



Lecture Series in Social Anthropology

Full
Semester
2025

Tuesday 16 December 2025 | 4.15 p.m. | Room AND-4-06

‘Middleness’ Beyond the ‘Global Middle Class’: Entanglement of Gender, Class, and Caste in the Work-Lives of Young Women in Urban India

Dr. Asiya Islam (London School of Economics and Political Science)

While there is now recognition that single-axis analysis of class presents a limited and even distorted view of inequalities, there still remains the challenge of finding the language to capture the entanglements of gender, class, caste, race, and so on. ‘Intersectionality’, of course, offers one way to do so, but it runs the risk of an additive approach – that is, intersectional analysis of class reproduces the centering of class, with gender, caste, race added on as an afterthought. In this talk, I argue that we need new conceptual vocabulary to describe such entanglements and that this should emerge from lived experiences. I develop the concept of ‘middleness’ from the narratives of young women workers in Delhi, India as a challenge to the (totalising) discourse of the ‘global middle class’. ‘Middleness’ is a ‘middle range’ concept that enables connections between the global, the local, and the individual. Further, it engages, rather than does away with, empirical and analytical contradictions that emerge from women’s navigation of both the successes and failures of globalisation in their lives. Taking ‘middleness’ seriously, rather than trying to place it into existing vocabulary of class, allows a move beyond conceptualisations based on difference from Global North-centric understanding of class, and towards understanding inequalities in the messy ways that they are experienced and lived by people.

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