

“Towards a Grounded, Immanent Critique:
The Politics and Cosmologies of Migrant Workers in Delhi”

This talk explores the lives, thought-worlds, and struggles of migrant workers working in a metal polishing export factory in the Okhla Industrial Area of Delhi. The workers of the Okhla factory, I argue, become entangled in activities which give rise to work intensifications, bodily hazards, surface-level respect relations, and competitive envy. According to workers’ implicit political and cosmological visions, these activities can be seen to arise from an entangling, dynamic interplay of souls and the *Kalyug* (the present, ‘decivilizing’ epoch in Hindu cosmology), in which thoughts, actions, and dealings become distorted by egoistic and demonic proclivities. Workers attempt to non-cooperate with these entangling processes, in and beyond the factory, through body-conserving resistances, humor and joking, efforts at collectivity, struggles for justice, deeper respect relations, and religious festivity. Through these attempts at what one might term, ‘anti-decivilizing’ activities, workers create possibilities for survival, respect, integrative relations, and glimpses of justice. By working with words, concepts, and practices in workers’ milieus, the talk attempts to recover and present distinctive forms of politics, strivings, and self-understandings that are alive in the worlds of migrant workers in Delhi.

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