“Education, Community Participation, & Women Empowerment in a Rural Pakistani Muslim Community”

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2:00 – 3:15 pm
G103 Stone Building

In contemporary times, empowering individuals, especially women, and communities as the primary agents of development has become the cornerstone of international development discourse. This intense preoccupation with empowerment, however, has been criticized by some development and feminist scholars for expecting individual actors to become self-reliant, instead of addressing the structural issues of inequality. Instead of approaching development and empowerment paradigms as solely “good” or “bad,” this talk examines how these paradigms are approached, translated, and contested in day-to-day lives of the subjects of these paradigms. Using ethnographic data, this talk highlights how three sets of actors involved in a transnational women’s education project – a development organization, female teachers, and male community members in Pakistan – differentially approached empowerment. This examination of the competing understandings of development and empowerment reveals the need to pay attention to different forms of inequalities that exist in different contexts as well as the need to embrace the unevenness of development and empowerment processes in these contexts.