

## The Quest for a Fieldsite and the Ethnographic Archive: Lessons on Producing 'The Field' from Sexuality Research in India

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1:00 - 2:30PM

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This talk is drawn from an ethnography of the spaces where queer, autonomous feminist and radical politics are mutually imbricated, adjacent, or coterminous India. Anchoring my thinking in the 'near histories' of South Asian sexuality politics, I focus on that period in every ethnographic project in which we search for the perfect, or almost perfect, ethnographic field site(s), only to find that the project requires modification, or relocation all together. The notion of both the quest and the habitation of a space that is later rendered as one's fieldsite in ethnographic writing disrupts the fixity of the site's coherence. At the same time, it confirms that ways in which the production of a fieldsite via physical habitation in a space or set of spaces over a long durée produces a unique form of knowledge, one that is both self-aware of its contingencies while able to reveal the complexities of waging everyday life that cannot be ascertained via any other method. This argument offers a bridge between positionality, textualism and the ethnographic value of inhabiting spaces over periods of time via a critique that demonstrates how sexuality research in India can offer methodological insights for our understanding of the fieldsite as a form and a frame of knowledge.



**Svati Shah** is an anthropologist and queer feminist scholar whose work is drawn from their commitment to social justice and critical inquiry. They are based at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (UMass), where they are an Associate Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and are affiliated with the Department of Anthropology. Their research examines questions of sexuality in relation to materialist history, racialization, caste politics, and political economy in India. Their current book project is drawn from a long term ethnography of radical social movements in India, including left, queer, and autonomous feminist movements.