

Conversations on society since 1960

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
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SRINIVAS SEMINAR ROOM, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

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THE QUEST FOR A FIELDSITE:

LESSONS ON PRODUCING SPACE FROM SEXUALITY RESEARCH IN INDIA

Abstract:

This paper draws from that period in every ethnographic research project in which the researcher looks for the perfect ethnographic fieldsite. This is an ubiquitous but undertheorized phase in ethnographic research usually excised from critiques and often relegated to a period prior to the actual research process. I argue that the quest for the site is critical to doing ethnography because it is the method by which the ethnographic gaze produces 'the fieldsite' as a discursive space from an emplaced location. This reading of sociality in ethnography moves beyond the reification of the ethnographic encounter, which rightly exhorts the ethnographer to read herself into the research frame. The Lefebvrian perspective on fieldsites I advocate addresses various aspects of ethnographic knowledge production, including interlocution, field notes, and visual and audio recordings that ultimately constitute the archive from which ethnographies are written.

The Speaker:

Svati P. Shah is Associate Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and currently a Research Associate at the University of Pretoria. They are a cultural anthropologist who works on the imbrications of sexuality, gender, migration, political economy and social movements in India. Their first book was *Street Corner Secrets: Sex Work and Migration in the City of Mumbai* (2014), and they serve on the Editorial Board of *Feminist Anthropology*.