

KEYNOTE IV

Projit Mukharji (University of Pennsylvania)

A Post-Western Race Science? Ayurgenomics and the Scalar Politics of “Stratified Populations”

/ Chair: Staffan Müller-Wille (Cambridge)

/ Samstag, 18.9.2021, 18.00–19.00 Uhr

The last decade or so has witnessed the birth and rapid growth of a new scientific discipline in India called Ayurgenomics. It is touted as a synthesis of Ayurveda and genomics and thus gestures towards a new, post-Western universalism that unites the knowledges of East and West. Yet, the new genomics of human variation it is grounded in is also increasingly being recognized by social scientists and humanists as being a new form of race science. Ayurgenomics shares many of the racializing tendencies of contemporary genomics. Yet, its operational protocols also seem to undermine some of the most obviously racializing elements of genomics. Indeed, it claims to be identifying “stratified populations” rather than “races”. What unites these seemingly orthogonal epistemic and political commitments in Ayurgenomics is its methodology of “multi-scale stratification”. In this paper I want to historicize the assumptions built into the scaling protocols and techniques that constitutes multi-scale stratification, in an effort to map the relationship of this new science to the race sciences of the past and present.

Projit Bihari Mukharji is Associate Professor of Health & Societies at the University of Pennsylvania’s History and Sociology of Science Department. He holds a PhD from the School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London (2006), and completed an MA programme at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, as well as a BA programme at the University of Calcutta. He was a Wellcome Trust Postdoctoral Fellow twice and has taught at several Universities including SOAS, McMaster University, Canada, Department of History, Oxford Brookes University, and Newcastle University.

His book *Nationalizing the Body* (London 2009) deals with the South Asian doctors and medical subordinates who were employed in the lower echelons of the colonial medical establishment in British India. He highlighted their creativity, agency and politics in vernacularizing 'western' medicine so as to meet local realities. In his second monograph, *Doctoring Traditions* (Chicago 2016), he explored how Ayurvedic medicine modernized under colonialism. While focusing on the agency and creativity of the Ayurvedic physicians of the colonial era, he also acknowledged their political exclusions as well as their intellectual engagement with “western” intellectual traditions. He is book reviews editor with *Isis*, editor-in-chief for *History Compass*, and co-editor of *Osiris*.

Mukharji was trained in the Subaltern Studies tradition and strives to formulate anti-colonial perspectives without falling into nationalist or identitarian narratives. His present research is dedicated to a history of human difference and race in 20th century South Asia. This touches on the histories of physical anthropology, evolutionary biology, human genetics and archeogenetics. His dual aim here is to both recover the repressed stories of Indian pioneers of genetics as well as to uncover how the politics of race, indigeneity and biocolonialism play out in the South Asian context. Research interests: Colonial medicine, indigenous medicines, race science, genetics, physical anthropology, science & the supernatural, forensic science, nineteenth-century chemistry, paracheical traditions (rasayana/kimiya).

Selected publications: *Doctoring Traditions: Ayurveda, Small Technologies, and Braided Sciences*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2016; *Nationalizing the Body: The Medical Market, Print and Daktari Medicine*, London: Anthem Press 2009 [PB 2011, Indian Edn. 2012]; *Medical Marginality in South Asia: Situating Subaltern Therapeutics*, co-edited with David Hardiman, Abingdon: Routledge, Intersections: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories Series 2012; *Crossing Colonial Historiographies: Histories of Colonial and Indigenous Medicines in Transnational Perspective*, co-edited with Waltraud Ernst and Anne Digby, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2010.