**Session Proposal**

# Session Title

# Soil and Sensibility: Revisiting Oral and Written Traditions in South Asia

# Session Organizers

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# Session Description

Asia’s pre-eminently agricultural past offers a fertile source for delving into knowledge practices that evolved in the region during the premodern period. These knowledges and soil classifications, captured in proverbs and written treatises, have often been transmitted over centuries. There is a tremendous potential today to apprehend and assess the potential contribution of these knowledge practices in remaking our relationship with soil and agrarian life.

The literati contributed to what one might label the modern scientific and agricultural breakthroughs. But farmers in Asia were cultivating crops and growing little traditions and knowledges that were disseminated orally, and which often found their way into compilations of peasant life-worlds. An instructive orientation often marked such literature.

The plan in this session is to distill traditional ecological soil practices that speak to current scientific and ecological insights. What these older oral and written narratives offer is thinking about soil for a capricious environment that must be acted upon for survival. The didactic aspect of proverbs, especially, is built into the structure of oral sayings that are culturally relevant and underscore mnemonic ways of communicating with farmers. The narratives embody experiences and practices that farmers reckon as valuable, recurring, and worthy of transmission.

From the cache of adages, proverbs and agrarian compendiums, it is possible to classify soils based on perceived differences in their inherent qualities and material agency. But as one digs deeper, the classificatory schema delineating soil types relates to wider classifications that make practical sense and connect to schemas of labour and water use and even allude to state officials and deities who are considered actors within the environment. These narratives kindle productive thoughts about survival modes in our present and future contexts of climatic and ecological uncertainty.

# Format

The format will have paper presentations by 4 researchers – two senior and two early career scholars. Their expertise lies in environmental sociology, anthropology, environmental sciences and geography will cover regions of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

# Proposed Speakers

* + - 1. Rita Brara Mukhopadhyay: Professor of Sociology and Social Anthropology, (Ph.D, Delhi University) has publications in the area of environmental sociology. She was twice a Research Fellow at the Rachel Carson Institute for the Study of Environment and Society in Munich and at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin. She has taught courses in environmental anthropology at both Delhi University and Ashoka University. She is also the Editor of the journal *Contributions to Indian Sociology.*
      2. Professor Nandini Sundar: Professor of Sociology, University of Delhi (Ph,D Columbia University) has published and worked extensively in the forest regions of India. Her recent publications include, *The Burning Forest: India’s War in Bastar* (Verso 2019) and *The Scheduled Tribes and their India* (OUP, 2016); *Civil Wars in South Asia: State, Sovereignty, Development* (co-edited, (Sage 2014).
      3. 3.Dr. Mitul Baruah:Associate Professor of Sociology/Anthropology and Environmental Studies at Ashoka University (Ph.D Syracuse University). His research interests include political ecology, environmental justice, water governance, hazards and disasters, rural livelihoods, agrarian studies, development and sustainability, climate change, and island studies. His current research focuses on the Brahmaputra valley in northeast India.
      4. Dr. Nairwita Bandyopadhyay: Assistant Professor at University of Kalyani in West Bengal (Ph.D., Delhi University). She specializes in drought impact assessment and climate change adaptation. India. She has published extensively in drought and disaster studies.
      5. Professor Muhammad Arif Ali: Professor of Environmental Sciences at Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan..He specialises in soil sciences and has compiled agrarian proverbs of the Punjab.