



University of
Zurich^{UZH}

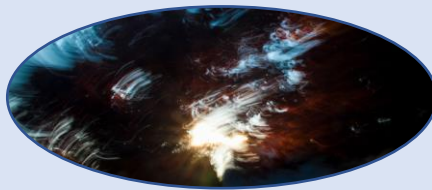
ISEK – Institut für Sozialanthropologie und Empirische Kulturwissenschaft

South Asia Forum

Lecture Series

Autumn Semester 2020

Everyone is cordially
invited to participate!



ISEK University of Zurich
Andreasstrasse 15

8th December 2020, 4.15-6 pm

Katyayani Dalmia (University of Zurich, ISEK)

Reading Others: On the Legibility of Skin Tone

Lecture Location: Online Only in Microsoft Teams – contact Daniela Dietz (daniela.dietz@uzh.ch) to be added to the seminar group

Abstract: In this paper, I provide an ethnographic glimpse into the relationship between skin colour and the formal categories of difference in North India—caste, religion, class. I examine how my informants use skin tone, and other bodily features, to determine identities and positions, placing individuals in a scheme of classifications, at the same time as they contend that the relation of colour to caste and religious identity is unfixed. How does colour persist both as an uncertain signifier, and as a marker of social position? What is it used to determine? This paper situates this problem within the milieu of Lucknow, a burgeoning provincial city in North India, where new possibilities of upward mobility, and anxieties of contact with unknown others render the bodily surface important in diverse spaces and relational contexts. I attend to the nuances and politics of a context where skin tone is central in the imagination of others as well as in the experience of the self, yet where its meaning is ambiguous.

Katyayani Dalmia is a senior researcher and lecturer at the Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies (ISEK), University of Zurich. After studying History and Sociology at the University of Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru University, she completed her PhD in Anthropology at The New School for Social Research, New York. Based on eighteen months of ethnographic research in the city of Lucknow, Katyayani's doctoral dissertation is a study of the imaginative linkages between bodily traits and formal identity; between, that is, skin color, body size, facial features, and diet on the one hand, and positions of caste, class, religion, and gender, on the other. Katyayani has taught courses in Anthropology, gender and feminism, body and colourism. At present, she is interested in examining how ideas of etiquette associated with being from Lucknow and notions of professional conduct – both of which contain proscriptions against making marked distinctions of community – conflict with desires for maintaining social and bodily distance with perceived others.