



## **Colloquium: The Politics of Knowledge: The Pharmaceuticalisation of Ayurveda in India**

Speaker:  
Madhulika Banerjee

Date / Time:  
November 15, 2012 - 3:45pm - 5:30pm

Venue:  
10th Floor, Auditorium, APU

### **Abstract:**

Ayurveda in twentieth century India faced an unusual crisis: it lost its legitimacy in the face of the new regimes of knowledge, while retaining its ground in terms of usage by common people. The dominant frame of medical reference for a very long time in India, regardless of changes of political regime, Ayurveda was dominated by people who recognized its loss of power. What was interesting is what they believed would restore it—namely, the equivalent of aiming to be the mirror-image of modern medicine. In the process, which I term ‘pharmaceuticalisation,’ dominant Ayurveda sought to position itself as a contestant of prestige and, I argue, failed miserably. The late twentieth-century chase for fresh knowledges that would serve up answers to the tired but difficult problems of ‘development’ shows this contest intensifying, with disastrous results for Ayurveda. This hardly seems a desirable trajectory, if such older forms of knowledge can better address the criterion of sustainability while working towards meeting development needs. Can an alternative be expected to emerge from our contemporary predicament? If so, where can one possibly look for it?

### **A Note on the Speaker:**

Madhulika Banerjee is Associate Professor of Politics at Delhi University. Her areas of research interest include public policy, traditional knowledge in contemporary developing societies, and comparative politics. In addition to numerous journal articles, she has written *Power, Knowledge, Medicine: Ayurvedic Pharmaceuticals at Home and in the World* (Orient Blackswan, 2009) and co-edited *Human Rights, Gender and the Environment* (Pearson Education, 2009).