



Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Lecture Series
Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Extractive Peasants Reframing the Debate on Informal Mining

Dr. Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt

Date: Friday, June 03, 2016

Time: 4 pm

Venue: Conference Room, HSS

This seminar explores one aspect of reconfiguration of peasant labour processes: the exchange of ploughs for picks. To address this question, it draws on recent scholarship that has problematised classical understandings of agrarian transition by going beyond the question of how capitalism transforms peasant production systems to encompass broader sources of social and economic change in rural areas. Following this thread of argument, this seminar will show that throughout the global south, peasants on mineral-rich tracts are being driven into what are generally portrayed as illicit and disruptive mining practices by rising commodity prices, increasing input costs and poor returns from agriculture, authoritative resource governance by states that favour large corporations, and poor environmental care by these operators. The aim in exploring the political economy of extraction by peasants is to expand the notion of extractive industries, to dig through the contemporary anxiety over such mining, and to extend the livelihoods diversification-versus-deagrarianisation debate. A contextual analytical approach to mineral-dependence would enable social scientists to shift away from the macroeconomic theory of resource curse, and place the geophagous peasants within the body of literature on agrarian change, by linking mining history with contemporary labour theories and those on the informal economy.

About the Speaker

Dr. Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt is a Senior Fellow of Resource, Environment and Development (RE&D) Program in the Asia-Pacific Program at the Australian National University (ANU). She is one of the leading global experts in critical research on the length and breadth of gender and community livelihoods in two areas of natural resources: water and extractive industries (mining). She has also contributed significantly in reframing the debates around informal, artisanal and small-scale extractive practices of minerals. Lahiri-Dutt has edited *The Coal Nation: Histories, Ecologies and the Politics of Coal in India* (2014) and co-authored *Dancing with the River: People and Life on the Chars of South Asia* (Yale University 2013) with Gopa Samanta. Her other publications include *Doing Gender, Doing Geography in India* (2011), *Moving Pictures: Rickshaw Art* (2010), *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water* (2006) and *Water First: Issues and Challenges for Nations and Communities in South Asia* (2008). She has also written extensively in leading journals on the issues related to natural resources, extractive industries, as well as the political ecology of environmental and social changes. She received her doctoral degree in 1985 on the urbanization process in the lower Damodar valley in West Bengal.