Bhrigupati Singh  
Assistant Professor of Anthropology  
Brown University  

*Poverty and the Quest for Life: Spiritual and Material Striving in Rural India*

Tuesday, August 30, 2016  
4:30pm  
Callaway Center S-319  
Emory University

Dr. Singh will discuss his recent book *Poverty and the Quest for Life* (University of Chicago Press, 2015). Set in Shahabad, an area of extreme poverty in rural Rajasthan, and focusing on the Sahariyas, a community of former bonded laborers, this book asks what the terms “aspiration” and “quality of life” might mean within such a milieu.

The book answers this question by taking the reader through a range of themes including ways of conceptualizing state power and everyday encounters with the state (beyond a fixation on corruption and sovereign authority), the decline of forests and the water table, the contestations but also the intimacies of inter-caste sociality, the rise and fall of gods, and the place of religious practice in everyday life. This book offers new ways of thinking beyond the religion-secularism and nature-culture dichotomies, juxtaposing questions about quality of life with political theologies of sovereignty, neighborliness, and ethics, in the process painting a rich portrait of perseverance and fragility in contemporary rural India.