harm and ill health. However, umbilical cord blood stem cells are also sourced and stored in cord blood banks and are used to treat blood disorders. When the dried cord stump falls off the navel, it is dried in the sun and powdered to be eventually stored in an amulet. In the future, it may be mixed with milk to be given to the child when the need arises, or in case of ill health. Cord blood banks hold the cord blood unit for a stem cell transplant when the need arises. By taking account of local beliefs and meanings surrounding pregnancy in Tamil Nadu, the amulet and its contents are delineated via the pre-pregnancy ritual, food, and sakthi (power) that the pregnant womb is believed to embody. The amulet thus becomes personalized medicine, a signifier of good health, used to ward off the evil eye, and a harbinger of prosperity and long life.

### **The Speaker:**

**Amishi Panwar** is currently a Guest Faculty at the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics where she did her M.A. and M.Phil. She has a Ph.D. in Anthropology and Sociology of Development from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID), Geneva. Her thesis, an ethnography of stem cell banks in India, explores the meanings of 'banking' on cord blood in South India.