

**Ms. Isabel Salovaara** a Ph.D. student in the Department of Anthropology at Stanford University was affiliated with A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna. Ms. Salovaara is going to defend Ph. D. research work - *Becoming the State: Aspirants. Examinations and the Government Job in Bihar, India* on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2026 (IST 9.30 pm).

Ms. Salovaara has conducted her fieldwork in Patna, Bihar and during her study she has been associated with the Government Educational and Research Institutions including A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna. She was associated with the Institute for her follow-up study on coaching industry in India in May through July of 2024. The fieldwork site for her study was Patna and its surrounding areas. Dr. Rajeev Kamal Kumar, ANSISS was her in-country supervisor during the period. The Institute has facilitated her and provided the certificate of affiliation with ANSISS.

# May/1st

## Anthropology Dissertation Defense

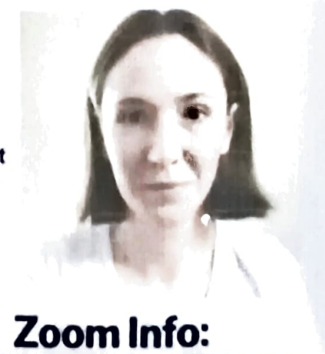
@9:00am

### Becoming the State: Aspirants, Examinations, and the Government Job in Bihar, India

with Isabel Salovaara



**What** happens when marginalized social actors seek to become agents of the state? In the state of Bihar in Eastern India, a quota introduced in 2016 reserved 35 percent of new government job vacancies for women, including in historically male-dominated careers such as the police. This “women’s reservation” complemented existing affirmative action policies at both the state and national level for historically disprivileged caste communities, and it drew large numbers of women into the burgeoning “coaching industry” of private education businesses that offered test preparation and training to pass the multi-stage examination process to get a government job. Through an ethnography of young women’s experiences in coaching and exam preparation, this dissertation argues that the expanding aspiration for state incorporation transforms the politics of social mobility in India. First, it reconsiders aspiration from the vantage point of the “aspirant”—a common term for someone preparing for competitive examinations—to emphasize its cyclical, rather than linear, temporality. The cyclical nature of aspiration clashed with social expectations about gendered life stages to create vital disjunctures: experiences of tension and disconnect in the hopes and expectations of aspirants and their families. Second, the dissertation shows that the coaching industry rendered examinations not as an individualizing disciplinary process but as a connective apparatus, creating a sense of proximity both to the state and to others who were trying to become a part of it. Finally, through the concept of partial incorporations, the dissertation offers a way of apprehending the aspiration for a government job as a process of partial and contingent transformation, rearranging hierarchies without fully overturning them.



**Zoom Info:**

MEETING ID:  
955-7912-0081

