

Shaping Asia

Biography, Private Archives and Oral Histories as Knowledge-making Sites

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10:15–11:45 (CET)

Zoom event

What constitutes knowledge? Who are knowledge producers? What are our languages of knowing? Where do we seek knowledge? These questions speak to my larger interest in decolonizing the social sciences via conceiving a set of refreshed research practices. As an ethnographer, I am committed to seeking alternative modes of anthropological and historical knowing. I have been led through my research and fieldwork to propose oral histories, private (rather than official) archives and biography, as sites where knowledge can be produced in a collaborative and co-operative endeavour with research interlocutors. I argue that taking these sites seriously signals that individual stories and voices, personal experiences and private collections of documents and images, are sources of legitimate and meaningful knowledge – they have something to say and teach us about ethnography and history. The larger project of decolonising research methodologies addresses inequalities in knowledge production processes as well as hierarchies of knowledge thus claimed. For the purposes of demonstrating the arguments I am making here, I draw on my current book, *Temple Tracks: Labour, Mobility, Piety*. This work bridges the literatures on railway studies, labour studies and religion, transnationalism, and migration.

Vineeta Sinha is Professor at the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore. Her research interests include Hindu religiosity in the Diaspora, intersections of religion, commodification and consumption processes, the interface of religion and materiality, religion-state encounters in colonial and post-colonial moments, formation of concepts and categories in the social sciences, Eurocentric and Androcentric critique of classical sociological theory, pedagogy and innovating alternative teaching practices. Her select publications include the books: *A New God in the Diaspora? Muneeswaran Worship in Contemporary Singapore* (2005); *Religion and Commodification: Merchandising Diasporic Hinduism* (2010); *Religion-State Encounters in Hindu Domains: From the Straits Settlements to Singapore* (2011); *Sociological Theory Beyond the Canon* (co-authored with Syed Farid Alatas, 2017) and *Southeast Asian Anthropologies* (Co-edited with Eric Thompson, 2019).

Zoom registration Link: <https://uni-bielefeld.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ0lc-2urD4pHtZVytyn0KMQuXsBTmQAWlsW>